

Cyclist encounters moose, bad weather, friendly folks

BY SANDRA BOLAN
sbolan@yrmg.com

Close encounters with moose, bunking in with Aborigines and sleeping in abandoned buildings are just some of what Billy Parker has done while cycling across the eastern portion of Canada.

Following the end of his 20-year marriage, the 49-year-old Edmontonian decided it was time "to see this side of the fence. I keep hearing about the CN Tower and Niagara Falls."

Mr. Parker left Winnipeg Jan. 2 following a brief visit with family, whom he described as not very supportive of this adventure.

Loaded onto a Trek mountain bike he has had for a number of years is camping equipment, clothes, a GPS navigator, camera, laptop, emergency lights, cellphone, drinks and canned food he gets from food banks along the way. The bike and all its gear weigh about 180 pounds. Mr. Parker tips the scales anywhere between "125 and 130 pounds soaking wet".

He rides at about five miles per hour and covers 40 miles a day "unless chased by dogs", then his speed and distance increase.

Mr. Parker got a ride into town from a stranger in the Ajax area recently. He was dropped off at McDonald's where he stayed warm with free refills of coffee.

His journey caught the attention of many restaurant patrons who listened as he spoke of moose encounters and how a man thought by providing him with a good meal and shelter he might get lucky. He didn't, but the pair spent the evening pouring over old photo albums of the man's family.

Since Mr. Parker embarked on this journey, the weather has been "terrible", which has forced him to hitch rides from total strangers now and again in order to keep moving.

It is also through the kindness of strangers, Mr. Parker, who is an artist and labourer, is able to avoid hotels much of the time and sleep on warm couches and eat hot home-made meals.



STAFF PHOTO/SANDRA BOLAN

Billy Parker and his bike at McDonald's.

His method of finding these strangers is simple — he knocks on doors.

Just outside of Toronto, however, he knew that would not go over well. Mr. Parker found an abandoned house, crawled inside and "just got a good sleep".

It was one stranger he encountered around Brantford who made his ride a bit more comfortable. The boots Mr. Parker started out with ended up not being very comfortable. But when he met up with a firefighter in that area, he gave Mr. Parker better footwear to finish his journey.

After Stouffville, Mr. Parker planned on passing through Peterborough, Kingston, Ottawa, Gatineau, Montreal, Quebec City and then New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland before heading back to the Thunder Bay area where he will drop off his bike before flying home.

He plans to have his ride completed by the end of the year.

COMMUNITY

Farm market set to re-open for 5th year

Fresh veggies, organic meat and baked goods are just some of the items you will be able to purchase Thursday afternoon when the Downtown Stouffville Farmers' Market opens for the season.

Most of last year's approximately 23 vendors are expected to return to the Park Drive market, which is in its fifth season, according to Anna Rose, the town's downtown co-ordinator.

'If it's coming from the terminal that's fine, but it better be comparable to the grocery store.'

Like many early-season markets, asparagus and rhubarb are about the only product coming straight from the farm. But that will once again be augmented with items from the food terminal.

"It's quite beneficial to the shoppers. They're getting fairly local produce," Ms Rose said.

"If it's coming from the terminal that's fine, but it better be comparable to the grocery store," she said of shoppers' attitudes to pricing.

The market runs from 2 to 7 p.m. rain or shine from May 9 to Oct. 10.

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PUBLIC INPUT INTO THE 2013-2014 OPERATING BUDGET

Presentations or written submissions are welcome

WHEN: During the Regular Board Meeting on Tues., May 21, 2013 or Tues., June 4, 2013 at 7 p.m.

WHERE: Catholic Education Centre, 320 Bloomington Road West, Aurora

HOW: To register to speak or arrange to submit comments, call 416-221-5051 or 905-713-1211, ext. 13006, or email frances.smith@ycdsb.ca, by May 10.

Budget information is available at www.ycdsb.ca

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