

[Page 44 - Mail and Snow and Roads and Mud](#)ISSUE : [Issue 16](#)

Published by Ronald Caplan on 1977/6/1

he'd send a bunch out from Ingonish\* So we did. We started Monday morning about day? light and they started about daylight. There were more in their bunch • about 10 or 12 fellows. Tuesday evening it was just getting dark when we met on the top of Smokey, the barren there. We had the mail with us\* They had horses with them and they took the mail back to Ingonish themselves and we turned back. Yes, oh, it was a hard grind\* (Was there more snow then?) I've seen it at Neil R.'s there and at Tommy MacDonald's when you'd be going across the road • the road was low then • and. in the summertime you'd have to look up to see the house when you'd be going by there • and I saw in the wintertime going by there, you'd be looking down at them and you could see them eating their meals at the table\* Now I saw 25 foot poles • it's hard to believe but it's the truth • telegraph poles, and they weren't down in the hollow at all • they were put up in the side of the bank • and you could walk along them and the wires were right level with the snow\* Yeah. It was wicked down at Roddy Hector's there at Wreck Cove\* They used to be all winter in the bank. It was wicked the way it would come\* There was no woods up above the bank there and the snow would drift, boy, when the wind would come northwest after an easterly snowstorm • it'd pile that bank up as high as the house and Roddy would have to be there, boy, and if it was a stormy day it'd almost fill in as fast as they wer'e shovelling it\* Himself and Dan would be there, every morning, the first thing when they'd have their breakfast, about daylight, they'd have to go down there shovelling that bloody bank\* And at Sandy MacDermid's • but it wasn't near as hard to keep it open • but it was wicked down there\* and that French River was awful\* We'd be shovelling there day and night. (Would you stay the night in Ingonish Fer? ry?) Oh, no. Storm or no storm you'd have to try and make it home anyway\* If you could get down you'd get back • but the next morn? ing everything could be plugged up. You'd have to get them to turn out again shovel? ing. And the county wouldn't pay a cent to open it\* (Who paid the men who shovelled Smokey?) I had to pay them\* There was one time the county had a fellow on each side of Smokey, paying them so much a year for keeping the road open • but it was costing them too much so they cut that off alto? gether\* I didn't have to pay much\* I think around \$2\*50 a day\* Of course, you could always get through along the shore here • the road was kept open voluntary\* In the wintertime the people here used to put horses out after a snowstorm and open the road along • that was a big help. There were times when a storm would come and the roads would block up and you'd have to open them yourself, but as a rule the neighbours, the people along the route was opening the road\* Cape Breton's Magazine/44 And then in the spring of the year when that snow would start melting, boy, after a rainstorm • you couldn't look at it\* Horse would go out of sight in it\* And you couldn't start with the car until the roads were dry • that'd be when the frost would come out • because it'd be all mud and you couldn't go through it at all\* The only thing you could do at Smokey was get a boat\* Go down with a boat when the ice would be out\* I used to take the boat from Breton Cove here\* I had 5 boats one time down in Ingonish • taking them down and

leaving them down • the ice would come in and I couldn't get back\* I'd have to leave the boat and walk back\* Yes, walk back, over Smokey\* And then when the ice would clear • a wind would come nor'west off the land again • the ice would push out a little • well, I'd load another boat and take off with it to Ingonish\* And maybe the wind would change in the meantime, when you were going down--coming from the east • and if it would the ice was back in\* And you'd just get around Smokey and get into Ingonish before the ice would catch you\* Well, then you had to leave the boat and walk back\* Yes, I had 5 of them down there\* Motorboats that the fishermen had here\* I had 4 down and I took another one down and the wind was off the land and the ice stayed out that day • so I tied them together and I got back with the whole business\* I took the mail 6 days a week\* Every day but Sunday\* And there were no holidays. Not even Christmas Day. When the weather was good I'd go to Englishtown and pick up the mail and take it all the way to Ingonish Ferry • and then come back home • every day\* (Did you deliver to each farm?) Oh, no, you had post offices then: Jersey Cove, River Bennett, Indian Brook, Plaster and Breton Cove; next was at Skir Dhu, Birch Plain and Wreck Cove • and that was the last of them till you'd get to Byno MacIntyre's at Ingonish Ferry\* In the winter I just brought it to Breton Cove, stop in here at night; and in the morning my brother, John MacAskill, used to take it through to Ingonish Ferry\* He'd get back at 1 or 2 o'clock • and I'd take his mail and go to Englishtown and load up and come back to Breton Cove\* (And was there much mail?) Well, you'd have the full of the car there; then you'd have to pile a lot of it on the outside, tie it on with a rope to take it all\* Around Christmas you'd have an awful dose of it\* There used to be an awful lot of Eaton's because it was the only way they had of getting clothes or anything\* Merchants weren't keeping anything like that\* Aw, it was slavery at that time\* There was nothing in it anyway, you know\* I forget today what I was getting but what I had in the tender there was \$2800 a year. (And that would pay you and your brother and shoveling Smokey?) Yes, and we used to keep around 5 horses\* There was nothing in it. They thought I'd renew the contract, but I was fed up.