

National Park Entrance Fee Now a Fact

When Jack MacAndrew broke the story on the National Park entrance fee last spring, the general public immediately opposed the idea as an infringement on their basic rights to use the beaches. It seems that over the years Islanders had grown used to the idea of ready access to the North Shore dunes. The move by Ottawa appeared to be one more attempt to restrict the public's enjoyment of any type of luxury.

The Guardian-Patriot got together a petition against the proposed fee that resulted in a total of 5000 names and a Telex nearly one hundred yards long that filled the C.N. Communications office. Two copies of the petition were sent off to Judd Buchanan, Minister responsible for parks and Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau at the beginning of the summer. Ottawa received the telex but gave no stated reply or reaction. In the opinion of the Guardian-Patriot news staff, the telex probably ended up in someone's wastebasket. So it goes.

Camper's City on University Avenue put a similar petition on the door of their store and gathered over two hundred names on the petition. However, up to this point, Camper's City has taken no action in sending it on to Ottawa.

That has been the general story on public action. Parks delayed implementing the fee on the Island for a year to let the issue cool - and generally it has. A lot of people last spring, most notably Gilbert Clements, Minister of Tourism, said that something must be done. Now it is fall; summer and the tourists have come and gone, and the provincial government, which has promised much, has taken no effective action, letting the issue die just as the federal government wished. The Parks Department has already built the toll booths in its fenced compound at Dalvay. They have five large booths, 15x8, and four small ones, 8x4, for fee collection. Tenders have already been called for road widening and other necessary park 'improvements' related to fee collection. The entrance fee is a reality.

Incidental facts concerning the entrance fee are varied and relatively unknown, even by the Parks Department. There will be a reduction of Park access roads from nine to five, one for each section of the Park. One large

booth and two small ones will 'service' the Cavendish entrance, one large booth at the Rustico access, one large and one small at each of Stanhope and Brackley and one large booth at Dalvay. There is, of course, the expensive two dollar entrance fee and the much more reasonable annual fee of ten dollars that allows entrance and exit from any part of the Park or from any Park in Canada for that matter. Bicycle riders and pedestrians are allowed free access. Contrary to previous government reports, there will be no parking lots at the entrance points for those who wish to leave their cars behind and walk. Buses and other commercial vehicle will pay more but motorcycles will be charged the standard rate. The fee is on the vehicle only, the number of passengers is of no consequence.

On the light of these developments, the resurgence of the establishment media's attacks on the 'proposed' entrance fee seem futile. It must be remembered that all of Canada pays the fee. P.E.I. was given one year of grace only. Before the idea of a fee, maintenance costs were paid by tax dollars collected from everyone, including those who did not use the Park. With the entrance fee most of the cost is borne by those who actually use them. For example, it is thought that the capital costs of building the booths will be returned in two years time by the monies collected. The fee does seem to be a fairer way of gathering the money.

The toll booths will be installed before winter sets in. In six months time they will be in use. Hence if resistance to the fee is to be continued then it must be fast, concentrated, and intelligent. No one I know really argues with the idea of paying a fee for all the Parks in Canada, because they offer varied wildlife, a natural habitat of many types, and impressive scenery worth preserving. But in P.E.I. we have a scant seven square miles that offers only one thing - sand-duned beaches. Our park was created for two purposes - to protect the dunes from erosion and exploitation and to provide equal access for every one. By putting a price on the park you are restricting its use to those of financial means. Also the park does not offer enough to warrant



paying money. The Parks Department's move means that Islanders will be forced to rediscover provincial or private beaches that offer the same as the National one. It is reasonable to pay two dollars to enter Fundy National Park because it offers so much more - forests, mountains, wildlife - and beaches. But the P.E.I. park does not have this variety. Further, it does not have the maintenance costs of parks thousands of times its size.

If you wish to protest the fee, the best way is to flood the mails with letters

immediately. Write the Superintendent of Parks on P.E.I., Don Harris, at Box 487, Charlottetown or Judd Buchanan, Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, House of Commons, Ottawa. Letters to a federal minister do not require postage. Even better phone Gilbert Clements this week at 4-4567 and ask him what he's doing about the issue, what provincial policy is and anything else that comes into your mind. Tell him to get off his ego trip and for once do something.

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