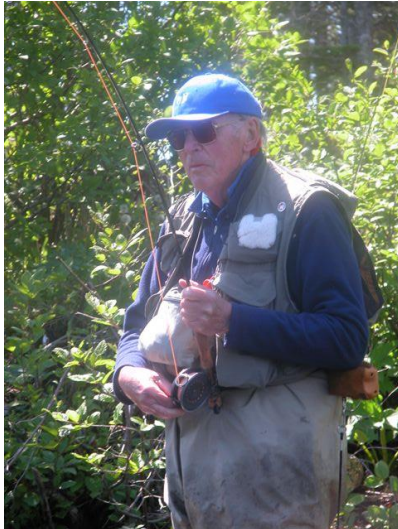




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**HL:** This is Hugh Lewis, and with me are Art Lingren and Charles Brumwell. And Charlie is looking at the oral history agreement form that was prepared for this occasion, and he understands that this permits the university to use the transcript that results from this. And by the way, Charlie, the auditory component is going to be preserved as well, so people can hear all the stuttering and fumbling and strange accents (Laughing). Things like that. But at present, they don't actually have a means of accessing the auditory part online. So if somebody actually did want to come and hear what this was all about, they'd have to get to the university, and find a way to park, and get up to the Sixth floor, unlikely, in the present environment.

**CB:** Wow.

**HL:** Anyway, do you have any questions?

**CB:** No. I was going to say, I've gone through this, numbered one through fifteen.

**AL:** Yes, I sent him a copy of it just so he was aware of what we wanted to talk about.

**HL:** Great. Thanks, Art.

**AL:** So, are we ready to roll?

**HL:** Yes, we're ready to go. Art, why don't you just start?

**AL:** Okay. Well, question number 1: What got you interested in fishing and at what age?

**CB:** Well, I grew up in Southern Alberta, on a farm, near the Bow River. And my dad was a very intense fisherman. We fished in the Bow River for pike, pickerel, and goldeye, casting. And then there was a big irrigation lake called Lake Newell, and I caught my first fish at the age of five in Lake Newell. My dad rigged a piece of bamboo with a piece of cutthunk about 10 feet long and a Dare Devil Spoon. And I was rolling this out and I caught this small pike, and I grabbed it in my arms and I ran right down the prairie where he was standing, with the fish in my arms flopping, and the piece of bamboo on my string, and the hook still in the fish's mouth, bouncing along behind me. So that was my earliest experience with fishing.

**AL:** Sounds like a Norman Rockwell picture. (Laughing) Right?

**CB:** The other fishing -- I moved from the prairies when I was 13, and most of the fishing was as I described. But in the summers, the whole family moved to Waterton Lakes National Park during the hot weather. And we fished there, but it was all gang trolls and things. I don't think I ever saw a fly fisherman.

**AL:** Okay. Well, when did you start steelhead fishing and then fly fishing for them?

**CB:** Steelheading in 1965. The first steelhead was in the Sooke River on Vancouver Island, using gear, Spin-N-Glo, caught a spawner. Fly fishing and gear fishing to 1970, just fly fishing since 1975.

**AL:** Okay. You've seen a few rivers in the province. Any that stand out above all the others for fly fishing for steelhead?

**CB:** The Dean, the Thompson, the Yakoun, in capital letters, Deena creek in Haida Gwaii, and the Cowichan were stand out rivers as far as I was concerned. We used to catch a lot of fish in the Nanaimo in the early, early days, but it wasn't with fly fishing. That was before I started exclusively using the fly.

**AL:** Okay, let's get onto Haida Gwaii now. How did you learn about the steelhead fishing on Haida Gwaii?

**CB:** I had a friend in the 1960s who had a buddy who worked as a butcher in the store in Queen Charlotte City on Haida Gwaii. He was invited by the friend to visit, and he returned raving about steelhead fishing in the Yakoun. So the rest is history.

**AL:** What rivers did you fish up on Haida Gwaii for steelhead?

**CB:** Well, the prime river was the Yakoun. But also in the Tlell, the Copper, and I couldn't remember the name of the little creek down on the south island with the hatchery.

**AL:** Oh, Pallant, Pallant Creek, yes.

**CB:** Pallant Creek.

**HL:** And there was a T-- -- another river, it was two syllables, it began with a T?

**AL:** Tlell.

**HL:** Tlell. How do you spell that?

**CB:** T-L-E-L-L. The natives spell it a little differently.

**HL:** I see, okay. Thanks. I do this because this will be transcribed, and sometimes it's hard.

**AL:** Alright, yes.

**CB:** And then the final Haida Gwaii river was Deena creek, which was between the two islands. It was on the Moresby Island. It ran into the ocean just before the passage between the upper and the lower island to the Pacific. And we had some very good fishing there, and very good coho fishing on the fly.

**AL:** Okay, let's talk about the Yakoun River and its steelhead. When you started to fish it, you had really, really amazing fishing, okay.

**CB:** Yes, we did, yes.

**AL:** Just incredible size fish and lots of them too, so.

**CB:** So the Yakoun in the 1960s to the 1990s was a steelhead bonanza, large fish to twenty-nine pounds. One trip in 1972, two of us had over a hundred fish with eight over twenty pounds, all released. Virtually no competition. You might see a couple of local fishermen. In some of the very deep pools, the access to the fish was a bit difficult, and maybe we'll talk about that with the gear.

**AL:** Okay, good. I think you mentioned when your first trip was –

**CB:** First trip was about 1965.

**AL:** Yes, 1965, so that was many, many, many, many years ago.

**CB:** Yes.

**AL:** At the run time in the Yakoun, what months have you fished it for steelhead? I know it was an early run -- I'm not sure if they were really late, late summer -- nah, they weren't summer fish. They were probably really early winter fish, in November.

**CB:** Mm-hmm, yes. Well, the first trip was around 1965, and for the next forty years, I made two trips a year, late October/early November and February or March. And I went every year until about 2006.

**HL:** And I have a question. Were these different runs of steelhead, or is this just the beginning of the run and the end of the run?

**CB:** Well they were new runs coming in. The first run in those days came in in the last ten days of October, and they were all big males, big, big bucks. Then the females, those came in, oh, in the first week or ten days of November. So we used to go up, I was working then, so we would straddle our Remembrance Day, your Veterans Day, November the 11<sup>th</sup>. We'd go up and have the time before and the time after, so we could have an extended trip. And it's interesting that the people up there tell me now that the late October/early November trip is extinct. They don't get that rush of the big fish coming in the way we did back then. They still get big fish.

**HL:** I see. It's just nothing like the numbers.

**CB:** No, no, not at all.

**AL:** Just as an aside, the fishing back early when Charlie started to do it in October/November, but there's fishing all the way through until April, I probably caught them up there in April, okay, so.

Charles Brumwell Edited Transcript – January 2020

*Fly Fishing Collection*

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**CB:** Yes.

**HL:** Bill McMillan has done studies trying to determine what run timing was for the Skagit River and other rivers in Puget Sound, and has figured out that that would be normal down there as well, the kind of run timing you're describing. And what happened is, they put in hatchery fish with a much later run time, and it has messed up everything. But anyway, please go ahead.

**AL:** One thing about that that Yakoun there's no hatchery steelhead up there at all. It's all wild fish.

**CB:** The hatchery down on Pallant Creek is not a –

**HL:** Not a steelhead hatchery.

**CB:** -- not steelhead.

**AL:** No, it was salmon. But it's even closed now, too, so.

**CB:** Is it? To fly gear.

**AL:** Oh yes, that's right. You fished a lot for steelhead there. Favorite fly patterns and techniques? I don't think you ever got into wading a fly across the surface for those fish.

**CB:** Well, not in the early years, you know. The thing you have to realize is that the water in the rivers in the Queen Charlottes is tea colored. It's not that bright, sparkly, you know, Dean River or Thompson. It's tea colored. So we used sink tips almost exclusively. And usually bright flies. My favorite was the *Skykomish Sunrise*. But you know, other flies, bright flies would work. And I think in retrospect, watching Art perform with his *Black GP* and so on, I'm sure that would've worked too, but we just -- really we just used the bright flies because they worked. And maybe the other things would've worked better, but we weren't into that particularly.

**HL:** Could I ask one other question? At that time, what kind of rods and reels and lines were you using?

**CB:** Well, my first fly rod up there was a Fenwick 108. It was a 5 and 1/8 ounce, and yes, with some guts in it. And the lines were usually for the deep, deep pools, with full sinkers. But otherwise they were 10-foot tip, you know, sink tips. You could choose your water, and over the years, you can pick out the water that the fly worked better on. But some of the deep pools were in the jungle, overgrown, and maybe 25 or 30 feet deep. There's no way you could cast a fly in there. The gear fishermen used to go in there with their gobs of fish roe and lead and sink it down to the bottom and get some big fish that were lying. But for fly fishing, it wasn't any good.

**HL:** Were they killing the fish that they captured in that fashion?

**CB:** In the early years, there was a kill on there. And as I recall, I think it was four a day to a limit of eight. And some of the people, and there were very few of them in those days, they would kill their limits, and so on. We would sometimes take one fish home. We used just barbless hooks, even in those days. And the big fish that we were catching, we released all of them, because they were all in spawning colors pretty well.

**AL:** You were part of a group of fishermen who did these trips to Haida Gwaii. And you've told me some interesting stories, Charlie, about some of the people you've fished with there.

**CB:** Yes, I have.

**AL:** A couple of those anecdotes would be useful, okay?

**CB:** Well just some background, there was a small group of doctors in from Vancouver in the 1950s. They used to go up to Tlell to fish the coho in the fall (September, starting in 1956). And they would go up for ten days or two weeks. One or two of them would fly fish in the river. But by and large, they gear fished with spoons and things. But the big fish really was off the estuary in the ocean. They would go out in boats and trolled dull and mac spoons and so on and get a lot of fish. So there was a lot of partying that went on. Sometimes their fishing day didn't start till lunchtime, and they quit rather early. So they finally leased a small plot of land on Richardson Ranch at Tlell, and they put a trailer on it. So then they worked on the trailer, because when they first started going, they stayed in the ranch houses. But then they had crossed the street from the ranch, behind the dunes, from Hecate Strait, they had the trailer. And that's where I started with them.

I joined their club because I was going up independently with some other fellas, staying in a motel. I joined that club in the mid-1960s. And they never went to the Yakoun that much. They just fished in Tlell. And I started going a bit later, the end of October, and then going to the Yakoun. And that sort of branched a few of the fellows from the coho in September, going to the Yakoun. The cabin would take, in those days, six people. And we had our own vehicle, and so you would go yourself, and you would take some friends or other people, especially fly fishermen. Although there was always some gear fishermen that went with us. So yes, correct that, I think I joined the group in 1970, not in 1965. And then from then on, I worked out of that cabin.

But there was all sorts of funny incidents. I remember one, this fellow was fishing down on the bank of the Tlell, and of course this is a ranch, so there's cattle, there's horses. And one day he was casting away, and on his back cast he hooked a pony in the rump, and the pony took off down the bank with the guy chasing him trying to retrieve his line, as they disappeared in the distance. And finally, the pony ended up with a fly stuck in his butt.

There was some other, you know, the usual sorts of things that happened. People following you unexpectedly. The people fishing out in the ocean, some of them were pretty elderly, and sometimes they would not be able to get the engine, the outboard, they were pull engines, and the engine would be stopped for some reason. They couldn't get it going. So Doug Richardson would have to launch a boat and go down, sometimes six or eight miles where they'd drifted down the coast. But most of the guys were well lubricated, so they weren't feeling any pain. And he'd tow the boat back up to the ranch. Those are the, you know, the sorts of things that went on, all the clowning around. And there was a hot poker gaming until the wee small hours, and, you know, all that sort of stuff.

**AL:** Just turning on the steelhead and the big steelhead there, what's the largest fish that's in there that you've caught? Okay, you mentioned the 20-pounders on that one trip where you guys had a hundred. But you got a monster fish there one time.

**CB:** Yes, one year. We would usually -- we'd be disappointed if we didn't hook a hundred fish in our time there. And then one time, in 1972, another fellow and I, we had over a hundred fish, and we had eight fish over twenty pounds. And my biggest fish was 29 ½ pounds. And the reason I know it was 29 ½ pounds is in those days I killed very, very few fish, but the fellow who was with me, this was a great big buck that took me forty minutes to lead it in. Then he decided that he wanted to keep it, to take back down to Vancouver to smoke. So I thought, well, I prefer to release it, but anyway, he kept it. And then they weighed it on the butcher shop scales in Queen Charlotte City the next day. It was 29 ½ pounds, but it was about twelve hours after it was caught. So I would suspect that it was probably over 30 pounds. But we had quite a number in the 25 pound range and the 20 pound range, but the averages were, you know, 10, 12, 14 pounds, especially -- The biggest female I ever caught was a 19 pound doe. I never got a -- I don't know whether they came over 20 pounds, but that was the biggest one I ever got.

**AL:** Still, an impressive fish, Charlie. The steelhead runs on that river have deteriorated a lot, okay.

**CB:** Yes.

**AL:** Our trip there was kind of meager, when we went to the Yakoun about ten years ago. But can you tell me what you think are some of the environmental conditions that have caused the decline? I am thinking of the access to Haida Gwaii becoming easier, access to the river when the logging roads were built, generous kill limits, watershed damage due to clear cut logging and poor practices, too many people fishing and killing fish.

**CB:** Well I think the only thing I can add to that list, and I agree with at all, is the poor enforcement in the early years. It's all very well to have these rules, but unless you've got enforcement on the river. Now the enforcement has improved as the years have gone on, you know. But in the early years, we never ever saw an enforcement officer. And I can well recall -- there were two logging companies up there, as you probably know. Graham Island, the north island, was Macmillan Bloedel. The south island was Crown Zellerbach, which was an American company. So at Jaskatla, the headquarters for the Macmillan Bloedel on Graham Island, near where the Yakoun ran into the ocean, there was a lot of loggers and so on there.

**HL:** Could you spell that, again, for the -- that place, Jaskatla?

**CB:** Oh, Jaskatla? It's just phonetically, J-A-S-K-A-T-L-A [sic].

**HL:** Got it.

**CB:** That was the headquarters of logging. Juskatla, yes.

**HL:** And when they were logging, I'm assuming that the problem was that they were not leaving adequate buffers between the cut area and the watershed of the river or stream where the fish came.

**CB:** That's right. They originally clear cutted right to the banks of the feeder streams that descend to the Yakoun. And when confronted about leaving a fringe, the answer was always the same, Oh, there's no use leaving those, they're just too exposed and there will be blow down. So, you know, the shaded side feeder streams suddenly became exposed and full of logging debris.

And one of the tragedies of the Yakoun was in the early 1970s, the logging companies began to try and short circuit the growth of fir, Douglas fir and so on, by eliminating, you know, not the birch trees . . . alder trees.

**AL:** Alder trees, yes.

**CB:** So what they did was they embarked on what's called a slash and squirt program, where they run through the alder forests, and with a machete put a slice in the tree and squirt a herbicide into it. So you can imagine, I mean, these trees died. They fell over, and the herbicide ran into the river. And from a prolific cutthroat population for years, we never got a cutthroat. Because they were homesteaders, they were living in the river, cleaned them right out. Now you still get some cutthroat in there now, but it's never been the way it was. And they don't do that anymore, you now.

**HL:** Right. Well they finally figured out, as they should've known at the time, that we simply have to wait and allow the alders to grow. They fix nitrogen in the soil, and it makes it a more robust environment for the ultimate growth of your Doug fir. What the heck were they thinking?

**CB:** My understanding was that they thought they could bring the marketable lumber logs to market 20 years earlier if they got rid of that part of the cycle, which was the alder. Which of course in retrospect, it was incredibly poor thinking. Because it was the alder that promoted, as it rotted and so on, the growth of the big trees, yes. Very sad.

But I know, you know, the steelhead management on the Queen Charlottes, that we were talking about in the next issue here, was really having a no kill, and that's been I think for, what, about 15 years, 20 years?

**AL:** Actually, Haida Gwaii was the last river to become. There was still a one fish kill there for quite a while –

**CB:** That's right, yes.

**AL:** -- on the island, so. It was really late, Charlie, probably maybe 10 years ago that they finally eliminated that.

**CB:** One of the other stories, anecdotes about the people who were taking fish in the river, was that some of the people who were from the logging camps would go down to the river to a pool and throw a half a stick of stumping powder into the pool, and then they'd select all the stunned fish or the dead fish floating and throw them in a barrel and take them home, that sort of behavior, you know.

**AL:** I just want to get on the access now to the Haida Gwaii, because you guys always flew up, right?

**CB:** We flew, yes.

**AL:** But you know, flights to Haida Gwaii must have been something that maybe happened in the 1960s. Because it used to be boats the only way to get there, and even the ferry traffic was not easy back in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, I wouldn't think, okay.

**CB:** No, there were no main ferry access. They had freighters. The Northland Prince that brought supplies in to the Queen Charlottes. And actually, I think in about 1970, my wife and I took our car on

the Northland Prince. They loaded it on the front deck, over the front hatch. And we went up and stopped at Kitimat, stopped at Prince Rupert. They offloaded us at Masset. We drove around all over the place and went to the Indian artifacts, and so on. And the next trip in, they picked us up, took us over to Rupert, and then we drove home on the highway from Rupert. But that was interesting.

There's an 8 millimeter movie that my wife was sitting watching me fly fish on the banks. And she had the 8 millimeter camera running, and I cast, and my fly ticked a tree and came in and caught my hat. And I'm trying to get that, and she's got that, I said, Turn the camera off. (Laughing) And that 8 millimeter is still around somewhere. Anyway.

**AL:** In those early years when you were there too, Charlie, you got -- Some of the native crafts up there are really, really good. And you did buy a bunch of things over the years. Any special items that --?

**CB:** Well the main thing was up at old Masset, up at the north end of Graham Island, I came to know some of the carvers. And one was a fellow called Victor Adams, he was well known. He carved a decorative grease box for the Expo --

**AL:** 1986?

**CB:** -- 1986, I think it was.

**HL:** Oh yes.

**CB:** And when I was there, Victor was carving a canoe for the Washington, you know, the Museum of Natural History, in Washington, a huge log. And the thing that galled him was, he's a native, full-blood Haida, he had to buy the log from Macmillan Bloedel. But Victor had a -- he was a very talented carver, and he had a corner of his house with a whole bunch of jewelry and stuff. And I remember I bought a sterling silver killer whale for my wife, and I bought a tie thing. But Victor offered me a narrow band, gold, carved raven bracelet for fifty bucks. And I didn't have fifty bucks to spare in those days, so I didn't buy it. But he was a very interesting guy, and I learned a lot from him. But a lot of the stuff he had in the corner of his house he said weren't for sale because he had carved them for his wife.

But in 1970, they opened a Distant Early Warning unit in Masset, a huge circular, aerial thing and so on part of the DEW Line. And 1,100 people came in, military people and technicians and families. And that changed the ambiance of the Charlottes, for a number of reasons. Of course one was there was increased pressure on the rivers to a point, although they weren't all that interested.

The other thing was, unfortunately, drugs came in. It was the hippie era, and there were a lot of people who were avoiding the draft in the states. At one point, the rumor was they were on the North Beach, there were 1,500 young Americans living rough on North Beach. And the complaint was you couldn't find a deer or anything that moved through those years when they were up there. But that brought a big change.

And another change was immediately they bought almost all of the displayed jewelry, carvings, the argillites, paying huge prices, which the Haidas were, you know, very happy to accept. But the net result was, people in the beer parlor would be confronted by a young Haida with a piece of [argillite] and a few scratches on it, you know, just to see if somebody would give them money for it.



But all of those things gradually changed the ambiance of the Charlottes.

**AL:** You said Bakelite. You were saying argillite.

**CB:** I'm sorry, I didn't mean to.

**AL:** Yes, because that's a unique stone, only to Haida people, I think, okay. Isn't it?

**CB:** Well, it's an interesting story. It's mined or it's collected from the shales. It's a kind of shale material which carves easily. And it's a mountain up behind Queen Charlotte City. It's called Slatechuck. Now there's two main bands of Haidas. There's the Skidegate Band, which is near Queen Charlotte City, and there's the Old Massett Band. The Skidegate Band for years claimed that that belonged to them. So there was always a lot of animosity about sourcing that material for doing carving. And I don't know whether they ever came to an agreement, because the Old Massett gang used to -- they took backpacks. There was no roads or anything. And they would hike way up the Slatechuck Mountain, and they'd load the backpack with 40 or 50 pounds of slate, and then they'd hump it back down. But there was some pretty angry confrontations. Now, again, I don't know whether it's been all worked out, but it has been very quiet.

There was another carver of the Skidegate named Rufus Moody, and he had a very big international following, beautiful carver and so on. And there's quite a few of his carvings in the Museum of Anthropology here in B.C., but also in Washington and a number of other museums around the world.

**AL:** Actually, those argillite carvings that are in the Skidegate Museum up on Haida Gwaii are really impressive. They're really impressive.

**CB:** Yes. That's a beautiful museum. It's interesting --

**HL:** I got to go there, at some point, yes.

**CB:** -- as an aside, there's a guy here, way up in his 90s I think, who was an architect, who designed that museum.

**AL:** Oh yes, yes.

**CB:** Interesting.

**AL:** Did you do any coho or spring salmon fishing with a fly on the Yakoun?

**CB:** Well we, as an incidental catch, we would catch -- in one pool one time, I got five species of fish. And we would get cohos and jacks and rainbows and coho and steelhead, all out of the same run. So there was quite a lot of selection in those days. And there was also Dollys. But you know, I have to say, going back with Art in recent years, to stay at the Richardson's Ranch, and fish the Tlell with Art's techniques with waking flies and all the rest of it, is certainly a wonderful way to catch big cohos, you know. They'd boil up and pick that thing up off the top, and there's a huge splash. And if you don't have a lot of backing, you better start running because they'll take off. And it's really some of the most fun fly fishing I've had.

**AL:** Actually, it is kind of amazing because the Tlell's not a deep river, and at times you can see this bow wave coming after the fly. Of course, the fish follow it really to the bloody shore. You're waiting for it to grab, okay. But some of those Tlell cohos are as good as any steelhead that we ever caught, I think, for just surface fly, just incredible fish.

**CB:** I remember that one fish in particular. You always kind of remember one fish. I was drawing in and I saw him coming, and he was waking, and he actually had his mouth open. And about 10 feet out from me, he grabbed the fly, he turned around, he went up on his tail, and he tail walked. The river's not that wide there, and he tail walked right across to the other bank. I don't know how he did it, but he tail walked all the way over. And then he took off. You know, your reel is practically smoking. So that was a lot of fun, yes.

**HL:** You know, that prompts another question that I should've asked earlier. So here it is in 1965, and you start fishing for steelhead in what became Haida Gwaii, and, you know, you shifted at some point from using gear to fly fishing for steelhead. How did you do that? Who did you emulate? Did somebody show you how to do that?

**CB:** Yes, there was a doctor, a colleague of mine, named Joe Sladen, and Joe was a lifetime fly fisherman. And he's the one that got me into the first set of gear, the Fenwick that I had and so on, before I had Sages and stuff. And Joe took me out on the lawn, outside the hospital, to show me how to cast. Now Joe was very controversial because we called him Lead Line Joe, because Joe in the Dean River still holds quite a few records for big fish. But he bottom bounced. And when he did, he used to tie his *Skykomish Sunrise* with five grains of lead thread wrapped in the body of the fly, then he would have four knots on a taper leader with four knots. And he'd put a little coil of lead around each knot. And then if you cast that thing, it was like throwing a bull whip. You know, you had to watch your ear. But anyway, it would go down. And he said, unless you could feel it going tick-tick-tick-tick-tick-tick, you weren't fishing. Well, you know, it depends on what you define fly fishing, because a friend of mine, they practically came to blows. He said, well, I just use pencil lead. What's the difference between you and me? I gear fish with a pencil lead and you lead fish with a fly line. And there was no meeting of minds over that. So Joe got me interested in casting with this gear, because I didn't have any proper gear before then.

Joe used to come up with us. He was a surgeon at St. Paul's. He was an interesting guy. He used to tie these flies, and he was the source of my *Skykomish Sunrises*. He used to tie them on a fairly big hook. And he had a few modifications.

**HL:** So were you on staff at the hospital at that point?

**CB:** Yes, I was on staff, yes.

**HL:** Okay, yes. Alright, thank you very much.

**CB:** And the other thing maybe I should just comment on . . .

**AL:** Yes, we've got lots of time.



*Charlie and Jackie  
Dhoon Lodge, Newfoundland*

**CB:** . . . . is the access in the early years. Because it was extremely active logging on the Yakoun. You had access two ways. You could go up island, across through near Juskatla, which was the logging headquarters. And from there, there was all the logging truck traffic, these huge trucks with 22-foot bunkers. And the roads were narrow, and they would come down the road, and they would fill the whole road, and they'd be slapping the brush on the sides as they came. You did not want to meet one of those. So you had an option. You could go in before the logging traffic, which meant getting up about 4 o'clock in the morning and, you know, having your breakfast, getting rigged up. When I was taking guys in with me, there was always one or two that didn't want to get up. And sometimes we just left them. But you had to be very careful, and you had to wait until the logging traffic was finished, which was just after dark. So we would finish fishing, and then we'd sit in the truck and drink coffee and wait until the last -- you could always tell because the busses that carried the loggers were called crummies. One of the best fishing branches was an inactive branch called Branch 40, and it was up the road from Juskatla about 15 miles. So we would park at the junction of Branch 40 where there was no logging and wait for the crummy to go by, which meant that was the last of the traffic, and then we would go home. We'd get home about -- it was an hour and 35 minutes to drive down to Juskatla and then around and down to Tlell. So it was a long day, and you were getting up at 4 o'clock in the morning. You were going to bed after 10 or 11pm, so you were pretty shy on sleep in those days.

Now the other access was a back road from Queen Charlotte City, and that was a very lightly used road, very rough road, and that took you in to the Upper Yakoun. In some years, we used that. And it was, again, it wasn't the heavy logging traffic on there. But when I started to fish out of Tlell, it was closer and more convenient to go Juskatla than to go down to the Queen Charlotte City and go that way. But before I joined the club at Tlell, we used to stay in a hotel in Queen Charlotte City, so we'd take that back road. A lot of bears, a lot of game, mule deer, you know, all of that. So that was the access thing. Now, in the early years too, you were behooved to go to the logging office in Juskatla and ask permission to follow a truck in. So then you'd wait just at the junction of the road from Juskatla and the road from Port Clements, which you'd come in from. And then when a big truck went by, which was an empty going in, well then you would stick right behind them. And when he pulled over, you pulled over, because you knew there was a loader coming, yes.

So it was a bit of a challenge, and I was young and fit in those days, and you had to be because sometimes we'd walk the river, and there were no paved paths on those rivers. We waded a lot and so on, yes.

**AL:** Yes. Actually in those days, there were no Water Masters, for sure, okay. But even inflatable rafts were not used to --

**CB:** You know, but later on, the guides -- when guides appeared up there, taking parties down onto the Yakoun, then they started using, they started floating the river. There's stretches where you can put in and take out. But then about ten or fifteen years ago, we found out that they wanted to use jet boats on the river, and so we all wrote letters like mad, and all the rest of it, because, you know, the fish had to have some haven. You get the jet boats going, and it's only about, I would think probably only about, I don't know, three or four miles of river that could take a jet boat there, otherwise there's logs across the river. So I don't know what the status there is now, but there's a lot of people on the river, I understand. You know, we would see no one, maybe a couple of locals. And sometimes some of the Haida kids would be down there jigging. They'd have a big Buzz Bomb with a big tribal hook, and they'd throw it out and, you know, the usual jigging thing. We'd see them occasionally down near Juskatla. But we would go for the whole week, and we would see maybe three or four locals, no outside fishermen at all.

**AL:** Just maybe too, Charlie, a comment on the size of these rivers. Haida Gwaii doesn't have long rivers, okay.

**CB:** No.

**AL:** Yes. The Yakoun is up and down, so you might have to do a little –

**CB:** Well the Yakoun, Yakoun Lake is its source, and it's up the main line road from Juskatla. I would think probably about 25 miles. You know, in all the years I went there, I never went into Yakoun Lake. Apparently really good cutthroat fishing in there and so on. Did you go into it?

**AL:** No, no, no.

**CB:** Never did. But then there was a huge flood went through in 1979 and undermined the banks and so on. And there was a bridge about 15-18 miles, across the Yakoun, and it took that bridge out. Now above that bridge, the river began to branch into smaller and smaller branches, and it was quite a bush-whack to get in, to get access. But these small branches, the steelhead would be layered in them and very exposed and accessible. So with pressure from the Steelhead Society and so on, we got that closed above the old bridge site so that those fish were left alone. And it's still closed, that's the upper fishing closure there, because that's where the spawning was going on.

**AL:** On the protection of the riverbank environment too, the Steelhead Society worked on that thing for years to try and get that riparian right. Well not riparian right, but riparian strip along the -- Eventually, we got it, but it was a chore, a real chore getting logging companies to give up that timber.

**HL:** That was back when Craig Orr was the executive director, as I –

**CB:** Well before that, actually, we started. You see the Steelhead Society was founded in 1970, and the first president of the Steelhead Society was a fellow called Dave Maw, M-A-W. And even in those days, we were trying to get some regulations, enforcement and so on, up in that area. But there were two people up there. The main one was a fellow called Noel Wotton, and he's still there. He was very active in the, they had a branch of the Steelhead Society, and they were very active in trying to get enforcement, closures, and so on. And another, I don't know whether Mark Walsh was involved in that?

**AL:** Yes, Mark was involved in the Steelhead Society back in those days too, yes, yes.

**CB:** But you know, they were –

**AL:** Bob Crooks too, okay.

**CB:** In those days, there was a doctor, George Deagle, that I knew who was practicing up in Masset, a young guy, and he was active in it too, yes. I took him down to the Yakoun, and he caught his first steelhead on the fly, I remember. He's retired now. He lives over –

**AL:** Okay, let's get back to this thing here, Charlie. What rivers did you fly fish for salmon? I know the Tlell, but there's other places, Deena there, you've told me stories about that.

**CB:** Yes, well, Deena creek, up at Queen Charlottes. The cohos would come in on the tide into the lower pools. And you sort of had to sidearm cast because there was a lot overhanging branches. But I found

that, you know, those cohos would come in on the tide, and then they'd stop on the first pool. And I used a General Money No. 1 with a jungle cock, and that really worked well in there. And if you hit the tides right, you would, you know, you'd maybe hook fifteen or twenty big cohos as they came in.

The thing about that country up in there was it was loaded with bears, a lot of the rivers, you know. Queen Charlottes has a reputation of having the biggest black bears in the world. They have, and I don't know about this, I've been told that they have black bears up to 800 pounds. I don't know. The ones I saw didn't weigh 800 pounds. They just looked like an ordinary black bear. But we often saw them. And we had one very favorite run on the Branch 40 of the Yakoun, we called the Stump Hole because there were several big stumps right in the middle of the river. And it was an excellent fly fishing place. But we'd go down there, and if you hooked a fish and you had the clicker on your reel, there'd be a whine or so on, and then you'd look around and a big ol' bear would come out of the brush and go walking down the beach waiting to be fed. It always gave me the willies. As there is more than one guy, like if you were two or three of you lined along, then he wouldn't come right down. He'd sit down on his haunches and watch. But we saw lots of bears. You know, when you're coming in the dark in the morning, you would see bears all the time.

And there were a lot of deer. I remember one time coming in across the little ferry between the islands from the airport and driving up and being dusk up to the ranch, was about 18 or 20 kilometers, miles, I forget, counting the deer who were standing in groups. And we lost count at over a hundred deer, little guys, little wee guys. You know, they weighed sixty, seventy, eighty pounds, but really nice venison, yes, yes.

**AL:** Yes, that's very true. A bear story I've got: When Bob Taylor and Ron Schiefke and we were on Pallant Creek, and we walked up to do a fisher run, a nice coho pool, and we were there for maybe an hour. Bob had just got there, and then one bear appears, and then another bear came walking up our side of the river. And they got so close to us, clicking, clicking his teeth, okay. Anyway, and then there was another bear, so wow, the ones that are coming. Ron, Bob, and I, we all went into the middle of the river to let these bears go past. And then we got out of there just after that. I could never talk those guys into going back into that spot, okay, even though it's filled with fish (laughing).

**CB:** You know the Richardsons, there's five generations of Richardsons on the ranch. But Doug Richardson, who was a contemporary of mine, we were very good friends, and they always had a big bull mastiff dog. And I said, you know, How come you keep a bull mastiff? He said, It's the only dog that you can handle a bear without getting killed. And I always remembered that, wow, Kuna (phonetic). Kuna was a big, mean-looking dog. I remember I was going in the farmhouse through the screen door one day, and Kuna wanted to get in. And I didn't know whether they wanted him in, so I sort of put my leg over. And I remember Doug Richardson saying, I wouldn't do that if I were you (laughing). Yes, you know, the ranch has evolved, five generations. It's got a veterinary hospital and dog kenneling there. And there are two veterinarians, father and son. Don Richardson is the father, and Dane Richardson was a devoted fly fisherman. And we see them every time we go up. We have the privilege of staying on the ranch, which is very nice. And the matriarch, Alice, Doug's wife, is still alive, and she's about the same age as me. So we go in and have visits and chat about the old days and all that stuff.

**AL:** Charlie, I think we talked about the insights regarding steelhead management issues on the Haida Gwaii, so I don't think we need to do that anymore.

But anyway, the last thing down here. You're 88 now and have fished for many decades and experienced some fine fly fishing opportunities and especially up there in Haida Gwaii. Any closing comments on your experiences and thoughts on what the future holds? You know, things are not good right now up here, so.

**CB:** Well, it's been a great privilege to be able to access this fishery. Now you know, in those early years and everything, there was lots of fishing around here. I mean, the guys were going over to North Shore and going fishing, and the Squamish opened up and the Vedder and so on. But it was the uniqueness of the experience, to go to a remote area, uncrowded. It was, you know, in those years, and when other people began to access and everything, it was kind of the wild west of steelhead fishing, because there were so many fish and so on. I wouldn't have changed it at all. And my biggest regret is not able really to go anymore. I went last year with Art to the ranch and fished coho. And I don't know, I'll see whether I go this year or not. But, you know the old cliché, if I'd known I was going to live so long, I would've taken better care of myself (laughing).

But is there anything else that you can think of that we haven't covered?



*Charlie's catch! Coho caught on the Tlell River in Haida Gwaii, 2016.*

**HL:** When did you meet Art?

**CB:** Well that was when I got to know him well, in the Totems.

**HL:** I see.

**CB:** It was a very rewarding experience with Art because he taught me a lot of stuff. You know, I can't set myself up as an expert fly fisherman. I'm just a run of the mill one. I used to tie the world's worst flies.

**HL:** Oh, I'll give you a run for your money on that. (Laughing)

**CB:** Art often gives me appropriate flies.

**HL:** Like the *General Money*?

**HL:** Actually, there are a couple. You are a member the Totem Fly Fishing Club?

**CB:** Oh yes.

**HL:** And when did you join?

**CB:** Well I was a latecomer. I joined, I think, in the early 2000s, I think it was, Art? Something like that.

**CB:** *General Money*. And then for the lakes, it's a little –

**AL:** *Little Bugger*.

**CB:** Art's *Little Bugger*, that just kills them, you know, on the lakes and so on.

And he got me actually more into dry fly fishing, well partly because I started going to the Dean. I went to the Dean with the Totems for the first time in 1992 as a guest, because I was going to the Dean every year to Rob Stewart's Lodge. And when I joined the Totems, they have their camp ever year, and so I then started going with the Totems. I think, I don't know how many times I went, counting the lodge trips, but I think it's probably fifteen or twenty times, you know, over the years. Some years were really great, and some years were duds. You know, it's just the way the fishing is. The best year that I had, I think I beached thirty fish, and that was all on one fly, which was a *Black Tom Thumb* that Kelly Davison tied out at the Sea-Run. And they were just crazy for that fly. And the worst years, I think I would hook one or something, you know. But it was always a great experience, yes, the Dean.

You know, I regret I never really fished the Babine much. I think I made one trip with Art, but that was for trout. It wasn't for steelhead particularly.

**AL:** Well, you fished the Bulkley though, Charlie.

**CB:** I fished the Bulkley quite a bit, yes. That was a success. I fished the Kispiox a couple times. But you know, I never fished the Skeena. I fished the Copper, the Zy-, or whatever you call it.

**AL:** Yes, Zymoetz.

**CB:** Zymoetz? I fished that. But Art has had great success in fishing a lot of as I understand the main body of the Skeena. But I never fished there. I went up to northern B.C. and fished in Kineskan and the lakes up there, but that was just for trout. I didn't do any steelheading up there at all. What are some of the other lake -- some of the other rivers? The Sooke, was where I told you I got my first fish.

**AL:** Well, the Thompson. You've fished the Thompson quite a bit over the years, Charlie.

**CB:** Thompson, yes, yes. Got some good fish on the Thompson.

**HL:** The Thompson's just a shadow of -- (Inaudible, multiple speakers)

**AL:** Makes you cry when you think about -- (Inaudible, multiple speakers)

**CB:** And then, the Gold River on Vancouver Island was really good fishing in the earlier years. I don't know how it is now.

**AL:** It's not good at all, Charlie, okay. It's collapsed.

**CB:** The Gold and the one that runs into it.

**AL:** Muchalat, or the Heber?

**CB:** Heber, yes. Heber was popular. But the deep canyon pools and they were fishing with lead and gear and so on up there in the early years.

And the Salmon on northern Vancouver Island. We had some quite good fishing up there in those days. And the White that runs into the Salmon up there.

But you know, the bottom line, I think, is that all of this global warming. And we never did really know what happens at sea with these fish. We knew that they go out after having spawned as kelts. And a lot of them were intercepted with nets up in Johnson Strait as an incidental thing. And the fishermen would pull them in, they'd be dead in the net. They called them snakes because they were long, and just toss them overboard. So that kind of pressure too was diminishing the runs up and down the coast.

**AL:** One thing, Charlie, before we do quit, you had an association with Rod Haig-Brown, at times, okay.

**CB:** Yes.

**AL:** Have you got any comments of, you know, being with him, fishing with him?

**CB:** Well, the only contact with Rod was at the outings of the Harry Hawthorn<sup>1</sup> group that went to Pennask Lake. And then sometime in the 1970s, early 1970s, what they did was two to a boat and you switched around at lunchtime. So I was with Rod for a half a day fishing. And you know, he was a great conversationalist, taught me a few pointers that I didn't know about casting and retrieving and so on. But other than that sort of contact, you know, I didn't know him, personally, other than those incidents.

**HL:** Did he talk to you about historical rivers to try to determine abundance and –

**CB:** Well it's interesting, and the clinic at UBC, his daughter in the later years, I looked after in the clinic. Was it --?

**AL:** Valerie?

**CB:** Val.

**AL:** Valerie, yes.

**CB:** And I used to ask her what her dad was doing when he was up at home up in Campbell River. She said, He's taken up snorkeling. And he was writing, but he was also snorkeling and counting fish and looking at fish. And I don't know whether he actually used tanks or not, but she said it was snorkeling.

**HL:** I think not. I think it was actually really snorkeling rather than scuba. Yes, I mean, he inspired Bill McMillan to approach fisheries management from an eyewitness perspective rather than simply making academic predictions based on insufficient data. He figured that, like Rod Haig-Brown, he wanted to actually see what was there rather than rely on somebody else's anecdotes.

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<sup>1</sup> Harry Hawthorn Foundation (University of British Columbia library)



**CB:** Well, he was a special guy, that's for sure. But again, regretfully, I mean in those days, I could've taken more advantage of my access to him, but it was more chat about the weather and all this sort of stuff, you know.

**HL:** He was writing, but I think he understood that there were issues and problems, but his role in it was a little different at that point. I guess it was before he had really made a personal mission out of trying to help save something that was rapidly dwindling right in front of his eyes.

**CB:** Yes. Well, he did his best, you know, all his writings. And he addressed our meetings, Steelhead Society meetings, a couple of times. And you know, we had coffee, in a group with coffee and everything, chatting in a group, but very little one on one, except at Pennask Lake.

**HL:** What made you join the Steelhead Society? I mean I think I know, but I mean, how did that come about?

**CB:** Well, I was sort of a founding member. We had our first meeting in 1970 in Port Coquitlam. And I just had been in steelheading enough to know that it really was going to need protection of some kind, and the best protection and pressure comes from an organized group.

**HL:** Absolutely.

**CB:** So then I went out -- It was interesting, there were two sports writers for fishing, writers for the newspaper. One was for the *Vancouver Province*, named Mike Cramond, and he wrote a lot of books and things. And the other worked for the *Vancouver Sun*, was Lee Straight. And they were at opposite ends of the world in terms of everything, including personal relationships. So I still remember the initial meeting for the Steelhead Society. The room was chairs on two sides with an aisle down the middle. And on that side was Mike Cramond and his followers. On this side was Lee Straight with his followers. And they're all sitting there with their arms folded, sort of looking over at each other.

Now that was the start and I was on the board for two or three years. But you know, Dave Maw was the first president. And Dave Maw was a bachelor, and he had no concept of time. And the meetings which we would have, which were all over the place, mainly at Dominion Bridge, where he worked, but also sometimes at Horseshoe Bay, where Jim Culp lived, and occasionally over on the island. But you know, I would get home from some of these meetings at 2 o'clock in the morning, and my wife thought I was having an affair, how could you be at a meeting till 2 o'clock in the morning? It was just too much, I had too much on my plate, so I came off the board. But I supported it ever since. I contribute every year, and I get their newsletter, and occasionally go to their fundraisers and so on. But then again, you know, you get to the point where your energy level slips a bit. You'll find out. You're just a kid.

**HL:** That's right, only 72.

**CB:** He is too. Although I think he's catching up with me.

**AL:** Yes, right.

**HL:** It happens.

**CB:** Well I can't think of anything else.

**AL:** Well I have one last thing, Charlie. We talked about Rod Haig-Brown. Rod was one of the founding members of the Harry Hawthorn Foundation, associated with The University of British Columbia. And you've been involved in that organization for –

**CB:** Oh, for years.

**AL:** -- for years and years and years. So just a few comments about it and their purpose, okay.

**CB:** Well initially, Stan Read was a retired professor of the English department, wrote a book, wrote papers and so on, on Harry Hawthorn. And he was the secretary/treasurer for years.

**HL:** Sorry, secretary/treasurer of –

**CB:** Of the Harry –

**HL:** Harry Hawthorn?

**CB:** Yes.

**HL:** Who was Harry Hawthorn?

**CB:** Harry Hawthorn was a UBC professor of anthropology, and that all goes back to the early years on the Buttle over on Vancouver Island. After exams –

**AL:** Buttle Lake.

**CB:** Buttle Lake. After exams every year, a group of them, the professors, would get together for a trip over to fish at Buttle Lake.

**AL:** With Haig-Brown.

**CB:** With Haig-Brown and the president of the university, Larry McKenzie, and Stan Read, and Harry Hawthorn. Anyway, they had a good natured banter and everything, and they had little bets on the biggest fish and the most fish. And it involved into having fines if it was [any objective behavior], you know, getting your fly thing around the propeller of the little boat or catching your partner in the neck with a fly. And they assigned fines, which were paid at the final meeting. So the first time they did it, they had \$35.16 that they raised in fines. So then the question came up as to what to do with that money. So they decided that they would form a foundation for the promulgation and inculcation of the ethics and practice of fly fishing. And they named it after Harry Hawthorn because he was the first one that got fined for allegedly catching over his limit, although he disputed that. But it was always known as the Harry Hawthorn Foundation. So Larry McKenzie, the president, came back to the university to the board of governors and passed a, whatever they needed to do to actually to produce this foundation as a part of the university, what is it? Not rules but...organization anyway. And then they began to collect books.

**AL:** The money was to go to buy books, fly fishing books.

**HL:** I see, okay.

**CB:** Fly fishing books, yes.

**HL:** What a great purpose, okay.

**CB:** And so, it's been going on for years. Art's donated some wonderful books to them. And I think they've probably selected something like, what, 2,300, probably?

**AL:** No, they've got to be up around 3,000 by now, Charlie.

**CB:** About 3,000 volumes.

**AL:** Yes.

**CB:** And they meet twice a year. They meet in March or April for a luncheon, and then they have an outing at the end of July or early August at Pennask Lake.

**HL:** So that's comparable to the WWU Libraries Special Collection in Fly Fishing, the advisory board for which Art and I sit, and they have about 3,000 titles.

**CB:** Well it's a, you know, from a little tongue-in-cheek beginnings, it's really gone well. And two of our elderly members are now gone, Tom Brown and Ted Wilkinson, both left endowment money for the Harry Hawthorn. I forget, I think both of them left \$20,000, separate endowments, which are still functioning. And then we pay dues every year. And we go to Pennask, you get prosecuted for trumped up charges of misdemeanors and things.

**AL:** Just to carry on the tradition of the first meeting where they fined.

**HL:** That's great.

**CB:** The first, yes. I used to, chironomid fished with a strike indicator. They fined me for unsportsmanlike fly fishing. And you know, there's the usual run of the mill, not pulling the anchor in, and pulling away with dragging the anchor, and –

**AL:** Bumping into rocks (laughing).

**CB:** Yes. You squeal on your partner's and everything. And they raise a day, you know, you get fined a modest twenty bucks or twenty-five bucks or something like that. And they raise a nice little bunch of money each year. So hopefully it will continue, because Ted and Tom Brown, they all just loved this organization, you know. I remember when Ted was at his end and talking, when he was in the hospital, terminally ill. And I remember the last conversation I had with him, he said, You WILL look after the Hawthorn Foundation, won't you? So, that was quite a trip, a trip to put on me, but I didn't mind, you know, yes.

But Tom Brown was interesting -- he was a war hero, had half his face blown off in France during the war. But he was an investment guy with a company he called Odlum Brown, very successful. And Ted Wilkinson was a QC, a Queen's Counsel lawyer, yes.

And Stan Read, the professor of English here really was a prime mover in the Hawthorn for years and years and years as the secretary/treasurer. So he wrote a, actually, he wrote a very definitive book on

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*Fly Fishing Collection*

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Pennask Lake, called *A Place Called Pinnask*. And Art, you wrote a history of that fishery, didn't you, as a forward for –

**AL:** Yes, for the, the last time he published, the bibliography of it, yes, yes, 10,000 words, yes, so. Well that's good. Anyway, I think we should be thinking about going to, head out for lunch. It's going to take us awhile to get there.

**CB:** I don't know whether you want to take this. It's my notes, front and back.

**HL:** Sure. Yes, it may help with spelling.

**CB:** Well great. I enjoyed it.

**AL:** Yes, that was fun Charlie.

**HL:** We are quitting and it's about quarter-to-one.

**The end.**