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WEEKEND REVIEW



"There's lots going on, there's still a very engaged community that lives in the area," Wayne Jackaman says of Jordan River. PHOTOS: DARRIN STONE/VICTORIA TIMES COLONIST

A SENSE OF EXCITEMENT

JORDAN RIVER FROM B21

"There was a terrific place to go fishing and hunting," he said. "It was one of the best places a kid could grow up."

Ross's family moved to Colwood, and the Michelsens moved to Sooke in the mid-to-late '80s, when the logging industry collapsed.

"People moved away and it was pretty much Shakes and surfers for a long time out there," said Ross, adding her grandparents finally retired about 15 years ago. By the time Pite bought the house — which had a cracked foundation, crumbling walls and broken windows — for the princely sum of \$28,000, the hamlet was starting to shrink. "I remember when I was first here in 1987, the elementary school was just being demolished," Pite said.

JORDAN RIVER'S HISTORY: BOOM AND BUST

In tracing its history, Jordan River has always been a boom and bust town. During the logging boom, which started in 1907 and lasted until the 1940s, Canadian Puget Sound Lumber and Timber Co. and Western Forest Products employed hundreds of people. The community reached 1,000 people in the early 1900s.

The hydroelectric dam was built by Vancouver Island Power Co. between 1909 and 1912, and in that year a gravel road was built to connect the community to Sooke.

"That was the heyday," said Edda Teers, a historian at the Sooke Region Museum. "In the 1920s, they had an orchestra, they had a playing field, they had a really big community."

In 1938, Duncan Irvine Walker built the Jordan River Hotel, his pub a popular drinking hole. The hotel was razed by fire in 1984.

Dick Poirier's family moved to Jordan River in 1939, when Poirier was eight years old. His father moved the family from Victoria to take a job with Canadian Puget Sound Lumber. Poirier followed in his father's footsteps, working in the logging industry for 47 years. "When I first started working



Doug Harvey, in front of his house in Jordan River, plans to have the two-storey home moved farther up the hill before selling it and then building another home closer to Sooke.



A boarded-up business in Jordan River, which has a history as a boom and bust town.

here, there were 200 men in the camp in the bunk houses that worked in the woods," he said. Poirier said the safety standards were minimal to nonexistent in those days. "It was hard work and dangerous work in those days. I saw a couple fellas get killed," he said. Anyone who slacked off "went down the road," Poirier said, "or in other words you were fired." Despite the hard labour, Poirier said loggers lived comfortably, particularly after the logging industry unionized, which lifted wages. "I can honestly say I had a really nice life living in Jordan River," said Poirier, who lives on a hill just east of the hamlet with his wife Doreen.

In 1962, a mine owned by Sunco was reactivated by Cowichan Copper, which brought an influx of miners to the area. The mine flooded in 1965 after a blowout during mining operations, and residents and conservationists complained that the mine tailings poisoned marine life, soiled the beach and left a strong odour.

The reconstruction of the diversion dam between 1969 and 1971 created a boom for the economy, with 350 employees settling down in work camps. It was a welcome injection following the exodus by the forestry and mining industries.

However, the dam reconstruction created tension with surfers, who were furious when bulldozers removed fill at low tide and moved it to the dam site. Two 19-year-old surfers quoted in a Sept. 9, 1969, edition of the Daily Colonist said they were worried the sandbars being dug away would threaten the surfing conditions.

Harry Young, a journalist writing in the Daily Colonist on Nov. 2, 1969, reflected on the undulations of Jordan River's boom and bust times.

"In all these periods, Jordan River bustled and fussed as only a pioneer town does, but once the construction workers left, it relaxed to its outpost quiet," Young wrote.

THE FUTURE OF JORDAN RIVER

Except for the Cold Shoulder Café, which serves homemade cookies and fresh coffee to the remaining locals, bikers doing the Cowichan loop and surfers, the hamlet is in a permanent state of quiet.

R.C. Hydro also bought 15 hectares in the flood zone, including the old townsite, from the Capital Regional District for \$3.13 million.

Pite said he has never been pressured by R.C. Hydro to sell and has received a letter stating the hydro authority has no intention of expropriating the land.

"They do ask me if I've changed my mind, but they haven't said: 'You better sell.' Everyone thinks Hydro is forcing people out, but Hydro didn't force anyone out."

Hofmeyr said Pite's place is not a palace, just a modest little cabin, but it's worth saving.

"I think it's unfortunate that all those houses are going because it will look even more desolate," he said.

Pite said he's not looking forward to the day when all waterfront homes, except for his, disappear.

"I'm not sure I really like the idea, I'm not happy with all the houses going."

Ross, too, said on her frequent visits to the place where she grew up, "it makes me sad every time I go out there and something's different, something's gone."

But the café's owner, Josh Constandinou and his wife Christine Winsby, do not want Jordan River's story to be one of boarded-up homes and demolished buildings.

About 100 new homes have been built up the hill, populated by surfers, retirees and young families. There are about a dozen kids under 16.

At least two of the waterfront homes will be moved up the hill, including Doug Harvey's two-storey modern home, which his architect son designed and he built 10 years ago. Harvey plans to sell the home in its new location and build another home closer to Sooke.

The Cold Shoulder is the unofficial community hub, but an old Western Forest Products building on the waterfront near the Welcome to Jordan River sign could soon fill that role. The building has been donated by the CRD to the community, which was set to meet there on Saturday for a potluck dinner and a discussion of the future.

Wayne Jackaman, whom Winsby jokingly referred to as the mayor, is organizing the gathering with a few other residents and said, while it's early days, there's a bubbling sense of excitement.

"There's lots going on, there's still a very engaged community that lives in the area," said Jackaman, who bought a piece of property on the hill about 12 years ago, but built his home two years ago. "It's unfortunate what's happening, but we want to move on. We're hoping the Cold Shoulder will remain as the last remnant of what the old community was like."

"It's sad, this is all Jordan River ever was," Constandinou said about the oceanfront landscape on West Coast Road. "But now it's up there," he said, nodding up the hill. Victoria Times Colonist



Josh Constandinou owns the Cold Shoulder café in Jordan River, which serves homemade cookies and fresh coffee to the few remaining locals and visitors in the shrinking hamlet.