Grant Hadwin got a chainsaw and did something terrible

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THE GOLDEN BOUGH by JOHN VAILLANT Grant Hadwin got a chainsaw and did something terrible. Issue of 2002-11-04 Posted 2002-10-28

There was only one giant golden spruce in the world, and, until a man named Grant Hadwin took a chainsaw to it, in 1997, it had stood for more than three hundred years in a steadily shrinking patch of old-growth forest in Port Clements, on the banks of the Yakoun River, in the Queen Charlotte Islands. The Queen Charlottes, a blade-shaped archipelago that lies sixty miles off the northern coast of British Columbia and thirty miles south of the Alaskan coast, are one of a decreasing number of places in the Pacific Northwest where large stands of virgin coastal forest can still be found. Ecotourism is a growth industry here, and the golden spruce was a popular stop on visitors' itineraries. The tree was also sacred to the Haida Indians, two thousand of whom still live on the islands.

The golden spruce was remarkable enough to warrant its own scientific name: Picea sitchensis 'Aurea.' The tree, a Sitka spruce, lacked eighty per cent of a normal specimen's allotment of chlorophyll, and, as a result, its needles were golden yellow instead of green. Unlike a typical Sitka spruce, which sends its branches off haphazardly, the golden spruce was, for reasons no one can explain, perfectly coniform. It stood out in the deep, green forest like a giant yellow Christmas tree. Several other golden spruces are rumored to exist in the Queen Charlottes, but they reportedly lack their famous counterpart's distinctive shape and are smaller and less uniformly yellow than the Yakoun River specimen, which had been standing long enough to be named K'iid K'iyass (Old Tree) by the Haida people and to be incorporated into their oral history.

On the night of January 20, 1997, Grant Hadwin, then forty-seven, stripped off his clothes and plunged into the Yakoun River, towing a chainsaw behind him. The river was swift and the water was cold, but this was no problem for Hadwin, a self-described "extreme swimmer" who had alarmed local police in Whitehorse, Yukon, earlier that winter by spending a quarter of an hour in the Yukon River when the air temperature was thirty-five degrees below zero. The golden spruce was more than six feet in diameter, and Hadwin's chainsaw had only a twenty-five-inch bar, but Hadwin had worked in the timber industry for years, and he knew how to make falling cuts. Leaving just enough of the core

intact so that the tree would stand until the next windstorm, he returned by ferry from the island to the mainland port town of Prince Rupert. Shortly afterward, copies of a letter he had drafted were received by Greenpeace, the Vancouver Sun, members of the Haida Nation, and MacMillan Bloedel, Canada's biggest lumber company, which had a timber lease on the land on which the golden spruce stood. The letter said, in part:

I didn't enjoy butchering, this magnificent old plant, but you apparently need a message and wake-up call, that even a university trained professional, should be able to understand. . . . I mean this action, to be an expression, of my rage and hatred, towards university trained professionals and their extremist supporters, whose ideas, ethics, denials, part truths, attitudes, etc., appear to be responsible, for most of the abominations, towards amateur life on this planet.

The golden spruce fell a couple of days later. Locally, the reaction was extraordinary. "It was like a drive-by shooting in a small town," one resident of the islands told me. "People were crying; they were in shock. They felt enormous guilt for not protecting the tree better." This was in part because, according to Haida legend, the golden spruce represented a person; and, later, a public memorial service for the tree, presided over by several Haida chiefs, was held "to mourn one of our ancestors." But beyond the mourning, some Haida, as well as residents of the mostly white logging community of Port Clements (where the tree had stood), wanted revenge.

Hadwin was located quickly by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and, after being charged and ordered to appear at the courthouse in Masset, which is close to the Queen Charlottes' two remaining Haida communities, he was released on his own recognizance. Hadwin, who was already known to—and suspicious of—the police, was offered no protection and did not request it. "They're making it as nasty as they possibly can," he told a reporter at the time. "They'll want me over there so the natives will have a shot. It would probably be suicide to go over there real quick."

Hadwin could have flown or taken a ferry from the mainland to Masset, but he chose instead to travel to court by kayak, leading people to believe that he was going to attempt a sixty-mile midwinter crossing of the notoriously dangerous Hecate Strait. In fact, Hadwin was last seen paddling north—bound, it seemed, for Alaska.

Throughout his turbulent and peripatetic life, Grant Hadwin demonstrated a level of woodsmanship and an imperviousness to the elements worthy of a character from the pages of Robert Service or Jack London. His wife, Margaret,

from whom he has been separated for a decade, described him as "indestructible," an opinion shared by many who have known him. "Basically, you're dealing with a person who, with very few resources, could be dropped anywhere on earth and come up smelling like a rose," Cory Delves, one of Hadwin's former bosses, told me.

Hadwin always felt most at home in the forest. During his late teens and twenties, he worked as a lumberjack and gold miner and lived in the mining town of Gold Bridge, British Columbia, a five-hour drive north from Vancouver. It is a tough, marginal place that is now inhabited by fewer than a hundred people and is accessible only by rough logging roads lined with fatal drop-offs. When Hadwin first showed up there, in the mid-nineteen-sixties, the surrounding valleys were thick with virgin, high-altitude timber. Today, as in much of British Columbia, vast clear-cuts push outward in every direction, giving the mountains the appearance of enormous animals unevenly shorn of their coats. The Northwest coast is, for all practical purposes, a rain forest, and the tall timber it nurtures can live for a thousand years and grow to heights that rival California's redwoods. (A Sitka spruce taken from the same forest where the golden spruce stood left a stump seventeen feet in diameter.) It was Hadwin, in his most successful incarnation, as a forest technician, who laid out many of the roads that gave loggers access to the remote forest around Gold Bridge. In the end, he helped to raze the site of many of his happiest memories.

Hadwin was well known for outdoing his co-workers. Paul Bernier, a longtime colleague and close friend of his, told me, "He was in the best condition of any man I've ever seen." Bernier was with Hadwin when he outwitted a pair of charging grizzly bears by dodging across a stream and feinting upwind, where they couldn't smell him. In addition to consuming prodigious quantities of chewing tobacco, Hadwin was known for buying vodka by the case and going on spectacular binges that, even in freezing weather, would leave him unconscious in the back of his vintage Studebaker pickup or passed out in a snow-filled ditch, dressed only in slacks and shirtsleeves. There was a local joke: "Look, that snowbank is moving. Must be Grant."

Early photographs of Hadwin show a fine-boned, handsome man, slightly less than six feet tall and built like a distance runner. People who knew him during his Gold Bridge days likened his lean, sharp-eyed appearance and remote manner to Clint Eastwood's. Quiet and courteous though Hadwin usually was, he possessed an almost tangible intensity, a piercing, in-your-face conviction that some found alarming. "He always had to be the best, had to be first," his Aunt Barbara recalled. "It always had to be Grant's way. There was never any room for compromise."

The golden spruce wasn't discovered by scientists until it was almost three hundred years old. When the Scottish timber surveyor and baronet Sir Windham Anstruther stumbled upon it, in 1924, he was dumbfounded. "I didn't even make an axe mark on it, being, I suppose, a bit overcome by its strangeness in a forest of green," he told a reporter before he died. For years afterward, no one knew quite what to make of Sir Windham's arboreal unicorn. Some suggested that it might be a new species, unique to the archipelago; others thought the tree had been hit by lightning, or was simply dying. In fact, the golden spruce was alive and well; it was just fantastically rare. Only a chance mutation would ever produce another.

A tree with this mutation is called a "chlorotic," and although it is not uncommon to see a chlorotic branch or two on an otherwise healthy evergreen, it is in theory almost impossible for an entire tree to be chlorotic and survive. Because this condition causes a fatal intolerance to bright sunshine, no one knows why the golden spruce was able to compete so well against healthy trees for centuries, or why it was able to grow to more than a hundred and sixty feet tall. Some contemporary scientists believe the tree's success may have been due to the unique lighting conditions afforded by its location. The Charlottes are sometimes called the Misty Isles; they share southeast Alaska's weather (as much as twelve feet of rain per year), and direct sunshine is a rare occurrence. It is conceivable that the island's climate provided just enough light to facilitate photosynthesis and turn the needles yellow, while diffusing the light sufficiently to keep the needles from burning out and dropping off. D'Arcy Davis-Case, a forestry expert who lived in the Queen Charlottes for years before becoming a consultant to the United Nations on forestry issues, said that when she lived there botanists and dendrologists were always trying to explain the tree's golden color. When I asked what they had concluded, she smiled and rolled her eyes. "Magic!" she said.

To those who were lucky enough to have seen the tree in bright sunshine, Davis-Case's explanation sounds plausible enough. Many who saw the golden spruce spoke of its peculiar radiance, as if it were actually generating light from deep within its branches. Marilyn Baldwin, the owner of a sporting-goods store in Prince Rupert, saw the tree on a gray, foggy day in the early nineties. "A few minutes after we got there, the sun burned the fog off, and suddenly there it was in its golden brilliance," she recalled. "We called it the ooh-aah tree, because that's what it made us all say." Ruth Jones, a Vancouver-based artist, visited the golden spruce late one sunny afternoon in 1994. "It looked as if it were made of glowing gold," she said. "It was like a fairy tale. How can this be?"

The Queen Charlottes have always had a somewhat mystical reputation; even loggers and land-use planners employ the adjective "magic" to describe them. The hundred-and-eighty-mile-long chain comprises the most remote of all the West Coast islands, and, in many ways, they are a world apart, hosting species and subspecies that occur nowhere else. The Haida language, too, is an "isolate," unrelated to that of any other West Coast tribe, and the largest collection of historic totem poles in North America that still survive in their original, beachfront locations are situated here.

Haida warriors, who ranged widely throughout the North Pacific, became legendary for a ferocity and maritime daring comparable to that of the Vikings. One of their seagoing canoes—sixty-three feet long and hewed from a single log—is on permanent display at the American Museum of Natural History, in New York. During the nineteenth century, the Haida's numbers were reduced from as many as twenty thousand to fewer than six hundred by warfare and a biological holocaust of smallpox and venereal disease which accompanied British and American fur traders, settlers, and missionaries. Many of the survivors converted to Christianity and were absorbed into the nascent fishing and logging industries. Since then, these core industries have been practiced in a rapacious and indiscriminate fashion, and today the numbers of fish and old-growth trees have been reduced almost as dramatically as those of the Haida.

In the mid-sixties, MacMillan Bloedel had reluctantly set aside the few acres of old-growth forest remaining around the golden spruce. In 1988, after a long battle that pitted logging interests and the British Columbia government against a coalition of environmental groups and the Haida, the southern half of the chain was designated a national park reserve that includes a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The land is currently owned by the Canadian government ("the Crown"), which leases it to MacMillan Bloedel, which is now owned by Weyerhaeuser. Before long, tour buses began lining up to see the tree, and in 1996 the local tourist trade got an additional boost when an albino raven showed up, one of only two known to exist in the entire country. Between it and the golden spruce, Port Clements had cornered the freak-of-nature market in western Canada.

Despite his mountain-man pretensions, Thomas Grant Hadwin could never wholly conceal his middle-class origins. He was born into an educated family from West Vancouver. His father graduated at the top of his class from the University of British Columbia's electrical-engineering program and became a senior engineer with BC Hydro, the province's biggest power company. Grant was the younger of two sons, who were brought up to be like their father—competitive and stubborn. Nothing, however, went as planned: Grant's older

brother was given a diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia, and Grant quit school and left home at seventeen.

Grant headed north, first working for a maternal uncle who owned a logging company that was engaged in clear-cutting the valleys above Vancouver. He was ideally suited to the work, and the isolated life style captured his imagination, not least because it flew in the face of his father's professional ambitions. But, even as Hadwin relished the bush life, he was horrified by what he saw. His paternal aunt, Barbara Johnson, recalls that Grant, who visited her as a teen-ager, described logging techniques that stripped the mountainsides down to bare rock. "Nothing's going to grow there again," he told her.

Meanwhile, his brother had become increasingly ill, and in 1971 he killed himself in a leap from the Lions Gate Bridge, in Vancouver. By this time, Grant had migrated to Gold Bridge, where he, too, with his excessive drinking, appeared to be well on his way to an early death. By the mid-nineteen-seventies, though, he seemed to right himself. He earned a forest technician's degree and, in 1978, he swore off alcohol and got married; Grant and Margaret, who was a nurse from Lillooet, about sixty miles away, had three children. In order to house his family, Grant built what would be the most imposing residence in Gold Bridge, two and a half stories tall and made entirely of hand-hewn logs. The capstone on the oversized chimney was a mattress-size slab of granite that weighed more than four tons.

Hadwin had also found his calling. After he had worked as a logger, a rock driller, a blaster, and a prospector, Evans Wood Products, in Lillooet, put him in charge of surveying "merchantable" timber in the deep wilderness and laying out roads to make it accessible. By most accounts, Hadwin was extremely good in the field, but this did not help him at the office. In 1983, Hadwin lost out on a major promotion. (He had been inserting critiques of the company into his written memos.) "He was out of time," Brian Tremblay, who has known Hadwin since they were teen-agers, recalled. "He was on his own trajectory. He was talking environment and proper forest management before anybody."

Hadwin believed in balance—in taking the good with the bad, the best with the bug-ridden—when it was standard practice to just skim the cream and move on. He quit Evans Products on bitter terms and went to work on his own. By this time, the impact of logging on the country around Gold Bridge had become painfully clear. According to Ecotrust, an Oregon-based conservation group, California, Oregon, and Washington have lost ninety per cent of their combined coastal rain forest, while British Columbia, which originally had twice as much forest area, has lost forty per cent. Hadwin was aware of this, and so is Al

Wanderer, who worked with Hadwin in the early eighties. "We basically gutted the place," he told me last October, referring to some of the logging around Gold Bridge. "Good God," he went on, "I didn't think it was possible to log this much." Wanderer looked down into his beer and added, "I've made a good living, but sometimes you wonder if it's all worth it."

Hadwin struggled to find a way to remain gainfully employed in the woods without gutting them. For three years after leaving Evans, he ran his own logging operation outside Gold Bridge, where he made railroad ties by cutting selectively and salvaging trees that had been killed by a beetle infestation. "That guy worked hard," his neighbor Tom Illidge said. "It would have taken three normal men to do what he did up there." Despite his superhuman efforts, Hadwin couldn't make it pay, so he went into freelance consulting, where his increasingly pro-forest views and decreasing familiarity with contemporary practices worked against him.

In 1983, when Hadwin quit his job, he was in his mid-thirties. He was opinionated and eccentric, but he was also a family man, a strenuous provider, and a helpful neighbor. "He wasn't lazy and he wasn't crazy," Tom Illidge told me. Illidge is one of Gold Bridge's oldest and most successful residents, one of the few who stayed put and prospered there. He sympathized with Hadwin's disdain for the company men who wield so much power over the forest without knowing their way around it. "Half of those assholes have never been four feet from a parking meter in their lives," he said. But while Illidge, Al Wanderer, and Corey Delves were able to swallow their irritation and press on, Hadwin had become increasingly frustrated and bitter. He began writing letters to powerful political figures all over Canada and the world. To CNN, he wrote:

Your focus appears to be Bosnia and O. J. Simpson. Your Native American problem, however, parallels our own and yet your coverage, appears to be non-existent. . . . You would apparently go to any lengths to deflect the focus from the real issues, which discredit yourselves or your professional institutions.

In 1991, Grant and Margaret separated, and she got custody of the children. (She continued to pay Hadwin's Visa bills, with the help of a sizable inheritance from his father.) By 1993, Hadwin had begun to experience episodes of paranoia, one of which compelled him to seek refuge on a remote island off the coast of Alaska; his rented kayak was punctured en route, and he lived off the land for twelve days before he was rescued by the Coast Guard. Later that summer, Hadwin was stopped at the United States border with three thousand hypodermic needles in the trunk of his car. He talked his way through Customs and proceeded to Washington, D.C., where he distributed the needles

on the street along with condoms, presenting himself as an advocate of needle exchange and safe sex. In July, with two thousand needles remaining, he caught a plane to Moscow; from there, he continued eastward, donating needles to children's hospitals as he went. He was arrested by the police in Irkutsk, Siberia, but apparently finessed the interview and parted on good terms. Hadwin wasn't simply on a good-will mission, however; he was also looking for work. Siberia is one of the few places in the Northern Hemisphere whose forests rival British Columbia's, and shortly before he disappeared he spoke of wanting to return there.

When Hadwin came back to Kamloops, a town of eighty thousand in south-central British Columbia, where his wife and children lived, people who knew him were alarmed by what they saw. The guerrilla-theatre dress he wore on his travels (running shorts, boots with spurs, and a baseball cap festooned with needles and condoms) raised questions about his mental state. After an altercation with a truck driver, he was sent to a forensic hospital for psychiatric evaluation. Hadwin was interviewed extensively by several doctors, and, although all of them found evidence of what one psychiatrist termed "paranoid reaction," the only diagnosis they could agree on was that he was mentally competent and fit to stand trial.

Hadwin's letter-writing campaign intensified, and within this raft of letters and faxes is what seems to be a last attempt to find acceptable employment. On January 12, 1996, in response to an ad for a Forest Renewal Project coördinator, Hadwin sent his résumé, along with this self-defeatingly honest cover letter:

I do not like clearcutting and my philosophical differences, with the Forest Industry, run deep. If you are prepared to try a "gentler approach," to forestry, with less "short term profit," I may be able to help. I am not familiar with the new "buzzwords," such as Forest Renewal. All of Forestry and most of the Forests, appear to need "renewing," in some form or another.

Hadwin didn't get the job. Five months later, he left Kamloops after befriending Cora Gray, an elder from the Gitanmaax tribe, in British Columbia's interior. Gray had a kindly, forgiving manner, and, from shortly after they met until the day that Hadwin disappeared, she served as his closest friend and confessor. He told her everything, it seemed, except his plan to cut down the golden spruce.

That fall, Hadwin moved to a hotel in Whitehorse, Yukon, and in November he persuaded Gray to join him there. She was watching when he swam in the Yukon River, despite the arctic temperatures. "The water was smoking," Gray

recalled. "When he got out, there were icicles hanging off his eyebrows and hair. He ran back to the car, where I was waiting, and he said, 'I know I'm O.K. when you're there watching me.' I asked him, 'Why are you torturing yourself?' and he said, 'I'm training myself. I won't be around here next year.' I knew he was planning something."

Local natives took Gray aside and told her they had a bad feeling about Hadwin, that she should get away from him. "When I mentioned flying home," she said, "he cried like a baby, saying, 'I think you're the only one who's ever worried about me.' " Hadwin told her not to answer the phone when her sisters called. "Finally, I persuaded him that I had to go home, and he offered to drive me. He said, 'Don't tell your sisters you're coming home; surprise them.' "

Gray and Hadwin left Whitehorse at 4 A.M. on December 30th, setting out on a fifteen-hour drive, through extremely remote country, to Gray's home in Hazelton, British Columbia. At five-thirty that afternoon, two hours north of Hazelton, they reached the one-lane bridge that spans the Nass River. Hadwin headed toward it at full speed, and, despite the bright moonlight, he failed to register that a pickup truck was crossing from the other direction. The road was icy at the entrance ramp and, at the last minute, Hadwin hit the brakes. His car, a Honda Civic, skidded and went sideways, up onto the railing. Gray believed she had reached the end of her life.

In the end, they didn't go into the Nass; they hit the pickup head on. Gray's ankles were shattered, her cheek was broken, and both hands were bruised; Hadwin suffered only a cut lip. Gray's ankles had to be repaired with screws and plates, and now she must use a walker to get around. Hadwin visited Gray in the hospital every day until he left for the Charlottes on January 12th. 'I've always wondered if Grant was trying to kill us both," she said to me shortly before I left for the Charlottes, "so he wouldn't have to be alone."

Once Hadwin was in the Charlottes, he gave every impression of being a man on a one-way trip. While staying in a motel at the sparsely inhabited north end of Graham Island, he gave away all his possessions. "Take whatever you want, because I'm going to burn the rest," he told Jennifer Wilson, the twenty-year-old daughter of the motel's manager. Hadwin went on at length about university-trained professionals, referring to them as "an incestuous breed of insidious manipulators." He advocated terrorism as the most effective means of bringing about change, and he talked a great deal about trees. "I learned a lot from him about the forest," Wilson told me. "I got the sense he had found his purpose."

After buying a gas can, falling wedges, and a chainsaw, Hadwin relocated to Port Clements, where he checked into the Golden Spruce motel. The last time Wilson saw him, he was wearing earplugs; he had to wear them, he told her, because every word he heard felt like a direct insult.

Hadwin's chainsaw roared through the night of January 20th. In the morning, he gave the saw to an acquaintance and returned to the mainland, where he sent his final fax, the entire text of which was published in the local papers seven days after the tree was discovered. During the following weeks, Hadwin carried on a dialogue with infuriated locals through newspapers on both sides of Hecate Strait. "Right now, people are focusing all their anger on me when they should focus it on the destruction going on around them," he told a reporter for the Queen Charlottes' Observer. "They should see a person who is normally very respectful of life and has done a very disrespectful thing and ask why."

But this was asking too much. Hadwin had cut down what may have been the only tree on the continent capable of bonding loggers, natives, and environmentalists in sorrow and outrage. Meanwhile, newspaper and television reporters from across Canada were coming to the Queen Charlottes to cover the story, which also found its way into the Times and onto the Discovery Channel. "When society places so much value on one mutant tree and ignores what happens to the rest of the forest, it's not the person who points this out who should be labelled," Hadwin told a Prince Rupert reporter who questioned his sanity. Hadwin was charged with criminal mischief—damage in excess of five thousand dollars—and the illegal cutting of timber. There was no precedent for how a local judge and jury might compute the cultural damage to the Haida, the economic damage to Port Clements, or the loss to science.

With his belongings liquidated and his safety in doubt, Hadwin was down to the contents of a single suitcase and a Visa card. Among the last items charged were an expedition-grade sea kayak, a camping tarp, a cookstove, a life vest, an axe, and a shovel—everything one would need for a long trip up the West Coast. After notifying Cora Gray, his wife, Margaret, and Prince Rupert's Daily News, Hadwin set off across Hecate Strait late on the afternoon of February 11th, bound for his court date. Hadwin had told everyone that he was travelling this way because he was afraid he would be attacked by locals if he took the ferry or a plane. Both Cora and Margaret notified the Mounties, who intercepted Hadwin before he left Prince Rupert Harbour, but Constable Bruce Jeffrey, an experienced kayaker and one of the officers on the scene, was unable to dissuade him. "He wasn't irrational," Jeffrey told me. "He wasn't suicidal, but I could tell he was a few fries short of a Happy Meal. Unfortunately, you can't arrest someone for being overconfident or foolish."

At dusk, with his gear stowed in fore and aft compartments and an axe and a spare paddle lashed to his forward deck, Hadwin paddled out of Prince Rupert Harbour and directly into a storm. Weather reports for that night show waves over ten feet, winds gusting to forty miles an hour, and rain; the temperature was just above freezing, but the wind-chill factor would have driven it down to zero. Hadwin was not an experienced kayaker, but even if he had been, it was unlikely that he could survive a night in such weather—and yet, somehow, he did. At dawn, he found his way back to Prince Rupert. "He was waiting at the door when we opened," recalled Marilyn Baldwin, who co-owns SeaSport, where Hadwin had bought his kayak and equipment the previous day. Hadwin had returned to buy some warmer clothes and (on Constable Jeffrey's advice) emergency flares and a chart. When the topic of the tree came up, Baldwin recalled, "He wanted to argue. I think he wanted his day in court. He got very agitated; his muscles were vibrating like something taut, ready to snap."

Early on the morning of the thirteenth, with five days left to make his court date, Hadwin set off again. This time, he didn't come back.

When Margaret first heard that Grant was missing, she wasn't all that concerned; he had disappeared before, and he hadn't always been truthful about where he was going. The test would be whether he called his daughter on her birthday; when March 1st came and went with no phone call, Margaret began to fear the worst, and the Canadian Coast Guard began searching in earnest. No sign of him was found until four months later, in June, when large fragments of a kayak were discovered on an uninhabited island seventy miles north of Prince Rupert; the serial number matched that of the one Hadwin was known to have purchased. According to computer-generated scenarios, the boat could have drifted there from almost anywhere in Hecate Strait. This raises a host of possibilities, ranging from Hadwin's having capsized en route to Masset to the suggestion, by Blake Walkinshaw, a constable from Masset, that Hadwin "could have got a pumping" (been shot) out on the water; it is also conceivable that he was struck by another vessel—by accident, or intentionally. Equally plausible, though, is the theory that Hadwin paddled a short way up the wild, empty coast, gave his boat a push off the beach, and disappeared into the bush.

What is odd about the wreckage is that all the gear was in near-perfect condition. The fish biologist (and veteran beachcomber) who found it speculated that, based on its condition, the wreck was less than a month old. This complicates matters considerably, as does the fact that Hadwin charged three hundred dollars' worth of food on the day of his first departure. Corporal Gary Stroeder, the officer who was formerly in charge of the missing-person

investigation on the Canadian side, is troubled by the location of Hadwin's axe. How, he wondered, did such a heavy object get above the high-tide line?

A number of alleged Hadwin sightings were made up and down the coast during the ensuing months, but none of them panned out, so rumors have filled the void: he was killed by Indians; he's doing time in the States for welfare fraud; he's running a trapline in Meziadin, British Columbia; he's in Siberia. Constable Walkinshaw believes that Hadwin could be alive: "The whole cop in me is saying there's something too neat about this." Constable Jeffrey, who has retired, thinks Hadwin drowned; Margaret Hadwin is trying to have her husband declared dead. But Corporal Stroeder isn't so sure. "If a coroner asked me to justify that he was dead, I wouldn't be able to," he told me, when we met in Prince Rupert. "There are too many loose ends."

One of them stretches all the way to California. Sometime during the Thanksgiving weekend of 2000, someone made a nearly fatal chainsaw cut in Luna, the massive California redwood made famous by the environmental activist Julia Butterfly Hill, who spent two years living in the tree's branches. As with the golden spruce, the cut did not fell the tree, but left it extremely vulnerable to high winds.

Port Clements, meanwhile, has suffered much; not only has the town lost its mascot (the tree is the centerpiece for the town logo) but, in November of the same year, its albino raven was electrocuted on a transformer. Yet the spruce may, in a sense, rise again; in 1997, eighty cuttings were taken from the tree as it lay dying by the Yakoun River. They were sent to a forestry-research station on Vancouver Island, where they were grafted to normal spruce seedlings and are now being held in trust for the Haida.

Last year, the Haida gave the town of Port Clements one of the grafts; it was planted in the town's millennium park, where it may be the safest tree in the Queen Charlottes. (The knee-high sapling is surrounded by a ten-foot chain-link fence topped with barbed wire.) Last June, in a private ceremony overseen by Haida elders, a second cutting was planted beside the stump of its parent tree. It is still green.

Meanwhile, Hadwin's case is still considered open by the Alaska State Troopers and the Mounties. No one has bothered to look for him in Siberia, but Cora Gray told me, "He talked about Russia a lot. He'd say, 'If I was going to choose a place to stay, it would be in Russia. Don't be surprised if you hear from me from there.' So now, when the phone rings late at night, I don't

answer."