



The Terry Fox Extension at Richardson's Side Road

The Lost Civilization along the Terry Fox Extension

When I was twelve we sold my pony, Danny. The truck arrived in the hot summer dusk and I felt like Judas, using white bread, one of his very favourite things, to lure him into the truck. He had become too small. By the time I was twelve my legs touched the ground when I sat on him, no matter how I tucked them in. How he must have felt about me and my increasing weight I can only imagine. I guess we might have kept him, but the decision to sell seemed practical at the time.

Danny was very small, more the size of a large dog than a horse. And he often behaved like a dog: our old collie had the habit of sitting near our kitchen door, to wait for me to come home from school. Danny would sit behind him, sitting like a dog, and turning his head as if to listen for my footsteps on the lane. The collie was not amused. And Danny didn't much like to provide rides to me or to other people. When families with small children would visit, he would make himself scarce, knowing that he'd be expected to provide rides. He'd be missing until the family left, and then he would be standing at his usual place at the gate into our orchard. He'd let himself into the house by times, quite uninvited, leaving the brass knob on the screen door dripping with grassy green slime. He rather liked the crab apples that would fall from a huge ancient tree near the highway, until they were gone: the road was expanded in 1961 in our first real encounter with development.

But for four years from the time I was eight, I had had the rights and responsibilities of horse ownership: cleaning out the stall in the morning before going to school, laying up hay for the winter, going for rides with him in the afternoon. I was very privileged to have a pony, although I didn't know that then.

I would say, "Danny and I had a good run," except that it was almost impossible to get him to do that. We would go out and ride through the fields and hardwood forests around our home in Carp, all at a walk, for he would only hurry into a sort of trot once we'd turned towards home and he could see that he was at the end of his servitude. Then we would canter home through the milkweed and golden rod in a large field, leaving, over the years, a well-beaten track from the woods to our back gate.

There's still a colour slide showing me on Danny around this time: I've got on a straw hat and a vaguely cowboy outfit sitting on Danny with my legs almost touching the ground and he standing in tall grass that reached to his shoulder.



So Danny and I would explore, usually accompanied by our old collie, across the fields and into the tall hardwood forests that were around Carp then. This was before there was any development to speak of. Now on the roads around Carp you can see people in spandex cycling suits and joggers and people in turbans and saris or practicing Tai Chi in parks, and that's a good thing. Back then people worked on farms, attended rural schools – later made into pub eateries like the Cheshire Cat on the Third Line of Huntley, (oops, it's now called Carp Road). We had a phone with a crank connecting us to the Monk Rural Telephone company operator in the village. To get a private line we had had to pay for the mile of wire from Carp. I never saw it, because my parents forbade giving countenance to such nonsense, but King Billy rode his white horse through the fair grounds on the 12th of July and defended the old ways against incursions of the Catholic, the foreign and the educated. Mind you, this was a King Billy with a round brown hole through his two front teeth. Although he could spit tobacco quite expertly through the hole, perhaps by then he was losing some of his glory.

Our explorations would take Danny and me, plus the collie, into the bush: tall ash trees, maples and oaks forming a high canopy under which ferns and spindly saplings grew in the damp shade, like the rain forest, I used to think. And, although the only civilization we ever came across were broken-down abandoned log buildings, I used to imagine that one day we would come over a rise in the Precambrian shield to see, not beaver ponds, blueberries and poison ivy, but a hidden city, never before discovered: a city nested in its surroundings as if it had always been there – somehow part of the forest world of rocks and shade, but unknown and foreign. I never got close enough in my mind to know what kind of city I expected to find: Long houses? An ancient Mayan pyramid? A Mennonite colony? A city from the future miraculously transported to our time? I had, after all, read Buck Rogers long before it appeared on our black and white TVs.

Today people who explore these woods are more likely using mountain bikes, not ponies. And they don't work on farms or make things since it's so much cheaper to bring food and things from elsewhere in our developed economy. Or they are driving into the countryside to dispose of old appliances, made in China, because it's too expensive to take them to official city dumps. And, now, exploration really does lead you to lost cities created by "development." Over that rise in the Canadian Shield are rows and rows of houses. And in some places, like the South March Highlands, the rocks and trees themselves are being completely removed to create a nice even contour, suitable for the erection of city houses, each only feet away from the next. Or should that be decimetres?

Right now, beside the mud ponds on the March Highlands, (oops, Kanata Lakes), housing is being extended into the hardwood forest beside the new Terry Fox Drive extension. They propose to clear cut the trees and then, probably, demolish the rocks to make gravel to fill in the flood plain of the Carp River. Developers take away and developers give. As the March Highlands disappear into gravel trucks, five miles away a huge monument of garbage rises at the Waste Management Site. The houses they build will have no yards: they will fill the space completely, leaving no space for exploration and no nature at all to be wondered at. But, of course, these new houses will have a marvellous view of the garbage mountain on Carp Road.

People need places to live and houses to live in and perhaps it is better if it's the forests of my youth rather than prime farm land that are destroyed to make way for development. Unfortunately it's both the farm land and the forest that are being eliminated along the Terry Fox Drive extension. The March Highlands are being removed from the landscape as quickly as possible: either to conform to



deadlines for infrastructure funding or to make any attempt to oppose this development irrelevant. The stupid little Carp River floods basements and needs to be controlled. We certainly need more shopping centres, for we don't have enough places to buy stuff. This is to make way for town houses and development around the Palladium (later called Corel Centre and more recently Scotiabank Place). This is far away from the centre of things, like that distant hole in the Gulf of Mexico that is gradually filling our seas with oil.

So what, one might say, we have lots of rock and trees and turtles. Just like the oceans – we have lots of them. They're not entirely full of garbage, yet. And we've got lots of air, too, I suppose, to absorb the gasses from cars driving long distances to work from the far west end. And time to sit in traffic. And lots of money to pay for it all.

We have lots of all that – no need to be sparing or to manage it differently. Our city land has become too small and we need to gobble up the countryside to make way for a new civilization from the future that doesn't need trees and landscape or farmland or room for walks in nature.

It's too bad it's at such a cost.



Now you see it, now you don't – The March Highlands in Kanata

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