

The Last Hurrah

On Friday, 26th January 2001 at 3:10 p.m. the last log was cut in Timberwests Youbou Sawmill. The thirty-six foot long fir log brought to a close seventy three years of continuous production at the Youbou plant and a proud sawmilling history for the communities of Youbou and Lake Cowichan. As the last moments approached a radio call was relayed throughout the plant, it simply said, "Last Log." This was the signal for virtually every employee to gather around 'A' Mills, 42ft Carriage to witness and photograph this Last Hurrah.

Earlier though, perhaps realizing the end was near, and like the employees, not wanting it to happen, that grand old Carriage ground to a halt. The problem, a broken drive cable normally takes not less than ninety minutes to fix. On this occasion, once again, the employees came through, uniting in a tremendous team effort to replace the cable in a mere 45 minutes. This is typical of the team spirit that has made Youbou such a unique place to work.

At 4:00 p.m. as the sawmill crew left work for the last time grim faced employees began to straggle out of the mill clutching small pieces of the "Last Log" as a memento. Handshaking, hugging and tearful faces were everywhere. No one noticed or appeared to care that this was all being recorded by countless media TV crews. This was their moment, the chance to bid adieu to people they had worked with for as long as forty-eight years. It was a moment frozen in time, a moment that required your presence to appreciate its depth and meaning, but a moment that Timberwests upper management probably enjoyed, after all they have tried for so long to achieve this closure.

For the first time in three-quarters of a century the mill is permanently silent. The shrieking of hard working saws, the clatter of chains worn thin by countless years of strain, the banging and thumping of pushers, kickers and turners are all gone as are the people that proudly operated this equipment. Computer screens are now blank, hi-tech scanners now have nothing to scan, and countless numbers of twinkling warning lights are now strangely stilled. Youbou Sawmill, provider of the community, that noisy, dusty, nerve-wracking place is finally laid to rest.

If anyone believes this article over dramatizes the facts please be assured that this is not so. If anything the opposite is true. If anyone from TimberWest's upper management reads this article and feels that victory is at hand, dream on, your victory will be very short lived and you will eventually pay.

