

Christmas mountains endangered

by Jeffrey Barton

On dasher, on Dancer, on Prancer, on Vixen, on Comet, on Cupid, on Donder, on Blitzen lies an old forest that has become the centre of a battle that pits environmentalists against the forest industry and government. Along with Mount St. Nicholas, these mountains make up the Christmas Mountains of north-central New Brunswick.

For 20 environmental groups, the greatest gift Santa could have brought recently was a permanent logging moratorium in the "largest continuously forested area remaining in New Brunswick."

As testament to their remoteness, the Christmas mountains were not uniquely named until 1964 by a provincial government surveyor, Mr. A.F. Wightman.

However, this area does have a history. As early as 1883, Edward Jack, a provincial government surveyor, suggested that 1800 square miles should be protected. In 1902, the Natural History Society of New Brunswick requested a 900 square mile wilderness park. Unfortunately, the enacted legislation was not passed by the cabinet.

Advice from the 1976 provincial forestry resources study was to save 55 square miles of the area's pristine forest. As recently as the 1990 Department of Heritage's Provincial Parks Master Plan advocated a wilderness area that would connect with the Appalachian Trail. However, the Christmas Mountains still remain unprotected.

With the onslaught of the feller-bunchers, this will be the third time in recent history that this forest has

been severely damaged. Other causes have been the great Miramichi Fire in 1825 and a spruce budworm infestation in 1910.

These were natural disturbances from which the forest ecosystem has the ability to recover itself. Will this be true of the extensive clearcuts?

The environmental community was first alerted to the threat facing the Christmas Mountains by an advertisement in an April, 1993 issue of the *Miramichi Leader*.

The advertisement was to inform the public that Miramichi Pulp and Paper Ltd., a subsidiary of Repap Enterprises Inc., would be conducting larger than normal clearcuts

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(greater than 100 hectares) in the region known as the Big South "because the Balsam Fir were getting to the age where they were starting to fall down and were subject to infestation by the hemlock looper and spruce budworm."

The Minister of Natural Resources, Alan Graham claimed that "the trees in the area had been devastated by insects and will be a forest hazard if they are not soon cut down."

An exploratory visit to the Christmas mountains by members of the N.B. Conservation Council, N.B. Wildlife Federation and Miramichi Environmental Society revealed "...vast expanses of healthy forest.

Black Spruce mixed with Balsam Fir carpeted the summits. The slopes contained a variety of hardwoods and big white pines, along with spruce and fir."

In one afternoon, a scientist from the University of New Brunswick found two rare plants.

It is also thought that this last vestige of New Brunswick wilderness may contain population of the threatened lynx and maybe even the mythical eastern cougar.

In light of this, a coalition of 22 environmental, aboriginal, angling, wildlife and naturalist groups launched a campaign to save 100,000 acres of this piece of New Brunswick's vanishing natural history. The effort included a poster campaign, a rally at the provincial legislature and a television commercial.

The fate of the Christmas Mountains was announced in late January 1994. The government placed a 3-year logging moratorium on 30,000 acres of forest around Logan lake, which is south of the Christmas mountains, to study its environmental value.

Twelve thousand acres of the study area had already been set aside as a wildlife refuge for the next 30 years to fulfil the obligations of a crown land release.

Approximately 5,000 acres of the area has been clearcut. The remainder is fragmented by "an extensive network of logging roads."

In addition to this, Freeze Lake and Mount Elizabeth were designated as ecological reserves and Kennedy Lakes will become a wilderness area.

This "compromise" was unacceptable to environmentalists because it neglected to save any wilderness in

the 12,000 acres of roadless forest found in the northwest quarter of the Christmas mountains.

Clearcutting can potentially recommence in the 30,000 acre study area and the quality of that protected is suspect.

A new coalition was formed in September 1994 to extend the logging moratorium in the study area to 15 years, create a clearcut zone from the Logan lake study area to Mt. Carleton Provincial Park and protect the 12,000 acres of untouched forest.

Amelia Clark, a student from Mount Allison University, was one

of the many university and high school students who spent four days in early November blocking logging roads into the pristine wilderness.

The group blocked one logging truck, arriving to collect fallen trees.

A delegation sent to Fredericton was even more successful. Following a meeting with Alan Graham, he announced that no harvesting would take place in the untouched portion until 1996.

When asked about the blockade Amelia said she was surprised that there were no major conflicts. In fact, "some loggers told us they had children and asked 'where have you been?'"

POINTLESS PONDERABLES

Last week's answer:

Zeke couldn't have gotten the rabbit in June because it was white, and in the summer, rabbits have brown or grey fur.

Congratulations go out this week to Andrew Pickett, who thinks that the Pointless Ponderables questions have been getting a little too easy lately. Well Andrew, here's a special question, just for your huge brain:

Calculate the average charge of all the quarks, detected or not, in a solid block of platinum weighing exactly one kilogram.

This week's regular question:

After last week's horrible event with Zeke, your friends have all deserted you. In despair, you wander downtown to be alone for a while.

As you pass by the Halifax library, a person comes up to you, looking shifty and nervous. He calls out to you.

"Hey buddy!" he says. "Wanna see a great deal?"

You agree, thinking that if you don't like what this guy's trying to sell you, you can just walk away. The guy pulls out a heavy steel helmet from his shirt pocket.

"This is a great buy, kid. A helmet worn by Hitler's brother-in-law during the first world war. See? It's even engraved! That proves it! And it can be your for only 5,000 dollars, kid," he says conspiratorially.

You look at the helmet, examining the engraving pointed out to you. There is an engraving inside, reading in German (translated, of course):

"This helmet is given to my dear brother-in-law, Adolf, of the last day of my military service during the First World War."

You look up from the helmet, grinning crookedly.

"I know this helmet isn't from World War One. And now it's payback time!

Retreating to a safe distance, you pull out your cellular phone, and call in an aerial strike by artillery and ground-attack helicopters. You smile as a squadron of helicopters make a hundred-foot hole in the ground where "shifty" the salesman once stood.

How did you know he was lying?

Answers can be dropped off at the Gazette office in room 312 in the SUB, or can be emailed to gazette@ac.dal.ca. The first person to get the correct answer in gets their name published in the paper, so hurry!

Solar house lights way

by Wayne Groszko

Somewhere in Nova Scotia, the sun is shining. Or at least, that's the hope of solar designer Don Roscoe and engineer Larry White, who designed a luxury home which obtains most of its energy from the sun.

They described the house in a presentation at the Annual General Meeting of Solar Nova Scotia, a local group which advocates energy conservation and renewable energy.

A wealthy client wished to build a house on a peninsula overlooking a small lake in Nova Scotia. The name of the client, and the location of the house will be left out to ensure privacy.

A complication arose because the chosen site is far from any electric lines. The cost and environmental damage of putting in power poles and hanging lines to bring electricity would have been excessive, so the client decided to construct an "off-grid" house.

Off-grid means that the house is not connected to the power grid, which is operated by Nova Scotia Power and supplies electricity to most buildings in the province. In many

off-grid buildings, a generator supplies electricity by burning a fossil fuel such as gasoline or propane. In the solar off-grid house which Roscoe and White designed, there is a backup propane generator, but a large proportion of the energy is provided by the sun.

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This is not an average house. Along with the standard rooms, there is an indoor swimming pool, a weight room, and a skylit column with stained glass walls in the bathroom. From the point of view of energy consumption, elements such as the pool heater, pool pump, and a big-

screen television make the demands of this house higher than average.

These demands include space heat in the winter, hot water for domestic use all year round, heat for the pool, and electricity to run all of the appliances, the pool pump, lights, fans, etc.

The heating demands are met by combination of passive solar input through south-facing windows, solar hot water panels for heating water directly and a heat exchanger to capture waste heat from the generator. Electricity is generated by solar photovoltaic panels, there is a set of batteries for storing the electricity, and a backup propane generator charges the batteries when the sun is not strong enough.

The designers estimate the house will be completely powered by the sun for eight or nine months of the year, but the generator will come on for a short time about once every two days in the winter, when the sun is not as strong.

They also point out that this is a luxury home, with exceptionally high energy demands. In a more modest house, it would be easier for the sun to do the job.



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