

A Forgotten Document

by Graham Brazier

According to the cover of a 53 page report titled “*Disturbing Trends: The Impact of Through Ferry Traffic on Denman Island*” it was released in January of 1997. The cover also informs us that it had been commissioned by the Denman Island Resident’s Association (DIRA) and was written by Gerald Hodge, PhD. Gerald Hodge was one of Canada’s foremost community and regional planners and, at the time, a resident of Denman Island. Before he came to Denman, Gerald had co-authored the text-book that introduced two generations of planners to their profession at numerous universities across the country. Consequently, his report was much anticipated by those who contributed to his research. Curiously though, formal announcement of its public release seems to have vanished from the historical record along with my own memory of it, not to mention hard copies of the report itself. Rather mysteriously, there is no reference to it in the minutes of any of the four Local Trust Committee meetings held in 1997. It simply vanished

It was only recently while researching another topic that I came across a reference to the study in the “**Denman Island Community Profile: 2011**” written by an unidentified individual, or perhaps, individuals, for the Islands Trust. This enlightening document (available at <https://denmanresource.files.wordpress.com/2011/02/derptcomprofilefeb2011.pdf>) triggered a further search for a hard copy of “**Disturbing Trends**” which, eventually, and with the assistance of Ron Shepherd and Mike Nestor, took me to the basement/crawl space of the old school where DIRA’s records are stored. Then good luck took over as I opened the top drawer of the first of three filing cabinets. There it was!

A document from another era — an era when staples were still in use and, in this case, employed to attach a less-than-perfect cover reproduction of a map awkwardly overlaid by a graph to 53 pages of text and charts. Fortunately the inelegance of the cover is not reflected in the text where one might have expected the words of a professional planner to be scholarly and analytical they are often philosophical and even, at times, poetic.

Gerald Hodge’s study of through ferry traffic on Denman Island opens on page 1 with the following quote from John Fowles: “There is a marked individuality of islands, which we should like to think corresponds with our own; their obstinate separatedness (sic) of character, even when they lie in archipelagos.” Expanding on the concept of the “obstinate separatedness” of islands, in the opening paragraph, he writes: “In effect, Denman Island has become a ‘stepping-stone’ to Hornby Island, a role it doesn’t want and didn’t ask for. Two things about this unique situation perplex and frustrate Denman Islanders and provide the context for this study. First, Denman Island is both a rural community and an island. The through traffic is a major disturbance to both of these fundamental characteristics. It presents a challenge to most Islanders’ identity of their community. Second, the through traffic is generated not by their own actions or desires, but by those of another community. In short, Denman Island not only sees its identity compromised by through traffic but also lacks the autonomy to do very much about it. Readers are urged to consider this context closely...”

Hodge then goes on at considerable length and depth to meticulously document the history and the growth of the through traffic experienced by residents of Denman Island in what can only be described as tender and philosophical tones, once again quoting John Fowles on page 37 as follows: “Island communities are the original alternative societies. That is why so many mainlanders envy them.... Some vision of Utopian belonging, of social blessedness, of an independence based on cooperation, haunts them all.”

Not surprisingly, the 1997 report predicts continued growth of the through ferry traffic and all the problems associated with it. Hodge concludes by suggesting a number of innovative approaches to addressing the problems which he believes are worthy of future consideration and study.

Presently, steps are under way to make Gerald Hodge's report: "**Disturbing Trends: The Impact of Through Ferry Traffic on Denman Island**" more widely available.