

A Conversation with Hans Roemer

By Mike Fenger

This is a one of a series of interviews with pioneers who built the Ecological Reserves System. The Ecological Reserve elders' interviews are part of the legacy of the BC's Protected Areas organized by Friends of Ecological Reserves. This is a transcript of an interview held on October 14, 2011 with Hans Roemer, in part made possible by a grant from the Community Legacy Fund, BC Parks Centennial to Friends of Ecological Reserves.

This interview took place in the Garry oak forest that surrounds Hans Roemer's home. These videoed ER elders' interviews will be available thanks to the archives managed by the Elders Council for BC Parks (<http://www.elderscouncilforparks.org/>).

Mike Fenger (MF). I am here with Hans Roemer to find out a little bit about the early days in Ecological Reserves and the role he had with ERs. Hans first we'd like to know a little bit about how you became interested in ecosystems and ecology?

Hans Roemer (HR): I became interested in ecology actually long before I came to Canada. After one year as a research assistant, I started on a PhD at the University of Victoria. I



Hans Roemer

worked in the natural environment in forest ecology and was interested in the Ecological Reserves program as well. I became acquainted with the ER Program in 1973 and have been with it virtually until I retired.

MF. You mentioned that you came here and then did your PhD. Where did you come from?

HR. I came from Germany and had a degree that was equivalent to a Masters Degree in Landscape Ecology and came to Victoria and did a dissertation on forest ecosystems on the Saanich Peninsula, basically southern Vancouver Island. I attended the early meetings of the so-called Ecological

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The Log

Autumn/Winter 2011

The LOG is published 2 times a year by the Friends of Ecological Reserves to promote the establishment, management and maintenance of Ecological Reserves in British Columbia. *The LOG* is distributed to members, volunteer wardens, affiliates, supporters, government, friends and the enquiring public.

The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the Friends. Articles for publication are invited. The deadline for submissions for the spring/summer issue of *The LOG* is May 15, 2012.

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Charitable BIN # 118914597RR

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Interview with Hans Roemer (Cont'd.)

Reserves committee. This was a big crowd of scientists, foresters and biologists from all over the place.

MF. Did you intend to stay in British Columbia or were you planning to go back to Europe?

HR. As a matter of fact I did go back to Europe later for 2 ½ years. After my father died, we had to get a lot of things in order, but I basically had the intention of coming back. I came back in 1978 and I was offered the Ecological Reserves job which was vacated by Dr. Jim Pojar. After some sorting out of immigrant status and citizenship I became the ER ecologist.

MF. So it's fair to say you were seduced by BC ecosystems and came back to work on them.

HR. That is putting it quite correctly. If you work in an area long enough in the natural environment you become attached to the place.

MF. You mention that you took over from Jim Pojar. What did that involve?

HR. I continued in the same fashion as Jim Pojar which was going out and surveying potential ERs and looking for pieces that would fit the puzzle.

MF. What were you looking for?

HR. As a plant ecologist I was looking for original native pieces of forest that were undisturbed, especially for those ecosystems that were already becoming uncommon at that time, like the Coastal Douglas Fir zone where logging was very big in the decades before and only a few places

remained, even at that time, that were undisturbed and deserved ecological reserves status.

MF. And when you found these areas how would you advance them to become ecological reserves?

HR. They would be described in words and their outlines put on maps and put into a proposal package. At that time we used the International Biological Program (IBP) form which was used widely in other countries as well. Those forms were completed to describe the natural environment, the geomorphology, the vegetation, wildlife, special features etc. This IBP form, as we called it, together with additional descriptions were passed on to the land managers whose responsibility it was to circulate these proposals to the various stakeholders, the Ministry of Mines, the Ministry of Forests and the wildlife biologist in the Ministry of Environment. This wasn't happening over night – it was taking quite a long time. They were modified or disapproved, which happened very often, or they were approved which happened very rarely.

MF. When you began, can you remember how many ecological reserves had been established?

HR. Actually quite a number, in the order of 100.

MF. You mentioned Jim Pojar. Were there a number of people you worked with at that time?

HR. I actually didn't work that much with Jim as he had left. Bristol Foster was the ER

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ER Warden Field Day: BC Parks Staff and Wardens Reconnect

By Rosemary Taylor

It has been several years since any gathering between Ecological Reserve wardens and Parks staff has occurred in the Lower Mainland, but on October 7, 2011, just such an event was organized by Bev Ramey (Co-Warden of ER#76, Fraser River Ecological Reserve) and Joanna Hirner (BC Parks Conservation Specialist).

Very often wardens work in isolation from each other, and from BC Environment Parks staff in their area, so an opportunity to get to know one another was the order of the day. The trip to the Fraser River Islands Ecological Reserve gave wardens a chance to meet their fellow volunteers and communicate face to face with Parks staff. It was also an opportunity to visit an Ecological Reserve only known to a few, and a chance to discuss issues on a one-to-one basis. A grant from BC 100 Conservation Partners in order to provide boat access, made this field trip possible.

On the morning of October 7, 2011, participants gathered either at the Mission public dock, or Island 22 boat launch in Chilliwack, to board boats which then took them out to Ecological Reserve #76, a complex of mid-channel islands in the Fraser River between Mission and Chilliwack.

In addition to the wardens and BC Environment Parks staff, a number of other visitors were invited, including local



Bev Ramey (L) and Joanna Hirner with the attendees of the field trip to Fraser River ER

stewardship representatives and technical and academic experts.

Shifting Gravel and the Boundary for ER#76

Once the folks from the two boats were assembled on the most downstream of the Ecological Reserve islands, geomorphologist Dr. Michael Church, Professor Emeritus, UBC Geography Department, used a series of aerial photos to show the islands' evolution over the past 90 years. He indicated how the Reserve has been shaped by the river, with flood flows eroding in some places, and depositing sand and gravel elsewhere. Those parts of the islands that have been relatively stable for some time now support large stands of cottonwood trees and other

well-established vegetation.

Dr. Church also talked about the gravelly fraction of the sediment load in this part of the reach. His recent work suggests that much of the gravel deposited between Laidlaw and Mission may have been mobilized by placer mining of gold upstream from Hope more than 100 years ago. Dr. Church also commented on other aspects of the river behaviour in the area, and noted that the rates of river deposition and erosion are being altered as a result of the Fraser being artificially constrained between rip-rapped banks.

Ecological Reserve #76 was established for "the conservation of the only remaining unaltered and uncommitted lower Fraser River floodplain islands". Located

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Publication Champions Garry Oak Restoration

By Judith Lavoie

Excerpted from the September 28, 2011 edition of the *Times Colonist*

Scattered around southeast-
ern Vancouver Island are
remnants of one of the rarest
ecosystems in Canada, and the
Garry Oak Ecosystem Recovery
Team hopes a new guide will
help to inspire restoration of
Garry oak meadows.

The publication is the only
definitive guide to ecological
restoration of Garry oak ecosys-
tems and has taken four years to
develop, said Shyanne Smith,
the team's program manager.

"This publication is an amaz-
ing resource and we are incredi-
bly excited to see the years of
hard work writing it come to
fruition," Smith said.

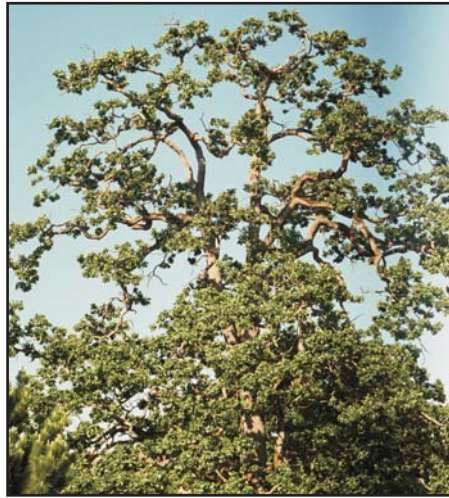
"Dozens of experts and
agencies have come together
and dedicated so much time to
it," she said.

Several Greater Victoria
municipalities have struggled
recently with disagreements
between property owners who
want to restore fragments of
Garry oak meadows and neigh-
bours who dislike the mess and
weeds.

Previously, restoration infor-
mation was scattered through
numerous scientific journals
and reports, with much of the
most important information
stored only in the minds of
restoration practitioners, Smith
said.

The guide, which can be
downloaded free from the
team's website at
www.goert.ca/restoration, pulls
the information together in an
easy-to-read format.

It covers topics such as assess-



Garry oak (*Quercus garryana*)

ing and monitoring a site,
creating a restoration plan,
involving the community,
species at risk and invasive
species.

Conan Webb, Parks Canada
species at risk recovery planner,
one of the lead authors of the
book, said he believes the guide
will encourage new restoration
projects.

"I am really excited to see this
product come to fruition after
many years of dedicated work
from so many contributors," he
said.

Fragments of the Garry oak
ecosystem exist only in the area
stretching from Victoria to the
Comox Valley, the Gulf Islands
and two isolated areas in the
Fraser Valley.

The meadows are biodiversity
hot spots with more than 1,600
species of native plants and
animals, of which more than 100
are at risk of extinction.

Only one per cent of the
natural ecosystem remains in the
Capital Regional District and a
total of five per cent in all areas.

CALENDAR

2011 Christmas Bird Counts

Victoria - Saturday, Dec. 17, 2011
(motmot@shaw.ca; 250-652-6450)

Sooke - Sunday, Dec. 26
(Daniel Bryant, 250-361-9049;
jingming@uvic.ca)

South Salt Spring/Sidney -
Sunday, Dec. 18 (includes Central
Saanich, North Saanich, Sidney)
(Karen Ferguson by email at
siskin59@shaw.ca for Salt Spring/
motmot@shaw.ca; 250-652-6450)
(Saanich Peninsula participants are to
meet at the Panorama Rec Centre
entrance at 8:00 for assignments,
unless otherwise arranged.)

North Salt Spring/Galiano -
Sunday, Dec. 18.
(Please contact Tim Marchant at
tim@villagecobbler.ca if you wish to
count on North Salt Spring Island that
day)

Duncan - Sunday, Jan. 1, 2012
(marven@shaw.ca; 250-748-8504)

**Please check the FER
website for information on
our AGM to be held in the
spring. Also, please check
the website for our spring
FER Field Trip to Race
Rocks. Details will be
posted when available.**

Botany BC 2012
Thursday, July 26 to Sunday,
July 29 in Manning Park
Visit Botany BC website for more
information:
<http://members.shaw.ca/BotanyBC/>

The Garry Oak Ecosystems
Recovery Team, a registered
charity, was formed in 1999 and
pulls together experts from
government, environmental
groups and First Nations.

in the gravel reach of the Fraser, the islands are formed, shift and disappear through erosion and accretion. As a result, the current boundary does not include some of the islands.

In the discussion on historical changes to the islands, Dr. Church noted that rather than drawing a line around the existing islands, a better approach for the long term to best encompass the shifting islands would be one of the following three delineations:

- a) include the gravel platform which is the base for the existing islands, although this does gradually change,
- b) extend to the deep water channels of the Fraser River flowing past the gravel platform, or
- c) extend to the high water mark (up to the dykes) on either side of the Fraser. This would be the best delineation, but would likely be the most complex to establish.

Salmon and Sturgeon

Pink salmon return to the Fraser River to spawn in odd numbered years, and there were many dead and spawned out adult fish along the river banks. It appears that this is also a year of high die-off before spawning, which is a regular and normal occurrence. To take advantage of this food source, several bald eagles were seen overhead on our arrival at the island. It was also noticeable how many fish carcasses were lying around as yet uneaten by scavengers or predators. Still, nature wastes nothing and some of the fish



Pink salmon carcasses along the beach of one of ER #76 islands

carcasses had been completely taken over by maggots. Needless to say, the smell in these areas was pungent!

Bear, deer and coyotes are among the larger animals living in the Reserve, evidence of which was seen as tracks or scat; unfortunately for us, these magnificent creatures, themselves, remained out of sight.

One of the members of the trip, Dr. Marvin Rosenau who is an instructor at BCIT and scientist for the Rivers Institute at BCIT, provided some insights into our observations during the day. Walking over wide pebble and gravel areas where pink salmon had been in abundance, Dr. Rosenau and Dr. Laura Rempel from Federal Fisheries and Oceans, pointed out both false and functioning salmon redds and how a redd with eggs can be distinguished from other erosion spots in the river by the way small gravel has been

displaced out of the spawning depression and onto a mound on the downstream side.

Trees fallen along the eroding side of the islands enhance fish habitat by providing this large woody debris **and reducing erosion of the islands.**

Dr. Rosenau also discussed some of the issues relating to the catch-and-release sturgeon fishery in the lower Fraser River, a sport which is very popular in this portion of the river. Of note, almost every sturgeon in the lower Fraser River is, on average, caught at least once a year, and evidence of this level of effort can be seen by the number of hook-marks found in sturgeon mouths. These fish may live to be well over a hundred years of age and the current intense fishery, albeit catch and release, may have some negative impacts on this stock. It should be noted that the catch-and-release by-

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catch of the First Nations and commercial fisheries of white sturgeon also occur and there are impacts via these fisheries as well. In order to relieve this problem, the agencies and stewardship groups are now discussing seasonal closure and sanctuary areas for these sturgeon fisheries.

Birds

One of our bird experts, June Ryder, compiled a bird list of what we saw and heard during the day's island visit, with input from all who had observations to add to the count. This resulted in 18 confirmed species plus two possible species for a total of 20 species. Many of the birds were gulls, ducks, or those found on or near water, together with Bald Eagles, ravens, crows, and birds of shrub and woodland habitats. The ongoing bird list for this ER, compiled since 1985, lists 63 species.

Plants

Botanist Terry Taylor compiled a plant list which included a few unusual specimens colonizing the newly accreting silt-rich bars of the islands. A highlight was the liverwort, *Riccia frostii*. Terry noted this was probably the most rare plant species we saw on the walk, but that it is not listed on the BC Species Explorer because, although mosses are listed, liverworts are not.

Also of interest were the two yellow-listed species: Columbia River mugwort (*Artemisia lindleyana*) and the soft-leaved willow (*Salix sessilifolia*).



Beautiful liverwort known as *Riccia frostii*

Wardens and BC Parks Discussion

While on the islands, Bev and Bill Ramey, co-wardens of ER #76, suggested areas of interest to walk, and people wandered off in groups, chatting as they went, which gave them a chance to interact with those they knew already, and others they had not met previously. Lunch continued this opportunity as the group collected together in one place, creating a forum for wardens to share experiences both with each other and with Parks staff in an informal question-and-answer session. The seven wardens present had provided BC Parks staff with a list of issues for their reserves, prior to the field day.

Brandin Schultz, Regional Manager of BC Parks, introduced himself and expressed his pleasure that such an event had been organized, and thanked those who made it happen. He

mentioned that it should now be possible to make better connections with Lower Mainland Park staff, located in offices at Cultus Lake, Alice Lake, Mt. Seymour, and on the Sunshine Coast.

During their turn, wardens were able to bring to light some of their concerns, such as encouraging Parks staff to visit the Reserves.

Garry Fletcher representing Friends of Ecological Reserves, suggested wardens could also consider research and other educational and mentoring possibilities.

Joanna Hirner suggested an annual meeting with wardens and those on the tour thought this would be helpful, with suggested best times of November, January or February. It was also suggested that BC Parks staff would visit reserves with wardens. Interested wardens should extend the invitation to their Area Supervisor and

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to Joanna, allowing as much advance notice as possible.

More gatherings and meetings such as this, it was noted, would be a valuable experience for all concerned. Although the lunch break was comparatively short, it opened the door for conversations, which then continued as people wound their way to the boat pick-up spot on a gravel bar further afield.

It is hoped that the trip to ER #76 will be the start of re-opening channels of communication between ER wardens and BC Parks staff, and an example of how outings such as this can be beneficial to all concerned in learning more about each other's Reserves. These trips facilitate getting to know those involved in protecting these important BC features, at all levels, and sharing expertise and knowledge among so many who have so much to contribute.

Website Links for Background Information

Historical photos (1928-1999) as presented by Dr. Michael Church www.geog.ubc.ca/fraserriver Once on this site of the Fraser River Gravel Reach Studies, click on "Reports and Publications" and then under *Atlas of the alluvial gravel-bed reach*, click on "Full Atlas (80Mbyte)". ER#76 is located in Reach 6 of this report, so look for the photo set for Reaches 5-7.

Experience the Fraser as noted by Wendy Dadalt of MetroVancouver Regional District and David Urban of Fraser Valley Regional District



ER # 76 has been shaped by the river, with flood flows eroding in some places

http://www.metrovancouver.org/services/parks_lscr/ExperiencetheFraser/Pages/default.aspx

Chilliwack Museum display:
"The Fraser River: Its Spirit and Place" as noted by Museum Director Ron Denman;
<http://www.chilliwackmuseum.ca>

Friends of Ecological Reserves website where wardens can post trip reports, studies, photographs
<http://www.ecoreserves.bc.ca>

Sturgeon
<http://www.frasersturgeon.com/home>

Rosemary Taylor gratefully acknowledges assistance with this article from Dr. Marvin Rosenau, Dr. Michael Church, Bev Ramey, Terry Taylor, June Ryder and William Galuska.

Visit our website at:
www.ecoreserves.bc.ca



Yellow listed Columbia River mugwort, *Artemisia lindleyana*

coordinator and Director of the ERs. There were a number of temporary people and Trudy Carson, now Trudy Chatwin, and later Lynne Milnes. There were summer students off and on. It was primarily Trudy Carson and myself who assisted Bristol Foster.

MF: What sort of goals did you have at that time? Did you have targets or could you bring forward areas and proposals as you saw fit?

HR: We could bring forward proposals. There were two main goals set on the basis of the Ecological Reserves Act. One was to protect representative ecosystems. These were ecosystems that are widely distributed and have a fairly large range such as ecosystems in the different biogeoclimatic zones and subzones; and the other was to protect special features for wildlife, vegetation, rare plants, geologic features such as unusual rock formations and cave ecosystems. That kept us busy.

MF: You must have travelled to all parts of BC.

HR: Yes I did travel quite a bit. I travelled to places where we never ever did get any representation.

I travelled to the center of the province where we already had the odd ecological reserve and we added some there. I traveled to the eastern corner but I never managed to come near the northern border of BC but it did happen later.

MF: You started in 1978 and carried on for a number of years. How long were you with the ER



Mike Fenger (left) interviewing Hans Roemer as part of the BC's Protected Areas Legacy Project. The interview was held October 14, 2011.

program?

HR: I worked directly for the ER program for 17 years and after that I was still responsible for Ecological Reserves but others were too. It was (1993) when the administration of ERs was put under BC Parks leadership.

MF: So that was the end of the independent ER Program?

HR: Yes.

MF: I wonder if there is anything that stands out from that time, some adventures, something that you would like to share that you remember with fondness?

HR: There were many places we were fond of that really cried out for protection. I remember the people. It was a privilege to do this. What stands out I really don't know. I remember one time we were up in the McGregor River area and were surveying a transect that went from river flats through wetlands, up slopes to a mountain top. When we got up there we looked back down and there was a big grizzly bear with

two cubs. The mother, presumably it was the mother, was teaching the two cubs how to catch ground squirrels. She would dig them out and let them go and the little ones would pounce on them and catch them again and so on. That was quite delightful. Many such adventures happened during work and I enjoyed them.

MF: You stated there were many areas where you weren't successful. What were some of the challenges you faced and that might still be there today?

HR: There were challenges to get ER proposals through the process. It took very long usually. I just looked at the list of ERs and noted a proposal that Jim Pojar originally made that took 32 years to become an ER in the Smithers area. Many proposals that I made never saw the light of day as reserves. They got bogged down in the referrals. There were too many objections. If it was a forested area it was forestry concerns to take it out of production. In

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other areas it was mineral potential, in fact mineral potential was the greatest obstacle of them all. Even if there was the mere potential not even an occurrence and nothing proven, it could be turned down and it happened very often.

MF. What was the role of Friends of Ecological Reserves in those early days? I am thinking maybe this role has changed over the years.

HR. I knew volunteer wardens did some monitoring of what was going on. You had to operate at a distance from the Friends, so I never knew much of what they did.

MF. Have you got some advice you would offer for government?

HR. I would offer to try and re-establish something like the advisory board in a fashion so that you could get really specific recommendations on ecological reserves. We have an example recently that you are aware of. Management in one of our most precious ecological reserves was such that people were horrified. There are other ER management cases where activities are border line and there are cases where management should be looked at by more than the officer in charge of the ER and the warden. They should be looked at by people with scientific know how and experience.

MF. Do you have any thoughts on managing succession and natural disturbance in ERs?

HR. Basically these processes should be left alone. The ER Act is written in a way so that they are basically to be left alone but

there are special cases. Take the case of Nimpkish Island. We had a fairly large proposal in the beginning, about 300 acres and in the end we had about 40 acres on an island. There are advantages to being on an island for a small ecological reserve. This island was in the Nimpkish River and it was subject to channel changes, bank erosion and blow down because the surrounding areas had been clear cut and so after the government had spent a million dollars to acquire this island, or rather, spent the money to acquire the timber on it, we started to lose the trees. This meant some effort to protect the reserve from being washed away was appropriate. We made various attempts to stabilize the banks, later deepened some channels to lead the water away. What else could you do after you spent a million dollars for a piece of forest? Those are hard choices.

MF. Was the science panel involved with Nimpkish Island and deciding what to do?

HR. No it was not because it was abolished before that. The Minister in charge earlier, in fact quite a few years earlier, in the late 1970s or early 80s, decided that he didn't want this advisory panel any more. So it was abolished. It was a very valuable part of the ecological reserves system because in cases where staff are too close to an issue, it is very necessary to have some outside advice.

MF. So something like the science advisory board would be used for management of invasive species in ERs? I know that broom only recently came

to this lovely Garry oak site where we are sitting.

HR. These things are a matter of degrees. No objections arose against 20 years of broom management in the Mount Tzouhalem ER but some Douglas fir in-growth has been managed or started to be managed or stopped in this same ER and everybody is horrified. These things could be averted in some cases by pre-existing rules. There is also an issue of what kind of ER it is. If this is a representative ER, then it could be left alone and there are no objections to going through successional changes. But it could be another ER where we have so many rare plants that you don't want these successional changes. Basically trying to arrest successional change is almost a futile attempt, but there are instances where it can be slowed down. The attempt to slow down Douglas fir in-growth met with very major objections.

MF. So some management of invasives is within the scope of management of an ER?

HR. It is a much easier decision with the invasive plant species than with natural vegetation such as the Douglas fir which had been there before and which is coming back. Because this ER has been selectively logged a long time ago. These issues should be outlined and discussed before we go and do something and they should probably be discussed and outlined for each ER prior to management because every case is different.

MF. You are familiar with FER

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Botany BC 2011

By Stephen Ruttan

Botany BC was held this year at Tatlayoko Lake in the West Chilcotin region. Tatlayoko is a long, narrow lake running north-south along the eastern edge of the Coast Mountains. Mount Waddington, the highest mountain entirely within B.C., is just to the west of the lake. At the south end, the Homathko River flows out and cuts through the mountains to the Pacific Ocean.

On Thursday evening, July 14th, people started to gather at Bracewell's Ranch which is located at the south end of Tatlayoko Lake. Most people were either staying in the lodge at the ranch, or pitching their tents in the field nearby.

That evening Carla Mellott gave us a talk on her master's thesis, which was based on the ethnobotany of the local native people. Her talk was entitled "The Potato Mountain Area and Ethno-ecology of Mountain Potato (*claytonia lanceolata*)".

Potato Mountain looms over the north side of Bracewell's Ranch. It was very important in the life of the native people in the entire Chilcotin region. They would come from far away for annual festivities. Several days would be spent harvesting the mountain potato and participating in games and social gatherings.

At nine a.m. the next morning several groups left to hike up Potato Mountain. The hike was nothing short of spectacular. On the way up and down were extraordinarily rich



Hiking up Potato Mountain amid spectacular wild flowers

displays of wild flowers. A late, wet spring had made it even better than normal. Local people said it was the best they had ever seen. What made it even better was the different ecological regimes we went through.

On the way up, on the south side of the mountain, we went through meadows dominated by balsamroot (*balsamorhiza sagittata*). At the top we were in the alpine with small, beautiful flowers clinging to the rock face. On the way down, on the east side of the mountain, the balsamroot disappeared, and mountain potato (*claytonia lanceolata*) and western anemone (*anemone occidentalis*) predominated.

When we reached the top of the mountain, we were treated to stunning views. To the west the long narrow ribbon of Tatlayoko Lake stretched beneath us, and beyond that the high mountains of the Coast

Range ran completely along the horizon. To the east stretched meadows all along the east side of the mountain, rich areas for wild life and grazing. In the distance were the Chilcotin grasslands, and a glimpse of Chilco Lake.

After the day spent hiking, we arrived back at the lodge just after five p.m. We had a barbecue supper at Bracewell's, and listened to a talk by Gerry Bracewell, the matriarch of the Bracewell clan. She has had an extraordinary life. She told us about one exceptional incident which happened in 1953. At this time the "Freedom Highway", linking Williams Lake and Bella Coola, was in its final stage of construction. The last link being worked on was the famous "Hill", where the highway, in a relatively short distance, plunges from the Chilcotin

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Plateau to the Bella Coola valley. She saw that history was being made with nobody to record it. So she rode out there with two small children and a movie camera. She managed to get dramatic footage of the final completion of the highway. After talking to us about it, she showed us a CBC film which incorporated this footage.

The next day we met at the Lincoln Ranch which is at the



Western anemone (*Anemone occidentalis*)

north end of the lake. This is the headquarters for the work of the Nature Conservancy of Canada in the region. They own several properties in this area. We attempted to go out to one property, Skinner Meadows, but the roads were too wet and muddy to get there. So instead, we headed east to grasslands just north of Chelquoit Lake, and browsed the native flora in an enclosure study area set aside for just this purpose. Later we drove over to the lake, and on rises by the lake found a cactus.

That evening we gathered at Tatla Lake Community Centre. We had a delicious dinner catered by a local group, and heard three presentations.

The first was by Peter Shaughnessy, the head of Nature Conservancy's operations in the region. He gave us excellent

descriptions of the properties they own and what they are attempting to do. Next we had Kristi Iverson, who is doing research on the ecological implications of fire in the region. Her talk was entitled "Botanical implications of altered fire regimes in the Chilcotin". Finally, Jim Pojar gave a talk on the extensive changes that are being made to official botanical names. He acknowledged that many people might disagree or even be upset by these changes, but they are established and we will have to live with them.

On Sunday there was a further hike to a place called Skinner Mountain. Unfortunately we could not stay. But we had already had a truly extraordinary weekend, one I will never forget.

Habitat Acquisition Trust's Conservation Connection Forum

By Louise Beinhauer

Habitat Acquisition Trust's Conservation Connection Forum, which brings together conservation groups in the Capital Region District, was held September 30, 2011 at Royal Roads University.

Choices have to be made regarding which seminars to attend throughout the day and for the first session, I chose to sit in on the Municipal Panel discussion on collaboration between local government and non-profit groups in the Capital region. Panel members were from the District of Sooke, the Municipality of Saanich and the City of Victoria. All three members gave examples of successful collaborative projects with NGOs and passed along their thoughts on why projects succeeded or failed.

The second of the morning sessions included a nature walk with Andy MacKinnon, co-author of *Plants of Coastal British Columbia*. The focus of Andy's walk and talk through parts of the Royal Roads campus was fungi. Andy started the walk by pointing out the interactions between forests and fungi. He discussed the fact that the coastal Douglas fir zone is the smallest of BC's biogeoclimatic zones and the most threatened. This zone doesn't extend much beyond the lower portion of Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands. Ninety-three percent of the remaining coastal Douglas fir zone occurs on private land and it will live or die based on



Nature walk through Royal Roads campus with Andy MacKinnon (center wearing white hat)

the efforts of organizations. It is threatened by urbanization and agriculture. It is the smallest percent of protected areas in BC and every described ecosystem in this zone is red-listed. Royal Roads contains one of the three most impressive examples of this zone. Rocky Point and Mary Hill are the other two.

Andy continued his walk and talk with a fascinating explanation of fungi and their association with plants. For example, there are 200 fungi associated with Douglas fir. The fungi bring nutrients back to the tree and the tree shares its sugars with the fungi. Trees have to be large enough to provide enough sugars for the fungi to grow mushrooms. After a meandering hour walk, we

finally came upon a small patch of old dried up Indian pipe and nearby, a lobster mushroom.

The early afternoon session was an interesting discussion of the 'many faces of conservation' with Gagan Leekha former Multicultural Environmental Education Program Coordinator with the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society (VIRC) and Global Human Rights Practitioner and UVic lecturer Moussa Magassa.

The focus of Gagan's talk was the ongoing efforts by organizations like VIRC to teach new immigrants to Canada the importance of environmental stewardship. She gave an interesting example of the fact that many immigrants don't

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and ER wardens – we are extra eyes and ears for government. Do you have any advice for FER? We have a strategic plan where we support ER wardens, promote research in ERs which was one of the reasons they were set up, we are interested in completing the ER system, promoting awareness of ERs and keeping ourselves as a happy bunch of volunteers. Given that and thinking ahead 5 to 10 years, where may it be best for a bunch of volunteers to place their effort?

HR. The functions of FER will not change very much. There are no obligations for the powers to be to listen much. At the same time FER is capable of putting some pressure through persuasion to the Ministry to effect change. I think this advisory board and efforts to re-establish it would be a good objective to pursue for FER.

MF. Thank you for that challenge to FER. You retired from government but still maintain an interest in natural ecosystems and so you have kept up your professional side in ecology and ecosystem science?

HR. I am doing work as a consultant now and getting paid so I have to be on the ball in ecosystem science.

MF. Since the time that you were most active in the ER program is there anything in ecosystem science and conservation biology that has changed? How we look at conservation – are there any advances that have been made?

HR. I am not sure about

scientific advances that have been made that are translatable into practical changes for ecological reserves. But the general attitude has changed and it is more positive than it has been for a long time. Even the notion of biodiversity as being something to look after and maintain has not been there in the past and it will help to forward ER issues.

MF. Are there other thoughts you would want to share?

HR. Yes the issues of "completing the ER system," that really raised some red flags for me. How can you complete a system if you do not have an end goal? For ERs the end goal has never been clearly defined. Maybe that was a good thing. Dr Krajina at one time said that it would be good to have one percent of the province protected in ecological reserves. We are far from that. I don't think it should be taken too seriously – it was a comment that he made.

Another thing that the FER could push for is a really good systems plan for ERs. I really have some slightly different ideas on how to treat the ER system or how ecological reserves could be treated ideally. We probably have to go back to what was called the Protected Areas Strategy in BC and look, through the eyes of the Protected Areas Strategy how we are doing for ecological reserves.

One thing that will immediately pop up is that our representative ERs are peanuts compared to what we already have in BC parks. Very large

Parks and large protected areas have to be taken into account for representation. ERs, as far as rare and endangered and special features are concerned, probably have to proceed as they did. Are we going to re-invent the wheel and go for a full complement of representative ecosystems, as it can be expanded into infinity because you can divide ecological units into smaller and smaller units and have to represent every single one. You will not get finished, ever. This representation aspect should be revisited. Whether it can be done without changing the ER Act I don't know. At least in discussion it could be brought to a point that is more reasonable than it is now.

MF. Well thank you Hans it is a goal for FER to have a resilient network of ERs and exactly what that means and what that looks like, we need help with.

I've been on hikes with you and we went up to one place on San Juan ridge, a place called the Hans Roemer Meadow. Can you tell us the story of the Hans Roemer Meadow and how it got its name.

HR. The Kludahk Club <http://kludahk.com/kludahkclub/> has a habit of naming places, for example, the Lessing Grove, Phoebe Meadow and one time I was up there and there was a sign saying Hans Roemer Meadow. So I took it down and brought it home and before you leave I can show it to you. Before I knew it, the next time I came to the same place, there was this sign again. Seems to be an in-

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understand the environmental importance of recycling but will happily take part when it is explained to them that they can save money.

Moussa's portion of this session was focused on the importance of language and meaning to different groups and nationalities of people. We spent time in break out sessions collaborating on the use of language and then reported back to the group.

The keynote speaker at this year's forum was well known CBC's "Quirks and Quark's" host and science expert, Bob McDonald. Bob gave an entertaining and surprisingly upbeat talk on planet earth as it travels through the cosmos.

He not only regaled us with images of earth as viewed from space, but explained how earth as well as our solar system was formed. Our small rock, covered in a thin film of water and air is just close enough to the sun to support intelligent life. There is no other world like it.

Bob's presentation examined how the earth has changed over time and how human activity is altering it. With over 7 billion people now on the planet, our future looks scary. We are experiencing droughts on the prairies, floods on the coasts,



Long-time Friend, Tom Gillespie with the new FER banner stand display

energy shortages and diminishing water supplies. But Bob is an optimist and thinks we can engineer our way through

another thousand years of civilization. And he believes that Canada is in a position to lead the way.

eradicable sign.

MF. That must be nice to see recognition of all the contributions you have made over those years. I was very pleased to see the sign 'Hans Roemer Meadow' on San Juan

Ridge and I am sure others are too. I hope this interview will be enjoyed in the future by others too. I will leave the last word to you – anything you want to get off your chest?

HR. I really don't have anything to get off my chest but

it was nice to chat and I am certainly willing to participate in discussions if you need me.



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Grant Helps Boost ER Legacy

As part of BC Parks' Centennial, community organizations were invited to submit an application for project funding. Friends of Ecological Reserves applied for and obtained a Community Legacy Grant.

FER is carrying out five projects, one of which is a series of interviews with 'elders' of the Ecological Reserve system. These interviews are recorded on DVD as well as transcribed into a computer document. Please see the first of the series of interviews in this issue of the Log starting on page 1.

Friends also commissioned a new display, namely a banner stand which was used at this year's H.A.T. Conservation Connection. The banner stand provides a more portable way to display information on Ecological Reserves in British Columbia.

We are also in the midst of developing a new and much

improved website. We hope to unveil it in the next month or so. Our web address will not change.

A new Ecological Reserves folding map will also be completed in the near future. The current map is 16 years old and not only out of date, but out of print. The new map will show all of the Ers within the broader context of the greater protected areas system.

The last project is the formation of a science panel as part of the 2011 BC Parks Conference to be held in Vancouver in early December. Key questions are being developed and a panel of respected experts will be asked to provide their views on the management of Ecological Reserves and whether the current ER directions are strategically on target. The legacy that will be generated will be published in a forum such as FORREX.

The Log



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