



Published by the Forest History Association of British Columbia

No. 61

Victoria, British Columbia

December 2000

THE TIEHACK

by the late Geoff Marples

Part Two of Two

Hewing – next came the broadaxe work, to lend that final touch of refinement to the product. Standing on the log – feet in line – you swung hard and drove the blade along the line visualized as the finished face, you hoped! If the tree had been properly scored and the axe truly swung, you ended up with a smooth surface.

If you were on a learning curve you ended up with a jagged mess that looked more like a badly-plucked chicken than a tie. You learned to hate! In fact, hacking ties is really no more than an exercise in hate in a controlled direction!

Recycled paper



I should mention that in all heavy axe work, each blow of the axe was accompanied by a big “Ugh,” “Oomph” or sounds to that effect. Like a rutting bull moose. The grunt helped to drive the axe deeper into the log and bled off a little of the rage and frustration. It also warned other creatures to approach with caution.

One thing you had to watch was to keep your feet parallel to the log when using the broadaxe. If you didn't there was a good chance of losing a little toe. That would be bad enough, but you would also ruin your boot and boots cost money.

My first efforts with a broadaxe were enough to deter even my loyal old brother and gave the Tie Inspector plenty of practice to perfect his “X” (for cull).

Bucking to length – a tie had to be 8 feet long. The newly-manufactured log had to be bucked into lengths with the crosscut saw. This was alright if the tree was lying on the level, but inevitably it wasn't. This meant that the saw became bound and measures had to be taken to free it. It was not always easy to raise the point of the sawcut in deep snow. Try it sometime! Think, too, of the tiehack's sentiments when the tie length is bucked free and there stands revealed a big wind-shake or cross-check which will mean that all that work produced a cull! “Get out the violin, Mother, and we'll play a sad tune!” or words to that effect.

Peeling – just when you think you've produced a masterpiece, comes the final frustration. It has to be peeled. And peeled clean! This means *no* residual underbark, otherwise, we were told, the tie will not “take the pickle.” In other words, the creosoting plant will have trouble due to poor penetration. Such was the propaganda.

To this day I don't believe any of my ties went through the pickling plant to end up on the main line. Even in Depression years the CPR had to keep up appearances. I'm sure my ties ended up on sidings and little-used branch lines that were well out of the public eye. Most of these branch lines have now been converted to hiking and biking trails. My composted tie remains will help bind the gravel ballast and make the trail smoother.

The problem of peeling was exacerbated by prolonged cold weather. In the dead of winter you had to chop every bit of bark off the tie. You could use an axe, straddling the tie, or a spud (which was a sort of chisel mounted on a handle about 4 feet long). Neither system worked very well except in the spring when the bark was loose. But in this season, with the frost coming out of the wood, you couldn't cut ties for the wood was like rubber. You couldn't win.

But peeling had to be done. No use in postponing it, it only got worse and probably with a coating of new snow to add to the grief.

The last operation at the stump was to pile the ties from each tree, from two to four in that short timber, and make sure one end of the deck was raised on an old log or something so that you could pass a logging chain around it for skidding after it had all frozen into a clump.

Skidding – the farm team was used to skid the ties to a point where they could be decked properly until they were hauled. A good team scarcely needed driving for the skidding operation – a couple of trips over the same course and they usually would follow the trail and wait for you to unhook the chain at the deck. Just as well, for it is sometimes a dangerous trip to run alongside, hanging onto the reins.

Hauling – hauling ties was a separate profession, peopled by entrepreneurs who owned a flatdeck truck and had to literally work themselves to death to pay for it. My ties were hauled by the Johnson boys, for 4 cents apiece, to the rail siding at Athalmer, 4 miles away. Their old Model A Ford truck would go almost anywhere, and did. Bill, the driver, would fight his way over logs and all the hills, hollows, holes, humps and hogsbacks that adorn the Columbia Valley to my little deck and he and his brother would load up. Brother would pull a tie off the top of the pile toward the truck with his picaroon* and lift it. Bill would swing his picaroon close by his brother's face, bury it in the end of the tie and then heave it aboard the truck deck. The old truck could haul about sixty ties.

My description sounds more complicated than the actual motions, but make it sound a lot easier work than it actually was. There were hazards and frustrations like driving over a stump and having the load slide off down the slope like a bunch of icicles.

The Johnson boys decked up my ties along a siding of the CPR, ready for loading on rail cars at the appointed time.

Scaling – this is the bitterest part of the operation. The CPR inspector examined each masterpiece and gave it a check mark or a big "X" for cull.

I don't know when he did his dirty work, it must have been on a dark night! My hard-won ties showed what I considered to be an unreasonable proportion of "Xs." In those times it took only a very small check in the end to cull it, or a small pitch seam or windshake. Perhaps even the odd tie that I butchered too badly to be acceptable? One must be fair!

The residual ties could then be loaded on the rail cars. The culls that were left over could be hauled away to be used for various purposes around the farm. There were dark stories afoot about cull ties, left at the loading point, disappearing. The CPR usually got the blame and was generally accused of hauling them away and using them. Who knows? It might have been our neighbours.

Loading – the price for loading each tie was normally 2 cents. This was outrageous! To save this cash outlay I undertook to load my own. This was another specialized enterprise that I never should have ventured into. Frankly, I was the wrong shape and not strong enough. But, since I had stuck my neck out, I had to go through with it.

Visualize a nice, neat deck of ties alongside the rail siding, usually 5 or 6 feet high, the ties piled at right angles to the track. But always well *below* the level of the track. Each tie had to be up-ended and carried up a plank to the deck of the boxcar, and stowed. As the pile grew, so did the height each tie had to be lifted in the car.

*an axe handle surmounted by an axe head ground down by a blacksmith to leave only a sharp point to drive into the wood

Professionals at this job wore a special harness on their shoulder – a piece of belting with a spiked heel-plate (from their boots) fixed to keep the slippery wood from skidding. The drill was to lift up one end, lean into the middle to engage the heel plate, grunt, give it a bunt with your belly, heave the weight on your shoulder and then walk up the sloping plank into the car.

My trouble was that my belly wasn't in the right place and didn't stick out. Straightening up with the weight of the balanced tie was not my thing.

I should mention that a No. 1 axe tie, green and full of frost, weighs about 200 pounds. I weighed about 160 pounds so it was an unequal contest.

The payoff - there were two recognized grades of axe ties, based on dimensions. It is a long time ago, but as I remember the No. 1 had to be 7 inches thick, from face to face, and the face had to be 9 inches wide. If the width between the curved sides was more than 11 inches then you had to square it. This was often the case with the butt end of the tree and meant a lot more hacking. The finished article, loaded on the car netted me 48 cents.

No. 2 ties had to be 6 inches thick and have a face of a minimum of 6 inches in width. These were used for sidings on the railway. They netted me 36 cents. I imagine my ties were about 50/50 No. 1 and No. 2.

My net grubstake from my winter's work was about \$150.

I squinted at the price tag on the broadaxe in Northern Hardware - \$149.50.

One of the Moffat boys was making his way in our direction, perhaps with the idea of selling us a broadaxe. We snuck quietly out the door.

Yes, things have changed and sometimes for the better. Can you imagine any sane young man of modern times doing that for a living? My grandson and I never discussed the matter. We didn't have to. He had his impressions, I had my recollections.



HISTORY OF THE COMOX LOGGING COMPANY

Although advertised during the summer, Richard Mackie's book entitled "Island Timber" (Sono Nis Press) was not available for purchase until November. If you were looking for it earlier, it's available now:

Mackie, Richard S. 2000. Island timber. Sono Nis Press, Victoria, B.C. 248 p. \$39.95.
ISBN 1-55039-101-1

FHABC 2000 AGM A GREAT SUCCESS

Many attendees considered this year's AGM to have been the best yet. At least 50 people gathered at the Wright family's Witherby Tree Farm on the Sunshine Coast, including such notables as Ray Williston, Mike Apsey, Wally Hughes and Vidar Nordin. The Wrights were gracious enough to provide lunch and take us on a tour of some of their properties to view the results of nearly 50 years of forest management.

John Parminter presented a copy of the final manuscript of his biography of Tom Wright to Tom during the business meeting. Details on how to order a copy of the published book are on the next page of this newsletter. Charlie and Gerri Parsons updated us on the work of the Powell River Forest Museum and invited us to hold our 2002 AGM there. (Check out their web site at www.prcn.org/forestrymuseum/)

The current Executive of the FHABC are

Mr. Geoff Bate
2278 Cooperidge Drive
Central Saanich BC V8M 1N2
gbate@telus.net

John Parminter, Newsletter Editor
3 – 130 Niagara Street
Victoria BC V8V 1E9
jvparminter@telus.net

Mr. George Brandak
5551 Clearwater Drive
Richmond BC V7C 3B4
gbrandak@interchange.ubc.ca

Mr. Clay Perry
402 - 623 West 14th Avenue
Vancouver BC V5Z 1P7

Stan Chester, President
5686 Keith Road
West Vancouver BC V7W 2N5
2schester@home.com

Mr. John Revel
183 McLean Drive
Prince George BC V2M 4R5

Mr. Allan Klenman
407 - 3260 Quadra Street
Victoria BC V8X 1G2

Mr. Jack Robinson
192 Knollwood Drive
Kamloops BC V2C 4M6

Mr. Edo Nyland, Treasurer
8793 Forest Park Drive
Sidney B C V8L 4E8
edonon@islandnet.com

Mr. Ralph Schmidt
979 Ridgeway Street
Victoria BC V8X 3C2

Members are encouraged to contact any member of the Executive regarding the FHABC's aims and objectives, activities and potential projects.



NEW PUBLICATIONS

- Endert, W.E. (Bill). 2000. The timbercruisers. (novel) The Slant Publishing, PO Box 363, Sechelt, B.C. V0N 3A0 222 p. \$13.95 CDN + \$4.95 shipping. Web site: www.user.dccnet.com/capricorn/ Also distributed by Caitlin Press, Prince George, B.C. ISBN 0-9686865-0-8
- Gilgan, W.W. 1998. Olden days. W.W. Gilgan, PO Box 140, Burns Lake, B.C. V0J 1E0 154 p. \$17.00 CDN, includes shipping. E-mail: trapper@futurenet.bc.ca
- Hak, Gordon. 2000. Turning trees into dollars – the British Columbia coastal lumber industry, 1858 – 1913. University of Toronto Press, Toronto, Ontario. 239 p. \$22.95
Web site: www.utpress.utoronto.ca/ Order desk 1-800-565-9523 ISBN 0-802083-5-6
- Keller, Betty. 2000. Pender Harbour cowboy: the many lives of Bertrand Sinclair. TouchWood Editions, Victoria, B.C. distributed by Heritage House, Surrey, B.C. 224 p. \$18.95. (Sinclair was a novelist who wrote the 1916 novel “Big timber: a story of the northwest” after observing logging operations at Harrison Lake for three years. It was later made into a movie in the silent era). Web site: www.heritagehouse.ca ISBN 0-920663-72-9
- Neufeld, Andrew and A. Parnaby. 2000. The IWA in Canada: the life and times of an industrial union. New Star Books, Vancouver, B.C. (co-published with the IWA Canada). \$50.00. Web site: www.newstarbooks.com ISBN 0-921586-80-9
- Parminter, John. 2000. Tom Wright: recollections of a pioneer forester and tree farmer. Forest History Association of British Columbia in cooperation with Trafford Publishing, Victoria, B.C. xiii + 106 p. \$15 CDN, shipping charges extra. To order phone Trafford Publishing at 1-888-232-4444 (locally in Victoria at 383-6864) and ask for the order desk. The catalogue number for this book is 00-0128. You will be offered payment and shipping options. They also have an online bookstore at www.trafford.com ISBN 1-55212-463-0
- Trower, Peter. 2000. The Judas hills. (novel) Harbour Publishing, Madeira Park, B.C. V0N 2H0 250 p. \$21.95 CDN. Order desk 1-800-667-2988 ISBN 1-55017-228-X
- From our neighbours to the east:
- Gilliat, N.W.W. 1999. If moose could only talk: stories from the Canadian Rockies in the early days of the Alberta Forest Service. Brightest Pebble Publishing Co., Inc. Edmonton, Alberta. \$19.95
- Gilliat, N.W.W. 1999. Watch over the forest: more tales of the Alberta Forest Service and life in the forest communities. Brightest Pebble Publishing Co., Inc. Edmonton, Alberta. \$24.95

INDEX TO ARTICLES IN NUMBERS 41 - 60

No. 41	December 1994 Permanent street building on the Pacific coast	R.S. Perry
No. 42	April 1995 Railway logging around Merritt Book review: The legacy and the challenge	Jack Robinson Terry Honer
No. 43	June 1995 Young ranger bands	Jack Long
No. 44	October 1995 The <i>B.C. Forester</i> : her life and times	Ralph Schmidt
No. 45	January 1996 A tale of a tree (the Cary fir)	John Parminter
No. 46	April 1996 The giant fiefdom Farmers to loggers: the Comox Logging Co.	Tony Robinson Richard S. Mackie
No. 47	June 1996 The B.C. Paper Manufacturing Co.	George McKnight
No. 48	October 1996 Milltown to Mill Lake: the Trethewey brothers British Columbia provincial forests	MSA Museum F.D. Mulholland
No. 49	December 1996 Genoa Bay, 1920 – 1925 More on axes David Douglas and the Fort St. James connection	Tom Barnett Allan Klenman Bill Young
No. 50	May 1997 James H. Parkin – portable sawmill pioneer Book review: Home from the hill	Tom Parkin Geoff Bate
No. 51	December 1997 Riding on fate The Royal Commission on forestry at Burns Lake, Oct. 1955	Kevin Hunter Ted Knight
No. 52	May 1998 Red Morrison – another view (1) Book review: Sawlogs on steel rails	Donald Ream, Jr. Patrick Hind
No. 53	December 1998 Red Morrison – another view (2)	Donald Ream, Jr.
No. 54	April 1999 Fairchild Husky – the “made in B.C.” waterbomber Fictional works set in the forests of B.C. The Tugaway	Dirk Septer John Parminter Betty Dalzell

No. 55	June 1999 Communing with nature – reflections on a forestry career (1) Forestry and/or logging poetry from B.C. – a list	Geoff Marples John Parminter
No. 56	October 1999 Communing with nature – reflections on a forestry career (2)	Geoff Marples
No. 57	December 1999 100 years of federal forestry in British Columbia	Steve Taylor
No. 58	March 2000 A private walk The life and times of Richard Hugh Spilsbury (1)	Ron Jones Richard Spilsbury
No. 59	June 2000 The life and times of Richard Hugh Spilsbury (2) Destiny's irresolute digit	Richard Spilsbury Hank Horn
No. 60	August 2000 The tiehack (1) The saga of Clancy Haldane	Geoff Marples Hank Horn



FHABC MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

A reminder that the expiration date of your membership is shown above and to the right of your name on the envelope. Renewal forms will be sent out with the first issue of 2001 to those whose memberships will expire at the end of 2000.



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, # 3 – 130 Niagara Street, Victoria, BC V8V 1E9. Phone (250) 384-5642 home or (250) 356-6810 office. E-mail: jvparmintter@telus.net

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

The President, Stan Chester, can be reached at 5686 Keith Road, West Vancouver, BC V7W 2N5. Phone (604) 921-9880. E-mail: 2schester@home.com