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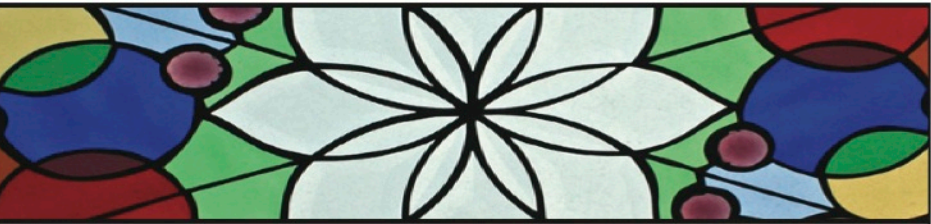
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The Humes River Wilderness Hiking Trail

by Mona Anderson

Cape Breton Island has so many wonderful things to offer, the history, the music, and the culture. But the island itself, in its natural state, is a richly wild and varied environment with generous portions of mountains, forests, and rivers as yet unspoiled. Some say “You have to experience Cape Breton to understand how beautiful it is.” There can be no better way to truly experience the island than by walking its trails. There are spectacular views all across the island that can only be seen if you are willing to walk to the mountain's heart.

A new trail is about to be added to the wide array of walking trails already available. Though the Humes River Hiking Trail is still in the project stage, it is soon to become a reality. The proposal is to build a back-country hiking trail within the Humes River Wilderness Area in southern Victoria County. The trail will begin near the edge of the Wagmatcook First Nation Reserve and run westerly for approximately 15 kilometres ending at Aberdeen in Inverness County at Exit #6 on the Trans-Canada Highway at the turn off to Little Narrows.

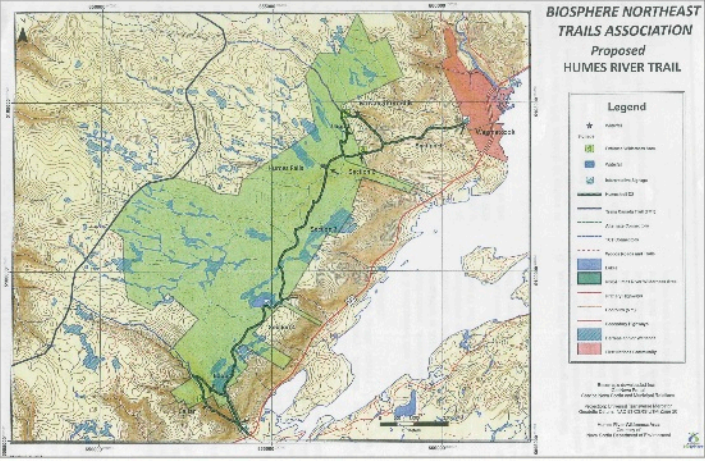
There is a section of old roadway near the new school in Wagmatcook that leads into the forest. This road will be used as the entrance to a parking area that will be built at the trail head. Loops at both ends of the trail will give hikers an opportunity to experience a smaller version of this new trail. At the eastern end the trail leads to three water falls, the McNaughton Falls, the First Brook Falls and the spectacular Humes River Falls where the water rushes over a 60 foot drop. This loop will be approximately 11 kilometres in length. The loop at the westerly end will take hikers 5 kilometres up the charming MacPherson Brook past lovely waterfalls and scour pools. There is also a relic “cellar” from the old grist mill located at one of the higher falls as well as a longer hike that includes a Bras d'Or Lake view from the Bucklaw barrens and a stop at MacPhedran Lake.

The Humes River Wilderness Area is part of the Cape Breton Highlands Ecodistrict and the Keppoch Mountain Natural Landscape. The Humes River Trail will traverse this wilderness area ascending steep well-drained forested slopes to a plateau that rises 300 – 450 metres above sea level. Much of this plateau is forested but in the vicinity of the proposed trail there are extensive areas of exposed bedrock, offering spectacular views of the Bras d'Or Lake.

The trail passes through one of the last large tracts of Acadian forests in the Bras d'Or Lake watershed. The forests on the plateau resemble the boreal softwood forests of more northern latitudes with balsam, fir, and black spruce mixed with white spruce and white birch. Wetter areas are dominated by black spruce and eastern larch along with spongy sphagnum mosses. This area of the plateau is one of the few locations that has not been cut over for pulpwood providing an excellent opportunity to observe a boreal ecosystem.

The ecodistrict offers refuge for many rare plants like the curly grass fern and pink lady's slipper orchid. The area also provides habitat for the endangered American marten and lynx. Cold, late springs and heavy snow cover, that lasts well into May, are typical of this part of the highlands. The lower reaches of Humes River are truly magnificent due to the numerous boulders in the channel. This characteristic makes Humes River quite different from other rivers like the Baddeck, Middle and Skye Rivers. As Humes River flows out of a gorge carved into the highland terrain it crosses and cuts down into an old glacial sand and gravel floodplain. Some of the boulders in this deposit are too large to be moved by the river. As a result they can be seen lying indiscriminately over the river bed forming a “boulder garden”.

There is an existing parking area at the westerly end of the new trail where the Lewis Mountain Road meets the Trans-Canada at Exit #6. This is a portion of the original Baddeck to Whycocomagh road that could easily be expanded providing an



Map of the proposed Humes River Hiking Trail.



First Brook Falls.



Pink Lady Slipper Orchid.

see New trail, Supplement, page four