

Where are we now and what are the future prospects for Callaghan's?

Callaghan's Rapids Conservation Area is a beautiful four-season outdoor recreation, nature education and semi-wilderness Conservation Area. The most spectacular attractions are the upper and lower falls along the Crowe River, the natural limestone pavement of the riverbed itself, a variety of unique ecosystems and the Marmora Maze Caves. Most of the property along the Crowe River watershed is privately owned and not accessible to the public. Therefore, Callaghan's Rapids Conservation Area is an important public asset for the citizens of the Province of Ontario and for tourists that live beyond our Provincial borders.

This facility is readily accessible from Highway 7. Callaghan Rapids Road and the parking lot are well maintained all year long by the Municipality of Marmora & Lake. This park attracts visitors from Montreal, Ottawa, Kingston, Belleville, Peterborough and the Greater Toronto Area, because when they travel along Highway 7, they are looking for a desirable halfway rest stop. During the summertime, most visitors come from the Belleville area, Peterborough and the GTA for family picnics, and to relax. There is also a constant, but small daily flow of local visitors that use the park to walk their dogs. Winter sports vary from year to year depending on quantity and quality of snow. Very few parks in North America offer horseback riding and this leisure activity is available at the adjacent Horsin Around Ranch. The Gatineau Park in the Province of Quebec for example, is operated by the National Capital Commission and has four horseback riding ranches that border the park boundary. Their horse ranch alliance has a contract with the NCC to maintain riding trails throughout the park and offer the public horseback riding experiences and related activities within the park.

The four-hundred-acre property called Callaghan's Rapids Conservation Area was purchased in 1973 with funding split three ways between the Authority itself, the Province of Ontario and a donation from the Seeback family. John Seeback Senior wanted to preserve and protect this natural wonder for future generations. Due to limited funding, the OPP, CVCA and EOTA were not able to effectively maintain, protect and develop this park. Accordingly, four major problems evolved over a period of thirty years:

1. Illegal trespass into the park and riverbed by unauthorized motor vehicles that ruined this park,
2. Destruction of the riparian zone (mucking trails) and most pedestrian trails by ATVs,
3. A real, present and growing danger to pedestrians by a handful of reckless ATV operators,
4. Minimal or nil parking facility, trail and woodlot maintenance by the CVCA due to a fundamental reduction in the funding model for many Conservations Authorities in the early 1990s.

To remedy this unfortunate circumstance, donations and joint funding was provided from EOTA and the CVCA to build barricades, including in-kind labour from the CVCA and volunteers of the Crowe River Group to effectively prevent trespass by unauthorized motor vehicles. In addition, now that most (99% or more) of unauthorized motor vehicles can no longer enter the park; parking lot, trail and woodlot maintenance is in full swing. The progress and results to date are outstanding, but more work (and funding) is required to sustain the operation of this park.

It is desirable at this time that the CVCA, under the leadership of the Board, champion the creation of a formal organization, tentatively called the "Friends of Callaghan's" that would be responsible for raising funds, and using said funds to maintain and develop the park, ultimately relieving the CVCA from additional financial hardship, and also sustain the hopes, dreams and vision of the Seeback family. The first step is to create a Board and Executive for the Friends. We thank the Board and General Manager for their generosity and support to date. This enterprise is a model community driven initiative that builds upon the labour and good will of our cherished ancestors, in order to preserve dwindling accessible public wilderness for future generations to enjoy.