

Thursday, May 5, 1983 O&E

A leisurely journey

Canadian rail trip offers 'best view' of the Rockies

THE TRANSCONTINENTAL train leaves Vancouver at 9:45 p.m. daily, moving slowly east into the night on its three-day four-night trek to Toronto, and on another six hours to Montreal. An early-morning connection out of Toronto will bring Detroiters home by early afternoon of that fourth day.

I leave the west coast of Canada on Tuesday night. The first day takes me through the Rockies to Calgary. Day two is a trek across the prairies to Winnipeg. Day three takes us through the

rock and tree country around Lake Superior to Toronto.

These trains were designed for turn-of-the-century travelers who had time to spend days and sometimes weeks on the move, for business or pleasure. But nowadays it is mostly middle-class tourists who carry their own small bags aboard, to upper or lower berths, roomettes or compartments.

They settle in for their first night of sleep, push through the train to the observation cars or stop for a drink at the club car bar. You must be reasonably

agile to travel like this, having not only the sea legs to stay aloft while walking through the swaying cars and the strength to open the heavy glass doors between cars but also the ability to dress and undress in bed. There is a washroom in every car for those who prefer not to stand on their heads while taking off their shoes.

THERE ARE several kinds of accommodation aboard a Vialrail train. Coach seats are for day trippers or those hardy enough to sleep sitting up. They come with the price of your train ticket. A Dayliner, which costs \$40 Vancouver to Toronto, is a spacious reclining seat with food service at your seat.

Most people choose an upper or lower berth in an open car, two beds for \$151; they may give you the best sleep short of a compartment, as well as social access to your neighbors. If you want privacy, especially if you are traveling alone, you'll choose a roomette for \$130. Double that for two people in a compartment.

Roomettes are the size of a single bed. In the daytime the bed takes the whole room, forcing you to stand in the doorway to get in. By day it folds away, leaving a wide single seat, private toilet, wash basin and lots of leg room. There's a one shelf for your suitcase and a small opening for your shoes, so don't pack too much to carry aboard.

The one-way fare Vancouver to Toronto is \$199, discounted APEX fares cost \$238 round trip, or explore the Canrailpass if you want to ride the rails for a certain number of days. Add the cost of accommodations, meals and some tips aboard when you budget.

Most of the travelers on this trip are aboard for the 24-hour run from Vancouver to Calgary, which gives you the best view of the Rockies available. The Rockies are higher in Colorado, but here they have been glaciated into sharp peaks, and the tree line is lower,



1-of-a-kind traveler
Iris Jones
contributing travel editor

giving you a full day of spectacular scenery. Unfortunately, the train goes through the grandeur of the Fraser Canyon at night.

In my roomette bed, with the world of light and dark flashing past my window, I keep the blind drawn so I can sleep, but often during the night I open it to see where we are. It is too dark to take pictures, but the scenes are imprinted on my mind:

THE SLEEPING lush farmland of the Fraser Valley. The wide river leading in a silver band to Ashcroft. A full moon reflected on the water and the wild country beyond. With dawn over the high hills, the cattle country of Kamloops begins to give way to the rich green foothills around Sicamous and Salmon Arm.

There are several mountain ranges between the coast and the Rockies. By Revelstoke, they begin in earnest, rising

high against the horizon, snow-topped but still mostly treed. The sheer-rock glory of the Rockies is still ahead.

From the observation car, seated high above the roofline of the train, we glide almost silently through the picture post-card scenery. Mountains looking down on a river wet with snow. Telephone poles walking across the loneliness of mountains. A glacier-green river following the curve of the train, and a wide highway following the curve of the river.

There is a gentle vibration as we follow the engine and the cars snaking away in front of us, mesmerized by the silver rooftop that inevitably pulls us around the same curve. We leave the observation car for meals or drinks, but somehow it always pulls us back.

Old-timers will tell you that the meals and service aboard these trains are long past the elegance of their beginnings. Thirty years ago a train dining room was one of the best eating places in Canada, with silver finger bowls and hovering wine stewards. Fifteen years ago, the silver finger bowls were gone but the waiters still hovered.

Now, both the hovering and the first-class food have gone. Breakfast can be good — \$4.50 complete — order the bacon and eggs. Lunch and dinner, \$8.50 for either of two choices, with an-

other \$8.50 for a half a bottle of wine, is likely to be a mixed blessing.

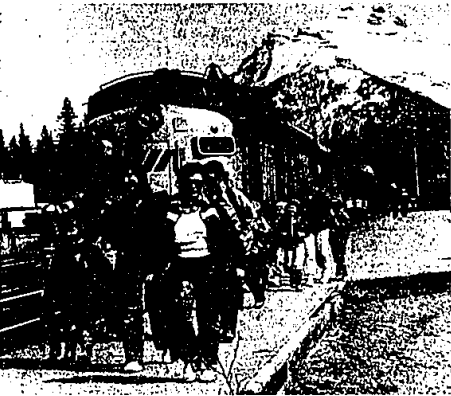
THE SERVICE is fair and the food is mediocre at best, tough and inedible at worst. The alternative is to eat in the snack bar, take a sandwich out of the stand-up bar, or have dinner during the one-hour stop in Calgary or the two-hour stop in Winnipeg.

The social life aboard the train will not disappoint you if you want it. You soon recognize and say hello to people from nearby berths, or those who sat next to you in the bar or the observation car. A faster friendship sometimes occurs after sharing a meal together in the dining room. Young people often eat, drink, play cards and socialize in at least one of the snack/drink bars.

There are often groups of children aboard between Calgary and Field, B.C. A small group of Cub Scouts took the day trip between Banff and Lake Louise, spent a few hours there and came back, for about \$8 each. A larger group of fifth graders took the run from Calgary to Field and back with their teachers.

I recommend either route for those of you who don't have time to take the train all the way but would like some of those glorious mountain moments.

Next week: Banff and Lake Louise.



IRIS AND MICKY JONES

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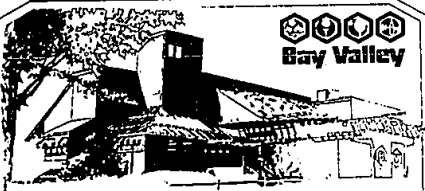
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