

Sentier des Crêtes trail revisited

By François-Xavier Regnault, Park Warden – Patrol Officer, Parc national du Mont-Orford

Sentier des Crêtes trail is a major attraction for Parc national du Mont-Orford. Created in the 1980s, this trail has taken the form of various itineraries over the years. For the Estrie region, it is a one-of-a-kind mountain hiking experience. Aside from the fact that it offers hikers spectacular viewpoints of the entire region and the north-eastern United States, Sentier des Crêtes trail (7.5 km in length, altitude difference of 530 m) also represents one of the only two segments of the Sentiers de l'Estrie trails (140 km) that are protected and enshrined in legislation.

For these reasons, Sentier des Crêtes trail has a very good reputation. It also enjoys a strong following among fall hikers. However, owing to the large number of visitors and its less than optimal location, the trail's walking surface had deteriorated to a point where it was only possible to preserve and restore the northern section. As for the southern section, it has been completely relocated. In both cases, restoration work is planned over two seasons in 2006 and 2007.

Redevelopment of the northern section (3.4 km)

In 2006, the northern section was partially restored. It was necessary to dry out the walking surface by carrying out drainage canal excavation work, by setting up water crossing points and stone stairs, and by trimming nearby vegetation. This latter intervention helps optimize the circulation of air and the passage of the sun's rays in the walking area.

Relocation and development of the southern section (4.1 km)

The southern portion, located on the ridge of the Mont Orford massif, was entirely relocated. The new route, repositioned some 600 m west of the old one, was located closer to the water divide. This has facilitated drainage management. Moreover, the search for exceptional natural elements to be incorporated in the trail, such as geological formations, changes in forest strata, observation points, etc., has made it possible to diversify the route and, in so doing, to encourage hikers to stop and take in the scenery. Wildlife and flora monitoring operations were part of the same planning process. These operations were carried out prior to the commencement of the work. However, it is the data, collected over a full year, that helped determine whether or not certain sensitive sectors should be avoided (protection of special status vegetation) or closed in winter (protection of moose yards).

Once these preliminary steps had been completed, it was possible to begin the actual development work. For the four-man team, the challenge consisted of laying out a trail with support structures made exclusively out of stone. Indeed, depending on their dimensions, the rocks make it possible to build long-lasting structures that are natural in appearance and that require very little upkeep.

We are now at the half-way mark, with still one season to go to achieve our objectives. Nevertheless, the work already carried out testifies to the importance placed on these preliminary

steps for laying out a hiking trail. Indeed, they make it possible to reconcile the preservation of the territory and its accessibility.