



The flume at Jordan River.

# The Jordan River flume

Elida Peers writes about the history of the Sooke region

ELIDA PEERS / Sep. 26, 2012 8:00 a.m. / COMMUNITY

Today it might be hard to imagine that the flow of water that powered the generators at the Jordan River plant that produced the electricity to serve Greater Victoria was carried on the wooden flume shown here.

The Daily Colonist reported on Friday November 26, 1948: “Seventy-five feet of water flume serving the Jordan River power plant of BC Electric Rlwy Co Ltd was swept away by a landslide early yesterday morning, resulting in a drastic cut in electricity for the city. The flume, constructed entirely of wood, is six feet deep and eight feet wide.”

The 1948 Daily Colonist went on: “Large industries were immediately affected ... local shipyards made a partial halt in operations ... many householders made voluntary power cuts ... Approximately 60 % of the power served to the lower end of the Island comes from the Jordan River plant, BC Electric officials said.”

With construction beginning in 1909, the hydro-electric system developed at Jordan River was a monumental undertaking of engineering that at its peak employed one thousand men, under the direction of Superintendent Duncan Irving Walker. Once the system was in place, with the flume carrying water 5 ¼ miles

from Diversion Dam to the forebay reservoir, thence via penstocks to the plant, most workers moved on. A substantial community of operational staff, however, remained at the river mouth, resulting in a significant hydro payroll for Jordan River well past mid-century.

Maintenance of the flume, perched precipitously along steep hillsides, was an ongoing challenge. For three decades Albert Sjoberg was maintenance supervisor, with crew access along the route provided via a narrow gauge railway. Ted Banner joined the maintenance crew in 1942, later serving as a supervisor, stationed with his wife Frances at the upper level of Camp 2 until his 1965 retirement. Ted's son Cliff Banner, a Company employee as well, recalled: "... the flume with its footings just clung on the rocks in places – it had all been built by hand ..."

Originally cedar, the flume had been rebuilt mainly with Douglas-fir in 1926. The tons of water it carried meant major work was required again by the late 1950s, lining with plywood. Several of the men in those repair crews, young fellows at the time, may be seen about town today, including Hilly Lewis, Evan Haldane, Bobby Nelson and Ross Pitre.

When the hydro system was re-developed in 1971, the flume's service was over, and crews engaged in salvaging the lumber.

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Sooke Region Museum