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Edmonton cyclist Ed Aunger to set off on second leg of trek across the country in support of the Trans Canada Trail and in his wife's memory



By [Doug Johnson](#)

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Ed Aunger marking the second stage of his five-year ride across Canada to support the completion of the Trans Canada Trail. He will depart again on July 1.

For the second year, Ed Aunger will set off on the Trans Canada Trail (TCT) in support of safe paths for bikers and in the memory of his wife, Elizabeth Sovis.

The TCT began in 1992 as a 25-year plan to create a continuous link from Victoria to Charlottetown. The desired completion date of the TCT, 18,000 km of greenway and 5,000 km of waterway, 2017, Canada's 150th anniversary.

According to the TCT's website, the trail is around 72% complete. Alberta and Saskatchewan have the largest number of gaps, Aunger added

A year after his wife's death in July of 2012, Aunger, now a retired University of Alberta professor, made a plan to bike across Canada, over five summers, using as much of the completed TCT as possible.

He set up a fund with the TCT in Sovis's name, which, according to a financial statement from December of last year, has raised \$24,050.

Last summer, he made the 2,660 km trek from Victoria to Edmonton. This year, he will bike across 2,750 km, from Edmonton to Winnipeg, on July 1.

In the last leg of the project, he hopes to reach the site of Sovis's death on its anniversary and hold a memorial in her honor.

During his ride, he will also document the condition and level of completion of the TCT.

Over a decade ago, Aunger and Sovis changed their summer vacation plans from hiking to three-week long bike rides, all off-road as Sovis felt unsafe biking alongside motor vehicles.

"It was a beautiful thing that she agreed, because this wasn't something I ever would have done on my own," he said.

The rubber of their tires hit trails in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Ireland, France and Slovakia.

In 2012, they set off for Prince Edward Island, a province well known for the quality of its bike trails, Aunger said.

They had reservations at a bed and breakfast in Hunter River on July 14, though there was five kilometres of shoulder-less, two-lane highway before they could rest.

About halfway in, a full-sized van — driven by a man three-times over the legal limit — struck Sovis, killing her instantly in broad daylight.

"I fell in love with my wife when we were 12 years old. We had an utterly amazing relationship, better than I ever could have imagined and I don't know how I could have survived this except for it was obvious to me what I had to do. She had a vision," Aunger said.

Sovis had planned on retiring from her job as a speech pathologist on July 1, 2013 and, prior to her death, wanted to spend this time petitioning for the completion of the TCT, after she and Aunger only managed to bike 17 km of Alberta's neck, which was thoroughly ravaged by all terrain vehicle use — too treacherous for all but the most experienced mountain-bikers — or just plain incomplete.

“That’s not what the Trans Canada Trail is supposed to be. It’s supposed to be for ordinary Canadians who want to ride their bikes and go for a walk,” Aunger said.

The Albertan government leaves the completion of the trails to individual municipalities, which lead to good systems around major cities, but shoddy or incomplete paths near rural communities, Aunger said.

After 22 years, less than half of the province’s commitment has been completed, he said, registering his disappointment that the idea of the TCT was originally born in Alberta, which, along with Saskatchewan, has the fewest kilometres finished.

For more information, visit ridethetrail.ca