

RV *gazette*

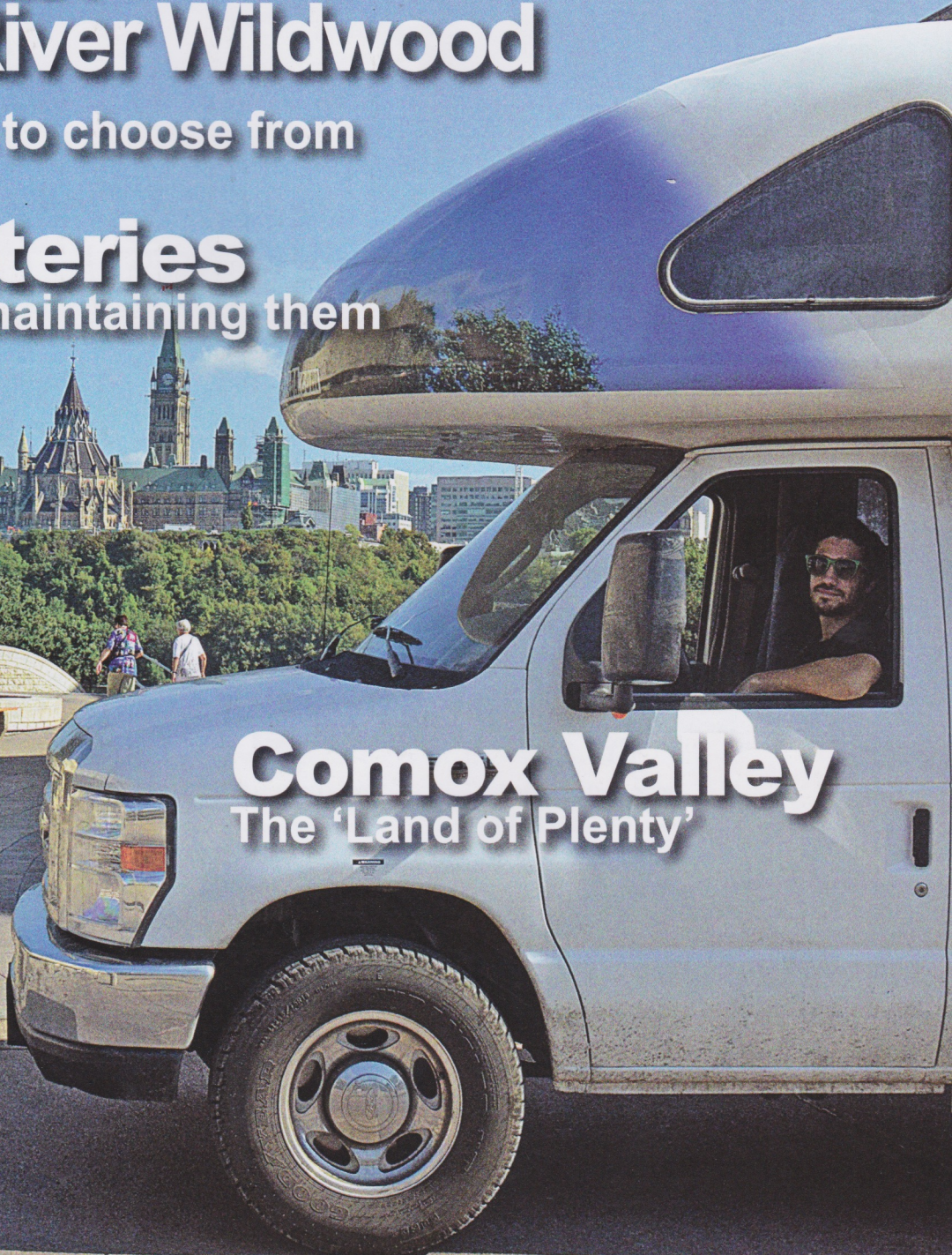
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Outoaouis

Our RV trip to Quebec.
Part I

By Dale Dunlop



For the past five years, I have been going on an annual week-long RV trip with my adult son Dale, and writing two articles about it for this magazine. In previous years, we have tackled the Trans-Labrador Highway, Nova Scotia's remote Eastern Shore, and New Brunswick's Bay of Fundy coast. This year, I suggested to my editor, Marcia Anderson, that we do something in Quebec. Her response was unexpected, "Some of my readers won't go to Quebec". I asked her why, and she replied that they worry about language difficulties, and that they might not feel welcome. Having been to Quebec dozens of times, I knew both these concerns were simply non-starters. The Quebecois are among the friendliest and most welcoming people in Canada. They have a *joie de vivre* and love of the outdoors that makes Quebec a perfect place to visit with an RV. The one legitimate beef is the failure to post traffic and other information in English as well as French. While this is not a big deal on the highway because of a GPS, it is annoying to go into a museum or on a hike and not be unable to understand the interpretive data. Surrounded by 350 million non-Francophones, Quebec should realize that it would help tourism enormously if signs were bilingual.



So my assignment this year is simple. Design an itinerary that will challenge any notions that Quebecers are unfriendly, or that the inability to speak French will hamper the enjoyment of visiting La Belle Province.

The starting point for our journey is Montreal, where we picked up our 19-foot compact RV from the Cruise Canada location in Laval, which Tourism Quebec was kind enough to provide. It's a little smaller than what we usually drive, but I'm sure it will be more than adequate!

The itinerary will focus on two areas of Quebec, the Outaouais and the Eastern Townships. Both are close to the Ontario border, and easily accessible from major cities in that province. They are also areas where English is spoken, or at least understood by almost everyone. Our first destination is Camp Leslie, on Otter Lake, in the Pontiac region of Outaouais. It takes three hours to get there via Highway 50, and then on to some lesser roads as we head west and then north. This is an area of Quebec that is quite unique in that most of the people are English speakers, and the towns have names like

Shawville, Campbell's Bay and Litchfield. Canadian flags are prominent everywhere.

Camp Leslie is quite simply a wonderful place to bring an RV. We are assigned a site that is larger than you usually get, and is set amidst tall pine trees on the shore of Otter Lake. The weather is absolutely perfect, without a breath of wind or a cloud in the sky. The only sounds are the calling of loons and the chirping of many little songbirds in the underbrush as they prepare for the long migration south. The only other people around are a middle-aged Quebecois couple next door. While Dale struggles to chop kindling with a dull hatchet, Rene from the next campsite offers the use of his axe, which does the trick, and we soon have a roaring fire going. As the sun gets lower in the sky, the reflected shadows on the lake grow longer, and if possible, it gets even quieter.

Lise, Rene's partner, comes over and asks if we would like some sweet corn that she has on the boil. Since there seems to be about a dozen pieces in the pot, we readily agree, and although Rene protests that it is not

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as fresh as it could be, it sure tastes good to me. After the corn, we have a great conversation with the two of them who are into cycling (Lise has cycled the Cabot Trail) and skiing. Rene pumps Dale for information on places like Revelstoke and Kicking Horse where he has skied many times. As the loons call, I learn that the French word for them is plongeon, which seems more fitting for these regal birds than our word, but then again I'd rather have a loonie than a plongeonie.

We say goodnight to Rene and Lise and head back to the RV, all the while staring at the mass of stars overhead. Camp Leslie is truly a dark sky location, and if you like seeing the Milky Way and other astral phenomena, then this is one place to do it. Time for a great night's sleep. Tomorrow I have a major expedition planned.

The morning dawns, and there is a fine mist over Otter Lake that portends another beautiful day.

The Chutes du Coulonge is a privately owned not-

for-profit park not far from the town of Fort Coulonge, which is the only significant francophone community in the Pontiac region. The park's *raison d'être* is the waterfall on the Coulonge River and the chasm that has been carved out below it. However, there is much more to do than just admire the falls and gorge, and that is why Dale and I are headed there this morning. But first, we need some breakfast, and stop at The Junction, in Campbell's Bay, where Dale has an enormous "Hungry-man Special" for the whopping price of \$7.50. All in, the total bill for both of us was \$15.00. I hope they can stay in business because it's finding little places like this that make travelling an adventure.

On the way to the chutes, we round a bend and see a magnificent covered bridge.

I had no idea there was a covered bridge of this magnitude in Quebec. On closer inspection, we find it is closed to any type of traffic, including pedestrian, and apparently, while everyone agrees it needs to be restored, the funds have not been allocated. Tomorrow we will visit a community where the covered bridge has been restored, and provides a great boon to local tourism. I can only hope that the Fort Coulonge Bridge gets the same tlc from its community.

The organization that runs Chutes du Coulonge decided some time ago that it needed more than just the falls and gorge to convince tourists to make the detour to this fairly remote area of Quebec. First, they added a zipline and suspension bridge, and then a via ferrata on which intrepid visitors could literally scale the canyon walls.

I've never been on a via ferrata, but in a few minutes, that's about to end. We sign up for the full meal deal



which includes the zipline, the via ferrata, and the aerial obstacle course, which is a completely separate attraction. Our fee also allows us to simply go look at the falls if we want to.

The zipline is first, and it's a good one as ziplines go - 800 feet over the raging waters some fifty feet below.

Then we cross a narrow suspension bridge to get to the via ferrata.

It takes about an hour to climb back to where we began using a combination of small bridges, ledges, and the iron railings and ladders that have been drilled into the cliff face.

We are clipped into either hooks, rails or rungs at all times, so there is no danger of actually falling into the gorge. This gives me a sense of safety that allays any fear of heights - maybe foolishly, but it does.

After the via ferrata, we do the aerial obstacle course, which would be worthy of a visit on its own. Oh, and did I mention that they have a great waterfall here?

The good news is, if you don't have a death wish, you can simply pay to walk the grounds and view the falls.

I am quite frankly amazed that I am not completely exhausted after these exertions, until we start walking back to the car and it feels like two fifty pound weights have been attached to my knees. I don't know if it's

caused by tired muscles or a delayed terror reaction!

Back at camp, Leslie, Rene and Lise have moved on, and we have the place to ourselves. Dale goes for a swim, and I have a rest, well-deserved or not.

The 2015 RV trip is off to a great start with two fantastic days and nights at Camp Leslie in Otter Lake, Quebec. However, there are places to go and people to see, so Dale and I are off to visit one of my all time favourite Canadian small towns, Wakefield.

If there is such a thing as the quintessential Canadian small town, then Wakefield may be it. It has a gorgeous location on the Gatineau River where it widens into a small lake. It is the jumping off point for exploring the Gatineau highlands extensive hiking, biking, canoeing, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing trail systems. The people are both laid back and adventuresome at the same time, so it has an active arts community with the attendant galleries that make exploring places like Wakefield so pleasant. There are no McDonald's, Starbucks or other chains to ruin the ambience. The town has preserved its 19th century look, and the coffee shops, restaurants and other businesses are locally owned. It has a world class inn attached to an old mill, and a dramatic covered bridge. As if that isn't enough, it's also a town of peace. I'll explain why later.

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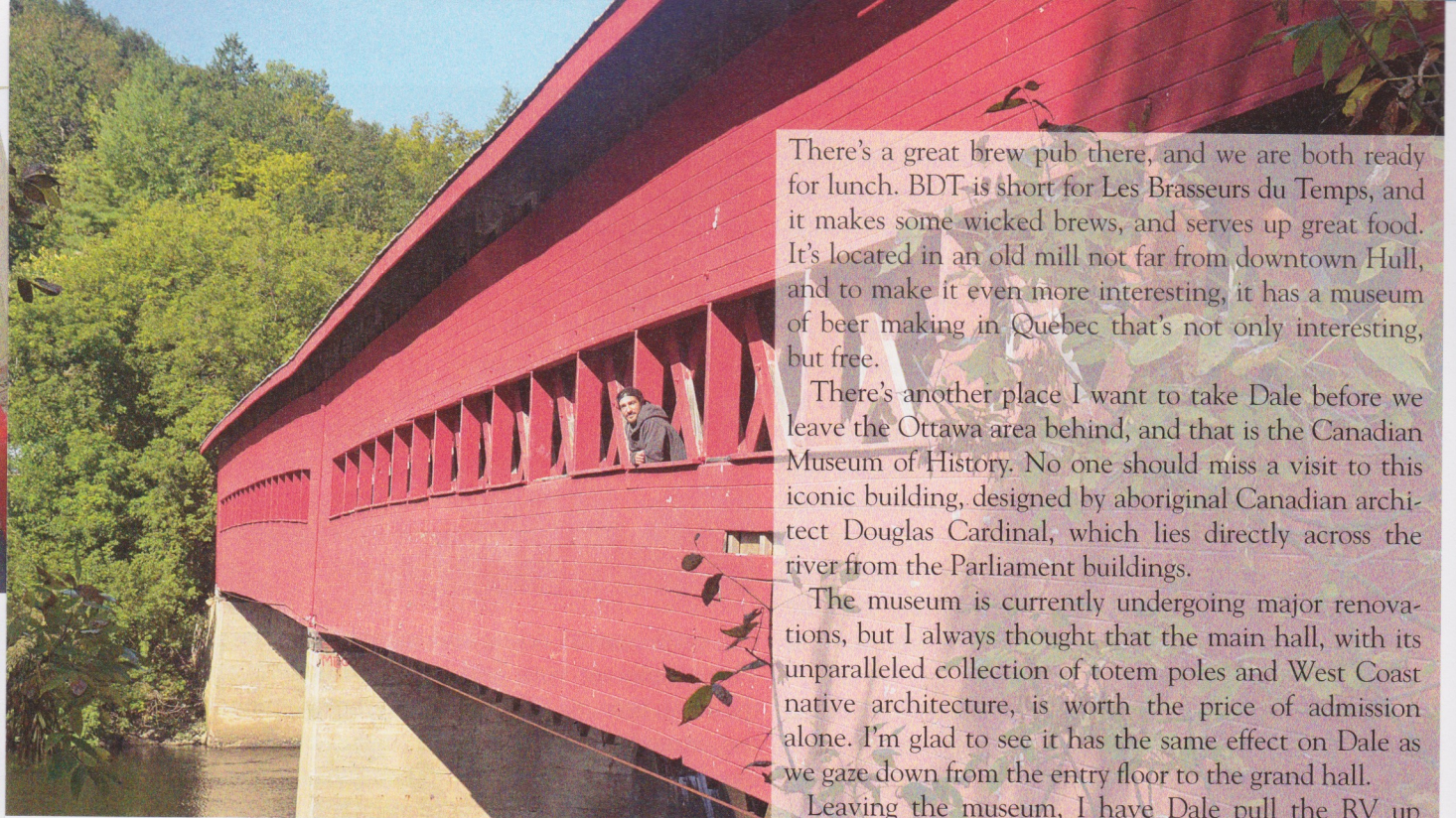
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There's a great brew pub there, and we are both ready for lunch. BDT is short for Les Brasseurs du Temps, and it makes some wicked brews, and serves up great food. It's located in an old mill not far from downtown Hull, and to make it even more interesting, it has a museum of beer making in Quebec that's not only interesting, but free.

There's another place I want to take Dale before we leave the Ottawa area behind, and that is the Canadian Museum of History. No one should miss a visit to this iconic building, designed by aboriginal Canadian architect Douglas Cardinal, which lies directly across the river from the Parliament buildings.

The museum is currently undergoing major renovations, but I always thought that the main hall, with its unparalleled collection of totem poles and West Coast native architecture, is worth the price of admission alone. I'm glad to see it has the same effect on Dale as we gaze down from the entry floor to the grand hall.

Leaving the museum, I have Dale pull the RV up just past the entrance to get a shot of the RV with the Parliament buildings in the background. Can't get more Canadian than that!

It's time to leave Gatineau and continue down the Ottawa River valley to our stopping place for the night, Plaisance National Park, just outside Thurso. If you repeat this route, make sure to take Highway 50 as far as the Thurso exit, otherwise, you'll endure miles of suburbia. Thurso is the hometown of Guy LaFleur, and as you head into town, look for the arena named after him.

When I describe Plaisance as a national park, I am not referring to the Canadian national park system, but rather Quebec's park system, which denotes what most of us would call provincial parks as national parks. The SEPAQ system, as it is known, has some of the best parks in Canada, and you can always expect top quality campgrounds, facilities, and a myriad of things to do. Most of Plaisance, which means a pleasure ground in French, is located on two peninsulas on the Ottawa River just east of Thurso, and that's exactly what this place is - a haven of fields, forests and marshes surrounded by water on almost all sides.

We are assigned a campsite that sits on a bluff overlooking the river, amid an Appalachian lowland forest that contains a much wider range of trees, shrubs, and flowers than we encountered at Camp Leslie, where pines are dominant. Once again, there are not that many people around, and we settle in for another quiet night, but before we do, we watch a stunning crescent moon set, followed by the emergence of thousands of stars. Another great day in Quebec comes to an end. Tomorrow we are on to the Eastern Townships. **RV**

Wakefield is only a short drive north of the Ottawa area, but today, we are coming from the Pontiac region of the Outaouais tourist area, and it is a very pleasant drive through rolling hills and century old farms before turning north at Eardley, where the Gatineaus rise abruptly from the Ottawa River valley. Arriving at Wakefield, Dale, who has not been here before, immediately recognizes that this is no ordinary town. We agree that we will spend a couple of hours just wandering around, but first I want to show him a couple of things.

The first is apparent, as you can see it quite clearly across the lake from Wakefield's main street. It is the Wakefield covered bridge, which was restored by persons of foresight in 1997 after some vandals burned it down in 1984. It had stood for the previous seventy years. The bridge is now a major tourist attraction, and pedestrians and cyclist cross it many times a day. It has long been an absolute must visit for aspiring photographers. The second place we visit is MacLaren Cemetery, which not only has a great location on a hill just above the Wakefield Mill, but also has some very interesting grave markers, and one very famous resident. That resident is the only Canadian to ever win the Nobel Peace Prize, former Prime Minister and statesman, Lester B. Pearson.

I could spend a lot of time in MacLaren cemetery, but the town beckons. Dale goes off to explore, and I go into ARIEs coffee shop to use the Internet and have a couple of lattes. Afterwards, I cross the street to a small park where there is a memorial to Canada's peacekeepers. As I said, Wakefield is a town of peace.

Time now to leave Wakefield, however reluctantly, and head to Gatineau, or what used to be called Hull.