

WHY FORESTRY? HEAVY DUTY MECHANICS EXPLAIN

By Pieta Wooley

Heavy duty mechanics can work anywhere. They're in demand in oil and gas, in mining and in shops serving other industries all over the world. Paycheques elsewhere can be bigger. But the men profiled here have discovered that for the lifestyle, nothing beats the coastal forest industry.

"We have a labour shortage unfolding every day in the forest industry," says Dave McNaught, TLA Director and Chair of the Education Committee. "So it's good to see young people choosing forestry so they can live where they work and be a part of their communities."

Each year, the Truck Loggers Association, through the Education Committee, offers scholarships to apprentices who work for TLA member companies and plan to make their career in the coastal forest industry. "We are proud to welcome new workers to the industry and help them offset some of their training and living expenses by sponsoring five annual \$1,000 scholarships," says McNaught.

We caught up with recent scholarship winners to find out why they choose to work in the woods and were inspired by what we discovered. This group of young men started out as roughnecks, cattle ranchers and computer techs. Yet all of them, because of their love of the woods and their drive to work hard, chose heavy duty mechanic apprenticeships in the wilds of BC's rainforest.

Adam Lavigne, Squamish Mills Ltd., Squamish

"I'm here to fix the equipment and just get the job done. I'm here to fix what's broken."

Squamish is an idyllic place to live, and Lavigne makes the most of it. You can find him, when the 23-year-old is not working, riding his Honda CR250 dirt bike up the Upper Squamish Valley

and into the Elaho—one of the most stunning landscapes in the province. Or hiking the Squamish Chief.

Heavy duty mechanics, he said, allows him to live and work in the town he loves. And forestry runs in his blood. His father is a faller, and his grandfather owned his own logging company.

"I like to stay local," he said, noting that he started cleaning



Photos: Courtesy of Squamish Mills Ltd.



up in shops when he was just 13. “And I like that I’m always working on something different.”

Zachary Iwasyk, Mount Sicker Services, Duncan

“There are not a lot of jobs where you drive 40 kilometres up a mountainside to get to work. Your office window is much nicer when it’s this far away from any other cars.”

Beater cars, lawnmowers and motorcycles. Starting when he was about 10 years old, you could find Iwasyk in his backyard with a wrench, learning to fix it by just getting in there and fixing stuff. His first car, a 1992 Chevy Tracker, was a Frankenstein-like combination of four different vehicles.

He’s a natural heavy duty mechanic, in other words. Now, he applies his tinkering instincts together with his apprenticeship training to wheel loaders, debarking machines, steep slope harvesters and boats.

“You’re never just sitting there,” said Iwasyk, 22, mentioning that he works between 50 and 70 hours a week—so a passion for mechanics is essential to the job. “Everything is a puzzle to figure out, and when you do, you feel good. There’s not a lot of us, so we work hard so everyone else can get on with their day.”

Wood runs in his blood: both Iwasyk’s grandfathers and his dad worked in sawmills on Vancouver Island. Could he make more money elsewhere? Probably.

But he wouldn’t be home at the end of his workday, and he craves the forest.

In fact, he’s currently inventing a landscape-specific four-wheel drive machine: it starts with a Suzuki Samurai, but he swapped out the engine and is upgrading the suspension so he can explore and camp in the more remote areas of the Island.

Jeffrey Aitken, Accurate Appraisals and Marine Surveys, Cobble Hill

“I like the whole culture around BC logging. As British Columbians, one of our main industries is forestry. You can take a lot of pride in being a beneficial part of that. If you’re skilled, you might as well help out at home.”

Both his grandfathers were mechanics. And his father is a registered professional forester—a silviculturalist. So you’d think heavy duty mechanics would have been his obvious choice from the beginning. But like so many BC boys, the big-money roughneck life lured Aitken to Alberta shortly after finishing high school. For him, it was clearly a job and not a career. The paycheques were great, but being away from his young nephews and his parents for weeks at a time was not.

After years in the patch, he came home to the Cowichan Valley and re-connected with an old soccer pal’s dad, Allen Waugh—who happens to own Accurate Appraisals. A couple of weeks lat-

er, he offered Aitken an apprenticeship and a chance at a real career—based on Aitken’s work ethic.

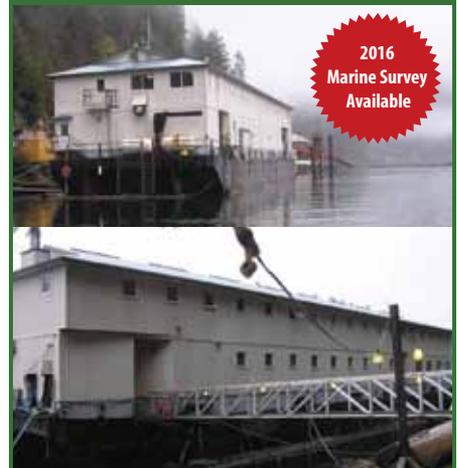
“I like the weather, and I like being closer to home,” said Aitken, 30, explaining why he chooses to apply his heavy duty mechanics training to

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forestry, rather than oil and gas. With more than enough work hours completed towards his apprenticeship, he just has seven more weeks of school and the Red Seal exam left to go.

His favourite machine to work on? The Madill 3800 Log Loader. “You can tell it was built by mechanics rather than engineers. The lay-out is smart, everything is easy to get at. And it’s a strong, robust machine.”

Mitchell Short, Fearless Log Salvage, Campbell River

“Working on logging machinery out on the block, you don’t always have the right part or tool. So you have to get creative to keep it running.”

Growing up on a ranch near Vanderhoof, Short spent his early years “chasing cows and cutting hay.” He’d planned to take over the family business after getting a trade—his dad expected him to bring in a needed skill and mechanical ability was needed. While training, an-

Photo: Courtesy of Fearless Log Salvage



other family member showed him pictures of the coastal forest. The farm boy’s life changed.

“The chance to live and work here every day? It’s too good to give up,” said Short, 23, who has finished all of the required work hours for his apprentice-

ship, and just has two years of schooling left before writing his Red Seal.

Logging, Short notes, is fast-paced compared to agriculture. At Fearless Log Salvage, he works under another mechanic to maintain a fleet of self-loading logging trucks and other machines. He’s still constantly surprised by the machines, which can go nearly anywhere in the woods.

“I do miss my cows sometimes,” he said, “But working out of the shop truck on logging roads around Campbell River, I see elk, deer and bear. My favourite part about my job is how much of the island I get to see and enjoy, and seeing the wildlife.”

Dylan Wood, Holbrook Dyson Logging, Campbell River

“I had a desk job, but I figured out I can’t sit at a desk. I get tired and lethargic. I couldn’t sleep right. Doing a labour job, you can keep going all day.”

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Even though Wood helped out at his dad's contracting business since he was barely a teen, he thought he would try something different. Three years after Grade 12, with a Mechanical Engineering Technology certificate in hand, he began a career in computer-based modelling—designing parts that would then be manufactured elsewhere. Soon, he found that sitting for long days didn't agree with him.

Now 28, he walks into his family business in coveralls and boots, ready to conquer whatever the day (and his boss) has in store for him. Welding something that's cracked? He's happy to. Replacing parts? No problem. Yarders, dozers, rock trucks, pick-ups—these are his puzzles, and he uses his body and mind to solve them in the shop and out in the woods.

"Knowing the area through work helps me find the best spots for camping and dirt biking," Dylan added, noting the additional benefits of getting out from behind a desk. He has already written his Red Seal and is just completing hours to finish his apprenticeship.

Tyler Sheppe, Island Pacific Equipment, Chemainus

"I'm never in a shop. I never know what I'm going to come across next. I've got to think, got to be prepared. Got to use my mind about what's going to be thrown at me. I like it."

At just 19 and already two years in to his four-year apprenticeship, Sheppe is a shining example of what's possible when BC's Industry Training Authority partners with a school district. At Kwalikum Secondary School, his guidance counsellor suggested he spend Grade 12 in the dual-credit program at Vancouver Island University, earning his first year apprenticeship while finishing high school.

"Thirty people applied and four got picked, including me," said Sheppe. "I was a hard worker at school, and by then, I already had lots of my classes done."

Hard work is Sheppe's personal brand. He started at age 10 counting change and doing odd jobs for Quality Foods. He's also scooped ice cream for Coombs Country Market, worked on a commercial fishing boat, and helped out in a welding shop. As a fifth generation logger, he says, diligence runs in the family.

He also plays hard, fishing for halibut and salmon in Nootka Sound every chance he gets.

"I'm not concerned [about the cyclical nature of the forest sector] because I'm good at what I do and I'm super hard-working. Of course it's always at the back of my mind what's going to happen. But good workers don't look for work. The work finds them."

While there is a labour shortage in the forest industry that many are working to address, these men clearly love their work and the West Coast. If forestry can attract more people like this, the industry will be in good hands.

If you know someone considering their career options or a heavy duty mechanic apprentice working for a TLA member company, show them this article and recommend the forest industry as a great career. The TLA still has Trade Scholarships available for this fiscal year ending September 30, 2017 and will have another batch available in October. For more information or to apply, visit our website, www.tla.ca/scholarships. 🌲



Photo: Courtesy of Holbrook/Dyson Logging



Photo: Courtesy of Island Pacific Equipment