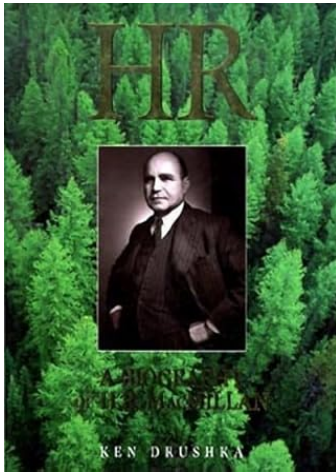




News and Events



Book Club

Join one of our monthly book club talks on **December 15th, 2025, 6:00pm - 7:30pm**. We will be reading [H.R.: A Biography of H.R. MacMillan](#) by Ken Drushka.

[Register via the link](#)

Speaker Series

Join us for our final 2 speaker series sessions this fall at <https://fhabc.org/speaker-series/>

Annual General Meeting

The FHABC AGM will be held **virtually** on December 1st at 7:00pm PST. All members are welcome and encouraged to [attend via the link](#).

Issue Index: Museums Map Project, p2; Excerpts from A CAREER IN THE BC FOREST SERVICE, p2; A Book Review: Lisa Anne Smit, *HASTINGS MILL: The historic times of a Vancouver Community*, p11.

Museums Map Project

Dear Members,

The FHABC is working on creating a provincial web landing page map of museums, archives, and locations that have forest history-themed or related content. Examples include the [BC Forest Discovery Centre](#), [BC Interior Forestry Museum](#), and [Central BC Railway & Forestry Museum](#).

Please submit any attractions you feel would be of relevance to info@fhabc.org.

With thanks,
FHABC

Excerpts from a memoir: A CAREER IN THE BC FOREST SERVICE

Author: George Stefanac

The following are excerpts from a memoir written by the late George Stefanac, who began a career with the Forest Service in the Squamish Ranger District in 1956 and retired as Ranger in charge of the Lillooet District. The full version of Stefanac's memoir will be available on our FHABC website under the 'Newsletter supplements' section of the 'publications page', or by clicking this link: "[A Career in the BC Forest Service](#)".

A CAREER WITH THE FOREST SERVICE for those of us who were deprived of a post-secondary education for one reason or another provided, those who stuck with it, a salary, some interesting experiences, and somewhere down the distant horizon, a reasonable pension.

So it was with me. At about age 21, I started what was to be a lifelong career in an environment that was very satisfying for me. Having been on a summer fire suppression crew and some weekend road maintenance projects while still in school, I eventually graduated to a full-time position on a 3-man HQ silviculture crew.

RANGER DISTRICT STAFF

The Forest Service at that time recruited their Ranger District staff, of which there were over one hundred throughout the province, from prospects in the general population, who, upon application, could write a general knowledge exam. I was successful in being accepted and was offered an "Assistant Ranger" position at Alta Lake, now the Resort Municipality of Whistler, (which, in 1956, had not yet appeared on the scene), in the Squamish Ranger District.

While the following experiences are not necessarily listed in chronological order, due to setting it up with different headings, I had stops in Alta Lake, Pemberton, Sechelt, Nootka Sound, Harrison Lake, the Ranger School at Green Timbers in Surrey and then became a “Deputy Ranger” at Port Hardy. In 1964 I was promoted to Ranger in charge of Thurston Bay West - Campbell River North districts before moving on to Lillooet where I eventually retired.

NOOTKA

One of my earlier postings was to Nootka Sound on the west coast of Vancouver Island. It required taking my Assistant Ranger boat, the *Douglas Fir II*, a 35-foot vessel equipped with basic accommodation - galley, head, engine room, and wheelhouse, around the south end of Vancouver Island and up the west coast to Nootka Sound. The Tofino Ranger boat, the *Yellow Cedar*, was also at the Forest Service Marine Station, so I was accompanied across the Georgia Strait, around the south end of the Island, via Victoria, then the rest of the way up the west coast.

For someone growing up in the Kootenays, the enormous swells of the west coast were extremely impressive as the other boat running alongside about 100 yards away, would disappear with only the mast showing. I spent much of the summer alone, between logging camps, and the towns of Tahsis and Zebellos, which provided many interesting, but also boring, experiences.

One Sunday afternoon, while in the very small community of Zebellos, I borrowed a truck from an acquaintance and drove about 10 miles up a valley to visit an old, abandoned mining camp, the Privateer Mine, I believe. As I walked among the deserted buildings, I entered one long low building to find that it had been the camp bowling alley, still equipped with balls, pins and hardwood floors. Not to pass up the opportunity, I set up a set of pins and threw a few frames down the somewhat sideways slanting alley making a lot of noise in an otherwise silent camp.



Photo 1: Loading groceries and baby buggies, Campbell River, about 1965. Geoff Teeple, checking out the boxes here, was later killed in a tragic helicopter/ glider collision in the lower Fraser Valley.

BOAT DISTRICTS

On the BC coast, until approximately 1980, the Forest Service depended very heavily on boats for administration of forest policy and general transportation, with some support from various aircraft. Many of the coastal ranger stations were quite isolated and staff had little access to amenities such as doctors, dentists, phones and something as basic as getting groceries. The Thurston Bay, Sonora Island, dual districts were at one time allowed one weekend every second week, where most of the staff could pile onto one of the larger ranger boats and head for town. There were usually several wives, occupying the station and for them the trip was something to look forward to. The staff, which at that time was only men, could get out almost every week and have contact with other humans as they did their field work.

The task of getting around on the boats was generally a few days to a week at a time. The travel was generally from logging camp to logging camp at a speed of between 8 to 10 knots. There was always the weather, where sea conditions could preclude any further travel, there were tidal rapids where passage could only be accomplished during

relatively slack tide but often found one going through with the flow or bucking current that limited progress to a couple of knots. The published tide tables for any one day, and any one location were always referred to, as well as the nautical charts which described the bottom that was to be travelled over.

On one occasion, while going through the Yuculta rapids with a fairly fast-moving tide, we had to leave the main stream to get into a bay where there was a fuel station. As we left the main stream, travelling at full speed, a significant whirlpool hole opened up immediately in front of us that we couldn't avoid, laying the fifty-foot boat over on her side and spilling a lot of supplies out of their cupboards onto the floor. After some deep groaning and vibration, the boat pulled herself out of the hole and we carried on. It was sometimes challenging navigating through an area containing underwater hazards such as reefs, always concerned that we had the landmarks and reference points figured out correctly.



Photo 2: Most of our fleet at the Thurston Bay Ranger Station on Sonora Island. The vessels on the near side of the float are the standard "Assistant Ranger" boats, all built at the Forest Service Maintenance Depot on the Fraser River, as was the larger Forest Ranger II tied on the far side of the float.



Photo 3: The old Hemlock – suffered the indignity of being perched up on a rock in Klaskino Inlet, then later gallantly took me around Cape Scott.

TRANSPORTATION

In “boat districts” we had transportation getting us from logging camp to logging camp, but road access from there to the actual logging operations was a different matter. Normally, we might rely on the loggers to provide transportation, but arriving after the crews had left camp in the morning tended to leave one standing on the dock. On some operations, we might hitch a ride in a logging truck or even a log skidder on shorter hauls. Accessing a company fire once, there were a dozen logger/firefighters clinging to a large log skidder climbing a steep skid road. Eventually, we were equipped with Honda trail bikes, which gave us a degree of independence, more than once travelling the 35 miles to the back end of the Southgate River road system. The camp itself was 28 miles back from their booming ground at the head of Bute Inlet. Helicopters and fixed wing aircraft also played a large part in the administration of fires and timber harvesting activity.



Photo 4: A west coast troller, seaplane, ranger boat, river boat and land transportation occupying a logger's float, Bute Inlet.

DEALING WITH TRANSPORTATION ISSUES AND INCIDENTS

After working in the districts alone much of the time, I suppose one gets involved in getting in and out of incidents on our own and commands a certain amount of confidence in his ability in dealing with issues. This may have been the case while travelling down Harrison Lake at the tail end of a week-long trip on the lake and beyond. There was one more inspection to get done and I had only a limited number of hours before darkness set in. Upon going ashore, I found the camp deserted but located a well-used pickup truck near the dock, probably the camp utility vehicle. Checking it out, I found it ready to go, but it had no brakes. No foot brake, no emergency brake. It had one of the floor mounted stick shifts connected to a four-speed transmission with a bull low gear. The truck road was fairly steep and included a number of switchbacks, so I tested out the truck for compression and hold back at the bottom of the hill. Having just mastered the art of driving in the mountains without brakes, I set off, not giving negative consequences much thought. By holding onto the shift lever firmly with my right hand, while staying in bull low, I was able to negotiate the uphill and downhill trip somewhat safely.

While working out of Port Hardy, on the north end of the Island, a logging operation had commenced in a very remote area called Klaskino Inlet, access to which required taking our boat from the more protected Quatsino Sound, into the open Pacific through very exposed waters. There were huge breakers pounding on the islets and rocky headlands which I believe came all the way from Japan. We managed to navigate through some treacherous waters and found shelter within Klaskino. Having spent the night there we set off for the logging site in the morning where we would inspect for compliance with the cutting permit.

The experienced ranger boat crew member, having been in the district for many years was accompanying me on this trip due to its unfamiliarity and its more difficult access. There had been one particularly visible and charted rock islet that was in the inside of the inlet which we had readily seen on the way in the day before. I was “down below” getting my maps and gear out in order to carry out the inspection while the crewman was taking the boat out. Somehow, he had forgotten about the now submerged rock and at slow speed ran our boat up onto it, immediately heeling the boat over a little. We contemplated trying to “back off” of the rock, but were concerned with seriously damaging the propeller or rudder on another rock in the process.

The tide was going out. We decided later when we saw our boat perched up on the rock at low tide that the back off procedure would have been the thing to do (but then there wouldn't have been this story). So, we lowered the dinghy and hung out on a nearby beach to wait out our dilemma. It was perched there not unlike a seagull sitting on a floating log. Now we had to wait for the next high tide, about 10 hours later, to re-float the 40-foot-long boat. As it was now on a significant list there was concern that it would take on water before the tide got it back on even keel. No apparent damage was done except for the partial loss of a day's work and a lot of embarrassment for a couple of guys who had spent a significant amount of time operating boats on the B.C. coast.

“ONE MAN JACKSON”

On Harrison Lake, there was an operator whom we referred to as “One Man Jackson”. He conducted a fairly sophisticated high lead logging system involving only himself. One of those situations where one doesn't have to put up with anyone else in camp and avoiding “cabin fever” a malady that often affects men sharing a small space and disagreeing with almost everything that the other does. As the “donkey engineer” he would run the rigging out perhaps several hundred feet into a patch of felled and bucked timber where he would lower the choker cables into the immediate area where his intended logs were located. Generally, “a donkey” was a combination of a large engine, powering winches carrying heavy cable, mounted on a large log sled. He would climb up the hillside and, if his positioning of the rigging was OK, assuming the role of the

“chokerman” he would attach the choker cables to one or two logs, then returning to his donkey engineer position to yard the logs into the water in front of his A-frame float. Sometimes on more difficult terrain the logs would get hung up behind a stump or protruding rock and slowing the process. After assembling a section of logs, he would become the “boom man”, containing his logs for the tow down the lake and river to market. Only a few logs a day would cover his expenses and provide a little profit.

THE LOOKOUTS

In the era before the general use of aircraft, the province was serviced by many mountaintop Lookout towers, which had the primary purpose of early detection of forest fires. They were manned generally from late spring to early fall. When I was stationed at Harrison Lake, our lookout man was a retired postmaster and due to the isolated nature of his lonely situation was very eager to talk when one of the staff hiked up the trail with his bi-weekly grocery supply. A certain amount of extra time had to be allocated for him to get all the little mountaintop adventures off his chest.

A unique concept for a lookout was located on a tree farm licence on the inner west coast of Vancouver Island at Gold River. It consisted of a platform perched on top of an 80- or 90-foot-tall spar tree, with a steel ladder bolted to the trunk. A trap door in the floor of the rail-equipped platform provided access.

When I was stationed at Thurston Bay on Sonora Island, I learned that years before there had been a fire lookout on a mountaintop above our station connected by an access trail. One Sunday, I decided to find the trail and investigate the lookout. The trail was in fairly good shape and reasonably navigable, so after climbing about fifteen hundred vertical feet, came upon the abandoned lookout cabin. On entering the cabin, I found that all of the original sparse amenities were still there, even items like tea towels and the last lookout-man’s wool socks still hanging to dry behind the little stove. I don’t recall if the instrument we refer to as a fire-finder was still there, normally positioned in the centre of the cabin to get a 360-degree bearing on any distant fire. It appeared that I was the first person to visit the site since the last lookout-man headed down the trail, perhaps fifteen or twenty years before.

THE END OF AN ERA

The dual Thurston Bay ranger station was closed down in 1966, while I was there, and moved to Sayward and Campbell River. With all of the 5 residences and other station buildings removed, it became part of the Thurston Bay Provincial Marine Park. The park brochure mentions the trail to Florence Lake but makes no reference to the old Sonora lookout trail.



Photo 5: The Syrene, adorning the Thurston Bay boat harbour. She began as a Mediterranean Yacht, then BC coast Church Mission boat, then Forest Service VIP boat, then FS timber cruising crew accommodation/ transportation, and finally a moving van for staff moving in and out of remote coastal ranger districts.

As a tribute to the closing of the Thurston Bay dual ranger station, which started out as the main Forest Service Maintenance Depot in 1913, we stacked up some of our left-over firewood about 6 feet high. We then placed an old dinghy that had been laying around on top of the wood pile to commemorate the boat orientation of the place. It was then adorned with our Ranger Station sign with our XLU63 call sign.



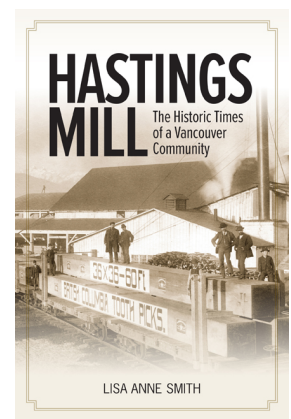
Photo 6: The end of an era – a partial Viking funeral. It was a vital Forest Service landmark from 1913 to 1964, but many celebrated its eventual retirement.

Book Club: Lisa Anne Smith, *HASTINGS MILL: The Historic Times of a Vancouver Community*.

Author: Katherine Spencer

In spirit of the July 6th Downtown East Side Forest History Walking Tour lead by Eric Andersen the FHABC Book Club met to discuss [*HASTINGS MILL: The Historic Times of a Vancouver Community*](#) by Lisa Anne Smith.

This book is not only a comprehensive history of Hastings Mills, but it also provides in-depth personal stories of so many pioneers who shaped and influenced early BC coastal logging. The chronological order of the book is a great way for forest history enthusiasts to build a clear picture of what the early coastal communities and forest industry development was like. Lisa does a superb job of finding



interesting stories on key historical persons of interest to really draw the reader into learning not just about the community of Hastings Mill but also the persons who made it what it was. This is a must for anyone's reading list.

STORIES: The Newsletter needs your reminiscences/anecdotes and is always thirsty for more forestry-related tales. Whether they are prose or poetry, all contributions are welcome. Most importantly, these stories can be as varied as the profession itself. Note that there is one requirement. Please ensure that your submissions are typed, not hand-written. This will save me much time and frustration in trying to decipher an author's handwriting. Thanks.

If you have an idea for Issue #123, please reach out to us at info@fhabc.org



This issue was guest edited by Peter Marshall and Eric Andersen.

Additional editing and page layout by Elizabeth July.

Tell others to become members of FHABC!

You are invited to join the Forest History Association of British Columbia. Formed in 1982, the association's interests cover a wide spectrum – from the history of people and machines to the evolution of forest resources management and the associated social and political aspects. Members represent a variety of professions and come from all corners of the province and elsewhere in North America.

Membership is \$20.00 annually, or three years for \$50.00. Memberships are on a calendar year basis – January to December. Membership includes a subscription to our electronic newsletter** as well as the opportunity to attend virtual talks and the association's annual general meeting. This usually involves a field trip in addition to the conduct of the association's business.

<https://fhabc.org/membership/>