



Jack Mitchell takes his epic from sea to sea

by Peter Twidale

Jack Mitchell has had the summer of his life, traveling as Odysseus did, and uncovering a talent that may lead to a career.

Being so busy, Jack has had precious few moments recently for Sandy Hill, his home until he left for McGill University four years ago, and still his parents' home.

Jack, now 23, studies classics, for which he has had to learn to read Latin. Emulating the story-telling tradition of Homer's *Odyssey*, he crafted an epic poem about the Battle of the Plains of Abraham (in English) and crossed Canada this summer writing and telling it. Jack traveled alone by motorcycle for two months, east coast to west coast, giving 25 recitations of his poem. He was an unknown until media exposure, including interviews on CBC Radio's "As It Happens" and "Richardson's Round Up", caught up with him.

Jack performed outside, giving a half-hour recitation from memory. He chose friendly, intimate locations, such as under a shade tree in a park. At first he felt like a scholar-writer. With time, however, he became more and more of a performer. He learned how to capture his audience, dispensing with preliminaries and getting

into what people really wanted to know about, which was the battle itself.

Jack relied on the power of myth to pull audiences into his recitations. "The purpose of my epic poem is to take Canadian history and deal with it as myth, as part of the national consciousness," he says. "The Battle of the Plains of Abraham is a Canadian story of legendary proportions."

As far back as he can remember, Jack has felt a profound attachment to Canada. The attachment has been imprinted since childhood, and may have resulted from a two-year overseas sojourn when he was small. Otherwise, Jack's childhood was spent in Sandy Hill, living on Somerset in Goulburn, then, while attending Lisgar Collegiate, on Besserer St.

It was while he was at Lisgar that Jack was bitten by a passion to learn Latin and study the early stages of civilization. The passion lasted until this summer when he had his first taste of performance and became addicted to it. He says, "To be in front of an appreciative audience gives me a thrill I had never expected. I realize now that during the hours I spent writing my poem I was thinking about how it would sound. I've discovered that I prefer performance by a country mile."

Jack Mitchell of Sandy Hill has written an epic poem which has rewarded him with an epic personal discovery.