

Making Some Extra Change at the Valhalla Tree Farm

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It was last May and I was opening my daily bundle of email and out of the stack jumped this one from a Pacific Northwest film location scout. This guy; Dave Drummond was interested in coming out to our 100-acre woodlot to see if our place fit his director's vision as a location for a primitive campsite needed by the script. They were looking for a wooded spot by a beaver pond or a lake and some other woodland scenes, plus they wanted to buy a tree to cut down. A film was in the works and somehow this guy had found us, and of course I was interested. As a private forest owner, I'm always looking for ways to cut expenses while our forest grows. There were several visits by the director, the photography gurus, and other producers. One thing led to another and we negotiated a two-week contract to acquire the back acreage of our tree farm for a film shoot. They wanted 24/7 access and would have on-site night security. Later I found out that the state-run office, [Washington Filmworks](#) offers advice and incentives to film companies and location owners.

We had a blast watching some scenes being filmed, [took some photos](#) and then were shooed away as the filmmakers got down to business and who knows the cost for a day of shooting. I am sure my Dad, Earl Ingebright would have been pleased to see the place become immortalized on film. He'd been managing the timber on this old wooded homestead in his spare time since he'd bought it as a family getaway in 1958 at age forty. It consisted of one hundred acres of second growth Fir, Cedar, and Hemlock. Like most of Snohomish County, the land was steam logged around the turn of the century. I'd grown up hiking and fishing the property and always had a special connection to the land.

Coming back into it in the 1980s, I had a tech degree, service in the Coast Guard, and a growing career under my belt. Earl was retired and had a lifelong interest in forestry. Father and son settled plans to work together and manage the valuable timber as a renewable resource and have some fun along the way. We hired a consulting forester and worked with him to build a thirty-year management plan. Earl joined the local farm forestry groups and used the WSU extension services to the largest extent possible. Over the years we successfully executed harvests and replants in 1986, 2008, 2018, and 2022. It wasn't easy and we made some mistakes, but the fruits of our labors were visible. The place grew trees really well.

One of our visions, along with being stewards of the land, was to teach and lead by example, successful private northwest forest management. The stunning thousand-foot vertical cliff backdrop, the healthy salmon creek and pond system and the various stands of trees were real eye-catchers and almost too good for us to lock the gate and savor for ourselves! Our first foray was to contact the local scout troops. Hearing some enthusiasm, we designed and built a couple of primitive campsites along with pit toilets and worked to improve the trails. We had some success with visits from troops of both Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, but for some unknown reason after a few years of visits, they just sort of faded away.

We decided to build a [web presence](#). If for no other reason than to post some pictures of the mountain behind us, our bulldozer, a nice tree or a shot of the beaver pond shimmering in the afternoon sun. I would recommend a webpage because you need to stay relevant even if you are not advertising anything. This is how the location scout found us and its always fun to have your dot com name on your business card. The cost is low even if you have someone do it for you, probably \$50/year. I like photography and designing things and most of the software is easy to use.

Then we heard about an online marketplace company called [Hipcamp](#) that offered outdoor stays and camping experiences via a website and a mobile app. We looked into it and found that private landowners list campsites, RV spaces, and cabins for users to discover and book based on listing type, location, landscape, activities offered, and amenities.

We were already well set up to give it a try. There were good roads behind automatic gates and gate video tied to a recorder. Once we got going, it was pretty easy. I never thought of myself being a park ranger but looking back over the past two years, we've had good success with a couple of campsites. It pays for a bit of the brush control, new gravel and maybe a dinner out. Since we live on the property, we have some visibility of who comes and goes. The overall experience has been excellent with good interactions and now repeat visitors. During the extremely dry fire season we blocked out the campsites using the online dashboard so they were not visible to be booked.

I never thought I'd be playing park ranger, checking TP and picking up garbage cans but it really hasn't taken a lot of effort. Pit toilets with a sack of lime, a couple of picnic tables and fire circles. Later I got to thinking about what I'd want in a NW campsite and had the idea to build a couple of simple wood crafted 10x10 open shelters. The Hipcamp web process is simple and the earnings show up in my PayPal account every Tuesday. I communicate with the camper via the website, note the number of campers, and maybe run the name on the internet. We correspond via the app and I follow-up the contact with an email and entry instructions. I add cautions and warnings, a "know before you go" sheet and a roads and trails map. More often than not, I do not contact the campers after they arrive. They come and they go, respect the place and contact me if there are any questions.

So, I guess this is one way to do it in the 2020s: Watch your trees grow, have some respectful campers, a nice dinner out and maybe a movie production on your woodlot!

