

# British Columbia



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## RECOLLECTIONS OF A FOREST RANGER ON THE COAST 50 YEARS AGO

By Ross Douglas

In the winter of 1936 I had come in from a summer survey party, and was working in the Forest Service office in Victoria, when it was decided to send a graduate forester out as a forest ranger on the coast, and 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 my 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 tiny settlements at Port Harvey, Jackson Bay, and Kelsey Bay. 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 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 bath-house 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 Licences 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 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 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 ranger 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 the Vancouver office and didn't always work, but there were no telephones or two-way radios in the district. To speak to a logging 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 Service 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 logging operators were working very hard for very little 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 \$.75 per thousand.

The base labour rate was \$.35 or \$.40 per hour. Logging was more labour-intensive then, with no power saws or mobile spars, to name two modern machines. 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. They preferred this life, hard as it was, to the problem of severe unemployment in Vancouver.

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 \$.50 per thousand instead of \$.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 and would soon 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.

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#### FOREST HISTORY ASSOCIATION OF B.C. ACTIVITIES AND OTHER NEWS

About 35 members and guests attended the Annual General Meeting of the Forest History Association of B.C. at Green Timbers in Surrey on June 11, 1988. Following the formalities a lunch was served, then films provided by the British Columbia Forestry Association were shown. A trip to view the first plantation in B.C. was followed by a tour of the arboretum, lead by Phil Haddock. The weather cooperated and the day was enjoyed by all.

The current slate of officers is as follows:

President:	W. Young
Past President:	W. Backman
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Director (Mainland Coast):	D. McMullen
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DAVID DOUGLAS - THE LAST LETTER

On July 12, 1834, David Douglas, the great botanist of western North America, was found dead in a pit dug to trap wild cattle on the slopes of Mauna Kea on the island of Hawaii. One of Douglas' last letters, written on May 6, 1834, was to his mentor Dr. William Hooker. In that letter, he describes his ill-fated journey of 1833 into what is now British Columbia:

Woahoo, Sandwich Islands

"...You will probably enquire why I did not address you by the despatch of the ship to Europe last year. I reached the sea-coast greatly broken down, having suffered no ordinary toil, and, on my arrival, was soon prostrated by fever. My last letter to you was written from the interior of the Columbia, and bore date about the middle of April, 1833 (last year), just before starting on my northern journey. Therein I mentioned my intention of writing a few lines to you daily, which I did, up to the 13th of June, a most disastrous day for me, on which I lost, what I may call, may all! On that morning, at the Stony Islands of Fraser's River (the Columbia of McKenzie -- see the map in his 4to. edition), my canoe was dashed to atoms, when I lost every article in my possession, saving an astronomical journal, book of rough notes, charts, and barometrical observations, with my instruments. My botanical notes are gone, and what gives me most concern, my journal of occurrences also, so this is what can never be replaced, even by myself. All the articles needful for pursuing my journal were destroyed, so that my voyage for this season was frustrated. I cannot detail to you the labour and anxiety this occasioned me, both in body and mind, to say nothing of the hardships and sufferings I endured. Still, I reflect, with pleasure, that no lives were sacrificed. I passed over the cataract and gained the shore in a whirlpool below, not however by swimming, for I was rendered helpless, and the waves washed me on the rocks. The collection of plants consisted of about four hundred species -- two hundred and fifty of these were mosses, and a few of them new. This disastrous occurrence has much broken my strength and spirits. The country over which I passed was all mountainous, but most so towards the Western Ocean: -- still it will, ere long, be inhabited..."

The rapids where Douglas' mishap occurred are known today as the Fort George Canyon, a few miles south of Prince George.

Submitted by W. Young

NOTICE OF MEETING

The 1988 Annual Meeting of the David Douglas Society of Western North America will be held in Seattle during the annual meeting of the Western Forestry and Conservation Association (December 5 - 7, 1988). For further details contact W. Young, 6401 Conconi Place, Victoria, B.C. V8Z 5Z7. Phone 652-3002.

REFORESTATION - THE FIRST DAY: A SEQUEL  
By W. (Bill) Young

In the May 1988 newsletter (No. 16), I wrote about the involvement of people on the first day of British Columbia's first reforestation project - March 15, 1930. Since writing that article, I have unearthed additional information to supplement the earlier story on who was involved in planting the commemorative grove.

Trees # 36 and 56: planted by Mr. F.J. MacKenzie. He was the former MLA for Delta and had been active in the unsuccessful battle to preserve the original Green Timbers forest from logging.

Trees # 10, 40, 62, 84, and 106: planted by Mr. E. Walmsley, the Crown Timber Agent at New Westminster at the time.

Tree # 27: planted by Mr. E. Walmsley for Mr. W.W. Cory. Mr. Cory was Deputy Minister of the Dominion Department of the Interior. FHABC member Gerry Andrews reports that his father and W.W. Cory were friends, as they grew up together in Gladstone, Manitoba.

Finally, I have found that the very first tree planted in this historic grove on March 15, 1930 was planted by Mr. J.W. Berry, Conservative MLA representing the Delta electoral district.

This additional information reduces our search for background on those involved to the following: Mr. T.G. Martin, Mr. E. Adams, Mrs. A.J. Christmas, Mr. G.T. Browne, Mr. J.W. Martin, and Mr. Roy A. Gibson. Can anyone help out with these?

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This newsletter is the official organ of the Forest History Association of British Columbia and is distributed quarterly at no charge to members of the Association, libraries, and to certain institutions. Items on forest history topics, descriptions of current projects, requests for information, book reviews, letters, comments, and suggestions are welcome. Please address all correspondence including changes of address to the Editor: John Parminter, c/o Protection Branch, Ministry of Forests and Lands, 1450 Government Street, Victoria, B.C. V8W 3E7.

**Membership** in the Association is \$5.00 yearly. Should you wish to join or obtain further information please write to the Treasurer: Edo Nyland, 8793 Forest Park Drive, Sidney, B.C. V8L 4E8. The President, Bill Young, can be reached at 6401 Conconi Place, Victoria, B.C. V8Z 5Z7.