

RIDEAU CONTRACTORS

The Rideau has recently seen significant infrastructure work to rehabilitate many locks and dams on the Rideau Canal that have been allowed to deteriorate over the years. This work has been done by contractors with their work supervised by government engineers. This is how the Rideau was originally built, the work done by contractors supervised by government engineers, British Royal Engineers. The decision to build the Rideau Canal using contractors was made before Lt. Colonel John By was appointed the Superintending Engineer for the project.

In 1825, the Duke of Wellington, who at that time was the Master General of Ordnance, tasked Royal Engineer Major General James Carmichael Smyth with investigating the defense of Canada. Wellington was a strong proponent of the Rideau Canal and Smyth's report confirmed the Rideau Canal as a critical component of Canada's military defense. Smyth left three main legacies – his report confirmed the need for a Rideau Canal; he put forward an unrealistic low estimate of £169,000 to build the canal (based on surveyor Samuel Clowes' estimates), and he recommended the canal be built by contractors. In March 1826 Smyth wrote a memorandum to General Mann (Inspector-General of Fortifications) which read in part, *"I am of the opinion that it will be found more economical and more expeditious to execute the greatest part, if not the whole, of the proposed Rideau Canal by contract ..."*

At that time the Grenville Canal (Ottawa River) was being built by the Royal Staff Corps (a military engineering branch of the British Army) who were directly supervising the hundreds of French-Canadian and Irish labourers who were building that canal. But the Rideau would be different, it would be the contractors responsible for the construction, hiring their own crews and building the locks and dams to the specifications of the Royal Engineers. A number of checks were put in place to mitigate anticipated problems. Colonel By insisted that no contractor be given more work than he was capable of completing in a two year period. So he divided the canal construction into 23 sections, ranging in length from 1 ¾ miles to 29 ¼ miles (3 km to 47 km), each with its own contractor. Royal Engineers were stationed along the line of the canal to directly supervise the work. To avoid potential labour issues, the Commissariat (supply and services division) made it a requirement that workers be paid in cash (silver coins) and that contractors would not be paid unless it was confirmed their labourers had been paid.

The financing of the project, by yearly Parliamentary grants, didn't work well with a contracted job. You can't simply start and stop contracted work and so By's superiors in Ordnance instructed him to do the work needed to build the canal, regardless of the



Jones Falls—1831 and Today

The painting shows the construction camp for the locks at Jones Falls built by contractor John Redpath to house and feed the tradesmen and labourers. Bottom is that same location today with the 1843 Blacksmith's Shop on the site. Parks Canada has never done any research or archaeological work here, so we don't know much about the original camp other than the 1831 painting. "Bason & Upper Lock at Jones' Falls; from the East Upper end of 3rd Lock. Works nearly completed", by Thomas Burrowes, October 1831. Archives of Ontario, C 1-0-0-0-55. Photo by Ken Watson.

**Parks Canada's Highly
Flawed Rideau Canal Draft
Management Plan.
See inside.**

Friends of the Rideau is a volunteer, non-profit organization, working to enhance and conserve the heritage and charm of the Rideau Canal.

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Parliamentary grants. This was to lead to troubles for By and his legacy. By's lobby for larger locks also caused him problems. Smyth recommended locks 108 feet long by 20 feet wide with a depth of 5 feet. Colonel By, anticipating the military steamboats of the day, lobbied for the locks to be 150 feet long by 50 feet wide by 10 feet deep (he later modified the depth to 5 feet to make his proposal more saleable). In early 1828, a commission was set up under Lt. General Sir James Kempt to investigate the issue. In June 1828 it recommended the locks be 134 feet long by 33 feet wide by 5 feet deep. Existing work on the smaller size locks had to be torn down, re-engineered and rebuilt.

The contractors themselves had mixed backgrounds. Colonel By noted *"the Dam at the Hog's Back and that at Smith's Falls were the first commenced; at which time there was not a man in the country that had ever done any key [stone] work, and I had repeatedly to pull down their work until they understood it, but as there are now plenty of men who understand this work I hope all my other Dams will stand the test of ages."* While perhaps true in terms of dam building, he did have a few contractors who were very familiar with stone work. Two of those, John Redpath and Thomas McKay, are well known today since they went on to become businessmen of prominence in Montreal and Ottawa. Another two, Andrew White and Thomas Phillips, while lesser known today, were also skilled at masonry. All had prior masonry experience in Montreal. But there were a host of contractors whose names are not familiar to most today, such as Donald McLever (Davis Lock), Edward Thompson (Kilmarnock) and A.C. Stevens (Merrickville and Nicholsons). In fact with the latter, we (I) don't even know his first name (if someone does please send me an email).

Colonel By fired at least one contractor, James Clowes, who was contracted for Clowes dam and lock. By stated *"contracted for by Mr. James Clowes who has cut a large quantity of good stone for the Locks, and commenced the Dam, but in so unworkmanlike a manner, that I broke his contract on the 13th Instant [January 1828], Capt. Savage, Capt. Victor & myself being of the opinion he had not ability to conduct such a work."*

About half the contractors made good money, the other half quit or went bankrupt – in part due to the

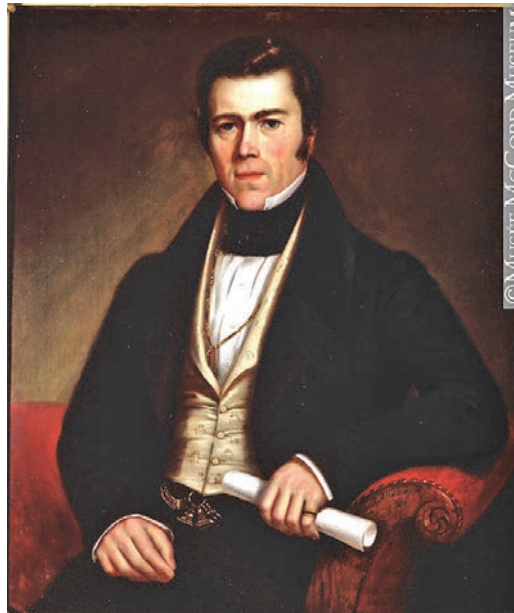
difficulty of the site they were working on, but mostly due to their skills, or lack thereof, as good project managers and businessmen. William Hartwell at Newboro asked to be released from his contract due to difficulties with the hard bedrock and problems with malaria at that site. Walter Fenlon, who most famously was the contractor for Hogs Back, begged to be released from his contract after the dam he was building there got washed away, twice. On June 18, 1828, he wrote to Colonel By: *"I find that I cannot possibly continue the Work at the prices that I am at present getting according to my Contract and I am the looser [sic] to a great amount on what I*

have already done. My humble prayer at this time, is, that Government would take the job and release me from all claims on the Contract. I trust I shall be allowed an estimate on what I have done in preparation for carrying on the work, and my losses I submit to the Consideration and discretion of the Commanding Officer."

At least two contractors died on the job. Samuel Clowes (who surveyed the Rideau in 1823 & 24) at Lower Brewers and John Sheriff at Chaffeys both died, reportedly from malaria. A few contractors went bankrupt, such as John Brewer at Upper Brewers who fled to the U.S. in 1831 with, as the story goes, "his creditors at his heels." Some did better than expected, such as Robert Drummond the contractor for Kingston Mills, who was a very savvy businessman. He took over the job at Lower Brewers in late 1828 after Clowes died, he took over Upper Brewers in 1831 after John Brewer left (at a price 40% higher than what John Brewer had contracted the job for) and he also took over the work at Davis Lock after McLever went bankrupt in 1829, forming a partnership with the remaining contractor at Chaffeys, John G. Haggart (Sheriff's partner).

The story of the contractors is a complicated one that has never been fully told. For those interested, you will find the names of the contractors, plus transcripts of two Rideau contracts (Fenlon's contract for Hogs Back and Rykert, Simpson & Adams' contract for Smiths Falls) in the book *"A History of the Rideau Lockstations"* published by Friends of the Rideau.

- Ken W. Watson



John Redpath in 1836

Perhaps most famously known as the founder of Redpath Sugar in Montreal, Redpath was a skilled masonry contractor. In a December 1831 letter, he expressed some regret at having taken the job due to the problems with malaria at the site (he came down with it 3 times). But in 1834, he moved his family to Jones Falls (where his sister was still living) as a healthier place than Montreal due to the cholera outbreak that killed his wife. Painting by Antoine Plamondon, 1836. Gifted to McGill by Miss Jean Bovey and held by the McCord Museum in Montreal.

The Depot

After a prolonged closure, due to both COVID 19 and the complexity of the work required, The Depot, Friends of the Rideau's visitor centre in Merrickville, will re-open in mid-June.

The need for restoration work on the building had been evident for some time, and the project was included in the capital funding announcement made by the government in 2016. Under the expert supervision of Al Smollett and his skilled team of carpenters from Parks Canada, the building received a new foundation, a new floor, repaired structural beams, brand spanking new washrooms, restored exterior wall panels and landscaping so that water runs away from the structure, rather than pooling under it.

As this article is written, we are about to re-install the interior displays and prepare to re-open in mid-June. Do come and visit us. Mindful of COVID 19, we will have the correct protocols in place to ensure you have a safe experience. We look forward to seeing you this summer.



Depot Restoration

A unique style building, the Depot was one of Parks Canada's heritage structures on the Rideau Canal noted in the 2012 National Asset Review as being in poor condition and in need of restoration. That work has been on-going for the last two years. The photo shows what it looked in 2020 as work was paused due to COVID. It should be all set to go for the 2021 season and hopefully many seasons beyond.

For the history of The Depot, see our Fall/Winter 2019 newsletter on www.rideaufriends.com

Membership

With the loss of revenue for our normal sales at summer events it's more important than ever that you renew your membership. A form has been included if a renewal is needed – please renew now.

For anyone reading this newsletter who is not a member, please consider joining us. You'll find membership information on our website. Thank-you.

Message from the Chair

Dear Friends,

All of us on the Board of Friends of the Rideau send our best wishes during these difficult times and hope that you have been able to at least start the vaccination process.

As you will see in other articles in this newsletter, Board members have been active on a number of issues over the winter. There have been several opportunities to take part in discussions with partner community-based organizations on the future management of the Rideau Canal. I hope I'm not being overly optimistic in saying that it is encouraging to see how the core objectives of Friends – sustainable management of the Rideau Canal, respecting commemorative integrity, and protecting its heritage character, are shared by many sister groups. The work to ensure that the managers of the Canal follow best practices in overseeing and operating the Rideau remains a challenge, and I encourage you to make your views known to Parks Canada and to the Minister of the Environment, Jonathan Wilkinson.

It has been so heartening to travel along the Rideau Waterway in recent weeks and observe the Canal becoming active for another season. It is such a source of pride to know that the Rideau is the oldest continuously operating canal in North America. There is of course the spectacular sight of the tulips along the Canal in downtown Ottawa which I am able to visit daily, but also the charm and tranquility of Nicholson's Locks, Davis Lock and Edmunds Lock, to name but a few. During the COVID 19 era, visiting the Rideau Canal offers us the opportunity to get outside and enjoy fresh air and our heritage – responsibly distanced of course.

As always, I invite you to visit us at The Depot in Merrickville and see our new and improved – well, restored – Friend's of the Rideau's visitor centre (see separate article.) We welcome your feedback on issues of concern you think we should be working on. And of course should you feel like volunteering with Friends, you are very welcome.

- Hunter McGill



The Depot Interior—pre-COVID

Come by this summer and see what it looks like now

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

I was shocked to read about the passing of John Bonser, but pleased to see that Rideau Reflections has recognized his achievements in promoting the recognition of the Rideau Canada as a World Heritage Site and his support for the production of the first Rideau Canal management plan. What is not known is that John deserves yet another plaudit for making possible the publication of the Parks Canada book, *Building the Rideau Canal, A Pictorial History* (May 1982).

During the fall of 1981, I was assigned to write a well-illustrated popular history of the Rideau Canal as a contribution by Parks Canada to the Rideau Canal sesquicentennial celebrations of the coming summer of 1982. In the New Year, while the book manuscript was being formatted by Parks Canada for publication, the project was stopped. The sesquicentennial committee, which Parks Canada had funded to plan and oversee events celebrating the Rideau Canal, announced that there was no money in their budget to publish the proposed Rideau Canal book. However, weeks later, it was announced that monies had been found to publish the book, and that an agreement was being worked out with a publisher, Fitzhenry & Whiteside, for a co-publication. The source of the 'found money' was not revealed.

At the last Friends of the Rideau AGM meeting that I attended in 2018, I spoke with John Bonser. He mentioned that it was Ontario Region that had come up with the money required to publish the Rideau Canal book. In sum, if it hadn't been for the personal interest of John Bonser in the Rideau Canal sesquicentennial book project, the *Building the Rideau Canal* book would never have been published. Hence, a debt of gratitude is owed to John, by myself and everyone who has ever enjoyed reading *Building the Rideau Canal, A Pictorial History*.

Robert W. Passfield

Ed Note: Friends of the Rideau reprinted Pictorial History in 2003 and we still have copies available for sale at the Depot.

2021 Hours of Operation

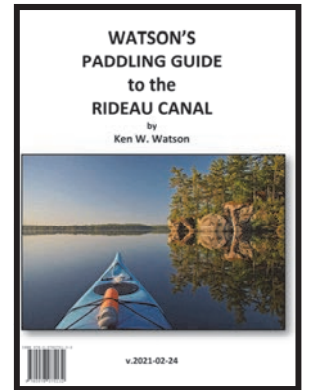
| Dates | Days | Hours |
|-------------------|----------------------|---------------|
| May 28 — June 17 | Mon to Thurs | 10 am to 4 pm |
| | Fri to Sun, holidays | 9 am to 7 pm |
| June 18 – Sept. 6 | Mon to Thurs | 9 am to 6 pm |
| | Fri to Sun, holidays | 9 am to 7 pm |
| Sept. 7 — Oct. 11 | Mon to Friday | 10 am to 4 pm |
| | Sat to Sun, holidays | 9 am to 5 pm |

A REMINDER

Just a reminder that we have the latest 2021 version of Watson's Paddling Guide to the Rideau Canal available as a free download from our website.

Of note, while geared to the paddler, it is a useful guide to the Rideau for any boater. And it's free!

www.rideaufriends.com



Boat Trailing

A novel idea to solve the "my kayak doesn't have enough storage room" problem. Trailer the extra gear. Photo by Ken Watson.



Social Distancing

A pair of socially distanced chairs sitting on the sandy bottom of Secret Beach on Clear Lake in 2020. Photo by Ken Watson.

2021 Fees

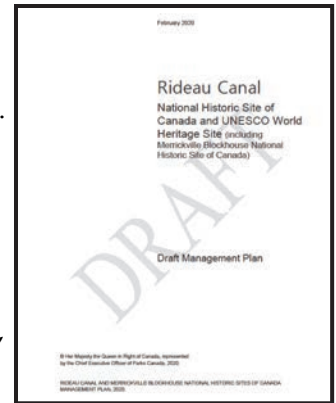
| | |
|-------------------------|--------------------|
| Single Lockage & Return | = \$ 0.92 per foot |
| One Day | = \$ 1.64/ft |
| Transit (one way) | = \$ 4.75/ft |
| Six Days (any six days) | = \$ 5.16/ft |
| Seasonal | = \$ 8.99/ft |

RIDEAU CANAL DRAFT MANAGEMENT PLAN

To see the draft management plan and our submission, along with those of several others, please see the management plan page on www.rideaufriends.com

The last management plan for the Rideau Canal was released in 2005. A new one should have been done in 2012 with the massive Parks Canada management shift on the Rideau Canal and most certainly should have been done in 2015, a legislated deadline. But it was not until December 2020 that Friends received a copy of the draft of a new plan.

Back in January 2018, Friends participated in a stakeholders meeting (one of several), convened by the then Assistant Director of Ontario Waterways regarding the scoping document for a new plan. Friends' representatives spoke about our concerns, which had been set out in issues of the newsletter and at our annual meetings, regarding the management of the Rideau Canal. These concerns, mostly dealing with natural and cultural heritage, were reflected by many others in those meetings. Then there was a 20-month gap between those meetings and the circulation of the above-referenced draft plan, which is dated February 2020. Unfortunately the draft plan that appeared did not reflect the discussions that took place in 2018.



The draft plan sets out ten-year objectives for the Rideau Canal (2021-2031). It is very brief and very general. In fact it is not a management plan, it fails to meet the most basic requirements for a protected area management plan. It is the opinion of the Friends' board that the plan is missing very important elements.

Overall, the draft plan emphasizes operating the Rideau Canal as a simple tourism site and does not give the necessary attention to heritage, including commemorative and ecological integrity which are clear mandates and legislated requirements of Parks Canada. In particular, the guiding principle of commemorative integrity, a core principle of Parks Canada's management of historic sites, is not listed among the objectives in the draft plan. As well as the built heritage structures of the Rideau, commemorative integrity covers the many significant cultural heritage landscapes along the Canal. This is also a significant concern of UNESCO. In November 2019 UNESCO wrote a letter of concern to the Government of Canada regarding management problems with the Rideau Canal, stating that "the management system for the property does not currently provide adequate protection to the OUV [outstanding universal value] or the setting thereof." None of UNESCO's concerns were addressed in the draft plan.

Previous Rideau management plans made reference to the need for collaborative efforts with private individuals, community groups and other levels of government to protect the historic and natural features of the Canal. The draft plan contains no such statements, it has no commitments to work with engaged citizenry on common issues. In our view there is a need for Parks Canada to show leadership and encourage the development of a shared vision for the Rideau Canal. The vision contained in the draft plan is not a shared vision.

In the 16-year interval since the last management plan was issued, there has been a steady erosion of education and interpretation activities, with staff replaced by static displays. From Friends' experience through operating a Rideau Canal visitor centre in Merrickville, visitors want to be able to talk with knowledgeable staff at the lock stations to properly appreciate the history and heritage of the Canal. The draft plan speaks about enhancing visitors' experience of the Canal through new and emerging technologies. For Friends, the invocation of mysterious-to-be-invented technologies to rectify the loss of education resources is simply deflecting from the real issue, the need to develop and deliver a robust public education program using skilled staff.

The plan fails to address the challenges of operating a 19th century heritage canal in the 21st century. Maintaining the heritage authenticity of the canal and maintaining the environmental health of the lakes and rivers that make up the Rideau are significant challenges that Parks Canada must address in any new plan. This includes fostering public understanding of the canal as more than a recreational waterway, including the reasons for its National Historic Site of Canada, Canadian Heritage River, and UNESCO World Heritage designations (the Rideau Canal's triple crown).

We have been told by Parks Canada that, despite the serious flaws with the current draft, there will not be a second draft of the management plan. Parks Canada intends to publish a summary of comments received, entitled "What we Heard" but will not allow us (the public) to see how they incorporate those into a new plan until it's too late (when it is tabled in Parliament). If you have the opportunity to read the draft management plan, and Friends' response, and you have comments to make, we encourage you to write to David Britton, Director Ontario Waterways, Parks Canada. Naturally, we would also like to know what you think.

See the management plan page on our website (www.rideaufriends.com) for more details.

Science and Research to Support Management of the Rideau and Trent-Severn Historic Waterways

Friends of the Rideau has been participating in a project funded by the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) to explore natural science and social science aspects of managing the Rideau Canal system. The project is led by professors Steven Cooke of Carleton University and Nathan Young of the University of Ottawa. Despite the COVID pandemic, work on the various dimensions of the project continues, and a progress report was presented at a virtual workshop on March 9, with 67 participants.

Of particular interest to Friends is the work being done by Professor Young and his collaborators Christine Beaudoin and Isha Mistry on the social science dimensions of managing the Rideau Waterway. Results of in-person and on-line surveys done by Christine and Isha were discussed, covering the public's views on challenges and pressing issues in the management of the Rideau. The challenges posed by the jurisdictional complexity along the Rideau system were well illustrated in a graph showing the interconnection of issues and responsibilities and the multiple levels of government involved. One of the researchers referred to the resulting diagram as a "horrendogram." It was a good illustration of the intricate interplay of governance issues and the various arms of government responsible for policy-making, management and enforcement of rules and regulations. Their work has shown the importance of collaborative, systems-based decision-making.

Material on the research and related topics can be found on-line at:

historicwaterways.mixsite.com/research

Other subjects being examined by the overall project include - among others - invasive and endangered species, algae trends, the impact of climate change on water budgets on the Rideau, and the impact of lock operation on fish passage and fish habitat connectivity. The research work will continue for another 18-24 months. Parks Canada is participating in the project together with other stakeholders, though funding is coming from the NSERC grant. Results of the project will be published for public access.

Hunter McGill



What's That in the Water?

A pair of loons discussing the strange sight of a human sharing their lake in June 2020. This year has also started off quiet but it is expected to be busier on the water than 2020. For those venturing out, watch out for the small loon chicks in the water (June, July & August) and keep your distance.



A Morning Paddle

These swans are enjoying an early morning jaunt in a quiet Rideau bay.



Look up—Way Up

Looking to the tree tops can be rewarded with the sight of herons nesting. These birds are part of a heron rookery on Sand Lake. Ospreys and eagles also like to nest in the top of trees, so keep your eyes open for these.

Photos on this page by Ken Watson