

# Mountain Shells

FIELD REPORT

## ISLANDS IN THE MIST

by Anne Champagne

*DEEP WITHIN BRITISH COLUMBIA'S INTERIOR is the only inland temperate rainforest in the world. New Denver Flats in the Slocan Valley of southeastern B. C. is an exquisite fragment of this forest. The Standard-Hartney trail bisects a few hectares of the flats, its inner sanctum a small grove of western red cedars. It would take a small flock of tree huggers to encircle one.*

*Our boots brush against mitrewort and wild ginger as we pass Douglas fir, hemlock, larch and white pine that would make a logger's fingers twitch for his chainsaw. This is a place of 160-foot trees, some nearly 500 years old. Some cedars are 6 feet thick. Hummocks of moss undulate like waves on the lush forest floor.*

*To the northeast, unexpected light penetrates the forest. Along the trail, just as we leave this line of light we become aware of another to the south. Clearcuts. We feel adrift on an island with its connection to the mainland newly severed. All around are patches of land littered with stumps, sunlight blaring on exposed heartwood. We walk about the amputated timber and wonder if its phantom limbs feel pain where trunks and branches grew.*

*My companion sweeps away sawdust, carves a narrow line into a stump and counts annual rings. White pine: 235 years old, 2 foot diameter; cedar: 128 years, 3 foot diameter. Fast growth fed by copious rains. Broken gray lichen litters the ground like ash. Shards of wood rise from stumps where trees have been ripped off their moorings. Rain turns the stumps deeper red.*

*Felled trees make catastrophic crashes as we take in the sight of huge slashpiles left to burn, and a few spindly reserve trees afloat in the shattered land. Steep slopes invite erosion. The villages and farms that depend on the water that filters through this ancient forest are afraid they'll have mud-brown slurry to drink or no water at all once the cutting is done. We will be left marooned on islands of green in an ocean of severed limbs, unless we find a way to be heard.*

*Each journey is simply a series of small steps.* TYLER STABLE FORD

