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RIDING ON FATE

by Kevin Hunter

The magical sound of another steam locomotive now echoes throughout the Alberni Valley. The Industrial Heritage Society restored the Number 7 locomotive, that served with distinction for two different logging companies in the valley. The Number 7 worked for the Alberni Pacific Lumber Company in the 1940s and early 1950s. It was sold to MacMillan Bloedel in 1953, renumbered the 1007 and operated in their Franklin River Division for two years. The Number 7's niche in history was its tragic crash through the Franklin River bridge. What most people don't seem to know is the strange sequence of events that led up to that day, forty-three years ago.

It was November of 1954 and the West Coast of Vancouver Island had been repeatedly lashed with violent winter storms. The Franklin River logging operations appeared to bear the brunt of these storms. Swollen creeks and rivers created a transportation nightmare. Numerous culverts washed out, cutting sections of the railway grade and even threatening some of the bridges. The damage was so severe that the rail grade to the huge steam Lidgerwood Skidders washed out, isolating them.

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Franklin River Division had no choice, they had to stop logging. The biggest priority was the grade crew desperately trying to hold the division together. All the locomotives were busy, transporting the grade shovels to the most serious washouts. They did their best to repair the damage and prevent any further destruction. The section crew scrambled to lay track, trying to hook up the rails.

On November 18, 1954, dawn broke rather ominously and the morning light had to be coaxed out of the driving rain and drifting fog. It was cold and there was even a hint of snow in the air. Miraculously, the mainline down to the log dump at Camp A on the Alberni Inlet was open. In a desperate attempt to get some wood down to the log dump, the mainline locomotive, Number 1007, was dispatched to haul a load of logs down to Camp A.

At 90 tons, Number 1007 was a large 1929 Baldwin saddletank rod engine (a 2-8-2T). It was a very powerful locomotive capable of pulling 40 loaded log cars, more commonly called skeleton cars. Working almost exclusively on the mainline, Number 1007 normally made two and sometimes three runs from Camp B down to the "beach" at Camp A, on the Alberni Inlet.

Don Moore, the regular engineer of Number 1007, was laid off. Don was a relative newcomer to the division. He had recently hired on from the abandoned Alberni Pacific railway operations. Bob Walker, a senior mainline engineer, was slated to take over the controls of Don's Number 1007 locomotive.

Inside the cab of Number 1007, Bob and his fireman, Stan Malachowski, were busy steaming up the locomotive. It was warm and dry in the cab but both Bob and Stan knew they had to complete one unpleasant task before they could finally leave. Donning coats, they jumped out of the cab into the driving rain and greased, oiled and inspected the running gear of the locomotive.

On that miserable morning, fate took a triple twist. Seniority again surfaced, sealing the destiny of an unsuspecting crew. The Number 1007 locomotive was normally operated by very experienced and usually senior engineers. It hauled the loaded skeleton cars parked on the mainline into camp, reassembled the cars into a much larger train and hauled them down to the log dump at Camp A. Being promoted to a mainline locomotive engineer was the ultimate engineer's job and the culmination of many years of experience.

Another train engineer, Ed Crosby, noticed Bob and Stan working on Number 1007. Ed had worked for years on the geared Shay locomotives, hauling and switching log cars from the woods down to the mainline. Ed had a lot of seniority running locomotives but had never worked on the mainline. Flexing his seniority muscles, he demanded to run Number 1007. With grave misgivings, Ed was granted his request and within minutes was in the cab of the locomotive.

Before leaving Camp B, Einar Ericksen, the head brakeman and Alex Bregin, the second brakeman, walked to the back of the train and checked all the loaded skeleton cars. A mandatory brake test was performed on the train before it moved. After some last-minute instructions, Einar walked to the front of the train and climbed into the cab. Alex quickly scrambled into the caboose at the back of the train. Glad to get out of the rain, Alex built a fire in the stove and settled down to what he thought would be an interesting but uneventful ride.

Number 1007 sat in camp hooked up to 35 skeleton cars. They were waiting for a speeder that was transporting men from Camp A up to Camp B. Once the speeder arrived in camp they were reassured that the mainline was clear down to Camp A. A quick call was made to dispatch, informing him they were on their way. Dispatch reminded them that all the bridges had been inspected the day before but to still proceed with caution.

Ed Crosby received the "all clear" from his head brakeman and checked to see if his fireman was ready. In a cloud of steam and a toot on the whistle, Ed released the air on the brakes and reached for the throttle. Slowly the heavy train eased down the mainline, three million pounds of logs, steam and steel, heading for tragedy.

Getting used to the motion of the locomotive, Ed carefully opened up the throttle. All three men in the cab scrutinized the rail grade in front of them. Already the windows in the cab were fogged up. It was fourteen miles down to Camp A and they had sixteen bridges to cross. It was going to be a slow journey, especially in this miserable weather. Highball was out of the question!

The crew marvelled at the hillsides turned white with saturated water. Torrents boiled and cascaded down the steep slopes on their short journey to the ocean.

Not far out of camp, the grade increased to a steeper 1 to 1 ½% downgrade most of the way to Camp A. Ed was busy in the cab, constantly adjusting the throttle and the brakes. The fireman worked at keeping the boiler pressure up. The head brakeman acted as another set of valuable eyes in the cab. Not only was he looking forward but he diligently watched the loaded skeleton cars trailing behind the locomotive.

A mile out of camp and with only one more bridge to cross, disaster struck. To the untrained eye the bridge over the Franklin River appeared intact but it had taken a severe pounding. Normally mounted twenty feet above the river, the bridge had only four feet of clearance. The raging torrent passing beneath the bridge undermined a supporting bent. The bent tore away from the bridge and smashed into two more bents, ripping them out. The bridge was severely weakened.

Number 1007 locomotive didn't have a chance. It steamed onto the bridge at about eight miles per hour. Thirty feet out on the bridge the locomotive sagged backwards. It plunged into the tormented river, dragging a skeleton car with it. Franklin River swallowed the locomotive. It completely disappeared from sight! In a pile of twisted timbers and hissing steam, Number 1007 rolled over on its side on the bottom of the river. The locomotive was now a steel coffin.

In the time it took to extinguish the flame in the boiler, the flame in two men also died. Ed Crosby, the engineer on his first mainline locomotive and Einar Ericksen, head brakeman, died in the cab. Stan Malachowski, the fireman, narrowly escaped. Surfacing one-quarter mile downstream, paralyzing fear almost sealed his fate. He didn't know how to swim! Miraculously he was swept close to shore. Exhausted, he dragged himself ashore and collapsed. Alex Bregin, in the caboose, was totally unaware of the catastrophe at the bridge.

It was weeks before a skyline was rigged and Number 1007 dragged out of the river. It had sustained surprisingly little damage and was repaired, living to steam for almost another twenty years.

Forty-three years later, in the excitement of restoring 90 tons of nostalgia we proudly call the Number 7, we are reminded of that fateful crash into the Franklin River. The Phoenix has risen!

The Number 7 was restored after 3700 hours of volunteer work, covering a period of nearly two years. For more information about the Number 7 and its stablemate, a 1912 Shay called the "2 Spot," contact the Western Vancouver Island Industrial Heritage Society at The Station, 3100 Kingsway Avenue, Port Alberni, B.C. V9Y 3B1.



NEW BOOK ON THE WAY

From W. Young

Two well-known authors from Perthshire, Scotland have teamed up to write a book (and possibly produce a television documentary) about Perthshire native son David Douglas.

Ann Lindsay Mitchell was brought up and educated in Scotland and has been a feature writer for some 25 years. She recently traveled to Vancouver and Victoria to do some research and to meet with members of the David Douglas Society of Western North America.

Co-author Syd House is a professional forester and has worked with the Forestry Commission since 1978. Through his work he has been able to discover the real worth of David Douglas' contribution and has an insider's knowledge of where to go to see the early introductions and best examples of the botanist's work.

It is apparent that David Douglas is a man who has a history in his own country and who will be further recognized by a new book that will help discover the man behind the name David Douglas.

NEW PUBLICATIONS

Drushka, Ken. 1997. In the bight – the B.C. forest industry today. Harbour Publishing, Madeira Park, B.C. ISBN 1-55017-161-5. \$32.95, cloth.

Drushka, Ken and H. Konttinen. 1997. Tracks in the forest – the evolution of logging machinery. Timberjack Group Oy, Helsinki, Finland. 254 p. ISBN 952-90-8616-4. \$39.95, cloth.

Grescoe, Audrey. 1997. Giants: the colossal trees of Pacific North America. Photography by Bob Herger. Raincoast Books, Vancouver, B.C. xii + 164 p. ISBN 1-55192-039-5. \$39.95, cloth

Guppy, Walter. 1997. Clayoquot soundings: a history of Clayoquot Sound, 1880s to 1980s. Grassroots Publications, Tofino, B.C. 80 p.

Williston, Eileen and B. Keller. 1997. Forests, power and policy: the legacy of Ray Williston. Caitlin Press, Prince George, B.C. ISBN 0-920576-68-0. 376 p. \$34.95.

Zimmerman, Adam. 1997. Who's in charge here, anyway? : reflections from a life in business. Stoddart Publishing Co. Limited, Toronto, Ontario. xi + 210 p.

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

Ira S. "Jack" Shearer

Information regarding "Jack" Shearer is being sought by his daughter, who was adopted by her great aunt and her husband in 1940. "Jack" Shearer worked in Washington, Idaho and Canada from 1910 to the 1950s, likely for the logging operations of a company named Diamond Match.

Anyone with knowledge of Mr. Shearer or the Diamond Match company is asked to contact

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THE ROYAL COMMISSION ON FORESTRY AT BURNS LAKE, OCTOBER 1955
by Ted Knight

On October 23, 1955 the Hon. G. McG. Sloan, his commission staff, various forest industry representatives and Forest Service staffers from the Prince Rupert and Prince George forest districts and the Victoria headquarters, came to Burns Lake for the session that had been scheduled for October 24 and 25.

Back then, that was a lot of extra people to have in Burns Lake on a Sunday, usually a quiet day right across the province but especially so in communities as small as Burns Lake in 1955. The Board of Trade, wisely, kept us off the street by hosting a reception and dinner for those of us in town for the session. This social interlude gave us a chance to get to know each other. I recall that the Commissioner went out of his way to meet and talk with the new faces in the crowd, that is, with those from the local forest industry and staffers from the Prince Rupert Forest District. He came across as a person with a sincere interest in the work that we were doing and the environment in which we lived and worked.

I can also recall meeting Gordon Wismer, notorious at the time, a former Attorney General, who was attending the session as counsel for a forest industry lobby group called the Forest Policy Development Association. We were also able to put a face to Cyril Shelford, the local MLA, a person who, up until then, we had only known of and respected for his observation during debate in the Legislature that "the only function remaining for the small operators at a Prince Rupert Forest District timber sale auction is to track in snow."

Although I have no clear unaided recollection of the presentations that were made during the session, I do recall the Commissioner preventing one of the counsel from harassing and embarrassing a local forest industry representative whose written brief was remarkably similar to one that had been presented by some other forest industry spokesman at an earlier session in Prince George. And I can also recall Mr. Wismer's cross-examination of one of the local small mill owners who told the commission that he was opposed to the granting of Forest Management Licences in the area. Mr. Wismer was able to lead him to acknowledge that "long terms of tenure are necessary in order for an operator to protect his investment" and that "he would buy one for himself if he had the money." Surely not the point the mill owner had come to town to make.

For the Forest Service, Cy Phillips, the District Forester for the Prince George Forest District, summarized the forest situation in the Vanderhoof/Fort St. James region and Percy Young, the District Forester for the Prince Rupert Forest District, gave a summary of the general administrative policies in his district. The Commissioner asked me to explain why differences in stumpage rates would occur in apparently similar situations and Jim Munroe was asked to explain Forest Service administration of the district's millsite regulations. In those days, in that region, most of the timber was manufactured through bush mills and the enforcement of regulations governing the operation of millsites was a bone of contention. We deduced that these were two of the industry's concerns and that the Hon. G. McG. Sloan had picked up on them during the earlier session in Prince George.

Persons presenting briefs were questioned as necessary by Mr. Cooper, the Forest Service counsel, by Mr. Locke, the commission counsel, or by Mr. Wismer, counsel for the Forest Policy Development Association. Presentations were made by Mr. E.C. Smedley (for the Vanderhoof Lumbermen's Association); Mr. L.O. Dahlgren (for the Fraser Lake Board of Trade); Mr. C.M. Shelford, MLA; Mr. D.R. Fleming (for the Lake District Lumbermen's Association); Mr. W.W. Gilgan (for the Omineca Lumbermen's Association); Mr. C.J.T. Mattras (a planing mill operator at Burns Lake); and Mr. G. Strimbold (a planing mill operator at Topley).

The issues that were raised in their presentations reflected the concerns of a pioneer forest industry what was largely locally-owned, operating portable and semi-portable sawmills, producing rough lumber for sale to planing mills situated in communities along the Canadian National Railway. That industry was having to come to terms with changes that were driven by increasing Forest Service regulation. There is a comment in the daily proceedings that "the reason for the brief was more to express fear of what might happen in the future than to express dissatisfaction with present Forest Service practices."

At that time the Forest Service was starting to control the rate of cutting in the Public Working Circles that had been and were being established. Those already involved in the forest industry could anticipate that any control on the harvest would lead to competition for timber sales where previously, with no restriction on the cutting rate, there had been no need for competition. The planing mills were starting to apply for and bid on timber sales in order to secure their wood supply. The small sawmill operators who had been unable to acquire and log their own timber sales would be relegated to contractors operating on a particular planing mill's timber sale. That concern had already been expressed on their behalf by the "trackers of snow" comment made by their MLA, Cyril Shelford.

As well, the forest industry was having to adapt to more intensive forest management, with the trees to cut more often defined by a Forest Service mark to cut than by a requirement that the trees to be cut exceed the tree diameter (DBH) by species specified in the timber sale contract.

And, of course, stumpage rates based on dressed lumber values were universally considered to be too high for timber that was manufactured and sold as rough lumber. And there were still those favouring a return to the board foot scale "with which the operators are familiar."

The briefs uniformly opposed the granting of Forest Management Licences, a form of tenure that the local forest industry associated with larger companies operating outside their region, companies that should not be encouraged to migrate into "their" timber.

There was a clear consensus that the industry already established in the region should be protected from competition from outsiders, and there was evidence that they defined outsiders to include persons operating in an adjacent working circle. In fact, the commission was told that "a general understanding exists whereby members of one of the local Lumbermen's Associations would not bid on timber sales in the adjacent public working circle in which members of another association are operating."

The general dissatisfaction with stumpage rates focused on the position taken by the Forest Service that the market for rough lumber, the product manufactured and sold by the majority of those operating on timber sales in the area, was not a competitive market because there were too few buyers. There was also concern that the Forest Service did not properly address the cost of building the road into the timber sale. The record of the daily proceedings notes that “there is a general feeling of distrust amongst the operators with regard Forest Service methods of determining road costs. It is felt that the road costs are not taken into consideration in stumpage appraisals.”

But the recommendations presented to the commission were not all defensive. They opposed the granting of Forest Management Licences but supported the concept that the forest resource should be properly managed so that the regional timber supply would last indefinitely. They were opposed to the sale of timber on a mark to cut basis but only until the Forest Service could hire trained and experienced field crews to provide some assurance that the marking would be completed competently and on time. There was also a recommendation that trees should be marked for cutting before the auction date so that prospective purchasers would be able to examine the timber before making their offer to purchase. Those, surely, were not unreasonable requests.

Reflecting on the local experience of the loss of the timber resource by flooding behind the Kenney Dam, it was suggested that reservoir areas created by future power development should be logged before being flooded. A timely reminder which should not have been necessary, but which was probably useful.

Finally, they were ahead of their time with their recommendation that local Forest Boards be established to which any individual could appeal the decisions of the local Forest Service.

It's been some time since I looked at the Commissioner's report, so I can't say for sure, but I would think that the Burns Lake session had an impact on him. It's probably true even now that you have to go to a community like Burns Lake to meet such pleasantly knowledgeable people.



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