

HAPPY TRAILS

The Chief Pontiac Trail: A Legacy of Adventure



By
Larry Faulkner
ISCA #7708
campmoreland@gmail.com

The Chief Pontiac Trail, one of America's greatest trails opened on June 14, 1958. The trail was originally established as a 25 mile foot or canoe trail in Oakland County, Michigan. The genesis for the trail first came from members of the Ot-

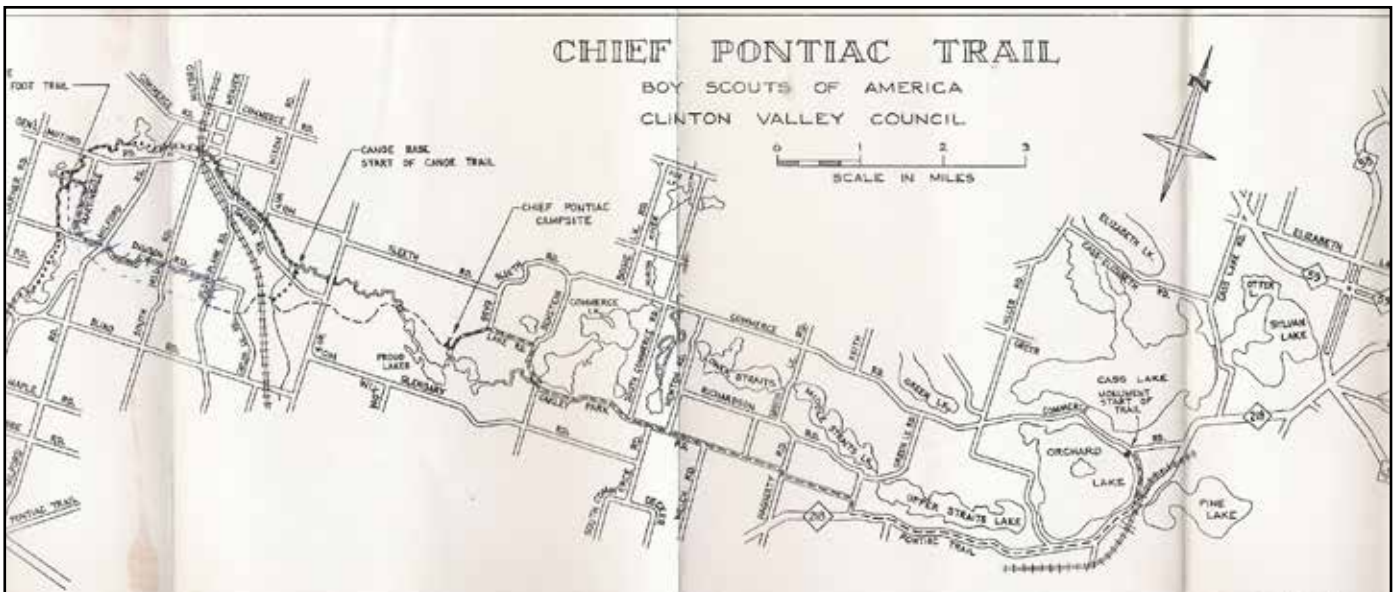
tawa District of the Clinton Valley Council in 1957. However, it was adopted by Troop 108 of the Walled Lake Methodist Church in March of that year and became their goal to complete the trail. This troop had been enthused during hikes of the Indiana Lincoln and Freedom Trails. The leaders of the Troop, Mr. E. Sherrick and Mr. J. Montgomery made an initial survey of the proposed route and in October of 1957 they used this as a conditioning hike in preparation for the Kentucky Lincoln Trail. In December of 1957, Troop 108 along with many other Scout units worked to break the trail through the Proud Lake Recreation Area with a goal of finishing in the spring of 1958. With this accomplished, the trail was finally ready for its grand opening in June of that year.

The purpose of the trail was twofold – first to allow Scouts to gain valuable lessons in Scouting skills by preparing for and carrying out the hike. An emphasis was on physical endurance and the ability for a Scout to apply their skills in backpacking, first aid, cooking, camping, map reading, compass use, and general safety. The goal was always to have this trail set up as one that was available to First Class Scouts and above. The second purpose was to educate the hiker on the influence of the great Ottawa Indian Chief – Pontiac. He was the most formidable leader of the Indian resistance movement faced by the English speaking people who ventured toward the great Midwest. He rules over a loose confederacy of Chippewa, Potawatomi, Ojibway and Ottawa tribes, but his influence extended over all the tribes of the

Algonkians. To this date, these remain the core purposes of the Chief Pontiac Trail.

Originally conceived as a 25-mile hike, it has changed over time due to urban sprawl and the route of the trail has been changed along with the mileage. But in its original state, the hiking Trail began at Orchard Lake where Commerce Road and Orchard Lake Road (Pontiac Trail) intersected taking them past the Chief Pontiac Statue. From here the trail zigged and zagged between Green Lake Road & Oakley Park Road, ultimately ending at Bass Lake Road where the Scouts would venture to the Chief Pontiac campsite for night one on the trail. This was located near the shore of Proud Lake. The trail then went overland to Childs Lake Road, Old Plank Road; South Hill Road, Dawson Road and ending at Kensington Metropolitan Park. The Canoe trail began just off Garden Road at the Heavener Canoe Base on the Huron River. The trail led into Milford, passing the Chesapeake & Ohio RR into Mill Pond, then portaging around the Dam past Camp Dearborn, under General Motors Road, past the Kensington Metropolitan Park (original terminus of the foot trail), and across Kent Lake to the finish on the southwest shore. Unique to both the foot and canoe trails was the requirement that all Scouts must complete a 300 word Native American History Book Report; a 250 word Trail Report of what they saw and a Map Sketch of the Trail. These requirements remain firmly in place to this date and are one of the reasons for the great long-lived success of the Trail.

With urban sprawl, the general East to West direction of the Trail had to change over time. The Chief Pontiac Trail Committee made changes to the route taking it in a more North to South-Southwesterly direction. This was done for Scout safety and to maintain the integrity of the original design of the trail. With this change the Trailhead moved to near Teeple Lake further to the



north and away from Pontiac, Michigan and the Orchard Lake start point. From Teeple Lake the Scouts would hike generally west and south over Mt. Omich. They would continue south toward Milford taking them back to Proud Lake where "The Pines" campsite is located for overnight camping. From this site Scouts hike overland following in general the old East to West trail that takes them to The "Kensington" Organizational campsite along the Huron River, ending a 16.5 mile, two day trek. The Canoe Trail now begins at Proud Lake with a 3 mile backpack upstream to obtain preplaced or rented canoes and follows the Huron River to the Kensington Metropark Organizational Campsite to end day one. The second day's portion of the Canoe trek travels from west to east across the original portion of the trail that has existed since 1958; ending at the Proud Lake Recreation Area. The current Canoe trek provides the experience of 11 miles on water and 8.2 miles on foot.

A southern Trailhead was established in 2003, offering the Scout the opportunity to hike a south to north route that passes under I-96 and around the western edge of Kent Lake. The first day's trek ends at the Kensington Metropark Organizational campsite. The second day's portion of the trek travels from west to east across the original portion of the trail that has existed since 1958; ending at the Proud Lake Recreation Area.

A Winter Trek experience was established in 1990 and is fully located with in the Proud Lake Recreation Area. The intent is to provide a CPT cold weather experience that requires an overnight temperature below 32 degrees F and a daytime temperature no higher then 44 degrees F. The Winter Trail can be backpacked

or undertaken while pulling all of the required support gear on a sled. The CPT Winter trek covers 8.2 miles of cross country ski trails that are shared with other park visitors. A few Scout units undertake the CPT Winter Trek as a cross country ski adventure; weather permitting sufficient snow to accomplish this intent.

There is a wide range of backpacking treks available on the CPT which helps make it one of the greatest Scout Hiking Trails in the United States. Scouts hiking the Trail are afforded a unique credentialing map they can use for the hike/canoe trek. The Chief Pontiac Trail Committee uses these to validate the completion of all requirements prior to awarding any patches or medals. There are many other programs offered by the Chief Pontiac Trail Committee and one of these an O.A. Trek opportunity, throughout the year, that is open to only members of the Order of the Arrow. They earn special patches and a unique copper medal different than the regular nickel-silver trek medal. There are also programs for Cub Scouts via their Lil' Brave Program that is designed to ease the Cub Scouts into the rigors of the Trail as they grow within Scouting. More information on all of these programs can be found at <http://www.chiefpontiacprograms.org/> or e-mail them at info@chiefpontiacprograms.org

The Chief Pontiac Trail is an example of what hiking trails should be – historical, rigorous, educational and fun. The Trail Committee has worked hard to maintain the original integrity of the opening day trail in 1958 and has been highly successful in doing this. But one thing this Trail has over all others is the most beautiful and prized Trail Medal in Scouting. The bust of Chief Pontiac with two long headdress feathers extending backwards has been in use from 1958



to present. The same die is still used to this date from Bastian Brothers of Rochester, NY. They maintain their relationship with Bastian in order to maintain the legacy of all Scouts receiving the distinct Silver Pontiac Bust Medal. There have been many Trail Medals made over the years that are fabulous in their design, but none reach the beauty, detail, simplicity, tradition and collectability of the CPT Medal. There have been no variations in the suspended Medal for the trail other than a Silver tone Medal for the regular hike and a Copper tone Medal for the O.A. Trek. There have only been three ribbon variations since 1958. The traditional Red-White-Red ribbon is still used for the regular hike and a solid Red ribbon for the O.A. Hike. The third ribbon variant is from 1963, when the Red-White-Red ribbon had a Topper bar for the Bicentennial of the "Pontiac Uprising". The back of the Medal states "SCOUT Walked in Chief Pontiac's Steps". Originally the blank or was left for the Scout to fill in their name and date of hike. In 1984, the CPT Committee began to track the Medals they issued by having them engraved with a sequential Serial Number, the Scouts name and date of hike. They were placed on the Master List of those who hiked the Trail so the Committee could track who received the honor. In addition, they offered Repeat Hiker Pins – colored Arrowheads (Blue – Canoe Trail Repeat; White – Winter Trail Repeat; Grey – Hike Repeat). These have become very coveted and hard to earn since the length of the trail is so long. But when combined these Medals simply are the most striking issued in all of Scouting. And

CHIEF PONTIAC TRAIL

FOR SCOUTS, SCOUTERS & VENTURERS

The credential hike program is a backpacking program designed to challenge youth and adults. It is a high adventure program that involves not only backpacking, canoeing, or winter trekking, but includes a report process designed to challenge the mind as well as the body.

The 16.5 mile trail is in Oakland County in South Eastern Michigan. Two different hiking treks are available and an option to canoe a portion of the trail. The winter trek covers a shorter distance but still involves overnight camping. The recognition items include a patch and serialized, engraved medal detailing the participants history with the trail program. Upon completion of the credential process the individual awards are presented by the CPT committee at a unit court of honor or other awards function, in a very impressive and highly personalized program.

This program has a very involved set of rules and requires close coordination with the Chief Pontiac Committee.

Visit us at <http://www.glescouting.org/epp/credhike.html> or
Email us at chiefpontiactrail@gmail.com for more info.

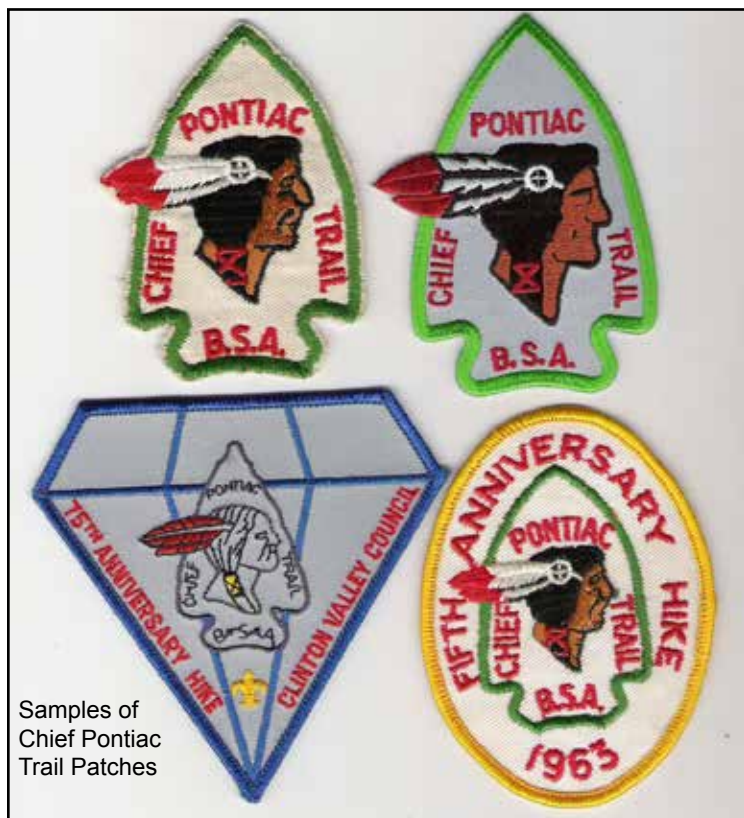


each are still packed with the original Bastian placards of old and presented to those who earn them by the Committee at special Courts of Honor. To find a Pontiac Medal is to find a treasure, as most Scouts simply will not let go of these due to the time, effort and sacrifice placed in earning them – not to mention their good looks and collectivity!

There are also a number of Patches issued by the CPT Committee over the years. Originally there was a simple Arrowhead patch with Repeat an Anniversary patches. These changed over the years and today the CPT Committee offers the following: 1) Arrowhead Trail Patch for first timers or repeat hikers; 2) Canoeist Patch for first timers or repeat canoeists; 3) Winter Trek Patch (same as 1 & 2); 4) CPT Service Project Patch – awarded after completing 6 hours of service on the Trail or at the Council Scout Camp; 5) CPT “Pioneer” Patch – given to

Scouts and Scouters who complete a full trek and participate in all camping and backpacking requirements but who do not submit or complete all of the report documentation requirements.

Then there are the above and beyond Awards which come in the form of Back Patches. Known to most as “Circle the Fire” these include the following: 1) “Circle the Fire” Back patch – for completion of one Hike, one Canoe trek, one Winter trek and six hours of Service; 2) “OA Circle the Fire” Back Patch – same as #1 but limited to OA treks and service; 3) “Black Ghost 40 Circle the Fire” Back Patch - for Adults age 40-49 who earn the Regular Circle the Fire back Patch, 2 Hike treks (non-OA), 2 Canoe treks, 2 Winter treks & 12 hours of CPT Service; 4) “Silver Ghost 50 Circle the Fire Back Patch” – for Adults age 50-59 who earn the Regular Circle the Fire Back Patch, the Black Ghost Circle back patch and three Hike, Canoe and Winter treks, along with 18 hours of Service to the CPT; 5) “Yellow Ghost 60+ Circle the Fire Back Patch” – for Adults age 60-69 who earn one Regular Circle the Fire Back Patch, one Black Ghost & Silver Ghost Back Patch and four total Hike, Canoe and Winter treks, along with 24 hours of Service to the CPT. So as one can see the Chief Pontiac Trail is demanding and continuously inviting – offering multiple opportunities for awards, adventure, honing Scout Skills and providing exercise that augments the current ScoutSTRONG Program.



Samples of Chief Pontiac Trail Patches

For collectors, the Chief Pontiac Trail offers some of the most fascinating and difficult to earn / acquire pieces of memorabilia. None more so than the Trail Medals – that rival and surpass all I have ever seen from an aesthetic perspective and pure collectivity. Whoever originally designed the Medal created a striking and unforgettable piece of Scouting History that has stood the test of time, changes in Scouting and urban sprawl to remain one of the most formidable trails in all of the United States. A tip of the Hat to Mr. Richard G. Russell, Jr. (current Chairman) and the Chief Pontiac Programs Committee for their tireless work in maintaining this great Chief Pontiac Trail for all Scouts to enjoy!

Should you have a Trail or story you would like to share for a future article, please contact me and we will talk through the details. I am always excited to hear about new trails or those that are established and continue to serve our Scouting needs.