

On the Road

TEACHER GUIDE

Canadian Press reporter Colin Perkel looks at how a pretty cool stunt devised by an enterprising entrepreneur in the early 1950s helped ensure the last stretch of the Trans-Canada Highway was built. The “Ribbon of Asphalt,” that a few decades earlier had been largely a dream of some West Coast car enthusiasts, would ultimately replace in large part the “Ribbon of Steel” — the railway that formed the critical link binding one end of Canada to the other.

When finally completed in 1970, the Trans-Canada was one of the longest roads in the world at 7,821 kilometres. Today, however, several routes carry the Trans-Canada designation, some better known than others. While specifications for the highway are set by the federal government, the provinces are largely responsible for its maintenance — another example of federal-provincial co-operation.

Additional discussion/research points:

- Can you find some popular musical examples that mention the Trans-Canada or railway?
- Can you identify the various routes the Trans-Canada now takes?
- What was “the Gap?” Before it was closed, how do you think people got around it?
- While the Trans-Canada is an example of two levels of government co-operating, can you find times when it wasn’t such smooth driving between Ottawa and the provinces?
- In terms of the Trans-Canada, what is the significance of Chippewa Falls?
- Who was the entrepreneur behind the “Wawa 4?” What lasting icon is he responsible for?
- Where did Prime Minister John Diefenbaker perform a ceremony opening the Trans-Canada in 1962? What was the significance of the location?
- What do you think is the political and economic importance of the Trans-Canada?
- Have you been on the highway? Where? What was your favourite part and why?



A vehicle is shown on the Trans-Canada Highway just south of Wawa, Ont., on Monday, April 3, 2017. THE CANADIAN PRESS/Nathan Denette



Prime Minister, the Right Honourable John G. Diefenbaker.



A sign outside the Wawa museum in Wawa, Ontario.



Two travellers consult a road map before the Trans-Canada highway sign at the intersection of highways 15 and 17, Ottawa, Ontario in July 1952. THE CANADIAN PRESS/HO-Library and Archives Canada

