



The steamship Phoebe, which will travel the route of the Rideau Canal this summer, leads the flotilla at the Rideau Canal opening in Ottawa.

The editor of the *Register of North American Steamboats*, Harcourt Hervey of California, said the flotilla would be the largest congregation of steam launches ever held in the world.

"The flotilla has caught the imagination of all steamboat owners across North America," said the flotilla's organizer Jack Telgmann of Kingston.

Coastguard provides fuel

The steamers making the city-to-city excursion will average 12 metres in length. Parks Canada is sponsoring the event and the Canadian Coastguard will provide a barge stocked with hardwood to fuel the steamers. Several boats are decorated in



One of the festive boats in the flotilla.

the style of the mid-1800s when steamboats were at the peak of their commercial popularity.

One of the boats in the flotilla will be the *Sue Ann* from the National Museum of Science and Technology in Ottawa. The *Sue Ann* was built in about 1885 and was restored in 1975. Another steamer, *Geraldine*, built in Bala, Ontario in 1886 will travel on a truck from Florida to be part of the flotilla.

Travelling at a speed of eight kilometres an hour, the steamboats will have the right of way over other boats in the canal. Because of the danger of gas vapours igniting, steam and gas engines cannot pass through the locks together.

Some of the other events planned for this year are:

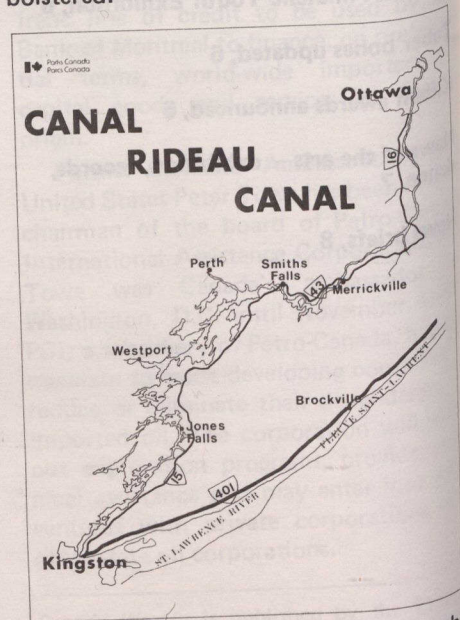
- the Bytown Museum in Ottawa is mounting a special exhibit called *Colonel By the Man – The Engineer*. Staff will dress in 1831 period costumes;
- Parks Canada is sponsoring a floating exhibit that will visit Rideau communities until September 5;
- the Public Archives of Canada in Ottawa is presenting an exhibition, entitled *From War to Winterlude – 150 Years on the Rideau Canal*;
- a relay footrace is being held along the canal from Ottawa to Kingston;
- three plays: *Rideau Café*, *The Historic Rideau Canal* and *The Youngest Canal Man* – will be staged at various locations during the summer; and
- an antique boat show will be held in Rideau Ferry in August. More than 100 antique boats and 19 gold cup boats from across North America will be on display.

In addition, as a memento of the canal's anniversary, Parks Canada is distributing to visitors silver souvenir passports containing sketches of Rideau Canal scenes and a space for each canal lock station's stamp.

Built for defence

For increasing numbers of people, the Rideau Canal has become an exciting historic waterway, but a scenic waterway was far from the minds of the men who built it, 150 years ago. The defence of British North America was the driving force that took them from what is today Canada's capital – Ottawa – through the wilderness to Lake Ontario.

In the War of 1812, the defenders of British North America came perilously close to defeat by the invaders from the United States. The colony was saved only by the disorganization of the American forces. British strategists realized they would not be able to rely on this situation in the future, and it was decided that the defences of the colony had to be bolstered.



One of the main problems in the defence of British North America was the difficulty of provisioning the military in Upper Canada – now Ontario. The most direct supply route was the St. Lawrence River, but a series of rapids between Montreal and Lake Ontario made it an expensive and difficult journey. Even worse, from Cornwall west to Lake Ontario the river formed the international boundary, and was easily swept by gunfire from the American shore. A safe by-pass was needed.

Surveys after the war indicated that the most practical alternative would be to