



A Prairie Odyssey – Alan Beaven and the Tree Planting Car

A *Prairie Odyssey: Alan Beaven and the Tree Planting Car* is a pleasure to read. It is the truly interesting and until now, largely untold or forgotten story of tree planting in Western Canada. The book presents first-hand observations gleaned directly from Canadian Forestry Association (CFA) reports, daily reports written by the Tree Planting Car lecturers, articles from *Forest and Outdoors* (a magazine produced by the CFA), and personal recollections by the author, Dianne Beaven, the daughter of Tree Planting Car lecturer Alan Beaven. The book is also a wonderful tribute to Mr. Beaven, and shows the great respect that Dianne has for her father and for what he helped to accomplish in Western Canada.

In 1919 the CFA, in co-operation with the Canadian Pacific and Canadian National Railways, launched what is truly one of the most innovative and longest surviving education programs ever undertaken on the Canadian Prairies. A railway car was equipped as a “traveling schoolhouse” and began a 50-year annual journey crossing the three Prairie Provinces. During this half-century, the Tree Planting Car traveled 263,000 miles and played host to four generations of Prairie people, numbering over one and a half million visitors; as well about half a billion trees were planted on approximately 100,000 farms. This educational program made a major contribution to the successful settlement of the Prairies, providing the impetus and knowledge to plant shelterbelts and field shelters to protect farm fields, to produce gardens and grow fruit trees in the protection of trees, and to beautify homes.

Dedicated lecturers were always on board to provide information, inspiration and assistance to farmers and towns’ people. Alan Beaven became the

appropriate series for school students who visited during the day and for adults in the evening. In addition, for forty years (1933-1973) the Tree Planting Car doubled as the Conservation Car and traveled through the parkland regions to promote the wise use of all the renewable resources, with emphasis on the importance of forests and trees.

Having visited the Sandilands Forest Discovery Centre, where the retired Tree Planting Car is now on permanent display, it was great to be able to associate a wonderful story not only with the photos in the book, but with the painstakingly preserved and maintained tree planting car itself. I encourage not only that everyone read *A Prairie Odyssey*, but if possible try to visit the Sandilands Forest Discovery Centre near Hadashville, Manitoba to truly understand its significance, and to have a full and excellent historical experience. The Institute’s involvement with forest history groups and activities across Canada continues to grow and develop. Many of our members are directly involved in leading these initiatives in their respective provinces.

John Pineau

For more information or to order a copy of *A Prairie Odyssey*: <http://www.thinktrees.org/>



longest serving lecturer, beginning his journey in 1926 and ending in 1946. Beaven’s name became synonymous with the operation of the car. The entire program was unique in that it promoted tree planting to people in their own communities on a prearranged itinerary. The lecturers used all available teaching tools over the years introducing slides, silent film, radio and eventually “talkies.” The presentations included a complete grade-

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