

EDITORIAL

IN AN ESSAY FIRST PUBLISHED in *Natural History* in 1988 (97 [1]: 16-24), the famed paleontologist and science writer Stephen J. Gould noted that successive generations of textbook authors had described the early horse (once known as *Eohippus* but later named *Hyracotherium*) as a small creature resembling a fox terrier. Curious, he traced the analogy back to a statement (by the director of the American Museum of Natural History, Henry Fairfield Osborn) published in 1904: “We may imagine the earliest herds of horses in the Lower Eocene ... as resembling a lot of small fox-terriers in size.” Gould was troubled by this, not only because the evidence for and the meaningfulness of this comparison were slim but also because he saw the persistent repetition of the analogy as evidence of a certain laziness among authors that led to the gradual “debasement of ... textbooks ... by endless and thoughtless copying.” By regaling his readers with what he called “The Case of the Creeping Fox Terrier Clone,” Gould sought to remind them that “independent thought has always been more difficult than borrowing” and that “cloning” in this way was an unfortunate “substitute for thinking and striving to improve.”

I was reminded of Gould’s essay (which is also available in his *Bully for Brontosaurus: Reflections on Natural History*, published by W.W. Norton in 1991) as we worked on this issue of *BC Studies*, and I think Gould would have appreciated the commitment, evident in each of the following articles, to the careful research and independent thought that enables their authors to challenge and refine long-established understandings of, and unexamined or taken-for-granted ideas about, the development of British Columbia.

In the first remarkable article in this issue, Frank Leonard is characteristically direct in describing common laudatory appraisals of the Canadian Pacific Railway’s achievement in establishing its Pacific terminus as “so much bump.” Painstaking research, focusing first on items only recently made available and then following trails suggested by them back into the labyrinth of corporate archives, allows Leonard to show how accounts of the CPR’s arrival in Vancouver (promulgated by a local booster and later reinforced by city archivist Major J.S. Matthews) became, so to speak, the fox terriers of local history. It also allows him to reveal that error and confusion were at least as characteristic of the CPR’s actions as were the foresight and shrewdness often ascribed to the company. Rich in detail and marked by probing, close-grained

analysis, this article makes a significant original contribution to our understanding of early Vancouver.

Railroad company activities are also at the heart of the third article in this issue. Here the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway, rather than the CPR, occupies centre-stage; but, as in Frank Leonard's Vancouver story, the appropriation of an Indian reserve for railroad development is crucial to David Vogt and David Alexander Gamble's concerns. Here, too, confusion and conflict are significant elements of the story as newcomers with various economic concerns and perceptions of the issues at stake were engaged by and with the local Aboriginal community, which was intent on protecting its interests. Although their success was limited, the Lheidli T'enneh were far from helpless in the face of the power represented (as one historian had it) by "the combined forces of God, the Law and Business," and it becomes clear that the reserve surrender was not accomplished, as has been understood, "with a minimum of trouble." Carve another notch on the tally-stick marking the value of attentive, conscientious research.

In a contribution to the environmental history of the province, Troy Lee traces the appearance of Scotch broom on Vancouver Island and challenges the popular perception that this plant was introduced into the Sooke area by an early settler and that it spread from there through the rest of the Island. Its dispersion was by seed germination rather than by cloning, to be sure, but the romantic notion that settlers planted broom in their new homelands for its cultural associations or out of nostalgic fondness for its bright yellow flowers has been almost as persistent as has the fox terrier-horse analogy. Ranging widely in order to understand this particular introduction as an example of an oft-repeated process sometimes called "ecological imperialism," Lee also uses an impressive variety of sources – from the artwork of E.J. Hughes through local newspapers and travellers' accounts to the scientific literature produced by biologists and ecologists – to establish his argument that both cultural and biophysical factors are important in the establishment of invasive weeds.

Finally, Michael Ekers and Brendan Sweeney turn our attention to British Columbia's tree planters, those under-studied but "often romanticized ... mythic do-gooders" who bring "ecological renewal to the clear-cuts produced by industrial forestry practices." These authors are well aware, however, that tree planting is "about work rather than ... environmental volunteerism," and they bring the evidence of numerous interviews with tree planters, labour leaders and corporate executives,

the work of other students of BC forests, and the theories of economic geography to understanding the challenges that bedeviled those who tried to organize tree planting labour in the 1990s. This article reveals much about those engaged in tree planting and about the ways in which “workers’ struggles over wages and the organization of work are tied to forest policy reforms and nature more generally.” It places tree planting (hitherto a rather unexamined activity) squarely at the intersection of environmental issues and the labour process and argues that the success of any of renewed effort to organize will depend upon the cultivation of a middle ground between these interests.

In sum, each of these articles advances our understanding by asking hard questions and by paying close and thoughtful attention to original source materials of one sort or another. Different as they are in detail, they justify the very act of research, even as they allow readers to better comprehend the forces, convictions, and circumstances that have made and continue to shape society and space in British Columbia. To their credit, none of these authors opts for quick or easy answers, or rests content to repeat familiar explanations. This, it seems to me, is both encouraging and important to mark as increasingly popular internet search engines hold out the seductive, but surely dangerous, allure of instantaneous “knowledge” – an indeterminate amount of which is, in truth, as derivative, as unhelpful, and as suspect as is Gould’s creeping fox terrier clone.

Yet, the internet cannot be ignored. It, like so much else, is what we make it. The challenge is to take advantage of its undoubted power and potential, while making sure that careful, high-quality, and important information reaches the web and is identifiable as such. This is no easy circle to square. The imprimatur of a journal such as *BC Studies* can provide a form of quality “certification,” but the costs of producing peer-reviewed, carefully edited, high-quality scholarship make a simple resort to open-access (without an infusion of resources to offset the loss of subscription and royalty revenues that accrue through more traditional forms of publishing) a potentially dangerous gamble.

Conscious of both the risks and the benefits in the so-called “digital universe,” *BC Studies* is seeking to minimize the former and take advantage of the latter for contributors, readers, and the journal itself. In the conviction that good writing should be disseminated and read as widely as possible, we have moved to ensure partial open access to the content of *BC Studies*. Upcoming book reviews, review essays, and case comments are now freely available on the *BC Studies* website

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We hope that these changes help to encourage interest in the lively and important scholarship on British Columbia that has long found a place in these pages and that the improvements in access offered by the world wide web will bring scholarship on the province into closer and productive dialogue with that elsewhere in the world.

Graeme Wynn