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RAILWAY LOGGING AROUND MERRITT

by Jack Robinson

Prior to the construction of an actual logging railway in the 1920s into Midday Valley, the Kettle Valley Railway (CPR) was used extensively to haul logs both to Merritt and to sawmills in the Okanagan Valley. The first interest in constructing a railway into the Nicola Valley was sparked by the huge coal reserves lying under the valley. In 1891 two railway charters were given: one by the Provincial Government to a group headed by William Merritt III and the other by the Federal Government to the Canadian Pacific Railway under the name Nicola Valley Railway (hereinafter referred to as the Kettle Valley Railway).

Controversy between the two companies and the lack of funding by the Merritt Group delayed the start of construction until 1905 when the shortage of coal caused the CPR to renew interest in the Nicola Valley. The CPR charter had expired while the Merritt group had renewed and expanded their charter and, facing a desperate situation, the CPR had to buy out the Merritt Railway Charter. The CPR was faced with numerous problems relating to the lack of material and manpower, but still managed to complete the railway from Spences Bridge to Nicola (five miles east of Merritt) by April of 1907.

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With construction of the railway into the Nicola Valley, industries such as logging and mining were developed while the already-present ranching industry was given a boost. While several small sawmills were in operation dating back to the 1870s, they were part of farm operations and did not operate on a full-time basis. It wasn't until 1907 that Mr. Andrew McGoran started the first large-scale logging and sawmilling business under the name Nicola Valley Lumber Company. The sawmill was located adjacent to the railway at Canford, approximately ten miles west of Merritt. Construction was supervised by the same foreman who had been in charge of building the CPR tunnels.

Andrew McGoran had acquired over 100 sections of timber, but the tenure of the land is unknown; however, based on the ownership pattern in this area, it was probably private land. The company ran its own logging operation and employed up to 35 men in the woods. Disaster struck the company during the hot dry summer of 1907 when a spark from a railway engine on the siding set fire to the mill, completely destroying it.

After the fire, the business, including the timber holdings, were sold to Mr. Henry C. Merker, who had arrived in Merritt in 1910. This new company was called Nicola Pine Mills. A new sawmill was constructed over a two-year period and was located about three miles south of Canford on a flat near the west bank of Spius Creek. A dam (which still remains visible) was constructed across the creek to form a large holding pond for the logs. Logging in the Spius Creek area was carried out by skidding the logs to the brow of the hill overlooking the creek. Logs were then sent down wooden chutes, up to 700 feet in length, into the creek which carried them to the holding pond.

In May of 1919 there was another unfortunate fire, this time caused by a faulty electrical system, and the sawmill was completely destroyed. Ironically, the short circuit was caused by an overload of the electrical system while movies were being made to promote the mill. After this fire the sawmilling operation was moved to Merritt, where it is now operated by Tolko Industries.

Prior to and during the early 1920s a large volume of timber was logged in the Coldwater Valley, south of Merritt. Logs were skidded by horses to landings and, depending on the season, were moved by wagons or sleighs to the Kettle Valley Railway (CPR) for transport to the mill (see photo on page three). Access to valuable timber stands in Midday Valley, a tributary of the Coldwater River about 25 miles south of Merritt, was gained with the construction of a logging railway in 1920.

The construction was contracted to A.H. DeWolf and Ham. DeWolf became mill manager of the Nicola Pine Mills and was succeeded by his son, who retired in 1961. The railway logging operation lasted until 1926 when the log supply for the mill began to be supplied by contractors. Subsequently, the railway operations were closed and the equipment sold. Unfortunately very little information about the railway exists and most of which exists does so only in pictures. Also, the actual length of the rail line is unknown. However, based on the writer's knowledge of the terrain in Midday Valley, it was probably six to eight miles long. The line had grades up to 6% and employed over 40 flatcars in log hauling.

The railway used two engines: Climax No. 2, a 45-ton machine built in 1913, which was eventually used by at least six logging companies in B.C. and Climax No. 3, an 80-ton machine built in 1922, which was the largest engine used by the railway. The latter engine worked for Corkin Coke and Coal in the Crow's Nest Pass and for Mayo Lumber, Salmon Arm Logging and even for Merrill Ring Wilson on Vancouver Island. The coal for these locomotives was supplied from local mines.



Decking and loading teams and the Kettle Valley Railway, Coquihalla Valley.

In view of actual known methods of logging in the Coldwater Valley at the time, it can be reasonably assumed that logs were hauled to decks adjacent to the railway by wagons and sleighs, depending on the season. The wagons and sleighs were loaded with logs by a rollway system of skids. Records do not indicate if the logging engines actually ran on the Kettle Valley Railway to Merritt or were used only to haul railcars to the mainline, where the CPR engines would take over. During this era and extending well into the late 1960s logs were hauled by the Kettle Valley Railway from the Merritt and Brookmere areas to the Penticton Sawmill in Oliver and to the mill at Merritt.

In the late 1920s Mr. Meeker founded the Southern Interior Light and Power Company to provide for his mill and the town of Merritt. This plant was used continuously to supply power for decades until B.C. Hydro took over. The economic "crash" in 1929 brought about financial difficulties for both Merritt and Mr. Meeker. He did not recover from them and left the valley in 1932.

In 1989, Merritt lost its last linkage with any form of railway logging as well as some of its heritage with the closing of the CPR and later removal of the tracks in 1990 and 1991. The railway, in operation for 82 years (from 1907 to 1989) and responsible for bringing prosperity to the valley, ended. Removal of the actual tracks was so final. I personally felt a twinge of sorrow and regret when this happened. Downtown Merritt seems so empty with the trains and tracks gone.

With deregulation of transportation and the heavy and discriminatory taxes the railways pay in comparison to the trucking industry, closure of the rail lines seems inevitable. Governments fail to recognize that railways remove heavy and dangerous traffic from our highways and construct and maintain their own rights-of-way while the taxpayer pays for the excessive damage to the highways caused by heavily-loaded trucks, as well as being subjected to increasing danger from them.

On a more personal note, Bill Young and I were assisted by the Kettle Valley Railway in the fall of 1951 in closing some loose ends of a forest inventory in the Coquihalla Valley as at that time the railway was the only access into the area. The rail grades are now but a memory of an extraordinary railway, but it is hoped that with foresight and creativity as well as some compromise, the rails will become trails and protected as linear parks. This will provide an opportunity for hikers, skiers, cyclists and equestrians to travel through spectacular and interesting country as well as sentimentally recalling the sights and sounds of trains which rumbled along the grades for so many years.

Perhaps the need for a more efficient and fuel conscious mode of transportation will result in many forgotten railways being given a new life. It is critical that this right-of-way be kept intact for important access routes in the future. The land has been assembled and it would be most unfortunate to have it disposed of piecemeal. Preservation of the rights-of-way would also be a lasting tribute to Andrew McCulloch, the brilliant engineer who directed the construction of the Kettle Valley Railway.



Grateful acknowledgments for assistance are given to the staff of the Nicola Valley Archive Association and the Nicola Valley Historical Quarterly, from which much of the material for this article was obtained. Acknowledgment is also given for the information on logging locomotives given by Robert D. Turner in his book "Logging by rail - a British Columbia story" and for local history provided by Mr. A. Gilmour, retired from managing the Tolko Industries mill.

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

I would greatly appreciate assistance in my search for a well-preserved, early model B.C. boom boat. Such a vessel would provide a very fine west coast complement to the pointer and Russel boats now in our collection. Also, I would very much like to consider the acquisition of a high rigger's outfit. The ideal would be the kit of a former high rigger, now retired (perhaps someone in the association?) since artefacts with known provenance are always more valuable and interesting than those without.

If you have material or information, please write to:

Garth Wilson,
Curator, Marine and Forestry
National Museum of Science and Technology
P.O. Box 9724, Ottawa Terminal
Ottawa, Ontario K1G 5A3

FOREST SERVICE VESSEL SQUADRON NEWS

The third annual rendezvous for the "Ex-Forest Service Vessel Squadron" was held from July 1 to 3, 1994 at Newcastle Island Marine Park. The vessels which attended included the *Alpine Fir II*, *Dean Ranger*, *Eva R.*, *Forest Ranger II*, *Kinbasket Forest*, *Kwaietek* (ex-B.C. Forester), *Lillian D.*, *Maple II*, *Nesika*, *Silver Fir* and the *Wells Gray*.

The 1995 rendezvous will be held at the Maritime Museum in Vancouver. Please be reminded that old photographs of ex-Forest Service vessels are being solicited. These can be sent to FHABC member Ken Morley (3470 Yellow Point Road, R.R. # 3, Ladysmith, B.C. V0R 2E0). All such items will be presented to the Maritime Museum, where they will be properly catalogued, stored and made available to researchers and the general public.

IN MEMORIAM

Former FHABC President Pit Desjardins passed away last September in Vancouver. He retired from Weldwood of Canada as vice-chairman of the board in 1984, finishing a career which began in the forest products industry in 1946. Mr. Desjardins was a member of the board of the Forest History Society, Inc. (based in North Carolina) from 1985 to 1991.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING DATE SET

Mark your calendars - the next AGM of the Forest History Association of B.C. will be held on Saturday, June 17, 1995 at the Sooke Museum. As usual, the program will consist of the business meeting, lunch and a tour of the displays at the Sooke Museum.

BOOK REVIEW

by Terry Honer

Rajala, Richard. 1993. The legacy and the challenge: a century of the forest industry at Cowichan Lake. Lake Cowichan Heritage Advisory Committee, Box 860, Lake Cowichan, B.C. V0R 2G0. 142 p., map. \$12.95.

This book is a must read for anyone interested in the history of forest resource development on Vancouver Island. It covers the period 1870 to 1992 in five easy-to-read chapters and provides a wealth of references for additional reading and research.

Richard Rajala grew up in the village of Mesachie Lake and took his elementary and secondary education in the local schools. During his student years he worked in the forest and in the mills at a variety of jobs. He received a Masters degree in History from the University of Victoria in 1987. He received the Governor-General's Gold Medal for his thesis, an analysis of technological and managerial change in the west coast logging industry. Doctoral studies followed at York University. Dr. Rajala now teaches history at the University of Victoria.

His account of the development of the forest resource has been thoroughly researched and he refers to the many people and companies that were established and operated in the Cowichan Valley using local newspaper references, government files and the correspondence of industry and government officials. In five concise and informative chapters he describes the beginnings of the industry, the logging practices and camp conditions to 1930, the Depression years and the rise of the unions, the era of sustained yield to 1960 and the falldown in the allowable annual cut to the present levels.

Industry takes root, 1870-1912: a number of companies are mentioned that started operations in the valley but of interest to this reviewer were the references to Mossom Boyd and the Cowichan Lake Lumber Company. Mossom Boyd was a wealthy timber operator from Ontario where he had operated for many years in the Ottawa valley and the country around Algonquin Park, producing square timber for the trade with England. As the trade in square timber was declining due to a much-diminished resource of pine in eastern Canada, Mossom Boyd moved a part of his operation west and took over the leases and the Genoa Bay sawmill of Hewitt and McIntyre in 1897. Rajala goes on to describe many of the details of logging practice at that time using excerpts from

published sources; the construction of logging roads, hand falling of large trees, the Dolbeer steam logging donkey of 1892 and the impact of mechanization on the men that made the timber.

Resource frontier, 1912-1930: industrial growth and the pace of harvest resulting in deforestation and the lack of young growth is described in some detail. This situation was of concern to many and ultimately resulted in the Forest Act of 1912 being proclaimed and the Forest Branch being formed under Chief Forester H.R. MacMillan to “oversee a timber sale allocation programme.” There is a brief description of the village of Mayo, about eight miles west of Duncan, founded by Mayo Singh and Kapoor Singh following the building of a 50,000 foot capacity sawmill. “By 1930 about 450 East Indian, Chinese and Japanese families resided at the village, renamed Paldi in 1936 after Mayo Singh’s native village in India.” Descriptions are provided of the Lidgerwood skidder system and the high lead system that required a typical crew of hooktender, engineer, rigging slinger, chokerman, chaser and whistle punk. The mechanization of the harvesting operation required a high order of teamwork and the impact on the labour force is described.

Depression and a lost opportunity, 1930-1940: the Depression had the effect of closing many of the logging companies that were operating in the valley and the effects on community development are described. But the logging camps that remained active were the target of union organizers “well schooled in Marxism” and the rise of the unions is well documented. It was also a period of great concern regarding the continuous clearcuts and the lack of regeneration on private lands, especially those of the E & N Railway. Chief Forester E.C. Manning was opposed to a government planting program because of the cost but advocated cooperation with industry to “follow the cheaper method of securing natural regeneration and protecting it.” With the commencement of the war and increased logging activity in the valley, community leaders “were bemoaning the district’s dependence on a single resource that seemed to offer little hope for long-term stability.”

Prosperity for posterity, the era of sustained yield, 1940-1960: the war years saw a sharp rise in harvesting activity in the Cowichan area. The communities expanded rapidly as did the clearcut areas of forest land. In 1942 Chief Forester C.D. Orchard, in a memorandum to Minister of Lands Wells Gray, pointed out that existing tenure arrangements prevented operators from taking any interest in forest land beyond timber extraction. He advocated combining private land and Crown timber into extensive working circles and replacing “cut and run” forest methods with sustained yield practices. As a result, the Sloan Royal Commission recommended “that operators be allowed to hold lands now under temporary tenures in perpetuity provided that they maintained their productivity and regulated the cut...on a sustained yield basis.” The emergence of the major industries controlling the forest land through the acquisition of tree farm licences is well documented and Rajala sets out the technical and political problems that were associated with the determination of the AAC. In particular, the controversy surrounding TFL 22, the large clearcuts, the reforestation program and the setting of the AAC are described in some detail. This chapter also documents the role of the unions, the strikes and the resultant changes in conditions and wages that were achieved.

Falldown 1960-1992: with mill and plant closures, it appears that the promise of a sustained yield could not be achieved in practice. The AAC had increased from 30 million cubic feet in 1968 to 35 million cubic feet and an additional increase was granted in 1971. With increasing technology came increased unemployment and corporate takeovers of the existing licences. The reduction of the land base due to removal of timber lands for environmental reasons also exacerbated the situation. As Rajala states “following all the rules of the sustained yield game set down by the state, produced precisely the result the model was designed to avoid --- a shortage of mature timber and massive, permanent layoffs.”

In a post script, Rajala presents two personal conclusions to his study. "First, discussions about forest policy in this province too often rest upon an inadequate or flawed understanding of historical processes. Far too little is known about what is happening in our forests, and still less about how current practices measure up to those of the past." Historical knowledge should be used to evaluate the actions of government and multinationals against the standards of their rhetoric. His second conclusion states the obvious but nevertheless is important to this work and Rajala's overall philosophy concerning resource development and management - "...forests are more than a collection of trees. They are also more than ecosystems. The forests on Vancouver Island have provided a basis for communities, a distinctive way of life, and a culture rooted in the relationship of working people both to corporate capital and the natural environment. ...communities no less than the old-growth forests, are worth preserving."

This reviewer believes that Rajala has presented an easy-to-read, balanced account of the historical developments in the Cowichan Valley. It is supplemented with fifteen black and white photographs and a small map of the Lake Cowichan area that indicates the locations of the camps, villages and rail lines. References are provided at the end of each chapter. However, the book does suffer from a lack of good proofreading. For example, on page 13, Robert Brown's Vancouver Island exploration is dated as taking place in 1964 whereas it should be 1864. This mix-up of dates continues on page 19 in regard to Dolbeer's steam logging donkey. In addition, there are several misspelled words ("emplyed" on page 77, "workplacewas" on page 104, and on page 111, paragraph 3, line 3 "calling" should be "galling"). In other phrases there is often a word missing, which usually caused this reviewer to reread the sentence in order to grasp its intended meaning. But these are of minor concern. Get a copy of the book and read it at your leisure, you will not be disappointed.

(As described in the last issue of this newsletter, Dr. Rajala received one of the FHABC's Awards of Merit for 1993 in recognition of this work. Ordering information was included in that notice.)

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Burton, Teresa. 1993. Hiking through history - trails of the San Juan valley. Port Renfrew Community Association, General Delivery, Port Renfrew, B.C. Illus. Map. 32 p.

Dellert, Lois Helen. 1994. Sustained yield forestry in British Columbia: the making and breaking of a policy (1900 - 1993). M.E.S. Thesis, Faculty of Environmental Studies, York University, North York, Ontario. vii +142 p.

Grainger, M. Allerdale. 1908. Woodsmen of the west. Reprinted 1994 by Horsdal + Schubart Publishers, Ltd., Victoria, B.C. Afterword by Peter Murray. vi + 216 p. \$14.95. ISBN 0-920663-31-1.

Kootenay Museum Association & Historical Society. 1994. A life in the woods - oral histories from the West Kootenay forest, Volume 3. Edited by Joel Russ. Kootenay Museum Association and Historical Society, 402 Anderson Street, Nelson, B.C. V1L 3Y3. xii + 113 p. Available for a tax-deductible donation of \$10.

Murphy, Alexandra. 1994. Graced by pines - the ponderosa pine in the American west. Mountain Press Publishing, Missoula, Montana. 119 p. \$10.00 (US).

- Murray, Peter. 1994. Home from the hill - three gentleman adventurers. Horsdal + Schubart Publishers, Ltd., Victoria, B.C. x + 214 p. \$14.95. ISBN 0-920663-30-3. (Biographies of Warburton Pike, M. Allerdale Grainger and Clive Phillipps-Wolley)
- Peterson, Jan. 1994. Twin cities: Alberni - Port Alberni. Oolichan Books, Lantzville, B.C. V0R 2H0. Hardcover, \$34.95, ISBN 0-88982-140-2. Paperback, \$19.95, ISBN 0-88982-139-9.
- Roach, Thomas. 1994. Newsprint: Canadian supply and American demand. Forest History Society, 701 Vickers Avenue, North Carolina 27701, USA. (919) 682-9319 Illus. Bibliography. \$6.95 (US). 64 p.
- Sorenson, Jean. 1994. The working forest. Harbour Publishing, Madeira Park, B.C. V0N 2H0. \$39.95. ISBN 1-55017-116-X.
- White, Howard. 1994. Raincoast chronicles eleven up. Harbour Publishing, Madeira Park, B.C. V0N 2H0. \$39.95. ISBN 1-55017-105-4. (Raincoast chronicles issues 11-15).

NEW MAILING LIST

The acquisition of new software for the association's mailing list now permits us to print the envelopes in one step whereas previously it involved three steps - stamping the return address by hand, printing the labels and then peeling and sticking them on to each envelope. The new software could not import the old database so all names and addresses were re-entered. It is possible that errors were made in this process, but hopefully not. Please report any mistakes in your name, address or membership expiry date to the editor, who takes full responsibility. This new software will hopefully permit us to produce a membership directory, which the old software (and hardware) could not do.

TIME TO RENEW?

If your membership expired at the end of 1994 you will find a renewal notice enclosed with this newsletter. Expiry dates are in the format DD/MM/YY for day, month, year. Data entry errors notwithstanding, your membership expiry date is shown on the envelope, above and to the right of your name.

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. Phone 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. Phone 656-9276. The President, Dr. Bob DeBoo, can be reached at 410 Raynerwood Place, Victoria, B.C. V9C 2B3. Phone 478-7446.

