

British Columbia



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EARLY LOGGING IN THE ALBERNI DISTRICT by Dirk Septer

One of the first logging operations on Vancouver Island started in Port Alberni in 1860. The Anderson Mill was built there by Capt. Edward Stamp on land acquired from the native Indians for \$100 worth of blankets and guns. This mill, known as the Stamp Mill, cut timber and spars for the Royal Navy. At the foot of Sproat Lake a dam was constructed to drive logs down the Somass River to Alberni harbour. There, ships of the Royal Navy took on spars and a deck load for their return voyage home.

In the early days lumber was hauled to shipside by horse and hand truck, then slid down a chute or lifted aboard in slings. The gear used to accomplish this was powered by a steam donkey. The rough lumber was piled solid and it took much time and labour to load. Twelve foot decks were common, and lumber was often swept overboard in rough seas. When chartered to carry lumber, many foreign-built ships with short decks and small hatches had to have their fore and aft ports cut in order to load long lengths of timbers and piling. Vessels specifically built for the trade had expanded hatches and long deck space.

Up until the 1890's, most logs used by the few mills then operating on the coast were bought from small operators. A large quantity of logs was cut by hand loggers scattered all along the coast. However, the bulk of the logs was produced by skidding with teams of horses. Most of these small operations were financed by the mills, who supplied the provisions, equipment, boom chains, and tugs to tow the booms to their mill. The standard price for Douglas-fir logs was \$3.25 per thousand board feet to the



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logger, plus a royalty of 50%, plus the cost of towing. The operators did their own scaling, and anything less than high grade was culled.

During the "big winter" of 1889 - 1890 the entire district was covered with snow up to 8 feet deep, with no possibility of getting supplies for two months. The last snow did not disappear until the first of May. Many deer died due to cold and starvation. Those that were able to make it to the beach, where they could eat seaweed, were mostly killed by the native Indians for their skins. They brought about \$1.00 each, while bear skins were worth \$10.00.

From the early days the mills tried to secure future timber supplies by obtaining large tracts of land. These were only available to existing mills. They usually had a 21 year lease with a 50 cent royalty when logged, renewable with an increased royalty to be determined from time to time. Until the late 1930's there was an open market on the Lower Mainland which the mills drew on. When demand was high the supply disappeared. This made the mills realize that timber limits needed to be secured to provide a stable wood supply. A great deal of trading resulted, and a large proportion of the accessible stands were purchased by the sawmills and pulp companies.

In these large blocks only high volume stands, preferably Douglas-fir, were selected. There was great demand for this species in the Alberni district, because of its high quality and the easy access there. At the time, Douglas-fir was the only species considered of value. There was no demand for western redcedar or true fir. Only the Brunette Mill and a few others used spruce, mostly for box shooks, their main product.

The first steam donkey used for logging began operating in 1885 in the Lake Cowichan area. The donkey, named after a ship's auxiliary engine, was invented in 1881 by naval engineer John Dolbeer. A small, high-pressure steam engine turned a capstan-like spool or drum by way of a set of gears and thus reeled a rope or cable. A man tending the upright spool threw several laps around it and coiled the rope or cable behind him when taking in the slack.

As the population in the Vancouver area grew rapidly, so did the demand for lumber. Coupled with an increased demand for export lumber, the small operators could no longer produce the required supply of logs. New areas were then opened up and new logging techniques introduced. Small railways were built to move the logs to the mills. One of the first railway logging operations was started by the Hastings Sawmill Company. Their first railway operations were from Wolfson Bay to Timber Berth "J" at Bear River.

The Bear River operation was later moved to Rock Bay. The area behind Ladysmith opened up and A.J. Anderson followed by logging Timber Berth 33, one of the Chemainus holdings near Union Bay.

Railway grades could be successfully operated only where the terrain was favourable and the timber extensive. If these conditions were met, development could take place at some distance from tidewater, until then out of reach of the ordinary logging methods of the time.

From 1885 to 1890 there was very little demand for both western hemlock and western redcedar. With the exception of the three railroad operations, the bulk of the logs were produced by small operators. They logged only the easy slopes which were relatively close to the mills. Daily production averaged 1,500 board feet per man.

The standard size of the logs at that time was 24 feet, based on the Scribner Log Rule. The price of logs delivered to Vancouver, Nanaimo or Victoria was about \$5.00 to \$6.00 per thousand. The price of No. 1 1x12 common Douglas-fir lumber ran about \$10.00 to \$12.00 per thousand, with very little change in prices for several years. Some special timber in long lengths was shipped to eastern Canada for use in canal construction.

The first considerable change in prices, with subsequent increases in production, occurred with the development of an export market. It also increased the interest in standing timber for future requirements. Prior to 1905, only manufacturing plants could obtain Timber Leases from the government. Small operators were unable to get timber for their future operations.

In 1905 an act was passed by the government which allowed the staking of timber in 640 acre blocks, with 21 years allowed to remove the timber. Much speculation resulted, and the volume of timber claimed amounted to much more than could be harvested in 21 years. Subsequent legislation permitted indefinite renewal of the licenses and in 1908 further staking was stopped.

Around 1907 a new method of logging was introduced. High lead was a change from ground yarding to loading out points. A high lead consisted of a spar tree rigged high up with heavy yarding blocks. The spar was guyed out to take the strain.

The next most important development in moving logs to the waterfront was truck logging. The first trucks used were heavy, with solid tires. This meant they had to travel on plank roads or hewn track logs as the solid tires would cut up even a gravel road. Pneumatic tires, light rear ends, and better brakes led to a greater role for logging trucks. With multiple wheels on the trailer, trucks could make longer hauls and negotiate steep hills.

Still a prime forestry area, the Alberni district has seen many changes in logging methods in over a century and a quarter.

BOOK REVIEWS

"Line Up or Roll Up": the Lumber Workers Industrial Union in the Prince George District. By Gordon Hak. B.C. Studies, Summer 1990.

The period between 1919 and 1925 was one of intense activity by those attempting to organize the forest industry workers in the Prince George area. Mr. Hak describes the activities and rivalries of the two foremost unions in the area - the Lumber Workers Industrial Union and the Industrial Woodworkers of the World (commonly known as the "Wobblies").

At the time, both pay and camp conditions in the area were abysmal, with constant strife between the fledgling union movement and the companies. Among the many conflicts, the February 27, 1922 "Mud River Strike" at the J.D. McArthur tie camp was one of the more notable. Hak colourfully describes a brawl which took place in Prince George's Royal Cafe involving H.P. Hanson (a union activist) and J.B. Daniell (editor of the Prince George Citizen). Both were subsequently found guilty of assault and fined.

By 1925, the forest economy of the Prince George area was in trouble, with many mills ceasing, or severely curtailing, operations. As a result, the union movement suffered with the LWIU and the IWW all but fading away. It would be another twenty years before the forest unions would again emerge as a healthy entity in the Prince George area.

UBC Forestry 1921 - 1990: an informal history. By J. Harry G. Smith. Faculty of Forestry, UBC, Vancouver, B.C. 140 p.

This book was written by Dr. Smith to help celebrate the 75th anniversary of the founding of UBC in 1915. The work was initiated by Dean R.W. Kennedy and completed by Dr. Smith, who retired in June of 1990 after forty years of teaching and research with the Faculty of Forestry.

Student annuals and UBC Foresters since 1948 provided continuity and contributed to an informal tone. There are eleven chapters:

- Introduction (B.C. forest history and the origins of UBC forestry);
- Students (undergraduate society, women in forestry, enrollment, characteristics and recruitment);
- Good Advice to Graduates (from Heads or Deans, and Honorary Presidents);
- Graduates (numbers by degree and their accomplishments);
- Staff (names and appointment dates, including the Sopron Division);
- Teaching (changes in curriculum and degrees offered);
- Research and Publication (funds, books and graduate studies);
- Extension and Demonstration (includes five forest properties);
- Professional Development and Community Service;
- Administration (organization, budgets, buildings and sources of support); and

Faculty Accomplishments (by Heads or Deans, current issues and future plans).

Some references are given but little has been published to date on the history of forestry education in B.C. An appendix records the names, dates, and degrees held by 2,794 graduates. There are 13 tables and about 20 photographs.

Copies may be obtained from: Publications, Faculty of Forestry, 2357 Main Mall, UBC, Vancouver, B.C. V6T 1W5. Price is \$10 per copy, with \$5.00 postage for one book and \$2.50 for each additional book.

W. Young

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

- Fossum, Jack. 1990. Mancatcher - an immigrant's story of logging, policing, and pioneering in the Canadian west. Lindsay Press, Comox. \$14.95.
- Gatensbury, Steve. 1990. Once, to learn it: a lighthearted account of a fifty year adventure in the B.C. lumber industry. \$12.95.
- Leier, Mark. 1990. Where the Fraser River flows. New Star. \$14.95.
- Leonoff, Cyril E. 1990. An enterprising life - Leonard Frank photographs, 1895 - 1944. Talonbooks. 176 p. \$39.95.
- Mahood, Ian. 1990. Three men and a forester. Harbour Publishing. \$26.95.
- Smith, J. Harry G. 1990. UBC Forestry 1921 - 1990: an informal history. Faculty of Forestry, UBC, Vancouver, B.C. 140 p.
- Turner, Robert D. 1990. Logging by rail: the British Columbia story. Sono Nis Press. \$39.95.

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FORESTRY SHORTIE

Hec and Vi Richmond were married for over 60 years. Hec Richmond passed away in July of 1989 (see B.C. Forest History Newsletter No. 21, p. 5). Vi's interests in forestry and forest entomology continue. She lives with daughter Donny at their home at beautiful Cedar-By-The-Sea.

Bob DeBoo, October 1990

Forestry Shorties.....



Vi Richmond - Counting Pinholes with Hec

"I first joined Hec in his entomological field projects in 1929, the year we were married. We were living in Vernon then. The project entailed surveys for mountain pine beetles on the Alberta side of the Rockies."

"We spent from June to October mostly alone, except for four horses. Starting near the Red Deer River, the survey went north of the Athabasca. Certainly, the people there with Parks and the Alberta Forest Service were as skeptical of us as greenhorns. Concern about the risk of bark beetles invading from B.C. was the reason for our mission. Anyhow, we soon got into a routine and I loved the beautiful scenery and the excitement of new experiences every day. Forging rivers was a challenge. Bears frightened the horses and, later in the fall, the moose did too."

"Most of the time we slept out under the stars. Our routine started at daybreak when Hec went out to round up the horses and I got breakfast ready. After clean-up, we'd saddle and pack the horses and head out for the day's work observing and mapping the areas traveled. We checked tree-top conditions and looked for tell-tale pitch tubes on tree trunks. We did this from horseback, and I would call out my observations to Hec. About 2 PM Hec would start looking for a good meadow and fresh water for our next campsite. Then we'd settle down, take care of the horses, and have a good meal. It was a great life."

"From early April to October each year, from 1931 to 1934, we worked out of a tent camp at Aspen Grove, 17 miles from Merritt. There Hec was conducting intensive investigations of bark beetles. My job then was still cooking and cleaning, but I also got the firewood and helped Hec and his assistants with the insect collections, egg counts, and other observations. We traveled to Merritt in a 1931 Ford coupe every Saturday for supplies and a big meal at the Canada Cafe. I remember the food was excellent - for 35 cents we got soup and crackers; bread; pork chops or cutlets, roast beef, or chicken; apple pie and ice cream; and coffee. Second helpings were available if desired!"

"In 1957, after postings to Winnipeg and Quebec City, with the federal service, we returned to the coast where Hec consulted for MacMillan-Bloedel and the Council of Forest Industries for many years. With other interests and responsibilities by then, I would only occasionally go out for a day trip with Hec. But even so, I had my entomological field duties, after packing a picnic lunch. In the late 1950's and 1960's Hec was deeply involved with the notorious ambrosia beetle which, through its feeding, caused tunnels and discoloration of the outer wood of logs. The beetles emerged through characteristic small holes in the bark. So, I have fond memories of many beautiful days out counting these pinholes with Hec."

REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

Forest Service Marine Fleet

A model ship builder is constructing a model of a former Forest Service vessel, the Cherry II. Photographs of the ship's superstructure are needed to ensure the model's authenticity. Anyone with photos of the ship is asked to contact Fred Smith in Vancouver at 660-1922 during working hours or send a note to the editor for forwarding to Mr. Smith.

Eagle Lake Logging Railway - not alone?

In the April 1990 newsletter I solicited information from readers for a future newsletter article on the Eagle Lake Logging Railroad. At the time, I believed this operation had been the only logging railroad to operate in the central and northern interior of the province. Since then, however, my research has confirmed that there was at least one other logging railroad in the area. This new insight involves the logging railroad which serviced the United Grain Growers' sawmill at Hutton, B.C. I'd be interested in hearing from any readers who may have information on either of these operations.

W. Young, 6401 Conconi Place, Victoria, B.C. V8Z 5Z7

RECOLLECTIONS

by Dr. Braham G. Griffith

I joined the B.C. Forest Branch upon graduation in 1926 and was posted to the Aleza Lake Forest Experiment Station east of Prince George. That summer there was logging going on in the Blue River area. In the late summer Dr. Percy M. Barr, the Superintendent of the station, sent me down to Lempriere to collect a few bushels of western redcedar cones from the logging operation. The cones were sent to the coast for seed extraction.

The next spring I was again at the Aleza Lake Forest Experiment Station and Dr. Barr sent me down to McBride to sow the western redcedar seed over a ten acre area near the junction of the Fraser and Goat rivers. I have never had the opportunity to revisit the area, but I believe that this may have been the first sowing of western redcedar seed in B.C.

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NEWS ITEMS

In conjunction with the IWA - Canada, Local 1-80, the Cowichan - Chemainus Valley Ecomuseum developed the "Life of a Logger" exhibit. This focused on loggers and their families in the Lake Cowichan area during the 1930's. That era was one of rapid technological and social change and the exhibit explored aspects of logging camp and community lifestyles, including types of work, transportation, natural environment, schooling, church and social events.

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The Forest History Association of B.C. has been appointed to the Green Timbers Advisory Committee. Our association will continue to strive for the preservation of the area's historical value.

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A small group of dedicated volunteers on the Queen Charlotte Islands are working to preserve the artifacts of the logging, mining and homesteading history of the islands. A small museum, built on 4 acres of waterfront in Port Clements, opened on July 1, 1987 and is already filled to bursting with a wealth of items.

Each artifact is unique, but of special interest to old Fordson buffs is the 1927 Tugaway, a conveyance used in the area by the Baxter Pole Company to haul poles to tidewater. It ran on a railroad constructed entirely of logs and had concave wheels which fitted over the log rails in a similar manner to train wheels. Restoration of this historic machine is soon to be undertaken with guidance from the Surrey Transportation Museum.

A 20 foot high bright red grapple standing on a cement pad is the first thing to catch a visitor's eye when driving along the main street of Port Clements. About 100 feet past the grapple is a big yellow 1957 LeTourneau electric arch. These two monuments of past logging methods flank the Port Clements Museum.

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The 1990 annual meeting and banquet of the David Douglas Society of Western North America will be held on Monday, December 3, 1990 in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. As usual, the meeting will be held in conjunction with the annual meeting of the Western Forestry and Conservation Association. For further information contact W. Young, 6401 Conconi Place, Victoria, B.C. V8Z 5Z7 (652-3002).

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