

Thirty Days and Thirty Nights



Zeballos Valley.

In 1983, Gerhard and I got a contract to select Western hemlock parent trees on the Northwest coast of Vancouver Island, from Nootka Sound to Brooks Peninsula. The contract was administered by Sven Rasmussen of Tahsis Company on behalf of the Ministry of Forests. Our contract was really with Mike Meagher, the Western hemlock breeder, but the money was laundered through Tahsis Company.

I knew Sven previously through my job at Tahsis Company in 1967 and 1969 and had also met him at various tree improvement meetings when I had worked for Mac Millan Bloedel.

Most of the parent trees were to be selected on Tahsis Company's TFL 19, and Sven had kindly provided us with excellent forest inventory maps to assist us with our "cruise" of second growth hemlock stands of a suitable age. We would wander, somewhat systematically, looking for trees that had excellent form, fine branching, and were taller, and greater in diameter than all its competitors. When we had identified one of these "elite trees" we would take a core sample to determine the age and keep the core to determine specific gravity at a later date. Once we selected a parent tree we would paint a couple of rings around it and a number. Lastly we would shoot branches off from the upper part of the crown, package them in damp newspaper, and place them in a cooler. There were later delivered to the Cowichan Lake Research Station and grafted onto seedlings for inclusion in clone banks and seed orchards.

We decided to start our contract in Zeballos because of its central location and proximity to many potential stands of the right age (50-100 years old) we had identified on the maps. We left Nanaimo early on February 10th 1983, and drove to Gold River, then up the Gold River and Nimpkish Valley to the turn off to Zeballos a few km past Woss Camp. It would have been quicker to take the relatively new Island Highway North, but we thought we would take the scenic route and possibly see a potential stand

for cruising at the same time. The road from the highway down to the village usually takes about an hour, but we did a bit of scouting on the way and went to the old Privateer gold mine, and Zeballos Lake area.



Zeballos in 1938 .

Zeballos was an old gold mining town. Between 1938 and 1943 \$13 million worth of gold bricks were shipped from Zeballos. The population was reputed to be 1500, but that is likely an exaggeration.

We checked into the Zeballos Hotel which hadn't changed much since I stayed in Zeballos as a kid with a friend and his family in 1964 for part of a summer. The hotel had been built in 1936, and had received minimal upgrades in the following 50 years.

The room rate was \$25, and it was fairly basic with sagging old hospital iron beds. We actually had a TV. In fact two, one for picture and one for sound! The owners of the hotel had a large inventory of TV's as they had purchased them from an auction of old hotel paraphernalia from the Hotel Vancouver. There was still the odd bullet hole in the bar, and amazingly there was an old portable Turkish bath in the attic. (No longer worked however.)

The owners of the Zeballos Hotel were two young couples who alternatively looked after the hotel. (Two weeks on and two weeks off.)

We had arrived at dinner time and went into the small restaurant where we had a surprisingly good home-cooked style dinner. We let our server and the cook know that we would be there for a while, and asked if we could have lunches made for the morning. The cook replied yes... but she didn't take orders..., you get what she made, and they were \$6.00. With no other options we readily agreed.

The next morning when we went in for our hearty breakfast, our two lunches were waiting for us on a

side-table in shopping bags! The lunches were always enormous, and delicious! I particularly liked the carrot cake. You had to be careful eating it however, as she always inserted toothpicks in the top to keep the wax paper from mashing the icing.

The lunches turned out to be the highlight of our day, and the weather not so much... After we had spent a few days there the cook warmed up to us, called us Hon, and put Happy Faces on our lunch bags.



Zeballos Hotel.

For our first day in the bush we decided to drive to the furthest drivable stands which were in the Tahsish headwater drainage.

This was the first time that we saw packs of wolves, always late in the evening always chasing deer, we would try to run them off the road. We see wolves in the bush almost every day, or always their scats.

We were able to find a couple of suitable stands and selected our first parent trees, 1458 & 1459. The weather was awful, a torrential downpour. When we got close to Zeballos the road had washed out, and we couldn't get back to town. Finally, Tahsis Company built a rough trail with a cat through the slash around the washout for us, and numerous others, trying to return to Zeballos. The "trail" was quite a challenge for my truck, a 1982 Dodge ½ ton, two-wheel drive. It was a long day..... That day was infamous because that storm we endured was coast-wide, and a landslide had ripped through Lions Bay on the Squamish Highway taking two lives.



Logging in Upper Tashish Valley.

I had bought my truck the year before when I left MacMillan Bloedel to go contracting. Having limited funds, I bought the cheapest new truck I could find, and it was not really intended for bush work. It had a 3-speed stick shift with a slant six engine, but was only two wheel drive. Knowing that it could be a problem accessing stands located behind de-activated or brushed in roads; we borrowed a Honda 90 Trail motorcycle from MacMillan Bloedel, which proved very useful on several occasions.

It rained almost every single day over the month that we were working on the West Coast. The saving grace was that the stands were excellent for plus tree cruising, generally flat to moderate slopes, and dense enough so there was virtually no undergrowth.

The worst part however was the constant rain and wind, when we had to shoot branches off the selected trees. The scopes on our guns would fill up with water, and condensation. We went through a lot of toilet paper cleaning out the scopes regularly.

To shoot scion material off the top of trees that are 30+ metres in height is challenging even in good weather, especially in dense stands. Shooting small branches off is relatively easy but getting them to the ground is another story! However, Gerhard and I had a lot of experience from previous parent tree selection and collection programs, and had developed a system that worked well. One of us would clear a path up the tree with a 30-30, taking off branches that were often two inches or more in diameter. Once a path up the tree was cleared, we would shoot material off the top for propagation.

Most evenings were spent drying out and cleaning our guns. It seems odd now that no one worried about us packing guns daily into our hotel room.

When you are shooting close to straight up, despite having rain gear, water runs down your sleeves and eventually every part of your body and clothing are drenched. We ran poly rope lines across our hotel room to hang up our wet gear. We would have the heat on high and the window wide open. After several days, when we returned home one day, the lines were down, and our clothes had been washed

and were neatly folded on our beds! That evening we met the lady of the house in the bar and she said that she hoped we didn't mind that she had done our laundry. We replied that we were thrilled and didn't mind paying. Her reply was, "Look, I am in Zeballos, I have a lot of free time." She was a lovely person and on a couple of occasions she arranged for goods to be brought in from Sayward and Campbell River, one of which was contact lens solution for me!

We spent eight days working out of Zeballos and really enjoyed the area, and the folks of the town. The hub of social life generally centered on the bar. By the time we had been there two days, everyone in town knew our life stories, marital status, what we were doing, etc. We were invited by three of the single girls in town who I think viewed us as fresh meat. (More so Gerhard than me, as he was technically still single!) We were invited to the Valentine's Day dance, but gracefully declined, something we both regretted later..... One evening we had a few beers with a local First Nation, fellow who worked for, (managed we were informed) the band's logging company. After a few jovial beers Gerhard was appointed Chief Forester, and I was Logging Manager. However, these positions were quite short lived.

We also ran into a faller whom I had worked with in Gold River.

At almost every meal we chatted with two fellows from Nanaimo that were refurbishing some pilings on the government dock. One was last name of Bell and was related to the owners of Bell Marine in Nanaimo. The pair went from one Federal government contract to another, and always did very well apparently. They were quite boisterous and poked fun at everyone in the restaurant. I remember that two of the other regulars were very quiet, secretive miners that were doing some exploration work, and one of the Federal crew shouted out loudly in a packed restaurant, "I hear you hit a rich vein today." I still remember the look of horror on their faces.

There was a crew of Geoduck divers there regularly as well. It sounded like an awful, destructive business.

After 8 days in Zeballos, we returned home for a couple of day to relax and deliver the cuttings to the Cowichan Lake Research Station.

On February 20th we headed back up Island, past Woss Camp turned off the highway, down to Zeballos and over to Fair Harbour. At Fair Harbour we caught a water taxi to Freil Lake Loggings camp at Chamiss Bay. Well,.. it was not really Chamiss Bay. It was a small bay north of Chamiss Bay, which the residents affectionately called Diesel Bay. This was the epitome of a gyppo logging camp. There was an unusual arrangement of very old Atco trailers, and numerous pieces of old logging equipment and vehicles scattered around, some halfway in the water. I remember also a couple of old fridges and freezers that we guessed had died as well.

We were greeted by the timekeeper/bookkeeper who it turned out was married to the daughter of a well-known local Cedar logger/saw miller named Pete Snow. He set us up in a basic room in one of the bunkhouses, filled us in on the mealtime's details, and gave us a key to one of Tahsis company's pick-ups. Albeit the rooms were clean and tidy, it was a bit alarming to see 5 gallon buckets strategically placed in the hallways to catch the water dripping from a multitude of leaks. Even the pool table in the Spartan Rec Hall had a bucket in the center of the table.

Don Pugh and Mike Henderson, engineers from Tahsis Company showed up later in the day to do a

couple of days of engineering. They were a wealth of knowledge about the second growth stands and road access. They also showed us the heavy-duty planks that were in each truck to aid in crossing deep water bars on deactivated roads. (tank traps).

As questionable as the accommodations were, the cookhouse was shockingly neat and tidy, and the food was outstanding! The cook Don was a nice guy who took pride in his trade and every meal was a treat. He would fish and trap prawns in his off time and we reaped the benefits. He was as an excellent pastry chef, which suited Gerhard well as he has always had a sweet tooth. The flunky was also a nice fellow, albeit quiet, but he cleaned all the dishes spotlessly in scalding hot water without rubber gloves. My skin would have peeled off.

The other noteworthy character in camp was the bull cook who cleaned the bunkhouses, periodically changed the bedding, cleaned the bathrooms, and was constantly unplugging the water system and toilets. The water source was a creek that contained a lot of iron and sediment which clogged the old pipes. He entertained us in the evening with stories of his adventures. I believe his name was Al. He had been a helicopter pilot, but had an unfortunate accident where two of his passengers were killed. He was later a tour boat operator in Vancouver harbour, and was now shanghaied in Diesel Bay. One night, likely after some intoxicants he started playing taps on a trumpet, after we had gone to sleep.

On our first day in camp, Don and Mike took us up Kashutl Inlet where they had some work to do, and they knew of some good second growth stands to cruise. They dropped us off and we found a couple of good stands where we picked two trees.

That evening Ralph Winters from the BC Forest Service showed up. He was supervising a planting crew and staying in camp for a couple of days. The poor tree planting crew was not allowed to stay in camp and they were living in tents a couple of kilometers up the mainline. The weather was not great for camping.... Later in my career I had a lot of contact with Ralph through my volunteer work with the Coastal Silviculture Committee. The following day we crossed the inlet to Hankin Cove, a Crown Zellerbach camp. We hitched a ride on their barge which seemed to take regular trips back and forth across Kashutl Inlet. The camp superintendent kindly lent up a pick-up and we drove out the Kauwinch Valley. We were able to get one tree at a higher elevation first, and then found a good- formed, older tree at a lower elevation. All was well until we bored it for a core sample and an age. Unfortunately, there was a rotten spot in the center, and we were not able to get a core sample, but also could not extract the borer from the tree, no matter what we did. Although we had an extra increment borer, we hated to leave one in a tree.

Just before supper, the owner of Freil Lake Logging arrived in his private plane. His pilot was a very chatty fellow full of stories. The owner, Rudy Deering was a gruff, no-nonsense kind of guy. I had spoken to him just once when making arrangements to stay in camp. I suspect Sven Rasmussen had told him that he would have to make space for us. We ate dinner with Rudy and he invited us back to his office later for a drink. His office was attached to the commissary where the loggers could buy clothing, boots, chocolate bars and pop, etc. He was very interested in what we were doing and we were having a good conversation when a young lad interrupted. He said, "Hi Rudy hate to bother you, but I've been in camp for three weeks now and my wife is expecting, and I wondered if I could go out for a couple of days?" Rudy replied, "What do you think this is? A Ffnn hunting and fishing lodge? If you want to go out, take

your gear and F off!” The young fellow replied, “On no problem, Rudy, that’s OK. I just thought I would ask, and then he hastily retreated.”

One evening we had coffee with Don the cook, and he related a funny story. He said that one day the company plane flew in and they dragged a logger that was passed out from the plane. They carried him to a bunk and flopped him down. A couple of hours later he woke up and staggered down to the cookhouse and he asked the cook where he was. When the cook told him, he burst into tears. The Freil Lake Logging Company was one of a number of gyppo companies that had trouble keeping people for a number of reasons.

Over the following four days we selected 11 trees in the Oukinish drainage, along the Chamiss Bay Mainline and an area called C-7 on Whonnocks area. These last trees were very easy as the stands were the result of logging prior to WWII. All low elevation except for two, and had little undergrowth and were very dense. The last tree was in a stand that was heavily infested with mistletoe.

On March 3 we drove to Gold River, and caught a float plane to Plumper Harbour on Nootka Island, a float camp run by Art Mangles, a long time, well-known and respected gyppo logger, and contractor for Tahsis Company. There were probably 20 men working in the camp. We met Art whom I had never actually met in person before, but had talked to on the phone when making arrangements to stay in his camp for a few days. He had a gruff exterior but was really a pussycat at heart. On the radio phone I had told him that there was a stand we were interested in cruising near Crayfish Lake which was accessible from Kendrick Arm. He said no problem and ran us up there in his crew boat. While en route he made arrangements for one of the foreman’s wives to pick us up at the dock and take us ½ a kilometer or so to where there was a pickup for us. We had to be back at the dock by 4:30 to return to Plumper Harbour. We drove out to the stand which was one of the most beautiful fir-hemlock stands we had ever seen. Tall and straight, and no underbrush! It was a beautiful crisp, clear winter day. We managed to find a nice candidate, shoot scion material off it, take core samples, and return to the boat only 15 minutes late. We apologized profusely, but Art said, “No problem.” We later heard from one of the guys on the crew that before we arrived that Art had cursed us to hell for being late!



Kendrick Arm.



Plumper Harbour

When we returned to camp, we were given a room (bunk) on the floating bunkhouses which were connected by planks. We had had a long day and were eagerly anticipating a "logging camp dinner." When the dinner bell rang, we went into the small cookhouse and got into line. There were two rough looking cooks (I imagined alcoholic, ex-army cooks.) serving. Much to our disappointment, they flopped a couple of tiny, fast fry pork chops; some canned peas, and boiled to death potatoes on our plates. Dessert was ice cream, which is ok, but overall, the meal was pretty Spartan and fell short of what we had expected. We returned to our room to tidy up the cuttings and paperwork. To our surprise, there was Satellite TV, but program selection was controlled by Art in his room. Every so often he would change the channel, and you would hear cursing and howls of protest from the other members of the crew in their rooms.

The next morning after an equally non-inspirational breakfast, Art took us back to Kendrick Arm where selected two more trees. We then returned to camp and headed south to Marvinus Bat where we managed to select another tree. When we returned to camp about 4:00, Art informed us that the entire crew was going out for a long weekend, but not to worry, Karl the caretaker would be looking after us. A crew boat arrived from Gold River with Karl, and the boat was returning with the crew. As Karl disembarked he was a site to behold. He was the epitome of an Austrian gentleman with Austrian hat, sweater, and Lederhosen. When we were introduced, Karl was thrilled to find out that not on was he going to have company, but someone to cook for as well. He immediately went to the cook house to prepare our dinner. Within the hour he called us to dinner, and it became quite clear that conditions were going to greatly improve. Dinner was delicious, and he was very entertaining!



We went to bed after a late evening of coffee and chatting. It was a cold crisp night, and after falling asleep we were awakened by a noise outside on the floats. I looked out the window and in the dim light I could see Karl scurrying around on the floats. I watched for a minute and then realized he was setting out crab traps! Well, I had a pretty good idea what we were having for dinner the next night! Not long after he retired for the evening, I fell into a deep sleep, only to be awakened by the yowling of mating raccoons. This lasted for an hour or two, and finally were done, I guess. However, not long after that, wolves started howling at the moon, not too far from camp. We saw wolf scat almost every day in the bush everywhere we went, and on Nootka Island we would often catch a glimpse of them slinking through the timber.

The following day was a good day both weather-wise, and productivity. We selected a couple trees on Plumper Main and two further south on South Beano Main. We were ahead of schedule, so we radioed Air Nootka to fly us the following morning up to Naspardi Inlet in the lee of Brooks Peninsula.

We enjoyed a seafood feast that evening courtesy of Karl. He was sad to learn that we would be leaving in the morning, but we had a very enjoyable after dinner chat.

The next morning the Beaver from Air Nootka arrived at 7:30. The pilot was a very gregarious fellow originally from Newfoundland. He informed us that the excellent weather that we had for the previous few days was coming to an end and getting in and out of Naspardi Inlet might be challenging. The flight was manageable all the way up, but once we passed the Bunsby Islands it got a little windier. He was able to toe us into the beach as it was a very high tide. He told us he would move around the corner to Johnson's Lagoon which was very protected. He had no other flights that day, so he was just going to wait for us. We estimated it would take 4 hours to select a couple of parents. We agreed that we would hit the beach at that time if things got ugly. He said that he would monitor the weather, and if things were turning for the worse, he would buzz the river, and we were to hit the beach running. We found a barely adequate tree fairly quickly and started shooting material off for propagation. The wind had

picked up substantially and shooting wasn't easy. We had just finished when we heard the Beaver fly overhead! We packed up quickly and made a beeline for the beach. The tide had gone out more than we expected, and he shouted that he could get no closer and that we would have to wade out the plane. With guns over our heads, we waded out to our waist and hoisted ourselves up onto the pontoons, and into the cab. Not the most pleasant thing to do on March 6th. The waves were extremely high, and he had to surf them to launch the plane. Finally, we were airborne! Once in the air we had to choose whether to return to Gold River, or go into Freill Lake Logging again. As we knew there was more area to cruise at Freill Lake we decided on that. The pilot was going to go to Gold River and we did not envy him. The weather was very rough.



Nasparti Inlet

Don the cook was happy to see us back, and we were happy to be on terra firma after our harrowing flight.

The next morning the two engineers Don Pugh and Mike Henderson showed up. They sorted out a vehicle for us and we went west to St Pauls Dome. St Paul's Dome was the site of some very notorious logging scars on the West Coast and they were being created when we were there. There was a lot of finger pointing, but the bottom line is that there were some temporary logging tenures that allegedly had to be liquidated resulting in a massive clearcut.

There were some second growth stands on the exposed face which we planned to cruise. They were quite high up the mountain and the road had blown out, so we walked up to the stands. It was a miserable windy day, as the storm from the previous day was still very active. I remember the wind was blowing up the road we were walking, and walking was almost effort-less as it pushed you up the hill.

The stands were riddled with mistletoe and we had trouble finding two decent trees, then shooting branches off them. The scopes on our guns as usual continually were filled with water.

The following day we selected 3 trees on what was still called Whonnocks Land (Interfor now), behind St Paul's Dome. It was a long day, over 200 km of driving plus bush time....

The wind and the rain were relentless that night, and although we had scheduled a flight, we doubted we were going to be able to get back to Gold River the next day. In the morning we had breakfast and packed our gear. There was a Forest Service scaler in camp who was scheduled to fly to Gold River as well. The weather seemed to be improving, but no reports on the radio. This repeated itself for a couple of days. We played a little crib, drank a lot of coffee, and shot the breeze. At about 10:00 on day 3, the timekeeper came into the cookhouse and announced that the plane was coming in! We headed immediately to the dock in anticipation. Finally from around the corner the Beaver appeared. The pilot tied up briefly and we scrambled in. The scaler got in the front, and Gerhard got in the back with a mountain of gear, while I got in the middle row of seats sandwiched between two very attractive French-Canadian tree planters from Thompson's Camp. I was pretty pleased. The pilot took off and headed upward in an ever circling flight-path. Visibility was almost zero, and he kept trying to find holes in the clouds while he turned. We were also being battered about by the wind. This was a catalyst for the two girls to start puking their gut out, and lucky me,... I was between the two of them. The pilot eventually headed straight west looking for openings in the clouds and after some time he was able to find some holes, and eventually we were able to go south then west to Gold River. When we landed the pilot admitted it wasn't a comfortable flight for him as well. The two girls got off the plane and laid on the dock. They were still there when Gerhard and I packed up our gear and headed off in our truck.

This project had lasted a month. We drove to Cambell River where we had a late lunch, then home for a few days of well-appreciated rest....



Photos taken from St Paul's Dome.



Progressive Clear-cut on Mt. Paxton. St Paul's Dome on far right.



Above Kyoquot.



Nootka Air at Gold River.

