

# The Conversation

**YOU READ IT...**

## The top stories on Globeandmail.com this week



**Double-double, please**  
Two whales breaching in unison off the coast of Newfoundland were the stars of one of the top-10 most popular videos of the week (#2).

### Scrubs hub-bub

An opinion piece about the rigours of medical school generated the most online comments and most referrals on Facebook and Twitter this week. “Think medical school is for you? You’re probably wrong” was also the third-most-read story. Many did not agree with its premise that high burnout and suicide rates among MDs are signs that people are going into the profession for the wrong reasons, i.e. money and prestige. Physician, reveal thyself.

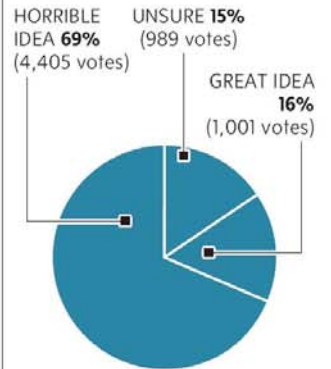
### Subjective top-10 video headline of the week

“Lucky snorkelers experience what it’s like to swim with millions of anchovies” (#9)

**Odds that a top-10 Globe and Mail video was about real estate**  
3 in 10

**YOU SAID IT...**

The retail giant J. Crew was criticized this week for introducing a vanishingly small new size for women’s clothing: 000. We asked readers what they thought.



THE GLOBE AND MAIL

# TALKING POINT

A dispute over a historic canoe route at Bala Falls has the Ontario Court of Appeal weighing whether the public has a time-honoured **right to portage** on public land when the government wants to cut off access. Readers, print and digital, scout the issue

This is about Canadian heritage and way of life. This country was inhabited by aboriginals who portaged long before the voyagers forded the same paths.

Public lands are a right of the people, not a privilege. They need to be respected and cared for.

The government needs to remember the country in which it is governing.

*Jodi Rosengren, Toronto*

That’s like banning the Timbit! Canadians won’t stand for this.

*Jonny Ray, Langley, B.C.*

The government can try it, but knowing the way Canadians are, and having been one myself for 32 years, most people who want to portage will most likely do it anyway, regardless of the government’s decision.

*Chris Kelly, Vancouver*

According to the Ontario government and the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR), the public has no legal right to use Ontario’s public lands. It only has a “privilege.” And it is a “privilege” we are being denied more and more by this government (A Very Canadian Question – Focus, July 12).

For decades, the government through the MNR has severely restricted access to over 2,000 of our best lakes and vast areas of prime public lands, mostly for the benefit of the remote tourism industry and its “guests” willing to pay big bucks for the remoteness, which means that no locals will bother them.

Now, the MNR is taking their privatization of public lands one step further by blocking canoeists from using a very historic portage at Bala Falls. The MNR claims that it’s for reasons of “public safety” but Bala residents are certain that the real reason is to allow the construction of a huge hydroelectric project at Bala Falls, one that residents do not want nor need. The case is now before the Ontario Court of Appeal with the Township of Muskoka Lakes maintaining that the Public Lands Act gives people the right to portage if



Bala’s battling signs: one for a portage trail, another prohibiting its use. MATTHEW SHERWOOD/FOR THE GLOBE AND MAIL

a route existed before the Crown sold or disposed of its land. The province’s position is that aspect of the legislation doesn’t apply.

Canoeing and portaging is an intrinsic part of Canada and our history; it is how our country was opened up by explorers. Our rivers served as our highways for centuries by the aboriginals and early settlers and the fur trade.

It is part of our identity; we have always had the right to portage, without which the right of navigation is meaningless. It is our land – and we want to be able to enjoy its beauty and splendour. It is our historical right, dating over four centuries.

What’s next on the MNR’s agenda? If they succeed closing portages in Bala, there will no doubt

be other closures of portages.

Is this the beginning of the end of the only remaining free means of accessing and enjoying our remote wilderness?  
*Simon Guillet, Guilletville, Ont.*

Jeesh. Why in Canada is this even an issue? Portages need to be protected by law. None of this ambiguity over each one.

And that includes portages over private land where the portage was grandfathered. Portages should be considered part of the navigable water course.  
*Gord Campbell, Toronto*

The falls and land around it are Bala’s main attraction. The land, now prohibited, provided access to waterfront for fishing and

swimming to tourists and locals alike who did not have access to their own waterfront.

Is that not the purpose of the Public Lands Act?  
*Frida Ardal, Bala, Ont.*

Absolutely ridiculous. Post a “portage at own risk” sign. Problem solved.  
*Adriana Pisano Beaumont, Richmond Hill, Ont.*

The original footpaths of Canadian exploration should be kept open.  
*Audrey Haylett, Victoria*

The government wants the sheeple to have fun only in malls, where you are being filmed, recorded and they can charge HST

on all the activities you will engage in.

*Filip Dan Radu, Toronto*

As frequent visitors to Bala, we were saddened to see that the historic portage between the Moon River and Lake Muskoka has been closed, courtesy of the Ministry of Natural Resources.

Instead, paddlers and others enjoying this well-known beauty spot may soon have to negotiate the strong and unpredictable currents generated by a proposed hydro plant.

Already we have seen children from nearby summer camps, now prohibited from the traditional portage, carrying canoes and other gear up the steep hill of Portage Street. Where this street meets Hwy. 169, the view of oncoming traffic is obscured by a bend in the road. Those crossing here must be very careful, even more so if they are carrying canoes.

It seems inevitable that Bala’s small business community will be seriously disrupted by major construction on the only road into town, while the needs of permanent residents are ignored.  
*Charlotte Morgan, Harry Johnson, Toronto*

You know if this was America, the citizens would be protecting this site with arms so that no one from any government agency could stop the public from using this public land.

*Lynn Randall Foster, Richmond Hill, Ont.*

My daughter goes portaging in the summer through Algonquin Park through some very historical parts of the park. If it weren’t for that, how are our young people supposed to learn about their country?  
*Marianne Wales, Kitchener, Ont.*

**Letters to the Editor** should be exclusive to *The Globe and Mail*. Include name, address and daytime phone number. Keep letters under 150 words. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.  
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