



About Walk for Wenjack

The Walk for Wenjack is a grassroots event that started in 2016. The first walk retraced the steps of Chanie Wenjack, a young Anishinaabe boy who died while trying to return home after escaping a residential school. Since then, Walk for Wenjack has provided Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada with the opportunity to participate in Secret Path Week in a meaningful way. It offers a space for people to come together to reflect, learn, and take action on the journey toward reconciliation.

Secret Path Week: Oct. 17th-22nd

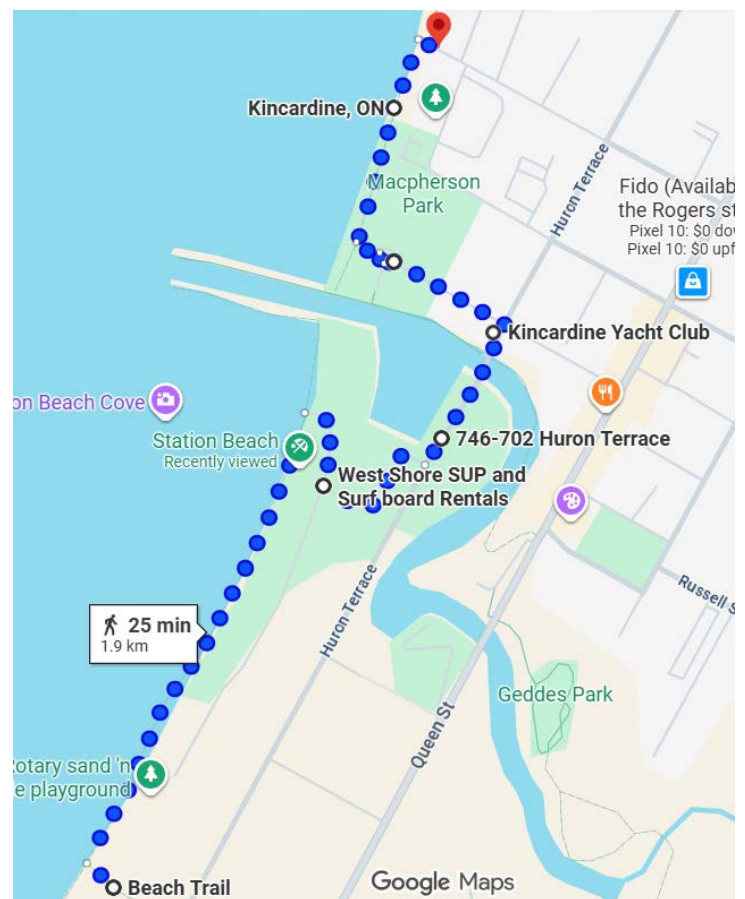
As a national movement to commemorate the legacies of Chanie Wenjack and Gord Downie, Secret Path Week marks the dates that Gord Downie (Oct. 17th) and Chanie Wenjack (Oct. 22nd) joined the spirit world. The Downie Wenjack Fund calls on Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples to answer Gord's call to "Do Something" by engaging in reconciliACTIONS during this week.



Walk for Wenjack

Station Beach to Dunsmoor Park

Municipality of Kincardine



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Program for the Walk for Wenjack – Municipality of Kincardine

Agenda	Location
Welcome – Bryon Millette, Warden Charbonneau & Mayor Craig Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation, Bruce County & Municipality of Kincardine	Station Beach – southwest end gazebo
Land Acknowledgement – Councillor Beth Blackwell Municipality of Kincardine	Station Beach – southwest end gazebo
Blessing – Elder Shirley John Saugeen First Nation	Station Beach – southwest end of park gazebo
Walk	See map
Reflection and refreshments – Christine John Founder & Principal Consultant Owl Vision Strategies	Dunsmoor Park – outdoor pavilion

Notes: *If you are not able to do the walk please feel free to join us at Dunsmoor Pavilion for the reflection discussion. There is also a porta potty available at Dunsmoor Park by the pavilion.*

Background for Bruce County

In partnership with Bruce County, the Municipality of Kincardine is participating in the national Walk for Wenjack initiative, led by the Gord Downie & Chanie Wenjack Fund (DWF). Walk for Wenjack events in Bruce County are hosted in partnership with Cape Croker Park, Ktaamgwedaagwad Gindasswin Adult Learning Centre, Nawash Chief and Council, Bruce County Museum & Cultural Centre, Bruce County Public Library, the Municipality of Kincardine, the Municipality of Brockton, and Bruce Power. The 2025 Walk for Wenjack series began on Thursday, August 14th, 2025, at Cape Croker Park in Neyaashiinigmiing. There are several walks held throughout Bruce County.

About the Gord Downie and Chanie Wenjack Fund (DWF)

[The Gord Downie and Chanie Wenjack Fund](#) is part of Gord Downie's legacy and embodies his and his family's commitment to improving the lives of First Peoples in Canada. In collaboration with the Wenjack family, the fund seeks to continue the conversation that began with Chanie Wenjack's story and to support reconciliation through awareness, education and action.

Chanie's Journey & The Secret Path

This guided walk is inspired by *Mapping the Secret Path*, a timeline created by the Gord Downie & Chanie Wenjack Fund. Along the route, there are 10 stops, each representing part of Chanie's experience—from his journey to residential school to his attempt to return home. This handout follows the same path: at each stop, you'll find the related section to read, learn, and reflect on the story and its lasting impact.



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Starting Location – Home (Ogoki Post) – Station Beach Gazebo

Chanie Wenjack was born on January 19, 1954, in Marten Falls First Nation, a small Ojibway community also known as Ogoki Post. Home to about 330 people, it sits at the junction of the Albany and Ogoki Rivers in Northwestern Ontario, accessible only by plane or winter road. Chanie spent his childhood there with his parents, sisters, and two dogs, surrounded by family, culture, and the land that sustained them. In 1963, when he was nine, Chanie and three of his sisters were taken from home and sent far away to residential school.

Understanding Residential Schools

Chanie and his sisters were not alone. From the 1880s until the last school closed in 1996, over 150,000 First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children were separated from their families and communities and sent to government-funded schools that were often hundreds of kilometers away.

The purpose of these schools was not simply education but assimilation—what the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) labeled cultural genocide. This school system was an attempt to erase Indigenous cultures, languages, and ways of life. Children were forbidden to speak their own languages, practice traditions, or see their families for months or years at a time. Many faced neglect, hunger, and abuse, and thousands never made it home. The TRC estimated that over 6,000 children died while attending residential schools, and there is evidence to suggest the true number is even higher since most of these deaths went unrecorded.

The impact of residential schools did not end when the doors closed. Their legacy continues today through lasting intergenerational effects on survivors, families, and communities—and it is into this system that Chanie was sent at just nine years old, shaping the course of his short life and journey.

Stop 1 – Nakina (Plane Flight) – Kincardine Rail Service Placard

When Chanie left Ogoki Post, he took a 45-minute flight to Nakina, a small town in northern Ontario. There, he would board the CN train heading west—the first leg of a journey that would carry him far from home, into unfamiliar landscapes and experiences.

Stop 2 – Train to Redditt – Kincardine Port of Commerce Placard

From Nakina, Chanie boarded a train bound for Redditt, Ontario, along with many other Indigenous children. The journey carried him farther from home than he had ever been, through northern forests and over frozen rivers. Today, this distance could be covered in about 11 hours without stops, but for Chanie and the other children, the trip likely took longer, with delays and extra stops along the way.



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Stop 3 – Arrival at Kenora / Cecilia Jeffrey Indian Residential School – Kincardine Pier & Lake Huron Wrecks Placard

After the train ride, Chanie most likely travelled by car or bus about 31 km to the Cecilia Jeffrey Indian Residential School, on the outskirts of Kenora. The school dormitory became home for around 150 children. Here, Chanie lived away from his family for years, his days governed by the strict routines and rules of the school.

Built in 1901, Cecilia Jeffrey—sometimes called the Shoal Lake School—received children from at least 17 reserves across Ontario and Manitoba. While local leaders had secured some protections, such as classroom learning, limits on labour, and consent for baptism, life at the school was still marked by hardship, separation, and loss. From the mid-1960s onward, it operated primarily as a residence for students attending public schools in Kenora. During his three years there, Chanie attended Rabbit Lake Public School for part of the time.

Stop 4 – The Decision to Escape & First Steps (Running Away) – “Our Founding Fathers” Lookout

On the afternoon of Sunday, October 16, 1966, 12-year-old Chanie was playing on the Cecilia Jeffrey grounds with his friends, Ralph and Jackie McDonald, when the boys decided to run away. They set out on foot, wearing only light clothing and leaving behind whatever few belongings they had in the dormitory.

Heading toward Redditt, they circled the Kenora airfield and then struck north through the bush along a “secret path” used by children at the school. Because Chanie was smaller and not as strong as the others, the boys often had to pause so he could rest. Near the end of this part of the journey, probably along the railway tracks, Chanie picked up a CNR schedule with a route map, marking the next stage of his journey home.

Stop 5 – Mr. Benson and Charles Kelly in Redditt – Old Railway Station/Volleyball Courts

After walking more than eight hours through the night, Chanie and the MacDonald brothers arrived in Redditt. A local man, Mr. Benson, welcomed them with food and a place to sleep. The next morning, they made their way to the cabin of Charles Kelly, the boys’ uncle. Shortly after, Chanie’s friend Eddie Cameron—also a runaway and Kelly’s nephew—arrived. Surrounded by family connections that were



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not his own, Chanie began to feel like an outsider. He told Eddie that he planned to leave soon to find his father, though all he knew was that home was “a long way away, beside a lot of water.”

Stop 6 – Leaving the Kellys / Mud Lake – The Phantom Piper Plaque/Lighthouse

On Thursday morning, Charles Kelly took his nephews by canoe to his trapline at Mud Lake, about five kilometres north of Redditt. There was only room for Kelly and his nephews, so Chanie stayed behind. After playing outside for a while, he told Mrs. Kelly he was leaving and asked for matches, which she carefully packed in a small glass jar. Rather than heading east along the railway, Chanie walked north to Mud Lake, arriving at the trapline cabin before Kelly and the boys in the canoe—perhaps to see his friends one last time before continuing home.

Stop 7 – Walking Along the CN Mainline – 7 Grandfather Teachings Crosswalk

After leaving Mud Lake, Chanie continued his journey home, facing more than half of northern Ontario on foot. Following the Canadian National Railway (CN) mainline eastward, he had only a windbreaker, a small amount of food, some matches, and his map. The land was remote, the temperatures dropping, and his bruises showed he had fallen along the way. For 36 hours, he walked through cold and wind, determined to reach a home that was hundreds of kilometres away

Stop 8 – Final Stretch, Exposure & Death Near Farlane – First Seating Area on Boardwalk

After 36 hours of walking through cold and wet conditions, including snow squalls and freezing rain with temperatures between -1° and -6° C, Chanie collapsed near a rock cut by the CN tracks close to Farlane, Ontario. His body was found beside the tracks, about 20 km from his last known stop, by a railway engineer on Sunday, October 23. A section crew and two police officers transported him back to Kenora, where an autopsy determined that he had died of exposure and hunger.

Stop 9 – Coming Home – Second Seating Area on Boardwalk/Blue Chairs

Chanie Wenjack finally returned home when the Indian Affairs Department transported his body back to Ogoki Post. He was placed in a coffin and sent by train from Redditt, accompanied by his three sisters and the school principal. At Sioux Lookout, his mother joined them, and they flew 110 miles north to their home. Grief-stricken, Chanie’s father buried his only son in the small cemetery on the north shore of the Albany River.



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Stop 10 – Inquest, Aftermath, & Legacy – Dunsmoor Pavilion

Following Chanie's death, an inquest was held. The jury concluded that "the Indian education system causes tremendous emotional and adjustment problems." They recommended that schools be properly staffed so children could develop personal relationships with staff, and that more effort be made to board children in private homes. Perhaps most poignantly, the jury questioned the system itself: "A study be made of the present Indian education and philosophy. Is it right?"

Chanie's story reached many Canadians through the media, notably the 1967 Maclean's article "The Lonely Death of Charlie Wenjack." His death became a catalyst for national conversation about residential schools, and his journey continues to resonate today. Efforts by the Gord Downie & Chanie Wenjack Fund, the National Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and others ensure his story is heard—not only to remember Chanie, but to inspire reconciliation and reflection in all of us.

What does reconciliation mean? What are ReconciliACTIONS?

The term 'reconciliation' often has different interpretations, but for the purposes of this guide, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada refers to reconciliation as:

An ongoing process of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships. A critical part of this process involves repairing damaged trust by making apologies, providing individual and collective reparations, and following through with concrete actions that demonstrate real societal change.

In its simplest form, reconciliation is about Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples coming to terms with the events of the past in a manner that rebuilds trust and respectful relationships. This will enable people to work out historical differences and build healthy relationships with a focus on bettering future generations in Canada.

ReconciliACTIONS are meaningful steps that move reconciliation forward. They bring Indigenous and nonIndigenous people together to create awareness, share, and learn in the spirit of reconciliation. These actions spark important conversations and meaningful change, reminding us that reconciliation begins with each of us and that every person can make a difference.

Some Ideas to Start or Further Your Journey to Reconciliation

- Read the TRC [reports](#), learn about the [94 Calls to Action](#), and [sign up](#) for the TRC newsletter via the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation website
- Register for [virtual events](#) by the National Centre for Truth & Reconciliation
- Watch [the Society of United Professionals Interview](#) with Bob Watts of the TRC



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- Watch the feature film [We Were Children](#) through the National Film Board of Canada
- Sign up for a Woodland Cultural Centre [virtual tour](#)
- Learn about Orange Shirt Day and the story of Phyllis Webstad through the Orange Shirt Society
- Choose an action to take from the list of [150 Acts of Reconciliation](#)
- Learn with [Spirit Bear](#) and visit the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society website for kid-friendly [Books & Learning Guides](#)
- Help get youth from kindergarten to grade 12 involved in [Imagine a Canada](#)
- Enroll in a [free course](#) through the University of Alberta
- Support Indigenous-owned businesses locally and online
- Read or listen to survivor stories through books, blogs, films, podcasts, and online videos
- Attend cultural events like powwows respectfully as a guest on Indigenous lands
- Sign up for educational opportunities such as learning circles
- Start a book club and commit to regular group discussions
- Post a photo, reflection, or commitment on your personal social media sites
- Share resources at home with family and friends to continue your personal learning

Websites

- Saugeen Ojibway Nation: <https://www.saugeenojibwaynation.ca/>
- Saugeen First Nation: <https://saugeenfirstnation.ca/>
- Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation: <https://www.nawash.ca/>
- The Gord Downie & Chanie Wenjack Fund: www.downiewenjack.ca
- Government of Canada's response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1450124405592/1529106060525>
- National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation: <https://nctr.ca/>
- UN Declaration on the rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP): unesco.org
- 21 Things you may not of known about the Indian Act: <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/21-things-you-may-not-have-known-about-the-indian-act->

The Municipality of Kincardine is committed to learning and acknowledging Indigenous history and culture and are committed to actions that move us towards a journey of truth, healing, and reconciliation.

For more information about the work the Municipality of Kincardine is doing, and has done, around Truth and Reconciliation, visit www.kincardine.ca/en/living-here/journey-to-reconciliation.



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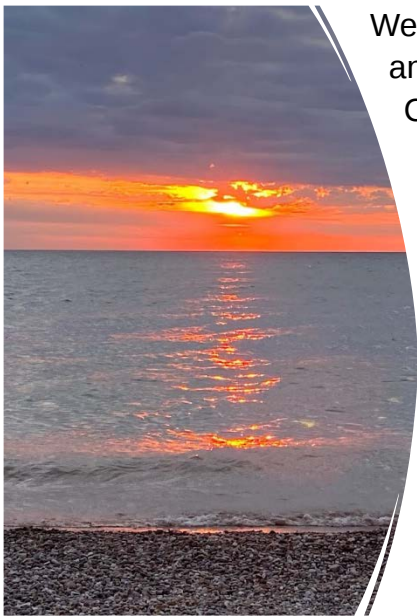


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Land Acknowledgement



We would like to acknowledge that we are walking on the traditional lands and treaty territory of the Saugeen Ojibway Nation, which includes the Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation and the Chippewas of Saugeen First Nation, whose ancestors were the first to inhabit, care for and live on this land.

We recognize and deeply appreciate the contributions that Indigenous Peoples have made, both in caring for this land and shaping and strengthening this community.

We are dedicated to learning and acknowledging Indigenous history and culture and are committed to actions that move us towards a journey of truth, healing and reconciliation with the Saugeen Ojibway Nation (SON), the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) and the Historic Saugeen Métis (HSM).

What is a Land Acknowledgement?

A land acknowledgement involves making a statement recognizing the traditional territory of the Indigenous people(s) who called the land home before the arrival of settlers, and in many cases still do call it home.

Providing an acknowledgement at the beginning of an event or meeting gives time for reflection and demonstrates recognition of Indigenous lands, treaties and peoples. It involves thinking about what happened in the past and present, and what changes can be in the future in order to further the reconciliation process. A land acknowledgement is a reflection process in which you build mindfulness and intention into whatever event or gathering you are having.

When is a Land Acknowledgment Offered?

An acknowledgement is offered at the opening of meetings, ceremonies, lectures or public events. It is to be offered even if there may be no Indigenous individuals present.

Doing a land acknowledgment at the beginning of a meeting does not mean our work and actions are done. The work we need to do towards reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples is a long-term journey which takes commitment, action and meaningful relationship building.

Typically the host of the event – (a non-Indigenous member of the group) will offer the acknowledgement. The person offering the acknowledgement first introduces themselves and may include family lineage and other connections to the land and Indigenous people if they so choose.



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