

David Swann in "The Forgotten Corner"
by Eric Musekamp
May 4th, 2007

David's visit to our corner of Alberta began with the Medicine Hat Liberal Party "Pasta Supper", spaghetti with pizza sauce. Another Liberal innovation. It was delicious. David gave a wonderful "off the cuff" speech, "when the music starts will you dance or will you walk away". He introduced me to Karen Charlton, Medicine Hat's next MLA, and many others. It was a delightful evening.

I asked David if he could come to Bow Island in support of Farmworkers. "Of course, I'll just spend the night and come out in the morning".

We decided to head out early and take a side trip to Red Rock Coulee Natural Area. We met the next day at the Premium Sausage store in Seven Persons, (no tofu sausage, we checked) David parked his Co-op hybrid and jumped in my pick-up to go down to the coulee.

We headed south on Hwy 887 through the lush irrigated fields already green. The water that gives life to these fields and surrounding communities originates in the snow pack of the Rocky Mountains. It is delivered through an elaborate system of dams, lake, canals, ditches and pipes.

As we rolled along I was able to point out a sod farm on one side of the road and a hay farm on the other. On the sod farm, workers have rights whereas, the workers on the hay farm do not. It's discriminatory discrimination. (I digress) As we continued we left the irrigated lands and could plainly see the difference between the "wet" and "dry". The dry in this area, is grass-land. Vast seas of grass, currently being used for cattle production. We crossed the flats and ascended the south bank of this huge basin. As we climbed, the vastness of this ancient lake and the melt-water channels became apparent.

The geomorphology of this region is truly dramatic. It was a pleasure to be able to escort David to this special place. We had a good look around and headed back to Seven. I hopped in with David so I could check out the hybrid car. (and bend his ear) The car is pretty interesting. It's roomy, very quiet, and all around, pretty neat. It wouldn't cut it out here in the country side though. I think our roads are so bad, it would just wreck the car. Even my heavy duty pick-up takes a beating.

We then headed to Bow Island to the headquarters of the Farmworkers Union of Alberta for a "meet and greet". A few folks dropped in to see David. The town's mayor Alan Hyland did not stop in or send word. Our local newspaper the 40 Mile County Commentator sent their editor Delynda Pilon who produced an excellent story--Front page, with a photo on page two. The photo shows David and I holding a basket of Alberta dry beans and "Classic Grains" (wheat crunch). The tag on the basket notes "this is not a Fair Trade Commodity". I presented the basket to David and posed the question.

"Do you know where your tofu comes from?"

After a nice visit at the FUA headquarters we slipped next door to the sporting goods store. David's Blackberry wouldn't work in our town, nor his cell phone or mine either (fringe area) so we had to borrow their phone. We had a good look in the store, archery and hunting are big out here.

Next, lunch, we went across the street to the good old Island Inn, a mainstay on main street. This is one of Alberta's typical, ubiquitous Chinese restaurants. David bought lunch so we all loaded up at the buffet. We were joined by a prominent local resident, long time farmer and business man. He was able to give all sorts of insight to local issues. Then after a nice lunch I tucked my big square head into David's hybrid (more ear bending) and we headed north across the South Saskatchewan river into the "big empty". We rolled through lease pasture land dotted with oil and gas wells and cattle. I pointed out the abandoned earthworks from a very early irrigation system that never came to be. WW1 erupted, cutting off the money. All that remains is many miles of laboriously horse and fresno constructed canals.

At Rolling Hills I left David to continue north to Highway 1 and "Cowtown". It was interesting to listen as he pulled away in the hybrid. Not a sound, save the noise from the tires on the road. Pretty cool.

Eric Musekamp