

Newsletter Fall 2002

Where to Bicycle on the Iron Horse Trail

The 15 km stretch of trail between Heinsburg and Lindbergh is scenic and firmly packed, making cycling a pleasure. Landscapes include open fields, aspen forest and river vistas. To extend the trip, turn north at the Middle Creek Staging Area sign, follow the road up the hill, cycle another kilometer (Tp. Rd. 562) and you will find yourself at Whitney Lakes Provincial Park where another 25 km of trails await. This would make an excellent weekend trip with camping at Whitney Lakes Park and exploring both the park trails and the Iron Horse Trail. For the physically fit, add in the 20 km section of trail between Lindbergh and Elk Point. Beware of one soft, sandy stretch about one kilometer long half way between Lindbergh and Elk Point. The trail slopes gently from west to east traversing rural landscapes and spruce forests.

Join the Iron Horse Trail

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| *Trail Building | *Events Planning |
| *Policy Direction | *Liaison |
| *Website Development | *Newsletter |

The Iron Horse Trail is a unique combination of municipal governments, recreation groups and service organizations working together for trail development in Northeastern Alberta. We are in the initial stages of what we hope will be a legacy to future generations and we welcome support and involvement from all those interested. Please contact any of our executive members to find out how you can be involved. Be a part of shaping the future.

President: Marvin Bjornstad 724-2061

Past President: Jerry Bidulock 645-4499

Vice President / Trail Blding: Danny Smyl 645-4414

Treasurer: Ernie Stark 656-3769

Secretary: Sheila Thompson 724-2007

Volunteer Hours

Your time is valuable and is recognized as a contribution in matching grant funds. Iron Horse Trail volunteers contributed over 2000 hours since January, 2002. Thank you to our volunteers for their dedication.

Update Along the Trail

***Smoky Lake County passed their Trail Use bylaw on August 26 and it is full speed ahead. The county is now busy grading the railbed and controlling weeds. As well, leasing agreements are being drawn up with adjacent landowners and planning for signage is ongoing. Smoky Lake County is sending a newsletter to all their rate-payers informing them of recent developments.

***Town of St. Paul has settled on a location for their walking trail circling the town and are preparing to pave.

***An old train station has been located and may be moved to the old station grounds at the south end of Main Street in Elk Point. The Town plans to build a staging area / rest area on the site.

***County of St. Paul is entering into agreements with adjacent landowners and installing standardized gates and texas gates along the trail. About 20 gates have been installed to date.

Grants to Iron Horse Trail

A huge thank you goes out to the following supporters of our trail system.

\$\$\$ Go for Green's TrailPak awarded Iron Horse Trail a provincial grant for \$3000 to build a website and hold a promotional event. Only one application is selected from each province for this 'Community Fund' so we were honoured to be selected.

\$\$\$ AlbertaTrailNet awarded Iron Horse Trail a \$60,000 grant from their Millennium funding. This grant will go toward initial elements needed along the corridor including signage and gates.

Calendar of Events

Sunday, Sept. 29: *Heinsburg History Event* Travel to Heinsburg along the trail and attend a noon hour barbeque (\$5 / person) and storytelling session. Learn about the history of the trail and visit with other trail users. Everyone welcome.

Railroad history comes alive

"The town owes its existence to the railroad"

By Gail Helgason

If you're driving through northeastern Alberta and notice what looks to be a ball-on-a-pole silhouetted against the skyline, don't think you're seeing things.

The ball-on-a-pole is part of the Heinsburg Water Tower, the largest surviving structure of its kind from Alberta's colourful railroad days, and the only one left in its original form.



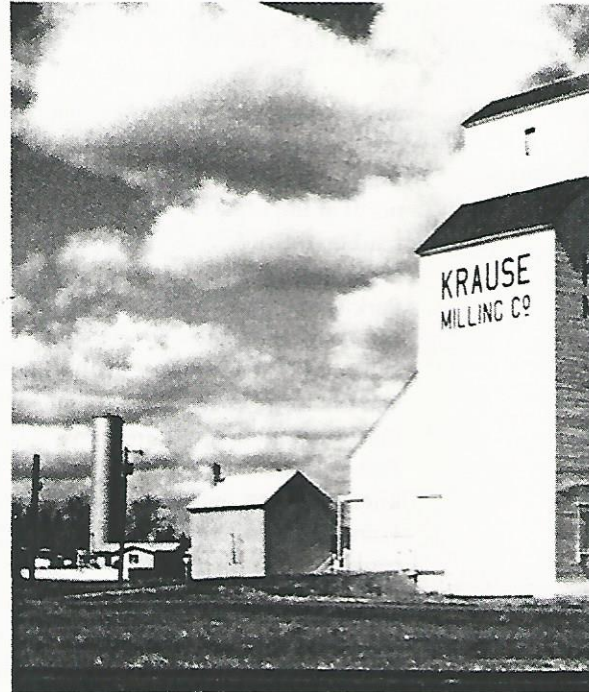
Heinsburg Water Tower: 'An eye-catcher.'

"It is an eye-catcher," says Robert Hendriks, project coordinator for the Heinsburg Community Club's historical committee, explaining that the ball was used to indicate water levels. "It's clean and straight and ready to go for another 100 years."

The 15-metre (50-foot) structure, which holds 60,000 gallons of water, has "stood proud" since 1930 on "railway flats" between the community and the North Saskatchewan River, he says. It's one of many such tanks that once dotted the province's right-of-ways, acting as reservoirs to fill huge steam locomotives with water.

The distinctive landmark has been designated a Provincial Historic Resource by the Minister of Alberta Community Development. The Alberta Historical Resources

Foundation (AHRF) contributed \$20,500 to the community club to assist in the \$60,000 facelift. The club raised almost \$40,000 to spiff up the tower, holding bingos, jamborees, wagon train trips and other fundraisers to achieve its "towering" vision.



Historical preservation under the guise of economic developm

"A lot of people come to see it," says Hendriks, noting that the tower is part of the Heinsburg Railway Theme Park Development, which the community hopes will further develop the area's tourist potential. "It's definitely a tourist attraction."

The community worked with David Capelazo, preservation advisor with Alberta Community Development's Heritage Resource Management Branch, to identify the tower as an historically significant site. Once that status was achieved, the site became eligible for AHRF funding.

The club is also working with the department to adapt the site for interpretation and recreational uses. "If sensitively done, recreation and (historical) interpretation can be well blended," Capelazo says.

The Heinsburg Water Tower is one of several railroad-oriented restoration projects under way in northeastern Alberta communities. The nearby village of Vilna, for example, features a block of "boomtown

stores" that went up almost overnight when the CNR completed its route through the district in 1919. "The town owes its existence to the railroad," says Roshan Nelson, coordinator of the Vilna Main Street Program.

Vilna is the smallest and most northerly community ever to be involved in the Main Street Program, which provides funding to Alberta communities for heritage resource projects. Six buildings have been restored under the program, with plans under way to restore up to 15 next year.

Small town, big restoration activity

The Vilna Pool Hall and Barbershop, believed to be the oldest operating pool hall in Alberta, is the feather in Vilna's restoration cap. Recently designated a Registered Historic Resource, the pool hall was built in 1921-22 and has been used for that purpose ever since. It features two original 10-foot Brunswick snooker tables and two six-foot Samuel May billiard tables as well as all the original cues, racks and scoring boards.

"It's remarkable," says Nelson. "All the walls are yellowed from smoke, and there are paths worn into the hardwood around the pool table." An antique barber's chair and Booker coal stove add to the heritage flavour.

The structure is now owned by the Friends of the Vilna Pool Hall Society, which is dedicated to preserving the building in its original state and operating it as a living museum. "It's still being used by kids during their lunch hour," explains Nelson, noting that the society features "drop-in pool sessions" as a fundraiser.

Interpretive walks, antique lighting and a boardwalk are also planned. The community of 300 hopes to draw some of the tourists who are attracted to



Railway history is 'definitely' a tourist attraction.

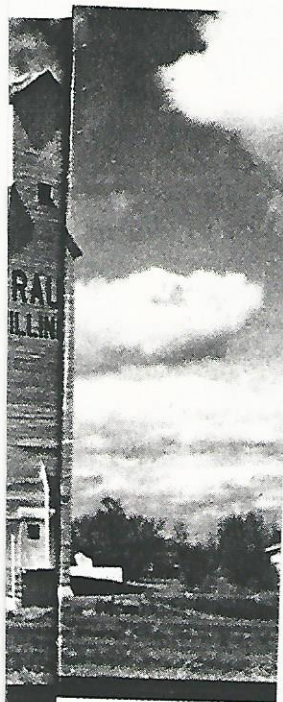
the region's lakes. "Essentially it's historical preservation under the guise of economic development," says Nelson. "That's the exciting part of it."

At Radway, the Radway & Area Historical Archives Association has restored a 1929 elevator, assisted by funding from the AHRF and Alberta Lotteries. "It was a labour of love," says Ernie Halun, the association's president.

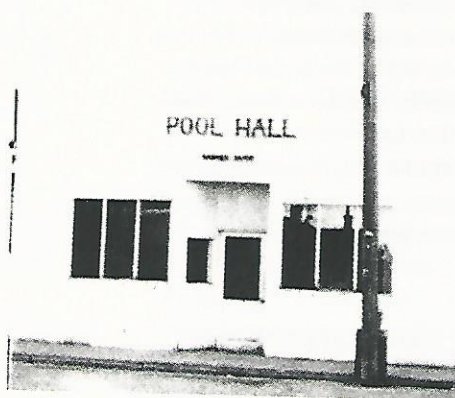
Nearby Smoky Lake has restored its CN station and is now working to save the one remaining grain elevator. Aside from its historical value, citizens say the elevator is key to drawing visitors to the town. "Smoky Lake is down in a valley," says Peter Goruk, vice-president of the Smoky Lake Grain Elevator Preservation Society. "If you don't see an elevator, you miss the town."

For information: David Capelazo, Alberta Community Development, Heritage Resource Management Branch, (780) 431-2326; david.capelazo@gov.ab.ca

Vilna Main Street project, www.historicvilna.ca



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Vilna Pool Hall: 'It's remarkable.'

Agritourism Consultant Visits Alberta

Ed Mahoney was such a popular speaker at both the 2001 and 2002 Alberta Rural Tourism conferences that he was invited back to tour the province for two weeks this July. On Saturday, July 27, Ed puts his experiences together at a session at Ukrainian Cultural Village. Here are some of his thoughts regarding rural tourism in Alberta.

1. Tourism volumes are lower than he expected. There is lots of capacity in our systems (camp grounds, etc.) and facilities would benefit from more use. The potential to capitalize on heritage, stories, skills, crafts and adventures is overwhelming. Do not let heritage buildings, barns, grain elevators disappear. People are looking for authentic experiences. Visitors will become advocates of preservation.
2. Diversity of product is in place. N-E Alberta can emphasize cultural landscape and human heritage.
3. Alberta is undervalued, undersold and underpriced.
4. Look hard for ways to cooperate. Some M.D.s are not cooperative with the tourism sector and others are even obstacles to tourism. Use cross-marketing of businesses and packaging. See each other as partners not competitors.
5. Encourage local artists. Hold seminars on marketing to tourists. Tourists want to shop. Artists have a sensitive understanding of the land. What do they see & portray? Work with their ideas for enhancing buildings, properties and staging areas.
6. In Ed's two weeks he found that tourism was subsidizing farm operations in 60% of the establishments he visited. Tourism is preserving some farms & ranches.
7. Tourism needs advocates. There is a need for Alberta Transportation support in better signage.
8. Keep heritage buildings alive through adaptive re-use - as art galleries, restaurants, B & Bs.
9. Be analytical and research carefully but also be brave and creative. A closing thought: Don't let persons with less vision, less faith, less passion block your path - blaze your own trail.

Economic Impact of Trails Documented

At the invitation of the Bonnyville Chamber of Commerce, Ken Buck of ESL International made a presentation on Monday, May 13. Drawing on his years of experience with Ontario trail systems, Mr. Buck showed that regions are using trails as a means of connecting existing attractions and holding visitors in their area for a longer period. Calculations based on expected use and expenditures showed investments would be recouped in a few years. He used the Niagara regional trail system, Fort Erie and Bruce-Grey Counties as examples. With regards to snowmobile trails, support from the province has allowed a major

network to develop. The Ontario Federation of Snowmobiles has achieved compulsory trail use permits with the money flowing back to the trail operators. Copies of Ken Buck's presentation are available from Alberta TrailNet at 1-877-987-2457

New Business Underway

Wagon Trains West is a tourism-related business in the Heinsburg area started by Lane Scott. It is Lane's plan to work with his father, Roy Scott, and others in the area to provide a unique western experience. This will include trail rides, wagon treks and accommodations along the way in log cabins and tepees. Call 943 - 2101 or 943-2700 for more info.

ATV Clubs For Smoky Lake and St. Paul

Riders of all terrain vehicles are joining forces to focus on safety and responsible ATV use. Their goals include promoting safety, educating users and planning community events. A number of events have been held already with more to come. For information in St. Paul, contact David Noel at Fountain Tire (645-3253). In Smoky Lake area, call Ernie Stark (656-3769).

Trail Legislation

MLA Ray Danyluk is heading the Recreation Corridors Legislative Review committee for the province of Alberta. The committee held public meetings in June & July throughout the province to hear Albertans concerns and suggestions for trail legislation. Important issues identified include liability, adjacent landowner privacy and environmental concerns. Danyluk stresses that the mandate of the committee is not to decide whether there should be trails, but rather, to ask for community involvement and solutions. The committee's report could lead to legislation unifying and clarifying the laws and regulations concerning trail use in Alberta.

We Have a Website

Thanks to our Go for Green TrailPak grant, we now have our own website: www.ironhorsetrail.ca
TrailPak's website: www.trailpak.ca
For lots of information on Alberta trails and trail building initiatives: www.albertatrailnet.com
North Saskatchewan Watershed Alliance - Our water route thru N-E Alberta: www.nswa.ab.ca