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Riding for Elizabeth

Man cycles on Trans Canada Trail to honour late wife; wants trail to improve

By: Cindy Chan



Edmund Aunger (left) is riding his bicycle across Canada on the Trans Canada Trail to raise funds and awareness for the trail's renovations and completions, as well as to honour his late wife, Elizabeth Sovis (right), who died two years ago when she was hit by a drunk driver shortly after they were forced to detour off the trail and onto a two-lane highway with no shoulders.

An Alberta man is trying to turn a personal tragedy into something positive and beneficial for all Canadians.

Edmund Aunger, from Edmonton, Alta., is cycling across Canada on the Trans Canada Trail from Victoria, B.C. to Charlottetown, P.E.I. in five stages.

The first leg of his ride began last year on July 1 in Victoria to Edmonton for a total of 2,660 kilometres. This year, he's riding from Edmonton to Winnipeg, a total of 2,750 kilometres.

Locally, Auger will be cycling from St. Norbert to the Manitoba Legislative Building, riding through the Richmond West, Fort Richmond, Waverley Heights, Whyte Ridge, Tuxedo Industrial, Westdale, and Charleswood areas.

In 2012, Auger and his wife, Elizabeth Sovis, were cycling on the Trans Canada Trail in Prince Edward Island when they were forced to detour onto a two-lane highway with no shoulder.

"My wife was killed (by a drunk driver) 10 minutes after we left the trail," Auger said.

Auger is riding cross-country to honour the memory of Sovis and to raise money for the Trans Canada Trail Foundation's Elizabeth Sovis Memorial Fund.

Auger said Sovis was passionate about the Trans Canada Trail, and wanted to work to make it better.

"She felt very strongly that we needed a trail people could ride on and walk on," Auger said.

Thus, the birth of "Ride the Trail for Elizabeth", the name of the cause.

"I have to do something about it," Auger said. "I can't accept it."

Auger is also calling out to Canadians to sign several petitions to get the provincial governments to complete their sections of the Trans Canada Trail by July 1, 2017 — Canada's 150th anniversary — to prevent any more tragedies.

Auger and Sovis were avid cyclists who took many cycling trips together. On many occasions, he said they found the Trans Canada Trail to be "unusable."

"We'd travel down the Trans Canada Trail regularly in different parts of Canada," Auger said. "And we were continually being forced to leave parts of the trail that were supposedly finished but were, in fact, unusable, and go onto the highways, because the trail had not been properly built."

Auger recalls one such experience in 2010 while cycling in Manitoba. While riding up to Lockport, the trail suddenly ended.

"The guide said the trail was there, the map said the trail was there," Aunger said. "We had to drag our bikes down through the bushes and find a road. We couldn't cycle any further. We got onto a highway that had no shoulders, and the traffic was going by closely beside us at high speed."

Aunger designed the ride to be a solo trip, but friends and family have joined him on parts of the trip since last year, and he's welcoming anyone interested in riding alongside him in the future.

Next year, Aunger will ride 2,450 kilometres from Winnipeg to Sault Ste. Marie, Ont. In 2016, Aunger will ride 2,200 kilometres from Sault Ste. Marie to Ottawa. He will complete the fifth and last leg of the ride in 2017, travelling from Ottawa to Charlottetown, a 2,390-kilometre ride.

Aunger anticipates he will complete the ride by July 14, 2017 — the five-year anniversary of his wife's death.

For more information, visit <http://www.ridethetrail.ca/>

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