

# Riding the Rails

## E & N celebrates 107th anniversary

*The historic E & N Railway marked its 107th anniversary last week and reporter Timothy Callin joined local dignitaries and railway supporters for a scenic round trip journey from Esquimalt to Nanaimo.*

By Timothy Callin  
News Contributor

Everyone waves at a passing train.

On Thursday, Sept. 30 1993, supporters of the E & N Railway held a brief ceremony in front of the Victoria station to commemorate the Dayliner's 107th anniversary in a show of support for the suffering service.

The Dayliner, or Budd Car, has experienced difficult times in recent years. Both VIA Rail and the Federal government intend to discontinue the service, a decision not well received by the supporters who boarded the train on this historic day in Canadian history.

In 1886, Sir John A. Macdonald drove in the last spike at Cliffside at the 25 miles of line between Esquimalt and Nanaimo with the promise of the railway to 'build, construct, complete, equip, maintain and work'. These vows may now have been forgotten by the government and VIA, but Joe Richards, affectionately known as Victoria's watchdog, and chief organizer behind the commemora-

tion, is not willing to give up the fight.

"A deal is a deal," Richards said. "The politicians should keep their word. It's a safe method of travel enjoyed by everyone." The ride in fact, is more than enjoyable. Passengers and supporters were given a lesson in luxury. Large windows that seemingly stretch forever allow unlimited viewing. The two cars are air conditioned with plush seats that recline with ample leg room and adjustable footrests. It's first class treatment no matter where one sits.

Robert Haden, a member of the B.C. Railway Historical Association who was on board to give his support for the dayliner, believes that the luxury is one of the ride's highlights.

"It's nostalgic, and a nice change from driving. You can sit back comfortably, relax and enjoy the scenery."

The scenery along the ride from Esquimalt to Nanaimo is breathtaking. Passengers experienced endless scenes of natural beauty and unspoiled wildlife that contribute



A rural scene greets anniversary train travellers at the rustic Cowichan stop.

in making the E & N so unique. Forests balanced in the midst of fall with their endless varieties of colored leaves still clinging to tired branches hugging the sides of the winding track. There are of course great mountains such as the Malahat, whose elevation of 1,000

feet offers a breathtaking view below for passengers who are brave enough to look. The train also slows down to pass over Niagara Canyon on a great narrow bridge that stands 260 feet high and 520 feet long, offering excellent picture opportunities for the brave.

The riders who occupied the dayliner, while enjoying the beautiful and abundant life outside the train windows, were also mindful of the possibility that the train may be put out of service forever.

Esquimalt councillor Rod Newman who was on board along with his wife Molly, agrees. "This is an early link to Confederation," Newman said. "If we lose this through a decision back East it's a bit of betrayal. It's our link to the past as well as the future. The Dayliner connects two proud working communities, Esquimalt and Nanaimo." The dayliner is not only notable for its great heritage and scenic beauty, but it is also an important means of transportation for many people on the Island.

"This train travels through all the small communities and is vital to many of those people," Engineer Frank Cooper said. "If we get rid of this mode of transport, in two years we'll be trying to buy it back."

One such dependent is Mary Haywood who has been riding the train once a week for the last 60 years. "The train used to be very busy, before everybody got a car.

They tell me I'm the one who keeps it going."

According to many of the passengers, the problems are due to the non-commitment of VIA Rail to advertise the service that could do well in alignment with Victoria's tourist market and the nearing Commonwealth Games. Along with VIA's seeming lack of commitment to advertise and general disinterest in the service, other problems persist.

"VIA Rail changes the schedule constantly and never lets anyone know," Cooper said. "They just don't bother to advertise it so people are left waiting for a train that never arrives. It's unfair treatment to us and the people of the Island."

Following the 2.5 hour trip to Nanaimo, another small ceremony was held at the Nanaimo station, where NDP constituent Dave Stupich offered his support.

"The railway service is needed for both freight and people. With the highways so congested the railway could play an important role. And we can't forget the romance of railroad travel, the word does get around."

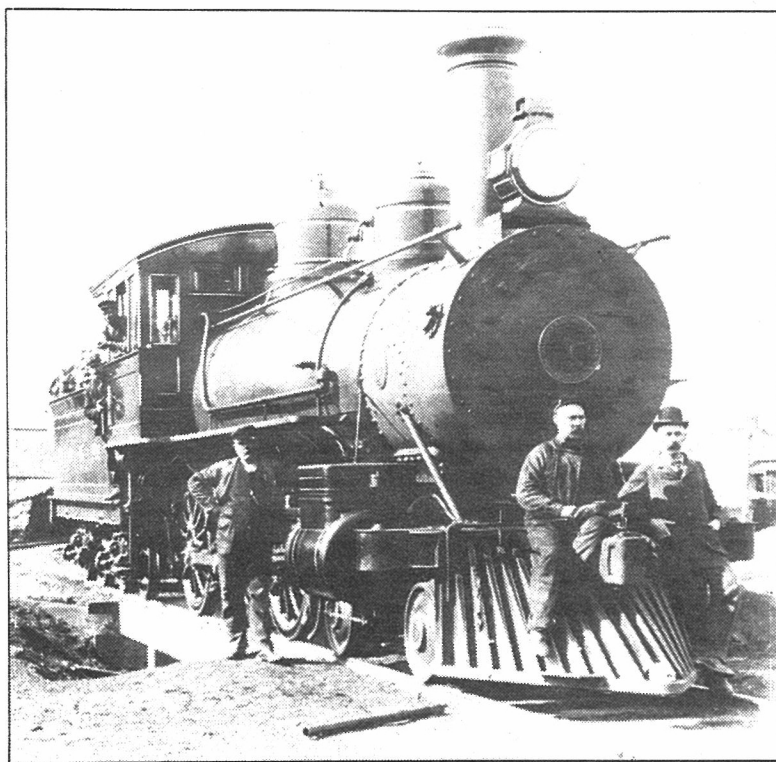
With the ceremonies over, the dayliner completed its route for another day pulling into the Victoria stop, as supporters pledged to continue the battle, in the hopes that the last waves don't mark the passing of a great train.



Engineer Frank Cooper leans out the window of the E & N train after its anniversary run last week from Victoria to Nanaimo and back.

Timothy Callin photo

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 6, 1993 ESQUIMALT NEWS



Second engine No. 1 sits over the cinder pit to have her firebox cleaned out at the E & N shops at Wellington which served the railway from 1898 to 1913 when they were moved back to Victoria.

Photo courtesy: PABC HP65730,  
The Esquimalt & Nanaimo Railway, Don MacLachlan

## E & N: that was then

On August 13, 1886, Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald drove the last spike in what is now the E & N Railway that links points on Vancouver Island.

On that auspicious day that saw Sir John A. and Lady Macdonald leave Victoria by carriage to board four miles down the line, Esquimalt and Victoria were not yet linked by rail. The historic run left Esquimalt promptly at 7:25 a.m., nearing Niagara Canyon in 54 minutes and subsequently crossing Arbutus Canyon.

It was the Dunsmuir family, headed by Robert Dunsmuir, who successfully built and operated the line during its first two decades of service. Canadian Pacific Railway bought it in 1905.

Sir John A's trip on the E & N led to the birth of Duncan. Although stations had sprung up in

Koksilah and Somenos, Duncan (as an area) was but a farm crossing. However, due to Somenos' distance from the main settled area and Koksilah's inaccessibility because of the Cowichan River (not yet bridged), "Duncan's Crossing" became the popular point of passage and gathering.

After three early settlers, W.C. Duncan, W.P. Jaynes and W.H. Lomas, organized a ceremonial gathering at this point, a station was just some hard work away.

The early years and history of the Esquimalt & Nanaimo Railway are extremely well documented and an interesting and recommended read in Donald F. MacLachlan's book, "The Esquimalt & Nanaimo Railway," from which the above information was compiled.