

Chester Peter Lyons

1915-1998

by Yorke Edwards

Chess Lyons was born in Regina; from the age of four until he went to university to study forestry, he lived in the Okanagan. He died in Hawaii on 20 December 1999, having lived an unusual life that will be remembered for many years by countless people who knew him. Still others will continue to discover what he has done for them in his books and in the parks that he helped to establish.

Throughout his adult life he seemed always to have several projects going, while others were waiting to be done. He was always busy, but also always ready for a joke, a short chat, or to help by providing good advice. Chess liked people, and people liked Chess. He enjoyed helping others, especially helping them discover the wild outdoors and its denizens. He did it through photography, lectures, television, books, and leading people into wild places.

Perhaps his best known publication was the book "Trees, Shrubs and Flowers to Know in

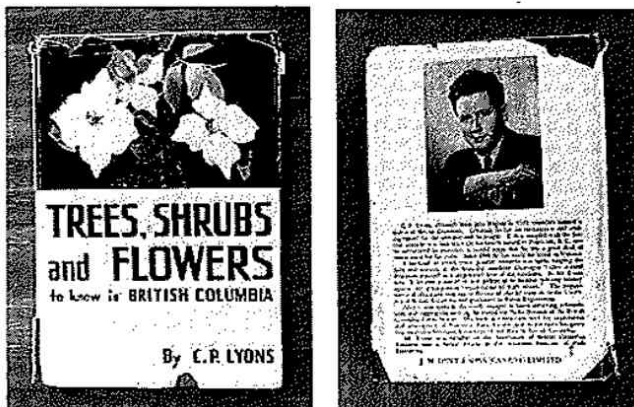


FIGURE 1. A well-loved first edition.



Chester Peter Lyons (1915-1998)

British Columbia," which first appeared in 1952 (Figure 1). It is still a best seller after many reprints and revisions, the latest revised edition having appeared in 1995. Thousands of worn and cherished copies of that book are on shelves in British Columbian homes – when they aren't in the pockets of outdoor jackets!

When the making of wildlife movies was in its infancy, Chess's films of beautiful British Columbia and its wildlife were being shown in cities from Toronto to San Diego. He traveled with the movies, on the winter lecture tours of New York's Audubon Society. Those films were broadcast later on Vancouver television. In later years he excelled in leading British Columbians into wild places of many foreign lands.

When British Columbia's Parks Branch was brand new, Chess explored the unknown interiors of large parks like Strathcona, Tweedsmuir, Wells Gray, Garibaldi, and Manning, among other areas. In his travels he also found many small but interesting places for roadside campgrounds. In later

years, he led the restoration of Barkerville, a town with a place in British Columbia's history, having grown during the province's largest gold rush.

In his last years, helped by Bill Merilees, Chess worked hard on four books, two for British Columbia, and two for Washington – for each region, a book about trees, and another about wildflowers. Most species described in these volumes are illustrated with coloured photographs, many of them his. He saw only the flower book for Washington published, the other three being still in press.

Chess was his own man. Those close to him agreed with comments first made by his friend Louis Kirk: "Chess doesn't count." It was a com-

pliment. When others faltered or failed, Chess kept going. Two examples come to mind: in foreign cities, when companions were immobilized by tainted foods, Chess continued to enjoy street snacks. And for decades he sought out the worst of roads into the wildest country in his aged camper, said to be still going after 300,000 miles. Chess didn't count!

And if you knew him, you will long to remember him, not bothering to count the years or the many reasons why. ♦

Yorke Edwards is a retired biologist living by the Strait of Juan de Fuca.