

Harry E. Cullis and David T. Suzuki, *British Columbia: Frontier for Ideas*

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Harry E. Cullis and David T. Suzuki. *British Columbia: Frontier for Ideas*. Vancouver: Western Education Development Group, Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia, 1986. Paper \$16.00, ISBN 0-88865-052-3.

The authors of *British Columbia: Frontier for Ideas* see this westernmost province with its varied and unique resources and environs as the ideal breeding ground for innovative and inventive thinkers. They go on to chronicle hundreds of successes, some of which are quite spectacular, and explain their import and how they work. On some occasions, these discoveries jump out of history at the reader, but on others, where source material is readily available, they are placed in an evolutionary context of the problem to be solved. Too often, though, the authors fail to place the developments in context of evolutionary development in the subject or industry and neglect to compare British Columbia with other regions or provinces to determine if this province is indeed the "frontier for ideas."

While the authors fail to provide the analytical framework upon which to draw any major conclusions about the inventive and innovative manner of this province's residents, they do provide a good "primer" for students of the field. Although the text is not footnoted, thereby hindering further research, the bibliography is sufficient to enable work to be carried out. More research would fill the gaps in the authors' treatment of the inventive process. For example, the discussion about chainsaws (p. 50) highlights MacMillan-Bloedel's invention of the "spacing saw" in 1968 but fails to note the many small inventions that took place in the 1940s—inventions that made the British

Columbia manufactured chainsaw a world leader. Also, further research on the "Bambi" bucket (p. 47) would have shown that this discovery was merely an improvement over the older, heavier "Monsoon" bucket invented in Nelson, British Columbia, fifteen years earlier.

Interspersed in the narrative are occasional welcome reminders of the general process of invention. In some instances "new ideas often come independently to different people and result in simultaneous discoveries" (p. 72); while on other occasions discoveries in one subject area can spark a breakthrough in another. An example of the latter process is the case where the coddling moth problem in fruit was solved by the application of discoveries concerning screw worms in cattle in the United States (p. 92). Yet, under different circumstances, the authors remind us, great advances result from accidents, as was the case of the bandsaw development (p. 57).

Despite these problems the book is easy to use. The text is divided into six general areas including primary resource sectors such as fishing, agriculture, mining and forestry as well as transportation, communications and medicine. Some of the material is strong, and the authors are most comfortable in dealing with topics relating to natural history, such as salmon migration. This material is easily understood by the reader and is placed in a context of one century's search for answers. Had the same understanding been there in the treatment of other topics the value of the book would have been enhanced considerably.