

British Columbia



Published by the Forest History Association of British Columbia

No. Twenty-six

Victoria, British Columbia

Dec. 1990

FORESTRY IN THE UPPER COLUMBIA AND KOOTENAY

Part one

by Gil Cartwright

The forest industry has historically been the major economic factor in this section of the Rocky Mountain Trench between Wasa and Spillimacheen. It is still the number one industry but may eventually be overtaken by tourism, which is growing rapidly.

In 1807, David Thompson, the first white explorer in the region, made mention of the land through which the Kootenay River flowed as being richly forested with grand timber and noted in his diary "...measured one girth 13 feet at 5 1/2 feet above ground and 150 feet clean growth and then a fine head. This one of hundreds." He described the entire valley as being heavily timbered.

The earliest use of timber was for log buildings and firewood. Early lumber was cut by pairs of men with a whipsaw but eventually sawmills were established to manufacture building materials for local needs and then, eventually, for export.

One of the sawmills in this locality, which was the first steam-driven mill in the Kootenays, was established by W.A. Baillie-Grohman in 1887. It was located between the Kootenay River and Columbia Lake, alongside the canal he was constructing between those two waterways. It took 23 days to transport the sawmill machinery from Golden to the canal flat aboard the Cline, a square-ended barge which had been converted to a steamer.



Recycled Paper

The purpose of the mill was to cut timber and lumber for the lock works on the Baillie-Grohman Canal. Fine stands of ponderosa pine were mentioned by Baillie-Grohman adjacent to the mill on the flat between the Kootenay River and Columbia Lake. He mentioned that many of these trees were three to four feet in diameter.

At this early stage in the history of British Columbia, the only legislation governing the cutting of Crown timber was the Land Ordinance Act of 1865. This made provision for Timber Leases which really were land leases on which there was an annual charge per acre, but they also conveyed rights to the timber. Amendments to the Land Act of 1884 provided for royalties to be charged on all timber cut from leases. The Department of Lands was responsible for the administration of forests at that time and there appears to be little record of how or whether royalties on cut timber were collected.

The Fulton Royal Commission on Forestry (1909-1910) recommended the establishment of a Department of Forests and in 1912 a Forest Act instituted a Forest Branch within the Department of Lands.

About this time some of the earliest large-scale logging was undertaken in this part of the valley. In the years 1910 to 1913 logging operations were conducted in the watersheds of Toby Creek and Horsethief Creek by the Columbia River Lumber Co. The creeks served as transport for the logs which were floated down to the Columbia River and thence to Golden where they were utilized by a large mill beside the river. This mill is reputed to have been able to cut 100,000 board feet of lumber per shift but was seasonal in operation due to the icing of the river.

In 1913 the province was divided into a number of Forest Districts. This area was within the Cranbrook Forest District which took in the southeast corner of the province, including Creston and north to the Railway Belt. Mr. J.D. Gilmour was the District Forester in charge and he had a staff of three Rangers and 22 Guards. In 1914 there were three Rangers, 21 Guards, 12 Patrolmen, and two Lookoutmen.

This is the first time the records mention lookouts but where they were located is unknown. In 1917 staff records show 5 Assistant Rangers but no Guards so one might assume that these positions were more or less synonymous. In all likelihood many of these positions were seasonal only, and not carried through the winter. This policy was continued for some positions until as late as 1950.

In the 1920's railway logging commenced in the southern end of the valley and most of the valley bottom land south of Canal Flats was logged by the Crows Nest Pass Lumber Company and hauled by rail to their large mill at Wardner. The valley floor was a beautiful forest of larch, ponderosa pine, and Douglas-fir. Except for steam locomotives and Marion loaders (which were steam jammers or cranes mounted on railway flatcars), there was very little mechanical assistance for logging in those days.

Pairs of men with 6-foot crosscut saws felled the trees and bucked them into suitable log lengths. These were skidded by horse teams to decks beside the railway ready for loading. Skidding to the railway lines was assisted by Oregon Arches, Michigan Wheels, or "Big Wheels" as they were known locally. These were ten-foot diameter wooden wheels shod with iron tires and reinforced and protected with iron rings on the inside attached to the spokes. They were mounted on axles about one foot square in cross section.

Apparently, a teamster would back these over the front end of the logs to be pulled, disconnect the horses, rotate the tongue back as far as possible, then chain the logs snugly over the top of the axle. When the tongue was rotated forward again, the chains would tighten and lift the forward end of the logs off the ground, thus reducing skidding friction and helping the logs ride over ground obstructions.

These were the fore-runners of logging arches used in more recent times behind both track and rubber-tired skidders. Modern skidders use the same principle by winching logs up to an apron at the back of the machine. Only the best logs were taken by the early loggers and vast areas of slash or waste wood were left behind.

Forest Branch administration changed somewhat in 1925 when the Cranbrook Forest District merged with the Vernon and Nelson forest districts to become the Southern Interior Forest District. Apparently this part of the valley was administered from Fort Steele. In 1924 the Timber Royalty Act provided a more flexible system for Crown charges and repealed the 1914 act which had proven unworkable.

Although Invermere is recorded as a Ranger District in 1925 and 1926 under Rangers J. Sanderson and F.T. Oatts respectively, it appears to have included the Fort Steele District because only that Ranger District name is shown for the years 1927 to 1932 under the direction of Ranger Colin Cameron.

In 1928 the CPR moved from Bull River to Canal Flats and built a large mill. Milling started in 1929 but the big mill operated only a couple of years, then six portable mills were constructed and started operating in the vicinity. A rail line was built up Findlay Creek in 1931 and two mills moved up the Kootenay River in 1932. These mills left hundreds of slab piles in their wake - so many, in fact, that the Fuel Control Board embarked on a major slab haul during World War II with 60 trucks operating out of Canal Flats. Sawn ties from the Kootenay River operations were slid down chutes into the Kootenay River and floated to the mill pond at Canal Flats. At one time over a million ties were stacked ready for hauling from Findlay Creek.

A serious fire burnt the area from Torrent to Dutch Creek in 1931 and burned out most of what was then the Canal Flats townsite. Much of this area was covered with logging slash which, as previously mentioned, was plentiful.

In 1932 Ranger R. (Bob) Little replaced Colin Cameron at Fort Steele and in 1933 moved to Invermere when both the Nelson Forest District and Invermere Ranger District were reconstituted. Bob Little remained as Ranger at Invermere until 1938. F.J.G. (Barney) Johnson was Ranger in 1939, H.T. (Harry) Barbour in 1940, D.H. (Doug) Ross in 1941, and J.R. (Ralph) Johnston in 1942. World War II was the reason for the quick succession of Rangers at that time. Barney Johnson enlisted in 1940, Harry Barbour in 1941, and Ralph Johnston in 1942. J.H.A. (John) Applewhaite took over from Ralph Johnston and was there for 1943 and 1944.

This period was an active time for logging and milling operations in the valley. Many portable mills were in operation cutting railway ties and dimension lumber and some larger and more permanent plants became established. Simon Ronacher built a sawmill and planer mill in Athalmer in 1935 but only operated the sawmill there until 1938, then operated with portable bush mills and hauled the sawn lumber in to be finished at the planer. In 1958 Simon Ronacher and Son built a large new mill at the same site, which is now the Ministry of Transportation and Highways maintenance complex.

Heinz Seel operated a portable mill either at Edgewater or in the woods from 1940, this being developed into a fully-automated mill and planer by H. Seel & Sons Company in more recent times. Harry Moore transformed his portable sawmill into a complete manufacturing plant at Edgewater in 1942 and continued at that site until 1966.

The CPR mill and logging operations at Canal Flats were purchased by P.A. McGrath and Dick Jarvis in 1942 or 1943 and became Columbia Contracting Company. This company was purchased by the Cranbrook Sash & Door Company in 1950 and merged with other logging and milling concerns to become Crestbrook Forest Industries in 1955. Another early day mill was owned and operated by Tom Alton at Parsons in the early 1920's and was there for many years.

This valley and the Kootenay valley experienced numerous and serious wildfires during the 1930's. This was also the period of the Great Depression so funds were severely limited. Forest Branch staffing was thin, access was poor, and fire-fighting forces and equipment inadequate for the situation. I have been informed that a Ranger could not exceed the expenditure of \$1,000.00 on fire control without an additional special grant from the government. It was apparently policy to withdraw suppression forces from fires as soon as the fires appeared to be under control, often to have winds carry them out of control again.

Much of the main valley, nearly all of Findlay Creek watershed, some of Toby Creek, and sections of the Kootenay valley - including a large section of Kootenay National Park - were burned over at that time. Both the weather and Forest Branch organization improved after the depression years and so did access and equipment. But serious fire situations still occurred in 1960 and again in 1985.

Forestry Shorties.....



Allan Klenman - Canada's Axeman

"How did I get my first axe? How did this specimen lead to my collection of over 1,200 today? Well, it all started in 1935 when I was a teenager and living at home in Vancouver with my parents and five older sisters."

"The first axe I ever used was the family axe. It was my duty to haul in the wood, chop it and stack it for use in our wood furnace and the kitchen range. The most frustrating part of this job was chopping the wood. We had the most disreputable axe - it was probably 100 years old. The head kept falling off the handle, and even when it was on, it would not chop the wood."

"Instead of raising a big fuss, I saved my nickles and dimes and one day went downtown to the Eaton's store. I selected an axe from their vast supply - perhaps a hundred different axes made by about 20 different companies. It was made by Walters Axe of Hull, Quebec. I paid \$2.20 for it."

"So I took it home and after a few days of really enjoying using it, my father asked 'Well what have you got there?' I answered, 'It's our new axe!' He asked, 'How did you get it? Who gave it to you?' I said, 'No one gave it to me. I went downtown and bought it with my savings.' 'Good show' said Dad."

"At dinner time that night, when we all assembled, I really got the royal treatment and a nice commendation in a speech to the family from my proud Dad. That was my introduction to the axe."

"I seriously started collecting after my career in the Air Force during World War Two. Sadly, many Canadian and American manufacturers went out of business in the 1960's with the coming of the chainsaw. My curiosity, and my concern, for this vanishing piece of Canadian industry started in 1970. It was then that I started the extensive research which led to the publication of my book."

"My purpose was never to just collect axes. Through my activities, I have tried to enhance understanding of our Canadian heritage, as the axe played a critical role in pioneering. Sadly, axes are no longer made in Canada, but when they were they were as good as any produced in any country in the world."

FORESTRY SHORTIE

Allan Klenman is a native British Columbian living in Victoria. He is a writer and Canada's premier axe authority. As an active member of the FHABC, Allan would be pleased to show his collection upon request. You may call him at 383-2321 for a viewing.

Currently, a portion of his display is on show at the Ladysmith Railway Museum. His book (Axe makers of North America, Whistle Punk Books, Victoria, B.C. 112 p.) is available at several local outlets, including Northwest Trader and Munro's Books. Members wishing an autographed copy can send \$18.95 to Allan at # 407 - 3260 Quadra Street, Victoria, B.C. V8X 1G2.

Bob DeBoo, December 1990

ooOoo

REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

Steam Donkeys

A researcher in Washington is trying to locate and document all surviving steam donkeys in that state. This information is being gathered for use in a planned book on the subject.

Information on steam donkeys in B.C. would also be appreciated by the author, especially regarding Tyee and Empire donkeys.

Please contact: Mr. John A. Taubeneck, 4229 11th Avenue NE, Seattle, Washington 98105 USA.

Phone: (206) 632-0491

Forest Service Marine Fleet

Our previous request for photographs of the Forest Service vessel the Cherry II yielded results in the form of three excellent photos. The current owner of the White Spruce is looking for any information on that vessel, such as construction details and its life history in the Forest Service.

Please contact: Ms. Chris Kolezar, 5192 Chilcotin Avenue, Powell River, B.C. V8A 4H7

Work phone: 483-3722 Local 2154

ooOoo

BOOK REVIEW

Turner, Robert D. 1990. Logging by rail: the British Columbia story. Sono Nis Press. \$39.95.

Robert Turner's book is undoubtedly the most comprehensive story of railway logging in this province. While the 348 page book includes over 500 photographs, it is more than a pictorial story. I expected the informative reviews on the many and varied steam locomotives themselves, and was pleasantly surprised to find that the author chose to treat the subject in the broadest sense. Thus, one also reads the story of diesel locomotives, gas locomotives, speeders, snow plows, flat cars, skeleton cars, railroad trestles and log dumps.

Turner estimates that over 200 steam locomotives operated on British Columbia's logging railroads from the 1880's until the latter 1960's when the last steam locomotive hauled a logging train.

Vancouver Island boasted the greatest network of logging railways in the province and it is understandable that the book's primary emphasis is on this region. While some mention is made of the substantial number of interior logging railroads, I was disappointed that these were not given greater coverage. In stating that the central and north-central interior supported but one logging railroad (Eagle Lake Spruce Mills Railway), the author was apparently unaware that the United Grain Growers Ltd. operated a logging railway in the early 1920's to service its sawmill at Hutton, B.C.

The author has successfully interwoven an air of nostalgia into his writings as one reads of this colourful era of British Columbia's forest history. Correctly, he has given due credit to Gerry Wellburn for his untiring efforts over the past decades to preserve the history of railway logging in British Columbia. Remarkably, 24 steam locomotives (12 gear and 12 rod) have been preserved and a promising number of these have been restored to running order.

Robert Turner's book is not only one for enjoyable evening reading but it will serve forest historians as an excellent reference source.

W. Young

ooOoo

AWARDS OF MERIT

The Executive has selected four recipients of the Association's Awards of Merit for 1990. These are presented annually in recognition of "outstanding contributions to enhancing the awareness of British Columbia's forest history." The awards will be presented at suitable occasions early in 1991 and will be announced in a future issue of the newsletter.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT
W. Young

The FHABC adopted a new dues schedule at its 1990 Annual General Meeting. Commencing in 1991 the revised dues schedule will be \$7.00 per year (or five years for \$30) which will continue to include the receipt of four newsletters annually, subject to adequate contributions from the membership.

While anticipated cost increases related to postage, the GST, and the like had some bearing on the decision, the primary reason was to enable the Association to become more active in promoting an increased awareness of British Columbia's forest history. Some programs being considered by the Executive include preparation of a brochure, promotion of heritage ceremonies (such as Green Timbers), forest history seminars and field trips. In addition, we plan to continue sending complementary copies of the newsletter to each British Columbia MLA.

Remember that the address label on your envelope indicates your membership expiry date. If it reads 12/31/90 your dues are needed for 1991, or the five year period 1991 - 1995 inclusive. For members in the USA, we have a US funds bank account now so your cheques can be accommodated easily.

ooOoo

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Southern, Karen and P. Bird. 1988. Pulp, paper and people - 75 years of Powell River. Powell River Heritage Research Association, 7155 Hazelton Street, Powell River, B.C. V8A 1P9 (485-2222) \$37.40 + \$2.25 postage and handling

Thompson, G.W. 1990. Boats, bucksaws and blisters - pioneer tales of the Powell River area. Powell River Heritage Research Association, 7155 Hazelton Street, Powell River, B.C. V8A 1P9 (485-2222) \$32.05 + \$2.25 postage and handling

ooOoo

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 address all correspondence regarding the newsletter and changes of address to the editor: Mr. John Parminter, # 1 - 949 Pemberton Road, Victoria, B.C. V8S 3R5.

Membership in the Association is \$7.00 yearly. Should you wish to join or obtain further information please write to the Treasurer: Mr. Edo Nyland, 8793 Forest Park Drive, Sidney, B.C. V8L 4E8. The President, Mr. Bill Young, can be reached at 6401 Conconi Place, Victoria, B.C. V8Z 5Z7