

Time travel

by BRIAN LOCKHART

?How far is it to the next town??

?It's about 25 minutes.?

That is a very Canadian euphemism ? expressing distance in time instead of kilometres. Everywhere else, people would answer, ?it's about 23 miles.?

We all say that and think nothing of it because it seems normal to us.

Another uniquely Canadian thing I've noticed when it comes to road travel is no one will ever admit how long it takes them to get somewhere.

I have attended a lot of out-of-town playoff games, and usually, there's a local contingent of fans who make the trek, especially if it's an important game.

For some reason, everyone has the ability to get somewhere a lot faster than I can.

I can't count the times someone has said, ?Oh, it only took us an hour and fifteen minutes to get there for the last game.?

That's strange because when I went to the same arena using the same route, it took me one hour and 45 minutes, and I wasn't driving slowly. It seems ?making good time' is some kind of road warrior badge of honour, and no one will admit how long it really took them to make the trip.

Putting vinegar on your French Fries is another very Canadian thing we do. I recall a friend of mine going to visit relatives in California when we were kids.

They stopped at a restaurant somewhere in the southwest, and when his order of fries arrived, he asked the waitress for vinegar. It was a strange request to her.

She returned with a jug of some kind of brown-coloured malt vinegar they had in the kitchen. She even hung around to see what he was going to do with it.

His mother explained to the waitress that in Canada, we put vinegar on our fries. The waitress thought it was the strangest thing she had ever heard.

Another uniquely Canadian word is ?hydro.' If you go camping in the States and ask for a campsite with a ?hydro hookup,' they will have no idea what you are talking about. You have to re-phrase and say ?power.'

Did your grandmother ever offer you a seat on the Chesterfield? I'm not sure if that word is still used much, but it is also a unique Canadian word for a sofa. If you go to a store in the U.S. and ask for a Chesterfield, you will probably get a pack of cigarettes.

I think they still use the word in the U.K., but there it defines a particular style of furniture.

Canada is a very east/west country. Just speak to someone from B.C., and the rest of the country is ?out east.' If you're in the Maritimes, the rest of the country is ?out west.'

If you're a beer drinker, you've probably used the phrase 'two-four' at one time or another. Anywhere else in the world, it would make no sense to go into a retail establishment and ask for something with two numbers.

Also, alcohol-related, if you ask for a Mickey in a liquor store in Canada, you'll get a small bottle of liquor. Anywhere else, you might get a stuffed, well-known mouse.

There's nowhere else in the world; you can go into a coffee shop and ask for a 'double double,' and they'll know what you mean.

Loonie and Twoonie ? outside of Canada, these words have no meaning at all. My friend once had a discussion with an American tourist who couldn't figure out what a Twoonie was worth.

'What's it worth?' he asked. 'Two dollars,' she replied.

'But what's it worth?' he asked again. 'It's a two dollar coin. It's worth two dollars.'

This went back and forth several times and ended with the tourist walking away and trying to figure out exactly how much money he had in his hand.

A Muskoka chair can only be found ? in Muskoka. The style is used elsewhere, but other regions have their own regional name for them. In New York, they are called Adirondack chairs.

Ever ask a waitress for another 'serviette'? Very Canadian. Everywhere else, they use the common 'napkin.' Now that I think about it, 'serviette' does sound a little snobby.

These unique phrases and euphemisms break down into regional habits as well.

I once asked a guy I worked with from Newfoundland if he had done any 'mumming' lately.

He was astonished and said 'how do you know about that?'

I'm kind of hungry, so for a totally unique meal, I'm going to have Kraft Dinner with peameal bacon and poutine, wash it down with a Caesar, have some Nanaimo bars for dessert, then burn some calories afterward by taking a walk in my runners.

No American would understand that sentence.