

R. Yorke Edwards (1924–2011)

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Introduction

On 9 January 1944, 19-year-old Yorke Edwards wrote to Dr. Rudolph M. Anderson, chief of the Biology Division at the National Museum of Canada and associate editor of the *Canadian Field-Naturalist* for almost four decades, asking questions on the focus of his nascent career in zoology. Anderson responded three weeks later, apologizing for his tardiness: “I have had to put this letter away twice without finishing, but it is a serious matter to give advice to a young man on his future career”. The letter is full of details on small mammal identification, the building of collections, and the life of a working zoologist. Obviously recognizing the zeal and commitment in Edwards’ letter, Anderson took time from a demanding job to encourage the young man’s growth as a biologist. He wrote Yorke several times in the 1940s with information, literature, and guidance on publishing and was instrumental in publishing Yorke’s first scientific paper, “Notes on two captive Meadow Jumping Mice (*Zapus hudsonius*)” (Edwards 1945).

Anderson's confidence in Yorke was not misplaced. The eager student grew into a man whose thoughts and energies have helped shape the minds and lives of countless naturalists across the country. For almost half a century he was a pioneer in wildlife biology, nature education (Figure 1), conservation, and museum life, stimulating people to think more deeply about the world and our place in it.

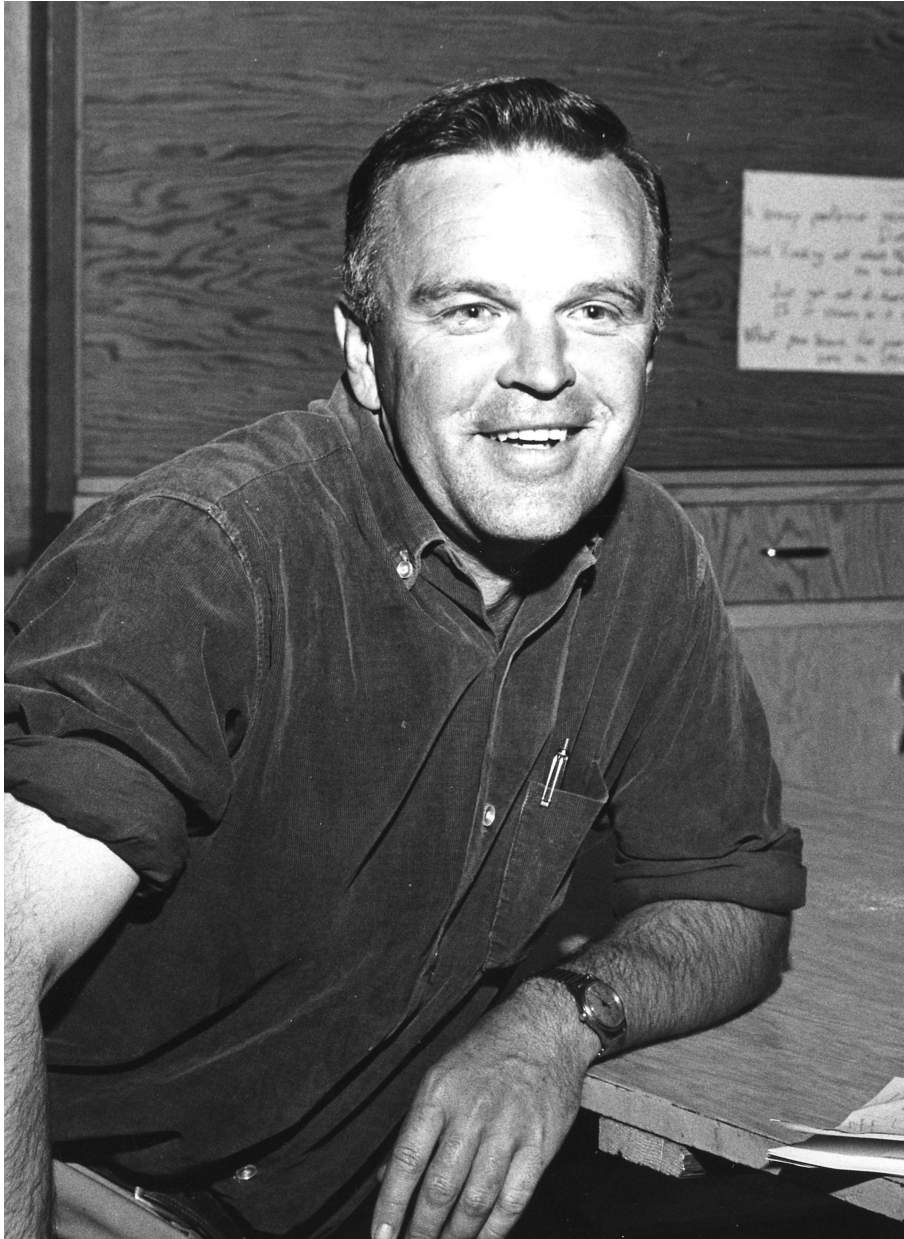


FIGURE 1. The communicator: Yorke Edwards speaking at a Canadian Audubon camp, Peachland, British Columbia, June 1965. Photo: Stephen R. Cannings.

The Beginning

Roger Yorke Edwards was born in Toronto on 22 November 1924 to John Macham and Agnes Cornelia (née Yorke) Edwards. His father was a chartered accountant, his mother a secretary. Yorke was an only child, self-contained and self-motivated. Reading the nature writings of Ernest T. Seton and Thornton W. Burgess plunged him into biology; the colourful Audubon bird charts that hung on the walls of his Toronto school drove him to memorize the plumages of all the species he came across. His first ornithological notebook began in January 1937, when he was 12 years old. Yorke's passion for birds was shared by his high school friend, John Crosby, who later became one of Canada's foremost bird artists. Beginning in 1940, the two rode around Toronto on their bicycles, birding fanatically (Figure 2). To get money for a pair of binoculars in 1941, Yorke painted the next-door neighbour's house but his "first good binoculars, 7×50", came from his friend Bruce Falls five years later.

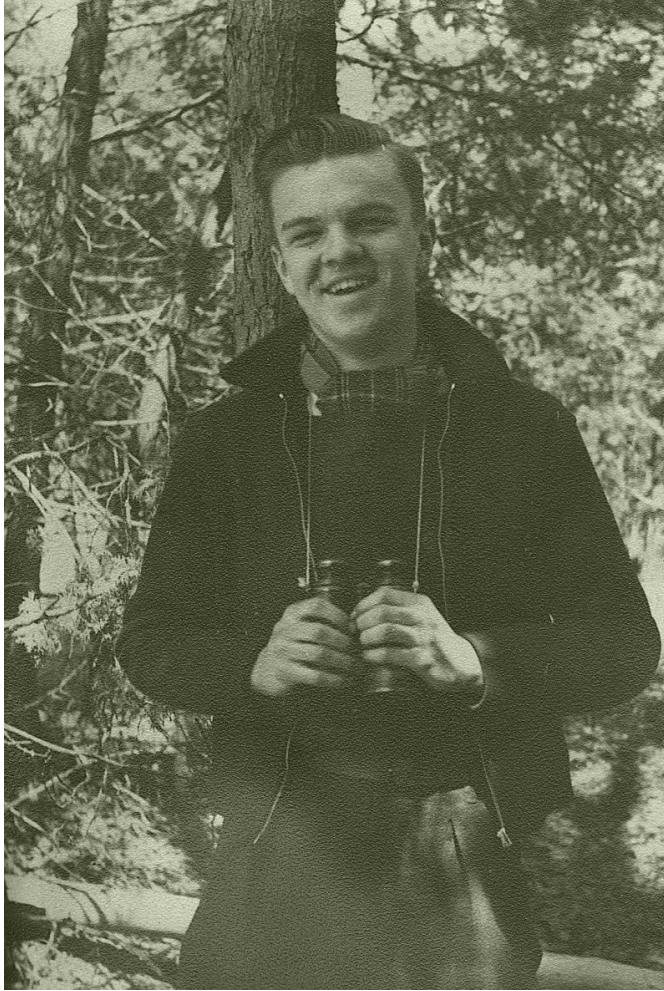


FIGURE 2. The teenage birder: Yorke in Ontario, spring 1940. Photo: courtesy of the Edwards family.

Yorke, Crosby, and other friends became enthusiastic members of the Royal Ontario Museum's (ROM) Intermediate Naturalists Club; Yorke was president in 1945. Today, some of these friends are well-known in biological and naturalist circles, including Robert Bateman (renowned wildlife artist), Bruce Falls (ecologist, University of Toronto), and Bristol Foster (former director of both the BC Provincial Museum and the BC Ecological Reserves Program). In the labs and collections of the ROM, Yorke was encouraged in his bird and mammal interests

by avid naturalists James Baillie and Stuart Thompson. Here were the origins of Yorke as a wildlife biologist and museum man.

Yorke wrote a lot, even in those early days. His diaries and field notes are highly organized and filled with exquisite detail, augmented by sketches and photographs; the tone is serious and earnest. He was very clear that observing and understanding nature was his life. Several manuscripts, with titles such as “A Northland Lake”, “Some Bark Lake Mammals”, and “The Early Nester” (on the nesting behaviour of the Great Horned Owl [*Bubo virginianus*]), and even a poem titled “Northern Lake”, were apparently rejected by magazine publishers. But there were also successes. One of Yorke’s first published articles, illustrated by Crosby, was a result of their intense birding activity. This lovely little piece (Edwards and Crosby 1942) was entitled “Six Wood Warblers”; the editor of *Canadian Nature* and ROM staff, who reviewed it, were impressed.

Blindness in one eye kept Yorke out of military service in the last years of World War II. He spent this time improving his writing, exploring for birds and small mammals, working a couple of summers (1943–1944) on the family farm in Agincourt, and beginning university. He reminisced (Edwards 1967a: 141) that “during the war, hawks and owls about airports lured many a naturalist, complete with spy equipment like binoculars, into the arms of security guards. With luck you got home for dinner, but somehow the experience left you convinced that you really were seriously different”.

From 1944 to 1948, Yorke studied forestry at the University of Toronto and received his Bachelor of Science in 1948. In the summers from 1945 to 1947, he studied small mammal populations for the Ontario Department of Lands and Forests in Algonquin Provincial Park, under Doug Clarke. Yorke considered Clarke to be one of his most important mentors. “More

than once,” he recalled, “[Clarke] threw me into waters where the ‘swimming’ was pretty shaky for a while, and each time that I survived, I felt better about him and me” (draft letter from Edwards to Bill Barkley 25 November 1984, R.A.C. collection). David Fowle, later a professor of biology at York University and a lifelong friend, was the leader of the student team. While at university, Yorke was also a part-time preparator of vertebrate specimens at the Royal Ontario Museum. He donated some of his own small mammal specimens—including a Hairy-tailed Mole (*Parascalops breweri*), a Star-nosed Mole (*Condylura cristata*), and an American Water Shrew (*Sorex palustris*)—to the collection.

To British Columbia

On 30 March 1946, while he was studying in Toronto, Yorke attended a lecture by Dr. Ian McTaggart Cowan, from the University of British Columbia (UBC), on wildlife research in the Rocky Mountain national parks. Yorke was enthralled, and eagerly accepted Cowan’s invitation in February 1948 to study with him in UBC’s Department of Zoology. Yorke arrived in BC that spring and, over the summer, worked on a BC Game Commission waterfowl nesting and banding survey in the Cariboo and Chilcotin regions. Always the keen observer, as part of that study he published a short paper on Barrow’s Goldeneyes (*Bucephala islandica*) nesting in old American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) nests (Edwards 1953). Cowan recommended Yorke to Cy Oldham, head of the Parks Division of the BC Forest Service, who hired him to undertake a biological survey of Manning Provincial Park in the summer of 1949 (Edwards 1991), the year the Hope–Princeton Highway was completed. Yorke’s supervisor that summer was Chess Lyons, who became a close colleague over the years (Edwards 2000). In 1950, while finishing his postgraduate studies, Yorke helped curate the UBC vertebrate museum founded by Cowan in

1943, now the Cowan Tetrapod Collection, part of the Beaty Biodiversity Museum.

Yorke completed his Master's degree in zoology in 1950 with a thesis titled "Variations in the fur productivity of northern British Columbia in relation to some environmental factors", later published in *The Journal of Wildlife Management* (Edwards and Cowan 1957). That summer he worked again in Algonquin Park and, in the autumn, began a doctoral program in the Zoology Department at the University of Toronto. However, the lure of the west proved too strong to resist and the next year, without completing his degree, Yorke returned to BC and accepted a position with the BC Forest Service in Victoria (recorded interview, W.J.M. collection). There he roomed at the home of his friends, Muriel and Charles Guiguet, the latter newly hired as Curator of Birds and Mammals at the BC Provincial Museum.

While at university in Toronto, Yorke met a young microbiologist named Joan Claudia Thicke. Back in Vancouver, Yorke and Joan married on 1 December 1951; Joan was a native of the city, born 29 years earlier, on 18 October 1922. After earning a B.A. at UBC in 1944, she worked as a microbiologist in Vancouver until 1950, when she moved to Toronto to work in the Connaught Medical Research Laboratories. Yorke noted in his diary for 1950: "Not a good winter, except met Joan Thicke". The young couple settled in Victoria.

Yorke's job in the Forest Service was to head the newly formed research section of the Parks Division, and from 1951 to 1959 he initiated numerous studies of wildlife and its management in BC parks (Figure 3). This, in his own words, consisted of "wildlife research, preservation, harvesting, habitat manipulation, censusing, hunter controls, and publishing of popular and scientific articles" (fragment of undated *curriculum vitae* of Edwards, R.A.C. collection). Much of Yorke's work was concentrated in the wilds of Wells Gray Park, where the impact of wildfire on Moose (*Alces americanus*) and Caribou (*Rangifer tarandus*) became his primary research

focus. His experimental use of controlled burning greatly improved Moose habitat. Burning was a novel management tool in those days, and Yorke and his team often found themselves at odds with other Forest Service workers (Cannings 1997).

Some of Yorke's wildlife management papers, frequently published in collaboration with Ralph Ritcey and others, are minor classics, including works on carrying capacity (Edwards 1955), aerial census techniques (Edwards 1954a), the effects of snow on ungulate populations (Edwards 1956), and specific studies on Moose: herd migration (Edwards and Ritcey 1956), parasites and diseases (Ritcey and Edwards 1958), and mark-recapture studies (Ritcey and Edwards 1956). Yorke's ground-breaking research on the Caribou of Wells Gray Park is particularly relevant today, as southern British Columbia's Caribou populations seriously shrink year by year. Notable here are his investigations on fire and Caribou decline (Edwards 1954b), the use they make of lichens as winter food (Edwards *et al.* 1960), their remarkable twice-annual migrations (Edwards 1959), and the influence of landforms on their distribution (Edwards 1958).



FIGURE 3. The wildlife biologist: Yorke (right) with a colleague in Tweedsmuir Provincial Park, 1957. Photo: Chess Lyons, courtesy of the Edwards family.

Not all of Yorke's studies in those years were confined to ungulates. In one study, he used an American Marten (*Martes americana*) mark-recapture study to estimate their home range (Miller *et al.* 1955). In another, he evaluated the usefulness of censusing Grizzly Bears (*Ursus arctos*) using track measurements (Edwards and Green 1959). By the 1960s, Yorke was also writing about forestry and resource management (Edwards *et al.* 1967) and, on the flip-side, about wilderness and conservation (Edwards 1967b,c, 1999).

Developing Interpretation in Parks and Museums

In 1957 BC provincial parks found a new home as the Provincial Parks Branch in the newly created Department of Recreation and Conservation. That year, Yorke championed a new cause—nature interpretation. How he came to this isn't certain. He'd been thinking seriously about nature interpretation at least since 1949, while working in Manning Park (Edwards 1965a). He probably witnessed Canada's first nature interpretation experiment in Algonquin Park, begun in 1944, when he worked there as a student (Merilees 2014); perhaps it was the 1957 publication of *Interpreting Our Heritage* by Freeman Tilden (Tilden 1957) that finally prompted him to act. In any case, he later wryly noted that the job found him, rather than the other way around. After convincing Cy Oldham to try park interpretation in provincial parks, Oldham turned the tables: "Edwards, you want it, so you do it. You have \$300 for supplies and one summer student" (Edwards 1987: 17). Yorke chose Manning Park for the pilot project. Bob Boyd (Figure 4), the chief ranger, who Yorke knew from his 1949 stint in Manning, was supportive of the new effort,

but there was little extra money. In the end Yorke settled for a mildewed wall tent and discarded tent floor, which he erected near the Pinewoods Lodge and public parking area. He hired Donald Smith, an Ontario graduate student (later professor of biology at Carleton University in Ottawa), to be the first park naturalist. Inside the tent, Yorke and Donald made exhibits of rocks and flowers, bird pictures, and American Beaver (*Castor canadensis*) workings. A wooden sign bearing the words “Nature House” hung over the door (Figure 5). Despite the fact that the province’s first nature house was frequently mistaken for a washroom, the park interpretation program flourished. In the summer of 1960 over 20 000 visitors flocked to the tent nature house (Edwards 1961). A new building was constructed in 1961, and over the years the program expanded, bringing more nature houses, interpretive signs, nature trails, and naturalist talks to most regions of the province.

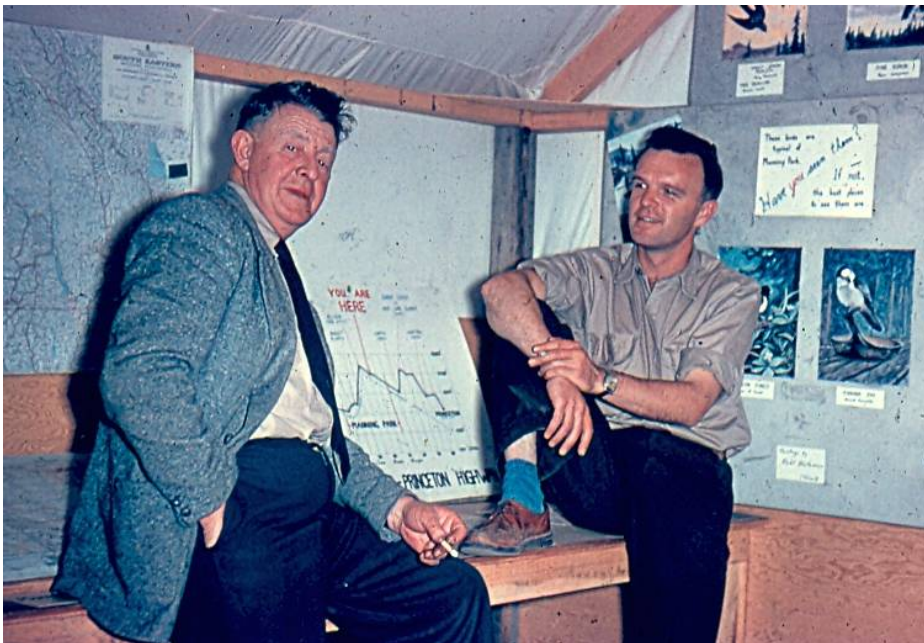


FIGURE 4. Bob Boyd (Chief Ranger) and Yorke Edwards, Manning Provincial Park Nature House, about 1960. Photo: courtesy of the Edwards family.



FIGURE 5. The makeshift tent Nature House, Manning Provincial Park, British Columbia. Photo: courtesy of BC Parks.

Yorke was ably assisted over the years by several full-time staff, including Ralph Ritcey (Wells Gray Park biological studies), David Stirling (hiring and training of seasonal staff), and J.E. (Ted) Underhill. Underhill was chosen as a Manning Park naturalist in 1958 and quickly became indispensable as an inventive interpretation specialist. He wrote much of the interpretive material on many subjects for many parks, but perhaps most importantly, he was in charge of the Parks Branch Display Studio where exhibits and signs were constructed. Yorke called him “a gem”. Some of the well-known artists who Yorke contracted to help produce displays and outdoor interpretive signs were Jean André (later to gain fame as the designer of many of the Royal BC Museum’s permanent exhibits), Robert Bateman, and John Crosby.

By the time Yorke left the Parks Branch in 1967, there were four nature houses and programs in nine parks; more came later. Yorke described the purpose of the program succinctly: “the

enhancing of public understanding, care, and recreational enjoyment of the natural environments preserved in parks” (fragment of undated *curriculum vitae* of Edwards, R.A.C. collection).

Widely admired, the program set a standard for park education across the country. George Stirrett, the first chief park naturalist for the National Parks Branch (now Parks Canada; Lothian 1987), frequently consulted with Yorke on interpretation matters. When visiting Miracle Beach Provincial Park in July 1962, Stirrett told Yorke that the new nature house and nature trails there were better than anything in the United States’ parks system.

As a manager and supervisor (Figure 6), Yorke was thoughtful, innovative, and tireless. He was also hands-on, working continually with park naturalists to help improve their messaging and delivery. In 1960 he was on the road for 75 days, driving from park to park, checking on the skills and morale of the summer naturalists at Manning and Miracle Beach (Figure 7) parks, seeking ideas for exhibits, drafting new park pamphlets and signage, and looking for places to start new park programs. His background in field research prepared him to view park interpretation as a prime opportunity for public education. He considered naturalists of all sorts to be scientists (Edwards 1985a) and encouraged his park naturalists to really get to know the parks they worked in, for example, by undertaking simple research projects. One of us (R.A.C.) recalls his first research on the job as a 16-year-old naturalist at Miracle Beach on Vancouver Island. With Yorke’s encouragement, he undertook a mark-recapture study of the three species of garter snakes that lived in the tangle of logs on the upper beach, studying their movements and trying to understand how they co-existed.



FIGURE 6. The administrator: Yorke Edwards in his Parks Branch office, Victoria, British Columbia, early 1960s. Photo: courtesy of BC Parks.



FIGURE 7. Nature House, Miracle Beach Provincial Park, Black Creek, British Columbia, 1960s. Photo: courtesy of the Royal BC Museum (BC Archives item 1-07042).

Always the visionary, Yorke was ahead of his time in many ways. “In the late 1950s and early 1960s”, notes W.J.M., “the Parks Branch field operations were exclusively male. It was Yorke who broke this model by hiring Betty Westerborg (now Betty Brooks) to work at Miracle Beach as a park naturalist. This caused a considerable stir within the Branch but, in time, women became the prominent component of the interpretation program and they steadily increased their representation in all other spheres of parks operations” (Merilees 2013: 1). W.J.M. also recounts (Merilees 2013: 1) another Yorke Edwards’ first:

“In the 1960s, a very spry, charismatic, youth-oriented senior citizen from Victoria by the name of Freeman King came to Yorke’s attention. Regulations of that day prevented seniors from being employed in the Public Service. In Freeman’s case, Yorke lobbied and received an exemption, whereby for many years thereafter, a special Order-in-Council was annually signed by the Lieutenant Governor permitting ‘Skipper,’ (as he was better known) to delight visitors at Goldstream Park each summer” (Figure 8).



FIGURE 8. Freeman “Skipper” King enthralling kids, Goldstream Provincial Park, Victoria, British Columbia, 1972. Photo: courtesy of BC Parks.

While he worked for the Parks Branch, Yorke was already involved in the museum community. He was active in the British Columbia Museums Association, founded in 1959 after the province’s 1958 centennial inspired the creation of many new community museums. Yorke was elected president (1961–1963) and also edited its magazine, *Museum Roundup*, beginning in 1963. Over the years, and even while he was with the Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) in Ottawa, this magazine served as a primary venue for his many articles on museums and education. He was made an honorary member of the association in 1967.

Yorke was no less influential in the organization of the burgeoning naturalist community in BC. In November 1962, Yorke and David Stirling wrote a proposal for the establishment of the BC Nature Council, the forerunner of BC Nature (the Federation of British Columbia Naturalists), which organizes the province’s many naturalists’ clubs. Yorke was a founding member of the Council (Figure 9), established in May 1963.



FIGURE 9. Yorke Edwards, Freeman King, and Steve Cannings at a BC Nature Council meeting, Fairview, British Columbia, May 1964. Photo: Robert A. Cannings.

Occasionally Yorke was tempted to enter academia and in 1961 turned down a teaching job at UBC, perhaps because the salary offered was lower than his government one. Cowan considered Yorke one of the best biologists in Canada and, but for his lack of a Ph.D., would have hired him as a UBC zoology professor. Yorke did lecture at UBC in 1963–1964 when he taught a course on the vertebrates of BC (excluding fishes), filling in for Jim Bendell, a friend from University of Toronto days, who was on sabbatical. Yorke would take the ferry to the mainland on Friday morning, give a morning lecture and an afternoon lab, and then return to Victoria in the evening. The ferry ride enabled him to make regular observations of the wildlife populations in Active Pass, some of which he published the following year (Edwards 1965b).

In late 1964, when construction of the new provincial museum buildings was imminent and plans for new exhibits were needed, museum director Clifford Carl turned to Yorke for help. In his diary Yorke noted: “Cliff Carl finally tells me he hopes I’ll be on the staff of the new

museum—as Curator of Exhibits. The situation is complicated since I now make as much as Cliff. Decisions!” The Parks Branch agreed to loan Yorke to the museum on a part-time basis. In the spring and summer of 1965, Yorke worked out a basic exhibit strategy and toured the southern Okanagan with staff to collect biological information and specimens for a diorama on BC’s semi-arid grasslands. Eventually he returned to his full-time job with the Parks Branch and the museum hired a designer to continue the exhibits planning (Roy 2018).

The halcyon days of interpretation in BC Parks are now long gone. They lasted almost a decade after Yorke stepped down in 1967, but ended when budget cuts and regionalization of Parks programs in the mid-1970s eliminated the centralized organizational model of park interpretation. One telling outcome of this was the conversion of the nature house at Manning Park into a pub. In 1991, Yorke wryly wrote (Edwards 1991: 47):

“Now the interpretation in Manning Park is different. The Nature House at Pinewoods, after many years of service revealing the unexpected details of the park, is not a nature house any more. But then, in a way it still is, for there is nothing more biological than beer, and I hear that my beautiful House, with the low eaves and the simple interior that I specified, is now a pub. As a lover of beer, I can’t really complain. And alcohol is the work of nature’s yeasty workers turning sugar water into grog. Nature still reigns in the House”.

To Ottawa and the Canadian Wildlife Service

In the mid-1960s, David Munro, director of CWS, became convinced that the wildlife management, research, and conservation initiatives of his organization would be effective only to the degree they were widely understood and supported by Canadians. He envisioned a series of

wildlife interpretation centres stretching from sea to sea, each explaining the distinctive life zone in which it was located. Munro asked Yorke to come to Ottawa and duplicate his provincial achievement on a national basis (Burnett 1999). Yorke accepted, but agreed to stay for only five years. He recalled: “David dangled more bait than he knew. I was ready to experience again the northern hardwood region of my youth, with its scarlet tanagers and bloodroots, maple forests and winter redpolls. I also had a strong yen to know Canada better, coast to coast” (Burnett 1999: 112).

From 1967 to 1972, Yorke worked on this new national vision (Edwards 1970a). He established a philosophical foundation for CWS interpretive programs, developed interpretation methods, planned the development of a series of nature centres, and established the first one at Wye Marsh (Figures 10 and 11), a rich southern Ontario wetland. Budgets were sufficient to allow innovation, and interpretation at Wye Marsh stressed observation, with a floating boardwalk, an observation tower, and an underwater window. The CWS mandate required an even-handed exploration of the management of lands and wildlife and the impact of humans on the landscape, as well as the usual natural history interpretation (Burnett 1999). Yorke hired Bill Barkley, who had once worked as a naturalist in the BC Parks Branch, to be in charge, and contracted his old friends Ted Underhill and Jean André to produce the centre’s exhibits.



FIGURE 10. Exhibits in Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre, Midland, Ontario, 1970. Photo: courtesy of the Wye Marsh Nature Centre.



FIGURE 11. The interpreter: Yorke in conversation with Freeman Tilden (left), guru of American heritage interpretation, Wye Marsh Nature Centre, Midland, Ontario, 1970. Photo: courtesy of the Wye Marsh Nature Centre.

After Yorke's tenure, four more centres sprang up across Canada, from Bonaventure on the Gaspé Peninsula of Quebec to Creston in the Kootenay region of BC. Work on the transcontinental vision continued until the government changed with the 1984 federal election. Slashed budgets doomed the program; the headquarters and regional units and all five wildlife centres were closed. Some centres completely disappeared, while others, such as Wye Marsh and Creston Valley, were repurposed through private/public partnerships (Burnett 1999).

Returning to Victoria and the Provincial Museum

Yorke returned to Victoria from Ottawa in September 1972 to become assistant director of the Provincial Museum, then led by Bristol Foster, an acquaintance from his early Royal Ontario Museum days. In early 1975, when Foster resigned to direct the new provincial Ecological Reserves Program, Yorke became director. His museum experience in Toronto, his background in wildlife research, his extensive involvement with exhibits and public education in both natural and human history, his work with the BC Museums Association—all prepared him for managing a major museum. Yorke was an experienced museologist who strongly believed in collections, research, and “inspirational public programming” (Roy 2018: 328). He helped develop many of the new building's early permanent exhibits. “The challenge is to turn scholarship into entertainment” is how he described his approach to the Canadian Museums Association in 1976 (Roy 2018: 328). During his tenure, a period fraught with fiscal restraint and budget cuts, the museum-going public attended the openings of several major exhibits including the *First Peoples* gallery and the natural history gallery, *Living Land, Living Sea*. Himself a writer, Yorke made sure the museum's publication program flourished. He also stressed the importance of

travelling exhibitions; between 1976 and 1982, an average of six museum exhibits visited 15 venues annually (Roy 2018).

Although a successful administrator of major government programs and a large museum, Yorke was happiest in the field, immersed in the natural world. While working for the Parks Branch, when returning to Victoria from research in Wells Gray Park or from supervising park staff at Shuswap Lake, he would often detour south through the Okanagan Valley, arriving at White Lake near Okanagan Falls about dusk. He'd sleep in his car, or under it, listening to the calls of Common Poorwills (*Phalaenoptilus nuttallii*) in the dark and waking to the fragrance of Big Sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata* Nuttall) and the songs of Western Meadowlarks (*Sturnella neglecta*). In 1981, just three years before his retirement, Yorke joined the Museum's Brooks Peninsula expedition to the remote northwest coast of Vancouver Island. He went not as the museum director, but as a field assistant to help museum staff collect and observe (Figure 12).



FIGURE 12. The field man: Yorke collecting aquatic samples during the Brooks Peninsula expedition, west coast of Vancouver Island, August 1981. Photo: Ruth Kirk, courtesy of the Royal BC Museum.

After his retirement in 1984 (Figure 13), at age 60, Yorke continued writing and working as a biological and museological consultant, and was designated a Curator Emeritus at the British Columbia Provincial Museum, soon to be renamed the Royal British Columbia Museum (RBCM) in 1987. As a research associate, Yorke usually spent one day each week in the mammal collections, mainly researching historical mammal-collecting expeditions by the provincial museum and other major North American museums. From field notes and published accounts he studied collection localities and calculated geographical coordinates for computer mapping—a significant contribution to the RBCM’s handbooks on British Columbia’s rodents and shrews and relatives (D.W. Nagorsen pers. comm. 25 July 2019).

Yorke suffered a serious stroke in May 1996. The cumulative effects of additional small strokes and the onset of dementia finally ended his writing career. His last major work was a chapter on British Columbia in *The Enduring Forest*, edited by his friend Ruth Kirk (Edwards 1996). His last publications date from 2003. He worked hard at the end—every one of the 12 issues of *The Victoria Naturalist* from 2001 through 2002 contains one of his articles.

Yorke died on 16 August 2011, at 86 years of age; Joan died nine days later, at 88. They had been married 60 years.



FIGURE 13. Yorke's retirement party, Provincial Museum, Victoria, British Columbia, November 1984. Left to right: David Stirling, Charles Guiget (back), Rob Cannings, Yorke Edwards, and Joan Edwards. Photo: courtesy of the Royal BC Museum.

Family

At the time of their marriage, Joan had begun a promising career in microbiology. While working at the Connaught Laboratories in Toronto, she was the senior author on a paper documenting the culture of the poliomyelitis virus (Thicke *et al.* 1952). This organization was at the forefront of Canadian efforts to control this medical scourge. Like many women of the time, Joan gave up her career for marriage; she balanced raising a family, organizing a household and busy social life, and developing her own interests, such as teaching children to read, volunteering at the Victoria Art Gallery, and preparing flower arrangements at Government House. Joan and Yorke raised two accomplished daughters, Anne and Jane. Anne holds B.Math. and M.Math. degrees in computer science (University of Waterloo) and has had a distinguished career as a

statistician and data analyst at the Chalk River Laboratories of Atomic Energy of Canada. Jane studied biochemistry (B.Sc.) at UBC and has since researched various medical conditions, such as lupus and diabetes, at the universities of Calgary and Western Ontario.

Anne and Jane remember outings with their father and his ever-present binoculars. Sundays were often birding days and Jane recalls hikes in Victoria's Francis Park (now Francis/King Regional Park) where the natural history stories of Freeman King were a highlight. Both sisters tell of road trips—the car halting abruptly, their father jumping out, binoculars in hand and striding down the road in pursuit of a bird. The family would wait patiently in the car for him to return and record the sighting in his notebook before driving off again. Anne says that while on family trips they always stopped at park visitors' centres where her father would ask her what she thought about the displays. “We might discuss how they were constructed—for example, did the lighting make reading the text easy? Or he might explain what he would have done differently -- should there be fewer words, less clutter, or more emphasis on the main message? To this day I automatically analyze any display I see in a museum or park visitor centre as I would have done with Dad” (A.C. Wills pers. comm. 8 July 2019).

Yorke's impact

Over the course of his long career, Yorke presented hundreds of talks and speeches on many subjects to many audiences, from school children to scientific societies, from museum workers and naturalists clubs to politicians and seniors' groups. He also wrote widely, publishing more than 400 titles across a wide range of topics, from research and science in museums (Edwards 1985b, 1993a) to more popular pieces on his first love, birds. Yorke savoured the complexities of gull identification (Edwards 1969b); hawk migration was a fascination (Edwards 1994); and

birding from the windows and patio of his home overlooking Juan de Fuca Strait was a favourite pastime in later years (Edwards 1992). Naturalist newsletters and magazines, including BC Nature's *Cordillera*, which he helped to found, are full of his articles about people and the natural world, birds, mammals, plants, ecology, and multitudes of other topics. Yorke was a frequent contributor to the Royal BC Museum's newsletter, *Discovery*, with articles on subjects ranging from extinct Caribou (Edwards 1993b) to the museum's native plant garden (Edwards 1995). He wrote dozens of book reviews and forewords to books. And he wrote a few books of his own. Among them, *The Mountain Barrier* was a popular treatment of the ecology of the mountains of western Canada (Edwards 1970c). He also recognized the value of writing for children and worked hard at it (Edwards 1970b, 1971b).

But perhaps his most influential papers are those in which he waxes philosophical about parks (Edwards 1965c,d, 1989), museums (Edwards 1977, 1979a, 1994a), and interpretation (Edwards 1968, 1969a, 1970a, 1976, 1981, 1997). In his book, *The Land Speaks*, Yorke sums up decades of thinking about heritage interpretation (Edwards 1979b).

Some of Yorke's writings remained unpublished at the time of his death, or else appeared in hard-to-find newsletters and government reports. Partly to make these and other writings available to a wider audience, the Royal BC Museum has published a book of Yorke's essays (Kool and Cannings 2021). Titled *The Object's the Thing ...*, this volume looks back at the glory days of nature interpretation in British Columbia and Canada— through the eyes of the man who, perhaps more than anyone, helped bring them about.

Yorke served on the executive boards of many conservation and natural history organizations: the Nature Conservancy of Canada; Royal Canadian Geographical Society; the Wildlife Society; Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club; Canadian Museums Association; Grants Committee of the

Museum Assistance Program, National Museums of Canada; Canadian Nature Federation; *Owl* and *Chickadee* magazines; Council of Associate Museum Directors; BC Historic Sites Advisory Board; *Wildlife Review* magazine; *Nature Canada* magazine; BC Forest Museum (now the BC Forest Discovery Centre); Whale Museum, Sidney, BC; Federation of BC Naturalists Foundation; and BC Government House Foundation. As a teenager he was president of the ROM's Intermediate Naturalists; later he was president of the BC Museums Association, the Victoria Natural History Society, and the BC Forest Museum. He served as editor of the journals of the Canadian Society of Wildlife and Fishery Biologists and the BC Museums Association.

Yorke won many awards for his dedication to the understanding and preservation of Canadian nature, including the Interpretation Canada Award for Outstanding Achievement (1979) and Canada's 125th Year Medal (1992). He was recognized for distinguished service to the Canadian Council on Ecological Areas (1989, 1991). Yorke was an elected member of the Brodie Club in Toronto (1947) and a Fellow of both the Royal Canadian Geographical Society (1984) and the Canadian Museums Association (1980). He was an honorary member of the BC Museums Association (1967) and the Ottawa Field-Naturalists' Club (1980).

Just as Rudolph Anderson's advice to Yorke years earlier convinced him that biology could be his life, Yorke's counsel helped many others on their way. There are others like us who count Yorke as a significant influence on their lives and tried to live his teachings. The three of us were park naturalists in BC Parks and later became his friends. R.A.C. worked at Yorke's nature centre at Wye Marsh, inventoried the biological diversity of new BC parks, and was a curator at the Royal BC Museum. W.J.M. had a long but intermittent (1960–1996) career in the BC Parks interpretation program and has extensive experience in community service in natural and human history and conservation. T.G. has devoted much of his life to conserving and understanding

Wells Gray Park; as Yorke did, Trevor loves the park. He worked as a naturalist there for many years and has since dedicated his life to research and public education in the area. In 1984 he built a home on four hectares adjacent to the park and has developed the property into an outdoor campus for naturalists. Trevor has gathered over 250 reports, papers, and books pertaining to Wells Gray and has initiated the Edwards-Ritcey Online Library Project, which will post many of these titles online for a new generation of naturalists and researchers. The library is named in honour of those two scientists whose early work on Wells Gray's wildlife created a solid foundation for future research (Goward 2014).

In 1991, Trevor, with the help of many others, and especially the involvement of the University College of the Cariboo (now Thompson Rivers University), set up the Wells Gray Education and Research Centre. A highlight of "Yorke Edwards' Day in Wells Gray", a tribute to British Columbia's "Father of Interpretation", organized by Trevor on 5 October 2013, was the sod-turning ceremony for the Wells Gray TRU Wilderness Centre.

Our stories are hardly unique. Hundreds of university students who worked as park naturalists in Canada during those years came away infused with his ideas. Today they are biologists, university professors, writers, artists, doctors, lawyers, teachers, parents, and grandparents. Thousands of others who visited parks, wildlife centres and museums, or who read his articles or heard his talks, also came away with a bit of Yorke Edwards.

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