

News from Canada ~ Fiddling in BC

by Rosemary Lach

Imagine—you're driving in the heart of the Chilcotins, heading towards Horsefly and Likely, British Columbia. You see a small sign to Gavin Lake. You turn right onto a gravel road and drive for four, five, six kilometers with no more signs and no sign of habitation. Are you in the right place? And then a turn in the road and you arrive. The sun is shining off the lake. A few people are wandering around, settling in. There's a large communal building for meeting and eating, eleven sleeping cabins and a big field for campers. This is home for BC Columbia Fiddle 'Treat, a five-day long fiddle retreat. Cell phones don't work; the nearest telephone is twenty kilometers away; there are no shops; even radio reception is spotty. It is very quiet and peaceful.

BC Fiddle 'Treat, a.k.a. Gavin Lake Fiddle Camp, is now in its twentieth year. It was begun by members of the Quesnel and Prince George branches of the British Columbia Old Time Fiddlers Association who wanted to continue the tradition of old time fiddling—old, familiar tunes that are danceable—in an environment of sharing and fun. Fiddlers aged 5 to 75 come from across British Columbia, Alberta and beyond to share in the tradition and to learn together. There are classes for guitar, mandolin and keyboard as well as the many fiddle classes. The instructors often include former Canadian and BC fiddle champions. Gordon Stobbe, Bob Montgomery, Keith Hill, Frank Rodgers, Ivonne Hernandez and Daniel Lapp have all taught at Gavin Lake.

Daniel Lapp, one of the instructors in 2012, grew up in Prince George absorbing fiddle music from his grandfather and other family members. He was BC fiddle champion in 1992. For the past twenty years, Daniel has been collecting BC fiddle tunes and now has over a thousand. So, what makes a BC fiddle tune? BC fiddlers reflect the history of their province—a province of immigrants—and each fiddler develops his or her own sound. Their influence may have been native, Métis, Québécois, American, Scottish and Irish or more likely a combination of all of these. One of these fiddlers was Leonard Sexsmith whose tune *Out the Buckhorn Way* is one of BC's most

cherished tunes. It has been recorded by Don Messer and has consequently become a well-known and well-loved tune throughout Canada and elsewhere. [Editor's note: Tune notation for *Out the Buckhorn Way* accompanies this article; to hear Daniel Lapp play it, go to <http://www.victoriafiddlesociety.com/jam-tunes/attachment/out-the-buckhorn-way-daniel/>.]

The fiddle camp is volunteer run. Until four years ago, only the instructors and lifeguard were paid. Now some kitchen staff is hired but everyone pitches in to help with the clean-up, each class taking a turn at the dishes. Fiddle 'Treat is self-sustaining. The fees cover all expenses. The day starts with breakfast. Then, several of the sleeping cabins are converted into classrooms. There's a homemade yurt for the guitar players. One fiddle class is down by the fire pit. Another congregates on the grass. Music is everywhere. There's the opportunity to learn to play the pennywhistle, to practise the spoons or bodhran, even to learn a morris dance or two, all taught by volunteers. In the evening the instructors perform and then there's a dance. The band plays waltzes, polkas, schottisches, the Butterfly, Seven Steps,* Canadian barn dance, all the old favorites, and I teach a few set dances, Virginia reels and the like. When not fiddling, you can fish and canoe or go for a walk in the forest, which is part of the University of British Columbia's research forest. It's an intense few days, culminating in the final concert. As one participant said, at Gavin Lake there's "good music, good people, good learning, good food." What more can anyone want?

Thanks to Jean Gelinias for providing the background about Fiddle 'Treat and to Daniel Lapp for the history of British Columbia fiddling. For more information on Gavin Lake fiddle camp: www.members.netbistro.com/fiddle/. For information on Daniel Lapp: www.houseofmusic.ca.

*To see a demonstration of the Seven Steps dance, go to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nsPVDMLIoto>.

"News from Canada" features news about Canadian events and groups. Ideas for articles should be sent to Rosemary Lach, rosemarylach@yahoo.ca or to Bev Bernbaum, wturnip@sympatico.ca.

