

This Place

Komas Bluff Logging Stopped by Protest

By John Millen

In 1984 the planned logging of Komas Bluff was stopped halfway through by strident local protest. This was quite early in the era of major protest against logging in sensitive areas of BC. During Easter 1984 a coalition of First Nations and Friends of Clayoquot Sound held a Festival in Tofino to draw attention to the simmering issue of the proposed logging by MacMillan Bloedel of Meares Island. 600 people attended the Festival. That was the beginning of the actions that culminated in the huge Clayoquot Sound anti-logging civil disobedience campaign of 1993.

On Denman Island in 1984 Weldwood of Canada Ltd. owned about 22% of the Island's land area. Their practice had been to clearcut one or two patches of second growth each year. There was little local concern about such logging which continued a tradition dating back to the Early Settler days.

There had been, however, two previous occasions when logging sensitive areas of the Island had been modified or stopped by community protest. In 1977 The Vancouver Foundation had planned to log land they owned around the Beaver Swamp on Pickles Road. The Foundation was persuaded by the community to instead return the land to the Crown as a Nature Reserve. It is now part of the Provincial Park. Later, in the same vicinity, Raven Lumber Co. was convinced to modify their proposed clearcut logging to leave some oldgrowth trees along the wetland margin that they owned.

The stability of Komas Bluff had been an Island concern for several years. In 1982 the Islands Trust Local Trust Committee had requested the stability be examined and bylaws were drafted to restrict development. In the spring of 1983 erosion and collapse of the Willimar Bluff in Comox had caused great concern there – and that is the same Quadra Sands formation as Komas Bluff.

The Community was taken by surprise in May 1984 when Weldwood, without advance notice, started logging Komas Bluff just north of the end of Swan Road. They completely denuded the land out to the edge of the Bluff to accommodate the operation of the portable spar and cut down everything on the slopes below. In mid-June the Ratepayer's Association met with Weldwood representatives who insisted there was nothing amiss and that they planned to log about two miles of the Bluff. It was private land, not within their tree farm licence, and they were free to treat it as they pleased.

The Community launched an avalanche of letters detailing their concerns to the BC Government and politicians.

On June 29 the Comox District Free Press (The Green Sheet) plastered a bold headline across the top of the front page "Logging at Komas Bluff stirs fears of erosion". With Paul Bailey's photos and extensive quotes from Local Trustee Harlene Holm the article ran on to page 2. On page A5 a story by Des Kennedy examined the 'stupidity' of logging the Bluff by way of an imagined discussion between Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson. Big city presses picked up the story and Weldwood soon caved in. The logging was stopped after about a mile as the clearing was reaching the higher and steeper slopes of the bluff.

In late 1985 Weldwood wrote to the Ratepayers Association advising of their logging plans for the coming year. In 1986 they logged their large block at the top of Owl Crescent and their property between Komas Ranch and the present Morning Beach Park.

The remaining old forest on the Komas Bluff is now protected by a Conservation Covenant held by Denman Conservancy, but that is another story.

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