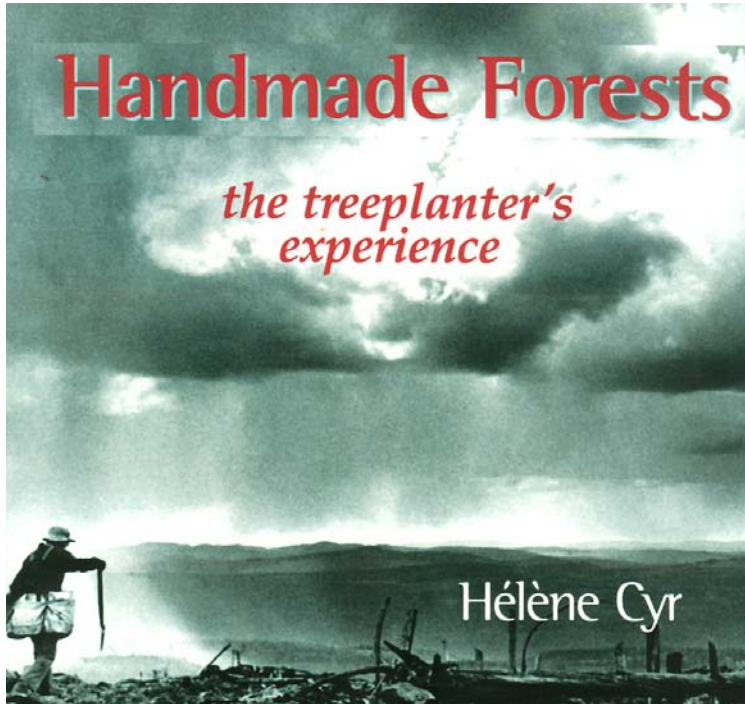


The Regeneration Generation

A Foreword by Dirk Brinkman

One hundred years ago there were six billion hectares of forest worldwide. Today the remaining three billion are only shrinking in the tropics, though still at an alarming rate of 17 million hectares per year. H el ene Cyr's Handmade Forests celebrates the generation of front-line planters who turned the tide of



deforestation in the northern hemisphere. Handmade Forests captures the spirit of treeplanter culture during the mid-'80s, the mid point of the first regeneration generation.

For centuries, civilizations have risen and fallen based on a pattern of building on their forest resources and then sputtering out on their deforested deserts. As the latest superpower to emerge from the vital pioneer phase of historical development, North America now plants nearly two and a half billion trees per year. Within the initially expedient industrial monoculture programs, a vision of ecological sustainability has emerged. British Columbia has led the way in the practical implementation of ecosystem principles, which guide treeplanting. Today in BC, professional career treeplanters select the right species of tree for each spot based on microsite indicators, and sites are reforested with an ecologically suitable mix of tree species.

H el ene Cyr has documented the sort of planting crews that made that uniquely sustainable phenomenon possible. The time when most of the photographs in this book were taken was a period of high diversity in the treeplanting world. Besides camping on site and using the first tree bags on belts, the planters with my company considered themselves landscape artists and made many innovations in the planting methods and style. We abandoned row planting and wove natural patterns of seedlings that followed the contours of the site and its obstacles, a style of planting that also didn't hold us back to the speed of the slowest planter in the planting line.

Piece-rate pay systems, which began as a logical way to split the net revenue of the reforestation contract according to how many trees each person planted, evolved in BC's wilderness Galapagos of free enterprise, emerging through every experimental blend of cooperative and capitalist structure. Only the fittest, fastest, most flexible, and innovative individuals and systems survived.

In 1987, BC passed a silviculture regulation which required logging companies to reforest every area cut at their own cost, using ecologically appropriate species which had to be grown until they were free of competition. I lobbied hard for this regulation and it has gradually transformed treeplanting. Now crews are not just survivors of the "lowest-bid-wins" curse. They are valued for the quality of their work and skills, and many forester-contractor-treeplanter relationships have stabilized. During the last decade, more and more career treeplanters have made silviculture their place to stand in life.

Handmade Forests is being published at a crucial time. The harvest is shrinking in BC and the IWA (Industrial Wood and Allied Workers of Canada) now wants these forest jobs. In the spring of 1997, the

Premier of BC planted the four billionth tree. But with this act he was not celebrating veteran treeplanters. In fact, the BC government has joined the union in demonizing these culturally unique professionals who follow the snowmelt from coast to interior, labeling treeplanters “itinerants, transients, and nomads.” Now on the coast over half of the new silviculture work is required to go to laid-off loggers, who neither fit silviculture nor cultivate the fitness required.

Handmade Forests celebrates silviculture, a vibrant sub-culture as unique as logging and pioneering. It celebrates the people who survived and thrived in vertical slash, horizontal rain, blinding sweat, deafening mosquitoes, and maddening no-see-ums. This is the regeneration generation who took reforestation in the northern hemisphere from a 60 percent survival rate in monoculture plantations, to a 97 percent success rate in establishing ecosystem appropriate plantations with species mixed by artists into natural eco-scapes. These trees don't just survive, they grow.

This is the first book, I hope, of a series, because there are many stories to tell.

Dirk Brinkman is the president of Brinkman & Associates Reforestation Ltd., the oldest and largest reforestation company in Canada. He is also the editor of the Canadian Silviculture Magazine.