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FHABC 2004 AGM REPORT

The FHABC's 2004 AGM was held on September 11th at Heritage Square in Coquitlam. We met in the Place des Arts, an impressive arts centre and music school which backs on to Ryan House, built in 1908 for the manager of the Canadian Western Lumber Co. sawmill at Fraser Mills. The main items of business concerned the newsletter, a possible web page, our finances, charitable tax status, funding for upcoming publications and the means by which we can encourage an interest in forest history among students at UBC and other institutions.

Following a catered lunch we were treated to a very informative talk by Tony Paré, who is writing a history of Fraser Mills, and then toured the Mackin House museum. Built in 1909 for the general sales manager of the Canadian Western Lumber Co., it has been restored to that time period and contains many artefacts. The basement houses a display which includes 700 valuable photographs of Fraser Mills, Maillardville and Coquitlam.

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



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RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Anderson, Steve. 2004. Clearcut cause. (novel) Caitlin Press, Prince George, B.C.
ISBN 1-89475907-9. 192 p. \$18.95

Faculty of Forestry, UBC. 2004. Innovation and discovery: a legacy of 50 years at the UBC
Malcolm Knapp Research Forest. Faculty of Forestry, University of British Columbia,
Vancouver, B.C. ISBN 0-88865-445-6. x + 77 p.

Freake, Ross and D. Plant (editors). 2003. Firestorm - the summer B.C. burned. (pictorial)
McClelland & Stewart, Toronto, Ontario. ISBN 0-7710-4772-X. 176 p. \$39.99.

Freake, Ross and D. Plant. 2004. Stories from the Firestorm. McClelland & Stewart,
Toronto, Ontario. ISBN 0-7710-4770-3. 264 p. \$36.99

James, Rick. 2004. The ghost ships of Royston. Underwater Archaeological Society of
British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C. ISBN 0-9695-0109-9. 64 p. \$13.00

Soames, Jorie and G. Turnbull (compilers). 2004. Touch the flame: stories from the
Okanagan Mountain Park fire. Northstone, Kelowna, B.C. ISBN 1-8968-3668-2.
\$18.69

THE COUGAR SISTERS
A BRIEF REVIEW FROM PORTALS OF THE PAST
by Donald Ream, Jr.

The American Civil War General, William Tecumseh Sherman, once said: “The world doesn’t care where you live, but how you live; not what you say, but what you do.” With this in mind, a review about the Solberg sisters is appropriate. The Solberg family consisting of the father, Herman, his wife, Olga, and their two daughters, Bergilot and Minnie, arrived at Sechelt Inlet from Norway in 1926. The Solbergs settled in the area or community known as Sandy Hook. It wasn’t long until Bergilot was hunting and trapping. Herman Solberg began handlogging in 1928. Later on both Bergilot and Minnie helped their father in this endeavour and Bergilot also worked as a Whistle Punk.

During 1928, Pacific Copper Mines Ltd. became incorporated with a plan to prospect for high grade ore, even to use a “Radiore Survey,” being an electrical prospecting method. This was unsuccessful and sometime after 1931 Pacific Copper abandoned operations. In the meantime, Bergilot and Minnie grew up learning life in the woods while their father Herman continued handlogging and running a trapline on the east side of Porpoise Bay.

John Dafoe, a Coastwise Guide of Halfmoon Bay, indicated in a letter to the author that Herman Solberg later sold some valuable land for next to nothing at Sandy Hook and that he was taken quite badly in the sale. Both Bergilot and Minnie eventually became markswomen with rifles and hunted cougars, deer, river otter, bobcats, mink and racoons for their pelts.

In the wonderful book entitled “Bright Seas Pioneer Spirits – The Sunshine Coast,” by Betty C. Keller and Rosella M. Leslie, the authors note:

“A few years after Pacific Copper abandoned the site, handlogger Herman Solberg and his daughter Bergie decided to try their luck on the mountain. Both had been working for Universal Logging at the foot of the trail leading up Sechelt Creek to the mine, and when the lease was logged out, Bergie was given the company’s draft horses. Father and daughter then launched an expedition to the old mine, but like those before them, they came out empty-handed. The venture was not without some profit, however, because Bergie loaded the horses onto a raft, towed them to Sechelt and found buyers for every one of them.”

Mr. Dafoe, in his letter, states in part “I was advised by a friend and elder Gilbert Joe from the Sechelt Band that they (I presume the Band or perhaps loggers) fondly called Bergilot Myrtle, I never did discover the significance of this and Gilbert passed away this summer.”

Mr. Dafoe went on to disclose: “The sisters had generally quit logging by the time I met them throughout the 1970s. I never heard anything about Bergie and Minnie’s mother.”

“Bergilot offered tea and banana bread at their home when I brought her father home from hospital (sometime in fall/winter of 1976 or 1977). Upon picking up Mr. Solberg he was enthusiastic about picking up some stout beer for the trip home and quickly found a bottle of Dubonne Brandy when he arrived home. Some time later, when her father passed away at Sechelt Hospital she simply said they ‘kilt’ him there and that was that.”

He continued on, noting “I first met Minnie and her husband at Bear Bay Logging Camp near Deserted River in Jervis Inlet where they offered me an extremely warm bunkhouse to stay in on a bitterly cold December night. I didn’t see much of them and left the next morning for my destination. There is a story that Minnie had to hide out for a while (presumably a few days) while her husband was dying because he was too dangerous to be around. I can’t remember the source but I remember the story being credible at the time.”

“I must correct the statement that I picked her (Bergilot) up by boat, as she was most often self-contained by boat. However I did drive her around to pick up goat food and hay and other errands when time allowed and enjoyed conversations with her, often stories about people and places of the bush. Whether or not she could read I don’t know (I expect that she could). She was aware of the articles about herself and Minnie and was aware of the content of those articles. One author wrote some less-than-complimentary stuff about the sisters and I had to dodge that subject and denounce the writer for some time until I was forgiven for bringing him over.”

“Later when I needed a Billy Goat, Bergilot offered me one of hers for a bit of help and was most concerned that I would treat it well. She commiserated with me for a couple of years when my Newfoundland dog was lost in the Skookumchuck Rapids. Whenever Minnie came out of Jervis Inlet for one reason or another, they did not always see eye to eye, they disagreed like sisters often do.”

“One time I said I was going up Jervis Inlet and Bergie asked me to take Minnie a few things. Every time I saw her she added to the load with an array of sweets and fatty foods that would be considered most unhealthy fare. Finally I got away and a good thing too or my little boat would not manage the load. We went up to a camp just past Deserted Bay and met by Minnie on a Quad that she drove to the beach. This mountain of a woman was quite a sight driving down to the landing on that machine. We explained our mission and were well-received by her and she wanted us to unload an oil barrel from a stand by her cabin. It appeared that the cabin was somewhat supported by the stand and barrel and we thought better of removing it. Minnie accepted our explanation.”

“As a conservationist and advocate for wildlife and habitats I was at odds with many of Bergie’s hunting practices and targets, but since she was among a very few perusing this lifestyle I was able to overlook the carnage of her ways. If there had been many more than herself and Minnie considerable damage might have been done to wildlife in the region. Bergilot had no use for Parks because ‘you can’t hunt in them’ and in sympathy to loggers ‘you can’t log in them.’”

Mr. Dafoe concluded the letter stating: "The main attributes of Bergilot that stand out are her presence of mind, humour and determination, considering, or perhaps because of the rough lifestyle that she lived. Eventually, Minnie moved into Sechelt in a self-contained residence called Greencourt. Minnie had been persuaded to move into some comfort due to her health and the isolation of Jervis Inlet. Once I mentioned to Bergilot that she might try to move into town for comfort and she was firm and clear that she would not live in town."

An obituary by Jan De Grass, reporter, appearing in the *Question* newspaper of Whistler and Pemberton on December 17, 2002, noted the passing of Bergilot Solberg and stated she had lived in an unheated shack for some 20 years on the west side of Sechelt Inlet with her four goats, her dog and until 2001 also her sister, Minnie. This obituary noted access to her home was by boat only. Her prowess as a hunter and trapper was similarly noted as well as her local travels in her boat. And Bergilot's life of adventure was not lost totally at her passing for she has been written about in history books and was the featured subject of a CBC documentary film in which she sang, yodelled and played a guitar. And this obituary commented that her lifestyle taught her the bush survival skills and even indicated she assumed her father's trapping permit after he died; also that she had trapped mink and racoon for fur sales.

For a good while Bergilot's sister Minnie lived with her after the days of living at the abandoned logging camp where the Deserted River empties into Deserted Bay. The article commented that as Minnie's health changed it became increasingly difficult to provide the care that she needed. So Bergilot searched the Sechelt community for a suitable new home for Minnie. Bergilot refused to move away from her goats, albeit admitting that she was not getting any younger. But it appears that some efforts were made by one of Bergilot's friends to try and persuade her to move into a nursing home. She refused such suggestion saying "if she went into town she would die."

When Bergilot crossed Sechelt Inlet she would go visit Tuwanek Spit where her friend Linda Williams lived. She was the last person to see Bergilot, a few days before her death. Williams said she seemed "just like Bergie" – quite well. She recalled seeing Bergie during the fall when she would arrive in her boat with rifle and dog to venture into the mountains and hunt deer. Williams observed it was like seeing a person from the past in the hunt for food ... a "history now closing."

At this juncture the reader may ponder how Bergilot Solberg had the nickname "Cougar Lady." This "handle" was given to her by her friend Jim Wilkinson when he set up a CB radio for her to use. The article indicates this particular friend called her over the CB radio on Monday, November 11, 2002 in the morning and spoke to her and that she was fine. That evening he called again but got no answer. Again he tried on Tuesday but had no answer then either. Then on Wednesday, Jim Wilkinson asked his son-in-law Steve Day to take his boat and investigate. He found her body on the floor of the cabin, with her dog "Bush" at her side.

In the Toronto *Globe and Mail* of Saturday, December 14, 2002, an obituary of Bergilot Solberg indicates her full name to be Bergilot Asta (Bergie) Solberg. This obituary notes her background in hunting in the mountains of the Sechelt Peninsula and the passing of her sister Minnie the year before. Further this obituary notes that she had goats which provided her with raw milk as well a secondary use as lures for attracting cougars into her rifle range. Her fearlessness is noted in an episode of her being alerted by her dog to a cougar which she chased up a tree; she then going to her cabin for her rifle. Thus said a friend of hers “she was something Walt Disney would like to make a story of.”

This obituary recalls Bergilot skinning and selling cougar, bobcat and river otter pelts, noting she was an expert markswoman at 400 meters distance. Her patience was also noted in her having tracked a deer for days. This obituary commented on changes and the encroachment on her 70 hectare premises in that a multi-million dollar real estate development had been established two kilometres from her own property. Neighbours could hear her 50 HP boat engine putt-putting along while they enjoyed relaxing in their hot tubs. Bergilot’s home had neither electricity nor running water.

In this particular obituary appears a nuance all its own in that Bergilot complained to Keith Thirkell some seven years before her passing: “there’s not many animals left. Many people are moving to Sechelt, building houses and more people are sport hunting, which scares away the game.” After the death of Herman Solberg, Bergilot and Minnie lived alone at Sandy Hook speaking Norwegian much of the time and when speaking in English the Norwegian accent was heard. Later on, Minnie Solberg settled in at the abandoned logging camp at Deserted Bay. The nearest store was some 50 kilometres distant. The sisters shopped in the community of Sechelt which they visited on a monthly basis for their needed supplies.

This particular obituary is unique as it discloses Bergilot Solberg wore a heavy purple cowboy hat which caused the tips of her ears to be forced down. Her other clothing consisted of sweaters and thrift shop goods. And continuing, states that Bergilot some years ago was filmed by a French television crew – apparently making her more prominent in France than in British Columbia particularly and in Canada generally. Local reporters visiting her home in recent years had tea served on china or were offered a can of soda, perhaps a bit rusty.

Bergilot’s “school” was the classroom of the forest. Mr. Collins, a local newspaper reporter, accompanied Bergilot on one of her hunting trips. She spotted some cougar “scat,” rolled it in her fingers, inhaled the scent, broke it in half and then put it to her nose. Her verdict was that it was fresh and then described the cougar’s diet.

This obituary also relates an episode when a conservation officer served Bergilot with papers explaining the rules and regulations for hunting and one time allegedly tried to seize her rifle. Mr. Collins indicated Bergilot Solberg did not know how to read. It was claimed this alleged inability caused her to have difficulties understanding the regulations concerning wildlife and the closed season. In other words, if she saw game – it was in season. This claim of not being able to read may well have been a matter of a level of ability rather than total illiteracy. Recall Mr. Dafoe indicated that she could read.

Bergilot's home is described as jerry-built from various pieces of scavenged wood. She piled her possessions against the walls, indicating "in case there's ever shortages again, like during the war." The Sechelt RCMP indicated she died of natural causes. Her friends believed she suffered a sudden and fatal stroke as there was evidence that she was midway through preparing a meal. Miss Solberg never married and had no children. However, she is survived by a niece who resides in the community of Armstrong, B.C.

This obituary concludes: "Bergie Solberg, hunter, trapper, scourge of cougars; born in Norway on September 5, 1923; found dead in a cabin north of Sechelt, B.C. on November 13, 2002." Now for those who may be going to Sechelt, an amazing painted portrait of Bergilot is hanging in the Blue Moon café.



RECOLLECTIONS OF HOWARD RUSTAD by Bill McGhee

It wasn't long after I joined Crown Zellerbach in 1956 that I met a most unusual man by the name of Howard Rustad. At that time our timber department offices were on the 17th floor of the Burrard Building and one morning around 8:30 a middle-aged stranger (to me) came staggering out of the stairwell on our floor.

Chuckling, my boss - Mais Philip - introduced him as our logging engineer and timber cruiser from Bella Coola, Howard Rustad. Now Howard, who daily worked unafraid in the grizzly bear forests around Bella Coola, was afraid to ride in elevators. He preferred to walk up the 17 floors to our office, so his visits to headquarters were very infrequent, in fact I can't remember another one while we were in that building.

A self-taught engineer and timber cruiser without any formal training, Howard proved to be very inventive at work. On my first trip to Bella Coola after I joined the company, I accompanied Howard on an inspection of a potential small logging show. As we hiked along we passed some large black cottonwood trees and he informed me that they were, what sounded like, "Bomb Gillard" trees. I let that one pass when I realized that he meant "Balm-of-Gilead," a common name given to a species of poplar with which he was familiar back east – where he worked before coming to B.C.

My other story about Howard illustrates his practical sense of humour. After cruising a potential logging show, Howard prepared a forest type map of the area and submitted it to our office for approval. Using a lurid colour of purple, he had marked one type F-T-B, supposedly indicating the species. When we were unable to decide what species Howard meant, we finally phoned him to learn that because that particular stand of timber was so poor he had invented a new type: "For The Birds."

TOM WRIGHT, 1916 - 2004

Born in Warren, Pennsylvania in 1916, Tom Wright passed away on December 26th in Vancouver. Tom obtained his Bachelor's degree in forestry from Pennsylvania State University in 1937 and then went timber cruising in California and Utah. After graduate studies in forest economics at Duke University, Tom was hired by the fledgling Department of Forestry at UBC in 1939. His consulting work on the ecological effects of slashburning for Bloedel, Stewart & Welch, Ltd. in 1941 and 1942 marked the first time a forester worked in that capacity for a logging company, rather than as a forest engineer. Additional work in 1942 and 1943 resulted in the first sustained yield forest management plan developed for an industrial company in B.C.

Following a stint in the US Army's 796th Engineer Forestry Battalion, Tom Wright returned to UBC in 1946. After that he took up the position of Chief Forester for Canadian Forest Products (Ltd.), (Canfor), a post which he held from 1947 to 1962. Beginning in 1956, Tom studied the forest industry around Prince George and concluded that as only 25% of the harvested wood was converted into lumber, there was definite room for a pulp industry. Canfor's Prince George Pulp Company began operations there in 1966 based on a 3.2 million hectare Pulpwood Harvesting Agreement. Two more pulp mills soon followed.

Tom left Canfor in 1962 to become Dean of the Faculty of Forestry at UBC, returned to Canfor in 1964 and then retired in 1974. Along with some consulting work, Tom ran his tree farm and woodlot on the Sunshine Coast, where he introduced many innovations in small-scale forestry, beginning in 1951. Tom once said "every forester should have a stand of trees his own age."

He was also an advisor to the Royal Commission on forestry in 1975 and 1976 and awarded the Association of BC Forest Professionals' Distinguished Forester Award in 1986. A Charter Member of the FHABC and a keen supporter of its work, Tom Wright was the subject of a biography published by the FHABC in 2000. He will be missed by many.



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