

I HAVE SEEN THE ENEMY, AND IT IS ... ABSURD

BY BRIAN BALLANTYNE

Soul-searching has recently taken on new meaning for land surveyors. To some extent this is understandable, what with Competition Act fallout, less work, and revelations that those electronic theodolites serve, in fact, as poor substitutes for sledgehammers. Besides, gazing at the navel of the profession has a long and honourable tradition among surveyors.

Rumours persist, for instance, that some surveyors of Ur, Lower Mesopotamia, spoke Chaldean while others spoke Assyrian. You can well imagine the debates that took place on the need to communicate. Now, the A.O.L.S. Quarterly includes articles addressing professional competence, critics, assaults upon the profession, integrated surveys, and the need to communicate. Even in the absence of any mention of the alleged 'incident' with the sheep and the tonic water, the theme remains one of defending the land surveyor.

Relax! Uncircle the wagons! The attacks might be hollower, and the defending might be easier, than anyone thinks. From my limited vantage point and thanks to the keen eyes of a colleague, I have received some reassuring signals from the Cottager's Handbook (Prentice - Hall, 1977), written by Bob Phillips. The 'Boundaries' section of the handbook is particularly gratifying, because it stresses to the cottager the importance of knowing the boundaries of any cottage lot. And although Bob appears to be opposed to hiring an O.L.S. to mark the boundaries, the handbook is actually a major public service to land surveyors everywhere.

I say a public service because Bob advises the intrepid cottager that, despite being surrounded by artificially-controlled bodies of water, blackflies, rock outcroppings, mosquitos, dense undergrowth, incompatible deeds, and blowflies: "If there is even one metal

pin, you should be able to figure out where the [boundary] lines go, if you are willing to accept a small error." How, you may ask, are cottagers to proceed? Apparently with one hand on their wallets, the help of a neighbour, and some of Bob's home-made survey equipment.

To wit: a long tapeline, a simple celluloid protractor, two 2-foot long pieces of wood secured by a single screw, a compass, and some 6-foot long marker stocks. The procedure is simplicity itself. Starting at the "one metal pin", and noting the magnetic declination, the cottager is advised to:

Read the angle of your property line from the survey plan or deed, and find the angle on the protractor. Then pivot the two stocks to the same angle and don't let them slip. With the screw towards you, line one stick towards true north, and the other to the required angle. Have your buddy stand far away and sight along the stick to guide him or her for the placing of a temporary marker. Then measure on the line the distance noted on the deed or survey plan.

At that point the cottager must look for a pin, and in its absence should erect a "semi-permanent wooden marker". Of course, the process is then repeated on all the sides of the parcel. Bob cautions that the final reading will put the peg "a disconcerting distance from the first one instead of on top of it." Drat, isn't that always the case? Cheer up; he has a solution: Repeat the entire process, but in the opposite direction. Average the errors by putting the "semi-permanent wooden markers" mid-way between the two attempts at each corner.

And thoughtful guy that he is, Bob even suggests to the cottager ways of passing the time on those lazy, hazy,

crazy days of summer: "If you do it all summer, and get a hundred readings to average, you should be mighty close." At last, an antidote for those dog days of August! Monumentation is completed by replacing the wooden markers with red metal stakes, presumably painted so that they are not confused with those look-alike bars used by surveyors. After all, there's no point in a cottager working like a bugger all summer only to have the fruits of his or her labours attributed to an expensive, unnecessary Ontario Land Surveyor, I can well imagine Bob throwing up his hands in frustration and exclaiming: "I mean, really, what's the point?"

Stop the presses! Another procedure for avoiding the bother of hiring an O.L.S. has recently been suggested to me. It is obviously a variation on Bob's method.

On the 11th hour of the 11th day of any month in which it is safe to eat shellfish, take three pounds of uncooked duck fat, a peck of watercress, and the entrails of a freshly-squeezed Snark. Simmer slowly over a low fire lit with old geodesy, photogrammetry and analysis notes. At the exact moment when a politician, anywhere in the world, gives a direct answer to a direct question, plunge your local zoning by-law into the concoction...

If there is the opposition, then the O.L.S. has little to worry about; the role of the land surveyor is secure. Even Bob acknowledges this in his last bit of sage advice: "Or maybe you should phone that surveyor." Land surveyors should also be grateful to the Cottager's Handbook for suggesting many innovative surveying techniques and instruments. After all, it is only by adopting the leading edge of such technology that the land surveying profession can stay at least one step ahead of those pesky cottagers. For the Snark was a Boojum you see!

ols