

Trans Canada Trail needs work, trekking reviewer says

Trans Canada Trail will continue to evolve, long after its completion date in 2017, trail director says



Edmund Aunger checks out a flooded section of the Trans Canada Trail. (Edmund Aunger)

An Alberta man is cycling across the country to raise awareness of some of the potential hazards along the Trans Canada Trail.

Edmund Aunger's wife was killed in 2012, during a bike trip, shortly after the couple had diverted their route from the trail to a highway.

However, Aunger says flooding and poor maintenance are making parts of the trail impassable.

And he said many sections require cyclists to ride on road shoulders or dirt roads.

"Many of these roads that I've ridden on have heavy machinery and transport trucks, farm machinery on the roads," he said.

"Sometimes, not only do they throw rocks at you, but the dust gets so big in the air that sometimes they can't see you," said Aunger.

Between Kenora, Ont. and Thunder Bay, Aunger took a bus because the trail in that area is actually a canoe route.

Trans Canada trail director Jane Murphy concedes the trail needs work.

"We will continue to evolve the trail from a road to a greenway," she said.

"Where possible, we'll try to develop a parallel hiking trail to a paddling route," Murphy added.

She said her organization will keep trying to improve it, long after the scheduled 2017 completion date.

Making the trail safer

Aunger and his wife were on a cycling holiday in PEI in July of 2012, following the Trans Canada Trail. After about three hours of cycling, Aunger said, the trail guide led them out onto the roadway, where his wife was struck by a truck and killed.

Her plan was to retire within a year and devote herself to completing the Trans Canada Trail and to making it safe.

On July 1, 2013, Aunger set out on the trail from Victoria, B.C. intending to cross the country over the course of five summers before holding a memorial in PEI on the fifth anniversary of her death.

Since starting his journey, Aunger's feelings about how to solve the problems with the trail have changed.

Aunger now wants the Prime Minister to convene the premiers and establish a plan to build a user-friendly trail, funded, built, and maintained by the provinces with substantial funding from the federal government — similar to how the Trans Canada Highway was built.

He said the feds could put money into the trail, just as they have invested in fitness initiatives such as Participaction.

He also said a user-friendly trail would have huge tourism potential.

'It's not for everybody'

Murphy said her group is pleased "overall" with the progress of the trail.

"There certainly are some sections that do require improvement but we are constantly monitoring the situation and work with our partners to improve them," she said.

The organization last year started developing a roadway strategy to review the sections of road on the trail.

They are also working with the Share the Road Cycling Coalition to develop webinars to educate partners and road authorities on how to improve cycling conditions on roadways.

Murphy said long distance trails such as the Trans Canada Trail are not built overnight, and the trail will continue to evolve long after the segments are all connected in 2017.

For now, she said, the organization needs to manage the expectations of users.

"The signage that we're developing and the promotional material that we will be developing for 2017 will clearly articulate what type of experience people will be using," Murphy said.

"Just like any kind of activity, it's not for everybody. Yes, you can do it from coast to coast to coast but it will take a variety of different modes to experience it at this point in time," Murphy said.

Corrections

An earlier version of this story stated "A man whose wife died in an accident on the Trans Canada Trail is cycling across Canada to raise awareness of its hazards." It has been corrected to read "An Alberta man is cycling across Canada to raise awareness of some of the potential hazards along the Trans

Canada Trail. Edmund Aunger's wife was killed in 2012, during a bike trip, shortly after the couple had diverted their route from the trail to a highway."