

# This Place

## Fillongley through the ages

by John Millen

In the storm winds of early Fall 2021 a big, old Redcedar tree, that had been leaning for some time, finally fell. I measured all the pieces of the tree that I could find and concluded that the cedar had reached a height of about 158 feet. It fell across one of the entry paths to Fillongley Park, so the Parks crew bucked the tree off at a point that had been 62 feet above the ground when the tree was upright. I counted the tree rings where Parks had bucked off the top. My ring count told me that the tree had reached the height of 62 feet 210 years ago.



The pins mark 25 year intervals

So this grand old cedar had been a young sapling, perhaps 30 or 40 feet tall in July 1791 when the first Europeans ever to visit the Salish Sea sailed by in their schooner *Santa Saturnina*. Under the leadership of 23 year old Jose Narvaez they had sailed north between Hornby and Lasqueti Islands to reach their furthestmost north survey station. That was where they could see around the top end of Texada Island, and get a bearing on Cape Lazo, which they named. Then they retraced their route south to reach an overnight anchorage just north of Qualicum Beach.

Narvaez and his associates were careful and conservative in drawing their charts. So they sketched the coast of Hornby Island that they had observed, giving it the name *Islas de Lerena*. They appear to have mistakenly charted the east shore of Denman Island including the high Komas Bluffs as the coast of Vancouver Island, designating the southern entrance to Baynes Sound as: *Boca de Valdes*, that is, as an inlet.

Where the old Fillongley cedar has torn away from its roots, the soil that it grew in is revealed. It is midden. Remains of likely thousands of years of occupation by First Nations people.

The present approved 'Master Plan for Fillongley, Helliwell, Tribune Bay and Sandy Island Provincial Parks' (completed September 1987) includes:

*Specific Actions:*

- i) determine the significance of archaeological resources in Fillongley Park with assistance from Heritage Conservation Branch... and*
- iv) present native Indian history to the public.*

While some of this work may have been done it seems that more could be done to assess and present the 'time immemorial' use of this site. It is notable that midden material is seen well up the trail towards the meadow, indicating that an extensive area was occupied by First Nations.

The history of park planning also includes some stories worth remembering. In 1978 BC Parks planners were considering some further development of Fillongley Park. The camping area had not been laid out as it is now; its capacity was referred to as 10 to 12 sites. At that time the remainder of George Beadnell's garden (at the meadow) also retained many more specimen trees, spring bulbs and his prized collection of rhododendrons.

As the October issue of 'Rag & Bone' reported, hearing of 'levelling activity' going on in the Park, a small group investigated. They found that 'maintenance work' had resulted in the removal of the remaining foundations of the Beadnell buildings, removal of shrubs and trees and the grading away of the bowling green. As well a fifty foot wide swath had been cut down the slope from the Beadnell house site towards the creek and beach. It appeared that these operations were the first phase of a plan that had been proposed by Parks and adamantly opposed by the Denman community, for major development of the Park. That proposal was for a fifty-plus unit campsite in the meadow with an associated parking lot to accommodate 'about sixty' vehicles for day use. The swath cut down the slope was to provide a pathway to the beach via a bridge.

Subsequently, as reported in the March 1979 issue of Rag & Bone, at a meeting sponsored by Islands Trust, "a large segment of the Denman community turned out to vote down the proposed extension of camping facilities at Fillongly Park. An audible sigh expressed relief felt by all those who feared even further summer congestion..."

In the April 1985 issue of 'High Tides' we find the Denman Ratepayers Association being informed that the Parks Branch was preparing a master plan for the Denman and Hornby parks, but that no further upgrading or development was planned for Fillongly Park. Later that year the Ratepayers' Parks Committee also started a campaign to have the Boyle Point area designated as a Federal or Provincial Park.