

Search called off for missing train

BY SHAWN BERRY
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The search for a locomotive that sank into a murky stretch of the St. John River 103 years ago is grinding to a halt.

Eric Ouellette says he has run out of steam after a fifth dive yielded no obvious sign of the engine that plunged into the river above Grand Falls is still there.

"I've been hopeful long enough," he said Friday. "I can't drop everything to do this."

Researching and searching for the locomotive that plunged into the river on June 21, 1900 has consumed his time over the past year. He used his holidays on the project, and left preparations for his wedding next month up to his fiancée.

"I think I've put in a great effort - five dives. I can't justify putting in any more time."

Late last week professional divers from Fredericton located a piece of rail and what appears to be a piece of hub that could be from Canadian Pacific Railway locomotive 508 or one of the railway cars.

Crew and passengers escaped serious injury when the 35-ton steam locomotive out of Edmundston fell into the river when a bridge spanning the St. John collapsed. If the engine is still there, it could be 65 feet underwater.

Mr. Ouellette can find no definite proof of the engine's whereabouts.

A CPR historian told him a July 31, 1904 document has the locomotive operating in the area, only to be scrapped in 1910. They have no evidence of salvage.

A \$5,000 side-scan of the

river could locate the engine, but Mr. Ouellette said that would only help if he were certain it is there. He would hate to pay for a scan that finds nothing, and learn later on that a salvage has been documented somewhere.

"Something tells me that train is still there, though. It's just to find the thing. I dunno, maybe it's not meant to come out of there and that's the reason we went five times and never saw it," he said.

Divers and locals have donated time and expertise to each search.

"Five dives is way more than I thought I was going to be able to pull out of this for nothing," Mr. Ouellette said.

If nothing else, the search effort certainly united the community and renewed interest in this piece of local history.

"If nothing comes out of this, well, we put Grand Falls on the map for a little while. We brought national attention to this little town," Mr. Ouellette said.

News of the search was carried across the country.

"We had a lot of community effort going, stuff you don't really see anymore. It was nice to see it."

"You have to stop and be realistic about what's going on after a while. I'm not saying I was alone - but you can only do so much," he said.

By fall, he may have his diving certification, he said.

"I'll stop bugging people and go on my own time then."

Grand Falls mayor Gerald Carroll, said the story captured the community's imagination.

"I tip my hat to Eric Ouellette, he's done a terrific job, he's taken care of this royally."