



Denman and Twin Islands Part 2

The Mike Jenks Episode

by John Millen

Word of a potential horror story flashed around Denman Island in December 1997. “Mike Jenks is logging Twin Islands!” Jenks’s company, 4064 Investments Ltd., was at that time busy logging the one third of Denman Island that his company had secured in June 1997 by a third party deal from John Hancock Insurance Company of Boston. Jenks was dreaming of the profits he could make from a 100 lot subdivision of the several kilometres of Komag Bluff waterfront that his company owned.

Twin Islands was thought of as a special place by many BC residents as it was remembered that Queen Elizabeth had stayed at the lodge there on a visit to British Columbia in 1994. The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh had also made an earlier visit in 1971, dropping in for afternoon tea during their tour of BC on their Royal Yacht, Britannia. The royal connection to Twin Islands arose from the purchase of the islands in 1962 by a regal couple from Europe of whom the Margravine Theodora was the Duke of Edinburgh’s sister.

A great attraction to the succession of owners of Twin Islands has been the grand lodge built in the late 1930’s by the Andrews family whose fortune had been made in Japan prior to World War 2 by importing machinery and supplies from the USA. The massive lodge was built in log cabin style out of local timbers and stonework.

By the end of 1997 the Denman community had responded extensively, but not very effectively to Jenks’s logging of Denman. A Co-op had been formed with the objective of establishing a Community Forest on land proposed to be bought from Jenks. As well the Local Trust Committee had amended the Community Plan to establish Principles of Sustainable Forest Land Use. However none of this activity prevented the continuation of Jenks’s logging. As seen by Denman Islanders, logging Twin Islands was adding insult to injury.

The sale of Twin Islands for \$4 Million to Mike Jenks and his partner Peter Shields had closed on December 1st 1997 and a crew of fallers were there within a week, starting to log.

Twin Islands are located close to the south side of Cortes Island. Notably, the Hollyhock Leadership Learning Centre overlooks Twin Islands. Carol Newall, partner in that Centre, was determined to prevent the logging of the Twin Islands and she had the wherewithal! She had previously established the Endswell Foundation with environmental objectives and she called upon its management to assist her to buy the Islands back from Jenks. In the meantime Cortes Islanders protested. On January 22, 1998 Cortez Island residents (60 of them in boats) blockaded logging crews from Twin Islands. In March 1998, when Jenks accepted \$10 Million for Twin Islands, he had already cut 33,000 cubic meters of cedar and fir timber off the Islands.

The Cortez-based plan then, was to establish restrictive conservation covenants on South Twin Island and sell that island to recover a proportion of their investment. In September 1999 Mark Torrance of Seattle, lifelong participant in sailing trips to Desolation Sound, chose to take a look at South Twin Island. Mark, in his mid fifties, had recently sold his major interest in a successful Internet enterprise. Twin Islands had much to offer him, though he had considerable reservations about the many restrictions set out in the covenants. Eventually a deal was made including that the covenants would be held by an individual, George Reifel. (This is very unusual as mostly only non-profit conservation organizations are certified to hold conservation covenants.) The sale was completed on 14th February, 2000.

Mark Torrance has extensively renovated the classic lodge as well as other buildings and facilities. He eventually also bought the North Twin Island which has not been developed except for a communication tower on its summit and a solar panel array on its sunny south shore.

ref. Sheltering in the Backrush: A History of Twin Islands by Jeanette Taylor, Harbour Publishing, 2023