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The BACKLAND TRAIL Opening Ceremonies

AMA Chairperson's Remarks

(Mr. Harvey Mercer, June 12, 1999)

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Mayor Hogan; MHA Fabian Manning; invited guests; ladies, gentlemen and children; Welcome and thanks for coming out this afternoon.

I would like to give you some background on the Argentia Backland Trail, and why we believe this to be significant, not only to the residents of the region, but as a tourism booster as well:

In 1995, the AMA recognized the considerable potential of the Argentia Backland Trail; here is to name just some of the tangible benefits:

- there are 18.3 km of road systems
- 10.4 km of former rail bed
- 2 km of integrated fitness trail along the shore of Shag Pond
- 2 six inch World War II shore mounted gun emplacements located at Long Hill. AMA's plan is to relocate the guns to an area for inclusion in the planned Argentia Museum.
- a silver mine that operated in the 1920's
- 8 water bodies
- 30 former munitions storage bunkers,

In 1996, and in cooperation with our partner, PWGSC, a meeting was arranged with Federal Forestry officials who provided an overview of the Thomas Howe Demonstration Forest in Gander, a site of example for anybody to view. From this initial meeting, the AMA arranged to have a forest management plan implemented and completed. This plan also highlighted the substantial potential to develop the Backland Trail into a first-class, day-use facility. This would attract much local interest and participation, plus attract tourism traffic and dollars to this area.

During the study period, a public meeting was held at the AMA Building in Argentia to inform the general public of the general directions that the Backland Trail Development would take. The aim of this meeting was to receive public input and support as to what the community would like to see incorporated in the development. Hopefully, you will see and agree that this first phase of the Backland Trail has moved in the direction of the community wishes.

The AMA is a partner with the Town of Placentia, Town of Fox Harbour, Community of Ship Harbour, Community of Point Verde, Placentia Area Development Association, Castle Hill National Historic Park and Festival of Flags, and all are members of the Heritage Trails Committee who are all interested in improving on and developing tourism attractions for this region. Heritage Trails are endeavouring to link all the trails and attractions and make us a destination of choice for our locals, tourists and others wanting to enjoy activities during visitations to our area. This committee meets on a regular basis to formulate plans on future trail developments including funding requests to create and/or upgrade trails and during the process create some jobs for our citizens.

Given that the predominant theme of this region is a military past, the AMA has tried to incorporate this theme into the development of the Argentia Backland Trail. You will see, therefore, a U. S. Navy Lookout, and the trails are named after destroyers that were stationed in Argentia harbour on Dec 7, 1941 (during the attack on Pearl Harbour) and famous war personalities. Among many others, these are only two significant events in our history. Since then: the relocation of Placenta Bay families from remote communities in the 1960's and 1970's and an announced smelter refinery by Voisey's Bay Nickel Company to be located in Argentia. From the Placenta Bay Lookout, you can see across and down the bay where the communities were previously located. From the Smelter Lookout, you can look directly over the site where the VBNC smelter/processing facility will operate, in hopefully not the far too distant future. Sooner rather than later!

In the development of the trail system, the AMA has been extremely conscious of the ecosystems and has tried, where possible, to incorporate all natural elements into the trail. In addition, the AMA has an inventory in place of the Backland ecosystems, Boreal Coniferous forest, animals/birds of the Backland forest and forest pests. There is an abundance of wildlife in the Backland and it would not be an uncommon occurrence to see moose, eagles, rabbits, grouse, foxes, black-backed woodpecker, mourning dove and blue jays, just to name a few.

The inventory/study will assist in the future to create signs and story boards to increase the educational value of the Backland Trail. During the actual creation of the trail and with the cooperation of our partner PWGSC, the AMA used recycled concrete as a base for the trail in an effort to minimize impacts on dumping in the region's landfill. We also used surplus pipe piles as culverts and other materials that had only salvage value in the development of Argentia.

The AMA has completed an environmental impact assessment on the Backland and in the words of Penny and Stokes Environmental Consortium "the AMA should be commended for their efforts towards the environment, society, and the economy. By constructing the Backland walking trails, The AMA has perhaps generated an appreciation for nature among locals and tourists alike.

"No significant negative impacts are expected to occur as a result of trail construction other than temporary minimum disturbances to the immediate area". The 5 miles of trail being opened today consists of a combination of refurbished U. S. Navy roads and about 1.8 miles of new trail, 4 miles of the trail consist of walking trail only and the remainder is a combination of general traffic (including ATV's) and pedestrians. Signs identifying lookouts, directions, and trail names have been installed to aid in your walk and enjoyment of the trail.

To date the Argentia Backland work has put \$534,000 direct dollars into the local economy and created 56,320 hours of employment for the people of this region. In 1997, the AMA did to complete a demonstration forest in the Backland. During the summer of 1997, 36 people completed a project comprising of timber harvesting, mature tree stand thinning, immature tree stand thinning, roadside enhancement, nature trail and viewing areas. This project was completed over 16 weeks.

In 1998, the AMA also contracted with the Newfoundland Woodlot Owners Association to conduct commercial woodcutting operation in the Backland. In addition to creating 6 short term jobs, the wood was sold on a stumpage basis to raise funds for future maintenance of the trail.

In 1998 the AMA, with the concurrence of our partner PWGSC expended \$167,000 to get the trail system that is opening today up to the standard it is. We hope you will enjoy it. The foregoing project provided 25 jobs and was conducted over two phases for a total employment of 18 weeks.

In 1998, the AMA constructed Churchill Sprint Trail and DD145 Greer Trail and upgraded several of the existing roads. The three lookout venues of U. S. Navy, Placentia Bay, and Smelter were constructed. In addition, picnic tables, rest benches and two significant benches were constructed. You will also note, during a walk of the trail, a significant number of signs are made from wood material in keeping with the desire to have people walk in a natural environment. A brochure with a map of the trail is available and we would encourage you to take one with you.

We would also like to point out that on the brochure there are certain requests designed to protect the trail. It would be physically and financially impossible to provide security to an area as extensive as the Backland and the only way to prevent vandalism is if the community takes ownership of the issue. We have tried to accommodate all user groups in the Backland ie; walkers, ATV-er's and drivers of vehicles.

To accommodate these groups, will require co-operation of all user groups. We also have designated certain area's as walking only and we would appreciate the general public's assistance in reporting abuser's of the trail system. There have been some occasions of people on machine's causing damage to the walking trail already. If you see anyone abusing the trail system, please report them to the RCMP or ask them to stop.

I would like to close with a special note of thanks to our partners; ACOA, PWGSC, HRDC, PADA, Town of Placentia, Town of Fox Harbour, Community of Ship Harbour and the Community of Point Verde. We appreciate the support in funding, advice and in some cases in kind contributions. Also, to the workers who have worked on the trail, please remember that without your dedication and commitment the quality product that we have here today would not be possible.

Finally, to Ken Browne, AMA's General Manager, this has been one of Ken's projects which he values very much. Ken has been the driving force behind this project and I want to thank Ken for his enthusiasm and drive in bringing the project to where we see it today. We have a long way to go before the vision for the Argentia Backland Trail is realized, but, I know that Ken will continue to leverage funds to carry on with the plan. May god bless you all and again thanks for coming out today.