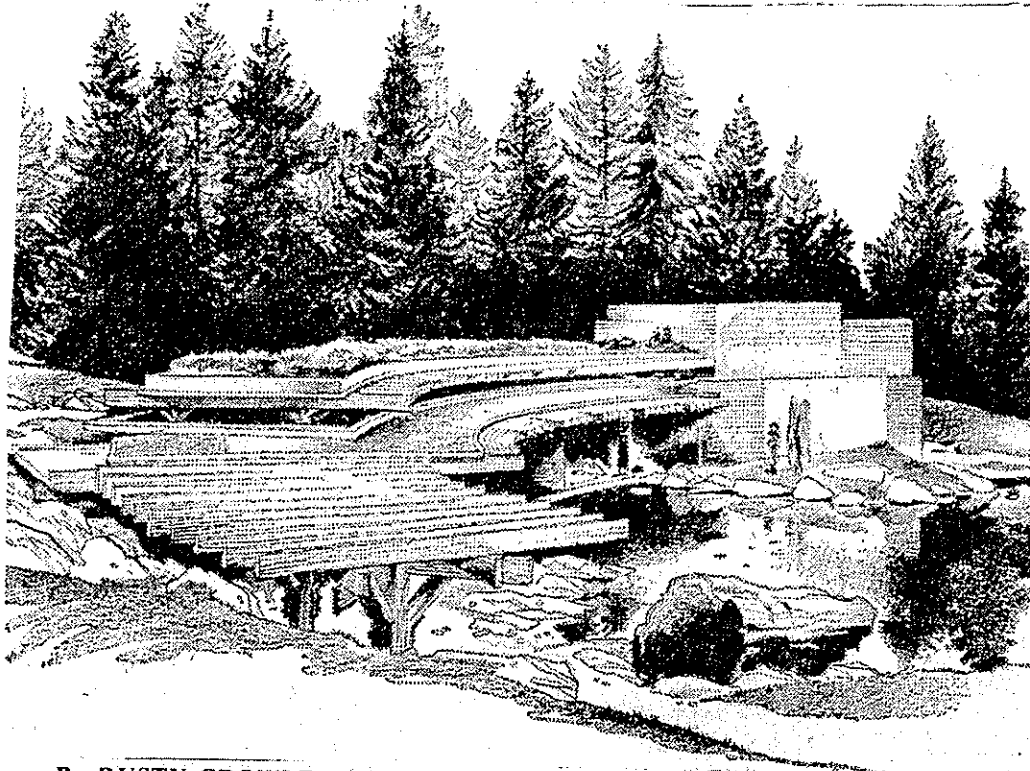


of birds and bees.



By **RUSTY CROWLEY**

Editor 1976

Photos courtesy

MacMillan Bloedel Place

Who would expect a forest centre to be humorous, fun, sexy and imaginative? MacMillan Bloedel Place is all of these, as well as being educational.

Part of what makes it such an interesting place to visit (I spent over two hours there and enjoyed every minute of it) is the involvement the planners have introduced into the learning process.

But to begin at the beginning, MacMillan Bloedel Place is a three and a half acre adjunct to the 55 acre Van Dusen Garden development on the old Shaughnessy golf course. It is set into the northwest corner of the gardens, the entrance of which is on 37th at Oak Street in Vancouver.

M.B. Place had its official opening Sept. 1 and since that time over 5,000 persons have gone through a "Walk In The Forest", the title of the exhibit. The staff hasn't yet got around to getting a proper visitors book, but records have been kept on a writing tablet, with such remarks as 'tree-ific' and 'very neat' which breaks up staff members, not to mention the ten year old who bluntly wrote 'I hate it'.

He (or she) must have been hard to please because there are many things there to involve the kids.

Basically the centre is set up to provide visitors with a unique opportunity to learn about how the forest grows, lives and regenerates. The building, with much of its roof covered with plants, blends naturally into its surroundings. It is set into an embankment overlooking a small lake fed by a 12 foot waterfall, where ducks and swans swim along, adding to the visual delight.

The 7,000 square foot building contains two main exhibit areas accessible by a gallery walkway beside an indoor pond and stream.

There are 22 exhibit units containing more than 100 information elements, focussing on botanical and biological aspects of plant life, especially species common to B.C.

There is also an informal theatre seating 50 people on carpeted tiers for slide and film presentations.

The building was funded by grants from MacMillan Bloedel of \$500,000 for construction and landscaping. Architects were Thompson, Berwick and Pratt. Design architect was Paul Merrick who was the winner of the Canadian Architect Year-book Award of Excellence in

surrounding site was done by Van Dusen Garden and Vancouver Parks Board staffs.

The design of the building utilizes post and beam construction in a unique way. Posts are set with beams radiating from them, suggesting a tree form, and that theme carries on to the ceiling, to add to the concept of a walk in the forest.

One side is completely walled in glass, so the outdoors is never divorced from the building as visitors walk along.

Staffer John Clark, who hails from New Brunswick, is the on-site naturalist who has his B.Sc. in Biology and an M.Sc. in plant physiology and has published work in the field of Photosynthesis. He has worked as a naturalist in provincial and national parks and while he was doing his research was a teaching assistant at SFU.

Although Clark has only been with the centre for a few months, (the project has been three years in the developing) he is delighted with it and what it is trying to do.

"Enlightenment on the environment," says Clark, "and about the forest is what it's all about. And it's so important.

"We help people to understand how this resource is

Clark is concerned the way people see but don't see.

"I used to work at Banff National Park," he says, "and people would come and I don't really think they knew why they were there. They had very little understanding of the mountain environment and seemed to learn nothing of it while they were exposed to it."

That bothered Clark who has a keen sense of appreciation of our environment and the fact that we are living on borrowed time and environmental capital. He is at his best when he is developing programs to help the public appreciate the beauties and wonders of nature. So he was a natural for the MB centre.

Having been so involved with the process of photosynthesis, which is the plantlife drawing of energy from the sun and utilizing it for its own life process, he is logically in favour of solar energy development.

"Atomic energy scares me to death," he says seriously.

And he looks at the way society is wasting oil, which is a finite commodity built up by nature over the centuries, and shakes his head.

He appreciates the balance of nature and comments that we are inside nature and must learn to be part of it. That's why he is so interested in the MB Centre.

"It will increase interest and awareness and appreciation of what's around you," he says, "and it will be entertaining if you enjoy learning and getting new perspectives. If you enjoy new knowledge and new perception."

That's easy to say, but not so easy to present in a way that people will enjoy and absorb.

The special projects department under the direction of Jim Peacock apparently learned a valuable lesson from static exhibits. They're dull.

At MB Place there is involvement, movement and lots of surprises for the visitor.

Press a button, see a narrated slide show, press another and small balls go tumbling through the air to illustrate wind pollination, step inside a tree, look at a 6" to 8" two year old pine tree encased in plastic (don't grow much in two years, do they?), and yes, Marjorie trees

JURISDICTION AND TREES.

The uninitiated may think that the roots feed the tree. Not so, the roots also have to be fed and to see the two way system a tree has going to get moisture from the roots and food back down to the roots, press a button and watch the twinkling lights trace what's happening.

Trees are so beautiful, who would think they would have enemies? But they do. A whole case full of them showing what these insects do to trees and how different kinds attack different parts of the tree. Some go for the soft centre. Others bore in the harder outer part. And there's even a real hole drilled by a woodpecker to be seen on one side of the display wood.

Another board illustrates where various trees grow in this province. To isolate a particular variety and its growth geography, press the button and a map lights up showing B.C. shaded in the areas where these particular trees grow. If it's a coastal tree, the shadowed areas naturally show up there.

That particular board has been the result of exhaustive study and one which is a continuing kind of thing, since trees can change locale much as the areas of a city change with time. Why this happens and how it happens is another fascinating story told at MB Place.

There are also stands with pictures of familiar (and not so familiar) plants. By sliding the panel upwards, you can see if you have identified them correctly. Another machine shows all those plants again, and now you insert a card and press a button indicating your guess as to its identity.

Of course if you did your homework at the first exhibit, you will get the machine punching circles indicating your answer is correct at the following exhibit.

Another display is set with three moving panels. You must match the panels for leaf, seed and bark of a particular tree, to get the light to go on. Makes you really look and to think back. I could match the spruce leaves and seeds, but I couldn't identify the bark. Which is just what John Clark was saying in my ear. People don't really see; don't really look.

And as Clark points out many places are now accessible to the public because of logging roads which have been built. Apparently these roads have opened up more recreation areas to the public, and that's the way the MacMillan Bloedel people like it.

Now I've covered the fun, the humour and the imagination that went into M.B. Place, but for those who are still wondering about the sex, you will be delighted to know about the bird and the bee.

For an animated demonstration of the oldest sex lesson in the world, there is a giant bird and bee which, at the press of a button, fly from one giant flower to another, picking up magnetized beebees from one flower and dropping them onto the other. An excellent illustration of what happens to pollen as the birds and the bees pollinate the plants and trees.

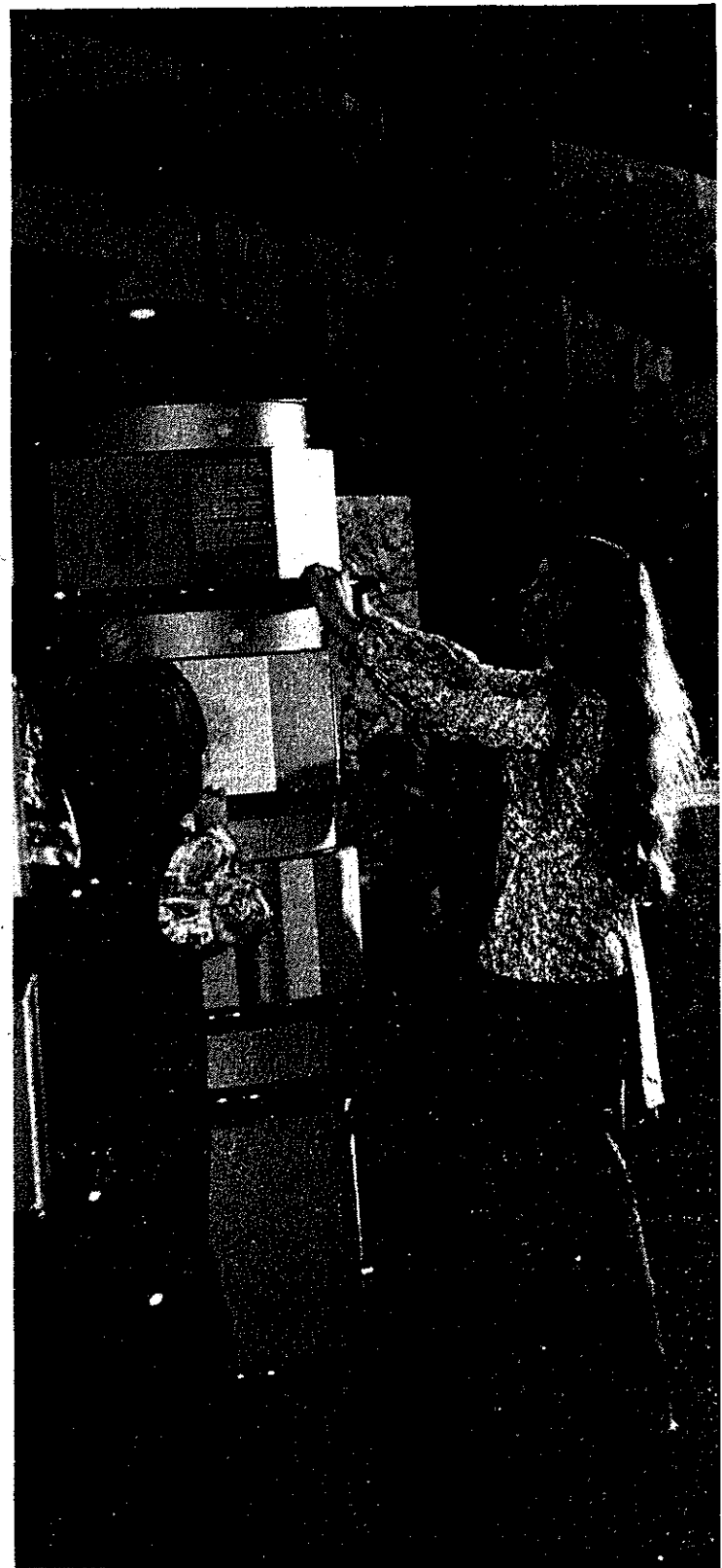
And no, the theatre does not get you off the hook for the next lesson. For that you are on your own. The slides and films shown are forests and trees in their natural state and are intended to augment the information visitors have gleaned from the exhibits.

Elsbeth Creith, another staff member, is busy getting together a kind of simplified tour guide which will be even that much

more meaningful for children. And John Clark is busy working on other slides and films. Along with manager Nicky Gillies and Heather Begg, it looks like M.B. Place a vital, moving and up-to-

date concept, which is a tremendous gift to the city of Vancouver by MacMillan Bloedel. It is to their credit that the exhibit is absolutely non-commercial, which makes it a very special gift indeed.

M.B. Place is a great way to spend some time with the family, especially before going on that hike or on that camping trip. The whole family will be more aware of what they are seeing and what there is to see.



ENLIGHTENMENT on the environment.