

The story of the Friends



In the beginning

The Friends of Killarney Park unofficially began in 1985 when the Park's superintendent, Jay Leather, introduced the Host Program. The program encouraged volunteers who were familiar with the Park to host visitors by answering questions, giving directions and helping with trip planning. Original Friends, Nancy and Gord Swatkov, and Jim and Peggy Park took on this task. They set up a picnic table, map and bookshelf at their campsite and met daily with Park visitors.

Eventually a group of these hosts formed what is now the Friends of Killarney Park. They held the inaugural meeting on January 18, 1986 where they elected the first board of directors. On June 17, 1986, the agreement between the Friends and the crown was signed. Ten days later, the Friends of Killarney became a registered charitable organization. With a very dedicated volunteer board and 40 members, the Friends was established.

The developing years

The first task of the Friends was to take over the production and sales of the Park map – earning revenue to keep the organization growing. A small kiosk was built where maps could be sold (along with a few souvenir items). As interest in the Park increased and visitor numbers grew, there was a need for a larger building. In 1992, Ontario Parks built a new gate office, also providing a new office and Outpost store for the Friends. In 1995, a second gate office was built at Bell Lake providing a second location for the bookstore.

The Friends eventually received grant money to hire summer students for projects like backcountry rehabilitation, trail maintenance and visitor programs. As the organization grew, it became necessary to hire an executive director. With the expansion of staffing and current operations, the organization was flourishing.

Today, and into the future

Over the years the Friends have evolved into a leader of Friends groups in Ontario. Today, with more than 400 enthusiastic members and committed board and staff, the Friends play a vital role in protecting the environment and producing valuable recreational and educational materials for Killarney visitors. Guided by strategic and fundraising plans, the organization is working hard to guarantee the continued well-being of the spectacular landscape.