

This interview is with Doug Leaney who is the captain of the *M.V. Native*, and co-owner of Paddlewheeler Riverboat Tours in New Westminster. The major themes discussed in the interview are paddlewheeler boats, the Fraser River, towing, waterfront industries. The interview was conducted while the boat was underway.

Interviewer: Andrea Walisser

Interview Date: 21 September 2013

Date Range: 1980s – 2013

Sound Recording Length: 00:45:26

Doug Leaney is the captain of *M.V. Native* used by Paddlewheeler Riverboat Tours in New Westminster. Leaney and his wife, Helga, started the company in 1989. On a nice day in 1985 or 1986, they boated to Fort Langley and came up with the idea of starting a riverboat tour company. The couple sold all their assets and purchased the *Beta Star* and later the *M.V. Native*, a paddlewheeler that was built at a shipyard near YVR. The boat is constructed with materials entirely sourced within the province, which is how it got its name the “Native.” Leaney was attracted to the paddlewheeler because it was “authentic” but also because of its history to the province. The company was initially based in Fort Langley, but the Leaneys moved to New Westminster because they noticed that whenever they operated the tour from New Westminster the paddlewheeler would be full. The interview is largely about the company’s history, the industry changes that Leaney has witnessed along the Fraser River, and the history of the river.

Section 0:00 – 7:29

- In this section Leaney tells the story about how he started Paddlewheeler Riverboat Tours. Leaney and his wife were pleasure boaters who never did boating on the Fraser River. However, on a beautiful day they boated to Fort Langley, fell in love with the area, and thought it would be a great idea to start a riverboat tour business. Leaney wanted a real paddlewheeler for the company and he was having a difficult time finding one. One day in a marine boating magazine he found an advertisement for an authentic paddlewheeler owned by a tugboat operator in the Lower Mainland. It took Leaney 8 months to turn the paddlewheeler into a fully licensed passenger boat, which he had estimated to cost \$150,000 but ended up costing \$300,000. Initially the paddlewheeler company was based in Fort Langley, but relocated to New Westminster.

Section 7:30 – 13:52

In this section of the interview Leaney discusses the process of getting his master of a small passenger vessel ticket. He took the necessary courses and the final exam, and mentions that since he did not know about marine operations he had to study a lot. However, he learnt more about working on the river by communicating with tow boaters. Throughout the years he learnt about the river inside out. He states that the biggest change he has witnessed on the river is the decline in the fishing industry. He recalls there was a period of time where the Fraser River used to be so busy with fishing boats that he could barely get to Fort Langley because the fishermen had their nets stretched to both sides of the river. He remembers one time there was a good run of sockeye salmon and there were 2000 boats from the mouth of the Fraser River to Hope. Another change that Leaney discusses is the lumber industry,

stating that the river used to be filled with log booms and barges full of logs. He argues this change is due to the off-shoring of wood products manufacturing.

Section 13:53 – 21:47

- In this section of the interview Leaney discusses the changes that have occurred at Fraser Surrey Docks. He states that the terminal has grown 3 times bigger since it became a part of Port Metro Vancouver from when he first started working on the river. According to Leaney, the industry that has been taking over on the river is gravel hauling, which was not the case when he first started working. He states that a barge load of gravel eliminates 70 truckloads; therefore, it reduces traffic on the highway. In this portion of the interview Leaney also discusses that in 2009 he was invited to go to Port Douglas, at the head of Harrison Lake, for a celebration of lakes, and describes the process of travelling there. Since the 1920s there had not been a paddlewheeler in Harrison Lake, which made the *Native's* visit a historical one.

Section 21:48 – 25:31

- In this section of the interview Leaney describes the changes in the demographic make-up of his customers. He attributes the significant decrease in American tourists to the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. He believes that incident made Americans fearful to travel, which was worsened by the increasing price of fuel. Leaney recalls the first 10 years of his business being very busy. However, when the *Royal City Star* casino boat came to New Westminster walk-on traffic fell to 10% when it used to make up 60% of his business, something he claims was also experienced by other smaller businesses in the area. Due to these changes, the company changed its marketing strategy to attracting local visitors instead of faraway ones. Now the company gets tourists from the Lower Mainland, the upcountry of BC, a few visitors from Alberta and Ontario, and Europeans fairly regularly.

Section 25:32– 36:55

- In this section of the interview Leaney discusses the individuals who comprise his crew and their specific duties. He believes that he has been incredibly lucky to have such loyal staff members. He discusses the narration on tours, which is done by 3 different people, and emphasizes that history is a big part of the tour. He believes that the Fraser River does not get the recognition it deserves. For instance, he claims that at one time there were more steam paddlewheelers on the Fraser River than on the Mississippi River. In this section Leaney also briefly discusses the planned redevelopment of the Fraser Mills site.

Section 36:56 – 45:26

- In this section of the interview Leaney largely describes the process of setting up for a cruise, and the company's working seasons. He mentions how the staff members are able to feed 100 full meals that are completely prepared on the boat, and that the company has a positive reputation for their quality of food and service. He talks about boat maintenance on their days off, emphasizing the importance of preventative maintenance.