



University
of Victoria

Graduate Studies

Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

JAMES DAVEY

BA (McGill University, 2012)

**“A Bridge to Nowhere: British Columbia’s Capitalist Nature and the
Carmanah Walbran War in the Woods (1988-1994)”**

Department of History

Thursday, September 12, 2019

9:30 A.M.

Clearihue Building

Room C316

Supervisory Committee:

Dr. Richard Rajala, Department of History, University of Victoria (Co-Supervisor)

Dr. Karena Shaw, School of Environmental Studies, UVic (Co-Supervisor)

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Dr. Rachel Scarth, Department of Biology, UVic

Dr. David Capson, Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies

Abstract

From 1988 to 1994, the Carmanah and Walbran valleys on southern Vancouver Island emerged from obscurity to inspire international newspaper headlines, ecotage, and election platforms, and figure in British Columbia's Commission on Resources and the Environment (CORE), the genesis of the current provincial land-use status quo. With Canada's tallest tree, first marbled murrelet nest, and the closest undisturbed old-growth forest to Victoria, the area stands as a touchstone conflict in BC's War in the Woods (ca. 1980-1995), one which resulted in Carmanah and the Upper Walbran and Lower Walbran becoming designated as Carmanah Walbran Provincial Park in 1995. The Central Walbran remained open to logging, which as recently as 2016 has incited backwoods blockades not dissimilar to those from July and August 1991, the climax of my narrative. This thesis explores how and why the Walbran land-use resolution disappointed Victoria-based environmentalists, Cowichan Lake forest workers, the Nuu-chah-nulth, and the nation-state of Qwa-Ba-Diwa, and why the fate of the watershed remains subject to debate.

Analyzing the roots of BC's "wood exploitation axis" helps contextualize why Carmanah Walbran campaigns in Cowichan Lake and Victoria failed to produce satisfactory outcomes despite significant compromises from provincial governments after much deliberation. In short, dissidence failed to engender land-use consensus because forest capitalism and its co-constitutive partner, colonialism, have since the nineteenth century crafted policy based on a conception of the world rooted in forestry-based development, a durable ontological construct against which other imaginaries of nature have had to compete. The Tree Farm Licence system brought the International Woodworkers of America into a Keynesian bargain with companies and the state after World War II, contributing to decades of overharvesting, overoptimistic regrowth projections, and corporatization which culminated in falldown and forest community crisis before environmentalists began to shape the public discourse regarding nature in the late 1980s.

A fundamental inability to produce a satisfactory vision of "sustainable" forestry and a narrow state narrow response – wilderness parks – to broad, diverse environmentalist demands allowed nature to remain envisioned as a store of raw material for industrial forestry. This thesis additionally seeks to problematize "wilderness" environmentalism and elaborate how green

knowledge production can act as discursive violence. Our “natures” are more than workplaces, sites for recreation, or pristine ecosystem. They are environments within which to find and make meaning. Or perhaps more accurately, nature is a symbol with which to construct narratives; narratives which, in Carmanah Walbran, often left little room for work in the woods. Environmentalists’ depictions of unpeopled nature advanced their wilderness-preservationist cause at the expense of marginalizing Nuu-chah-nulth land claims, loggers’ paycheques, and ecocentric worldviews based on holistic conceptions of interconnectedness and/or radical dissent against the forest industrial complex. In short, the Carmanah Walbran War in the Woods added 16,365 hectares of new parkland, resulted in the 2001 closure of the Youbou mill, the last at Cowichan Lake, and ensured that a isolated gravel road still ends at a bridge to nowhere.