**POST HIGH SCHOOL IN CANADA**

Summer was rolling around. I wondered what I should do. I looked into apprentice programs for some trade. I could join a machinist program. It was for five years and paid twenty-five dollars a week. That did not seem very fruitful. I did not want to work in the mills where lumber was processed. People were cut up in those jobs. I came across an advertisement about a job working for the International Pacific Salmon Fisheries Commission. This is the title for a joint U. S. and Canadian organization to replenish the salmon fisheries in the Fraser River. I was in for another great adventure.

There were five or six of us hired from June through October. The year was 1949. We were assigned to a field biologist. He was an American. We drove from New Westminster, where the commission’s office was, to the Cariboo back country in British Columbia. We were headed to Prince George about 600 miles away. The end of pavement was at 101 Mile House. Various places had mileage names to denote distances. From then on we were on dirt roads.

We picked up another young man our age in Prince George and then came back down to William’s Lake, a town of maybe 200 people. The Salmon Commission built a hatchery there It just opened, and our job was to stock it with salmon eggs. We would wade in ice cold water and net female salmon. We would fill buckets with eggs. A few males were caught and their sperm or milt, as it was called, was squirted into the buckets of eggs. That was these fish’s sex life. That must be where the expression, “poor fish," comes from. After a day of this we were cold and famished. Our four-wheel truck had a dozen cans of sardines in the glove compartment. I couldn’t stand sardines. My hunger overrode my distaste. They tasted so good. The oil must have been just what I needed to warm up.

I learned much about the salmon species and how amazing nature is. The salmon would disappear into the Pacific for four years and then return to spawn and die. No one had any idea where they went. Later, it was discovered they went to the Bering sea above Eastern Asia to mature. Part of the Commission’s job was to run census on the various sub species of Sockeye salmon. There was a major spawning area on the Chilko River. There was a battle between, ALCOA, the aluminum company and the fisheries. The aluminum company wanted to dam up this area. This would kill off the salmon that spawned there. We were to count the salmon population. This would stop the dam construction, which it did.

About eight of us lived in a bunkhouse. There was a cook. The food was great. During the week, early in the spawning cycle we would net fish and tag them. The tag was a long pin with a plastic number on it. We stuck it under the dorsal fin and let the fish go. This activity went on for a month. The salmon started to die off, their natural cycle. Now we would patrol up and down the 15 miles of river. The dead salmon were picked up and thrown way up the bank into the bush. We kept count of the tagged fish retrieved and the total fish retrieved. By simple arithmetic an accurate count of the total fish population was determined. I recall approximately 700,000 salmon were spawning in this area. We probably threw 100,000 up the bank. These fish weighed about five to eight pounds each. It was an interesting job being in the wilds with nature. I loved it

Sometimes I would hear a noise up in the bush. There were brown bears that would follow along up the bank above me. They were waiting for the fish that were not too rotten. It was easy pickings for them. I was doing the work and they got fat for their winter hibernation.

One Sunday, on our day off, three of us took our twelve foot outboard up to the lake. We were about 5 miles up and we spotted a moose standing up to his neck in the water. We approached and had the bow of the aluminum boat just a foot away from his nose. He was really down on his knees eating weeds from the bottom. He stood up and towered over us. I spun the outboard around, gave it full throttle and beat a hasty retreat. Fortunately, the moose did not decide to climb into our boat.

At other times, we would go down the river where bigger Spring salmon were spawning. These fish could reach 125 pounds. They would pair up and swish their tails' and make holes in the bottom for their eggs. A normally smooth river became like rapids. We would careen down this stretch at full speed. Once we took our gill net down to see what would happen. We snared a big fish and it towed us for 2 miles.

We had a telescope in our bunk house. The leader of our group said during some years there were Grizzly’s sighted five miles up the mountain up behind our location. I went adventuring one Sunday. I carried my trusty Mossberg 22 caliber rifle. This is the smallest rifle available and adequate for plinking at cans. I was way up the hill and thought I spotted some deer in a clump of pine trees. I was so dumb in the ways of the wild. I plinked away, one time, into this clump. Well, it seemed as if a Greyhound bus with ears stood up. It was a Grizzly Bear that I had irritated. I climbed about twenty feet up a pine tree trunk. I saw the trees separating as the bear lumbered down the hill away from me. I was scared to death and slid down the tree after about a half hour. I went down to look and saw a pine tree about the size of the one I was up broken off. Later I will tell a Grizzly story an old trapper told me when we moved to Horsefly.



Horsefly was booming metropolis of about 50 people. It had a general store and a dance hall. This place was about one hundred miles east above William’s lake. A fellow named Bob Conn and I lived in a cabin on the Horsefly River We were there to count the salmon going up this river. A wire dam, called a weir, was built across the river which was about forty feet across. The salmon swam into a wire pen and we would net them and put them upstream so they could continue on their way. We had no transportation so stayed on the river through the week. We were picked up and went into town for supplies on the weekend. The twenty or so miles took two hours to drive. If it rained, we had to winch the truck along the road. Saturday was a big night. Trappers and locals would come to the dance hall. I don’t think many danced but it was a chance for them to drink, carouse and fight.

During the drive from the Chilko to Horsefly I noticed two or three Jaguar sports cars rusty and abandoned by the side of the road. We were miles from civilization. Our biologist said, “There is a remittance man in Horsefly”. I asked, “What was that?” This man was a social outcast from his family in England so they sent him money, called a remittance, to live on. He would buy these fancy sport cars, totally inappropriate for the wilds of the Cariboo. He would hang them up on the center of the road, and tear out the transmissions. There they set, rusting away, and he would order another.

We moved from one assignment to another, driven by our biologist leader. We would go for hours and not see another human. When someone did come the other way we always stopped and talked to them. I asked the biologist, "Why?" He said it was vital for survival in the wilds. That person had been where we were going. It was important to know what lies ahead. Trees could be down across the road, the road may be washed away or any other happenstance could hang us up. We were out there alone. We didn’t have any radios for communication. Being stranded in the wilderness could be very serious. Later years when I heard of people in big cities ignoring anyone they passed, even if they were dying on a sidewalk I thought of this. We depend on each other in thinly populated areas. In highly populated areas, people often are a danger to each other. This may be the adaptability of our species.

We had a trash burial site near our cabin on the Horsefly river. We notice that something was digging into it. We had a 32 caliber, lever action, rifle. Our biologist left it for just in case. Bob Conn saw a young yearling bear near our cabin. We shot it and nailed the pelt up on the cabin wall to cure. Nothing went to waste as we dressed the carcass and had fresh meat for the rest of our stay. Bears that have gotten to fish have a bad fishy taste. This young one had not yet eaten fish and lived on berries. This was my one and only hunting experience. It was important to me that we used all the meat.

This cabin had Coleman lamps and a wood stove for cooking and warmth. My stint in the wilds was over. It was October and the snows would come, closing the area up until spring. I found out later, much to my surprise, that Bob Conn was a pyromaniac. He burned down a couple of buildings when he returned to New Westminster. He did not have any tendencies to torch our cabin that I could see. Maybe the wilds were a calming influence.

I promised a Grizzly Bear story. I met an old fur trapper in horsefly. He was an old scarred up guy and told great stories. These trappers would set out trap lines in the winter. They lived in the wild, ran their trap lines for furs and essentially lived on what they could carry on their back for the winter. It was a rough, rugged existence. This trapper was surprised by a Grizzly. He could not get up a tree for safety. Grizzlies cannot climb He knew if he could lie down flat the grizzly could not get a paw under him and pick him up. If that happened he would be killed. The bear held him down with one paw and raked him with the other. A Grizzly bear’s paw is about the size of a tennis racket. It has claws that extend about 5 inches long and are sharp. The trapper was scalped and raked from head to toe. It was cold so he did not bleed to death. Somehow, he survived, though alone, out in the wilderness.

Later, he became a sheep rancher. There was a maverick brown bear that would attack his flock killing for pleasure. He set traps which were ineffective. He set out with his rifle but the bear was too cagey for him. Then he got the bright idea to drill a large hole in a tree trunk. It was several feet below a large branch He filled the hole with honey. He tied a large rock to a rope so it was hanging over the honey hole. The bear climbed up the tree, batted the rock away. The bear kept pushing the rock away from the hole. The rock would swing back hitting the bear in the snout. This kept on. The bear was bloodied but determined to get to the honey. The desire for honey was greater the pain. The trapper, now rancher, came onto the scene. He was able to shoot this maverick bear that was ravaging his cattle. That is it for bear stories.

My experiences, in this wild and woolly environment, were another adventure for me. I learned and experienced some of what our early forefathers did. This was frontier country. It was partially tamed but Mother Nature ruled supreme. I was a part of a biological research program. I was among new people doing a job. It was a rewarding time in my life.