

The Confluence

"Where different waters meet and are transformed"

The Newsletter of the Camosun College Faculty Association

Volume 5, Issue 3: November 2015



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Bronwen Welch

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Activist Assembly YYJ: A Regional Convergence of Organizing and Action!

On Saturday, Nov 28, the University of Victoria is holding a day-long mini-conference: The Activist Assembly YYJ.

The Activist Assembly YYJ will be a full day of workshops, speakers, and participatory planning sessions working toward the future of our progressive movements. The Activist Assembly YYJ is free for anyone in the Victoria area.

Please see the link to the conference list of events:

<https://uvss.ca/events/activist-assembly-yyj/>

I will be part of a panel entitled "Issues and Organizing in Post-Secondary Education." The panelists joining me will be Seamus Wolfe (speaking from grad student perspective) and Simka Marshall (Chairperson of the Canadian Federation of Students-BC, and former executive at the Camosun College Students Society, speaking on province-wide challenges and issues).

Report from FPSE' Presidents' Council: November 19th and 20th

On November 19th and 20th, I attended FPSE's Presidents' Council. This is an opportunity for presidents from all the B.C. locals to meet and discuss issues in the post-secondary system. Here are some of the highlights of that meeting.

- **Labour Relations and Bargaining Across the B.C. Post-Secondary System:** The bargaining process at many locals was complicated by program cuts, especially in areas such as Developmental Education and English Language Training, where federal and provincial cuts have begun to have an impact. As of November 20th, three locals have not yet settled their collective agreements with their employers.
- **Canadian Labour Congress (CLC):** On November 10th, 2015, the Canadian Labour Congress met with our spanking new Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau. Prime Minister Trudeau vocally committed to repealing Bills C-377 and 525. He also discussed the need for historic investment in infrastructure, child care, trades training, public service sick leave, adequate mental health care, and fair and balanced labour laws. On the Syrian refugee crisis, he reiterated his intent to bring 25,000 to Canada by January 1st, 2016. The Prime Minister explained, however, that the government could not do this on its own—the provinces, municipalities, and labour must all help.

CLC is also planning a lobby of new ministers in February or March 2016, and will ask for a meeting between CLC executive and the Prime Minister.

FPSE's Response to Cuts to ABE and ESL Funding

- In 2014, the BC government cut \$22 million in funding from EAL programs in post-secondary institutions, after losing the same amount in program-specific transfer payments from the federal government.
- As of May 1st, 2015 a semester of Adult Basic Education and a semester of a Master's degree cost about the same.
- The Federation of Post-Secondary Educators (FPSE) is calling on the BC government to reinstate funding to English as an Additional Language (EAL) programs in post-secondary institutions.
- FPSE, along with several other organizations representing students and educators across BC, made this same appeal to the Legislature's all-party Select Standing Committee on Finance this fall. That committee published its recommendations last Friday. The first recommendation is to "restore full and sustained funding to the Adult Basic Education (ABE) and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs."

Economic Stability Dividend

Camosun College Faculty Association is one of the FPSE Locals that has ratified collective agreements under the Economic Stability Mandate all faculty and thus will be receiving a pay increase of 0.45% in February 2016.

Last week, Statistics Canada released the finalized 2014 provincial GDP data, reporting that BC's economy grew by 3.2%. Under the terms of our Memorandum of Understanding with the Post-Secondary Employers' Association (PSEA), this economic growth is applied as an Economic Stability Dividend (ESD), resulting in a wage increase to be applied on the salary scale

- **What is the Economic Stability Dividend?** The Economic Stability Dividend (ESD) is a component of the 2014 Economic Stability Mandate that allows for additional general wage increases based on the economic performance of the province. In order for the ESD to be applied, the GDP growth for British Columbia must exceed forecasts set at the start of the fiscal year. The wage increase is calculated based on 50% of the positive difference between the forecast and the data released by Statistics Canada.
- **How is the ESD calculated?** In November, Statistics Canada releases a report titled *Real Gross Domestic Product at Market Prices* that includes GDP growth for the provinces. If actual GDP growth exceeds the Economic Forecast Council's February projected GDP growth, then half of the difference is used to calculate an ongoing general wage increase for union members covered by collective agreements under the Economic Stability Mandate.
- **How does this affect Camosun College Faculty Association members?** B.C.'s real GDP grew by 3.2% in 2014. This exceeded the Economic Forecast Council's forecast of 2.3% GDP growth by 0.9%. An amount equal to half of that positive difference will go to members as a pay increase 0.45% in February 2016. Similar calculations will be conducted over the next three years and could lead to ESD pay increases in February of 2017, 2018 and 2019.

Resource spotlight on...

Margie Clarke, Librarian

Curio.ca - the streaming audio and video collection from CBC & Radio-Canada. Find thousands of programs and resources available in English and French. Also included in our subscription is News in Review 2014-15 — the latest season of current-events.

You can navigate by show, by category, or by collection. If you would like to create playlists for use in the classroom please contact clarkem@camosun.bc.ca to obtain account login information.

Check Curio.ca out either via the library's A-Z database list or from the Streaming video page of the Videos at Camosun Library guide.

Birthday Bliss

Peg Ford, CCFA Administrative Assistant

The dilemma of how to celebrate my birthday.... So many options to break in “the newest year”! (Truth bomb- I suffer from a solid case of indecisiveness.) In the end the decision was clear: Slim Sandy and the Hillbilly Boppers playing at Northern Quarter - "A Modern Interpretation of a Public House".

I heard about the Northern Quarter Restaurant from a friend who admiringly lives *loud*. Dinner and a show? Does it get better? The best part? My husband Dwane and 2 of our very dear friends were “all in” to fulfil my birthday celebratory wish.

From the moment we sat down I was enamoured. The Northern Quarter, at 1724 Douglas Street, is a relatively small restaurant with various basic tables facing a retro stage complete with curtains and a lamp you would have seen in your parents/grandparents (depending on your age!) living room. From the first cocktail to appetizers consisting of Brussel Sprouts (best I’ve eaten!) and Coconut Chowder we knew it was going to be a fabulous evening. Fresh, fun and most definitely hip with mismatched glasses, dishes, beautiful food and staff that is clearly fond of the atmosphere that has been newly created in Victoria.

Starting at 8pm we were entertained by Slim Sandy accompanied by Will Mae and his Hillbilly Boppers. So you’ll have a visual, basically an evening of energetic old time rock’n roll & country swing. The ‘show’ is by donation (we offered up \$10/person). There is entertainment value here, no question!

What can we say? My husband and I are from the Prairies and Dwane worked in country radio for a spell. Finally, a chance to show off our our two step! It was a memorable and perfectly executed birthday celebration.

I hope you have as much fun as we did when you visit Northern Quarter. Who knows I may just see you there...



Professional Development

Its that time of year: you’re starting to gear up for next year’s conference opportunities. **Please hold off a few weeks** before you go through the process of filling in your forms - we have new ones coming in the next couple of weeks. The PD Committee will start to review 2016/17 Fiscal (April 1, 2016 - March 31, 2017) applications in January. In the meantime, you may still use the old forms available here: <http://camosunfaculty.ca/professional-development/pd-forms/> for activities with start dates before April 1.

We will be holding information meetings on applying for Long Term Funding (and if you have SD questions):

- Thursday, December 10, 3:30 – 4:30pm; LACC 354 Interurban
- Friday, December 11, 12:30 – 1:30pm; LLC 151, Lansdowne

If you have any questions regarding the process, your application, register [here](#).

Call for Submissions:

We want you to contribute to the Confluence: tell us about your groovy SD project, the creative work you’re doing with your students, or what you did on your summer holidays. The deadline is ongoing, so no pressure. Email your 1000 word or less article to Erin Waugh: waughe@camsoun.bc.ca.

Parking

Clause 19 in the common agreement states that the college “shall provide parking near the place of employment at no cost to the Employee.” Faculty members have often pointed out that there is a cost, and indeed, a parking pass is a taxable benefit. Last year, the value was deemed to be \$832, so although it depends on your tax bracket, a full-time employee for the year would probably need to pay about \$88 in tax, and a part-time employee (or anyone earning up to \$40,000) would pay about \$63.

In the last round of local bargaining this past spring, the CCFA signed a letter of agreement with the college for an “Alternate Transportation Dividend” (Letter of Agreement 7 in the 2015-2019 CCFA Collective Agreement). This allows faculty members, both continuing and term, to sign up for the full or flex transportation dividend program. Anyone who signed up for the full program will be paid a one-time \$120 incentive payment in December, and anyone who signed



Judith Hunt, Contract Management Committee Chair

up for the flex program will receive \$60. The flex program allows employees to park any ten days of the month, from September through to August. The days chosen are indicated by a scratch card that employees can leave on the dashboard of their car.

The college has estimated that 12% of CCFA employees don't get a parking pass in any given year. Last year, out of a total of 536 CCFA employees, 64 didn't bring their car. This year, 52 faculty members opted for the full dividend program and 31 members opted for a flex pass. What the dividend will be next year is anyone's guess, but in the meantime, finding another way to get to the college is something to consider, especially on the fine sunny days we've been enjoying.

For all things parking, please see <http://intranet/parking/>

Homes for All

Julia Grav, School of Business

There have been numerous media recently concerning homelessness, particularly after a B.C. Supreme Court Ruling in Abbotsford said not allowing individuals to sleep in parks is a violation of Section 7 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom. In Victoria, the recent homeless camp at the court house on Quadra Street is in a state of flux. Victoria's Regional Hospital Board is meeting to vote on the “Housing First Strategy” Wednesday, Dec. 9, 2015 at 1:30pm. This fundamental decision could greatly affect the lives of our most vulnerable citizens by providing \$30M to put up roofs for 367 individuals.

On Dec. 9 at 12pm in Centennial square, I invite you to bring your donations of woollen blankets and socks to an “Homes for All” event and join us for food and speakers in support of the Housing First Strategy. At 1:30pm we will rally to show our support of a “Yes” vote for the Housing First Strategy. Find the event promoted through Facebook for more details.

We are still looking for donations to make sure we can feed all who attend. Please contact Julia Grav: gravj@camosun.ca if you have questions or can provide support for this initiative.

Also take a moment to sign our electronic petition: http://www.victoriavoices.ca/no_displacement_housing_now

“Homes for All” is a committee advocating for a real solution to the Victoria homelessness issue. The group is composed of members from Together Against Poverty (TAPs), the Cool-Aid Society, two city Victoria Council members, an Aboriginal Elder and two UVic Student Society Directors, plus concerned citizens – including myself.

Links

- [1] <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/abbotsford-homeless-court-ruling-1.3281875>
- [2] <http://www.timescolonist.com/news/local/neighbours-fed-up-with-tent-city-next-to-victoria-courthouse-1.2119100>
- [3] <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/victoria-homeless-housing-plan-vote-1.3270208>
- [4] <https://www.facebook.com/events/186270448385971/187325184947164/>



Urban cycling is dangerous.....really?

Tony Webster, CSEE

This is Part I of a three part series on cycle commuting.

As you all know, the College is trying to move us out of our cars towards more sustainable transportation methods. Cycling is one of those options.



Unfortunately many are still hesitant to commute on a bike as they are under the impression that it is too dangerous. Sure, urban cycling has its risks, but I want to convince you that ultimately the experience is as dangerous as you want to make it. Here's how folks unknowingly make their cycle commute more dangerous:

1. *Assuming car drivers and pedestrians are paying attention and that they will obey the rules of the road* – I'm sorry to have to break this to you, but urban traffic is a veritable green garden of mistakes. Until we all have those fancy self driving cars that take human error out of the equation, this is just a fact of life. If every road and sidewalk user remembered this there would be far fewer accidents and rage on our roads. Never assume anything. A superior approach is to adopt a rather paranoid mindset when riding your bike in traffic. Expect chaos and stupidity. Positive thinking might be great for some things in life, but I would argue exactly the opposite is needed when riding on the roads. [and on that note... if you haven't read Chris Hadfield's book "An Astronaut's Guide to Life on Earth" I suggest you do – there is an excellent piece on the power of negative thinking].
2. *Not wearing a helmet* – this is a no brainer (pun intended).
3. *Being invisible* – get some decent bike lights and ideally some bright reflective clothing! Both are thankfully quite cheap and easy to get these days. An invisible cyclist enrages car drivers and is obviously dangerous on the roads. Based on my daily commuting experience, I have concluded that some folks seem to think that if they stick to bike trails that "ninja" cycling (no lights, dark clothing) is acceptable. Now imagine two cyclists travelling at 30 km/h colliding on a narrow

bike trail because one didn't see the other. Time to think again. Oh and by the way, when you buy that super powerful front bike light, PLEASE angle it down so oncoming bike trail users can see where the heck we're going! (a pet peeve of mine).

4. *Riding in the door zone* – avoid riding in the ~3 feet zone from parked cars where you are susceptible to being "doored". Only ride in the door zone when you have no choice and in that case, slow down and expect those doors to fly open! Getting doored is a violent and traumatic event which I have thankfully never experienced, though I came close once. It's no use assigning blame to a motorist who absent mindedly opened their door on you. They didn't intend to injure you and you are the one writhing on the ground. Too late for blame. You must nudge your "vigilance meter" up a notch. I repeat: do not ride in the door zone unless you have to.
5. *Ziping by pedestrians and other slower cyclists without letting them know you're passing* – the Galloping Goose, Lochside and other local trails are chock full of pedestrians, cyclists and other generally unpredictable beasts (dogs, etc.). Let them know you're approaching. A couple of summers ago I watched a perfect storm unfold in front of me. It went something like this: absent minded cyclist approaches a dog walker rapidly and quietly from behind, dog sees errant squirrel on opposite side of trail, dog lunges across trail at just the wrong time, dog takes out cyclist. It could all have been prevented with a little more attention and communication. Give pedestrians and slower cyclists a wide berth and ring your bell or say "on the left" clearly before you pass. You will even find that pedestrians will thank you for it!

Want more tips on how to make your bike ride more dangerous? Tune in to the next episode!

Tony Webster teaches in the Centre for Sport and Exercise Education and is a self-confessed cycle commuting addict.

The Power of Calm

Erin Waugh, ACC

Last night, I was reminded of the power of practicing calm.. and thought I'd offer up some food for thought.

The scene: in my absence and while searching for dinner ingredients which he was unable to find, my frustrated, 6'1" teenaged son has slammed a cupboard door and ripped one of the hinges out leaving it sort of hanging. I returned home after a very long day (I left at 7:10am...it was now 9:00pm) to find the kitchen in disarray, the door hanging and my son cleaning his bike in the dining room. (Surprisingly, this article is NOT about the bike cleaning in the living room.)

My first thought: WTF! (although this was in my head, it was loud, and I sounded ALL the words out). My second thought: “take a deep breath, Erin.”

And so I did, and rather than lose my temper, I calmly went about damage control. My son was visibly shaken by what had transpired - his frustration level had gotten the best of him and, well, he *broke* the house. Rather than launch into a demand for an explanation, I turned my attention to his emotions, made sure that he knew that everything was going to be ok, and considered how the situation in my house (messy cupboard, salt in a package that looked NOT like salt) had contributed to what had happened.

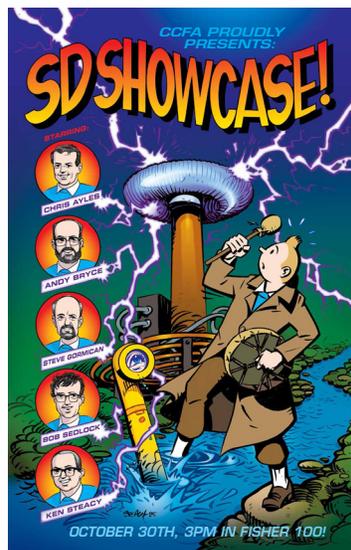


Guess what happened? He helped repair the damage, apologized for breaking the house, we got to talk about managing rising anger. A situation that might have damaged our relationship (what with the yelling and consequences) ended up strengthening it. My son saw me manage MY anger in a healthy way. He witnessed me taking responsibility in my part in what had happened and he easily took responsibility for his part in it. It reminded me that calm is the place where my very best parenting moments have come from. It also reminded me that taking that breath before I do anything else is the way to access that calm. And...its worth the practice.

SD Showcase

Bronwen Welch, President

The SD Showcase this semester took place on October 30th, the day before Halloween, which could perhaps account for the number of costumed individuals in attendance. This was an absolutely amazing group of presentations. Part of my delight was because of the collective joy and passionate interest each of the presenters felt for his subject. At the end of the evening, we all collected in the Wilna Thomas Cultural Center, for wine and snacky-type items. The CCFA executive wants to host this event again in the January 2016 semester. We want to hear about your awesome SD projects! If you would like to present next semester, please let me know.



For now, here is my brief synopsis of the evening's presentations:

Chris Ayles, our Indiana Jones of Geography and Environmental Technology, described his research at Fairy Lake, located five kilometers northeast of Port Renfrew. While teaching his students applied techniques for collecting geographical data, Chris conducted his own research regarding a geographical mystery (see Chris' article in this edition of *The Confluence*).

Next, our most beloved Ken Steacy, from the Comic and Graphic Novel Program, described his Parisian journey investigating the world of Franco-Belgian comics. Not only did Ken give his audience a fascinating peep into the world of French comic culture, but he did it dressed as Tintin, a visual nod to Belgian cartoonist Georges Remi (who wrote under the pen name Hergé).

The presentation that made me weep was Andy Bryce's

documentary "Finding Peter Bryce." This documentary details Andy's investigation into the life and career of his great-grandfather, Dr. Peter Henderson Bryce, a Medical Inspector in the Department of the Interior and Indian Affairs in the early twentieth century. This is a heartbreaking look into the systemic racism of the time, but it is also an inspirational story of a heroic man.

Steve Gormican (aka Camosun's Jacques Cousteau but sans the red tam o'shanter) from Environmental Technology, detailed his adventure on board the vessel *Nautilus*. Asked to participate as a member of the Ocean Networks Canada research team, Steve spent ten days at sea. While the ship cruised the west coast of Vancouver Island,

Steve wrote live blogs as well as answered questions from individuals around the globe. Moreover, Steve was able to communicate in real-time with his Camosun students during the entirety of his experience on board ship.

Finally, Physics' instructor Bob Sedlock demonstrated how a Tesla Coil conducts voltage. As part of his presentation, Bob turned off the lights in the lab, instructing his audience to stand away from the coil. Watching from my flattened position against the wall, I witnessed the explosion of long, brilliant blue electrons leap through the air; these ribbons of electricity seemed to reach out towards us -- in actuality (I learned later) the electrons were looking for a conductive landing place. As the peacock cerulean streaks leapt outwards and upwards, there was a collective gasp, small shrieks, and much laughter from the audience, and we all agreed it was a fantastic way to end a very successful SD Showcase.

Fairy Creek – A Marginal SD Story

Chris Ayles, Geography

Over the past several springs, I have slowly chipped away at a field-based geomorphology puzzle. This SD project is marginal in two senses: it hasn't amounted to much, and it took place in the margins of my real work. You see, I am among the minority of faculty members who sacrifice our two months of dedicated SD to teach ten months per year. Collective agreement mavens, stand down: I do this voluntarily. Partly, I enjoy the reduced teaching load in fall and winter. Partly, I am glad to help keep the amazing Environmental Technology spring program running. More than anything, I treasure the small-group field work I do with students each spring. The SD suffers, no doubt about it. I do most of my course development on the fly, and never get to spend two months concentrating on radical course redesign or research. But I get things done in the spaces in between, and this is an example.

Every June, five ET instructors drag the entire first-year student cohort out to Fairy Lake, on the west coast of the Island, for a six-day field camp. We sleep in tents, eat around the campfire, get rained on, and spend our days teaching environmental field skills in the field. (Which may sound self-evident, but Camosun deserves credit for supporting this essential, expensive pedagogy.) I have gone to camp 11 years running, and taught quite a few different things: power boating, timber cruising, ecosystem assessment... But I struck gold when Warren Drinnan retired and bequeathed to me the streams module, because as a fluvial geomorphologist, streams are what I know best.



My field site is Fairy Creek, a humble watercourse that, most years, barely trickles beneath Highway 14 on its way to the lake. Downstream of the bridge, the water utterly vanishes, although the clean gravel and piled-up logs tell a story of vigorous winter flows when no one is looking. Early on, I took to walking down the lower creek every year, and that 30-minute hike revealed some surprises:

- A superabundance of gravel filling the channel, swamping old tree stumps and pushing into the forest;
- Large log jams spanning the creek; and
- No water at all, except in the deepest holes scoured by winter floods.

It's a textbook picture of aggradation: excessive buildup of sediment, often an indicator of disturbance in the watershed, and a real problem for salmon trying to use the creek. Not unexpected in a place like this, where a steep creek hits the flats of a larger river, but a striking case.

So I wondered: is Fairy Creek just naturally productive of sediment, or did this perhaps result from logging in the watershed? Clear-cuts and logging roads are notorious for causing heightened landslide activity and sediment loading in streams, to the detriment of fish habitat. In fact, this stimulated major regulatory reforms for BC forestry in the 1990s. Was I seeing evidence of forest operators misbehaving in the Fairy Creek watershed?

Fortuitously, field camp includes a guest appearance by Mark, a manager for the Teal-Jones Group, who hold the timber harvesting rights around Fairy Lake. Mark is a neat, bland, avuncular fellow. He drives an hour from Cowichan Lake to tell our students about the challenges of modern forestry, and to patiently answer questions about environmental issues and job prospects. I asked Mark if he knew of any logging-related landslides into Fairy Creek. No, no, that watershed is a protected old growth management area. Never been logged.

I took his word for it, and chalked it up to natural instability. It's a very steep watershed in a rainforest, after all. But sometime later, the subject came up as I was talking to Kelly, an ET alumnus who worked at the local fish hatchery. Kelly mentioned it to his colleague Mike, and Mike remembered something about a landslide from a logging road above Fairy

Creek in the 1980s or 1990s. He even printed me a grainy Google Earth image that seemed to show it.

Hot on the scent now, I gathered some historical air photos. I examined the Fairy Creek watershed for clearings, natural or otherwise. I found some natural erosion, though less than I expected. In such steep terrain, there are many small failures that don't show at a distance. I also found, contrary to Mark's assertions, evidence of logging in the watershed. Mike's slide showed up clear as day in a cutblock above the east ridge, and must have occurred sometime between 1987 and 2002. I pulled out a forest cover map donated by Mark, and sure enough, that older cut-block was shown, just straddling the Fairy Creek divide. It had been under my nose for years.

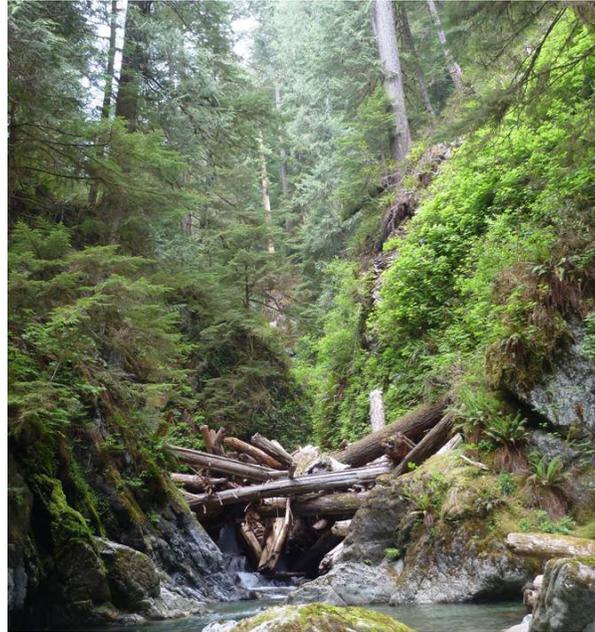
I started taking hikes up the creek, either while the students were busy or after hours. I was hunting for Mike's landslide, which was starting to seem like a sort of geomorphic Moby Dick. I found plenty of evidence up the creek. Abundant angular gravel in the channel, a clear sign of recent landslide activity. Chunks of rusty, corrugated metal that probably were once road drainage culverts.

The valley walls were incredibly steep, with tilting trees due to slope movement. I eventually found a substantial landslide from the top of the ridge, but it seemed like a natural rock failure. At this point, the valley narrows to a canyon choked with wood and waterfalls; I got no farther.

Finally, I decided to explore the old cut block above the creek. I hiked as high as I could up the logging road network. The clearest roads led to nothing but bear scat and viewpoints, so I pushed into a barely discernable older road overgrown with alder. It took about a kilometre of stumbling through the brush, but finally I found my white whale. The landslide was rather underwhelming at first glance, a gully covered with young alder forest. But it was 20 m across, several metres deep, and hundreds of metres from top to bottom. It had begun at a road switchback and had blasted through a lower road crossing on its way down to Fairy Creek, gouging out rock, soil and trees all the way. Back in camp, my colleagues greeted this triumph with politely feigned interest. I love those guys.

The following year, I politely reported all this to Mark after his guest lecture. He shrugged at my mundane non-discovery, not even acknowledging his earlier denials on the subject. (Teal-Jones presently has controversial plans to log old-growth forest in the upper Carmanah-Walbran, right beside the park. Mark may just be the perfect PR man for that job.)

So, what did I really learn here? Yes, there was at least one logging-related landslide into Fairy Creek. It probably predates the Forest Practices Code, so I'm not sure anyone



broke any laws, and even if they did, that horse left the barn long ago. I could raise a stink about it with Mark, but is it worth jeopardizing our guest lecture? I still don't know whether forestry is to blame for the sediment buildup in the lower creek, since there is plenty of natural slope instability too. To settle this, I would need to compare the volume of sediment eroded from sources natural and otherwise. I might also look at sediment travel time down the creek, or try to date the deposits downstream.

In other words, I would need to do proper research, a daunting task for a full-time teaching instructor, never mind one

without a dedicated SD period. It's probably not going to happen. So am left with the marginal success of having tracked down one fairly minor landslide, and a bit of malaise over my research credibility. But this project has yielded some teaching payoff. I developed a new module on terrain stability, where I march the students into the steep places I have discovered and teach them about watershed processes. I tell this story to students, show them the clues, and hope that imaging the creek as a mystery to be solved stimulates their scientific curiosity and sharpens their observational skills.

Maybe most importantly, the case of Fairy Creek has kept me intrigued and searching. If I can stay excited about environmental field work, I stand a better chance of sparking the same interest in my students. And for me, at least, that's as valuable an SD outcome as any.

The Union Reel

Kelly Pitman, CNC Chair

Breaking Bad

Prod. Vince Gilligan, 2008-2013

I recently finished watching the series *Breaking Bad*. The premise: a mild-mannered chemistry teacher is diagnosed with inoperable lung cancer. Faced with insurmountable medical expenses, a paltry salary, and a ridiculous but, alas, not unbelievable code of male self-sufficiency, he gets the bright idea that cooking meth might be the ticket to accumulating enough money for his treatment and this family. Cue debacle. One thing's for sure: your worst day at work is nothing compared to what you have to face when you work in illegal narcotics. And of course, I can't help but wonder, how would a union work in this sector?

First, the underlings would have some rights, which would mean Jesse Pinkman, the high-school drop-out turned industrial-grade meth mixer, would have a representative when he negotiated with his employer. From where I sit, Jesse is in dire need of a fair contract. There have got to be some rules in the compensation package saying that they can't, for instance, kill your girlfriend if you're not making your targets. And is there any process for determining who gets appointed to a supervisory position? Because really, the guy with the ginormous attitude problem ("I am the one who knocks!") should not have been promoted without some kind of due process. And when it comes to solving manager-employee disputes, surely an established grievance process is better than Freudian father-figure manipulation and a gun in your face? Maybe it's just me, but I see grievances aplenty here.

Second, the whole "temporary employees" category needs examination. What are the qualifications? Related to the district manager by blood or nefarious nepotism? Check. Ability to solve moral equations by resorting to violence and extortion? Check. Dead-eyed stare of a conscience-free killing machine? Check. Is this really the best they could do? Where is the Human Resources Department? Ah, maybe that's it. Maybe this organization thinks that humans ARE resources? Never a good way to go, as the body count proves. Employees should have some role in determining who comes on board. It saves a lot of cleaning up later. Literally. Then again, learning how to dispose of a body so that it will never be found is surely a marketable skill in this cutthroat world, so there's that.

Third, what about workplace health and safety, not to mention a decent benefits plan? Alright, they've got hazmat suits, but what with all the poisoned cigarettes and flying bullets and explosions, well, let's just say that it makes my persistent anxiety about the paper cutter seem trivial. At the very least, there ought to be health and welfare benefits. That way, if you almost asphyxiate yourself because you mismeasured the chemicals

necessary to make street drugs in an RV parked in the baking desert (is it Friday yet?), you could have some paid sick days. And surely if ever workers were in need of life insurance, these are them. But even the little things count. Someday, Jesse Pinkman is going to need to take a break from the violent mayhem of his workaday life and get his teeth cleaned, and when that happens, bam, 95% reimbursement. That will make his gruelling and heart-wrenching abandonments of all his principles easier to take.

Fourth, who's in charge of the strategic plan? Is it the guy with the sports car? The guy with the biggest gun? The guy with the piles of money in the crawlspace? Not good enough. One of the running gags in *Breaking Bad* is that Jesse often has a good idea that is completely ignored by his ego-wielding supervisors. In fact, when it comes to planning, this organization has problems. No division knows what the others are doing. The people who are handling the so-called big stuff have no idea how it all works on the ground. And the company spends more time fixing its mistakes than working together to plan a realistic future. No long view here, and no consultation. Maybe that's why the show isn't on anymore.

The ironic tragedy at the heart of *Breaking Bad* is that unregulated capitalism often seems to us the best chance for making our lives and those of the people we love better, but in the long run, it doesn't work. It might seem to. You might end up with a lot of money in the crawlspace. But you'll always have to have more. Meanwhile, you'll have to sell your soul, and you will try to justify that by counting your money, not to mention you'll have to protect your money forever.

And you'll still have cancer. You were always going to die, after all. And in the end, what matters? Not profit. Not winning. Just decency. Just people. Take care that you still have some. Take care that you still like yourself. That is what I learned from *Breaking Bad*.

Also, I should have paid attention in Chemistry.

