



Rendezvous 2016 – Ladysmith

Ex-Forest Service Vessel Squadron



Boat Building and Maintenance

In the early days of coastal logging in BC, most of the logging operations were accessible only by water. Starting in 1912, The BC Forest Service acquired a fleet of ‘Ranger launches’ which were used by Rangers and Assistant Rangers to patrol and police these logging operations in the different BC coastal forest ‘water districts’. These launches were mostly wooden vessels, either bought as private yachts and converted, built under contract for the Forest Service, or built by the Forest Service in its own boatyard. Over many years, the Ranger launches were used for administration, timber cruising, inspections, fire suppression, transporting equipment and tree seedlings, and as accommodation for inventory and other crews.

After starting with a very small facility in Heriot Bay in 1912, the Forest Service built a new base in 1914 at Thurston Bay on Sonora Island. Marine ways, boat storage, float houses and a bunkhouse were built at this remote spot, and for the next 27 years, construction and maintenance of Ranger Launches were carried out. In the late 1930’s Thurston Bay became progressively impractical as a base due to its remote location, a shortage of skilled labour and dwindling coastal steamship service. Leaving just the Ranger Station at Thurston Bay, all other equipment was moved to the North Arm of the Fraser River in Vancouver in 1941. The new Forest Service Marine Station was opened in July 1941, and Ranger launches were built and maintained there until fire destroyed the station in May 1949. Soon rebuilt, the station continued with boat building and maintenance. In 1965 the station assumed responsibility for manufacturing and maintaining a much broader range of Forest Service equipment, and was renamed the Forest Service Marine Depot (FSMD). The 48-foot *Coast Ranger* was the last vessel built at FSMD in 1966, however vessel maintenance continued until most of the Ranger launches were taken out of service and sold at auction in 1984/85. Following a similar sale of launches in 1974, this latter sale all but spelled the end of a proud history of government service by these many Ranger launches. Labour intensive construction of wooden vessels was giving way to mass produced fibreglass and aluminum vessels. Unionization of vessel crews and the advent of more expedient and practical helicopter and float plane access to coastal logging operations also served to render these very well built and maintained vessels surplus to Forest Service requirements. But for many of them, a new life was about to begin!



Forest Ranger II



White Birch

Private Ownership of Ranger Launches

The various Ranger launches were taken away by the lucky new owners who had successfully bid for them at the auction. They recognized that the quality of construction and maintenance of their newly acquired vessels set them apart from many other similar sized vessels on the coast. They also understood that they were now custodians of a living piece of BC's coastal heritage, and for the most part, set about to preserve that heritage with loving care and pride.



Syrene I



Alpine Fir II

The Squadron is Born

In 1992, Norm Wright, a new owner who lived on board the retired Ranger launch *Nesika* in Sidney, BC, wrote to all of the other new owners for whom he could obtain addresses. At Norm's instigation, the first rendezvous of retired Ranger launches took place on the July 1st long weekend of 1992 in Pender Harbour. Sixteen former launches attended. At the next rendezvous in Maple Bay in 1993, the **Ex-Forest Service Vessel Squadron (EFSVS)** was formed. Regular membership was open to former BC Forest Service vessels, and Associate membership to former mission boats and other vessels with a history of former provincial or federal government service. The Squadron currently comprises 16 former Ranger launches, including *Coast Ranger*, the last launch built by the Forest Service and the last one to be decommissioned and sold at Prince Rupert in 2010. There are another 23 former Ranger launches which are unfortunately not in the Squadron, but for which we are doing our best to keep track of their ownership and location.

Squadron vessels and their owners and crews gather for a Rendezvous each year in different locations around the south coast. At our 2012 Rendezvous in Victoria marking the BC Forest Service Centennial, owners were presented by the Forest Service with individually cast commemorative Centennial plaques in recognition of the dedicated custody and care of their respective vessels. We are proud of our former Ranger launches, and encourage visits by the public during every annual Rendezvous. We hope you enjoy your visit with us today. You can also get a good idea of the heritage of our vessels by watching "*Against The Tide*", a colourful sixteen-minute video of our 1995 Rendezvous at the Vancouver Maritime Museum.

<http://youtu.be/LVcZbtewpSM>



Silver Fir, Nesika, Dean Ranger and Forest Ranger II
Sidney B.C. 1995



Centennial Plaque

Our Squadron is proud to be affiliated with and a supporter of the **Maritime Museum of BC.**