

Former Trump 'toy' now logging Jervis Inlet

By Brian Lee

Perched precariously on a sidehill watching the biggest helicopter I've ever seen whisk 25,000 pound logs down to the chuck and return before I've cleared the sawdust from my eyes, I can't help but think, "How the hell could handloggers do this?"

Helifor Canada's four-person Hughes MD 500 lets us down on an impossibly small, 6 x 8-foot makeshift helipad of halved logs at the bottom of one of three cut blocks they've been contracted to log near the Delta rock gravel mine in Jervis Inlet.

Hovering disconcertingly nearby, a Boeing Chinook 234 helicopter swings a hydraulic grapple from a 250-foot cable that seems to magnetically clamp on to giant logs 16 times

heavier than the helicopter we just landed in.

With a maximum lift capacity of 28,000 pounds, the Boeing Chinook 234 is the heaviest lifting commercially rated helicopter in the world.

Only the Russian military helicopter, the Mil-26, can lift more.

First built for British Airways to ferry passengers and cargo to offshore oil platforms in the North Sea, the Chinook 234 boasts a range of achievements from hanging wire between transmission towers a record 1.5 miles apart in China to water-bombing forest fires throughout the Pacific Northwest.

The passenger version of the aircraft has a range of 644 miles and can carry up to 44 passengers in an interior much like a commercial Boeing airplane complete with galley and overhead storage bins.

The Chinook weighs about 26,500 pounds and its twin 4,500-horsepower engines move it along at a maximum speed of 167 miles per hour but that's not where it really excels.

Logging/camp manager Dave Morrison has worked for Helifor's Eclipse crew for 25 years and clearly likes to talk wood.

A stocky man in his early 40s, Morrison mentally calculates board feet and cubic metres like an accountant and exudes a quiet pride as he answers questions about

the operation.

The heady smell of pitch and panoramic views to Campbell River, surround Morrison and his crew on this mild day April day.

It's late afternoon and the crew of five has assembled to wait for a ride out on the Hughes.

Chatting and joking quietly, they're still fascinated by the display of power as the helicopter lifts logs that they had bucked earlier that day.

Behind them, armed with a can of spray paint, 10-year-old Kaiden Bosch is busy tagging every log within 50 feet with a bright blue "Kai", any nervousness about his first helicopter ride long gone.

This helicopter, C-FHFB, was built in 1981 and, according to Morrison, was previously owned by Donald Trump, ostensibly to ferry himself around Manhattan for meetings that must have left carbon footprints the size of Costa Rica.

Formerly called Helifor Industries, the Helifor Canada Eclipse crew and equipment were bought by US-owned Columbia Helicopters in December of 2006 from Interfor Canada.

Helifor Canada owns four Vertol 107 helicopters and a single Boeing Chinook 234.

This operation has taken seven weeks to fall 12,000 cubic metres of high quality timber.

The Chinook will only be at this operation for 5 five days to clear out the heaviest stuff, after which it will be off to carry heavy equipment into a gold mine north of Stewart, BC.

A smaller helicopter, the Vertol 107 with a lift capacity of 10,500 pounds will arrive to clean up the rest.

That should take about two



Brian Lee photo

The Hughes MD 500 is just used to ferry men and supplies ack and forth to the cutblock.

weeks.

The timeline makes it extremely important that the fallers on the ground buck and mark the logs accurately to maximize the usage of the expensive machines.

Each armed with a chainsaw, a tape measure and a bucking card that gives them the correct length to buck each log in relation to the size of its butt and optimum mill specifications, the fallers have left the cut block strewn with chunks of fir each with a ribbon indicating weight.

With the hydraulic grapple and cable weighing in at 3000 lbs, the maximum log size can't exceed 24,500 pounds.

The bright pink ribbons are surprisingly easy to spot from the air.

A single ribbon indicates a log weighing about 20,000 lbs, a double ribbon 22,000 and a triple ribbon the maximum.

Knowing the weight of the logs is crucial to the pilots as extra weight means extra risk.

Smaller logs often get picked up at the same time, which isn't a problem if the pilot knows the weight of the target log.

A 24,500-pound fir log yields approximately 14 cubic metres or 6000 board feet of lumber — enough for 1,120 rough-cut, eight-foot two-by-fours.

If the tree was the right milling



Brian Lee photo

The Boeing Chinook 234 can lift 28,000 pounds of Donald Trump's gold or ferry 44 would-be Apprentices around Manhattan.

dimensions, the Chinook could lift a log large enough to produce a 12-by-12 beam 500 feet long.

But it isn't cheap.

This Boeing Chinook 234 burns 1500 litres of fuel an hour so you don't want to waste its efforts on sub-standard timber.



Brian Lee photo

Three pink ribbons mean a log weighs approximately 24,500 pounds. The grapple and cable weigh 3000 lbs. The helicopter weighs another 26,000 pounds. All held up by a tenuous supply of forced air.

Heli-logging (cont.)

During a typical 10-12 hour day, the Chinook will extract 1,500-2,000 cubic metres of wood.

That's equal to about 40-50 highway logging truck loads of top grade, non-export saw logs destined for milling expensive beams or other value added wood products.

Occasionally a log is measured wrong and is too heavy for the helicopter to lift.

It costs time and wastes valuable timber when ends have to be taken off and on this day there have been some costly mistakes.

"One of the fallers was reading his card wrong so we had to double check and buck a few." says spotter Jim Morrison with a wry smile.

"It happens sometimes."

As if to prove it, the Chinook tries in vain to lift out a massive trunk that is eventually let go after a couple of attempts, the chopper's deafening exhaust blasting its disapproval.

Young and obviously extremely fit, faller Jason Kemmler says it took him an hour and a half to hike up to where we're standing, 700 feet above the chilled waters of Jervis Inlet.

Another half-hour hiking up and he was still finding old stumps with springboard notches.

Considering that many of the

bucked-up chunks strewn around this spot have butts with diameters of eight feet or more, the handloggers must have missed a few or decided not to bother with the "small" ones.

Nowadays, heli-logging is considered to be the most environmentally friendly method of extracting wood from the forest.

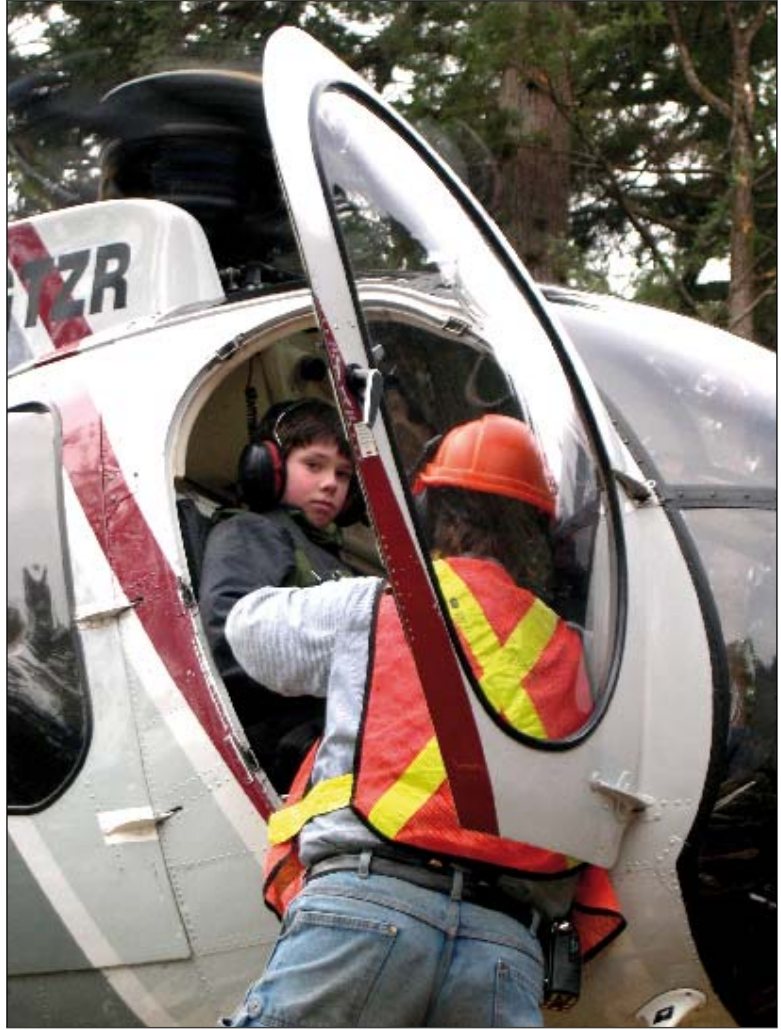
Because soil erosion on steep slopes is usually associated with road building rather than the timber extraction itself, heli-logging has become a low-impact method of harvesting inaccessible terrain.

All it takes is a couple of very experienced pilots and a \$28-million helicopter.

Inside the cockpit, there's a pilot and a co-pilot who trade duties every 90 minutes when they refuel.

In a 26,500-pound helicopter lifting its own weight, the co-pilot is as busy as the pilot.

Responsible for monitoring twin 4500-horsepower engines churning two 60-foot diameter, three-blade rotors, five transmissions and a complicated array of gauges, he doesn't have a lot of room for error.



Brian Lee photo

Ten year-old Kaiden Bosch gets strapped into the co-pilot seat of a Hughes MD 500 for the ride back to Egmont

In 1997, another 234 went down in the Comox Valley.

A flight control system failure cost two pilots their lives when, according to a Transportation Safety Board report,

"The helicopter had lifted the [16,000-pound] log two-thirds of the way off the steep terrain, with one end still in contact with the ground, when witnesses observed the helicopter commence a rapid right turn." the report said.

"In the next five to 10 seconds, the helicopter continued to turn rapid-

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ly to the right several times, traveled laterally, then descended in a nearly level attitude and struck the ground.”

Though the pilots never had a chance this accident was an anomaly and Helifor has maintained an excellent safety record despite logging long hours in an industry repeatedly cited for its high accident record.

Mechanics work through each night preparing the helicopter for service the next day because, unlike fixed-wing aircraft with glide ability, the nature of helicopters carries the unsettling reality that if there's a serious mechanical error, a crash is usually the result.

Whether it's superstition or simply an unpleasant topic, Morrison's reluctant to talk about such things.

There's no sense dwelling on the danger when you have a job to do like this one.

On our way out we pass the refueling Chinook and one of the pilots hops out to make some kind of comical gesture up at us.

I don't know what it means exactly but clearly it's been a good day.



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10:20 a.m.	11:20 a.m.	10:20 a.m.	09:25 a.m.
▶ 11:30 a.m.	01:20 p.m.	◆ 02:25 p.m.	11:20 a.m.
12:20 p.m.	03:30 p.m.	04:25 p.m.	◆ 01:25 p.m.
12:50 p.m.	04:00 p.m.	06:25 p.m.	03:30 p.m.
02:30 p.m.	05:30 p.m.	08:20 p.m.	05:25 p.m.
04:30 p.m.	07:25 p.m.	10:10 p.m.	07:25 p.m.
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