

MOVING NATURES: Mobility and the Environment in Canadian History Edited by Ben Bradley, Jay Young, and Colin M. Coates

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Forest, Stream and . . . Snowstorms? Seasonality, Nature, and Mobility on the Intercolonial Railway, 1876–1914

Ken Cruikshank

In 1905, a novelty postcard began circulating in Nova Scotia. Titled “Maritime Express Fast in the Snow on Folleigh Mountain, February, 1905,” it depicted a dozen men standing atop a wall of snow banked against the side of a train. It is almost impossible to see where the wall of snow stops and the train begins, but one thing is certain: the Intercolonial Railway’s express train from Halifax to Montreal is not going anywhere soon. The postcard’s caption writer chose his words cleverly, with the railway that promoted itself as “The Fast Line” stuck fast in the snow (fig. 2.1).

For the managers of the Intercolonial Railway, this kind of incident was no joking matter. A major reason that the government of Canada built and operated the railway was to ensure continuous communication to and from the Atlantic Ocean during the winter months, when ice on the St. Lawrence River prevented ocean-going vessels from



FIGURE 2.1. Postcard of the “fast line” frozen in place, February 1905. Author’s collection.

travelling upriver to Quebec City and Montreal. The government hoped that the railway would establish Halifax as Canada’s winter port, capturing a share of the traffic that otherwise moved between its growing commercial, industrial, and agricultural centres and Atlantic ports in the United States. The storm of February 1905 that paralyzed the railway’s central lines through Nova Scotia would prove enormously costly to the Intercolonial, not only in the expense of removing snow drifts up to five metres deep, and the revenues that were lost as the railway dealt with a backlog of freight orders, but also in terms of the political capital that a public railway needed to fend off critics.

The Intercolonial Railway was, in many ways, built to be a seasonal railway, providing critical overland transportation services in winter. Seasonal mobility therefore posed particular challenges for the managers of “The People’s Railway.” One set of challenges related to winter. During the period of the year when the railway was most valued and faced the least competition from ocean freighters, its managers

struggled to ensure reliable operations in the face of unpredictable weather, including heavy snow, ice, and freezing temperatures. Then, once the ice moved out of the St. Lawrence River and navigation resumed, railway officials faced a quite different challenge: finding sources of revenue that would help defray the high fixed costs associated with operating during this slack period. Like officials on other railways, they hoped that increased passenger traffic—and tourist traffic in particular—might fill the gap, but the route of the Intercolonial lacked the sublime, iconic wilderness of Niagara Falls or the Rocky Mountains. Railway officials therefore worked with the local wilderness that they had and supported efforts to ensure that nature so framed would live up to tourist expectations.¹

The Intercolonial's status as a publicly constructed and operated railway made it distinctive in North America, yet the struggles of its managers to cope with seasonal conditions and work with particular natural environments were not. Railway managers all around the continent turned to engineers to survey local topography and respond to the challenges posed by winter storms, spring flooding, and summer heat. These engineers constructed new physical landscapes of bridges, tunnels, ballasted roadbeds, and snowsheds in order to facilitate relatively predictable seasonal railway operations. Railway managers also turned to artists and publicists to survey local environments and highlight features that might help attract tourists to their line. In doing so, they constructed landscapes of the mind in order to create uniform and relatively predictable seasonal railway earnings.

Historians rightly point to the importance of railways in “annihilating” time and space, and to the ingenuity of railway managers in controlling and counteracting natural processes—even, as William Cronon points out in *Nature's Metropolis*, learning how to “capture winter” in refrigerator cars.² Yet natural processes still mattered. Railway operations took place in particular local environments—environments that were not static but that changed with the season, whose features railway managers tried to understand and master, but which ultimately set limits on their operations. The winter hazards faced by North America's transcontinental railways have attracted considerable attention from historians, as have the railways' efforts to promote

tourism, but managers of regional railways faced their own particular environmental challenges.³ The experience of those who operated the Intercolonial Railway points to some of the challenges that seasonality posed to mobility in North America. The publicists for the Intercolonial could not construct sublime natural attractions out of the landscapes along their line, nor could its engineers fully predict or overcome the fury of a Maritime blizzard.

"The People's Railway"

The Intercolonial's origins shaped its environmental and operational context and gave rise to its nickname "The People's Railway." In the 1840s and 1850s, railway promoters in England and the independent colonies of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Upper and Lower Canada envisioned a line connecting Halifax to the St. Lawrence River as a prelude to the union of Britain's northern North American colonies. The railway's early name—the Intercolonial—stuck, even though the project was not started until after the colonies ceased to be separate in 1867. The new Dominion of Canada—spurred on and assisted by a generous British loan guarantee—completed construction of the railway in less than a decade. On July 3, 1876, the first passenger train left Halifax on a seven-hundred-mile, twenty-seven-hour journey to Quebec City. It travelled up through the Cobequid Hills of northwestern Nova Scotia, across the north shore of New Brunswick, through a northern branch of the Appalachians referred to as the Notre Dame Mountains, and then along the south shore of the St. Lawrence. This was not the shortest available route between Halifax and Quebec City, but it was considered safe by the British government, who wanted to be able to transport troops from the naval port of Halifax to Quebec and Ontario in case a war should break out with the United States when navigation was closed on the St. Lawrence. Just as importantly for the Dominion government, the route would serve the lumbering and fishing towns of coastal New Brunswick; also, of all the potential routes, it did not disadvantage either Halifax or its seaport rival, Saint John. The railway was gradually extended westward up the St. Lawrence valley, reaching

Montreal in 1898, and also eastward through the coal, iron, and steel districts of eastern Nova Scotia and Cape Breton Island.⁴

The government of Canada constructed the line, but many hoped the Grand Trunk Railway would operate it. Changes in Grand Trunk management dashed those hopes, and the Intercolonial became “The People’s Railway,” owned and directly operated by a department of the Dominion government. The railway both contributed to and benefitted from the economic growth of eastern Canada. Although intended as a transportation link between the Atlantic and central Canada, much of the Intercolonial’s freight business reflected the local economies in which it operated and involved moving coal, lumber, and products of the iron and steel industry within the region. As a government-owned and operated railway, the Intercolonial was not expected by its political masters to pay a return on investment; indeed, it would have been criticized if it had made large operating surpluses. However, because the railway’s managers tried to avoid large surpluses, the Intercolonial’s financial performance was highly vulnerable to unexpected increases in expenditures. Between 1880 and 1914, the railway broke even or earned a small surplus (generally just above 1 percent of earnings) only sixteen times. It had an operating deficit eighteen times, with deficits averaging about 10 percent of earnings. Critics of the Intercolonial focused on these operating losses and were quick to blame them on inefficient government ownership.⁵ The public railway’s managers sought to make their financial returns as predictable and uncontroversial as possible, and that meant coping with the challenges posed by the seasons to freight and passenger flows. They hoped to tame winter and sell summer.

Taming Winter

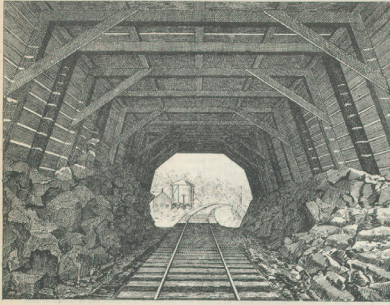
From the outset, Intercolonial officials sought to prevent winter snow blockades, given that the blockades produced both unexpected costs and substantial losses in freight and passenger revenue. Winter snowfall and cold on parts of the line, and the costs associated with them, were to be expected. The best run of turn-of-the-century weather data for the region shows, perhaps unsurprisingly, severe cold and heavy

snowfall in the St. Lawrence valley and northern New Brunswick, where the moderating effects of the ocean were felt least. For officials, the trick was to anticipate and render predictable the impact of winter weather conditions.⁶

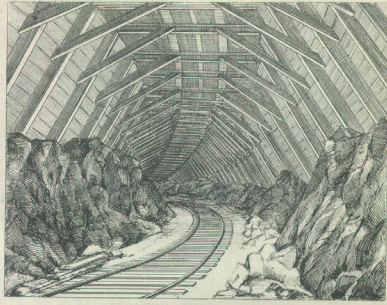
The government's chief engineer at the time of construction is credited with having the foresight to guard the line against winter storms; he insisted that the roadbed be well raised with ballast and had snowsheds constructed at obviously vulnerable points along the line. As a result of several particularly snowy and cold winters in the years immediately following the opening of the railway, the Intercolonial's managers learned where the line was most affected by drifting snow and were able to justify further investments in snow protection. In 1877 and 1878, they extended several existing snowsheds and built new ones so that sixty-five separate sheds covered 12.5 miles, or 1.75 percent of the mainline. Snow fences protected another 6 to 8 percent of the line. The railway's managers had to spend more money on fences than they had initially expected. They had to purchase more property to widen their rights-of-way at points along the St. Lawrence River after discovering that fences erected too close to the rail bed failed to prevent snowdrifts covering the tracks. Apart from these investments, the railway also had to purchase snow-clearing equipment; by 1879, the Intercolonial had twenty-seven snowplows, nine wing plows, and four flangers available to keep the line clear.⁷

The railway's managers took pride in their successful handling of a few severe winters in the first half of the 1880s, which produced only a few delays. Snowsheds, fences, and plows could be costly to maintain, but even with the occasional seasonal damage—be it from flooding, fire, or freezing—they represented a relatively predictable expense. Winter's effect on operating expenses appeared to be contained; managers carefully tracked the various monthly costs associated with running locomotives, including fuel consumption. They also used locomotive, passenger car, and freight car mileage statistics to measure how well they kept traffic running. For example, they could see that coal consumed as fuel increased in the winter months, but also that the increase did not vary significantly from year to year. Similarly, by the mid-1880s, they had come to expect a 6 to 8 percent decline in passenger car mileage

SCENES ON THE INTERCOLONIAL RAILWAY.



INSIDE OF SNOW-SHED AT CAMPBELLTON, N. B.



INSIDE OF SNOW-SHED AT MATAPÉDIA.



OUTSIDE OF SNOW-SHED AT MATAPÉDIA.—From Sketches by Rev. T. Fenwick.

Figure 2.2. Snowsheds on the Intercolonial Railway at Matapédia, Quebec, and Campbellton, New Brunswick. From sketches by Reverend T. Fenwick, in *Canadian Illustrated News* (1876).

and a 9 to 10 percent decline in freight car mileage during January and February.⁸

The winter of 1886–1887 proved particularly challenging. Heavy snowfalls and cold weather in northern New Brunswick disrupted and at times paralyzed traffic on the railway for several weeks in February and March. The decline in freight car mileage per one hundred locomotive miles was double the normal amount for January and February

(17 to 18 percent below) and continued on into March. Thousands of men were recruited to help keep traffic moving by clearing the line by hand, and snowplows—which had never run more than fifty thousand miles in any winter—ran nearly one hundred thousand miles. Coal consumption by locomotives was higher than in any previous year. The cost of clearing ice and snow, which cost \$40 to \$60 per mile in previous winters, rose to almost \$95 per mile. In a year in which the railway lost nearly \$262,000, the extra cost of this winter, without even considering lost revenues, was estimated at more than \$100,000.⁹

The Intercolonial's managers, who had scrambled and spent large sums of money to keep traffic moving, admitted these costs but defended their operations. They pointed out that the Intercolonial was better equipped with sheds and fences than any other railway east of the Rockies, implying that the winter's impact might have been much worse. They also assured their political masters that they were arranging for new snowsheds and fences to be built in locations where the storms had shown the railway to be vulnerable. By October of 1887, the chief engineer could report that an additional five miles of snow fence and two and a half miles of sheds were protecting the line, and that over ten miles of sheds had been repaired or completely rebuilt. Railway officials would be better prepared next time—yet they did not need to be. Except in a few isolated pockets, the snowfall and cold of the next fifteen years did not match the winters of the 1880s, and especially not the winter of 1886–1887.¹⁰

Then came the winters of 1903–1904 and 1904–1905. The Intercolonial struggled through some severe storms in the winter of 1903–1904, but kept the trains running. Their operation came at a cost: the cost of clearing snow and ice in the 1890s had been about \$40 per mile; the cost in 1903–1904 was \$75 per mile. The railway's annual operating deficit was the largest ever—over \$900,000—but worse was to come. In January and early February 1905, the Intercolonial struggled against a series of heavy snowstorms that waylaid some smaller railways in Nova Scotia. Then, on February 15, 16, and 17, there were reports from Halifax of “raging, howling blizzards [that] sent blinding drifts sweeping in every direction.”¹¹ Snowdrifts as deep as five metres in places paralyzed traffic in Halifax and through much of eastern

Nova Scotia. It took several weeks for the Intercolonial to return to normal operations. This time, it cost not \$40 or \$75 but \$195 per mile to clear the line of ice and snow. The typical February decline in freight train movement was twice as bad as usual, yet the railway's locomotives actually consumed 5 percent more coal than normal. Railway officials estimated that the winter cost the railway more than \$500,000 in extra expenditures, without even considering lost revenues. Overall, the railway lost \$1.7 million in 1904–1905, its worst operating year ever.¹²

What had happened? Most of that winter's storms did not test the snowsheds and fences that the railway had so carefully constructed to guard against delay and disaster. The winter was not even particularly harsh in northern New Brunswick or along the St. Lawrence. Instead, blizzards pounded southern New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, particularly in the vicinity of Halifax, where the railway was least equipped to deal with harsh winter conditions. Nature had been what no railway manager wanted: unpredictable.¹³

Given that few such storms occurred over the next decade, the winter of 1904–1905 can be viewed as an exceptional event for which railway officials could not have been expected to prepare. However, this unpredictable storm proved very significant in the history of the Intercolonial. The People's Railway had become particularly controversial after 1898, when it extended its mainline west to Montreal, the economic heart of Canada. Critics of the public railway focused not on the exceptional circumstance of February 1905, but on the \$1.7 million loss. From 1905 onward, successive governments experimented with new ways of managing the Intercolonial and came under pressure to increase freight rates on the line in order to enhance revenues. When the government nationalized several other railways during World War I, the Intercolonial was also incorporated into Canadian National, a new government corporation that would have significant independence from politicians.¹⁴

Intercolonial officials had followed the advice of engineers and made significant investments in infrastructure that was expected to control, or at least make more predictable, the impact of winter weather conditions on their railway's operations. Their accomplishments were significant, yet they could never fully tame winter. The very difficult

and costly winter of 1903–1904 was followed by the exceptional winter of 1904–1905, and the losses incurred during these two seasons played into the hands of those who saw government ownership as inherently inefficient, thus helping to shape the subsequent fate of the People's Railway.

Selling Summer

Managers of the Intercolonial recognized that to counter their critics they needed to avoid operating deficits. The challenge they faced was that, as difficult as winter might be, it was the one season that the railway was expected to perform well—and the one season that the railway faced the least competition from steamships, particularly in the carriage of important bulk commodities like coal, lumber, and grain. To reduce the railway's exposure to the vagaries of winter weather, its managers needed to find sources of revenue in the other seasons of the year. At an early stage in Intercolonial's history, the railway's managers turned to tourist passenger traffic as one of those sources, especially during the summer and early fall. Tourist service was attractive for more than just business reasons. Many railway executives and managers took a personal interest in tourist travel because it was one of the few socially prestigious activities in which they could engage—a sharp contrast to the often mundane world of managing the flow of coal, hay, and cattle. Nor could the two sides of the business be so easily separated. It was hoped that providing visiting business leaders with high-calibre passenger service would help attract investment to the region.

The Intercolonial made significant investments in its passenger service. As early as 1885, the railway's managers decided to stop having the prestigious Pullman Company operate and profit from its specialized sleeping and parlour car services, and took charge of this side of the business. The Intercolonial's first-class sleeping, passenger, and dining cars offered the "procured luxury" that American travellers expected from a major railway. The cars featured polished mahogany inlaid with lighter woods, Wilton rugs, ornate ceilings of green and gold in the Empire style, plate glass mirrors, Pintsch gas lighting, solid silver

settings at the dining tables, and plenty of space in which the traveller could move around.¹⁵

For all of these important investments, railway officials had to find reasons for passengers—particularly the much-valued American tourist—to want to travel on their first-class cars. Here again they faced the challenge of working with the specific environments that their main-line passed through; how they met that challenge can be seen in the tourist guidebooks produced by the railway. In these guidebooks, the Intercolonial's publicists tried to focus what John Urry has called the "tourist gaze." The tourist gaze, Urry argues, "is directed to those features of landscape and townscape which separate them off from everyday experience."¹⁶ Places that offer the promise of "out of the ordinary pleasures"—often with "a much greater sensitivity to visual elements . . . than [is] normally found in everyday life"—become the object of the tourist gaze.¹⁷ Through the descriptions, illustrations, and photographs in guidebooks and other promotional materials, railway companies' publicists sought both to highlight and define the sights worth seeing and to explain how they should be seen. They sought to create a desire to travel and see the "real" places. However, the Intercolonial's publicists could not rely on the kind of iconic tourist attractions available to other major Canadian railways. The region east of Montreal did not boast a Niagara Falls, and the Appalachian Mountains were little match for the Rockies.

By the turn of the century, *Forest, Stream and Seashore* had emerged as the Intercolonial's leading guidebook, providing the foundation for most of the smaller, more specialized pamphlets that the railway also circulated. A Saint John writer, W. Kirby Reynolds, appears to have been responsible for formulating the initial editions of the guidebook, as well as earlier promotional literature. Reynolds was paid as a contractor before being hired on as an official press and advertising agent in 1899. However, he did not last long in the railway's service; he was dismissed in 1901 for doing something socially acceptable for a writer but unacceptable for a railway officer: namely, drinking.¹⁸ After Reynolds's dismissal, *Forest, Stream and Seashore* was reworked every few years with updated images and information. By 1908 the guidebook was over two hundred pages long, featuring several colour illustrations and over

seventy-five black-and-white photographs. *Forest, Stream and Seashore* communicated the Intercolonial's particular image of eastern Canada to its passengers as well as to potential tourists in the rest of North America and abroad.

That image was, of course, constructed with the material interests of the Intercolonial in mind. The St. Lawrence route east of Quebec City received considerable attention because the railway saw a valuable market in the Montrealers who regularly travelled to the popular seaside resorts of the lower St. Lawrence, including Murray Bay, Cacouna, and Little Metis. Further east, the Gaspé and Baie de Chaleur region, Prince Edward Island, and Cape Breton preoccupied the Intercolonial publicists. Some material covering areas such as the Saint John River valley was added grudgingly, in response to complaints from local boards of trade. General manager David Pottinger saw little point in publicizing such areas, since travellers were unlikely to use the Intercolonial to reach them.¹⁹ The resorts of the lower St. Lawrence, Baie de Chaleur, Gaspé, and Cape Breton districts were perfect tourist areas from the perspective of the Intercolonial because they maximized the railway's proportion of the passenger's journey and therefore its potential earnings.

The railway's managers also clearly believed that the Intercolonial's interests were best served by appealing to as broad an audience as possible. *Forest, Stream and Seashore* emphasized the variety of tourist opportunities available, allowing "all classes" to "adapt their excursions to their circumstances." While the wealthy could find plenty of ways to enjoy the luxury of modern hotels, travellers of moderate means were assured that "in no country of the world may so much enjoyment be had for so small an outlay of money." The railway, readers were promised, could offer features that would appeal to the "sportsman," the "artist," the student of history, the "lover of the quaint and curious," and "all who seek rest, recreation and health."²⁰

What could the tourist expect in the region? Here, the reader was told, "is a land where civilization has made its way, and yet not marred the beauty of nature."²¹ Perhaps no theme stands out more clearly in the guidebook than this sense of the balance between civilization and wilderness. *Forest, Stream and Seashore* emphasized the modernity of

cities such as Halifax and Saint John, with their fine hotels and up-to-date electric streetcar service. It described in detail the Dominion Iron and Steel Company's steel works and, in the 1908 edition, the pioneering attempt to harness electrical energy at the Chignecto coal mines near Amherst.²² Passengers were encouraged to view the "rich farming country" in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, the product of energetic, thrifty, and "progressive farmers who have learned to regard agriculture as a science." Tourists, then, were not to feel they were entering a backward or undeveloped part of North America.

At the same time, unspoiled nature was near at hand. Like other turn-of-the-century Canadian tourism promoters, Intercolonial managers hoped to profit from the increasing interest in wilderness holidays. Various North American opinion leaders expressed increasing concern over the physical and mental conditions of the city, particularly for those who found themselves sitting in offices shuffling paper all day. In response, they argued that middle-class urban residents needed either vigorous or contemplative encounters with nature. A wilderness holiday offered city dwellers a chance for physical revitalization and spiritual renewal.²³ Intercolonial publicists eagerly appealed to this "back to nature" movement, particularly since it matched the kinds of destinations and accommodations that they could most easily provide.

One of the chief features of a Maritime holiday, according to the railway's tourism promoters, was the opportunity for controlled and potentially brief encounters with forests and streams. By travelling only a short distance, the tourist

is as much in the wilderness as if thousands of miles away. Yet all this time he knows that, if necessary, a few hours will bring him to the railway, the mail and the telegraph—to communicate with the busy world. He may leave the railway on the shores of the St. Lawrence and make a canoe voyage to the Baie de Chaleur or Bay of Fundy. When he arrives at his destination he will find his luggage and his letters awaiting him.²⁴

Throughout *Forest, Stream and Seashore*, the convenience of the Maritime wilderness experience is emphasized. From Saint John, with its fine hotels, the interested traveller could travel just a few hours to reach “one of the best moose hunting grounds in the province.” Better yet, much of the journey was by rail, so the hunter was saved the “usual fatigue entailed by a long and tiresome journey over rough roads.”²⁵ The guidebook repeatedly assured travellers that moose, caribou, and abundant fishing were available close to the rail line. Here was a region, then, where the busy middle classes with limited vacation time could have the same enjoyment as those with unlimited leisure time.

Northern New Brunswick in particular offered the tourist an easy escape from busy cities to “a dense wilderness as yet undesecrated by man” and “forests in which solitude and silence reign.” The wilderness that tourists would encounter, the guidebook frequently assured its readers, was not so wild as to make their experience unpleasant. For example, the “occasional rapids” on the Restigouche River were “not dangerous,” allowing for canoe trips “even with ladies in the party.” Guides were available to assist the hunter in tracking down moose and caribou, in finding the best fishing locations, and with “woodcraft.”²⁶

Intercolonial publicists clearly sought to capitalize on the popularity of wilderness holidays at the turn of the century. The key attraction of the “undesecrated” wilderness was not so much the “solitude and silence,” however, but rather the abundance of fish and game. Although *Forest, Stream and Seashore* did not contain the detailed regulations and information on guides that were available in the numerous specialized brochures offered by the Intercolonial, it did dwell on the hunting and fishing opportunities throughout the region. Readers were offered practical advice on which lures worked best in which streams, the best time for fishing, and the accessibility of fishing. A basketful of 150 to 200 brook trout was not an unusual day’s catch in the Charlo River, the guidebook promised. Even in Shediac, Pointe-du-Chêne, and Pugwash, where the “seashore” was the main focus, the guidebook pointed to nearby opportunities for fishing and hunting. Mira, near Louisbourg on Cape Breton, received almost as much attention as the ruins of the fortress because of the presence of tuna in the surrounding waters,

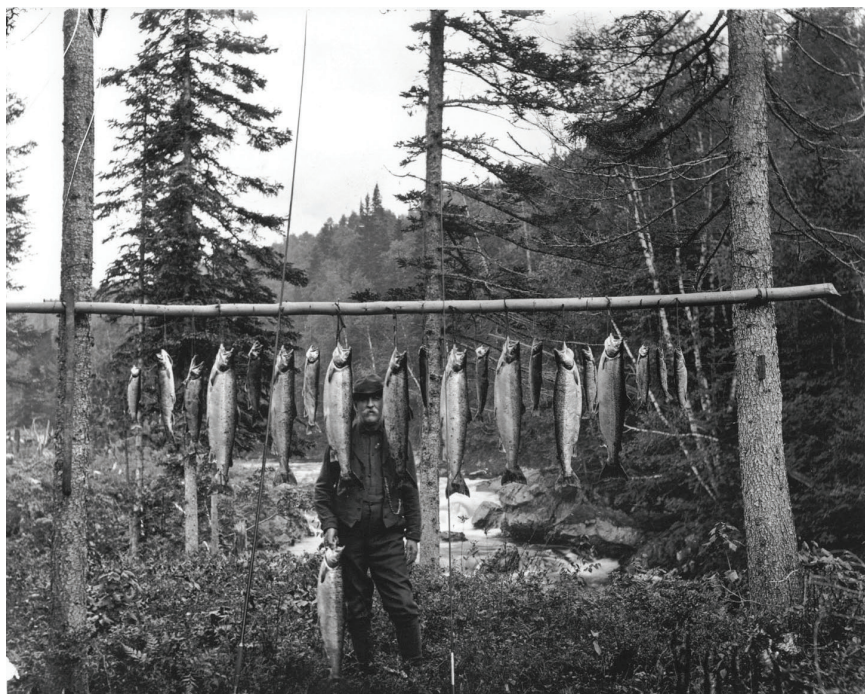


FIGURE 2.3. Luring sportsmen to the Intercolonial line. *Forest, Stream and Seashore* (1908).

which, according to *Forest, Stream and Seashore*, promised to make the village the rival of California's Catalina Island.²⁷

Visual images underlined the importance of hunting and fishing as tourist attractions in the region. The guidebook's first colour illustrations, appearing in 1908, focused on hunting. The colour frontispiece—titled “Calling the Moose”—portrayed a hunter and a guide riding in a canoe, the hunter armed with a rifle and the guide blowing into a horn. The second colour illustration, located in the section of the guidebook covering the Bathurst region, showed, as the caption indicated, a “Moose Answering the Call.” In addition to these colour illustrations, the guidebook included two photographs of a moose and another of a hunter and guide with a downed moose. The 1908 edition of the guidebook also featured more photographs of people fishing

than had previous versions (fig. 2.2).²⁸ Again, in spite of text that suggested opportunities everywhere, most of these photographs associated hunting and fishing with northern New Brunswick.

In his fine book on twentieth-century travel in North America, the historical geographer John Jakle excludes from his analysis the “trips of sportsmen.” However, the emphasis on sportsmen in *Forest, Stream and Seashore* and other Intercolonial guidebooks, plus the fact that the Canadian Pacific Railway’s most successful promotional brochure dealt with hunting and fishing, suggests that excluding them is a serious mistake.²⁹ Sportsmen clearly were an important component of early railway tourism, and their “gaze” was directed towards almost any location that promised abundant fish and game. They may not have left the kinds of travellers’ accounts that Jakle and other scholars value, but they left their imprint on the regions they visited. For a railway like the Intercolonial, which lacked iconic landscapes, hunting and fishing trips seemed the most likely form of tourist traffic.

The Maritime provinces enacted fish and game laws that supported the Intercolonial’s efforts to shape the wilderness that tourists might encounter. They aimed to preserve wildlife in the name of promoting tourism.³⁰ Indeed, governments went beyond the mere protection of species through licensing and restricting seasons. From the 1870s onward, fish hatcheries operated in New Brunswick, collecting salmon eggs from the Miramichi and Restigouche rivers and distributing the hatchlings back into the rivers at various points. As well, efforts were made to plant salmon-trout and whitefish from the large Ontario fish hatcheries into smaller rivers and lakes in both New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. In Nova Scotia, deer were introduced to provide sport hunters with additional prey. The “natural” wilderness attractions of the Atlantic region, as elsewhere in Canada, were not left to nature, but carefully managed and manipulated, with varying degrees of success.³¹

While Intercolonial publicists expended considerable energy attracting the wilderness sportsman to the forests and streams of the Atlantic provinces, they also appealed to the “worn and weary pilgrim” from North American cities who sought a “quiet, healthful, and restful” retreat by the seashore.³² Hoping to draw Americans who traditionally travelled northward to escape the summer heat, promoters sought

to identify sites where they could promise cool temperatures and the restorative powers of salt water. They faced two challenges in promoting the seashore. With the exception of the lower St. Lawrence, much of the area served by the Intercolonial in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia lacked the kinds of summer seaside resort accommodations that wealthy travellers were familiar with. Publicists—understanding that holiday-goers were looking for a safe, comfortable encounter with nature—also sought to address a number of concerns about the seashore that tourists may have.

Descriptions of the attractions of both Halifax and Saint John were accompanied by photographs of children “surf bathing,” suggesting that the ocean was accessible to travellers visiting these cities, in which they could find fine hotels. The presence of children on the beaches helped to underline the possibility of family outings and also encouraged readers to think of these beaches as safe. In describing other beaches in the region, the publicists directly addressed concerns about the safety of ocean bathing. On the beaches near Shediac, readers were assured, bathers could enjoy salt water with “no under-tows to play tricks upon the weak and unwary.”³³ The Baie de Chaleur region offered “cool but not cold” temperatures and “freedom from raw winds, and fog, that terror of so many tourists.” Dalhousie, the publicists promised, was not only “a spot where the strong and healthy may enjoy themselves, but it is one where the weak may become strong, and the invalid take a new lease of life.”³⁴

If Dalhousie continued to show promise, the Bras d’Or Lake region was clearly developing as a summer resort area. Bras d’Or provided a relatively sublime and romantic visual experience, and the Intercolonial’s publicists unleashed some of their most florid prose in describing the area, with the kind of descriptions reserved for major holiday attractions such as Quebec City and Percé Rock. As with those other sights, the reader was warned that the scene surpassed “the power of pen to describe.” Again, as with the others, this did not prevent the publicists from wielding their pens:

Who can describe the beauties of this strange ocean
lake, this imprisoned sea which divides an island in twain?

. . . At every turn new features claim wonder and admiration. Here a cluster of fairy isles, here some meandering stream, and here some narrow strait leading into a broad and peaceful bay. High above tower the mountains with their ancient forests, while at times bold cliffs crowned with verdure rise majestically toward the clouds. Nothing is common, nothing is tame; all is fitted to fill the mind with emotions of keenest pleasure.³⁵

Intercolonial publicists were quick to reassure the reader that, although “nothing is tame,” the sublime nature of the views did not require a dangerous encounter with wilderness. The Bras d’Or Lake region of Cape Breton shared many of the same positive attributes as the Baie de Chaleur region. The lake offered swimming in salt water “that is delightfully warm,” safe boating in an area where there “never has been a drowning accident,” and, of course, an abundance of fishing. Moreover, the summer climate all around the lake was “well nigh perfect” and provided all the benefits of saltwater breezes, with little fog. From the perspective of the railway and the traveller, the region surpassed the Baie de Chaleur region not only because hotel accommodations at Baddeck and elsewhere were far better, but also because several wealthy and famous Americans had already made the area a summer home. At Bras d’Or, then, the traveller could see the sublime wonders of mountains and lakes in the company of other well-to-do visitors. Easily accessible by the Intercolonial, the area was attracting increasing numbers of tourists yet still had a “freshness about it.”³⁶ Here was a comfortable and civilized encounter with untamed wilderness.

The descriptions of the Baie de Chaleur and Bras d’Or Lake show that Intercolonial publicists were anxious to overcome negative perceptions of the Atlantic region. They promised the absence of those features they feared some travellers associated with the north Atlantic seashore: poor lodgings and services, cold temperatures in and out of the water, dangerous tides and jagged rocks, and thick, unhealthy fog. *Forest, Stream and Seashore* sought to reshape this image of the region’s seashore, to emphasize a rather more tame and comfortable,

if still romantic and dramatic, encounter with nature. Intercolonial publicists therefore worked with the local environments—and perceptions of those environments—in which they operated. Eastern Canada was defined by the publicists as a progressive region of thriving farms, towns, and cities that predominantly offered tourists opportunities to fish and hunt, to enjoy the therapy of cool summer temperatures and saltwater air, or to do both. The wilderness and seashores that tourists could encounter were relatively untouched by humans but not forbidding, and they offered a comfortable, temporary escape from the pressures of civilization. One could find places off the beaten track, but still within close range of modern towns and cities—and hopefully, not too far beyond the tracks of the People's Railway.

It is difficult to measure Intercolonial's success in defining the regions it passed through, or to determine its effectiveness in attracting tourist passenger traffic. In the years between 1900 and 1914, which some railway historians have called the “golden age” of passenger traffic, the number of travellers on the Intercolonial Railway increased 250 percent. Passenger earnings tripled, as did the revenues associated with sleeping, parlour, and dining cars—the special services most often associated with tourist traffic. However, unlike American railways (but like other Canadian railways), overall increases in the passenger business did not outpace the growth of freight operations.

Nevertheless, summer passengers were an important part of the Intercolonial's business. In the years when monthly passenger traffic statistics were published—specifically, in 1906, 1907, 1909, and 1911—the summer months of July, August, and September show substantially higher passenger activity and somewhat lower freight activity than in other months of the year. On average, 31 percent more passengers travelled on the railway in these summer months. Passengers boarding from a connecting railway or steamship—presumably the kind of long-distance tourists that the publicists sought—represented only 1 to 2 percent of passengers in the summer months, but there were far more of them—on average 41 percent more—than at any other time of the year. As well, “local” passenger mileage was, on average, 44 percent higher in the summer months, suggesting that those who took the train between points on the Intercolonial were taking longer trips. All

of this activity made some difference. Although monthly expenses are not available, we do know that passenger revenues at least offset losses in freight earnings during the summer. These losses were, on average, 39 percent higher in the summer, whereas freight earnings averaged 11 percent lower in summer than at other times. Overall, the railway's monthly earnings were slightly higher in the summer months—8 percent higher on average—than in the rest of the year. It is difficult to say whether summer passenger activity was profitable for the Intercolonial without some way of attributing expenses to the service, but it clearly brought significant revenues to the railway during the season when freight traffic was down.³⁷

Conclusion

This analysis of the Intercolonial Railway is intended to highlight a few themes of importance to those seeking to understand mobility and the environment in Canada's past. It shows that those who sought to promote mobility had to overcome both material environments—like ice and snow that blocked the way—and imagined environments—for example, perceptions of wilderness hazards that could discourage pleasure travel. The Intercolonial's engineers and publicists had to work with the local environments through which they sought to move people and freight and to seize the opportunities and overcome the obstacles that those environments created. Those environments of mobility were seasonal, and in northern North America that meant warm, sunny summers and cold, snowy winters. Many of the Intercolonial's objectives were seasonal: its engineers sought to ensure that the railway lived up to its public promise to provide continuous operations between the Atlantic Ocean and central Canada during the winter, while its publicists sought to enhance passenger revenues during the summer, when freight operations faced serious competition from other forms of transportation. The challenges were also seasonal. The railway's engineers identified vulnerable sections of the line and buttressed them against winter hazards through the construction of snowsheds and fences and the deployment of snowplows. Publicists looked for features of the summer landscape that could draw the tourist gaze away

from more iconic tourist destinations and settled on forests, streams, and seashores, presenting them as comforting and comfortable wilderness areas, at once both close to and apart from civilization. Both the engineers and publicists sought to create seasonal landscapes where nature was both safe and predictable.

The Intercolonial's publicists could take heart from the higher passenger numbers and earnings they helped generate in summer. Its engineers could take heart from the railway's ability to maintain operations during all but the most difficult winter conditions, thereby sustaining its winter earnings and living up to its public mandate. The publicists' success may have been limited, however; after the disruption created by World War I, regional tourism promoters turned to other themes—namely heritage and “the folk”—to overcome the reluctance of tourists to visit the region.³⁸ At times, the success of the engineers proved fleeting as well: the storms of February 1905 struck the railway where least expected, paralyzing its operations for weeks. What one observer noted at the time is of some significance to those who would understand mobility and the environment in Canada's railway age: “A winter such as 1904–05 demonstrates the extent to which the whole economic system of the country now hinges on the railways, and how with all our progress, we are still merely playthings of the elements.”³⁹

Notes

- 1 E.J. Hart, *The Selling of Canada: The CPR and the Beginnings of Canadian Tourism* (Banff: Altitude, 1983); Patricia Jasen, *Wild Things: Nature, Culture, and Tourism in Ontario, 1970–1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 105–32. Alan MacEachern emphasizes the lack of iconic landscapes in Atlantic Canada, in *Natural Selections: National Parks in Atlantic Canada, 1935–1970* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001).
- 2 William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), 55–93, 230–47.
- 3 Patrick Allitt, “How the Railroads Defeated Winter,” *American Heritage of Invention and Technology* 13, no. 3 (1998): 55–67; John G. Woods, *Snow War: An Illustrated History of Rogers Pass, Glacier National Park, BC* (Toronto: National and Provincial Parks Association of Canada, 1983); J.D. McDonald, *Rails and Killer Snows: The Saga of Rogers Pass* (Trail, BC: Rossland Historical Museum Association, 1997).

- 4 For a brief popular history, see Ken Cruikshank, "The Intercolonial Railway," in *The Golden Age of Canadian Railways*, ed. Bruce Clement Cooper (London: Worth, 2010), 49–59.
- 5 Ken Cruikshank, "The People's Railway: The Intercolonial Railway and the Canadian Public Enterprise Experience," *Acadiensis* 16, no. 1 (1986): 78–100; Ken Cruikshank, "The Intercolonial Railway, Freight Rates and the Maritime Economy," *Acadiensis* 22, no. 2 (1992): 87–110. E.R. Forbes challenges Cruikshank's conclusions about freight traffic; see E.R. Forbes, "The Intercolonial Railway and the Decline of the Maritime Provinces Revisited," and Ken Cruikshank, "With Apologies to James: A Response to E.R. Forbes," both in *Acadiensis* 24, no. 1 (1994): 3–34.
- 6 To get some sense of the winters, I have used daily and monthly weather data, particularly measurements of snowfall and temperature, from Environment Canada, *National Climate Data and Information Archive*, accessed February–April 2011, http://climate.weather.gc.ca/index_e.html. Unfortunately, data for snow on the ground does not exist for these years, nor is it possible to get a sense of the drifting associated with particular storms. As well, the best runs of data are for urban centres. I used data for Montreal, Quebec City, Chatham, and Halifax between 1878 and 1914, but also looked at data for Saint John, Dalhousie, Truro, and Moncton within that time frame.
- 7 Shirley S. Woods, *Cinders and Saltwater: The Story of Atlantic Canada's Railways* (Halifax: Nimbus, 1992), 78–80; Canada, Parliament, *Sessional Papers* (hereafter *SP*), 1878, Paper no. 7, "Annual Report of the Department of Railways and Canals (ARDRC) 1876–1877," 169–70; Canada, Parliament, *SP*, 1879, Paper no. 8, "ARDRC 1877–1878," 132; Canada, Parliament, *SP*, 1880, Paper no. 6, "ARDRC 1878–1879," 81, 94–96.
- 8 All data is derived from various reports contained in volumes from 1879 to 1916 of Canada, Parliament, *SP*, "ARDRC 1878–1879" to "ARDRC 1914–1915."
- 9 Canada, Parliament, *SP*, 1888, Paper no. 8, "ARDRC 1886–1887," 36, 40, 56; "A Big Snow Blockade," *New York Times*, 4 March 1887, 1; "Snow Blockaded Trains," *New York Times*, 31 March 1887, 1.
- 10 Canada, *SP*, 1888, "ARDRC 1886–1887," 21.
- 11 F.W.W. Doane, "Meteorological Notes," *Proceedings of the Nova Scotia Institute of Science* 11, part 3 (1908): 363.
- 12 Canada, Parliament, *SP*, 1906, Paper no. 20, "ARDRC 1904–1905," xvii–xviii, 70, 81; Doane, "Meteorological Notes," 362–70.
- 13 Doane, "Meteorological Notes," 365.
- 14 Cruikshank, "People's Railway."
- 15 Quotation and description of passenger cars from Intercolonial Railway, *Where to Go for a Vacation: The Fast Line Intercolonial Railway of Canada* (n.p.: Passenger Department, Intercolonial Railway, 1901). For a brief history of the relationship with Pullman, see David Pottinger to W. Morcom, GM Compania del

- Ferrocarril Mexicano (Mexico), 22 Jan. 1909, vol. 12121, pp. 383–84, Records of the Canadian National Railways System, RG 30, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa (hereafter CNR Records).
- 16 John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies*, 2nd ed. (London: Sage, 2002), 3.
 - 17 Ibid.
 - 18 David Pottinger to W.F. Hatheway, Saint John, 3 Aug. 1894, vol. 12003, pp. 679–80, CNR Records; Pottinger to Hon. A.G. Blair, 23 March 1899, vol. 12135, pp. 86–88, CNR Records; Pottinger to T. Evans, ICR, Moncton, 7 April 1899, vol. 12026, p. 241, CNR Records; Pottinger to J.M. Lyons, general passenger agent, 23 Nov. 1899, vol. 12031, p. 191, CNR Records; Pottinger to Geo. Moffatt, New York, NY, [8 Dec. 1899], vol. 12031, p. 845, CNR Records; Pottinger to Lyons, 9 Feb. 1900, vol. 12032, p. 1572, CNR Records; Pottinger to E. Tiffin, traffic manager, Moncton, 15 May 1901, vol. 12042, p. 457, CNR Records.
 - 19 Pottinger to Hatheway; Pottinger to Hon. A.G. Blair, 2 April 1907, vol. 12134, pp. 668–69, CNR Records.
 - 20 Intercolonial Railway (ICR), *Forest, Stream and Seashore* (n.p.: 1905), 3. I examined and compared the 1901, 1905, and 1908 versions of the brochure; unless otherwise stated, page numbers refer to the 1905 edition.
 - 21 ICR, *Forest*, 4.
 - 22 Ibid., 92, 95, 117–19, 156–57; ICR, *Forest, Stream and Seashore* (n.p.: 1908), 115–16.
 - 23 Jasen, *Wild Things*, 105–32; George Altmeyer, “Three Ideas of Nature in Canada, 1893–1914,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 11, no. 3 (1973): 21–36; John A. Jakle, *The Tourist: Travel in Twentieth-Century North America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 53–83; Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 3rd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).
 - 24 ICR, *Forest*, 34–5.
 - 25 Ibid., 96 cf. 72–3, 78.
 - 26 Ibid., 50–51, 113.
 - 27 Ibid., 69–70, 98–99, 106, 129, 140, 158.
 - 28 ICR, *Forest* (1908), opposite 3, opposite 80, 89, 90; new fishing and hunting photographs are included on pp. 49, 83, 85, 86; new photographs of fishing in PEI are included on pp. 183 and 187.
 - 29 Jakle, *The Tourist*, xiii; Hart, *Selling of Canada*, 27.
 - 30 Clare Brown, “Management of the New Brunswick Sports Fishery during the Nineteenth Century,” and Claire Guyer, “Game Protection in New Brunswick, 1889–1971,” both in *Proceedings: 5th Canadian Symposium on the History of Sport and Physical Education* (Toronto: University of Toronto School of Physical and Health Education, 1982), 58–64, 65–75; Kevin Walmsley, “Good Clean Sport and a Deer Apiece: Game Legislation and State Formation in 19th Century Canada,” *Canadian Journal of the History of Sport* 25, no. 2 (1994): 1–20.
 - 31 Canada, Parliament, *SP, 1901*, Paper no. 22, “Fish Culture,”

- annual report of the Department of Marine and Fisheries; Canada, Parliament, *SP*, 1911, Paper no. 22, "Fish Breeding," annual report of the Department of Marine and Fisheries; Janice E. Jellicoe, "Perspectives on the Evolution of Deer Hunting in Nova Scotia," in *Proceedings: 5th Canadian Symposium on the History of Sport and Physical Education* (Toronto: University of Toronto School of Physical and Health Education, 1982), 76–86.
- 32 ICR, *Forest*, 98.
- 33 Ibid., 96, 98, 122.
- 34 Ibid., 48, 51–52.
- 35 Ibid., 143.
- 36 Ibid., 142–50.
- 37 Volumes from 1907 to 1916 of Canada, Parliament, *SP*, "ARDRC 1905–1906" to "ARDRC 1914–1915."
- 38 At least, this was the case in Nova Scotia. Ian McKay, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994); Ian McKay and Robin Bates, *In the Province of History: The Making of the Public Past in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010).
- 39 Doane, "Meteorological Notes," 365.