March 22, 2018

Trespassing Across America

Edmonton – The Keystone XL Pipeline has been a hot topic of debate in Alberta for several years, for those who support the pipeline and those opposed to it.

A week after President Trump’s inauguration he signed an executive memorandum reviving the pipeline. But Trump’s support is no guarantee it will be built, says Ken Ilgunas, a young writer who hiked more than 3,000-km along the proposed pipeline route which would carry oil from northern Alberta to Texas.

His book, Trespassing Across America: One Man’s Epic, Never-Done-Before (and sort of illegal) Hike Across the Heartland, tells the story of his five-month journey down the pipeline’s contested path. Along the way he met supporters and opponents of the pipeline project. “In Alberta there is a lot of support, because the provincial economy is heavily dependent on resource revenue,” says Ilgunas.

Across the American heartland there were mixed feelings about the pipeline. “One time in Oklahoma a truck drove past me, then stopped and backed up. The driver asked me if I wanted a ride so I explained to him what I was doing,” he says. “The driver said, ‘good on ya, they should never build that pipeline’ and then he drove off. Fifteen minutes later he came back and gave me a bag of McDonald’s. He told me that I looked hungry so he bought me some food.”

But walking across the Great Plains he found a lot of people support the project. “Along the Great Plains I saw many ghost towns and abandoned homes. The folks there realize the sense of mortality when it comes to community, so any project that is going to bring in necessary revenue is welcomed.”

“I wasn’t surprised when Trump approved the pipeline. He’d been saying he was going to approve it all along,” said Ilgunas. “It was first approved in 2008. But even though Trump has motioned for it to be built, I’m not 100 per cent certain it will be built.”

Ilgunas will appear at MacEwan University at a free public lecture, where he will discuss in detail his five-month journey along the proposed pipeline route. The lecture is presented by MacEwan’s Office of Sustainability.

When: March 28
Where: MacEwan University, City Centre Campus: Room 6-156 (Building 6, room 156)
Time: 7 - 8:30 p.m.