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On the Cover:

Producing wood chips for manufacturing pulp is an important part of the forest industry in Canada, but producing forestry biomass for energy facilities is also of growing importance. Industry research organization FPInnovations has some solid tips on achieving the standards expected of biomass in a story on page 45 of this issue of Logging and Sawmilling Journal (Photo of B.C. Interior chipping operation by Paul MacDonald)

Keeping lumber on track (keeping.php)

The rail system is an essential link in the supply chain for Canadian lumber producers, and industry associations are stressing that the system needs to be maintained and reviewed to get the best service—especially as the industry seeks to develop overseas markets, and get lumber to ports.

Maxing out value from logs (maxing.php)

B.C.'s Skeena Sawmills has launched a broad-based effort to improve log utilization, and that effort includes the installation of a new small log canter line—and it's also looking at a new log scanner, to maximize the value from each log.

New planer mill technology delivers (planer.php)

A new planer mill at IdaPine in Idaho is helping Evergreen Forest Products meet growing market needs—and standards for the company's appearance grade products have been greatly enhanced by innovative Finnish scanning technology created by FinScan.

The right stuff—all the way 'round (right.php)

Nova Scotia logger Peter Archibald understands full well that he needs the right gear to deliver the right wood to the right mill, and he now has some new equipment—and some newly-trained operators—to deliver that wood.



John Deere harvesting equipment at work using the Remote Operated Bulldozer (ROB) winch assist system, at the Demo 2016 show.

ROLLING UPHILL WITH LOGGING CHANGES

The B.C.-based Clusko Group is used to adapting to new environments and making changes, and the latest is a move to higher ground and steep slope equipment, with the Remote Operated Bulldozer (ROB) winch assist system.

By Heather Hudson

The Clusko Group, a Clearwater, B.C.-based logging operation, is no stranger to adapting to their environment. The company, founded by Arnold and Imke Bremner as a trucking firm in 1979, has been reinvented many times over the years.

Just five years ago, Clusko was based in Prince George, with secondary operations in Williams Lake and Kelowna. It boasted a 160-man workforce, a huge fleet of equipment and was harvesting 1.4 million cubic metres a year.

Today, its patriarch and matriarch want to slow down, so sons Jared, Ryan and Troy run more of the business. They've downsized their employees and equipment by half, closed up their Prince George operations and are heading to higher ground.

It's a natural evolution. With the flat valley bottoms gone in B.C. and widespread damage caused by the mountain pine beetle, the real bounty is on high, rugged terrain.

"Even with our conventional logging operation, the ground-based skidding systems and roadside operations have been pushed into steeper ground. We have to do a lot more trailing with excavators and hoe chucking the ground for those machines where it's too steep to stay within allowable limits," said operations manager Jared Bremner.

With these limitations, it made business sense to invest in steep slope specialty machines. "We started looking at this type of equipment to get a head start on other contractors, learn the system and be a leader in the field," said Bremner.

In 2016, Clusko started working with Doug Hanson, Brandt Tractor's major accounts manager for B.C. forestry, to find solutions to tackling a new frontier. "Everybody's going to the slopes and scratching their heads to figure out how to get in there. Clusko has made some smart equipment choices to be leaders," says Hanson.

The move to higher ground is a natural evolution in many areas of the B.C. Interior. With the flat valley bottoms harvested and widespread damage caused by the mountain pine beetle, the real bounty is now often on high. In the Clearwater area, Clusko Logging is dealing with a lot of steep terrain, rock and broken ground.

The Remote Operated Bulldozer (ROB) winch assist system—an import from New Zealand—was a logical choice. It's made its way to other areas of B.C. with great safety and production results. Hanson, and Island Pacific Equipment, the dealer for the ROB Dozer, helped Clusko create a steep slope system that reaches where little other machinery can go—and that keeps operators safely off the ground and in a ROPS cab.

"The two-machine system requires only one operator who sits in the cab of the harvester and runs the ROB by remote control. The harvester, tethered to an anchor machine, can work safely on steep slopes in places where a conventional system cannot," said Hanson.

Hanson and Island Pacific Equipment outfitted Clusko with a John Deere 850J ROB with a two-winch system attached. The winches are powered by the 850J's hydrostatic drive motors. Both winches have 400 metres of 7/8" cable that run through two fairleads attached to the top of the dozer blade, and onto a hitch on the harvester.

"The machine has a 21-ton safe working load, at a safety ratio of 5:1, with ProPac rope. The winches are spring apply, oil release, as are the tracks, so in the event of a failure, everything is locked," said Hanson.

The ROB's low centre of gravity makes it an ideal anchor. The system is equipped with tension monitors and detection systems that will shut the machine down in the event of a cable jumping off a winch, an overheat, a blown hose or any anchor machine movement. The cable can also run up to 45 degrees off the blade fairleads on each side of the dozer, offering a wide cutting swath without moving the ROB.

Clusko also invested in a John Deere 909MH harvester/Southstar 750 directional feller. The 909MH is equipped with a 330 hp JD 9 litre engine.



Rolling uphill with logging changes (rolling.php)

The B.C.-based Clusko Group is used to adapting to new environments and making changes, and the latest is a move to higher ground and steep slope equipment, with the Remote Operated Bulldozer (ROB) winch assist system.

Resourceful sawmilling (resourceful.php)

Vancouver Island sawmiller Lawrence Wheatley has weathered two decades of the ups and downs of the sometimes unpredictable wood products market by being extremely resourceful, and having a strong focus on local customers.

The Edge (edge.php)

Included in this edition of The Edge, Canada's leading publication on research in the forest industry, are stories from the Canadian Wood Fibre Centre, Alberta Innovates, Alberta Agriculture and FPInnovations.

The Last Word (last-word.php)

The forest industry must lead on developing a national carbon credit trading system, says Tony Kryzanowski.

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John Deere dealer Brandt Tractor and Island Pacific Equipment outfitted Clusko with a John Deere 850J ROB with a two-winch system attached. The winches are powered by the 850J's hydrostatic drive motors

"There are many features that make this harvester best in class. The harvesting front has 34 feet of reach which is very important when working on a slope," said Hanson. "A factory-designed hitch was installed on the harvester, so that guys working on a slope where normally you wouldn't want to take a machine are perfectly safe because they're held by two 7/8" cables.

"It's a one-man system because it's controlled remotely. If the operator wants to go back up the hill, he tells the machine to spool cable in. If he wants to go down, he spools out," adds Hanson. "You keep a certain tension so you never slide and

you can work from side to side easily. The levelling system offers 26 degrees forward, 7 degrees rearward and 14 degrees to the side, keeping the operator level and comfortable in the cab."

Although Clusko looks to John Deere and Brandt to be their main supplier, they do have a Tigercat 365 six-wheel skidder that specializes in rugged terrain.

Jared Bremner says investing in this cutting-edge equipment was a strategic move for the company. It's where they see the future of the business. Operators, managers and owners have all undergone extensive training to ensure proper operation and safety procedures are followed. Practice has been key to working out any kinks. "There's some element of trial and error to know what works best as you go through different scenarios on the ground. We want to be front runners in the system so it's beneficial for all of us to get up to speed quickly."

So far, they've gotten great value out of the system logging in Valemont, B.C. on slopes varying from 45 to 85 per cent. "Once the ROB is set up and the operator is doing his thing, he was extremely confident and comfortable on hills as he felled timber and chucked it down the road."

They saw great handling on tree sizes of .8 cubic metres. "It was a huge asset compared to hand falling which had a lot of risk. The steep slope equipment eliminates a lot of hand fallers on the ground. Safety is our number one priority and this system helps reinforce that," said Bremner.

Earlier this year, Clusko Logging Enterprises was recognized for its business excellence, winning forest company Canfor's 2017 Top Canadian Contractor Award. Pictured above, left to right, are: Andrew Lavigne, Operations Manager, Vavenby Fibre; Don Kayne, President and CEO, Canfor; Jared Bremner, Clusko Logging; Stephen Mackie, senior vice-president, operations-Canada; Kevin Horsnell, group general manager-forest management group Canada.



In 2015, Clusko Group built new infrastructure, including a full-service truck shop and 20-man camp in Clearwater, where the heart of their business is and where they want it to grow. They also have offices in Kelowna and Williams Lake. Clusko logs about 325,000 metres annually for Canfor in the Clearwater, B.C. area and employs roughly 80 people. They continue to run a complete road construction side, building main roads, access roads and bridge installs. Bremner says downsizing has largely been a positive exercise.

"When we were as big as we were back in 2013, we started to lose our day-to-day interactions with the crew. It's hard to have relationships with 160 people. That's always been important to us and we wanted to re-establish that."

Downsizing also meant weeding out extraneous equipment. Bremner says the company worked with Hanson and Brandt Tractor to offload outdated machinery and upgrade others.

"The operating area in Clearwater is vastly different than the north. There's lots of steep terrain, rock and broken ground. Moving here was the beginning to move toward the steep slope tethered machines. We had to adapt from flat-bottomed tilters to bigger, six-wheel drive skidders that can handle the area appropriately," said Bremner.

"Overall, you have to evolve with the conditions in logging. You've got to be willing to change and stay with the times."

The Bremner brothers are taking that spirit of entrepreneurial evolution and mixing it with the legacy of the family business. "We're looking to expand for sure. It's more strategic than just saying, 'Yeah, we want to grow back up to a million and a half cubic metres a year.' We want to diversify and take on more opportunities where it works."

One of the ways the business has evolved is with each brother forming his own company within the Clusko Group. "We've all started our own companies. We're slowly adding machines and trucks, but are still under the mothership company," said Bremner.

Troy runs Troyco Enterprises, which supervises the trucks, loaders and the shop serving the Clearwater operations along with the harvesting operations. He employs two log loaders and seven logging trucks that haul for the Clusko Group.

Ryan is owner of North Face Ventures and also runs a log loader and six logging trucks within the Clearwater area. Some of them are long loggers which help get the wood off the mountainside. Ryan tends to all the company's vendor accounts and purchasing and assists with the trucking fleet.

And Jared runs Jareco Holdings Ltd., which has four processors and two skidders and takes care of all the processing for Clusko Group. "We each have our separate phases or areas of focus and continue to grow so that eventually we have our different sides in the future. In three to five years, we all plan to hopefully have our own standalone operations," said Jared.

In the meantime, they run the business as a well-oiled unit for the Clusko Group, consulting daily and working toward the same goal to evolve with the business.

“Our focus is being successful in this industry in well-defined locations. We have systems in place that are strategic and effective for us. We see a bright future.”

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