

## The E&N LAND GRAB - A BRIEF HISTORY

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This synopsis of the **E&N Land Grant** tells the history of why we are dealing with a **wilderness access problem on Vancouver Island**.

The LAND GRANT was no more than a "LAND GRAB" as this railway corridor never became part of the Trans Canada railway system, nor did it reach Campbell River.

1865 The colony of BC wants to join the Federation of Canada. As a condition of joining - BC was to complete the Trans Canada Railway through to Esquimalt.

The chosen route from the mainland, was to cross at Seymour Narrows (north of Campbell River) onto the Island, then run down to Esquimalt.

The colony of BC did not have the money to pay a contractor, and so Canada put up some money (\$750,000), and **BC allocated 809,000 hectares** of SE Vancouver Island as payment. This included most of the **natural resources**, including mining rights.

**THAT is a full 25%** of the area of Vancouver Island! (VI sq kms = 32100 / 8090 = 25%)

This **land grant area included land 20 miles (32 km) on each side of the proposed railway corridor** (from Seymour Narrows to Esquimalt).

At Courtenay this is almost half the width of the island, some 40 km inland.

At Jordan River it extends clear to the west coast.

1871 BC joins the Federation of Canada.

1875 4 yrs later, they realize that building the railway to cross at Seymour Narrows is a **daunting task. The plan is aborted.**

However a local railway is still needed for settlement and growth on the island.

1884 **E&N company is established; Dunsmuir** is president and owns half the shares. At that time **Dunsmuir** is the richest man in the province, and has a seat in legislature. He made his fortune in coal at Nanaimo. He was also interested in the coal in the land grab area.

Behind the scenes, he played a hand in negotiating this contract for himself.

During construction of the railway, the contractor and government use the Indian Reserve Act (1880) to expropriate land from 3 reserves (Cowichan, Chemainus, Ladysmith) for the railway.

1887 3 yrs later the railway is completed from **Esquimalt to Nanaimo**.

**The land grant area TITLE, is transferred to E&N company.**

note: The railway built is only half the negotiated length, but the contractor is still given the full payment in land.

Then **E&N sells land to settlers and businesses, exploiting the resources and real estate opportunities.**

Brochures were distributed to advertise the land. Total sales 138,000 hectares (\$1.4 M)

**That is 17% of their land area, or 4% of VI.** (671,000 h remaining)

- 1905 **CPR buys E&N railway assets and 85 % of the remaining land** (566,000 hectares) for \$2.3 M (land was \$1.2 M of that amount)
- 1910 **E&N sells the COAL MINING** in the land grant area for \$11 million. **Logging** is now realized for it's value, and **CPR sells off it's land** in the land grant area.
- 1950s Logging rail lines are being converted to roads as truck logging takes over from rail. The public could now have easy access to recreation, **but access is forbidden by the landowners**. Recreation (mainly hunting & fishing) in the area is only for the elite.
- 1962 With public outcry, a **Special government Committee on Public Access** is formed and recommends the **Public Access Act** which would also affect these private lands. (note: public access was also a problem on government land)
- The logging companies fear this act and the **committee's work is suspended when forest companies granted access to their land.**
- This happened slowly over the next 7 yrs to full access.
- 2000s **Access again becomes restricted on the private lands.**
- The 1962 draft of the PUBLIC ACCESS ACT, and the reason why there were no gates for many decades, has been forgotten.

#### bibliography:

- A History of the E&N Land Grants - by our BC government
- British Colonist newspaper - Victoria
- Vancouver Island Railroads - by Robert Turner
- The Watershed Sentinel magazine - a watchdog for the public's interest