

National Trails Day celebrated in Sandy Lake

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By **CATHY WROBLEWSKY**

To mark National Trails Day, a group of 10 people, some as young as eight, left the Symonds Rails to Trails Symonds Kiosk at 3 p.m., on Saturday, June 7, to walk westward along the TransCanada Trail up to and past where the old trestle bridge once stood. Actually it still does. It is referred to as the "buried rail bridge," in *Hiking the Dream*, by Kathy Didkowsky.

Everyone was welcome that day, but in particular we had invited Stella Kowalchuk, Hazel Michalchuk and Earl Symonds because of their personal experiences with the railroad, especially the section we were going to walk on. Before we left the Kiosk, Earl answered questions and shared with us his well-organized binders containing maps, pictures and a wealth of railroad information. One of the maps indicating every curve, revealed that out of the 104 miles of the Rossburn Subdivision, approximately 100 curves occur in only 60 miles. These curves add so much to the already scenic, hilly, potholed landscape.

Fond memories

The popular swimming area not far from Highway 250 where kids had campfires and dove off a board into Beaufort Lake, held fond memories for some of our group. Stella said that Sandy Lake was for the cottagers; Beaufort was for the kids. Earl described the water as shallow for about 25 feet, then dropping off suddenly.

Hazel spoke of walking along the train tracks to and from school watching carefully for the train. On a windy day, steam from the engine would be less visible. Going home (west) from Sandy Lake, she was always looking behind her. If she was halfway on the bridge when she saw smoke, she had to run to beat the train to safety. Passenger trains were predictable. "Extra" trains were not. During winter she came to school across the frozen lake on a sleigh. Towards spring she recalls her father's warnings about "foaming, spinning air holes" on the lake beside the trail made by the sleigh.

The adventures of Hazel Michalchuk didn't end on June 30. There was Ukrainian School for six weeks! She was dive-bombed by hawks and "black gulls." Hearing rustling in the bush one day, she ran the rest of the way in terror. "Someone was probably picking hazelnuts," she said. She related a story from more recent years about a man scuba diving on Beaufort by an island (which is now covered with water). He saw a "huge" creature in the water, and said he was never coming back.

We approached the area where the lake is on both sides of the trail. Stella pointed to the smaller lake and announced that we have our own Ogoogo. We stared at her. "It's true!" she said. She described seeing a long, serpentine creature coming full speed around the island, spikes along its back with tendrils sticking out of its head. We were transfixed. "It was beavers pushing an old fallen tree," she burst out, laughing.

Trestle bridge

We arrived at the spot where the trestle bridge was thought to begin. Earl said it was about 1200 feet long, most of it on a curve. Earl has memories as a very small child of train cars carrying gravel with the purpose of filling in the bridge. The channel between the two parts of the lake may have been as wide as 1000 feet. Observations were made about the high level of water as opposed to years ago.

Hazel explained how blocks of ice were taken from the lake (both Beaufort and Sandy) and kept covered with sawdust in log shacks or cellars. One of our group mentioned a comment he'd heard that, "you hadn't tasted tea until you'd had a cup made with ice water".

Further on we accidentally frightened a mallard from her nest. We commented and debated over shrubbery, scat, and flowers. Anemones were just beginning to open. Was it honeysuckle or snowberry, goose or something else (the scat), arrow-leaved coltsfoot or a different kind of coltsfoot. We marked the location of the coltsfoot plant so we can observe its development over time. Another interesting plant, a type of crowsfoot, not yet flowering, was pointed out in this same wet spot. A clump of marsh marigolds bloomed on the edge of a small slough.

A book on wildflowers later revealed that snowberry is in the honeysuckle family. We shared what we knew, or thought we knew, and learned, in the casual manner of a nature hike. To think we have the opportunity to experience such a trail, each time a new adventure, in our own backyard.

Cathy Wroblewsky, who lives in Sandy Lake, is an avid supporter of the Trans Canada Trail.