

Darkness at Noon - The Bloedel Fire of 1938

John Parminter
Research Branch
B.C. Forest Service
Victoria, B.C. V8W 3E7

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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 led 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. 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.

Wednesday July 6 - Day 2

Ranger Langstroth phoned Assistant District Forester C.C. Ternan at 1:00 AM from Campbell River and reported on the state of affairs. At first light Ternan came by floatplane from Vancouver to inspect fire suppression actions on what was now known as the Bloedel fire.

He flew over the fire twice, then landed at Menzies Bay. After arriving at Boot Lake at 9:00 AM, he found the crew from Bloedel, Stewart & Welch's Camp Four holding the fire on the railway spur with logging locomotives, tank cars, and fire pumps.

The crew finished off a bulldozed fireguard from the railway line to a small lake and backfired the guard late in the afternoon. They held the fire with difficulty due to the intense heat from burning cold decks, felled and bucked timber, and slash.

Around Gosling Lake the fire was burning in old slash and spotted to the southeast up to 3/4 of a mile away into an old logged and burned area. It only smouldered there and so the crews concentrated closer to Gosling and Boot lakes, doing more backfiring in the evening.

Thursday July 7 - Day 3

The fire is being fought by nearly the entire Bloedel, Stewart & Welch logging crew with the assistance of the Forest Branch. It has burned over several cold deck piles and two logging donkeys. Work continued today at Boot Lake and fireguards were put in to stop the fire from entering the Elk River Timber Company and Campbell River Timber Company limits to the south and west.

The fire is mostly burning southeast from Gosling Lake towards Loveland Lake and, while not yet stopped, is fairly well under control. Backfiring continued on the east side of Gosling Lake. Spot fires have reached as far as the shore of Campbell Lake. The weather has been partly overcast and a light rain fell briefly at 4:30 PM.

Friday July 8 - Day 4

The fire was quieter than yesterday. Although it sneaked outside the guards on the north side, between Boot and Gosling lakes, little further damage was done. Fire pumps and hose are being deployed along the fireguards in the southwest corner of the fire. Snags are being felled on the eastern boundary.

Saturday July 9 - Day 5

The fire has stabilized at 700 acres. This morning it was quietly smouldering and showing little smoke. So far it has consumed eight cold decks of timber. The latest word is that it will soon be under control. Rain showers fell at 8:30 PM.

Sunday July 10 - Day 6

"All went quietly" according to Ranger Langstroth's report. More light showers fell.

Monday July 11 - Day 7

Thanks to cooler weather the fire has died down. A few smouldering patches are in the southwest corner but the patrols are easy.

Fire fighters said the danger has passed. No spot fires were observed.

Tuesday July 12 - Day 8

A crew investigated a reported fire at the forks of the Elk River. Patrols continued on the Bloedel fire.

Wednesday July 13 - Day 9

The weather was hot and dry with light northwest winds. Fire was stirred up within the lines and jumped them in places. Extra fireguards are being built by the crews. Locomotives, tank cars, and fire pumps are working into the night. Fire suppression efforts have been largely successful and the fire is considered to be under control.

The fire has so far burned through 13 cold decks of logs containing 20 million board feet of lumber. Besides the two logging donkeys, other equipment burned and will require extensive repairs.

Thursday July 14 - Day 10

All went well until 3:00 PM when the lookouts at Upper Campbell and Elk Falls reported the fire to be much stronger and spreading. The wind and heat from the fire started whirlwinds, speeding up the fire's progress. By 4:30 PM it was going strong in green timber and snags on the ridge above Campbell Lake, northwest of Jack Pine Point. A mile and a half of the Campbell River Timber Company line was cut off.

Ranger Langstroth examined the situation in the late afternoon and early evening. At 11:00 PM he brought a fire fighting crew to Forbes Landing from Campbell River. Fanned by a strong northwest wind, the fire ran out of control through large blocks of logging slash.

It jumped Campbell Lake at Big Bay, near Loveland Lake, and spotted onto the Forbes Peninsula. The fire crew split into two groups and spread out. Backfires in slash lighted from midnight to 3:30 AM temporarily stopped movement on the fire's east side on the peninsula.

A new fire spread rapidly along the lakeshore east of Forbes Landing. In light of the dangerous situation, forty guests were evacuated from the Forbes Landing Hotel. They left reluctantly - "If it's good enough for you, it's good enough for us" - they told the owners, Mr. and Mrs. James Forbes.

Vancouver District Forester Charlie Haddon said the blaze had sprung to life in a previously burned area which was still smouldering.

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.

Saturday July 16 - Day 12

After their early morning arrival by ship in Nanaimo, the fire fighters boarded specially-chartered buses and headed north to Campbell River. The 212 men were on the firelines at the Elk River Timber Company's Camp Eight and T.J. Brown's camp by 8:30 AM, according to Assistant District Forester C.C. Ternan. He is in charge of fire operations and working out of Menzies Bay.

The B.C. Loggers' Agency sent 70 men to the Elk River Timber Company to join their fire fighting crew of 75. Charlie Haddon left Vancouver this morning by air to take charge of the crews working in the slash near Campbell River. He said the situation was reported to be extremely dangerous, but no one knows exactly how far the fire travelled in the night.

Most of the fire fighters employed by the Forest Branch worked all day to save Forbes Landing. Fire encircled the resort and came close to the hotel. Although Margaret Forbes, along with her daughters Lorraine and Margaret, had returned, the trio went back to safety in Campbell River this morning. The lookoutman at Elk Falls also hurriedly removed himself from his perch. The next west wind could put him in peril.

Cinders falling on the road from Campbell River to Forbes Landing are reminiscent of a swarm of insects. Ashes from the fire are drifting 40 miles to the southeast and falling on Comox like snow. Foghorns sounded over Vancouver's harbour today because of a blanket of smoke from forest fires on Vancouver Island, the Gulf Islands, and the Lower Mainland.

The total number of fire fighters reached nearly 800 today. About 400 are from the Bloedel, Stewart & Welch and other logging camps, and 350 are employed by the Forest Branch. Many use the facilities at Camp Eight when they come off shift. So far, the fire has wiped out 8,000 acres. Crews are managing to hold the fire with fireguards constructed by hand and cats, backpack pumps, fire pumps and hose, and backfires.

The Young Men's Forestry Training Plan crew worked to establish a camp at Elk Falls to accommodate the contingent of newly-arrived fire fighters. The men will stay at Forbes Landing, the Willows and Quinsam hotels, and Camp Eight until the camp is ready.

The Forest Branch urged people to stay out of the woods entirely, or else to take extreme precaution on their outings. Chief Forester Ernest Manning said that public travel is stopped at Forbes Landing because the fire is definitely a major one and travelling fast. The weather continued to be hot and dry with a moderate west wind.

Sunday July 17 - Day 13

Winds today were lighter and from the east, keeping that side of the fire quieter. It has slowed down on its 20 mile front. The greatest fear at the moment is that a change in the wind will send fire through the vast acres of logging slash towards Courtenay.

Most of the action concentrated in the Elk Falls and Forbes Landing areas. Crews could not hold the fire at McIvor Lake, so fell back to near Elk Falls lookout. There they used old logging railway grades as fireguards. These were extended north to the Campbell River by cats working long into the night.

A dozen families were evacuated from Forbes Landing today as fire once again threatened the settlement. James Forbes, owner of the Forbes Landing Hotel, said:

"They've done all they could -- forestry boys, the loggers, provincial police, and game wardens. They put up a great fight to save this place."

Volunteers from as far south as Duncan and Victoria arrived to help with fire fighting duties today. An additional 115 loggers came from Vancouver. Residents are also being pressed into service, with only tourists, women, and children being exempted and allowed out of the area without a doctor's certificate.

The Brown Logging Company's camp southeast of Forbes Landing, adjoining the Elk River Timber Company operations, was burned out. The camp, logging equipment, vehicles, and two million board feet of cold-decked timber are a total loss.

At night the wind switched to the northwest and freshened. Camp Eight and the timber stored south of it are now in jeopardy. The fire got as far as the junction of the Forbes Landing and Camp Eight roads.

Chief Forester Ernest Manning said that this could develop into "...one of the worst fire seasons in history unless we get damper weather soon." A logger returning tonight from Campbell River to Vancouver described the fire scene as being like two sunsets. The smoke column is visible from offshore at Nanaimo.

Monday July 18 - Day 14

This morning the fire was out of control once again and Forest Branch officials could not predict when it might be contained. "It all depends on the weather," was the comment. The main fire is burning south on a five mile front, from the Campbell Lake area towards Quinsam. Forecasts call for continued hot and dry weather with no rain.

Supervisor Conway pulled all crews away from Mclvor Lake, leaving some men to protect Forbes Landing. Half of the fireguards put in between Elk Falls lookout and the Campbell River were lost when high winds drove fire across them. Crews extended a new fireguard and backfired, starting at 10:00 AM. The area remained secure until crews were forced to leave after a fresh west wind created smoke, reducing visibility to near zero. The fire also crossed the Quinsam River, reaching the Elk River Timber main line at the old Camp Five.

Although Mrs. Forbes and her daughters had returned to the landing, they were forced to leave yet again. Since the road to Campbell River was made impassable tonight by half a dozen spot fires, they had to travel by small boat up the lake. The group reached safety at the Campbell River Timber Company camp.

Thirty families from there and several from the Elk River Timber Company camp were also moved as a precaution. Since fire had burned out the main line of the Campbell River Timber Company's logging railway, the refugees went out on a branch line to connect with the Bloedel, Stewart & Welch main line.

Flames spared the Bloedel, Stewart & Welch camp but destroyed two million board feet of timber. Although a pile of logs and an automobile at Elk River Timber's Camp Eight were lost, it is hoped that logging equipment there will be saved. Telephone communication to the west of Campbell River was knocked out tonight as snags fell on the lines.

C.C. Ternan is in charge of the crew at Camp Eight. A fire camp at Elk Falls became operational today, with dinner being served to a large crew. Accommodations exist for over 200 men.

About 850 loggers and unemployed men are now battling the blaze in the face of a northwest breeze. Fire fighters were on 20 hour shifts over the weekend. Today they are working to keep flames out of the holdings of the Comox Logging & Railway Company southwest of Campbell River. Scores of pumps, miles of fire hose, several cats, and many fire crews are spread out in the fire area.

Charlie Haddon explained the current strategy of pinching the flanks of the fire to reduce the width of the front. It will then be possible to deliver a final blow and finish the fire off. With so much depending on the weather, the fire fighters' success rests heavily with the fates and the winds.

Tuesday July 19 - Day 15

At 2:30 AM the temperature was 78° F, the humidity 46%, and the winds strong but variable. At 4:30 AM the fire spotted across the Elk Falls - Forbes Landing road, which a short time later became impassable. Two cats were put in the area and by 10:00 AM had built a road around the new fire. A new road was bulldozed into the Elk Falls camp and firelines manned from there south towards the Quinsam River.

Brechin No.1, a fish packer from Nanaimo, ran aground near the Gabriola Island lighthouse this morning. The cause was given as the dense smoke pall which obscured vision. The accident left the captain, T. Furushima, slightly injured but the mate was unharmed. Smoke from fires in the vicinity, and further north, has reduced visibility in Nanaimo to two blocks. For the first time in many years Gabriola Island, less than four miles offshore, is not discernible. Housewives complain about the soiling of laundry and curtains by blowing ash and cinders.

The fire now resembles a horseshoe. The eastern leg is near Campbell River, the other is west near Quinsam Lake, and the curve is north towards Camp Eight. The main fire is within the bounds of the horseshoe. The eastern flank is now about two miles west of Campbell River and the fire is heading southwest.

Forbes Landing was encircled by part of the 10,000 acre blaze. It doubled back on itself this morning, reburning an area scorched last week. Mrs. Forbes and her two daughters left the landing once more at 1:00 PM for Camp Eight and reached there safely.

Intense heat forced fire fighters to the end of a wharf where they set up their pumps to make a stand. A small garage at the landing went up in flames at 2:00 PM and all other buildings were evacuated. The crew radioed to Campbellton that they were being forced to abandon their station and flee. At the last minute a let-up in the wind permitted them to stay.

All highways out of Forbes Landing eventually became unusable. The 25 remaining fire fighters obtained a motorboat to use on Campbell Lake in case they needed to evacuate. They could also leave by logging railway or floatplane if necessary.

Pilot Howard MacDonald of Canadian Airways delivered a load of 10,000 feet of fire hose to Campbell Lake this afternoon. The fire was 30 feet from his wingtips as he taxied to Forbes Landing. While he was there, six automobiles were driven into the lake to save them from the flames.

By 8:20 PM the fire was all around the buildings at Forbes Landing. Fire fighters were keeping the hotel and the outbuildings wetted down. A Forest Branch official said "things look better than they did earlier in the evening. It looks now that we might be able to save the rest of the settlement." Communications became impossible after flames consumed the telephone poles along the route to Campbell River and the lines fell.

For a short time today the fire fighting base at Elk Falls was reachable only by logging railway. The men there worked on fireguards to the west to safeguard Elk Falls Park. Two bridges along the road from Campbell River to Elk Falls are being wetted down. Water is being sprayed from above and below by crews with pumps and hose. Another crew is building a footbridge across the river, just above the falls, as an alternate escape route from the area.

Crews built a fireguard from Elk Falls Park south to the Quinsam River. A Forest Branch cat worked the line, which was also patrolled by men with hand tools and pumps. Conditions worsened and the two cats were removed before the bridges on the road to Elk Falls burned to ruin. It appeared doubtful that Elk Falls Park would survive.

Because of the strong wind, preparations were made to evacuate the Elk Falls fire camp. Trucks stood by across the Campbell River and those men not on fire fighting duty moved out the camp equipment and food all through the night. The remaining cat cleared a space at the river bank and lowered a Forest Branch car and two trucks into the water. Other metal equipment which could not be removed was buried.

At 2:00 PM the fire blew up in Block 27, to the east of Quinsam Lake, and headed southeast. Work halted in the Camp Five area and the cat moved south to the Comox Logging & Railway Company's Camp Three, ten miles north of Courtenay. Elsewhere the fire was "running fast" before a strong wind of more than 20 miles per hour. Later this evening the wind increased to near gale force and drove the fire further over to the southwest.

District Forester Charlie Haddon awaits arrival of a floatplane to carry out an aerial reconnaissance of the fire. Results of this survey will be used to formulate a plan of attack to deal with the fire's southward advance. Several spot fires in the Oyster River drainage merged this afternoon. The larger fire moved towards Camp Three.

Complete evacuation of the families at Camp Three took place tonight. The Provincial Police reported that every able-bodied man who can leave Courtenay is involved in the fight to keep the fire away from the logging camp. The entire force of experienced fire fighters employed by Comox Logging has been mobilized under the direction of Superintendent Bob Filberg. He also sent for men and equipment from Ladysmith and advised the Comox Lake crew that they will be needed.

At Camp Three between 30 and 60 million board feet of felled and bucked timber risk destruction. The flames, advancing at seven miles an hour, are within three miles of the camp. Three million board feet of stored timber and some logging machinery were destroyed by the fire late tonight.

Mrs. J. H. Newman of Black Creek told of her evacuation to safety at Courtenay:

"It was almost like a furnace around our home. My face became so warm with the currents of blistering air that I got a severe headache. We buried our linen in the ground and scattered the furniture around the potato field and got out immediately. For all we know our home is still standing."

Cats and pumpers from various logging camps are supplementing Forest Branch fire fighting equipment. Many fire fighters have worked for several days in a row with little sleep. Chief Forester Ernest Manning is preparing to leave for Forbes Landing tomorrow to view the situation and consult with fire boss Charlie Haddon, working out of Campbell River.

Millions of board feet of felled and bucked timber have been destroyed so far. One saving grace is that the territory burned over has consisted primarily of logged areas and some second growth. Nonetheless, the greatest danger remains a crown fire in old growth, a situation that is nearly uncontrollable.

Wednesday July 20 - Day 16

The fire now covers an area of 30,000 acres and is moving on three fronts towards Campbellton (two miles north of Campbell River), Elk Falls, and Comox Logging's Camp Three. It is from five to ten miles wide and at its length, eighteen miles. Smoke is reaching 6,000 feet into the air.

Drifting smoke from forest fires reduced visibility in downtown Victoria to half a mile this morning. Most has been driven down by north winds at high altitudes from the Bloedel fire. Others on the Olympic Peninsula are contributing to the smoke pall and an east wind is now bringing more smoke from the mainland.

At 3:00 AM fire crossed the Quinsam River about four miles south of its junction with the Campbell River. The Forest Branch said the fire was "unpleasantly close" to Campbellton but there are wide fields between the settlement and the forest. Fire fighting efforts are concentrated at the head of the fire's western flank in order to divert it from Campbell River and Campbellton.

No reports were immediately forthcoming regarding conditions at Forbes Landing. The men are "too absorbed in fire fighting to stop for details," explained Assistant Chief Forester C.D. Orchard. The crew slept out on a wharf and took shifts spraying down buildings with water. After saving the resort from the fire later in the day, the 25 men prepared to leave for other sectors of the firelines. Trixie, the resort's pet deer, and her two fawns still come by for handouts despite the turmoil.

All personnel except fire fighters evacuated Elk River Timber's Camp Eight after most of the machinery was buried as a precautionary measure. Up until now the camp acted as a fire operations base. Manager Roger Cobb and Superintendent Pete Haramboure of the company, as well as Assistant District Forester C.C. Ternan, are directing fire fighting efforts there.

The Comox Logging & Railway Company supplied two cats to the Elk River Timber Company to cut fireguards and save their old Camp Six. Snags are being felled some distance ahead of the fire so the fire fighters will be able to make a stand.

The Canadian destroyers *HMCS St. Laurent* and *HMCS Fraser* were summoned by the Forest Branch and are standing by in Duncan Bay, north of Campbell River. They are ready to assist with fire suppression and emergency evacuation of residents and fire fighters, should the need arise. Plans are to move the ships to Campbell River and put hose lines ashore to safeguard the town in case the fire approaches too closely.

Two navy signallers set up equipment ashore to maintain communication with the ships. They also established radio links with two logging camps. The main fire fighters' camp is now located at the Campbellton bridge and is under the supervision of Freeman King. Pilot Clare Dobbin delivered new fire pumps and then flew back to Vancouver to obtain more.

A crew using hose lines from the river, a cat, and backfires saved the area around Elk Falls Park. It resembles an oasis of green in a landscape of black. Fire fighters evacuated as the fire approached, the footbridge constructed yesterday over the Campbell River enabled them to reach safety. They followed the river upstream and circled the fire until they arrived at Menzies Bay. They are now based at the Campbellton camp.

A 20 mile an hour wind is propelling the fire southeast, towards the Comox Logging camps at Camp Three and Headquarters, two miles further south. Between 200 and 300 men are on the firelines at Camp Three. Many have come from Deep Bay, Fanny Bay, and other east coast settlements. Two cats are clearing a fireguard between the camp and the approaching fire. Another is working to protect cold-decked logs in Block 28, south of the Oyster River.

Forest Branch Ranger A.S. Silke of Courtenay is organizing crews of experienced loggers to work in the area between Camp Three and the Island Highway. The southern head of the fire is inland about four miles from Oyster Bay.

Tonight the fire jumped a guard at Cariboo Creek, an upper tributary of the Oyster River. It then headed south parallel to the logging railway main line and is within half a mile of Camp Three. Another arm of the fire is two and one-half miles away. Most fire fighting crews are moving south to try and save the Comox Logging limits. Old grades from the Oyster River north to the Elk River Timber main line will be backfired tonight to prevent the fire spreading west to Block 28.

There are fears that the fire could reach Courtenay as continuous logging slash exists nearly to the town border. Chief Forester Ernest Manning and Vancouver District Forester Charlie Haddon are somewhere in the midst of the action, directing the tense fight. More than 1,200 men are on the firelines and many have not had more than a token rest in the past three days.

The Forbes family - James, his wife Margaret, and their two daughters - came away from the fire zone today and went to Nanaimo. They are en route to Vancouver, in search of much-needed rest.

Thursday July 21 - Day 17

Inspector Robert Owens, of the Provincial Police, returned to Victoria briefly today. He is securing reinforcements for police details assisting the Forest Branch in fighting the conflagration. The fire is now out of control and has burned over an area of 50,000 acres. The eastern edge is within two miles of Campbellton and the southern point has eaten well into the Comox Logging limits.

The Forbes Landing Hotel and five summer cottages, together valued at \$20,000, were destroyed early this morning. A northwest wind sent flames back into the settlement for a third time. Fire fighters could not save the hotel once the fire took hold, although some houses nearby escaped unscathed.

Courtenay police detachment Sergeant Don Tweedhope said that nothing but a blackened ruin exists west of Quinsam Bridge on the road to Forbes Landing. The landing was totally evacuated two days ago except for the fire fighters. Trixie, the resort's mascot, kept her two fawns on the lakeshore while the fire raged. The trio was unharmed.

Events took a dramatic turn when sabotage occurred on the fireline. Almost 1,000 feet of fire hose at Elk Falls was cut and slashed by knives yesterday. Sugar in the gas tank put a fire pump at Forbes Landing out of action this morning. Members of the fire fighting crew felt sure that the Forbes Landing Hotel would have been saved had the pump not malfunctioned.

The men used the pump to spray river water on the settlement. After it failed the buildings were quickly consumed. The pump came to Forbes Landing from the Mud Lake area. Provincial Police Constable M.N. McAlpine reported that officials do not know who was responsible for these actions and so far have made no arrests.

Fire boss Charlie Haddon dismissed up to 100 men from the firelines. They will soon be sent back home to Vancouver and elsewhere. Most of these men are from the ranks of the unemployed and inexperienced in fire fighting. They have shown an unwillingness to devote their total energies to the task and are being replaced by loggers and local residents.

A group of dismissed men asked to be put back on the firelines. Haddon replied:

"Some of you boys haven't been hitting the ball, and you're going back to Vancouver. I'll be frank with you. Some of you may not be at fault, but the situation is too big and too dangerous to take chances."

Some of the men offered to work for nothing rather than leave under a cloud of suspicion. Haddon said it was a serious and dangerous fire and he didn't want to take any chances. He emphasized that malingerers from Vancouver Island had also been discovered and discharged, therefore it wasn't a plot against just the Vancouver men.

Hundreds of fire fighters slept in the open field at the new fire headquarters at the Campbell River bridge last night. They are on duty on the line west of town. Fireguards are being extended from the Quinsam River bridge south through the Elk River Timber truck logging operation. Further south, residents are packing their belongings to make ready for a quick departure to safer ground.

Nothing short of a miracle occurred this afternoon in the northwest corner of the fire. Flames reached to within 15 feet of logging slash which, had it ignited, would have carried the fire to 30 million board feet of cold-decked logs nearby. The fifty Elk River Timber Company men working on the fire with logging locomotives and water tank cars gave thanks that a probable disaster was averted.

Chief Forester Ernest Manning drove down to Victoria from the scene of the fire this afternoon. He reported that the biggest danger is still at Camp Three. Between there and Headquarters the fire is crowning through old growth Douglas-firs, making it nearly impossible to fight effectively.

Five hundred men, four cats, and an array of other equipment are trying to stop the fire from reaching \$500,000 worth of cut logs two miles north of Camp Three. Another fireguard is being put in to the west in an attempt to save some green timber in that area.

Bob Filberg of the Comox Logging & Railway Company and Assistant Forester Doug Taylor of the Forest Branch took off on a flight with pilot Ted Dobbin to reconnoitre the fire. They reached the conclusion that controlling the fire under current conditions is a nearly impossible task. The slash along the Tsolum River should not be backfired as this action might effectively advance the fire to the south by one day's travel.

At 5:00 PM today the Minister of Lands, the Hon. A. Wells Gray, issued an order closing the lower two-thirds of Vancouver Island to logging operations. All burning permits and campfires are also cancelled. The Minister said:

"The situation on the lower coast is fraught with more serious danger to life and property than has ever existed within the experience of the Lands Department."

A prominent lumberman added:

"There has been comparatively little standing timber lost but the loss of felled, bucked, and cold-decked timber, equipment and bridges will set a record for British Columbia by a wide margin. We've never had anything to compare with this before."

Should the fire get into nearby tracts of old growth timber, it will burn more fiercely than it has so far in logged areas and young second growth. With continued moderate winds the settlements should be safe but only a heavy rain will completely extinguish the blaze in short order.

Thirty-two men dismissed from the Campbell River area arrived in Nanaimo tonight at 7:15 PM. They had to stay overnight as their bus was too late to connect with the 7:00 PM sailing to Vancouver. The Forest Branch provided food and lodging. Others are returning to their homes elsewhere on Vancouver Island. Another eighty or so men will follow tomorrow.

Fully 1,700 men are on fire duty on different parts of the front. The fire now parallels the Island Highway for ten miles. The winds at the northern end of the fire are from the northwest, while on the southern end are from the east.

Thirty families from the area between Headquarters, Courtenay, Bevan, and Cumberland moved to safety in Courtenay late tonight. These people are mostly Mennonite settlers. With their men away fighting the fire, the women and children at home remained in some danger. They were evacuated as a group to the Exhibition Grounds in Courtenay. Cattle, horses, and other stock have also been moved in, so most fields in the area are fully occupied.

The refugees are under the general care of a committee formed tonight. It consists of representatives of the Canadian Legion Ladies Auxiliary, the Women's Institute, the Native Daughters of Canada, and the Comox Agricultural and Industrial Association. It is headed by Mayor Milton Stephens and Mrs. M. Bryant. Tents provided by the Forest Branch and Public Works Department are being set up to house many of the evacuated settlers.

Trains have been heading out of Courtenay for the past two days. Equipment and rolling stock are being moved to safety further south. The mayors of Courtenay and Cumberland met today with Doug Taylor and George Melrose, in charge of Protection Division of the Forest Branch, and were advised of the possible fire threat to the two towns.

Friday July 22 - Day 18

During the early hours of the night, fire burned alongside millions of board feet of felled and bucked timber at Comox Logging's Camp Three. That one, and Headquarters, are flanked by advancing arms of the fire. Spokesmen for the company consider the camps' fates to depend on the weather.

Comox Logging Superintendent Robert Filberg estimated that the fire would reach Headquarters before noon. Camp Three is comparatively safe at the moment. A stiff northwest breeze advanced the fire another half a mile to the southeast this morning. Filberg said that Courtenay is likely safe. The fire will probably either go around Constitution Hill to the west and up to the Forbidden Plateau, or east and into the Dove Creek area.

Premier Pattullo said this morning that the Provincial Police and the Forest Branch will hold an inquiry into the sabotage of fire fighting equipment. He said it would be unfair to blame all of the unemployed men for the activities of an irresponsible few.

Chief Forester Ernest Manning added that the Campbell River - Courtenay forest fire represents the most serious in the history of the province:

"The fight is by no means over yet. The only things that will help us now are rain and a favourable wind, which will allow us to control the fire. The wind presents a very difficult factor. It is bad today."

This proved to be the case as the area burning doubled in size in eight brief hours. The northwest wind reached top speeds of 45 miles per hour, fanning fire on three fronts within the 24 mile long stretch between Elk Falls, Headquarters, and Courtenay.

The fire is advancing south, west of the Merville burn of 1922, through the 1937 and 1938 slash along the Tsolum River. Here the fire has behaved with a fury not seen so far. As 500 men worked at midday to put in a fireguard and backfire to save Headquarters, flames destroyed 40 million board feet of felled and bucked timber only a mile and a half away towards Camp Three. This loss alone was estimated at \$300,000. In addition, the Tsolum River bridge was reduced to ashes.

All families and important company records were removed from Headquarters this morning. It is now strictly a fire fighting camp. Seven logging locomotives are taking water from the Tsolum River through pumps to spray the camp buildings and equipment. Hoses line the streets and emergency ladders are on hand everywhere. Ashes and debris rain down from the sky, accompanied by the unmistakable sound of the approaching fire.

District Forester Charlie Haddon estimated that the fire moved four miles south from Headquarters in eight hours. The main arm of the fire headed inland, racing through the treetops on Constitution Hill and towards the Forbidden Plateau. The roar from this run was heard for seven miles. Should the wind shift, Courtenay, Cumberland, and Bevan will be in danger. Forest Branch officials are hopeful that these communities will remain safe as long as conditions do not change markedly.

North of Dove Creek, slash in the limits of the Woods Brothers, Carney, and Larson logging companies is ablaze tonight. A messenger sent to an outfitter's camp on the Forbidden Plateau informed Eugene Croteau of the current situation. Croteau reportedly feels safer there than in the valley and so is staying, complete with provisions for two months.

Three miles from Campbellton the fire once again came to life in slash and young growth. The remaining residents nearby were advised to make ready for evacuation. A freshening northwest wind pushed fire across the Forbes Landing road, nearly encircling 300 fire fighters at Camp Eight. Constable M.N. McAlpine of the Provincial Police said their only means of escape will be to the north if the ring tightens.

From Campbell River, Charlie Haddon spoke by radio with Assistant District Forester C.C. Ternan at Camp Eight. He reported that fire was in the slash again. The felled and bucked timber and cold decks north of Quinsam Lake are in peril. Ternan asked Haddon to advise Mrs. Ternan that he would be home at the end of August after the fire had hopefully died out. Haddon replied "Okay, Merry Christmas."

In a narrow cut the fire burned fiercely on one side of the Elk River Timber tracks. The radiant heat was intense enough to ignite slash on the other side along a 200 foot front. A logging locomotive pulling tank cars and fire fighting equipment raced through the flames to save 13 piles of cold-decked timber nearby. Engineer Andrew Teck and the brakeman, "Waggo" Wain, made 15 trips through the area.

They rushed into the fire area, sprayed water on the slash and logs, backed out to cool off, and then repeated the procedure. Teck's gloves were burned from his hands. As they doused each other with water, spray shattered the hot locomotive windows into bits. An observer said:

"I don't know how they did it. It was one of the most unbelievably brave things I have ever seen. Those boys must be made of asbestos."

They pulled back to Camp Eight in order to devote their energies to saving it. The fire then headed south to Quinsam and burned through half of the 30 million board feet of timber there.

Fireguards west of Campbell River have nearly been completed and backfired. The road from Quinsam bridge to Forbes Landing and on to Camp Eight is now open to official traffic. The Elk River Timber logging railway from Campbell River to Camp Eight is also functioning again. Rails bent into giant horseshoes by the heat of the fire have been replaced.

A new fire, believed to be of incendiary origin, started six miles north of Oyster River. In two other locations fire jumped the Island Highway late in the afternoon. A gang of Comox Logging fire fighters working to save the logging railway bridge over the Oyster River was almost trapped. "It nearly had us," said one of them.

Camp Three was abandoned tonight when the wind became too strong and the fire fighters were at risk. They escaped along the railway as ties burned behind them. Although fire burned along the track and the road, Camp Three was largely untouched. The wind shifted from northwest to north as the fire approached Headquarters. The flames passed by to the west, heading further south for Dove Creek.

Twenty-five Mennonite families fled from near Headquarters and Camp Three in an orderly retreat to Courtenay. They were taken by volunteered trucks and billeted in the Agricultural Hall and at Williams Creek, north of Courtenay on the Strait of Georgia. Another 75 families from east of Black Creek prepared to join them should the fire advance down the coast.

Three hundred refugees from the Dove Creek area moved to Courtenay this afternoon in a procession of police trucks, cars, and horse-drawn wagons. Most of this group went to the Native Sons Hall as the Agricultural Hall was at overcapacity with 135 people. The Courtenay High School basement is being used to store many of the refugees' effects.

Evacuation of settlers was on the recommendation of the Provincial Police and the Forest Branch. Most have brought their own bedding, some furniture, and other necessities. After getting established in the Native Sons and Agricultural halls, some of the families dug underground caches in which to put their small belongings should fire reach the town. Mrs. Fred White of Dove Creek said:

"We put in a night of terror... A great shroud of black smoke swept down upon us in a high wind and it became so dark that we turned on the lights at 6 o'clock in the evening.

We packed that night and prepared for speedy departure and we watched and waited till dawn, expecting momentarily to have the fire burst upon us. The next day the police came and advised us to move at once."

The first settler's cabin consumed in the Dove Creek area went up in flames about 9:00 PM. Although located in a clearing about 100 yards square, a glowing ember landed on a woodpile at the back of the house and started the blaze.

In the meantime, the navy ships moved down from Duncan Bay, north of Campbell River. The Canadian destroyer *Fraser* put 50 seamen ashore at Comox this afternoon. They were sent to Bevan to act as a bucket brigade, wetting the buildings down as a precaution against flying sparks. The communications team is maintaining an invaluable radio network between Headquarters, Campbell River, and Camp Eight.

Another team of 50 stood ready to be dispatched where needed to act as fire fighters. Others assisted with the movement of refugees to Courtenay as well as patrols there and at Cumberland. The *Fraser* and the *St. Laurent* are standing by to assist with emergency evacuation of residents.

Quarters are being organized on shore for the sailors. Many bunked in at the Parish Hall, setting up their hammocks. Some of the sailors are fresh from the Royal Navy where they were on patrol off Spain.

John Matts, Secretary of the Relief Project Workers' Union, said that members of his organization who fought fire near Campbell River were not connected with any acts of sabotage. Charges of "malingering on the fireline" were preposterous as "any man who would lie down on the job would be endangering his own life, as well as property," said Matts.

J.L. Aubrey, spokesman for a group of 31 unemployed single men returned from the firelines, said that none were near Forbes Landing when the pump was supposedly sabotaged. He admitted that at least one line of hose had been slashed at Elk Falls, but did not rule out the possibility of an accident or other causes:

"We had an inkling of trouble as soon as we arrived in the firelines last week. We were told that some of the loggers resented that labour had been brought in from Vancouver."

Although there were four witnesses to the sabotaging of one line of hose, Charlie Haddon refused to release them from duty on the fireline. This was in spite of requests from the Provincial Police to do so and offers by the remaining unemployed men to replace them on the line.

Officials of the Relief Project Workers' Union are writing the Premier, requesting a full investigation of the alleged sabotage incidents. Spokesman R.W. Campbell said:

"While our men have not actually been charged with sabotage, they stand guilty in the eyes of the public through insinuation."

There are still about 100 men from the Vancouver contingent at work on firelines in the Quinsam Lake area. A foreman said:

"There are a few good workers among them and the services of them will be continued. The rest will be brought to Campbellton camp and shipped out."

In an evening radio address from Victoria, Premier T.D. Pattullo had this message to the province:

"The conflagration is the most serious in the history of the province. Yesterday all logging operations in the area and all campfire permits were cancelled. The Government has taken every step for safety that can be devised to cope with the emergency, beyond this, we can only appeal to the co-operation of the public."

"The timber industry will always be one of our chief industries and we cannot afford to jeopardize an industry which presently employs some 30,000 individuals, produces \$75 million a year, and is capable of perpetuation."

The Premier added:

"I regret the sabotage that has taken place at Campbell River by deliberate cutting of hose and doctoring of gasoline. The fiends who perpetrated this outrage should receive the severest penalty of the law. This incident is indicative of the fact that malign influences are at work in our midst and it behooves all law-abiding people to lend no countenance or encouragement to those who undertake to accomplish their purpose by methods subversive to orderly government."

George Melrose chaired an evening meeting in Courtenay. Plans were made for construction of a fireguard between the town and the advancing fire. Melrose, Doug Taylor, Campbell River District Supervisor Bert Conway, Mayor Stephens, and Commander Reid of the *Fraser* also conferred over the continuing influx of refugees.

The Forbidden Plateau was largely evacuated tonight. At midnight the fire was midway from Headquarters to Courtenay. The western flank headed in an unknown direction away from the west side of Constitution Hill through standing timber. The flames were visible 60 miles away from Courtenay.

Today was the worst single day in the short history of the conflagration. The fire fighters called it "Black Friday." In the 24 hours preceding 3:00 PM the fire added to its total area to date by one-third. The mood in the communities bordering the fire area is tense. Torchy Anderson, a reporter for the *Vancouver Daily Province*, wrote:

"People are nervous, taut. They live in a world of amber light reflected from the vast pall of smoke overhead. Distances take on unnatural shades of purple and mauve."

Estimates of the fire's size cannot be made with certainty as smoke thoroughly obscures visibility. An immense pall pushed by a west wind rolled across the Strait of Georgia this afternoon and settled over the Lower Mainland. Ash fell heavily on the North Shore and in Burnaby was thick enough to accumulate on the ground. The sky took on a dark veil like thunderclouds. At times the mountains were obscured and the sun became a huge orange glow, eventually disappearing from the sky before sunset.

Courtenay has achieved world-wide notoriety because of the fire and the town is full of cameramen and correspondents. Events were blown out of proportion in some quarters, as shown by a story in the United States that Courtenay was now ashes, along with its 5,000 inhabitants. In response, telegrams and long distance telephone calls offered accommodation and assistance until the danger has passed.

Saturday July 23 - Day 19

During the night the fire consumed 40 million board feet of Alberni Pacific Lumber Company timber valued at \$250,000. The fire travelled through virgin timber past Constitution Hill, northwest of Headquarters, towards the Forbidden Plateau.

At 6:00 AM today seven people ordered out by the Provincial Police descended from the Forbidden Plateau. Travelling on horseback via the Dove Creek trail, they rode beside the forest fire for two miles. The party consisted of Alderman H.L. Corey, George A. Grant, Jessie Grant, and the Misses Malcolm, all of Vancouver, Mac Barron of Seattle, and a packer employed by Eugene Croteau.

About 1,600 men are now on the firelines. The fire resembles a giant "L" 25 miles long by 5 to 10 miles wide. Estimates put its size between 100,000 and 125,000 acres, although conditions make accurate assessments difficult. It is spreading to the southeast on its western fork and growing on its eastern fork due to the incendiary fire at Oyster River. The main Comox Logging crew of 400 men and all machinery are deployed in the Oyster River and Camp Three areas, holding the fire away from Block 28.

Fire fighters, stripped to the waist in the heat, using saws, axes, pumps, hose, and cats are concentrating on the southern flank. Much work is being done in the Dove Creek area, along the Tsolum River, and near Headquarters. For the moment both Camp Three and Headquarters are safe, but water is still being sprayed onto the buildings and stored logs. The temperature at Headquarters reached over 100° F late this morning. Fire fighters have that community safe as long as the wind doesn't shift.

The fire moved half a mile this morning and its head is within 3 1/2 miles of the edge of Courtenay. Experienced Comox Logging fire fighters, assisted by more than 100 unemployed men, are building a fireguard away from Piercy and Condensory roads. From there, a mile and a half north of Courtenay, the guard will go west to the Bevan and Forbidden Plateau road junction. Five cats are clearing the fireguard and hopes are that the Puntledge River will slow down the fire's advance towards Courtenay.

Another 100 naval ratings came ashore this morning from the destroyers at anchor in Comox harbour. The streets of Courtenay are being patrolled by 150 men from the *Fraser* and the *St. Laurent*. They will assist should evacuation occur.

A radiotelegraph message sent by Admiral Sir Sidney Julius Meyrick from the *HMS York* to Commander C.T. Beard at Esquimalt advised that the British cruiser is diverting to Campbell River at increased speed. The ship's crew hope to lend assistance if necessary. The admiral expects to anchor off Campbell River at 09:00 tomorrow morning.

The *York* is steaming south from Prince Rupert to Esquimalt to take part in the annual Navy Week celebrations. Based in the West Indies, she has a complement of 625 men, is 575 feet long, and displaces 8,250 tons.

An additional seventy-five inexperienced fire fighters dismissed today had proven "troublesome," according to Chief Forester Ernest Manning. After collecting their time this morning, they went on their way to Vancouver.

According to Sergeant Don Tweedhope of the Provincial Police, preparations are being made for the evacuation of residents of Bevan (pop. 250), No Mine (pop. 150), and Cumberland (pop. 2,400) to safety at Royston and Union Bay. This will be necessary if the winds rise in the afternoon.

About 500 men constructed a fireguard around Bevan. The trucks and locomotives of Canadian Collieries (Dunsmuir) Ltd. are standing by to evacuate the residents. Flat cars are also on sidings in Cumberland, complete with locomotives with steam up.

In addition, a convoy of 75 trucks is at the ready in Courtenay. Fire hoses are spread out along many streets and houses are being sprinkled with water to prevent fires starting from sparks. Firemen are on 24 hour duty and all available equipment is at the ready. Ashes and fine debris continue to fall on the town like snow.

Mayor Milton Stephens denied alarmist reports that plans are being made for the mass evacuation of Courtenay by special trains. The fire department, naval forces, and citizens are patrolling the town for spot fires. A car with a loudspeaker is travelling through town and advising residents to wet down their roofs and lawns. The situation is well in hand and the mayor does not anticipate a wholesale exodus.

He stressed that the refugees evacuated to Courtenay were given ample warning and came with their personal effects, furniture, livestock, and family pets. All are being well cared for. Some Merville area residents evacuated earlier are returning home this evening as the danger there has passed. Decreasing winds removed much of the immediate hazard to the communities on the fire's margins. Only Bevan is in any danger.

Further north, Elk Falls Park and Campbell River are safe as long as the wind does not shift direction. Just light winds are blowing at the northern end of the fire and all lines are holding. The Elk River Timber Company's Camp Eight was saved, along with half of the 40 million board feet of timber cold-decked nearby. The fire has cooled down sufficiently at Elk Falls Park to allow the crews to remove the Forest Branch vehicles from the river.

The evacuated Mennonite settlers, and the nuns of the Roman Catholic school in Courtenay, offered prayers today for rain to end the current ordeal. In Campbell River, Vancouver, and Victoria the Sisters of Saint Anne are maintaining a constant prayer vigil.

By order of the Forest Act, logging is now stopped and woods travel banned. Only residents and prospectors are permitted in forested areas on the coast south of Knight Inlet and on Vancouver Island south of the Salmon River. Provincial Police have halted public travel north of Courtenay on the Island Highway until the fire has been brought under control.

In a press release Premier Pattullo stated that the additional closure was to stop all recreational and unnecessary use of the woods for the time being:

"It is desirable particularly that we shall have the co-operation of the public, because our forest protection organization is fully engaged in actual fire fighting."

Assistant Chief Forester C.D. Orchard left for the fire scene in order to assist Vancouver District Forester Charlie Haddon with the operations.

According to Assistant Forester Doug Taylor the damage done to date by the fire amounts to about \$500,000. This includes the destruction of 67 million board feet of timber, several donkey engines, other logging equipment, and 15 logging railway trestles.

Sunday July 24 - Day 20

This morning the minesweeper *HMCS Armentieres*, dispatched from Esquimalt, unloaded a shipment of buckets at Comox. She continued north to stand by on station off Campbell River. Although Admiral Sir Sidney Julius Meyrick had offered the *HMS York's* assistance, a radio message relayed to the British cruiser while she was off Little River said the firelines were holding. Thus, the ship continued on her way to Esquimalt.

The southern end of the fire is approaching the logging slash on Carney's limits. This is the most hazardous remaining block between Courtenay and Campbell River. If it catches fire and the wind comes up, Bevan and Cumberland will be in peril.

The wetter terrain at the southern end is a saving grace. Cats are nosing their way towards a swamp on the Browns River with the aim of connecting this with the fireguard above Bevan. Others are road-building between Headquarters and Dove Creek. Four more machines arrived from Vancouver this afternoon and two others from Nanaimo were dispatched to the Browns River and Dove Creek areas.

On a spur of the colliery railway which passes through Bevan, boxcars and flatcars remain ready in case of evacuation. Despite a constant veil of smoke, the inhabitants are standing firm for the moment. A youngster returning his cows from pasture said "Naw, we aren't scared here."

Temperatures at Campbell River reached 93° F and the humidity dropped to 20%, making it the most dangerous day so far. The complete lack of wind answered fire fighters' prayers:

"It would have not been possible to have had a worse fire day unless there was an accompanying wind."

said Charlie Haddon.

Five cats are working between Cariboo Creek and Quinsam. They are clearing 14 miles of fireguards to safeguard 35 million board feet of cold-decked timber belonging to the Comox Logging & Railway Company. This timber, nine miles inland from Oyster Bay, was thought to have been lost in the Black Friday battle. The cats reached the area by travelling overland from Oyster Bay since the Oyster River bridge burned down long before.

At Oyster Bay, four miles north of Oyster River, fire broke out in the afternoon and 250 fire fighters were dispatched to the area to protect the nearby farms. Several cats arrived on the scene from various points on the island to build a fireguard north of Fisherman's Rest fishing resort at Oyster River.

Inspector Robert Owens and Sergeant Don Tweedhope of the Provincial Police made an aerial inspection of the entire fire area with pilot Ted Dobbin. They found the situation to be "very favourable," but thought that a northwest wind could spell trouble at the Campbell River end.

Charlie Haddon let go fifty more single unemployed men from the Quinsam area crews today and shipped them back to Vancouver. Sixteen others who had demonstrated a willingness to work were kept on. Provincial Police Constable Jimmy Osman returned to Campbell River from a week of fire fighting duty. He told of finding men asleep in the woods and out rowing on Campbell Lake while Forbes Landing burned.

R.W. Campbell, a spokesman for the Relief Project Workers' Union, stated that the pump at Forbes Landing failed because it was refueled with straight gasoline rather than a mixture of gasoline and oil. Referring to charges of malingering, Campbell said that the welfare of the workers was neglected. Some men on the firelines had worked for 16 hours with nothing to eat but a sandwich.

Thanks to the absence of wind today the fire progressed southward only half a mile towards Courtenay. One small building was destroyed on the southern front. Smoke reduced visibility to less than 100 feet and automobile headlights were turned on long before dark.

Fifty men from the *Fraser* were sent ashore tonight to engage in front line fire fighting duties. This is a departure from their usual functions of patrol and radio work. They went to the Burns Road area, towards the Browns River, to douse spot fires and keep flames away from settler's homes.

Mayor Milton Stephens re-emphasized that Courtenay is well prepared for the worst eventuality. Fire hoses are still strung along the streets ready for use, wooden structures are being sprinkled with water, and the fire department is organized to patrol the town section by section.

The E and N Railway Company offered a train of coaches for evacuation, the Victoria Red Cross Society has staff ready, and the Saanich Fire Department has volunteered some of its fire engines. "If the fire comes into Courtenay we can lick it," stated the mayor.

Game Warden Barney Harvey said the resorts on Vancouver Island are open for business and the sport fishing is now at its best. "There is not, and never will be, any likelihood of visitors being recruited to fight forest fires," he added.

The Island Highway north of Oyster River remains open only to *bona fide* tourists and fishermen. The highway is closed to sightseers so excess traffic will not interfere with access. Fire fighters may have to get to a new outbreak somewhere near the highway. Provincial Police turned back several hundred cars this afternoon.

Monday July 25 - Day 21

Shortly after midnight fire broke through the lines at Oyster Bay. Six families were evacuated, the road closed for an hour, and telephone lines downed. As a result, naval communication teams set up a shortwave radio link between the northern and southern ends of the fire.

The fire travelled east across the Island Highway near Ahern's ranch, right to the Strait of Georgia. Several logs on the beach caught fire. Snags were felled in the area and water pumped directly from the ocean to the blaze along 200 yards of the highway.

This morning the outbreak is burning in second growth and slash for a mile south along the coast but is under control. Ground communications have now been re-established and the road is open once more.

The *HMS York* arrived at Esquimalt at 9:00 AM. The *Fraser* remains at anchor in Comox Bay. A number of the engine room crew went ashore to help man the fire pumps. The *St. Laurent*, affectionately known as the "Sally Rand" to its crew, is steaming south today back to its Esquimalt base.

Seventy-five sailors headquartered at the Parish Hall continued patrol on the fireguard between the Carney limits and the Browns River. The men are "very steady and reliable."

At 10:30 AM an ember landed three blocks from the centre of Courtenay and started a grass fire. It was quickly extinguished by the fire department. The main forest fire is now burning in the Jackpot Creek area, south of Dove Creek. A number of cats sent to the area are boxing it in with guards.

George Melrose said all firelines on the northern end are in and backfired, so just a patrol crew will remain at hand. The Bloedel, Stewart & Welch area where the fire started three weeks ago is dead and cold. At Quinsam Lake the fire is well under control. The Forest Branch is removing its crews, leaving the situation to the logging companies. The 250 fire fighters from the main fire camp at Campbellton are moving south to Oyster River to concentrate on the eastern flank of the fire.

Fire camp boss Freeman King collapsed yesterday after ten days with little sleep. He was taken to Lourdes Hospital in Campbell River. Having awoken this morning, he sneaked out of the ward and returned to his duties. Although the doctor sent an ambulance to retrieve his errant patient, King refused to return.

All firelines from Campbell River to Shelter Point are complete. From Shelter Point to Black Creek, 8 miles to the south, the fire is not yet under control. However, it is quiet at the moment due to the still air. From Black Creek to the southern end of the fire, 3 1/2 miles north of Courtenay, firelines have been built but the fire is not contained.

For the past three days, a Comox Logging crew has been working to build a fireguard between Constitution Hill and the cold-decked timber north in Block 28, at the Oyster River. Five cats unloaded from flat cars at Headquarters went to the fireline with 15 men and a cook. Their orders were to stay out in the woods until the work was done.

At noon today a western breeze came up and raised fears that the fire could resume spreading. Fireguards on the southern end near the Forbidden Plateau are almost finished and backfiring has begun. Pump units and fireguards have stopped the fire's advance. The western flank is nearly boxed in by guards but the fire is moving along Dove Creek and up the Tsolum River.

A group of 51 refugee children staying at the Agricultural and Native Sons halls went on an outing to the lower Tsolum River, near Cooper's Corner. The youngsters enjoyed a swim far from the tumult, garbed in bathing suits supplied by a Courtenay merchant.

Later today the wind lulled and all concerned hoped that the fire would simply burn itself out in its present location. Bevan is still closest to the fire and additional work is being done on the fireguard around the town. Even the western flank of the fire, which had been heading towards the Forbidden Plateau, was quiet. Nevertheless, fire fighters are maintaining a long and weary vigil against sudden outbreaks.

The main fear now is of a strong southeast wind which could possibly spread fire through slash into the Elk River Timber limits, seven miles distant. All of the company's available resources are being used to protect the main camp and keep fire from crossing the logging railway right of way and getting into the timber.

At 5:00 PM Premier Pattullo issued a third order. This closed the rest of the woods in the Vancouver Forest District, both on Vancouver Island and the lower mainland coast. Although conditions between Courtenay and Campbell River are still serious, the fire hasn't moved significantly lately. It is three miles from Courtenay.

Most residents along the Island Highway towards Campbell River have been brought in to Courtenay. Bevan and Cumberland are considered to be in the most danger and work on the fireguards there is receiving priority. The Forbidden Plateau Lodge is safe for the moment, the fire having passed by at a lower elevation.

Courtenay is bustling with forestry and police officials, naval officers and seamen, loggers, and fire fighters. The Forest Branch office operates 24 hours a day and continues to be a beehive of activity. Officials keep in touch with the firelines by telephone and the shortwave radios operated by naval communications teams. Pumps, hose, and other equipment are constantly being loaded onto trucks and sent to where they are needed. An expanded crew is staffing the Provincial Police office, working overtime to cope with the extra load.

The current number of men on the fireline totals nearly 2,500. Thirty pumps, 67 miles of hose, 12 tractors, and 12 cats are in use on the firelines. New pumps and hose are still arriving daily. The weather forecast calls for continued dry weather and no hope of rain. A good rain is seen as the only salvation by fire fighters.

Tuesday July 26 - Day 22

Although the wind sprang up early in the day, it didn't last and the fire remained at a standstill. The humidity is up from 27% yesterday to 52% today, and the temperature is down. For the first time since the fire began its run to the south, the communities in its path are considered safe.

The main fire front is separated by a seven mile long and 16 foot wide fireguard from Courtenay, Cumberland, and Bevan. It was constructed by special crews with cats and tractors. Nevertheless, the communities are not out of danger and a constant vigil by 500 fire fighters is being maintained. In Courtenay the rooftops and sidewalks are still sprinkled with water every morning as a precaution.

Taking advantage of the lack of wind, fire fighters are extending fireguards on the western flank. A trail was put through from the Comox Logging main line to Dove Creek to check a tongue of fire heading southeast from the main blaze. Another 400 men are working on the east side guards, north towards Black Creek.

The Bloedel, Stewart & Welch crews took over operations in the Elk Falls area, using Forest Branch fire pumps and pumpmen. Except inland from Oyster Bay, all night crews have been removed. Cats and crews are working there but the fire is slackening.

Chief Forester Ernest Manning issued a statement this morning to clarify the issue of sabotage reported last week on the firelines:

"Dispatches from Campbell River report sabotage of Forest Branch fire-fighting equipment. The prominence given to these reports publicly has, I fear, left an erroneous impression in the minds of some of our citizens.

Two serious cases of sabotage have come to the attention of the Forest Service to date. Until it is possible to fix responsibility it would be unfair to suggest that it is the deliberate work of any group or large number of fire fighters."

The first instance of sabotage was tampering with a fire pump at Forbes Landing, the second of cutting fire hose at Elk Falls. Both cases are still under investigation.

Many of the 212 men from the Vancouver area were dismissed because of inexperience in fire fighting and returned to the mainland. While a few may have been involved in the sabotage, the entire group was not under suspicion. It was thought best to send the men back since the Forest Branch did not have adequate time to train them properly for fire fighting duties.

The Mennonites and other refugees are still housed in tents on the Courtenay Exhibition grounds, attended to by the Provincial Police. Contributions of food are being provided by the Town Council, the Provincial Secretary's office, and the residents of Courtenay. Only a few of these families have suffered losses due to the fire reaching their properties.

The Island Highway north of Courtenay was reopened today to *bona fide* travellers since the Oyster Bay outbreak has been subdued. It is now possible to drive to Campbell River and Campbell Lake. The tourist trade has, in most areas, suffered little impact from the forest fire situation.

Assistant Chief Forester C.D. Orchard escorted the Minister of Lands near Campbell River and Camp Eight today. After viewing the scene, the Hon. A. Wells Gray said that efforts are being concentrated on putting out the remaining fire. He added that:

"I have always been proud of our forest service but after looking over the work they have done here, I am prouder than ever."

Wednesday July 27 - Day 23

The burned area has been reduced to a smouldering ruin thanks to the general lack of wind over the past four days. Some flames can be seen in the Oyster Bay area and not far from Bevan. Fire fighters are hopeful that the wide fireguard they built there will hold should the fire become more active.

One logging company spokesman said that the fire was "...boxed in all along the line. It would take quite a strong wind to get her out of there now." Large crews are working on all sides of the current blaze.

Two new pumps and several thousand feet of hose obtained from Seattle are now in use. The Hon. A. Wells Gray approved their purchase when the Forest Branch found that stocks of equipment in British Columbia were exhausted.

Bob Filberg, Superintendent of the Comox Logging & Railway Company, sang the praises of the cat teams today. They have constructed hundreds of miles of fireguards, replacing the former method of manpower with picks and shovels:

"It would take nearly all the manpower in Canada to accomplish in one week by the old methods what we have done with cats."

The destroyer *Fraser* recalled 150 men working at various duties ashore, but left behind a small crew to continue with radio communications. The ship will leave tomorrow morning for Esquimalt. *HMCS Armentieres* steamed south this morning.

Before sailing from Nanaimo for Vancouver this afternoon, Charlie Haddon said:

"Providing no howling gales spring up, I believe we have the terrible forest fire at the Campbell River and Courtenay district licked."

The Comox Logging operations at Camp Three and Headquarters are out of danger. Most of the work remains concentrated in the Dove Creek area. More fireguards have been put in over the past few days and backfires lighted on Monday and Tuesday worked excellently, he added.

Thursday July 28 - Day 24

Winds increased today and humidities remained low, causing concern among fire fighters. Efforts on the fire were on the southern end of the western flank adjacent to the Forbidden Plateau. The fire is still burning around the base of Constitution Hill.

A 50-man crew was sent to the Dove Creek trail to combat a tongue of flame heading up a ravine towards the plateau. Seventy-five men are working on the west side of the fire, putting in a guard from Dove Creek to Wolf Lake. A Comox Logging crew of 20 men is deployed to the north of Wolf Lake.

An extra crew and pump were dispatched to battle a spot fire a mile away from Bevan. It was two acres in size and might spread towards the townsite should a west wind arise. Although Courtenay, Cumberland, and Bevan are separated from the fire by a fireguard, it would be of little benefit in the face of a high wind, especially one from the northwest. Fire fighters are hopeful that the winds will remain calm.

The main fireguard now extends from Oyster River to the south, above Black Creek, to Headquarters. From there it goes across the Tsolum River to the Dove Creek bridge, and then through to the swamp on the Browns River. Men posted night and day at intervals along the guard extinguish fires which cross over.

Any gaps on the eastern flank are being closed one by one. The pumps used at Oyster Bay have been moved inland to the river for cleaning in fresh water. The fire hose is being rolled for its next use. The main camp of fire fighters moved south from Campbellton to Oyster River today to permit concentrated work there. Another camp is at Dove Creek.

Assistant District Forester C.C. Ternan is in charge of operations at Campbell River. The Elk River Timber Company has 300 men working with hand tools and cats on the lines in the northern end. They have lost 4 out of 21 cold decks of timber, although the remaining ones are safe for as long as the winds stay calm and the fire doesn't spring to life. It is considered a marvel that the fire did not consume Camp Eight, as it is so encircled by desolation.

The refugees at Courtenay expect to return home in the near future. They were notified that the government's responsibility to feed them ends tonight. They are at liberty to return to the Dove Creek, Headquarters, Camp Three, and Black Creek areas. The Forest Branch stated that unless there is a marked change in conditions they can leave in safety.

With regard to the issue of sabotage on the firelines, a letter to the editor of the *Comox Argus* from Jack Dingwall alleged that the pump failure at Forbes Landing was due to "a well-known policeman of Campbell River" advancing the speed and putting it out of commission. Dingwall himself was in charge of that pump and another nearby at the time.

Provincial MPP Colin Cameron of Comox called for the authorities to "thoroughly investigate this whole business of sabotage." In his opinion the group of unemployed men from Vancouver paid collectively for the misdeeds of a few.

Attorney General Gordon Wismer discussed the possibility of a closed season on Vancouver Island game in view of the fire's destruction. A final decision will be made later. In the meantime, he instructed the Game Department to supply grain to the wild grouse orphaned by the fire. They are huddling in flocks on roads and railway tracks, as well as in the green areas which escaped the fire's fury.

Friday July 29 - Day 25

The fire is "well under control" at the northern end. Fireguards near Bevan are being maintained and enlarged to secure the community. The fire is still advancing slowly to the south, although winds have been light.

Chief Forester Ernest Manning spoke with the Campbell River crews by telephone and was told the firelines are being held and no immediate trouble is anticipated.

The Salvation Army Band held a benefit concert in Victoria's Beacon Hill Park today. Funds raised will go to aid the refugees at Courtenay.

Saturday July 30 - Day 26

A light rainfall from 5:30 to 7:30 AM raised hopes that the fire will soon be laid to rest once and for all. At the moment the flames are more or less dormant. Work is still concentrated in the Dove Creek and Oyster River sections. The men think the fire will not spread further in these areas.

As usual conditions re-establish themselves, tourist associations are advising travellers that the Island Highway is open from Victoria to Campbell River. From his office in Vancouver, District Forester Charlie Haddon said:

"We think we have the fire licked, but you can never tell in this business. The long dry spell and dry westerly winds every night made fire fighting a real problem. The woods were dry as tinder and, generally speaking, fire travels fast in the day and dies down at night."

"But in this case it was just the opposite. The days were calm, permitting us to make a lot of guards, and just about sundown every night the wind came up, making it difficult and often impossible to hold the guards."

The government has offered a \$1,000 reward for information leading to the conviction of any person or persons found guilty of sabotage on the firelines on Vancouver Island. In announcing the reward, Attorney General Gordon Wismer said:

"We are satisfied there was sabotage. After conversation with Premier Pattullo, I have decided to offer these rewards. We are determined to sift this matter to the bottom and stamp out sabotage and incendiarism."

Also announced was a reward of \$250 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of anyone carrying out incendiarism in the fire area.

Sunday July 31 - Day 27

Four hundred men were released from fire duties this weekend. The Comox Logging and Elk River Timber companies still have crews out on patrols, mopping up smouldering parts of the fire.

James A. Griffith of Victoria made a day trip by car to Campbell River and back. He filed this report as a letter to the editor of the *Victoria Daily Colonist*:

"The air was clear and there was no smoke in sight. We ran into a rain shower between Courtenay and Campbell River and when we returned it was still raining. The heavy clouds over in the mountains where the fire was indicated a heavy rain was falling.

The fire wardens at Courtenay said the fire was a hot one on account of everything being so dry, which is unusual on the Island, but that they had the fires well under control and did not think there would be any more trouble."

The 25 tents set up at Courtenay to house the refugees are empty. The families are returning to their homes. The Mennonite settlers from the Black Creek area left the Exhibition Grounds with relief and joy. Most of their properties had survived the fire intact.

While the Mennonites accepted food provided by various agencies, offers of help and financial assistance from all sources were declined gratefully. A personal cheque intended for the refugees was returned to Lieutenant-Governor Eric W. Hamber by the Courtenay town hall. The Lieutenant-Governor expressed his sympathy to the refugees and praised the relief work done by Mayor Stephens and the committee.

Monday August 1 - Day 28

A light rain fell today in the Courtenay area, bringing some relief. The fire was quiet. A crew of 50 men ordered in to the west side between Wolf Lake and the Oyster River devoted their attention to an outbreak in the Burns Swamp.

Except for one mile of road eight miles south of Campbell River, the Island Highway has been unaffected. The fire crossed the highway at Oyster River but is dead out there now. The air has cleared itself of smoke except for an area about ten miles to the west.

George Melrose, of the Forest Branch, said the blaze is being held within an 85 square mile area by fireguards. The northern end of the fire is in excellent shape. The threat to Bevan, Courtenay, and Cumberland has largely subsided. The eight remaining naval radio operators have now returned to their base in Esquimalt.

Chief Forester Ernest Manning decided to keep logging operations on all but the northwest tip of Vancouver Island closed as a precautionary measure. The Hon. A. Wells Gray, Minister of Lands, announced that he will travel to Comox tomorrow to survey the current situation. He will then discuss plans with Forest Branch officials and logging operators.

Attorney General Gordon Wismer said today he intends to press investigations of the alleged sabotage and incendiarism in the Campbell River - Courtenay fire "right down the line." It is expected that the issue will be debated when the provincial legislature convenes in the fall.

A variety theatre company from *HMS York* presented a vaudeville show at the Victoria Shrine Auditorium tonight. A full house enjoyed the three hour show, entitled "Lessons in Laughter." Proceeds from the gate will go towards relief for the Courtenay refugees. The show will be repeated tomorrow night.

Tuesday August 2 - Day 29

Patrols continue on the major sectors. Cats and other equipment were shipped south to a fire at Bowser this afternoon.

The ban on logging north of Knight Inlet on the mainland and above the 50th parallel on Vancouver Island west of the 126th meridian was lifted today in view of the decreasing fire hazard. The situation in the remainder of the Vancouver Forest District will be reviewed on Friday, according to the Hon. A. Wells Gray.

Wednesday August 3 - Day 30

Patrols and pump crews handled the odd flare up today. Although there was more rain yesterday, it was local and only a light shower fell at Courtenay. Thus, the concern continues. The Forest Branch summed up the fire situation by saying the past week was "one of the worst in the annals of the department."

"All danger was not past" according to the Minister of Lands, the Hon. A. Wells Gray, who arrived in Courtenay today to assess the aftermath of the big fire first hand. The Minister spent two hours in the Courtenay office of the Forest Branch. He then proceeded to Headquarters to see Comox Logging & Railway Company Superintendent Bob Filberg.

The Forbes family is back at Forbes Landing. They are living in one of the cabins which escaped unharmed in the July 21 blaze. James and Margaret Forbes have not decided how to rebuild their camp. Letters of support poured in from all parts of North America, including offers of accommodation until they get re-established. Their pet deer Trixie, and her two fawns, are safe and sound, gambolling on the grounds once more.

Thursday August 4 - Day 31

A fire burning along Dove Creek shows there is still a possibility of further action. Seventy-five fire fighters from the nearby camp are dealing with this new outbreak. The burned out sections of the Forbidden Plateau trail will require some work before pack trains can travel there again. The Forbidden Plateau Lodge has reopened for business, with Mr. Wood and his staff back in attendance.

Friday August 5 - Day 32

The Minister of Lands lifted the logging ban on the mainland north of Lund. The ban was also lifted on Vancouver Island north of a line between Courtenay and the mouth of Muchalat Arm. While conditions in these northern districts have improved, the south remains hazardous. Therefore the ban on logging and woods travel is still in force in those areas.

Saturday August 6 - Day 33

An editorial in the *Victoria Daily Colonist* raised the issue of the vast areas of slash which result from high lead logging. Such debris is wasteful, hinders second growth, and represents a fire hazard. Many fires have broken out in slash and spread into adjoining virgin timber, "a fast-disappearing resource."

The slash should someday "...be turned into something more useful than fodder for fires, whether set intentionally and the fire controlled or by accident when it endangers lives and property and destroys a large amount of bird and game life."

Heavy rain fell on the fire area for two hours tonight. This was a welcome event but would have been even more welcome had it continued longer. A corps of fire fighters remains on duty patrolling the fire in case of renewed trouble.

Sunday August 7 - Day 34

The majority of cats hired from the Finning company are no longer required. They are being loaded for shipment by barge to Vancouver. A water tank truck and other vehicles are also being released.

Doug Taylor and Bob Filberg discussed the fire and agreed that slash disposal last year at Quinsam Lake and near Camp Eight had unquestionably reduced damage done by the fire there. Filberg also suggested that all snags on logged areas be felled as a protective measure.

Monday August 8 - Day 35

In addressing the New Westminster Liberal Association tonight, the Hon. A. Wells Gray vowed that stricter fire prevention methods will be employed in the future. Mills and logging camps will be shut down earlier when the fire hazard becomes threatening.

He said the situation on Vancouver Island was by no means back to normal. "Very little rain has fallen on the lower part of the island and a strong wind is all that is needed to fan the smouldering embers into an inferno."

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.

Wednesday August 10 - Day 37

Rain fell between 6:00 and 11:30 AM at Headquarters. More men on the firelines will be laid off today and tomorrow as conditions continue to improve. The Dove Creek camp is still occupied by a small crew.

The Hon. A. Wells Gray stated today that the forest fires of recent weeks focussed attention on the need for reforestation. The larger fires, notably the one between Courtenay and Campbell River, have burned much young growth and destroyed scattered seed trees. Without a natural source of seed, these areas will be denuded of forest growth for generations to come.

As they are some of the most productive growing sites in the Pacific Northwest, replanting must be carried out. "With this in view, it is intended to increase our planting programme materially," said the Minister.

Accordingly, seedling production at the Green Timbers nursery in Surrey will rise from 3 to 10 million annually. Sites will be examined on Vancouver Island for establishing a supplemental nursery near the devastated area.

Extra seed is now being collected so the additional seedlings may be grown. The Minister added:

"Exact plans will have to await more detailed examinations of the areas involved, but it seems possible that we can be planting up to 10,000 acres per annum in the course of the next two years, and this programme can be largely increased if desirable in the light of more exact information yet to be collected."

This program will have the added benefit of acting as a source of employment for men on relief. Accordingly, two new forestry camps will be constructed on Vancouver Island, where most of the new planting will take place.

The cost to plant about 1,000 trees per acre is estimated at roughly \$10. Seedlings will also be supplied free to ranchers to start woodlots. These plantings will be made under Forest Branch supervision.

Thursday August 11 - Day 38

Most of the remaining men who have been patrolling fireguards from the Oyster River and Camp Three to near Headquarters for the Comox Logging & Railway Company are coming out of the woods. Other crews are engaged in rebuilding burned bridges on the Oyster and Tsolum rivers.

Further north, two spot fires were found between the Oyster River and the Elk River Timber main line. The men of the Elk River Timber Company are also busy with similar reconstruction work.

Friday August 12 - Day 39

With a light rain falling, fire fighting equipment is being removed from the Black Creek and Headquarters areas. Pumps, tools, and hose are being picked up from the firelines for maintenance and clean-up.

Saturday August 13 - Day 40

The Dove Creek fire camp was closed down and dismantled. Chief Forester Ernest Manning lifted the three week old campfire ban in the Vancouver Forest District. This follows resumption of logging and woods travel.

Sunday August 14 - Day 41

The Dove Creek area is being patrolled. At the northern end the Bloedel, Stewart & Welch crew is being reduced. No smoke is visible in that area.

Trucks sent to the southern end of the fire assisted with removal of fire fighting equipment. Hose is being cleaned in the Oyster River.

Monday August 15 - Day 42

Fair weather and a fresh wind resulted in a few flare-ups. These were handled easily by the remaining patrol crews.

Tuesday August 16 - Day 43

A *Victoria Daily Times* reporter interviewed Gordon Palmer, an educator from Philadelphia, this morning. The Palmer family was vacationing at Forbes Landing shortly before it was destroyed and had a first hand look at the rampaging fire. Mr. Palmer suggested that patch cutting would lessen the fire hazard by avoiding such large and continuous areas of slash.

The Palmer family has holidayed on Vancouver Island six times. Mr. Palmer considers it the finest spot for rest and recreation. He took much colour film footage of the fire action near Forbes Landing and elsewhere but has not yet had the film developed.

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 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.

Thursday August 18

The patrol crew was laid off today. Only the clean-up gang remains. Timekeepers are busy with the accounts and payrolls, checking for duplication and other errors. A system has been worked out to distribute paycheques to the men at all three camps operational during the fire.

Chief Forester Ernest Manning wrote to Commander H.E. Reid of *HMCS Fraser* expressing thanks for the help provided by the navy:

"The feeling of security given the public by the presence of your vessels was valuable but still more was the well organized and able work done by the ships' crews at Courtenay under Lieutenant-Commander Tisdall and Sub-Lieutenant Rutherford.

On behalf of the Forest Service I wish to express to you our appreciation of the co-operation given us at a time when our resources were taxed to the limit in dealing with a difficult situation."

Friday August 19

Commander Reid replied to the Chief Forester:

"It was a great pleasure to the Navy to co-operate with Mr. Melrose and Mr. Haddon and the other members of your Department, and instructive to us to witness the quiet and efficient operations of the Forest Service during a time of emergency."

The Minister of Lands, the Hon. A. Wells Gray, wrote to the Minister of National Defence in Ottawa expressing his appreciation of the navy's assistance.

Tuesday August 30

The Minister of National Defence, the Hon. Ian A. Mackenzie, replied, stating that:

"It is indeed gratifying to hear that the Naval Service acquitted itself so creditably. Your kind expression of appreciation has been brought to the attention of the officers and ratings concerned."

Epilogue

The fire consumed 50,000 years worth of employment, according to estimates based on 2,000 men working for 25 years. With 100,000 acres producing 50,000 board feet per acre at maturity, the loss represents 5 billion board feet of timber. One thousand board feet will keep two men working in the woods and mills. Therefore, the total loss amounts to 10 million man-days. This is based on operations going 200 days per year

Questions were raised regarding the coastal high lead logging method and the flammable logging slash created. In addressing the Forestry Committee of the provincial legislature, Chief Forester Ernest Manning said:

"Let us not be too critical of this high-lead logging method with its accompanying wastefulness, until a substitute is found for it that will permit companies to operate at a profit and not compel them to close down, thereby adding to our unemployment problem."

James Forbes started work on a new two-storey hotel with a full basement and 20 guest rooms. There will also be a large lounge, dining room, kitchen, and owner's suite. The exterior will be in the Tudor style, with local woods used in construction.

Soon after the fire went out, logging crews began to salvage the burned timber. Load after load of black logs arrived at the east coast booming grounds. The loggers looked more like coal miners when leaving the bush at the end of a shift. Over the next few months vegetation regrew on the area, wildlife returned, and foresters and loggers recovered from their long ordeal.

More than fifty years later, only a trained eye can detect traces of what happened between Boot Lake and the Browns River. Man and nature have healed the scars. There have been many thousands of forest fires in B.C. since 1938. Although some have been six or seven times the size of the Bloedel fire, none have approached its total impact nor become the stuff of legend.

Additional information

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.

The court case

A lengthy suit against Bloedel, Stewart & Welch by the Elk River Timber Company took place during the winter of 1939 - 1940. The trial lasted seven weeks before B.C. Supreme Court Justice Morrison, producing 1,800 pages of transcripts. The jury reached a decision for the plaintiff on February 20, 1940 after 44 hours of deliberations.

As a result, the Elk River Timber Company received a damage award of \$92,594 in May of 1940. These fell into 16 categories, including \$22,671 for standing timber, \$35,964 for felled, bucked, and cold-decked timber, and \$14,776 in fire-fighting costs.

Statistics on the fire

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