AGM set for March 14, 2006

President Arden Rytz invites all members and interested individuals to the second Annual General Meeting of the Forest History Association of Alberta on March 14, 2006.

The meeting will start at 7 p.m., at the Best Western Westwood Inn, 18035 Stony Plain Road, Edmonton.

"It is significant that the FHAA's first year coincided with Alberta's Centennial year," says Arden. "Forestry in all its aspects has played a tremendous role in the development and life of the province, and we're fortunate that so many are dedicated to the task of documenting and preserving this history for today and future generations."

Arden says the first year has seen some good strides made in building FHAA membership, working towards charitable organization status and exploring protocols for archiving interviews and cataloging artifacts.

"I urge all members and other individuals interested in preserving this valuable and fascinating history to join us on March 14, and continue their financial and personal support of the association," Arden says.

Items on the agenda will include FHAA business and the election of three directors, acceptance of the financial statements, and a review of past activities and future plans.

Dues for 2006 ($25) will be collected at the door, or may be mailed to the FHAA care of Bruce Mayer, Treasurer, 22 Hutchinson Place, St. Alberta, Alberta, T8N 6R3.

For more information on the meeting, contact Bruce Mayer at (780) 644-4656.

Waterlogged - Bob Stevenson sends this photo of pilot Frank Arman and a Bell 47J-2 near the confluence of Wabasca and Muddy rivers, 1966. He writes: "The machine refused to start after we endured a 'micro-burst' shower, forcing us to check and dry the wiring harness and plugs before it would fly. The J-2 was our vehicle for a tree growth and spruce budworm project in the Wabasca area."

If you have any historical tidbits or anecdotes we could use in future newsletters, please contact David Holehouse, Secretary.

Historical notes on Chisholm Sawmills

By PETER MURPHY

Chisholm Sawmills was built around 1915 by Tom Chisholm, who started as a tie contractor for the Edmonton, Dunvegan and British Columbia Railway. He set up camps along the Athabasca River to make ties for the coming railroad.

In 1915 he built a steam-powered sawmill at Chisholm that initially produced 60,000 fbm per shift. Logs were cut and decked along the Athabasca and floated down as needed. Both the logging and mill were major operations. In 1932 they started a box factory and hired Tom Matty to manage it. Tom later became manager of the entire operation, transferring to Swanson Lumber when they bought the operation in 1941. Tom Matty served as President of the Alberta Forest Products Association and Rocky Mountain Section of CIF.

The year 1935 was the year of the big flood on the Athabasca. The company lost three million board feet of logs that broke the booms in the high water and "ended up at Fort Chip" according to legend. The last drive was in 1937 and the big steam sawmill was shut down. Instead, a new planer mill was constructed and rough lumber was brought in for processing.

In their ongoing search for timber, in 1941 they punched in a rough road to the west end of Fawcett Lake and built a camp and sawmill. The mill was steam powered, using sawdust for fuel, and the concrete bases for the boilers are now all that remain of the operation. In 1942 it began producing rough lumber that was hauled to Smith by truck and then by rail to Chisholm for planing.

Logs were winter cut along the lake, especially the south shore and at Paul Lake. They were skidded tree-length and decked on the ice, then held to the shore in booms after breakup. The logging camp was built on rafts so it could be moved east on the lake to follow the logging.

Logs were boomed in batches to the sawmill using the home-built tugboat "Edith" that was powered by a diesel engine from a TD-9 Cat. Tom Matty explained how they would put the engine back into the Cat when they did not need the tug. The tug was also used to move the camp. That operation continued until 1949.

Tom Matty told about the time the tug crew cut out a boom-full of logs to haul to the mill, cinching the boom chains and tying the tow-line to the tug. It was late evening when they finished, so about 9:00 p.m., putting the tug into towing speed, they headed into the cabin for dinner, to visit and play cards. Around midnight they went to check their progress and found they had not untied the boom from shore – there were some red faces and laughs about that.

Floating logging camp on Fawcett Lake, 1940s