



The Oystercatcher

MARCH 1992

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Murray Shoolbraid

THE SALT SPRING TRAIL AND NATURE CLUB - GANGES B.C. VOS-1EO

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Welcome to new members in our club. We hope you enjoy your time with us and encourage you to share your experiences and ideas to further our club aims. The executive meetings are usually on the 2nd Thursday of every month, and others (for talks, slide shows, etc.) in the evening on the 4th Thursday.

Turnout for the AGM was an impressive 75 members who generated some good ideas. These suggestions are being incorporated into the programme--it should be an interesting year.

Your executive set some priorities for this year, which we share with you:

- construct the Jack Foster Memorial Trail
- finish training programme for potential trail leaders
- encourage the planning of an island-wide public trail network to be included in the Community Plan
- form ourselves into a charitable organization
- plan for the FBCN '94 fall meeting on Salt Spring
- help form Friends of Ruckle Park/Maxwell Park Society
- support the Crown Lands Use Coalition.

Thanks to all who make the meetings run smoothly. The refreshments are delicious and appear like magic, and the chairs are popped up and down very efficiently. Remember to car pool if possible.

Fiona Flook

A reminder of the Federation of B.C. Naturalists goals:

Promote the understanding and enjoyment of nature by education through field trips, camps, lectures, and publications.

Encourage the establishment of protected areas within the province, with special attention to preservation of endangered and threatened habitats.

Defend the integrity of our existing wildlife sanctuaries.

Promote and engage in funding and research needed to protect the integrity of natural ecosystems.

Encourage and engage in the protection and restoration of threatened and endangered species with special attention to the preservation of essential habitats.

Secretary's Report

Highlights of the January Executive meeting:

- letter sent to CRD Parks Committee expressing concern over the proposed development of trails in Mt. Norman Park, Pender Island.
- 14 replies had been received from experienced leaders willing to share their knowledge with newer members of the Club. Elda will be arranging training sessions.
- Club dues must increase by a minimum of \$2 effective 1 January 1992, and again effective 1 January 1993 in order to reflect the increases in dues levied on the Club by the FBCN.
- Bev Frankcombe had agreed to become the new Special Events Coordinator.
- the Trails Development Committee chaired by Jim Barber to be re-activated and the possibility of adopting an Adopt-a-Trail system on the island to be explored.
- Don Flook agreed to continue as the Club's representative on the Crown Land Use Coalition.

Ken Strike, Secretary

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SPECIAL EVENTS HIGHLIGHTS

APRIL:

RESERVE A SPOT NOW if you want to go to the special event in Victoria on Sunday, April 5th! Leaving Fulford Harbour on the 9:30 A.M. ferry; returning to Salt Spring on the 4:30 P.M. ferry.

Trip will include a tour of historic Ross Bay Cemetery, with an experienced guide; a walk around the waterfront to Beacon Hill Park; lunch in the park; and a conducted tour of the 8th International Orchid Show at Princess Mary Restaurant, 344 Harbour St., Victoria. There will be hundreds of orchids to admire, to photograph, and to buy.

Cost: \$2.00 per person, Donation for Ross Bay Cemetery;

\$3.00 per person, senior and handicapped half price for orchid show.

Please call Bev Frankcombe (537-4942) by March 17th if you plan to go.

MAY: Trip to Sidney Spit--date to be announced.

JUNE: Trip to Butterfly Park--date to be announced.

SPRING TRIP (JUNE):

Lester Pearson College--walk the East Sooke Park. Date to be announced.

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NEW NEW NEW !!!

We are starting a Letters to the Editor section, and are requesting people to come forth with letters or questions on natural history, club policy, and so forth. For instance, an education committee is being established, to inform members about various aspects of nature study, and readers can let us know their opinions as to where it should be expending its energies. Members can put questions, and the editor will try to have them answered, as e.g. "What if" queries, "Why" (and "Why not") puzzles; while reminiscences about the Club, or any experiences of readers, will be very welcome.

Our first happens to be from our secretary, Ken Strike:

Dear Editor,

During our recent walk in Ruckle Park I was engaged in a conversation on the propriety of the Club becoming involved in matters that can be considered political. I overheard several others on the same topic.

My response at the time was that the Club has a responsibility to speak up on occasions on matters of direct interest to its members, as members of the Club, but not to become the vehicle for the views of individuals which do not fit this definition.

Our Objectives state that we are to "stimulate interest in outdoor activities, natural history, and the study of flora and fauna in their natural habitats...." To me this does not mean simply arranging outings to locations that other people preserve for us; instead, I believe it means on occasion focussing attention on situations where we feel such preservation is threatened, or at least draw attention to actions that are detrimental to the natural habitat.

That portion of the Objectives I quoted concludes with the proviso, "... subject to rules, regulations and Code of Ethics." I support this statement as strongly as I present my viewpoint above, and I believe that it is this proviso that safeguards the executive or the Club from crossing the line and becoming a voice looking for a cause, rather than at times a responsible body voicing a concern where it feels it has just cause.

As opinions are divided on this, perhaps my letter will generate some response and further expressions of opinion.

BIRD NEWS:

Spring was announced by the cheery song of the Winter Wren chattering from the forest floor. Hutton's Vireos have been singing from the treetops since mid-February. Spring must be here. Violet Green Swallows should be seen fluttering over the open fields any day now. Later in the month, the first Turkey Vultures should be seen circulating over the mountain tops. Western Bluebirds should be checking out the bird boxes.

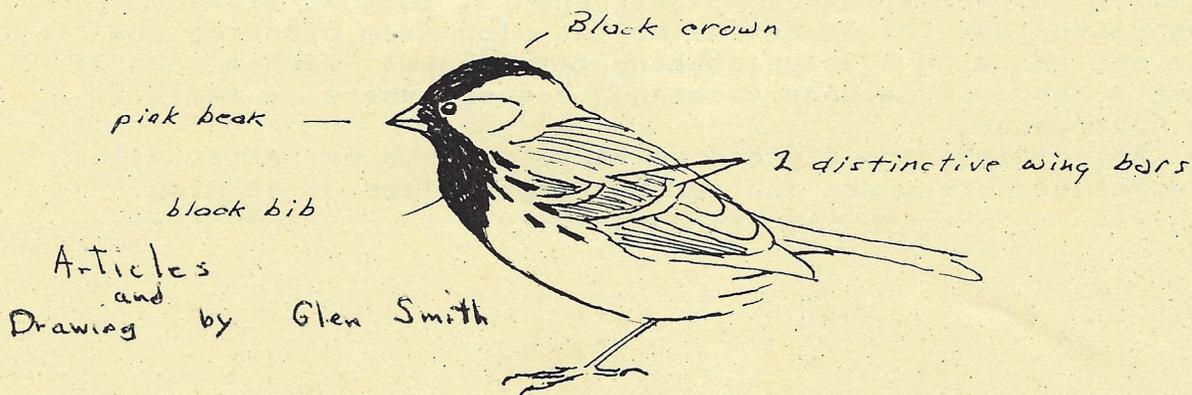
Have you cleaned out your bird boxes yet? The birds would appreciate it. Are your hummingbird feeders ready? The hummers will be here soon.

Be on the lookout for some unusual bird species this Spring. I would like to hear from you if you see Yellow Warbler, Northern Oriole, Meadowlark, and any species that is not on The Checklist of Birds of Salt Spring Island.

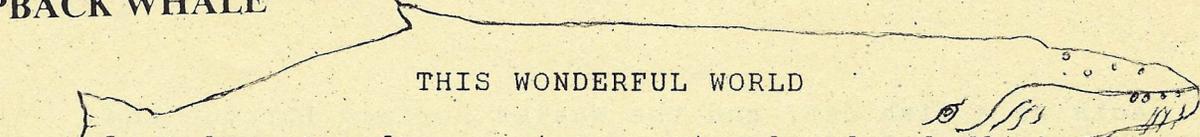
Glen Moores (537-5557).

Trail and Nature Club member Lynda Mc Kieve discovered a wintering Harris's sparrow on the Christmas bird count - a first recording of this species on Salt Spring Island. The presence of this bird has been reported, and documented with several photographs that clearly show its black cap and bib, prominent wing bars, pinkish coloured beak and heavy build. This is an arctic breeding species that normally ranges southward in the winter east of the Rocky Mountains. It has been previously sighted on rare occasions in Victoria and the Lower Mainland area.

The sketch below shows the main features of this sparrow.



THIS WONDERFUL WORLD



Last August, after an interesting low-level flight from Prince Rupert to Petersburg, Alaska, a town that is very proud of the Norwegian ancestry of its early settlers, we joined the *Island Roamer*, our home for the next ten days. Having settled on board, we gathered on deck to meet the crew and fellow guests. Pat, our hostess and gourmet cook, outlined the rules that governed life below deck, including pumping the salt water toilet at least fifteen times. Rod, our captain, ran through safety procedures, and told us we were welcome to help with the sails or steering, or just relax and enjoy ourselves. Next we met our naturalists, John and his wife Bev, who are both whale researchers and work out of the Vancouver aquarium. John said we would see a variety of marine mammals, but the focus of the trip would be whales, both Killer and Humpback, and we should look out for the telltale spouts which from a distance resemble small clouds of mist.

That evening, when we were anchored for the night in the shelter of Foot Island, John gave us a talk, illustrated with slides and recordings of the songs of Humpback whales, describing the research that was going on in Alaskan and Hawaiian waters. These massive creatures, from 40 to 50 feet long, are identified by the white markings on the underside of their tails. Like fingerprints, no two are the same, so the research files are filled with tail photos and dates of sightings. The whales spend the winters in Hawaii, where they calve and mate, and the summers in the rich feeding grounds of Alaska. An interesting fact is that the males have a song which can last ten to fifteen minutes, and this song is improved upon continually through the variations that are added by the different singers of the population.

Next day the whale watchers, binoculars and cameras in hand, found choice lookout spots and were eager to be the first to call "Thar she blows!" As it happened, there were so many sightings that it was hard to know where to look or to photograph. John and Bev were concentrating on tails, while the rest of us aimed for anything that looked like a whale. A video camera would have been ideal. One whale seemed to be thrashing a smaller one with its long flukes endlessly, whacking away for at least half an hour. John said that it was a mother trying to discourage her last year's calf from bothering her, a weaning process that was essential if she was to absorb enough food to see her through the winter.

Through a hydrophone we were able to listen to the voices of the whales as they talked. These sounds ceased shortly before a large ring of bubbles was seen on the surface. Suddenly this area erupted with whales, jaws open and water streaming through their baleen plates as they sifted out the krill which had been concentrated by the bubble ring. In this feeding technique the whales blow a circle of bubbles from their blowhole below the prey; this

Jean Holmes and Mary Silvander spent many hours identifying trails on maps and then locating the owners of the properties involved. This was followed by correspondence seeking necessary permission for the Club to hike over the chosen area.

The Club was destined to succeed from the first. Hard-working executives planned the many necessary actions carefully, and still do. Numerous volunteers arranged and led walks, improved trails, wrote briefs, drew up a constitution, registered the Club under the Societies Act with the Provincial Government, made complicated but necessary arrangements for trips, and helped in numerous other ways. Even good hiking land was deeded to the public by a member. To name a few persons would be unfair to the many who could not be mentioned.

Off-Island trips included various points of interest in Greater Victoria, Forbidden Plateau, Hurricane Ridge, Manning Park, East Sooke Park, Cowichan Valley, Seattle, and several islands: Orcas, Mayne, Russel, Pender, Gabriola, Galiano, Hornby, Thetis, Quadra, Wallace, and Prevost, besides a trip as far distant as Costa Rica.

Experts, too numerous to list completely, led expeditions or gave slide shows devoted to their favourite subject. Some names which come to mind are: Tom Wright--Geology; Sabina Leader-Mense and Betty McKinnon--Marine Biology; Beth Hill--Archaeology; Mick Jones, Allan Best, Allen Brooks, Marg Pearce, Gertrude Smith--Ornithology; Wayne Campbell, from the Provincial Museum--Ornithology; Tom Bergerud and Heather Butler--Caribou; Dr. Bristol Foster--Ecological Reserves and Ornithology; I.C. Shank and the late Dr. Ralph Bird--Botany.

Enthusiasm of members was always high, and I don't remember that it was ever necessary to have membership drives. Annual meetings were always well-attended, and turned into happy social and dining occasions. Many close friendships have been formed over the years. All Club members love nature and the outdoors--this is the common bond.

Our Association has been a loyal supporter of the Federation of British Columbia Naturalists, pays dues and sends delegates to its meetings. It recently hosted a regional conference on Salt Spring.

Annual Christmas bird counts have been another activity with help from the Provincial Museum, who now value our results. I believe around 100 species have been identified locally.

Past Presidents were, in order: Ruby Alton, Mary Silvander, Jean Holmes, Tom Fraser, the late Jack Ready, Bob Robertson, Peggy Jacobs, Eleanor Lloyd, Jean King, and Dennis Seward.

Our membership was 36 in 1973, and now it has reached 180.

[Membership now is at 220.]

Early Days in the Hiking Club (as remembered by Joan Millner)

Sometime early in 1971 Mary Sylvander, Lassie Dodds, and Joan got together to start hiking. They were soon joined by Doris Anderson, Beth Stafford, Val Keys and various others. The first unofficial meeting was at Joan's house on Old Scott Road. From then on the Club flourished, with more people coming out each week. On September 12, 1972 the first official meeting was held in Joan's house, and Mary Sylvander was elected President. Joan continued hiking for 8 years, in spite of breaking both wrists on separate occasions. Her hiking career was brought to an end by a coronary. Sadly, she had to settle to gardening and sailing. She continues to take an interest in the affairs of the Hiking Club, and only wishes she was able to take an active part again. - Val Keys.

Fred Powell is now our Club Slide Show Coordinator. Anyone wishing to show slides at a Club meeting should get in touch with him ((537-4739). First show is April 23rd.

Thanks to Brenda Cornwall for making a videotape of Robert Bateman's visit to our potluck dinner (see elsewhere), and also of the January A.G.M. The video is available in the cobbler's box for anyone to borrow. As the Aussies would say, "Good on ya, Brenda!"

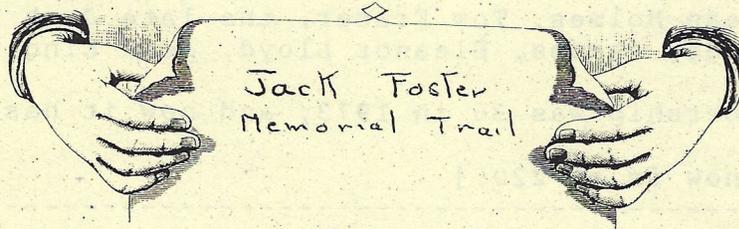
We will be offering suggested reading on various topics, and this time we bring to your attention the following: three books on forest policy:

Stumped, by Ken Druska

Never Under the Table, by Joe Garner

Three Men and a Forester, by Ian Mahood.

Trail-building: Southey Point Jack Foster Memorial Trail is pending, while we await a reply from the Ministry of Highways giving us the final go-ahead. The mills of bureaucracy grind quite slowly (most of the time), so patience is asked for. The permit is hopefully expected on Monday, March 16, when representatives from the T N C, Dept. of Highways and property owner will meet to discuss the placing of the trail.



LABRADOR ADVENTURE

On Thursday 26th March, Annemarie Linders and Lo Camps want to share their experiences and adventures in northern Labrador. They tell us:

In the spring of 1988 we came to Canada for the first time as students from a Dutch university to conduct research. Our supervisor, Dr. Tom Bergerud from the University of Victoria (and a Salt Spring resident) gave us the opportunity to do so.

Once in Labrador, we flew for many hours over vast taiga forests and the desolate subarctic tundra, both in a small floatplane and a helicopter. When we were 800 kilometres from our radio-base station, the Wildlife Biologist said: "Come on, quick, quick! Time is money. Somebody will pick you up in two weeks from now." "This is it," we told each other, and started putting up the dome tent that was to be our home for the next three and a half months. We marvelled at the scenery around us: barren hills with clumps of dwarfed spruce in the crevices of the rocky substrate. We were surrounded by caribou, hundreds of them, and a ptarmigan welcomed us with its friendly cackle.

Among other things, we observed and classified the caribou of the George River herd. This herd is the largest in the world but, after reaching its peak of 560,000 animals in 1984, the herd is now declining. We were asked to figure out why. We thought of two limiting factors: a possible shortage of food and a shortage of time to feed. If the caribou could not feed enough and/or find the time to feed, then they would lose weight rapidly and may consequently starve during the harsh winter. Since caribou are migratory, we had to migrate too. Every two weeks we would shift camp, and once we "cruised" the 300 kilometre-long George River with an inflatable boat to follow the herd.

Apart from lots of caribou (once we were in a herd of 110,000 animals), we encountered everything the subarctic has to offer: wolves, bears, hordes of mosquitoes, beautiful flora and the ever-present grandeur of the vast and seemingly endless tundra. We loved what we did out there, and continued the research every summer up to 1991. Since then we have given presentations in several countries in Europe, Canada and the U.S.A. We hope, aided by our slides and stories, to share some of our thrilling experiences with you. We look forward to meeting you.

SPECIAL OUTING TO RUCKLE PARK

The Club held a special outing to Ruckle Park when both walkers and hikers combined to enjoy a leisurely stroll in the park and along the waterfront.

The reason for this event was primarily to view the new

service road built in the park by the Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks. Concerns had been expressed to the executive by Club members over the type of material used and the calibre of the road itself, as well as its location. The President wrote to the Ministry repeating the concerns of the members and received a response dated 10 December, wherein the following rationale was given:

"The new service road was installed to allow BC Parks to better service the campsites in the wet shoulder seasons, but was also developed with the following benefits in mind:

- reduce damage to the open field area caused by service vehicles driving through wet areas,
- increase park accessibility for disabled persons,
- permit access of emergency vehicles and service vehicles during wet weather,
- function as a multi-use trail for people walking, jogging or cycling, increasing their enjoyment of the area.

"Service vehicles only will be permitted on this road.... The new service road has been seeded and given time will blend into the area.

".... Ruckle Park will remain a special place for tourists and residents and [is] in part unique in the BC Parks system for its lack of amenities. The new service road is consistent with the approved park master plan. However, should any new major development be proposed public consultation involving Islands Trust, and other interested agencies would be initiated."

It was the complete lack of consultation and apparent indifference to the projects requested by the local park officials, that gave rise to the concern of the members. These projects included improving the potable water supply in the park, and developing a car park in the orchard by the barn which is badly needed. The road becomes very busy in the summer and that site constitutes a hazard to road users.

Currently the road surface is unsuitable for bicycles, joggers and most certainly wheelchairs. Provided it is not treated with pesticide or some such substance, maybe the grass will render it more adaptable in time.

On Tuesday 14 January some 45 members were present to see the road in question, and three Club representatives were afforded an interview with Ministry representatives who visited for that specific purpose. In essence the response was the same as that contained in the letter, but it was acknowledged that it was most unfortunate that a circular turning had been made at the end of the road for the express purpose of enabling the gravel truck to turn around and make its exit. Also it was regretted that the natural grassy area which is the habitat of a number of wild flowers which assist in giving the park its unique flavour, was crossed, and seeding that part of the road would now be introducing

other than local vegetation.

In the final analysis the road is a *fait accompli*, but the Club has placed its concerns on record, and perhaps the one positive action to emerge is that the Ministry has encouraged the Club to become instrumental in establishing a "Friends of Ruckle Park" Association. Such an association, recognised by the Ministry, will ensure that similar unilateral action by Parks officials will not occur in future, and that consultation will take place before action affecting the Park is taken.

Ken Strike
16 January 1992

[Something has been lost in our unique wild park. Why must all our parks, with man-made intrusion, look like the tamed and homogenised parks of the city? --Ed. note]

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#### ANNUAL POTLUCK SUPPER

The decision of the Executive to divide the annual Potluck Supper and the AGM into two separate meetings was vindicated on Wednesday 14 January, when approximately 145 members congregated in Meadon Hall at the Royal Canadian Legion for the supper, and to listen to the guest speaker, Robert Bateman.

Before the highlight of the evening Fiona welcomed all present and with immediate Past President Dennis admitted being at a loss to put the correct name to each face. This was not due to failing memories but to the recent growth in new members.

The event had been billed as a Gourmet Supper and it certainly turned out to be so. The ladies of the Legion Auxiliary were hard pressed to find table space for all the delicious deliveries, and how they managed to keep the hot dishes hot during the preliminaries is a kitchen secret. Jim Barber deserves congratulations for tracking down, if not personally treading the grapes for, sufficient wine and other beverages to suit all palates.

After supper, while Mr. Bateman autographed books, our indefatigable Inez continued to renew memberships and even used her persuasive ways to solicit new members where possible. Elda took the opportunity to sign up potential leaders for the familiarisation hikes to be given by experienced leaders who now wish to pass on the mantle, together with their considerable experience of Island trails.

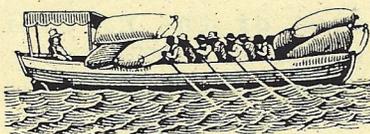
Then the moment arrived and we were treated to a thought-provoking trip through history by Mr. Robert Bateman, internationally renowned conservationist, internationally acclaimed wildlife artist, ardent hiker and local resident. Our speaker was introduced by Loes Holland who has known Robert and his family for a number of years, both in Ontario

and B.C.

The presentation took the form of "philosophical musings", to use Mr. Bateman's own words, illustrated with a variety of slides pertinent to the points being made. The basic theme, or more precisely underlying question asked was "What sort of life do we really want in the twenty-first century?" The fact that the lifestyle and philosophy of the twentieth century could not continue was graphically made, but no national nor international leader seemed willing or able to provide an alternative.

Question time followed the main presentation, and although normally at nine o'clock in the evening Salt Springers seem to retire to the privacy of their own homes at an astonishing speed, it was noticeable that at ten-thirty there was a group of participants challenging both the speaker and themselves over this intriguing question.

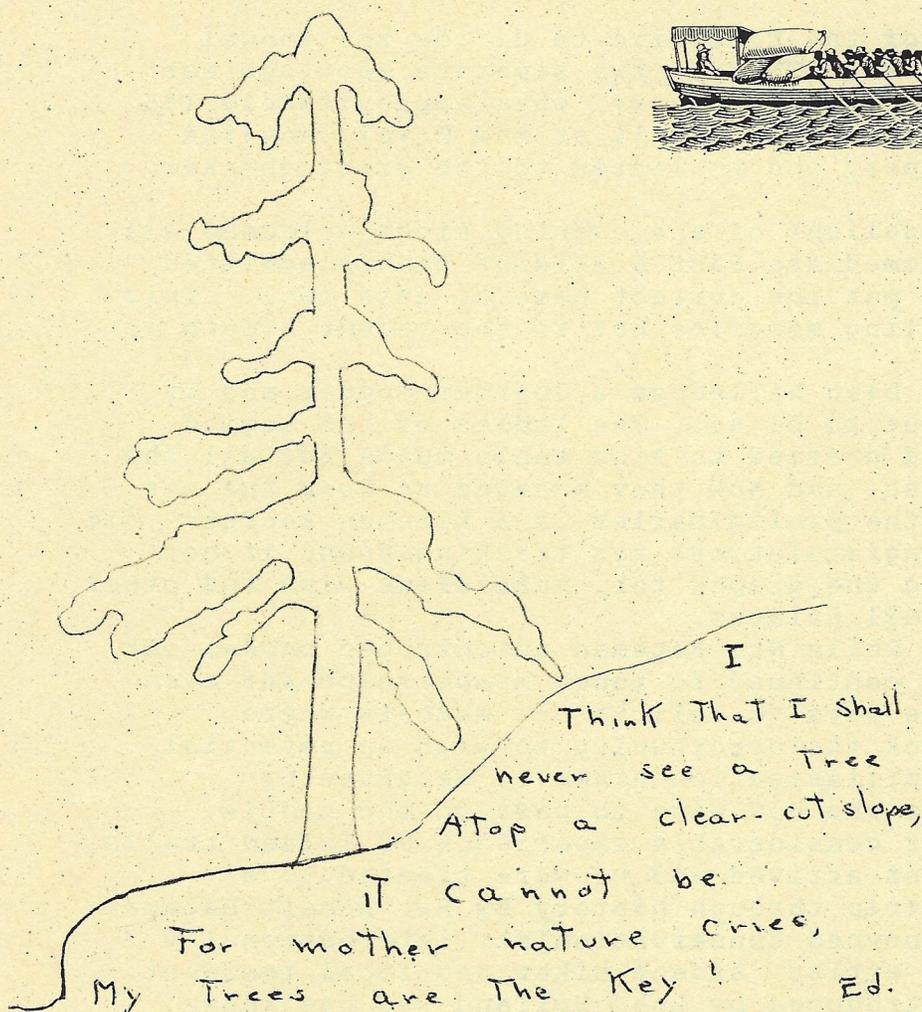
Ken Strike  
16 Jan. 1992



**U2 CAN CANOE  
NATIONAL LETS GO  
PADDLING WEEK**

**May 22-May 31/92**

The Recreational Canoeing Association of BC in conjunction with the Canadian Recreational Canoeing Association needs your help to promote Lets Go Paddling Week throughout British Columbia. All paddlers, canoe clubs, outdoor stores, outfitters and manufacturers are being asked to plan an open house or some other activity in support of this one week event. In doing so you can therefor help to accomplish the RCA's goal of promoting safe and enjoyable canoeing in the province. You still have a couple of months to plan an event. Be sure to share with the rest of BC and Canada what you have in store.



Ed.

Thanks to all who  
contributed to this  
issue. Please write!

Eds.