



# Exploring the Waterloo Region

Part 2

This is a wonderful area to explore!

By Dale Dunlop



'Fly-fishing on the Grand'

Day four starts with fly-fishing with Dan Kennaley, a city planner, but whose true passion is fly-fishing. The Grand River is home to a great variety of fish, including brown, rainbow and brook trout, as well as both largemouth and smallmouth bass.

My track record as a fly fisherman is dismal, and Dale has never tried fly-fishing before, so Dan has his work cut out for him. He starts by unveiling an amazing array of fishing paraphernalia stored in his SUV, including





**'Ready to ride'**  
**West Montrose covered bridge**

hip waders, rods, reels, and hundreds of flies. Dan gets the rods ready as we pull on the hip waders. The flies we use are 'Woolly Crayfish', a variety that Dan has invented and are meant to resemble the tiny crayfish that inhabit this part of the river.

Fly fishing is one of those things like riding a bike - once you know how to do it, it does not take long to recall the skills, no matter how long between sessions. Dale is a very quick study, and soon looks like he was born a fly fisherman.

I wish I could include pictures of all the fish we caught this morning, but they were very camera shy. Dan catches a few but releases them before I can get a shot. Dale catches one that falls off the hook literally one second before I get the picture. I keep my track record perfect; lots of bites and zero landings, but the old saying about the worst day of fishing being better than

the best day at the office is proven true once again.

We are scheduled to play Whistle Bear golf course, just outside of Cambridge, but by the time we get back to home base, the skies have opened up with rain, thunder and lightning, so golf is out of the question. We spend the afternoon in the RV, me writing while Dale reads *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, which I swear he has been doing for five years.

By evening, the skies are rosy again, and we head for the Lancaster Smokehouse in Kitchener. I don't know anyone other than vegans who can resist a good barbecue joint, and from the moment we walk in, the aroma and the look of the place say 'Authentic'. Real barbecue joints never look classy, fancy or well scrubbed. It's all about the meat - smoked on site, as it is here. The place is hopping on a Tuesday night, and we soon find out why - it's rib night. And to wash down the really excellent ribs, there is yet another opportunity to choose from a great selection of Ontario craft beers.

The morning dawns gloriously sunny, perfect for what we have planned for the day - forty kilometres of cycling the Kissing Bridge Trailway, and the backroads of Mennonite country. We meet Sjoerd Vermeyden, a guide with Grand Experiences, a company that specializes in outdoor experiences on and around the Grand River.

I am psyched for today's journey, even if my two companions are less than half (one third in Sjoerd's case) my age. The Trailway runs 45 kilometres from Guelph to Milbank, a part of the Trans-Canada Trail system, and is for active transportation only. Our starting point is the pretty West Montrose covered bridge, the only original one remaining in Ontario.

It's easy to fall in love with the pastoral countryside of this region, and if you really want to appreciate the sights, smells and sounds of the landscape, there is no better way to do it than on a bike. The portion of the Kissing Bridge Trailway we cycled this morning is a perfect mixture of open country interspersed with woodland, providing a canopy of leaves overhead to give relief from what is rapidly becoming a very hot day.

All too soon, we reach the tiny village of Wallenstein, where we find one of the last true general stores in Canada. There are a number of buggies and wagons parked by a sign indicating that the place had been around for over one hundred and fifty years.

Inside the store, the clerks are dressed in traditional Mennonite garb, and the goods on offer are clearly aimed at old school Mennonites. There are hundreds of bolts of cloth, threads and everything else required to make clothes. There are dozens of styles of baby



shoes, but all in black as are the men's overalls. I have to repress an urge to buy a straw hat that is a part of every male Mennonite's millinery. There is elegance in the plain and simple hats that make them fashionable - truly a case of 'everything that is old will become new again'.

We buy really tasty tuna sandwiches and eat them sitting in rocking chairs on the store's porch, watching the traffic roar by. Leaving Wallenstein, Sjoerd explains that we will make our way back to St. Jacobs via a series of side roads, mostly unpaved, that will parallel the Conestogo River.

Even though there is a fair amount of uphill climbing, I can honestly say that it is one of the most enjoyable cycling rides I've ever taken. The ride is not only through beautiful countryside, but is uniquely peaceful as we meet more people in a horse and buggy than we do in cars. Almost all the farms appeared to be Mennonite, and many have the traditional clothing billowing on clotheslines.

Along the way, Sjoerd leads us into a huge barnlike structure that turns out to be a tack shop, literally stacked to the rafters with every possible item that a horse owner could ever desire or need. We talk to one of the clerks who says that while they still make most of the leather items on the premises, they have started importing the horse collars in recent years. Prices are very reasonable. Dale found a really good pair of leather work gloves for \$10.00.

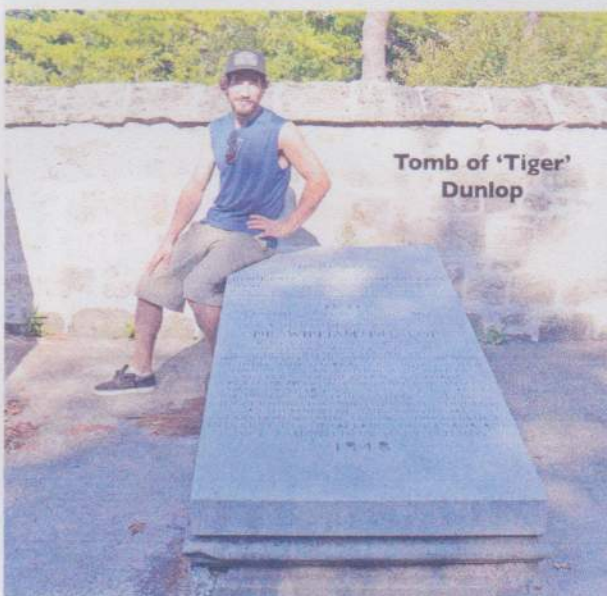
After being on the road for just over four hours, we arrive in St. Jacobs, and bid Sjoerd farewell. We head back to Nith River Campground, collect the RV, and head for our next destination, the Falls Reserve Conservation Area, just outside Goderich, where we choose a lovely campsite beside the woods.

Not long after arriving, Regional Tourism Rep Napier Simpson pulls up in a truck bearing two brand new bikes for our use. He draws a map showing us how to get from Falls Reserve to Goderich. We plan to do that in the morning, and then meet up with Napier in the afternoon for more cycling.

We wake on day six of the great Waterloo region RV trip with blue skies and calm winds. Heading toward Goderich, we look for breakfast and come across Flippin' Eggs. Believe me, if you are a hungry man looking for a big breakfast, this is the place to go. I have never seen Dale defeated by an excess of food, but this morning he cannot finish his lumberjack special that includes three eggs, bacon, ham, sausage, home fries, toast, French toast and a huge pancake.

After breakfast, we mount the bikes and cycle the Goderich to Auburn Rail Trail into town. Along

**'Flippin' Eggs'**



**Tomb of 'Tiger' Dunlop**

the way, we come across the tomb of William 'Tiger' Dunlop, a legendary character in this part of Ontario. Continuing on, we soon come to a view of Goderich and the Maitland River that is simply spectacular. The people of Goderich had the great foresight to prevent the huge railway bridge that crosses the Maitland River, just outside of town, from being torn down after the railway ceased to operate. Once the longest railway bridge in Ontario, the Menesetung Bridge makes for a great entrance into Goderich.

We head straight down to the waterfront first, where we are both anxious to get a close up look at the fourth largest lake in the world. There is a salt mine right at the entrance to the harbour; and this is no ordinary salt mine, it is the largest in the world. Almost right beside the salt mine the beaches start, and despite the nearby industrial port, the water is safe to swim in, which is exactly what Dale does.





When Dale returns from his swim, we ride our bikes up the steep hill to the town proper, at least Dale does; I walk mine once my legs give out half way up. We have a couple of hours before we are to meet Napier and bike to Bayfield, so we set out to explore the town. All I can say is that Goderich has some of the nicest homes, parks and gardens in any town of a comparable size, and lives up to it's slogan, 'The Prettiest Town in Canada'. De-

spite being nearly razed by a horrific tornado in 2011, Goderich today bears no sign that I could see of this terrible event.

We meet Napier, and are soon off cycling the back streets of Goderich until Orchard Line Road, which we follow all the way to Bayfield.

The most interesting site on the way are Texas long-horn cattle, that according to a small sign on their fence,

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**'Beautiful'**  
**Sunset cruise on Lake Huron**



were former rodeo steers in the Calgary Stampede. Now they are retired and enjoying the good life without fear of cowboys or the abattoir.

We descend into Bayfield after about two hours of good riding through pastoral country, with no towns or even hamlets along the way. Bayfield is one those places that is so pretty that it almost, but not quite, appears Disneyfied. Unlike Goderich, Bayfield is strictly a tourist centre focused around one main street that has a number of interesting buildings and businesses, and no chain restaurants.

We return our bikes to Outside Projects, whom we have to thank for letting us ride these excellent machines, and go across the street to the Black Dog Pub & Bistro. By now I am hungry, but first we have to choose one of the twenty beers on tap - tough decision!

You might think that we have done enough for one day, but the best is yet to come - a sunset cruise on Lake Huron. We meet up with Napier's wife, and go on board the *Stir Crazy*, operated by the husband and wife team of Chris Thatcher and Lorraine Foster.

The purpose of this excursion is to see the sun set into Lake Huron, which we have been told is the second best in the world. If there's a better one, I'd love to see it. On the way back, I learn that Chris and Lorraine are RVers who spend the winters on the road.

Despite the fact we had been up since six, we still have time for one last campfire to reminisce about our great day.

There is a fair amount of rain at night so we decide to check out the actual falls at Falls Reserve Conservation Area before breaking camp and heading back to Waterloo. The falls on the Maitland River are not overly spectacular in terms of height, but they are the type that you

can get right into if you want. It was pretty chilly at 7:00 AM, so even Dale decides to just admire the falls from shore. The gulls, however, are out in full force looking for an easy breakfast.

We head straight for Stratford for our breakfast, and settle on Features, which claims that this is 'Where Stratford Meets for Breakfast'. The place is packed, and we are shown to a room at the back of the restaurant that has only a few tables. As I look around, I notice a very familiar face two tables away, and recognize the well-known character actor James Cromwell, who is perhaps best known for his role as the gentle farmer in *Babe*.

Then, two enormous men come in and sit side by side at a table at the very back of the room, and about a minute later two skinny guys with lots of tattoos come in and sit at another table. I pay them no attention until Dale whispers "That's Justin Bieber" and so it is, the big men obviously his bodyguards. Stratford is Bieber's hometown. So, Features does live up to its boast that it was where Stratford goes for breakfast, at least the most famous ones.

Our last stop of the trip is one that I had been looking forward to since I knew we would be in the Waterloo area. African Lion Safari was opened in 1969 with the idea to let the animals roam free for a much better viewing experience for the people, and a more humane experience for the animals. I know in advance that we will not be permitted to drive the RV through the safari trail, but we get really lucky when a herd of elephants comes parading by the RV.

We have the option of taking the SUV through, or getting on one of the tour buses. A bit unsure of what





**African Lion Safari**

we will encounter, we opt for the bus. These buses are a great way for the elderly, disabled or children's groups to see the animals. At first you might think, as I do, that seeing the animals through a glass window will be a detraction, but the windows are spotlessly clean and do not interfere in any way with my photography.


The safari tour lasts over an hour, and makes repeated stops to view the animals.

While your vehicle might not be in any danger from the lions, the same can't be said of the baboons, who actually act like a bunch of baboons. The youngsters jump on the front of the bus, and one little guy does all he can to detach the wiper blade. Leaving the baboon's area, the bus is stopped and eyeballed for stray hitchhikers. The next part of the tour is my favourite. It is designed to resemble the open African veldt, with many species of antelope, ostriches, giraffes and rhinos all roaming freely.

The most compelling animals to me are the white rhinos, which are doing their best to look like their black cousins by rolling in mud. Getting this close to such a huge and rare beast is worth the entire visit.

We leave African Lion Safari very well satisfied with the experience, and make our way back to Kitchener and our final night's stop at Bingemans, at




a site by the river. The lower part of the campground is now deserted, and we get our final chance to enjoy the Grand River, just watching it as it flows by on its gentle way to Lake Erie. In the past week, we have canoeed it, fished it, rode on horseback through its tributary, and cycled over and around it.

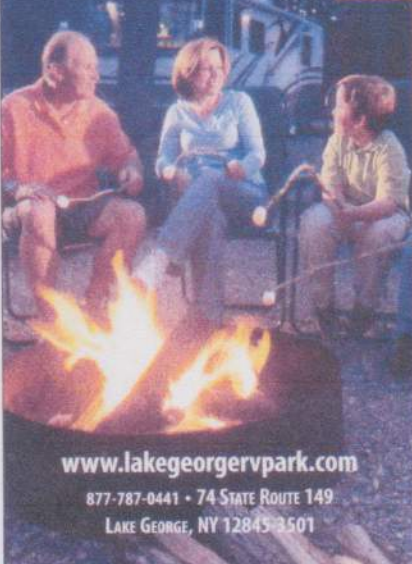
That night, we have a final celebratory meal at Charcoal Steakhouse and talk about the week gone by, and the many things we have seen and done. It sure has opened my eyes to the tourism potential of the Waterloo and Huron regions. I can honestly say that we finally met our Waterloo and it turned out a lot better for us than it did for Napoleon. 

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