

## Motor car operators happily tour part of the Gaspé railway line

GILLES GAGNÉ

ESCUMINAC – Fourteen motor car owners, accompanied by as many friends or relatives, toured part of the Gaspé Peninsula railway on June 22 and 23, to their great delight and that of passers-by who saw them travelling, whether these passers-by were on foot, on the road or on a boat.

Motor cars, also called railcars, are old vehicles used for railway maintenance. They were replaced from the mid-1970s and onward by more versatile pickup trucks running on rails, or hi-rails.

Seven motor cars came from Quebec, three from Ontario, three from the United States and one from New Brunswick. They had to travel between their hometown and New Richmond, the starting point of their two excursions,



On the way to Escuminac and back, the motor car drivers stopped between Carleton and Saint-Omer to enjoy the view of the Baie des Chaleurs, a highlight of the excursion.

Photo: G. Gagné

in road vehicles pulling a trailer on which there was a motor car.

For safety reasons, the

group was supervised by two pickup trucks for the total duration of the New Richmond-Escuminac route, a distance

of 45 miles, double that with the return. The hi-rails belong to the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie (SCFG),

the municipal entity operating trains on the peninsula.

### Who owns a motor car?

American resident David Sigafoose left New Jersey, a 16-hour drive from New Richmond, to join the group coordinated by Louis-François Garceau.

“When I was three, my father bought me an electric toy train set and I loved it straight away. It was a rather large network. This passion has followed me ever since. I saw my first motor car in 2000. I didn't know that we could use these machines like this. I bought my first motor car in 2001, my second in 2004 and my third in 2007, a bigger one. I made trips to Rivière-du-Loup, on the Quebec North Shore and Labrador Railway (between

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### MOTOR CAR:

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Sept-Îles and Schefferville), on the Ontario Northland. This is my second trip to the Gaspé Peninsula,” said Mr. Sigafoose, who participated in the September 2006 excursion.

Louis-François Garceau, founding member of Draisines Québec, is a retired Canadian National railway worker, while his excursion companion, Pierre Lassonde, is a retired construction worker.

“I have been a crane operator almost everywhere. I have always loved trains. This is what attracted me to motor cars. I saw that an American association existed, NARCOA (North American Rail Car Operators Association) and that its members came to drive here. I told myself that we had to create our association. We did it in 2004,” assures Mr. Lassonde, who owned five motor cars at one point.

Born in Carleton and now living in Drummondville, Jean-François Boudreau returned to his roots to participate in this trip. “I still have my electric train store in Drummondville. I still love trains and I came to see my



Photo: G. Gagné

David Sigafoose drove 16 hours one-way between New Jersey and the Gaspé Peninsula to make this excursion.

grandmother.”

The family, made up of Anthony Lefebvre, 10 years old, and his parents Caroline Trudel and Claude Lefebvre, from Saint-Stanislas, in Haute-Mauricie, was on their first trip on a handcar.

“When I saw that, I said to myself that I had to buy one,” summed up Mr. Lefebvre, a longtime train enthusiast.

Anthony finds it “interesting to see how it works. I love school outings. My parents always sign for me to go,” he

says.

“Claude bought the railcar in the fall. He was thinking of upgrading it in the winter but he ended up taking two weeks recently to do so. I don't hate it (travelling on a motor car) but I enjoy it less than my boyfriend. I wouldn't go out every weekend,” says Caroline Trudel.

The Lefebvre-Trudel handcar experienced some alternator problems. The battery was therefore not charging, which hampered starting. It was done

on compression, thanks to her energetic thrusts.

Denis and Pierre-Luc Dumas, highly competent railway mechanics, one retired from the CN (Canadian National Railway) and the other very active in this company, members of the third and fourth railway workers, saw here and there opportunities to give little advice and repair certain elements during the two excursions.

### A necessary certification

“You need certification from NARCOA. It's not a question of knowing how to operate the three levers of a railcar. It's, above all, a question of knowing the safety rules,” explains Louis-François Garceau, who has just sold his vehicle for \$5,000. At 77, he will make other excursions, on motor cars belonging to friends.

This could also be the case for Heather Kuhn and Brian Adams, from Alfred, Ontario. “Can you say in your report that our handcar is for sale?” she asked.

“This is my second trip to the Gaspé Peninsula. I came a dozen years ago,” said Mr.

Adams, remembering a spring 2011 excursion.

Except when railcars travel at grade crossings protected by barriers or members of the railway team, they give way to road users.

The railway is only passable between Matapédia and the Black Cape sector of New Richmond, with major repair work taking place in many places on the Gaspé railway.

Annual maintenance work on June 22 and 23 also limited the group's journey, forcing them to turn back in Escuminac, while the operators were initially supposed to go to Matapédia, which would have added 50 miles to the journey, including the return trip. Contractors are taking advantage of the weekend, a quieter period for SCFG's freight operations, to move forward with their work.

Are rail riders passionate? They repeated the same route on June 23, with a small addition towards Black Cape, where work to move the railway has blocked the passage of all traffic towards Caplan since November 2023. Their second day was enhanced with a visit to the Rail GD railway equipment repair shop in New Richmond.