

PG50 and Other Long Distance Walks in Prince George

by Mike Nash – revised May 9, 2017

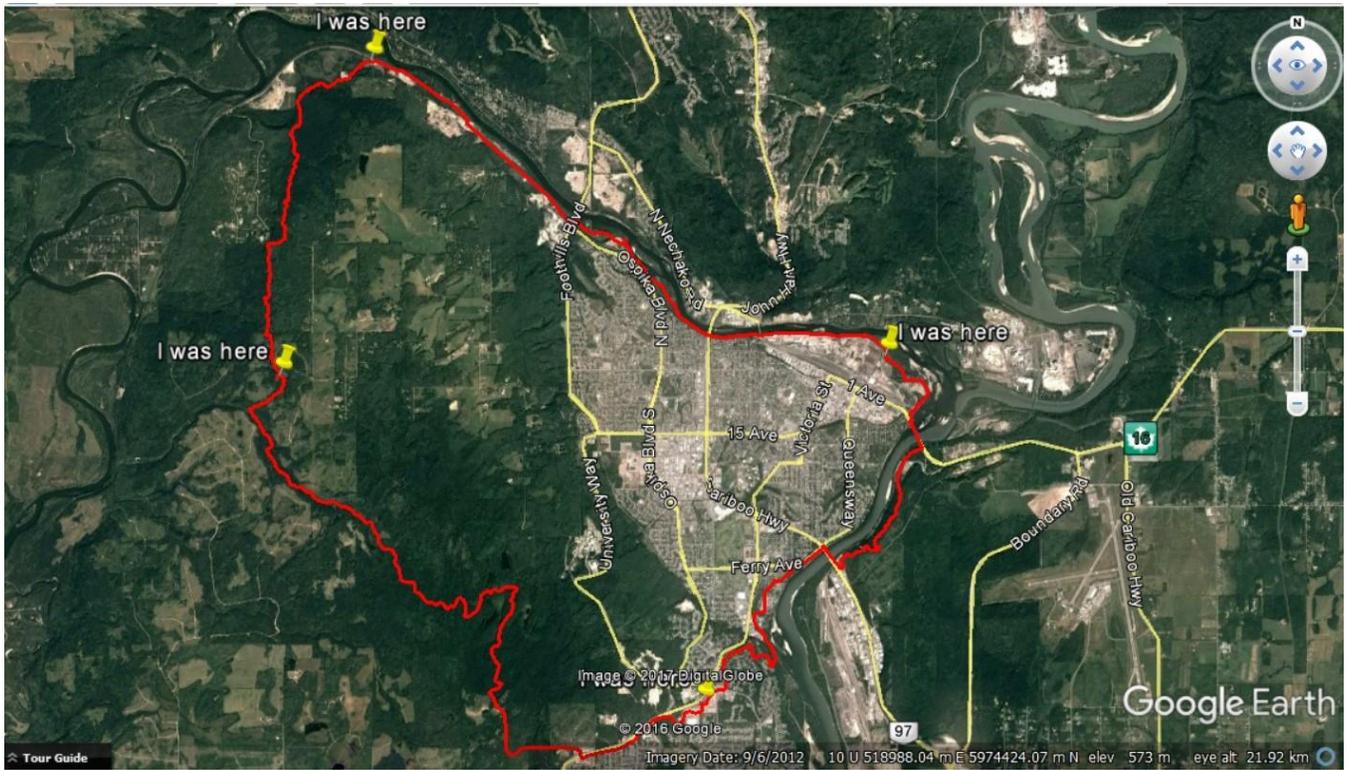
The *PG50* is a 50-kilometre loop walk around the City of Prince George, British Columbia, Canada. The route follows greenspace and the two rivers where possible and takes a highly eccentric orbit from the rivers confluence close to downtown out to the farthest reaches and heights of the Cranbrook Hill Greenway Trail. It includes Wilson Park and the Heritage River Trail along the Nechako River; Cottonwood Island Park and the rivers' confluence; the Gunn Trail above the east cutbanks of the Fraser River; and the entire 22 kilometre Cranbrook Hill Greenway Trail from Otway to Highway 16. GPS statistics indicate a distance of 50.17 kilometres (31.18 miles) and Google Earth shows an elevation change from 570 metres at the rivers confluence to 849 metres at the highest point on the Greenway Trail, for a difference of 279 metres. More importantly, GPS statistics record the total ascending elevation for the walk, including all the ups and downs as 396 metres (1,300 feet) which, added to the distance, makes a reasonably challenging hike.

It is recommended that you will have done at least a 30-kilometre walk such as the city's Centennial Trail before undertaking the PG50. If you can maintain a sustained average pace of about 4.5 kph while moving, it will take you around 12 hours including an hour aggregate of refreshment breaks (three recommended). The loop can, of course, be done in either direction, starting/ending anywhere on the loop, for example if you happen to live on or near the route. Otherwise, the recommended option is to stage the walk from the parking lot at Cottonwood Island Park next to the Railway and Forestry Museum and walk in an anticlockwise direction, which keeps the sun predominantly out of your eyes.

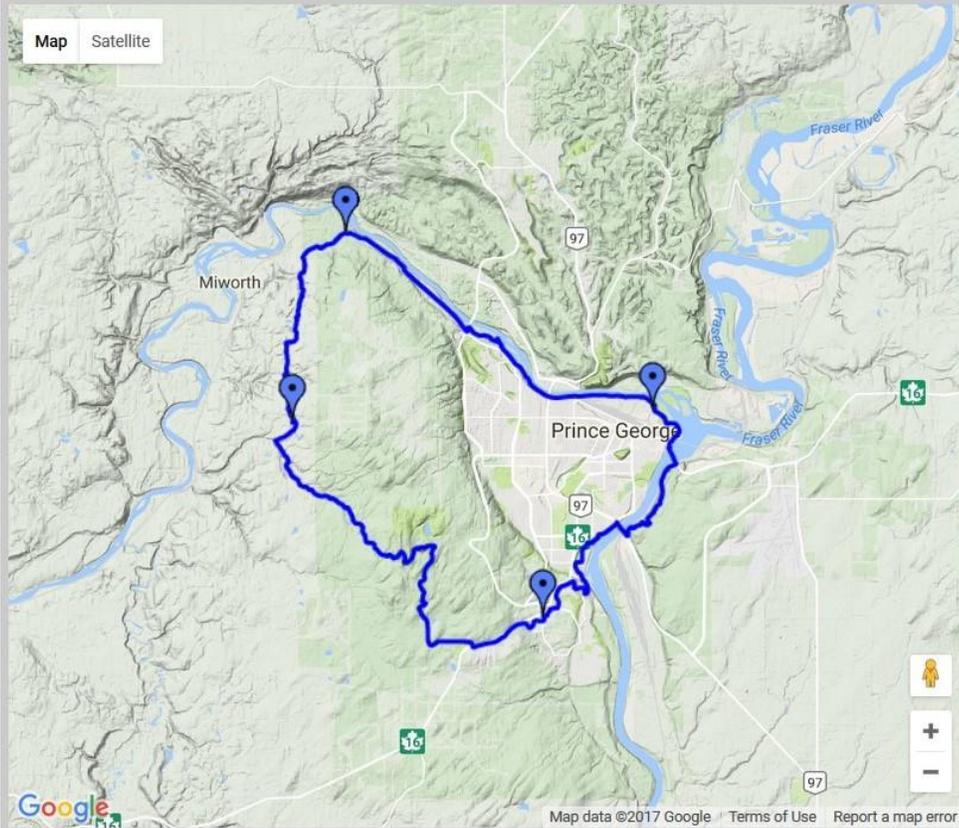
The route heads west from Cottonwood Island Park along the Heritage River Trail / Centennial Trail to Carney Street, and then follow the Centennial Trail through the residential area to the 5th and Central intersection. Next, head northwest through another residential area and find your way down to Wilson Park on the Nechako River. Follow the Nechako River west to the Foothills Bridge, and then walk 4.8 kilometres west along the Otway Road to the Otway Ski Centre. From there, the 22-kilometre Cranbrook Hill Greenway Trail leads south to Highway 16, and thence follow highway side roads down to College Heights. Use Cowart Road down to the bowl area and pick up the Cemetery Trail through to Queensway and back to the Fraser River. Walk south across the Simon Fraser Highway Bridge and then north along the Gunn Trail before crossing back over the Yellowhead Bridge and ending the hike via the Heritage River Trail around the confluence. Refreshment breaks can be taken at the Otway Ski Centre for a morning snack/coffee (bring your own), kilometre-9 picnic table on the Greenway for lunch (bring your own) and College Heights (bring your own, or lighten your load and choose a coffee shop or eating place in the College Heights shopping areas). Carry at least two, and preferably three litres of water, especially on a hot day.

Other safety tips: Leave your itinerary with a trusted person. Exercise care on the sections of the walk that follow roadways (the first part of the Otway Road can experience heavy industrial traffic to and from the gravel pits, especially in the morning) and when crossing roads and highways. The Greenway Trail is wilderness-like terrain where you might not meet anybody else for several hours, so make sure that you can complete at least 18 more kilometres before embarking on this section. Bear spray and mosquito repellent are recommended, as well as sunscreen and moleskin for blisters.

Disclaimer: You use these directions to the PG50 or other local walks entirely at your own risk.



Waypoint/Track Map



Stats

Points:	8659
Length:	50.17 km
Duration:	11:52:26
Moving:	8:54:12
Stopped:	2:58:13
Mx. Speed:	18.9 km/h
Av. Speed:	4.2 km/h
Elev. High:	842 m
Elev. Low:	560 m
Tot. Desc:	395 m
Tot. Asc:	396 m
Moving Sp:	5.3 km/h
Av. Pace:	14:12 min/km
Mov. Pace:	11:14 min/km

Download [GPX File](#)

Download [KML File](#)

GPS tracks and statistics provided by Shudao Ni

Trail Use – Historical Record

PG50 – Friday May 25, 2012

Schedule

0845 Start Cottonwood Island Park
1115 Arrive Otway
1700 Arrive Hwy 16 Blue Spruce
2035 Arrive Cottonwood Island Park

Statistics

11 hr 50 min elapse incl. 1 hr 18 min breaks; average speed while moving 4.75 kph.

Participants

Mike Nash

Comments

This was the inaugural PG50 walk.

The slideshow video (note the white sturgeon broaching in Nechako River) from the 2012 trip is available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_V6BiQ8vB_U&feature=youtu.be

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## PG50 - Saturday April 30, 2016

### Schedule

0745 Start Cottonwood Island Park  
2015 End Cottonwood Island Park

### Statistics

Duration: 12 hr 30 min; Total break time: 1 hour (Forest landing just south of Westcrest Drive at kilometre-8 on the Greenway) 30 min, College Heights Tim Horton 30 minutes.

### Participants

Shudao Ni, Tim Gardner, Laura Ryser, Li Wan, Cherry Tong SN, TG, LR, LW

### Comments

All 5 people completed the hike.

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PG50 - Wednesday May 25, 2016

Schedule

0701 Start Cottonwood Island Park [to Cameron Street Bridge 2.59 km]
0801 Arrive Wilson Park [5.46 km]
0840 Arrive Foothills Bridge / Start of Otway Road [8.73 km]
0935 Arrive Otway [13.53 km]
0952 Arrive Santa's Cabin (Old Biathlon) (Greenway ~1.4 km) Morning Coffee Break 20 minutes
1012 Leave Santa's Cabin
1153 Arrive Greenway 9 km 'halfway to UNBC' Lunch Break 19 minutes [22.53 km]
1212 Leave Greenway 9 km
1500 Arrive Hwy 16 Blue Spruce [35.53 km]
1545 Arrive College Heights Starbucks - Coffee and Snack Break 21 minutes [38.80 km]
1606 Leave College Heights - descend into Bowl via Cowart Road to start of Cemetery Trail [41.66 km]
1712 Arrive / Start of Gunn Trail on the east side of the Fraser River [44.45 km] [Gunn Trail north end is 47.56 km for a total of just over 3 km]
1842 Arrive Cottonwood Island Park [50.04 km]

Statistics

Elapse time 11 hr 41 min; overall average speed while moving 4.68 kph.

Participants

Mike Nash

Comments

- I repeated the PG50 four years to the day of my first PG50 on May 25, 2012. With an easy but steady pace on a nice day, my final time was 11 hr 41 min versus 11 hr 50 min in 2012, a variance of only 9 minutes.
- All other things being equal, an individual traveling alone has an advantage over even a well-balanced group in that you can optimize pace/pauses/stops.
- It was a beautiful day; there were a few mosquitos, but not a bother while moving. As in 2012, I did not see another person for 21 km on the Greenway, which is remarkable for a city the size of Prince George. Wildlife seen included one deer and one osprey on a nest, both on the Otway Road.
- I found Cowart Road to be more agreeable and safer than the direct route down the Hwy 16 hill. It has the added benefit of pushing the total route distance over 50 km; whereas taking the Hwy 16 hill could mean that you will be a few hundred metres short. I took this into account on my first trailblazing trip where I did several small detours while laying out the route and taking pictures. I recommend the PG50 route follows Cowart Road from College Heights to the Cemetery Trail.
- Three 20-minute breakpoints worked well for this walk.

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## PG50 – Sunday April 30, 2017

### Schedule

0720 Start Cottonwood Island Park

1852 End Cottonwood Island Park

### Statistics

Duration: 11 hours 32 minutes

Total break time: 1 hour (Forest landing just south of Westcrest Drive at kilometre-8 on the Greenway 30 minutes, College Heights Tim Horton's 30 minutes)

### Participants

Four hikers completed the PG50: Shudao Ni, Tim Gardner, Nancy Jilg, and Geordie McGregor.

### Comments

Seven hikers started the walk at Cottonwood Island Park, plus one hiker joined the group at Foothills Bridge. Four people left the route by prior arrangement at UNBC. For those who completed the PG50 the GPS time was 11 hours 52 minutes, including 20 minutes talking at the trailhead before starting out.

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PG50 – Tuesday May 30, 2017

Schedule

0710 Start Cottonwood Island Park

0752 Arrive 5th and Central

0842 Arrive Otway Road near Foothills Bridge [8.73 km]

0934 Arrive Otway Ski Centre [13.53 km]

0950 Arrive Santa's Cabin (Old Biathlon) (Greenway ~1.4 km) Morning Coffee Break 20 minutes

1010 Leave Santa's Cabin

1140 Arrive Greenway 9 km 'halfway to UNBC' Lunch Break ~10 minutes [22.53 km]

1150 Leave Greenway 9 km

1445 Arrive Hwy 16 Blue Spruce (22 km back to Otway sign) [35.53 km]

1525 Arrive College Heights Starbucks - Coffee and Snack Break 25 minutes [38.80 km]

1550 Leave College Heights Starbucks - route into Bowl via Hwy 16

1815 Arrive Cottonwood Island Park via Gunn Trail [~50 km]

Statistics

Overall average speed while moving 4.84 kph. My final time was 11 hr 05 min versus 11 hr 41 min in 2016 and 11 hr 50 min in 2012.

Participants

Mike Nash

Comments

- I completed the PG50 for my third time on this walk, five years since my first PG50 on May 25, 2012. Challenges and/or changes noted this time were:
 - Increasingly heavy industrial traffic on the first half of the Otway Road related to the burgeoning gravel and asphalt plants.
 - Peak mosquitoes on large parts of the Greenway Trail particularly at the Otway end: I twice had to stop and apply repellent (something that I rarely do), as well as constantly expending energy

swatting them away. On the plus side, the bugs kept my lunch stop short and prompted a steady pace on the Greenway Trail.

- 27 C temperatures in the afternoon necessitated soaking a cotton shirt for evaporative cooling. A side benefit is that a wet shirt is by far the most effective bug deterrent until it starts to dry off. It likely suppresses and/or masks the CO that they need to detect in order to find you.
- Thunderstorms forecasted necessitated carrying a little extra weight for raingear – the sky got black a couple of times but aside from a few sprinkles, the storms never materialized.
- Flooding had closed trails at the Fraser and Nechako rivers confluence necessitated rerouting the final segment along First Avenue and River Road.
- Average speed while moving on this walk was 4.84 kph versus 4.68 kph in 2016 and 4.75 kph in 2012, an insignificant variance of +/- 1.5 per cent.
- Other variables:
 - The peak mosquitoes forced me to maintain a steady pace on the Greenway, compared to the more relaxed walk in 2016.
 - I took the 2012 route down to the bowl alongside Hwy 16 rather than the Cowart Road route that I took in 2016. Henceforth, as previously mentioned, Cowart Road is the preferred route as the Hwy 16 route is unpleasant and not particularly safe for a pedestrian.
- The only mishap was a slight blister near the end of the greenway and a near miss turning an ankle while distracted dealing with mosquitoes near the Otway end of the Greenway – accidents are usually the result of multiple factors.
- As with 2012 and 2016 I did not see another person for most of the Greenway. No wildlife of any significance was encountered save for bugs, birdsong and a pileated woodpecker attacking a power pole on Highway 16. I caught up to and chatted with a guy from Maryland in the last kilometre out to the Blue Spruce campground where he was staying while getting his vehicle repaired after a high speed sideswipe near McBride – another good safety reminder.
- Recommendation: Go on a ~20 C day, with no rain forecast and before or after the bugs get bad.

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## PG50 (Reversed) – Monday June 5, 2017

### Schedule

0647 Start Cottonwood Island Park

0713 Start Gunn Trail

0802 End Gunn Trail

0902 Arrive College Heights (protein refreshment break)

0927 Leave College Heights

1010 Start Greenway Trail on Hwy 16 W

1253 Arrive 9 km Picnic Table (refreshment and blisters break)

1311 Leave 9 km

1457 Arrive Otway Ski Area Km-0 (refreshment break)

1511 Leave Otway Ski Area

1605 Arrive Foothills and Otway Road (start of Fishtraps through Wilson Park)

1656 Arrive 5<sup>th</sup> and Central (optional 4<sup>th</sup> refreshment break at Starbucks skipped)

1712 Arrive Cameron Street Bridge – Start of Heritage River Trail

1740 Arrive Cottonwood Island Park [Trip 50+ Km]

### Statistics

Total elapse time 10 hr 53 min; total refreshment breaks 57 min; overall average speed while moving 5.03 kph. Previous times: 11 hr 05 min a week earlier, 11 hr 41 min in 2016, and 11 hr 50 min in 2012.

### Participants

Mike Nash

### Comments

This was my second PG50 in one week, the first PG50 to be done in a reverse (clockwise) direction, and the first PG50 to be completed in under 11 hours:

- Reverse direction means that almost all the climbing is done in the first few hours, after which the Greenway is mostly downhill. Of the two directions I prefer the normal anti-clockwise direction – for me it offers a better paced walk and refreshment break options.
- The mosquitoes were still plentiful on the northern part of the Greenway Trail, but not as bad as 6 days earlier and not too bad at all elsewhere.
- The day was cooler than 6 days ago, but still warm in the afternoon.
- Weather was pleasant, sunny, low 20's.
- Two blisters – this seems to be a fact of the PG50 for me.
- Less heavy industrial traffic on the Otway Road in the afternoon versus the morning.
- No wildlife seen, but lots of birds singing all the way and ospreys on both pole nests along the Otway Road; three other groups were encountered on the Greenway, two were runners (two and one) and a party of a dozen taking part in an aboriginal education field trip identifying edibles.

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PG50 - Sunday May 6, 2018

Schedule

0730 Start Cottonwood Island Park

0811 Arrive 5th and Central

0825 12-minute wait for train while entering Wilson Park

0907 Arrive Foothills Bridge / Start of Otway Road

1004 Arrive Otway

1021 Arrive Santa's Cabin (Old Biathlon) (Greenway 1.4 km) Morning Coffee Break 24 minutes

1045 Leave Santa's Cabin

1231 Arrive Greenway 9 km 'halfway to UNBC' Lunch Break 21 minutes

1252 Leave Greenway 9 km

1542 Arrive Hwy 16 Blue Spruce

1630 Arrive College Heights Plaza – bought Gaiter Aid with electrolytes in Drug Store

1640 Arrive College Heights Starbucks - Coffee and Snack Break 22 minutes

1702 Leave College Heights - descend into Bowl via Cowart Road to start of Cemetery Trail

1810 Arrive / Start of Gunn Trail on the east side of the Fraser River (5-minute break atop Gunn Trail)

1938 Arrive Cottonwood Island Park

Statistics

Elapse time 12 hr 08 min; overall average speed while moving 4.72 kph, comparable with, but a little slower than most other times, except slightly faster than my first 2012 PG50.

Participants

Mike Nash

Comments

- This was my slowest PG50 yet – 18 minutes longer than my first PG50 in 2012 and 1 hr 15 m longer than my best time, achieved on my second (reverse direction) PG50 in June 2017. In part this was due to my taking a total of 1 hr 36 min breaks, starting with a forced break waiting for the long, slow train before entering Wilson Park.
- The weather was forecast to be clear and 20C; but it felt more like 24C, with a blazing sun and some sunburn despite using sunscreen twice, necessitating an extra stop for Gaiter Aid to replace electrolytes. I haven't had to do this before, but I felt it was needed even though I didn't sweat too much. In all I consumed about 3.5 litres of various liquids: water, coffee, Gaiter Aid, Café Misto.
- No bugs yet, which was nice as compared to last June's PG50 (the bugs were the main reason I moved fast and kept breaks short on that hike).
- Snow all gone on the Greenway except for very occasional ice patches; but frequent patches of wet trail with standing water slowed me.
- There is a new pedestrian lights-controlled crosswalk at the Hwy 16 terminus of the Greenway. That one simple fact now makes it feasible to hold public PG50 events (e.g. as a fund raiser for the Greenway) without incurring the unacceptable safety risk of a large number of people trying to cross that fast, four-lane highway.

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## Other Long Walk Options in the City of Prince George

*(Note: The PG50, PG40 and PG30 variants all utilize the full length of the Greenway Trail)*

### PG40 – Tuesday 12 May 2015

#### Schedule

0900 Start Cottonwood Island Park

1120 Arrive Otway

1130 Leave Otway

1510 Arrive UNBC

1800 Arrive Cottonwood Island Park

#### Statistics

Elapse time: 9 hours, including a leisurely 1 hr 23 min of stops at an overall average speed of 5.38 kph while moving.

## Participants

Mike Nash

## Comments

The PG40 (actually 41 km) follows the same route as the PG50, except exiting the Greenway via UNBC and walking down the Connector Trail and across the bowl to Cottonwood Island Park. This is an option

for people attempting the PG50 if they are tired, blistered or running out of time and wish to shorten it towards the end.

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PG30 – Prior to 2012

Schedule

No timings recorded on my walks, but allow at least 7 hours.

Statistics

N/A

Participants

Mike Nash

Comments

- I walked the PG30 twice prior to first undertaking the PG50 in 2012. The PG30 was the inspiration for the longer PG50, and would be good practice for anyone contemplating the PG50.
- Recommended route: Park at the UNBC/Greenway trailhead; walk through the UNBC campus and down the Connector Trail to the city bowl; follow Foothills Blvd to the Otway Road (detour through Moore's Meadow Park if you wish). Walk the Otway Road to the Otway Ski Centre and return via the Greenway Trail back to UNBC.

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## The Centennial Trail

30 km around the city taking in the Heritage River Trail, Moores Meadow, and parts of the Connector Trails from UNBC to the top end of Ospika Blvd and back via Ginter Meadows and Massey Drive. Allow at least 7 hours for the walk – try it in both directions.

For a YouTube video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5uofan7NkVI&feature=youtu.be>

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Trails around UNBC

Allow at least two hours to complete all of the trails shown in this video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0K11oXWUkAc&feature=youtu.be>

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## Fishtraps

The area between Wilson Park and Foothills Bridge south of the Nechako River:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xS-tXn01QNA&feature=youtu.be>