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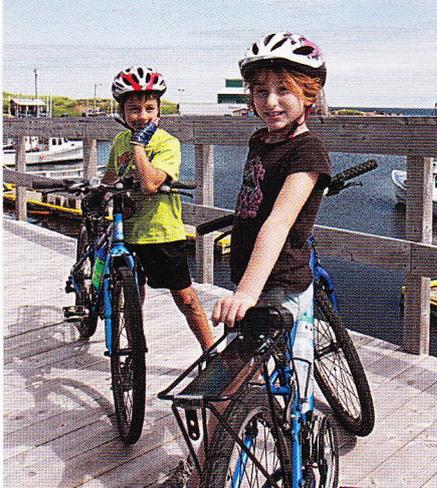
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Cycling the Gentle Island

PEI's Confederation Trail makes travel by bicycle easy and enjoyable

by Dale Dunlop



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In August of 2000, Prince Edward Island became the first province in Canada to complete its designated portion of the Trans-Canada Trail—the Confederation Trail, a continuous linear “park” that follows the abandoned CNR track across almost the entire length of the Island.

The province acquired the rail bed in the 1990s and created one of the finest cycling opportunities in Canada for people of all ages and abilities. The goal was to entice locals and tourists to plan a vacation around cycling the Island, and to help them make the journey in a safe and environmentally supportable fashion.

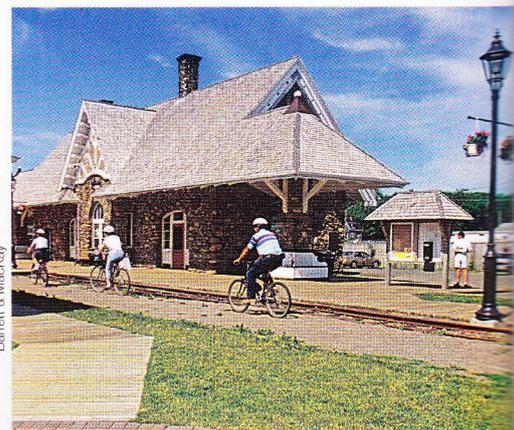
The tip-to-tip route from Tignish to Elmira totals more than 270 kilometres, but more than 350 kilometres of excellent rolled stone dust surface is available for use. An attractive feature of this trail is the fact that nowhere on the entire trail does the grade exceed two per cent; the story goes that when the route was laid out, the planners simply went around obstacles rather than over them. That has resulted in a trail that meanders more than most, but that makes for a gentle ride on this, “The Gentle Island.”

Long distance cycling requires that a variety of specialty services be available—bike racks, repair facilities, ready access to campgrounds or B&Bs and first aid kits. To this end, PEI has created the Cyclist Welcome program; the program recognizes and offers assistance to businesses that take the needs of cyclists into consideration and who make their properties welcoming and easy for visiting cyclists to use. More than 100 businesses have stepped up to make the PEI cycling experience a good one.

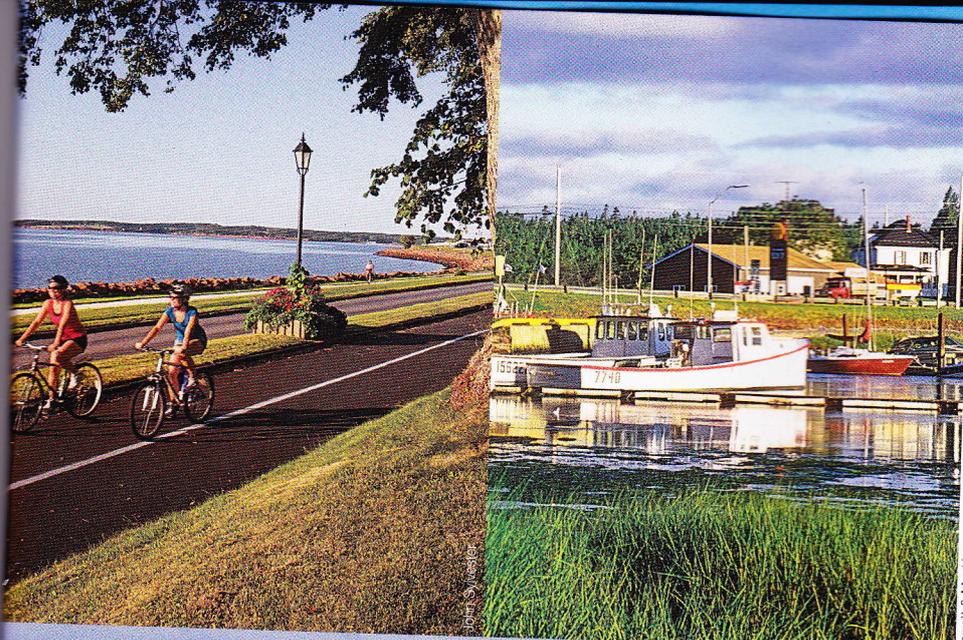
PEI Tourism has made planning a cycling trip to the Island quite simple by creating The Confederation Trail Cycling Guide. The guide offers useful information about the trail and recommends a five-day itinerary for travelling the main portion of the trail from Tignish to Elmira. (A copy of the

Clockwise from top left: PEI's Confederation Trail is kid-friendly, with a grade that never exceeds two per cent; cyclists often take a short side trip from the Confederation Trail to visit scenic East Point; the Trail wends its way through Charlottetown, the fishing community of Cardigan, and the farmland around St. Peters. Below: cycling past the former train station in Kensington.

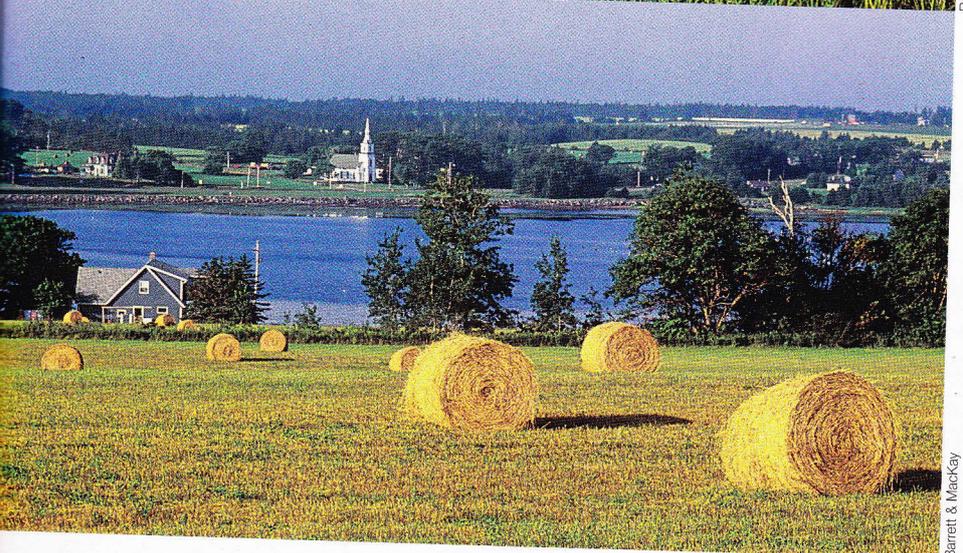
Whether cyclists tackle the entire trail or just a portion of it, they'll have ample opportunities to commune with nature



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guide can be ordered online or downloaded at tourismpei.com/pei-confederation-trail.)

The Confederation Trail has several branches that make it easy to get up and cycling within minutes of reaching the Island. These include a path to Charlottetown that passes very near the airport and another that hooks up with the ferry crossing at Borden, where vehicles can be parked prior to the launch of your cycling tour.

Whether cyclists tackle the entire trail or just a portion of it, they'll have ample opportunities to commune with nature. They'll see rolling pastures dotted with dairy cows, potato fields that stretch to the horizon and, at St. Peter's Bay, a fantastic view of the ocean. Some people may be surprised by how much forest remains on PEI; for considerable distances, the trail is surrounded by trees on both sides.

The trail also passes through wetlands, including the Miscouche Swamp, outside Summerside. Beaver dams are a common sight, and you can expect to come across foxes and other wild animals in the course

of the day, and to see many species of birds. There are even opportunities to fish at numerous small rivers and brooks (but note that you must have an angling license and a Wildlife Conservation Fund licence).

But communing with nature is not the only attraction of this trail. Many of PEI's towns and villages are traversed by the trail or by an offshoot of the trail. Some of these places have changed little over the last century; places like Kensington, St. Peters, Cardigan and Montague are quite charming.

The larger communities of Summerside and Charlottetown are both situated on the Northumberland Strait, and offer numerous opportunities to leave the bike behind and get out on the water.

The core area of Charlottetown is a delight to explore on foot, with many excellent restaurants and craft shops. It is also possible to tour the PEI legislature, where the dream of a Canadian confederation became a reality—and now, the dream of a Confederation Trail unifying Prince Edward Island has become a reality as well. ♻️



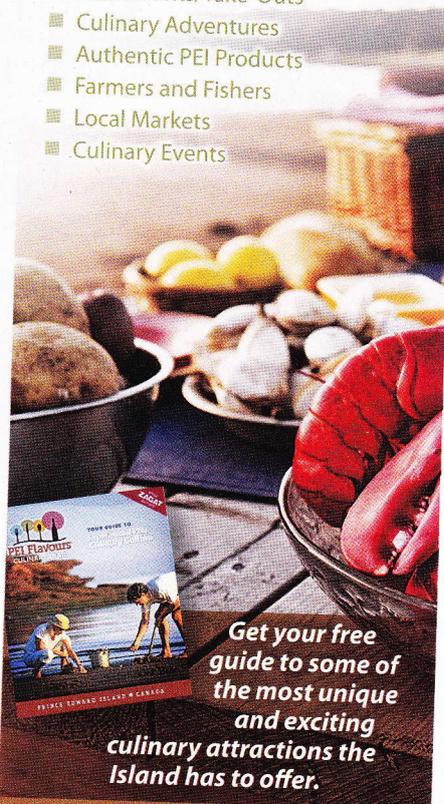
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