

The BC Forest Service Oval

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Identifying the Unit

No one knows who designed the very first version of the BC Forest Service Oval, but we do know there have been numerous versions made over the years by a host of draughtsmen, mapping assistants, technicians and likely an artist or two. This is a story about history, culture and branding, and about one of the most recognisable symbols from British Columbia. Let's begin the story.

For years, companies and governments and sections within each of them have chosen to carry colours, flags, crests or some type of marking to identify working units.

They were/are used to make a statement about a working, service, or battle group, to name a few of the applications. The British Columbia Forest Service was not different in that regard. It chose uniforms for field staff that emulated an armed forces style (breeks, battle dress and Monty-style jackets) and chose to identify them and the government property with a number of patches, marks and decals.

Early property was marked by paint and stencils or heavy stamp (hammer used) to mark metal and wooden items. Each Service group used a special mark or identifier as a part of a greater government unit.

We will now deal solely with the Forest Service.

One identifier was the “F” broad arrow “B” when the Forest Branch was within the Department of Lands in the early years, and later the “F” broad arrow “S” once it became a service in a larger unit – the Department of Lands and Forests and then the Department of Lands, Forests and Water Resources. For additional background information on the broad arrow, please visit: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Broad_arrow

Figure 1 shows a set of metal stamps, mirror-imaged so the image can be viewed correctly. You can almost see the start of “Forest Service/Branch with a tree in the middle (?)”.



(Figure 1)

The broad arrow was a British designator of Crown property and was even used to mark convicts' uniforms so they could be identified if they happened to escape!

Forest Branch – Dept. of Lands

For the sake of keeping the story going, we will leave the broad arrow **F↑S** and move to the more visible signs of this government unit.

Figure 2 is the earliest example of the wording *Forest Branch* that was used on the first run of stationary for the new department in 1912. Read

the full story of the creation of the Forest Service and a speech by Hon. William R. Ross at: <http://www.bcfs100.ca/docs/pdf/3/383.pdf>

Figure 2 is taken from an official receipt signed by H.R. MacMillan (BC's first Chief Forester).



(Figure 2)

The Forest Service

We assume that a more visible unit marking took hold during the Great War (WW-1, 1914-1918), when the returning veterans began to influence forest policy. It is at this time we believe the “Forest Service Oval” came into existence.

The earliest known example of this is a fold-out flag pamphlet that broke the Union Jack flag into its constituent parts (individual folding crosses of St. Andrew, St. George, and St. Patrick). These pamphlets were handed out to schools and Scouting groups. See Figures 3, 3a.

Text in this folder refers to the importance of protecting our forests, defending the Empire and the many important uses of wood at the Front.



(Figure 3)



(Figure 3a - Oval enlarged)

The next example of a similar (but different) Forest Service (FS) Oval is from a 1921 Forest Surveys and Working Plans publication. When viewed close up, this version actually shows 2 parallel lines on the outside of the oval, and has slightly different branches and cones. This indicates the oval was still being hand drawn or traced for publications at this date. Note the use of dots on each side of the outer edges to separate the text. See Figure 4.



(Figure 4)

The significance of the FS Oval was starting to spread into the culture of the Forest Service. Memorabilia, trinkets, badges, belt buckles and folk art began to be produced. Figure 5 shows a 2-inch 1920's brass jacket pin likely worn on a front pocket.



(Figure 5)

A similar Oval (Figure 6), enhanced with a different garland of Douglas-fir boughs, is also found on the cover of the first internal newsletter – the “Root and Branch” – May 1922. The Oval in this version was slightly rounder, the tree was simpler, no separating dots were used, and the lettering was more refined.



(Figure 6)

This next version of the Oval (Figure 7) appears to be the oldest example to show *Forest Service* at the bottom of the Oval instead of *Lands Department*. This Badge outwardly identified a forest officer. The tree is slightly different and the diamond shaped separators on each middle outer edge were present and were actually rosettes. The tree is also slightly different and shows up in

a few different items during this era. This has not been positively dated, but we believe this version was used in some form in the mid to late 1920's.



(Figure 7)

The next Oval (Figure 8) is from a 1933 officially dated publication that shows the very first version of a cleaner double-line oval that looks almost identical to the Oval we see today. Note this version is the first to use the words *Forest Service* at the top of the Oval, and *British Columbia* was moved to the bottom. This version includes the garland style from the very earliest versions.



(Figure 8)

Other Significant Markings

The Forest Service constable badge was issued to rangers, these were individually numbered. This

badge was usually carried in a wallet or similar leather case. Note that the crown in the center of the badge is the same or similar to a police constable badge. The version shown in Figure 9 is from the 1950's.



(Figure 9)

The first time the FS Oval was used in the ministry annual reports was in 1959 to accompany a report on the forest fire rating signs (seen in Figure 10) that showed the new fire rating sign attached atop of the standard Forest Ranger sign.



(Figure 10)

In the 1950's the most visible marking for BC government vehicles was known as the golden oval" (Figure 11 - frequently referred to as the 'football') and was found on all vehicles. Well almost all; the Premier's car did not carry one!



(Figure 11)

From buildings, the province's setting sun was flown usually on a flag staff. Letterhead and envelopes carried the Province's official Coat of Arms as did the envelopes. There were coloured letterheads to denote units within government. The Minister's letterhead always carried their name.

Forest Service vehicles were marked with the usual gold decal but were specifically identified by a number. Prior to the 1950's, the region's vehicle numbering started with the first letter. K26 is from the Kamloops Forest District and still exists today as an example of that practice. This style of marking pre-dates the golden oval. [K26 is an operating 1932 Ford p/u housed in the BC Forest Discovery Centre (BCFDC) in Duncan, BC.] In later years, the all-encompassing letters "FS" along with the number were used in the provincial vehicle fleet, i.e. "FS 123".

In addition to the specific numbering process (that carries on today in various forms), Forest Service vehicles previously sported a green and

white “B.C. Forest Service” licence plate, 7.5cm deep by 30.3cm wide (3in. by 12 in.) made of stamped and painted metal (Figure 12) attached to the top bar of the licence plate holder if field conditions permit, otherwise, on the bottom for better visibility. Sometimes the road conditions were underestimated, and the plate’s fate was sealed before the driver recognized the problem!



(Figure 12)

Initially the Oval was never used as an outward sign (advertising or official papers, etc.) of government or Forest Service but certainly denoted the Forest Service in other ways. It was used on many public handouts from blotters to posters, pamphlets and scribbles; from uniforms to signs designating Ranger Stations and other such establishments such as nurseries, research stations and a significant road sign programme.

Also Forest Service uniforms sported shoulder patches or flashes as they are sometimes called. (The shoulder flashes have been traded around the world with other forest services as a sign of unity in service and protection of the world’s forests.) Interestingly, the original colour version of the oval lines was a yellow or gold colour.

Yellow lines changed to red as forest protection units became numerous and it was an easy marker for that group. See Figure 13.



(Figure 13)

Figure 14 shows a more recent version of one particular forest protection unit, with the original style yellow outer lines, and wings added reminiscent of WW-2 air crews.



(Figure 14)

While the various identifiers in the BC government units have been modified and/or changed to meet marketing needs, the FS Oval has received few significant alterations.

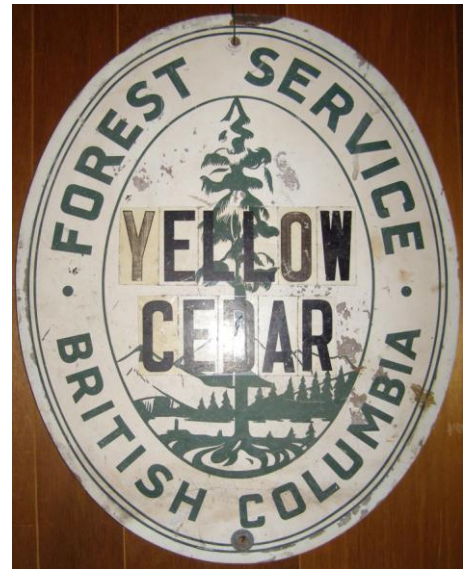
Time passed and with it came change – again! Unlike the provincial Coat of Arms that was to be enhanced with dogwood flowers and its use extended to other areas, so did the life of the bright green Oval from the 1950’s and early 1960’s. That version was replaced by a cleaner version of the FS Oval – ease of use in printing

being one reason particularly when colour began to be used extensively (Figures 15 and 16).



(Figures 15 and 16)

Another example is a 1960's Oval used for a wharf or dock sign indicating where the FS Vessels tied up. This large plywood sign, with the Oval applied (Figure 17) was originally located on the pilings which marked the moorage for the F.S. Yellow Cedar at the Fourth Street dock in Tofino (1960's to early 1970's). In this case, the words *Yellow Cedar* had been added over the original sign. The FS Oval also appeared on many vessel exhaust funnels (without the vessel name, which always appeared on the bow and stern).



(Figure 17)

For a short period the Oval was replaced by another visual identifier that was seen (at the time) to be more up-to-date graphically and provided greater visibility for the Forest Service. This emblem (Figure 18) was the focus of a service-wide visual identity program.



(Figure 18)

Signs and all the internal and public documents carried this new identifier which certainly allowed for easy public viewing. Vehicles were

allowed by special permission of the Premier to sport this new emblem on the doors ABOVE the gold decal and on the rear of the vehicle along with its identification number.

It is interesting to note that the visual identity program took the new symbol and gradually changed the shape into a form that was adopted by all of the BC Government, as evident from a collage from various business card logos (Figure 19). Still, the FS Oval eventually made its way back onto business cards, documents, vehicles and websites of anyone and anything connected with the Forest Service.



(Figure 19)

It is also true that in carrying the forest theme, most service vehicles were ordered with a particular shade of green or dark green with yellow roofs some of which carried the vehicle number for easy aerial identification. The dark green with the yellow roofs were designated Engineering Division vehicles. Transport trucks, trailers, some river and lake boats carried that dark green colour either in a stripe or a uniform coating.

There were numerous changes in other ministry's identifiers over the years as well. Suffice to say, that the "FS Oval" has survived almost one hundred years at this writing. It has been used in more recent times in ministry and government advertising; something that never happened

before. The Oval has also been used on internal and public handouts (Figures 20 and 21).



(Figures 20 and 21)

The Oval was used on vehicles and buildings assigned to the ministry. It is used on staff personal apparel, and special awards and prizes. It has been worn with pride over all these years and while there were some changes in the outward signs, the Forest Service sterling silver pin and the special citation received by all who completed 25 years of service always bore this significant hand-coloured Oval emblem. In addition to this, the hand-coloured Oval was the

first page viewed in the book of acknowledgment received as staff retired from Forest Service life. This symbol has been printed in colour in more recent years.

BC Forest Service celebrates its 100th anniversary in 2012. One of British Columbia's most recognizable symbols is the Forest Service Oval, which has been in existence since as early as 1914.

The Forest Service and the Oval have been a proud part of BC's history – identifying those who carried on the tasks related to management, utilization and protection of our land base, our natural resources, our communities and who have been a big part of building the province to what it is today.

While the Forest Service Oval has changed very little since first being created, the ministries which the Forest Service have belonged to - have had a long history of change and integration. Staff often supported or moved back and forth between ministries and their respective cultures, as well folks moved between industry and government agencies

Be sure to join others in British Columbia to celebrate 100 years of the Forest Service in 2012.



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This story is still evolving. We are still looking for a copy of the 25th anniversary Oval. Please email any unique or especially interesting additions for this story to:

BCFS100@gov.bc.ca attention: Rick Wells
