

# Planning for Recreation, Shaping a Happy Workforce

## The Postwar Design of Kitimat, British Columbia

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In 1951, the world-renowned designer Clarence Stein (1882-1975) wrote to the Aluminum Company of Canada (Alcan) accepting its offer to coordinate the planning of the city of Kitimat, roughly 600 kilometres north of Vancouver on Canada's Pacific coast. Alcan had chosen the region as the site for a massively productive aluminum processing plant because of the area's immense hydroelectric capacity. The project for Alcan and the design team was not to make changes to a preexisting town to accommodate industry, but to build a town up from the ground, taking into account both the material and social needs of its future residents. Stein said that for Kitimat to succeed as a "new town" which would attract and keep workers, a "physical plan [was] not enough" and that a "complete plan for living was required."<sup>1</sup> Planning began in the same year, proceeding under Stein's advice to develop a town in minute detail, which would be a place where workers and their families would want to live.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Clarence S. Stein, Letter 417, July 27, 1951, in *The Writings of Clarence S. Stein: Architect of the Planned Community*, ed. Kermit Carlyle Parsons (Baltimore and London: The Johns

<sup>2</sup> Although there has not been a great deal of scholarship devoted to Kitimat, one particular study provides invaluable insight on the town's development: Alan C. Elder, "On the Home Front: Representing Canada at the Triennale di Milano, 1957" (Master's thesis, University of British Columbia, 2000). Elder's study is about the representation of Kitimat as the focal point of Canada's presentation at an international exhibition in Milan in 1957. He argues that this display sought to illuminate a distinctly new sort of working man: "No longer a hard-hatted, hard-headed industrial worker; he was portrayed as a sophisticated individual working in a modern technological sphere in a civilized community" (ii). Elder highlights the interplay between industry and sophistication that gave Kitimat a distinctive role in Canada's

One of the aspects of this rigorously planned “good life” was the necessity of diverse opportunities for recreation and leisure-time activities. The Kitimat planners emphasized a certain freedom and leisurely existence for the prospective residents, which was always conditioned by the goal of keeping workers happy and the plant successful. Stein began the Kitimat Townsite Report in 1952 by stating unambiguously that the “purpose of Kitimat [was] the industrial success of the plant.”<sup>3</sup> In design proposals and in commentaries on the town’s early development, Stein and other enthusiastic authors stressed that this fundamental goal of industrial achievement was complemented in Kitimat by the possibility of pleasant community life. An investigation of these sources will illustrate that in designing leisure time, planners imagined and formed the town’s prospective society; Kitimat was to be a community of happy families who could fulfill their desires for enjoyable living while providing long-lasting service to the industrial development that was making the “good life” possible in postwar Canada. As such, leisure in Kitimat was not a neutral outgrowth of economic progress, but a tool in the hands of planners for shaping a steady, happy workforce in their version of an ideal postwar community.

I begin this discussion by exploring the concomitant development of leisure and industry in the 1950s and the community planning influences that acted upon Kitimat’s design. Next, I consider the particular goals for leisure in fostering the happy family life of prospective residents, as well as the role of outdoor recreation in familiarizing these residents with the “strange” topography of the Pacific Northwest, in order to root them in Kitimat for the long term. Overall, the actual planning process for Kitimat, fueled by hopes for quality living, stability, and economic output, was as much a product of the postwar zeitgeist as the town itself.

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postwar development. See pages 23-38 for his main discussion of the planning and development of Kitimat.

<sup>3</sup> Clarence S. Stein, preface to Kitimat Townsite Report, Vol. 1 (Kitimat: Corporation of the District of Kitimat, 1960, reprint 1969). This compilation of planning proposals is subsequently abbreviated as KTR.

## Economic Growth and the “Good Life” in Postwar Canada

Recreational opportunities expanded in conjunction with economic development in Canada after the Second World War. This period can be characterized by prosperity and the new notion of “disposable income” for more of the population than ever before.<sup>4</sup> Christopher Dummitt notes that under W. A. C. Bennett’s Social Credit government (1952–1972), the “good life,” in conjunction with rapidly expanding infrastructure, became a major focus for British Columbia. Along with the new forty-hour work week, leisure time was promoted as part of economic development.<sup>5</sup> In the American situation, the 1950s and 1960s saw the working class gaining opportunities closer to those of the middle class for consumer enjoyment.<sup>6</sup> The Kitimat planners were in tune with this feeling of economic prosperity and opportunity. As Stein said in his preface to the community plan, the residents of Kitimat “must be given the utmost freedom to develop their lives and that of their pocketbooks,” and consequently, “the plans of Kitimat, both operational and physical, have been developed to serve as a flexible setting for good living that is open to continuous growth and expansion.”<sup>7</sup> The focus was on unbridled possibility, not only for the town, but also for the personal lives of the residents. Albert Mayer, one of the Kitimat planners, told colleagues in 1950 that “[g]ood living is to peace time what security is during the war.”<sup>8</sup> Mayer’s words highlight that

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<sup>4</sup> See Magda Fahrni and Robert Rutherford, Introduction to *Creating Postwar Canada: Community, Diversity, and Dissent, 1945-1975* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008), 3-4.

<sup>5</sup> Christopher Dummitt, “Risk on the Rocks: Modernity, Manhood, and Mountaineering in Postwar British Columbia,” *BC Studies* 141 (2004), 10-11. For the more general growth of recreation services in Canada after the Second World War, see George Karlis, *Leisure and Recreation in Canadian Society: An Introduction* (Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, 2004), 62-3. Shirley Tillotson has demonstrated in another context that the expansion of recreational opportunities can also be linked to increased democratic political participation, in *The Public at Play: Gender and the Politics of Recreation in Post-War Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Gary Cross, *A Social History of Leisure Since 1600* (State College, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 206.

<sup>7</sup> Stein, preface to KTR.

<sup>8</sup> Albert Mayer in an address to the Committee on Urban Design and Housing of the American Institute of Architects, quoted in Thomai Serdari, *Albert Mayer, Architect and Town Planner: The Case for a Total Professional* (PhD dissertation, New York University,

there was a sense of necessity in facilitating this “good life.” Just as security was a fundamental goal for a country at war, an agreeable lifestyle was a crucial factor for society after war had ended, as it emphasized durable prosperity. Mayer’s sense of necessity can be linked to the movements toward industrial stability that drove Canada’s postwar economic progress.

Kitimat’s growth was part of a broader pattern of corporate investment in Canadian resource development. Many communities in remote areas came into existence as companies like Alcan sought to expand.<sup>9</sup> The success of such industrial endeavours was a brilliant symbol of peace time. An enthusiastic pamphlet about Alcan deemed the Kitimat project “an essential thing for the free democratic world” and “a further line of defense against aggression, for U.S. military authorities have said, ‘Our requirements for aluminum are unlimited.’”<sup>10</sup> Clearly, in the case of Kitimat, it was the specific resource being processed that warranted the conceptual link between security and the development of the community itself. Alan Elder has demonstrated that in the postwar years, aluminum was an especially popular and distinctly modern product.<sup>11</sup> Alcan’s project, therefore, was timely. Kitimat was one of many young communities developing as part of a pattern so insistent as to warrant two contemporaries to name Canada the “land of new towns.”<sup>12</sup> This was particularly true of the resource-rich areas of northern Canada. P. W. Hallahan, the reeve of Kitimat, stated in 1958 that the town was “well prepared to assume a leading role in this ‘Awakening of the

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2005), 225. See also pages 233-34, where Serdari notes longevity as the goal of the “good life” at Kitimat.

<sup>9</sup> Gerald Hodge, *Planning Canadian Communities: An Introduction to the Principles, Practice, and Participants*, 4th ed. (Scarborough, ON: Thomson Nelson, 2003), 50-1. See also Edward Davidson McRae, “New Communities for a New Era: The Instant Town” (Master’s thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1970), 28-30. McRae calls Kitimat the “precursor” to the instant towns of postwar Canada, which were communities in which working class demands had increased. For a history of industry towns in the United States, see Margaret Crawford, *Building the Workingman’s Paradise: The Design of American Company Towns* (London and New York: Verso, 1995).

<sup>10</sup> Dietrich Collins Equipment Ltd. *The Alcan Story* (Vancouver: Dietrich Collins Equipment, Ltd., 1952/3).

<sup>11</sup> Elder (see note 2 above), 25-8.

<sup>12</sup> Peter and Cornelia Oberlander, “Canada’s New Towns,” *Progressive Architecture* 37, no. 8 (1956), 113.

North.”<sup>13</sup> Kitimat was a valuable player in this story of industrial development. For those involved, the town’s success was crucial for maintaining that urgent postwar prosperity.

For the aluminum smelter to fruitfully respond to these demands for economic progress, a steady workforce was essential. In a town dominated by one industry, providing diverse opportunities for a fulfilling lifestyle was a way of responding to such a need, especially in particularly inaccessible communities. The Howe Sound Company had earlier recognized this concern with their mine at Britannia, in the Squamish-Lillooet region of British Columbia, by providing the working residents with recreational opportunities.<sup>14</sup> Kitimat’s planners showed a similar sensibility. George D. Butler wrote the section on recreation in the Kitimat Townsite Report. His comments of 1952 summarize the necessity of a high quality of life:

Recreation is a function of growing importance in every community. It will have a special significance in Kitimat because the only leisure-time opportunities available to the residents, other than those provided in the homes and in the wilderness area surrounding them, will be those in the town itself. Unless adequate areas, structures and leadership are provided to assure the residents recreation opportunities that will afford attractive and satisfying leisure-time living, people will be unwilling to reside in Kitimat.<sup>15</sup>

Butler’s statement illustrates the direct correlation between worker stability and the quality of planned recreation. The designers could not assume that workers would want to stay in the town merely because it facilitated employment opportunities. For workers and

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<sup>13</sup> P. W. Hallahan, Foreword to *Kitimat: The First Five Years*, by Pixie Meldrum (Kitimat: Corporation of the District of Kitimat, 1958), 1.

<sup>14</sup> Linda Carlson, *Company Towns of the Pacific Northwest* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2003), 83.

<sup>15</sup> George D. Butler, “Recreation,” in KTR, 89. For the general importance of recreation and entertainment in industry towns, see Alex Himelfarb, *The Social Characteristics of One-Industry Towns in Canada: A Background Report* (Fredericton, NB: Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1977), 19-21.

residents to stay, Butler emphasized that they had to be able to enjoy themselves and be satisfied with their lifestyles. By extension, meaningful leisure would be a necessary condition of industrial productivity. Kitimat therefore required a planning method that could anticipate interest and give particular attention to recreation and leisure-time activities. Designers needed to be able to accommodate the “good life” in order to make a success of their postwar resource development project.

### **Models for Good living in Kitimat’s Community Planning**

Stein and the planning team brought various design traditions to Kitimat, all of which favoured leisure and a high quality of life. Two particular inspirations were the English Garden City and the town of Radburn, New Jersey. Taken together, these influences emphasized features such as the importance of green space in the town, convenient access to central areas, safety, a small and contained population, and the minimization of vehicle traffic.<sup>16</sup> The Garden City, a turn of the century idea put forward by Ebenezer Howard, is the best known of these influences. Lewis Mumford, a contemporary of Stein, said that Howard’s idea “laid the foundation for a new cycle in urban civilization: one in which the means of life [would] be subservient to the purposes of living.”<sup>17</sup> For Kitimat, this tradition furthered the core idea that the workers and their families needed an enjoyable community amenable to personal fulfillment. Stein’s earlier experience with Radburn had also stressed the importance of the quality of life in any city planning project. In his work *Toward New Towns for America*,

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<sup>16</sup> “Industry Builds Kitimat,” Part 1, *Architectural Forum* 101, no.1 (1954), 131. See also Serdari, 232-33. For Stein’s influences and planning career, see Kermit Carlyle Parsons, “Clarence Stein’s Variations on the Garden City Theme by Ebenezer Howard,” *Journal of the American Planning Association* 64, no.2 (1998): 129-30; and, by the same author, Introduction to *The Writings of Clarence S. Stein*, (see note 1 above), xvii-xxxiii. For Stein’s postwar career, see Kristin Larsen, “Cities to Come: Clarence Stein’s Postwar Regionalism,” *Journal of Planning History* 4, no. 1 (2005): 33-51. For the story of Radburn, see Daniel Schaffer, *Garden Cities for America: The Radburn Experience* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982).

<sup>17</sup> Lewis Mumford, “The Garden City Idea and Modern Planning,” in Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of To-Morrow*, ed. F. J. Osborn (Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press, 1965), 40.

Stein quoted a survey demonstrating that eighty-five percent of people who moved to Radburn had done so because of the town's diverse opportunities for recreation.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, as a political idealist, Stein sought the "good life" for people who did not necessarily have the privileges he himself enjoyed.<sup>19</sup> This attitude is visible in the plans for recreation in Kitimat. Industry town planning, in which recreation was required for workers to stay, acted in interplay with this democratic community planning, which sought enjoyable living for all people.

There seems to have been a certain revival of the old with a combination of the new that characterized Kitimat's proposed "good life." In a 1959 article that extolled Kitimat's early development, authors B. J. McGuire and Roland Wild said: "Kitimat has reclaimed other long-forgotten sources of peace-of-mind that in ages past were part of urban living" and "has added many conveniences peculiar to the twentieth century."<sup>20</sup> It was old in its idealized, urban ethos, and new in its material aspects. Kitimat's "newness" was both an opportunity and a difficulty for the planners in trying to truly plan the good life there. Stein recognized the "counterattraction of the big city with its varied life and entertainment, and the chance of easily getting another good job."<sup>21</sup> This was the difficult side of Kitimat's "newness" – the planners had to envision not only what would be spatially efficient and attractive, but also the whole range of activities that workers and their families would actually want if they were to remain there. As a community planner, Stein had always advocated for his colleagues to attempt to foresee what prospective residents would desire.<sup>22</sup> Kitimat's "newness" was also an opportunity, for it truly allowed the designers to work imaginatively. An Architectural Forum

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<sup>18</sup> Clarence S. Stein, *Toward New Towns for America*, introd. Lewis Mumford (Liverpool: University Press of Liverpool, 1951), 61. For a source contemporary to Radburn's development, which describes the extensive opportunities for recreation, see Robert B. Hudson, *Radburn: A Plan of Living* (New York: American Association for Adult Education, 1934), 52-9.

<sup>19</sup> Parsons, Introduction to *The Writings of Clarence S. Stein*, xvii.

<sup>20</sup> B. J. McGuire & Roland Wild, "Kitimat—Tomorrow's City Today," *Canadian Geographic Journal* 59, no. 5 (1959): 143.

<sup>21</sup> Stein, preface to KTR.

<sup>22</sup> Edward K. Spann, *Designing Modern America: The Regional Planning Association of America and Its Members* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1996), 105.

article highlighted this sense of possibility: “To conceive a city directly for the people in it, and to start fresh, the planner likes to dream of building on an island or in a wilderness.”<sup>23</sup> Kitimat offered this chance. Kitimat’s development was characterized by confidence in the ability of planners to foresee and facilitate a life pleasing to prospective residents.

Kitimat was truly a “new town” in that it needed to be physically and socially designed. In stating the objectives for the community plan, Stein referenced Alcan’s earlier project at Arvida in Quebec’s Saguenay region. He wrote: “Arvida is different. It belongs to an old and fixed culture – the French Canadian. This and the Church, in great part, set its pattern of living.”<sup>24</sup> Stein made note of Arvida to show that Kitimat was a new town not only physically, but also culturally. Indeed, the workers recruited for the smelter, came from all over the world. A contemporary source reported that seventy percent of the people who came to Kitimat could not speak English.<sup>25</sup> In trying to create a society conducive to the good life, planners needed to attempt to shape a synthesized community. They delved deeply into the social life of the prospective residents, taking into account the minutest quotidian details. They had to consider who would be coming to Kitimat, and how the community plans could appeal to the prospective core of this industrial workforce society. Sophisticated urban planning traditions and attitudes, combined with the true “newness” of Kitimat, helped designers to place a high quality lifestyle at the forefront of their plans for prospective residents.

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<sup>23</sup> “Industry Builds Kitimat,” Part 1, 128.

<sup>24</sup> Stein, “Planning Objectives,” in KTR, 3. For the Arvida story, see Lucie K. Morrisset, “The Washington of the North: The Design and Creation of an Industrial Metropolis,” *Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada Bulletin* 22, no. 1 (1997): 11-18.

<sup>25</sup> George B. Barbour, “Kitimat,” *The Geographical Journal* 125, no. 2 (1959): 221.

## Family-based Recreation for a Functional Community

The town designers considered the family to be the social stabilizer that was otherwise lacking in Kitimat; thus, they made family happiness a top priority.<sup>26</sup> Stein wrote: “Family needs, above all else, form the basis of the Kitimat Plan. It is the family man, whose wife and children have a desirable home in a community they like, who throws out his anchor and stays.”<sup>27</sup> As such, the plans for recreation in Kitimat were almost exclusively geared toward the family. The focus of family-based leisure pursuits was the greater social regulation of the town. Employers often used recreation to keep people busy in order to avoid deviant behaviour, which would disrupt company productivity.<sup>28</sup> The plans for Kitimat included hints of using recreation in this more controlling way. Lois Barclay Murphy, discussing Kitimat family affairs, noted the possibility of adults becoming lonely, which could lead to “some of the aspects of primitive American pioneer life of the 19th century . . . including aggressive rough house behavior and disorganized sex[ual] behavior.”<sup>29</sup> This led Murphy to emphasize the necessity of “special attention to social life [and] creative activities.”<sup>30</sup> Recreation clearly had an important social function in the plans for Kitimat. The planners emphasized that a wide variety of leisure-time pursuits would secure family happiness. At the same time, Kitimat’s plans also featured the more predictable industry-town method of using recreation to keep workers in check.

An important function of leisure time for the workers was the maintenance of a positive paternal role in family activity. The planners assumed that virtually all these men

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<sup>26</sup> See Elder, 37. For the responsibility of the family in the productive continuity of wage labour, see Peter S. Li, *The Making of Post-War Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1996), 31.

<sup>27</sup> Stein, “Planning Objectives,” in KTR, 3.

<sup>28</sup> Rex A. Lucas, *Minetown, Milltown, Railtown: Life in Canadian Communities of Single Industry*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 189-93. Tillotson has demonstrated that postwar recreation could be considered a way to avoid crime and even communism, in *Public at Play*, 37.

<sup>29</sup> Lois Barclay Murphy, “Family and Community Living (Citizen Initiative and Family Participation),” in KTR, 43.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

would be young fathers. Murphy proposed that “fathers of young children might be put on shifts so that they would not miss the afternoon-evening fun.”<sup>31</sup> Their participation in family affairs was important for an equilibrium that would keep the plant running. Since happiness at home would increase the chances of workers and their families staying in Kitimat on a long term basis, the planners emphasized that fathers should partake in recreational activities in order to cultivate domestic harmony. Christopher Dummitt notes that, in the postwar years, Canadian families were urged to enjoy themselves together. It was important for the father to participate actively in these leisure pursuits.<sup>32</sup> The Kitimat planners emphasized the freedom of these men to choose how they might occupy themselves as working fathers. Stein suggested that “[o]utside their door they can potter in their gardens, or they can turn amateur farmer and grow food for the family in one of the many groups of private or allotment gardens on the terraces near their homes.”<sup>33</sup> The focus for workers’ recreation was that they kept busy with pleasing activities of their choice, in order to maintain their effectiveness as fathers and as Alcan employees.

With the majority of prospective residents being young couples who had or were about to have families, the planners seriously considered the quality of playtime for Kitimat children. The facilities and opportunities geared towards children, such as ample green space, encouraged carefree independence. Murphy made this clear, saying that children required “unplanned space as well as planned space and equipment – i.e., areas where they can be independent, explore, make [their] Own caves, tunnels, dams, bridges, etc.”<sup>34</sup> Children needed the capacity to be creative and imaginative. Active participation with the family was also important. Murphy noted certain activities that fathers and children could do together, such as horseback riding and fishing.<sup>35</sup> She especially stressed that children should have opportunities for responsible involvement in adult life, contending that “[i]t would be an important contribution to modern life to show that children in an industrial area can have

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>32</sup> Dummitt, 11.

<sup>33</sup> Stein, “Planning Objectives,” in KTR, 5.

<sup>34</sup> Murphy, “Family and Community Living,” in KTR, 47.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

suitable chances, not to be exploited, but to participate in living with grown-ups.”<sup>36</sup> Murphy’s statement specifies the industrial nature of the town as an added consideration in determining children’s roles. It was important that Kitimat children would not lack the life opportunities they needed to eventually pursue the same “good life” that the planners were designing.

The recreational independence that the planners desired for children acted in conjunction with leisure time for their mothers. Stein wrote that “[a]t Kitimat the wives will have additional time for themselves due to the varied recreational opportunities and security of their children.”<sup>37</sup> This notion of free time characterized the descriptions of mothers’ lives in Kitimat. They were expected to employ their time to be useful and to enjoy themselves. Stein imagined the daily routine of a Kitimat mother:

If she takes the littlest one to school, she can at the same time do many things necessary and pleasant. She can attend to her marketing, she can get a book at the library, she can visit her club, or attend a lecture, or stop in to see the neighbourhood nurse about the children’s ills.<sup>38</sup>

The impression here is that mothers would be doing useful things, but would simultaneously enjoy themselves in a leisurely fashion. Stein suggested that the Kitimat mother might “just want to gossip or discuss Kitimat’s weather or politics with friends, gathered by the green between the stores and the community building.”<sup>39</sup> Even though the wife/mother figure was to engage in practical duties, the manner in which she could approach these tasks would be distinctly relaxed and pleasurable. In other words, the plans implied that the whole lifestyle of a prospective Kitimat mother was to be somewhat leisurely, though not all her time was to be “leisure time.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>37</sup> Stein, “Planning Objectives,” in KTR, 4.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> For reasons of scope, I have not developed the important gender question at stake in the proposed lives of Kitimat mothers and fathers. The organization of leisure time partly on the

The proposed city centre was the focal point for Kitimat as a well-planned family setting for the good life. Stein characterized this space by its multipurpose functionality as a microcosm of enjoyable activities. Ensuring that the centre would be easy to access, he wrote:

. . . it will be convenient for any worker to stop off on the way home to do a little shopping for the wife. Or he may play a game of billiards or bowl with his friends. Later he can meet the whole family for supper at a restaurant looking out on the gardens, then after taking junior to the playgrounds – and perhaps leaving baby at the nursery, the scene is set for a carefree evening – a cinema show – a hockey game at the arena, maybe some music or a real live play in the auditorium – or perhaps just a walk between gardens and well-illuminated shops. It will all be pleasant and gay with color and lights and moving crowds – and fountains playing in the central park.<sup>41</sup>

Stein's words give the impression of a distinctly leisurely, almost indulgent, experience. The worker was to be responsible, active in the family, and social with his friends, but above all, his after-work time was to be "carefree." He would decide what he wished to do from the variety of choices available to him, and his family would benefit from this liberal leisure. He had the freedom and the material capacity to partake of any of these activities.

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basis of gender was an aspect of Kitimat's development as a 1950s suburban setting. This was another way in which designers attempted to shape the lifestyle of prospective residents, placing husbands at work and wives at home. Elder discusses gender issues in Kitimat's development, but his main concern is with notions of masculinity as portrayed in Milan in 1957. See "On the Home Front," 38: "the designers of the display in Milan chose not to look at suburban, family-oriented Kitimat of 1957, but instead chose to focus on an image of homosocial, male environment of its construction."

<sup>41</sup> Stein, "Planning Objectives," in KTR, 6.

## **Kitimat's Topography as an Opportunity for Recreation and Familiarization**

The enjoyable, multipurpose city centre exemplifies the truly urban ethos that the planners sought for Kitimat, in contrast to the surrounding northern topography. The Architectural Forum article noted that the “quality of urbanity vs. what might be called sub-urbanity seemed [...] particularly important to achieve in Kitimat’s isolated location with more than enough of nature and forest.”<sup>42</sup> It was desirable in this wilderness to establish a humming, tight-knit urban life. Indeed, the planners saw the isolation of Kitimat as a potential difficulty in getting workers to stay. Stein said that the three main obstacles of Kitimat were “climate, remoteness, [and] strangeness,” and that “the setting for a good life must be hewn out of the unknown wilderness.”<sup>43</sup> He wanted the first residents to “become old timers, bound to Kitimat by enthusiastic love of their town and its unusual qualities.”<sup>44</sup> By Stein’s estimation, it was important that residents would know and love their natural environment, not simply the opportunities afforded them by the city planners. A 1952 proposal for the Kitimat Museum, written by Benton MacKaye, is a prominent example of how designers attended to this need. The purpose of the museum was partly to induce residents “to view the Kitimat wilderness, not as a nightmare but a ‘happy hunting ground’; thus to convert it from a possible liability into a tangible asset.”<sup>45</sup> In this way, the museum would serve to interest people in a particular brand of exploratory outdoor recreation, which was specific to the topography of the Pacific Northwest.

The potential for meaningful outdoor recreation in the surrounding wilderness was noted in the planning documents, but was not an immediate concern. This was partly for practical reasons, which Butler explained when he noted that while there were many possibilities to be exploited, they would have “little, if any, direct bearing upon the needed

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<sup>42</sup> “Industry Builds Kitimat,” Part 1, 139.

<sup>43</sup> Stein, Preface to KTR.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Benton MacKaye, “The Kitimat Museum,” in KTR, 117.

open spaces and structures within the town itself.”<sup>46</sup> The planners did not need to factor the natural surroundings into the initial design for the town site. Rather, it seems to have been left up to the bold spirit of prospective residents to meaningfully integrate the natural environment into their leisure time. Stein said that the “surrounding forests and mountains [would] invite the adventurous, into the wilderness areas for mountain climbing, skiing, camping with his sons, fishing the wild streams hunting, and innumerable other healthful occupations for all seasons.”<sup>47</sup> Indeed, after the town had initially developed, the specific northern topography figured as a key factor for the quality of life in Kitimat. A 1958 book about Kitimat stated that the residents were “discovering the mountains, lakes and streams of an unequalled recreation area,” that “[t]he sense of isolation [had] dwindled,” and that the residents were “learning that even its climate [had] compensations.”<sup>48</sup> Through leisure-time pursuits, Kitimat’s topographical situation became an important part of its identity as a town.

Sources construed the remoteness of the area as providing an exciting pioneer-adventurer aspect to Kitimat, allowing for the opportunity to identify with untouched nature. B. J. McGuire and Roland Wild expressed this well: “To the youngsters, Kitimat presents a pleasing blend of modern, urban, recreational facilities in a wild-west, wilderness setting. To the adults, it offers physical grandeur, unexcelled hunting and fishing, neighbourliness, dependence, and the genuine friendships of a new community.”<sup>49</sup> This statement emphasizes that the residents were able to achieve a synthesis of the natural environment with the planned aspects of the community. At this time in Canada’s development, there was a certain fascination with the mysterious notion of the North, which the whole Kitimat project as a northern experience vividly illustrated.<sup>50</sup> An outdoor exposition at the museum, which involved a hike, would draw the participants into this process. MacKaye described the desired result:

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<sup>46</sup> Butler, “Recreation,” in KTR, 92.

<sup>47</sup> Stein, “Planning Objectives,” in KTR, 5.

<sup>48</sup> Meldrum (see note 13 above), 36.

<sup>49</sup> McGuire & Wild, 147.

<sup>50</sup> Elder, 31-2.

At the summit, the explorer can sit down, draw a long breath, and make out he is Humboldt.<sup>51</sup> Knowing something at least of the cross section of the country, he is ipso facto monarch of all he surveys. From here he can lay out other countries to 'conquer.' Now he can begin to become a true habitant of Kitimat, and take his part in making the most, mentally and physically, of its wilderness.<sup>52</sup>

In this dramatic proposed situation, the hiker could achieve a strong referential, environmental identity, not through a humble awe of untamed nature, but through a conscious conquering action of knowing. The surrounding wilderness was there for the taking.<sup>53</sup> Free to choose nature, the worker could become a conqueror in his leisure time. By engaging recreationally with the natural environment, residents could achieve that vital identification with the place that would root them in Kitimat for the long term.

## Conclusion

The Kitimat project was a special instance in the history of urban planning and the planning team was aware of this distinction. It was an opportunity to imagine a truly new community. The endeavour was not, however, without conceptual bounds. From the outset, the goal was to create a town that would efficiently and lastingly serve the aluminum smelting industry. The postwar trend of economic prosperity and the formal influences acting upon Kitimat's design drove the planners to establish high quality living in this industrial setting. Stein and the design team hoped that leisure-time activities would allow for the proper functioning of family life and, by extension, the pleasant social equilibrium of the town. Kitimat's northern topography, though not fully exploited in the initial plans for recreation,

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<sup>51</sup> Presumably Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859), the German natural scientist who conducted scientific explorations in Latin America.

<sup>52</sup> MacKaye, "Kitimat Museum," in KTR, 120.

<sup>53</sup> Thierry Paquot, "City and Nature, a Missed Opportunity?" *Diogenes* 207 (2005): 70, emphasizes that town dwellers view nature as an object of consumption according to their desires.

came to be seen as an important aspect of the stability of adventurous workers and their families. By fostering choice-based, gratifying leisure time that matched the prosperity of postwar Canada, the Kitimat planners hoped to ensure that employees would abide dutifully during their work time. The town designers believed that the prospective residents would only achieve Kitimat's fundamental goal of furthering Canadian industry if they could approach the task happily. Any satisfaction families might derive from well-planned recreation would be as significant a step toward economic productivity as the aluminum smelting process itself.

**\*\*Media Editor's Note:** Clear typographic errors and minor grammatical errors were silently rectified. Minor footnoting errors were silently rectified. Any errors of information omission that remain result from the original publication and not this transcription.