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John Tasker Henderson
Scientific First in Vankleek Hill

It was in a back shed at the farm of G.D. Mode on County Road 10 just east of Vankleek Hill that a scientific discovery took place in 1932. "Good echoes-whooppeee!!", "Too good to be true whooppeee!!", "Zowie!!" So read the log book entries of radio-physicist Dr. John Tasker Henderson as his radio experiment during the total eclipse of the sun August 31, 1932 made history. In his 1933 report, Henderson explained: "In the early days of radiotelegraphy great difficulty was experienced in explaining how electromagnetic waves travel so far around the earth."

By 1926 it was proven that there are two electrically conducting layers in the atmosphere that reflect, or bend, radio-waves down towards the earth. The lower layer is at 100 km above the earth’s surface, and the upper at about 250 km high. The question remained, what causes the existence of these ionized layers?

Henderson’s 1932 experiment gave the first photographic recordings of oscillograph data produced by the particle eclipse portion of a solar eclipse. These photographed recordings of the particle eclipse proved "that the cause of lower layer ionization is ultraviolet light from the sun".

To perform this experiment Dr. Henderson needed partners and significant locations. In early 1932 he chose Vankleek Hill and Corner Brook. The Canadian Marconi Co., Bell Telephone, Northern Electric, and Gaitineau Power Co. agreed to take part.

On July 26, 1932 Vankleek Hill town clerk J.S. McIntosh wrote to Henderson to express the town’s willingness to cooperate. In Vankleek Hill, Henderson set up a 60-foot transmission tower at J.P. Taylor’s business property on County Road 10 (Main Street East/Street Road) west of Newton Road. He also set up his receiving station at the home of G.D. Mode, County Road 10 (SW Mode’s Corner at junction of County Roads 10 and 12.).

Vankleek Hill was selected based on its position within the ‘umbra’ shadow – the complete shadow – caused by the eclipse. Henderson wrote, “... one party was located at Vankleek Hill, Ontario directly below the shadow at 100 km”, and a second experiment was in Corner Brook, Newfoundland. In the end, the Vankleek Hill location provided conclusive proof to his theory with the backing of the Corner Brook results.

During WW II Henderson laid the foundations for Canadian radar research and manufacture. He helped construct the atomic clock, accepted in 1968 as the international time standard. Born in Montreal in 1905, he died in Perth, Ontario in 1983.
From C.M., Windsor:

One day, I was seized by cramps and could not swim. On hearing her cries, my companion ran for help, but the unfortunate disappeared; she went away before they could lend her any assistance. The victim was 22 years of age.

Response from C.M., Windsor:

I am absolutely thrilled with what you have sent: this is information about my grandmother and my great-aunt! The funeral was held at Carillon, PQ.

— James Bernard Harkin cont’d. from page 3

J.B. Harkin, Commissioner of Dominion Parks agreed that the internees could provide a much-needed workforce for developing tourist facilities in the park areas.

Many of the internees were Ukrainian immigrants, who came to Canada to work on construction of the railway, and in forestry or mining operations. They were traveling with Austrian passports, as they were from what was Galicia and Bukovyna, parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire before WW I. By the outbreak of the war, many of these men were considered alien and interned if they were unemployed, without identity papers, or had failed to report regularly to the police.

Although WW I ended November 11, 1918, some internees remained detained in camps until the late spring of 1920, when Canada’s first national internment camp closed. This interim placement near the internment camp on Mount Revelstoke commemorates this little-known chapter in Canadian history. (Mount Revelstoke National Park of Canada)

Mount Harkin, Kootenay Park

J.B. Harkin retired to Ottawa and died there on January 27, 1955. He is remembered most for his devotion to Canada’s national parks. In 1923 a peak in the Mitchell Range of Kootenay Park was named Mount Harkin. It reaches 2980m (9770 ft). J.B. Harkin, Commissioner of Dominion Parks agreed that the internees could provide a much-needed workforce for developing tourist facilities in the park areas.

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James Bernard Harkin — reflections

In 1930, under Harkin’s direction, the National Parks Act was created. The national parks are holy places; that they may be preserved so as to leave them unimpaired for the use of future generations.

Harkin wrote, “People sometimes accuse me of being a mystic about the influences of the mountains. Perhaps I am. I devoutly believe that there is in these mountains an inspiration, some kind of spiritual quality, which, as it were, stimulates the mind and purifies the spirit. … National parks are maintained for all the people: for the ill that they may be restored; for the well that they may be fortified and inspired by the sunshine, the fresh air, the beauty, and the all other the healing, enabling agencies of Nature. They exist in order that every citizen of Canada may satisfy his craving for Nature and Nature’s Beauty; that he may absorb the poise and restfulness of the forests; that he may fill his soul with the brilliance of the wild flowers and the sublimity of the mountain peaks; that he may develop the buoyancy, the joy, and the activity that he sees in the wild animals; that he may stock his brain with great thoughts, noble ideals; that he may be better, healthier, and happier.” [Peakfinder, Canadian Rockies]

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James Bernard Harkin was born in Vankleek Hill on January 30, 1875. His parents were Dr. William and Lizzie (Eliza) Harkin (both of Vankleek Hill). He was the last of six children, as Dr. Harkin died suddenly in 1881. In the 1881 Canada Census, this Vankleek Hill (West Hawkesbury) family (Catholic and all born in Ontario) is com- prised of: Lizzie Harkin, widow, age 44; Cherry (5), son, studying law; Frederick, 17; teacher; William, 15; Ma- rie; 8, and Bernard, 6. The household also contains Duncan McDonald, wido- wer, 81 and Mary McDonald, 70 listed as a “servante” in the Census.

The family lived at 88 (86) High Street, Vankleek Hill. The lot was bought by Dr. Harkin in 1876 and the house was built in 1877. It was home to Bernard Harkin until age 17.

Dr. William Harkin

Dr. William Harkin attended school in Vankleek Hill, high school in L’Original, and graduated from McGill in medicine in 1891. He became head of the family. Dr. William Harkin was a mem- ber of the 1895 committee that laid the groundbreaking groundwork for the eventual construction of St. Gregory Catholic Church in Vankleek Hill. It took five years to raise the $1200 to purchase land and construct a chapel. The church we know today took shape in 1877.

Dr. Harkin served as Reeve of West Hawkesbury for three years. He was elected as the Prescott County Conserva- tive representative to the Ontario Legisla- tive Assembly on January 18, 1875. He officially served until February 27, 1881, around the time of his death.

James Bernard Harkin

At age 17, James Bernard Harkin left his home at 88 (86) High Street, Vankleek Hill to embark on his career. He joined the staff of the Montreal Herald newspaper in 1891, and was then dispatched on regular assignment to work for the Ottawa Journal 1893-1900. In Ottawa, he became a renowned civil servant.

In his lifetime J.B. saw a mountain named after him as founder of Canada’s national parks system, and he is remem- bered even today with annual environmen- tal awards in his name. He was also involved in immigration issues be- fore and during WW I in the waning days of British colonial rule. It is interesting to note that whether we agree with his attitudes or not, the fundamental issues J.B. Harkin faced entering the 20th centu- ry — environment and immigration — are the same controversial issues we face today in the early years of the 21st cen- tury. 

Harkin was the subject of a special article on James Bernard Harkin.

Canada’s National Parks

In 1901, with Sir Wilfrid Laurier as Prime Minister, Harkin became parlia- mentary secretary for Clifford Sifton, Liberal MP for Brandon, Manitoba who was Minister of the Interior (responsible for immigration). When Sifton resigned in 1905, Harkin worked for his successor, Frank Oliver, Liberal MP for Edmonton.

From 1911 - 1936 Harkin served as the first Commissioner of Dominion Parks. An environmentalist, Harkin was instru- mental in framing the 1917 Migratory Birds Convention Act. He was also in- volved in declaring Canadian sovereignty of the Arctic Islands, and gained protec- tion for the Canadian musk ox and rein- deer. “With skifful eloquence he promo- ted the concept of unspoiled but publicly accessible wilderness, believing that national parks represented the moral value of out- door recreation, a haven from degenerate cities.”

“Often called the Father of National Parks, J. B. Harkin developed the idea of conservation in Canada at a time when there was little precedent. Harkin created Canada’s National Parks, the world’s first national park service, and laid the foundations for their preservation, Harkin created a world class example of land conserva- tion.” [Canadian Parks & Wilderness Society]