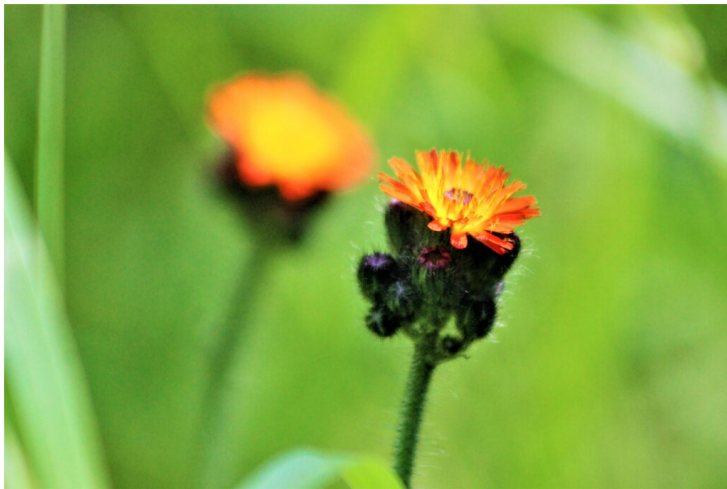


On the road again



By Nate Smelle

Driving north on Hwy 28 Saturday afternoon; headed for Bancroft with the windows all the way down and the music turned all the way up. The sun is shining, the temperature rising, and the only item left on my to-do list for the day involved picking up and eating a pizza. A quick 20-minute detour through town and I would soon be stuffing my face and sipping an ice cold beer in the backyard. Or at least that was the plan.

Rolling into Bancroft, salivating at the idea of the rest of my day, I had to slam on my brakes when I noticed that the traffic had backed up almost all the way to Tim Hortons. Having been more than a couple years since the last Rockhound Gemboree because of the COVID-19 pandemic, I had forgotten how fast and furious the traffic could get during the weekend of our town's signature gem and mineral festival. While it had been some time since I experienced a traffic jam in Bancroft, it was certainly not the first time I found myself in such a predicament on this stretch of highway. Employing the expertise I had attained from past experience, I estimated that my 20-minute detour would now require at least an hour to navigate the crosstown traffic and collect my pie.

At first, the unavoidable delay enraged my growling stomach, as I realized the obstacle impeding my quest for sustenance. Then, as I sat there in line watching the greenhouse gases spew from the tailpipe on the truck a few vehicles ahead of me, it dawned on me why it had been so long since I had experienced a traffic jam in town. With the absence of festivals and events due to the pandemic, we really haven't had to deal with such minor inconveniences over the past couple of years. With the return of these type of seasonal expectations, it appears we are finally starting to get use to living with COVID-19.

Creeping forward in the line a few inches every minute, I decided to settle into the moment to make the most of it. Looking around at the cars and the people crawling along with me, I noticed several of the vehicles had canoes or kayaks lashed to them. In a car headed in the other direction, at a speed equally as slow as I was traveling, a family of six were enjoying ice cream. There was music blaring louder than mine from a Canadian flag-clad pick-up truck towing a trailer. I could hear laughter pouring from the open windows of a car full of teenagers in front of me.

Despite the annoyance of going nowhere fast, everyone within sight seemed to be enjoying themselves ? myself included. Continuing to soak in my surroundings, it occurred to me how never before had I been a part of such a cheerful traffic jam.

?What is it making everyone so happy?? I asked myself. ?Is there a gas leak at one of the dentists' offices??

Then it hit me; the experience we were all sharing that sunny afternoon, was among those precious moments in life that many of us

took for granted prior to the pandemic. Don't get me wrong, traffic jams are awful for both our personal and planetary health. However, spontaneously arising challenges standing between us and a pizza, a day at the beach, or a trip for ice cream, those are often among the most memorable moments that keep us laughing and smiling for a lifetime.

For many travelers, this summer will be their first time to explore outside their home community in more than two years. As the world continues to reopen and we reestablish ourselves within it, we must carry forward with us this newfound appreciation of our time and how we spend it. In doing so, whether it is a short drive to town for pizza, or a long trek north to the cottage, we ensure that every trip is a good trip.