



*Catch and release fly fishing at its best, for Kamloops rainbow trout*



# A Small Town Survey Practice

*Robert Allen*

**M**y first exposure to Land Surveying was when I was about 10 years old. I had a school chum in Courtenay, Smokey Wagner, whose father, Gordon Wagner, was a British Columbia Land Surveyor (and he was also a Notary Public).

On the way home from school one day, I saw one of Mr. Wagner's transits

set up, and try as I may, I couldn't see anything through it. It was set up too high for me!

In Grade 10, my math teacher Bill Edwards used to talk of his Summer experiences while working with Mr.

**After graduating from Courtenay High School, I attended BCIT to study Survey Technology.**

Wagner. He told us how they actually used geometry while surveying, so there really was a reason for learning all that math and algebra and, later on, trigonometry.

Jack Kirk, one of our neighbours, used to work for another survey firm in Courtenay, Davidson and Williams; I heard about some of the work he had done.

And my parents talked about two old-time BC Land Surveyors from Courtenay, Leroy Cokely and Vilhelm Schjelderup.

In Grade 10, I chose "Land Surveyor" for my job study. When I finished that project, I decided to pursue the profession.



*GPS survey control for foreshore lease survey at the Langdale ferry terminal*

After graduating from Courtenay High School, I attended BCIT to study Survey Technology. In 1967, in the second wave of graduates from the school, I achieved the top marks in the Survey Class.

An eight-month stint with the Department of Highways took me to Highway #4 alongside Sprout Lake near Port Alberni, to survey the location line. Then I moved to Fort St. John to serve my articles under Ken Longstaff, BCLS, a partner at that time with Earl Little, BCLS.

After passing my BCLS exams in the Spring of 1972, I moved back down to the coast to Powell River in early June to work for Robert Durling, BCLS.

By October, we had decided to open an office in the Sechelt area. I opened the office on Monday, October 16, 1972. In October 1974, I bought out Mr. Durling's interest in the business and started operating on my own. After 32 years and two weeks—on October 31, 2004—I decided to call it quits and semi-retire. My associate John Theed, BCLS, has taken over the business.

During my time in Sechelt, BC Land Surveyors Neil Bennett, Larry Penonzek, Don Smith, and John Theed worked with me.

One of my first contacts in Sechelt was Jack Mayne, Notary Public. At one time, if I remember correctly, Jack was the oldest practising Notary in BC. In those days, the surveyor's signature on the oath on subdivision plans and other plans had to be witnessed by a Notary or Commissioner. Jack's office was only two blocks from mine

**As I read *The Scrivener*, I recognize the names of many clients for whom we have done mortgage surveys on the Sunshine Coast.**

so it was relatively easy to track him down to get his signature.

Over the years, the oath has changed. It is no longer necessary to have a witness to our signature. Notaries Public are still a big part of our professional alliances, however. We now deal with Tracy Parker, one of Sechelt's newest Notaries, on a regular basis—at least once a week. A number of clients require both our services.

All the Notaries with whom we have worked over the years have been very professional. As I read *The Scrivener*, I

recognize the names of many clients for whom we have done mortgage surveys on the Sunshine Coast.

Small-town survey practices are quite different from those in the larger centres or those that specialize in certain types of work. For instance, most surveyors in the Greater Vancouver area deal mainly in mortgage surveys and re-surveys of properties and building layouts for new house construction, while most of the surveyors in Fort St. John specialize in the gas and oil industry.

The public generally thinks of land surveyors as standing on the side of the road holding a stick. Nothing could be farther from the truth!

My practice was mainly centred on the Sunshine Coast but, occasionally, my work took me to the Yukon, the Queen Charlotte Islands, Vancouver Island, the West Kootenays, and northern British Columbia.

Our work varied, to include timber-licence boundaries, subdivisions, Crown land surveys, repostings, mortgage surveys, topographical surveys, foreshore lease surveys, and everything in between.

A lot of the Sunshine Coast was surveyed in the 1890s and early 1900s. Looking for old survey evidence is somewhat like looking for a needle in a haystack—even worse if the property has been logged once or sometimes twice!

Looking for the old evidence and re-establishing property boundaries under very trying circumstances made the job interesting as well as frustrating at times, especially



*GPS survey control in sub-alpine (helicopter access only) for topographical survey work on an independent power project*

when those old surveys were done with old technology, untrained staff, and wooden survey posts with a limited life expectancy, as opposed to the metal posts we use now.

Most Notaries will recognize the involvement of land surveyors in subdivisions, easements, rights of way, repostings, mortgage surveys, etc.

My practice also does a lot of topographical surveys. Some are on building sites, so that an architect can design a house to fit the lot. We also do topographical surveys on raw land so the engineering design can be done for road design and sewer design, etc.

Other topographical surveys are done on gravel stockpiles, to determine the volume of gravel in each pile. Others are done on raw land in gravel pits before and after the excavation, to determine how much gravel has been extracted from an area. We also do yearly topographical surveys on the Land Fill in Sechelt to see how much garbage has been placed there during the previous year. In those two instances, our computer software compares the before-and-after topographical surveys and computes a volume.

Recently, we have worked on four independent power projects where the proponents have installed run-of-the-river hydro-electric generating plants. These are generally in somewhat inaccessible areas that require different access logistics: float planes, helicopters, or just plain slugging

it up steep mountainsides carrying a lot of equipment.

These projects usually require topographical surveys along penstock routes and in and beside creeks and lakes. These all require their own safety considerations. Once the project is complete, the right of way for the penstock must be surveyed and Crown land surveys done on the power house and intake locations, etc.

Some of the negatives include travel logistics, weather conditions, and keeping electronic survey equipment in good working order. These all must be taken into account on a daily basis and the jobs done in a certain order, to provide the best working relationship with them all. The positives of land surveying far outweigh the negatives, however.

As well, I have made many good friends of land surveyors all across Canada as well as architects, engineers, foresters, lawyers, and many Notaries Public throughout British Columbia. ▲

**Robert Allen is a British Columbia Land Surveyor and a Canada Lands Surveyor. He is a past president of the Corporation of Land Surveyors of the Province of British Columbia and a past president of the Association of Canada Lands Surveyors. Robert has served on numerous committees for both Associations and continues to take an active role in both of them.**



*Crown land survey in Narrows Inlet: Dan Fennings at the total station (similar to a theodolite) with GPS set up for additional control*

## World Events 100 years ago in 1905

*The British Columbia Land Surveyors Act 1905* is enacted and comes into force.

The Butcharts begin working on their Japanese Garden addition at Butchart Gardens, Victoria, BC.

Neil MacDermid is carried aloft in Canada by a large box kite named *The Siamese Twins*, designed by Alexander Graham Bell.

Wilbur Wright makes a flight of 24.2 miles (39 km) in Flyer III. The flight lasts almost 40 minutes.

Albert Einstein publishes his Photoelectric Effect and Brownian Motion theories.

*Huckleberry Finn* and *Tom Sawyer* are banned from the Brooklyn Public Library as a "bad example."

Albert Einhorn introduces Novocaine, a local anesthetic.

The Russian Revolution of 1905 begins when troops fire on a defenceless group of demonstrators in St. Petersburg. Strikes and riots follow.

The Treaty of Portsmouth sees the Conclusion of the Russo-Japanese War. It is signed September 5, 1905, at Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

Las Vegas is born.

### Births

Actresses: Thelma Ritter; Anna May Wong; Myrna Loy; Dolores del Rio; Greta Garbo; Clara Bow

Actors: Franchot Tone; Robert Donat; Joseph Cotten; Henry Fonda; Joel McCrea

Writers: Ayn Rand; Lillian Hellman

Singer: Tex Ritter