

Took a while to make Caledon Trailway what it is

By Bill Rea

The Caledon Trailway is one of the showpieces in Caledon's trail network, but it's only been available for less than 30 years. Caledon East resident Wayne Noble recently offered some facts about the trail to members of the Caledon East and District Historical Society.

It used to be a rail line snaking through Caledon. Noble said it was started by the Hamilton and North Western Railway in the 1870s, and it was eventually taken on by the Grand Trunk, and later Canadian Pacific. There also used to be a lot of stations along the line, including in places like Caledon East and Cheltenham. The last passenger train stopped in Caledon East in 1960. After that, there were a few freight trains passing by.

Noble recalled the Caledon East station was over a creek, and he remembered playing there as a kid, "something that would never be allowed today."

The station was closed and demolished in 1971, and a couple of years later, the line was used as a shooting location for the CBC mini series *The National Dream*, based on books by Pierre Berton. Students from the local public school were used as extras in that project. That caused a lot of excitement in the community in those days.

"Now, when we see a movie production, it's more of a pain in the butt," he remarked.

The line was used in those days for walking and hiking, as well as to get to fishing spots and cross-country skiing. Noble said there were always people using it, even though it was private property.

Not long after the Mississauga train derailment of 1979, there was talk of using the line as a possible alternative for hauling dangerous goods.

"It wasn't long after that that the tracks got taken up," he said.

The Town eventually decided to buy the land in 1989. Noble recalled Emil Kolb was Caledon's mayor at the time, and he was in favour of the acquisition. It turned out that council was split on the idea, and Kolb was obliged to break the tie.

Noble said the Town paid \$30,000 for the trail, and there were some who said at the time it was a waste of money.

"It was one of the greatest achievements for council at the time, and especially Emil," Noble declared.

He said it's saved millions of dollars over the years. The trunk line sewers serving Caledon East run under the trail. "It saved a fortune then," he observed.

He added the well that serves Inglewood is on Highway 10. The connecting pipes were installed under the trail, avoiding the expense of running them south to Olde Base Line Road. The fibre optic cable serving Town Hall also makes use of the trail.

The early 1990s saw a lot of community involvement on the trail, along with considerable volunteer work. A committee was formed, and that led to such things as uniform signage along the route.

It was also decided that no motorized vehicles would be allowed on the trail, except in emergencies or for maintenance. Gates have been installed at all access points, but they can be opened in an emergency.

Although it cost \$30,000 to buy the 37 kilometres of trail, there was still work to be done. There were bridges and fences that needed to be fixed.

"So much of it back then was being done by volunteers," Noble said.

The federal government established the Trans-Canada Trail in 1992, with the idea of a network that would run from one end of the country to the other. The trail running through Caledon, from Inglewood to Highway 9, was designated part of that.

The Town also applied to have the first pavilion along the trail in Caledon East, and there was also an effort to get the area cleaned up.

"When I was a kid, it was basically a dump down there," he remarked.

Volunteers pitched in, and got the area cleaned up in about six weeks.

"I've never seen such work done so quickly," he commented.

The pavilion went up in June 1996. Broadcaster Lloyd Robertson was on hand for the opening, along with about 5,000 others. It was the first of 86 that are now standing.

The work on the Trans-Canada Trail has not yet been completed, but Noble said there are hopes it can be done in time for the country's 150th anniversary celebrations next year.

The trail has seen its share of improvements over the years, an important one being the bridge crossing Highway 10. He said there had been calls for it for several years, since there was no safe way to get between the two portions. But there were many people who thought they would never see it, including himself.

?It's a pie in the sky,? he said he remembered thinking.

It eventually took a lot of time and political will to get the project started. There were some who said it was a waste of money, while Noble remembers thinking nothing would happen until someone was killed.

Work finally got started on the bridge in 2006, and it was completed the night of Nov. 28, and opened Christmas day.

The trail requires on-going maintenance, and Noble said it's a little awkward to get volunteers to do it because of liability issues.

The Town started cutting bushes along the side of the trail twice a year. Some of the skirts at the roadways have been paved to make things easier for cyclists.

There are also the push-button traffic signals where the trail crosses Airport Road, and Noble said a lot of people use it.