

You'll never understand Quebec until La Beauce

By DANIELLE THIBEAULT

It is nicknamed "Le pays des Jarrets Noirs", or "Black Hock country" by most of Quebec's older generation (mostly by those who've never been there.) And if you pass through it on your way to the States you'll probably never give it a second glance, but you'll never fully understand what Quebec is all about until you've visited "La Beauce."

It's a county roughly 70 miles south of Quebec city and it gets its nickname from the days when it was "lumberjack country." As the old wives' tale goes, lumberjacks would get their "hocks" dirty from working in the woods all day and at night would fall asleep (from beer or fatigue) without even taking their boots off... and so on through the week until the weekend where the festivities drowned any "incentive" for hygiene.

Such were pictured (outsiders) the lonely and strenuous days of a lumberjack in camp.

Today, though a good part of the "Beauceron's" income comes from the forest, either from the actual felling and cutting or from the other forest-related jobs (i.e. mills, heavy equipment operators and dealers) the number of people employed is much reduced compared to the days of the "Black

Hocks."

The work is seasonal, sporadic, and requires only local labour, thus the camps which were mainly set up to accommodate those who came from the States and abroad and those who lived too far away to make it for 8 in the morning have disappeared.

The employees drive up in the morning (a car is a must in that part of the country) from the neighbouring parishes, cut their quota, stock it, wait for the measurer to assess their day's work, hop back into their car and usually make it home in time for supper. A rich meal is the order of the day, because it's still a hard day's work even though the chain-saw and the "tumble-jack" have replaced the axes and horses of old.

The really amazing features of "La Beauce" are the people and the setting: a world of contrasts. The parishes are nine miles apart from one another (as is the custom in French-Canada) and a taxi will charge you \$5.00 for transportation between. Thus the convenience of your own means of transportation. As a matter of fact, anybody who can walk has a bicycle or mini-bike and if you're old enough to qualify for a Student loan and you're one of 12 kids in your family, you

probably have a motor-bike. And no family would be caught dead in the Beauce winter-wonderland without a snowmobile, (or two, or three). So if you love snowmobiling and hate traffic, you know where to go.

The countryside is vast as you travel on route 23 from Quebec to Armstrong and it seems limitless at times. The Chaudiere river arises around Levis from the lake of the same name and follows R. 23 down to St. Georges where it turns south-west and leaves its sister river Liniere the right of way down to the USA border. (By the way, Liniere is the old name of St. Come and R. 23 is the road Quebec-Fredricton by way of the States.)

All along the riverside, the parallel arrangement of green fields and pastures may remind you of postcards of Scotland or Ireland and the old abandoned farmhouses, barns and covered bridges scattered along the way will please any camera bug and or lover of frontier settings.

A sunset behind an old wooden mill burner is a must if you pass by Armstrong, by the way, is a point 10 miles north of the USA border which consists mainly of one hotel, one motel, six gas stations (all different brands), two restaurants

and a depot for Domtar where I spent 10 working weeks during the summer of '72. Population at that point: 4, (all living at the depot) three students on summer employment and an all-year attendant named Paul, who was once a cook in various lumberjack camps and who related to us most of the history behind La Beauce.

Two miles south and 7 miles west is the small village of St.-Theophile, pop: 1,000, where most of the houses are white and the whole parish is built on an intersection.

It's a pretty quiet place in an old fashioned sort of way and the night life consists mostly of either sitting on your porch drinking a case of beer, or riding your bike to the nearest pizza and or ice cream stand or dropping in at the local hotel for the festivities accompanying the wedding-party of whoever's sister, brother, niece or nephew has just pronounced the sacred vows.

Nine miles north of Armstrong is yet another parish, St.-Come, (pop. 5,000) this one closer to and on a slope toward the river. It's a cozy type town where most of the houses are privately owned, the streets are all on an incline and there are no streetlights.

Most of the stores are in private homes, including the grocery or general stores. In St.-Come, as in St.-Theophile, everybody knows everybody else, the smallest corner store has a year's supply of beer, the presence of a liquor store is imperative, and the "Caisse Populaire" is the size of a single room at a UNB residence.

St.-Georges, nine more miles north, is quite a different picture. Together with St.-Georges-Ouest on the other side of the river, it has a population of 14,000 people and offers 17 different entertainment spots running from the go-go dancer strip joint to the swinkest discoteques you're seen in a long time. Most of the places, if not all, have live entertainment and charge no admission price. All liquor goes at Tavern rates except at discoteques where hand liquor runs between \$1.15-\$1.65. And their discoteques would put a lot of the

Montreal and Quebec city spots to shame. They are large, have ample space to move around and dance, are open from Wednesday nite to Sunday nite and do not close before 3:30 a.m. (if there are still people around.) Altogether, it's a pretty swinging place for the area and it attracts a lot of the Quebec City crowd on weekends. It proclaims itself as "Industrial St.-Georges" but it's a more commercial and entertainment center than anything else. And it's thriving though it retains a measure of warmth in the everyday inter-relations between people (customer-clerk-client.)

There is something I've been a witness to both during my stay in Armstrong and my travels through different parts of "La Beauce" and that's the hospitality offered to outsiders, the genuine effort of each and everyone to make you feel at home, and the outgoing

attitude toward strangers. It's a place where you'll get your five bucks worth of intelligent, informative and humour-sprinkled conversation on your way to and from a night on the town. Nobody is too meaningless, too important or too drunk to get courtesy, patience, generosity and or humour. A lift is usually as easy as lifting your thumb (if you can't afford a bus or cab) and the driver will often go out of his way to drop you somewhere where you can get a good lift for the remainder of your journey.

During my stay, last summer, I grew to love what I thought was "nowhere's ville" and intend to come back again and travel through more of this unadvertised side of Quebec. And if you are ever around Quebec City on your way back to Fredericton, take the long route home: The highways aren't the best in the world but the experience will be unique and truly rewarding. And if you're going through Armstrong, take the time to stop at the depot behind the fire hazard Indicator and say hello to Paul - tell him Danielle sent you.

Next week: the long way back home.

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feb. HIGHLIGHTS in the sub

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"VALDY" Entertains at a Coffee House in the Cafeteria Wing. Coffee and Suds.	"MOON-MINGLE WOOD AND THE UNIVERSAL POWER" Stage Show with a Bar. SUB Ballroom	"EVERYDAY PEOPLE" in concert SUB BALLROOM	"SEA DOG" Stage Show with a bar. SUB Ballroom.	SUB BALLROOM Nightclub: Featuring.... "MARTIN MULL" All Events Begin at 9:00pm All Admissions—\$1.00

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