

# A Little Bit about My Survey Career, So Far



Neil at the Peak of Grouse Mountain

**S**urveying can be a multifaceted career path.

Since 1968, I have worked as far north as Little Cornwallis Island in the Canadian Arctic, as far south as Colombia in South America, as far east as Saudi Arabia, and as far west as you can go in Canada—Langara Island in Haida Gwaii.

**My experiences pale in comparison to those of many fellow surveyors, though...**

My experiences pale in comparison to those of many fellow surveyors, though—such as a friend who, because of a certain

intestinal problem, saw most of South Korea from a toilet seat. And people who have worked in central Africa tell me the movie, *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, isn't far from the truth.

I did not go directly into surveying after high school. After some university math and physics and a few seasonal surveying jobs, it seemed like it might be a good career choice. I would be outside; I would use math and logic; I enjoyed challenges. And, if I so chose, I could run my own business one day . . . exactly the things my dad had suggested—and I had ignored—when I completed high school and the brand new BCIT opened.

As time goes by, I'm not outside nearly as much; I use the telephone much more than math and logic; the challenges are still there but they are much different than when I started in surveying. And I did, in fact, get to run a business.

Over time, the perception of surveying has changed, too. What started as, "Are you one of those guys who holds a stick in the road?" has changed to "It's gonna cost how much . . . ?"



"Cloudy during morning, clearing by afternoon" Sketch by D. S. Meredith, BCLS, 1951

Broadly speaking, surveying can be broken into two groups or styles: in-town surveying and out-of-town surveying. In-town surveys can be characterized by all the complex matters currently being undertaken in the urban core such as airspace plans, strata developments, subdivisions, and lease plans of parts of buildings.

Out-of-town surveys can be as broad and exciting as the world is big, inclusive of offshore surveys, mineral claim surveys, jobs accessed by helicopter and float plane—just about anything. Of course, some out-of-town jobs include the aspect of not having or being able to have a shower, sometimes for weeks, but that part isn't advertised very much.

Both in- and out-of-town jobs have their own particular charm and sometimes that charm isn't seen until we have finished the job and are doing something else. As a friend says—the same guy who went to Korea—sometimes the best part of an out-of-town project is the feeling of

the plane's wheels leaving the ground at the end of the job.

This is not to say that in-town surveys lack excitement . . . like measuring the buildings on a lot for a mortgage certificate and finding the garage full of pot plants. It's just that there are so many more exciting things that can happen on an out-of-town job.

**What started as, "Are you one of those guys who holds a stick in the road?" has changed to "It's gonna cost how much . . . ?"**

That being said—a few stories.

An in-town story first. A few years ago, a client of ours was building a high-rise project in Downtown Vancouver. Next to the site was a lawyers' office in a small low-rise building. The lawyers had a

saltwater fish tank with many—probably expensive—tropical fish. Unfortunately, the tank was next to the wall closest to the construction site.

Somewhat more unfortunate, though, was the position of the battery-powered electric clock over the fish tank. (You can probably see where this is going.) Yes, the construction vibration dislodged the clock into the tank and all of a sudden, the fish were sushi material. Just bad luck it was a lawyers' office.

Nothing concentrates the mind like a looming deadline. The short winter days in the North provide their own special brand of excitement . . . like being dropped off at the bottom of a hill with a powersaw and a can of fuel to create a helicopter pad at the top of the hill by nightfall—and nightfall is 3:30. If the pad wasn't finished, I would spend the night there. I did complete it in time but as the short afternoon wore on, my excitement/commitment level grew.

On Little Cornwallis Island in July, the snow was melting daily and the arctic



*Small surveyor in big hole, Downtown Vancouver*

foxes were having a great time feeding on lemmings. Eventually we began giving the foxes our leftover porridge, which vanished in seconds, and eventually made sport of trying to hold onto a large kippered herring and getting the foxes to take the herring without taking part of a finger.

For a few days, it became Summer (15 degrees) and the whole barren island turned to yellow and purple flowers. Just as suddenly, they were gone.

Oh, and the scotch in Saudi Arabia, smuggled in for Christmas Eve, after we had been dry for quite a while . . . I'd just as soon forget that one.

Being ushered into an internal security building in Bogota, past a guard who appeared to have a room temperature IQ but who also carried an Uzi, certainly had its own special “charm.” The company I worked for had failed to get me the correct visa but had said it was *no problema*. It turns out it was a big *problema*. *Adios muchachos*.

But through it all, I have had some wonderful experiences, worked with some great people (well, there are exceptions . . . the guy who said “Sympathy is in the dictionary between shi\* and syphilis”),

caught some great fish, took some photos I like, and learned skills to apply in everyday life and the current part of my career.

Today, I am in my first year on the Board of Management of the Corporation of BC Land Surveyors, serving the profession I joined in 1968 and that I am enjoying greatly.

For someone searching for a career with a lot of variety, surveying has much to offer. ▲

**Bennett Surveys**  
 North Vancouver, BC  
 neil@bennettsurveys.com