

Human-caused Wildfires—The Message Remains the Same

The two causes of wildfires are: natural (lightning) and human. Lightning fires are somewhat predictable in that forecasters are generally able to provide some warning that instability in the atmosphere may/will bring convective cells. Lightning strikes are more traceable allowing for patrols to be carried out in the general proximity of a belt of lightning that has moved through an area. The real enigma is human behaviour. Human-caused fires are less predictable as no one knows who is likely to cause a fire, or where it will occur. Unfortunately a large degree of chance remains in regards to fires started by humans.

From the very earliest reports about wildfire in government documents there has been discussion on how to get the message of campfire safety across to campers, travellers and those working in forested areas. Reading through the reports it is somewhat disheartening to realize that little has changed in 104 years. The message has remained largely unchanged but there continues to be a segment of the population that simply ignores it. Either



through arrogance, inexperience or carelessness and human-caused fires continue to be an issue.

Prevention messaging, however, is still important. Children must grow up knowing that to enjoy our forested areas people must take responsibility for their choices. The government continues to provide the message but it is ultimately up to parents to make sure that their children know and understand its importance. Help us out, teach your kids about campfire safety: <https://smokeybear.com/en>

In the 1924 BC government Sessional Papers, it was noted that 'with a view to concentrating the risk and preventing fire-setting by campers, a number of additional Forest Branch camp-sites were established during the season at various places throughout the Province. Forest Branch camp-sites have been the subjects of much favourable comment on the part of the users'. This is one way in which the Government of the day could provide an outdoor experience, provide some amenities, while at the same time monitoring fire use. These parks were a great success and are the basis for our BC Parks of today. For more information go to: <http://www.sitesandtrailsbc.ca/>.

Getting the Word Out—1961 BC Government Sessional Papers

In 1961, the Protection Branch (as it was called then), hired its first Information Officer. This position was hired for the Fort George District (Prince George). In addition, the BC Forest Service mounted a multi-media Prevention campaign using a school lecture program, exhibits (Pacific National Exposition), new signs, even updating the fire danger display to what we see today. Below are excerpts from the Sessional Papers describing this effort.

Radio - Due to its flexibility, accessibility and speed, radio is unquestionably one of the most efficient media available to the Service, particularly during periods of extreme fire-hazard. The stations themselves continue, year after year, to offer the most complete and generous service, far beyond that purchased by the commercial contract.

Between June 19th and September 30th, Divisional officers had the opportunity to broadcast daily, six days a week, one-minute fire-protection messages over station CKDA, Victoria. A total of ninety-five of these broadcasts was made, and they were repeated on tape at a later time each day, making a total of 190 broadcasts. Several other stations assisted greatly by allowing immediate direct broadcasts of forest closure and other vital public information. In addition, staff members participated in numerous special-event and public service programmes on radio. Similar facilities were offered district officers throughout the Province whenever requested.

Television - Paid programming of a special Division-produced twenty-second forest production clip was continued over CBUT, Vancouver. A total of twenty-eight transmissions was scheduled, once each Friday and Saturday, during July and August.

During the year, Divisional staff members participated in or arranged for eight "interview" type television programmes featuring forestry matters; six special-events programmes for coverage by television cameras; wrote and produced two one-half-hour programmes; and supplied film footage and special material for other productions, some with national coverage.

Commercial Theatres - A specially produced 35 mm. forest protection trailer was circulated through forty-four commercial theatres in the Province, for one week in each theatre, between July 10th and September 1st, for an audience estimated to be in excess of 100,000 persons. For the metropolitan Vancouver and Victoria areas, a similar item was scheduled twenty-eight times over television station CBUT, Vancouver, in lieu of using the theatres in these areas. The television audience for this item was estimated at 300,000 persons for each transmission.



Wildfire then



Autocamping—The Rise of Leisure Camping

The automobile introduced in the 1890s was a boon to a variety of leisure activities as it provided an easy means for people to access a variety of outdoor activities including sporting events, carnivals and fairs, as well picnicking and enjoying life outside the cities. At first the automobile was considered a rich man's toy but when they became more affordable to the masses in the 1910s car ownership boomed and so too did camping.

Autocamping was simply an extension of the need for car owners to stay on the open road. Travellers began to pack up their belongings and explored every road and path available to them stopping at night along rivers, lakes and streams each night, only to continue on the next day.

In the earliest days of autocamping, the traveler would drive through the countryside and each night stopped in a farmer's field, or a local schoolyard until autocamping became more popular and municipalities established small parks that did not charge fees. As these parks gained in popularity in the 1920s, municipalities were forced to charge nominal fees to offset the costs of maintenance and provide better services. What it also served to do was separate the tourist from the 'bums' and 'wanderers' who were also utilizing these free facilities. City politicians used an entrance fee to municipal parks to control who patronized their community parks. As the Depression began there were many who took to the road to: look for work, avoid debt or those who simply had no where else to go, consequently, community campgrounds were often patrolled regularly by police, imposed an allowable length of stay and for the first time began to register its guests in order to control usage. These measures also served to make the campground a viable commercial enterprise because businessmen

could now compete for more patronage of those who previously used municipal facilities.

As the Depression struck the number of patrons in Federal parks declined but private tourist camps were thriving. At first, laid-off workers who had saved up some money before they lost their jobs used the opportunity, their time and cash to take a vacation and see the country. As the Depression deepened trailers were often the only homes many families could afford to maintain.

By the 1930s autocamps were expected to be a simple field but those who frequented campgrounds expected good laneways and semi-private parking areas. People were constantly trying to make camping more convenient, still wanting the comforts of home without having to pack them all into their automobiles. A multitude of inventive devices from the ridiculous to the inspired were developed to make the experience more enjoyable. Everything from the 'Imperial Toilet Tent' to luxury baths, to massive radios with kites attached to serve as antennas were tried.

The term autocamp has all but disappeared but 'camping' and camping culture continues to be a popular pastime as people continue to escape to the country even if its just for a weekend.

Airstream

The commercial production of 'automobile trailers' took off in the 1920s and by the early 1930s autocamps were changing the way they provided services to their clientele to accommodate the new 'homes on wheels'.

The Airstream trailer was developed when Wally Byam, a lawyer working in advertising as a copywriter, found that a set of plans for an 'auto trailer', featured in a magazine were deficient. He set out to improve the plans by producing his own and found the results to be a vast improvement over the original's. He began to sell the plans for \$5.00 and build a number of the trailers himself. His greatest innovation was to drop the floor so that campers could stand comfortably and move about in the trailer.

The early Airstreams evolved into an aerodynamic, aluminum monument to sleekness that became an icon of the 1930s. Byam also switched from plywood to the lighter material, Masonite.

The Airstream trailer became an American classic and although \$1200.00 was exorbitant during the Depression Byam's factory could not keep up with demand. Today, Airstream is the only North American trailer manufacturer to have survived the Depression, and although forced to close due to lack of materials during the Second World War, it reopened in 1948 facing a great demand for its product.



Coleman



The Coleman Company was founded by W.C. Coleman in the early 1920s. In 1901, W.C. Coleman came upon a lamp used by farmers to light their fields at night. The lamp used a mantle instead of a wick. He bought out the inventory, as well as the patents to the Efficient Lamp, which he improved and reintroduced it to

the market in 1909. The new Coleman lamp was revolutionary producing the equivalent light of 300 candles.

In 1923, Coleman went on to develop a camp stove that conveniently folded up and became a staple of the camping set. The product was so popular it, and the Coleman lamp, became iconic staples for all campers.

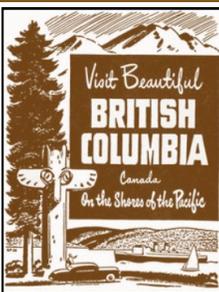


Wildfire then

Historic Fires in Coastal

Port Neville Fire 1925—The Port Neville Fire of 1925 was just one fire in a season of unprecedented ferocity. Although there were more fires in 1922, the number of fires caused by lightning (510) in the Southeast part of BC made the season abnormally difficult. A total of 2521 fires occurred province wide in 1925, second only to 1922 when 2591 fires were recorded. 672 of these fires were in the Vancouver Forest District.

The fire season was also notable for the number of accidents in connection with fire-fighting and more specifically two fatalities. In Port Neville, assistant Ranger Oliver G. Clark, lost his life on June 26, 1925 in what the BC Sessional Papers of that year hail as 'heroic circumstances', although no details are given. The suspected source of the fire was a local logging operation. A launch was purchased the next year and dubbed the 'Oliver Clark' in honour of Clark's valour.



water bombers, and several pieces of heavy equipment. It took eight days to get the fire to Mop-up.

Elaho Fire (2015) - The Elaho fire was reported on June 14, 2015. The fire was initially thought to be a human-caused fire but was later determined to be a holdover fire from lightning occurring five weeks earlier. On July 4, 2015, a significant wind event resulted in the fire growing from 611 hectares to 12,523 hectares. Smoke was extensive with reports of an pale orange cast in the skies over the Lower Mainland, Vancouver Island and beyond. Resources were involved with this fire for the entire 2015 fire season. The fire occurred in a high recreational area affecting rafting companies, hiking and other activities. The fire was finally declared out in November 2015.

A three year drought, dry conditions, lightning, a weather event, as well as difficult terrain, all contributed to making this one of the larger fires in Coastal's history.



Bloedel Fire (1938) - On July 5, 1938, during a period of extremely dry conditions on Vancouver Island a fire broke out when sparks from a yarding engine ignited a pile of logs at a camp operated by Bloedel, Stewart and Welch. The fire ultimately burned over 74,495 acres (30,147 ha.), employed every available young man from the area, as well as 211 unemployed workers from Vancouver and spewed smoke as far as Seattle.

This fire is not only renowned for its size and its ferocity but for the massive tree-planting project which resulted after the burn. Seventeen million trees were planted over the next two years in an area adjacent to the fire perimeter. The area is now recognized as the Sayward Forest.

Taylor Flats (Tay Fire, 1967) - On August 16, 1967, at 2:37 pm the Tay Fire, or Taylor Flats fire was started by a road construction crew, who were widening the highway by blasting rock. The blasting shorted power in nearby hydro lines which started several spot fires. The fire occurred in mid-August after a dry spell through June, July and into August, and with winds of 50 km/h.

Up to 478 Forest Service personnel and fire fighters, as well as employees of MacMillan Bloedel Ltd., and the road construction crew worked to put out the fire.

When the fire finally ebbed there were 35 miles of hose to pick up, 2535 hectares of land to be assessed and the fire cost over half a million dollars to put out.

Burns Bog (2005) - although there have been several fires in Burns Bog the fire that was probably the most serious took place September 11, 2005. The Bog is an ecologically sensitive area covering 3000 hectares. It was commercially mined until 1984 when it was closed to all but scientists because of its unique characteristics. The fire of 2005 grew to 200 hectares in size in three days. The BC Forest Service sent seven

Coastal Statistics

- Most Lightning-caused fires in a year - 416 in 1975
- Most acres burnt in a year - 1921 - 242,615 acres (98,183 ha.)
- Most Fires in a year - 1960—Vancouver District—1866 fires

Historical Highlights of the BCWS

1912	The BC Forest Service was formed under the Forest Act.
1918	The Forest Branch commissioned the Curtiss Aircraft Company to build a 'flying boat' specifically to patrol for fires. The plane crashed during trials and aircraft was not used again until 1920.
1918	Portable gas pumps for firefighting were introduced.
1927	Permits required for campfires in fire season.
1920	The Marconi Company was contracted to develop a wireless radio for the Forest Service.
1930s	Heavy equipment was first used to aid crews in digging fireguard and accessing fires.
1958	Airtankers were first used to assist on fires: four Boeing Stearman aircraft converted for use as airtankers.
1967	Forest fire drought index card used.
1969	Forest fire danger indices first produced by computer.
1970s	Lightning detection equipment developed and utilized.
1977	First helicopter rappel crew used.
2003	The Wildfire Act was enacted.
2012	100th Anniversary of the BC Forest Service in BC.



Wildfire then

Fire Diary—1922 Fire Season

The following is paraphrased from the 1923 Sessional Papers, Annual Reports, Province of British Columbia.

The fire season of 1922 was abnormal throughout the Province. A long, cold winter, during which little snow fell, froze the ground deeply in every forest district in the Province. The spring was late and cold, with the result of the previous year's vegetation did not start until late May or early June. This was not followed by the rains in June. The season was the driest of which we have recorded.

The result of these conditions was a fire situation fraught with the gravest danger which might have at any moment developed a conflagration of which the disasters at Merville and Lang Bay would have been mere details.

The causes of fires show that the travelling public is still the biggest single factor in causing the outbreak of fires. It seems incredible that the travelling public should year after year head the list in starting fires, but it is to be hoped that the educational work that is being assiduously carried on, assisted by the stern prosecution of known offenders, will result in a decreased number of fires as time progresses.

Between 80 and 90 per cent of the fires originate from human causes, mostly due to carelessness or the procrastination of taking precautionary measures until too late. Eliminate these fires and much of the problem is solved.

The weather charts show very clearly the causes for the rapid spread of fires, which in the season of 1922 reached the record number of 2,591. The fact that 1,546 fires, or almost 60 per cent of the fires which broke out, were extinguished before they reached 10 acres in size is a convincing record of work put in by the field and organizing staffs, when the fire conditions were taken into consideration.

Possibly the most outstanding feat of the season was the transporting of fire-fighters to Buttle Lake in the centre of Vancouver Island [F3 Flying Boat]. This fire was reported on July 28th. To get into this lake with a crew of men would have required a two-day trip and construction of about 14 miles of trail over a difficult country. By the time the crew arrived in all probability the fire would have been of such a size that it would have been impossible to have taken in sufficient additional men to have fought it. The big machine [type of plane not mentioned] and emergency fire-fighting equipment were wired for. The equipment consisted of a portable pump and set of tools. These were loaded together with 1,200 feet of hose, a sixteen-man ten, six shovels, six mattocks, six axes, camp outfit, and provisions for six men for two weeks. Four fire-fighters

were carried also, in addition also, in addition to the crew of the machine. The total load on this trip was 4,895 lb. Visibility was very poor, but the machine rose to the height of 1,000 feet and hit across Vancouver Island in the direction of Buttle Lake.

The route following the Campbell River to Campbell Lake was taken, crossing the Campbell River fire; then following the Elk River and landing in Buttle Lake about fifty-four minutes from Campbell River. Equipment and personnel were put ashore at the fire in collapsible boats. The machine then returned to Campbell River and picked up three more fire-fighters and took them in to the fire. The fire-fighters were landed at 4 in the afternoon, fought fire all night, surrounded the fire with a fire trench, and got the pump into action. The fire was practically under control in the morning. The crew was left on the fire for two more days, and on the fourth day the machine went in and took out the crew and equipment. The gasoline taken in for the portable pump was used as extra fuel and one man was left to patrol the fire.



'Over 90 per cent of all forest fires in British Columbia are due to human agency of some kind, and therefore are preventable. Of all such fires, those known to be caused by campers and travellers are greater in number than those from any other single known cause, amount to nearly 25 per cent of all fires during the last five years. There is no doubt, too, that most of the 'unknown' fire are due to campers and travellers. Of all causes, this then is the most prolific of fire; it is also the most unnecessary and the most irritating for the reason is carelessness, ignorance or laziness. All such fires are avoidable.'

Sessional Papers, 1915
Province of BC

The Great Merville Fire—1922



The community of Merville was established as a World War I soldiers settlement. The community consisted of a store, church, school, post office, garage and church.

On July 6, 1922, a stray spark at a logging camp turned into a forest fire that swept through the community and destroyed many homes and farms. The fire ultimately burned 8508 hectares. The damage was so extensive that when Premier Oliver ordered for the lands to be replanted in an effort to assist the displaced community, the Minister of Agriculture, E.D. Barrow, after an extensive survey of the lands reported that the lands should not be replanted as most of the land was worthless for cultivation. Many of the residents, moved to other communities after receiving a cash payout for their land.