



**Jasper-Yellowhead  
Museum & Archives**

## Trains

Last month several Jasper-Yellowhead Museum & Archives staff members followed Arvon Hilworth on a fieldtrip out to Lake Edith. We spent an enjoyable hour tracing the route of a model railway that wound its way through the trees and along

the shore of the lake in the 1930s. Built by Dr. William Rowan, a University of Alberta zoologist, traces of the old tunnel and mountain remain to this day.

The line of the Lake Edith Railway was laid out in modified cloverleaf design winding over tree roots where it travelled across bridges to prevent the swaying trees from derailing the train. What appears today to be a pile of rocks was in fact Mount Oliver which the train skirted on a narrow ledge. A reservoir at its summit fed a waterfall that poured into Lake Sylvia below. In the centre of the layout was a twenty foot tunnel and a trestle bridging a coulee. The track was made by slotting creosoted ties, fastening them on long boards and slipping the strap-rail track into the slots. It took weeks for the Rowan family to finish the surveying, smooth the grade and lay down the track. There was even a ceremony when Mr. F.G. Roe of the Canadian National Railway drove the last spike.

The trains used were two live O gauge steam locomotives and two clockwork engines. The clockwork ones were less efficient as they were not able to make it around the large layout without being rewound. The passenger cars were homemade following CNR prototype and painted a rich green with black piping. Each car was equipped with an electric light powered by a battery in the express car. An article in a 1939 issue of *The Model Railroader* noted that the best time to watch the railroad in action was at night. It must have been a magical event for the children of Lake Edith watching the little steam train labour up the long grade and disappear into the tunnel.

The *Model railroader* article also mentioned the hazards of wildlife wandering through the set up. Imagine a bear or even a stray horse stepping on the track! We noted that wire mesh was still wrapped around several trees possibly to discourage beavers from wrecking havoc with the layout. Other than one Douglas fir falling across the tracks, most of the derailments were caused by twigs and pinecones dropped by squirrels.

While the plans for this railway are part of the William Rowan fond at the University of Alberta Archives, it's not known what happened to the tracks and trains. John McLay remembers walking through Westmount Shopping Centre in the 1960's and seeing them for sale in an antique show. Who knows where they ended up? Perhaps Dr. Rowan's Lake Edith Railway will be featured on the Antiques Road Show or on eBay and once again be resurrected in Jasper.