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ENGL 4260

April 12, 2022

Critical Reflection on Place

The abandoned train trestle at Fry Lake is a place that I have a personal connection to. I spent many summers camping there as a child. Fry lake is a part of Lower Campbell Lake, about forty-five minutes from Campbell River on Vancouver Island. Lower Campbell Lake was flooded in nineteen-fifty-eight by the BC Power Commission when the Strathcona Dam was built. Since I have been alive, Fry Lake has been a campground. It is not the kind of campground with flush toilets and electrical hookups, just fire pits made of repurposed tire rims from logging trucks, and wooden hole-in-the-ground outhouses. Fry Lake is beautiful for swimming and its special feature is the train trestle that is half submerged in water. Tall trees tower around the shore, occasionally shedding their leaves in the wind, sending them floating down the channel. A trestle that used to support logging traffic decades ago is now used as a diving board.

Whenever I visit the trestle to this day, I have feelings of nostalgia. The trestle has slowly rotted away since I was a child. I recall one of the diving board beams having to be sawed off because it was rotting. I was about ten years of age. My uncles used local lumber to make add-ons to the structure so us kids could still jump off it safely. I have snorkeled around it and examined its submerged beams made of tree trunks that stand strong on the bottom of the lake. They are covered in a thin layer of algae and have become part of a diverse ecosystem of aquatic organisms, ducks, loons, snakes, bears, cougars, and more. And when I come to the surface and look up at the magnificent structure I picture a train, like a ghost, chugging across it, its sounds drowned out by children squealing and laughing.

It is captivating to think of every person or animal that has been to this spot that means so much to me. As an adult, I have come to see the site in a different light. It is not only a playground for children, but a piece of history. The image of the Fry Lake trestle might evoke different images for different people, depending on their age, culture, and education. I might picture my younger self in a life jacket, plugging my nose with my fingers, asking my mother to watch while I jump off the lower ledge. Another might think about the industrialized logging that North Island towns like Campbell River were built on. And others might imagine times, preceding colonial interference, when Indigenous populations occupied the area for thousands of years. However, I never contemplated the Indigenous occupation until my adulthood. I think that is because of a combination of things. The tire rims and the train trestle paint a clear image of a historical logging site, overshadowing the long history that took place before it. It is unfortunate that the effects of colonization stood between me and my understanding of this place.

Thinking of the history of Fry Lake trestle makes my experience with it seem like a tiny moment in its long story. As a child, I felt like I partially owned the place for myself because I had so many memories there. Now, I feel like more of a guest in a long line of guests of the trestle, lucky to exist at the same time.