

Interviewed: February 26, 1976

Mr. Harold Iverson,

9750 River Road,  
Delta, B. C.

- Born on the river bank, 1912, Father a fisherman, his father ahead of him, his father ahead of him, fish folks.
- Fishing in skiffs at 7 and 8 years old in the river for salmon, lots of fish then, you didn't have to go very far.
- In those days of course, it was all oars and sail then.
- When he was 16 he had a power boat, he was the big shot around then because 40% of the fleet was still under sail.
- 5 HP one cylinder engine.
- Old leaky boats, no equipment in those days.
- Power boats came in the 20's and the power winches came in 1938.
- Parts were used from cars, clutches, cables, etc.
- Whole rigging used to cost \$25.00 now it costs 6 or 7 hundred dollars.
- First gas boat was 26 ft. with a 5 HP Palmer and automatic intake valve outside of the air pipe.
- No two days in a row that it ran the same, always needed adjustment.
- Fished mostly in the Fraser until the 50's, then the off shore Japanese fleet and fishery closures made it necessary to go further afield.
- Used to fish at San Juan and Queen Charlotte Sound and the Skeena.
- As a kid, he remembers the stern wheelers who used to deliver to farmers up and down the river.
- Not much ~~family~~<sup>coming</sup> on River Road; too expensive and too boggy.
- You ran a truck, garden, you had cows, one or two for milking and chickens.
- Came from a family of 6: 2 brothers died, 1 lost at sea, 1 from a brain tumour at 45 & 47 years old.
- Long lined halibut for 20 years, trolled, and also gillnetted salmon.
- You went north of Vancouver Island or West Coast of Vancouver Island for halibut.
- Halibut catch has gone down from 50 million to 23 million pounds; the quota is now 23 million pounds for halibut.
- In early days you averaged 2 or 3 days in a stretch, now you get maybe 24 hours or even 12 hours to fish.

- Hard work in the old days.
- Started in Strait of Juan de Fuca 1939; tough place to fish, no phones, no sounder.
- Now he has three phones on board.
- His boats have gotten bigger.
- Lost a 50 ton boat in a 100 M.P.H. gale in 1970 in Queen Charlotte Sound, visibility was poor and his partnership came and pick him up.
- Spray was coming off the water like thick fog.
- He was in the water, wired to the rigging, he had to dive to free himself and then swim to the other boat, heavy clothes weighed about 100 pounds with water.
- Just about quit fishing but he changed his mind.
- Today, you're just the operator pushing buttons on the hydraulic gear.
- B. C. has the most up-to-date fleet in the world, but fishing still requires a good deal of know how.
- His son catches more fish than him but he is 30 years younger.
- 1942 was the first time they got paid by the pound; 12¢/pound, not a very big gain.
- Discussion of fish prices; get less for dressed fish now (chum salmon) who can afford to eat fish now?
- He still smokes chums mostly for gifts.
- The number of springs caught have declined.
- The Americans don't practice conservation, they take more than their share of the Fraser River salmon.
- The Canadian government is just a bunch of yes-men; the Treaty is very difficult to understand.
- Whatever they do is fair, that's the American way all over the world.
- Also the seine fleet has increased because of the buy-back program.
- The gillnet fleet is bigger but the seine fleet is more effective.
- During the depression, they had lots to eat, root house, cows, chickens, they winter fished and salted them.
- Groceries were delivered once a week from New Westminster by boat; bread was 4¢ a loaf, not uncommon to buy 20 loaves for the week.
- There was a large Japanese Community on Annacis Island during the 30's.
- The Japanese were restricted as to where they could fish.
- There were unions during the 30's along various gear lines, communications were very poor and therefore, it was difficult to organize.

- The unions were very competitive.
- New Westminster burned down in 1907, and the Great Northern Railway didn't happen until 1907.
- He describes the building of the Dyke Road.
- He got along pretty well with the Japanese, there was no discrimination they were our friends and neighbours.
- The companies helped them get back into the fishing industry.
- The unions were amalgamated in 1942, they made a big difference in price wise.
- In the old days you never knew what you were going to get for your fish like halibut, the price went down in the 50's to 10¢ and 11¢/pound.
- There is only one charter under the British North American Act for a fishing union.
- The Iverson family had the charter for the union and they signed it over in 1944 or thereabouts.
- At one time there were 40 canneries in the Fraser but now there is only one.
- Location of canneries is discussed referring to the map; he maintains there were more canneries than are on the map, at least 5 more.
- He fished for Canadian Fish Co. for 20 years.
- The Vancouver Co-op worked for a while but it went bankrupt due to inefficiencies to people being greedy.
- Shell fish were used by Indians but they were not found in the river.
- Shell fish such as crabs and oysters were ignored until after the war because there was lots of other fish to eat.
- The River has been changed by the attempts at dredging the river up at New West; this stirs up the silt and it piles up in other places, they never accounted for the tide which prevents the silt from being carried down at the Surrey docks.
- "Trifurcation" the redirecting the flow of the river so that freighters can travel easier; has caused him trouble with the build up of silt in his harbour.
- The old sternwheelers faded out in the 1920's.
- Deadheads are a problem; the account for 20% of boat damage according to insurance reports.
- Discusses the old union steamships; they were very comfortable.

- Canneries at Smith Inlet and Rivers Inlet are listed: Todds, Goose Bay, Wadhams, Rivers Inlet Cannery, Brunswick, Beaver.
- 25¢/piece for sockeye in 1925, went home with \$900.00 for 3,600 fish, the company paid 36¢/piece but they took one-third for their skiff and their net, at the end of the season the company charged \$50.00 for skiff and fuel and food.
- Strike at Rivers Inlet in 1933 put the price up to 35¢/piece.
- Workers in the canneries got 15¢ a tray.
- Boxes contained 96 pounds and were made of wood, so they would get the fish canned for 60¢ in labour, the companies knew how to make money.
- There weren't too many Indian fishermen in the Delta area; mostly up River and they would come from the Gulf Islands to work in the canneries.
- Story of when he was a kid; retrieving arrows for Indian children in order to get a shot.
- In the early 20's the slash around his house burnt and they enjoyed wild blackberries for five years.
- Discussion of wild-life around the River Road area - still deer around his house.
- Discussion of the herring fishery and reasons why it was depleted before 1971; herring is the most sought after species on the earth.
- Explains the reason for rich fishery as large amount of phosphorous coming from the mountaineous coast to provide plankton for the fish.
- He criticizes against Federal Fisheries for allowing the Americans to take more than their share of the catches.
- His visit to hatchery at Mission is discusses with photos and comments on the future of the salmon fishery, which are mostly pesimistic.
- Calls for a Minister of Fisheries from B. C. not back east.
- In the old days when you were fishing close to home you used to socialize and have dances and you knew the people you fished with; but today you go further a field and the old friendliness is lost.
- His grand-father moved to the coast in the 1890's and homesteaded Crownland.

(Brother, Raymond joins in)

- Raymond discusses his first boat.

- Halibut fishing is discussed as very hard work especially out of a dory in the old days.
- Fishing in a skiff; you had six oars in case you lost one, canvas tent, you used your net cover for a mattress.
- Wet! in Smiths Inlet for 6 weeks; there were 3 hours and 45 minutes of sunshine, an Englishman kept track of it.
- Fishing at Smiths Inlet is described.
- A 640 pounds of halibut was caught in Rivers Inlet in Wadham Bay; biggest one that's ever been caught.
- Early gas boats (1927-28) often had poor engine mounts and they often shook the corking loose which meant you had to pump the water out by hand.
- Story about this.
- "Pumped the ocean through twice" on the way to Smiths Inlet.
- Ocean is a dump for everything.
- Discussion of pollution of the water.
- Tape ends with a discussion of the book "Bermuda Triangle".
- Also discussion of smuggling rum during prohibition.
- Rum is easier to carry than herring; it doesn't move around.
- Story about this.