Ken Purvis Remarks

Bill and Dorothea Tutte at Dagmar

Bill Tutte, no doubt continuing his interest and his enjoyment of hiking in the countryside which began in his native England, became a member of the Canadian Youth Hostels Association on his arrival in Canada in the late 1940s. At that time, the CYH consisted of an early core of Canadians, and a growing number of immigrants, predominantly from Great Britain. Bill and others were part of the Great Lakes Region of the CYH. The largest number were based in Toronto, with groups also in Hamilton, London, Brantford, and other centres.

Activities of the groups evolved over the years with the background and interests of the members. At the time of Bill's arrival, most members engaged mainly in hiking and cycling, the former typically consisting of Sunday hikes up the river valleys in and around Toronto, and the latter being weekend stays at Youth Hostels within bicycle distance from Toronto. These hostels were at Langstaffe (just north of Toronto), Erindale (just west of Toronto), Waterdown, Barrie, Baysville, Woodstock, Dunville, and of particular significance to Bill, Dagmar (south of Uxbridge). The rule was to arrive "under one's own steam" although that rule was bent in the case of more distant hostels which could be reached by train or automobile, as long as those participating did some hiking while there. In later years, the focus began to include skiing and canoeing, neither of which were engaged in by Bill and his wife Dorothea, nor in fact did they do any significant cycling.

Bill met Dorothea Mitchell through the Hostel movement, and they married in what was to be a long and happy partnership. They complemented each other beautifully, Bill being naturally reserved on the surface, and quiet, while Dorothea was lively and chatty. Bill could be articulate when the occasion suited, however. One recollection was of this writer being accused, as a skit in a Hostel social gathering, of "alienating the affection of the ladies." Bill, clad in academic gown, defended me adroitly and effectively, and I was acquitted.

For a time, the Hostel Great Lakes regional office was on Classic Avenue in Toronto (this street having been subsumed in the construction of New College of the U of T). Bill and Dorothea for a time rented the upper floor for their residence, and they were generous in the loan of their space for social activities. My 21st birthday party was held there in 1950.

Bill and Dorothea subsequently bought a house in Leaside, but their great love, before they were won over by West Montrose, was the cabin they built at Dagmar. They bought from a local farmer first five acres of hitherto grazing land, and subsequently a further 12 acres to provide greater privacy. The farmer had in an adjoining field, a frame house he provided at modest rent to function as a Youth Hostel. This was the favourite Hostel of many Toronto hostellers, including the Tutes, and they fell in love with the district, which at the time had few dwellings and afforded great scope for hiking, and tobogganing or rudimentary skiing in winter. At the time, the only real ski facility was Skyloft, although the farmer whose property included the Hostel had a simple rope tow. Since those days, Dagmar Ski Club and Lakeridge Ski Resort have been created nearby.

Bill and Dorothea were avid gardeners. They would beg cuttings of flowers and shrubs from friends and neighbours to plant on the property. Despite the present writer, now occupying the property, being completely inept at cultivation, many of the flowers planted by the Tutes still live a precarious existence. Bill showed his building skill and ingenuity in constructing a 20'x30' cabin, largely "prefab" but with Bill's own touches. In those days, large picture windows were not available, but Bill created a large window with 15 panes of 2.5-foot glass. He whimsically named the cabin "Warpwood Hall", and referred to it that way affectionately until his death. Since Dorothea was socially inclined, and since Bill needed quiet to do his thinking, he also built a small 8x 10 cabin close by, which he named the "Dagmar Hills Mathematical Research Centre".
The Tuttes lived in their cabin for as much of the year as they could, Bill commuting to his post at the University of Toronto, only resorting to their Leaside residence when the winter weather was too extreme for their little-insulated cabin. Both buildings still stand, the original cabin used as a weekend retreat by the writer. I rented the property from the Tuttes (actually Dorothea was the owner of record) in 1971 some time after they moved to West Montrose. I subsequently bought the property after Dorothea's untimely death in 1994. In 2001, I donated the property as the first donation to the newly-formed Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust, dedicated to the acquisition and preservation of moraine land. Bill was pleased with this action and we agreed that Dorothea would also have been happy that the property would stay "green" forever.

Many former Youth Hostellers remember Bill and Dorothea fondly. They exemplified a remarkable group of people in the 'forties and 'fifties, both long-time Canadians and newcomers to the country, who loved and enjoyed the countryside and formed strong friendships which still endure.

May 2002