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Looking for a safe path

Man pushes for better safety along Trans Canada Trail

By Sharon Samuel



Safer routes

Submitted photo

Edmund Aunger and his wife Elizabeth Sovis pose for a photo during the B.C. portion of their annual cycling trip. She was killed in 2012, and he now rides in her honour.

A former Waterloo resident is on a cycling campaign in loving memory of his wife to make the Trans Canada Trail a safer route.

Edmund Aunger and his wife Elizabeth Sovis were on a cycling holiday on the Trans Canada Trail in Prince Edward Island on July 14, 2012. They followed the official guide book of the trail, which led them to a highway route. Sovis was struck by a van and killed.

“My wife was really not a very experienced cyclist and she was always very, very careful and very concerned about safety,” said Aunger. “When she agreed to cycle with me, she set a condition that there would be no roads.”

He and his wife did cycling trips every summer for almost 10 years, and would alternate between Canada and Europe. He would plan their trips in advance and he found lots of trails, which did not have to ride on the road.

He said they did not find any problems in Europe and assumed there would be no issues in Canada either, as the Trans Canada Trail route is touted for its safety. They decided they would pick a section every summer and complete it.

“What we discovered is that a lot of Trans Canada Trail was on roads, which it was never supposed to be,” said Aunger.

His wife wanted to make the trail route safe for the cyclists as it was never supposed to be on roads and highways. She wanted the 18,000 km greenway to be cyclist friendly. She wanted to continue that work after retiring as a speech-language pathologist.

Aunger quit his job 10 days after her death and decided to pursue her vision. He started his work by cycling the trail route from Victoria, B.C. to Charlottetown, P.E.I. He began on July 1, 2013 and is set to finish the cross-Canada route by July 14, 2017 promoting the construction of a trail and its safety.

He touched down in Waterloo last week. He wanted to stop at a place he called home as a student at Wilfrid Laurier University in the 1970s. He said Waterloo Region has changed a lot.

He also said the Waterloo trail route is beautiful and well maintained.

Aunger travels from one province to another and talks to people and provincial governments to get involved in making the trail route as safe as possible.

“At my different stops, I speak to the media and I visit every legislature on route,” said Aunger. “This Sunday I am going to speak at Queens Park, where the Ontario legislative assembly is held, and I’ll be calling on the Government of Ontario to intervene and set minimal standards for trails.”

A spokesperson from the Trans Canada Trail’s Ontario division said the provincial route is about 5,000 kilometres long and is maintained by local volunteers and community partners.

“I empathize for the accidents, but if we feel that the route is not safe, then we shut it down,” said Al MacPherson, with Trans Canada Trail Ontario.

Aunger said when the decision was made to build the trail route, it was left to volunteers and individuals.

“The governments have been reluctant to get involved so it’s done by private individuals,” said Aunger. “There are many regions in the country where there are very few people, so how are they going to build the trail there?”