

Lettres/Letters

I just came across Kenn's "Fishing Grounds" in 32:1. The song doesn't make a whole lot of sense unless you understand the terminology used in it. The following was published by us in an earlier issue of *BC Folklore*, the bulletin of the British Columbia Folklore Society, Number Two, Spring 1996, pp. 14-16.

"Fishing Grounds" is a commercial fishing song about trolling for salmon off the Queen Charlotte Islands. There are a number of different methods used to catch salmon. In trolling, the fish are caught on lines suspended from poles, like giant fishing rods, slowly trolled (towed) behind. On board, a line is wound round a gurdy, or winch, and then led up to the linespring (verse 5), with its warning bell (verse 5), which is suspended from the pole. The purpose of the linespring is to allow for any sudden tension on the line, and the pole's purpose is to get the line high enough to trail over the side, free from obstacles. Lines have numerous hooks spaced along them, each with a spoon-shaped lure to attract the fish. If one colour of lure doesn't appear to be attracting fish, it is sometimes substituted for another colour (verse 5). Also, the lines are weighted down with 50lb round lead weights, called cannonballs.

Ken's boat ran 12 trolling lines, back in 1981, when the song was written, but the law has since changed and only 6 lines are now allowed. To keep the lines from tangling up with each other, giant Styrofoam floats, known as "pigs" (verse 2), are attached to them. The pigs have angled vanes that force the lines out to the side as they are being towed forward. Once a salmon is caught, the trolling line is winched in, but is only able to bring the fish to the boat's side. From there it has to be gaffed and pulled over the side by hand (verse 3).

There are a number of different species of salmon in British Columbia's coastal waters but, without confusing the issue unnecessarily, it is safe to cite five true native salmon: the pink, the coho, the spring or chinook, the chum or dog, and the sockeye. The salmon being fished for in "Fishing Grounds" is the spring salmon, known in the fishing trade as "smiley" from the shape of its mouth, which takes on a more pronounced "smile" as it gets older. This is especially noticeable after the fish has passed a weight of 25 lb.

There are two types of springs, one red and one white. The reds, at that time, had a value of \$4.50 a lb. whereas the whites brought in only \$1.00 a lb. from the buyers. Fish caught had to weigh over 25 lb., but fish up to 60 lb. were not unusual. During the spring salmon-fishing season, coho salmon are also in the area, passing through on their way to their grounds. The coho themselves, however, cannot be caught and kept because they aren't yet in season (verse 5). If they are caught by mistake, like the rock cod (verse 6), they tie up the line, waste time, and have to be released. One way of finding where the fish are is to look out for gulls ("birds," verse 4) which flock over tight schools of herring, known as herring balls, under which the spring salmon come to feed on the herring.

The boat was fishing off Hippa, an island off the west coast of Graham Island, the large north island of the Queen Charlottes, in a rough sea with short, erratic, choppy waves ("a dirty lump," verse 2) and, consequently, the pigs were bouncing (verse 2). One might expect that a fishing boat would not remain at sea during such weather but, unfortunately for the fishers, that is apparently the best time to troll for salmon. Because of the rough weather and a lack of fish however, Ken thought that hand logging (verse 6) and log salvaging on the west coast of the Queen Charlotte Islands might have been a better way to make a living. Perhaps he could have put together a raft of logs which could then be towed to Charlotte (Queen Charlotte City) for quick sale and a quick profit.

"Skunk" (verse 2) comes from "skunked," to be defeated or out-witted, and is especially used in fishing and sports. [*In lots of other fields, as well, including guitar-picking and English-teaching, alas! —GWL*]

"Keep" (verse 3) comes from "keeper" or, more usually, "a keeper," and here refers to a fish whose size is within legal limits. It is also commonly used when choosing things of a better standard from a pile, or when selecting finished pieces during a job where quality varies.

Ken Hamm is a singer/songwriter living on Vancouver Island and is one of Canada's most respected blues performers. Although not all of his songs are written in the blues format, "Fishing Grounds," track 2 on his new CD *Eagle Rock Road*,

is one of the blues-oriented pieces. The recording includes 15 tracks, half of which were written by Ken. For a review of the recording, see the Bulletin 30.2, June 1996.

Mike Ballantyne
Cobble Hill, BC

Here is my renewal. I was pleasantly surprised to receive 32.1—I thought you had gone out of business. [*Gulp!—eds.*]

Please excuse my typing errors—there are two causes: the fact that this typewriter needs to be serviced (if you breathe too hard at a key, it will reprint) and my fingers, which have developed a nasty habit of "doing their own thing," both in playing the accordion *and* typing! I guess I have been doing too much "whole-hand" work recently, as well as working a bit harder than my usual lazy manner! Best wishes for the future, and I hope the financial picture improves.

Georgina Lapointe
Powell River, BC

I am of Scottish and Irish families and have taught singing for some years, and I have a small Irish harp; I have a wide interest in the folk and native heritage of different countries (and also have some interest in natural healing, herbs, &c.). I am hoping to perform in the song, poetry and oral traditions and will be looking for someone who plays acoustically to put a programme together—flute/guitar/narrative—over the next year.

A letter from anyone interested in a similar project or al-

ready doing this would be lovely! I will be including "nature" poetry and perhaps storytelling, but at present I would like to talk the ideas over with someone.

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Does anyone know of any songs about the Trans-Canada Highway—the building of it, travelling on it, thinking about it? It was a relief unemployment project in 1931-4, and postwar development project between 1949 and 1961 when it was completed. While there is almost no end of train songs, Canadian highway songs seem pretty scarce. I'm most interested in songs since the Second World War—can anyone help?

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In December 1995 (29.4), we published "The Trans-Canada Highway," which Edith Fowke collected from Tom Brandon of Peterborough, Ontario. James Keelaghan recorded his very fine song, "Get To You, on his Green Linnet album, A Recent Future. That's all we can think of—can any readers help out?