

GHOST ROADS OF TEXADA

A sudden change of terrain beneath the feet or a piece of pavement that mysteriously disappears into the forest - these are clues that you may be on the edge of one of Texada's long-ago roads - a "ghost road".

Cruising along at 80 km/h between Van Anda and Gillies Bay today, one can easily forget that this speedy commute was once the stuff of adventure and would take the better part of a day. The first challenge was the sharp right angle turn onto the old one-lane wooden bridge which once spanned the backwater at the foot of Priest Lake hill. Sections of the timbers can still be seen today.

Mud holes and rocky terrain hampered early travellers as well. Those making it as far as the double-S bend at Andy the egg man's Corner (Zaikow's historical log cabin) next faced the swampy meadow which often flooded. Even after a proper road following the old horse trail was pushed through, clouds of dust from the limerock road bed reduced visibility in sections to near zero. The mossy bluffs of Cranby Lake were a welcome sign that the cross-island expedition was almost over.

Texada's original main artery - Central (High) Road - connected the farms of "Snoose Valley" and "Upper Gillies Bay" with the supply town of Van Anda. Horse teams approaching Van Anda would rest and drink from a spring near the "Slow Farm" before attempting the arduous uphill pull past Imperial's gate. Today's gravel road was upgraded in constructing the LNG line in 1990, but one can imagine the many original swampy sections that often became impassable, even with planks laid across.

A popular hiking path reveals another "ghost road" - School Road - which connected the Gillies Bay District School (1910 - 1928) servicing the "Upper Gillies Bay" farm community with the head of Gillies Bay. One can imagine leaving the sunny, open fields of the High Road and entering the cool, dark, lofty forest past mossy bluffs to emerge downhill (near the present ball field) at the beautiful tidal sandflats.

Yes, there are other "ghost roads" - for example, the original Iron Mine Road built in 1893 for \$350 which connected Kirk Lake, Surprise Mountain and the mine. Hand-piled rock retaining walls can still be seen in places. Paxton Road (now a path) connected Paxton Mine to the Oasis community centered around the Marshall School (1912 - 1924). Finally, let's remember the old Blubber Bay Road which zig-zagged past arbutus trees, farm fences and grassy meadows - now quarried.

Remains of more "ghost roads" of Texada can still be discovered and remind us of the days when island travel was more of a hardship.

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