



Scaup/M Graesser

Your Voice

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Walking with Ghosts in New Zealand

By Mark Graesser

An 85 kilometre walk through the New Zealand mountains seemed like a good way to mark my 77th birthday. Actually, I never thought of it that way until a youngish biker in one of the huts casually asked how old I was. Rather, I undertook this latest foray more in the spirit of "keep on tramping" if that's what you do.

Seasonally sojourning in Nelson, New Zealand since 2001, I have done a lot of tramping in the "hills" (i.e., mountains), sometimes on multi-day routes in true back country. Nelson is conveniently surrounded by three large national parks. Last year my wife Alice and I walked the 5-day, 79 km Heaphy Track as companions to my younger sister and her husband. When our frequent hiking and traveling friends Mary and Bob Watson from Wellington heard of this exploit, Mary promptly proposed that we should join up to walk the Old Ghost Road in 2020, as a sort of "last hurrah." We would include in the party Maryann and Bill, retired wilderness guides with whom we had also tramped many a mile. All but Maryann would be well up in our 70's.

Whereas most of the hiking trails in New Zealand are managed by the Department of Conservation, the "Old Ghost Road" is the recent creation of a community trust, a non-profit consortium of enthusiasts and local authorities based on the West Coast, some three hours from Nelson. It was designed to stitch together two nineteenth century mining roads, one leading into high mountains from the inland Buller River, and the other following a wild river in from the West Coast. Although the early miners had ambitions to connect these two strands, the intervening wilderness was formidable, and the gold played out by 1910. Left behind were the



Bill Rooke, Maryann Ewers, Mary Watson, Bob Watson, Mark Graesser

sites of several once-bustling mining camps, the ghost towns from which the trail now takes its name.

Although earthquakes and landslides had taken their toll, the original "roads" were horse trails which, once cleared and repaired, would make for a gentler gradient than the usual

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President's Message

Almost all of us – and half the world's population – are under some form of lockdown and "sheltering in place." Daily routines, whether it's shopping, socializing with friends, going to the gym, a concert or a movie, have either been shelved or transformed and taken online through web conferencing software, in which we see each other and share news and thoughts, secure – we hope – from a deadly virus.

CANCELLATIONS AND POSTPONEMENTS

MUNPA has suspended face-to-face meetings of our focus and special interest groups and previously announced programmes. This includes our Annual General Meeting, originally scheduled for Thursday, June 4th.

We have done so not only to ensure the health and safety of our members, but also to comply with Memorial University directives and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador Public Health Orders issued during the ongoing Public Health Emergency.

We will resume normal programming when we receive word that it is safe to do so.

Our office at the Signal Hill Campus is closed. However, we are monitoring our e-mail account and checking messages left on our office telephone. We will respond as quickly as we can.

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Like every one of us, MUNPA has struggled to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances. Early in March we considered whether some of our programming could go on, albeit in larger rooms that would allow for social distancing. We had barely decided to go ahead when it became apparent that we could not. Instead, we suspended programming and held our first online meetings of our executive and administration committee – a test run for our first online meeting of our Board of Directors a few days later.

Sheltering in place has not meant cessation of business. Our office assistant, Jackie Collins, has been working from home, monitoring phone messages and our e-mail account. With Jackie, I have been fielding inquiries about SSQ Travel Insurance and how they would treat COVID-19 emergencies – the answer that Glen Roberts, HR's Manager of Pensions and Benefits elicited was on a case-by-case basis, the same way in which they treat other emergencies – and have been working with Kelly Martin, Payroll Manager, to ensure that as many of you as possible were receiving their pensions by direct deposit to ensure there was no interruption in monthly payments. Those inquiries have now tapered off, allowing us to direct our attention to other matters -- exploring the extent to which some of our programming could be taken online. Three of our focus and special interest groups, the Memoir Group, the Shutterbug Club, and Health and Aging have experimented with and, in at least two instances, switched to online meetings.

Also on our agenda is whether our Annual General Meeting, scheduled for June 4th, could go ahead. Our interim conclusion is that it cannot. Yet to be determined is whether we can hold it later in June or will need to postpone it until the fall. The latter is increasingly likely.

Keeping in touch and avoiding isolation are essential in times like these. Many of us have found ourselves reaching out to friends and family, near and far, more frequently than we normally would. We would like to keep as many of you in touch with each other as we can. Taking some of our groups online is one step.

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From the Editors

A very warm welcome to MUNPA's April newsletter. A great deal has transpired in the world since our last publication which caused us to ponder what we could or should put in this edition. Many thanks to our President who so aptly addressed the pandemic situation and what it means for all of us. The Co-editors agreed that the remainder of the newsletter should, as in the past, provide some facts, entertainment and humour as well as wonderful photographs displaying what our members have been up to. We do hope you enjoy this edition and allow yourselves to escape some of the negative news of the day.

Since we are all staying safe and staying home, it may be a great time to consider writing us to comment on what you've read or what you'd like to see. Most of all, take this opportunity to write that piece you've always wanted to write but couldn't find the time. That's your challenge until we connect again! Wishing you all an enjoyable holiday period and hope others will enjoy reading something you've written in our June issue!

Bernadette Power and Ann Ryan

President's Message, continued

Another step, far less conventional for our demographic, is a leap into social media. We are not sure how many of you will want to join, but we've established a private MUNPA Facebook group. There you can share experiences, anecdotes, as well as links and online resources – e.g. free films, concerts, plays -- that are coming our way. You can also establish subgroups around topics of interest to you and others. To join, go to <https://www.facebook.com/groups/530849997840639/> or, if you are already a Facebook user, search "MUNPA," look for our new logo and ask to join the private group. You need to join in order to see items and post to it. The rest is up to you.

Please keep well and keep safe in these difficult times.

Steve Wolinetz



Wanda Garrett



Rug by Marilyn Collins



Quilt by Joane Samson

What's Up with Pensions

Pension Reform at Memorial and What Does it Mean?

By Glen Roberts

The Memorial University Pension Plan (the Plan) is one of the largest public sector pension plans in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. It provides a lifetime defined benefit pension upon retirement and is funded through contributions made by employees and Memorial, as well as income from investments. The majority of employees at Memorial's main campuses are participants in the Plan (i.e., Grenfell campus, Marine Institute, Labrador Institute and the St. John's campus).

Within Newfoundland and Labrador, other large public sector pension plans have undergone a transformational pension reform process which resulted in the establishment of shared responsibility for pension plan management and funding. Employees and the government now jointly sponsor these pension plans.

In consideration of the Plan's status as a public sector pension plan and in recognition of its funding challenges, the provincial government has requested that Memorial and pension plan stakeholders also move to establish joint sponsorship of the Plan and formulate a funding policy to guide its future sustainability. Under this structure, the Plan would be jointly sponsored by the university and employee groups and the sponsors would share equally in the Plan's ongoing management and funding.

During the Fall of 2019, a joint committee comprised of university administration and employee groups, as represented by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Public and Private Employees (NAPE) and the Memorial University of Newfoundland Faculty Association (MUNFA), reconvened to work on pension reform measures aimed at addressing the unfunded liability and a joint sharing of responsibility for the Plan and its governance. This is a continuation of work previously begun in the Fall of 2017 toward reaching agreement on joint sponsorship of the Plan. The guiding principles of the protection of already accrued benefits, maintenance of a defined benefit pension plan and the

preservation of current retiree pensions remain unchanged.

This means that for retirees and other beneficiaries in receipt of a pension from the Plan, there would be no reduction or change to their pensions. Future retirees would, however, receive pensions in accordance with any changes that the new pension plan sponsors deem necessary under the reformed pension framework.

For the pension plan, operating in an environment of rising pension costs within the university's current budgetary reality is challenging at best. However, the Plan remains on a relatively stable footing with an estimated funded ratio of just over 90 per cent. Memorial University is committed to maintaining its defined benefit pension plan and continues to work with employee groups toward developing a governance and funding model that will ensure the Plan's sustainability for current and future Plan members.

Glen Roberts is Manager of Benefits, Pensions and Compensation, Human Resources



Gwen Hanson

A BUTTON

By Roberta Buchanan

MUNPA Memoir, December 2019

[Prompt: We were told to close our eyes, and the facilitator, Catherine Rees, dropped an object into our hands (Amherst Writers and Artists, Memoir Writing Workshop).]

I have a BUTTON. I know it well. Round, a smooth upper surface, and below the bit sticking out with a hole in it for sewing it on. A guilt trigger! It is the button on my winter coat, hanging loose attached by a few threads of cotton. Any time now it's going to fall off. Every time I put my coat on, it reminds me that I have to sew it on, SOON. But I'm just heading out the door, I've no time now. When I reach my destination and take off my coat, it reminds me again. Sew me on, otherwise you're going to lose me. And you look so untidy with your coat half undone. What will people think of such sloppiness? I'm just at my meeting! I'll do it when I get home. If I remember. My memory isn't as good as it used to be.

But now it's dinner time. I'm hungry. I can't do it now. I have to heat up some leftovers.

How long has this been going on? Weeks, months, years? You really have to take yourself in hand. Put it on one of your to-do lists and underline it to show it's important and must be done now.

I'm getting sick of this button, nagging away. I have more important things to do. I have to do my civic duty and go out and vote. I jerk the coat back on and rush out the door. When I get home, and take the coat off with the reproachful button, I have urgent things to do, like watching the election on tv. I can't be bothered with such trivialities as buttons. The country's future is at stake.

MUN IN MOTION On the Trail to Healthy Aging

By Evan Simpson



Bay Bulls North Head, June 2019

Every year the East Coast Trail Association (ECTA) organizes a community hike to help sustain and improve this wonderful treasure of the Avalon. Since many Memorial faculty (me included) and staff are avid users of the trail, we decided to contribute to this worthy cause by creating a team which we call Mun in Motion.

Healthy aging is a topic our MUNPA members like to discuss and actively participate in so it's no surprise that our 10-person team includes several MUNPA members. Last year the team had a fine time and raised more than \$10,000, a record amount for any participating team. We also won prizes – kayak trips and Ferryland Lighthouse picnics – that we had the pleasure of sharing with the University's indigenous and international students.

This year's community hike was planned for Saturday, June 6, and Mun in Motion was eager to get moving again. With the coronavirus situation, ECTA had to postpone this event until the fall. We will post updated information on our website as more becomes available. You can also learn more about the East Coast Trail and the community hike by going to www.eastcoasttrail.com. Look forward to seeing you there in future.

A Lifetime at Memorial

By Bill Eaton

I worked at Memorial between 1980 and 2016. I was a student at Memorial from 1968 to 1974. My father, Doug, was a Phys Ed teacher back in the 1950's when he carried me into the gym at age 2 and I still use the gyms at Memorial. So Memorial has been part of me for 66 years.

I entered first year during a time of great change. The frat people, the cool kids of the fifties and early sixties, saw that the waters around them had grown as the times were a changing so that in 1968 the cool kids had long scruffy hair and wore lumberjack coats and boots. Keep on truckin'.

I was schooled in the 50's and 60's to pass exams. We never reflected on the meaning of anything: we were taught to memorize and get good marks. So I would take a 15 minute "act like I was cool" break every hour and hang out in the weed infested Spanish Caf and catch up (network we call it today). I played water polo and basketball a few times a week and was in a rock band during my MUN days: after my studies of course.

I missed one class because of indolence during my years at Memorial and my father, by then dean of students, gave me a lecture about responsibility. My mother was a lecturer in English and she chimed in too. It was only one class! Never did figure out how he found out. By the time my younger brother was at MUN he missed classes every Friday to play on the basketball team. Parents get more relaxed as the children go by.

Back in those days Memorial was part of an Exchange program whereby students could go to Germany and work for a summer with a month off to hitch hike about Europe. I worked on a farm in the Black Forest and got brucellosis from drinking unpasteurized cow's milk. I made



the diagnosis retrospectively four years later during a third year medical school lecture that laid out all my symptoms.

I had three bouts, the last one just before end of term of my second year. I was bed bound for two weeks and studied the whole time. I sailed through the exams like I was trained to do and I went off to medical school. I was in the second class admitted to Memorial's medical school when there

were more teachers than students. We had 42 in our graduating class.

As medical students we had no senior students, just the bunch one year ahead of us and they weren't much in the way of role models really. There were the interns, impossibly cool, and from somewhere else (of course) who had little time for us lowly med students. It was only when I went off to Edmonton to be an intern myself that I realized we were as good (and often better) doctors as anybody else.

Memorial was good to me as a faculty member, a student, and a child. It still is.



Linda Kirby



On the tops, our guide Jenni

New Zealand mountain tracks. The challenge was connecting the two pieces through mountains which had rarely, if ever, experienced human footprints. The Trust achieved this by raising millions of dollars and mobilizing a massive amount of volunteer effort to construct a new 85 km trail, together with several huts, linking up the old ghost trails.

The key to obtaining most of the funds was designing the trail for mountain bike travel, making it eligible for large government grants. For hikers, this, like the use of old horse trails, made for much easier grades than average for New Zealand, but also raised unease about sharing a path with bikes.

Since it opened in 2015, the Old Ghost Road had attracted lots of my tramping buddies as a rewarding new challenge. So we had it on our bucket list, and promptly took Mary up on her proposal. The plan was to engage a guide, Jenni Kingston, to take care of logistics and food. Mary, who is determination personified, vowed to walk 1,000 km in preparation. Alice and I did some hikes on the East Coast Trail, but mostly just thought about it. These hikes and thoughts led Alice to the conclusion that the OGR would be a bit too much, especially one 25 km day, so she opted out but agreed to drive around to the Coast to meet us for a post tramp party at the Ghost Lodge, operated by Bill's son.

So, on January 27, four of us set off from Nelson in Jenni's van. We met Maryann and Bill at the trail head on the Buller River.

Day 1 was all uphill, but gently so, 765 metres over a distance of 18 km. We were surrounded by giant native trees all the way, and passed numerous artifacts at such former towns as Zalatown and Eight Mile. By four o'clock we reached our first hut, plenty of time to rest up while Jenni cooked up a gourmet meal. I welcomed a restorative ten hours in the bunk.

The next day I was feeling fine, and it was upward again, nearly 500 metres, through mist and rain, but by noon we had broken out of the forest and cloud, and onto the open "tops," a high ridge with extensive mountain views and characteristic New Zealand sub-alpine grasses, shrubs and flowers. This was true wilderness. A couple more hours and we reached our next hut, perched above Ghost Lake. An "easy" twelve km. Lots of time to enjoy the view, and observe the mountain bikers who showed up in our wake. These were mostly men about half our age, with the resources to employ helicopters to move them from one end of the trail to another and transport a case of beer to the hut. They seemed as puzzled about what made us old trampers tick as we were about them. But proper respect and etiquette prevailed.



Long road ahead

Day 3 was also relatively short, thirteen km, rough but mostly down hill. Day 4 was the biggie, 25 km, up and down. By now I was happy to feel my strength rebounding nicely, rather than flagging; there was life in the old legs yet! I cruised along at the head of the now rather spread out party, along with Jenni. We were all at the hut by 6:00, rather to Mary's

Ode to COVID 19

By Bill Eaton

*The public's now in a panic its true
How to cope with this pandemic flu
Hoarding has now become a bit of a farce
Like...How many times do you need to wipe
your arse?*

*Stay at home, self quarantine. Do your best
for the public hygiene
At least until we get a vaccine. Oh it's mean
Covid 19*

*The stores have posted on their advertisers
A limit of two on hand sanitisers
Liquor stores still there to serve us
Oh course they are; they're an essential service*

*Keep your space, cover your nose
Don't touch your face wherever you go
Hope that ICU is clean
2020 went viral...for the Queen*

*Bored at home staying alone. Watch TV , play
with the phone
Waiting for the new world order. Waiting for
troops at the border
Hospitals need our resources. Hockey rinks turned
into morguesses
But the mock up is so pretty on the TV screen
Fuzzy red and green Covid 19*

*At the park I saw some guy sneeze
People shunned him like he was the disease
These days don't know who to trust
Do these masks hide looks of disgust?*

*I know my paranoid delusions are glum
I hate this nervous wreck I've become
And watching the TV news, gives me the blues
Covid 19*

I sing this song to whoever will listen

Walking with Ghosts, continued

astonishment. My only problem was the onset of blisters brought on by pounding along crushed rock used to harden the trail for bikers. I vowed next time to wear my heavier boots.

On the final day we walked 17 km down the wild Mokihinui River, high on the side of a gorge. Long swing bridges aided our passage over the fabled "suicide slips" left by a 1929 earthquake. Again, we passed 150-year-old remains of mines and settlements in seeming impossible locations. It brought to mind the words of Robert Service (referencing the Yukon of the same era): "There are strange things done, in the midnight sun, by the men to moil for gold." And the town of Presbyterian Church, in the film "McCabe and Mrs. Miller."

Everyone ended the journey in good spirits. Pessimist Mary, who at some points suggested that we would have to return and collect her bones along the trail at a later date, confessed to being "quite knackered" but no worse as we

headed off for a celebratory BBQ at the rustic Ghost Lodge on the nearby beach.

The moral, if one is needed, is use it or lose it. And keep on ticking off challenges on your bucket list.



End of the road, mission accomplished!

Mark Graesser, Political Science, is a life-long hiker. To see an album of photos from this trip, [click here](#) and select Albums/Old Ghost Road.