

## Wiggly Lines on a Map, the Denman Island Archives and the Creation of Morrison Marsh

by Graham Brazier

Hanging on the wall of my study is a 2' x 3' map printed on heavy, but rather brittle, paper titled "Baynes Sound and Approaches". Essentially, it is a map of Denman Island. It has an authoritative and formal quality about it which is reflected in the language of its creators. According to the fine print at the bottom, it was "Published at the Admiralty, 2nd July 1900, under the superintendence of Rear Admiral Sir W.J.L. Wharton K.C.B: F.R.S: Hydrographer" in London, England. It was based on a survey of Baynes Sound and Lambert Channel conducted two years earlier by Commander Morris H. Smyth, R.N. and his crew aboard H.M. Surveying Ship "Egeria". My copy is not an original but is one that has benefited from several official updates by unnamed individuals in the early part of the nineteenth century. Consequently, numerous features that would not normally find their way onto a navigational chart created to guide sailing and steam vessels are present on my copy.

Among a dozen individual farms that are located on the map are the Pickle's Farm, the Piercey Farm, the MacMillan Farm, Graham's Farm, Morrison's Farm and a "Japanese Farm" near the south end of the island. In addition, the post office, the school and a Methodist Chapel are shown along with a number of barns and several houses, including two white ones, and one red one. But the feature that drew my attention is a notation on the map just inland from Morrison's Farm which is shown on the south eastern coast of the island where a unnamed creek from "Graham's Lake" enters Lambert Channel just north of what we know today as "McFarlane Beach". There are a series of marks or wiggly lines (rather like ^^^^s) that extend roughly 3 kilometres from just south of the creek parallel to the coastline toward Boyle Point with the following notation: "Dry in summer, 4 feet of water in winter." This would seem to be the earliest description we have of the large wetland that includes the marshy land on the north side of, what is today known as, McFarlane Road and Morrison Marsh on the south side.

My map is unable to offer any more details with respect to these extensive wetlands so I turned, first to the internet and then to the Denman Island archives. The internet turned up a study titled "Sensitive Ecosystems Inventory: East Vancouver Island and Gulf Islands 1993-1997" which revealed that prior to the construction of McFarlane Road, when the wetlands were a single entity of 47 hectares, they formed the largest wetlands complex in all the Gulf Islands. Presently, the wetlands north of the road (referred to in our Official Community Plan as "McFarlane Marsh" and by many locals as "Windy Marsh") occupy 19 hectares while Morrison Marsh, on the south side, covers 28 hectares of land. The internet had a great deal more to say about Morrison Marsh but not much on the construction of McFarlane Road.

So, then, it was off to the Denman Island archives where, with the help of Barry Landeen, I discovered another map pertinent to my investigations. This one was considerably less formal than the one on my wall and contained many revisions — some more formal than others. It was titled: "Denman Island: Nanaimo District" and dated 1929 and, curiously, the lake we know today as "Graham Lake" was called "Owl Lake". Nevertheless, it revealed a new tidbit of information — one that provided at least a partial answer to a question that had been provoked by the wiggly lines on my wall map. A revision dated September 1933 showed McFarlane Road and described it as "under construction". It also offered a few further details, such as, on March 29,

1934 it was "Gazetted 66' wide". This tidbit may well be one that will assist a further investigation of the construction project that created Morrison Marsh. Stay tuned.

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