

*The Legacy and the Challenge: A Century of the Forest Industry at Cowichan Lake*, by Richard Rajala. Lake Cowichan: Lake Cowichan Heritage Advisory Committee, 1993. xi, 142 pp. Illus. \$12.95 paper.

Richard Rajala was ideally qualified to write this learned and timely forest history. From a Finnish-Irish logging family, and brought up at the Hillcrest Lumber Company's village at Mesachie Lake, Rajala worked at the sawmill at Honeymoon Bay until the recession of the early 1980s. Out of work, he went to the University of Victoria to study history, gaining an M.A. there in 1987. When asked to write this book he was "plodding through a doctoral study of forest practices on the west coast, and welcomed the opportunity to discover more about the region and relate some themes of my academic work to the local setting." But the book is even more personal than that. Rajala wanted to know what happened to the forests and to the "stable communities" of his youth. "Forests are more than a collection of trees. They are also more than ecosystems. The forests of Vancouver Island have provided a basis for communities, a distinctive way of life, and a culture rooted in the relationship of working people both to corporate capital and the natural environment."

"The central, organizing theme of the book is the rise and recent decline of the Cowichan Lake forest industry," he writes, but his chronology and conclusions apply beyond Lake Cowichan. In 1913 the CPR opened a branchline to the lake; ten years later the last lakeshore timber had been cut; the CNR opened its own railway to the lake in 1925; in 1929 the first of several mills was built there; a year later some 2,000 unionized loggers and millworkers lived at Lake Cowichan, which subsequently became the base for exploitation of timber as far west as the Pacific. By 1946, 400,000 carloads had been carried out of the region on the CPR line alone, representing over 2 billion feet of timber. "By 1950 the presence of large sawmills and industrial villages at Youbou, Honeymoon Bay, and Mesachie Lake made the Lake a robust and thriving region marked by a culture of hard work and energetic community endeavour. Men and women raised families, educated their children in the schools around the lake, and planned for the future. But when the future arrived it brought mill closures, unemployment, and dislocation."

The opening of the lake, Rajala notes, had coincided with the development of efficient new railway and overhead logging technologies which led, in turn, to the clearcutting of much of the E&N grant and surrounding land. "Under the high lead and skyline systems

coastal logging became a matter of clear cutting large areas at a single setting." The result was an exploitative forest frontier that did not provide a sound foundation for community development. Between the wars, chief foresters Caverhill and Manning, and *Cowichan Leader* editor Hugh Savage, advocated regulation through selective logging, but the provincial government ignored their advice first in the depression and then during the war, when political priorities dominated. Reforestation by the provincial forest branch did not begin until 1944, but by then "there was little evidence of the industry providing a basis for community permanence and prosperity."

In 1943 Chief Justice Gordon Sloan was appointed to head a Royal Commission to study the forestry question. He recommended the adoption of a "sustained yield" policy on new Tree Farm Licenses (TFLs) carved out of provincial crown land. This system of tenure was meant to "attract investment capital, encourage the practice of forestry and stabilize communities whose existence was tied to the industry." Sustained yield was put into effect in 1947. Western Forest Industries adopted the shifty slogan "Here Today and Here Tomorrow." Soon, however, the provincial government allowed the AAC (Annual Allowable Cut) to exceed sustainable levels. Between 1950 and 1970 government and industry increased the AAC "with more regard for full production and profit than sustainability"; most of Lake Cowichan's sawmills closed in the 1970s and 1980s due to timber shortage.

Mill closure cannot be blamed, Rajala concludes, on British Columbia Forest Products or current TFL owner Fletcher Challenge. "The demise of the Cowichan Lake forest industry was assured long before Fletcher Challenge arrived on the scene. Rather, the cause lies in a heritage of uncontrolled, and then poorly regulated resource exploitation." British Columbians were "lulled into a false sense of security by the comforting, largely rhetorical, programme of sustained yield legislation." As always, Rajala is interested in the effect of this on community. "The recent deindustrialization of Cowichan Lake, this study suggest, arises from the provincial state's historic failure to adequately regulate industrial forest practices in the interests of community stability." Thus, we should blame the ghost towns of Lake Cowichan on the provincial government; but we should also remember that "the state" is elected by the people. Perhaps the people get the government they deserve.

This book is occasionally a tough read. Chapters are not numbered; there is no bibliography or index. Rajala's "focus on industrialization and physical development" calls for better maps. He avoids ecological

and environmental issues. He sometimes prefers academic and trade jargon over simple English: "context" for setting; "structure" as a verb; "the provincial state" for the province; "tidewater" for ocean; "manufacturing facility" for mill; "harvest" for cut. I've never reviewed a book with so many typos: low-valve timber, barbaining, behing, excaserbating, reprot, Argus for Angus, Pearce for Pearse, Walkhem for Walkem.

Although Rajala has found a local voice that is often absent in academic writing about British Columbia, he also relies too much on American sources and models. U.S. presidents Harrison and Cleveland (first names and all) do not belong in a history of Lake Cowichan nor, arguably, do American descriptions of horse-team, skidder, hook-tender, steam donkey, and overhead logging systems, nor union and conservation history from south of the border. Rajala assures us that "Manning's campaign, then, took place within a larger context of regulatory initiatives in resource conservation," and that "Sloan's tenure proposal was quite in line with contemporary developments in forest planning." To quote the good work of Manning and Sloan and then assert that their ideas were simply branch-plant copies of American originals is to lessen their achievement, to colonise our past, and to diminish the role of personality and local agency. One sympathizes with local IWA trustee Jack Greenall of Cowichan Lake for his refusal to follow, in 1947, his American bosses' order to comply with "Taft-Hartley" (whatever that is). "The principle involved is very simple," Greenall wrote, "and boils down to the fact that a government to which I owe no allegiance, in a country where I haven't a vote, has no right to tell me or any other Canadian what political principles must be endorsed or rejected."

*The Legacy and the Challenge* is an impressive study. As well as providing the forest history promised in the subtitle, this book also makes valuable contributions to community, labour, and corporate history in British Columbia. Rajala shows how a combination of capital, government, and technology turned his home town into a ghost town.

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