



Published by the Forest History Association of British Columbia

No. 71 Victoria, British Columbia September 2003

**Queest Mtn. Lookout Dismantled
by Heather Persson, *Salmon Arm Observer***

Lookouts placed on mountain tops have historically been part of fire fighting in British Columbia since the 1920s. The Salmon Arm Forest District was disbanded in 2003 – and will also become a part of the history of the Forest Service. So it seems appropriate that local forest district staff have chosen to save a lookout slated for disposal and rebuild it as a legacy to their work in the region.

The lookout on Queest Mountain, near Malakwa, was in operation for more than five decades. During the fire season it would house a staff person who would spot fires, report their location with a sight-enhancing “fire finder” and transmit the information back to officials organizing the fire fighting. After the 1998 forest fire season, the ministry decided not to send personnel up to Queest - or any of the other lookouts. Improved technology and the availability of aircraft made the cost of repairing access roads impractical.



Recycled paper

Ironically, the lookout - whose whole purpose was to help stop fires – was slated to be burned due to liability risks. John LaBoyne is the Salmon Arm Forest District employee who saw the potential to save the lookout combined with the need for the staff to leave behind a symbol of their presence in the area. “I thought we should do something,” he says, adding the District Manager and others in the office were quick to support the concept.

He and others in the office then began to research the lookouts and the Queest location in particular. They found original plans and blueprints for the lookout dating back to the middle of the last century. But in the history of the Canadian Forest Service, lookouts were used even before the turn of the century. Their use was initiated by W.N. Millar – the second chief forester in the country’s history. It was with a sense of history and purpose, the project went from plans on paper to action.

On a clear, summer day - perfect for enjoying the incredible view found at 7,000 feet above sea level - 13 workers from the Salmon Arm Forest District and a hoe operator headed up the mountain to dismantle and move the structure. They had to brave clouds of mosquitoes and blackflies, but in a few hours the building was dismantled and on its way down the mountain. It was designed in modular units, which made it easier to take down. The pieces now lie in a locked-up shed, waiting to come together.

Talking to employees who worked on the project, it is clear they were glad to find an outlet for their feelings of loss about the closure of the office and the elimination of their jobs. “It’s something to look forward to,” says Kimm Magill-Hofmann. “It feels good to leave something behind.”

Home sweet home

For 10 fire seasons, the lookout at Queest was home for Pamela Axley. “It was the best thing I’ve ever done,” she says. “I’ve cried every summer I couldn’t be up there.” Loneliness was an issue. She would take 50 books for 40 days on the mountain, wrote poetry, knit, embroidered and even played on a Gameboy her kids purchased for her.

She describes the lookout as very comfortable, especially once a shower was rigged up for her outside. Rain water would gather in a black plastic bag to heat up for her use. “I would pray for enough rain,” she laughs. Visitors and hikers would make their way to the lookout - something she greatly enjoyed. Wildlife also wandered to the mountain top. She describes seeing silver-tipped grizzly bears, cougars, caribou, wolves and many birds.

Sometimes she spent six weeks at the lookout without a break. “I’d be lying if I said it wasn’t long,” she says. “But there would only be moments.”

Lightning struck the lookout several times when Axley was on duty – and although the tower was equipped with a grounding system, it was still scary. “The fear would come in the lightning storms,” she says, adding watching sparks and white light flashing was too much at times. “It was so intense...I just went to bed.”

Her last season at Queest was perhaps the most intense. She had a view of the Salmon Arm/Silver Creek fire of 1998 that showed all too clearly the devastation that hit homes - and threatened Salmon Arm. “It was very traumatic for me,” she admits, describing what looked like a mushroom cloud of smoke coming from the Fly Hills - then watching the flames jump through the Salmon River valley to Mount Ida.

“I sat down and started to cry,” she says, but adds she and the other forestry workers pulled many 24-hour days spotting and fighting the fire.

Artefact tells story

Forest district staff have also started to gather items to set the lookout up like it would be if it were still in operation. The era they are aiming for is the 1950s. Among the artefacts is the 1931 diary of an operator from another Shuswap lookout on Joss Mountain - Robert Henry Allan. The book was donated by his grandson, who also works for the Forest Service. In a strong, even script, Allan wrote daily about the details of life in the lookout.

Naturally, the weather and the strength and direction of the wind plays a major role. One August entry describes snow, which was welcome as a source of water. He does, at times, mark down the full range of his emotions. One clear day he writes, “A great day to be 8,000 feet in the air...”

But limited visibility due to clouds or smoke was a frustration. After several days of smoke blocking his view he writes, “I’ll be glad when it is time to get out of here for all the good I am doing.”



Recollections of a Forest Ranger on the Coast 65 Years Ago by the late Ross Douglas

In the winter of 1936 I had come in from a summer survey party, and was working in the Forest Branch office in Victoria, when it was decided to send a graduate forester out as a Forest Ranger on the coast. I was given the job. At that time many coast ranger districts had no roads at all, airplanes hadn't come into general use, and boats were the only means of getting around. The Vancouver Forest District had a large boat fleet and operated a substantial boat maintenance station at Thurston Bay on Sonora Island. I don't recall if they built boats there but they did build them, to a fairly standard design which anyone who has seen will remember.

I was to have a boat district centered at Port Neville, 150 miles up the coast from Vancouver, and a boat was to be transportation, office, and living quarters for an engineer - radio operator and myself. Early in 1937 I reported to Thurston Bay to get my boat and meet my engineer, a nice young man by the name of Jack Randall. The boat was the *Eva R*, a venerable old 32-footer with an equally old, slow-speed gas engine and a cruising speed of about 7 knots. The first trip, from Thurston Bay to Port Neville, could have had its comic side as neither Jack nor I had ever been on small boats before, but we made it without hitting anything.

Port Neville was a pleasant, quiet inlet. On the south side was a dock where the Union Steamship called once a week. Above it was the large log home of the Hansen family, where Mr. Hansen had homesteaded early in the century. One of the Hansen girls ran a small store and post office near the dock. Across the inlet were two or three other small homesteads. This was the settlement of Port Neville, which was to be my home base for nearly eighteen months. My ranger district covered both sides of Johnstone Strait from below Loughborough Inlet to Robson Bight. End-to-end would take about ten hours by boat.

It was pretty empty country. Besides Port Neville there were similar tiny settlements at Port Harvey, Jackson Bay and Kelsey Bay, and here and there were two or three solitary homesteads, such as the Bendickson farm on Hardwicke Island. Scattered widely through the area were 20 or more small logging operations. Most of these were on the mainland and small islands, and the large valleys on Vancouver Island of the Salmon, White, Adam and Eve rivers, so active today, were then untouched wilderness.

The logging operations were all of small, independent owner-operators who sold their logs on the Vancouver log market. Most of them would have only one or two donkey engines, and only two or three of them could operate two or three sides. The common type of operation, was a cold-deck and swing to the water, sometimes with an A-frame. One operator cold-decked and then shot the logs to water down a steep log chute, quite a spectacular sight.

There were a couple of handloggers, and two small truck operations hauling on fore-and-aft timber roads. A number of the camps were float camps. One of these, a Japanese camp in Call Inlet, presented the unusual daily spectacle of the Japanese crew, after work, emerging from a large bathhouse on the float and parading around in brightly coloured kimonos, an exotic sight in that setting.

Nearly all the logging was in Crown timber sales, as of course there were no Tree Farm Licenses or Public Sustained Yield Units. There were no forest inventory maps or air photos, in fact no accurate maps at all in my area, so a logger would hunt up a piece of timber on his own and apply for a timber sale. I would cruise it and set the boundaries, and report to Vancouver. In due course a timber sale contract was issued. This was usually for a term of two to five years, with stumpage fixed for the life of the contract. Sales over a certain size had to be advertised for competitive bids, but there was never any competition in my time. Once a man located some timber he wanted, it seemed to be "finders keepers."

When logging commenced I inspected it regularly for performance, including utilization which by today's standards was terrible. I can't recall what our standards then were, but mills were designed for large logs and I doubt if many tops would be less than 14 inches. In fire season I checked regularly on fire precautions and equipment. The only measure of hazard was the sling psychrometer, plus how one felt. Fortunately I had no fires in either 1937 or 1938, though 1938 was a bad fire year down the coast.

These cruising and inspection activities kept me fairly constantly on the move around the district. I would anchor or tie up where I was working and return to Port Neville about once a week for mail and supplies. The work was fairly vigorous, being all on foot. Boat living had the usual discomforts, but boat travel in good weather was a pleasure in this attractive country, and the worst weather could usually be avoided.

A District Manager today I guess has the same basic duties but with many more complications and problems. Timber sales then were much simpler to administer than the modern tenures. There were no annual cutting plans or prescribed rates of cut - a logger could cut as much as he liked where he liked as long as it was in the sale area. He was not yet required to fall snags or plant trees. Environmental concerns and public involvement hadn't started. Logging areas today are usually large, with complex patterns of leave blocks and roads requiring accurate mapping. Mine were relatively small and simple, and my cruising and mapping were pretty rough and ready, always working alone and pacing distances.

A big difference from today was in communications. The two-way radio on the boat was for contact with Vancouver office and didn't always work, but there were no telephones or two-way radios in the district. To speak to an operator I could go by boat to see him, which might take all day, or leave it until my next visit perhaps three weeks away, which I generally did.

This sparseness of communication tended to narrow concerns down to essentials. All my dealings with operators were verbal and things were settled on the spot. I guess Forest Branch communications were influenced by these conditions too, because while there were frequent reports to make they were very brief affairs, and I wasn't overburdened with correspondence from head office. In fact my total office was a 5-foot shelf in the small wheelhouse of the boat containing mainly the *Forest Act*, an instruction manual, a typewriter and some files. And I wasn't bothered with telephone calls. It wasn't a bad way of doing business.

The years 1937 and 1938 were still in the Depression, and I soon found that the logging operators were working very hard for a very small margin of profit. Douglas-fir booms delivered to the Vancouver market fetched \$6.00 per thousand board feet for No. 3 grade (there was no cubic scale), \$9.00 for No. 2 and \$12.00 for No. 1. There were no peeler grades or premiums. Hemlock was ungraded, and fetched a flat price of about \$5.00 per thousand. Stumpage was around \$0.75 per thousand. The base labour rate was \$0.35 or \$0.40 per hour. Logging was more labour intensive than with no power saws, mobile spars etc., and the small operators hired as few men as they could and did the high-priced jobs themselves. They often had relatives or friends working with them. I remember one group of about six young men who had got hold of a donkey engine and a small patch of fir a mile up the Apple River. They did everything themselves including the cooking, and were totally isolated from everything. They preferred this, hard as it was, to the problem of unemployment in Vancouver, which was severe at that time.

As I got to know my logging operators I came to admire them very much. Many were pioneers on the coast. Oscar Soderman, for example, showed me with pride in 1938, a fine stand of second growth on a point in Johnstone Strait which he had logged in 1908. With rare exceptions these men were hard working, cheerful under difficulties, asking no favours of society, and honest. I was a conscientious civil servant, but as I learned their character and the conditions they faced I concluded that part of my job was to help these people survive. There wasn't much I could do except do my work for them promptly and try to get them what breaks I could (such as a stumpage of \$0.50 per thousand instead of \$0.75). I confess though, that there were times when I bent the rules a bit, or turned a blind eye to some minor infraction, when an honest operator needed a little tolerance. I had no cause to regret it.

My stay in this beautiful part of the country ended in the summer of 1938 when I was moved to a different job in the B.C. interior. It was only then, in retrospect, that I realized how insulated my boat community and others like it were from the outside world. With no newspapers and radio so unreliable that most people ignored it, world news didn't seem to penetrate. After I left I found we knew almost nothing of the events which had been taking place in Europe which shortly would lead to World War II. It was as if we lived in a different world or a different time. I guess this rather happy detachment ended when war was declared in 1939.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Thompson, Dennis; Dunn, Rich; Hauff, Steve *et al.* 2003. The Climax locomotive .
ISBN 0-9647521-6-6. 512 p. Hardback. \$67.95 US

The Climax Locomotive is the complete, comprehensive story of one of America's venerable industrial locomotives. Only about 1,035 were produced from 1888 to 1928, yet they saw service all over North America and were successfully exported. Most served in the woods or in the mining industry. Like its major competitors - Lima's Shay and Heisler's geared engine - the Climax was well-suited for work on steep grades and sharp curves running on light rail or tram roads on wooden rail. Some felt the Climax was an unbalanced monster waiting to shake itself apart while others would run no other. Regardless, the Climax proved itself a reliable and rugged unit with most providing service to several owners over long periods of time.

This book has over 650 photographs, plus drawings and several comprehensive versions of Climax production records detailing this unique and fascinating locomotive. The authoring team includes a who's-who of Climax researchers, and the entire project was started and endorsed by the late Walt Casler, a former Climax employee who spent his entire life researching this locomotive. (There are no surviving factory production records, making the research of this locomotive especially challenging.) There has never been another book like it, and the work here - years in the making - represents the most ambitious attempt to pull together all known data and offer a wide range of photos from literally all over the world.

The Climax Locomotive is an all-new, from-scratch effort led by the late Walt Casler and represents a significant attempt to pull together all known Climax data to date.

Available through your local book dealer. Direct order (US) please add \$5.00 Shipping & Handling (the book weighs nearly five pounds!). Canada and international, please contact us for shipping details.

Oso Publishing
PO Box 1349
Hamilton
Montana 59840
USA

Telephone (800) 337-3547
Fax (406) 375-7559

http://www.osorail.com/Oso_Publishing/books.html

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE FHABC

Date: Saturday, October 4, 2003

Place: B.C. Forest Discovery Centre, Duncan, B.C. (Forest Museum)

Directions: just north of the Duncan city limits, turn east on Drinkwater Road

Program: 11:00 AM Business meeting
 12:00 Noon Lunch on site
 1:30 PM Tour of the Discovery Centre and grounds
 ~ 3:00 PM Departure for mainland members

Please confirm your attendance soon: mainlanders are to advise Stan Chester at (604) 921-9880 or e-mail stanchester@shaw.ca

If you live on Vancouver Island please advise John Parminter at Office: (250) 356-6810 or Home: (250) 384-5642, e-mail: jvparminter@telus.net

Car pools will be arranged to the extent possible.



This newsletter is the official organ of the Forest History Association of British Columbia. Please submit newsletter material and send changes of address to the Editor: John Parminter, # 3 – 130 Niagara Street, Victoria, BC V8V 1E9. Phone (250) 384-5642 home or (250) 356-6810 office. E-mail: jvparminter@telus.net

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

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