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## Notes

This section of *SHALE* provides an opportunity for contributors to present the partial results of ongoing research, publish less-than-normal-length articles, and provide “interesting facts”.

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### **The drought of the 1930s—by Nick Doe**

In Jenni Gehlbach’s article on diatomaceous earth in the last issue of *SHALE*,<sup>1</sup> she noted that when the mining took place in Dutchmans Swamp<sup>2</sup> in 1939, it was dry. Not only that, the diatomaceous earth was only discovered after there had been a fire. Now, this is strange because nowadays, the swamp—some call it a “pond”—retains some surface water throughout the year.

This reminded me that the 1930s were of course a time of drought; there were widespread crop failures and mass migrations out of the Great Plains, and it was in 1938 that there was a big wildfire here on the island.<sup>3</sup>

In a paper on multi-year droughts published in 2004,<sup>4</sup> the authors describe how they looked at tree-ring data from thirty-two sites in the watershed of the Columbia River and by figuring out the relationship between tree-ring data and flows in the river, they could use the tree-ring data to deduce what the flows in the river must have been in years before anyone was recording them.

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<sup>1</sup> *SHALE* 24, p.22, June 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Between Berg Road and Dunshire Drive. Also known as Eppers Swamp or Epps Pond.

<sup>3</sup> June Lewis-Harrison, *The People of Gabriola*, pp.255–6, 1982.

<sup>4</sup> Z. Gedalof, D.L. Peterson, & N.J. Mantua, *Columbia river flow and drought since 1750*, Journal of the American Water Resources Association, pp.1579–1592, December 2004.

The authors surmise that there have been six multi-year droughts between 1750 and 1950. These were in 1772–1778, 1800–1808, 1840–1852, 1888–1892, 1920–1928, and 1931–1940. Since 1950, we have not had a significant multi-year drought. The drought of the 1930s was second in severity and persistence only to the twelve-year long drought in the 1840s.

While perhaps of no significance, it was probably in the 1840s that the Snunéymux<sup>w</sup> abandoned their village on False Narrows as a year-round settlement.<sup>5</sup> While it is impossible to predict when a drought of such duration will occur again, the authors of the paper say that it can only be a matter of time before there is one. ◇

### **Augusts on Gabriola Island**

*Daily Colonist*, August 15, 1878.

Nanaimo: Extensive bush fires are raging throughout the entire district. A very large one is devastating the country between Wellington and South Wellington Railway, and the works on the latter railway are said to be in imminent danger. ...If the high winds of the past few days continue, the citizens will have to take some steps to prevent the fires spreading to the city. Up the Nanaimo River and on Gabriola Island large fires are burning.

*Victoria Daily Colonist*, August 16, 1904.

Nanaimo: Last Saturday night the lofty bluffs of Gabriola Island presented a curious and splendid spectacle across the four miles of water which intervenes between them and this city. Along their whole length a bush

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<sup>5</sup> *SHALE* 4, p.5–8, June 2002.