

# Media checked out through eyes of La Ronge

*The national media often ignore small centres like La Ronge — so they came to La Ronge to talk about it*

The eyes of the nation will soon get a closer look at La Ronge.

A crew from CBC Television's show "Undercurrents", a national program that deals with media and technology issues, were in town Jan. 18-21. Their documentary will focus on how La Ronge sees — and is seen by — the national media. It will air in the next few months in "Undercurrents" Sunday night slot. The date is not yet set.

The concept behind the documentary was born last July, when the *National Post* abruptly cancelled its subscription delivery to La Ronge at the same time that Toronto was facing a newspaper explosion: three free newspapers exclusively for Toronto subway travellers, in a city that was already home to two local dailies as well as *The Post* and *The Globe and Mail*.

The curious juxtaposition got "Undercurrents" field producer Catherine Legge thinking: why not go to La Ronge and find out just how "national" the national media really is?

For John Badcock, the answer was a revelation. "It never even occurred to me a week ago that the *National Post* wouldn't be reflective of the country," the Toronto-based camera operator



Photo by Carmen Pauls

***Catherine Legge (right) led the CBC crew of John Badcock and Mary Wong to La Ronge for a few days to discover what local people think about their presence — or non-presence — on the national media map. While some people who have moved here are disgruntled at being ignored, said Legge, people who grew up in the North "don't seem surprised or care. It's resignation to the way things are."***

said. "(Now I ask), where does a paper like the *National Post* get off calling itself a 'national newspaper'?"

"People ... who are from here or grew up here don't seem surprised or care (that the media ignores them)," Legge said. "It's resignation to the way things are."

However, people who have moved to La Ronge from more media-exposed centres are frustrated, she said. "Some people believe that they are entitled to be part of that national media."

Sound recordist Mary Wong came away from her La Ronge experience with a firm belief in the value of the one media outlet that truly tries to be "national": CBC Radio.

"I realize (now) how important CBC Radio is, just as a thread for people 'way out there' — to some trapper," Wong said. "I bet you there's tons of communities like this across the North, and if the CBC were gone there'd be a huge void."

What the "Undercurrents" crew found was that La Ronge residents are intensely proud of

their town — so much so that the crew felt awkward, lest they come across as critics, Legge said.

They also found out what it was like to be novelty: a truck full of hooting boys roaring past during an interview, worried looks from passersby who thought that perhaps, as Legge put it, "something bad has happened that they haven't heard about," and even a marriage proposal from a man enthralled by the TV camera.

The crew also had a few myths shattered. "I expected

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deep freeze," said Badcock, who admitted he was "kind of disappointed, actually," by the mild January weather.

Wong, meanwhile, had a sound tech's surprise at the lack of serene silence. Even away from the roads, snowmobiles could be heard every few minutes.

In less than three days, they became regulars at the La Ronge Motor Hotel's restaurant, went to an Ice Wolves game, watched the bank corner on Channel 61, and in Wong's case, tasted bannock for the first time.

"There's a feeling of community here," said Wong, who has travelled to every continent with the CBC. "It isn't just a bunch of people thrown together and making do. ... I'm not a little town person, but this is a good little town."

Their most vivid memories, however, will be of one place: Robertson Trading. All three spoke with awe of seeing and feeling the furs, and of listening to Scott Robertson talk about his father and the fur industry.

"I was really blown away by that.... You don't see a lot of people who are so connected to their history," Legge said.

The classic image of Saskatchewan is of waving wheatfields, and Legge said only an actual visit altered the crew's perceptions.

"You can come here and understand something about the reality of what's going on, rather than the perception you've been shown," she said. "That's why we need a truly reflective national media."

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