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Van Egan has written a book on fishing that celebrates the life of his friend, pioneering environmentalist Roderick Haig-Brown.

## Visionary naturalist still relevant today

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### CAMPBELL RIVER

**T**he pinks are breaking the surface of the Campbell River.

You can see them from Van Egan's picture window, bright sun catching their silver flanks as they thrash through the swift-flowing water. Don't know how Egan gets any writing done with a view like that — had he lifted his head from his old typewriter this week, he could have seen a black bear sniffing for salmon.

For 50 years Egan has lived in his riverbank house, little more than a long fly cast from what was the home of his good friend and fishing partner, the late Roderick Haig-Brown.

Haig-Brown is legendary around here and among seri-

visionary environmentalist that his name resonates today, 32 years after his death.

That's the Haig-Brown who stands out in Egan's sixth book, *Shadows Of The Western Angler*, published on the 100th anniversary of his friend's birth. It's a book about angling, written for anglers — the kind who talk about their flies in the hushed tones reserved for great works of religious art — but it's also about Vancouver Island, and what we have done to it.

Read it, and it becomes apparent B.C. would be a better place had more people heeded Haig-Brown's warnings a half-century ago. "Those were the days when abundance was accepted as if there would be no end, the laws to prevent greed and damage to the resource poorly enforced," Egan writes.

Roderick Haig-Brown came out from Britain at age 17, toiling in Washington state as a logger and weekend prize-fighter before an expired visa chased him north to Vancouver Island's Nimpkish River in 1927. Still only 19, he worked in the woods again, but it was writing that got him

tugging at your knees, joy singing in your heart and the line shooting out into the boiling waters."

Haig-Brown settled into that home on the Campbell in 1934, on a property that has been preserved in his name. Five years later came *The Western Angler*, the first great book on West Coast fishing — including early warnings about the vulnerability of our fisheries. "All humans know, at least vaguely, our resources are our capital," writes Egan in pondering Haig-Brown's conservation message. "What hasn't been broadcast widely, or apparently accepted widely, is that exploiting them should not be our lone purpose in their lives."

"You never win a conservation battle," Egan recalls Haig-Brown saying, "but you got to fight them." Haig-Brown lost, as he knew he would, the 1950s struggle to prevent the damming of Strathcona Park's Buttle Lake. Other fights with the "mercenary vandals" in the provincial cabinet followed as they opened the door to industry in parks. Haig-Brown was a fierce critic of logging practices that destroyed whole

meat fishermen, know there is more to their sport than just catching fish," writes Egan. Real anglers live in harmony with the environment.

Egan met Haig-Brown in 1954. "I had the audacity to go to his home and ask him to sign my copy of *The Western Angler*." Their subsequent angling adventures, complete with Haig-Brown's hand-drawn maps of Nimpkish fishing holes, are catalogued in *Shadows*. That the book has been published in a limited edition through the Campbell River *Courier-Islander* newspaper is a reflection of Haig-Brown's standing on the north. *Courier-Islander* editor Neil Cameron (who, by the way, had a fly rod in his office this week) was a driving force behind the project.

A play based on Haig-Brown's writings was to debut in Campbell River last night. This weekend also sees a Haig-Brown Institute symposium on sustaining wild salmon. Were the man alive today, Egan figures he would be there banging the drum about fish farming, or sounding the alarm about sulphates killing crustaceans and insects — salmon