

“Ride the Trail for Elizabeth” campaign cycles the Winnipeg River valley

An Alberta man whose wife, Elizabeth Sovis, was killed three years ago in a horrific cycling accident, pedalled the Winnipeg River valley earlier this month, travelling through Fort Alexander, Powerview and Great Falls, en route to Sault Ste-Marie, Ontario.

He is on the third leg of a 12,500 km cross-country journey, riding the Trans Canada Trail from Victoria (British Columbia) to Charlottetown (Prince Edward Island).



Edmund Aunger and Pierre Bourgeois discussing the Trans Canada Trail

Edmund Aunger is honouring his wife and promoting her vision. “She wanted to see a Trans Canada Trail that was a true greenway, not a motorised roadway,” he said. “She complained bitterly that the existing Trail was not only incomplete; it was often inaccessible and unsafe. I believe that this very problem caused her death. During a cycling holiday on the Trans Canada Trail in Prince Edward Island, we were forced to leave the gravel trail and detour onto a two-lane highway. Ten minutes later, she was struck by a full-size van. The impact threw her body 150 feet.”

“Elizabeth believed passionately in the Trans Canada Trail, an 18,000-km greenway that would link Canadian communities, promote widespread tourism, protect natural environment, encourage active transportation and ensure safe travel. I am taking up her cause,” Aunger said.

“The proposed Trans Canada Trail route from Traverse Bay to Powerview would follow the Snoman 50 and 17 trails, but these are much too sandy for pedal bikes. More importantly, they are heavily used by quads and even pickup trucks, and this motorised traffic makes them dangerous for hikers and cyclists.”

“Consequently, I took the Hwy 11 route, cycling on the paved shoulder. This wasn’t a particularly safe option either. I had to contend with bike-chasing dogs, particularly near Fort Alexander, and share the narrow pavement with quads, pedestrians, cars and on-coming cyclists.”

“The Trans Canada Trail crosses the Pine Falls dam, and then goes south in the drainage ditch beside Broadlands Road. In the winter, when the ditches are frozen, this might be a useful path for snowmobiles; in the summer, the ditches are often wet and overgrown, and impossible for cyclists. Putting a national spine trail for hikers and cyclists in a ditch is absolutely ridiculous,” Aunger said.

“On this section of my ride, I am accompanied by two friends from Edmonton, David Parker and Margaret Marean, and a nephew from Ottawa, Ron Jeffery. We’ve received a warm welcome all along the Winnipeg River valley. This afternoon, while we were cycling on Broadlands Road, Pierre and Edith Bourgeois stopped their vehicle to see if we were okay, and then invited us to their home for lunch. They recounted some of the local history and described the condition of the Trans Canada Trail in the area.”

“Although the original signage still remains, the old Trans Canada Trail route, over the wooden pedestrian bridge at Coca Cola Falls and then across the Great Falls dam, was abandoned several years ago. It is now very overgrown, marshy and muddy, and practically impossible to cycle. But the new trail reaches a dead end at Coca Cola Creek. Maybe we could have forded the creek a week ago but, with the recent rainfall, the

water is too high and about 30 feet wide.”



Edmund Aunger contemplating Coca Cola Creek

“There are many dedicated trail supporters in the Eastern Manitoba region, notably Dan Lester, Sean Michaels and Jack Brisco, but building a national spine trail is too big a project for volunteers. They don’t have the resources.”

“The Trans Canada Trail is slated for completion by July 1, 2017, as the keystone of Canada’s 150th anniversary celebrations. But it won’t ever get done,” he said, “certainly not by 2017, unless the prime minister gets the provincial premiers on board, and makes it a government priority!”