

[Page 32 - "Oh, You Will Not Drive Over Ben Verick? No, Man, No!" A Cape Breton Travel Tale from Dawn Fraser's Book, Echoes from Labor's Wars](#)

ISSUE : [Issue 63](#)

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Oh, You Will Not Drive Over Ben Verick? No, Man, No! A Cape Breton Travel Tale from Dawn Fraser's Book, Echoes from Labor's Wars In 1923 Dawn Fraser travelled over Ben Verick Mountain (Beinn Bhiorach • Gaelic meaning "Sharp Mountain"). A travelling salesman from Glace Bay, Fraser describes it here as a treacherous, rugged bit of road. In 1980, Hiking Trails of Nova Scotia described part of this; trail • between Sight Point and MacDonald Glen in Inverness County • as: "Landslide area. A very narrow sheep track crosses this region. Proceed with extreme caution, especially if the path is wet." Dawn Fraser crossed it in winter! HAVING DOUBTLESS CONQUERED FEAR, and I been over the Cabot Trail, perhaps you are seeking new worlds or mountains to conquer. Very well! Just follow me, friend. I WAS REGISTERED at the hotel in the town of Inverness, having arrived by train, and that evening after supper I began to quiz my host, Mr. Alex Campbell, about the territory I had to cover during the next few days. I had customers to interview all the way from this town of Inverness right down to Port Hood and most of them were in rather remote sections off the so-called beaten trail. The post road through Mabou and down to Port Hood did not interest me, as my contacts led me down the shore road through Strathlome, Port Ban, MacKinnon's Brook and further south. It was the winter season with considerable snow, but Mr. Campbell assured me that the shore road was passable. He had talked that very day to a farmer who had driven in with horse and sleigh from Port Ban. There were, he said, no crossroads or anything to confuse a traveller. All I need do was follow the road along the shore and I should have no difficulty. The following morning I engaged a rig at the livery stable of Johnny Owsen-bick • which is probably not the correct way to spell the last name, but what can one do when he is no Gaelic scholar • and away I go down the shore road. Concluding my business at Strathlome and at certain other scattered farm houses along the road, I drove in to the tiny village of Port Ban. It was here that I heard that dread name, "Ben Verick" {PubUsher's Note: "Beinn Bhiorach," Gaelic for "Sharp Mountain"} • and I was to hear it many times before and after nightfall. Turning to a very agreeable but slightly curious resident, he asked me what my destination was after leaving his home. There is not a doubt but that the gentleman meant to be helpful to the stranger at his gate and I, needing information, replied, "I am headed down to MacKinnon's Brook and beyond to Mabou." "Oh! You are on the wrong road, you will have to go back to Inverness and take the post road to Mabou and come into MacKinnon's Brook from the south." "But is there not a road over the mountain?" I asked. "You will not go over the Ben Verick?" came the shocked answer. "I intend to," I replied. "Oh, no! You will not go over the Ben Verick. No, no!" "But they told me at the hotel and the livery stable man said there was a road over." "Oh, no, man. The ice from the top of the mountain runs over that narrow road and to the right it is a clear drop of hundreds of feet straight down and into the sea. Oh, no. You will not go over the Ben Verick." I did not argue further with the gentleman but thanked him for his kindness. I had



other customers further down the road and I determined to call on these and then if necessary turn back and approach MacKinnon's Brook from the south as I had been advised. Naturally, at the other houses I pursued my inquiries and at many met the dread warning, "You will not go over the Ben Verick! No, man, no." But it seemed as I came nearer to the dread mountain, the natives seemed to be losing respect for it • 'perhaps proving again that "familiarity breeds contempt." I also learned the reason or excuse for this secondary road. Most of the settlers along this northern shore had business contacts in Inverness town and this road or trail was to accommodate them. As the shore became settled further south the road was extended until it came right down to the Ben Verick. Those living on the south side of the mountain did not relish the idea of going back to Mabou to catch the main road to Inverness, either. They could not tunnel through the mountain, so they cut a ledge along the side of it facing the sea. In the summertime when there was no ice, a person with a good steady head and a good steady horse could pass along this ledge, there being just room for the width of a carriage and with perhaps a few inches to spare. AS ONE APPROACHED THE MOUNTAIN from either side it was evident that the residents did not like to have it referred to as impassable. There was a legend that many years before two young men belonging to the section but who had been out west came home to visit their friends. They and two bottles of Scotch whiskey drove over the Ben Verick in the pitch dark in an old Ford car. And did not Sandy Beaton from the Brook bring a thrashing machine over the Ben Verick? And did not his daughter "Marack" drive a load of hay over it? No, these good people felt that any dangerous CO. Cape Breton Auto Radiator RADIATOR HOSES • REPAIRING • CLEANING • RECORDING .r-?r' _ . COMPLETE CYLINDER HEAD SERVICE '_, 518 Grand auto * truck • industrial Sydney Lake Road Complete Line of Gas Tanks 564-63621 • NOW DOING AUTOMOBILE AIR CONDITIONING • Bird Island Tours TOURS 7 DAYS A WEEK June 1-30: 10 AM & 1:30 PM • Sept. 1-15: 1:30 PM July 1 - August 30: 8:30 AM & 10 AM & 1:30 PM imiiW.liHim'Hi=HH'0 A 2 1/2 hour cruise from MOUNTAIN VIEW BY THE SEA Camping and Cabins 4 miles off Trans-Canada Highway (Route 105) • BIG BRAS D'OR, CAPE BRETON • (902) 674-2384