

SAVING OUR COUNTRY ROADSIDES

Much of the charm of our country roadsides has been destroyed by the grading which is necessary to make all-weather roads in a province which has wind and snow in winter. When such construction is necessary, a good deal can be done to restore the attractiveness of the roadway after the road is built. On other occasions, especially in areas of aspen parkland or forest, we could do much more to preserve part of the original beauty of the landscape, which is so often disregarded in the building of a road.

Across the continent the attitude toward roadside preservation is becoming more thoughtful. In a recent article in *Canadian Audubon* (March-April, 1966) Charles Sauriol reviews the ideas on this "new challenge to conservation" that came from a stimulating conference in Ontario last October. This Provincial Waysides Conference demonstrated what one newspaper called "growing public concern about the steady loss of trees, wildflowers and plain old-fashioned

attractiveness along Ontario's roadsides and rights-of-way." Its principal speaker was Dr. Robert Ellarson of the University of Wisconsin, who described Wisconsin's new programme of Selective Brush Management for the Protection and Improvement of Roadsides, a programme consisting of a major "face-lifting" operation of the rural roadsides of the State. The Wisconsin programme is soundly based on research, for example on a 1929 Wildlife study which showed that the loss of quail population in Columbia county was directly related to the loss of 61 per cent of the hedgerows of which two-thirds were along roadsides.

The Ontario Waysides Conference was able to show that roadsides could be maintained in a natural state without detriment to sound farming practices, and emphasized the benefits from such roadside management—protection from wind and snow, retention of moisture, provision of wildlife refuges. It is encouraging that



Country road, east of Regina, 1966

Photo by Robert R. Taylor

these conservation experts were also ready to consider the aesthetic values of natural roadsides where numbers of hikers and motorists can enjoy the scenery. Hal Borland, in his book *The rural roadside*, suggests that this latter consideration is really important, for we need the country roads that were laid out for leisurely travel, "as a relief from the haste and tensions of the highways."

Charles Sauriol describes how, in the eyes of the naturalist, our country roads are "picture windows of the changing seasons, where in winter the wind-moulded snow drapes its forms on weed and shrub stalk, where the brooks make ice bijouterie with the help of frost and the splashing current, where in spring the golden catkins of willows glow from the thickets, as do the red cockades of the maple flowers. Who has not heard of an April evening from the roadsides pools the welcome voices of wood frog, hyla or spring peeper, of swamp tree frog—or in summer the staccato tapping of a woodpecker or plaintive call of a wood pewee?"

He also quotes President Lyndon Johnson's statement: "By making our roads highways to the enjoyment of nature and beauty we can greatly enrich the life of all our people in city and countryside alike. Our task is twofold. First to ensure that roads themselves are not destructive of nature and natural beauty; to make our roads ways to recreation and pleasure . . . the forgotten outdoorsmen of today are those who like to walk, hike, ride horseback or bicycle. For them we must have trails as well as highways. Nor should motor vehicles be permitted to tyrannize the more leisurely human traffic."

The Ontario conference seriously considered the preserving of picturesque back roads which all through southern Ontario wind up hill and down, past abandoned farmlands, through cedar or balsam lowlands, alongside woodlots, by protecting them from indiscriminate and often needless spraying and cutting. They also considered improving roadsides by plantings of staghorn sumac, bitter-

sweet, elderberry, dogwood, honeysuckle, chokecherry, wild apples, etc. Main arteries of travel have to be treated differently, of course, for here road design has to take into consideration the problems of traffic volume and safety. The conference, however, felt that many of the older, winding roads could be preserved as they are, and that roadsides so preserved could even be marked as such by plaques or signs similar to those in provincial parks. Although our situation in Saskatchewan is different from that in Ontario, the same principles of roadside protection apply. For example, while we are thinking of a scenic motor highway along the Qu'Appelle River, we should certainly be planning at the same time for a natural road or hiking trail which will represent the original landscape of the Valley.

HERBARIUM IN REGINA

The collection of vascular plants in the University of Regina is growing rapidly now that proper care and storage can be given to the specimens. The herbarium may be visited by botanists (amateur and professional) who have permission.

The collection contains over 8,000 specimens. The Cyperaceae (1,200 specimens) has good representation for the collection began when I was studying *Carex* and other sedges. There are 682 specimens in the Gramineae and 851 in the Compositae. The family which has received most attention, however, is the Leguminosae. There are 2,600 specimens in the Leguminosae now and many more waiting to be identified and added to the collection. This part of the herbarium has special research value.

The collection has representative specimens of Saskatchewan and Canadian flora and is becoming increasingly valuable for teaching. Several people have offered to contribute and it is hoped that summaries of additions may be printed in the *Blue Jay*.—George F. Ledingham, University of Saskatchewan, Regina.