A Place Apart

One of this country’s earliest Loyalist settlements, Ontario’s Prince Edward County reminds us that self-reliance still flourishes in Canada

BY WYNNE THOMAS

Writing should not fall in love with their subjects. Too often it blinds the vision, adds the thinking and, alas for the reader, infects the prose. So I begin this essay with a caveat. I am an unreliable witness when it comes to describing Ontario’s Prince Edward County. I am besotted with the place.

Like many such an affair, it began as a casual thing—a brief visit, a one-daystand. I was instantly enchanted, because Prince Edward County has much to charm the transient tourist. A 1,000-square-kilometre island surrounded by the waters of eastern Lake Ontario, it offers astonishingly varied scenery, safe swimming, excellent fishing and boating, welcoming inns, decent food, outstanding pioneer architecture and some of the finest bird-watching in eastern Canada.

But these attributes merely constitute the icing on a richly layered and subtly textured cake. Today, having lived on and off in “the County” for the past eight years, I have come to recognize a more compelling and seductive pull. I have learned something of its history and heritage and discovered, in the habits and speech of its present-day inhabitants, the echoes of a Canadian way of life that has all but disappeared.

My County friends, of course, would dismiss such thoughts as pretentious rubbish. Many of them have lived there all their lives—as did their parents and grandparents before them—and, unentimenteral realists that they are, see nothing unusual in their daily round as farmers, fishermen, carpenters, butchers, bricklayers, mechanics, merchants and homesteaders.

In this they do themselves a disservice because they are a quite remarkable breed. And what sets them apart from any other group of people I know is their incredible self-reliance and resourcefulness. They are extremely adaptable, and if one job disappears they can generally find another. Fisherman turned house painter, restaurateur turned truck driver. One man grows garlic for a living, another raises llamas, yet another is a renowned reptile breeder. Masters of many trades, brilliant at improvisation, they scarcely encounter a problem in their working lives that they cannot solve through their own skills and ingenuity or with the help of friends.

If I were to find myself marooned on a desert island, my companion of choice would be my friend Roger. He is a stonemason by trade, as was his father, and one of the best there is. But he could just as easily earn a living as a carpenter, a tiler, an electrician, a horsetrainer or an animal breeder, for he is skilled in all of these pursuits.

For fun, Roger grows orchids and other exotic plants in a greenhouse he built himself. In the summer he tends a vast and immaculate garden. He owns a peacock and a peahen and breeds ornamental birds. He used to raise
pleasants and release them in the wild. He laughs derisively when I call him a naturalist, but that's what he is. He makes birdhouses of every description and nest boxes for wood ducks. He recognizes ducks in flight with ease and knows where to find bluebirds and wild turkeys and fiddleneck and wild asparagus and mushroom mushrooms.

Over the years I have turned to Roger for help in many an emergency, and he has never failed me. Other of my County acquaintances have been similarly obliging. One late fall day I happened to mention to my friend George that it was time to bestir myself and get in a winter wood supply. A couple of weeks later I found a cord of logs (a real hards cord, not one of your fancy city faced cords) neatly stacked alongside the house. I was profuse in my thanks. It was George: "It was your wood. All I did was cut down a couple of dead trees and saw them up."

It was a typical County gesture. Most people I know are unfailingly generous of their time and labour. It is not unusual for a man to spend a couple of days working at his own trade, devote the next two to helping a neighbour harvest his hay and then spend another day putting a new roof on a friend's house. Indeed, in the interdependence of its people and their mutuality of interest, much of the County's way of life today mirrors, with startling accuracy, its pioneer beginnings two centuries ago.

The first white man to see Prince Edward County was the French explorer Samuel de Champlain. In 1615, on a campaign against the Iroquois in the Mohawk Valley, he led a party of 16 French soldiers and several hundred Iroquois Indians through the Bay of Quinte into Lake Ontario, skirting the County's shoreline. "All this lovely region was uninhabited," wrote Champlain, "for its Indian population had abandoned it for fear of Iroquois raiders."

And largely uninhabited it remained until the 1700s, when permanent settlement began with the arrival of the County's first permanent settlers. These refugees from the American War of Independence, who remained loyal to the British Crown, were originally housed in camps in the Province of Quebec before being given land grants in Upper Canada.

In September 1784, some 250 settlers, including women and children, landed in the County in what is now the Township of South Marlborough, soon to be known as the County Seat. (including Benjamin Hallowell, who had been commissioner of customs at Boston during the Boston Tea Party). From all accounts they were a resilient, self-reliant people, and they needed to be. They lacked warm clothing, there were not enough tents to go around, and they subsisted on any rationing the only tool available to them - the light, short-handled ship's axe - proved woefully inadequate to the task of chopping down trees, necessary not only to clear the land but to provide lumber for log cabins and furniture.

But things were to look up. By 1792, when the County was named in honour of Prince Edward, Duke of Kent, son of King George III and father of Queen Victoria, several communities had been established and were thriving. Around the middle of the 19th century, with the ranks of the Loyalist settlers swollen by emigration from England and Ireland, the population had reached about 20,000 and business was booming.

First came the "barley days." The rich soil and dry summers of the County were particularly suited to the production of high-quality barley, a commodity much in demand in the United States for the manufacture of beer. Barley exports flourished until 1896, when the isolationists Yankees passed a bill that shut Canadian barley out of American markets.

In response, the resourceful settlers turned to two other commercial enterprises: canning and cheese-making. The County's first cannery opened in 1881, and during the next three decades the industry underwent spectacular growth. By the turn of the century there was a brisk demand for canned County fruits and vegetables - corn, peas, tomatoes, beets, apples, pumpkins, raspberries and strawberries - and by 1915 there were more than 50 canning companies in operation.

Cheese-making was a craft that many settlers had learned in New England, and they were to put their skills to good use in their new home. The County's first two cheese factories opened in 1867, the year of Confederation, and by 1874 there were as many as 2S in operation. These small-scale operations could not compete with larger centres. Canning and cheese-making were to linger for many years, but it was a losing battle.

The last cheese factory closed its doors a couple of years ago, and the lone cheese factory remains at Black River. But it's a splendid one and deservedly thrives. The County's cheese circles are famous, a Toronto friend of mine who is an aficionado in these matters and who makes regular pilgrimages to the place swears that they are the best and freshest he has ever tasted.

Today, the population of the County is scarcely more than it was a century ago. But the relative remoteness and inaccessibility that were to lead to its economic decline have also helped preserve an unmatched record of early Canadian settlement. There are parts of the County that have scarcely changed in more than 100 years; the landscape, the houses, the barns, the lovely hedgerows remain frozen in time.

More than anything else, it is the buildings that capture the County's essential character.

The pioneeers' early dwellings were temporary and insubstantial, often no more than log cabins that provided only rudimentary shelter. But with increasing wealth came the urge to build better and permanent structures, and the pioneeers were to prove themselves master builders.

They used the materials they had at hand: hardwoods such as black cherry and maple; limestone, which was in plentiful supply; fieldstone and locally made bricks. From these the settlers fashioned houses that clearly drew their inspiration from their American past - beautifully proportioned, symmetrical neoclassical structures at once functional and attractive - New England come to New Canada. Some of them are imposing even by the standards of today, but the ones that speak most poignantly to me are the simple farmhouses - of clapboard or board and batten construction for the most part - that harmonize so perfectly with their surroundings that they seem to have grown organically out of the ground itself. But I may be biased. I happen to live in one.

For me, one of the pleasures of country living has always been a heightened awareness of the progression of the seasons. To the countryside, the turning year is signified not by a succession of artificial celebrations - what a city friend of mine calls Hallmark holidays - but rather by a...
cycle of logical imperatives: ploughing, planting, harvesting, hunting, gathering wood and clearing snow. This last activity was much in evidence throughout the County during the past winter, which

had turned out to be, as in much of Canada, one of the worst on record. For nearly three months land and lake were locked together

in a single frozen mass, and everywhere in the countryside the drifted snow imposed new and alien contours on once familiar landscapes. In parts of the Big Swamp, the source of much of the County's timber, the drifts lay so deep that people were unable to cut their next winter's supply of wood. But the real snowstorm of the season, which came around the middle of March, had a less threatening look to it — "zap snow" it's called in the County — and by the end of the month the possibility of spring was in the air.

Spring in the County is always a delight. The countryside is at its best, the waters of Lake Ontario (never more than a few kilometers away wherever you are) positively sparkle, the birds are in full migration, there are wild flowers everywhere, and the deer have already begun exploring our garden in search of their first asparagus.

Summer is the time when the visitors come to bike, bicycle on unchallenged roads, camp, swim, sail, fish, sunbathe on the remarkable dunes at Sandbanks Provincial Park, browse for antiques or simply enjoy the serenity of the place. Although much of the County’s more than 500 kilometers of shoreline is privately held, there are many excellent parks on the water. Visitors are assured of a warm welcome, not only because tourism is an important industry but because hospitality is a genuine County trait rather than a Chamber of Commerce marketing ploy. Summer in the County is a very pleasant time. Even so, my personal season of choice is the fall.

Admittedly, the weather can be fickle, but the light has a mellowness to it that is somehow peculiarly suited to the County and its architecture. But also the residents begin to relax from their spring and summer labors with their own traditional forms of home-made entertainment. One of my favorite outdoor activities, the County ploughing match, was held out last year, but on the whole the land was too wet.

The most famous of these is the Picton Fair — which rivals in local popularity the even better known County Agricultural Show. One of the most spectacular events at this annual event is the

acrobatic displays of their American colonial forebears. They give a "showing" and "a-going," and "a-posing.

LOOM is pronounced "loom"; a cree a is "a."

The simple "no" becomes the far more emphatic "now." One afternoon, having registered ourselves pleasantly with the County Fair people, we found that a local photographer at Milford, one of the prettiest and most historic villages in the County, named after Milford in New York State, the original home of many of the first settlers. Last year's Milford Fair didn't disappoint. First came the parade, with bands and marching schoolchildren and clowns and antique cars and trucks and floats and horses and ponies and decorated tractors and farm machinery of all kinds and I can't remember what else. There was a canoe race on the millpond — itself a reminder of the village's beginnings as an important pioneer milling centre. And a kite-flying competition, a baby show, Ferris-wheel rides, contests of all descriptions (women's nail-driving, women's rolling-pin throwing, log-sawing for both men and women), bingo and face-painting. There were prizes for the oldest man present, the oldest woman, the largest family, the longest-married couple, the visitor from the greatest distance. The Napanee Highlanders were there and so were the members of the locally renowned Mozart Tabor Playhouse and the equally celebrated Grandpa's Good Time Band, playing on the lawn. There was a cat show, with prizes for the best long-haired cat and the best short-haired cat, and a dog show, with prizes for the best large dog and the best small dog. And yet more prizes for home-made cookies, breads, jams, pickles, sewing, knitting, quilts and embroidery.

But all of these activities were mere scene-setters for the important business of the day: deciding who had grown the season's best flowers, vegetables, fruit and grain. In the afternoon, there was a large heating and plumbing exposition. The exhibits included the usual number of commercial fishing ports, and its harbour, a calling point for steamers plying between Kingston, Orono, and Toronto, offered one of the few safe havens along the entire shore. In the fall of 1878, when a violent storm swept Lake Ontario, 64 ships anchored for shelter in this little port. Today, the visitor to the harbour will encounter but a handful of fishermen, the occasional scuba diver (the adjoining waters are littered with wrecked and perhaps one or two naturalists visiting the old lighthouse, built in 1861, which now serves as a bird observatory and banding site. But mostly it has reverted to nature. The deep woods are carpeted with wild flowers. Lines of coal mines cross the lake, Caprona terris, black-backed and herring gulls patrol the shoreline, herons flap lazily across the inner harbour and hundreds of herons in the

marts. I have seen him here and there, too, although they are uncommon on the lake. It is a haunted, haunting place.

Gentle reader, do not be beguiled into believing that Prince Edward County is an earthly paradise. Alas, it is far from that. For one thing, the County is not a Hollywood convention but a slice of rural Canadian reality. It has not escaped economic hardship, and it is as difficult to sustain a lifestyle here anywhere else. The Loy- alists were no saints (the vast majority were demobilized soldiers), and neither are their descendents. We have our share of knives and tools and sinners — and all-terrain vehicles and dirt bikes. Slowly but surely the County’s traditions are being eroded, and too much of our lovely pioneer architecture has been replaced by structures better suited to a suburban street.

And yet it remains a place apart, a place where people stand for something more than merely themselves. Anchored by history and buttressed by geography, it has maintained a sense of cohesiveness and self-determination that is rare in today’s world of shifting values and casual allegiances. It is the home of a Canada that is passing, one that we need not mourn but rather should we forget. There may be other places in Canada like Prince Edward County, but I don’t know them. For me, apart from my native Wales, it is the nicest place on Earth. But then, as I waited, I am an immovable witness. *
On the Trail of History

Once a strategic wartime project, the Canol pipeline has given rise to one of the world’s great hiking trails

By Tim Hawkings

I would like to linger on the mountain, amid the alpine meadows, the flowers and the incredible silence, but Stan is impatient to leave. Takeoff is easier than landing, and soon we are flying back through the mountains. Clouds and fog coming in from the west force us to fly low over deep canyons, barren windswept plateau and high mountain passes. We see a cove and a lamb below us, and just behind them a wolf.

This is a severe and unforgiving land; cold, dark and desolate through long winters. But for a few months in the summer the mountains come alive. Flowers spring from a thin rocky soil. Rivers race through deep canyons, caribou and grizzly bears walk the valley floors, and lambs become meals for wolves high on the mountain side.

Occasionally I catch a glimpse of the trail below – a washed-out piece of steel, a broken bridge or the red roof of an abandoned building. The Canol is more than just a hiking trail through the mountains; it is the remains of one of Canada’s first megaprojects.

The history of the Canol (derived from “Canadian Oil”) project is brief but interesting. During the Second World War, just before the Japanese occupied two of the Aleutian Islands in the northern Pacific, the United States became concerned about the vulnerability of its oil tanker routes to Alaska.

Deciding that they needed inland oil supplies, which would be safe from attack, the Canadians, with the agreement of the Canadian government, decided to build a refinery in Whitehorse. The oil, it was proposed, would come by pipeline from an oilfield of Imperial Oil at Norman Wells, 650 kilometres west of Yellowknife in the Northwest Territories. Imperial had discovered oil at Norman Wells in 1920 and operated a small refinery there, but production was limited. More oil would have to be discovered to support a pipeline.

There were other problems. At that time, constructing the 1,200-kilometre pipeline would have been a massive undertaking under the best of conditions; it would have to thread its way through some of the toughest mountainous terrain in Canada.

By the end of 1943 Imperial had drilled another 26 wells at Norman Wells and had found enough crude oil to supply the pipeline. By the following year, a small army of American engineers had managed to lay the 10-centimetre Canol pipeline through the mountains. During its one year of operation, about a million barrels of oil were pumped through to the Whitehorse refinery.

In April 1945, with the end of the war in sight, the Canol pipeline and Whitehorse refinery were closed down. The U.S. Army moved out as quickly as it had arrived, leaving a road, bridges, cabins and an assortment of abandoned equipment and vehicles. Today, half a century later, much of the road, most of the buildings and many of the vehicles remain. This is the Canol Heritage Trail.

During my travels in the North I had learned of the trail and heard the story of vehicle gravestones, wooden Aircraft hangars and abandoned pumping stations. Now, with my son and two friends, I was about to explore this legacy of the war.

The Canol has been called the toughest hiking trail in Canada. It is remote and long, and there is little support. Once on the trail, you’re on your own. I thought about this when Stan and I were flying back from making the food drop. On a remote and desolate part of the trail we came upon five hikers walking slowly down a narrow defile, one lagging behind. They waved and fired a flare, the sign of distress. Stan circled over them, but there was nowhere to land, so he radioed Norman Wells to find a helicopter to pick them up. We learned later that the hikers were from Europe and had underestimated the challenge of the trail. They were hurt, tired and short of food – they were lucky the weather had forced us to fly low.

The obstacles faced by the pipeline builders were formidable. The Mackenzie Mountains comprise several separate ranges, some rising to more than 2,500 metres, dissected by deep valleys and fast-moving rivers. The only map of the mountains in existence at the time had been made during a traverse in 1908 by a Canadian government geologist. There were few aerial photographs of the region, and only one flight had been made over the mountains to search for a pipeline route. Fortunately, the Mountain Dene, for whom the region was a traditional hunting ground, knew the country through which the pipeline was to pass, and in October 1942, a survey team, together with a small group of Dene, set out from Norman Wells to find a route for the pipeline.

Blondin, who today lives in a small community near Yellowknife, was one of the few Dene who could speak English. He joined the group as an interpreter.

Today Blondin talks vividly of the hardships of the trip and the great hurry to complete the survey. "We left in mid-October, before there was enough snow on the ground. The toboggans couldn’t run properly and wore out, the dogs’ feet got torn and bloody and the sleds, and the rivers hadn’t yet frozen and we had to make rafts to get the supplies across. The dogs were used to eating fish, but we only had cornmeal and tallow. Without their usual high-protein diet it was hard for them to pull the heavy sleds. The chief surveyor was always in a hurry and was reluctant to let us stop and hunt. Towards the end of the trip we did come across some moose and caribou – the game which we killed. In early December we arrived at Sheldon Lake with only some tea and a little moose meat left. We had to stay all winter on the other side of the mountains."

Ultimately the route suggested by the Dene, which avoided the highest mountains and the deepest valleys, was the route chosen for the pipeline. On steep mountainsides and over high, windswept plateaus in the dead of two arctic winters and during the short arctic
summer of 1943, the road crews, followed by the pipeline and camp builders, constructed the road, pipeline and telephone line, 10 pumping stations and several support camps. On February 16, 1944, the last lengths of pipe were joined together.

The pipeline's design suggests that it was not built to last. Alex Hemstock, a former Imperial engineer who completed an inventory for Imperial in the spring of 1945, found 141 leaks in the line. "The army's instructions," he says, "were to get in and out fast and not to build for the long term. The pipeline was laid on the surface of the ground, and it was not anchored. Differential freezing and thawing caused it to flex and then break."

Some travellers have seen their dream of traversing the trail fade away on the banks of a Canol river.

My son, John, who has the enthusiasm and impetuosity of youth, is always the first of us to cross a river or stream. So he is first into Trout Creek, a grey, cold, fast-flowing and malevolent river. As soon as he steps in, the river tries to knock him over. Halfway across, with a heavy pack and boots around his neck, he is still on his feet, avoiding the deep pools hidden beneath the surface, slipping and sliding on the boulders. Three quarters of the way across, with knees starting to weaken, ice is gathering from the cold. Finally he makes it to the far bank. Only then does Trout Creek give up and spit him out in disgust.

Now and then we come upon others who have taken up the challenge of the Canol trail. Canadians who have walked the West Coast Trail and are trying a new and more challenging route. Germans seeking solitude; Britons seeking adventure; Imperial employeesNorman Wells exploring the history of one of Canada's earliest and largest energy projects.

We meet Neil Fuller and Brad using six Venturer Scouts from the Duncan Point Grey district of Vancouver to canoe on a Canol, one of the hidden gems of the region. They are collecting data from pump houses and lakes, leaving empty shells of buildings and vehicles.

Except where it runs through rivers and streams and has long been washed away, the road is still distinguishable, providing hikers with access to an otherwise inaccessible region. Time has taken toll on the old road. Yellow potentials dot its surface, and in sheltered duff areas one can find brilliant pink patches of moss campion. In low-lying areas the surface is waterlogged. Alder and willow press in on the trail, leaving a narrow passage that hikers share with animals: the evidence of grizzly bears, wolves and caribou is all around.

As the road gives the trail structure, the rivers give it character. They flow hard, fast and cold. Some travellers have seen their dream of traversing the trail fade away on the banks of a Canol river.

Peter Neugebauer, the director of tourism development and marketing for the government of the Northwest Territories, is optimistic about the future of the trail. He recognizes two challenges: to improve the trail itself, making it safer without detracting from its wilderness character; and to develop an appropriate conservation plan for the buildings and artifacts.

We leave the trail during an early August storm. Snow has settled low in the mountains, the canals, and the changing colours of the land signal the end of another short Arctic summer. It is also the end of our adventure, and we feel some of the same sense of achievement as we imagine those who had struggled through the mountains 50 years ago must have felt. Our exploration will lose; theirs must surely have dwindled as they saw their efforts coming to naught.

Despite the termination of the Canol project, however, oil still plays a major role in the economic life of the region. Oil continued to be produced at Norman Wells after the pipeline closed. In 1980 Imperial drilled more wells and undertook a major expansion of its facilities there. Today the Noman Wells field produces about 35,000 barrels of oil daily. Some of it is refined on the spot to serve the needs of the North, while the remainder is carried by a modern pipeline (unlike Canol, a buried one) to southern markets.

Although fraught with difficulties and short-lived, the Canol project gave us a rich legacy: it means to traverse on foot some of the world's most magnificent wilderness country.
In the Footsteps of Sergeant Preston

A far cry from the image of yesteryear, the modern Mountie is often a member of a visible minority and a multilingual university graduate

By Marcia Kaye

"Left, right, left! Right wheel—no that way, you moron! Down and do it!"

The hapless recruit drops to the ground and does 10 quick push-ups before scurrying after the rest of his troop as it marches away in stiffly choreographed formation. Meanwhile, one recruit is consistently out of step. Another mistakenly salutes with the left hand. The drill corporal, formidable with his booming voice, threatening-looking cane and high polished boots with clanking spurs, pronounces mockingly, "Combined 82 of this troop: four points lower than plume life!"

A U.S. marine boot camp? Hardly. After drill class, driving lessons, swimming and target practice, these recruits will attend classes in forensics, the law and community policing. For this is the training academy of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in Regina.

The Mounties have long been considered one of the world's most highly disciplined and best-trained police forces. Competition to join is fierce. Last year, the force (as members like to call the RCMP) received nearly 10,000 applications—many from people with excellent credentials—but was able to accept only 250 recruits. A generation or two ago, most recruits were 19-year-old anglophone white males with a grade 11 education. Now many are multilingual, have at least some university or college training and offer more than sheer brawn.

Among this new crop of recruits are people like Donna MacLaren of Saults, P.E.I., who is bilingual, has traveled extensively and has an accounting degree. "Being a chartered accountant was too boring," says MacLaren, 25. "I want to work in commercial crime."

Or John Athumastades, 25, of Montreal, who holds a degree in economics, speaks English, French, Greek and Spanish and gave up a $41,000-a-year job in immigration to become a $31,000-a-year Mountie recruit. "I never, ever wanted to be a cop," he admits, "but the scope of RCMP work extends far beyond the bounds of traditional police work. Through the RCMP, I can serve my country by going into immigration law or foreign services."

Or Bob Archer from a small community near Lethbridge, Alta., who applied to the RCMP when he was 18 and was finally accepted last November at the age of 30. "It was worth the wait," he says. "As far as I'm concerned, the RCMP is the best police force in the world."

When Nelson Eddy, in scarlet tunic and breeches, belted out "Indian Love Call" with Jeanette MacDonald more than half a century ago, Hollywood's celluloid image of the Canadian Mountie entrenched itself in Western culture. And what an image it has been. Popularized in British and American radio serials and comic books such as Sergeant Preston of the Yukon, our tall, handsome, upright defender of the true North strong and free braved arctic squalls and frontier desperadoes and always got his man. The Mountie has been our Superman, Lone Ranger and Davy Crocket.
et rolled into one—and in a much spiffier outfit than any of them.

The aura of adventure and romance is almost tangible at the RCMP Centennial Museum in Regina, the largest police-history museum on the continent. Here you’ll find original movie posters of MacDonald and Eddy in Ross Marie, Gary Cooper in Cecil B. de Mille’s North West Mounted Police and Alan Ladd in Saskatchewan (“Actually filmed in the Canadian Rockies!” the poster declares). You’ll see the exquisitely beaded tobacco case of Sitting Bull, the Sioux chief who led his people into Canada after defeating Custer at the Battle of Little Big Horn in 1876. You’ll find the 60-year-old snowshoes of Albert Johnson, the Mad Trapper of Rat River, who ingeniously wore them backwards to confuse his pursuers. And you can’t miss a display of old products capitalizing on the Mountie image: Canadian Birchwood after-shave, Canoe Wear Tapioca; the fashion doll Canadian Barbie, complete with red serge; and posters from Labat’s British advertising campaign, offering the enticement, “Try the true taste of Canada—Malcolm the Mountie always gets his can.”

It’s enough to make you proud to be a Canadian. But it’s not enough to give you much of an idea of the RCMP today. “We’re a police force that has grown up in Canada and is almost part of the national fabric,” says Commissioner Norman Inkster, who will retire in June. “But a lot of people still see us as either a plain-clothes force or in red serge on Parliament Hill. They probably don’t fully recognize our national or international role.”

The RCMP has come a long way from its early frontier days in the northland. With almost 16,000 regular members and growing, the RCMP works with other police forces here and abroad; Commissioner Inkster is also head of the world police organization Interpol. The force can be involved in investigating everything from international drug trafficking to highway speeding to a homeowner’s complaint that a neighbor has been stealing carrots from his garden. The RCMP is Canada’s federal police force, with a jurisdiction that includes immigration, customs, counterfeiting and drug enforcement. It is also contracted by all provinces except Ontario and Quebec to serve as the provincial force. In addition, it serves as the municipal force in hundreds of communities across Canada. In the Northwest Territories and Yukon, the RCMP is the only police force.

Since the formation of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) 10 years ago, the RCMP hasn’t had the direct responsibility for the national security duties it once had. Prior to the establishment of CSIS, the RCMP handled such well-known security cases as the defection of Igor Gouzenko and the Gerda Munthe affair. Still, the force has had its share of high-profile cases in recent years. The Giant mine explosion in Yellowknife, the Wentworth mine disaster in Plymouth, N.S., and the murder of JoAnn Wilson, the former wife of the Saskatchewan MP Colin Thatcher (who was later convicted of the crime), were all investigated by the RCMP.

While the image of the tall, clean-shaven white male Mountie will soon be something of the past, the RCMP has foreign roots and has been constantly evolving. For starters, the word “Royal” was never part of the force’s original name. Back when Canada was only a few years old, Sir John A. Macdonald first conceived the idea of a mounted police force to patrol the vast expanse of western land that Canada had obtained from the Hudson’s Bay Company. In 1874 about 300 young men signed on to join the North West Mounted Police for 75 cents a day and set out with horses and wagons on a 1,300-kilometer march from Dufferin, Man., to Fort Whoop-Up in what is now Alberta (named after the Whoop-Up Bug Juice sold by American whiskey smugglers, whom the new police force was determined to apprehend).

The press proclaimed the march a victory, but the truth was the lackluster recruits suffered from mosquito attacks, starvation, disloyalty and exposure; the horses starved to death or fell during a thunderstorm. By the time the marchers struggled into Fort Whoop-Up the smugglers had long since vanished. Still, the force managed to set up police detachments and establish friendly relations with many of the native people. As Crowfoot, chief of the Blackfoot, later said, “The police have protected us as the feathers of the bird protect it from the frosts of winter.” The force’s good service eventually earned it the prefix “Royal” from the British monarch. While it has tried to live up to the high standards of the name, the force has had some inglorious moments: its pursuit of witch-hunters for the Communists and homosexuals; the various illegal wiretaps, searches and mail openings by the now defunct security service; and the 1992 suicide of Claude Sante, an RCMP inspector who at the time of his death was under investigation for selling information to criminals. Admits Lemaire: “We have a strict code of conduct, but people do get through the cracks.”

The word “Canadian” didn’t appear in the force’s name until 1920, when its operations became more national in scope. Interestingly, the force began as a mixture of borrowed traditions. It stole its motto, Mammies le droit (Mamma trusts the rule), from the militia unit of the Grand Trunk Railway; it copied its military style of training and discipline from the Royal Irish Constabulary; and it patterned its first uniform after that of the British Redcoats. In fact, the uniform that we associate with the Mounties—scarlet tunic, navy breeches, high brown boots and starched—in

**RECOGNIZED AS ONE OF THE WORLD'S BEST TRAINED POLICE FORCES, THE RCMP GRADUATES RECRUITS AT ITS REGINA ACADEMY.**

**CORPORAL BOB GALLOWS, AN INSTRUCTOR, BELIEVES DULL CLASH HELPS TRAIN OFFICERS TO REACT QUICKLY AND CALMLY.**

**FLIEN IN FOUR LANGUAGES, JOHN ATHANASIADIS, WHO HOLDS AN ECONOMICS DEGREE, NEVER IMAGINED HE'D BE "A COP."**
The chapel where Reverend Allan Hugo gives optional Sunday services is the oldest building in Regina.
An Affinity for Natural Beauty

Dedicated to healing the earth, Cornelia Oberlander is widely recognized as Canada's foremost landscape architect.

By Brian Preston

Below us in a steep ravine the stream is just visible through green tree boughs. We are getting down through a huge pane of glass, the wall of Cornelia Hahn Oberlander's airy Vancouver living room. "Isn't it gorgeous!" Oberlander says enthusiastically, her infectious energy brightening a rain-soaked morning. "Look at the rhododendrons; they are already getting ready for the spring. It's fantastic, oh!" She points to the flora outside: "These are all native trees, nothing foreign. This is the native daphne. That grey启动的 one is the maple. This is the chokecherry and this is the same species of rhododendron that you have on Vancouver Island. Those are salmonberries. And that's it. That's the garden. Don't reinvent the wheel!"

Cornelia Oberlander is widely recognized as Canada's foremost landscape architect; her artistry has been acknowledged and complemented some of the most prestigious assignments in recent Canadian architecture. Her own garden naturally fits her philosophy and working methods, and describing it allows her to display her penchant for pithy, imperative phrases: "Grow what you see." "Restore what is natural." "Use local plants and soil." "Don't reinvent the wheel!"

This vital, charming woman says she understood early in life, as early as her childhood in Germany in the 1930s, that she would be a landscape architect. "I grew up with a big garden, and my mother was a horticulturalist," she remembers. "From the time I was four years old I liked growing and flowers. At four I had a garden plot in which I could raise whatever I wanted. I usually chosed corn and peas. I liked corn and peas, and I still do." At the age of 11, while sitting for a portrait, she discovered her life's work: the backdrop in the painter's Berlin studio was, she says, "a river Rhine depicted on the wall with an imaginary town."

There were green spaces with beautiful flowers and trees. The painter informed that they were parks. When she returned home she told her mother that she wanted to "make parks" when she grew up. "My mother said, 'That's very difficult, and you will have to drive a bulldozer. And I said, 'That would be fun.'"

The young Cornelia came by her desire for challenge quite naturally. Her uncle, Kurt Hahn, was the founder of Outward Bound. Her father, an engineer, was an avid skier (tragically, he was killed by an avalanche while skiing in 1933). And her mother was, says Oberlander, "a woman of great fortitude and courage." In 1939 she removed her family from Hitler's Germany and came to the New World, settling in rural New Hampshire, where she bought some land and raised vegetables for sale. Oberlander attended Smith College as preparation for the Harvard Graduate School of Design, where she studied under the architect Walter Gropius of the Bauhaus school. "I learned there the collaborative teamwork I practise today," she says. In 1947 she became one of the first women to graduate from Harvard with a degree in landscape architecture. At a class picnic at Walden Pond she met her future husband, a student by the name of Peter Oberlander, who was also a refugee from Europe. After obtaining his degree in city planning from Harvard in 1947, Peter worked in Canada for the federal government, assessing housing from coast to coast. He arrived in Vancouver on a beautiful May day in 1949 and fell in love with the city and its setting and dreamed of returning. In 1953 the Oberlanders moved to Vancouver. Cornelia remembers "a new and beautiful country with untouched open spaces, limitless potential and challenges."

Her first commission was to landscape the grounds of a private residence not far from the University of British Columbia; she proudly informs me that 40 years later the grounds are still kept exactly to her design. "They have never changed a thing."

She herself has changed: the climate and plant life of Canada's West Coast has broadened her palette, and the rugged beauty of the natural landscape has contributed to her personal evolution into a pioneer of what she calls ecologically sound design. "What we're trying to do is heal the land. Landscape architects are looking at the land in a new way. We used to plant just what we thought would make an area beautiful, but that time is over."

She first incorporated this concept when she planned the landscape for the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia in 1976. She decided to use plants native to the region, with particular emphasis on plants of practical use to people of the traditional West Coast aboriginal cultures. "I used native grasses to make meadows," she remembers. "Right now there is a movement about to make people understand that we are wasting a lot of energy and manpower keeping our lawns neat and that meadows around buildings are very beautiful. They give refreshment to the eye and to the soul and are more connected with nature."

As the museum is mere minutes from her home, she visits periodically to take stock and make suggestions to the staff. "I've made comments like, 'Don't mow the grass until the seeds have dropped! Luckily the museum and the university have come to an understanding that they will only mow the grass once a year. Last year we had the best show of flowers ever.' Peak season is from June to September. The museum itself was designed by Arthur Erickson, who, when asked about Oberlander, says, 'I can't overemphasize the contributions Cornelia has made to my buildings. She approaches every assignment almost like a thesis project – she really does a lot of research. Her ideas of turning the forest into an ethnobotanical museum extended the museum into the landscape. It was a brilliant idea.' Erickson and Oberlander have since collaborated on a number of buildings and sites, including Robson Square in downtown Vancouver, which Oberlander characterizes as "an attempt to reintroduce the forest into the city."
Oberlander collaborated with Matsuzaki Wright Architects to bring East and West together at Ritsumeikan House, a residence at the University of British Columbia.

The grounds of the Friedman residence in Vancouver are among a number of private properties whose landscapes Oberlander has designed or renovated in Canada in 1993.

Oberlander and the greenhouse owner, Millicent McTavish, entered her 20-year-old residence in the summer of 1990 to collect seeds and cuttings for the plants. The Snapdragons Apallachian Blue were taken from the neoclassicism in Erickson's design, which turn in echo's neighboring buildings along Pennsylvania Avenue—read the works of Plichta's new seniors of design and garden of the classic villas of Rome.

Arguably, Oberlander's best-known work is the landscaping for the grounds of the National Gallery designed by Moshe Safdie and completed in 1988. Inspired by the paintings of the Group of Seven, particularly A.Y. Jackson's Tamarack Tree, Oberlander created and oversaw the installation of a living expression of the taiga, the landscape suggested in Jackson's work. The taiga is that rocky, untamed, small-treed landscape that stretches in a band all the way across the North, just south of the tundra. Oberlander exposed some of the flat rocks found under the soil and added northern plants such as iris, native grasses, red-osier dogwood and wild strawberries.

The response has been favorable: one critic commented that Oberlander's garden "gives visitors their first tactile and aesthetic understanding of the strong influence of the land on the Canadian art of the 20th century." Oberlander herself says that even the body thinks that the National Gallery grounds are just becoming mature now. It takes five years for a landscape to look somewhat nice. The plants are doing remarkably well and getting lots of care from the very good gardeners of the National Capital Commission.

At Oberlander's Vancouver home, which is also her office ('The land is very important to me, that's why I'm very happy not to have to go to an 18-stor office tower to work,' she says), we retire from the window and settle onto a comfortable couch. She pulls out some snapshots of a current project: landscaping the buildings of the new legislative assembly of the Northwest Territories, which sits on a promontory overlooking a lake near Yellowknife.

The building itself was opened to great fanfare in November 1996, but the landscaping has yet to be completed. In June, Oberlander will head to Yellowknife to supervise the planting of 20,000 plants of 10 species, all native to the site, all currently being nurtured at a greenhouse in suburban Surrey, B.C. They include hardy mounds of conifers. "Conifers are very good at that," she says. "We'll come on site and work right with the landscape." Evi Matsuzaki, a Vancouver architect, has collaborated on several projects with Oberlander.

Robson Square in Vancouver, where Oberlander's aim was to reintroduce the forest to the city, is one of a number of projects she has worked on with architect Arthur Erickson.

Collaborating with architect Moshe Safdie on Ottawa's National Gallery of Canada, Oberlander designed the interior courtyard to be a place of meditation.
Contemplating Canada

Once epitomized as "Our Lady of the Snows," Canada still remains an enigma for many Europeans

BY ALBERTO MANUEL

While visiting Upper Canada in the last years of the 18th century, the aristocratic French writer Viscount François-René de Chateaubriand found himself lost in the woods a short distance from the base of Niagara Falls. "I soon noticed," he wrote, "that all around me, daylight was slowly dying and I was able to enjoy, in complete solitude, the beautiful spectacle of night in the wastelands of the New World."

It is obvious from his writings that Chateaubriand was drawn to the New World. It is also obvious that, like most Europeans of his day, he viewed it as a wasteland. For Chateaubriand—blind to the reality of the native civilization—a vast land void of European culture could be nothing but a wasteland, no matter how spectacular it was.

This bleak and patronizing view of North America was to be held by European writers for many years. Canada, in particular, was an immense and unknown land, an undefined space that they could furnish with all kinds of qualities, desirable or otherwise, to suit their own inclinations and purposes.

Innocence was a favorite theme of some. Here was an unspoiled place—a kind of northern Garden of Eden—against which human sins could be readily perceived. Thus, Cathar- mine Parr Traill in her famous book, The Backwoods of Canada, published four years after her arrival in the country, was moved to suggest that "any sin that might contaminate this new place, or taint it with the shadow of an outcast evil, must concentrate on the person of the settler himself." In the same vein, Wilkie Collins (collaborating with Charles Dickens) found Canada to be a useful backdrop for the melodrama The Frozen Deep, against which human passions could be portrayed in all their rawness, since there was nothing in the vast white landscape to temper bare emotion.

For other 19th-century European writers, Canada was a handy place for their characters to seek, and sometimes find, spiritual redemption. In British literature of the day, certain qualities were attributed to the far-flung colonies. Australia was the land of new beginnings (Dickens's Mr. Micawber went there to "make good"); India was the land of adventure (a notion Victorian writers both encouraged and parodied).

But Canada was, to use Rudyard Kipling's phrase, "Our Lady of the Snows," a combination of virgin mother and ice queen, bestowing—at the whim of the writer—both salvation and death. Jules Verne, embracing the British myth, condemned the hero of his novel The Far Country to the Arctic, where he was to set up a Hudson's Bay Company post on what he thought was firm land but turned out to be an iceberg. The popular novelist Jack London and a number of his imitators sent their angst-ridden gold seekers and trappers to wash clean their sins in the purgatory of the Klondike. And one of the characters in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's 1893 romance The Refugees summed up the colony this way: "It is not green and peaceful and smiling, but it is grand and strong and stern like Him who made it."

Indeed, so powerful is this godlike redemptive quality of Canada that it permeates among present-day writers. In The Handmaid's Tale Margaret Atwood has her heroine attempt to escape the horrors of an American misogynist dictatorship by seeking—unsuccessfully—salvation north of the border.

To these literary images of our country—Canada as a blank page on which human frailty can be exposed or as an icy cleansing place for the soul—immigrants were to add other images. They saw Canada as a land of infinite possibilities, a place where all wishes were gratified, a land of unlimited bounties, rich and ever fruitful.

In recent years this composite cartography, depicting a huge and pristine country, montly stanch and materially wealthy, hardly seems to have altered in the European imagination. Canadians abroad complain, with justification, about the dearth of Canadian news in the foreign press, and what coverage there is usually serves to reinforce the stereotype. For example, Canadian contributions to United Nations peacekeeping efforts have tended to reaffirm the image of Canadian neutrality (Peter Ustinov once defined Toronto as "New York run by the Swiss"). And Canadian companies doing business in Europe appear to be going about it in such a modest, unobtrusive manner that when I asked at the Galerie Lafayette (Paris's megadepartment store par excellence, which prides itself in "carrying goods from the four corners of the earth") if the store had any Canadian products, I was directed, after much thought and consultation, to a delicatessen shelf displaying bottles of maple syrup.

In Britain, perhaps because the romanticized colonial ideal is still more powerful than the factual reality, the image of Canada seems to have remained largely that of a vague and valiant country cursory overshadowed by her neighbour to the south ("Canada seems like a convenient way of getting to the States," I was told by a Cambridge student doing a stint at the University of British Columbia).
Even the recent success of Canadian writers in Britain—where Canadian literature is becoming increasingly popular—has not noticeably altered these perceptions. In spite of the fact that British publishers not only acknowledge the bud but actually advertise the centre in its past few decades to understand Canada and its people better have not led to a true image of Canada among the general public. "There is a great deal of this "Canadian literature" which is held by academics and that by the public at large. Students coming to the embassy inquiring about Canadian studies are often told that there are two separate countries and that we are not two separate countries or that we are not a snowy wilderness. The only North American country many of them know is the United States.

My own experience of Canadian studies centres in Europe has been limited but encouraging. In Italy, where I was invited to lecture a couple of years ago, the centres—mostly attached to universities—seemed to be run by professors well informed and interested in learning more about Canada and its people, such as in Bologna and Venice. I found that, while much of the research on Canada never reached the general public, a number of scholars were interested in translating Canadian works, showing Canadian films, exhibiting Canadian art and mounting Canadian plays, so that, to some degree, Canadian cultural material has been transformed from one of the least accessible to one that has its roots in the creations of Michel Tremblay, Margaret Laurence and Joyce Wieland. No huge crowds attended my lectures (on the Canadian ghost story and on The Handmaid's Tale), but that, perhaps, was the fault of the lecturer’s lack of celebrity rather than a reflection of the skill of the organizers.

I had a very different experience in Argentina—where there are seven centres for Canadian studies—some years ago, when I was invited by the Canadian Embassy there to deliver several lectures. My first lecture, at what had been represented as "a Department of the Centre of Higher Studies at the University of Buenos Aires," was given in a dusty room on the second floor of a shopping mall. It was packed. I was approached by members of my family who live in Buenos Aires plus a few friends and one or two strays and the audience was predominantly made up of Argentine students. In the city of Tucumán in northwest Argentina, where a new Canadian studies centre was to be opened, was equally disastrous. A reading began that was brought to a quick close because another lecture had been scheduled for the same room. Later, at lunch, two of the presidents of Canadian centres confessed to me that they had never heard of people such as Margaret Atwood, Robertson Davies, Alice Munro and Timothy Findley.

Lucette Nobell found my Argentine experience still a little too enclosed. In Europe do good work, she says. In Sweden, for instance, the organization of the centres is superb. However, it is true, she adds, that "serious" Canadian writers and books are not shut off from the outside world, does not go beyond the walls of the university. In her study of Nobell suggests that "the Canadian studies movement must remain very cautious about looking too much inward and must avoid, at all costs, the building of narrow circles. That, along with personal power plays, will only diminish the credibility of the movement and tarnish its reputation. Perhaps more than ever before, the Canadian studies centre must move forward and take on more active roles in the wider parliaments of Canada."

The American writer Jorge Luis Borges observed that "Canada is so far away that it hardly exists." If we are a myth, we are a vague and distant one. Is a stronger myth of Canada likely to replace one of Chateaubriand so recently embraced two centuries ago? Possibly. Whether they are prompted in part at least by the critical toasts at the Canadian centres or voluntarily promoted by private enthusiasts far from academic life, in this main Canadian artists, film makers and writers who are adding a much needed texture to the bland adjective "Canadian." In film, the works of Denis Arcand and Atom Egoyan are dispelling the notion that Canada is now only the land of the French presses and the "broaden the support of Canadian studies." That way, perhaps, the old myth might surrender to a bolder, more complex image of our country. Barely 10 years ago, the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges observed that "Canada is so far away that it hardly exists." If we are a myth, we are a vague and distant one. Is a stronger myth of Canada likely to replace the one Chateaubriand so recently embraced two centuries ago? Possibly. Whether they are prompted in part at least by the critical toasts at the Canadian centres or voluntarily promoted by private enthusiasts far from academic life, in this main Canadian artists, film makers and writers who are adding a much needed texture to the bland adjective "Canadian." In film, the works of Denis Arcand and Atom Egoyan are dispelling the notion that Canada is now only the land of the French presses and the...
Planning for Tomorrow

Even in these days of reduced workforces, Imperial continues to recruit talented graduates in its effort to build a strong management team for the future

By Russell Felton

IT WAS DECEMBER 6, 1960. A CHILLY MORNING in Calgary. A young man, 25 years old, married just a few months earlier and fresh from completing his master's degree in chemical engineering at Queen's University in Kingston, Ont., reported for his first day of work at the offices of Imperial Oil. There he would be assigned to the production department, which was responsible for developing the company's reserves of crude oil and natural gas. The young man was not unfamiliar with the oil industry or Imperial. Two years earlier he'd spent the summer working for the company in Calgary and during the previous summer had worked on pipeline construction projects in Saskatchewan—one of the attractions of that job being that it allowed him to spend the summer near his parents' home in Estevan, in the southeastern corner of that province.

The offer of permanent employment with Imperial, which had arrived unsolicited in the summer of 1960, had similarly held out the prospect of returning west, this time with his bride, who hailed from Victoria. "That was a major factor," he recalls today. "To be honest, at that point I had no real idea how I'd spend my working life. At that time my inclination was basically towards the academic aspects of science—chemistry and physics—rather than its practical application in, say, a chemical plant or a petroleum refinery. If Imperial hadn't offered me the job in the West, I might well have ended up with an academic career."

If a geographical preference seems like a somewhat unsurprising reason for choosing an employer, it's probably representative of the logic that drives many people at that time in their lives. In any case, it's safe to assume that the young man was not to regret having been recruited by Imperial. His name is Bob Peterson, and today he is the company's chairman and chief executive officer.

A prime responsibility of those who manage an organization is to ensure its long-term survival—in financial and operating terms, of course, but also in terms of its ability to renew and revitalize itself continually. Markets develop. Technologies evolve. Approaches to doing business and managing an enterprise and its operations change, as do the attitudes, aspirations and knowledge of the people who make up the organization or who buy the company's products and services. Companies that are able to adapt to such changes tend to survive and grow. Companies that fail to adapt tend to stagnate and be overtaken, either by their competitors or simply by "the times."

An essential element in this process of continual renewal is the systematic introduction of new people into the organization—"fresh blood," so to speak.

Imperial has traditionally renewed itself in this sense primarily by recruiting graduates of Canadian universities and colleges, and Bob Peterson and his senior management colleagues remain committed to this approach. In recent years Imperial has reduced the size of its workforce by about 35 percent, from around 15,000 following its 1989 merger with Texaco Canada Inc. to around 9,000 today. Yet the company has continued to hire new graduates. And while only 12 were hired in 1992, campus recruiting was restored to a more traditional level in 1993, with more than 65 new graduates joining the company. Another 75 or so graduates will be hired this year.

One of those hired in 1993 was Neil FitzGerald, now a programmer-analyst with Imperial's information services department in Toronto. Like Peterson, FitzGerald was recruited from Queen's, where he earned an honours degree in computer science and economics, and, interestingly enough, geography was a factor in his decision, too. "I'm a Toronto native and wanted to work in the city if I could, so the offer from Imperial was well come," he says. "Beyond that, Imperial is a strong, solid Canadian company with an excellent reputation as an employer. I was confident I'd get the combination of training, work experience and opportunity I was looking for."

Bob Peterson says that Imperial will continue to hire new graduates each year, at about half the rate of natural attrition. "In normal times we'd expect to lose around 150 management and professional people each year through retirements and resignations, and we endeavour to replace about half of those people with new recruits," he says. "We believe it's important to maintain a balanced mix of youth and experience in the company. If we don't maintain that balance, then sooner or later we'll find that we don't have people with the right experience for the management positions that become available, and that could put the business at risk."

"It has always been Imperial's preference to develop and promote people from within the company rather than to hire people for many recent roles from outside the company," says Brian Daly, manager of employee development systems in Imperial's human resources department. "In order to do that, the company must continually hire high-quality graduates with management potential and to that end spends about three quarters of a million dollars a year on its recruitment programme."

Since Imperial's needs are mainly for graduates in engineering, in business disciplines such as commerce, accounting and economics and in computer science, its recruiting team tends to focus its efforts on a core group of about 20 French and English speaking institutions across Canada with strong records of producing high-quality graduates in those fields. "We don't limit ourselves entirely to the core schools," says Daly. "In fact, we want to reach a greater number of small and medium sized universities and colleges, providing they can demonstrate they have high quality programmes. But it makes sense to focus on the most fertile ground, so to speak."

Jodi Wagner, a human resources adviser at Imperial's headquarters in Toronto, graduated in 1991 with a bachelor of arts degree in communications studies and psychology from Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ont., which is not currently one of the core schools, although it is a highly respected university. "I applied to Imperial through the campus career placement centre and was interviewed three or four times before being offered a job," she recalls. "I was delighted to
join Imperial because it’s a big company that provides a full range of human resources services, with lots of challenges and opportunities for the HR professional.

It has always been Imperial’s policy to hire the best in terms of academic performance. Says Daly: “Only in exceptional cases will Imperial offer a job to a student who does not graduate in the top 25 percent of his or her class. Only within that standard do other attributes and accomplishments come into play.”

Maintaining close connections with the core universities helps to identify the most promising undergraduate candidates for summer employment with Imperial and also for cooperative and internship programmes. In a cooperative programme, the student spends one term of an academic year in full-time employment with a company. Under an internship programme, a relatively new concept in Canada that is now being tested at Imperial, students take a year off school to work full time for the company and then complete their education.

Such programmes give both companies and students an excellent opportunity to assess each other. They also provide a means for companies such as Imperial to support Canada’s educational system. In 1993, nine of the new graduates hired by Imperial had previously worked for the company as summer students or participated in a cooperative programme or both. And since the successful candidates had been identified during their work term rather than through extensive interviews, the cost of recruiting them was significantly lower ($600 per graduate, compared with more than $10,000 per graduate hired without previous work experience with the company).

Virginia Jung, a marketing programmes coordinator with the lubricants and specialty products group in Imperial’s products division, spent the summer of 1988 as a business analyst with the company while studying for her bachelor’s degree in industrial engineering at the University of Toronto. “I really enjoyed the experience and came out of it knowing I wanted a career with Imperial,” she says. The feeling was mutual. When she applied to Imperial through the campus placement office in 1988, her supervisor from the previous summer was able to recommend her for the job.

Nina Nielsen, a chemical engineering graduate of McMaster University in Hamilton, Ont., spent the summer of 1987 working in the inspection laboratory of Esso Chemical Canada—now part of Imperial’s products and chemicals division—and after graduation in 1989 joined Imperial as a process design engineer. She is now working at Imperial’s refinery in Nanticoke, Ont., with responsibility for the facility’s catalytic cracking unit.

Imperial’s Calgary-based resources division regularly hires graduates who have had previous experience with the company, to the extent that more than 70 current employees spent time working with the company as students. One of them is Garrett Ulmer, a mechanical engineering graduate of the University of Victoria. Through the university’s cooperative work programme, Ulmer spent a four-month period with Imperial’s oil and gas producing operations inJudith Creek, B.C., before joining the company permanently in Calgary in May 1993.

Another is Terry Anderson, a petroleum engineer who graduated from the University of Wyoming in December 1993 and was hired by Imperial’s resources division in February 1994. Anderson spent four summers in field work with the company, gaining practical experience at various oil and gas production plants in Alberta.

For most students, however, the recruitment process begins when Imperial posts notices of employment opportunities at campus placement centres. Applicants are initially screened for academic performance, and those who meet the standards are invited to a first interview, usually conducted on campus by one of Imperial’s business managers who have received training in interviewing.

“In the first interview we try to assess the individual in seven areas,” says Anne Hardacre, formerly Imperial’s recruitment and staffing coordinator, who was herself recruited from university in 1991. “These are an ability to learn, basic business literacy, skills in thinking, communicating, self-management, an ability to work effectively in a group or team, and leadership qualities.”

Candidates who meet the company’s standards in these areas are invited to at least two and often three or four follow-up interviews with senior line or department managers before a job offer is made. In 1993 Imperial received 2,100 job applications from graduating students. About 500 of the students were granted a first interview, about 120 were invited to further interviews, and 90 were offered employment, with 66 accepting.

Identifying, recruiting and hiring high-quality graduates is one challenge. Keeping them is another, and in this respect Imperial’s record is mixed. About half of the new graduates hired to leave the company within five years, and on average, about seven out of 10 leave within 10 years. While this attrition rate is about average for Canadian business as a whole, it is a matter of concern for Imperial, which prefers to hire people for their whole career and develop them to their full potential.

“It’s an issue we’re trying to address,” says Bruce Orr, manager of management development in Imperial’s products division, who with his colleague Maureen Bradbury is currently involved in a general review of the company’s employee development processes. “Obviously some people aren’t suited temperamentally to spend their careers in a large and diverse corporation like Imperial, where the performance standards are high and there’s lots of competition for advancement, so they move on. Also, since Imperial hires the cream of each year’s graduating crop, some of them are likely to be attracted away by other employers, especially if they gain valuable work experience.

“From the company’s viewpoint, however, it’s disappointing to have gone through the expensive process of recruiting and training people only to have them leave when they’re just about to become fully productive professionals,” says Orr. “We need to do more to provide these young people not only with sound training and work experience but with clearly defined career paths.”

One recent initiative has been to study the attitudes of today’s university students regarding their future careers in general and a potential career with Imperial in particular. Research, completed in 1991, suggests that while most students approach their first job as an entry into sustained employment, many of them admit to some uncertainty as to whether they will remain with that job for more than a few years. The research report notes that students have specific expectations of what they want the first job to entail: valuable experience in a stable, solid, open environment and work that is project oriented, that provides a direct and meaningful springboard to a career. It also notes that many students expect to change jobs or even companies after a few years.

Anne Hardacre agrees with this assessment. “Graduating students are much more interested in the immediate job than the career it might lead to,” she says. “This is why the notices we post in campus placement centres are for specific positions and include such details as location, duties and terms of employment to be performed and qualifications required. It’s not enough just to announce that Imperial is looking to hire so many chemical engineers, so many graduates with MBAs and so
The other day my dog and I were wandering along a path that meanders through the Don Valley, a swath of tranquil wilderness in the heart of Toronto. We are usually late to this day, and as Chodimondly sniffed this and that and my mind turned to thoughts of summer vacations. I love vacations, all kinds, but to me there is something singularly pleasant about summer vacations. They seem more carefree than other holidays, perhaps because for many of us they don’t involve rushing off to catch a flight to some distant country but travelling the byways of this land.

I have had many such holidays — my parents held fast to the belief that one should explore one’s own country before venturing off to others. My first Canadian holiday took place when I was 13. Newly arrived in Canada, my parents, brother and I drove from our home in southwestern Ontario across the northern shore of Lake Superior to Winnipeg. We then spent two glorious weeks in a tent on West Hawk Lake, which sits in Manitoba near the Ontario border. The cottage was on a bay high above the lake, and with it came an aluminum boat. I learned to start the motor and steer the vessel and soon was allowed to take it alone to the nearby marina, where I’d buy a newspaper, bread and milk. It was my morning occupation, and I loved my newfound freedom. I revelled in the beauty of the lake — the plangent pine-clad shores, the rocky outcrops, the small islands, the smell — and the consistently warm days, a completely new experience for a child used to holidaying in England and North Wales.

And of course, there is the chance that in this year’s crop of graduates, or next year’s, a young person will join Imperial — perhaps for life in the industry or in Canadian business in the general region. But that’s not necessarily a bad thing, and it’s a trade-off we’re willing to make, with good reason.

The day we set off for Montreal and Quebec City. We lingered over late breakfasts in small cafes and walked cobblestone streets, learning something of the history of these cities. We drove north from Quebec City to Lac St-Jean and then returned to Montreal and drove north through La Vérendrye Park to Val-D’Or, stopping along the way to amble through small picturesque villages with graceful stone churches. The countryside seemed wild and exciting, and for the first time it dawned on me how vast and sparsely populated this new country of ours was. We crossed into Ontario and stayed near Larder Lake, where on night we heard wolves call.

But we were only warming up for greater adventures. The next summer we headed west, driving across the Prairies and through the mountains to Vancouver and then crossing to Vancouver Island. We had a month in which to make this trip and stepped wherever and whenever we pleased. I remember picnicking beneath the wide Prairie sky near a slough in Saskatchewan where we watched white pelicans soar and dive. We spent a couple of days wandering the mountain trails near Banff, Alta., and listened to my father tell us of crossing the country by rail during the war — he had come to Canada to train as a pilot and fell in love with the place. We drove across the Rockies with our silver bullet of a trailer following behind. We parked it at the Harrison Hot Springs Hotel, where we checked in for a night or two so we could enjoy the hot springs. I loved the ferry crossing from Vancouver to Victoria and remember well the serenity I felt as we passed through the Gulf Islands: one slightly misty summer morning, but my fondest memory of that trip is of a spot by a narrow river beneath a towering mountain. I cannot help remembering that peaceful spot, the river running calmly by, the mountain majestic above us.

I have travelled with my husband along the Gaspé and to Newfoundland, where we jogged for cod near the spectacular fjords off the island’s west coast and the cod's tangerine one rainy evening near Port aux Basques. We have camped by the sea near Cavendish on Prince Edward Island and eaten lobster and lemon merinque pie in church hall not far away in St. Ann. We’ve bought snow crab from a fisherman in Néls Harbour on Cape Breton Island and cooked them on our Coleman stove on a windswept beach near Chéticamp, eating our fill with lots of melted butter, fresh bread and a cheap bottle of chablis. And we’ve had tea on the terrace of the Algonquin Hotel in St. Andrews, N.B., and walked along the village’s charming streets to the tidal flats of the mighty Bay of Fundy.

As I sauntered back along the Don Valley, my mind turned to the future. I have young children of my own now and dream of the adventures we shall share. I like to think we’ll see the wild horses of Saltue Island and travel the Dempster Highway, cycle around Prince Edward Island and explore the Queen Charlotte Islands, sail through the Inside Passage and visit the Ballards of Alberta. I cannot help to show them off or even most of this splendid country, but I hope to what their appetites as my parents whetted mine. — Sarah Lansley