

Last updated at 9:26 AM on 14/06/07

Healthy hiking towards excellence  

[Post a comment](#)



[DAVE WHITE](#) 

The Western Star

Young Arne Helgeland says he's 67. You'd hardly know it.

He does like to joke. You wouldn't say to look at him he's much more than 50-something, save for the silver highlights.

The smiling sun lines on his spring-tanned face fade in the bright light of western Newfoundland's Long Range mountaintops. There, too, a shrug of bursitis grown in his right shoulder from a skiing accident some years ago is his only spoken complaint.

On his third hike this year to the pinnacle of Bear Head Mountain, about 340 metres (some 1,100) feet straight up and miles beyond, Arne allows he's traversed the scenic ridges above the incredible Humber River onward through the pristine boreal forest and wild resort lands further up the valley at least 30 times.

Twenty years a Newfoundlander, the native-born Norwegian's comfortable pace over the steep hills and around the deep kettle lakes found in the shallow dales of the north Humber lands belies his age. He is more than a match for some 50-year-old desk jockeys, that's for sure. I know. I was there.

He went on his fourth walk there Wednesday, taking summer trail workers on an orientation expedition from Wild Cove Pond south to the Bay of Islands' north shore, crossing to Corner Brook at Ballam Bridge.

Helgeland is chair of the Bay of Islands sectional committee of the International Appalachian Trail Newfoundland and Labrador Chapter, one of eight designated volunteer-led groups on the west coast pooling their efforts with public and private-sector interests as all embark on what some consider one the most ambitious social and economic development projects ever undertaken in the province.

Eclectic mix

Five years of planning, legal provisioning and in quest of partners, a provincial volunteer board of directors led Northern Peninsula tourism outfitter Paul Wylezol, with environmental studies specialist Dr. Greg Wood, its chief communications officer, the chapter is mapping out strategies that offer to draw untold thousands of international tourists to the region to enjoy our great outdoors.

The International Appalachian Trail is something local people may enjoy as well. Assorted nature lovers are forming up in groups and making wilderness hiking part of their healthy outdoor routine. Entourages of 40 and 50 walkers attached to the chapter by their love of wilderness adventure hike together around the west coast each weekend.

With the help of hundreds of tri-sector partners and eager partners found from within the growing ranks of local and regional enthusiasts, the organization is offering to blaze a trail of epic proportion, stirring the promising legacy ever emergent within the environmental excellence that yet resides in our blessed part of the world.

Federal support

Recent announcements of federal financial support for the Long Range Mountains project is indicative of the kind of determination and organization being shown by the collective interests involved.

Opening high spots, low lands and chosen points in between Rose Blanche in the south and Belle Isle in the north, the local chapter estimates the inaugural expedition to secure a pleasingly accessible, two-metre walking path the entire length of the province's western mountain range will take 10 summers to finish and further provide additional direct and spinoff employment throughout the region for decades to come.

The western Newfoundland extension represents "the last northern vestige" of the Appalachian Mountains in North America.

Good to go

Announced federal approvals, secured provincial funding and corporate sponsorships totaling some \$148,000 will contribute to the development and marketing of the trail over the next two years.

Some 275 freely accessible kilometres of Long Range Appalachians in Newfoundland and Labrador are expected to be made complete in additional work scheduled to be done by three sectional working groups being employed this summer.

Helgeland is overseeing a five-man team being dispatched next Monday to carve 30 kilometres of open trail between Ballam Bridge in Corner Brook and the eastern flanks of the Humber Valley Resort by autumn. Other teams of five are assigned to similar undertakings in the Bay-St. George-Lewis Hills section of the extended trail and in the Parsons Pond area of the lower Northern Peninsula.

Virtual views Googled

The naturally-rugged, 10-kilometre expedition to the top the increasingly-known rock formation known as the Man in the Mountain is the five-hour trek in and out from sea level at Riverside Drive.

Ascending 60-degree inclines and across flats of ladyslippers and lilies to atop of the legendary escarpment, onward and down to the lips of glacial kettle lakes and up again, old moose-trod leads intersect with human passages and scattered bog holes. A test of faith. Things of beauty. Fresh air.

The views of beautiful Bay of Islands are out of this world, though minor vistas by comparison to the distant peaks of the Blomidons to the south have a peek in virtual reality on Google Earth. The adventure between continues between 48 degrees, 57 minutes, 11 seconds north latitude and 57, 51.13 west longitude. Geocaching, a wilderness hide-and-seek game, is a growing outdoors sport. At least one cache had turned up there.

The hike can be a trying one in places. It is recommended that anyone taking up any form of rigorous exercise consult their family doctor and embark on a progressive fitness plan.

Arne will be the first to tell you mountain hiking is not a race. No member of a party should outdistance the slowest member of the team. Just getting his second wind a half hour into the first half-kilometre of the riverside climb, he likens the adventure as more like that of a Cadillac, and not a Ferrari.

Dave White welcomes your Bay of Islands news and events information at 688-2003, or, by e-mail at: daver.9@netzero.com