

Rivers were the major transportation arteries, so ditches and chutes were excavated to reach them more easily. Once logging began in earnest, teams of oxen and horses were brought in to skid the logs to the nearest river, where they were floated downstream to the booming grounds and then towed to the mills. (Booming grounds are stretches of river, close to shore, where free-floating logs are stored in the water, confined by a chain of connected, floating logs, or booms.) After 1887, steam donkey engines and railroads were incorporated into the operations.

Lowland forests and those on the banks of the rivers were the first to be removed, including one of the best



Elgin Douglas-fir today.

stands of Douglas-fir the loggers had ever seen, on the north-facing bank of the Nicomekl River, near Elgin. Tall second-growth conifers grow in this location today (Map E3). Across the Nicomekl valley, in Colebrook, the Burr family logged Panorama Ridge and the Mitchells worked Surrey Centre, both operators floating the logs along ditches at the foot of the ridge to the Serpentine River. The White Rock area was first logged by John Roper, using the Little Campbell River to store logs.

Once the towering trees had been felled, the stumps had to be hauled out using chains and horses or blown up with powder, caps and fuses. This highly dangerous work often had calamitous results. Harry Bose remembered a dreadful accident in the 1920s when Chow Wing, part of a Chinese labour crew clearing his land, was blown apart when he went to check on a reluctant detonator.

The stumps were often massive, far surpassing the stumps of modern trees. Even in 1947, when few giant trees were left, Allan McKinnon measured one oldgrowth stump in Surrey Centre at 3 m (9 ft) diameter. The holes they left were great craters, that had to be back-filled with soil scraped from the surrounding area before being plowed. Brush piles were burnt and the smoke of a thousand fires drifted over the Boundary Bay hills, as the appetite for land and logs grew. As logger



*Herbert Gilley Logging Co. crew with steam donkey engine, Surrey, ca. 1890 - 1910.
(Surrey Archives)*

Danny Cummings described the forest: “While you worked in the woods you wouldn’t see the sun only once in awhile.” In the early 1900s, there was so much timber being cut that sawmills were built at Elgin, Tynehead, Cloverdale, Hazelmere, Sullivan, Blaine, Drayton Harbor and the mouth of the Little Campbell River. Campbell River Lumber, that worked the woods throughout White Rock and Crescent Beach, was among the first to use a logging railroad, for moving logs over to the Nicomekl estuary booming grounds. Railroads increased efficiency and sped up

forest clearance, and were soon in general use for the industry. Where the land was not farmed or built on, second-growth forests quickly grew in the moist coastal climate, softening the barren clear cuts. Even as second-growth, the conifers are magnificent trees, enormously tall by global standards, with straight trunks and long branches. Mere youngsters, lacking the density of lichens, mosses and ferns of the oldgrowth trees, they would need to be allowed to grow for a good few hundred years more to approach the maturity and richness of forest that they replaced.