

ForeTalk

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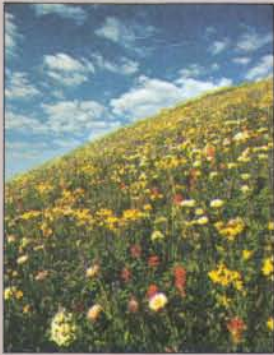


ForeSTalk

Volume 7 Number 1 SPRING 1983

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Cover: Kimberley freelance photographer Pat Morrow did a lot of recreational mountain climbing in the Kootenays before he became the second Canadian to scale Mt. Everest, which is how he came to be on Idaho peak in the Selkirks one sunny day when the wildflowers were in full bloom.

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Many B.C. communities could not exist without the forest industry, and over the past year these forestry-based communities have faced tough economic times because of declining world markets for lumber and pulp. But there's been a change in the wind. Last year the talk in the industry was about sawmills or pulp mills on the verge of closing; this year the rumours are about the mills opening again. And as we emerge from this recession, we'll be a leaner, more productive, more competitive forest industry than we've been for a long time.

Hon. Tom Waterland,
Minister of Forests

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THE VIEW BEYOND THE VALHALLAS

They're creating a new park in the Valhallas, and that's just one of many long standing land-use issues in the West Kootenay on the road to being resolved.



by Douglas Cowell

Valhalla Mountain Touring guide Craig Pettitt stands high on a mountain ridge in the fast-fading light, waiting while his ski party pulls on extra sweaters and cinches up parkas for the run down to the cabin.

Pettitt was raised here, hunting and fishing with his father. At the age of 12 he began helping a local trapper, learning to be at home in the bush. He has worked as a logger, as assistant forest ranger, and as backcountry ranger with Provincial Parks. Now he guides ski-touring trips in winter and is fire suppression crew boss for the Ministry of Forests in summer. "And it seems being a director on the Valhalla Wilderness Society board has been a full time job these days."

The society has been dedicated to having a section of the Valhalla Mountain Range set aside as a provincial park, and is only one of the parties engaged in the controversial land-use debates that have been going on here for years.

"It's all laid out at my feet here," Pettitt muses. "Up here above the treeline the competition for resources isn't too bad. There are a few mining people who want to make sure they don't lose the right to put mines in, and there are us recreation types, and the wildlife. But down below, in the forests, that's where it's tough."

And indeed, in the West Kootenay, where the forest industry is the largest single employer, forest management is a major source of resource-use contention. Forest products companies need a constant supply of wood. The Ministry of Forest's responsibility is not only to provide good forest management, but also to insure that a healthy forest industry is maintained. Recreationists want wild lands protected. Conservationists demand that wilderness areas and the environment's ecological integrity be maintained. Tourism operators know their customers want pristine mountain scenery. Miners argue the importance of their industry and defend their access to mineral deposits. There's lots to fight about.

But this afternoon Pettitt is keeping away from all the issues. He's simply appreciating the beautiful land.

The vista Pettitt is meditating on is mainly Crown forestland and a part of that area designated by the Ministry of Forests as the Arrow Timber Supply Area (TSA). Beginning at the U.S. border, the TSA boundaries run north, approximately along the tops of the Selkirk and Monashee Ranges, narrowing into a strip of mountains east of Revelstoke. It includes the Arrow and Slovan Lake systems and such towns as Castlegar, Trail, New Denver and Nakusp. The area's forests are managed as a unit to provide a regular timber supply.

Slovan Forest Products is the major forestry operator in the Arrow TSA. ATCO, Louisiana Pacific, Kalesnikoff Lumber and several other operators also have cutting rights here, but the region's largest operator is B.C. Timber, formerly CanCel and Kootenay Forest Products. It operates partially within the Arrow TSA boundaries on Tree Farm License 23. TFL 23 is spread out along the Arrow Lake system, and its logs are floated to a sawmill and pulp mill at Castlegar.

This part of the world wasn't always primarily a wood producer. In the late 1800s it was opened up by a mining boom. Prospectors routinely burned off whole watersheds to make rock outcrops more visible and to make travel easier. Predictably, the boom fizzled out, leaving boom towns such as Silverton, New Denver and Sandon struggling. Some became ghost towns while others became the basis for a slowly di-

versifying economy: mixed farms and orchards, a little logging, some mining; it grew slowly. Lending stability to the region were the hard-working Doukhobors with their self-sustaining farming and logging economy.

In the 1950s and 1960s, development accelerated. The mill and smelter at Trail grew to be the largest such complex in the world. Sawmills, a pulp mill and a plywood plant sprang up. Roads snaked into the backcountry to provide access to wood to supply those mills. The forest industry became king. B.C. Hydro was busy too, building dams on the Arrow and Duncan Lakes. Some of the best forest and farming land in the interior was flooded.



(Previous page) Valhalla Mountain Touring guide Grant Copeland (in suspenders) pauses with his cross-country skiing party just outside the new Valhalla park boundary. (Above) A mountain climber's view of the Valhallas from atop Mt. Gimli. (Opposite page) A look at the Valhallas across Slovan lake from the top of Idaho peak near New Denver.

Kootenay Lake, east of the Slovan Valley, became a popular summer resort area. The population grew. The regional economy, although below the provincial average, seemed healthy enough as wood to feed the mills poured in.

By the early 1970s the development bubble was beginning to burst. More and more people were moving to this beautiful, mountainous area, looking for rural homesteads. Increasing ecological consciousness was

placing more operational constraints on forest managers. Many of the newcomers came with educated, middle-class backgrounds, escaping what they perceived to be the excesses of the big cities. They came with different values, an ability to handle complicated issues, and a willingness to make their wishes known. Tensions were unavoidable.

Throughout the 1970s contentious issues such as the formation of parks, logging techniques, and uranium mining filled the "Letters to the Editor" pages of local newspapers. Although time and familiarity inevitably taught the various factions to get along together, the land-use conflicts only increased.

To cope with the situation in the Slovan Valley, The Slovan Valley Planning Program, a joint regional and provincial venture, was undertaken. Provincial government resource agencies, the public, industry and the regional district worked together on various resource and economic issues. The list goes on and on: annual timber cuts, environmental protection, recreation and tourism development, preservation of agricultural land, mining development, settlement patterns and watershed management.

Provincial ministries generated inventories and recommendations; local citizens' committees wrestled with the needs of residents and began realizing how difficult and complex the problems were. The reports piled up.

To insure public participation, public meetings were organized and input invited from any and everyone involved. But before any development plan could be put into effect, the region had to await a decision that only the Environment and Land-Use Committee (ELUC) of the provincial cabinet could make: whether or not to create a new provincial park in the Valhalla Mountains.

The park proposal to reserve a 60,000 hectare area of mountains along the west side of Slovan Lake originated in the early 1970s at a meeting of the Kootenay Mountaineering Club. Pettitt explains the reasoning behind it: "From highway six, along the east side of the lake, you've got this wilderness vista across the lake and the far shore, and then all the way up the mountains there's a succession of forest types. And you've got some great peaks up top."