



## Call him Mr. Rideau Canal.

Whenever you want to know something about the historic waterway, all you have to do is visit Ken Watson's website: [www.rideau-info.com](http://www.rideau-info.com).

You could also read one of his three books: *A History of the Rideau Lockstations*, released in 2000, *Engineered Landscapes: The Rideau Canal's Transformation of a Wilderness Waterway*, released in 2006 or *The Rideau Route: Exploring the Pre-Canal Waterway*, released in 2007.

Yep. Ken has it bad.  
Canal fever.

One hundred and seventy five years ago, malaria felled many a pioneer in the ranks who carved the beloved canal out of the wilderness.

For the past dozen years, this talented and curious Eastern Ontario resident has been carving an information pathway, every bit as winding and complex and inspiring, to tell the rest of us about this "work of human creative genius."

His first encounter with the legendary canal – now designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site – was back in the early 1980s when his in-laws moved to a lake on the Rideau.

"Growing up in Montreal, my previous impression of the Rideau was, similar to many Canadians, of a ditch in Ottawa that you could skate on in winter."

His wife had happily spent many childhood summers on the waterway. So, he says, "it was an extremely pleasant surprise, when first visiting my in-laws after their move, that the Rideau was in fact more of a waterway than a canal – beautiful historic locks linking a string of lakes and rivers."

He was hooked, moving with his wife, Pat, to the shores of Rideau in the fall of 1995. As a geologist, his intent was to work from home, building internet websites. And he discovered there was little information about the canal on the web. "So I decided to learn how to build websites by creating one about the Rideau Canal."

Bingo. [www.rideau-info.com](http://www.rideau-info.com) was launched in 1996. Today he describes it as a "hobby gone wild." (It's now the largest canal-related website in the world.)

"When I first started the website, my vision of the Rideau was of a place for boaters," he explains. Soon he discovered it was much more than that. "There were interesting local communities, a fascinating blend of ecologies, and an extremely rich history."

When his first book, *A History of the Rideau Lockstations*, was released, there were no others in print or available in bookstores. "I thought it was a shame that this pivotal piece of Canadian history was unavailable."

"Since you can see the historic features of the canal at each lockstation, I wrote the book as an historic visitors guide to the locks — it goes lock by lock describing why and how they were built."

His second book, *Engineered Landscapes: The Rideau Canal's Transformation of a Wilderness Waterway*, wasn't really intended for the public. It's a research document. Ken's latest work, *The Rideau Route: Exploring the Pre-Canal Waterway* "reveals the secret world that lies below the waters of the Rideau Canal – the drowned landscape of the original Rideau Route."

Think he's finished yet? Nope.

"...I hope to publish the diary of Peter Sweeney, the first lockmaster at Jones Falls, and also a general audience version of Parks Canada's underwater archaeology study of the Rideau Canal – both would be done through Friends of the Rideau. (I'm chair of the Publications Committee.) In the future, there may be a Field Guide to the Rideau (ecology of the Rideau) but that's a long-term project."

In the meantime, Ken's keeping busy with – naturally – Rideau Canal stuff. As a Friends of the Rideau director since 1997, he currently serves as Newsletter Editor and Webmaster.

To purchase his latest book, check out his website: [www.rideau-info.com](http://www.rideau-info.com) for ordering details.