

Reader, I have a book which may interest you.

Have you ever gone looking for remnants of the steam era—where the roadbed used to be, where a station stood, searched for the buried foundations of a roundhouse? Among the urban sprawl and development of the present day? Then you know the futility of seeking out the past in today's world.

Even when you see a steam locomotive running, something is missing. The bigger scene is gone. There are no telegraph poles, stations, water tanks, trackside industries. Nothing around the locomotive remains of her former habitat. She is a relic from the past, like a fish out of water.

All those times you've gone poking around in the present day, searching for a bygone era...

Have you ever wished you could travel back in time?

Just for a moment, ponder what such an experience might involve, were you to design it. Summer. It would need to be summer. Say July.

Where would you go? How about Ontario, Canada? The backroads and railway branchlines of 1957 would be perfect. Late enough in time to have a reliable vehicle, not too late to miss steam.

You'd need a car, indeed. Nothing too fancy—you wouldn't want to stand out. How about a 1956 Ford? In Bermuda Blue, like the clear summer skies.

Can you imagine this really happening? How might it start?

You'd get your hands on a road map. In the 1950s, the Imperial Oil Company published those showing railway lines. Pack one of those for 1957.

How old would you be? Young. Say, 21. And with a cute female companion your own age. You'd travel around the King's Highways in search of steam trains.

But all this is idle talk, you realize. It couldn't really happen. Dreams like this never come true. Or do they?

Angus Wolfe, age 21, thought the same way. Until his old mechanic friend, Eddie, stuck him behind the wheel of a 1956 Ford Mainline two-door sedan. And then...

Well, it wouldn't be fair to tell you. Just open *King's Highways & Steam Trains (volume 1)*. And be prepared for a too-good-to-be-true adventure of a lifetime.

Way back in the 1950s, when steam locomotives were disappearing daily, photographers from the United States discovered something. Up in Canada, the steamers were still prevalent. As late as 1957, there were still as many of them as there were diesels. And, if a railfan were to journey to the little-used branchlines of Ontario, well. He'd find nothing but steam locomotives!

“Steam in Canada!” became a rallying cry. It drove photographers from the northeastern U.S. on safaris to the backroads of Ontario.

Among the numbers of camera-carrying enthusiasts were a couple of professionals. Their names were John Rehor and Don Wood. And they meant business. This author has chatted with someone who tagged along, sleep-deprived, in the backseat on one of their junkets.

Rehor and Wood carried 4x5 Graphic cameras to Canada from 1957 to 1960. Their work was featured in *Trains* magazine and the book *Canadian Steam!* Decades later, this author was the personal guest of Don Wood in his home. It is Wood's—and partner Rehor's—work which features prominently in the *King's Highways & Steam Trains* series. In fact, here's a secret for you:

King's Highways & Steam Trains was conceived to showcase the Rehor-Wood chronicle of a July 1957 visit to Ontario.

You may wonder at the format of this new book series. Why the work of Rehor and Wood is wrapped in a time-travel narrative of a 21-year-old fellow named Angus and his similarly-aged girlfriend Amanda.

Well, why wouldn't it be? Rehor and Wood were in their 20s back in 1957. The lure of adventure and the open road—and steam locomotives most of all—beckoned them to Ontario.

Their trips were those of young men. And who among us doesn't want to be in our 20s again?

Here's something else you may not know. The author of *King's Highways & Steam Trains* has met personally with many photographers from the United States. In particular, those fellows who visited Ontario in the late 1950s in search of steam locomotives on branchlines. And he has been able to provide them with something they missed back in their days of driving hell-bent in search of coal smoke against summer skies—context.

Context. Inspired by the photographic record of steam fans willing to share their work, this author, Ian Wilson, has put the 1950s railway scene of Ontario under a microscope. In so doing, he's filled those once-young (and often, now-departed) American photographers in on just what they were preserving on film.

That big-picture view comes through loud and clear in *King's Highways & Steam Trains*.

Where is the nearest open train-order office along the Brampton Subdivision? How was the Railway Post Office car on train 168 routed? How many turns do you make on Highway 36 to get from Ancona Point to Bobcaygeon? Where do you buy gas en route to Stratford? And, by the way—is there a lunch counter there?

The best part for you, dear reader, is you don't have to drive a mile to take an epic journey to July 1957. You don't need to pack a 4x5 Graphic in the trunk of a '56 Ford or worry about changing out film plates. There's no need to roar down gravel roads to beat the eastbound mixed train to the grade crossing, so you can get set up with the sun behind you.

No, you just have to sit back in your favourite chair and open the cover of *King's Highways & Steam Trains*. Then—escape.

That word—escape—is what reading stories is all about. Let me ask you a question, writer to reader. Does the present-day world ever frighten you, like it does me? As one ages, our times seem to be less safe. Nothing seems sure anymore. It never was, of course, because no one has been able to predict the future. But don't you feel as if the uncertainty of our times is more acute than ever?

The past, though, is a different story. It doesn't change. It's rock-solid. It's already happened. Alas, for someone like you or me, who longs to experience or relive the steam era, it's long gone.

Just about every visual reminder has been obliterated in our redeveloped world.

That reminds me of something a longtime reader of mine, Chet, related. This would have been in the early 2000s, a good decade and a half ago. Chet had been among the lucky readers to acquire a copy of my book *Steam Over Palmerston*. Although his main interest in railroads was the Wabash, the book beckoned him. The branchline trains and the Ten Wheelers that pulled them depicted an idyllic world of the 1950s. He got to know the places in the book and yearned to visit them. In order to see them for himself, he travelled to Ontario one summer.

On that trip, Chet visited many of the locations depicted in *Steam Over Palmerston*. But it was far from a pleasant experience. He was doomed to disappointment. Some of the encounters made him weep. He went so far as to discourage fellow American readers from making a similar pilgrimage. Why?

Quite simply, the world he'd come to know between the covers of the book didn't exist anymore.

There was barely any resemblance between the locales of the 1950s and their 21st century counterparts. And that, dear reader, was some 15 years ago. It's much worse now.

So, if you're anything like me or Chet, you know it's not good enough to visit a geographical location in search of the past. It can be downright distressing. It always disappoints. It can't possibly measure up to its 1950s status. So, what can you do? There's only one satisfactory answer.

To explore the steam era, you have to go there firsthand.

In distance and in time. You need a time travel vehicle—like a 1956 Ford Mainline. And you need an Imperial Oil road map, showing where the railway tracks are. That's right—*are*. You'd be in the present tense if you travelled in time! Like Angus Wolfe in *King's Highways & Steam Trains*.

You're wondering what this series of publications looks like.

Well, the first volume measures 9 x 11.5 inches and has 52 glossy pages, plus a cover. Like all illustrated railway books by Ian Wilson, it's printed on 80 lb. gloss paper. It's not tissue-thin like today's magazines.

And you know something else? That first volume is only the beginning. There will be a good half dozen by the time the story finishes. A new one every three months or so. You'll have the complete set by collecting each one. There's an overall storyline you won't want to miss. Although, each volume will be entertaining on its own, like an episode in a TV series.

You'll enjoy the story best by getting to know the characters, by taking the whole journey starting on day one.

You'll also be happy to know that the book series—like all Ian Wilson steam volumes—is printed in the Ontario city of Guelph. Not offshore, like most books these days. I'd tell you that the print shop was once housed in a steam-era factory, with brick-arched doors and windows. It's along a Canadian Pacific spur line. But there's no need to overload you with imagery.

What else would you like to know? It's designed painstakingly—like all Ian Wilson books—by the author. It carries on the format that won a coveted Gold Award in the *International Gallery of Superb Printing*. That was for *Steam at Allandale*. The judges for the *International Association of Printing House Craftsmen* awarded the book that status—from some 500 entries. For design and printing excellence.

And, well—once you receive an exclusive Gold Award, you don't go changing things. So, I haven't.

You could read through hundreds of testimonial letters received over almost 20 years. They speak of personal recollections, and discoveries, occasioned by reading an Ian Wilson narrative nonfiction book on steam railway operations. But if you were to boil all the comments down, there is one nugget you could extract from the reams of personal reflections. It would be this:

I feel as if I have been there.

Readers of Ian Wilson's books on steam railway operations smell coal smoke when they absorb themselves in the stories. They behold the dimness and dampness of roundhouses, the rush of excitement on a station platform at train time. They hear steam whistles echoing in their mind as they linger in the world between the covers of the books. It's an escape akin to a real-life experience. And the human mind cannot distinguish between a real and an imaginary experience, once it has been etched on the hard drive of our brains.

Reader, I know for sure that you are interested in steam locomotives. Do you remember how that started?

Maybe it was that Christmas you received your first model train set. Or, maybe it was the day you happened along a railway line—here in the province of Ontario, perhaps—and beheld an operating steam locomotive for the first time. Maybe that happened with your dad. You might even have been small enough for him to hoist you up on his shoulders for a better view. Or, perhaps you encountered a surviving locomotive in a museum or behind a park fence. Then, your wondering mind started to imagine such a dinosaur in action.

You may have seen a steam locomotive operating this century. Perhaps Canadian Pacific's 2816. Or South Simcoe's 1057 or 136. Maybe Essex Terminal's number 9. If you're a little older, you may remember the Canadian National's excursion engines 6060, 6218 or even 6167. Or, maybe you go back a little farther, and remember regular service steam of the 1950s as a boy or girl. Even luckier still, as an adult. Whatever your beginning with this fascination for steam locomotives, you have it.

And, if you're anything like me, you lament the state of our present world where your interest is concerned.

Glance at any photo of steam railway operations in Ontario in the 1950s. You'll find thousands in my books. Or, pick up a copy of a glossy railway heritage magazine. Leaf through any excellent volume on the subject. Study the pictures.

Then, dear reader, journey to a location depicted in a photograph. Do that, in the present.

At best, you'll be lucky to find tracks.

At worst, you'll stare in dumbfounded frustration at a picture from the 1950s. Then you'll raise your glance to the present surroundings. Not a single visual clue will remain to link the two places, separated by some six decades of time. That's a lot, in some ways. A blink of an eye, in a larger perspective. Regardless, if your experience is anything like mine at Harriston Junction in September 2015, you'll be disillusioned.

Let me put you there. You're standing at the location where the CNR's Owen Sound Subdivision and the CPR's Teeswater branchline crossed. You have a copy of *Steam Over Palmerston*—the book you wrote—in your hands. You're staring at a picture, by Don Wood, of two branchline steam-powered trains at the crossing.

And you're seeing nothing—absolutely nothing—in the present scene that enables you to recreate the past.

I don't know about you, but such experiences cause pain for me. I can't take too many of them without becoming depressed. It's sad. We cannot just walk out the door to a location depicted in a 1957 photograph and recreate the scene. We can't put ourselves there. Not anymore.

So, where does that leave you and me?

With one option, perhaps. And that is to live the experience of 21-year-old Angus Wolfe. He has the good fortune—for awhile at least—of having a friend named Eddie. That old mechanic has a 1956 Ford Mainline. It's restored to its original Bermuda Blue finish. And, doggone it, the car is a time-travel vehicle for Angus. It can take him back to July 1957.

By opening the cover of *King's Highways & Steam Trains*, you experience the world through the eyes and ears of Angus Wolfe. You climb behind the wheel of that '56 Ford and take a trip like no one else can. You travel back in time—for real—to the Ontario of July 1957. Where all the branchline trains are 100% steam-powered.

Do you realize how liberating that is? You have a time-travel vehicle at your disposal. You don't need to traipse around in search of reminders of the past. To heck with digging for spikes and insulators like an industrial archaeologist. No, you can bypass all that and go for the real thing.

You can simply visit the past, where the branchlines are always in service and the steam engines always run.

This happens by a magical process triggered in your imagination. Author Ian Wilson, through imagery and word pictures, paints just enough of the scene for you. Then, your imagination takes over. You live the dream of 21-year-old Angus, beholding the Ontario countryside in July 1957. In a 1956 Ford, you drive the King's Highways and backroads in search of steam locomotives.

When you have absorbed every phrase, every illustration in *King's Highways & Steam Trains*, you'll close the cover. Then, you will enjoy a remarkable sensation.

In your mind, you will have visited Ontario in July 1957.

You will have seen those steam locomotives, ridden with Angus in that '56 Ford along those country roads. And you will have enjoyed all that with an inquisitive, imaginative girl named Amanda by your side.

In short, *King's Highways & Steam Trains* will have been the ultimate escape for you. But only if you're quick enough to reserve a copy of this limited-edition first volume in a series.