

Third front

CANADIANS USING HYDER FOR ILLICIT TRADE

Alaskan border town is the Wild West

by KEITH MORGAN
Vancouver Province

HYDER, Alaska (CP) — A lawless Alaskan border town is being used by crooks to sell cocaine, run guns and bootleg hard liquor.

The Mounties say Canadians are slipping across the uncontrolled border into Hyder from Stewart, B.C., after dark and plying their illicit trade without fear of arrest because there are no police in the Alaskan community of 85.

Stewart RCMP are so alarmed they're planning frequent stakeouts of the three-kilometre highway between the border communities, and Alaska state troopers are seriously considering putting a member into the community for the hectic summer months.

But that's not enough for anxious leaders of the northwestern B.C. community of 2,400. They're also demanding that Canada Customs reopen the border post that was closed four years ago.

"All the problems are being caused by Canadians who know we can't go in after them," says Stewart RCMP Cpl. Randy Churchill, whose three-man detachment recently seized almost 250 grams of coke from a Canadian trafficker.

"We have reports of open cocaine use on the street and we hear a lot of handguns are coming out of there," he says.

Alaska state trooper A. J. Charlton says: "The town is described as the last lawless town in the West and it's living up to that description. The guns go hand in hand with the drug dealing."

Charlton says a loophole in the law is behind some of the gun problems.

"Our laws say that guns can't be sold to anybody who lives in another state. Canada isn't another state, so there's the loophole," he says.

Chuck Hart, owner of the Border Bandit gun store in Hyder, was reluctant to talk about his business but admitted: "Business is very good."

Stewart Ald. Gary Hubbard says: "We watch trailerloads of liquor go through Stewart under Canada Customs seal to a town with a population of not much more than 80 people."

"The bars in Hyder are open until after 5 a.m. which means drunks on the road and a great deal of opportunity to buy cheap liquor to bring back. It's our own government that's letting us down, not our neighbors."

Stewart grocery store owner Charlie Fenner says the "fast-tracking of free trade" caused by the absence of Customs is costing him a great deal in lost business.



Glacier Inn owner Jim Bunn tells visitors that residents of Hyder, Alaska, do their bit for the Canadian economy by buying their vehi-

cles and groceries in adjacent Stewart, B.C., because the nearest Alaskan town, Ketchikan, is an hour away by plane.

"Why buy cigarettes from me at \$29 when you get them for \$18 (a carton) there?" Fenner says.

Maurice Walford, director of communications at the B.C. Government Liquor Branch, says it's losing an estimated \$250,000 worth of business annually. "That's substantial for a place the size of Stewart. We're trying to figure what we can do about it."

Haig Bozoian of Canada Customs holds out little hope for a new border post.

"If we're only there part-time, then people will smuggle when we're closed up," Bozoian says.

That's good news for the Hyder businesses, who prefer more frequent police patrols to discourage drunkenness and drug dealing rather than a border post.

Glacier Inn owner Jim Bunn says: "The only people Customs would hurt is the ordinary working Joe who heads home with a bottle

of liquor. I don't see any large-scale bootlegging. Things balance out because we spend just about all our money in Canada. The critics seem to forget that."

Those damn Yankees and crazy Canucks are still fighting the war of 1812, but the battlefield has moved from distant central Canada to Stewart Secondary School, where modern-day British Columbia borders Alaska.

No blood is spilled in the rematch but the pride of five U.S. students from neighboring Hyder is regularly wounded. The Alaskan youngsters are forced to listen to our version of the historical truth because there's no school in Hyder.

"They try to tell us we lost a war but we hear it right when we do our U.S. history course," chuckles Ronnie Kruger, a 14-year-old from across the line. "Anyway, Canadian history is boring. There aren't really any wars."

History teacher Russell Earle enjoys speaking out of both sides of his mouth.

"They have to study Canadian history to graduate here in B.C., but their own school board also requires them to study U.S. history. It gets really lively because a few of the Canadian youngsters also take the course."

Hyder is landlocked and the nearest American city, Ketchikan, is more than an hour away by air. So the twin-history course is one of many good-neighborly ventures enjoyed by the adjoining communities.

Stewart Mayor Darlene Cornell says: "We have to help each other out. We may be a much bigger community but we're interdependent."

"Their school board pays for the schooling and they've also provided a computer and books. It's unique and it works very well. We

also have a mutual aid agreement for firefighting and our hospital copes with all their medical needs," says Cornell.

"We benefit from the Alaskan ferry which brings in a lot of tourists and actually docks on the Canadian side of the border. And they have the only road through to the Canadian mines."

Hospital administrator Denise Moore says: "The Hyder residents pay cash up front for their treatment. . . and there are so few of them it causes us no problem. I know they're happy. It would cost them far more in the States for the same medical attention."

Prominent Hyderite and bar owner Jim Bunn says the community's 85 residents may benefit from the social services, but it's a two-way street.

"There may not be many of us here but we spend a great deal of what we earn from tourism in Can-

ada," Bunn says. "Most of us buy our vehicles in Canada and once a month I take my kids to an orthodontist in Terrace, so we do our bit for the Canadian economy."

And, Bunn adds: "We do the bulk of our grocery shopping in Stewart. It sure beats going to Ketchikan to buy a pound of hamburger."

To step back into the Wild West these days, you have to go north. You know you're there when the pavement stops.

"Welcome to Hyder," the cloth sign taunts, almost daring you to leave your timidity in Stewart, B.C., as you step across the Canada-U.S. border into the southern-most tip of Alaska.

Take that one step off the pavement and there you are — in a dusty little one-street border town, no Hollywood western facade but the real raggedy thing.

And it attracts thousands of Canadians every summer.

Hyder may be short on tumbleweed, but it's got the rest — dust, shanty shacks, wooden sidewalks. . . and saloons where you can plunk down two bucks and take a shot of 190-proof grain alcohol.

"The secret is to drink a glass of water right after. . . or else your throat's gonna suffer," says Jim Bunn, owner of the Glacier Inn where the walls are covered with Canadian dollar bills and other currencies.

"We figure there's about \$35,000 on these walls. . . people wrote their name on a bill and staple it to the wall. Then if they return someday penniless there will always be enough for a drink."

Hyder bills itself as the Friendliest Ghost Town in Alaska, and behind the door of every apparently condemned building is a smiling face.

People are all eager to serve you in exchange for your Canadian dollars. The only U.S. bills you see are in the diminutive post office.

Bearded David Stephens sells souvenirs "and anything else people want to buy" at the Canal Trading Post.

"Believe it or not, this is a great place to be. We're left pretty much alone here and we look after ourselves," says Stephens.

Dorothy Britton moved from Sacramento, Calif., eight years ago to open an art and gift store.

"I wouldn't swap Hyder for any place else. My business is growing and I'm building a bigger place down the road."

And that's Hyder. After visiting Britton's store, there is no more.

The Wild West ends here, in Alaska.

JOURNALISM CONFERENCE

Media issues explored

It was a made-for-media event — but no one bothered to wear tails. Instead, they brought their pencils and notepads.

Sixty B.C. journalists came from as far afield as Prince Rupert, Dawson Creek, Valemount and Vancouver to take part in a one-day Centre for Investigative Journalism conference in Prince George, the first such journalistic conference ever held in northern B.C.

"The continuing aim is to explore media issues from a northern perspective," said Citizen reporter Bill Seymour, one of three conference organizers along with Citizen reporters Ken Bernsohn and Malcolm Curtis.

"It's hoped the conference — and those in the future — will continue to focus on the problems and situations unique to journalists who work in remote communities, often communities that are supported by one or two industries."

The Centre for Investigative Journalism is an association of Canadian journalists based in Ottawa that has active chapters in Canadian cities from coast to coast with close to 1,000 members.

Panel discussions ranged from networking in the north to reporting on environmental issues.

George Garrett, CKNW radio reporter from Vancouver told his audience the secret of getting along with the police was to build a reputation for honesty.

"A poorly researched story can sully an individual reputation and tarnish the overall reputation of the media," said Garrett.

Vancouver Sun reporter Frances Bula, a CIJ executive member, spoke on how to get the story.

"Great reporting is having the largest telephone directory," said Bula, an award-winning reporter.

A disturbing trend in radio news was reported by Fred Jackson, CBC radio news director based in Vancouver. Jackson recently returned from a trip to Houston, Tex., where he says there are 30 radio stations.

"Out of those 30 only five have more than five people on staff," said Jackson. "Stations are buying canned news programs and the local radio news is dying."

Jackson observed that the trend toward canned news meant small communities would be losing out

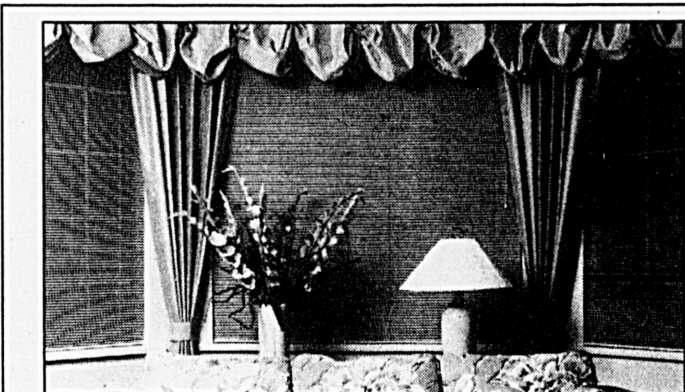
on local coverage.

Those attending the conference agreed that reporting on the environment was the most important challenge facing journalists in the 1990s.

Nick Hills, editor-in-chief at the Vancouver Sun spoke of the pitfalls in reporting on the environment.

"We are all, presumably, on the side of a clean environment," said Hills. "However, it's such an emotional issue we have to make sure we get it right. Don't let's rant, let's be calm, clear and objective."

"Remember, we work for an industry that mostly doesn't use recycled newspaper."



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Canadian Cystic Fibrosis Foundation

(NC) — Did you know that 1 in 20 Canadians is a carrier of a "defective" gene causing cystic fibrosis? Chances are 1 in 4 that a child born of two parent carriers will have CF.