

OPUNTIA

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THE TRAVELING TRUSS

by Dale Speirs

Calgary's Light Rapid Transit system began in 1981, when the first line was built running from the south central area to the northwest. The main impetus was for the 1988 Winter Olympics. Since then, the system has lengthened the original lines as well as adding a northeast line. For years, attempts were made to extend a new line to the western suburbs, but were blocked by vociferous opposition from wealthy enclaves in between, whose denizens did not want the rabble traveling through their neighbourhoods. Eventually the number of voters in the far western suburbs of the Rocky Mountain foothills outweighed the inner city clique, and the west leg of the LRT was approved. A very nice computer animation of the west leg has been provided by Calgary Transit at: www.westlrt.ca/content/about/route_animation.cfm which you can either stream or download.

Because the west leg was left for so long, the initial section out of the downtown core to the Bow Trail/Crowchild Trail freeway interchange had to be built three stories high, smashing through the Science Centre (which is being rebuilt elsewhere), through Millennium Park, along the trans-continental railroad right-of-way, and then over the spaghetti junction of the freeways. From there westward it is a standard cut-and-fill or at-grade system, which I haven't bothered photographing. However, the initial

section was built by an unusual traveling truss crane. The truss was imported from Seattle where it had been used to build one of their transit system lines.

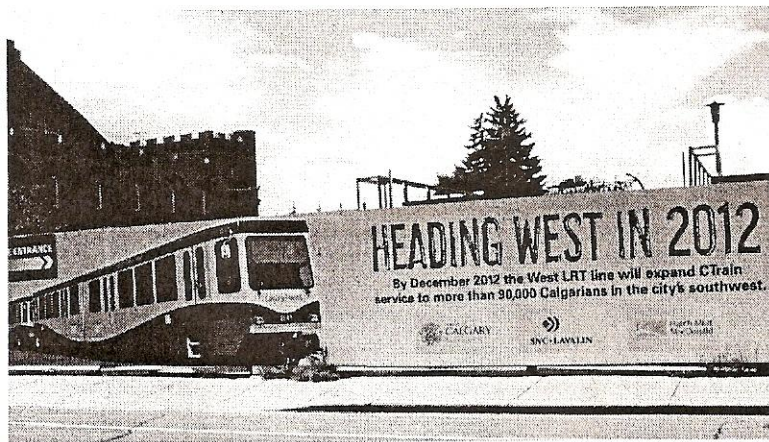


Figure 1 (above): The starting point of the west leg at the west end of the downtown core. The Science Centre used to be behind the hoarding. At left is the Mewata Armoury, the headquarters of the Calgary Highlanders regiment.

Figure 2 (at right): The traveling truss crane as it builds the ramp through Millennium Park that will take it up to three stories height. You can see a segment of the bridge about to be lifted.

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The truss has three supports, and crawls along them, lifting the forward one ahead. The LRT trackway is built off site in sections, which are then lifted into place by the truss and secured by pre-tensioned cables and rebar. The photo below shows the truss alongside the Millennium Park skateboard pit, about to lift a section. This part of the trackway is the ramp that will bring the line above all the various road bridges and railway tracks over which it must pass. The park was minimally affected and stayed open during construction.



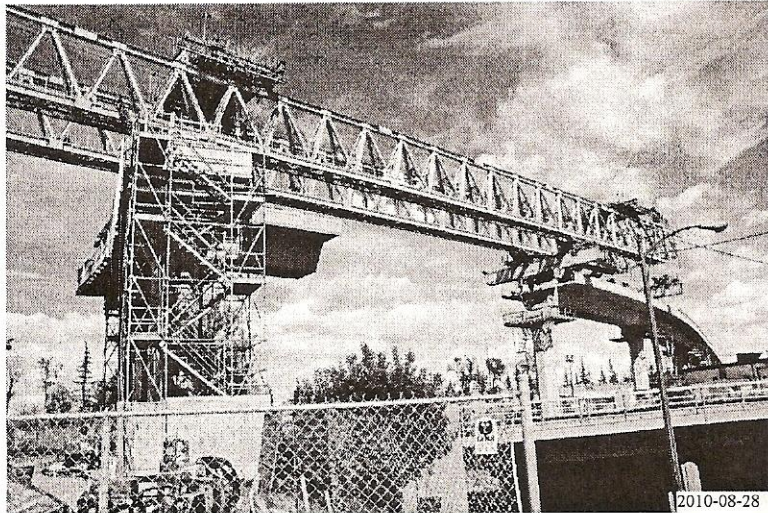


Figure 3 (above): The truss arches above 14 Street SW a month later and starts to curve westward (to the left) along the trans-continental railroad.

Figure 4 (at right): Looking at the front of the truss, as it builds the trackway out over the railroad.

The construction of the LRT line is along the major access points into the downtown core from the west, so the commuters stuck in the morning traffic jams had something to watch with interest as they crawled along in their cars. Many of them will no doubt be using the system when it becomes operational.

2010-09-11



The Bow Trail (east-west) and Crowchild Trail (north-south) interchange is a confused mess at the best of times, but as the truss approached the spaghetti junction, various on and off ramps had to be closed or altered. Even for Cowtowners the changes were troublesome, and I hate to think what outlanders went through trying to find their way. It was at this point that downtown commuters began to really suffer.

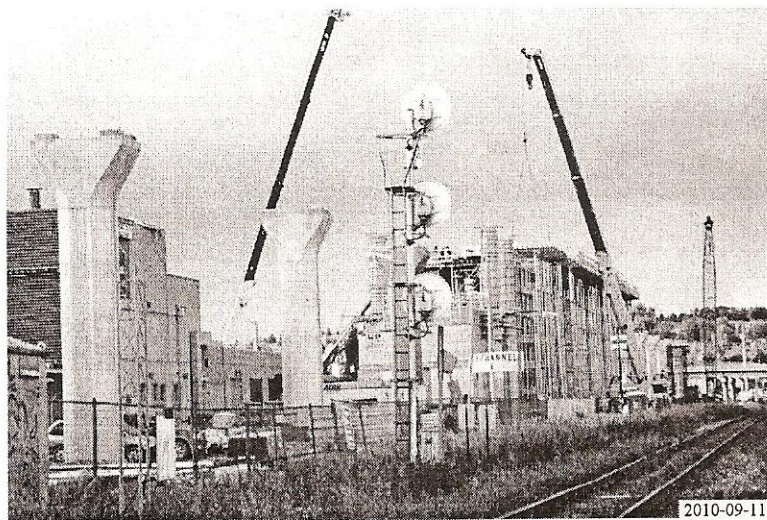


Figure 5 (above): Looking west from beside the trans-continental railroad, with the traveling truss behind the camera. The scaffolding and cranes are working on the Sunalta LRT station, the one that the inner city folk fought against.

Figure 6 (at right): Looking eastward from the deck of the Bow Trail freeway overpass three months later. The downtown core and Sunalta station are in the distance.

2010-12-12



2010-12-12

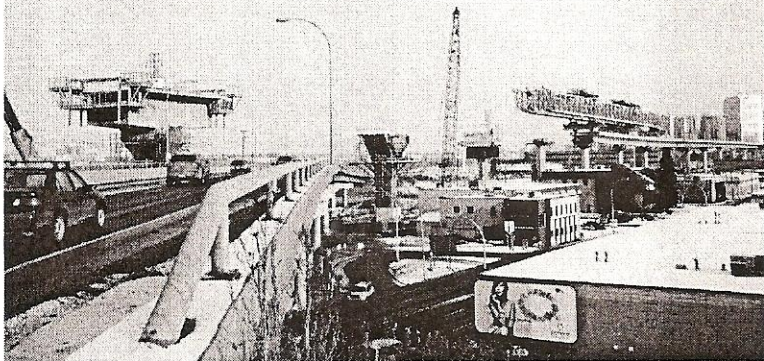
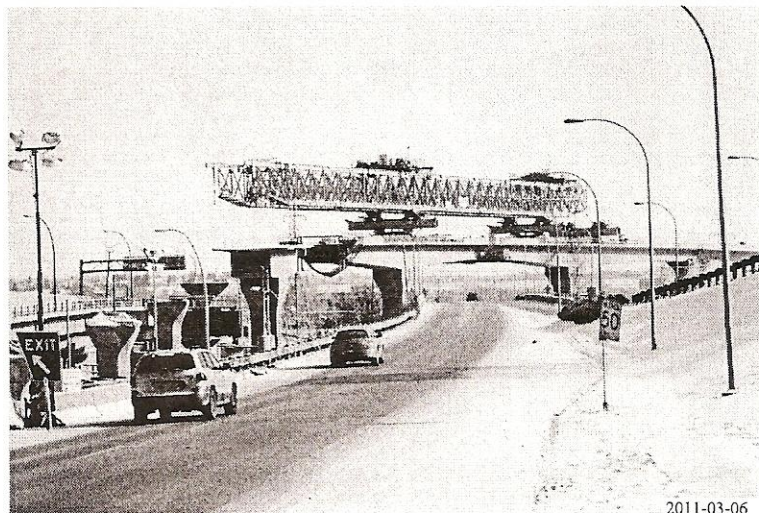


Figure 7 (above): The traveling truss approaches Bow Trail. Photo taken the same date as Figure 6 but from the southwest.

Figure 8 (at right): The truss passes over the Bow Trail interchange three months later and starts to turn downward to run along the median of Bow Trail.

Most of the LRT construction past the Bow Trail interchange was the usual style of track building, with some cut-and-fill trenches to go underneath side road intersections.



2011-03-06

Figure 10 (below): A month later, this close-up shows the truss with ten segments of the trackway dangling from it, ready to be aligned and tied in place.

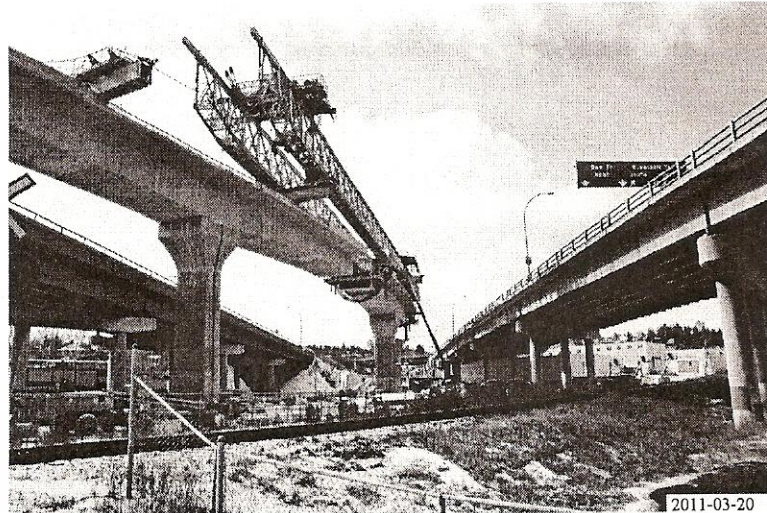
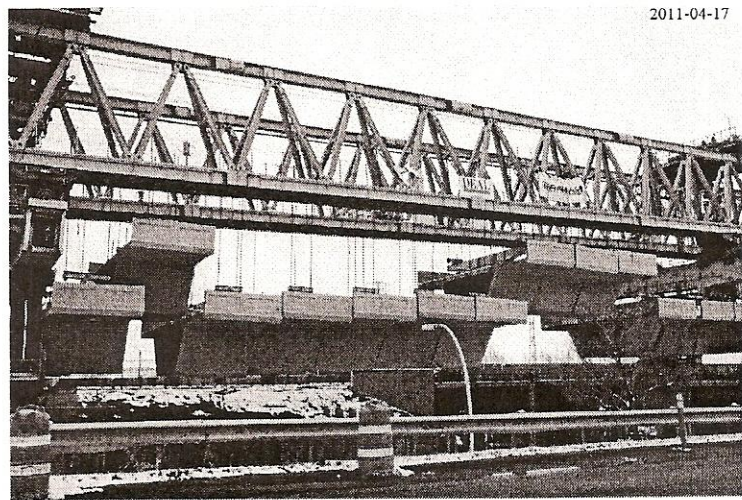


Figure 9 (above): A different view of the truss from the opposite side and taken at ground level, looking at it from behind. The truss has made the turn, with its stern swinging out into open space. It is moving away from the railroad and heading up the median of Bow Trail. The overpass at right is westbound Bow Trail. The overpass at leftmost is eastbound Bow Trail into the downtown core.



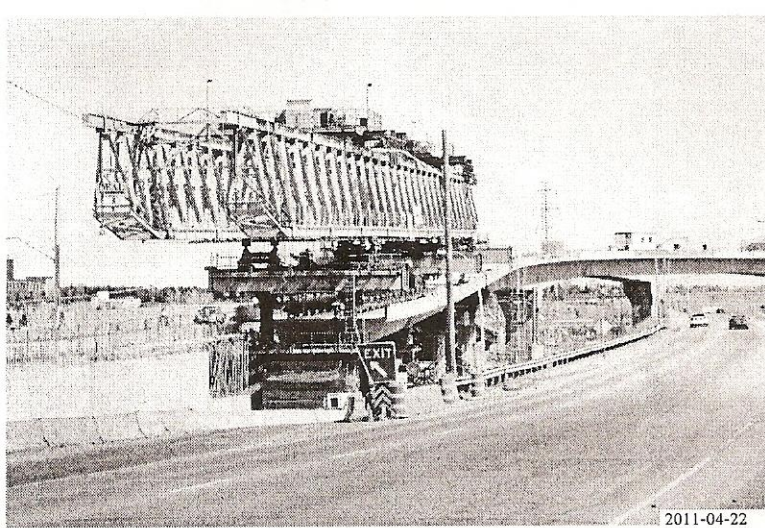
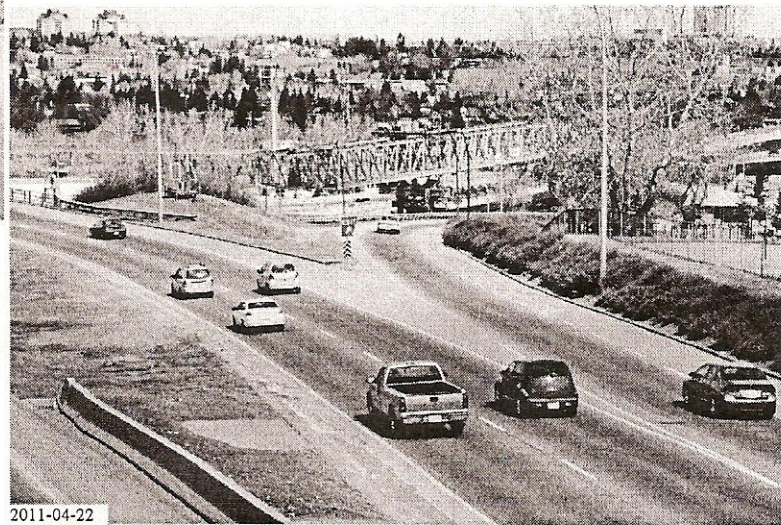


Figure 11 (above): The ten segments are now set in place. Look closely under the truss's supports (perpendicular to the trackway) and you can see the front ones have spacers (parallel inside the trackway) placed under them to keep the truss level.

Figure 12 (below): A long-distance photo from a pedestrian overpass on Crowchild Trail SW, looking north. The LRT track will go under Crowchild Trail at ground level, so this is the end of the trip for the traveling truss. Ten months to travel 14 city blocks.



WHY THE GOOGLE STREET VIEW STAFF GET ULCERS

2011-05-18

I seldom travel southwest of Calgary because there is little direct access to the mountains as there is by going due west on the Trans-Canada Highway. However I had a

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business trip to Okotoks, straight south of the city, and decided to loop back through the foothills on my return.

Calgary sprawls immensely, and its southwest boundary goes well into the country up against the Municipal District of Foothills. That boundary line is the centre of a rural road which the City of Calgary insists is 69 Street SW but Foothills insists is 128 Street West. Hopefully everyone who lives on that road has a postal box number.



ROCKY MOUNTAIN WAY, JUNE 2011

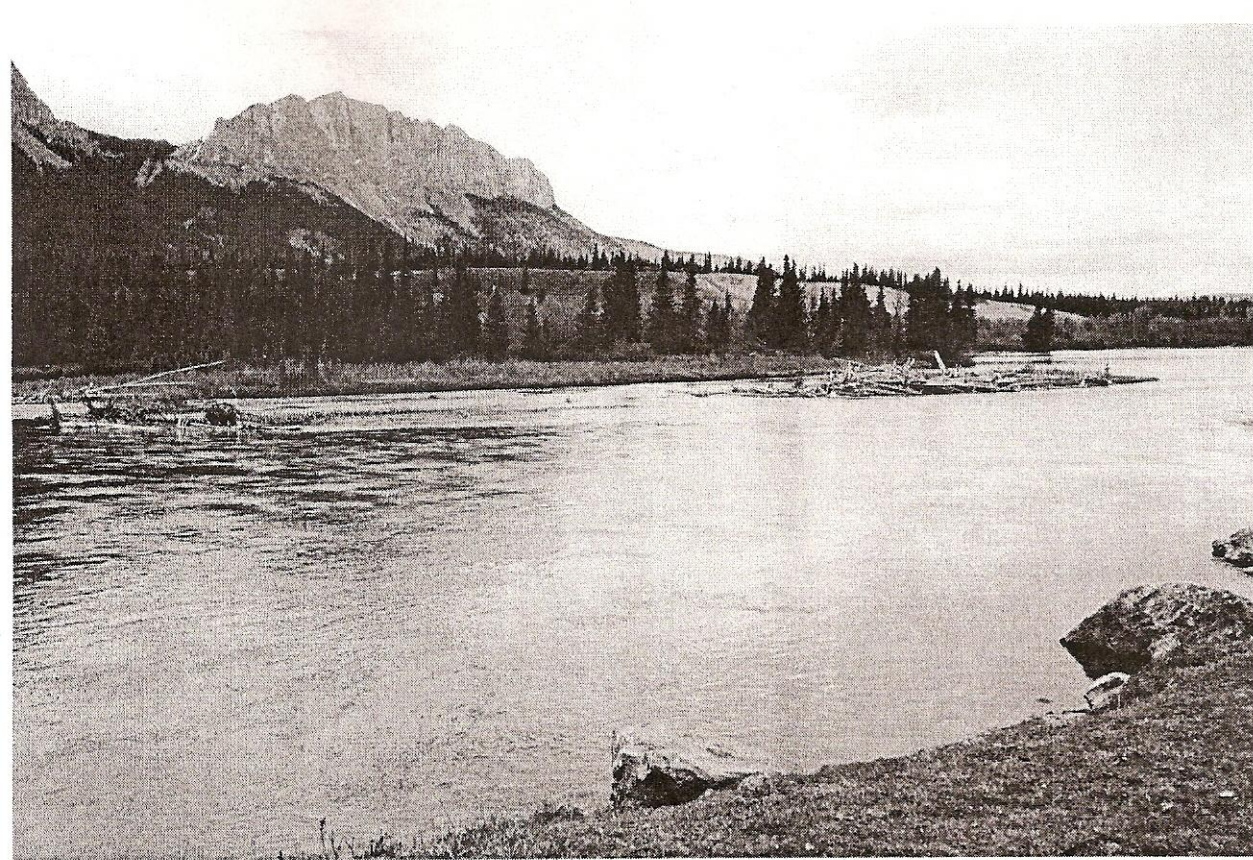
Gap Lake, one of my favourite stops. As I hiked along the top of the cliff at the west end of the lake, I spotted a herd of Rocky Mountain sheep grazing along the heights. They were not alarmed to see me, perhaps because I was walking at a tangent past them rather than directly towards them.

Rocky Mountain sheep may safely graze. The mountain looming largest in the background is Pigeon Mountain. In the far left background is Mount McGillivray.

Gap Lake in the background, and a bunch of suspicious sheep in the foreground. I didn't want to get too close!

In the background, the trans-continental railroad separates Gap Lake from the Bow River. Yes, the same railroad that the traveling truss built over in Calgary. The city is 90 kilometres to the left of the sheep, about an hour's drive.

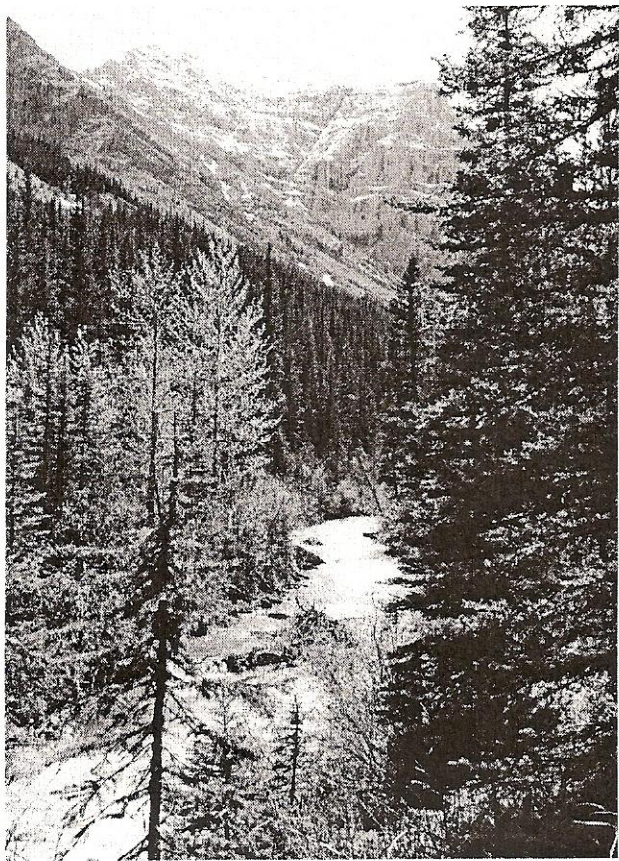




Further downstream from Gap Lake, just after the Bow River leaves the Rocky Mountains, it traverses bottomlands at the foot of Mount Yamnuska, seen here in the distance. To the right of the mountain the flatlands begin, initially covered with spruce forest, but gradually thinning out and becoming grassland further west.

The vertical face of Yamnuska is due to half the mountain being sheared off by the Bow Valley glacier as it exited the Rockies during the last ice age.

In late June, I went to the Kananaskis River, a side valley which empties into the Bow River just downstream from Yamnuska. One of its tributaries is Ribbon Creek, seen at left, which runs 8 km back into the Kananaskis mountains. The mountain in the distance is the northwest corner of Mount Kidd. There is a spectacular waterfall at the creek's origin but alas, I had to turn back at the 7 km mark because thunderclouds started to form. You don't want to be caught in a narrow canyon when the weather turns bad. I made it back to my car in time, four hours on the round trip of 14 km. Below is Ribbon Peak, on the opposite side of the creek from Mount Kidd.



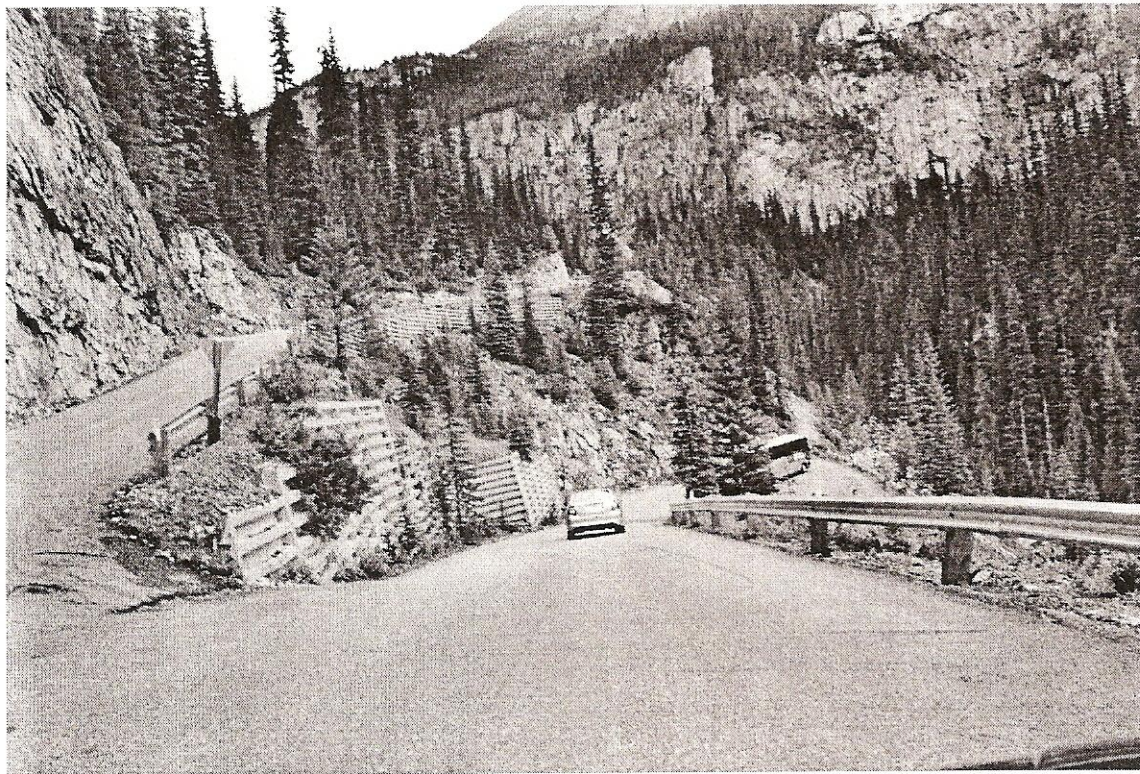
LOOK WHAT THE TOW TRUCK DRAGGED IN

2011-07-04

I was stopping off at the McLean Creek general store in eastern Kananaskis when I saw this wrecked 4WD. The shop clerk told me that it had been extracted from further back in the mountains. The roads don't have guard rails in the back country, and it is your liability if you slide off and go over the cliff. The clerk told me that the driver survived despite landing upside-down after falling off the cliff.

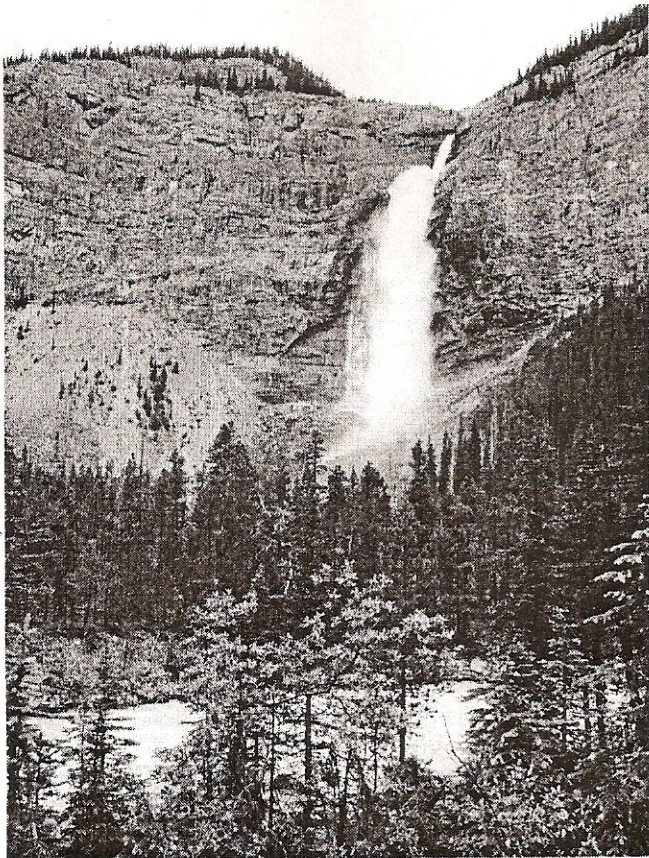


The cost of retrieving the wreck is the responsibility of the owner. They can't just leave it to rust; the park rangers won't allow that. This 4WD had to be airlifted by helicopter up to the road, then an all-wheel-drive flatdeck truck brought in to haul it out. Total cost, said the clerk, would be in the \$5,000 range.



Park, just across border in British Columbia. This is part of the narrow road up the Yoho River valley. Takakkaw Falls, shown on the next page, is the star attraction, about two-thirds of the way along the road.

The photo at left shows a switchback en route to the falls. On the lower bend you can see a coach bus trying to make the turn; the driver had to back and forth about four times to get round the curve. At left is the curve I just drove past. Even in my Honda Civic, I had to make a three-point maneuver. Trailers are banned from the road for obvious reasons.



Takakkaw Falls (the Cree name for it, meaning “it is wonderful”) is 254 metres tall, or about the height of an 80-story skyscraper. In the foreground along the bottom edge of the photo is a glimpse of the Yoho River (also the Cree name, meaning “wow!”). The waterfall originates from the meltwater of a glacier on top of the mountain, not visible from the valley floor.

The wind was blowing when I was there and bouncing huge masses of spume off the cliff. The lower level of the falls, hidden behind the spruce trees, was covered with a blanket of mist. In the dry season, August to September, it is possible to climb up to the base of the falls and stand directly under the water. When I was there, the slope was too slippery to get anywhere near it. Close-up photos of the falls turned out blurry because the mist blurred the lens.

The site is a must-see for Japanese coach parties, so much so that on the hiking trail I counted only three other Caucasians besides myself, while there were at least fifty Japanese. But oohs and aahs are universal, and I had no trouble understanding them.

Just so you don't think I spend all my spare time traversing mountains, here is where I was on Canada Day, on Prince's Island in downtown Calgary. This photo looks west along the Bow

River channel towards a pedestrian bridge. After 31 years shoulder-to-shoulder with people. After 31 years with the Parks Dept., it was nice to wander around without having to worry about looking after all that humanity.

Prince's Island is at right, and is named after Peter Prince, a sawmill operator who owned it back in pioneer days. The logs were floated into the channel from the Rocky Mountains, and the lumber built the city. The park is Calgary's equivalent of Central Park in Manhattan. On Canada Day, several hundred thousand Calgarians come down for the festivities.

