

RIGHT FROM THE START: PAUL DIXON, CLS, ALS, Edmonton

Paul Dixon has worked at Stewart, Weir & Co. Ltd, one of Alberta's oldest surveying companies, for his entire surveying career. Even before he graduated from the University of Alberta in 1987 with a surveying science degree, Dixon was working summer jobs for the Edmonton-based surveying and engineering company.

“It was great,” he recalls enthusiastically. “I was out in the field, I was travelling and I was making good money. What wasn't there to love about it?”

It was also in the blood: Brian, his father, was also working for the company and subsequently became a principal in the business. Dixon joined the company full time when he graduated, undertaking his articles with Brian and receiving his CLS commission in 1992, along with his Alberta papers. He is now Vice-President of Geomatics, and considering a technology-oriented executive role with the company.

Becoming a Canada Lands Surveyor, says Dixon, has allowed him opportunities and adventures he would never have experienced otherwise. His timing has also been good. He started working at a time when Global Positioning System (GPS) technology was coming into its own, but the applications of GPS were still unfamiliar to many surveying practitioners. “Because I was already familiar with it—I had studied it at school—even though I was young, I became the ‘go to’ guy on GPS use in relation to pipe lines and power lines for a while,” he laughs.

In the 1980s, according to the company's web site, it also led the way in North America with digital orthophotography. “When I joined,” says Dixon, “I got involved with doing a project for the Department of National Defence, mapping military bases on

Vancouver Island and in Quebec. That was very memorable. We had to be very careful, because access was so restricted. We got to see into places the general public never get to see. I can't talk about it, of course," says Dixon, "but trust me, it was fascinating!"

Dixon has also spent considerable time working on First Nations' and Inuit land claims in Alberta, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut. Overseen by Natural Resources Canada, the federal surveying requirements with respect to the boundaries of Indian reserves and treaty lands are different to those of provincial Crown lands, and only a CLS is permitted to conduct such surveys.

"That was amazing work, especially in the High Arctic," says Dixon. "There are no trees in the far North, and the parcels are enormous—one boundary alone might be ten kilometres in length." As part of the job, Dixon and his colleagues also trained Inuit community members to work on the surveys, a rewarding and enjoyable experience.

Living in camps, encounters with Arctic wildlife and emergency helicopter landings on the sides of mountains haven't put Dixon off angling for more projects in the North. "It's a special place. I'd certainly like to spend more time working up there."

In 2010, Stewart Weir's 3-D scanning department was nominated for the David Thompson National Geomatics Awards, in the "Contribution to Society" category, for a project relating to the Bitumont Provincial Historic Site in Alberta. "Three-dimensional laser scanning is fairly new technology, there's not a lot of it around yet," says Dixon. "We were asked to scan an abandoned oil sands mine with historical significance, dating back to the 1940s, which was going to be declared a provincial historic site. We had to produce a 3-D model of it—not one of our more run-of-the-mill jobs, that's for sure."

The same technology is being used to assess the dome of the Alberta Legislature for potential problems and to determine whether repairs or replacement may be required. “We’re finding as surveyors,” says Dixon, “that we are often at the front end of new technology like this. It’s changing so quickly and constantly. We have to be prepared to try new things and new methods all the time. It’s one of the reasons I am interested in getting even more involved in this area.”

The life of a Canada Lands Surveyor, concludes Dixon, is a good one. He’s pleased to be looking forward to many more years in the job. “I do feel lucky to have chosen it as my career, right from the start.”