

IRON HORSE

Trail

A Newsletter of the Riverland Recreational Trail Society
Building Trail from Fort Saskatchewan to the Saskatchewan Border
Fall 2003

Trails Tied Together At Abilene

By Vicki Brooker

Reprinted with permission St. Paul Journal, June 10, 2003

They came from the northeast, the southeast, the west. They came riding in on close to a hundred ATV's, driving a long line of wagons and buggies, hiking, riding horses and bicycles. They brought with them the flags of 10 municipalities, and three ribbons signifying the three branches, as politicians, recreationalists and a group of tired but victorious volunteers gathered late Sunday morning at Abilene junction near Ashmont to celebrate the grand opening of the Iron Horse Trail.

Placards lining the fence above the junction and a handful of watchful adjacent landowners reminded all of the conflicts which trail planners had overcome in their quest to see 300 kilometers of abandoned rail line become a multi-use, multi-seasonal recreational trail for all to enjoy.

Master of ceremonies Marshall Grekul quoted Robert Frost as he explained "this is where three branches meet. We can travel any of the branches, by any of many means."

Vince Steinhauer offered an honor song, and said "we've been here a long time ... it's an honor to be here to represent the First People." Marvin Bjornstad of the Riverland Recreational Trail Society presided over the placement of flags by municipal representatives as a kilted Brent Mosley played the bagpipes and MuniCorr president Robert Bouchard unfurled the Iron Horse Trail flag for the first time.

"After four long years," Bjornstad said, "10 for some, we have an excellent land base, an excellent trail and amenities will be done soon." The route "goes very deep in historical roots," part of it blazed in 1813 under the direction of Fort Edmonton factor John Rowand.

The Carlton Trail, as it was known then, was used for over a hundred years, and in 1919, the railroad was begun, completed to Heinsburg in 1928. "It went from a trail to a rail line, and now back to a trail ... which is already a major asset to communities ... and is forming linkages between governments, user groups and individuals. It will be a lasting legacy to be used over the years." Fiddle music by Mike McGee and tsymbaly tunes by Victor Sydor emphasized the multiple cultures of the area.

Bouchard said this part of the opening was held in Abilene 'because of what it symbolizes - a fork in the road where we come to a common point ... the coming together of 10 municipalities. It's not only a multi-use trail, it's a new community of



Hoisting the Iron Horse Flag: RCMP Honour Guard, Iron Horse Pres. Marvin Bjornstad, MuniCorr Pres. Robert Bouchard, MLA Ray Danyluk and MLA Dave Broda

northeast Alberta." MLAs Ray Danyluk and Dave Broda were also on hand and applauded the years of volunteer effort that went into the creation of the trail. Danyluk said "it's a multi trail in a number of aspects: multi-municipality, multi-use, and so important, multi-seasonal. It's so positive that these trails were set aside, going from railway use to trail use without taking away from valuable agricultural land."

Del Huchulak, from the west branch, Sheila Thompson, from the southeast, and Dave Hunter, from the northeast branch, came forward with three long ribbon banners. MD of Bonnyville Reeve Eva Urlacher and Cold Lake Mayor Hansa Thaleshvar joined the two MLAs to ceremonially tie the banners together atop the Iron Horse Trail flagpole. Danny Smyl proudly carried the beribboned flag at the head of the procession as ATVs, wagons and walkers headed up the trail to Ashmont for the remainder of the opening ceremonies.

For membership or other
information
visit our website
ironhorsetrail.ca

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On the Trail



Watchable Wildlife Ted Hindmarch of the Beaver River Naturalists observing waterfowl near Cold Lake.

Natural Beauty Abounds By Ted Hindmarch

The portion of the Iron Horse Trail just south of Cold Lake on its approach to the Beaver River trestle offers some wonderful natural landscape. It offers an excellent venue for a hike, quad or bike ride. The trestle is 4.5 km south of the Cold Lake end of the Iron Horse Trail located behind Fast Gas/Petro-Pass. The most scenic portion of the trail is to the south of its juncture with the west end of Twp Road 624. From this point the trestle is less than 1.2 km south along the trail, an easy round-trip walk. A black spruce forest to the west of the trail harbours the beginning of a small beaver-dammed creek. The creek crosses under a small bridge on the Iron Horse Trail about 200m south of this point. It then parallels the east side of the trail in an ever-deepening gorge on its way to the Beaver River, offering great views of the beaver-ponds and opportunities to see wildlife along its length. Past the bridge over this creek, the forest opens into a predominately deciduous mix prior to opening onto the vista of the Beaver River valley. Here, the trestle offers a spectacular view of the Beaver River valley both east and west from more than 60m above the river.

Morning walks along the Twp Rd 624 - Beaver River Trestle portion of the trail in late June and early July provided great wildflower, bird, butterfly and wildlife viewing. If you like quiet solitude, it is best to walk on the weekends when 4 Wing flying activity is low.

The best wildflower surprise along this stretch is the occurrence of several small patches of Yellow Lady-Slipper, a splendid orchid that is in decline in many settled areas as a result of being over-picked or dug up for gardens. Lady-slipper orchids tend to occur in lime-rich soils. Most orchids grow in close association with fungi in the soil which makes them difficult, if not impossible, to transplant. Domestic lady-slipper varieties are available through many nurseries. The brilliant orange to red flowers of the Western Wood Lily (Tiger Lily) can also be seen in good numbers along this stretch. Sadly, this provincial floral emblem of Saskatchewan is also in decline in settled areas of the southern boreal forest through over-picking and digging. When these flowers are picked or mowed, the food producing leaves are removed from the bulb root system and the plant dies. Other wildflowers to be seen are Canada Anemone, Cut-leave Anemone, Tall Lungwort (Tall Bluebells), Strawberry Blite, Heart-Leaved Alexander, Golden Corydalis, Common Harebells (Bluebell), Northern Bedstraw, and Hawkweed. More seasonal varieties will come and go. It is important to enjoy the wild beauty of these flowers in their natural habitat. Do not pick them but leave them for those who follow.

Many butterfly varieties such as the Tiger Swallowtail, White Admiral, Northern Crescent, to name a few of the more noticeable species, can also be seen enjoying the wildflowers or sunning on the gravel banks of the trail.

I documented a minimum of 34 bird species along this short section of trail. A family of Bufflehead ducks was in one of the ponds, and Mallards, Blue-Winged Teal, Common Goldeneye and Ring-Necked Ducks were probably nesting. An unexpected sighting of two female Hooded Merganser's was made in one of the beaver ponds to the east of the trail. You can expect to see a resident Red-Tail Hawk, American Kestrel, and perhaps an illusive Sharp-Shinned Hawk. Killdeer, Solitary Sandpiper and Sora rails are along the ponds. An Eastern Phoebe is nesting under the creek bridge so don't linger too long. Alder Flycatchers, Cedar Waxwings, Common Yellowthroat, Yellow, and Ovenbird Warblers, Song, White-Throated, Clay-coloured and Chipping Sparrows also nest along the creek and trailside woods, while the strain of a Hermit Thrush can be heard in the woods beyond the creek valley. The large Pileated woodpeckers are also around the area. On the way into the trail along Twp Rd 624, at the junction Rge Rd 423 (turn off to Sam's Auto Rescue) stop and listen for the melodic refrain of one of our few local nesting pairs of Western Meadowlarks in the meadows to the north.

*When on the trail ... take only pictures,
leave only your thanks.*

Geocaching

Geocaching is an outdoor pursuit gaining popularity around the world. The objective is to use GSP readings and written clues to find a hidden 'treasure chest'. Within are a number of prizes from which the tracker can select, often replacing the object with one of their own. Danny Smyl has geocaches hidden in Northeastern Alberta. One along the Iron Horse Trail near Cold Lake is called "Trailblazer Beaver Lure." Danny has had visitors to his cache from Canada and the U.S. "This geocaching is a game that is fun for all who own a GPS or know someone who does - a great pastime!" Danny's geocaches can be found on the internet under www.geocaching.com.

You're in Bear Country!

Occasional sightings of bears added to the excitement of many trail users this summer. Remember, the Iron Horse Trail also serves as a wildlife corridor so take precautions. Travel with companions and use a bear bell to alert animals to your presence. Cyclists in particular move swiftly and silently so can be upon wildlife in a flash.

Fan Mail for the Trail

Elk Point Review

Tuesday, July 22, 2003

Dear Editor,

Last week I had the pleasure of riding my bicycle on the Iron Horse Trail with a friend. Every year we enjoy a short vacation together riding our bikes on a trail in Alberta or Saskatchewan. We are two middle-aged women who enjoy the outdoors and the physical activity of cycling. We were delighted to find the Iron Horse Trail on the internet and made our plans to stay in a local bed and breakfast and enjoy the local cuisine and culture. We wish to express our appreciation to the local residents of the area for their many volunteer hours and vision to create such a magnificent trail. Next year, we will continue our ride from Elk Point to Vilna.

Cathy Watts

Saskatoon, SK

And ... from the Smoky Lake Signal Wednesday, August 6, 2003

Wagon trekkers from Thorhild & Redwater enthused, "It is an excellent trail. It is an all round road for us. The Iron Horse Trail is the best idea this province came up with."



Quadders enjoying an autumn day at St Edouard, east of St. Paul.

Postcards from the Iron Horse Trail: The Movable Feast

It is a well-kept secret that Northeastern Alberta has the greatest heritage diversity in the entire province and a visit to eateries is a tasty theme for an Iron Horse tour. In Glendon, try the Pyrogy Park Café. It is a cozy restaurant with a view of the world's largest pyrogy. Order the house special, a variety of sauerkraut, potato and cheese pyrogies served with delicate cabbage rolls and sausage. From Glendon, traveled to Vilna. You'll feel like you are on the movie set of *Busy Town*. Workers are bringing storefronts back to 1920s vintage. Vilna Foods, with its carefully restored 1925 brick façade, is a pleasure to explore. The original pressed tin ceilings and creaky hardwood floors take you back in time. All cyclists brake for bakeries and ice cream and Vilna Foods offers fresh pastries five days a week. Choose between a peach strudel, cherry Danish or blueberry scone. Across the street, Vilna General Store features a wide selection of Foothills ice cream with creamy texture and a dozen flavours. Vilna's monument to fine food is the mushroom and a variety of mushroom dishes can be samples at the Side Street Café.

Down the trail from Vilna, is the Smoky Lake Inn. They have a thoughtful menu with special monthly events such as rib night (beef & bison) and seafood night. Every Sunday it is steak & eggs all day. Homemade pies and a choice of fresh coffees round out the menu. Also in Smoky Lake, Bread and Soup: The Old Fashioned Bread Bakery is a must-see. If you're lucky, they'll be baking in their traditional Ukrainian peeche oven right next door to the bakery.

Back on the northeast branch of the Iron Horse Trail, Cold Lake's waterfront has a number of restaurants to choose from including Clark's, with an imaginative, nostalgic décor. Their number one menu item is fish and chips. They will even cook your own fresh caught fish for you. Traveling along to Bonnyville, don't miss Mom's. You'll get great homemade soup and bread six days a week. On the southeast branch of the trail in St. Paul, sample French cuisine at Chez Lyne's. The décor is charming provencal with a menu to match. Escargot, Cordon Bleu and Sugar Pie are house specialties. Most weekends, Daniel Gervais, the 15 year old violin prodigy, entertains from 6:00 - 8:00.

Last but not least on the food lovers' tour, Elk Point boasts no less than ten eateries. A walk down Main Street provides many choices: a good steak, Chinese food, pizza, sub sandwiches or home-cooked quality. Taste Buds offers the best Chinese food in the country-side. Particularly fine is the lemon chicken made with the freshest of ingredients. For a satisfying light meal try a bowl of Wor Won Ton soup full of vegetables and plump won tons. Elk Point's most established restaurant is the Empress. Don't miss their homemade pies. You may want to share one of the generous portions with a companion. The newest addition to the restaurant scene is Outback 646 Ranch-house which offers local beef in a historic western setting. Northbound 41 of Elk Point stocks MacKay's famous ice cream.

Many people make an afternoon expedition out of visiting a neighboring town for a meal or a treat. It is a great excuse to hit the trail and sample the fine food our region offers.

Thank You to Our Volunteers!

5000 volunteer hours in 2002 brought great advances to our regional trail system. If you are interested in getting involved, attend one of our meetings call 724-2061.

Economic Opportunities Increasing

Promoting our region just got easier with Alberta's Lakeland DMO's successful application for Canadian Tourism Commission 'product club' funding. A stated goal of the product club is to create a "centennial trail" inviting visitors to explore the history, cultures and natural beauty between Edmonton and Regina during the dual centennials in 2005. Much Western Canadian history took place here and deserves to be featured.

Alberta Economic Development has added support to this venture by designating funding to hire a facilitator for the process. Recruitment for this position is underway right now. For more information, call Janice Kennett at 645-2913.

Calendar of Events

Wednesday, September 10: Ashmont Legion
Trail Stewards Workshop

Thursday, September 18: Cold Lake
RRTS Directors Meeting (Info: 724-2061)

Saturday, September 20: Elk Point Seniors Ctr
Annual Historical Day—Hospital History

Saturday, October 4: Smoky Lake
Pumpkinfest

Thursday, October 16: Elk Point
RRTS Directors Meeting (Info: 724-2061)

Thursday, November 20: Waskatenau
RRTS Directors Meeting (Info: 724-2061)

Thursday, December 18: Glendon
RRTS Directors Meeting (Info: 724-2061)

Thursday, January 15: St. Paul
RRTS Directors Meeting (Info: 724-2061)

Thursday, February 19: Smoky Lake
RRTS Directors Meeting (Info: 724-2061)

Thursday, March 18: Mallaig
RRTS Directors Meeting (Info: 724-2061)

Thursday, April 15: AGM Bonnyville
RRTS Directors Meeting (Info: 724-2061)

Promote your community events & invite trail users to attend by posting on the Iron Horse Trail website.