

San Francisco Chronicle

# WORLD/BRIEFING

■ FOCUS/*British Columbia's Other Logging Battle*

## Alarm Grows Over Clear-Cutting on Majestic Coast

By Cort Howard  
Chronicle Foreign Service

**SUMMARY:** As large companies encroach further on what is left of the Canadian Pacific rain forest, the Heiltsuk Indians are waging a last-ditch battle to save a piece of their heritage

Vancouver

**F**ar from the public eye and the condemnation of the environmental community, the remaining pristine areas in British Columbia's remote mainland coast are falling prey to the same devastating logging practices that caused international attention to be focused on the Clayoquot Sound area of Vancouver Island.

The hidden valleys of the mainland coast are largely undefended. In these majestic fiords and inlets, there are few people, few villages and few other hints of human contact apart from totem poles that sprout new moss in the canopy shade.

What is at stake is a region significant not only for its rich and varied ecosystems, but for its cultural and historic value for the Heiltsuk Indian nation, which 10 years ago submitted a land claim for about 40 percent of the mainland coast's 6 million acres.

While the claim continues to drag through the courts, four giant multinational logging firms — International Forest Products, Fletcher Challenge, Doman Brothers and MacMillan Bloedel

— are finalizing plans to clear-cut vast areas of government-owned "crown land" that includes part of the acreage claimed by the Heiltsuk.

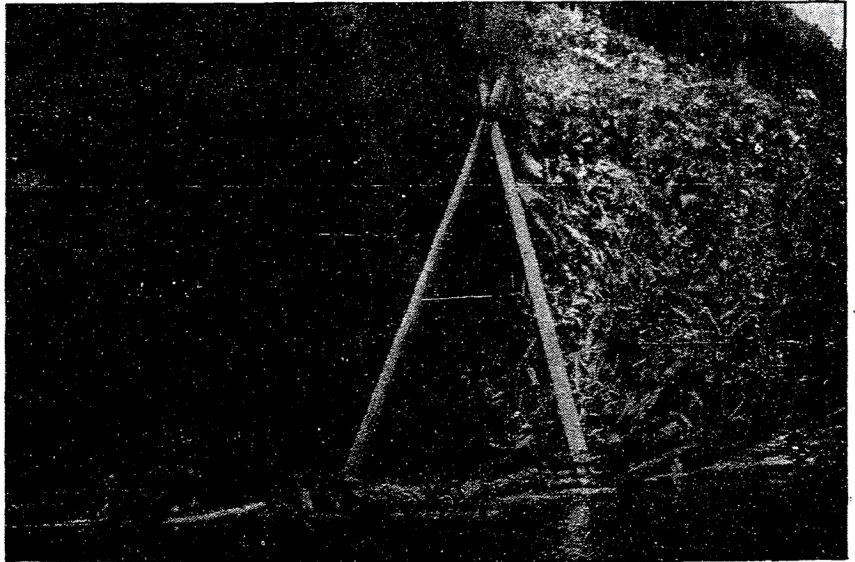
Small logging operations are also forging ahead to remove what they can before they are restricted from doing so.

The government has approved a total harvest of 1.1 million cubic meters annually for the mainland coast, a figure environmentalists say is not only excessive but probably inaccurate as well, because the Ministry of Forests relies on timber companies for its data.

The endangered areas — none of which have national or provincial park status — include all 204 of the coast's primary watersheds.

Peter McAllister, past director of the Sierra Club of Western Canada and now director of the Raincoast Conservation Society, a 3-year-old group established to research and document the area's ecological importance, said in a recent interview:

"There isn't much time. The timber companies, in conjunction



The Raincoast Expedition found extensive scarring from clear-cutting on a remote fiord

BY CHRISTINA POST/SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

with the Ministry of Forests, are rushing ahead with plans to land the bulldozers and start logging in these precious valleys before the public finds out about them."

This summer, McAllister led a four-week expedition of environmentalists, researchers, journalists and film-makers into the heart of the mainland coast to document and study the area.

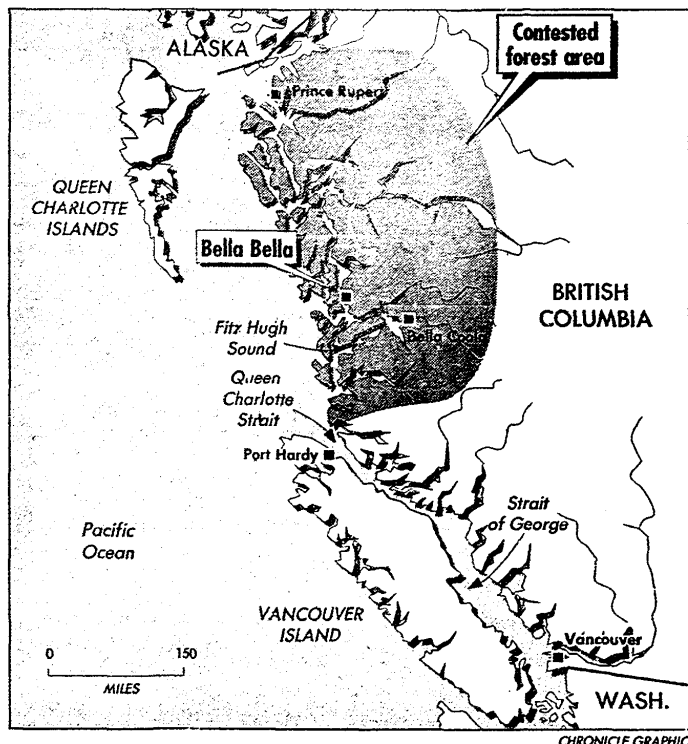
"We went into valleys that neither conservationists nor scientists have ever been in," he said. "No research has been done on the grizzlies, the old-growth values or even the scenic and ecotourism values."

One of the places sacred to the Heiltsuk is Eilersie Lake, home to numerous pictographs, ancient ceremonial houses and legends.

Despite a few hand-logging operations, this watershed valley still hosts stands of ancient spruce, hemlock and cedar. It is known to some as the Yosemite of the North.

The Raincoast Expedition visited the Eilersie Valley in time to see a small logging company be-

**CLEAR-CUT:** Page A12 Col. 3



## THE COASTAL LEGACY

The mainland coast of British Columbia may be one of the most significant remaining wild habitats for grizzly bears, according to Peter McAllister, director of the Raincoast Conservation Society. There are extensive home ranges in 10 intact wilderness areas that include vast interconnecting corridors.

Clear-cut logging operations pose a severe threat to the bears' habitat and food supply and make intrusion by poachers and hunters far easier. Logging in the mainland coast also affects the rest of the food chain. There has been ample documentation in British Columbia of the destruction of migratory salmon streams because of erosion from slopes that have been denuded of their timber. But there have been no authoritative surveys done on the numbers of grizzlies — or any other species. Canada has nothing comparable to the U.S.

### Endangered Species Act.

Another important coast species is the marbled murrelet, a small bird that lives only in old-growth watersheds. The Raincoast Expedition found more than 300 murrelets at the mouths of two watersheds. "We've probably already lost the most substantial amount and don't know it," said McAllister. Similarly endangered are some of the last remaining stands of Sitka spruce and giant red and yellow cedars.

Christian Schwaegerl, a German botanist who accompanied the expedition, said the coastal woods are "inhabited by incredibly specialized and beautiful organisms." He fears that the remaining old-growth forests will be gone in 10 years, and he warned, "If you disturb only one part of the system, it will collapse."

— CORI HOWARD

# CLEAR-CUT: British Columbia's Unpublicized Logging Battle

From Page A10

gin clear-cutting a 200-acre parcel of private land.

Logging plans need not be made public when the harvesting occurs on private land, and Larry Jorgenson, a teacher and fisherman from Bella Bella who married into the Heiltsuk nation and has a small cabin near Eilerslie Lake, was alarmed and disheartened when he learned of the cut.

"When your strength comes from your connection to people and your history, and someone comes in and wantonly wrecks it ... without even asking, that makes me angry and sad," he said.

Jorgenson recently found a way to delay the logging. Although the work was being done on private land, the logger was going to use waterfalls on crown land to remove the timber without obtaining the necessary permits. Because of a Jorgenson-organized letter-writing campaign to authorities, the logging has been put on hold.

Unfortunately for the Heiltsuk, there is no legal framework to provide an interim moratorium on logging on public lands. Doman Brothers and International Forest

Products have already received government approval to take out the most valuable wood from the Indians' claim area. The slopes along Spiller Channel, the scenic gateway to the Eilerslie, already have been clear-cut.

According to Otto Phlanz, mid-coast operations manager for the Ministry of Forests, logging has increased in the Heiltsuk claim in the past two years for two reasons:

- New rules on visual impact and reducing the size of cuts are forcing companies to disperse harvests over a wider area.

- "The screaming demand out there for wood," in Phlanz's words, is causing companies to harvest at average levels of 120 percent of their annual allowable cut. This is legal under flexible rules that require that the overage be made up over a five-year period.

Canada's forest industry produces more than \$45 billion in wood products per year, employing directly and indirectly more than 1 million people. But the economic benefits to native people are dismally low.

Bella Bella, the main town within the Heiltsuk reserve, has an 80 percent unemployment rate,

and the local high school has a 50 percent dropout rate. The traditional occupation of the Heiltsuk, fishing, is virtually denied to them because stocks have been depleted by overfishing by commercial boats and erosion from denuded forest slopes.

"There isn't a logging operation on the coast that buys their groceries in Bella Bella," said Jorgenson. "There isn't one person from the village that works in a logging camp. People here not only have no jobs now but will have nothing left for their kids."

The Heiltsuk are determined to remedy these inequities through their land claim.

"We want some benefit from our natural resources," said Chief Edwin Newman. "The government has helped create many of our social problems, and the story has to be told. No one really cares what happens to Indian communities. We're tired of being the victims of change. We want to be part of the process, too."

Even if the Heiltsuk eventually win their case, marketable timber remains on less than 10 percent of the 2.4-million acre claim.

Bob Friesen, director of corporate policy and planning for the Ministry of Forests, estimates that aboriginal claims have been made for 90 percent of British Columbia's land area. He said, "The province is anxious to resolve those claims, but we can't foresee a moratorium ... on all resource or infrastructure activities for the years it will take to do this.

"We have to get on with logging and try to do it while at least attempting to meet native aspirations to ensure there's a resource base they can negotiate over."

Dennis Bendickson, International Forest Products' operations manager in Port Hardy, said, "The (Heiltsuk) claim is something that's really up to the government."

Meanwhile, ecosystem damage from small logging operations continues to mount. Small clear-cuts on steep slopes scar the mountain valleys, and logs are left rotting at the water's edge. McAllister described the situation as "red alert."

"Somehow we have to wake the public up to the fact that the largest storehouse of unprotected temperate rain-forest valleys on Earth are right here," he said.