

# Bob Wills - Diary Entry June 2010



*Holy cow, Devi! It's June and the midpoint of another month has already made its way downstream. And now with midpoint of another year biding its time in the tall grass and the term "twenty-ten" rolling off the tongue like water from the Kingsway spillway, I'm caught by a quirk. Why is it that the days can dawdle but the years zip by?*

*I'm also caught somewhere amidst the clouds and the sun and the lyrics of a Neil Young tune. As those early June skies have proven, there "comes a time when you're driftin', comes a time when you settle down."*

*And it's not just clouds. The signs of drifting and settling are clearly evident at Wakamow in June. The River Park Campground fills with people on the move as geese and growing goslings settle into in their summer homes. A murky creek drifts over dams and weirs on its journey to the sea. Meanwhile, painted turtles settle down bank-side just to watch it pass. And a warm sun breaks through the drifting clouds to remind us that the summer season is about to settle in.*



*So too are hobos. For decades, hobos (travelers, trekkers and adventurers) have been riding the rails and drifting across this vast and wonderful land. For decades, hobos have been enticed by the wonders of our handsome little river valley. During the 1930's, the Moose Jaw Hobo Jungle (an area south of the CPR mainline and east of Plaxton's Lake) was rated as a four star facility in the "hobo gazette". As a result, many a traveler found temporary respite there. Seventy years later, many still do.*

*Don't be surprised if you encounter more adventurers in the weeks to come. They appear like mosquitoes whenever the sun chases the clouds away; whenever the CPR Police chase them from the remote units. What is surprising however is that many of our modern day hobos are riding the rails with dogs in tow. Maybe Jerry Jeff and Mr. Bojangles were right. Maybe dogs do make good traveling pals.*

*June is also the month when Wakamow is aglow with the smiling faces of those looking to settle down. It's adorned by long dresses and constricting neckties. With the facilities at the Sportsman's Centre, Kingsway Connor Park and Kiwanis River Park booked to the max, many of the less punctual are opting for other park spaces to share their "I Do's". Wakamow has hosted/will host weddings on the boardwalk, in Kinsmen Wellesley Park, Queensway Park, McCaig Gardens. Who knows, some of our modern day hobos might have even tied the knot while twisting the ends in the bushes by Lions River Park. There comes a time when you're driftin', comes a time when you settle down.*

*If you are like me however and are uncertain as to whether you are adrift on the settle (and the relentless April showers have you looking at you shoes), you should seriously consider a June stroll through Wakamow. With the river full of water and the valley teeming with life, Wakamow is a prairie beauty. And, she looks stunning in green.*

*Even if the clouds choose to settle in, I'll continue to make my daily treks through both Wakamow Valley and Crescent Park (it too looks beautiful by the way). Hopefully I'll even be able to add other lyrics of Mr. Young into my walking shoes. If I can "Zen-it" long enough, I just might be able to "be the river as it rolls along; be the rain, be the rain". Sunny days, of course, need no prompts. They just are.*

*Right now however, I seem to be feeling the lyrics of Norah Jones. With what has almost become an annual June tradition, I often find "my mind racing from chasing pirates." Oh well, I'm told that's where the thrill is. Besides if Neil is right ... "there comes a time."*

*Why not drift through Wakamow this June? Why not settle down and enjoy the season?*



*Looking across Moose Jaw River to site of Hobo Jungle*

Except from "Hobo Jungle Presentation" given in 1994 by Robert Ilg, former Wakamow employee

Hi. My name is Patches. As you can see, I've had some rough times and I'd very much like to tell you about them.

First of all, a long, long time ago, back in the early 1900s at a time when jobs were getting pretty scarce, me and thousands of other ordinary people had to leave our home and families to find work. The only way we could get from city to city was by riding the rails, which was very dangerous.

Some of us ended up in Moose Jaw...in that area over there, which we called the Hobo Jungle. This was a good area because we had water for drinking and for washing our clothes. As you can see, I take great pride in how I look. If we went any further down the line this way or that way, we would have been arrested by the police. For years about 60 or 70 of us a day stayed in this area. We made our little shacks out of old pieces of metal or wood and whatever else we could find. I liked to tear up piles of prairie grass and throw them inside my hobo hut to make a nice soft bed. Any food I could scrounge up would be cooked in an old tin can or rusty old pail.

The police didn't like us too much, every once in a while they would raid our camps and chase us out. Probably because some of the hobos would sneak into the city in the dark of the night and steal chickens and raid gardens...I would never do that. A couple of days later, we would all come sneaking back, repair out little hobo huts, then our hobo village would be back to normal. But you know, it wasn't all that bad. Sometimes at night we would start a big bonfire and sing songs and dance 'til the sun came up.

# Bob Wills - Diary Entry May 2010



Sometimes I just can't hit a curve ball. And now with a reproachful mind under wraps, I'm wondering who or what to blame. Whatever the cause, those early May days almost had me walking Spanish. They seemed intent on saddling me with Miss Fanny's baggage. Thank goodness Crazy Chester didn't catch me in the fog.

Apparently, I wasn't the only one feeling the weight of a dogged winter. I noticed a number of cars making their way through those early May mornings with snow blankets on their rear windows. Maybe it was all about a refusal to look back on that which has passed. Maybe it was strength in the belief that skies giveth and the skies taketh away. Maybe it was just lethargy.

But that was long ago. That was yesterday. Fortunately, the weather has soared back to more reasonable norms and has managed to drag May along with it. Sometimes our prairie skies really are enigmatic. They can hang heavy like a bad odor and then morph into a vastness that can set you free. Maybe that's the feeling my Vancouver acquaintances have been raving about all these years.

The heavy prairie skies did play havoc with our early season maintenance chores however. The maintenance crew returned just as the weather was on the turn. Not to worry. With nearly a century of experience to rely on, the crew will have the valley (weed) whipped into shape in a jiffy. Besides, the washrooms are already open. We're a full service facility once again.

As you regular park users among might have guessed, Wakamow washrooms are among the aging infrastructure issues we are hoping to address in the not too distant future. Washroom replacement accounts for a sizable portion of the \$1.3M in infrastructure upgrades we've identified in our Five Year Plan. There is many an improvement that Wakamow would like undertake. Without belaboring the point however, there also happens to be the little matter of available funding standing in the way.

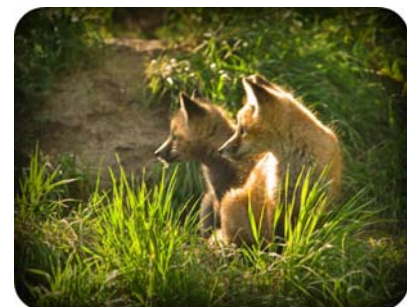
On the positive side of the ledger, Wakamow does have money in waiting for the Assiniboine Bridge Project. More importantly, we're on the move. We're also doing things in the usual Wakamow way. Thanks to the countless hours of "professional" volunteer assistance (okay, so I am counting) Wakamow has saved more than \$6,500 since January. Phil Adkins, a Moose Jaw cum Saskatoon cum Regina cum Moose Jaw engineer, has put in particularly long hours to date. Thanks for helping to bridge the community Phil. Hopefully we'll get that bike across the river in before the snows return.

The May snows and our budget woes didn't seem to bother some of the new Wakamow residents. If you haven't heard, Wakamow recently became the proud enablers of a couple of young fox kits.



They've been frolicking about through all kinds of weather. Oh to be young and wild.

The valley has also been



*blessed by the arrival of several wood ducks. Somehow, these colourful new residents have ventured a considerable distance from their usual nesting areas. They're a welcomed addition to the valley nonetheless.*



*When you combine the above residents with the plethora of creek critters and assorted aquatic life netted by the Moose Jaw Watershed folks during their recent educational Earth Day activities, it's evident that the valley is alive and well. The Wakamow concept is working.*

*So with the promise of May and the wonders of a growing wildness massaging a reproachful mind, I'll sign off with the words of Carman. She just happens to be another of Robbie Robertson's fictional characters who suggested; "I got to go but my friend can stick around".*

*And, as I do make my way, I'm sure the reproachful mind will remind me . . . sometimes I just can't hit a curve ball.*

*Other wildlife seen in the park include:*



*Family of Canada Geese*



*Great Horned Owl*



*Pelicans*



## Diary Entry - April 2010

Bob Wills – General Manager

*It's April in Moose Jaw. It's summer in Siam ... it truly is.*

*And for some reason, I can't remove the Poques' disc (including the song Summer in Siam) from my CD player. It was a hand-me-down, a re-gift. Needless*

*to say, I am enjoying it immensely. But isn't that the way of the world? Isn't that one of the beauties of life? What some see as refuse, others lean on for respite.*

*Of course, our differing world view-sheds don't end with music. Take water management for example. If you are a regular Times-Herald reader you will know that discussions over local water issues have lapped the shores of late. It's not surprising. Water levels in the Moose Jaw Creek have been discussed since 1884 and the construction of the first CPR Dam. When the City took ownership of its successor and the management processes entered the political arena, these deliberations blossomed like algae in summer waters. The river is bound to rise again. Water management issues are destined to re-enter the political arena in the months/years to come.*

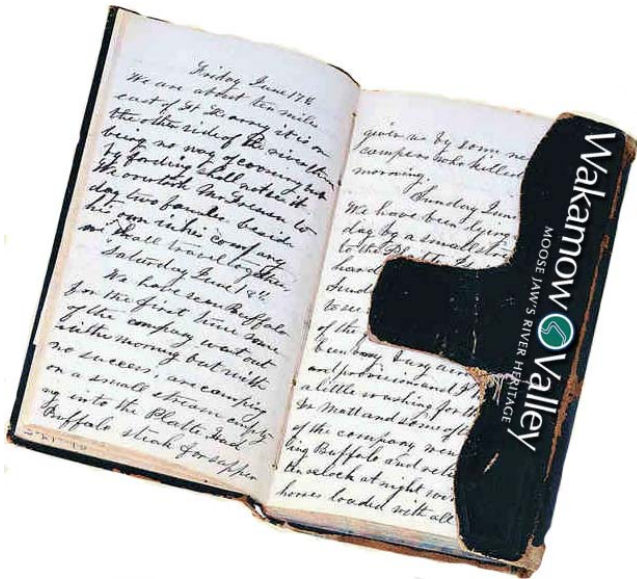
*And yet in hindsight, the 2010 fears over spring flooding and the discussions thereof drifted down stream with barely a ripple. The snow melted, the ice rotted and the river rolled on. Moreover, despite what was a textbook year for ice jamming (high fall moisture, full fall supply levels, thick ice, heavier than normal snow pack) nothing untoward happened. Isn't that wonderful? Sometimes we get so intent on standing our ground and so focused on our targets that we tend to overlook the upshot. Nothing untoward happened.*

*So what did happen? I would love to credit it to a finely honed management policy, the quick work of the City crews and/or a lack of in-stream river crossings, but in the end we owe our gratitude to the grace of Mother Earth. She lead us through unscathed. I am told that a gentle melt spread the runoff over an extended period. In turn, the same gentleness allowed for higher losses to infiltration and sublimation. The fact that we escaped without any noticeable spring precipitation also added to the relief effort. Beautiful really.*

*And now as the City crews add log replacement to their long list of après l'hiver duties, we're hoping that the antiquated structure will actually hold water. We're also hoping that high water levels can be maintained and that the frogs will return. We're hoping that the new dam, which has been in the works since at least 1995, finally makes its way off the planning table. We're hoping on several fronts.*

*But isn't that one of the wonders of April on the prairies and summer in Siam? Hope does indeed spring eternal. It's bigger than that if the lyrics of Shane MacGowan and the Poques are to be trusted. For in his 1990 song Shane sang (okay droned) that, "when its summer in Siam, all I really know is that I truly am". Wow. What a wonderfully metaphysical thought for an English punk with bad teeth and an insatiable thirst for Singha Beer. What a shame that most of us overlook this revelation in our daily struggles to be someone else.*

*So, don't let the March winds and the April showers keep you from enjoying Wakamow this spring. There's still hope. It's summer in Siam after all... it truly is.*



## Diary Entry - March 2010

Bob Wills – General Manager

*I began this Diary on a sunny March day when even the artificial rumble of a dusty Harley couldn't detract from the prophetic offerings of a Bob Marley tune. And though the heavy March skies will surely return, I'm not troubled. For now, the sun is doing its best to chase away what remains of a long and*

*gray winter, and I am left with the feeling that "everything is going to be alright."*

*But isn't that one of the wonders of spring? Isn't that one of the dichotomies of March? Lured by the hues of the prairie sky, our thoughts are either dragged back towards the darkness or tickled by the inevitability of the change to come. Such are the marvels of life on the Northern Plains; such is the splendor of spring under skies alive.*

*As Wakamow moves through March, we seem to have one foot in both worlds. We are looking forward with considerable excitement to the construction season ahead while glancing back with trepidation to the end of winter and the closure of another fiscal year. Maybe it's only natural. For as Mr. Marley also cautioned; "in this great future, you can't forget your past."*

*Wakamow is doing just that. Members of the Wakamow Board will be looking to build on a successful past while seeking resources to assist with a new and improved (insert more costly here) future. The timing is spot on. With the new bridges on the horizon, we're set to open a whole new chapter in the Wakamow dream. Before doing so, we're interested in addressing what amounts to an antiquated (insert 1985 here) funding scheme.*

*With the pressures of passing years and growing costs in mind, the Funding Committee will be meeting with both City Council and the Province of Saskatchewan. Here's hoping that our two main partners will find some new dollars and thereby lead us into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Here's hoping they can locate a few more paddles for our trip up the creek.*

*With March upon us, Wakamow is also setting priorities for the coming fiscal year. This year, the desire for improved partnerships has grabbed the spotlight. Vishnu willing and the creek don't rise, Wakamow will look at strengthening and/or maintaining its partnership with the Association of Urban Parks and*

*Conservation Agencies, the Moose Jaw River Watershed Stewards, the Moose Jaw and Area Trans Canada Trail Committee, the Moose Jaw Lions Clubs and SIAST Paliser Campus among others.*

*Wakamow will also be moving forward on the Cree Bridge retrofit this March.. We are hoping to remove the old and tired decking from the bridge while the ice is strong enough to support a proper clean up. Needless to say, we are committed to completing this and all of our redevelopments in an environmentally conscious manner. It's what we do. It's who we are.*

*And so, with the gentle March sun soothing my tonsure, I am content to flash back to another of a modern-day sage and the cautions of Willie J. Jones. While extolling the virtues of those 1960's burlesque shows that traveled with the Thomas Amusements, Willie had many a clever line. He professed that his shows could "make the old feel young and the young go feeling". And so it is with spring.*

*Whether you are young or old (or somewhere in between), here's hoping the sun's rays and the spring spirit find you this March. And, if the joys of a Wakamow moment can help ... so much the better.*