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## High Falls becoming an ugly blight on Muskoka's landscape

August 12, 2009

High Falls is the canary in the coal mine. Yet we ignore the warnings it offers to anyone who either cares or cares to look.

There was the ill-advised expansion of the High Falls power plant. Its opponents were bamboozled and co-opted. The "public consultations" were a sham, corporate flummery that met the letter but not the spirit of the law.

The plant, an ugly concrete bunker that sits athwart the falls like a scab on a pretty face, was built precisely as had been planned. Promises to landscape it were never kept. Nor was anything said about the chain link fence and barbed wire that convert that section of the Trans Canada Trail to something resembling a maximum security prison yard.

The ugly Bailey bridge plopped across the top of the falls intrudes rudely on the view from below. It may be part of the trail, but it detracts from the natural environment that is the very purpose of the trail.

An attractive suspension bridge, built back from the lip of the falls, could have added to the now vanished charm of the area. (Add bad dental work to the scab on the pretty face).

There is the continued blight directly opposite the falls on the honky-tonk beach, trailer park and occasional nudist camp. Where once there were diving birds and paddling beaver there are now garish water slides and plastic pontoons (cheap lipstick around the bad dental work and scab).

Now, adding to the despoliation of High Falls is the conversion of once rustic and picturesque High Falls Road into the high-speed northern bypass, a brilliant piece of political if not environmental engineering.

Trees have been felled by the hundreds. Where once there was a picturesque rise of forested rock, there is now a monstrous slag heap that totally dominates the now worthless view. (Add acne to the scab, the bad dental work and the cheap lipstick).

It lacks only railway siding and smokestacks to give it the ambience of Hamilton harbour.

Those of us on the south side of the river have had our once verdant view replaced by a rough stone embankment and a steel guardrail. The grind and thunk of construction has made life unpleasant for a year. It soon will end, to be replaced by the constant noise and lights of a never-ending stream of cars and trucks.

In one area, the new road is within a few feet of the shoreline. Not only will silt and road salt cascade into the river, given the higher speed limit and the increased traffic, it's inevitable that a car will plummet through the fence and into the river, which is quite deep at that point.

I will take no pleasure in saying "I told you so," when that happens.

The river is high this year. It's fed not only by the rains of this dismal summer but also by the tears of those of us who sought beauty and a better life by settling on its banks.

Dick Smyth

Bracebridge

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