



Hello GDTA Volunteers!

This guide is intended to provide you with information of what to expect while you're volunteering on a GDTA trail crew. It will inform you how to plan and prepare for your trip. However, we can only provide you with the basics here. Learning what life is actually like on a trail crew will only come from experiencing it yourself.

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## The Great Divide Trail Association Vision and Mission

- The Great Divide Trail Association's (GDTA) Vision is the completion and long-term protection of the Great Divide Trail, providing a unique wilderness experience in the Canadian Rocky Mountains along the spine of the Great Divide.
- The GDTA's Mission is to provide a public amenity by planning, designing, constructing, maintaining, and obtaining formal recognition and protection for the Great Divide Trail as a significant heritage site in the Rocky Mountains of Canada; and
- Educate the public about the Great Divide Trail, and promote and encourage its use in a manner consistent with the conservation and preservation of the scenic and wilderness value of the Rocky Mountains of Canada.

To learn more about the Great Divide Trail Association visit [greatdividetrail.com](http://greatdividetrail.com)

## THE GDTA TRAIL CREW

Volunteer Trail Crews are a vital component in the building, maintenance, and protection of the GDT. Each year these GDTA volunteer-led trail crews take out new and seasoned volunteers to conduct trail work. Projects can include maintaining and constructing structures, maintaining and improving tread, as well as brushing and clearing vegetation. Trail crew volunteers provide invaluable assistance to make the GDT the amazing trail that it is today.

Each trail crew is composed of a diverse group of people. Getting to know your fellow trail crew members can be fun and is an inevitable part of being on a trail crew. The crew size will typically consist of 10-20 individuals. Since the crew camps and works together throughout the duration of the project it is important that all crew members pitch in to help one another. Responsibilities are shared both on the trail and at the camp. Many times teamwork is the only way to complete a task at hand.

Each crew has one to three crew leaders who will act as a source of information, education, assistance, and advice to you. They oversee and make decisions on matters concerning crew life, safety and work. While the crew leaders are there to ensure the quality of work and oversee a safe working environment, they are also there to act as instructors. We want you to learn valuable trail skills that you can use to do the job right. We encourage you to ask questions, watch and work with experienced crew members, and learn all that you can. Try to experience a variety of work projects during your involvement with the crew. Find your own pace and work together with your fellow crew members.

We know that your time and energy are extremely valuable. Our goal is to provide you with the opportunity to use your strengths and pursue your passions to not only better the GDT but also enrich your own life.

## Trip Models

The GDTA utilizes six different trip models, depending on the location and type of trail work. All trip models include tool training and safety orientation but vary in duration, size and camp set-up. Volunteers provide their own personal backpacking gear (tent, backpack, sleeping bag) and need to be comfortable living and working in the backcountry. When possible, OHV support will assist with transport of tools and gear to base camp and work locations. The chart on the next page highlights the key features of each trip model and will help you decide what trip you would like to volunteer for.



**Signature Trips** showcase how much fun it is to be involved with the GDTA, creating a safe learning opportunity for new volunteers while building or maintaining an important section of the GDT. Signature trip base camps are accessible by vehicle or OHV allowing for an enhanced camp set-up that includes full backcountry kitchen facilities, a privy and a solar shower. All food is provided and meals are prepared by a head cook with volunteers taking turns helping out in the kitchen with prep and clean up.

**Base Camp Trips** are similar to signature trips with camp accessible by vehicle or OHV but with a scaled down camp and kitchen set-up. This trip model offers a more independent camp experience with volunteers responsible for bringing and cooking their own food.

**Self-Supported Trips** involve smaller crews, fewer or no camp facilities and a more independent and flexible camp experience. Self-supported trips might require hiking in a short distance to camp without OHV support. This is a preferred trip for experienced volunteers.

**Backcountry Walking Trips** offer a unique experience for a mobile crew, performing light trail maintenance while hiking 10-15 kilometres per day on the GDT. Camp location moves daily and participants are responsible for their own gear and food. This trip model is designed for small crews where backpacking experience and a higher level of fitness is required.

**Scouting Trips** are designed for experienced trail builders who are able to evaluate trail and terrain conditions to prepare for trail building and maintenance trips. Crews are small, mobile and often cover large distances. Due to the demands of scouting, backpacking experience is required.

**Bridge Building Trips** involve technical construction techniques so volunteers with wood and bridge construction experience are preferred. Camp set-up is usually similar to that of a Base Camp trip.

TRIP MODELS	Signature	Base Camp	Self-Supported	Backcountry Walking	Scouting	Bridge Building
<b>GDTA Membership</b>	Required on all trips					
<b>Number of Participants</b>	15-20	10-20	5-12	2-10	2-6	3-10
<b>Duration (days)</b>	5-6	5-6	2-6	2-6	1-4	2-6
<b>Trip Fee</b>	\$150	None				
<b>Experience</b>	Trail crew experience not required; Backpacking experience recommended	Trail crew experience not required; Backpacking experience recommended	Trail crew experience recommended; Backpacking experience recommended	Trail crew experience recommended; Backpacking experience required	Trail crew experience recommended; Backpacking experience required	Bridge building experience recommended; Backpacking experience recommended
<b>Transportation</b>	Crew carpooling arranged or encouraged; Drivers reimbursed fuel expenses					
<b>Food</b>	Provided by GDTA	Provided by participants				
<b>Cook</b>	Yes	No				
<b>Kitchen</b>	Yes	Yes	Optional	No	No	Optional
<b>Privy</b>	Yes	Yes	Optional	No	No	Optional
<b>Solar shower</b>	Yes	Optional	No	No	No	No
<b>Tool training, First Aid, Sat comm device</b>	Provided by GDTA on all trips					



## Your First Day

You will begin by meeting the crew at a designated location and time. Please review the directions to the meeting location well enough in advance so that if you have questions you will have adequate time to get answers and clarification. It is important to meet the crew at the appointed time. If, for whatever reason, you are running late, please contact a crew leader to let them know. After meeting, your personal gear will be packed into the vehicles and the crew will drive to the trailhead to set up camp, backpack to a base camp, or begin work on the trail.

## The Trail Crew's Daily Schedule

The daily schedule will vary depending on the project and crew. Once you meet your crew, the leaders will provide you with additional details on what you can expect each day. Work days are typically six to eight hours long and you can expect each full work day to contain:

- Breakfast at camp.
- Training and safety sessions with the crew leaders.
- Trail maintenance briefing prior to the beginning of a new project.
- Trail work in a backcountry setting that can be up to 10 km from a trailhead or base camp
- Lunch and snack breaks while out on the trail.
- Dinner and evening relaxation, conversation, and personal time back at camp.

Shared kitchen facilities will be available to use on Base Camp Trips but all crew members will be responsible for bringing and preparing their own meals, as well as cleanup. On Signature Trips, all meals are provided throughout the duration of the project, and all crew members are expected to help out with cooking and cleanup. Leave No Trace Principles are also practiced – Please see the *Leave the No Trace Principles* section at the end of this guide to learn more.

## Nutrition and Meals

A well-fed crew is a happy crew! Food is one of the most important facets of a trail crew. As trail workers burn calories and expend energy at a rapid rate, the need and desire for food increases. On Signature Trips we bring meals and snacks that are delicious, nutritious, and filling. On Base Camp and Self-Supported Trips, we recommend you do the same. If you have food allergies or dietary restrictions, please contact the GDTA with your needs at least four weeks prior to the project start date.

## What You Will Need to Bring

In the week prior to your trip, check weather forecasts and refer to emails from your trip leader for more information on predicted weather, and pack accordingly. At the end of this guide you will find a *What to Bring Checklist*. When packing, please keep in mind:

- Temperatures may vary from as low as freezing at night to the high 20s (Celsius) during the day. Weather can change quickly and it often does. We work in the mountains so be prepared for cooler temperatures and dress warm. Crews work in almost every condition, rain or shine, cold or hot, so please come prepared for all elements.
- Trail work is dirty. Since you will be working in the dirt and may be working in mud or dense vegetation, please bring appropriate gear. This means you may want to reconsider bringing your most expensive outdoor apparel.
- Insects are always a possibility. This can include mosquitoes, black flies, horse flies, and ticks in some areas. Clothing that covers your arms and legs can prevent bites; consider bringing insect repellent. Inspect your body at the end of the day and when you get home for bites.



- Ample sunshine can make for a great day on the trail; however, at higher elevations the risk of sunburn increases. You should bring a hat, sunglasses, sunscreen, and lip balm.
- You should bring a minimum of 2 litres of water as you're working throughout the day. In dry areas, each trail crew will have a large water jug available for re-filling water bottles.
- We recommend bringing a folding lawn/camp chair for sitting around the campfire in the evenings.
- A second pair of shoes/boots is recommended for rainy days or creek crossings. Gaiters are also helpful in wet/muddy/snowy conditions.
- For your personal safety, we recommend bringing a whistle and bear spray and have them both readily available while out on the trail.
- Bring a bag lunch for the drive to camp on Day 1.

## Keeping Clean

Sanitation is a vital component to crew life. Good sanitation practices can minimize transmission of respiratory infections, including COVID-19, influenza and common colds. Since hands are the main transmitting devices please wash them often. Here are a few guidelines that all crew members need to follow:

- Wash your hands before handling any food.
- Liquid hand sanitizer is available at the privy.
- Wash all cooking gear and personal eating utensils after meals.
- Purified water will be available at camp but if using water from outdoor sources make sure to treat, boil, or purify it.

## TOOLS

All trail maintenance tools will be provided by the GDTA.

**Hand Tools:** loppers; pruning shears; bow saw or hand saw; pole saw (curved blade attached to extended handle); rake, hoe, or shovel for tread repair; Pulaski (axe/adze combination), mattock (pick/adze combination); hammer; crowbar; paint supplies for blazing.

**Power Tools:** brush saw, chainsaw.

## Tool Safety

- Choose the right tool for the job. The wrong tool can force you to work in awkward position, increasing fatigue.
- Keep your tools sharp. They cut easier and safer when sharp.
- Keep a good grip on your tools; always wear gloves.
- Carry your tools properly. Carry tools in downhill hand with the working-side forward, sharpest side facing ground. Do not carry tools over your shoulder – this is a good way to hurt someone else.
- Watch where you swing a tool. Keep well clear of your work mates' sphere of tool swinging. Be careful of other workers and of overhead hazards.
- When passing near someone using a tool, ensure they are aware of your presence and communicate clearly: "head's up" or "passing through".



## When Using Power Tools

- At a minimum wearing ear protection, eye protection and a hard hat are mandatory.
- Protective pants/chaps are mandatory when using a chainsaw.
- Protect your fellow workers; power tools throw debris great distances at high speed. Know where your assistants are at all times and encourage them to keep a respectable distance from your active work site.
- Chainsaw use and brush saw use are allowed only by trained personnel.

## Trail Clearing Principles

- Follow the tread and clearing width dimensions as outlined by your crew leader.
- Work on the trail tread as much as possible rather than on either side.
- Cut stumps and shrubs as close to ground level as possible.
- Carry or scatter cleared material out of sight from the trail.
- Never use an axe for limbing live trees. Cut branches flush without removing trunk bark.
- Ideally the completed trail should look like it has always been part of the landscape.

## SAFETY

Safety is a very important to us and is something we will address here and again on the trail. The GDTA adheres to federal and provincial health and safety guidelines and restrictions where applicable. Volunteers will be made aware when such restrictions could impact your trail maintenance experience.

While building trail, we utilize a variety of tools. If used improperly, they can be dangerous and there is the risk of an accident. In addition, the daily use of trail tools can be stressful on your body. We do our best to avoid injuries. The best way is to be mindful, listen to your crew leader and be aware of your fellow crew members. Work smarter, not harder. Don't try to compete with yourself or anyone else. If you're tired and need a water break, take it! Be particularly attentive at the end of the day, as most injuries occur when folks are tired.

Any participant on a project should feel responsible and empowered to stop trail work operations if they spot a safety concern or problem. They should immediately inform the crew leader(s) regarding safety issues, or inappropriate comments or behavior. In addition, all participants on a project should work within their personal physical limits and should not feel compelled to push themselves beyond their limits. Nothing is as important as an individual's personal safety. All participants need to be honest with each other regarding the state of their personal well-being. The right to refuse work, as outlined in the GDTA Safety Manual, will be honoured.

Each crew leader is trained in emergency procedures and each trail crew is equipped with first aid kits and at least one individual with first aid training. Prior to beginning trail work, the crew leaders will provide the crew with a safety session. You will be instructed of the emergency protocol, location of the first aid kit, and any other safety precautions that need to be taken at the particular project site.

To help protect your personal safety, please take the following precautions while you're on a trail crew:

- Wear boots with slip-resistant tread that offer sturdy support. Light-weight running shoes, sneakers, and sandals are not appropriate.
- Wear clothing suited to the location, climate, and job.
- Long pants are required for trail work. Long sleeved shirts are recommended as needed.
- Always wear safety glasses or sunglasses for eye protection.



- Wear sunscreen.
- Drink water regularly.
- Never work alone.
- Rotate tasks and tools used to mitigate repetitive muscle strain.
- Be sure others know where you are at.
- Watch your step and make sure you have secure footing at all times.
- Always be on guard for falling trees, snags, limbs, rolling logs, or rocks.

### In an Emergency

In the event that someone does get injured, your first priority should immediately become their welfare. Stop work and use whatever means possible to get them medical attention. Use on-site first aid, and then use whatever communication method available to seek further help if necessary. A satellite communication device will be available for emergency use. Try to have medical personnel meet you at the trailhead if necessary, then help the injured volunteer to the trailhead.

### Working in Bear Country

The Great Divide is home to both grizzly and black bears. Because our trail crews most often consist of more than 4 people, bear encounters while working on the trail are very uncommon, but knowing how to avoid an encounter is the best way to protect yourself. Volunteers are recommended to carry bear spray and know how to use it. When working on the trail make noise so you don't surprise a bear, especially near noisy creeks or in areas of low visibility. At camp, ensure all food, garbage, recyclables and any other smelly items are locked away in secure storage (like the GDTA trailer), a bear proof container, or hung from a tree away from your campsite. Under no circumstances should food or other sources of smells be stored in your tent.

### For Your Protection

The attached *GDTA Trailblazer Checklist and Release Form* have been designed to ensure you have a safe and enjoyable volunteer experience and make you aware of the risks that come with doing trail maintenance work. The *GDTA Release Form* must be completed and signed by all volunteers prior to your trip.

### Ensure Your Experience is Positive

Living and working on the trail can be an enjoyable and rewarding experience. While each person's experience will be different, we often hear from volunteers at the end of their project that they feel refreshed and energized, satisfied with the work they performed, excited about their new friendships, and thankful for the opportunity to give back to the Trail.

While we try to make sure your needs are met while on a trail crew, please remember you are a vital component in ensuring your own experience is a positive one. Being flexible and open-minded with a willingness to work as part of a team will help to make your experience joyous and memorable.

We have created a Facebook group to connect past, current, and future trail building volunteers that you may access [here](#). It is a great resource to ask general questions about the GDTA trip experience, including gear suggestions. If you have any specific questions, or do not use Facebook, please contact your trip leader.

We look forward to seeing you on the Great Divide Trail!



## WHAT TO BRING CHECKLIST

For all backpacking/backcountry trips, please bring lightweight, compact items and equipment even if your crew will be assisted by OHV support. Label or mark everything with your name.

### Clothing

Crews work in almost every condition, rain or shine, cold or hot, so please come prepared for all elements. Layers work best as outdoor temperatures, weather, and your activity level will vary through the day. Follow the layering system for your work and camp clothes. Long pants are required to conduct trail work. Long sleeve shirts are recommended for sun and insect protection and in some areas are required for trail work.

- Layer 1: Lightweight long-sleeve top or t-shirt, pants and socks, preferably made of synthetic material.
- Layer 2: Mid-weight insulating layer – wool or synthetic shirt and pants. Can be more than one layer; bring additional layers if you get cold easily. Cotton is not recommended.
- Layer 3: Rain coat and rain pants, or other water/wind resistant gear.
- Sturdy boots. No sandals or sneakers while working on the trail but you may want to bring these for wearing at camp or creek crossings.
- A change of clothes (warm and dry) for camp, including a warm hat and gloves.
- Work gloves

### Sleeping Items

- Tent
- Sleeping bag – Recommended rating -5° to -10°C
- Sleeping mat
- Pillow

### Food and Cooking

- \* Food and snacks (\*Provided by the GDTA on Signature Trips)
- \* Plates, bowls, cutlery (\*Provided by the GDTA on Signature Trips)
- \* Cooking pots, pans and utensils (\*Provided by the GDTA on Signature Trips)
- \* Cooking stove and fuel (\*Provided by the GDTA on Signature and Base Camp Trips)
- Hard-sided (i.e. bear proof) food storage container
- Reusable container to pack lunch
- Cup / insulated drinking mug
- Water bottles – 2 litres water storage recommended

### Toiletries and Personal Items

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sunscreen          | <input type="checkbox"/> Insect repellent   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hand sanitizer     | <input type="checkbox"/> Flashlight or headlamp   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sunglasses         | <input type="checkbox"/> Bear spray   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hat                | <input type="checkbox"/> Whistle  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lip balm           | <input type="checkbox"/> Large daypack – You'll be carrying tools as well as your personal gear |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Biodegradable soap | <input type="checkbox"/> Camera   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Towel              | <input type="checkbox"/> Folding lawn/camp chair  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Medications        |   |

### Other Items to Consider

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Alarm clock        | <input type="checkbox"/> Book to read  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Compass and/or GPS | <input type="checkbox"/> Notebook to write in  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pocket knife       | <input type="checkbox"/> Water filter or purification (purified water will be available at camp) |





## LEAVE NO TRACE PRINCIPLES

(from Leave No Trace Canada, Outdoor Ethics)

Leave No Trace Principles are utilized by the Great Divide Trail Association. While obviously performing trail work can result in “leaving a trace”, these principles are designed to help us minimize our impact on nature. Please do your part by reviewing and applying these principles whenever you are travelling and staying outdoors.

- 1. Plan ahead and prepare.** Outdoor users can increase their level of safety and comfort as well as minimize damage to nature by planning ahead and being prepared for the terrain and weather conditions that will be encountered. Users need to be prepared for all weather conditions and have adequate gear including clothing, boots, shelter, water, and food.
- 2. Travel and camp on durable surfaces.** A primary, identifiable trail provides a route that concentrates outdoor users and minimizes the impact to the area. Trampling can occur when users depart from this trail. The resulting barren area can lead to erosion and with consistent use the area will be unable to recover. When traveling users should avoid shortcuts and walk in a single file in the middle of the marked trail even when wet or muddy. Choose the most durable surfaces such as sand, gravel, rock, dry grasses, or snow when traveling and camping. Protect riparian areas by camping at least 50 metres from the edge of a stream or lake.
- 3. Dispose of waste properly.** Be informed about proper waste storage and disposal. A good rule is: pack it in, pack it out. Leftover food needs to be properly sealed and stored away from the tent. If latrines are unavailable, human waste will need to be disposed of in catholes 15 to 20 centimetres deep in the soil and at least 70 metres from a water source. Toilet paper and hygiene products need to be packed out. To wash dishes or yourself, water needs to be carried at least 70 metres from the water source. Strained dishwasher should be scattered. You can also practice “negative trace” by picking up trash that others may have left behind.
- 4. Leave what you find.** Preserve the present and the past. Leave rocks, plants, natural objects, and historic and cultural artifacts as you found them. Take pictures instead! Do not dig tent trenches or hammer nails into trees. Replace rocks and twigs that you may have cleared when setting up your campsite. Avoid introducing or transporting non-native species by keeping your boots and gear clean of hitchhiking seeds.
- 5. Minimize campfire impacts.** Natural areas have become increasingly degraded with an overuse of fires and increased demand in firewood. Alternatively, a lightweight stove can be used for cooking and a candle lantern or headlamp can be used for light. If fires are permitted they should be limited to fire rings, fire pans, or mound fires. They need to be kept small and made from sticks found on the ground that can be broken by hand. Campfires need to be extinguished completely and the cool ashes scattered.
- 6. Respect wildlife.** Wildlife need to be quietly observed from a distance. Users should not follow, approach, or feed them. During sensitive times (mating, nesting, raising young, winter) wildlife should be altogether avoided. Storing food, scented personal items, and trash in secure locations can help protect the user and the local wildlife.
- 7. Be considerate of others.** All users have the right to an enjoyable outdoor experience. Courtesy and respect toward fellow-users help protect the quality of their experience. Yield to other users on the trail, step to the downhill side of the trail when pack stock are passing, and camp away from the trail and other visitors. Let nature’s sounds prevail by avoiding loud and obtrusive voices and noises.



## The Great Divide Trail Association Volunteer Trailblazer Checklist

### Dear Volunteer:

Thank you for volunteering to help care for the Great Divide Trail. To help ensure a safe and enjoyable day, please review the following items and verify they have been explained to your satisfaction by the GDTA crew leaders. If you have any questions about any of the items, please ask the appropriate person.

### The GDTA Crew Leaders responsibilities are to ensure:

- The crew leaders and fellow workers have been introduced.
- You understand the mission of the Great Divide Trail Association and the objective of this trail maintenance trip.
- You have been told approximately how far you will be hiking and estimated finish times.
- They have checked that you have adequate clothing, footwear, water, food, etc.
- You have told at least one person about any allergies or health concerns you may have.
- You know what to do in a case of emergency.
- You have discussed and are aware of who in your group has first aid and/or emergency communications.
- You are aware of where the emergency satellite communication device is, its proper operation including who to call for outside assistance if required.
- You have discussed safety issues including the carrying of tools and the importance of staying together as a group.
- The various work tasks as well as the maintenance standards for the day have been explained.
- You have been shown how to correctly use the tools provided.
- You have discussed and know how to store tools on the trail when not in use.
- You step aside when hikers or others walk through the work site.
- You work within a safe distance from fellow workers.
- You receive adequate rest breaks and a lunch break.
- You rotate work tasks to prevent boredom or overuse of muscles and enhance learning.
- Remember, for your own safety, if you have any further questions or concerns regarding tool usage, procedures, first aid requirements, etc., please ask your crew leader at any time throughout the day.

- I have been provided with and understand the information above considered pertinent to volunteering for trail building and maintenance activities with the Great Divide Trail Association.



## THE GREAT DIVIDE TRAIL ASSOCIATION RELEASE FORM

Note: As there is a risk of being injured when doing trail maintenance, please read, complete the RELEASE and sign below. **\*\*Please Print Clearly\*\***

FULL NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

EMERGENCY CONTACT: \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

In consideration of the Great Divide Trail Association accepting this, my application for voluntarily participating in trail building and maintenance, I hereby waive and release any and all claims for damage (whether for personal injury, death, illness, property damage and/or property loss), including claims for successors and assigns which I may have as a consequence of my involvement in any activity organized by the Great Divide Trail Association, the executives, members of committees, the volunteers and other participants in any activity organized by the Great Divide Trail Association and their volunteers.

I acknowledge that trail maintenance is an activity that comes with inherent risks (both known and unknown), and in signing this RELEASE FORM it is my intention to accept those risks, and all the consequences thereof, for myself alone. The terms of the RELEASE are severable from one another, and the invalidity of any one or more clauses in the RELEASE shall not affect the validity of the other clauses.

Notwithstanding the fact that medical information is privileged I hereby acknowledge that I am not required, but may in my own best interest and for personal reasons choose to advise my crew leader of the following health conditions:

\_\_\_\_\_

I ACKNOWLEDGE THAT I HAVE READ THIS RELEASE IN ITS ENTIRETY, THAT I UNDERSTAND AND AGREE TO BE BOUND BY ITS TERMS AND I AM SIGNING IT VOLUNTARILY AND WITHOUT DURESS OR UNDUE INFLUENCE FROM ANYONE.

SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

Without charge or notice, I grant permission to the Great Divide Trail Association to use audio, video or photographs of me, arising from my volunteer service with the Great Divide Trail Association for purposes related to the mission of the Great Divide Trail Association. INITIAL: \_\_\_\_\_