



YOUTH EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE

# Success Story

The landscapes the Trail Crew enjoy daily are breathtaking. Port Munro looking out to Pic Island on the Group of Seven Lake Superior Trail.

## Building a trail offering engagement with the natural landscapes behind iconic Group of Seven paintings

**THE GROUP OF SEVEN LAKE SUPERIOR**  
(the G7 Trail) offers its users a unique experience – the opportunity to trace the footsteps taken 100 years ago by Canada's renowned Group of Seven artists and see the actual sites that inspired many of their most famous paintings.

The founding members of the Group of Seven made numerous painting trips to the North Shore of Lake Superior and the Marathon area between 1921 and 1928. The beauty of the landscape kept drawing them back, and the result was hundreds of sketches and paintings.



MARATHON,  
ONTARIO

**Canada**

This project is funded by  
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Ethan Harmer with some of the trail clearing tools the Trail Crew uses while maintaining their hiking trails.

Today, local residents and tourists are similarly drawn to the lake's coastal shores, excited to walk the G7 Trail and see firsthand many of the scenes immortalized in their iconic artwork. The trail has become a major tourist attraction and a boon to the economy of Marathon and the broader region.

Bringing the trail to life has been a multi-year project, coordinated by the Group of Seven Lake Superior Trail Association, a not-for-profit organization working in partnership with the Town of Marathon and Biigtigong Nishnaabeg (Ojibways of the Pic River). Currently, 42 kilometres of trail have been developed, and the plan is to ultimately create a 60-kilometre long trail connecting Pukaskwa National Park to Neys Provincial Park.

In the summer of 2022, Ethan Harmer was part of the field crew working on the trail. Ethan, age 18 and from Marathon, was hired through funding provided by the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association's Youth Employment Experience program. The program, funded by the Government of Canada, helps young people job gain experience and new skills and allows parks and recreation organizations to boost their capacity.

"The CPRA funding helped us to accomplish a lot over the summer," says Kirsten Spence, Project Coordinator with the G7 Lake Superior Trail Association. "Ethan was made Assistant Trail Crew Leader, supervising half the crew. Being able to divide the team into two groups made us more efficient and very productive," says Kirsten.

"That summer, we added seven kilometres of developed trail – rebuilding existing sections and cutting 4.2 kilometres of new trail."

Ethan also helped maintain the 35 kilometres of existing trail and built foot bridges and other trail features. "I grew up out being outdoors, and having an outside job all summer was amazing," he says. "I learned a lot about actual trail

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Kirsten Spence, Project Coordinator with the G7 Lake Superior Trail Association

construction and how much is involved – different tasks like cutting into a hill to build a pathway and building bridges over creeks to allow water to pass through."

Ethan says he enjoyed the work tremendously and appreciates all that he learned about the world of work – knowledge that will serve him well in the future. He is studying the electrical trades at Confederation College in Thunder Bay.

"I learned about team work and about how to make quick decisions when the unexpected happens," he says. "I also learned communication skills, very important when you are in the bush and depending on each other to remain safe."

Kirsten appreciates that mentorship is an important part of the CPRA grant, guiding the employer and employee to collaborate on a development plan and to track progress towards goals. "The mentorship model adds structure and elevates the importance of the job experience," she says.

"Through this job, Ethan was able to develop solid planning skills; work planning is crucial when travelling long distances and working in remote locations. He also learned how to safely handle machinery and was certified on chainsaw operation. These are all skills that are highly transferrable to other jobs and environments," says Kirsten.

Ethan says he also found the job rewarding because he was building something that enriches the lives of local residents and visitors alike.

"Trails are definitely valuable for the community. It was great to help showcase the beauty of nature to people and to help them connect with the Group of Seven. "I am very proud that I was able to be a part of this project."

"I love seeing the pride that our young employees feel about working on the trail," adds Kirsten. "It's how we can foster environmental stewardship and a lifelong love of recreation." 🍁