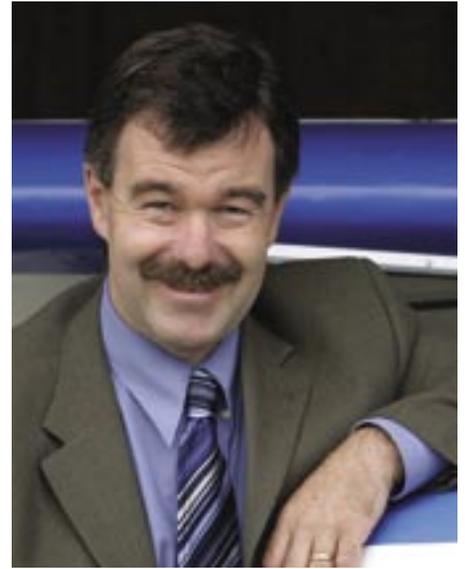


Master of All He Surveys



Dave Bazett

With Val Wilson

Imagine enjoying the vista of beautiful forests, waterways, and mountains on your way to work—from 1000 feet?

Because many assignments are more accessible by air than road, Dave Bazett combines his love of flying with his successful career as a BC surveyor.

Within our vast province, we live in a very small world. Dave—like Ken Jacques, our Summer 2004 Cover Story personality—was born in Duncan. Dave grew up in Maple Bay, the port closest to Duncan on Vancouver Island.

There are no “degrees of separation” between these two gentlemen. Their maternal grandmothers—née Agnes and Jean Paterson—were sisters.

And Ken’s mom and Dave’s dad are first cousins!

Dave has just landed.

Let’s go talk to him.

Q: That’s a very handsome flying machine, Dave. I understand your family has lived in the area for over 100 years.

A: Yes, my great grandfather came to the Cowichan Valley in 1890 and operated the first general store there. I grew up on 20 acres of bush near Maple Bay. As a kid, I spent most of my time outside building forts and playing with fire.

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Q: What schools did you attend?

A: I went to elementary school at Maple Bay, then junior and senior secondary schools in Duncan.

Q: Do you recall your first job?

A: I started off with a paper route, but the houses were so far apart where we lived, it was a lot of work to make about 12 bucks a month. When I was about 14, I started working on Saturdays for Sidney Rodd, a retired boat builder, master craftsman, and close friend of the family.

I used to ride my bike down to his shop in Maple Bay and help him with the project of the day. He’d have the fire going in the stove and everything laid out on the bench—the project was always different—

it might be building a dingy, repairing some plumbing, or turning something on the lathe. It was a great learning experience and Sidney was a fascinating guy.

Q: Why did you choose to become a BC land surveyor?

A: More by accident than design, really. I always wanted to be a geologist because I liked rocks and wanted to work outside. As the old saying goes, “it’s not what you know, it’s who you know.” In my case, it turned out that one of Sidney’s friends was Bernard White, the local land surveyor. I was introduced and Bernard offered me a job right away—cutting his lawn and doing yard work.

That was the summer I turned 17 and I toiled away in the sun while Bernard assessed my abilities. I must have passed muster because he hired me as a chainman the next May, once school ended—for the huge sum of \$250 a month. I can still vividly remember the excitement of that first day of work—and the frustration of trying to hold a plumbob steady and pull the chain at the right tension at the same time.

After working for a year, I decided this was the perfect occupation for me: lots of variety, mental challenges, and exacting work. On top of that, all the surveyors I worked with loved their jobs and there was great camaraderie.



The sepia photos, taken in 1912 or 1913, are from the PGE railway survey in the Fraser Canyon. Photos are from the collection of Robert Lowe, Dave's grandfather, who worked for a number of BC land surveyors and later became an engineer.

I studied on my own and wrote the Preliminary exams, then entered articles with Mike Hanson, one of Bernard's partners. Over the next four years, I passed two more series of exams and completed articles to get my commission in 1979.

Q: Did you have a mentor?

A: I was surrounded by mentors—that is how our profession passes on the “art” of land surveying. You learn the “science” from a book or at school, but the practical application of that knowledge is learned from your master and other land surveyors during a period of articles.

The system may seem archaic but it works. The skills needed to find and assess old survey evidence in the field are pretty hard to acquire without practical experience and getting some dirt under your fingernails in the process. I hope I can mentor some aspiring land surveyors and pass on this knowledge to the next generation . . . or trade it for some instruction in the latest gadgets.

Q: Why do some BC land surveyors (BCLS) carry the CLS designation of Canada Lands Surveyor?

A: This is an additional qualification that allows them to conduct surveys on Canada lands. In BC, these are Indian Reserves, National Parks, and offshore waters.

Q: What are your current responsibilities as President of the Corporation?

A: My main responsibilities are to chair meetings of our Board of Management and to represent BC at the annual general meetings of our sister organizations across the country. All the presidents and their wives travel together to the other provinces so you get to know a great group of people during your year as president. Many of the issues are common across the country, so it's also an ideal way to share ideas and experiences.

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In the last few years, the Corporation has taken a more proactive role in dealing with government. We established a Task Force to meet regularly with the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management to discuss issues of mutual concern. This led to the development of the Electronic Checklist Registry, which was our solution to reduced survey plan-checking by government. Since then we've expanded this group to consult with other Ministries.

We've been involved in the process of setting up the new Land Title and Survey Authority along with Notaries and other stakeholders; we've assumed responsibility for many of the Surveyor General's regulations that dealt with survey standards and we're involved in the process of changing to digital plan submissions.

Q: Do you still have time to survey?

I don't have a choice. While the job of President is very rewarding, it doesn't pay the bills. Our organization depends on volunteers and I look at this as an opportunity to repay some of the benefits I have enjoyed as a member.

Q: You are leading your organization into its 100th year in 2005. What celebrations are planned?

A: Our Annual General Meeting will be held at the Empress Hotel in Victoria, January 18 to 21, 2005. Besides our regular business, we'll find time to celebrate this milestone in an appropriate fashion. We start things off with a reception at Government House hosted by the Lieutenant Governor, followed the next evening by a “1905” theme night at the Royal BC Museum.

We also have an awards luncheon where we welcome newly commissioned land surveyors and recognize the efforts of distinguished members and friends. The end of the meeting this year will be particularly special because it will mark the change of name from the Corporation of



This is my grandfather, Robert Lowe, in the Nass River area during the winter of 1913.



Land Surveyors of the Province of British Columbia to the Association of British Columbia Land Surveyors.

We have planned a special ceremony to mark the handover to the new president. This will, of course, include passing on a pair of “spats,” an old tradition that has been observed for many years. Then we will cap the celebrations with the President’s Dinner and Ball.

We have engaged well-known author, Katherine Gordon to write a history of land surveying in British Columbia, which should be available by Christmas of 2005. As a legacy for the future, we have also raised funds for the BC Land Surveyors Foundation, to provide scholarships and bursaries for survey students.

And we appreciate the contributions that the Immediate Past President of the BC Notaries, Leta Best, makes as a Director of the Land Surveyors Foundation.

Q: What do you most enjoy about your work as a land surveyor?

A: For me it’s the outdoor aspect of the job and the beauty of the remote places where I prefer to work. I love the coast and have developed a survey practice that allows me to combine my passion for flying with a business that can justify the use of a floatplane. There have been many times when I’ve been cruising along with the mist draped over the hills and the inlet glassy calm that I wonder how it could get any better.

Q: Please compare the work of a BCLS a century ago with today’s BCLS.

A: The 1905 BCLS worked on a blank canvas—vast areas of the province were still unmapped and most surveys were for the first Crown Grants for pioneer settlement and development. The great gold rushes were fading and the pre-WW I land boom hadn’t quite started. Most surveys were done with very rudimentary equipment—compass and chain—and calculations were aided only by tables of trig functions and logarithms. All drafting was done by hand, usually back in town at the end of the field season. He—no female BCLSs in that era—probably spent most of the year in a tent with his horse nearby.

One of the great land surveyors of that era was Frank Swannell. He was also a gifted photographer and recorded the life and times in some great photographs that have just been published in a new book by Jay Sherwood called *Surveying Northern British Columbia*. The Corporation was pleased to be able to support this project, which was well timed for our centennial year.

In contrast, today’s BCLS spends a lot of time re-establishing boundaries from previous surveys and can call up detailed mapping and aerial photography of the most remote area in minutes over the Web. Robotic total stations and real-time satellite positioning systems record data instantly and transfer it for display on networked desktop PCs.

Drafting is accomplished by laser-jet plotters that can change scales with ease. He or she is rarely required to stay in anything more rustic than a B & B and thinks of transportation in terms of horsepower.

The only things that haven’t changed in a hundred years are West Coast sallal, Chilcotin mosquitoes, and the personality type that is attracted to land surveying.

Q: What do you see for the future of land surveying in BC?

A: I see a very bright future. There is growing recognition of the fundamental importance of a sound system of land administration and information systems to our economy. I believe the establishment of the new Land Title and Survey Authority will lead to better integration in the administration of surveys and titles and better understanding of the role of land surveyors as custodians of the cadastre.

Like other professions, our aging demographic profile means we will have to attract new members to replace those who will be retiring soon, which should create job opportunities.

Q: What community service have you enjoyed?

A: I was involved with Rotary in both Port Hardy and Courtenay and I’ve been involved in Search and Rescue and the local airport association.

Q: What are your special interests and hobbies?

A: I enjoy flying, photography, fly fishing, and travelling.

Q: What special book have you read this past year?

A: I enjoyed reading James Houston’s novel *Ice Master*, perhaps because I met him in the Queen Charlottes years ago and remember a great evening of his storytelling.

Q: What is most important to you in life?

A: My family and friends, without question. I am lucky to have both my grown children close by and working with me every day and a two-and-a-half-year-old son who has taught me a lot about priorities. My wife has been a great support this past year and has put up gracefully with a lot of other demands on my time. ▲