

# British Columbia



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ENCOUNTERS WITH THE BULL OF THE WOODS  
Part One of Two  
by Bill McGhee

When I read the Gordon Gibson story "Bull of the Woods" I was struck by the number of times my path, through 34 years of life in Port Alice, had crossed that of Gordon's. Each crossing reveals a bit of Gibson history and a bit of my history.

Sailing up the west coast of Vancouver Island on the "good ship" **Maquinna**, as she was fondly called on radio newscasts in later years, I first crossed Gordon Gibson's path in early December 1919, at age one month, when the ship stopped at Ahousat, his home at that time.

Of course neither of us was aware of this event, which was to be repeated again in 1921 and 1923, when my mother travelled to Vancouver to bear my brother and sister, there being no hospital in Port Alice then. Writing about these journeys fills me with awe at the thought of my Vancouver-born mother travelling in 1923 aboard the **Maquinna** for four and a half days with a new baby girl and two rambunctious boys under age five. No doubt the presence of a stewardess aboard ship in those times eased my mother's dilemma.



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Seventeen years elapsed before I actually met Gordon Gibson on what, unbeknownst to me at the time, was an historic occasion -- the arrival in Port Alice of the log barge **Malahat** in 1936. For here was a converted rum-running sailing ship which (as Gordon wrote) was the first self-powered, self-loading and unloading log barge on the coast. It was the only one until 42 years later when the **Haida Brave** was launched in 1978.

Logs were handled by a small A-frame with a swinging boom, all of which could be skidded fore and aft on about six feet of reinforced deck inside the gunwale. It was my experience working as a boomman loading the **Malahat** under the supervision of Archie Kerr (RPF Life Member 44) that led to my post-war occupation from 1947 to 1950 of shipping logs in and out of Port Alice, both by barge and log raft.

While most of the logging in Quatsino Sound during the thirties was for pulp species, the forests on the south and west slopes of some inlets contained Douglas-fir, only a minor portion of which was used for local needs. The **Malahat** provided the means to ship accumulated Douglas-fir logs, many of them peelers, to the Vancouver market.

Following her first trip to Port Alice, the **Malahat's** engines were condemned and subsequent voyages were made under tow. This was the first of a number of occasions when Gordon Gibson's ingenuity solved a problem for the B.C. Pulp and Paper Co. Ltd.

Although I nearly went to work in Gordon's west coast logging camp in the summer of 1938, when the Port Alice mill was shut down due to poor markets, our paths did not cross again until the post-war years of 1949 and 1950. These events were not exactly landmarks of history but one involving a log barge could have been.

In December of 1949, the Port Alice sawmill, including barkers but not the chippers, burned to the ground. With commitments to buyers, management decided to try and manufacture enough chips to maintain pulp production. Temporary equipment was quickly installed in the mill yard to cut cordwood for the chippers -- chain saws were used for bucking, while previously-discarded steam splitters were installed to split 4-foot blocks.

Barking was the big problem. The loggers used "spuds" to peel bark from logs in flat booms, both at camp and in the mill storage grounds, before delivery to the mill yard. In addition, barked logs were shipped on flat barges (scows) from the other company pulp mill at Woodfibre.

Once again, Gordon Gibson entered the picture. At his Tahsis sawmill, where all logs were barked before sawing, he worked out a system whereby the barked slabs coming off the headrig could be bucked into 4-foot lengths, bundled and shipped to Port Alice by coastal freighter. At Port Alice a conveyor was built to take this "cordwood" from the water to the chippers.

I will never forget spending New Year's Eve of 1949 watching bundles of sapwood dropping over the ship's side into a standing boom and wondering if they would ever surface. I believe this unique supply of pulpwood, together with the local supply, enabled the pulp mill to maintain normal production until a new mill was built.

In 1947 a large inventory of Sitka spruce logs which had accumulated during World War II lay stored on the tide flats adjacent to the Port Alice mill. I was transferred from the engineering crew at Holberg to supervise their export to Vancouver. The seagoing tug **Island Navigator** towing the steel barge **Island Forester** (a converted sailing ship) was hired to haul these logs to Matt Sutton's Sitka spruce mill on False Creek. Carrying a crew of ten, the barge was equipped with three 15-ton coal-burning steam cranes which had been purchased from a shipyard. After proving unsatisfactory for handling logs which weighed up to 40 tons, the cranes were removed and a log loading works with a fixed gin pole was built across from the Port Alice mill for fore and aft loading of ship barges.

Herein lies a tale involving Gordon Gibson, who was by this time contract logging for the company at Jeune Landing. While log production in his operation was primarily pulp species (hemlock and true fir), a sufficient volume of Douglas-fir had accumulated by 1949 to make a barge load for shipment to Vancouver. At that time, in the wake of the Port Alice sawmill fire, bundled barked logs from Woodfibre were arriving on flat barges to be unloaded at the log loading works and reloaded with Sitka spruce for Vancouver.

Keep in mind that the fixed gin pole log loading works was designed for fore and aft loading of ship barges. Thwartship loading of flat barges, although awkward and costly, was being done fairly efficiently by the Port Alice crew. Seizing an opportunity to get rid of his accumulated Douglas-fir, Gordon arranged to ship out a load on a flat barge and insisted on using his own loading crew. Working long hours, they completed loading in two days and returned to Jeune Landing. Due to lack of experience in loading thwartships they failed to yard the logs far enough inboard, leaving the barge with a decided list to starboard from logs overhanging on the outboard side.

At about 8:00 PM, with a roar that could be heard across town, the loaded barge became the first self-dumper, discharging the complete load into the inlet (with no boomsticks to corral it). As it slid back from under the load, the empty barge leapt high in the air and with great force broke the Sitka spruce gin pole at its mid-point. It was five feet in diameter there. All the stiff-legs which held the standing boom for mooring the barges were also smashed.

After rounding up the loose logs, repairing the loading works, reloading the barge properly and counting his losses, Gordon Gibson decided to let us load out his logs in the future. I have often thought, however, that we missed the idea of a self-dumping barge. It was not to be developed until several years later.

## EX-FOREST SERVICE VESSEL SQUADRON NEWS

In an earlier newsletter it was mentioned that Ken Morley and Tommy Edwards had been appointed as trustees of the squadron, as representatives of the Forest Service Ranger Staff and the Forest Service Marine Depot respectively. Since then Bill Young has been appointed as a trustee, representing the Forest History Association of B.C.

The main responsibilities of the trustees will be to ensure that the history of the fleet is documented. In future issues of this newsletter we'll be requesting contributions of documents, photographs and personal remembrances pertaining to the Forest Service vessels. This material will be stored at the Maritime Museum in Vancouver, where pertinent displays, exhibitions and reunions will be held.

Through their respective owners, the following vessels are currently part of the squadron:

Balsam II	Cottonwood II	Dean Ranger
Forest Cruiser	Forest Ranger II	Hecate Ranger
Lillian D.	Maple II	Nesika
Oak II	Oliver Clark I	Wells Gray
White Birch	White Spruce	

Some of the other vessel owners are known and at the time of this report may or may not be part of the squadron. These include:

Alder II	Alpine Fir	Arbutus II
B.C. Forester	Check Scaler	Cherry II
Elmera	Eva R.	Forest Ranger
Oliver Clark II	Salt Mist	Silver Fir
Tamarack IV	Western Yew	

W. Young

**Other news** - some of the vessels will be taking part in the Vancouver Maritime Parade on June 5th. On the preceding evening a raft-up will take place at the head of False Creek. From July 1st to July 4th another raft-up will be held at Maple Bay, near Duncan.

Forest Service staff and retirees with a connection to the vessels are welcome to stop by and say hello.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

- Bungey, Lloyd M. 1992. Pioneering aviation in the west, as told by the pioneers. Canadian Museum of Flight and Transportation, Surrey, B.C. Published by Hancock House, Surrey, B.C. ISBN 0-88839-271-0. 328 p. \$22.95.  
(contains information on forestry flying and the development of aerial fire suppression techniques)
- Macdonald, Bruce. 1992. Vancouver - a visual history. Talonbooks, Vancouver, B.C. xi + 84 p. \$45.00  
(includes information on the logging history of the area, with the location of logging activities traced through time)
- Rajala, Richard. 1993 (?). The legacy and the challenge: century of the forest industry at Cowichan Lake. Lake Cowichan Heritage Advisory Committee, Box 860, Lake Cowichan, B.C. VOR 2G0. ISBN 0-88878-3338-8. 152 pages, plus map.  
Includes photographs. \$12.95 + tax. (phone: 749-6554)
- Tataryn, Joy. 1992. The logger's digest, volume 1 - from horses to helicopters. MCB Communications Ltd., Port Alberni. iii + 163 p. \$18.95.

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FORESTRY SHORTIE NUMBER 8

The memoranda of the B.C. Forest Service reproduced here entitled "Red Alert at Puntzi" are only two of thousands filed during the past 80 years. The mixture of official formal communication and tongue-in-cheek humour to the boss was a trademark of some Forest Service men for many years. I'm not sure how much of this has survived to 1993.

A.F.W. (Arnold) Ginnever was one of the best. After demobilization in 1946, Arnold joined the Forest Service at Port Alberni. Various postings around the province eventually led to Victoria and retirement in 1982. Arnold died while fishing with a friend in the Cariboo, sadly in 1984.

Tom Walker, the Ranger at Tatla Lake in 1972, has been District Manager at Duncan for the past dozen years. Tom retired recently to concentrate on his smile and the weather there.

Bob DeBoo  
February 1993

# Forestry Shorties.....



## MEMORANDUM

To: Chief Forester  
Victoria, B.C.

From: District Forester  
Williams Lake, B.C.

June 19, 1972.

Attention: Protection Division

The attached photocopy of a memo from Ranger T. Walker of Tatla Lake suggests to the reader that despite the rapid technological advances being made in scientific fields today, there may still be room for the simple approaches that served our forebears so well.

If you have room in the establishment for Mr. Lulua and his amphibious assistant, we will be pleased to arrange an interview.

A.F.W. Ginnever  
i/c Protection

## MEMORANDUM

To: District Forester  
Williams Lake, B.C.

From: Forest Ranger  
Tatla Lake, B.C.

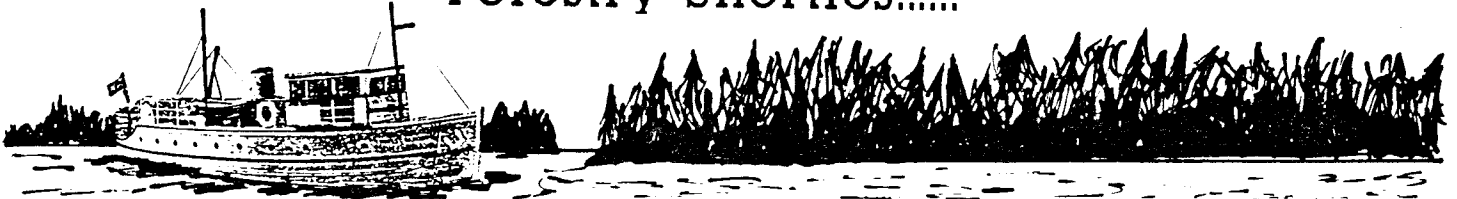
June 2, 1972.

Attention: A.F.W. Ginnever

I have just recently concluded an investigation into the sudden weather change that took place on May 6, 1972. As you recall, on May 5th we in Tatla Lake decided to man Chilanko Lookout and Alexis Creek decided to man Alex Graham Lookout. Fire occurrence was increasing. The weather forecast read in part, "warming and drying trend expected to continue for next several days." We were given a 0 percent chance of rain. The situation was critical. Both we and Alexis Creek decided that this was serious enough to warrant using a \$250 per hour helicopter to take these lookout men up to the lookouts.

As well, we understand the urgency of the situation was felt by your District Protection Office and a Bird Dog aircraft was stationed at Puntzi Tanker Base on an emergency basis.

## Forestry Shorties.....



These decisions were made by senior staff members of the Forest Service who called upon years of experience, using latest computerized and satellite assisted weather forecasts, coupled with the BUI and FWI figures that many years of research has produced. We were using the latest scientific aids!

By the evening of May 5th the Forest Service was ready. All systems "GO" and all staff on "RED ALERT." Most of us slept uneasy that night.

Then, the morning of May 6th we awoke to heavy rains, snow storms and 35o temperatures. What happened?

My investigation has found that while the Forest Service was making these preparations, one David Lulua, a local Indian lad, was working from dawn to dusk mopping up a fire that was covered by a burning permit but continually threatening to escape. By the evening of May 5th, he had just completed his third sixteen hour long day mopping up this fire. He was very weary and the situation was desperate. He felt as the Forest Service did, that emergency procedures should be implemented. Accordingly, he caught a frog and with a shoe lace staked this frog out on high ground.

David Lulua explained rain would be sent to keep the frog from dying the following day. We explained that by consulting our 20th century aids that the only thing that would happen to the frog was that it would dehydrate in the next day's heat. David smiled, we smiled, both knowingly.

The rest is history, the rains came! And came!

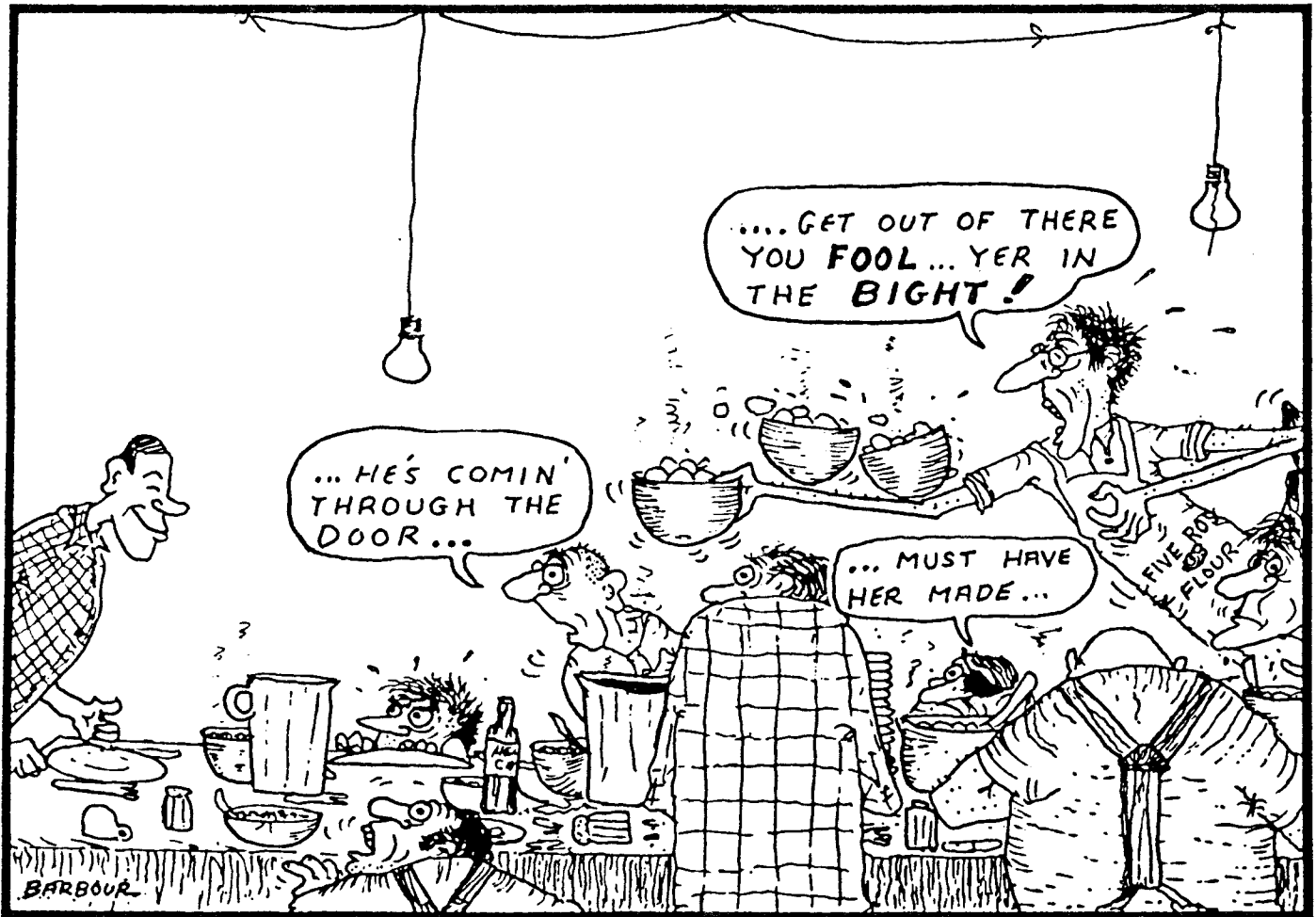
On Monday morning I saw David Lulua. "For Christ sake," I said, "turn that damned frog loose. The roads are washing out!"

David turned loose the frog, the rains stopped. David smiled knowingly.

I didn't.

Tom A. Walker  
Ranger

P.S. Please advise if you wish to hire Mr. David Lulua as a weather consultant.



... REMEMBER WHEN THE GREENHORN KID CHOKERMAN HAD THE DIABOLICAL GALL TO SIT IN THE HOOKERS' PLACE...

- GIBSON BROS. LOGGING, ZEBALLOS, B.C., 1946.

This newsletter is the official organ of the Forest History Association of British Columbia. It is distributed at no charge to members of the Association, libraries, archives and museums. Items on forest history topics, descriptions of current projects, requests for information, book reviews, letters, comments and suggestions are welcomed. Please submit newsletter material and send changes of address to the editor: Mr. John Parminter, # 1 - 949 Pemberton Road, Victoria, B.C. V8S 3R5. (595-0374)

Membership in the Association is \$7.00 yearly, or \$30 for five years. Please send dues to the Treasurer: Mr. Edo Nyland, 8793 Forest Park Drive, Sidney, B.C. V8L 4E8. (656-9276)  
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