

Book Reviews

Vancouver Island, by S. W. Jackman. Toronto: Griffin House, 1972.
212 pp., illus., \$8.95.

The Unknown Island, by Ian Smith. Vancouver: J. J. Douglas, 1973.
174 pp., illus., \$17.50.

Two books about the same island, but poles apart in their approach to the subject and in their interest for the reader anxious to learn something about Vancouver Island. To be fair, Jackman's latter day Baedeker was, it seems, written for the Briton contemplating immigration and is at worst a graceless recitation of fact — and near fact — and at best a capsule guide to some of the more obvious features of town and country from Victoria to Port Hardy. It is, nevertheless, offered for sale in local bookstores despite its schoolmasterish tone and constant conversion of dollars into sterling. There are doubtless many who would learn something from its pages and it may be carried about by the determined explorer to some value, but only if the reader is cautioned that the facts are dated in many cases, the photographs in some instances antique (like the one of the old steamer at a Gulf Island wharf that is accompanied by the caption, "inter island communication still depends on the small boat . . .," or the rather dated picture of a floating logging camp), and that the dedication to Pembroke College, Cambridge — is surely a sly put-on.

Ian Smith, on the other hand, has written and illustrated, largely with his own photographs, a book that conveys with commendable restraint the mystery and the majesty of a landscape still largely unexplored by the recreational traveller. Unlike Jackman, Smith is concerned only with the natural environment: he has nothing to say about the cities and the industries. He writes instead about the forests, the mountains, the sea and the birds and animals that inhabit them. And he does so with the keen eye of a naturalist and, as far as I can tell, with the accuracy of one. But he is clearly not writing for the expert. The descriptions are simple, at times to

the point of tedium and on occasion needlessly repetitive, but for the most part entirely satisfying.

The photographs which make up a major portion of the book are outstanding and compensate for any deficiencies Smith has as a writer. They are mostly colour plates, admirably augmented by ink drawings done by Carl Chaplin, and reproduced to great effect. Obviously printers have mastered the art of colour reproduction for some time, it is nevertheless a delight to turn to page after page of photographs that are superb representations of their subject. Smith has chosen the plates well, they never fail to expand the subject and urge even the most sedentary to contemplate a week with a packboard invading the last untouched wilderness on Vancouver Island.

Although he is clearly on the side of the conservationists, Ian Smith seems to have more faith in the ultimate regenerative powers of nature than some of his more shrill colleagues. He is no apologist for the timber industry and the mines, but he does seem to have discovered a sense of the inexorable dominance of the landscape, especially in those cases where man has been able to exercise even the most modest amount of intelligence.

The Unknown Island is no lament for the lost innocence of the land. It is rather a testament to the majesty of Vancouver Island, tinged with rue for those parts that will not return to what they once were, but in the main charged with a recognition that change has been the pattern from the beginning, whether man intervened or not.

One need never go to Cape Scott or to the forest of the Tsitika watershed to get from this book some sense of excitement and grandeur of these places, but in all likelihood some of us will be led to strike out to see what it was like before it all began.

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Bowen Island 1872-1972, by Irene Howard, for the Bowen Island Historians. Victoria: Morriss, 1973. 190 pp., illus., \$7.95.

"This book is about the real island, and the island of the mind. It will tell the story of the people who have lived on one or the other, and of those who have tried to live on both."

With these words, Mrs. Howard introduces us to her approach to the history of Bowen. As the book unfolds, it is clear that she has been as