

A Basin to Basin Stroll  
or  
Making Tracks for Wolfville  
( 16 to 22 June, 2011)

One of the joys of being relegated to the retirement cohort is the relative freedom to escape the working weekend straight-jacket and to do things of a duration that exceed 48 hours, commencing and finishing whatever day of the week that one chooses. Two years ago this June I read in "The (Kentville) Advertiser" about Barbara Davis Lynch's multi-day walk with her friend, Lorna Stafford Wall, along the route of the former Dominion Atlantic Railway train bed from Digby to Wolfville. "Try part or all of it; you'll love it," she encouraged.<sup>1</sup> This sounded like a summons to get out of the house and into an adventure. So we did!

I took the opportunity during the preceding months to speak to a variety of people ranging from Ms. Lynch to Department of Natural Resources personnel to a variety of trail users to complete strangers, whose numbers I found serendipitously in the telephone book. [If any of these folk should read this narrative, I want to say "thank you;" it was most reassuring to know the nature and degree of most of the anticipated hazards before we actually confronted them in June.]

Early in my investigations I began to get feedback that the route had deteriorated at key points in the intervening two years. Indeed, some conversations were not very encouraging as regards the practicality of undertaking the walk. It was a given that we would not try to cross the old, long trestle bridges at Bear River and Clementsport for safety reasons. Added to this was the increasing number of washouts in Annapolis County where DNR had stepped in to rock armour the banks of tributaries flowing under rail bridges had that been either been swept away or suffered subsidence. Still others I spoke to were unsure whether forest creep had choked off foot passage entirely in specific places. Ah, there is nothing quite like a good mystery to exercise the mind before ordering the body into action!

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<sup>1</sup> For the full story see the 25 August 2009 edition.

After gathering what intelligence I could (and my Hurtin' Buckos Running Club colleagues will affirm that is not much), I decided it was time to send out the advance scouts to reconnoitre key points on the trail.<sup>2</sup> That would be us. In the five weeks preceding the trek we did a weekly two hour hike to visit as many of the washouts as practical and drove to Digby to locate the Highway 1/ rail bed intersections. We also kept a sharp eye out for eating establishments and overnight accommodations that we might patronize during the walk.

The intention was to assure ourselves that we, so to speak, had the outside edges of the jigsaw puzzle fully framed up before embarking and that the hike could be completed both safely and enjoyably. Each two hour preliminary hike allowed us to test out our equipment, toughen up our soles and try our mettle against some obstacles that we would face on day-long walks. The more trial trail treks we completed, the more confident we became that this was mission possible without any suspense-filled music!

Our plan had been to set out on Wednesday 15 June but that day's forecast predicted substantial rain, starting the previous night and continuing through the afternoon of the 15th. BINGO! Rather than lining up with the other paired animals to board the ark, an unusual stroke of common sense struck me and we postponed departure one full day to allow the 50 mm of rain to grow grass between someone else's ears.

DAY 1 --- Thursday 16 June --- Digby to western Clementsport

JB and I were up early and in front of the Acadia University Athletic Complex to catch the Kings Transit 7:17 a.m. bus to Digby. This trip is one of the great bargains in the Annapolis Valley! It cost us \$2.00 each to travel from Wolfville to Digby, surrendering two transfers en route. To embellish this value for money transaction, we arrived exactly on time at the Digby General Hospital, four hours later. Our earlier reconnaissance had identified the current Digby Farmers Market as the site of the original train station so we taxied there, discovering in the process that our driver was

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<sup>2</sup> The Hurtin' Buckos and the Horton (Wolfville) Buckos --- the latter being a fully autonomous franchise of the former ---share many of the same reciprocal trademark and copyright claims but admittedly have very little gross intellectual property between them over which to squabble. The Supreme Court of Canada is currently pondering the appellant's filing; in the meantime, we'll continue to posture and pontificate and explore any counter argument short of reason.

the daughter of a former DAR locomotive engineer who had resided in the town.

Following a ceremonial photograph in front of this "starting line," I chortled the Buckos'<sup>3</sup> obligatory "Waaaagons, Hoooooa!" and we went walking at 11:36 afore noon in bright sunshine and 22 degree temperature.

First Avenue now covers the alignment of the old DAR line as it traces a southward route through downtown Digby and intersects Montague Row to curl along the inner harbour. We brashly pursued this path for about 200 meters only to meet up with a most perplexing wall of assorted trees and bushes. Retreat! . . . but to where? Answer: follow Montague Row's asphalt surface for a couple hundred meters until you see an intersecting rail cut and jump on. Freer breathing restored.

We noticed three large circular aquaculture cages nearby in the Annapolis Basin as we walked along the rail bed that is now garnished with a new layer of crushed stone. The next five kilometers to just beyond Joggin Bridge have been fully resurfaced and all vegetation brushed back a very comfortable distance. This was great for taking photos, except that my batteries were expiring! Uuuuugh! . . . 45 minutes into a seven day hike! Not to worry; we'll just charge up our spirits with some nutrition snacks from my back pack . . . hey, my rain poncho is missing!

Did it fall off the strap attached to my backpack on any of the five 2-hour, out-and-back practice walks? No. Was it missing now? Yes. Was I going to run back and see if I could find it? I'm too pig-headed to do this and, besides, it might be 4 km. in arrears. Nope, on we went to Joggin Bridge. The train bridge is only a few meters from the Highway 101 bridge and it has been re-surfaced and fence-railed quite recently. This landmark is the southern-most point on the 137 kilometer walk to Wolfville and we arrived here at 1:00 p.m.

As an aside, I'll confess that during the first couple of years in my 35 year teaching career, I coached a junior girls basketball team at Lawrencetown Consolidated School. When we travelled to play in Digby,

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<sup>3</sup> Readers of fine literature who have not yet been subjected to earlier tales of the rambles of said Buckos are referred --- with extreme caution --- to the comic chronicles of our Middleton to Bridgewater rail bed hike (2008), the saturated 3-day slog through Cape Chignecto Provincial Park (2009) and the most recent Ceilidh Trail train bed walk (2010), which featured a cameo appearance by the incomparable Benny the Beagle.

the girls clamoured to establish a tradition of getting out of the car and jogging across the sidewalk on Joggin Bridge. Today, insurance considerations and liability lawsuits would cause a coach to shudder at the thought of such a ritual. However, OUR insurance is paid up, so we did!

About one-half kilometer beyond the bridge the trail reverts to its original gravel/sand surfacing. For the next hour or so we moved along under a partly-shaded trail, stopping to rest on occasion or to let the 3rd ATV roar past. Smith's Cove is "resort destination" and there are several very nice inns and B&Bs we could have stopped at for the night, but it was too soon to bivouac.

We were quite amazed at how few puddles there were on the rail bed given yesterday's downpour. Not complaining; just amazed. By 2:20 p.m. we came to the derelict trestle over Bear River. We discovered that if you follow an ATV track to the right of the barrier for about 200 meters you emerge where the Highway 101 bridge crosses the river. Research had already made plain that there was a 4 foot sidewalk across the span. It was a pleasure to be able to promenade this panoramic 300 meter bridge in comfort and relative security as about 30 cars sped by.

By 2:40 we had descended to the train bed at the eastern end of the bridge and, before we struck out in earnest for Deep Brook, paused to have a rest break and snack just outside the gates of an upscale residence. Any would-be trekkers reading these words ought to be advised for their own planning and prognostications that our cruising speed was never more than a casual strut and that at all major breaks I de-socked my feet to do a dorsal inspection of my increasingly colourful nails and give back to Mother Nature some of that pungent odour that she occasionally chokes me with when passing swamps, bogs and sewage treatment plants. There were a few short sections in the Deep Brook area where the route was a little too arboured and narrow, with the consequence that the brim of my Aussie hat was ideal for tossing aside small branches.

3:30 saw us approaching an ominously steep descent in the path ahead. It was with emotions not unlike a Stanley Cup victory parade that we soon saw that the ghost of a once substantial train bridge had been reincarnated as a 5 meter trough at the bottom of which was a gravel topped culvert. Translation: Walking, not wading, was in order! Up the east

rise we went and, for the next five kilometers to Cornwallis, made our way on a re-worked surface that within the past five years has had a sewer pipe installed in the ballast of the old DAR train bed. The construction crew had simultaneously brushed back the vegetation on both sides of the corridor so that the crushed rock path could be negotiated with no impediments.

By 4:15 p.m. we had arrived at the western end of the former Cornwallis Naval Base <sup>4</sup> and 15 minutes later we were sprawled on the benches in the former Canex store, now a Valufoods grocery store, et. al. Lop off perhaps 45 minutes for assorted stops/rest breaks and it was about a net 4 hour stroll.

We had two choices for supper . . . and they were both within walking distance. After consulting a sagacious unnamed source, we opted to shuffle 100 meters west along Highway 1 to The Hollow Take Out. We were not disappointed. Delicious, piping-hot cheeseburgers and fishburgers, poutine and a draft of chocolate milkshake to wash it all down. \$26.00 never tasted so good and the aroma of the food helped to mask TWO sets of tender tootsies convalescing in the late afternoon shade.

At 5:45 p.m., having provisioned our food supplies for the next morning at the aforesaid Valufoods, Joan and I walked east on the shoulder of Highway 1 past the remainder of the former base, many of its buildings now shabby from neglect and the sports fields over-grown with tall grass.

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<sup>4</sup> A little military history aside at this stage in the narrative. Cornwallis base was established in 1941 to take some of the immense pressure off the port of Halifax during World War Two. Halifax would focus on convoys; Cornwallis, tucked into the relative safety of the Annapolis Basin, would serve as the major training depot for east coast naval recruits. It continued as a "boot camp" base up until the federal government closed it in the mid-1990s. Greenwood air base, in the center of the Annapolis Valley, was begun a year earlier by the Royal Air Force as part of the British Commonwealth Air Training Program. It transitioned to Canadian control about the time of the 1944 D-Day invasion of Europe. The militia base at Camp Aldershot, north of Kentville, was founded even before the First World War. What's my point, I hear you whine, keen to shoulder your backpack and get back on the dusty trail? This: probably nowhere else in the nation did Ottawa have military bases in such close proximity that represented all three branches of the armed forces and which oozed federal dollars into the local economy. Aren't you glad you asked? Sorry about that! You're reading the rantings of a one-time "Call to Remembrance" junior high school military quiz team coach. The Royal Canadian Legion do a fine job of running this Reach-For-The-Top style competition in Nova Scotia schools. For the students and Legion members involved in the program, it creates a rewarding inter-generational "love-in." We need more of this respect in today's fragmented society. Anyway, if I hadn't brought the matter up here, you would have taken a hit in the fuselage as we hiked by 14 Wing Greenwood later in this epistle!

This detour [I'm talking about the walking one, not the lengthy military fine print manoeuvre above] was necessitated because earlier "blind" phone calls had failed to provide an answer as to whether our sanctuary for the night --- Best View Cabins -- was accessible from the trail. So, we sauntered on for about a kilometer, arriving at our destination (km. 19) in western Clementsport at 6:15 p.m. After replenishing our plastic camel pack water bladders and slipping the camera batteries into their re-charger (which I thankfully had remembered to pack), we could relax, recline and watch the sun sink below our throbbing feet in the western sky.

Day 2 --- Friday 17 June --- Clementsport to Annapolis Royal

Bright sunshine and a temperature of about 17 degrees greeted us as we set off at 7:30 the next morning. After a few hundred meters of walking the road's shoulder, we spotted the abandoned Clementsport train trestle ahead. With no second thoughts about heroics or bungee jumping, we followed Highway 1 down into the "village center" and back up the far side to just beyond the Clementsport post office, where Duke Street enables the hiker to finally regain the old train bed.

The triumph was to be short-lived. Almost immediately we were moving through tall grass, weaving back and forth around shrubs and forcing our way forward by bending the bows of trees. The 400 meter meander ended with the "spotting" of a phantom train bridge that used to crown Twin Cove Road. We scrambled down the steep embankment and up a scarcely defined path on the other side. The end seemed inevitable and it came mercifully quick. Within a hundred meters we were checkmated by an impenetrable forest that camouflaged the rail bed completely. As I carried only a 10 centimeter jackknife and not a machete, Sleeping Beauty would have to wait to be rescued by a different prince! The last train passed here in 1990 and now, after a scant two decades, nature had obliterated all signs of the "iron horse." That didn't stop three mares in the pasture adjacent to Twin Cove Road <sup>5</sup> from a sarcastic "we told you so!" whinny as we extracted ourselves and marched east on Highway 1.

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<sup>5</sup> Some fifty years ago the in-coming tide swallowed a pair of family binoculars I left on the beach while we vacationed here. Things were at a low ebb for me until my father retrieved his W. W. 2 binoculars several hours later! They worked fine despite having been assaulted by the sea water.

After about 1 kilometer we took the driveway at #2125 northwards back down to the train bed; it was now 8:42 a.m. The route was passable but very grown-in in places. This no doubt had a lot to do with the fact that two huge boulders had been deposited on the rail bed to prevent off-road vehicle traffic that would have kept the trail more open. It was single file forward for the majority of the next two or three kilometers as we approached Upper Clements Theme Park.

This tourist attraction opened in the late 1980s and had the good fortune to purchase the log flume ride from the World's Fair held in Vancouver a couple years previous. Now, as we coaxed our way forward through crowding vegetation and very indifferent footing, I heard the faint but familiar whirling of its electric motors and periodic bump of a log hitting the bottom of a chute. The auditory promise couldn't have come at a better moment! The trail was deteriorating into a washout mildly reminiscent of our descent from Gros Morne Mountain, Newfoundland when what should appear but a "Trail Impassable" sign. This was not good.

Nevertheless, we edged forward and soon saw the reason for the sign. There is about half a lane of a small train bridge left over which we crossed our fingers and then ourselves. No motorized vehicle would have had a chance to transit here. Almost at once we were at the provincial picnic park that is contiguous with the western boundary of Upper Clements Theme Park. Time for a well deserved physical and emotion break! We greeted about eight "clammers" who had just finished bringing 20 or so re-pack plastic boxes of clams up from the tidal flats on the back of their two ATVs and, at 9:50, parked under the shade of a canopied picnic table to savour a sandwich purchased from Valufoods.

As we pushed on past the theme park some thirty minutes later, listening to the shrieks of school children paroled from mid-June classes to ride the Flume, Tree-Topper roller coaster and other sensory & kinaesthetic delights, the course looked promising and our spirits were buoyed. I was pleased to see that my "brief launderlode" remained despite the recent tussle with the undergrowth; i.e., my Day 1 socks and underwear were still secured to my backpack with clothespins while waiting for sunny skies to wick out the moisture after last night's washing.

Well, mercurial is perhaps the most appropriate word that comes to mind to describe hopes and expectations for much of today's segment. Very soon the train bed trail seemed to come to a full forested stop again, BUT, upon closer inspection, what should I spy but three large tell-tale boulders and then, beyond, open trail. Hallelujah! The Annapolis River estuary is dyked as you move east from Upper Clements and as we began to come into more open surroundings we could see verdant marsh grass while the more distant dyke hid the river beyond. We were perhaps two km. east of the theme park by 11:00 a.m. Still another false trail end encountered and then explained; a small train bridge was now replaced by two large creosoted timbers on which to balance while crossing a water ditch. The final 20 minutes to the Allain Creek bridge were picturesque and uneventful.

We detoured to Highway 1 to cross this river/creek and made a 70 meter incursion into the lupine crowned vegetation on the south side of the road. We stopped abruptly at the barricade and back-pedaled to the highway. It was high noon by the time we reached "the" traffic light (km. 33) and about 12:15 p.m. when we slumped into chairs at Leo's Cafe on St. George Street in search of lunch. Joan recounted a few occasions when, years ago, she had lingered over an elegant noon meal here with her mental health colleagues. I gritted my teeth, recalling the 10 minute sandwich-cramming sessions in the teachers' staff room that bisected my typical work-day. However, I declared a gastronomic truce long enough to allow a delicious "California Salad" to pass my lips.

After lunch we chatted with my relative, Ken Mahar, and had an interesting walk through Sinclair House Museum where he is the guide. Ken advised that this is the second oldest wooden frame house left in Canada and that his role in part is to sit outside on the sidewalk and wield froe and drawknife in hopes that, as a "human speed bump," he can entice tourists to put the museum on their itinerary immediately.

With a forecast of poor weather for tomorrow we detoured to Home Hardware to purchase a \$5 plastic poncho for yours truly and then beat a track to the Queen Anne Inn via the old train station and the grey stone covered rail bed. This remarkable three story wooden building is a beautiful gem of "second empire" architectural style and is crested with an imposing

belvedere. Our lovely room was . . . you guessed it . . . on the third floor, some 45 rungs up Jacob's Ladder. <sup>6</sup>

Day 3 --- Saturday 18 June --- Annapolis Royal to Bridgetown

The breakfast portion of the B&B experience meant that Joan and I shunted out the front door, across the back lawn and onto the train bed corridor at 8:25 a.m. It was breezy, mild and the darkening clouds seemed to promise precipitation soon. Beyond the initial half kilometer of groomed trail that skirted prime water fowl viewing positions, the train bed began to narrow to some sections that required single file progress.

We would pass through six washouts today. All but one of these we had previously reconnoitred to examine the handiwork of DNR and the type of portage to be effected. We decided to detour around the first at 8:55 in Lequille because this required only a hundred meter walk along Highway 201 before reconnecting with the trail at civic #416. The walking was good from here to the second washout in Moschelle where we crossed, at 9:45 a.m. on a narrow rock "causeway" that some thoughtful soul had engineered in the center of the re-construction. The train bed trail continued excellent as we moved on to a farm in Round Hill that accesses it by means of a Bailey Bridge.

When it first began showering at 10:05 we donned the \$1.50 "saran wrap" ponchos purchased at Valufoods. At 10:15 the skies opened wider and Joan lowered her deluxe \$40 Mountain Equipment Co-Op poncho over her shoulders while I peeled apart my \$5 Home Hardware plastic mini-skirt, thinking of the lucky chap who discovered my MEC "give-away." At 10:35 a.m. the explanation of why the trail was in such good shape appeared and scented the air. From out of the west came a humungous John Deere pulling an equally titanic "muck chucker" cylinder astern! I was out of defensive haberdashery options and out-classed for cover --- I hid behind Joan until the miasmatic behemoth had rumbled past.

Your ambulatory protagonists dined on the Bailey Bridge where the battalion of black flies had left only a paltry garrison on duty and at 11:18

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<sup>6</sup> Following a reviving shower we shuffled a short distance down St. George Street to the Historic Gardens for a horticultural show-and-tell that may be unparalleled in our province. Then, it was over to the adjacent German Bakery to purchase tomorrow's sandwich and back to the B&B for a wonderful lamb repast.

moved on under a much narrower and lower canopy. Can you predict what lies in wait for us, seasoned reader? If you guessed a decaying 15 meter train trestle with a minority of ties in a state of serious disintegration, you're catching on to the correlation between the train corridor's penetrability, and the claustrophobic vegetation and state of (dis)repair of its bridges. We made our way slowly forward and on to washout #3 at 12:25 p.m. where we thankfully were able to traverse the stream via stepping stones.

While the rain had stopped some two hours ago, it continued to mist off and on and the colour of the low cloud cover alternated between concerning and anxiety-arousing. We were moving into Tupperville area now and noticed that some conscientious soul had cut overhanging brush and left it on the trail to shrivel and brown. Better than having switches scratching at your face, though. The trail was pretty good as a result and, when we came to washout #4 around 1:20, there was another modest rock causeway that permitted a dry passage to the far bank.

Our luck ran out 15 minutes later at the fifth washout. Like the previous four, the Department of Natural Resources had shaped and rock-faced both sides of the stream bed adjacent to the trail, but some probing with our hiking poles proved that we would not be walking over water here. We had each been carrying a pair of dense foam "holey soles" on a lace around our neck and it was finally time to play this safety card. With darkening clouds threatening to attack our rearguard, we stripped down to our underwear and, arm-in-arm with poles at port and starboard, waded thigh-deep through the 5 meter wide stream. Once across we searched out the least uncomfortable spot to sit while we pulled on first our pants and then our socks and sneakers.

So far, so good. We passed the former Britex Elastics plant with its highly visible ball-shaped elevated reservoir at 2:22 p.m. From here on into Bridgetown we knew what to expect as it had been one of our practice ranges. Not long after, a dark coloured animal the size of a dog flashed directly across the train bed some 20 meters ahead, too quick to even conjecture what it might have been.

Five minutes later we came to the 10 meter long train bridge (ties only) that seemed to be still in good repair and moved on uneventfully. Ahead lay an increasingly over-grown rail bed with both shrubs, trees and

wild rose bushes falling in to choke the corridor. By the time we ducked, bobbed, slalomed and hop-scotched our way through a kilometer of puddled undergrowth, I emerged at 3:05 with a more-or-less shredded plastic poncho. Two concrete barriers pinched close enough to prevent any motorized traffic signalled that our most challenging crossing lay just ahead.

Our final washout (#6) this day was one we had rehearsed before --- Bloody Creek. We were surprised to probe how deep it was today and wondered if this might be attributable to the Annapolis River being tidal below Bridgetown. Regardless of the depth of water in the stream at the bottom, these washout sites require care in scrambling over significant sized rocks and, as you get closer to the water, good-sized boulders. We had devised a carefully choreographed descent routine to minimize the handicap of Joan's vision restrictions and took our time. A twisted ankle or gashed knee out here was not a pleasant thought even if we did carry a cell phone.

It was misting into sporadic showers as we shed our pants, socks and sneakers and donned our holey soles for a second baptism of fire. This time the water in mid-stream was waist deep and getting out on the far side proved a challenge. Recent spring run-off must have swept some of the armouring rock/boulders into the nearby river because the first two meters of the shore ascent was more mud than rock, slippery mud! In due course we made dry land, re-robed and made our way up and along the open train bed trail, arriving at the End of the Line Pub in Bridgetown at 3:55 p.m. We were at the 53 Km mark. <sup>7</sup>

While it was desirable to head south to our B&B some 400 meters away, I needed a new HH \$5 poncho. Since the store would be closed Sunday, we shuffled across the river to make the purchase, gather some food for tomorrow's mid-day refreshment and then walked to Reminisce B&B, located next to the Catholic Church.

The room was to our liking and the hot shower even more so. We sandwiched our evening meal at the pub between two cloudbursts and

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<sup>7</sup> With a name such as this, you'll not be surprised to learn that this eatery is, in fact, the former DAR station in Bridgetown and is clad in the company's signature --- perhaps I should editorialize to say "scribble" --- magenta colour of paint.

arrived back at our lodging pretty much dry. A review: this was our longest and most challenging day on the trip to date and our feet, while sore, were holding up. We had seen eagles circling in the sky over the Annapolis River in Centerlea and even a hawk (or possibly a falcon) beating its wings rapidly westward at one point. In general, though, it was a day of action, not sightseeing. We slept soundly.

DAY 4 --- Sunday 19 June --- Bridgetown to Middleton

"The breakfast was the best we have had at a B&B since our six week stay in Britain in 1975" I wrote in Sue's guest book before we departed our lodging for the three minute walk north to the train bed. I'll let you salivate and imagine what it included, shall I? We crossed over the nearby train bridge at 8:30 a.m. as the warm air carried a breeze and the sky darkened behind us. Some property owners here have mowed their lawns right back to the trail --- great; this helps keep the bed safe for other recreational users and discourages those pesky alders and briars that nip at us pedestrians. On we went past Bridgetown Regional High School, where I taught from 1992-94 as the ominous sound of thunder rumbled in the distance. By the 101 overpass it was beginning to sound like a tympani rehearsal and the paparazzi were arriving for good measure too.

It was with some trepidation that we continued on about 300 meters and discovered that a red circle drawn on a map I received from DNR did in fact mean "danger here;" there was a precipitous three meter drop down exposed crib work below where a train bridge deck had once provided easy passage. After a brief consultation and show of hands, discretion once again prevailed and we race-walked back to the underpass while Mother Nature tugged furiously at the curtain cord to begin a performance of "Apres Moi La Deluge." Things were literally looking very dark!

We sat on our croc. shoes from 9:15 to 9:40 as it rained, boomed and flashed mightily, all the while admiring the underside of an engineering marvel. Water poured down drain spots on both sides of the overpass. Trying to be helpful, I tossed Joan a bar of soap, but she just glared at me.

When we ventured out "sans ponchos" it was to take a dirt road up to Highway 1 and proceed along the shoulder for approximately 1 kilometer to within a few meters of the Paradise "city limits" sign. Opposite civic #9563 it was back down a tractor/ATV grass path to a rail bed that was ready for

customers, if somewhat puddle proud. The next two km. stretch varies from 1 to 2 "lanes" wide and we caught our first real look at terrestrial wildlife; two turtles with shells about 30 cm in diameter lounged on the corridor and a deer bounded over a backyard lawn. A bridge just east of the Highway 1 crossing is still in very good condition and we moved on past Leonard Road to where the trail begins to narrow to single file only. This is the norm until you emerge a kilometer later at another intersection of Highway 1 at the western extremity of Lawrencetown.

200 meters after this asphalt crossing you approach a set of barricades and the final (Hurray!) washout of the trip. Skies were alternating between sun and cloud by this stage and we were able to step our way over on stones at 11:10. The remaining two km. into the village is over an even grey crushed stone surface. We passed the Annapolis County Exhibition Grounds, again crossed Highway 1 and made our way north of the Lawrencetown Fire Hall <sup>8</sup> to a welcome lunch at the village restaurant.

Some chowder and a sandwich refreshed us and by 1:20 p.m. we were back on a trail where the sun became an afternoon fixture. The train bed continued with a dressed chip stone cover until the Mount Hanley Road (2:20) where it reverted to the original gravel/sand surfacing. After the last washout there was no longer a need to walk in file; only an occasional wayward branch needed banishment. I had called my friend and Bucko colleague Tom Ross from the restaurant and he met us west of the TRA warehouse in Lower Middleton --- with treats in hand --- to walk into my birthplace, past the community's third station (and current railway museum) and on to the new Heart of the Valley assisted living center where my Mom now resides. (4:00 p.m.; km. 75)

Thelma was in fine form as Joan and I saw her chatting with our mutual friends Aubrey and Verna Ingraham. After a warm greeting I was reminded that I ought to be getting that four-day growth off my chin at the

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<sup>8</sup> A couple years after I began my 18 year teaching stint at Lawrencetown Consolidated School, the staff Christmas party was booked at the fire hall's social room. Things had just gotten underway when a fellow showed up in a train conductor's uniform. "It's been a while since Hallowe'en," I thought dismissively to myself. Would you believe that one of the teachers had parked their vehicle so far to the rear of the parking lot that it was actually blocking the tracks for the Dayliner train car? It was a real conductor, and he really did want the owner to move their car . . . now! I thought that sort of thing only happened well after the bar opened!

earliest opportunity! Mom was eager to hear of our experiences since we had begun our trek four days ago.

My brother Bob and his wife Linda live in town with the result that we were now to be pampered with limousine service to their house and a full, tasty home cooked supper for the first time in four days. We chatted for awhile after supper and then turned in for the night, aware that tomorrow would require an early start to compensate for the hike's longest segment.

DAY 5 --- Monday 20 June --- Middleton to Berwick

There was no difficulty in provisioning for the day and fuelling up at breakfast; hospitality abounded. Bob chauffeured us back to where we left the rail bed yesterday and we were in locomotion by 6:30 a.m. under sunny skies.<sup>9</sup> Some ten minutes later we crossed Senator Street at the east end of town and, from the lofty vantage of a train culvert, looked down on the pond that was the Middleton "town swimming pool" until I was 16 years of age. Not the good old days, I can assure you!

Highway 1 intersections were made at Wilmot (7:15) and at "Frenchy's Corner" (7:40) as we greatfully enjoyed the shade provided by the corridor of trees in the early morning. We went into Atlantic Superstore in Kingston at 9:00 in search of "premier league" toilet facilities and stayed for the air conditioning and a wrap/beverage snack. After skirting the Greenwood golf course at 9:55 we moved into more open, sandy and hot surroundings. The pair crossed Highway 1 in Auburn near West Kings High School at 11:15 and came within sight of Saint Mary's Elementary in Aylesford at noon. We expected the usual Valley wailing siren noon signal at the fire hall, not far behind us. Instead we were astonished to hear the air torn asunder by a diesel locomotive's whistle! We did a "double take" for a split second wondering "How on earth . . . ." [Smart aleck fire department!]

Water supplies were topped up at the nearby Needs Convenience store and then we lunched in the picnic park some 100 meters north of the track bed on the 101 connector road. During our practice hike in this area, a local had told us that the soft, forgiving surface applied to the rail bed

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<sup>9</sup> I eschewed this rail-less route for my 65 kilometer retirement run home in 2009 for the variety of reasons given in that monograph.

within the village was not recycled asphalt but, rather, ground-up asphalt shingles reclaimed from a construction-debris site.

We were in motion again by 12:50 and passed the dirt Longpoint Road at 1:40, arriving in the vicinity of the extensive Annapolis Valley Peat Moss operation ten minutes later. Some of the harvested area is replanted in a variety of vegetables but a second expanse is still in production. Lots of baled inventory and storage and manufacturing equipment that are never seen from the highway were on display from our vantage point.

We arrived in Berwick at 2:50 p.m. under partly cloudy skies and a temperature of around 20 degrees. Joan's tally for the day included: 5 pedestrians, 4 dirt bikes and 7 ATVs. Some of our motorized comrades courteously slowed and returned our wave; others just waved. We queued with about 8 others to board the 3:30 p.m. bus back to Wolfville, satisfied to have covered about 32 kilometers in just over eight hours and three litres of water. (105 km.)

DAY 6 --- Tuesday 21 June --- Berwick to Kentville

As we embarked on the Kings Transit bus in Wolfville this morning we drew a few knowing glances from habitual patrons and a "welcome back" from the driver who had shuttled us to Digby five days ago. Once discharged into downtown Berwick we prepared to "eat fresh" by ordering our mid-morning veggie wrap at the Subway restaurant close by the train bed. Joan and I then made tracks for points east at 8:35 a.m. under sunny skies and a temperature in the low 20s.

Within a half kilometer we read the only metrage sign to be seen on the rail corridor in the entire 137 km. passage, suggesting that we had covered 33 km. yesterday and had 14 more to go to reach Coldbrook. At 9:15 we were raucously greeted by a boisterous canine who came bounding out of a nearby yard to take exception to our trespass through his dog-dom. Thankfully, he obeyed our cease-and-desist shouts before reaching the train bed, and we re-sheathed our walking poles and whistles. There were less than a handful of such incidents on the entire trip, none serious.

At 9:35 a.m. we passed in sight of the Waterville post office and by 10:05 camped out on the shaded steps of a vacant building on Cambridge Road to submit the afore-mentioned wrap to a searching scrutiny. Again, I

addressed the (for me) hiker's protocol: before touching the food, take off the sneakers and socks to air the toes. I might --- and so I will --- say, at this point in the narrative, that running shoes were ideal for this specific, prolonged hike. The quality of the surface of the trail was quite high, in general, and so this levelness invited a light-weight, breathable form of footwear that did not need to offer the stability (and extra weight) of a hiking boot.

We weighed anchor at 10:40 and passed into "paradise." From Cambridge Road to South Bishop Road in Coldbrook the old DAR line has metamorphosed into "The Cornwallis River Greenway." With periodic steel gates and narrow pass-throughs for pedestrians and cyclists, this six kilometer section has been transformed into an active transportation corridor. The rail bed is topped with 3 meter wide small grey crushed stone and centered on top of this is a two meter wide "carpet" of grey crusher dust that is a delight to tread across! Every kilometer or so one passes a bench, picnic table and/or interpretive panel, and the cheery visage of a fellow recreationalist out for a tour of duty amongst the beauty and tranquility of the natural world.

We intersected South Bishop Rd. at 11:20, declined the refreshment possibilities of the adjacent Foodland supermarket and instead pressed on for the Scotian Gold ice cream stand a few minutes up the line. We met our first dirt bike in several hours here but, more importantly, also cyclist Trevor Lloyd, a member of the CRG association that promotes and helps to superintend the maintenance of the restricted access pathway. [For more info.: [cornwallisgreenway.ca](http://cornwallisgreenway.ca)] We asked admiringly about this group of dedicated volunteers and in return granted him the Julia A. Mosher Award for best advice on the quickest route to an ice cream emporium. My psychologist and I spent high noon staring *tete-a-tete* into the eyes of a prodigious "small" sized cone. This refreshing moment recalled many happy memories from years ago when our family would drive up to eat out in the nearby Coldbrook Provincial Picnic Park and then progress over to SG, while my grandmother and mother played a feisty game of verbal brinkmanship with regard to WHO would pay for the chilly pleasure.

We departed at 12:20 p.m. past giant stacks of apple bins enjoying a summer vacation and returned to the train bed en route to the Coldbrook

Highway 101 overpass where, at 12:30, the crusher dust settled and we made do with more humble, traditional trail surfacing. At 1:35 Kings County Academy appeared on our right and, with it, a paved sidewalk that now graces the rail bed into downtown Kentville. The construction of a new senior's residence in the neighbourhood of the old Dominion Atlantic Railway roundhouse and over the original rail routing forces one to "dipsy doodle" towards the site of the town's demolished train station. It was 2:00 p.m. and we were ready to catch the train's closest descendent, the bus, back home to Wolfville. Joan's traffic tally included sightings both within and outside the CR Greenway: 1 dirt bike, 3 runners [2 with a dog, and one of these also pushing a stroller with TWO tots riding shotgun!], 9 walkers and 11 bicyclists --- what a great way to pedal from Kentville to Coldbrook we thought! (124 kilometer mark)

DAY 7 --- Wednesday 22 June --- Kentville to Wolfville

The finale was like a post-race lap around the stadium; a sense of anti-climactic achievement accompanied us as we set out for the demi-day conclusion to our seven day parade. Again we KTed to our "bookmarked" start line. Today it was the brick "faux" replica of a typical DAR station located on Cornwallis Street in the Kentville. The day started cloudy with the air temperature reading 18 degrees.

We moved along Justice Way at 8:00 a.m. as the pavement transitioned into the original railway bed and continued on to the Middle Dyke Road overpass. Somewhat prior to this, the route tapered to a single file path. About 200 meters east was the end of the line for us! The ties are still in the ground here and vegetation is overtaking them rapidly. We reversed and headed up a service road on the south side of the overpass, arriving at the corner of Middle Dyke and Commercial Streets at 8:50.

From here to Wolfville we walked the Highway 1/Commercial St. sidewalk and, since we had only some 13 kilometers to cover on this particular day, we paused for some delicious refreshment at the Saraj Bakery and Cafe in the heart of New Minas. Since re-locating from Middleton to Wolfville eleven years ago, we have sought out premium bread and, in our judgement, no one makes a better quality local loaf than the folks at this shop.

At 10:35 we passed Blomidon Nursery and the Irving fuel station in Greenwich and by shortly after 11:00 came to Cherry Lane, comfortably inside Wolfville's western boundary. By heading north on this street one can intersect a path that runs immediately parallel to the extant rails for one kilometer to the preserved Wolfville train station (now operating as the town's library). By 11:30 a.m. we had reached the 137 kilometer terminus and shanghaied a local bibliophile to snap a couple pictures of us with the landmark in the background.

It was over . . . but in some ways we had climbed the summit much sooner. The challenge of the first day had been to avoid podiatry foot-shock. Day 2's obstacles were blister prevention and trail obfuscation. The Annapolis to Bridgetown span on Day 3 was the steeplechase segment where we did get half submerged. Day 4 required good fortune and patience as we sat out the thunder and lightning storm and dealt with two more washouts. While Day 5's corridor was benign, it was easily the longest portion of the trek we walked in a single day. During the penultimate and final days we strolled with the assurance that the end was achievable and that it was more time than space which separated us from completing the mission.

"And in conclusion" . . . how many times have we heard that only to be subjected to another 15 minutes of tedium dear reader? Well, you're at liberty to toss this missive into the fire-starter bin at any time . . . and maybe you have already done so! If not, here ARE a few final thoughts about this experience.

I enjoyed very much planning this hike. Over the course of many months I spoke with a variety of people, some of whom knew a considerable amount about certain sections of the train bed and some who knew absolutely nothing! Even the latter, whom I sometimes called "cold," were pleasant and tried to refer me to someone who they thought would know about the idiosyncrasies of a local portion of the route. A good example of this was a call that I made to the Municipality of Annapolis County offices in Annapolis Royal. The receptionist gave me a telephone number for "John" who was a known trail user. He offered reassurance about the navigability of the train bed in that area. Incredibly, we met John Rodie today, 7 July, at a luncheon at the Gaspereau Community Hall just

outside of Wolfville. He was visiting a mutual acquaintance up this way who happened to ask Joan and me how the walk had gone as they made their way to waiting cold plates and strawberry shortcake. Smaaaaaaall world, n'est-ce pas? I thanked him a second time.

Mrs. B and I have entered year 39 of matrimony and, I must say, it has been "a good hurt" to date. Many would no doubt dub this sortie an "unusual vacation" and who could argue the point? Nonetheless, we had a great time together, and together we were! Sort of like doing a marathon three-legged race, eh? Whether it was sauntering along on the open trail, lolling about under the shade of trees during a break or negotiating the washouts with their fordable streams, it was compatible teamwork which made the journey so enjoyable and brought it to a successful conclusion. Oh, the weather, too, was very co-operative.

The absence of all those other "Y" chromosome Hurtin' Buckos --- and I'm not at liberty to divulge the names of Tom, Gerry or Matt --- resulted in a much more cerebral and serene experience. This relieved me from the need to reincarnate as a kindergarten teacher to break-up constant squabbles. However, I must confess, there was a responsibility on my shoulders to point out to Joan their many past foibles and indiscretions both for her edification and my amusement.

It's time to comment on the partial disappearance of the DAR route. We don't want it to evaporate into the mists of time. Ms. Lynch was right: we did "like it." While it may not be fiscally prudent to expect governments to rebuild all the infrastructure that once constituted this railway company, it is practical to think and hope that a variety of stakeholders may coalesce around a plan to preserve and enhance the full original corridor to render it comfortably walkable in the near future. It will take some dollars; but even more, it will take the foresight and resolve of residents all along the line to leverage aspirations into action. We applaud the clubs, councils, associations and individuals who have stepped forward to date. There is more work to be done for the greater good of all. We hope all who are interested will move forward with an inspiration battle call to action to accomplish this worthwhile task. . . so, in the word's of the Hurtin' Buckos, "Waaaaagons Hoooooa!"

Roger Boutilier  
Wolfville, N. S.  
9 July 2011