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[Back-issue Link](#)

Summer Issue

From the President

By Richard Dominy

Well, lots of us feel like prisoners in our own homes for a crime we didn't commit! To help everyone through this, the newsletter has some great material.

Have a look at Gerry Burch's thoughtful and thought-provoking "op-ed" piece about the Forest Industry, written with insight and experience.

The passing of a previous Chief Forester, John Cuthbert in February was especially touching. In my career, I first worked in the Nelson Forest Region when John was Regional Manager. I fondly remember John sitting in the coffee room at the Cranbrook District Office. Time passes for all of us; let's remember to prepare our bucket lists and start checking off the items!

Looking for a summer read? Check under Book and Media Reports.

Bob Hyslop's adventures in Ghana are an exciting read told in a laconic style that is both informative and entertaining.

In the story retold by John Parminter of the famous 1938 Bloedel Forest Fire in the Campbell River District, take a read of the statistics. The article references Freeman King – I think we should include an article on Freeman King in a future edition – he had a fascinating life and has touched many of us unknowingly as forest practitioners. He was a field naturalist along with a bevy of other titles – was well known for the time spent with the Victoria's Junior Field Naturalists.

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The Dire State of the BC Forest Industry

By Gerry Burch *A history-influenced opinion by a life-long industry leader and observer. Fourth in a series of Gerry's writing for FHABC. His bio can be found in the UBC Library's [Gerry Burch fonds](#).*

The forest industry has been the dominant resource industry in this province over the past century. During this period, constant expansion and modernization of manufacturing plants have occurred to supply distant markets, using more fibre, until the entire Allowable Annual Cut (AAC) was committed. But, the past few decades have also seen much expansion of public use of the forests, leading, in some instances, to the separation of the "working forest" landbase toward single-use preservation. This development, coupled with the impact of insect outbreaks and wildfires, has led to a dramatic drop in allowable cuts across the province (from 75 to 50 million cubic metres). It is commendable that the forest industry has made available

recently a greater volume of usable fibre to be economically harvested. With economic studies, more could be harvested in the future.

I have now been encouraged, because of my life-long involvement with this industry over the past 70 years, and as a Registered Professional Forester, to present my views on policies, or actions, that I think should be considered to return this important, profitable, and sometimes-maligned industry, to its position as a worldwide leader in forest management.

First, I must point out that BC's forests are extremely complicated to plan and manage, with numerous ecosystems, many tree species, complex weather systems and global warming – all coupled with the numerous public demands on the finite landbase.

During my professional life, I have been involved with many new forest policy advances, most of which were debated, and evolved, in the three Royal Commissions that I attended. However, no commission has been set up for about 50 years, and many problems have arisen during this time. I believe the top three topics that now require review in order for the forest

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Gerry Burch
BASc48.

A tribute to John Cuthbert, RPF

By Editor Dave Florence, with inputs by several FHABC Directors and BCFS colleagues

John Cuthbert, a former BCFS Chief Forester (1985-94), passed away February 19, 2020 in Summerland, BC, at age 81. A reading of his obituary and tribute wall ([Providence Funeral Homes](#)) shows the rich life John led both on and off the job, during his working years and after his retirement.

From his [obituary](#): “John was born to Robert and Zanda Cuthbert in his beloved Summerland, BC, where he formed many lifelong friendships. An avid outdoors fan, he studied forestry at UBC (BSF 1961) and became an RPF in 1966. His BC Forest Service career took him throughout BC, including Prince Rupert, Prince George, Nelson, and Victoria.”



John held volunteer appointments with the Canadian Institute of Forestry in the 1970s and served on the ABCFP council from 1978.

Appointment as Chief Forester

At age 46 he was named Chief Forester for BC, serving from 1985 until 1994. He was responsible for the Forestry Division of the Ministry of Forests & Lands, which was comprised of Resource Planning and Inventory Branch, Protection Branch, Recreation Management Branch, Research Branch, and Silviculture Branch.

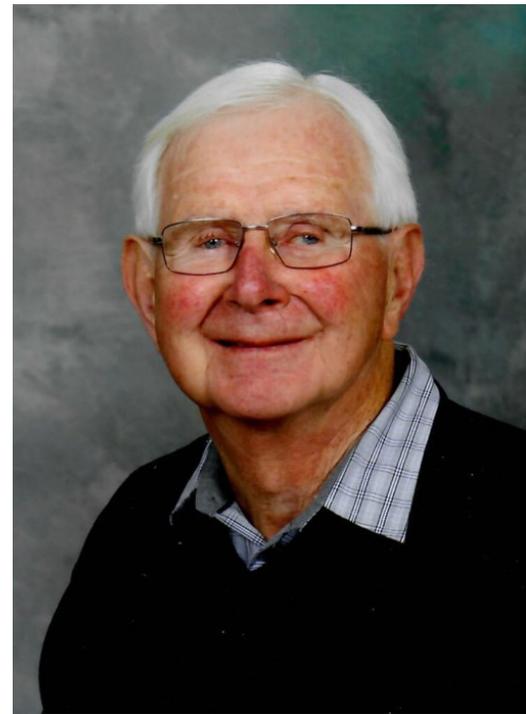
From a colleague: “John was well-respected during this tumultuous time in BC forest politics. He was a team player and always kept the team on track. He respected his fellow workers and worked well with senior staff and political ministers. He was good at getting out into the bush and visiting small communities.”

He was at the helm during a period of public controversy over forestry practices (e.g., the [Clayoquot protests](#)) and significant industry restructuring. He steered staff inputs to many policy changes and legislation such as the 1987 Forest Amendment Act; and in 1994 the BC Forest Renewal Act, the Forest Practices Code Act, the Forest Land Reserve Act, and the Forest Renewal Plan.

To see the type of hotseat that John dealt with during his tenure as Chief Forester, check out this 30 minute Westland series video from 1988 [found in UBC collections](#) when a panel questions him on topics such as clearcutting, the rate-of-cut, tree farm licences, reforestation and integrated use with other resource interests. Another previous Chief Forester and a founding director of FHABC, Bill Young, was also on the panel.

Post-Retirement Service

A perspective on his thoughts upon retiring from the Chief Forester position can be read in the Aug 1994 [BC Forest Service Newsletter](#). He was replaced by Larry Pedersen, also from Summerland, who also served in that post for about a decade.



John continued to share his forestry insights during his [appointment to the Forest Practices Board](#) from 1997 through 2001. The FPB “provides British Columbians with objective and independent assessments of the state of forest planning and practices in the province, compliance with the Code, and the achievement of its intent”.

From the tribute wall at ([Providence Funeral Homes](#)):

“A substantial and caring man. An excellent forester, making a significant contribution to the Province of BC.”



(Continued from page 1) President's Report

A reminder: don't forget to read David Brownstein's article reflecting on the possibility of having some valuable forest history lurking in your or a friend's home or business; or basement, attic, storage locker, horrible musty crawl space, or garage that might be important to fellow historians. You may well be harbouring a forest history treasure!

AGM 2020

Plans are proceeding on the development of our AGM to be held in Prince George on 18 - 21 September this year. In the world we now live in, this event is likely to be a virtual AGM and convention. More to come over the next month or so, directly to members from the organizing committee.

Stay healthy and stay safe!



Membership: New or lapsed member?

\$20.00 annually, or three years for \$50.00

To join, or renew Membership by email & e-transfer:

- 1 Print a membership form from the website, complete, scan and email it to us at info@fhabc.org
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Print a membership form from the website, complete, scan and mail, along with your cheque made payable to "Forest History Association of BC".

Printed Newsletters

We send Members by email both the 8.5"x11" version and the 11"x17" version of the current Newsletter, and invite those who want a printed version to make their own arrangements. Some prefer the 8.5"x11" version on a home printer; some prefer to take the tabloid 11"x17" version to Staples or other sources of tabloid printing and make it booklet-style. Some choose black and white, some print it in colour.

More Book and Media Reports

Prince George's [Central BC Railway and Forestry Museum](#) posted a Facebook link about a recent display they completed featuring a series of paintings of Beehive Burners in Central B.C. by Lou Englehart. Because the "live" walk-in display is unavailable due to the Covid-19 situation, they prepared a series of five [youtube.com videos](#) so that we can enjoy the exhibit virtually. Well done!

Don't throw that out! David Brownstein's [Facebook post](#) about the ongoing Canadian Forest History Preservation Project is described further on page 12. David also shared some interesting posts about [Arbour Day in Canada](#)

From [our Facebook page](#): [Harbour Publishing](#) has been such a good contributor to the recording of BC forest history over the years! From their spring catalog. [Slashburner \(Sep 2020\)](#) "Hot Times in the British Columbia Woods" by Nick Raeside *A lively, hair-raising memoir about working in the British Columbia logging industry back in the days when anything went.*



FHABC Newsletter team:

Editor: Dave Florence **Reviewers:** John Parminter, Mike Meagher, Terry Simmons, Eric Andersen, Richard Dominy, David Brownstein, David Morgan.

Submissions??: Yes, Please!
email us at newsletter.editor@fhabc.org

2019/20 FHABC officers:

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David Brownstein

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Eric Andersen
Sarah Giesbrecht
Claire Williams
Katherine Spencer
David Morgan
Dave Florence

Book and Media Reports



... selected from our [Facebook Group Page](#)

FHABC director Eric Andersen shared many posts:

- A photo of the [Old Curly](#) locomotive, the oldest surviving steam locomotive in British Columbia, used by the British Columbia Mills Timber and Trading Company, and now owned by the Burnaby Village Museum. (posted in the [BC and Yukon Facebook Group](#))
- A link to "The Forest for the Trees", the [IWA Archive](#), located at the [Kaatza Station Museum and Archives](#) in Lake Cowichan British Columbia, covering IWA records from the 1930s to 2004.
- A link to a posting in the [MacMillan Bloedel Past and Present Group](#) about the history of the [Haida Monarch](#) log carrier, part of the Kingcome Navigation fleet from the 1970s to 1990s, and now operating as a towed barge renamed the *Seaspan Survivor*.
- A link to "[The Man in the Tower: Forest Service Images in the BC Archives](#)" which was researched and presented by Dr. Kelly Black, President of the [Friends of the BC Archives](#), and provides an interesting set of photos and video links with thoughtful commentary.
- A post from the [Western Vancouver Island Industrial Heritage Society](#) with a perceptive short summary and 14 photos of the steam logging era in central Vancouver Island.
- There are many more of Eric's and other posts with insights into forest history to be found by scrolling down the [Facebook BC Forest History Group](#) page.

Director Sarah Giesbrecht, at [UNBC Northern BC Archives & Special Collections](#) posted a link to "[The Mark of Progress](#)", a 25 minute film presented by the British Columbia Forest Service in 1959 that shows forestry management techniques of the 1950s in Prince George, BC.

... **More Book and Media Reports to the left...**



(Continued from page 1)
 Dire State of the Industry

industry to reach its goal of maintaining, and improving, its status as BC's #1 industry are as follows:

- Working Forest Landbase
- Social Licence
- Tenures.

Working Forest Landbase

The forest landbase in BC is finite, occupying around 25% of all land. I maintain it should be identified and administered as such. Extraction for other uses must be considered by the government, but, if so, due consideration must be given equally to economic and social concerns, many

presented by the forest industry.

A possible solution is to establish a Forest Land Commission, similar to the Agricultural Land Commission, whereby all such applications requesting the release of forest land would be adjudicated by an appointed independent body. To classify areas for the Working Forest Landbase, a study would be necessary to determine which lands are best suited for long-term forest production.

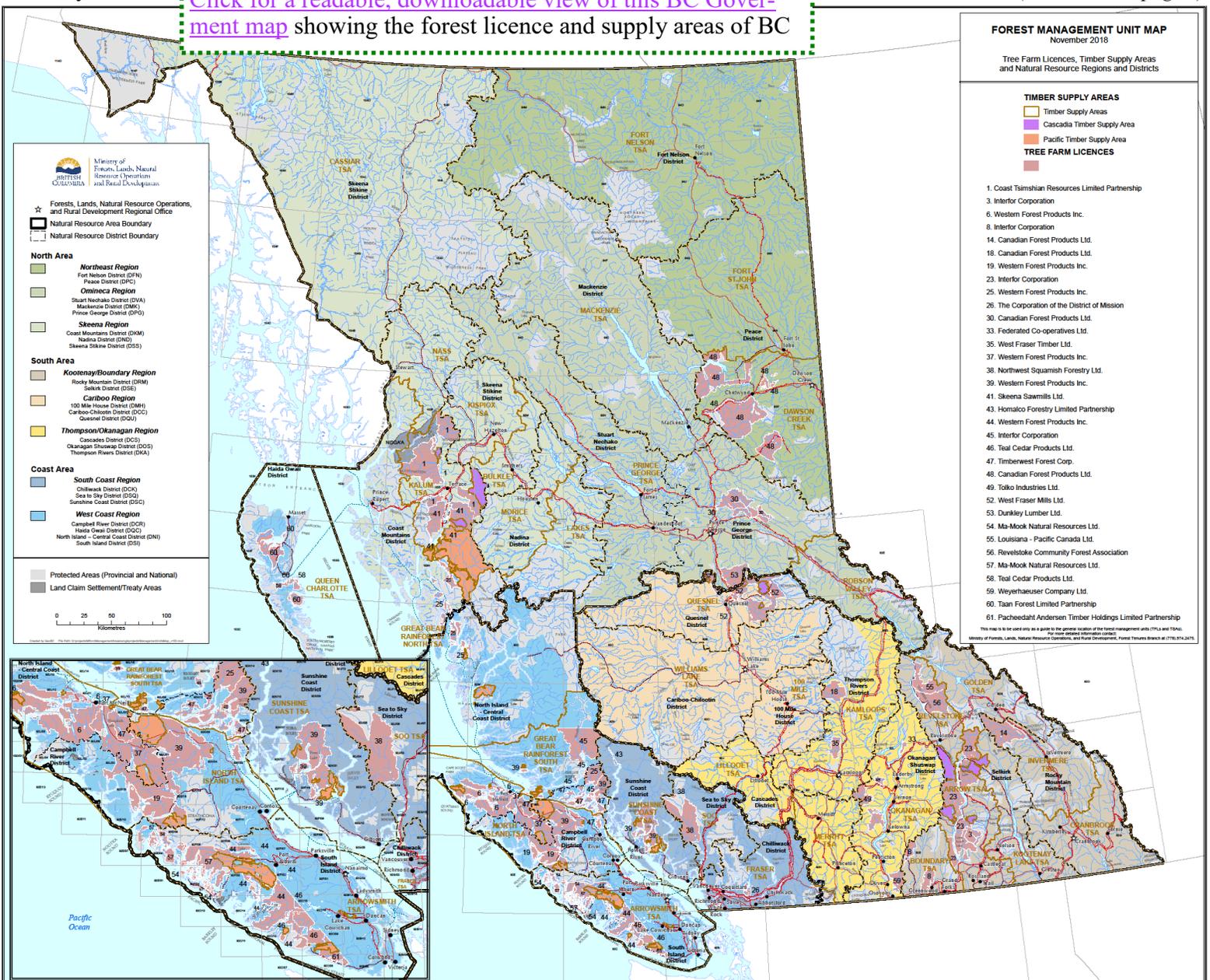
Social Licence

This is a very important topic that requires continual action. It is often called "The Need For Public Support," and is a requirement of all industries in order to accomplish their

objectives. The BC forest industry has been trying to obtain this support through public-engagement sessions, field trips, school projects, etc., but continual and greater effort is needed. Periodic surveys throughout the Province indicate that the public values Professional Foresters and their opinions more than other sources of information. But, I still perceive that this industry does not yet have the level of Social Licence necessary for the numerous activities planned, and conducted, by Professional Foresters employed by government and industry. It appears that a portion of the general public either lacks knowledge of the forest industry, and its importance to the province, or is not interested.

[Click for a readable, downloadable view of this BC Government map showing the forest licence and supply areas of BC](#)

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This situation indicates to me that greater effort and higher importance must be made to engage the public for support, not only by the forest companies but also by all contributors, such as unions, contractors, forestry schools, professional bodies, governments and our many customers.

Oftentimes in the past we have not acted in unison, which can be confusing to both the public and government officials. It occurs to me that strong leadership is needed on this issue.

Tenure

Because the government owns and controls 95% of the forest land in BC, tenure, in its many forms, is one of the most important topics. Past Royal Commissions concentrated upon tenure as it is paramount in the planning, research, progression and management of this industry in BC. The prime objective of an area-based tenure is to increase allowable cuts by applying the many forms of intensive forestry, in cooperation with the landowner (government), and its knowledge, support, and incentive financing.

The last three Royal Commissions (1943-1945, 1955-1957, and 1975-1976), the all-party Committee Report on Area-Based Tenures (2014), and even a former Chief Forester of the province (1946 -Reference 1), all supported the principle of area-based tenures over the common volume-based tenure system. These reports emphasize that the prime advantage of area-based tenures is better management, increasing allowable cuts and stumpage levels, better road and access maintenance, all of which lead to increased employment. It is commendable that some small area-based tenures have been established in

the last decade, such as Woodlot Licences, Community Forest Agreements and First Nations Woodland Licences. But, the prime recommendation leading to the creation of Tree Farm Licences from a combining of the volume-based quota holders in Sustained Yield Units has not been adopted, promoted, or accepted to date.

Summary

The recognition and action on the above three subject areas are very necessary to re-establish the BC forest industry's worldwide reputation. Because the government owns the forests of this Province and should be a partner and leader, in its promotion and development, it is paramount to examine the reasons for the lack of leadership and financing in order to increase allowable cuts on such tenures.

A reading of the recent All-Party report and its conclusion suggests many onerous requirements must be considered by a volume-based licensee before a Tree Farm Licence (TFL) would be granted (See Reference 2). All original TFL licensee contracts contained a financial incentive clause to promote silvicultural and operational advances to promote increases in the AAC. A perfect example is the advances made by professional foresters employed by government and industry in the research and development of a forest genetics program for all BC species, which has received worldwide recognition. The results indicated an increase in allowable cut, in some cases to 25%, for all areas planted with improved seedlings. These projects were financially shared by the government with TFL licensees, but this incentive clause was cancelled in the early 1980s and has not been re-established. Obviously, since then, few intensive forestry projects have

occurred on any BC public tenures.

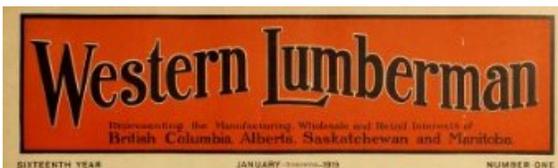
One of the many submissions made to the All-Party committee in 2014 resonated strongly with me and is worth repeating here: "Many of those non-industry groups appearing before the Committee, and supporting conversion of tenures, thought that the government should not make the conversion process so onerous that it results in no companies coming forward and expressing interest in the process. There is clearly a balance to be struck between the benefits the government will be seeking from proponents, the process that will be used to implement any conversions, and the potential benefits to a licensee (or group of licensees) that conversion from volume to area-based would provide."

So, I submit that the obvious outcome of the establishment of new area-based TFLs in BC will probably never be accepted by industry if the conditions listed above in the report are rigidly applied. And, the obvious result will be a slow decline in the provincial allowable cut!

Gerry Burch, RPF (Ret)

Reference 1 - Excerpt from a separate book prepared after the hearings of the Royal Commission on Forestry 1943 - 1945- by Chief Justice Gordon Sloan. The responses of the then Chief Forester, BC Forest Service, Dr. C.D. Orchard, stated in the following sections: lines 15573-1; 15675-15; 15576-27; 15577-10-11 and 15579-28.

Reference 2 - Summary of recommendations on the report on Area-Based Forest Tenures by the All-Party committee of the BC legislature - 2014- (pages 28-37 and 41-42.)



Research tip: <https://archive.org/> is a good place for exploring Forest History. Eric Andersen recently checked out "influenza" in the [1918/1919 Western Lumberman](#) issues and found many interesting items we hope to have room for in a future issue. So .. for now... it's a homework assignment for our readers. Enjoy!

palaces in comparison to the condition of these camps. A doctor never visits any of the camps unless he is compelled to, and when he does visit them all that he does is leave a little medicine and probably disinfect the camp. No sanitary inspectors nor policemen ever visit the camps in order to enforce the sanitary laws. During the plague of Spanish influenza men were dying in the camps by the score without seeing a doctor or getting any medicine, and the camps are still without medicine. During the plague people were being prosecuted in towns and cities for not wearing masks and neglecting to observe the regulations of health; but the men in the camps neither received care nor protection, although the companies collected the usual \$1.50 per month for hospital and medical attention and the poll tax of every

Rambling In The Wood Industry

By **Bob Hyslop RPF (Ret)** This piece was written circa 2014 as part of the "International BC Foresters" series initiated by George Nagle which was introduced in Issue #103. More of this series will appear in future issues; we have pieces by Conrad Smith, Doug Rickson and another by George Nagle. More are welcome to newsletter.editor@fhabc.org

GHANA

My first morning in Takoradi, I woke with the first rays of sunlight streaming through a dusty window and disintegrating curtains. Perched on the balcony railing, staring me straight in the eye was a huge vulture. He looked as hungry as I felt.



My counterpart in the district was a man with a Master's degree in forestry and economics, had a wife and four children. More properly, he had a wife with three children and a second wife with one child. They had eaten very little lately. He invited me to his home for coffee and made no bones about that being the only thing offered as it was all they had. I had brought a cache of candy bars packed by my wife, and the eyes of the children when they saw the bars was ample reward.

Towards the end of my stay in Takoradi, my counterpart insisted that I should buy a Ghanaian dress for my wife. These are most unique in that, in addition to terribly intricate sewing patterns on the bodice of the tie-dyed cloth, they have streamer



connections from the wrists to the hem of the skirt. This is for raising the hem as high as necessary when crossing through mud, water, or elephant droppings.

I normally avoid buying my wife dresses because I do not really know how to describe her size (small and cute wasn't adequate). Nevertheless, he dragged me off to a small dress-maker's shop in a small village. The workmanship was astounding. When I had picked the colour and pattern that I thought was appropriate, he took me back onto the street and got me to point out a lady of the same size and dimensions as my wife.

When at last I spotted a very nice young lady, he called her into the shop. She promptly doffed her dress - she was wearing nothing else - and tried on dresses until we got the right size. She would take nothing for her trouble, saying it was her pleasure. Mine too. The dress fit beautifully on my wife.

On my return to Accra, the food shortage had not abated. The house boy, who was famished, had been unable to find anything with the local currency that he was allotted for food - so I gave him twenty U.S. dollars in small bills and sent him off to the black market. He returned in a few hours with beer, tinned bacon, tinned beans and a loaf of bread. We sat on the floor together and had a feast.

My hosts took me by jeep to see the Akosombo dam and power station on the Volta river. This huge project was constructed to provide fisheries (lake Volta), irrigation, and hydropower. Its enormous spillways spew water and fish into a huge pool which has more crocodiles in it than I have ever seen in my life. These monsters don't even have to work for their food. Simply open their mouths and swallow.



After several hours of the heat and dust of elephant country - the savanna land characterized by baobab trees and termite hills - we reached the lake behind the dam. I was parched and dusty. The water looked so blue and refreshing that I bailed out of the jeep and into the water while my hosts remained onshore. After a few minutes I looked up to see, along the shoreline, one of the most splendid power launches I have ever seen. I called to my hosts to ask what it was.

A research vessel. What kind of research? River blindness research. Then it struck me. I was in the most infested waters in all of Africa for river blindness. River blindness, caused by the larval form or microcercaria of schistosomes, is one of the nastiest diseases of this region. The victims contract it by wading in infected water while planting millet. There the nasty little bugs enter the skin - in much the same way that the swimmer's itch organism attacks people in the temperate zones - and wander their way to the optic nerve which they, and thousands of their relatives, destroy. In this way whole villages up and down the Volta have been left with no adults that have not lost their vision. Children must lead lines of adults joined by sticks ("walking sticks") to the fields to grow millet. Too soon, the children join the lines with their parents.

All of this flashed through my mind in

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an instant. I think I reached shore without touching the water again and rapidly brushed myself dry. I understand that it takes several thousand penetrations to result in blindness. I hope so. In the meantime, I'll wear glasses.



CONGO

Brazzaville, capital of the Peoples Popular Republic of Congo, or Congo as it is known, lies directly across the river from Kinshasa, Zaire (*DRC*). Officially, there is a state of hostility, or at best animosity, between the two states, based on historical tribal differences but primarily on current political philosophies. Officially, there is no trade or commerce across the river, but ferries do travel back and forth daily. Even the river is called by a different name - fleuve Congo.

Congo has been a communist state for some years, and this has had the same sad effect on its economy from this philosophy as other East-bloc aligned countries. Private investment has been discouraged, although the policy says "oui" to joint ventures in which the foreigner puts up all the money, know-how and marketing for a maximum of forty-nine percent ownership and the government of Congo gets a minimum of fifty-one percent. Plus control. No guarantees.

East bloc "aid", in the form of training, education and economic assistance has now disappeared. It wasn't that good in the first place. The education and training was primarily political, while the economic aid was in military hardware. Any goods purchased or bartered from Congo were for roubles or other non-convertible east-bloc currencies. Many of the old soviet style regulations, formalities and controls were put in place at the

arrival and departure ports, as well as in hotels and other temporary habitations. Even to obtain a visa to visit became a major undertaking in both time and expense.

In spite of substantial resources in agriculture, forestry, minerals and oil, the economy has been in a shambles for some time. Tourism has fallen off completely and services are most hard come by.

In former days, Congo had her moments of glory. Being one of the most sparsely populated countries in Africa, there was ample opportunity for subsistence agriculture and hunting which ensured that hunger was not common. At one point during the Second World War, Brazzaville was the headquarters for the French Foreign Legion. Brazzaville's proximity to the Malebar Pool on the Congo and the cataracts below made a tourist delight, as did the fabulous beaches at Pointe Noire on the Gulf of Guinea.

Today, hotels are hard come by and in poor condition. On one visit I was quartered in an old motel type unit to the west of town that had been con-



verted into an army barracks. My room was on the riverfront only a couple of meters above high water. At night, huge Nile crocodiles and giant bullfrogs made a stroll in the moonlight a real challenge. In the daylight, I could watch all the debris of the upper river system as it coursed over the cataract. Wrecked canoes (goodness only knows what had happened to their owners), enormous logs, and the bloated carcasses of elephants and

hippos surged on by.

My room, or at least the bathroom, was a bit of a wonder. It was some six meters square and was equipped with a sink on one wall (at an angle), a toilet on the opposite wall (at a different angle), a rusty shower pipe sticking out of the third wall and smack dab in the centre of the room, a magnificent bidet.

This arrangement was not convenient, at least not to me. I was wont, in those days to, while in the pangs of dysentery, sit on one fixture while using the other as a vomitorium. The distance between the two was too great for accuracy. On another occasion, a kind-hearted World Bank employee offered to let me share his room in a hotel. The arrangement was okay as there were two beds and ample workspace for both of us. The hotel didn't mind, but charged us both the full rate for a single room as we were not married - at least not to each other.

Log extraction and processing were the main industries. Huge virgin tropical rainforests covered most of the interior of the country. Logs of up to three meters in diameter were felled in the upper drainage of the Ubangi and Sangha river systems. These logs were then either rafted or barged, with the help of pusher tugs, to Brazzaville where they were crane lifted from the river. Some logs were then processed locally to sawn wood and plywood, but the bulk was loaded on to railway flat cars for shipment by rail past the cataracts and gorges of the Congo to Pointe Noire, where they could then either be processed or transhipped to Europe for conversion. Landlocked Central African Republic (CAR) also relied heavily on this transport to reach export markets.

At one point, there was a proposal to replace these rather slow and unreliable pusher barges with a high-tech system employing the use of "turbo hydro-glisseurs". These hydro-foils, based on the Russian-designed high-

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speed hydro-foils used for passenger transport on the rivers of Russia during summer months, was proposed by a French company with communist party backing. The proposal was heartily endorsed and studied by the bureaucracy in Congo.

The turbo barges were to roar up and down the river system at a speed approaching the speed of light, carrying hundreds of tonnes of logs, cargo and passengers. Their speed would reduce the barge transport time from the existing two months average, would eliminate the loss of logs from sinkage and would cost slightly less than a tribal chief's ransom in a country that could ill afford an enormously expensive experiment as the system was not in use in any country at the time.

All this sounded, in spite of the technological risks, as being reasonable. That is, until one took even a brief glance at the river system itself.

The river system from CAR to Brazzaville was the only route for travel between villages. It was in constant use by transport canoes (mostly dug-outs) and fishermen's boats. It had huge numbers of hippopotami - both pygmy and standard size. It had vast numbers of crocodiles—both giant and small. It was constantly full of floating logs, trees that had washed from the river banks. The bloated carcasses of poached elephants, hippos, crocs and rhinos also drifted by. In short, any high-speed vessel would be in constant danger of ramming any of these at great risk to life and limb of all parties, not to mention the potential of damaged animal life and the vessel itself. And all of this in a country that had great difficulty in maintaining the simple diesel engines of the pusher barges. Reality eventually took charge, and the hydrofoil service ended.

Getting out of Congo can be even more trying than getting in. You are required to have an exit visa - this can only be obtained on the

day of your scheduled departure and is only good for one day. To get it, you must submit your passport and application, along with the appropriate (exorbitant) fee at a small office at the city hall. On the day of your departure you return to the office with plenty of time before flight time, along with all your fellow passengers. The passports (a whole planeload sometimes) are stored in a cardboard box, which is unceremoniously dumped on a table. The passengers then paw through the heap of documents until they find their passport, or at least a close facsimile thereof.

On one trip out, our plane was scheduled for a nine P.M. departure. It was late and was re-scheduled for twelve-thirty in the morning. Aha! The exit visas were invalid and we could not be allowed out of the country. The airline (Air France) went to work and arranged for the visa office to be reopened, and for a bus to transport some forty passengers to the office to pay for (now at double charge) and obtain new visas. After the mad scramble was over and we were finally boarded and airborne, I looked at my passport. No new visa had been issued, but the original had been smeared.

On another voyage, when I went to leave, I found that my confirmed reservation was invalid (a very important person had taken it). Once again, Air France came to my rescue. They found a charter aircraft and pilot who would fly me across the river to the airport in Kinshasa - "in transit" - and made a reservation with Sabena to get

me to Brussels. A young German businesswoman was in the same fix. She asked to share the charter plane with me to get out and I was happy to agree.

The flight across the river was a treat, especially after the treatment. We had a bit of time to spare and the pilot took us for an overfly of the cataract, part of the gorge, then upriver to the sand islands where thousands of crocodiles and a goodly number of pygmy hippopotami were sunning themselves. It was a spectacular bonus tour.

At our final departure from Kinshasa we had to go through all the formalities, including a check to make certain that none of Congo's inconvertible currency was taken out of the country. In spite of previous warnings from me and the airline staff, the young woman was carrying some eighteen thousand francs C.F.A. of Congo money (worth about fifty dollars U.S. at the time) in her handbag. When the body search (which the officers really enjoyed) turned up the money, things got a bit sticky, especially since the officers thought that the lady was mine. I finally suggested to her that she should simply give them the money. That was really all they wanted and, as soon as the wad was turned over to them, they let us go.

Some of the true adventures of travel in the third world occur while trying to make a gracious exit.



Darkness at Noon - The Bloedel Fire of 1938

By John Parminter, FHABC co-founding member; and Editor of the Newsletter for 27 years.

Bio in [Issue 104](#)) This article is an extract of the full article that was originally published on the BC Forest Service Research Branch website in 1994. [Readers may access the full 42 page document here.](#)

Prelude

During the hot, dry, and hazy June of 1938, forest fires burned throughout western North America - from California to Alaska and far inland. East of the Rockies the situation was similar. By June 21, dense forest fire smoke lead to the cancellation of most flying in Alberta and Saskatchewan. Fires were burning around Grande Prairie, Lesser Slave Lake, and in the foothills northwest of Calgary. A few days later, cool weather and rain brought relief to northern Alberta. In British Columbia forest fires were widespread from the Peace River to the Cariboo. Dense smoke hampered operation of the Forest Branch's lookout system and by the third week of the month had grounded all aircraft in the Peace River, Omineca, and Cariboo areas. On June 23 two United Air Transport planes bound from Vancouver to Prince George made forced

landings at Williams Lake and Soda Creek because of poor visibility. The major fire suppression operations soon shifted to central Vancouver Island. Fires were burning near Bowser, Great Central Lake, Campbell River, Quinsam, and Mohun Lake. In Victoria only 0.02 inches of rain fell, or 0.83 inches below normal. It was the driest June since weather records were first collected in 1874.

The scene was set. One of the most famous forest fire in British Columbia's history was about to spring to life. Ignited in early July, during the next three weeks it burned over 74,495 acres.

What follows is a diary of that fire, reconstructed from various newspapers, magazines, and fire fighter's reports. It is written from the point of view of a correspondent filing a report

at the end of each day, describing the action.

Tuesday July 5 - Day 1

A Bloedel, Stewart & Welch logging company fire patrol discovered a fire this afternoon along Track 21C in Block B of Lot 145. Although the last locomotive left at 12:30 PM, the area was under patrol because of the fire danger. At 4:20 PM Jock McLeod and David Crawley noticed a curl of dark smoke. It was coming from a pile of this seasons' cold-decked logs about 300 feet away from the track.

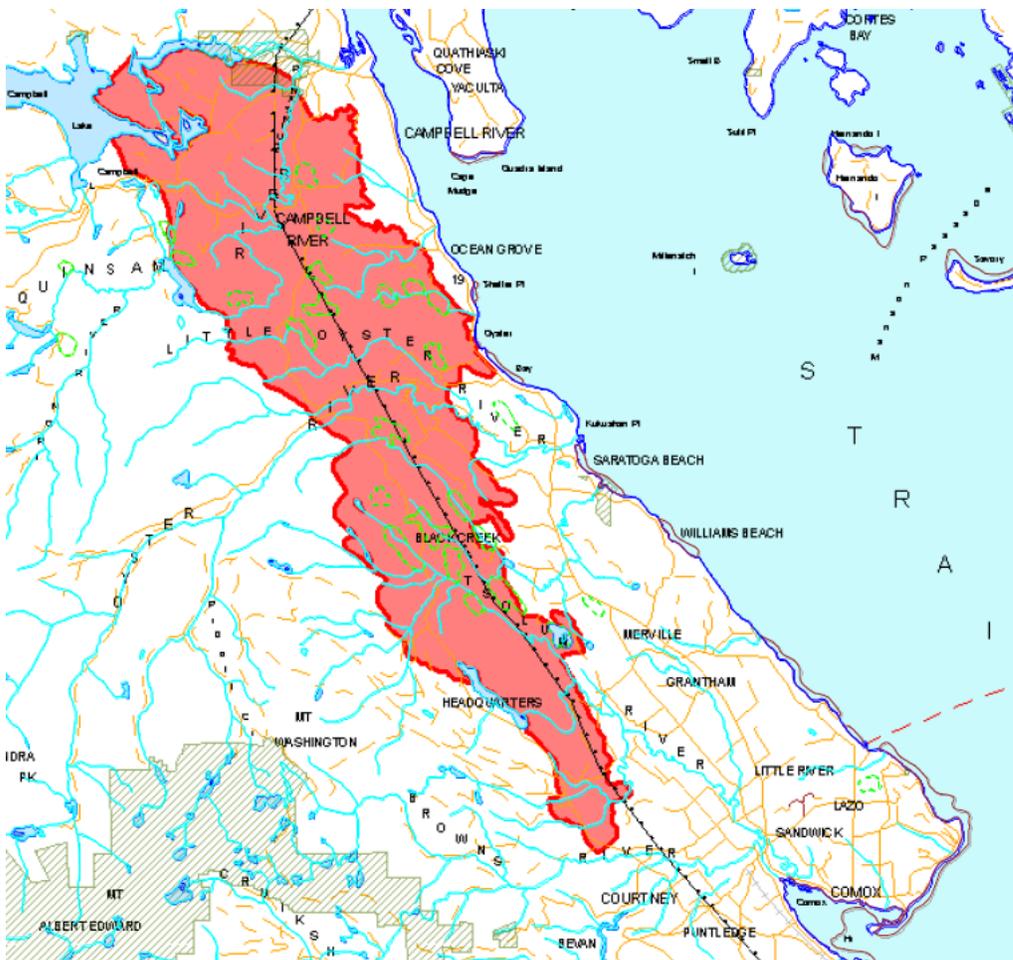
As Crawley described it: "We were between Boot Lake and Gosling Lake. There was a telephone two miles away and I started to run for it, through the slash. On the way I met Frank Coy, a warden, and warned him. Together we gave a general warning."

They relayed a report to the Bloedel, Stewart & Welch camp at Menzies Bay, on Mohun Lake. Soon 185 men left for the scene. The fire lookouts at Elk Falls and Upper Campbell alerted the Forest Branch office at Campbell River at 4:15 PM.

Fire fighting began at 6:00 PM, by this time the fire was 5 acres in size. In spite of a lack of wind, the flames soon got out of control due to the extremely dry conditions. Ranger Langstroth of the Forest Branch's Campbell River office arrived on the scene at 8:00 PM with a fire pump and operator. They were put into action near Boot Lake and a cat called for. Later the wind came up out of the northwest, causing the fire to jump half-mile-wide Gosling Lake. At midnight the fire was working its way up the east side of the lake.

[Days 2-10 in the main article](#)

(Continued on page 10)



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Friday July 15 - Day 11

With a steady morning wind at its back, the fire ran southeast towards the Campbell River and McIvor Lake. It also went strong on the Forbes Peninsula. More than 400 men from Bloedel, Stewart & Welch and all available equipment are battling the blaze. Another 100 men are employed by the Forest Branch. Charlie Haddon said "anything can happen unless rain falls shortly," as the woods are as dry as powder. The fire menace is the worst that Haddon has seen in a number of years.

Reports were that burning pieces of moss and bark carried aloft on the winds started new spot fires up to 1 1/4 miles from the blaze at Forbes Landing. One such fire was in slash to the southeast on Brown's limits. Men and equipment rushed to this new rapidly-spreading outbreak.

Fire jumped the river downstream from Forbes Landing just before noon, then spread to both ends of Campbell Lake, into the limits of the Elk River Timber Company. It also spotted into slash along the bluff above Forbes Landing, out of reach of the pump crews. The fire spread quickly, and by midnight reached to within 200 yards of the settlement. The owners and guests of the Forbes Landing Hotel were evacuated to Campbell River once again. This was in spite of the desire of many guests to remain and watch the advancing fire.

Chief Forester Ernest Manning described the general situation in the Vancouver Island forests as "very seriously disturbing." He advised people to stay out of the woods entirely to minimize the chance of fire. Restrictions have been in force for two weeks near Campbell River and Oyster River, with permits required to

enter the woods. District Forester Charlie Haddon suspended this system today. The region from Oyster River to Menzies Bay is now closed to all but persons actually engaged in



fire fighting.

The S.S. *Princess Elaine* arrived in Nanaimo this afternoon with a contingent of 60 fire fighters. They were dispatched to Campbell River by bus, along with their fire fighting equipment. This evening the northwest wind quickened, sending the flames into a fury. Officials recruited nearly all available local men to help in the fight. Others are coming from Courtenay.

C.C. Ternan returned to the scene after a week's absence on other duties. He went to Forbes Landing to assist with fire fighting. Campbell River Ranger District Supervisor Bert Conway asked Charlie Haddon for a plane to carry out aerial reconnaissance and an additional 200 men from Vancouver.

In response, a message was broadcast at 8:30 PM over several Vancouver radio stations. J.H. McVety, Superintendent of the Employment Service of Canada, described the situation.

More men were urgently needed on the firelines. The reaction was immediate, with 150 men answering the call within 15 minutes. About 300 men stepped forward from the ranks of the unemployed to take on fire fighting duties at 25 cents per hour. In all, 212 men were hired and rushed from Vancouver to Nanaimo on the midnight sailing of the S.S. *Princess Norah*.

Late at night the fire spotted into the Brown Logging Company slash and took hold. A Young Men's Forestry Training Plan crew from Oyster River worked on the fire under the direction of their foreman, Freeman King.

[Days 11- 35 in the main article](#)

Tuesday August 9 - Day 36

As conditions improve, fire crews are being reduced in size. The Camp Three - Oyster River and Tsolum River - Wolf Lake trails are being worked. Unburned young stands within the fire perimeter are being fireguarded and patrolled as a precaution.

The ban on logging operations on southern Vancouver Island and the mainland was lifted this morning. The fire hazard, however, remains in a serious state.

The Minister of Lands appealed to logging operators:

"...both large and small to do as little work in the woods as possible, and to take every precaution against fire, and I urge operators to work on the early morning shift, closing down operations by noon."

The hardship imposed on the industry in part influenced the decision to lift the ban. Yet, should the hazard increase again, or logging operators and the public become careless, the closure might be reapplied. A few areas are still limited to travel under permit. Burning permits and campfires remain cancelled.

[Days 37-43 in the main article](#)

Wednesday August 17 - Day 44

Heavy rain fell during the night, extinguishing the last smouldering spots within the Bloedel fire. It has been declared out, after 43 tense days of unending effort by fire fighters. Most equipment has been removed from

(Continued on page 11)

(Continued from page 10) John Parminter's
Bloedel Fire piece

the woods and the regular Forest Branch patrol crews remain on duty.

Ranger Langstroth noted that this fire was the opposite of most, at least at the start. On most days the wind was strongest at night rather than during the day. This meant that backfiring was done in the morning or afternoon. Most of the effort in holding the firelines took place at night.

The slashburning legislation

On December 10th of 1937, the British Columbia legislature gave assent to an amendment to the *Forest Act*. The new section dealt with the disposal of slash in the Vancouver Forest District. Persons carrying on operations were now bound to "...at least once within each calendar year, or as instructed by any officer authorized by the Minister, dispose of the slash and dead standing trees by burning or falling, as the case may be, to the satisfaction of the Chief Forester...."

This amendment was necessary as logging operations in the Vancouver Forest District were annually creating 40,000 acres of cut-over land. Existing legislation was inadequate to deal

with the resultant fire hazard. All too often areas of logging slash were the scene of forest fires which ran wild over the landscape.

The new legislation took effect on January 1, 1938, with the intent to reduce the fire hazard on cut-over lands. The new legislation preceded the Bloedel Fire, it was not passed because of it. However, it was still too little, too late for the land between Campbell River and Courtenay.

The "Sayward Fire"

The Bloedel Fire and the Sayward Fire are not at all synonymous. The latter was at Sayward in 1922. Even it was not within the gazetted Sayward Provincial Forest Reserve. Only about 15% of the Bloedel Fire actually burned within the Sayward Provincial Forest Reserve. The remainder of the fire was south of the 50th parallel, in private land of the Esquimalt and Nanaimo Railway Company Land Grant.

Statistics on the Bloedel Fire of 1938

74,495 acres burned over, consisting of:

- 15,690 acres of merchantable timber
- 8,300 acres of immature timber
- 6,740 acres of land logged between 1917 and 1938 which had not been slash burned but was not restocked
- 30,000 acres of logged and burned
- 20 acres of recent burn
- 8,605 acres of non-commercial cover
- 80 acres of grazing and pasture land
- 5,060 acres of non-productive sites
- 60 million board feet of felled and bucked timber belonging to seven companies lost
- 14 million board feet of cold-decked timber belonging to three companies lost
- \$74,950 worth of logging equipment belonging to five companies destroyed
- \$10,000 worth of damage done at

Forbes
Landing

- 20 road and logging railway bridges burned out

Fire suppression costs were as follows:

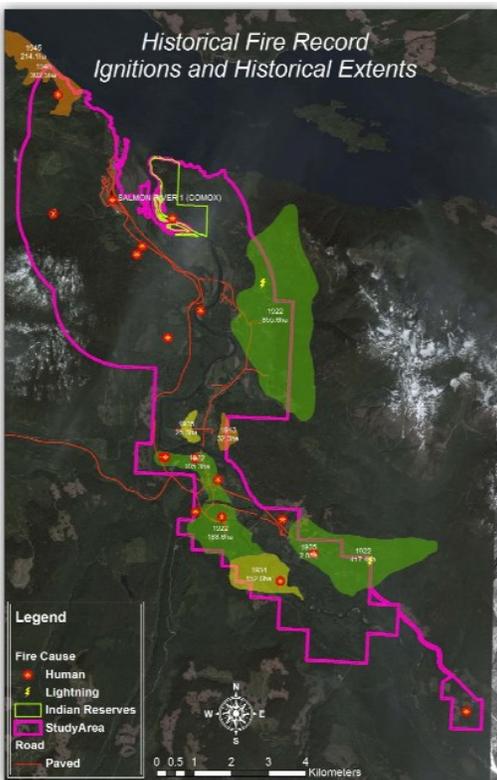
- Forest Branch - \$108,003
- Comox Logging - \$14,723
- Elk River Timber - \$22,789
- Bloedel, Stewart & Welch \$66,213

The total net stumpage loss from killed merchantable and immature timber was estimated to be \$429,160, although 80% of the timber was thought to be salvable

The amount of merchantable timber affected was estimated to be 459.6 million board feet. Damage to all other cover types totalled \$86,696

The following equipment was used in the battle:

- 14 cats from 18 to 23 tons
- five logging locomotives with high pressure tank cars
- 30 fire pumps, some of which were obtained from as far away as Seattle, Portland, and San Francisco. The pumps ran for a total of about 2500 hours, and fuel consumption was estimated at 1366 gallons
- 75 one-man backpack fire pumps
- 30 large trucks
- about 100 automobiles
- a dozen radio sets
- three railway trains
- three naval warships
- 300 miles of fireguard were built
- a maximum of 2,500 men fought the fire at any one time
- the clean-up crew at the Oyster River cleaned 75,000 feet of fire hose





Don't throw that out!

David Brownstein updated our [website Projects page](#) to remind us of the ongoing “Canadian Forest History Preservation Project” which has been underway since 2011. This ongoing effort is shared by the full Canadian forest history community which includes FHABC, other provincial forest history organizations, the federal and provincial government forest services, the US Forest History Society (FHS), and the Network



This photo shows a major archival donation by WFP as it looked in Campbell River in 2016. [Story in Issue 98](#). It can now be found in [UBC Archives RBSC-ARC-1754](#)

in Canadian History and Environment (NiCHE). The main message of the [brochure](#) initiated by David Brownstein is still current today. Copies are handed out at our outreach activities such as the TLA convention and ABCPF conference.

In his related [Facebook post](#) reminding us of the importance of preserving historical forestry

records, David wrote: “Do you see some valuable forest-history-related material in danger of being lost or destroyed? The FHABC is here to help find a loving home for old photographs, maps, letters, reports or the like. Let us know what you may have found, or are considering discarding, and we will put you in touch with the right museum, library or archive. There, it can be preserved, and used by future researchers to create the histories that we all enjoy.”

The brochure contains a good description of the mission shared by all our partner forest history organizations: “Our shared goal is to safeguard Canada’s forest history by identifying at-risk collections and facilitating their placement in official Canadian repositories. While protecting and providing access to historic records has always been a central concern of our groups, our current efforts respond to the real and present threat of losing valuable records due to consolidation in the forest industry and an aging population. We invite all who are interested in forest history to join us in locating documents and collections that need to be preserved and working with appropriate locations in which to house them.”



Upcoming Events

Corona-rules! We know organizers will take into account the regulations and restrictions administered by all levels of government, and most importantly, the health, safety and well being of everyone before proceeding with any of the events listed below.

All summer: We’re not aware of any logging sports events that are not cancelled for 2020.

June 5-7 ~~cancelled~~
[British Columbia Historical Federation Conference](#) in Surrey, BC
“Back to the Future: Celebrating Heritage in the 21st century”

Sep 14 [#2020 CIF National Conference & 112th AGM](#) Sault Ste Marie, Ontario

Sep 18-21 [FHABC AGM Weekend](#)
 Prince George BC (or a virtual AGM)

Sep 20-26 [BC's National Forest Week](#)

Some Forestry-related cancellations shared from [Treefrog News](#)



Next Issue: Sept 2020

- More of the Burch and International series
- Recollections from 1954/55 by a young UBC forestry student
- a book report?—submissions encouraged
- Your Story? Contact us at newsletter.editor@fhabc.org
- Website: fhabc.org

