

Let's resurrect the Explorer

By Tom Claridge

The decision of Orangeville Council to investigate sale or disposal of the Town-owned Orangeville-Brampton Railway was seriously defective, in that no mention was made of the possible resurrection of the Credit Valley Explorer, which appropriately billed itself as Southern Ontario's most scenic tour train.

I don't know, but suspect, that none of the seven councillors have ever ridden on the Explorer or on the CPR Dayliner that operated until the 1970s, and therefore knew anything about the route chosen by the builders of the Credit Valley Railway.

Although we know that the Explorer was the brainchild of Steve Gallagher, who managed the line for its first operator, Cando Contracting, we know virtually nothing about the Explorer's demise roughly before Cando left the scene.

There is also no doubt whatsoever that the Explorer was a successful operation, that all its runs south to the north end of Brampton sold out weeks before they took place, and that the train helped keep Inglewood's general store in operation. Although I've no idea how much revenue the tour train brought in to Orangeville, it must have been substantial.

To this day there has been no public disclosure of what negotiations, if any, preceded the Explorer's disappearance. Among the questions that should be answered: was Cando ever asked to consider selling or leasing the coaches used for the train, all of which were in excellent condition, having been well maintained and given a fresh coat of paint? Was there ever any discussion of the possibility of expanding the service by having some of the trips commence in Brampton and feature a two-hour stopover in Orangeville that could include bus tours of this area?

Since most of the Explorer's patrons seem to have come from Toronto, perhaps readers should be given an idea of just what the tour train provided in the three hours spent making the round trip on what was probably the only tour train operation not run by volunteers.

In contrast to the dullness accompanying the trip by bus or car down Hurontario Street, with nary a curve, let alone a forest anywhere between Orangeville and Highway 410, the rail route has beautiful, changing countryside as it follows the Credit River as far as the Boston Mills area and then passes through the lush farmlands preserved by the Greenbelt, winding up beside an urban subdivision just north of Mayfield Road.

The patrons were given glossy pamphlets with pictures and reading material outlining the area's history, and on most trips were served multi-course dinners or luncheons provided by some of this area's best caterers.

The Explorer coaches were built in the 1950s for the CNR's transcontinental trains, and at least one was also used on the Royal Hudson steam tour train that ran between North Vancouver and Squamish.

The biggest mistake made was the failure of the Town or Headwaters tourist organizations to assume ownership of the tour train in case Cando, which had no other similar operation, lost interest in managing the southern portion of the former CPR line between Toronto and Owen Sound.

In my view, the Town and Headwaters Tourism should immediately investigate just what would be involved in bringing back some sort of tour train. Can a couple of the coaches used for the Explorer be purchased or leased? If not, what about acquiring older coaches or the sort used in Tottenham for the volunteer-run South Simcoe Railway.

After all, a lot of money has been invested in a station, concrete platform and large paved parking area, all now unused save for a few cars parking for the GO Transit buses.

Two other things Orangeville Council should be looking at beyond resurrecting the tour train would be a name change and exploration of the line's potential for commuters as well as tourists.

The current name suggests that the line ends at Brampton when the reality is that it connects with the CPR main line at Streetsville. A far more appropriate option would be a return to its first title, the Credit Valley Railway.