

POCAHONTAS FOREST LOOKOUT - THE TRUE STORY

Thanks to Tom Brent of “Upper Gillies Bay” for his extensive research into the Pocahontas Forest Lookout. We can now reveal the facts!

It was not the first in Canada nor even BC. In 1913, 8 lookouts were erected in BC, the first being BX Mountain (now Silver Star).

The first reference to Texada was in 1919 when BC Forest Service allotted \$20.85 for maintaining the Mount Pocahontas trail, suggesting that a fire patrol trail was in place by then.

An actual lookout cabin was built in 1927 (cost \$785) to be replaced 3 years later with a new “D-6 design” cabin featuring an upper level cupola (photo). By 1960 the cabin had been replaced with a new version with a wrap-around catwalk, but no cupola.

It is interesting to note that a second lookout was built on Mount Shepherd (named “South Texada”) in 1936 but was abandoned in 1950 due to difficulty accessing the site.

Records show that Elmer Staaf was the first lookout man on Pocahontas (1928). George Cook became a regular attendant (1930 and 1935-1947) while Jim McKimmie was a seasonal forestry patrol man responsible for transporting goods to the cabin until age 75.

It was sometimes difficult to find people willing to take on the job in such an isolated posting. Ron Jones, ex forest ranger, reports that it was a struggle to get supplies and equipment strapped to packboards up the steep terrain. On several occasions the first message from Pocahontas was, “I quit. Come get me out!”

Some men were provided by social agencies in East Vancouver. Not suited to the job, one fellow left his post and was found asleep on a pool table in Van Anda!

Nowadays modern satellite communications have replaced the job that once belonged to special men who loved the isolation.

Even though all that remains of the lookout cabin now is its concrete anchors, it’s still worth a trek up Pocahontas for the view and to imagine a life of isolation on top of the hill.

Tom would like to acknowledge the assistance of Jim Wright for his passion for Forest Lookout history.

PS : Does anybody know who George Cook was?



Peter Lock

Texas Island Heritage Society