The History of Cowichan Lake Research Station
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by
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Some members and guests who attended the 1947 meeting of the Canadian Society of Forestry Engineers (the forerunner of the Canadian Institute of Forestry) at the station. From the left, Dr. B.G. Griffith, Dr. R. Tarrant, H. MacWilliams, A. MacBean, L. Isaac, M. Gormely and A.W. Bentley.
Time Line

1920<

1930< 1929 CLES established. Construction begins. First thinning plots in B.C.

1933 Research Division operating budget at an all-time low ($11 000).

1935 Construction of camp facilities and road started by YMFTP

1936 Station road connected to public road system.

1940<

1941 Station used as a base for reforestation crews and federal researchers.

1950<

1953/54 Douglas-fir tree improvement program started. New kitchen and dining facilities built by Reforestation Division.

1957/58 New dormitory built by Reforestation Division.

1960<

1963 Bare-root nursery established for tree improvement program.

1970<

1971 Research Division takes over camp operational costs from Reforestation Division.


50th anniversary of CLES commemorated.
Preface

This transcript is taken from a slide presentation given on June 15, 1991, at the annual meeting of the Forest History Association of British Columbia. It was preceded by an introductory speech by Trevor Green. Trevor was an employee of the Research Branch at the Cowichan Lake Research Station from 1963 to 1978.

In 1979 Cowichan Lake Experimental Station changed its name to Cowichan Lake Research Station, in order to be consistent with the titles of both Kalamalka and Red Rock Research Stations.
The son of pioneers who settled on the banks of the Cowichan River over 100 years ago, Trevor Green entertained the audience with many stories of early settlers as well as of his own experiences in the area, including a trip by boat to the newly opened Cowichan Lake Experimental Station in 1929. My roots in the Cowichan Valley do not extend as far into the past as do Trevor Green’s. I first saw this valley in the spring of 1943 when I came here from Saskatchewan, where I had hired out as a chokerman for Industrial Timber Mills. My first home in British Columbia was a floating logging camp at Camp 6 (now Caycuse). Although railway logging predominated in this operation, most of my time was spent in a back-rigging crew, working on the first truck-logging show in the Cowichan Lake area at Wardroper Creek.

My first visit to Cowichan Lake Experimental Station (CLES) was four years later, in 1947, when Bill Young and I, along with around 20 other University of British Columbia students, attended a two-week training session sponsored by the Forest Service to develop the skills required for forest inventory field work.

To prepare this presentation on the history of the Cowichan Lake Research Station, I began by using the Forest Service library. In the process, I extracted information from the Forest Service annual reports, the Research Reviews and about a dozen other sources. This exercise resulted in a long list of dates, and usually a very brief reference to events. I felt that it was necessary to obtain a lot more information concerning why and how these events materialized, and about the people who played key roles in their realization. I also felt that there was a need to dig up interesting stories of the past, which just might provide a bit of entertainment to break up what could be a rather dull presentation.

Most of the time that I spent in preparing this paper involved talking with old-timers (that means anyone older than myself). The exercise was truly a long trip down memory lane. It became a very interesting experience. As we all know, our memories sometimes play tricks on us. Some of the old-timers were able to reel off names, dates and events without hesitation. In other cases, it required a lot of coaxing on my part to unravel a story. And, in a few instances, one person’s recollection of past events conflicted with those of another.

If a few of the facts have become warped by time, so be it. I would say that 90% of what I tell you today is accurate. The rest is a little hazy, and so is our very first glimpse of what we now know as the Cowichan Lake Research Station.
The year is 1923 (six years before the research station was established) and if you were looking out over the lake on a showery June evening you would see a small boat slowly making its way toward a tent pitched at Pick's Point, which is located within the station boundaries. Through the mist you could identify two men in the boat. At the stern sat a rather portly gentleman sporting a trim moustache above a very satisfied smile. He is also sporting a fishing rod. At mid-ship sits a slight-built young man, steadily plying a pair of oars but not displaying a great deal of satisfaction.

The fisherman was J.L. Alexander of Growth and Yield research fame, and the oarsman was his summer assistant, Eric Garman, on his first Forest Service job. I got this story plus a lot of other information from Eric Garman on his 93rd birthday. After his first experience with the Forest Service, Eric decided to study forestry. He attended the University of British Columbia, Oregon State University and Yale University where he graduated in 1928. Upon graduation he worked for Bloedel Stewart and Welch, assisting an engineer in bridge construction at Union Bay. The next spring he rejoined the Forest Service and worked at CLES during its first official year of operation.

J.L. Alexander left British Columbia in 1927 to teach at the University of Washington in Seattle. He returned in 1942 and was in charge of forest mensuration research at the Research Division, until his untimely death in 1951 after he and many other Forest Service personnel had contracted salmonella at the Forest Service annual dance. Throughout his career, Alex was known as a very dedicated sports fisherman, and it is no accident that most of the growth and yield plots were located within easy access of excellent fishing waters.

After seeing Eric Garman, I talked to Alf Bamford and Wally Hughes. The story of CLES in the mid-1930’s began to take shape. Both of these gentleman provided me with other sources, and I gradually accumulated a lot of information, anecdotes and photographs. Some of these old photos have become faded and blurred. Nevertheless, they do constitute a valuable linkage with the past.

The first printed reference to CLES that I could find was in the Forest Branch Annual Report of 1929, as follows:

The outstanding features of research work during the year have been the establishment of the CLFES [sic] [Cowichan Lake Forest Experimental Station] and the reservation of the Green Timbers area near New Westminster as a site for a forest nursery and experimental work.
I believe that much of the credit for establishing the CLES must go to R.C. St. Clair. In 1923 he prepared a report which strongly supported the concept of setting up forest experimental stations in the principal forest types of the province. As a start he recommended the establishment of two stations, one on the South Coast and one in the Northern Interior. The following year the Aleza Lake Forest Experiment Station, near Prince George, became a reality.

The selection of the CLES site can probably be credited to A.E. Pickford who had frequently done field work from a tent camp at Pick’s Point (named after him). The decision to establish an experiment station on this site was greatly influenced by two factors:

- Its location on a peninsula within close view of a forest fire lookout on Bald Mountain reduced the fire risk; and
- The presence of a considerable acreage of 20-year-old “fine, thrifty Douglas-fir.” It was in this forest that Schenstrom established thinning plots in 1929.

Since road access did not exist, the station maintained a couple of clinker built boats equipped with outboard motors. A report by Riley mentioned that a passenger and mail boat made daily trips up and down the lake. Riley also noted the rapid progress made in 1929. In this first year of operation, a camp site was cleared to accommodate buildings, a fire break was constructed on the east boundary, and four permanent buildings were erected in addition to tents with wooden floors and frames for living quarters. The buildings comprised an office, boathouse, dining hall and a combined tool and woodshed. (Garman’s field notes indicated that the total cost of these buildings was $3260 including wages: labour $3.75/day, carpenter $7/day and assistant carpenter at $5/day.) These buildings were paid for with research funds. In succeeding years research budgets were constrained, and for three and a half decades the cost of new camp buildings was absorbed by the Re-forestation Division of the B.C. Forest Service.
These buildings were of very good quality. The office was moved to the Duncan nursery around 1963 and later moved to the Surrey nursery in 1990 where it is still in use.

The vigour and enthusiasm shown by the researchers at the station were very short-lived. The change was triggered by two events: the negative effect of the depression on research funds, and the sudden loss of professional staff. Pickford became superintendent of the Green Timbers nursery. Riley left for a job in eastern Canada, and Schenstrom went to South America. As a result, research activities slowed down to a snail’s pace and would remain so for most of the next two decades. Nevertheless, the camp itself was a hive of activity, benefiting from an assortment of relief and wartime programs.

The first of these relief programs for the jobless started in 1931 and was financed entirely by the provincial government. Relief crew projects in that year included trail improvement and extension, as well as road construction. (Garman noted that $3000 was allotted for road construction, including the use of a 30 HP tractor.)

The provincial government apparently did support relief camps from 1932 to 1934, but I could find no reference to work done at CLES. At this time the Dominion government did not financially support relief programs. Prime Minister Bennett was convinced that unemployment was not a serious problem, and that it was temporary. The responsibility to solve the problem was shifted to the provinces and municipalities. Finally in 1933, when one and a half million Canadians were on the dole, the Prime Minister commissioned General McNaughton to evaluate the problem across Canada. McNaughton prepared a report and recommended that relief camps should be established to remove young men from the cities and avoid civil unrest. Bennett approved of McNaughton’s recommendations and turned the project over to him. (I got these details from Pierre Burton’s book, *The Great Depression.*)

Under McNaughton’s direction, 120 relief camps were in operation in 1934 across Canada, with a high percentage in British Columbia, mostly in remote areas. By and large, the relief crews at these camps were occupied with futile “make work” projects and the camps were operated in a quasi-military style with rather harsh rules:
1. The pay was 20 cents per day.

2. Food costs were 19 to 22 cents per day.

3. There was no organized recreation, radio, books, newspapers or sports equipment.

4. No complaining was allowed. If you complained, you were expelled and blacklisted.

5. If you left camp for any reason, you could not return and you were denied further relief.

As a result, "the camps seethed with discontent" and by the end of 1934 the "Relief Worker's Union," a communist-inspired outfit, had organized all British Columbia camps. The newly elected Premier of British Columbia, Duff Patullo, became alarmed when 700 of the relief workers congregated in Vancouver in March of 1935, and he urged Ottawa to conduct an investigation of Dominion relief camps in British Columbia. The reply from Ottawa was, "Jail them as vagabonds."

By April 1935 there were 1500 of these relief workers in Vancouver conducting demonstrations, rallies, mass meetings, tag days, picnics and parades. Finally in June, they boarded freight trains with Ottawa as their objective. They stopped at Kamloops, Revelstoke, Golden, Calgary, Medicine Hat, Swift Current, Moose Jaw and Regina. The CPR accommodated them and the citizens of these cities fed them. When they reached Regina the Prime Minister decided that something must be done, and the RCMP were brought in to stop them. The ill-famed Regina Riot was the result.

You might think that I am straying off target by giving you this amount of detail, but I have two good reasons for doing so. First, during the preparation of this report, I became convinced that CLES would probably not have progressed much beyond the stage it reached in 1930, had it not been for the various relief programs (given the shortage of research funds which persisted for several decades after 1930). I feel certain that the Cowichan reforestation crews of the 1940's would not have been based at CLES if both road access and a camp had not been available in 1941. At that time there were two abandoned logging camps a few miles away, and one of these could have been easily transformed into a suitable base. Furthermore, once used as a reforestation camp, CLRS was heavily subsidized by the Reforestation Division (split off from the Economic Division in 1946) which paid for food and cookhouse staff until 1971.
A relief program worker applying roof shakes in 1935.

The cookhouse constructed in 1935 at a total cost of $627.46. Demolished in 1953 and replaced by a modern facility.

The interior of the original cookhouse.
Wally Hughes operating a clinker-built boat in 1935, ferrying crews and supplies across the lake, prior to the connection of the station road with the public road system.

Diving raft constructed and enjoyed by Young Men’s Forestry Training Plan workers (1936).

George Allen in 1936. He spent several years as a researcher with the B.C. Forest Service.
My second reason for going into detail on relief projects concerns
the marked contrast between the Dominion relief camps and those
started by the British Columbia government in the spring of 1935
(which Burton totally ignores in his book). The concept of the “Young
Men’s Forestry Training Plan” (YMFTP) started in February 1935,
when Hugh Savage, MLA from Duncan, proposed the scheme to the
British Columbia legislature. He spoke of a youth plan which would
wipe out relief camps and provide useful work and job-training. His
plan was accepted in May and $90000 was allotted to the Forest
Branch to put the plan into operation. There may well have been an
underlying reason for entrusting the Forest Branch to do the job. In
1932 there had been an expose of relief camp corruption, in which
the relative of a cabinet minister had received an annual rent of
$7000 when his property was used as a relief camp. Army camping
equipment was obtained from the Department of National Defense
and in June the plan became a reality. About 500 men were hired
and deployed to Forest Branch establishments throughout the
province. Sixty of these young men between the ages of 18 and 25
came to CLES starting on June 8, and activities got under way
under the supervision of Charlie Schultz.

Evidently, Savage was very interested in the success of the
YMFTP, for his name appears in the CLES visitor’s book on July 16,
1935, and again on July 11, 1936.

In 1935, within a few months a great deal of work was accom-
plished at Cowichan Lake. A camp was constructed, complete with
a cookhouse, bunkhouses, a station residence, a telephone system
and a water system. Considerable work was also done on building
trails and the road, which had not yet been connected to a public
road.

The morale of these young men stood out in sharp contrast to
that in the Dominion relief camps in the same year. The pay was
good — they netted $1/day and a $10 clothing allowance after two
months’ work. The food was good. According to Eric Garman’s field
notebook, 16218 meals were prepared in 1935 at Cowichan Lake, at
an average cost of approximately 24 cents per meal, more than
three times the cost of meals at the Dominion relief camps. In the
YMFTP camps there was organized recreation as well as job training
activities, including field trips to sawmills and logging camps,
lectures on many aspects of forestry by Malcolm Knapp, forestry
professor at UBC, and a course on log scaling by the supervisor of
British Columbia scalers. By the end of 1935, 10% of these young
men had secured jobs in logging camps and sawmills.
Before we pass to 1936 I should mention that Dr. Alan Orr-Ewing signed the CLES visitor’s book on May 14, 1935. He worked on regeneration surveys as a field assistant to James Robertson. No money was available for this job, so Alan volunteered to work for nothing and the Forest Service was happy to accommodate him. The following summer Alan again worked for the Forest Service under Eric Garman and Cy Oldham, on regeneration studies throughout much of the Vancouver Forest District. Fortunately for him, he was paid $90/month plus board. He had to return to Scotland before the field season ended, and he was replaced by Alf Bamford.

The YMFTP was repeated in 1936 and again paid for entirely by the British Columbia government. More forestry lectures and recreational features were added, and some instructional movies were shown. A first-aid course was given at CLES and 40 men obtained certificates. Wally Hughes was one of the young men who worked at CLES in 1936. He credits his experience there with his later choice of a career in forestry.

The success of this program after two years of operation convinced the Dominion government to adopt a similar program across Canada. It became known as the Youth Forestry Training Program (YFTP) and the Dominion government paid 40% of the cost. This program increased in size each year, and in British Columbia there were 860 men at these camps in 1939. The final year of operation was 1940, when only 17- and 18-year-old youths were eligible.

In British Columbia, the YMFTP was augmented by another relief program in 1936, designed to provide winter and spring employment for transients. This was called the Forest Development Project. It was financed provincially and administered by the Forest Branch. In its first year of operation, 1400 single homeless men were accommodated at 21 camps in the Vancouver Forest District. The Forest Branch Annual Report 1937 claimed that it was “the first programme in Canada designed primarily for forest development, protection, and conservation, and reforestation as a means of alleviating unemployment.” The pay was on a par with that of the YFTP, and the Dominion government paid 50% of operating costs.

In 1939, the Dominion government sponsored a National Forestry Program. It was much more structured than its predecessors. Eric Garman noted that, in 1939, personnel at CLES included 21 men in the Forest Development Project, 34 in the National Forestry Program, and 15 in the Youth Forestry Training Program.
Once the buildings had been completed at CLES, most of the effort was concentrated on building and improving roads within the station boundaries and to the village of Lake Cowichan. Pete Hemphill who eventually became an Assistant Deputy Minister of the Forest Service got his start in 1938 as a truck driver earning $30/month in road construction at CLES. He must have been a productive employee because he earned $50/month in 1939.

All relief programs collapsed because the unemployment problem was substantially reduced by the war. At CLES, a functional camp had been created, complete with dependable road access, at practically no cost to the Forest Service. Very limited use of the camp was made in 1940 by an assistant ranger headquartered there, and by a few Dominion government pathologists and entomologists. This almost empty camp was of little use for research which lacked both staffing and funds.1 Fortunately, an expanding reforestation program came to the rescue.

The first planting crew housed at CLES arrived in 1941. It was supervised by Ted Whiting who had several years of experience as a supervisor in the YMFTP and other relief programs. The first planting took place between Mesachie Lake and Lake Cowichan village.

Reforestation projects were faced by a serious labour shortage which prevailed during World War II. However, due to a strange quirk resulting from the war, the problem was solved. The Japanese had developed an incendiary bomb device supported by a balloon and capable of being transported over the Pacific Ocean by prevailing air currents. There was concern that forest fires would be ignited in British Columbia. According to Harry Forse, some of these bombs did ignite fires in the Merritt and North Thompson areas.

In any case, the bomb threat resulted in an agreement in 1942 between the Dominion and the British Columbia governments to allocate a maximum of 1000 “alternative service workers” (ASW’s) to British Columbia for fire suppression purposes. These ASW’s were

1 The research budget decreased from a peak of $55,748 in 1930 to a low of $11,000 in 1933 when the staff was reduced to four researchers.
young men, fit for military services but not willing to join up, otherwise known as “conscientious objectors.”

In 1942, ASW crews were dispersed by the Forest Service throughout the province and trained in fire suppression techniques. Between fires (which accounted for most of the time) these crews were usefully employed in other duties. Many were attached to reforestation projects.

Ed Roberts arrived at CLES in 1942 to take charge of an ASW crew. He already had considerable experience in logging and doing seasonal work with the Forest Service. In the spring of 1945 he became a research employee, working as caretaker and foreman of the CLES. He maintained that position until he retired in 1975.

Ed’s ASW crew was involved in converting abandoned railway grades to vehicular use, and in dismantling abandoned logging camps. The Forest Service did not want to encourage the use of empty camp buildings surrounded by thousands of acres of plantations. The railway steel was transported out by locomotive and a bulldozer was used to establish a roadbed for trucks. Logging camps were either burned or dismantled for salvageable material which was used to strengthen and weatherproof the CLES buildings so hurriedly constructed in 1935.

The station was a very busy place during the war, housing as many as 115 men, including cookhouse staff. Pre-fab bunkhouses were transported to Cowichan from Goldstream Park where they had been used by fire suppression crews. Eight men were crammed into bunkhouses originally designed for four.

Snag falling was another major activity of ASW crews, not only on areas to be planted, but also on adjacent areas with high fire risk situations. One ASW crew had just completed snag-faller training when they tackled a huge Douglas-fir snag near...
the highway between Lake Cowichan and Duncan. Unfortunately the snag fell the wrong way and crossed the highway, hitting a car and killing both occupants.

The ASW program came to an abrupt halt at the end of March 1944. I don’t know why. Perhaps the Dominion government had decided Japanese bombs no longer posed a threat, or perhaps it did not like the idea of subsidizing British Columbia reforestation projects. In any case, thousands of acres had been planted at nominal cost to the Forest Service. Halting the program created another labour shortage.

Ed Robert’s job as foreman of the station had very broad terms of reference, requiring many talents and capabilities. A temperamental power plant had to be maintained, first aid had to be provided, fire suppression equipment had to be kept in good order at all times, repairs had to be made to the underwater telephone cable which linked CLES with the north shore, and cooks had to be calmed down and, on occasion, sobered up.

I’ll give you a little example of the extra dimensions of the job. One cold, wet winter day the sodden crews returned to camp to find the dirty breakfast dishes still on the tables, an ice-cold cook-house stove, and no sign of a cook or dishwasher or flunkies. The cookhouse staff had taken umbrage when someone had complained about the hot cakes that morning. They had packed their bags and departed for more congenial environs in the East Hastings beer parlors. Ed immediately came to the rescue and organized “volunteers” to prepare a late but hearty meal.

To help you capture the tenor of the times I would like to read a page from Ed Roberts’ memoirs. It is a vivid description of “the good old days.”

Cooks in the camp were treated without fairness and consideration and often threatened to quit before they were granted time off. It was years before conditions improved.

For a number of years, during the ’40’s and early ’50’s, help was scarce and cooks came and went with regularity. That was the scenario, so we had a permanent order for help at
the Duncan Employment Centre, not only for kitchen help but for tree planters. At one time we were without a cook for two weeks with about thirty hungry men to feed, so we were desperate for help. However, we received a phone call from Mesachie Lake that a man for the F.S. was on the early bus and would be dropped off. Hurrah, I thought, the new cook! I headed up the road to Mesachie in the pick-up and met this man about half way. He was young, quite well-dressed, but he could barely speak English; still, he was able to make me understand that he had been sent from the Duncan employment centre. Back to camp we went and into the cookhouse to show him his workplace. A look of amazement or fright came over his face. I then realized that he was sent as a tree planter. I was disappointed, but we knew a cook was loose somewhere heading our way, so that evening I met the bus.

I saw passengers disembarking, and one man, obviously drunk, fell to the ground, but he managed to regain his position and stepped on the bus step, holding onto the side rails. The bus door was still open, and at that moment the bus driver’s foot from within the bus was planted on the man’s chest, forcing him back onto the ground. Someone said he was a cook for the F.S. camp. Well, I dragged him to the pick-up and drove off, and then dragged him to his sleeping quarters and put him to bed. The next morning at 5:30, I was amazed to see him busy cooking breakfast.

What is now the Canadian Forestry Service (CFS) made its first appearance at Cowichan Lake in 1941 when a lease was signed with the Forestry Branch for the use of two bunk houses for Dominion researchers for 25 years at no cost. Drs. Malcolm Prebble, Ken Graham, Jack Bier, and Don Buckland were among the first to make use of these facilities. This lease was renewed for an additional 21-year period in 1962. During this second lease period, the CFS had a laboratory constructed at CLES, and when the lease expired this building was given to the Forest Service for one dollar. Today it serves as a conference centre.

A serious labour shortage resulted after the ASW program’s cancellation in 1944. Very little tree planting took place in 1945, and a backlog of seedlings accumulated at the nurseries. As a result, no seedbeds were sown in the spring of 1945.

In the spring of 1946, Alf Bamford was in charge of planting in the Robertson Valley, using any available labour. There was a constant turnover in manpower. In desperation, Harold McWilliams went through proper channels to borrow a platoon of soldiers from
the Nanaimo army camp. The platoon arrived at CLES complete with NCO’s and an officer. Most of the soldiers did not take a liking to tree planting, and planting bags and tools were often discarded. Problems such as this had to be referred to the officer, who could seldom be found as he had grown rather fond of fishing in the lake.

The rebirth of the Research Division, paralleled by increasing activities at Cowichan Lake, started in the late 1940’s. In 1951, the Research Division regained its identity as a distinct part of the Forest Service. (Since 1939 it had been a part of the Economics Division, along with Forest Surveys and Reforestation.) In 1951, the research budget rose to $231000 from a low of $11000 in 1933. Overall, staff increased to 15 professionals.

George Warrack, a silviculturist, was hired in 1947, to take charge of the administration of CLES. Under his direction the Schenstrom thinning plots underwent a third thinning in that year and, within a short time, several new thinning experiments were started on the research station and elsewhere in the Cowichan area. Two commercial thinning experiments were also conducted, on 50 acres in the North Arm block and on 30 acres in the Mesachie block.

Over the next three decades, George Warrack continued to be responsible for the administration of CLES, for the conducting of thinning and spacing research, and, starting in 1960, for the technical management of the overall Research Division program. In 1971, he became Director of the Research Division, but still maintained the administrative responsibilities for the station until his retirement in 1979. Over the years, a good deal of George’s input at CLES involved finding funds to improve the station infrastructure (water supply, power transmission, road upgrading, building construction and maintenance) and uplifting the morale of a loyal station staff during difficult times.
During the post-war decade, other research based at Cowichan Lake included studies of seed crop production, direct seeding and rodent control, the effects of slashburning, and Douglas-fir heartwood. However, the most far-reaching event during the 1950’s was the inception of the Douglas-fir tree improvement program.

The following quote comes from the 1953 Forest Service Annual Report:

A new field of study was initiated in 1953. Forest genetics has been somewhat neglected in British Columbia, considering that the earliest reforestation projects began in the coastal region in 1932. At the end of 1952, 106,322 acres had already been planted, by far the greater part of this area being on Vancouver Island, with Douglas-fir being planted almost exclusively. Therefore, a program that has as its main object, improved quality of seed, would seem very timely, especially as there is very limited knowledge concerning the many races and strains into which an important species such as Douglas-fir is almost certainly divided.

Genetics research started in that year largely due to the persistence of Dr. Alan Orr Ewing. Research budgets were still tight, and it took a lot of persuading by Alan to get genetics research launched. Broad acceptance of this research took several years. Alan had several little stories indicative of the times.

During the 1950’s he had established several different field plots at Cowichan Lake to demonstrate the importance of genetic variation in Douglas-fir. On one occasion he was conducting a busload of foresters through these plots. At the completion of Alan’s explanation, he anticipated some questions, and was very disappointed because the bus driver was the only one to ask a question.

On another tour, a group of Russians visited his demonstration plots, and Alan was downright insulted when he saw one man relieve himself on one of his select trees.
Perhaps at this point I should backtrack and explain the rationale for locating the Douglas-fir tree improvement program at CLES, especially since the station climate is not the optimum either in terms of encouraging cone crop production or in minimizing winter damage from excessive snowfall.

Despite a well-documented report by Alan Orr-Ewing that the Saanich Peninsula offered many advantages over CLES, the decision was made to locate the tree improvement program at Cowichan. The predominant reason was the lack of funds to purchase agricultural land on the Saanich Peninsula.

Developing the program at CLES became George Warrack's responsibility and it proved to be an arduous, protracted and frustrating experience, for it had to be pursued piecemeal on an annual basis because of skimpy budgets. In 1955 thirty acres were cleared for progeny testing. By 1970, this acreage had gradually increased to a total of 170. George had to use all of his ingenuity to get the jobs done. For example, by selling old-growth logs from various small patches of timber on the station, he generated cash to get the land clearing done.

During the early years Alan relied a great deal on help from the Reforestation Division to grow planting stock and to help establish test sites. When this genetics research started, no one had any idea that it would eventually play the dominant research role that it has since achieved at Cowichan Lake.

In addition to serving as a base for an expanding provincial research program during the 1950's, the station also provided a base for other activities. The principal ones were the reforestation of both public and private lands, and the initiation of federal research in forest entomology, pathology and silviculture.

The reforestation program based at Cowichan Lake provided financial support for the maintenance and improvement of the camp, and paid for the operation of the cookhouse. This support continued until 1971, when the Research Division took financial responsibility. The Reforestation Division also paid for the construction of a new kitchen and dining facility in 1953/54 and a 32-man dormitory in 1957/58. Although constructed only 18 years previously, the original cookhouse and bunkhouses were getting decrepit. They had been constructed in haste to provide for relief programs. The old cookhouse was very primitive, still relying on a wood-fired stove and a screen house for storing meat supplies. It was said that the biggest rats on Vancouver Island were seen in the vicinity.
During the 1950’s the provincial government supported a youth training program to provide summer jobs for students. Each year, between 10 and 20 male students would be stationed at Cowichan Lake. They were primarily occupied with maintaining and widening trails, painting buildings and assisting researchers from time to time.

It was also during the 1950’s that the Civil Defense Organization of the provincial government decided that the Cowichan Lake station was sufficiently remote to provide safe refuge for the cabinet in case a serious threat of atomic bomb attack occurred. The Reforestation Division was tagged with the responsibility of maintaining a large stock of canned goods at all times. It was also stipulated that the stock be inventoried and replenished monthly. This inventory usually required the better part of a day for two people. Finally, in 1972, Ingemar Karlsson quietly eliminated this practice, and no one in Victoria ever noticed that it had come to an end.

During the 1960’s it became evident to Alan Orr-Ewing that a production nursery was not the most appropriate place to grow nursery stock for genetic research. As a consequence, land at CLES was cleared and fenced and a nursery site was prepared in 1963. Raised seedbeds of cedar boards were filled with an artificial soil mix, and 1+0 bareroot stock was produced and then transplanted for one year in an open field. Raising the 1+0 stock required careful attention, and a long-established male dominance in the hiring practice of CLES was abandoned in 1965 when two local women were hired to provide this attention.

In 1970, Ingemar Karlsson was placed in charge of the station, a position he held until 1985. He had been hired in 1964 to assist Alan Orr-Ewing as a tree breeding technician, in view of his considerable experience in this field in Sweden. With his background in tree improvement, Ingemar had a clear idea of the facilities needed to provide adequate support for the program.

He played a dominant role in developing plans for expanding the propagation facilities at the station, and in 1979 a large capital expenditure was approved for the purpose. Phase I was completed in 1980 and comprised the installation of four additional greenhouses, construction of a rooting house and service buildings, and expansion of the adjacent nursery and clone bank areas.
The year 1979 also marked the 50th anniversary of the station, and was commemorated on August 24 by a gathering of foresters and others, many of whom had been closely associated with the development of the station. Recollections of the past were presented by Eric Garman, Dr. Clifford Riley, Dr. Braham Griffiths, Charlie Schultz, Dr. Alan Orr-Ewing, Dick Spilsbury, Ted Whiting, Harold McWilliams, George Warrack, Dr. Ray le Jeune, Trevor Green and Ingemar Karlsson. The program ended with a dedication ceremony at which the Honourable Tom Waterland unveiled a stone cairn into which a time capsule had been implanted.

As you’ve probably noticed, I have given much more detail on the events of the 1930’s and 1940’s than for later decades. I have provided only a sketchy treatment of the 1960’s and 1970’s. I think that this treatment is compatible with the objectives of the Forest History Association of British Columbia.

I will have very little to say of the 1980’s. However, I would be remiss if I did not briefly address a couple of topics.

The year 1980 was the year that Al Wilkinson was hired as cook, or should I say `chef.’’ I have sampled the meals at the station from time to time during the last 44 years, and I am convinced that Al’s culinary talents are one good reason that CLRS is such a popular place for meetings, training sessions and other gatherings.

In the 1990’s, CLRS continues at a very busy pace with a permanent staff of 12, plus three professionals and seasonal employees, all of whom commute from nearby communities. The station also provides a variety of support services for tree improvement and tree physiology researchers headquartered elsewhere.

The station staff in 1991 (from left to right).
The camp provides a meeting place for diverse groups and purposes. A few which appear every year include:

- Dr. John Borden and his entomology students from Simon Fraser University spend a week here on field work at the station and in nearby areas.

- The provincial government sponsors a course for training prospectors here. This was the earliest training program established at CLRS. In 1935, while the camp was being built, a short course on placer mining was given to young men eligible for the YMFTP. Some modification of this course has been given during most of the intervening years.

When we look back it is apparent that CLRS has come a long way in the last 60 years. Its biggest accomplishment in the research sense is the development of a very capable research centre providing many specialized services in support of tree breeding and tree physiology. Results from the station have been applied extensively in seed orchards and used in propagation techniques and cone induction.

The station has also fulfilled a significant educational role by providing a very amenable meeting place for training groups in forestry and many other fields, as well as for groups and organizations such as the Forest History Association.

I would like to end this presentation by quoting from the 1937 Forest Branch Annual Report. From a lengthy program statement concerning the Youth Forestry Training Program, I extracted the following statement:

*Just as the young forests of British Columbia are an asset of the future, so too are the young men of the province, and this program has proved itself a valuable means of developing character, initiative and self-reliance in the young men enrolled, and of accomplishing essential forest development and protection work which it might otherwise be impossible to undertake. The YFTP has demonstrated conclusively that it is practical to combine youth training and Forest Service work with mutually beneficial results.*

From a 1991 perspective I would add the comment that this relief program is one of the primary reasons that CLRS has come so far in the last 60 years.
### People mentioned in the text

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Years</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alexander, J.L.</td>
<td>Research Division, 1921-27; 1942-51</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Bamford, A.R.</td>
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<td>Bentley, A.W.</td>
<td>Forester, Newfoundland</td>
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<td>Bier, J.</td>
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<td>Borden, J.</td>
<td>Professor, Forest Entomology, S.F.U.</td>
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<td>Buckland, D.</td>
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<td>Carson, D.</td>
<td>Manager, CLRS, 1980-</td>
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<td>Curtis, J.D.</td>
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<td>Finlayson, E.H.</td>
<td>Senior Administrative Forester, Federal</td>
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<td>B.C. Forest Service Administration</td>
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<td>Young, W.</td>
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