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CANADA

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BC

[A CANADIAN TIME MACHINE]

British Columbia has been part of the Canadian federation for one hundred years this year, and celebrations of its beauty abound. But there really is no need to eulogize the grandeur of BC: the name conjures up images enough. Nor is there any need to protest, in BC, that Canada is a modern nation—not just a vast and wild wilderness. Let Ontario do that. British Columbia, by its sheer force, is still a vast wilderness. And because it is, it is becoming less so.

Where people generally go, it is perhaps as developed as the western U.S. Where natural resource exploiters go, further back in the interior, you can see their tracks—especially from the air. Bulldozed seismic lines crisscross the wilderness, and lumber has been taken visibly from the forests. Still, you can go for hundreds of miles across stupendous tracts without crossing man's footprints.

BC is more than twice the size of Texas (though smaller than Quebec) and so formidable that in many areas moving over the ground is possible only in the frozen months and in other places only by water in the summer. It is so spectacular that the population, technology, and capital have not yet combined to make it submit.

Within BC there is some difference in attitudes about the land. The coast is the Canadian California. With its idyllic climate and nearness to almost everything recreational, it is a haven for prairie people who have seen enough prairie winters. Unless you are a desert rat, it is geographically perhaps the most pleasant place in

the world, British Columbians say with probable justification. The people, as a native puts it, are "very west coast, somewhat alien to eastern Canadians. The politics, for easterners and some British Columbians, are incomprehensible." Vancouver is a city unlike most in North America. It is a *city*, a great port. You can walk from downtown to the beach or a marina. Thirty minutes by boat in one direction and you are in extraordinary, beautifully islanded waters. Thirty minutes in another by car and you're well into the mountains. Politically the population is mixed ("polarized" the native says): retirees and hippies; labor unions on the coast and main street businessmen in the interior, with a strong popular distrust, in the interior, of things "city slicker."

Though one can't easily generalize, it might be said that despite the building boom in Vancouver, the population on the coast is becoming jealous of guarding the land more quickly than the population in the interior. There, the western frontier, can-do, make-the-most-of-these-limitless-resources spirit is strong. For the past twenty years the province's Social Credit governments have leaned rather more heavily towards economic expansion, and indeed the economy and income have boomed. Prince George, in the center of BC, may be the fastest growing city in Canada, nurtured on the province's natural resources. Lately, environmental concerns have gained strength, however. It is becoming, for example, much more difficult to build power dams than it was when the beautiful Columbia River was