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**THE LIFE AND TIMES OF RICHARD HUGH SPILSBURY – AN EXTRACT**

Part 2 of 2, by the late R.H. Spilsbury

In 1927 I again applied to the Forest Branch for a summer job and was fortunate to be assigned to a survey party starting out south of Giscome, east of Prince George. Gerry McKee was the boss. I travelled on the CNR as far as Mount Robson, then caught the westbound train to Prince Rupert. Giscome was a sawmill town but our camp was to the south, in a farmer's field.

I am rather hazy about who the members of the crew were, but I think there were two cruising crews, with Bill Trenholm as compassman of one, and a soil classification crew. I was on the latter, being compassman to Gab Luyat, an Aggie graduate of 1926.

Recycled paper



I will always remember the first six weeks. The survey area was south of the Willow River, in an area of gumbo clay. It rained the entire time and the mosquitoes were everywhere, in clouds. To make matters worse, we had to start off on the same trail every day and with the rain one sank into the clay about ankle-deep, making a mile seem like ten.

The mosquitoes were so thick that one could not eat a mouthful of sandwich without swallowing at least six insects. I was bitten so much that I became immune to them later in life. The boss, Gerry McKee, broke out in spots that the sawmill company doctor diagnosed as measles. He ordered Gerry to remain at our camp for fear that an epidemic would spread through the mill town. As the doctor was paid a salary by the company, an epidemic would mean a lot of extra work for which he could not charge a fee.

The next camp was at Chief Lake, some miles north of Prince George on a road that would eventually lead to Williston Lake and then to Fort St. John. For the next six weeks there was not a drop of rain. The shallow lake alongside our camp became infested with leeches and biting flies reached their zenith. However, this was better than the previous combination of rain, mud and mosquitoes.

I had an adventure at this camp that I will mention. Gab Luyat had never seen a bear in the wild but I had seen many at the garbage pit at Glacier House. One day, as we came out of a ravine, I saw a black bear following Gab. I called to him to turn quickly and see the bear before he ran off but, instead of running, the bear continued to approach us. Gab picked up a stone and threw it at the bear. Gab and I were about 20 feet apart and the bear charged me instead of Gab. I went up a trembling aspen and the bear stopped, eventually turned around and ambled off.

If you know the interior trembling aspen you will appreciate how slippery the smooth powdery bark is. I have tried climbing them both before and after the bear episode but was not successful.

The third camp was at Stoner, some twenty miles south of Prince George. We used an old PGE construction camp instead of our tents. One "feature" of this camp was packrats. They would pick up anything shiny that was left around and hide it. By now it was September and after the first frost the environment was unbelievable – no mosquitoes, flies or other biting insects. The air was crisp and bright, with the leaves turning golden and all the previous unpleasantness forgotten.

After graduating from university in 1928 I decided that I had to visit the "Old Country" to see where my parents came from. This would require funds that I did not possess and so I applied to the Forest Branch for work on a survey party.

This time I was assigned to the Momich cruise, in an area north of Shuswap Lake from Smith Creek in the east to Adams Lake in the west. It was a vast, triangular, mountainous area with Tum Tum Lake as its northern limit. By this time Gerry McKee was an assistant to Fred Mulholland, who was in charge of the Forest Surveys Division. John Liersch was the party chief. As he was manager of the UBC soccer team and also lived on the North Shore, I knew him well.

Harold McWilliams was the assistant party chief, so at this time I got to know him. In all there were 12 in the party, plus an equal number of pack horses.

We assembled at Sicamous to board the *SS Lamb*, a paddle-driven boat that served several small communities on Shuswap Lake. We proceeded to Smith Arm and disembarked on the beach. Our first camp was where two branches of Smith Creek met. Here I was assigned my compassman, Howard Moberly. By now I was a cruiser.

We drew our equipment from the stock. The choice was by seniority and, as I was the most junior, I drew what was left – the most worn and patched or repaired. Thus, I ended up with a leaky tent, a well-mended chain and other well-used items. Harold McWilliams, as the senior cruiser, drew as his compassman a likeable chap known as a good camp cook.

I was assigned the west fork of Smith Creek and so I was initiated into fly camping early. This meant we had to carry up to a week's supply of food, plus ground sheet, tent, blankets and so on by packboard to make a temporary camp perhaps ten or more miles from the main camp, usually on a trail.

When we had cruised the surrounding area, we were met by the party chief and supplied for another week. He ferried us across a small river in a dugout canoe that we had found and left us to make our way west to join the next camp at the foot of Momich Lake, about 20 miles to the west. We were timber cruising all the way – running strips every half mile from the lake up the mountainside to the timberline.

The entire area was mountainous, so there was very little potentially arable land for me to assess. Also, because there were only trails (kept open by Forest Branch rangers), all food supplies were brought in by packtrain from dropoffs made by the *SS Lamb* on Shuswap Lake. Thus, there were only four main camps during the entire season. The third was at the head of Adams Lake. The fourth was on the way to Tum Tum Lake. This meant that I spent almost the entire period fly camping and eating rice, oatmeal, powdered milk, bacon and bully beef – all lightweight and compact to carry.

My compassman left in mid-season. He was a good woodsman but impossible socially, so we got along well in the field but in the evening found little in common. I finished with two inexperienced compassmen. The first was the son of a missionary, sent from China to B.C. for his schooling. He tried hard but was hopeless in many ways. The last was a packer's assistant. He knew horses but little else.

I think it was early November before we were finished. I know that we finished after the first snowfall. During the entire season the Ranger was the only person we met, aside from our own party. There were a number of incidents that remain clear in my mind but I will tell of only one.

The cook, in his spare time, made an alcoholic beverage from potato peelings, wild berries (as they ripened) and dried fruit. The boss was teetotal so the distillation had to be done without his knowing. Usually this was accomplished by enticing him into a bridge game in a distant tent.

The distillation required an elaborate arrangement of large dishpans over the stove. The top pan was filled with cold water to condense the rising alcoholic vapour, which then dropped into a pan held above the wort. This produced only about an ounce for each of us so no doubt the boss turned a blind eye to this activity. I learned later that the cook had a real still hidden at his home near Sinclair Mills and the CNR train crew bootlegged his whisky between Prince Rupert and Edmonton.

That winter I continued working for the Forest Branch, in Victoria. I did not know anyone there so I started off batching with Lyall Trory, our draughtsman. We had a grubby room on Quadra Street, between St. John's Church and an undertaking parlour. It was cheap and I wanted to save as much as I could for my upcoming trip to the "Old Country" the next spring. However, Lyall got into trouble and we parted company.

I stayed next at the YMCA, then at the corner of View and Blanshard Streets. They kept a number of rooms and served breakfast and dinner for transients like me. I must say I found Victorians difficult to meet, so my social activities were limited to Forest Branch employees. There were several field parties compiling their summer's work so I got to know quite a few people.

Only one activity stands out in my mind. I became a member of the Joker soccer team that played in the Victoria league. It was a month before I learned that the Joker was a prominent Esquimalt bootlegger. I think we won the Jackson Cup that year, a trophy still being played for, though the Jokers are long gone.



### **FHABC AGM WILL BE IN SEPTEMBER**

This year's AGM is tentatively scheduled for Saturday, September 16<sup>th</sup>. The departure from our usual date in June is for two reasons. By coincidence, a number of Executive members will be out of the province during late June and by postponing until September we expect to be able to unveil our next publication – the biography of Tom Wright – at that time.

In fact, the AGM will be held at Tom Wright's tree farm on the Sunshine Coast. Details will be finalized and announced in the next newsletter, scheduled for August. To minimize costs on the Langdale ferry we plan on organizing car and van pools.

### **HUSKY LOGGER PERFORMS DARING FEAT**

From *Western Lumberman*, Vol. 13 No. 12., page 33  
December 1916 issue

A few weeks ago the crew of Higgins' logging camp at Cameleon Harbor, Tribune Channel, about 80 miles north of Vancouver, witnessed an act of remarkable daring and agility, performed by one of their number, which will doubtless be talked about for many a day in the Coast lumber camps, where feats of daredevil bravery are as common as "scraps" among school boys.

In the course of a shift to a new logging location it became necessary to attach a cable to a very tall tree at a point 120 feet from the ground. Usually this is done by a workman equipped with pole-climbing spurs and belt, but this time these means were not available. What was to be done? It would take several days to secure the equipment from Vancouver and a shutdown of the operations for that length of time was not to be thought of, owing to the heavy expense involved.

This is where tall Andrew Busby came to the rescue, if reports are true. He was an expert chopper and skilled in using a springboard. With his axe and two springboards he began to climb the tree. Standing on the first board, he chopped a notch five feet above him, slipped the second board into the notch, climbed up, and, drawing the first board after him, repeated the performance a score of times. In an hour, while his companions below watched him breathlessly, he reached the top of the tree and affixed the rope. Standing on a board a few inches wide, he was apparently as cool at 100 feet from the ground as when he was only five feet from terra firma.

Busby is now a private in the 230<sup>th</sup> Forestry Battalion, having enlisted in Vancouver a few days after performing the act above recorded.



### **REQUEST FOR INFORMATION REGARDING FEDERAL FORESTRY**

If you have any information, maps or photographs pertaining to the federal forest reserves or Timber Berths in the Railway Belt, between 1887 and 1930 please contact:

Steve Taylor  
Canadian Forest Service  
506 West Burnside Road  
Victoria BC V8Z 1M5

Phone (250) 383-0758  
E-mail: [staylor@pfc.forestry.ca](mailto:staylor@pfc.forestry.ca)

## DESTINY'S IRRESOLUTE DIGIT

by Hank Horn

In the early 1950s I worked in the woods at a place called Bloedel Camp Five, out of Campbell River. The camp held well over 300 men at that time. The company was still heavily into rail transportation but they were rapidly changing over to truck logging. The reasons were that fuel for the steam pots was expensive, as was the upkeep of the track. The grades were far too steep for rail but mostly it was terribly difficult to get water to the machines during the summer.

I worked on one of the machines called a Unit, which was a combination high-lead yarder and loader. The hook tender (bossman) was Ernie Alexander, formerly the world champion tree climber. I had also worked with Ernie's uncles, in Victoria, packing coal for Kingham and Gillespie. But that's another story. Ernie was the boss on the last steam Unit on its last rail show on the Bloedel claims at Camp Five.

Just prior to this machine finishing its work at this site there was an accident, so outstanding that it makes fiction pale by comparison.

The camp and rail yard were on a flat at the foot of some low mountains. There was a short run to a fairly big creek that had a trestle bridge spanning it, and a little way beyond the tracks began a steep grade which ended up where the Unit was logging and loading. On this particular day a Shay locomotive was chugging and puffing its way up the hill, pushing a steam Cherry Picker.

The Shay was a workhorse steam locomotive with three vertical pistons on the right side of the cab and very large counterweights at the bottom of each cylinder rod. These were connected to a driveshaft geared at each drive wheel, making for a unique and unusual powerhouse of the woods. The Cherry Picker was a log loading machine that generally loaded logs onto skeleton cars placed within its reach from the track.

A mile or two up the track a crew of Gandy Dancers (track workers) had completely removed the inside rail on a beautiful, classically-curved trestle some 100 yards long. It spanned a dry gulch.

Up top at the logging site, the Unit loader with its split drum (a very handy feature of this machine) was pulling up the 14 skeleton cars loaded with logs in anticipation of the Shay locie coming to take the loaded cars down to tidewater.

As the cars were being spotted along the line, a 1 1/8<sup>th</sup> inch thick steel cable broke with a bang. Immediately the cars started rolling down the grade. The loading crew was helpless to stop the runaways but, more importantly, had no way of warning anyone who was further down the track.

Down at the curved trestle, one of the Gandy Dancers happened to look up and saw the runaway loads flying down towards him and his workmates. His bellow instantly galvanized the crew into action to save their butts from certain bodily harm, perhaps even death.

The men took some considerable risks jumping off the trestle, since they had no chance to run to either end. Unbelievably, no one was hurt. The loaded cars hit the trestle at breakneck speed and hung on the outside rail. The inside wheels had no rail to rest on but didn't touch any of the ties.

Far down the track, the Swede – the track and road boss – was standing on the front of the Cherry Picker, already under steam, when he saw the runaway loads coming at him. He screamed at the Locie puncher and the trainmen who were riding in the cabin, but the noise of the engines made it impossible to be heard.

He jumped and hit the steep bank. With fear and adrenaline pumping through him, he went up the slope like a deer. It seemed, at that moment, that he was in the safest position of any man involved in this bizarre scenario. But events proved otherwise.

The load of logs hit the Cherry Picker with a horrendous bang. A slender slab peeled off the peak log on the first load, swung around and as though it were programmed, shot up the hill and cut off the fleeing man's foot just above the ankle.

On the track, the cars stripped the gears on the Shay and without any hesitation the whole kaploo headed down the hill like a juggernaut. The crash also jarred the Cherry Picker's house into gear and it immediately circled with the loading boom, taking chunks out of the Shay at every turn.

The trainmen, somehow or another, baled out of the cab and landed in the slash at the side of the track, unharmed. The Engineer, 64 years old, had no alternative but to ride it out. The whole mish-mash finally reached the flat and turned to cross the trestle over the creek. Here the Shay left the track and fell into the creek. The Cherry Picker and 14 cars of logs followed it like trained pigs until there was nothing but a huge cold deck pile of logs, covering the two machines. Clouds of steam came from the hot boilers when they hit the cold creek water.

Miracle of miracles, the old Engineer pulled himself up through the pile of logs with nothing more than cuts and bruises. With a broad grin he hailed the rescue team that finally arrived from the camp.

The moral of the story might be "never underestimate the fickle finger, even if you think you're in God's pocket."



## REQUEST FOR INFORMATION REGARDING EIKICHI KAGETSU

My father, Eikichi Kagetsu, was a Japanese-Canadian logger. I am writing his biography and am interested in obtaining relevant historical information. Eikichi Kagetsu worked for the Still Creek Logging Company from May to September of 1907. His earliest ventures in the logging business were as follows:

December 1907: bought timberland at Sechelt  
 January 1909 – May 1911: bought timberland at Blind Creek, Cortes Island  
 March – July 1912: had a logging operation at Myrtle Point  
 April 1917: began work at Blind Channel, West Thurlow Island  
 August 1917: bought timberland at Roy  
 1916 – 1924: had an operation at Seymour Creek  
 1917 – 1923: had an operation at Bowen Island

I am looking for historical information about these areas around the dates indicated. Please contact:

Jack Kagetsu  
 435 Dutton Drive  
 Lewiston, New York 14092 USA

## NEW PUBLICATIONS

Mackie, Richard S. 2000. Island timber. Sono Nis Press, Victoria, B.C. 248 p. \$39.95. ISBN 1-55039-101-1 (the story of the Comox Logging Company)

O'Keefe, Betty and I. MacDonald. 1999. The Sommers scandal: the felling of trees and tree lords. Heritage House, Surrey, B.C. 192 p. \$18.95. ISBN 1-895811-96-1



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Membership in the association is \$10 yearly, or \$45 for five years. Please send dues to the Treasurer: Edo Nyland, 8793 Forest Park Drive, Sidney, BC V8L 4E8. Phone (250) 656-9276. E-mail: [edonon@islandnet.com](mailto:edonon@islandnet.com)

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