

Excerpt from "Momentous Primeval Moments"

by Ingmar Lee (2004)

It is truly heartbreaking to see these trucks loaded with 1000-year-old yellow cedar from the highlands of the East Creek valley, -the 85th of Vancouver Island's 91 primary watersheds to be roaded and gutted in 150 years of massive industrial logging. The primeval forests of the Klaskish Valley, immaculate until 1997, have already been destroyed by Interfor, and just last year an incredibly steep mainline was punched from there into East Creek. Now another unconscionable assault on our island's magnificent wilderness is in full swing. The East Creek valley is an intact primeval ecosystem and contains an elk herd, wolves, cougar and bears. Marbelled murrelets nest in its ancient moss-laden trees and all 6 species of salmon run up its crystal-clear streams. But it is so remote and so far from the general public radar screen that this vicious crime against nature is being perpetrated virtually unchecked. In our wildest dreams, we hope that our efforts at East Creek might somehow help protect this jewel of wilderness from the depredations of the planet's largest and most voracious logging corporation, Weyerhaeuser.

We launch our kayaks into the robin-egg blue waters of Klaskino Inlet which gets that colour from white marble silt carried by streams into the Pacific salt water, and begin the 5 hour paddle to the Brooks Peninsula where we plan to set up our base camp. Soon the clanking roar of the log-hogs begins to dissipate and is superseded by the sounds and silence of nature. Nevertheless, it's still a long way to the real wilderness of our destination. Gradually we pass under the flanks of Yaky Kop Mountain and come alongside Tsowanachs, an ancient, now abandoned Quatsino village site. All that remains of this village are deep shell mid-

den berms which outline the old house footprints, which are all growing over with thimbleberry bushes. Its most ideal location behind a chain of islets has protected the sandy beachfront from the Pacific storms, but the entire landscape surrounding the village has been brutally stripped of trees. Directly across the inlet looms one of Vancouver Island's most disgusting logging obscenities, Weyerhaeuser's Red Stripe Mountain, better known as 'Road Stripe' now, with its flanks completely roaded and denuded right from peak to beach.

There are 3 known abandoned villages sites in this area between the north Brooks Peninsula and Quatsino Sound, and Tsowanachs, as well as the one on the north side of Klaskino Inlet at Side Bay have had their surrounding forests ruined by the insatiable clearcutting. The other village site, called Klaskish, lies at the base of the Brooks Peninsula near the East Creek estuary and the forested land-base that sustained it has thus far been spared the axe. We plan to do a reconnaissance of the forests of East Creek and the Klaskish village environs, looking for Culturally Modified Trees. CMT's are living heritage trees, which show evidence of usage by traditional First Nations who once lived in the area. Our project is to wander through the forests and drill increment bore samples of select CMT's which we might find. By counting the rings in the calluses that grow across the barkstrip, or plank-split wounds, we can get an idea of when people last lived in these forests and how far and wide they travelled through them. So little is known about this village, and there is a lot to learn from the amazing story that is written in these CMT's. As we paddle around Heater Point and out into the unobstructed Pacific Ocean swells, the hideous Red

Stripe Mountain finally disappears behind us. We set our bearings on Mount Doom, in the centre of the Brooks promontory and as we paddle a porpoise surfaces here, a raft of curious sea otters bob their whiskered heads in our direction and slip under the sea and swim away. Few people in today's world will ever again have the chance to experience the Earth's magnificent wilderness. It is disappearing so fast.

We pass beyond the 'Cutting Edge' -that extent to which modern 'civilization' and 'progress' has penetrated, and are now heading out into a pristine, primordial place. Before us stretches that rarest and most precious of Vancouver Island vistas, -an unobstructed forested landscape as far as the eye can see in every direction, but now there's a difference in how it's seen. There's a sea-change in consciousness moving from one world to this wild and lonesome place. With all Babylon blasting behind, and the wondrous whelm of wilderness ahead, we press on, brought directly to the moment. Entering into the planet primeval, in which we seem so genetically, if not instinctually familiar, our moment is suspended in these gentle ocean undulations, juxtaposed in vulnerability and survival, and haunting, fearsome and mysterious beauty. How distant it is, so increasingly rare and alien to us, that we look at it as though we originated from somewhere else. But people lived here in the distant past, in wilderness, as did we all, and did so as fully functioning participants in the ecological processes of the land and sea. Their skillful stable civilization persisted here harmoniously for millennia. We have come here to discover some of the story of their tenure which is hidden very subtly, deep in these forests.