

“The Persistence of the Visionaries”: Forestry, Ecotourism and the Commodification of Nature in Powell River, BC.

DALTON PAGANI

Throughout the twentieth century, Powell River, B.C. has been a textbook example of a “company town.” With the incorporation of the Powell River Paper Company in October 1909, a prosperous pulp and paper mill shaped the emerging community. Today, rapidly changing social and economic realities have caused many forestry-driven communities to look for new ways to diversify their economies. Ecotourism represents one way for company towns to re-commodify nature, which involves changing how it is utilized and valued. The Sunshine Coast Trail, for instance, demonstrates the potential for ecotourism to transform Powell River in new ways. While it can be a challenge for single-industry communities to redefine their relationship to nature, it is a worthwhile to explore the possible role of ecotourism in Powell River’s future.

The following essay explores the economic and social impact of Powell River’s mill, and the challenges it faces today. Then, discussion turns to the opportunities and risks that ecotourism offers, particularly through an analysis of trail-building. Finally, two case studies of company towns in B.C. shed light on the possible outcomes of re-commodifying nature in a Powell River.

Introduction

Nature is commodified in many different ways. For over a century, the landscape surrounding Powell River has been valued for its role in the forest industry, particularly through extraction and manufacture. For decades, the pulp and paper mill has shaped the economic and social life of Powell River. Like many of British Columbia’s “company towns,” however, Powell River is currently “in the throes of a profound restructuring.”¹ In the face of new economic and social realities, old industries are being challenged and new perspectives on the environment and economy are being introduced. With a vast and beautiful landscape, Powell River is a prime candidate for ecotourism,² defined as “an enlightening nature travel experience

¹ Tanya Behrisch, Roger Hayter, and Trevor Barnes, “I don’t really like the mill; in fact, I hate the mill’: Changing Youth Vocationalism Under Fordism and Post-Fordism in Powell River, British Columbia,” *BC Studies* no. 136 (Winter 2002/03): 73.

² Jenny Clayton, “Chapter 7: Volunteer Trail and Bridge Builders in Powell River since 1988,” in *Making Recreational Space: Citizen Involvement in*

that contributes to conservation of the ecosystem, while respecting the integrity of host communities.”³ For a community historically defined by a single industry, such a re-commodification of nature may be a challenge; however, it is useful to consider why and how ecotourism may attain a larger role Powell River’s future.

To begin, this essay outlines the history of Powell River’s pulp and paper mill, particularly its economic presence and social perception. With this historical context in mind, analysis turns to challenges that currently face the mill. Then, the essay introduces ecotourism. After a brief discussion of tourism, the essay explores how trail-building in Powell River shows some of the opportunities and barriers for ecotourism. Finally, to understand the possibilities of ecotourism, the essay examines two other company towns in BC that have undergone similar processes: McBride and Chemainus. Overall, this essay seeks to explore if, at Powell River’s current economic juncture, it is possible to diversify the economy and explore new, less-harmful ways to value nature.

Setting the Stage: Powell River as a “Company Town”

As J.A. Lundie notes in *Powell River’s First 50 Years*: “no story of [the] Powell River area would be complete without mention of the [Powell River Company’s] role in that story.”⁴ For the purposes of this paper, an extensive, chronological account of Powell River and its mill is unnecessary, since several comprehensive histories already exist, including Donald MacKay’s *Empire of Wood*, Roger Hayter’s *MacMillan Bloedel: Corporate Restructuring and the Search for Flexible Mass Production*, and Karen Southern’s *Pulp, Paper and People*.

Rather, the following three sections explore specific aspects of this history to create a foundation for the discussion of ecotourism: the

Outdoor Recreation and Park Establishment in British Columbia, 1900-2000, (PHD thesis, University of Victoria, 2009), 239.

³ “Feasibility Study and Business Plan,” prepared for: Powell River Parks and Wilderness Society (PRPAWS), Community Futures Development Corporation of the Powell River Region, and Human Resources Development Canada, *Synergy Management Group Ltd. and ADR Forestry Systems/Shearwater Ltd.* (Jan. 2000), 0.

⁴ Harry Taylor, *Powell River’s First 50 Years* (Powell River, BC: Windflower Books & Stationery, 1960), not paginated.

economic presence and social perception of the mill, and how both have been challenged. In general, this summary illustrates the mill's economic importance throughout Powell River's history, how the mill's social influence contributes to its image, and how current realities challenge this image.

Economic Presence of the Mill

It must be acknowledged that the City of Powell River would not exist without the mill. In 1908, the Brooks-Scanlon Lumber Company of Minnesota recognized the economic potential of the region and purchased "local water and land rights" to construct the first pulp and paper mill in western Canada.⁵ Following the incorporation of the Powell River Paper Company in October 1909,⁶ the company directors began work on the mill, as well as "an entirely new industrial city."⁷ After some initial challenges,⁸ the first batch of paper rolled out on April 12, 1912.⁹ As a "model company town,"¹⁰ Powell River developed under a "boom market and rising prices" during World War I, which sustained it through the Great Depression and kept it in "firm financial position" through World War II.¹¹ Overall, people recognized "the Powell River pulp mill was a winner...creating a prosperous new coastal city around it."¹²

In 1960, the mill underwent a major change when the Powell River Company merged with MacMillan & Bloedel.¹³ The new company, later known as MacMillan Bloedel Limited [MB], became a leader in BC's forest economy.¹⁴ Under Fordist practices, it utilized a

⁵ Karen Southern and Peggy Bird, *Pulp, Paper and People: 75 Years of Powell River* (Powell River Heritage Association: Friesen Printers, 1988), xxi.

⁶ *Ibid.*, xxi.

⁷ Taylor, *Powell River's First 50 Years*.

⁸ Donald MacKay, *Empire of Wood: The MacMillan Bloedel Story* (Vancouver, BC: Douglas and McIntyre, 1982), 49-50.

⁹ Southern and Bird, *Pulp, Paper and People*, xii.

¹⁰ MacKay, *Empire of Wood*, 52.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 53, 65.

¹² Howard White, *The Sunshine Coast: From Gibsons to Powell River*, 2nd ed. (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Publishing Co., 2011), 137.

¹³ MacKay, *Empire of Wood*, 163.

¹⁴ Roger Hayter, "MacMillan Bloedel: Corporate Restructuring and the Search for Flexible Mass Production," in *Flexible Crossroads: The Restructuring of British Columbia's Forest Economy* (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2000), 107.

large workforce in a system of mass production,¹⁵ and the mill expanded in both jobs and output.¹⁶ Following losses in the mid-1970s and a recession in the early 1980s, restructuring was soon needed.¹⁷ Thus, MB shifted toward flexible production, which allowed the mill to redefine itself through a “diversified range of higher-quality papers for a wider range of markets.”¹⁸ Increased productivity, however, came at the cost of cutbacks.¹⁹ While new techniques like thermomechanical production effectively modernized the mill, far fewer machines and workers were needed.²⁰ As a result, employment fell from 2,600 in 1973 to 1,275 in 1994.²¹ Despite this diminished workforce, MB’s modernization redefined and sustained the mill in a changing global economy.²²

Following Wyerhaeuser’s takeover of MB in October 1999, and several subsequent acquisitions,²³ the mill once again hopes to “revitalize its operations” under a new name: Catalyst Paper.²⁴ In the face of continued market and technological changes, division vice president and general manager Fred Chin confirmed his optimism regarding the mill’s future in an April 19, 2017 interview.²⁵ Moreover, despite a reduction from seven to two paper machines, and only 360 employees,²⁶ the mill still remains the community’s largest employer.²⁷

¹⁵ Behrisch, Hayter, and Barnes, “I don’t really like the mill; in fact, I hate the mill,” 74.

¹⁶ Roger Hayter, “High-Performance Organizations and Employment Flexibility: A Case Study of *In Situ* Change at the Powell River Paper Mill, 1980-1994,” *Canadian Geographer* 41, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 31.

¹⁷ Hayter, “MacMillan Bloedel,” 108.

¹⁸ Hayter, “MacMillan Bloedel,” 108; Hayter, “High-Performance Organizations and Employment Flexibility,” 28.

¹⁹ Hayter, “High-Performance Organizations and Employment Flexibility,” 28.

²⁰ “Powell River Environmental Effects Monitoring (EEM) Pre-Design Reference Document,” prepared for: MacMillan Bloedel Limited, Powell River Division, *Hatfield Consultants Ltd.* (June 1994), 6/1-4.

²¹ Clayton, “Chapter 7,” 214.

²² Hayter, “MacMillan Bloedel,” 108, 147.

²³ *Ibid.*, 108.

²⁴ Chris Bolster, “Catalyst Paper Corporation optimistic about Powell River mill’s future,” *Powell River Peak*, April 19, 2017, Business, not paginated.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

Nonetheless, as mayor Dave Formosa aptly notes, “[the mill’s] future is far from certain.”²⁸

Overall, the Powell River mill shaped the town and its economy through highs and lows; however, in the face of continued downsizing, one must consider the role of social capital to help the mill maintain a relatively positive image in the community.

Social Influence of the Mill

Even in economic difficulties, the mill has maintained a positive perception among residents. Since Powell River’s inception, “the company exerted economic, material, and cultural leverage over its employees, making decisions not only about employment but also regarding housing, consumer goods, education and recreational activities.”²⁹ The mill, for example, played a role in rehabilitating WWI and WWII veterans by offering them jobs and support upon their return.³⁰ Indeed, the resident manager stood at “the peak of the community pyramid” for many decades.³¹ Today, Catalyst continues to promote its “[support for] local programs and organizations” through donations and fundraising, which allows the mill to maintain social capital in the community.³² The mill has certainly contributed to the strengthening of Powell River’s social fabric, but local histories reveal how nostalgia may influence people’s perception of the mill today.

Most notably, Karen Southern’s *Pulp, Paper and People* “[traces] the progress and regress of the community with each expansion and cut-back of their lifeline, the pulp and paper plant.”³³ Backed by MB, Southern frames the mill’s development and the town’s development as parallel throughout the book. In other books, the mill’s presence is not as explicit, but nostalgia and the “pioneering spirit” still shape authors’ views of the company. For instance, in *Powell River’s First 50 Years*, Harry Taylor attributes Powell River’s economic and social success “solely to the vision and perseverance of

²⁷ Canada, *British Columbia Newcomers’ Guide to Resources and Services, Powell River Edition*, Welcome BC (2014), 6.

²⁸ Bolster, “Catalyst Paper Corporation optimistic about Powell River mill’s future.”

²⁹ Clayton, “Chapter 7,” 209.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 95.

³¹ Southern and Bird, *Pulp, Paper and People*, 140.

³² “Our Mills: Powell River, BC,” *Catalyst Paper* (2013), not paginated.

³³ Southern and Bird, *Pulp, Paper and People*, vii, inside cover.

those men, who in the first decade of the century risked their capital and reputation to pioneer the newsprint industry in our province.”³⁴ Bill Thompson use similar rhetoric in *Once Upon a Stump* and *Boats, Bucksaws, and Blisters*, which position H.R. MacMillan as a pioneering figure in British Columbia and the forest industry.³⁵ This impulse toward nostalgia is also present in a speech given by J.V. Clyne to the Newcomen Society in April 1965. In detailing MB’s history, he notes the company’s “virile, adventurous, and exciting [past],” and even makes a comparison to the Roman republic.³⁶

To this day, this idealization of the mill continues to permeate Powell River’s local memory, as seen in Howard White’s *Sunshine Coast*. In the book, White notes how the “language of Powell Riverites is shaped by this historic perception of the mill and town.”³⁷ Phrases like “south of town,” used to denote different areas, “[hark] back to the day when the mill and the company that ran it were supreme.”³⁸ Similarly, many residents continue to “mark off the periods of their lives” by the operations of the mill, since it was in the forefront during the economic and social transformations of their lives.³⁹ In all, the presence of the mill, even in economic decline, continues to be shaped by residents’ perceptions of a more stable, prosperous past. Such notions, however, have been increasingly challenged.

New Realities, Changing Perceptions

As early as 1977, skepticism of the mill’s future is evident in an “Economic Base Study of Powell River.” The study, prepared for the Powell River Economic Adjustment Committee, was sponsored in part by MB to “identify those economic and social factors that influence the Powell River community and to determine their impact on the future economic development of the community.”⁴⁰ In

³⁴ Taylor, *Powell River’s First 50 Years*.

³⁵ Bill Thompson, *Boats, Bucksaws and Blisters: Pioneer Tales of the Powell River Area* (Powell River Heritage Research Association: Friesen Printers, 1990), 243-244.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

³⁷ White, *The Sunshine Coast*, 146.

³⁸ White, 146.

³⁹ White, 147.

⁴⁰ UVic SC, “An Economic Base Study of the Powell River Region,” Prepared by Karen R. Boyer, *Regional and Resource Planner*, July 1977. Prepared for

discussing the “expansion, cut backs, and stabilization” of the mill, it was concluded that continued modernization would lead to further layoffs.⁴¹ This proved to be true. Additionally, due to a “lack of diversity in the Powell River region economy,”⁴² the study argued that tourism has been “neglected” and its potential “lies virtually untapped.”⁴³ As discussed below, there are barriers to making tourism or ecotourism part of Powell River’s economy, but this study demonstrates an early indication of the growing concern over low employment and a need to diversify.⁴⁴

Another challenge to the mill’s supremacy can be found in an article on youth vocationalism in Powell River. As mentioned earlier, the shift toward post-Fordist practices in the 1980s involved smaller, more flexible workforces, which reduced employment significantly by 2002.⁴⁵ In the article, Tanya Behrisch, Roger Hayter, and Trevor Barnes examine how the expectations of students and the content of high school programs has been influenced by “the new economic reality of forest towns.”⁴⁶ In “labour market expectations,” the authors conclude that both students and schools do not place the mill high.⁴⁷ Essentially, in a post-Fordist labour market, the students are looking for alternative employment and the schools are accommodating this shift. Today, Brooks Secondary School and Vancouver Island University boast a range of Trades and Applied Technology Programs, including welding, carpentry, hairdressing, and culinary arts.⁴⁸ Also, there is an “enriched outdoor education program” called the Coast Mountain Academy, which makes “outdoor adventure tourism” a part of education.⁴⁹

Powell River Economic Study Adjustment Committee, Call Number HC117 P65B68, 2.

⁴¹ Ibid., 68.

⁴² Ibid., 148, 155.

⁴³ Ibid., 107.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 155.

⁴⁵ Behrisch, Hayter, and Barnes, “I don’t really like the mill; in fact, I hate the mill,” 75.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 73.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 91.

⁴⁸ “Personalized Learning Programs,” School District 47, <https://www.sd47.bc.ca/dualcredit/programs/Pages/default.aspx> (accessed 15 November 2017).

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Moreover, the mill no longer holds the same economic and social power it once did, especially among the younger generation. Rather, in this new context, alternative options like ecotourism are being pursued and promoted.

Enter: Ecotourism

Throughout Powell River’s history, the mill has shaped how the community understands its relationship to nature. Now, as the mill continues to struggle and the community looks to diversify its economy, ecotourism has an opportunity to gain attention and transform how the environment is valued. To understand the possibilities it presents, one must first contextualize ecotourism within the tourism industry in general. Then, it is useful to discuss an aspect of ecotourism that is already developing in Powell River: trail-building. Finally, two case studies of other company towns in BC offer insight into Powell River’s current situation and the potential of ecotourism to redefine the community.

Tourism in Powell River

In Powell River, an industry like ecotourism presents both opportunities and risks. From vast forests and majestic mountains, to winding rivers and thundering waterfalls, Powell River is a beautiful place with great potential for “tourists and outdoor recreationists.”⁵⁰ Despite the advantage of scenery, Powell River’s isolation poses problems.⁵¹ While there are two a BC Ferries’ routes to Powell River, along the Sunshine Coast and from Vancouver Island, it is not on any major transportation routes.⁵² As noted in a 2008 report by Tourism BC, 95% of visitors go to Powell River with the intent of spending time, not just passing through.⁵³ With little tourist traffic flowing through, they must be “enticed” to stay.⁵⁴

As a result, Powell River’s growing tourism and a service industry, which includes fine dining and attractions,⁵⁵ has so far been

⁵⁰ UVic SC, “An Economic Base Study of the Powell River Region,” 98.

⁵¹ Clayton, “Chapter 7,” 214.

⁵² UVic SC, “An Economic Base Study of the Powell River Region,” 107.

⁵³ *Value of the Powell River Visitor Centre: Study Results – For Distribution*. Tourism British Columbia, Research and Planning (April 2008) 47.

⁵⁴ UVic SC, “An Economic Base Study of the Powell River Region,” 107.

⁵⁵ Joe Wiebe, “Powell River,” *The Province*, May 13, 2012, Travel, E.6, 2.

aided by a strong arts and culture presence. Kathaumixw, for instance, is an internationally known choral music festival that draws people from all over the world every two years.⁵⁶ Ecotourism, on the other hand, is still developing. On the water, Powell River promotes several kayaking, diving, and sailing areas, as well as a weeklong canoe route that “follows a circle of lakes surrounding the town.”⁵⁷ For this discussion, however, it is necessary to consider how trees, the primary resource upon which Powell River was built, may be re-commodified through ecotourism.

Trail-building: From the Bomb Squad to the Sunshine Coast Trail

In Powell River, trail-building is worth exploring for two key reasons. First, it shows how volunteer groups can exercise agency and encourage new activities, which can later yield social and economic benefits. Second, it shows how Powell River’s forests, which have been viewed in mainly extractive-terms for the last century, can be valued in entirely new ways. From the Bomb Squad in the mid-1980s to the Sunshine Coast Trail today, it seems that Powell River may be able to re-commodify its forests and make ecotourism a profitable venture.

The relationship between forests and tourism is not new. Indeed, the 1977-1978 MacMillan Bloedel Forestry Recreation Guide invites visitors to “explore and enjoy the forest lands under management of MacMillan Bloedel.”⁵⁸ Through such initiatives, MB sought to demonstrate their “progressive forest management,” especially multiple use practices.⁵⁹ Interestingly, this coincides with the increased popularity of hiking in the 1970s and 1980s,⁶⁰ which leads into a discussion of the Bomb Squad: a group of volunteer trail-builders.

Jenny Clayton’s *Making Recreational Space*, a dissertation on BC’s “outdoor recreation and the social construction of wilderness,” includes a chapter devoted to Powell River and the Bomb Squad.⁶¹ As the mill restructured and downsized in the 1980s and 1990s, the

⁵⁶ White, *The Sunshine Coast*, 147.

⁵⁷ Wiebe, “Powell River,” E.6.

⁵⁸ BCA, Map, Item 14943A sh. 1, “A MacMillan Bloedel Forestry Recreation Guide, 1977-78.”

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Clayton, “Chapter 7,” 234.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, iii.

“Bloody Old Men’s Brigade,” which included many former mill employees, began building trails and bridges.⁶² Initially, the group did not have permission to operate on Forest Service lands,⁶³ but since the labour cost nothing and the wood they used was salvaged, logging companies and the Forest Service benefited from and thus supported the group’s activities.⁶⁴ As Clayton notes, “[t]he Bomb Squad points to new directions for nature-based tourism strategies that can help company towns adapt to new economic configurations.”⁶⁵ Today, they continue to work hard to develop the recreational potential of forests, with some observers recently calling the Millennium Park trail system the “Stanley Park” of Powell River.⁶⁶

Following in the footsteps of the Bomb Squad, the Powell River Parks and Wilderness Society [PAWS], represents another step toward ecotourism.⁶⁷ In 1992, also using volunteers, PAWS began work on the Sunshine Coast Trail [SCT]: “a 180-kilometre back country hiking experience that stretches from Sarah Point in Desolation Sound to SALTERY BAY.”⁶⁸ With 13 huts so far, it is “the longest hut-to-hut hiking experience in Canada,” and the only free one.⁶⁹ In 2000, Synergy Management Group and ADR Forestry Systems created a “Feasibility Study and Business Plan” for PAWS. The study, which examined the trail’s potential and various aspects of ecotourism and trail tourism, concludes that the trail offers “exceptional potential economic stimulus to the area” and could become “one of BC’s and Canada’s premier wilderness trails with national and international following.”⁷⁰ In regards to the economic component, the study notes how Powell River is “a key component of the Sunshine Coast tour route and is positioned to benefit from marketing initiatives that

⁶² Ibid., 214.

⁶³ Ibid., 228-229.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 233.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 239.

⁶⁶ Dave Brindle, “Groups complete new Millennium Park trail system,” *Powell River Peak*, June 1, 2016, not paginated.

⁶⁷ “Sunshine Coast Trail,” Powell River Parks and Wilderness Society (PAWS), 2017, <http://sunshinecoast-trail.com> (accessed 14 November 2017).

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ “Feasibility Study and Business Plan,” 146.

promote the region.”⁷¹ This study, therefore, relates to two previously discussed issues: the SCT could be a way to entice people to visit, and, in turn, Powell River could benefit as people pass through for amenities or stay for longer visits. While more research is required to fully explore the current or future economic impact of the SCT, the trail is already gaining popularity with hikers from around the world.⁷²

Through a re-commodification of nature, the volunteer-based Bomb Squad and PAWS reveal the potential of ecotourism to attract visitors and gain revenue in new ways. More studies are needed to understand the extent of ecotourism’s potential in Powell River, but until such studies are undertaken, the experiences of two forestry-driven communities may offer some insights. First, McBride explores the tension between forestry and ecotourism, and how trail-building fits into this dynamic. Second, Chemainus illustrates how a company town can diversify its economy through the introduction of a new industry. Together, these case studies further demonstrate the opportunities and challenges that face Powell River.

Ecotourism in British Columbia

In “Ecotourism and Forestry,” David J. Connell et. al. examine growing tensions in McBride as the community attempts to “reduce its dependence on forestry” and diversify through ecotourism.⁷³ In particular, the article discusses the Robson Valley, which, like Powell River, is relatively isolated and has relied on forestry for the last century.⁷⁴ Today, as ecotourism becomes a viable possibility in other parts of northern British Columbia,⁷⁵ increased attention has been placed on the Robson Valley’s Ancient Forest Trail [AFT]: “a recently established nature trail located in a globally unique stand of old-growth cedars.”⁷⁶ While a clear connection can be made to the SCT, this article also examines to the tension between ecotourism and forestry in company towns.

⁷¹ Ibid., 50.

⁷² “Sunshine Coast Trail,” PAWS.

⁷³ David J. Connell, John Hall, and John Shultis, “Ecotourism and Forestry: A Study of Tension in a Peripheral Region of British Columbia, Canada,” *Journal of Ecotourism* 16, no. 2 (2017): 170.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 172.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 171.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 170.

Interviews with stakeholders in forestry, tourism and recreation, and economic development revealed an acknowledgement that McBride’s economy is in transition, and new industries are needed for diversification.⁷⁷ During discussions, point of contention arose in regards to the AFT’s potential to provide enough local jobs and revenue.⁷⁸ Such concerns can similarly be expressed in Powell River. During the interviews, a “lack of education and skills in tourism” and “entrenched institutional legacies” also made some respondents skeptical of ecotourism.⁷⁹ Clearly, economic and social barriers can emerge as traditionally forestry-driven communities grapple with change.

A noteworthy point in regards to this tension is the potential for the coexistence of ecotourism and forestry. Often termed “multiple-use,” such policies reflect a desire to manage land for more than one purpose.⁸⁰ In the aforementioned 1977-78 Recreation Guide by MacMillan-Bloedel, the phrase “multiple-use” was featured several times.⁸¹ While the McBride case study does not offer much information on the potential for this cooperation, another company town in British Columbia does: Chemainus.

Although Chemainus has not turned to ecotourism, it nonetheless serves as an example of how a traditionally single-resource community can incorporate a new industry. Like Powell River and McBride, Chemainus is a forestry town. The book *Water Over the Wheel* by W.H. Olsen is quite similar to the local histories of Powell River, with a focus on pioneers, the role of the mill, and so on.⁸² While Chemainus has recently become best known for its murals, an article by Stanley Meisler demonstrates how the mill and murals have actually operated as a “dynamic duo.”⁸³ As early as 1994, Meisler noted how, “[b]y diversifying its economy, Chemainus took a vital step that other British Columbia forestry towns may be forced to take sometime

⁷⁷ Ibid., 178, 180.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 182.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 184, 187.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 183.

⁸¹ BCA, “A MacMillan Bloedel Forestry Recreation Guide.”

⁸² W. H. Olsen, *Water Over the Wheel* (Chemainus Valley Historical Society: Peninsula Printing Co., 1963).

⁸³ Stanley Meisler, “Take a look at a town that wouldn’t lie down and die,” *Smithsonian* 00377333 25, no. 2 (May 1994), not paginated.

soon.”⁸⁴ Even in the “era of the murals,” Meisler argues, “Chemainus has always kept in step with the main business of the province.”⁸⁵ While the murals are not ecotourist attractions, this cooperation between traditional and new industries has proved to be quite significant for Chemainus, with one resident arguing that the town’s revitalization “surely depended on both mill and murals.”⁸⁶

While these two case studies cannot be applied directly to Powell River, both indicate how ecotourism may continue to develop. It is unclear whether increased tensions will emerge, or if Powell River will achieve cooperation between the mill and ecotourism. Regardless, it will be important for those invested in forestry, ecotourism, economic development, and environmental sustainability to look at how such conversations are taking shape and what they may say about Powell River’s future.

Conclusion

As noted in the introduction, nature is commodified in many different ways. Over a century ago, Brooks and Scanlon looked to the trees, lakes, and rivers of Powell River and saw profit in nature’s manufacture and export. Today, trail-builders also look to the forests, but see its value much differently. It is hard to know what Powell River will look like in another hundred years. In many ways, the mill is still idealized and ecotourism is still disregarded, which continues to shape how the environment is viewed and used. But, as Clayton notes, attitudes toward local nature can change over time.⁸⁷ Thus, it is worth considering, how ecotourism may lead to a re-commodification of nature, and how this may influence Powell River moving forward. In 1912, it was due to “the persistence of the visionaries” that the first batch of paper was produced and a city was born.⁸⁸ Perhaps in 2018, it is once again up to visionaries to put their plans into action and transform this place we call home.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Clayton, “Chapter 7,” 239.

⁸⁸ Southern and Bird, *Pulp, Paper and People*, xii.

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