

[Page 33 - "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](#)

Published by Ronald Caplan on 1993/6/1

feature lessened the value of their property • something like a haunted house will be avoided. They did not wish to have their happy community shunned. At a home I visited as I approached nearer to the mountain I discussed the possibility of the crossing and getting down into the valley below. The farmer at this home seemed to have even less respect for the Ben Verick than those who lived further back along the trail. This gentleman declared that if there was no ice at this particular point and if I had a good steady head and a good steady horse I might make the crossing. But he advised that I stop at the McDonald home which was the last farm on this side of the mountain and enquire of these good people as to the condition at the narrow point of the trail. "One of the McDonald boys will inform you of this and he will probably attempt the crossing with you, if conditions seem favourable." And it is one of the McDonald boys who is the real hero of this tale. As I drove toward his home I noticed that the road led upward and it was evident that I was climbing a sharp hill or mountain and doubtless nearing the dreaded Ben Verick. Looking at my watch I found that it was about nine P.M. and a very dark night. At the McDonald house my knock attracted a young man to the door and I was invited inside. I explained my problem and at once young McDonald volunteered to go with me and investigate the condition on the mountain. "There has been a recent thaw," he explained, "and if the road is icy at the danger point your sleigh might slip down and carry you and the horse with it into the depths below. Is your horse sharp?" the young man enquired. He then lighted an oil lantern and I noticed that he hastily grabbed a hatchet or a small hand-axe, then he said, "Come on. Let's go!" As we drove higher and higher up the incline I began to get nervous and I suggested to my new friend that perhaps he had better take the reins and guide the horse, as he would be aware of the danger points. "Oh, there is no danger here," the young man assured me. "It is only at one point near the top of the mountain. If you could see here, you would find that there is trees and vegetation on each side of us and we could not leave the road if we tried, but near the top, where the old folks cut the ledge years ago, the road is bare slaty shale. I guess the water from the mountain top came down the side all through the years and washed all the good earth away, and nothing grows in this rock formation. That is why one needs a sharp, well-shod horse in crossing the Ben Verick in the wintertime. Drive on. Mister, I will tell you when we come to the bad place and then maybe we will have to lead the horse. It will be in our favor if the animal is steady and does not stop or balk at the bad part of the road. It is perhaps better for him and better for us that it is so dark and we cannot see the right side of the road where it dips down straight into the sea. Of course, I have driven over this mountain in the daytime before and, if you can trust your animal, there is really no danger." After we had proceeded a bit further, with me still driving, my friend said, "Now, you stop the horse and wait here. The place is just beyond. I will go ahead and see about the condition of the road." After taking the axe with him, McDonald proceeded up the trail. Returning after some minutes

he instructed me, "Leave the horse and sleigh here and you come with me." "Is the road icy?" I asked with apprehension. CAPE BRETON REGIONAL TRANSIT AUTHORITY TRANSIT INFO 539-8124 PEOPLE ON THE MOVE Get your DISCOUNT BUS TICKETS at Shoppers Drug Mart stores in industrial Cape Breton "Some ice, but we will see," he answered bravely. Proceeding further, at one point he got down on his hands and knees and I could hear him chopping with the axe. Then he said, "We better leave the sleigh on the mountain for the night. I am afraid it will slip. But you unhitch the animal and wait here." I did as instructed and he soon returned with further instructions. "Now I will lead the horse by the head and you follow me." Soon we halted again, and again McDonald descended to his knees, re-marking, "Now, Mister, right here is the bad place. I am going to crawl across. You take the reins out through the rings at the animal's middle and leave them attached only at the bridle so they will be long. Catch the end of the reins in your hand and crawl after me, keeping very close to your left and in close to the rib of the mountain. I will meet you and take the end of the reins from you. I am afraid to walk with the animal in case he shies or balks and we both go over the side." I handed him the reins when we met near the middle of the "bad place" and he instructed me to crawl back to safety. He also crawled to safety on the other side with the ends of the reins in his hand. Then I heard him say, "Get up. Come on boy." The gallant steed obeyed and soon I had a triumphant call from my guide. "All right. Mister. Now you can crawl over here and don't be afraid the ice is well chopped and the distance is not great. You can now lead the horse down to Sandy's. It is only a short distance to the valley below and there are no bad places." AND IT WAS THUS THAT I CROSSED the Ben Verick. One thing I always regretted was that I do not ever recall thanking my good friend or rewarding him in any way for his kindness and care. I was excited, nervous and shaky after the experience, but I thank God that it was at night I visited Hall EST. 1906 COMPUTERIZED PRESCRIPTION SERVICE • FILMS • SUNTAN LOTIONS • FIRST AID SUPPLIES 66 Commercial St. , 1 Commercial Str DOMINION GLACE BAY 849-0200 849-6552 (if busy) 849-1030 PHARMASAVE Office for Race Relations and Cross-Cultural Understanding Nova Scotia Department of Education The Department of Education, through the Office for Race Relations and Cross Cultural Understanding provides leadership regarding race relations, anti-racism education, multiculturalism. Black and Native education and human rights. The aims and objectives of the Office are met through co-operation with Department of Education staff, external educational partners such as school boards, universities, associations, other government agencies and the general public. The Race Relations and Cross-Cultural Understanding Office staff provides a variety of services both internally and to the public school system, some of which are:

- Support in developing and implementing policies and programs on race relations, cross-cultural understanding and human rights
- Developing a provincial comprehensive strategy in race relations, cross-cultural understanding and human rights
- Identifying and developing resources reflective of racial, ethnic and cultural groups which are free from bias, prejudice and stereotyping
- Developing racial, ethnic and cultural specific curriculum and complementary resources
- Providing information on anti-racism education, English as a second language,



Mi'Kmaq shidies. Black shidies and heritage language • Presenting workshops and in-services on a variety of topics in race relations, multicultural education, Black and Mi'Kmaq education • Acting on recommendations from partners; e.g. Nova Scotia Advisory Group on Race Relations, Select Committee, Voluntary Planning, Nova Scotia School Boards Association and Nova Scotia Teachers' Union For further information, fax 424-0519 or contact: Glenda Redden, Coordinator for Multiculturalism, 424-4307 Janis Jones-Dart, Race Relations & Cross-Cultural Understanding Consultant, 424-2032 Marjorie Gould, Mi'Kmaq Education Consultant, 424-3429 Nova Scotia Department of Education