

The Neepawa Press
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“Ride the Trail for Elizabeth” campaign arriving in Neepawa

An Alberta man whose wife, Elizabeth Sovis, was killed two years ago in a horrific cycling accident, is now on the second leg of his cross-country journey, riding this summer from Edmonton to Winnipeg on the Trans Canada Trail, a distance of more than 2,750 km.

Edmund Aunger is honouring his wife and promoting her vision: She wanted to see a Trans Canada Trail that was complete and accessible and safe. “Ultimately,” he says, “it was this very problem that killed her. We were cycling on the Trans Canada Trail, while on holiday in Prince Edward Island two years ago, and we were forced to detour onto a highway. Ten minutes later, Elizabeth was struck by a drunk driver. The impact threw her body 50 metres.”

Aunger will be arriving in Neepawa on Sunday, August 17, 2014, and stopping at the Neepawa Swimming Pool on Tupper Avenue. There, at 4 pm, he will speak about his trip and its objectives, including fund raising and public awareness. He is calling on Canada’s provincial governments to ensure completion of the Trans Canada Trail by July 1, 2017, in time for Canada’s 150th anniversary celebrations.

“Elizabeth believed passionately in the Trans Canada Trail, an 18,000-km greenway and a 5,000-km waterway, linking Canadian communities, encouraging active transportation and ensuring safe travel. But she was dismayed that the many impassable and incomplete sections made it necessary to travel on dangerous roads and highways.”

“During our regular cycling holidays, she had two particularly upsetting experiences, while travelling on supposedly “operational” segments, once in Alberta and once in Manitoba, and these convinced her to advocate for the development of safe walking and cycling trails.”

“In July, 2008, near St. Paul, Alberta, the Trail was composed of soft sand, loose gravel and heavy ballast, used only by all-terrain vehicles. Unable to pedal our bikes, we detoured onto a nearby rural road that had less motorised traffic. In July, 2010, north of Winnipeg, Manitoba, the Trail came to an abrupt and unexpected end, forcing us to push our bikes through thick brush, down a steep slope and onto a busy shoulderless road.”

“Later that afternoon, when we reached our destination, Elizabeth angrily announced: ‘That’s it. I’m not doing this ride anymore. I’m going home.’ And I had to cancel all our B & B reservations. Our Manitoba holiday was ruined, but our lives were saved.”

“Elizabeth resolved that, during her retirement, scheduled for July 1, 2013, she would work to promote the Trans Canada Trail. She wanted to see it completed, but most of all, she wanted it to be accessible and passable and safe – a trail that could be used by everyone regardless of their age or ability.”

“I am taking up her cause. I am honouring her life and her vision.”

“I am cycling the Trans Canada Trail from Victoria to Charlottetown in five stages. This year’s trip, the second, is from Edmonton to Winnipeg. The final leg, in 2017, will be from Ottawa to Charlottetown; I intend to arrive on July 14, the fifth anniversary of Elizabeth’s death, and lead a memorial service.”

“With 92 % of its 1,470-km planned Trail completed, Manitoba appears to be well on its way to reaching its objectives. However, these optimistic figures greatly exaggerate the province’s accomplishments. Parts of the Trail are unusable or impassable. Parts are simply rural roads posted with Trail signs. We have to do better.”

Note: Information on the “Ride the Trail for Elizabeth” campaign is posted at www.ridethetrail.ca