

One of my all time favorite projects was doing the book (and the box) accompanying a video documenting the efforts made by the employees of the Valanco Aluminum Company of Vancouver, Washington in keeping their pots online during a flood that turned the plant into an island.

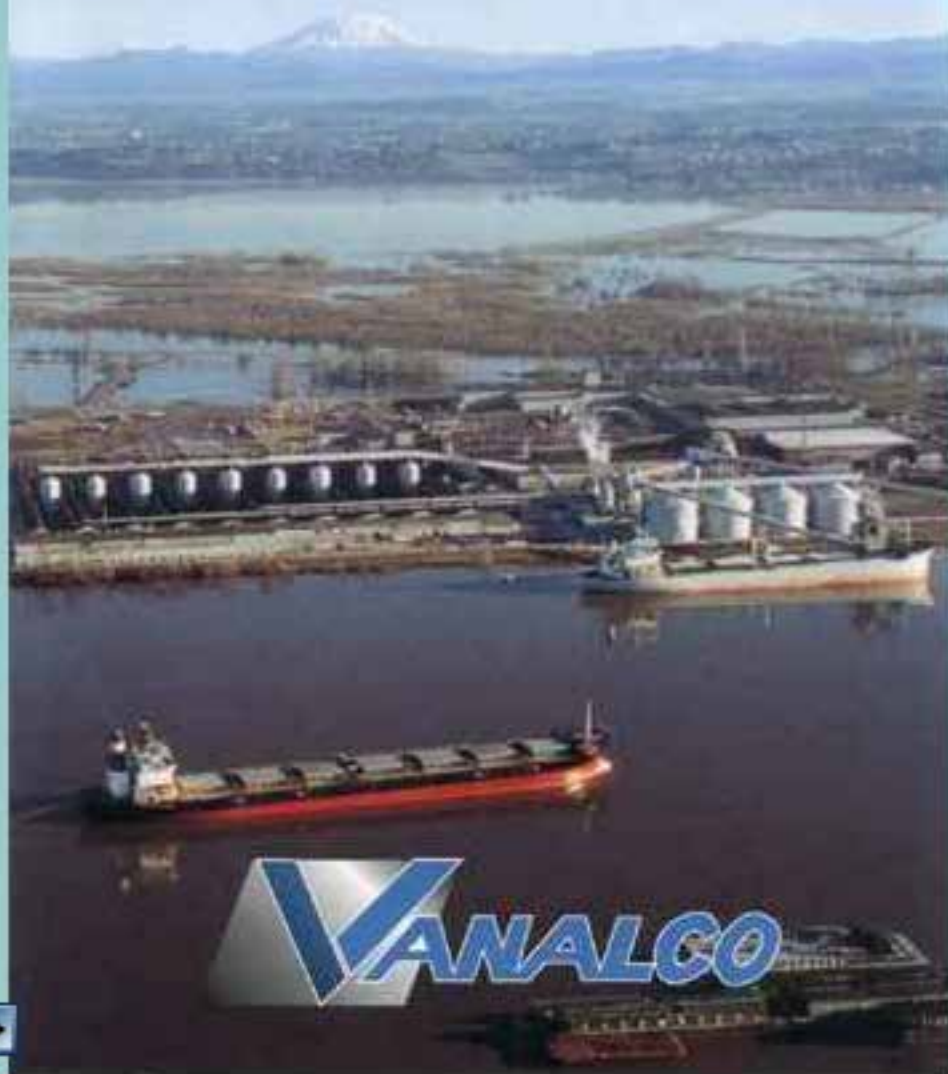
Stopping production would have cost the company thousands of dollars, so with some of the funds saved, management gave each worker a commemorative edition along with a way-to-go pat on the back.

I suggested this PR piece also be distributed to those who had worried that Vanalco had no concern for the environment – namely, the Columbia River.

I think the piece shows industry at it's best, and I too was proud to be part of the 'Vanalco team.'



VANALCO AND THE FLOOD OF '96



VANALCO AND THE FLOOD OF '96

The River

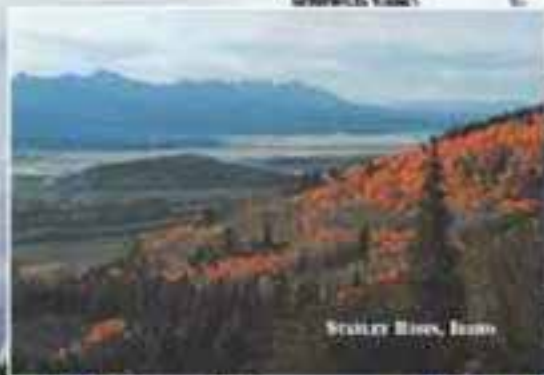
The Columbia River begins as a drip, then a trickle, and soon a rivulet off the Columbia Ice Field on the Alberta, British Columbia divide of the majestic Canadian Rockies.



COLUMBIA ICE FIELD



It is also born in the Montana Wilderness on the southeast corner of Yellowstone Park in Wyoming and in the south end of the Stanley Basin in Idaho. In Washington, it begins with the headwaters of the Klallan on the Kalama River and Hill Crab Creek winding its way through the Central Basin. The John Day in Oregon heads in the Blue Mountains near Baker City. These headwaters are nothing but small creeks, the kind you can step over. Each one a source. Each one a tributary. All contribute to the total flow that comprises the Columbia River drainage network. The wide rolling Columbia which we see at Vanalco's eye deck is almost home — having traveled collectively thousands upon thousands of their miles to get to the Pacific.



STANLEY BASIN, IDAHO

BARKWORTH RIVER, IDAHO

SPECIAL PROJECT

The official headwaters of the Columbia River are at Columbia Lake near Cecil Falls in British Columbia. The major tributary in the watershed is the Snake River whose official source is Jackson Lake in Grand Teton Park, Wyoming.

Together these rivers and tributaries with their associated dams and lakes have provided a system of hydro-electric power, irrigation, flood control, and recreation throughout our northwest that is unsurpassed elsewhere in the world. To a native Northwesterner the mining of outdoor values and industry are not thought of as incompatible. The reason for Vandalco's smelter, being located at Vancouver was a special partnership with the Columbia. We borrow from the river to produce a metal for humankind that consumes the burning of fossil fuels in transportation — in name just one use. And, just as the waters of the Columbia are used many times over, the metal that comes from our plant very often is recycled itself. When all is in harmony, the system works very well.

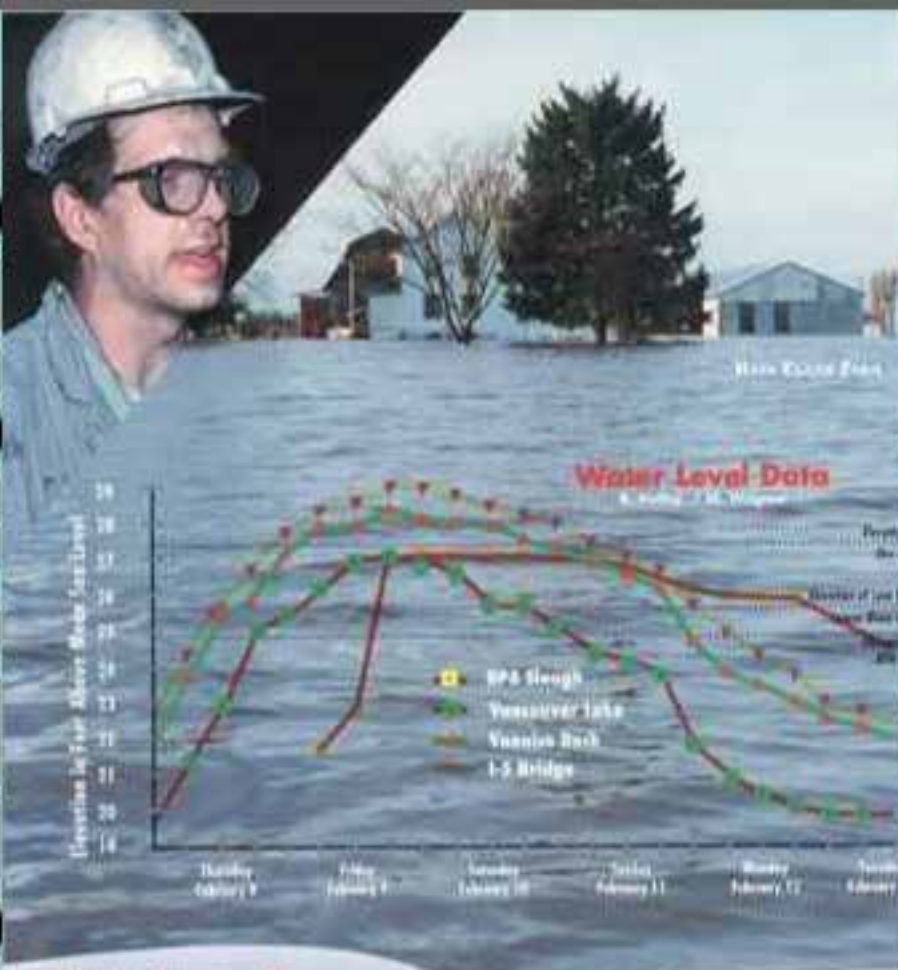


COLUMBIA RIVER GORGE, OREGON

The river has been showing us what it would be worn out — ready to be recycled from salty ocean depths to moist mist, air, to snow, clouds, to rain and snow, to pack, ice, and runoff — the cycle completed again and again over the centuries. Rivers rise. Rivers fall. Reservoirs fill and empty. Turbines spin, electrons travel, transmission lines sing, transformers hum, aluminum crucibles simmer, and smelter workers toil — all in a never ceasing series of events powered by the laws of nature and human need. Normally this cycle is a smooth one, and we grow confident and complacent. But once in a great while, hydrological and meteorological events align, and the river, still operating under natural law, reclaim its flood plain. Shards below.

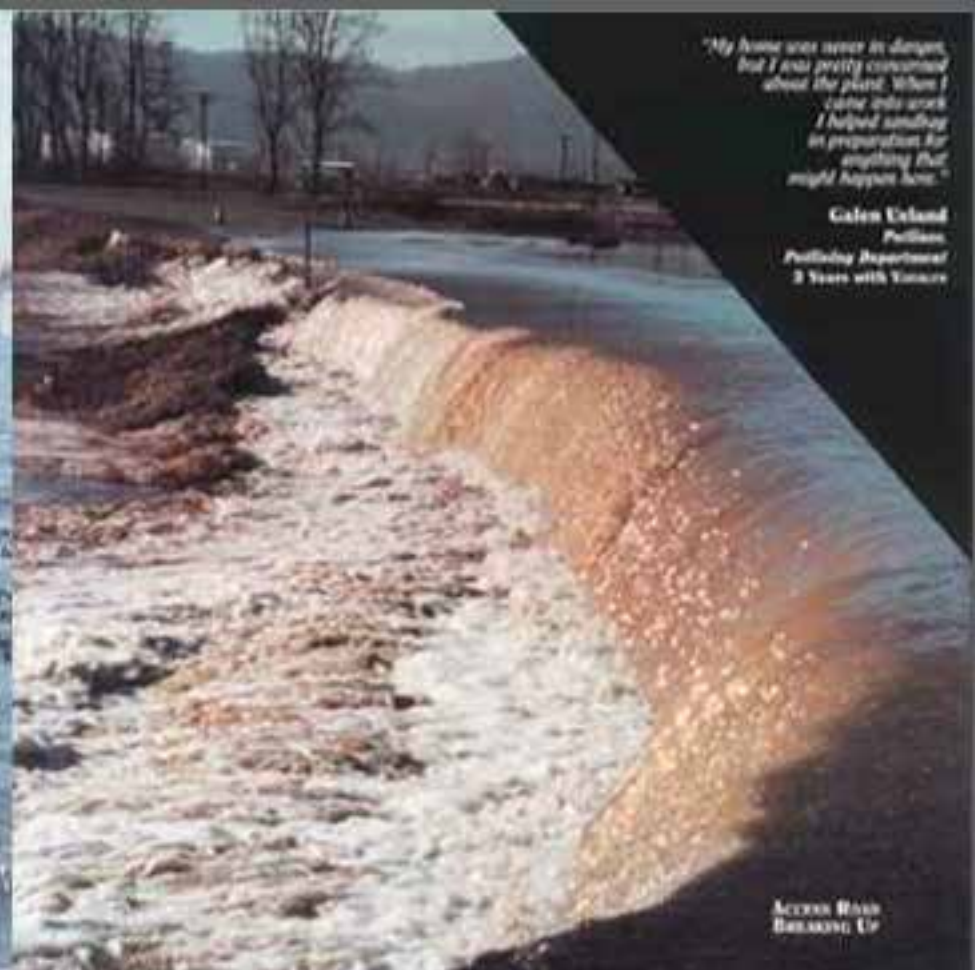
Cities, towns, fields, roads, bridges, and smelters are vulnerable in its path.
Such was the setting in early February 1980.





FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 9

- 1:00 am — Another neighbor brings horse into Yanacoos compound.
- 2:00 am — Rain stops.
- 4:00 am — Clear and cold.



"My home was never in danger, but I was pretty concerned about the point. When I came into work I helped sandbag in preparation for anything that might happen here."

Galen Ecklund
 Pollution
 Prevention Department
 3 Years with Yanacoos

ACCESS ROAD
 BREAKING UP

- 10:00 am — High Tide. Insignificant at flood stage.
- 11:30 am — Water over Lower River Road.
- 12:30 pm — Flooding takes Yanacoos Tidewater/Columbia Recycling access road near Yanacoos sign. Road begins to break up. "Deep" pothole created.





Epilogue

Just as in flooding, the receding water followed the same sequence. First the river began dropping, followed by the Vancouver Lake. And the BPA slough, now trapped within the confines of the Alona/Vancouver Dam, Lower River Road and Vancouver entrance road, would not recede completely for a long, long time. Such is the nature of floodplains and oxbow lakes in flood plains of major rivers.

Perhaps most interesting of all these events were the activities of some of Vancouver's furry, feathered, and finned neighbors. Some species look quite a healing such as rabbits, mice, and moles. But red-tailed hawks and great blue herons cleaned up at the floating dinner tables. A month after the flood, Canadian geese and beaver had taken up residence on and around the BPA slough, giving employees close-up and spectacular views. Backwaters are now teeming with fish that will become prey to bald eagles as the waters dry up. All wildlife appears to be oblivious to humans and their insignificant activities. Their kind saws upon the saga repeated for centuries, even millennia. No big deal for them. Rivers rise — then fall — over flowing to the Pacific — “Roll on Columbia, roll on!”



Was the project worthwhile?

Shortly after this event the one-plant company survived an attempt of unionizing the workforce.

And they were somehow considered “different” than then major aluminum companies by those supporting ripping out dams on the Columbia to save the salmon.

What really closed the doors was a flood of subsidized aluminum production from overseas at the same time Enron escalation of energy prices made it impossible to compete.