The 2012 annual meeting of the Society for Range Management is a partnership of the Idaho and Pacific Northwest (PNW) Sections representing a combined area of about 1.3 million square miles, or one-third the size of Canada or the United States. Together with the natural resources, the meeting theme of history, culture, and tradition produces the building blocks of our rangelands and their management.

British Columbia is Canada’s most westerly and third largest province. It occupies about 944,735 km² (364,764 square miles) between the 49th and 60th parallels. The landscape is dominated by rugged mountain belts, river valleys, and plateaus and by plains in the northeastern corner. Volcanism and repeated continental glaciation have formed the skeleton of today’s landscapes. Lava flows and cliffs, glacial drift, scoured surfaces, steep rocky slopes, and colluvial, fluvial, and aeolian deposits all form components of the provincial landscape. This variation is reflected in ranges of climate, soils, plant, and animal resources. Climates span from cool, moist, and mountainous to marine, Mediterranean-like, semiarid, alpine, and subarctic. Soils utilized for crop and livestock production range from moderately well-developed mineral soils to fully saturated organic soils and those containing permafrost near the soil surface. Soil textures range from coarse and well-drained sands or gravels to dark, fertile loams. Ranching and rangeland management have a long history in the province, originating with European discovery of “riches” within the wilderness and evolving to recognition and management for multiple use.

Furs and Gold

Furs were integral to development of trade and transportation corridors in British Columbia. Furs had high value, and early explorers representing fur-trade companies trekked across the seemingly limitless spaces and wilderness to facilitate trade with First Nations peoples. Alexander Mackenzie was the first European to cross North America north of Mexico, reaching the Pacific Coast at Bella Coola in 1793. In 1805 Simon Fraser followed Mackenzie into central British Columbia, building forts to facilitate trade and subsequently journeying down the Fraser River to its mouth near Vancouver in 1808. David Thompson crossed the Rockies into southeastern British Columbia in 1807 and later followed the Columbia River from its headwaters in British Columbia to its mouth near Astoria, Oregon. These three men were part of the North West Company (1779–1821), a fur trading enterprise based out of Montreal. It competed with the Hudson’s Bay Company for the lucrative western fur supply and was eventually forced to merge with the Hudson’s Bay Company after several decades of rivalry and strife. The forts were later transformed from simple trading posts to larger settlements following a decree that required them to be self-sufficient and produce a surplus of foods for trade.

The Hudson's Bay Company used an extensive system of boats and horse trails to carry furs from central British Columbia to the mouth of the Columbia River. In 1846 the boundary between British Columbia and the United States was established at the 49th parallel. This severed the horse trail by which furs were carried to the Columbia River. The Cayuse War in American territory and heavy customs duties forced the Hudson’s Bay Company to find new routes to access the Pacific Ocean. These later became trails for gold miners and settlers.

The discovery of gold in the Fraser River brought worldwide attention to what is now British Columbia. It spurred an influx of people from the east, the United States, and many other countries. For example, the population of Victoria grew from fewer than 300 to as many as 6,000 in 1858. In 1858 British Columbia became a British colony with James