

GORDON STACE SMITH

(1886-1962)*

"An Insect-Chaser and a Sonnet-Weaver"

Gordon Stace Smith, coleopterist of Creston, British Columbia, was born in Beausejour, Manitoba, October 10, 1886, the eldest child of John Stace Smith (1862-1921) and Jean Horsburgh Grant (1861-1939). His family moved to Salmon Arm in 1890, where Gordon passed his boyhood and where he finished his formal education at the age of 14 in 1901. There followed twenty years of wandering at numerous occupations in many places—stone-quarryman, lumberman, hard rock miner, prospector, mining foreman—a rough, hard, and varied life that gave a wealth of experience but resulted in few worldly goods.

Gordon married Elizabeth Ann Martin (1876-1960) in April 1914 at Phoenix, B.C. His connection with Creston dated from 1921, but he was not continuously resident there until late 1944 or 1945. His interests were varied—literature, postage stamps, Indian artifacts, birds, butterflies—but his most creative work centered in writing verses and in collecting and studying beetles. His verses were collected in three choice volumes: *In the Kootenays and Other Verses* (London, 1930), *Poems and a Reverie* (Toronto, 1940), and *Far West and Book of Sonnets* (London, 1960).

Gordon's interest in beetles dated from the early or middle 1920's. At first, his son tells me, he was compelled to keep his specimens in tobacco tins, cutting out discs of corrugated cardboard to press into the tins to receive the insect pins, and it was a great and happy event when he was able to buy regulation double insect boxes from London.

* For assistance in preparing this note I am indebted to Mr. Stace-Smith's son, Mr. J. Gordon Stace-Smith of Alberni, B.C. It is condensed from a longer manuscript that may be published elsewhere.

From 1927 to 1930 Stace Smith worked at Copper Mountain, B.C., in the eastern Cascade Mountains a little south of Princeton. The result of his collecting at Copper Mountain was Gordon's most important publication, a list of 323 species of beetles that appeared in two numbers of *Museum and Art Notes* (4, 1929: 69-74; 5, 1930: 22-25), published by the Art, Historical and Scientific Association of Vancouver, B.C. By nearly a hundred species this was the longest list of beetles from a single locality that had been published from the Pacific Northwest up to this time. Gordon's other publications consisted mostly of 17 notes in the Proceedings of the Entomological Society of British Columbia appearing between 1945 and 1957.

The years from 1934 to 1944 Stace Smith spent in mining at Duparquet, Quebec, between 48° and 49° north latitude, near Abitibi Lake and only a few miles from the Ontario line. He had by 1934 been pretty much committed to forming a specialized collection of British Columbia beetles. He applied himself vigorously, however, to the Abitibi fauna and eventually gathered a collection of over 16,000 specimens in 45 insect boxes, which he sold to the California Academy of Sciences about 1951.

Mr. Stace Smith organized his collections in the most approved manner, each specimen carefully mounted with full locality and frequently with host plant or other ecological data. Moreover each specimen that had been named by a correspondent bore the name of the identifier and the name or Leng Catalogue number of the beetle, and frequently the same specimen would come to carry several different names. He had a binocular microscope and studied his specimens closely, but most of his



identifications were based on a skillful comparison with specimens named for him by others. His library was insufficient to allow him to go very far on his own.

Gordon was a tireless collector, mostly on foot. He processed his specimens immediately upon returning from the field — mounting or papering or discarding, labeling and identifying and incorporating in his collection the same evening. When he found he had taken something new or rare, he would be back at the very same spot the next day and the day after that and so on, or at the same spot the following year, so that he was frequently able to build up extensive suites of specimens of rare species. Specimens taken in copulation were so marked and in a group like the flea beetles he did not collect specimens unless he could ascertain the host. His collection of British Columbia beetles came to number about 2,800 species in 145 insect boxes. He restricted his series of a species to 20 or 25 specimens, sufficient, however, to allow for specimens illustrating variation and distribution within the Province.

He corresponded widely. In his Copper Mountain list (1930) Ralph Hopping (1868-1941), W. J. Brown, G. A. Hardy, Alan S. Nicolay (d. 1950), and Karl E. Schedl helped with identifications. In 1934 the following additional coleopterists were assisting him: J. B. Wallis (1877-1962), Charles A. Ballou, Kenneth W. Cooper, Frank E. Blaisdell (1862-1946), R. E. Barrett, and John W. Angell (1885-1946). Among other correspondents may be mentioned C. A. Frost (1872-1962), Hugh B. Leech, George Ball, and Carl Lindroth.

The present writer visited Mr. Stace Smith 10 times between 1948 and 1960. His home was modest, even humble—a mile north of Creston overlooking the flood plain of the Kootenay River and the Nelson

Range beyond. By the middle 1940's Gordon's collection of British Columbia beetles was the most important collection in the Province and it behooved anyone interested in beetles from this corner of the continent to see what it contained. Among coleopterists known to me to have visited Creston at this time were Hugh B. Leech, W. J. Brown, Mont A. Cazier, M. C. Lane, George Ball, Henry and Anne Howden, Jim Grant, and Carl Lindroth.

Desiring to keep his collection in the Province, early in 1960 Stace Smith sold his collection to the University of British Columbia in Vancouver for \$6,000 and was in the process of transferring it at the time of his death. It was said to number 2,800 species in 1959 (Spencer, Proc. Ent. Soc. B.C. 56, 1959: 12). Especially noteworthy was his collection from the vicinity of Creston, which, if my memory serves me correctly, numbered 1,200 or 1,500 species; and it is hoped that the list of these species may be assembled and published.

Mrs. Stace Smith was laid low by paralysis in November 1957 and Gordon's life became troubled. She was taken by air to the home of a daughter in Penticton, B.C. in 1958, where she died March 19, 1960. Gordon continued on in Creston, but seems to have neglected himself. Returning to Creston from a visit on Vancouver Island with two daughters and a son in December 1961 and January 1962, he developed a cold. Entering the Creston Valley Hospital on February 10 in extreme cyanosis, he died on February 19 with a diagnosis of chronic myocarditis, arteriosclerosis, and chronic bronchitis. He was in his 76th year.

—MELVILLE H. HATCH

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