

Stout State University  
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COWICHAN VALLEY FOREST MUSEUM

The forests of Vancouver Island, British Columbia still echo to the sound of the steam locomotive at work, several of the major logging companies still use steam for powering their log trains and one ex-logger has established an operating museum railroad for public amusement. One mile north of Duncan, on the shores of beautiful Semenas Lake, the early history of Cowichan comes alive for the visitor in the Cowichan Valley Forest Museum. The museum is built around the extensive collection of old-time logger "Gerry" E. Wellburn. Wellburn is no novice to steam logging, having served an apprenticeship with the C.P.R. as locomotive fireman, Superintendent of a pair of sawmills and eventually starting his own small tie-mill in the late twenties. A pioneer in the use of trucks in logging, he built this mill into a modern logging and sawmill operation which he later sold to H.R. MacMillan Expert Company, his chief customer. He retained management of the Shawnigan Lake Logging Division until his retirement in 1962.

Wellburn was astonished at the rate that logging locies, both large and small, were being scrapped in favor of trucks which were able to go higher and deeper into the heart of B.C.'s forested hills. He therefore resolved to collect logging locomotives as well as his many other historical lumbering material and the basis for the museum was established. The museum is a co-operative enterprise of the nearby communities and industries.

The museum has nearly a mile of 3' narrow gauge track, laid upon retproof yellow cedar ties and has an interesting locomotive collection which includes shays, tank locos, and even gas locomotives. An outdoor exhibit of heavy machines recalls the days of early logging and is accompanied by a late 1800 display of buggies and other horse drawn conveyances. A log building is being erected to house the extensive Welburn collection of historic documents and artifacts.

A.C. Lynn Zelmer

Thanks to the MacMillan, Bleedel and Powell River DIGESTER for historical data.

Photo # 1

GOWICHAN VALLEY # 25 hauls two homemade cars of visitors across the 300' trestle ~~XXXX~~ spanning an inlet of Lake Semenas on the mile long 3' gauge steam railroad

Photo # 2

An old steam tractor rides the wooden rails of ~~an~~ a late 1800 logging road.

Photo # 3

A vertical beilered steam donkey used on Vancouver Island in the early and middle years of steam railroad logging.

Photo # 4

This steam yarder saw more than 50 years of service in steam logging and was retired early in the 1950's.

Photo # 5

# 1 Spot, a 42 ton Shay locomotive, originally built for Bleedel, Stewart and Welch in 1911 originally worked on Vancouver Island and was sold in 1953 for service in the Philippines but never left Canada. Relf Sturm of Calgary leans from the cab of this operable locomotive.