

Sweet Solitude *and* Mosquito Repellent

As Notaries, in the course of a conveyancing transaction, we seldom give thought to the great Dominion Land Survey that divided most of western Canada into one-square-mile sections.

Nor do we realize the grueling living conditions or hazardous travel surveyors went through to facilitate surveying the great mountainous region in northern British Columbia.

Very early in the 1900s, a surveyor by the name of Frank Swannell spent several years surveying in the rugged country of northern BC. He was not only a surveyor, but a collector of many observations along the way. By reading Jay Sherwood's recently published book, *Surveying Northern British Columbia—A Photojournal of Frank Swannell* (Caitlin Press), we can get a taste of the rugged north and, by his excellent notes and photography, see what an accomplished historian Frank Swannell was.

Throughout my life, I have had a number of opportunities to explore some of this great land. When travelling on foot or horseback, we can see many marks made by those who travelled before us. We occasionally run into a meridian line and

stand in awe of the hardships endured just to get there—never mind survive and work in the remote areas.

Commuting in that country consists of packing up all your worldly possessions every morning, loading them onto pack horses, travelling for the day, and setting up camp again at night. It was not—then or now—nor will it ever be travel for the faint of heart. It is very time-consuming

to cross rivers with no bridges, sleep out in tents for the entire summer, cook over smoky campfires, and endure the cursed mosquito, black fly, and horsefly season.

By modernizing our gear, we have greatly improved this mode of travel. We now have space-age sleeping bags, satellite phones, lightweight cooking gear, vacuum-packed food, and—most important—mosquito repellent.



Here I am with my horse Peggy Sue and dog Champ. This photo was taken approximately 10 miles north of where Frank Swannell ended his survey of the Ingenika River in 1914.



Photo Credit: the Lawrence Dickinson Collection

This black and white photo is a Christmas card sent to Lawrence Dickinson in 1903. Lawrence worked for Frank Swannell in 1910, 1911, and 1912. My first job was working summers in Lawrence Dickinson's General Store in 1966 and 1967.

It is interesting to note that some of the items used for this mode of travel are indispensable and still used today. The Sawbuck packsaddle still fits on a horse the way it did 100 years ago, when Swannell and his men travelled these same mountains. The panniers—boxes or bags that hold the supplies—have changed much over the years, but they are still snugged down with a diamond hitch. A properly tied diamond hitch will secure approximately 300 pounds of gear on a horse. If balanced properly, this load will stay in place all day.

The compass, tucked securely in my pocket, is taken out only occasionally now, to settle arguments with newcomers about which way is north. The map produced by the British Columbia government from Swannell's survey is consulted often to confirm the name of a newly found river or lake. The stars, used for navigation for thousands of years, still shine brightly once we are away from the city lights.

The telephone has been shut off. It is used only for emergencies or the occasional call to friends in Vancouver, reminding them where we are and how much fun we are having.

The solitude of crossing the mountains on the early morning dew brings renewed strength we can draw on, repeatedly, over the next year. The ache of muscle and bone after a long day's ride is easily silenced by a swim in a cold mountain lake at 4000 feet elevation. Once camp is pitched at the end of the day, sleep comes easily—no sleeping pills required. ▲

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