

Ward's Voyage an Adventure

By STANLEY WESTALL

The first day of winter brought crunchy, beautiful weather to the Toronto waterfront. Sparkling sunbeams made the filthy water look good enough to drink and under a blue sky, the coal heaps and dockside buildings were almost romantic.

On the far side of the Western gap, a little red bus discharged its passengers on to the friendly deck of the cable-ferry. In a few seconds, the barge had reached the other side—concluding a miracle of transportation that the Roman engineers would have envied. (The people of Toronto Island believe that after 2,000 years, the TTC could improve on Roman methods, but Davisville wasn't built in a day).

This ferry is the important link in a complex routing of Ward's Island dwellers to the centre of Toronto. Using ingenuity and foresight, the Toronto Transit commissioners have given the islanders a daily adventure with travel which Jules Verne never imagined. To go the two miles from Ward's Island to Queen's Quay involves a journey of about one hour—usually longer—and practically every method of locomotion except camels.

Marie Die, of Seneca St., Algonquin Island, shows how much she enjoys the TTC's arrangements with this tribute:

"We are forced to go miles out of our way. We must walk all the way to Ward's Island if we hope to get a seat on the packed bus, driven at our peril over the entire length of the Island on roads which invite death they are so full of great holes and narrow twisting passes, some barely missing the water's edge. We are shunted like cattle over the Western Gap on a barge-like contraption likely to be put out of commission by winds of any strength. There is no bus to meet us at the city side and so we must walk up through a muddy, hazardous area to the Bathurst loop and then try to squeeze into already packed street cars at our various transfer points and head back to the downtown section where most of us are employed.

"Returning to this cable-driven barge at night is quite dangerous as there are no lights and one must pick a way over logs and unseen muddy holes; traffic comes out of nowhere and there are no sidewalks."

Another woman resident writes: "After a needless 20-minute bus ride travelling west (from Ward's to the Island airport), you have to pick your way through mud and mire to the corner of Fleet and Stadium Road (the reason why we islanders have to wear rubber boots up to our hips when the city sidewalks

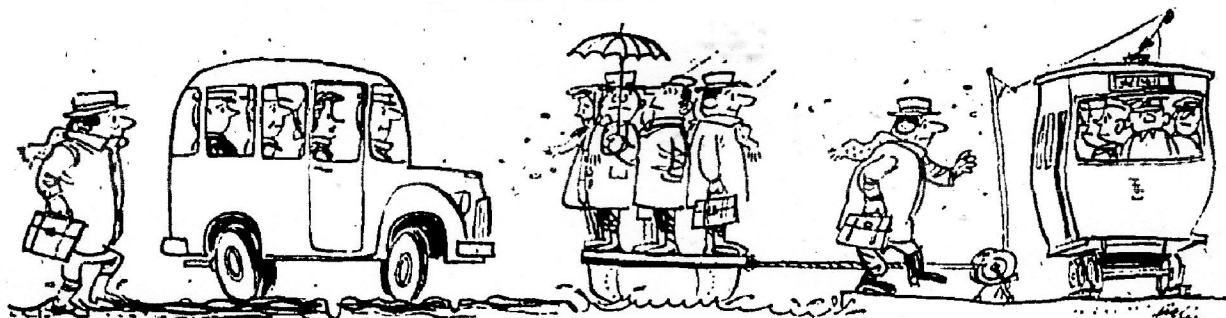
are dry), where we wait, wait and wait for a green light to get across the street."

(This is a pedestrian-operated signal crossing on the traffic-clogged Lakeshore.)

"When we are finally successful in getting a green light, we then wait at the car stop another five minutes at least until the oldest relic in use by the TTC takes us to our next transfer point. You then endeavor, and what an endeavor, to get on a King, Queen or Dundas car and proceed to travel east approximately the same distance as you rode west on that needless bus ride."

Coming home, Mrs. A. A. paints a picture of the shopper loaded down with parcels, struggling with other passengers in the crowded antiquity of the Exhibition and Fort cars, treading with apprehension the dark yards to the ferry down Stadium Road, facing then the ordeal of the 20-minute roller coaster ride to the faraway islands.

In the bright, crisp, light-hearted sunshine of high noon these complaints seem ridiculous. If you're not in a hurry, the bus ride through the Islands is pleasant, instructive and not so awful as



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on some of the roads in the Rockies. The little boat trip is something the others haven't got—those poor North Toronto dwellers who take the stuffy tunnel to town. And toward the end, there's a health-giving walk up Stadium Road, giving a man a chance to contemplate the architectural wonders of Tip-Top Tailors, Molson's Brewery and Jack Kent Cooke's ball park.

But it doesn't take a vivid imagination to project the experience to the dark and dangerous cold of January, February and March, to the slipping and silthering ordeal of a snow-rutted Stadium Road. It doesn't take much imagination to realize the fear that would strike a lone woman obliged to take that badly lit road to the ferry.

The Islanders have always struggled under difficulties which the rest of us do not have to face. They live in an awkward place. The heavy subsidy which was carried by the rest of Metro for the old winter service may be out of proportion to the needs of around 700 Islanders, living there only until 1968. Even now, Metro-at-large will have to meet a loss on their transportation — just as it meets a loss on other non-profit routes.

But common humanity demands an improvement on the existing service. A system which can undermine the seat of Government at Queen's Park, drive its tunnels through the heart of a busy city and carry hundreds of thousands of mainlanders around the town every day should be able to improvise a bus line up the few hundred yards of well-paved Stadium road.

It will cost money, but no one has claimed that the Islanders should have to pay the whole price of progress. This is part of the expense of reclaiming a park which Toronto was foolish enough to destroy and wise enough to take back.

