

The Beavers Control the Gate to Sunset Country

By Kelly Parker

Call it separatism by nature.

Last Wednesday morning, this was a country divided—east from west, province from province, city from...um, cottage country. At 2:30 in the morning, near Granite Lake, a few kilometers east of the Ontario/Manitoba border, a beaver dam let go and washed out the highway. One more time: beaver dam...let go...highway out. Not any highway mind you, The Trans-Canada Highway; the main artery for vehicular traffic that, like the railway before it, binds this country from sea to sea...except when the beavers get involved. Only in Canada.

Interesting that our national animal, which makes its home and manipulates its environment using nature's most ingenious designs, will also periodically have those designs completely fall apart, crippling (at least part of) the country.

Kind of like The House of Commons.

So I walked into the Kenora Safeway looking for newspapers Wednesday morning, and the cupboard was bare. I asked the checkout girl about it, and she said something about the highway being washed out, stranding the Winnipeg newspaper trucks. Then the lady behind the customer service desk chimed in helpfully to confirm, "Highway's washed out at Granite Lake, 2:30 this morning. You didn't know?" To which I replied, "Nope. Haven't seen the paper!"

The only one reading it that day was the poor trucker stuck on the highway trying to run the beaver gauntlet to get them to the cottagers. Maybe he handed a few out to the other truckers stranded with their *loads of commercial goods that help to drive Canada's economic engine*, which of course, was sputtering...on account of THE BEAVERS!

I don't know whether it's comforting or frightening to know that while streets in the majority of Canadian cities continue to deteriorate to the point where they're being scouted as locations for Jeep™ commercials, the problem is not unique to your city or mine, or even to just our cities, for that matter. Take a road trip down the Trans-Canada—federal highway #1, after all—anywhere in the country and you'll be appalled at how badly into disrepair it has fallen. While the cost of the gun registry heads for \$2 billion and MP Reg Alcock tries to decide whether AdScam cost us 10 or 100 million dollars, we've got Cletus and Lerleen from the backwoods of Tennessee up here on a roadie in the pickup, and he's white-knuckling the MAIN HIGHWAY of the country; "Hon, we gotta go back! Old Red's fixin' to come apart!"

If you've ever had the pleasure of traveling the Interstate system of the United States, you will have found a brilliantly conceived system of immaculate highways—odd numbered interstates go north-south, even numbered go east-west—that you could eat off of, or change a baby on (not that I'm advocating either, although I believe Cletus and Lerleen hail from a state where it's legal to stop and pick-up road kill for the home freezer...and they're STILL scared to drive up here!).

Keep in mind that the interstate system was a make-work project conceived by then-president Roosevelt to help bring the U.S. out of the depression. Last time I checked, the depression ended some 65 years ago. The Trans-Canada by comparison—and correct me here if I'm wrong—was completed a week ago Thursday. And beavers are knocking it out!

This isn't even the first time this has happened on this same stretch of road. Anyone who has been traveling out to Lake of The Woods cottage country for any length of time will tell you that a few years back a beaver dam let go just a few kilometers farther east and shut the highway down for a couple of days. I was on my way out there from Winnipeg with my wife, and we found out via the standard emergency measures communication protocol—*by overhearing a trucker at a gas station*—that the OPP was turning people back at Clearwater Bay. As with many places across Canada, because of the lay of the land in that area, the TCH is the only highway linking the two places. In order to make Kenora before the highway was re-opened 48-hours later, we had to backtrack almost all the way back to Winnipeg and the Steinbach cloverleaf—where, by the way, it wouldn't have been the worst idea in the world to have the RC's stationed to alert eastbound travelers that this was their last chance to avoid sleeping in the car at Pine Grove Halt with one eye open watching for bear carhops—drive south into the States, and around the south and east side of Lake of The Woods; in all, a 10-hour trip.

We're talking beavers here, people! They can barely walk on land and they're taking out our infrastructure!

This country has one of the highest standards of living in the world, and is a global leader in a wide-ranging and impressive list of technologies. Do you think that maybe, just maybe, we could find a way to protect The TCH from the beavery hoards? We're not exactly talking the Star Wars missile defense system, here.

Or even the gun registry.

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