

Interview of Clarence Byers by Oonagh O'Connor, 1995

Clarence's words are in regular type; *Oonagh's are in italic*; **Etta's are in bold**

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So was your father a logger for the whole time that he was raising the family?

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Yeah. He came from South Africa in around 1905, I think it was. *Wow.* Yeah. Him and my uncle, Andy.

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You ran a livery stable down in Langley.

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Yeah. They spent a year or two in Winnipeg, and then they got out to North Van. They did a bit of land clearing there, and then they got out in the Fraser Valley. Yeah. That's where I...that's where I met my mother. *In the Fraser Valley?* Yes. I was born at Langley Prairie.

Why did they ever decide to settle on Cortez? Well, my mother's brothers and her mom and dad had been up there, up the coast on Cortez, and they were horse logging. Yeah, they had been at Read Island, and then they'd moved to Cortez from Read Island.

And they were the Aldrichs? Yeah, yeah, and they talked about that.

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They moved from Read Island to Langley and then back to Cortes. I guess that was it. Yeah, right.

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That's when your mother stayed in Langley.

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Yeah. Right.

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And when you were born, she'd married. Yes. And then your mom followed after the kids were all born.

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Yeah, right. Yeah.

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How did they get the land?

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The land where...? *Where you were raised.* Oh, that was bought. It was...there was, I think, six 40-acre blocks there, and they wanted so much, an acre for the...

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They called them crown purchase, mostly from the government.

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Yeah. Yeah. I think he thought it was kind of a bit high, and he went to Mike Manson, Et's [Etta's] granddad, about it and he got it lowered. And I think they only paid about \$250 in the end.

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Oh, yeah, your mom said \$7 an acre. Yeah. Grandpa got it lowered.

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Wow. But, gee, there was some beautiful timber. It was taken off later, yeah. *After you sold it?* Yeah, I think he and my dad sold it to Hartman for \$600. That was all. That was still not too good a time, yet.

So did you have chores to do when you were a kid?

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Oh, gosh, yeah. I always got the wood in, split the kindling. I got a short one toe from cutting kindling. It was a big, long shake, and I was standing up on this block of wood and the heavy two-bitted blade ax, and it got away on me, went down, and went right in between my little toe and the next one. It cut it right off. It's just a skin hole.

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So you were on Cortez Island. How did your... was it your mother who dealt with that, or what did you do?

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Yeah, yeah, well, most of Dad and Mother, they... well, they had to go to Powell River to get it sewed up, you know.

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Did someone take you over in a boat?

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Yes. The road foreman then was Joe O'Donnell at Manson's, and he was doing a bit of road work on the Squirrel Cove Road up to our place, so we got him to run us down to Powell River. That took til quite late at night, but it was about 7 o'clock, I think it was, when I did this, and we didn't

get down there till about midnight. Yeah. Slow boat, you know. And it was the forest fires back of Lund, and there was a lot of smoke. You could still see the fire from the water. Yeah. That was one of the... *One of your chores, that was.* Yeah. But I never really got into the milking end of it. I don't know why. *You had animals there?* Yeah, we had a cow and a horse. I never seemed to get into it, mother or dad and always milk the cow. Of course, we had chickens. But we never knew what hard times were during the hard times, you know.

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Because you had so much food?

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Yeah, you know, we had plenty with the garden and cow. You didn't have to buy much, only coffee and sugar, tea, I guess.

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And how about the wintertime when the snow was on the ground? His mom wouldn't be isolated?

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Oh, no.

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At that time?

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Oh, the snow would get quite deep odd times. We lived way up there, away from everybody else. We used to shovel a path down to Squirrel Cove with the shovels.

With the shovel? Yeah.

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So your mom could get down?

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Yeah.

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Oh, she'd be out there too, shoveling?

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Oh, yeah, she'd be out shoveling.

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She was strong. She could do anything. Yeah. **No way would she be isolated. She had to get out.** Yeah. *So would she go to the store every day?* Oh, no. No, no. *Mail days?*

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Mail days.

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That was once a week, wasn't it?

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Yeah.

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Did you hunt? No, I was never ---- I used to hunt a few grouse, but I was never a deer hunter. No, my dad, he used to do all of that. Yeah. I never seemed to get into it for some reason or other, other than getting a few grouse, you know, blue grouse. The 22.

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You never had the heart for it.

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I guess not. I did go out a time or two, but I never didn't have a proper gun.

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So when you moved up to...I think I remember hearing this story, but when you moved up to Von Donop and your...the houses were getting moved?

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Yes.

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What was that? Tell me about that story.

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Oh, well, we moved them all onto floats, you know. There was, what, one, two? **There was five of 'em.** Five, yeah, five houses. Each on their, each float. We were on with the donkey float, our house, and the truck was on it, and it was down right level with the water. I think the house runners were dragging in the water pretty near, yeah. So, yeah, we, we had the tug come that we used to do our towing. What was the name of it again?

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Oh, I think I've got that written somewhere. *So you had the tug pulling five houses?*

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Yes, yes, yes.

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One behind the other.

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Yeah, and Ken and Hazy, they were Hansens. *Hansen?* Yeah, they'd gone to...Ken had gone to get vegetables and I don't know, chickens and what else, and they had a speedboat, a little speedboat. So we left that. They weren't there when the tug come, and the tug wanted to get going, you know, because it was an all-day. Had to go right up Lewis Channel and around. So we left the speedboat at the wharf at Seaford, and away we go. And pretty soon we got way up there, oh, two or three hours. We see the speedboat coming, and they made it all right.

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Did you have any difficulties with moving the house? No, none at all, no. It's just we used the old donkey as a gas donkey, you know.

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Was it a calm day?

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Oh, yes. It was a very beautiful day, sunny day. I think it started a bit foggy in the morning. It was foggy in the morning. **That's what concerned the skipper.** Yeah.

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But then it cleared.

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Yeah, it was beautiful. And then they used to come get our booms every time, that same outfit. Preston-Man Towing was the name of it. And it took us a year or two in there to get going. *And get your logging operation?* Yeah, you know, it was a ...we logged up into Barrett Lake, Blue Jay Lake, into that kind of...it was a beautiful timber in there.

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It was a job building that barricade around that front. Oh, yeah, it was quite a rock bluff there, and we had quite a cribbing type of thing to get around. Fore-and-aft road, you know, a huge flat on. We didn't have sawmills in them days. And then we built the road more or less by hand.

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You built a road?

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Yeah. *To where?* Truck road up towards Blue Jay Lake. Oh, yeah. Yeah.

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And before that, was there any way out besides boats?

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No, no, there wasn't. And then eventually we brought our Model T from Squirrel Cove and kept it at Blue Jay Lake there, and they had a big barn until our logging road got through. There was

an old settler years ago back in there by the name of Woods, and he had his log house in there. And left it just like it was. There was a lot of good books and everything. And he had a bit of a road out that connected on to the Barrett road that they had out to Whaletown. So we eventually connected onto that, and then we drove out to Whaletown for our mail. But before that, we went to Redonda Bay. I had a little boat with a four-horse Easthope in it. We used to go up there once a week. And then I got another boat later on, and when anything heavy or boom chains and that, we used to go to Whaletown with it and get the boom chains and what have you. Well, it was all quite an experience.

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And so did you use that house of Woods?

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No. Somebody got in there before we moved in there, and I guess they camped there or something, and it got a fire and it all burnt down. Yeah, it was a shame because you had a notice on it to use the cabin but leave it as you found it, you know. Yeah. There used to be a big house at Barrett's Lake, too, a big lumber house, and a beautiful log cabin these Tait's lived in. And then what's the name of the people there now? Verschuur. Verschuurs, yeah.

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All that's left of the Tait house is the fireplace. Yeah.

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They've got a pot there. Yeah.

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They cook in an open pot.

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Yeah. He had a bit of a corn roast here two years ago, and we were invited over. And it was right where they had the corn roast was where this log house used to be. It's all grown up so bad now.

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Yeah. **What did you say about those logs? Didn't someone take them down?**

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Took them. I thought Mike Anders took them down to the beach and was going to reassemble them. Yeah. It was big cedar split in half, but then they were set long ways, but they were beautifully dovetailed on the corners, you know.

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Is that the one that was built for the Hucks?

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No, the Hucks was another log house. Yeah. I guess there's still bits of it left, I think. Yeah. And there was always an orchard, too, with these. This big orchard at Barrett's Lake there. But when I worked for the Gulf Loggers in 19...

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Oh yeah, oh yeah. **It was the winter of 35.** Oh yeah, right. I got a little mixed up in the dates there, when I was up at Ramsey Arm before. Before that. Yeah, and we stayed in that big lumber house at Blue Jay Lake. It was for a camp, like. *Oh, because you were logging there?* Yeah, they had a big old gas 60 cat, a 60-cat. We pulled logs into the lake and then we took them out down and put them into Carrington Lagoon. They had a big, what they called a chute. And my job was to chute these logs down this hill. They had a little Fordson tractor on wheels with a pile driver winch on the front and it had a cable. That's what I used for dumping these logs. Yeah. They had quite a bit of stuff they took out of there. I often wonder how they made any money or whether they did. Yeah.

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Did you ever start making money through logging? No. Never. Just wages.

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Just made it.

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Wages were so slow. When our daughter got her job at Safeway, she got more than he did.

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Still, when I left the boom in 1967, she was making more money at wrapping meat. Not much, but it was still more. *Did you like it, logging?* Well, there's certain jobs I liked, yeah. Booming was one I wasn't too fussy about, and I ended up doing most of that. Yeah. I worked 11 years at Buckley Bay for Jack Rebbon. *Did that seem dangerous?*

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No, no, no, no. There was no danger to that.

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That's why he was there. He used to like falling.

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Well, the money was a little better. **The boys came home and all, with no experience, and I heard a couple of stories they just about got killed. I said, you get out of the woods. So that's how he ended up on the boom.**

Did you go to the war? No. No, they wouldn't take me on account of my eyesight, or at least the old Dr. Lyons at Powell River. He put me in the category E.

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He was pretty upset. No way was he going to pass him.

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Yeah, he put me in. *Did you know people who went away to the Second World War?* Oh, yes.

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Oh, yes. **No. Cortes Island lost all her boys. None of them came home.**

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Yeah.

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Several boys from Cortes.

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Yeah.

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I used to get so mad. I'd hear the news and

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they'd say...

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Dolly Hansen, she lost a brother. Yeah. **Enemy losses were so great, ours, nothing, they kept saying, and none of our boys came home. Stories they'd tell you.**

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Yeah. Yeah. **There was Fred Jeffery, the Whiting boy.**

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Yeah. **And the Patterson boy.** 0:14:33

Yeah.

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Reg.

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I forget what story that was, too. Yeah. And what was that boy from Powell River? **Lionel Rourke.**

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Rourke, yeah.

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He never came home.

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He never, yeah. Oh, there was others.

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I couldn't believe it.

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Did you know of any people who refused to go to the war? **No. No, no, you were shot if you refused.** Yeah. [indistinguishable] the firing line. The First World War, there were some hid out. Doug Forrest was one, all the way up to Toba Inlet. And parents said they'd come looking for them, but they never got them. But it's got to the point now there's just nobody who will speak up for themselves a bit more. Yeah. Since the Vietnam crisis, the thing, you know, it was terrible.

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Got people thinking a little bit more.

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Well ---- What were you going to say? No. Go ahead.

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I was going to ask you if it was hard for you to leave Cortes when you left.

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No. I don't know why. No. **We were ready to go.**

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Yeah.

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[indistinguishable] Yeah. Well, I guess it was to have a decent car and what have you. I don't know. Easier to get around. Easier to get around. I guess, yeah, Cortez was always good, you know, good to us.

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What year was it you left?

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Forty-five.

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Forty-five.

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Were the roads better then?

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No, no. It was after. It was in the fifties they started to get better, I guess. Yes. When Ken and Ter Harrell [??] logged out towards Gorge Harbor there, and that put that road through, and eventually got it all. But we used to have to walk to the dances from Stitches to Whaletown, nine miles. We used to walk from there to Manson's Hall. Yeah. Dance all night and walk home.

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And when Dad was a foreman, that's when the first truck came for the roads.

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Yeah.

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They gave him a truck for hauling dirt and that. Up to then it was just wheelbarrows and truckloads, and that wasn't until the...

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I was trying to think when he put the road through to Squirrel Cove.

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That was in 30...

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Yeah, he got Uncle Wilf from Hernando with a little cat.

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It was the fall of 31, because Wilf was born in January 32.

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Yeah.

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Auntie Jean was expecting him. They stayed with us at the ranch, and it was 31 when Dad put the road through.

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See, to me there was some guy started it, and I forget his name. **Ryan?**

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Ryan, yeah.

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I think so. But it wasn't that far past Cowan's Hill. Right. Down there.

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But as far as the road department on Cortes, they had no equipment. They hired Uncle Wilf from Hernando to bring his cat over.

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And I think they had a little horse grader that they used, because we used it after, at Von Donop to build our road. Oh, yeah.

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Pulled it.

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Because it wasn't until about 1931 Dad got that truck.

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Yeah.

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And that was the first improvement they had.

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And so, of course, now they've got the grader and it's black topped, gradually, which is a big improvement.

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But there weren't many cars either in the early days.

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No. The logging helped. Like Nimai [sp??] logged in the gorge, and he logged right up to Stitches and that put that road through, you see. Yeah.

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To their old logging road?

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Yeah, yeah. Other than my dad, he put the road from Squirrel Cove up to Stitches. He built that with a team of horses to move his lumber up. He towed logs down to Blubber Bay and it was a sawmill there and they cut the lumber up for him and he piled it all in the water like a crib sort of thing and they towed it back with the old boat and they had to pack it all ashore again after the tide would go out, you know, at Squirrel Cove to get it up. So it was a real pioneering days in them days, yeah.

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Were there any oysters around?

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No. Oysters started to come in 1938. *The Japanese oysters?* Yes. We used to be able to walk up towards Squirrel Cove from Seaford and get a feed. Yeah.

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Was there anyone who had an oyster lease, like an original oyster lease or something?

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No. The only one that I know of was in Von Donop Creek in the lagoon. A fellow by the name of Dave Logan had what they called the Olympic oysters. They were the little ones. He had quite a bed in there, but he never did anything with it. *No, he didn't sell them?* I don't remember that, no.

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What about Pender Harbor?

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Yeah, I believe they had them. I think Uncle Wally always said these come from Deep Bay or Ladysmith. They had them down that way, and the seed gradually came up. And then, of course, you had the Jap weed, too, from the oyster seed. And it was quite a nuisance. *What's that?* The Jap seaweed. Oh, yeah. It grew just almost like a tree, and it was terrible on the props, the propellers of your boat.

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Oh, I see, and it was in the seed inside the oysters that they brought.

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Yeah.

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I don't know if it came over with the oysters.

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That's what they told us, yeah.

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Because it didn't come until about, oh, 1945 was around when we left Cortez.

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Yeah. It was terrible stuff, though.

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Before that, we didn't know anything of it.

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No.

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It was right down our coast.

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Oh, I just realized, Clarence, I'm cutting into your lunch time. Oh. Let me thank you. Oh, you're quite welcome.

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