

OPUNTIA

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BREAD AND CIRCUSES.

by Dale Speirs

2009 was the centennial year of the Grey Cup football championship of the Canadian Football League. In 1909, Governor-General the Earl Grey wanted to encourage amateur sports among the colonials, so he decided to award a challenge cup for hockey. He was a slow mover, and a wealthy businessman named Hugh Allan, a Scottish immigrant worse yet, pipped him at the post with the Allan Cup. So the Earl settled for a cup for amateur rugby. The first game for it was played in 1909, although the Earl forgot to order the cup from the jewelers in

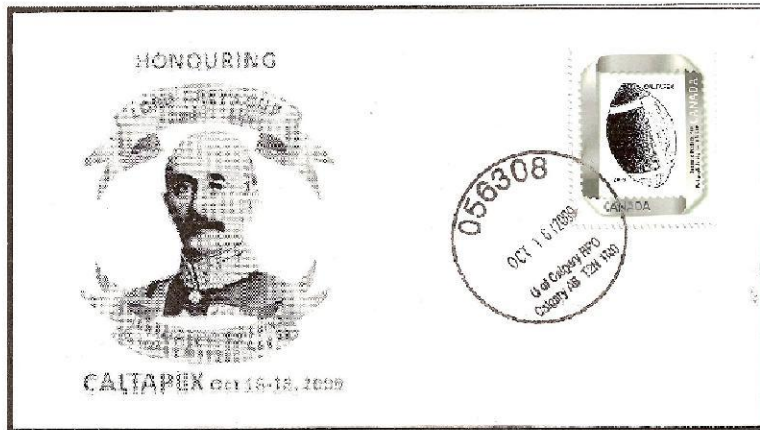


time and it wasn't presented until a few months later. Over the next five decades, the Grey Cup was used variously for rugby, then amateur football, and then in 1954 became the supreme trophy of the CFL. The Grey Cup is one of the oldest sporting trophies in the world continuously in use. The World Cup of soccer only dates from 1930, the American Super Bowl started in 1967, and the rugby World Cup began in 1987.

The final is between the western and eastern divisions of the league. So much for national unity. The Grey Cup game used to be played in December, but after much protest about the weather it was finally moved to a more seasonable time and is now played on the last weekend in November. For my American readers wondering why the CFL has an extra player on the field compared to the American leagues, that fellow runs the snowblower to clear a path for the receiver.

2009 was also the year Calgary hosted the Grey Cup game, which rotates each year from city to city. It was the 97th playing of the game because it wasn't played during three of the war years. In 2008, the Calgary Stampeders won the cup at Montréal, and had hoped to repeat in front of a hometown crowd. Unfortunately the Stamps choked in the Western final and lost in Regina to the Saskatchewan Roughriders. The Montréal Alouettes won the Eastern final.

The Calgary Philatelic Society had its annual show CALTAPEX on the weekend of October 16 to 18. Like most stamp shows, we issued a commemorative cover. Some years we have trouble thinking up a subject but this year it was obvious. The cover used a personalized stamp depicting a football, a cachet showing the Earl Grey, and postmarked at the University of Calgary postal outlet. (The university owns McMahon Stadium, where the Grey Cup was played.)

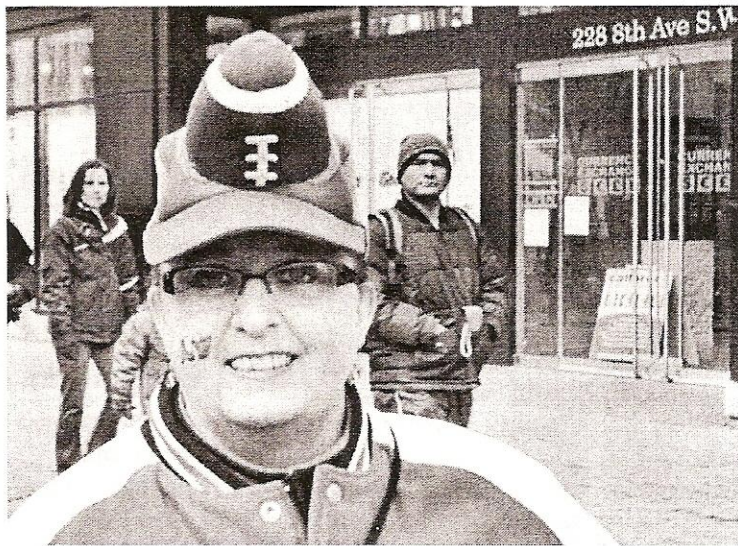


I have no interest in sports, but I enjoy a good party as much as the next person, and if there is one thing Calgarians know how to do, it is public celebrations such as this.

The anticipated Sea of Red (the colours of the Stampeders) instead became the Sea of Green (the colours of the Roughriders) after the loss to Saskatchewan. A flood of flatlanders began arriving in Cowtown for the pre-game partying, and many of them even had tickets to the game. Calgarians joined in, and every store in town was sold out of Roughrider jerseys and any kind of green jacket or hat. No one was sure what the colours of Montréal are; we figured they might get a hundred supporters at the game if they're lucky. While fans celebrated the Grey Cup, shopkeepers celebrated the fans, and the taxman celebrated the shopkeepers.

Sometime in the 1990s, Saskatchewan fans developed the habit of making helmets out of green watermelons. One carves out the interior as you might a pumpkin at Halloween, then trims the rind into the shape of a helmet. It is important, I am told, to get all the pink flesh out, otherwise it will drip down your face during the game. That done, the next step is to staple or tape a thin film of plastic to the inside to save having to wash your hair afterwards. The ersatz helmet can then be accessorized to taste with decals, small flags, bobble heads, or bumper stickers. The watermelon is worn sideways, that is, the long axis in line with the shoulders. All of Calgary's supermarkets are sold out of watermelons. Safeway had to rush-order a shipment from California. The Mexican immigrants who harvest the crops would be amazed if

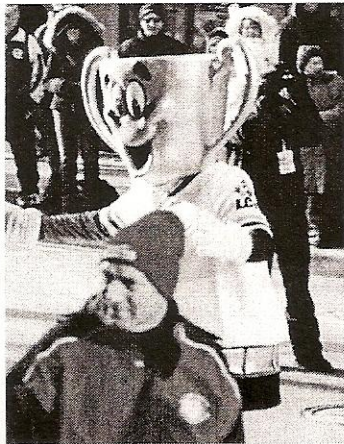
they knew to what end their labour was for. Probably the farmer as well, as I don't expect anyone would have told him the reason for the rush order. The Safeway spokesman said the main difficulty was trying to get someone on the phone, because it was the American Thanksgiving down there.



A Saskatchewan fan I photographed downtown on the pedestrian mall.

Today is Friday, the first official day of the Grey Cup Festival, although everyone started celebrating yesterday. Normally I work weekend shift Friday to Sunday but I am on vacation from November 20 to January 14. I took the bus up to the university library to do some research, then the LRT downtown to pick up my mail at the central post office. From there, I walked along the 8th Avenue pedestrian mall. Its length was jammed with people. Each block had a stage with a band thumping away, there was a marching band with cheerleaders, food pedlars lined the sides, and every merchant had a sidewalk sale.

I saw a man dressed up as the Grey Cup. About half the people were dressed in green, and the other half were businessmen and secretaries trying to think up an excuse not to have to go back to the office. The Olympic Plaza, at the eastern terminus of the mall, had a band doing cover songs on the stage. It began snowing slightly, although the weather forecast is that it will

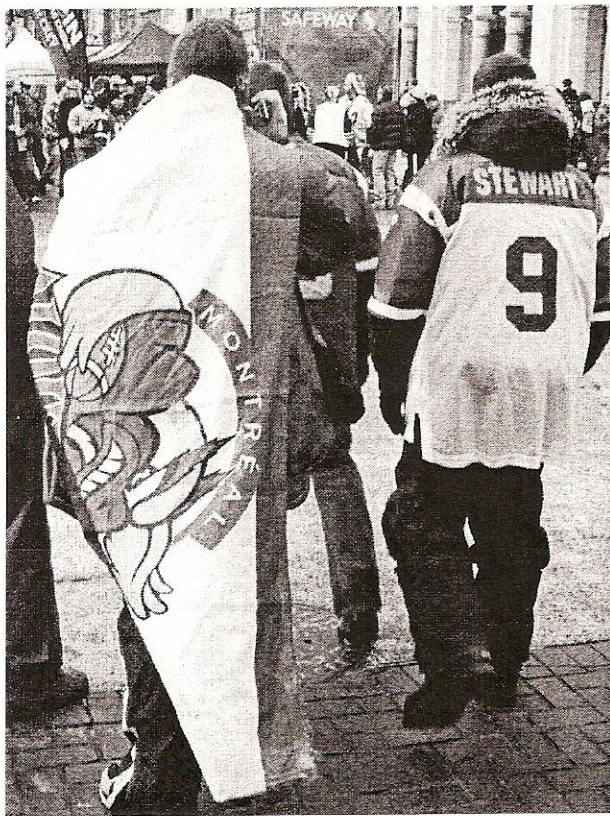


They Have Their Exits And Their Entrances.

It was easy enough to spot the flatlanders because they had elaborate green capes trimmed with sequins and well-made costumes, obviously used at home games in Regina. Cowtowners

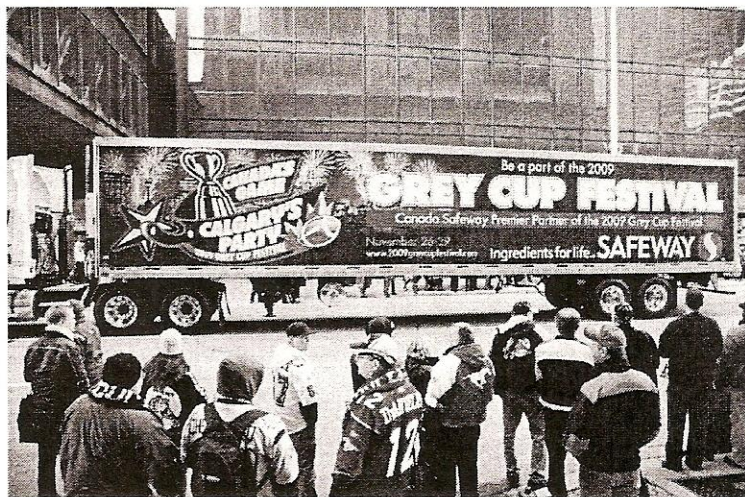
just wore the green jerseys or jackets. A few other CFL teams had fans there. I saw one woman dressed up as a tiger, so she was must have been from Hamilton (their team is the Tiger Cats). The head office at the CFL had borrowed the Calgary Stampeders cheerleaders (they obviously weren't going to be busy on game day) and re-dressed them as generic CFL cheerleaders. It would be interesting to know why the headgear chosen was black Prussian helmets with red feathers on the spikes. The league also brought in a convoy of minivans, each painted in the colours of one of the CFL teams.





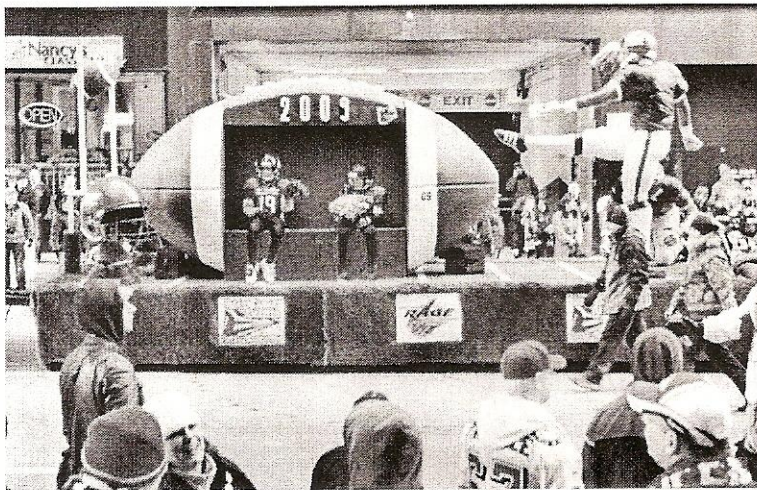
A rare sighting of some Montréal fans on the mall.

One Man In His Time Plays Many Parts.



Saturday morning dawned crisp and clear, and stayed just below the freezing mark under sunny skies. I took the bus downtown and waited for the Grey Cup Festival parade. Calgary has always been a good town for parades from its very beginnings in 1875. The big event of the year is the Stampede rodeo parade, which brings in 500,000 spectators to line the downtown streets. Ethnic and special-interest groups have parades during the year, plus the Santa parade put on by the downtown merchants.

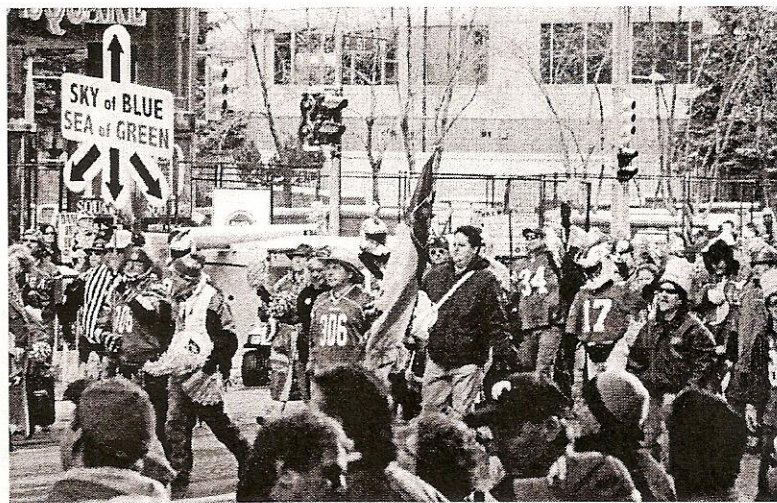
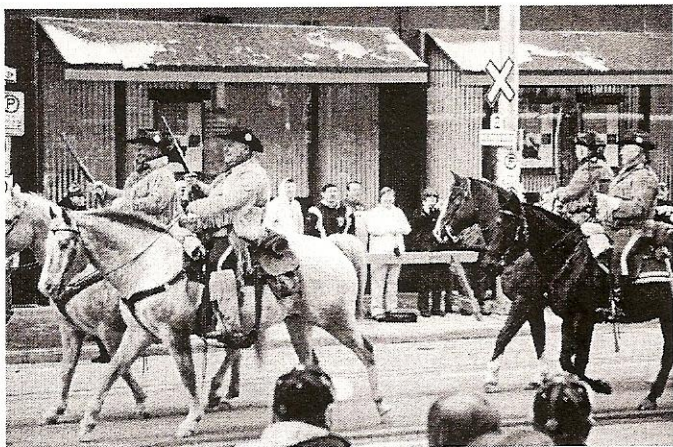
The Grey Cup parade began with the traditional procession of side-by-side police cruisers, lights flashing and sirens blaring, clearing the route of pedestrians. From there it was a steady procession of floats, high school marching bands, cheerleader teams from most of the CFL teams, highlander pipe bands, and lots of horses and colour guards. The Canadian Forces, currently taking heavy casualties in Afghanistan, were cheered. They are a popular act because their tanks do pirouettes in the street, which always goes over big. The University of Calgary showed off their new solar-powered car, which they will be using in the 2010 North American solar car race from Texas to Alberta.



Afterwards, I walked down the pedestrian mall, taking photos of the better-costumed fans. I was never refused a photo; I had only to ask and they said yes. There was a Santa Claus decked in green with white fur trimming rather than the usual red. I counted exactly seven Montréal fans in their blue colours. The rest of the mall was a sea of green. -6-



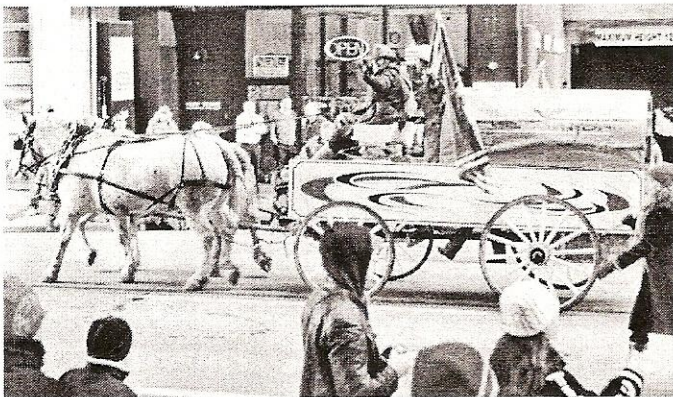
Some views of the parade. I was lucky enough to find a planter to stand on, so I was able to photograph over the heads of the crowd.

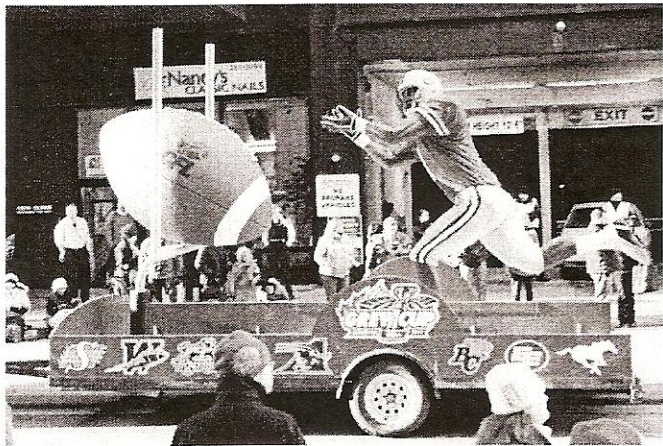


Above: The Saskatchewan Roughriders fan club march past. The sign is a pun on Saskatchewan's tourist slogan "Blue Sky Country" and, of course, a certain Beatles song.

Top left: Colour guard of pioneer rangeland cowboys.

Bottom left: Pink-coloured chuckwagon. It doesn't show up in the photo but the wagon is named the Chickwagon, and the driver is a woman.





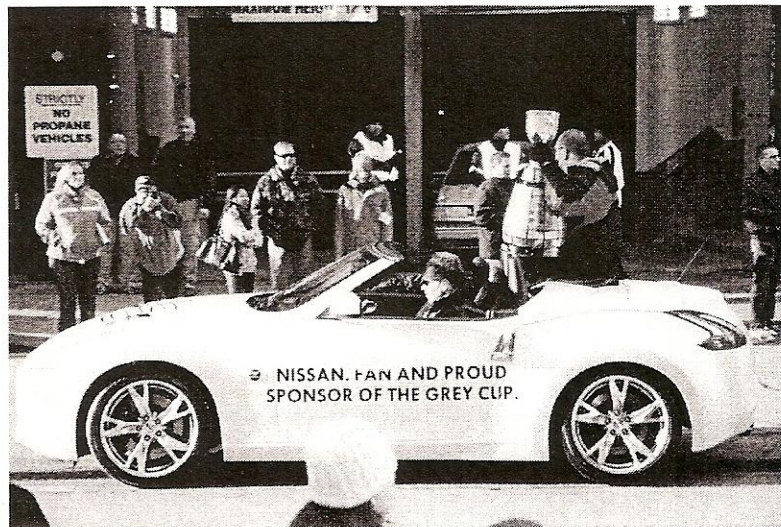
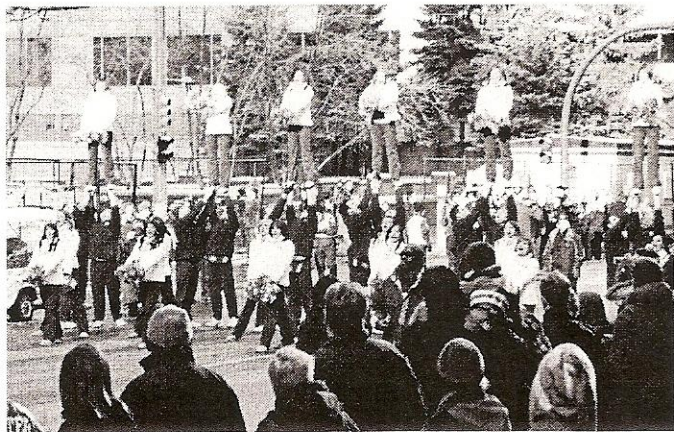
Top left: Edmonton Eskimos float.

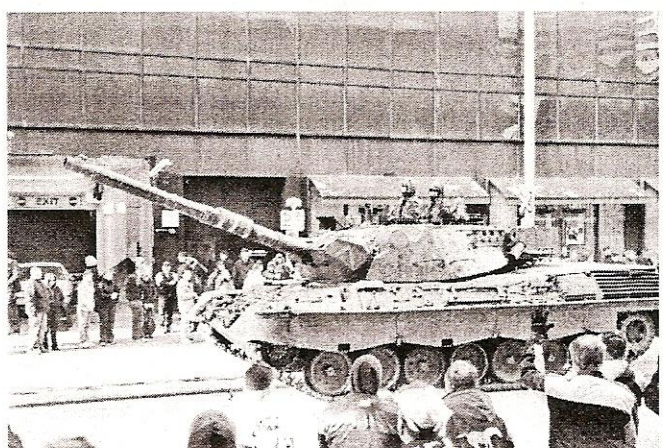
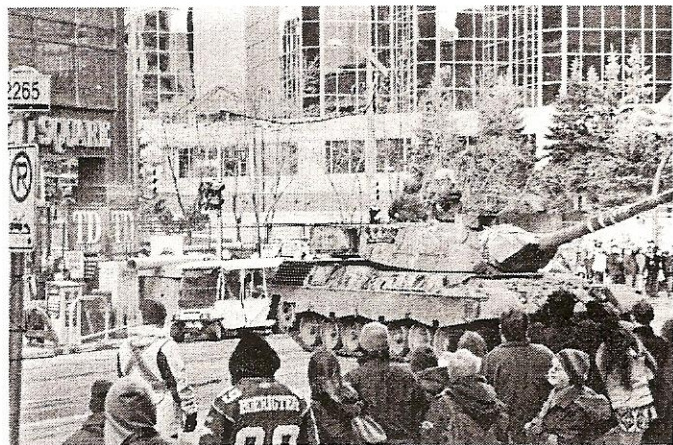
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Bottom left: Immediately behind the float, Edmonton cheerleaders stage a double-decker pyramid stunt.

Below on this page: Somebody-or-other hoists the actual Grey Cup.

Page 9: A Canadian Forces tank dances on the street.

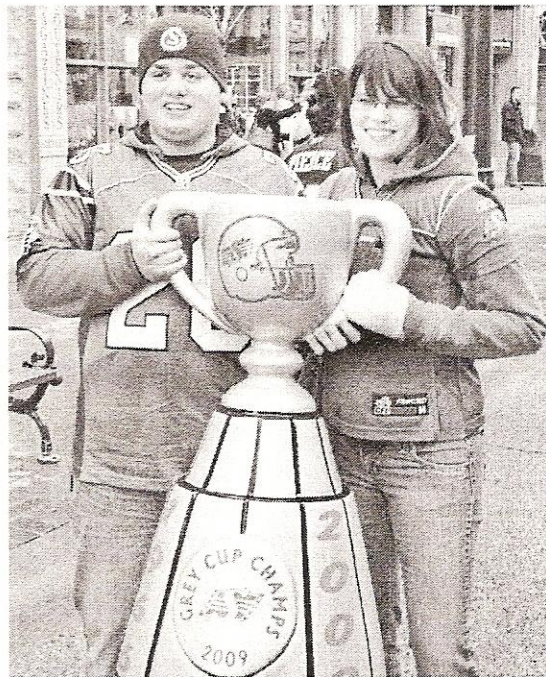






Left: Looking toward west end of 8th Avenue mall. -10-
The tall "sculptures" are wind baffles designed to deflect the wind funneling through the skyscrapers and calm the air at ground level so pedestrians don't have to walk bent over.

Right:
A young couple from the flatlands, with an inflatable Grey Cup replica.





Above: Edmonton Eskimo fans in yellow and green face paint. Edmonton and Calgary are traditional rivals, but old feuds were set aside for the 2009 Grey Cup and everyone cheered for Saskatchewan. Edmonton will host the 2010 Grey Cup.



Above: Hamilton Tiger Cat fans. Even given that it was a brisk chilly day, the fan at left must have been hot in that suit.

Page 12: Looking east at the Olympic Plaza where the mall terminates in front of City Hall. Calgary's original city hall is the sandstone building and clock tower behind the stage, and the new city hall is the glass palace next to it.



Snatching Defeat From The Jaws Of Victory. 2009-11-29

Saskatchewan was leading Montréal 27 to 25 in the final few seconds of the game. Montréal had possession of the ball and in desperation kicked for a field goal and missed. Then they noticed that Saskatchewan had too many men on the field, protested, and got a free penalty kick. With zero seconds left on the clock, their second kick sailed between the goal posts, and Montréal won 28 to 27. You can't get a more exciting finish than that. I don't know who the thirteenth Saskatchewan player on the field was, but he'll need police protection when the team gets back to Regina. The coach may also have to go into hiding.



Postmark of the village of Earl Grey, Saskatchewan, named after the man himself.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[Editor's remarks in square brackets.]

FROM: Lloyd Penney
1706 - 24 Eva Road
Etobicoke, Ontario M9C 2B2

2009-07-21

[Re: my late uncle Norman Maki] You're related to the Maki family. I remember a number of players in the NHL with the last name but many of them came from Sault Ste. Marie. Any relations there?

[No. Maki means 'hill' in Suomalais, so it is a fairly common surname among Finns. My mother's father was a Humalamaki which means "hill where they grow beer hops". Her older brother Norman liked to translate it as "hill of drunken Finns". The next generation shortened it, and many used the Scottish spelling of Mackie due to prejudice against non-anglophone immigrants. My mother used Mackie as her maiden name, and Norman used Maki. The majority of Finns settling in Canada landed in either Ontario or, in the case of my ancestors, west-central Alberta.]

I Also Heard From: Ken Bausert, John Held Jr

**ROCKY
MOUNTAIN
HIKES 2009**

by Dale Speirs

Just a few photos of places I was hiking last summer.

At left is Mount Baldy pass, looking south, up the Kananaskis River valley. The river widens out in the foreground into Barrier Lake. Highway 40, seen in lower left, winds its way along the east side of the valley and goes through the gap in the distance.





Looking west at Gap Lake in the Bow River valley, with Pigeon Mountain on the far side of the valley. The Bow River and the new Trans-Canada Highway are hidden in the spruces between the lake and the mountain.

Notice the rock slide on the western shore of the lake, where the old Trans-Canada Highway was blasted out of the north bank of the valley. The photo on the next page was taken from that slide.



Looking down from the rock slide into the waters of Gap Lake. A nicely matched pair of boulders which split in half many decades ago when they came down the mountainside. For scale, each boulder is about the size of a Smart car. The water is crystal clear and you can see clumps of aquatic plants growing on the lake bed. -16-

Gap Lake is more of a large fishing pond, but it is one of my favourite places. Before or after hiking elsewhere in the Rockies, I like to stop in at a supermarket in nearby Canmore, pick up a few sandwiches and a soda pop from their deli section, and have a picnic here. Because it is off the beaten track on the old Trans-Canada Highway, few tourists know about it. It's just the locals and regular hikers such as myself who visit here.

It is not enough to prudently lay up gold and silver for one's old age, or invest in petroleum companies for current income. This size of your house does not determine your worth. One must also remember to enjoy the present. I consider myself fortunate to be living on the edge of the mountains, and able to make many trips to commune with nature and hike through cool mountain glades while most Calgarians scabble for their living in the glaring heat of the big city.