

**A SHORT HISTORY OF
THE NATIONAL TRAIL
the first 25 years**

By Douglas Campbell



1971—1996

Retrospectively ...

... come dream with us, build with us, and hike with us were the words of Association president James Feeley.

In the early years, the vision of an identifiable cross-Canada trail originated from the accomplishments of Ontario's Bruce Trail pioneers. It was seen to be a long, long endeavour and the boundary year 2000 between the centuries caught the imagination as target year for completion. It was under this canopy of expectation that the following pages were written.

Now, the century and millennium have turned and completion still remains elusive but the vision turns to reality as the nation learns to count the benefits of countrywide trail corridors, and the distant horizon draws closer. Sentier National Trail and the Trans Canada Trail were each born from faith in the future and dependence upon the goodwill and support of Canadian citizens. On such firm foundation, there is assurance of fulfillment and dates on a calendar are of little consequence.

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A SHORT HISTORY OF THE NATIONAL TRAIL

This account of three decades of the national trail movement is written in recognition of those who in some way contributed to its fortunes.

Douglas Campbell



1 - The Pieces Come Together

‘Mind-boggling’ was the term used by the trail-blazer. It was the early 1960’s and a group from the Toronto Bruce Trail Club was route-surveying where the Niagara Escarpment is little more than an outcrop breaking through level farmland. A member had asked where the Bruce Trail would end and someone commented that in fact the Niagara Escarpment continued beyond Tobermory on the Bruce Peninsula, and the trail could leap-frog to the Manitoulin Islands and beyond. Like a gun barrel, the peninsula pointed to the vast Ontario northland. The possibilities indeed boggled the mind and the remarks of that day lodged in the recesses of memory, like a seed falling into a crevice awaiting more fertile times.



Early 1960's group from Toronto Bruce Trail Club paces out proposed B.T. route. (Photo: Robert R. Taylor)

The calendar moves to 1965 and to another group studying routes for the Youth Hostels' Centennial Trail in British Columbia. The proposed route led eastwards from Hope in the Lower Fraser Valley into Manning Park. Another option considered the wild Coquihalla Valley and a third proposed continuing along the Fraser River Valley. It was the last option which fired the imagination, fed by writer Bruce Hutchinson's exciting record of the mighty Fraser and its colourful history. Here, like the Niagara Escarpment, was a topographical feature which spanned the province with majestic Mount Robson at its eastern extremity. A trail to parallel the fateful salmon run to the high waters was a challenge. It was but an exercise in wishful thinking, yet it added to the climate for germination of ideas.

In 1968 yet another set of outdoor enthusiasts gathered, this time in Calgary, to explore means for providing citizens with places to walk. Edmonton was completing its city ring trail through the efforts of the Waskahegan Trail Association, and the Great Divide Trail Association was embarking upon its north to south route along the spine of the Rockies.

Complicated land ownership problems faced Calgary's Chinook Trail Association. One alternative proposed was to establish a route across Alberta leaving the Calgary section until last, the nut in the nutcracker approach which had proved successful on the Bruce Trail. The Bow River Valley not only offered a line of continuity through Calgary and across most of the province, but it embraced a wealth of contrast from the unique Cypress Hills in the south-east, through the semi-desert home of the pronghorn antelope, bald prairie, treed foothill country to the fen and forest of Banff National Park with its stark landscapes and rich alpine meadows. Coincidentally, the suggested route paralleled the B.C. boundary and led through the mountain parklands to Jasper to form a direct link with a prospective Fraser River route.

It was supposition but a new dimension emerged - a route across the two most westerly provinces. And then there was that trajectory line from the imagined gun barrel of the Bruce Peninsula arching round the Great Lakes. Suppose those lines could be joined for a trail spanning the five western provinces. Was it really feasible to establish a trail across the more populated southern regions and what purposes would it serve? Would it survive without the vital thread of continuity provided by an escarpment, mountain range, river or historical route?

An exchange of letters with the Bruce Trail Association in November 1968 gave encouragement to the concept. The federal Director of Fitness and Amateur Sport commented in March 1969: "This appears to be an extremely worthwhile venture and would undoubtedly have much value in Western recreation programs in future years." Subsequent correspondence with leading national outdoor and youth organizations denoted interest. Objectives materialized: access to new areas for recreation, encouragement of healthy outdoor activities, preservation of places of historic and scenic value, promotion of the awareness of and appreciation for the natural environment.

A Regina hotel room was the meeting place for a handful of outdoor people to discuss a continuity of route from the Alberta boundary by way of Saskatchewan's Cypress Hills area, by-passing Regina and leading through the Qu'Appelle Valley to Manitoba. The response was positive.

A broader consensus was needed and a meeting was proposed for April 1971. Invitations went to the Alpine Club of Canada, Boy Scouts of Canada, Boys' and Girls' Clubs, Bruce Trail Association, Canadian Audubon Society (later Canadian Nature Federation), Canadian Camping Association, Canadian Youth Hostel Association (later Canadian Hostelling Association), Girl Guides of Canada, National and Provincial Parks Association (later Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society), YMCA and YWCA. Observers were to come from the Federal Departments of Amateur Sport and National Parks.

Scant days before the meeting a cry came from Nova Scotia: "Why was the east being left out?" Lack of prior consultation was no adequate response. The agenda was changed to accommodate this rightful plea and with it came a new vision - an Atlantic to Pacific trail. It was no longer a thought-to-be-feasible prospect of joining trails across the west to meet the Bruce Trail but an expansion into the unstudied field of determining a route to traverse three more provinces and contemplating eventual extension to the island provinces. Moreover, it meant the key system of the Bruce Trail, because of its north to south orientation, could no longer be included in its entirety. The enormity of the new vision in return provided the essential element for continuity - a theme: a physical bond to unite the forces of conservation right across the country.

The meeting went ahead at the YMCA's premises on Toronto's Yonge Street. There was strong attendance and whole-hearted endorsement of the concept of a cross-Canada trail, although opinions varied on the means of development. The National Trail movement came out of the shadows on the evening of April 29, 1971.

2 - The Hard Climb to the Summit

The Toronto meeting of national associations showed clear support for the idea of a cross-Canada trail. By projecting this consensus to provincial organizations and the legions of outdoor enthusiasts across the land, massive support was indicated.

The question was how to harness this support. The Bruce Trail was the model to follow. Obviously, funding and promotional expertise were priorities, but whether an appeal was directed to the public, the corporate sector or government, it was clear that the trail would not survive without a solid base at local level. Key centres were Vancouver, Calgary, Regina, Winnipeg, Thunder Bay, Toronto, Montreal and Halifax.

A joint letter was directed to the ten national associations, inviting each of them to appoint, or seek from their members, two representatives at each city. From a potential strength of twenty individuals in each centre an organizational meeting could be held to determine the next step, probably the convening of a public meeting, to establish a National Trail group. Within six months provincial organizations would be in existence across the country.

The plan failed as most associations declared full dedication to their respective objectives and could not commit members to other assignments, however desirable they might be. Perhaps the appeal should have been pursued, but its rejection was so complete that enthusiasm was quashed. Tauntingly, decades later the plan remained viable if national associations could only extend themselves marginally to a cause they had declared desirable.

An appeal was made individually to certain of the national associations which might have benefited the most from a national trail to broaden their objectives to include the scheme, but again these proposals were declined. Approaches to governmental departments of tourism and recreation failed to evoke desirable responses.

Then began the years of imperceptible growth when glimmers of progress came infrequently but gave heart. Individuals began to claim places in the archives, yet most were names only, faces hidden across the vastness of the land, voices rarely heard. Correspondence was the mode of the day, long-distance telephoning costly, fax and email services light years away in imagination.

Following the April 1971 national meeting, ably chaired by Eric Kennedy of Toronto, Ann Prewitt with Canadian Camping Association made the first gesture to bolster the cause. Ann ran a camp in Ontario's Algonquin Park and translated her enthusiasm into action by the simple act of donating stationery supplies of letterhead.

Designing a logo for letterhead grew from a need to convey the image of a premier hiking route. Taking the letter H for hiking trail, superimposed by the figure I, the tops of the characters were squeezed and shaped into the form of a directional arrow, common in trail systems of the day. The letterhead carried the slogan "Towards a Foot Trail across Canada" and listed names and organizations attending the Toronto meeting. Thus correspondence was given the respectable air of authority. Copies of a letter outlining a trans-Canada trail scheme published in the July 11, 1970 edition of The Globe and Mail were useful as enclosure background material.

Most welcome in 1973 was news of the founding of the Voyageur Trail Association with plans to forge a route along the north-eastern shore of Lake Superior, a vital link through terrain in places very harsh. Correspondence was exchanged with Paul Symes, association president and veteran trail-builder.

From Manitoba came word from Vern Dutton that a section of trail to fit into the national system already was in the course of construction. This civil engineer and ardent Scout, popularly known as Skink, had galvanized his troop of Boy Scouts into forging an east-west route.

In Québec there was talk of a trans-provincial route being sketched in on the map using existing trails. Other authorities and organizations were taking interest: provincial departments of Environment, Tourism, Culture, Municipal Affairs, Forestry, Parks and Recreation, the Greb Hiking Bureau and The Bata Group.

In 1977 engineer Fred Dorward of the Waskahegan Trail Association suggested sending an unsolicited proposal to the Secretary of State with a view to securing government funding, a procedure he had followed with success for another recreational group. National association status was a prerequisite for the application and the required steps were taken towards incorporation. We clubbed together to cover the \$200 application fee. Letters Patent were granted on August 23, 1977.

At a meeting in Red Deer in February 1978 representatives of the Chinook Trail Association, Rocky Mountain Ramblers Association and the Waskahegan Trail Association finalized paperwork and the proposal was submitted. Our hopes were high but the Secretary of State found it outside the scope for funding and it was declined. Disappointment was keen but the exercise had brought about the formation of The National Trail Association of Canada. The corporate 'we' could now be used, but what good was high gear when the wheels were spinning.

Efforts turned to image-building. Attempts at publicity had brought a full-sized, informative article by writer David Thompson in the March/April 1980 issue of *Outdoors Canada* and mention in *Readers' Digest*. Infrequent newsletters went to a handful of loyal supporters subscribing \$5 each.

In 1983 Fitness Canada canvassed for funding applications and we requested a grant sufficient to cover the cost of a national meeting of trail groups and national outdoor associations to be held in Ottawa. Almost beyond belief, after an age of near stagnation, our appeal was heard by sympathetic official Sue Cousineau and funding was approved. Arrangements went ahead for a meeting to be held at the Roxborough Hotel, Ottawa, on the weekend of March 3-4, 1984. Surely the breakthrough to gaining momentum was near.

Four N.T.A.C. directors attended, travelling from Alberta. They were ardent Scout and aircraft restorer Vincent DeJong, lawyer Anthony Harben, Chinook Trail Association president Fred Mitchell and me. Our presentation was well received and delegates from national associations gave strong endorsement to the need for a national trail. Out of the debate and group discussions came the plan for organization and development. N.T.A.C. representation was to be spread among five regions: Atlantic provinces with 3 directors, Prairie provinces 3, and British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec each with 2. There was unanimous agreement to develop a national hiking trail system with the N.T.A.C. as co-ordinating body among provinces with priority being given to the Atlantic to Pacific route.

Directors were elected and they appointed the executive: I was to continue as president with Michael Fedak (Manitoba), Doug Robertson (Ontario), Jim Rutter (B.C.) and John Saywell (Quebec). The latter three were full-time executive directors of leading hiking organizations within their respective provinces, well-experienced in trail organization matters.

With an indication of further funding from Fitness Canada, surely indeed the breakthrough had arrived at last.



Delegates start to size up the challenge at the National Trail Conference held at Ottawa in March 1984. (Photo: Vincent DeJong)

3 - The Best Laid Plans...

The 1984 national meeting went well but I have always felt more should have been achieved. I had prepared an agenda which included the nitty-gritty issue of organizing groups in major cities along the N.T. proposed route. Fitness Canada had offered the services of a facilitator to relieve me of chairman duties and to enable me to participate more freely in debate, but on the eve of the meeting we were advised to concentrate on reaching the basic essentials of defining objectives and establishing countrywide representation. The plan was successful but an opportunity to shape regional organization in the presence of, and with the help of, national outdoor groups was lost.

The executive met at Canmore, Alberta, the following October with a full agenda of re-drafting the constitution, developing plans for fund-raising and promotional schemes including map requirements and audio-visual presentation, preparing a budget and re-designing letterhead to meet bilingual acceptance. There was unanimous agreement to retain the same name and logo. "National" was common to each language and left room for broad interpretation.

Fitness Canada had sent additional funds of \$2,500 for this executive meeting and by using airline seat sales, shared car travel and avoiding commercial accommodation, expenses were kept to less than half this sum and I was able to refund the balance within a few days. This was a mistake which led to unfortunate consequences. Fitness Canada officials informed me later that such surplus funds should be kept for future expenditure on purposes for which funds were granted - in this instance, on meetings. I should have asked to have this option confirmed in writing!

Our application for 1985 funding was received favourably and the sums of \$6,000 towards promotional material, primarily for an audio-visual presentation, and \$5,400 for meetings were granted. The May 1985 annual general meeting held in Ottawa ratified the constitutional changes and plans for development. Things were moving slowly but at least they were moving. Very little was happening at regional levels, awaiting directions and promotional aids. Doug Robertson provided update reports published in Hiking, later to become Explore Magazine.

Publicity Director John Saywell had canvassed for colour slides from all regions and comprehensively researched material for the a-v presentation in consultation with Fitness Canada for approval of content. The 12-minute presentation entitled Challenge of a Lifetime was ready for viewing at the October 1985 meeting held in Canmore. It was deemed a first-rate production, requiring only some minor modification. Unfortunately, the minor adjustments necessitated re-recording of the text and the original narrator was not available. The final production lost some of its effectiveness and stimulation. Twelve slide carousels and cassettes in each English and French were distributed in the regions and proved useful at promotional meetings. Indeed, fertile seeds were sown at a presentation given to the Calgary Area Outdoor Council chaired by computer marketer and keen cyclist Paul Poirier. Five years later, Paul played a significant role in bringing the concept of a cross-Canada multi-use trail to the notice of the Canada 125 Committee, triggering the Trans Canada Trail program.

For many months thought had been given to using the occasion of the International Congress on Trails and Waterways Recreation, to be held at Vancouver in the spring of 1986, to inaugurate the National Trail. It would have been appropriate to hold a ceremony on the Baden-Powell Trail in North Vancouver but it would have conflicted with events in the Congress schedule and we concentrated instead on promoting our image by booth display and showing of the a-v presentation in the main auditorium.

Also in early 1986 I was invited to the Guelph "Broadening Horizons" conference of Hike Ontario and was given the opportunity to address the assembly. The Bruce, Ganaraska, Rideau and Voyageur trail systems were the jewels in our crown and I was gratified at the keen interest for completing the link-up with club members volunteering help to other clubs. In a panel discussion, Ray Lowes mooted the prospect that the trans-continental trail could shadow the international border to which I countered that travellers would suffer stiff necks in admiring scenic Canada! But I came away from Guelph sharply aware that the N.T.A.C. did not boast a single trail-marker to encourage the enthusiasm evident at the conference.

Fitness Canada had financed the 1986 A.G.M. to coincide with the Vancouver Congress, but when we applied for 1987 funding it was intimated that cutbacks in government funding were anticipated. It was plain that the momentum generated at the 1984 national meeting was being lost and we were not achieving results.

The original promising executive became decimated with Secretary-Treasurer Mike Fedak's resignation as a result of health and other personal considerations, Publicity Director John Saywell's departure on moving from Sentiers Québec, and Fund-raising Director Douglas Robertson's withdrawal due to inability to devote the time required.

Vice-President Jim Rutter lamented the lack of direction within the organization, asserting our efforts should be concentrated more forcefully on gaining support through channels of government. My approach had been to gather strength from whatever quarter, remembering that strong local support by clubs and individuals had been the life blood of the Bruce Trail movement.

Facing a cut-off from government funding, there seemed to me to be one chance left to breathe new life into the Association: to hold an inaugural ceremony on part of the National Trail coupled with the next annual meeting when re-organization would be the vital topic. Fitness Week in June 1987 became the target date.

The problem was that Fitness Canada annually made known its funding program in late March or April, far too late for planning a June meeting but, having been advised that unused portions of previous grants could be put towards such expenses as future meetings, we proceeded in calling and arranging a June meeting, pre-paying accounts to make sure that no cheques were dated after the fiscal year of March 31. This procedure was later held against us as a misuse of funds, an allegation I resented intensely.

Very valuable help was given in developing our plans by writer Henry Heald of Ottawa's Rideau Trail Association. By moving the date to June 5 of Environment Week, he was able to have Maurice Strong, world-renowned environmentalist and Secretary of the first United Nations Congress on the Environment, and John Fraser, Speaker of the House of Commons, agree to attend the inauguration. Henry also located an ideal site for holding the ceremony where the Rideau Trail touched Parliament Hill and he circulated the news media. We were all set for placing the first trail-marker.

At last the National Trail would no longer be a sketchy line on the map but a point at the heart of the nation.

4 - Back to Basics

When the first National Trail marker went up on Parliament Hill in Ottawa on the morning of June 5, 1987, the event was to be my last throw of the dice as president to win national recognition for the trail.

News releases had been issued and the local TV station was on hand as a small group gathered in front of the Mill Restaurant under bright sunshine. President Pearl Peterkin and other members of the Rideau Trail Association were in attendance.

The ceremony was brief. I introduced the guest speakers, Maurice Strong and John Fraser. They applauded the efforts being made in the causes of fitness and environmental awareness and they acknowledged the importance of the immense voluntary organization involved. They joined in nailing a temporary trail-marker alongside a Rideau Trail marker.

A message from Prime Minister Brian Mulroney was read:

On behalf of the Government of Canada, I am delighted to extend my warmest greetings and sincere best wishes to the members of the National Trail Association of Canada on the occasion of the launching of the trans-Canada recreational trail corridor.

Fred Bodsworth, a Canadian author, once wrote, "It is no coincidence that our national emblem is not a rising sun, a star, a hammer, a sickle, or a dragon, but a beaver and maple leaf. Nor is it coincidence that there are more paintings of wilderness lakes, spruce bogs, and pine trees on more Canadian living room walls than in any other nation on earth. We may scoff, we may deny, but the wilderness mystique is still a strong element of the Canadian ethos."

This recreational trail will help bring the wonder and beauty of the wilderness into hearts and minds of Canadians, reminding us of our heritage and cautioning us that we are merely occupants of this world, charged with its preservation and enhancement.

May I wish each of you continued success in this project, as well as good health and happiness.



International environmentalist Maurice Strong and Speaker of the House John Fraser place the first National Trail marker on the Rideau Trail at Parliament Hill, Ottawa, on 4th June 1987. (Photo: Henry Heald)

From Fitness and Amateur Sport Minister Otto Jelinek came more words of encouragement:

Canadians of all ages are getting in touch with our great nation through hiking. From coast to coast, they are not only discovering the importance of conserving Canada's outdoor splendour for all to enjoy, but they are taking hiking trails that are putting them on the road to a healthier, fitter lifestyle.

It is appropriate that hiking enthusiasts across Canada be linked by a national trail system that stretches from the Atlantic to the Pacific. This ambitious project was conceived and nurtured by the National Trail Association of Canada and the Federal Government, through its Fitness and Amateur Sport program, has been proud to support this project.

The National Capital Region is indeed fortunate to be selected as the site for the official placing of the first marker of this trail which will stretch over 10 000 km, luring hikers to experience Canada and her people.

As Minister of State for Fitness and Amateur Sport, I congratulate the National Trail Association of Canada on its hard work and wish it every success in completing this unique trail.

Following the ceremony, some of those attending walked part of the route to seal the inauguration process. And what of our design for national publicity? That evening a brief item appeared on local Ottawa TV newscast with some ten seconds of video footage. The event was well recorded but its publicity value fizzled.

The next day at the annual general meeting I stepped down after ten years as president and a new executive formed under Jim Rutter's direction, Luc Larose of Sentiers Québec as vice-president and Henry Heald as secretary-treasurer. A motion for a change of name to National Hiking and Trail Association of Canada was defeated, a proposal that was felt to narrow the scope of the organization's broad appeal.

Jim Rutter felt strongly that real progress would only be made at political level, by working through governmental levels and provincial hiking organizations, hopefully finding sponsorship through the corporate sector. His approach contemplating route completion by 2000 was outlined in interview form in the March/April 1988 issue of Explore Magazine. Efforts to secure further funding from Fitness Canada failed.

My own attempts at fund-raising had been futile. Starting in 1978 I had tried to persuade my employer, British-based Prudential Assurance Group, to consider some financing. The Group had been eminently successful in sponsoring junior soccer across the country. In 1984 it fell to Doug Robertson as fund-raiser to re-activate discussions and in the following year Group interest was aroused with the thought of donating funds towards the production of trail-markers. When Doug Robertson resigned in late 1986 little progress had been made and I resumed negotiations. Fortunately, my appeal fell on receptive ears and it was to the credit of the Prudential Assurance that their donation was made without tax concession as the Association did not carry charitable organization status. It was not until 1989 that a supply of 2,500 plastic trail-markers in the Group's colour combination of red and grey on white, bearing the name of the donator, was produced and distributed to the regions. Discreetly, the first official marker went up to replace the temporary one at the site of the 1987 inauguration ceremony, followed by others along the Rideau Trail. I felt that finally the National Trail was being built.

Early retirement in 1989 enabled me to give more time to the Association, including the take-over of secretary/treasurer duties from Henry Heald who had to withdraw due to more pressing considerations. The outlook was not encouraging. The organization remained intact with directors in all regions but it seemed activity was at a standstill and really all we had to show for years of effort was a short section of National Trail marked from Ottawa on a westward course.

How could we have slumped from the heady, aspiring days of 1984 with so much going for the project? My own shortcomings in a leadership role must have contributed significantly but in retrospect I question the wisdom of delegates to the 1984 national meeting in appointing professional trail people to key positions in a voluntary organization. While their knowledge and guidance were extremely helpful, they could not be expected to function with the same zest as a volunteer who devoted spare time to the project and always they were subject to criticism, valid or not, of conflict of interest and failure to give 100% to their respective daily routine. Tinkers and tailors have no such worries. With all this know-how available we should have been more soundly established.

We were running out of steam with few options left. The tide would turn, as it always had done and would do again, but action was vital to maintain some kind of momentum. My thoughts went back to those early Bruce Trail days when the Toronto Bruce Trail Club was beginning to stagnate having completed route surveying with many ownership permissions approved. No-one was doing anything but talk. T.B.T.C. took it into their own hands with President Ian Smith declaring - let's build!

That formula had worked then and the time was ripe for applying it again. My attention over the years had been directed to advancing the scheme nationally and I was very conscious that I had done little in my home province of Alberta, short of promoting the idea. Now we were armed with trail-markers and all that was needed was trail. But where to start? Thankfully I could count on others.

5 - The Trail-markers go up

I imagine I must have thought that if the National Trail was becoming bogged down at the end of 1989 that I would need to bury frustrations by pushing ahead locally and perhaps other areas would follow.

At the Red Deer founding meeting in 1978 the consensus was that the most suitable route would parallel the Bow River Valley which provided a contrasting cross-cut of the province's broad range of natural scenery. I doubted whether any other provincial span could match the variety found across Alberta.



Veteran Québec trailmaster Paul Perreault (2nd from R) accompanies trail-building colleagues at Labelle, Québec. (Photo: Doug Campbell)

Where to start was not a hard question. The lead came from Rob Gardner, a naturalist with the City of Medicine Hat and a member of the Grasslands Naturalists to whom I had made a presentation a couple of years earlier. He was keen on having a section of the City's excellent trail system designated as National Trail and he had been quietly working towards this end. On May 27, 1990, 18 km were dedicated at a ceremony attended by the Mayor, Ted Grimes, M.P. Bob Porter, and M.L.A. and Deputy Premier Jim Horsman. The first section of National Trail in the west was on the map.

Like a bolt from the blue came news of another trail opening. Weeks earlier, Director Réal Martel, with his team from Sentiers Québec had dedicated his province's first section - no fanfare, no advance notice - just a local press clipping on the 42 km section. Réal, a mailman and a dedicated trail-builder, had enthusiastic backing from his sister, Nicole Martel and dynamic retired Montrealer and veteran trail-builder Paul Perreault. The 1000 km long Sentier National was on its way!

In neighbouring New Brunswick, Director railway executive Edwin Melanson and supporters concentrated on completing the 58 km Dobson Trail from Riverview to Fundy National Park, and Edwin was already campaigning across the province to gain N.T.A.C. support.

Such islands of initiatives shown by others gave satisfaction and stimulus. Encouragement all too often came on a roller-coaster and we made the most of the summits. One such boost for morale came in September 1991 when we heard that the Bruce Trail from Devil's Glen to Tobermory had been posted with N.T. markers, personally nailed up by a conscientious and dedicated Susan Oleskevich who had walked the entire distance both ways during the summer months. To have the Bruce Trail physically brought into the system was rewarding, harking back to correspondence in the late 60's sounding out founder Ray Lowes on the prospect of a trail link with the west.

Back in Alberta, I had my eyes on the key section bringing the trail to the Rockies from the east. The Bow River comes through a gap hemmed in by steep slopes where both the Trans Canada Highway and Highway 1A as well as the C.P. Railway squeezed their paths. Congestion, traffic noise and unsightly industrial growth deterred pursuing this route and by contrast the Skogan Pass to the south provided a dramatic introduction with a view of the valley leading to Banff and the ranges ahead.

The intriguing feature lay in the land managers involved: Banff National Park, Kananaskis Country, the Towns of Canmore and Banff and Three Sisters Resorts, a massive development proposed alongside the Bow River. There were only five interests extending the 65 km section but they involved three levels of government - federal, provincial and municipal - and the corporate sector.

Early discussions indicated general interest among the governmental jurisdictions, an encouragement especially from the Canadian Parks Service where National Parks would be involved elsewhere in the country. But should we be dealing with a major developer planning to build golf courses and pockets of residential and resort properties along the treed Bow Valley slopes?



*“The Gateway to the Rockies” section follows the Bow Valley to Banff National Park.
(Photo: Doug Campbell)*

One of the Association’s prime objectives is the preservation of the natural scene, and the development plans obviously conflicted with these environmental concerns. Had the National Trail been established already through the valley, we would have a solid base to contest such issues. Indeed, the concept of the National Trail is strength through continuity, a chain of iron where encroachment would be felt and reacted upon countrywide. Included in the development plans was preservation of the century-old coalmine railbed as a recreational route which seemed an acceptable course for the National Trail, and our preferred position was to accept the route gratefully and subject to its suitability, impressing upon the development firm the benefits of utilizing a generous corridor for pleasurable walking, scenic advantage and wildlife movement. It was decided to talk and to inject cohesiveness into our proposals.

A meeting was called at Canmore in October 1990 and representatives from all land managers attended. The Association was represented by N.T.A.C. Director and Archivist Vince DeJong; Wally Drew, geologist and driving force behind Alberta’s Centennial Trail, high on Mount Allan; Frank van der Voet, prostheses technician and president of Calgary’s Rocky Mountain Ramblers Association, and me, with professional trail designer Don Gardner as consultant. There was unanimous acceptance of tentative routing and in subsequent months trail-markers went up on approved stretches of the route.

The dedication ceremony was scheduled for June 9, 1991, and on that cloudy and cool morning the three levels of government represented by Louise Feltham M.P., Brian Evans M.L.A. and Banff's first Mayor, Leslie Taylor, joined in putting up a National Trail marker at Banff's Cave & Basin Interpretative Centre, a significant gesture at the heart of the national park system. It was yet another occasion for chronicling and perhaps to catch the public gaze, but in spite of issuing timely releases it stirred no interest within national news media. Coincidentally, and seemingly mocking of our illusion of achievement, a mass of moguls and minions from that disinterested world were preening themselves two kilometres away within the comforts of conference rooms at the international Banff Television Festival. Maybe we were expecting too much, maybe becoming too big for our hiking boots, but how was public opinion to be harnessed to push momentum to a higher level?

Actually, it was a year ahead and only 125 km away in Calgary before the anecdotal grapes would be trodden to ferment into a strain more potent than we could concoct. It would be called the Trans Canada Trail.



Louise Feltham, M.P., shares in placing the National Trail marker at the heart of the national park system at Banff's Cave & Basin site, June 1991. (Photo: Mary Campbell).

6 - The Feeley Era

It began in December 1990. A vacancy for Director occurred in Ontario Region and Jill Leslie, President of Hike Ontario, appointed James Feeley of Ottawa. In his words:

When Jill asked me to be #2 rep for Ontario on NTAC I said I was somewhat overloaded, but if she was stuck and if I didn't have to do too much right away I'd accept. I (mis-)understood #2 to mean I was an alternative to #1. I now understand that there are two reps and I am one.

By way of background: I was one of the founding members of Ottawalk. Among my many sins I was a bureaucrat in Ottawa (a director-general for Informatics Applications Management in the Dep't of Communications) and now I'm part-owner of a 20-person high tech firm involved in consulting, working software, doing R & D in geomatics, etc. I've lived in B.C., Sask and Ontario. I've done work in all provinces and territories (except P.E.I. and N.W.T.). I've biked (parts of) the Alaska highway, the Jasper-Banff highway, and in Newfoundland from St. Anthony's to Corner Brook. In September of this year I spent two weeks hiking the Southern Upland Trail in Scotland.

With that James jumped in with both feet, offering three or four years service and a desire to start a regular newsletter. At about the same time, freelance writer and photographer Roch Dufresne was appointed as a Director for Québec Region and there began a vigorous, wide-ranging exchange of correspondence among James, Jill and Roch, covering every aspect of N.T.A.C. affairs. Refreshingly, nothing was sacred: analysing, philosophizing, questioning, proposing and planning. The trio met within months, the letters ceased but James had the momentum rolling.

In early 1991 the position of president became vacant and I nominated James, appointment acclaimed.

Thank you for anointing me president. Just so I don't get too far out of line in the first year I'll retire anytime you and two other directors so request. You see, as kingmaker you have real power. After that, assuming I'm still around, it'll take a majority of the Board to dump me. I trust this is satisfactory.

From then on, things weren't the same. Derek Morys-Edge, keen cyclist and hiker, burst upon the B.C. scene, speculating a route across the province would be found within a year. How close he came to this perceived pie-in-the-sky claim and how sadly he was to be cheated!

Correspondence began to fly. As secretary, almost daily there was something in my mail-box, memos and copies with the initial J; tens of thousands of words churned out by only a special kind of free-thinking mind with talents of a wizard on the PC keyboard. Well, even wizards are no match against a bewitched computer:

... let that preceding garbage be a lesson to someone. Maybe it was a power surge, maybe a bad disk, whatever I just lost about six pages of typing, even though I had saved them. Now to re-start ...

All nine directors were bombarded, kept informed, opinions sought. Sadly we failed and wouldn't have lasted a week in his employment. But he knew we were volunteers, that we had lives to live and didn't expect the same degree of time-consuming dedication.

My approach is quite simple:

- A *if any one of you wants to be our fund raiser then raise your hand now, and let me know ASAP, then develop a plan and submit it within a month. Merci.*
- B *if no one volunteers [and tells me within 10 days] then I'm it.*

What were the directors supposed to be doing? James, unsolicited and unknowingly, drafted the Job Description when writing to a potential candidate.

- 1 *either be active locally, or provincially, or nationally (of course you can be active at two or three levels if you want)*
- 2 *'active' has many meanings: building and maintaining trails; writing manuals or guide books; lobbying; starting trail organizations; develop policymaking state-ments; liaising with other organizations, such as provincial parks authorities, boy scouts; writing articles; publishing newsletters; etc.*
- 3 *report on activities in her/his province/territory*
- 4 *represent NTAC as appropriate*
- 5 *participate in dialogue which executive often start by sending letters.*

As a responsible minimum your activity as an NTAC director would take about 5 hours per month.

What keeps a handful of volunteers together when physically they are far apart across the country?

I am not saying that we should lock ourselves into a plan so tightly that spontaneous acts cannot be considered or supported - I'm always in favour of spontaneous acts, especially if they are at least somewhat irresponsible or at least juvenile, and fun.

I am saying that to be effective we, as a team, must create and share a common vision, or better be possessed by it. The operative phrase is "as a team" and the operative verbs are "create and share". Without this we will be marginally effective. With this we will be, to use a current pop word, awesome.

Perhaps directors needed spoon-feeding or was it to keep us on our toes with this approach:

1 *Should we be urging the Canadian Parks Service to get involved with the National Trail?*

Yes No

Please provide at least one sentence supporting your opinion.

2 *If your answer is yes...*

Whatever the response was to this questionnaire, the end result was:

re: Strengthening the Canadian Parks Vision

The members of the National Trail Association of Canada pretty well support everything you guys do, and in addition, we think there should be a National Trail across the country, and we think Canadian Parks Service should be heavily involved. We think it would strengthen your vision: protected spaces, heritage, networks, interconnected nodes, greenways - all those good things. Maybe we need something like a new, expanded, revised, Canadian Landmarks Program? Enclosed is a recent copy of Hike Canada.

Think about us.

When response to a question was wanting:

I am interpreting your silence as support, not indifference.

To me came a two-page missive (not the only one) in bold title **WHAT IS THE NATIONAL TRAIL?** with a series of philosophical/conceptual questions beginning: *Is the NT.....*

On environment ministers:

The fact that there have been three environment ministers in three years and 5 in seven years means you waste a lot of time talking to these guys who are just warming cabinet seats.

To the Prime Minister, straight to the point:

Maybe you should commit yourself and your government to getting Canada connected by a transcontinental hiking trail?

His approach to (the big 8) national conservation groups:

Hey guys, trails are better than no trails, because with no trails all those crazy city people will just wander all over that great wilderness and wreck everything that you are trying to protect, whereas if you help us to give them trails they'll leave your wilderness alone (more or less) then these guys, the big 8, might even buy such an argument, then go out and build trails and we'd have to do nothing. Wild eh? Why not?

As for bureaucrats:

Perhaps it was your tight deadline or perhaps it is inexperience that permits you to courier a memo to a voluntary organization and expect the Board of that organization to make a decision within less than a week? It can't happen. Perhaps you have been working too long in a bureaucracy when you think you can use such a bureaucratic technique as "if you don't deny it we'll do it" with voluntary organizations? Don't do that again, at least not with this organization. If you want to fund a two-hour Trans-Canada audio-teleconference of our Board, and the effort and calls necessary to set it up, then I could give you our Board's decision.

And this part of a report on a meeting with two federal officials to acquire funding for a teleconference:

They work in policy. Need I say more? Expect no teleconferences within a year, if ever, and if ever so contained by regulations as to be counterproductive. Discouraged I am. Not a grand request, but they aren't even able to think about meeting it soon. First they have to think sideways within their world, thinking straight ahead may be psychically impossible [and operationally dangerous]. Expect nothing within the short term. Our children may benefit from their goodwill and effort.

There's nothing wrong with that in a report but then who would send copies to the two officials? Know thine adversary - talks resumed the following week!

Exasperation showed through in this rejoinder to the Appeals Committee following the refusal of the Canada Post Corporation to allow second class mail rates for *Hike Canada*.

Regardless of nit-picking bureaucratic regulations and the brilliant but unimportant arguments of the Senior Counsel this HC deserves to be classed as requested. CPC is mandated to do more than make a profit on the backs of non-profit, voluntary, public interest groups.

After a cordial meeting with the Canada 125 Committee chairman, Pierre Camu, faxes flew, this one (in 5 mm print!) headed 7.11 am 3 July 1992:

National Trail Initiative - Suggestion A

- 1 *Take as much money as you can from Canada 125 funds and set it on the table [I hope it's about 5 million \$s, but less will work]*
- 2 *Call, or call a meeting of, some highly-placed people in several national, Canadian firms, such as BCE, Unitel, Southam, CP, CBC, Canada Post, etc, [with at least three "national in Quebec" firms/organizations also] telling/asking them to kick in at least XXX,XXX\$s each, tax exempt. Their contributions should at least match what you"/the government"/Canada 125 put in.*
- 3 *Use it to set up a trust fund for the National Trail.*
- 4 *You [vous] get to appoint the Board, including a couple of former premiers [maybe a former prime minister?]*
- 5 *The objective: By Canada 150 to have the Canadian National Trail System in place, built on top of the existing trails as much as possible.*

Talk about a legacy, This could be real, man!

If that was Suggestion A, additional Initiatives sent three days later were more specific, listing:

- 1 *A travelling Task Force to publicize via meetings with outdoor recreation and tourist organizations.*
- 2 *A National Trails Conference be held.*
- 3 *A National Trails Day be held.*
- 4 *Signage to be erected on the National Trail, simultaneously across the country.*
- 5 *A proclamation be made designating the National Trail as our first National Scenic Trail, staged as a political media event.*
- 6 *A National Trail guide be produced (and if we get ambitious from sea to sea to sea)*
- 7 *A giant Nationwide "Walk the National Trail" event staged to generate public awareness.*
- 8 *A one-hour TV programme on "Canada's Hiking Trails", stressing environmental issues.*
- 9 *Hire a consultant to undertake a major study.*

The chairman replied, expressing great appreciation for the usefulness of the correspondence and proposed recommending the hiring of consultants at the Canada 125 meeting set for July 10 in Calgary. This key meeting went ahead and one of the consultants engaged was ex-N.T.A.C. director Doug Robertson. Research was favourable and resulted in the decision to go ahead with establishing a multi-purpose recreational trail from "sea to sea to sea". Others of James' proposals were adopted as time passed.

To a motorized trail group he sent this salvo:

Our first priority is to work towards getting a foot trail across the country - that is, a trail for walkers.

We don't like

mountain bikes that go too fast and frighten walkers

horses that leave their droppings where walkers want to walk

motorized vehicles that make lots of noise and cause pollution.

The newsletter was his baby and he christened it Hike Canada. Six issues per year, he said, starting at 12 pages and growing to sixteen. In his opening editorial he called the N.T.A.C. "the ambitious dreamers."

Dreams keep us alive. Dreams nourish us. This country needs dreams and dreamers. So, we invite you to come dream with us, build with us, and hike with us.

The fourteen issues he edited, prepared, designed, published and arranged distribution almost single-handedly could be termed a monument to the first real effort to catalogue trails on a national scale. Gratifyingly, his achievements were recognized and acknowledged in his last issue by Roch Dufresne's summation: "Through Hike Canada, you're doing a great job, Jim, not only to put the National Trail on the map of Canada, but also to consolidate the various existing trails within our great country. In a word, to bring hikers together."

His editorial comment in the February/March 93 issue on the Canada 125 Committee and its proposals for the Trans Canada Trail was biting from his perception of the organizational structure after frequent discussions with officials. It did not diminish his enthusiasm to see the scheme succeed and his applause for the Committee's recognition for such an ambitious undertaking was adequately dealt with in the subsequent editorial content in the April/May 93 issue.

His quotations cited capture the free spirit of the dedicated volunteer, the determination and frustrations of the pioneer and something of the philosophy of those who venture into these trail-building sprees, all expressed in plain and human terms. They are lively and at times barbed and on their own they may be misleading. Correspondence invariably was addressed courteously, with understanding, constructiveness and always to the point. James developed his own clichés, consequently it was inadequate to say his sudden passing ended an era - but it had.

I never met James Feeley. No, that is not entirely true. We met in the phenomenal flow of correspondence and we talked on the phone. I just never faced him or shook his hand. The telephone rang less and the mailbox became less crowded but he left a legacy to follow, the legacy of the trail-blazer. His loss to the N.T.A.C. was not just a gap but a vacuum.

7 - Ride High, Fall Hard

The James Feeley years (1990-93) were golden, with the president way out front and me as secretary-treasurer trying to keep up. Our views differed rarely and invariably an issue in doubt through correspondence was settled with a chuckle over the phone.

Lack of funds prevented board meetings and we continued the cumbersome and unsatisfactory measure of attempting to satisfy key A.G.M. requirements through the mail.

Acquiring charitable status for tax-relief contributions continued to elude us but the bank balance became active with the introduction of an associate membership drive, coupled with the initial issue of Hike Canada. For long we yearned for an informative newsletter and its quality and meticulous two-month regularity bound the organization together and spread our message.

Always, without acknowledging the fact, we sought the elusive breakthrough where the scheme would be drawn forward under its own momentum instead of pushing, forever pushing.

Events in B.C. raised spirits. Derek Morys-Edge's enthusiasm and confidence in establishing a route across the province within a year was so impressive he was urged to hurry as upon completion he could take on finishing the job across Canada! By mid-1991 he had set up the Centennial Trails Trust with former Lt.-Gov. Henry Bell-Irving as patron. Application to Canada Manpower provided funding for office facilities and there followed issuing of the B.C. Trail Trekker newsletters and mass mailing to communities across B.C. Derek departed from proposals from earlier B.C. directors, convinced that the most suitable route lay along the more southerly and more populated southern region, extending 1400 km from Victoria to the Alberta boundary. He concluded the best chance of success lay in adopting a multi-use approach, a concept which we had always considered as practicable in more remote areas. He explored the areas and options and eventually travelled an entire route from the west coast of Vancouver Island to the Alberta boundary, drafting a guide book for the Centennial National Trail.

Wally Drew of Calgary's Rocky Mountain Ramblers joined our Board, having given us sterling help in membership, banking and book-keeping work. In March 1992, he and I attended the founding meeting at Red Deer of Alberta TrailNet, the province's umbrella council for all trail-user organizations. Shades of 'déjà vu' fell as we stressed that priority should be given to an east-west provincial corridor as immediately across the highway from the meeting-room was another hotel, scene of the first meeting of N.T.A.C. directors where similar concepts were discussed 14 years earlier!

It was not until May 1992 that I finally responded to a Canada 125 Committee circular offering assistance to organizations planning Canada anniversary events. I outlined the significant trail opening planned for August, connecting the Ontario and Québec systems at Hull, and provided literature on our Association, its aims and achievements. Had I known that the Committee held a mandate for legacy projects beyond the anniversary year, my reply would have been more direct for ongoing

sponsoring. However, unbeknown to me, Alberta TrailNet under the presidency of Paul Poirier, had broached the concept already with the Committee, proposing a multiple use corridor. With two letters in his hands on the subject of cross-Canada trails, Bill Pratt, General Manager of Canada 125, who had attended a Calgary meeting touching on long distance trails in March 1989, appreciated the immense potential. For a province regarded as something of a maverick, Alberta was indeed pioneering a course to strengthen national ties.

Things were happening within the Association.. Associate membership numbers continued to climb, responding to the introduction of the informative newsletter. Media attention was caught by Director Derek Morys-Edge, resulting in August 1992 with national television coverage in a seven-minute feature item on C.B.C.'s Midday program. This broad exposure depicted Derek in British Columbia linked across the continent with Director Colin Stewart in Nova Scotia. Increasingly, when the National Trail was mentioned to strangers, came a response: "I've heard something about that." This heartening feedback soon became confused and lost as the promotional campaign of the Trans Canada Trail blanketed the country.

In Québec, Réal Martel through Sentier Québec continued to build trail, true to form rarely reporting on progress. James Feeley joined him in attending the opening ceremony of the 55 km section through Gatineau Park. Over the boundary in New Brunswick, Edwin Melanson, having worked hard in completing the Dobson Trail system, was cramming retirement days with efforts into route-planning and enlisting support across the province.

Veteran director and lifelong Scout Vincent DeJong carved a niche for himself and used his familiarity with National Trail archives by personally and at his own cost preparing, erecting and manning a National Trail exhibit at the highly-acclaimed and successful International Scout Jamboree at Seebe, Alberta. Elsewhere in Alberta, Rob Gardner was firming up prairie ranchland sections. Through funding of Summer Employment Experience Development, he had earlier obtained the capable services of university student, Curtis Schafer, who wrote, illustrated and produced the National Trail Manual, a basic handbook on all aspects of our venture.

I was invited to attend the July 1993 Board meeting of the Trans Canada Trail and did my best to convey the mixed feelings among our directors to the multi-use trail concept and to the lack of trail-user representation on the T.C.T. Board. Here, also invited, I met John Woodworth, founder and president of the Alexander Mackenzie Trail Foundation. John had been eminently successful in re-opening the voyageur route of old, a route I had originally recognized as perhaps the only historic line across the face of Canada worthy of adopting as a trail theme but which I had dismissed as eastern provinces and major population centres were left out.

Trail opening peaked in July 1993 with a ceremony at historic Fort Walsh dedicating a 40 km section along the Cypress Hills, requiring joint co-operation among the Provincial Parks of Alberta and Saskatchewan and the National Park authorities. Rob Gardner was the key motivator and it was his crowning achievement before his departure for a stint overseas.



Founding members of cross-Canada trail initiatives come together at dedication of the City of Calgary trail system to Trans Canada Trail, July 1993. L to R: Calgary Mayor Al Duerr; Paul Poirier; Alberta TrailNet; John Woodworth, Alexander Mackenzie Voyageur Trail; Doug Campbell, Sentier National Trail; Pierre Camu, Trans Canada Trail. (Photo: T.C.T. Foundation files).

The summer of 1993 closed with swift devastation. Funding in B.C. came to a close and Derek wrote with deep feelings of frustration arising from either an apathetic attitude or deliberate undermining of the Trust's efforts - or both - by outdoor groups. The N.T.A.C. came in for criticism for failing to recognize accomplishments in B.C. in Association publicity, and claiming that Board members had liaised with B.C. groups without his knowledge and had on occasion caused embarrassment. Our publicity tended to highlight official trail dedication ceremonies and actual sections in use and marked as National Trail, obviously overlooking other creditable achievements. As to dealing with B.C. groups, I knew of no director other than the two N.T.A.C. representatives authorized to do so. Where the grapes had been the sweetest, there was now sourness. That was in July 1993.

In August came that terse and ominous note from James Feeley, typed in bold print five days earlier:

Doug

6.42 pm Tuesday 24 August 1993

Tomorrow I go to the hospital for an 'echo' which, according to reputable health scientists will show that I had a heart attack last week.

Nothing serious I say, but I'm taking it easy for a month.

So my NTAC response time will be never, or slower. Which means I won't be doing as many things as I usually do. For instance...

I called his office first thing next morning to learn from stunned staff of his death on the 27th.

In the space of a few weeks, the Association's fortunes plummeted. We had a history of ups and downs but we had never plunged so far.

Roch Dufresne had accepted vice-presidency to serve only with James as president and consequently resigned his office.

Priorities were obvious: find a president, a vice-president, an editor, new directors, but , above all, keep Hike Canada rolling. Without the funding for national and regional meetings, the newsletter was the channel available for general communication and to keep our loyal and valued supporters informed on progress.

Our presence in Ottawa was gone and the focal point shifted back to Calgary where facilities for Hike Canada production were available. Not entirely coincidentally, the N.T.A.C. and the T.C.T. had become neighbours.

As stark and chilled landscapes once again channelled activity back to deskwork, there was room for gloom but a watershed had been reached. We were being overtaken by others with powerful corporate support and influence whose aims embraced the desire for 'a foot trail across Canada'. The Trans Canada Trail would write its own pages in history. There was comfort in knowing our efforts had done much to bring about this new initiative. Our ways were one, but it was apparent confusion of the two systems was arising in public ranks. We decided to re-design the trail-marker to make it clearly distinguishable as representing a hiking route, incorporating a striding hiker outline, bootprints and token retention of the original arrowhead design to maintain continuity.

At the close of 1996, we boasted 1800 km of marked and used trail with many hundred kilometres more of unmapped and accessible route on public lands. So many kilometres, so many trail-workers, so many stories which cannot be told in this brief chronicle. With countless commitments to trail clubs and landowners to honour, we were far along the road and our course was clear: to continue in conjunction with and supportive of other trail-builders. The story theme was the same - one step at a time - with more chapters to be written.



HIKE CANADA

Directors

Lennard Black	1977-78	AB	
Douglas Campbell	1977-	AB	(Pres. 1977-87)
Vincent DeJong	1977-	AB	
Frederick Dorward	1977-78	AB	
Anthony Harben	1977-84	AB	
Gerald Sentes	1977-78	AB	
Stanley Skirrow	1977-78	AB	
Brian Westcott	1977-78	AB	
Frederick Mitchell	1983-84	AB	
Bruce Blackwell	1984-90	BC	
Michael Fedak	1984-86	MN	
Fraser Hale	1984-85	NB	
Douglas Robertson	1984-86	ON	
James Rutter	1984-90	BC	(Pres. 1987-90)
John Saywell	1984-87	QC	
Lucien Larose	1985-86	QC	
Daniel Latendresse	1985-87	QC	
Don MacDougall	1985-86	NB	
Edwin Melanson	1985-	NB	
Brian Williams	1985-86	ON	
Henry Heald	1986-89	ON	
Colin Stewart	1986-94	NS	
Réal Martel	1987-	QC	
Roch Dufresne	1990-96	QC	
James Feeley	1990-93	ON	(Pres. 1990-93)
Derek Morys-Edge	1990-94	BC	
Mary Sauchyn	1991-92	SK	
Peter Stinissen	1991-92	ON	
Sandra Webster	1991-92	ON	
Charles Clapham	1992-	BC	
Henry Graupner	1992-96	ON	
Wallace Drew	1993-	AB	
Jean Law	1993-	ON	
Barbara Young	1994-95	NF	
Neal Kinden	1995-	NF	
Pierre Blouin	1996-	QC	
Patrick Harrison	1996-	BC	