

LOCOMOTIVE MYSTERY

Hunt for train engine resumes Wednesday

■ **Sonar equipment will be used in bid to locate steam engine believed to be at bottom of river**

BY SHAWN BERRY
Telegraph-Journal

Eric Ouellette and his team might be mistaken for ice fishermen when they start drilling holes on the St. John River near Grand Falls Wednesday, but the searchers won't be thinking about catching anything other than a glimpse of the answer to a long-standing mystery.

They'll drop sonar equipment through the holes as they fish for

clues about what happened to a locomotive that sank into the St. John River 103 years ago and may remain submerged there.

"I think this will be the one where we'll get our answers," said Mr. Ouellette who will have been working on the search for a full year come Thursday.

"If there's something there, we'll see it. If there's nothing there, then there's nothing. Some say it might be buried. If it is, let it rest in peace."

The front end of a passenger train fell into the river in June 1900 when a bridge collapsed. While train cars were reported recovered, no one in the area seems to know what happened to the engine. Stories have

abounded in the community for years that the engine is still underwater at a spot about a kilometre upriver from the falls.

The search will focus on an area near the old bridge's pylons, where a scan by a geology professor last summer detected magnetic anomalies, and where a group of divers claimed to have found the train three summers ago.

Nick Burchill of Kongsberg Maritime in Dartmouth, N.S., will bring in the equipment used for underwater surveying. The device will record information within a 50-metre radius, and overlapping information should give searchers a fairly vivid image of what might be down there, Mr.

Ouellette said.

If something's found, he plans a dive in to check it out.

Divers could benefit from performing the scan in winter, he said. Ice cover on the river means there will be much less sediment, and the ice will give searchers a firmer base.

Divers who scoured the waters last summer had a tough time with the limited visibility in the river but turned up metal debris that was part of a braking system from the wreck. They could not confirm whether the debris came from the locomotive or another train car.

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