

Cash in your pocket:

It's as easy as one-two-three!

By Morgan Beaudry

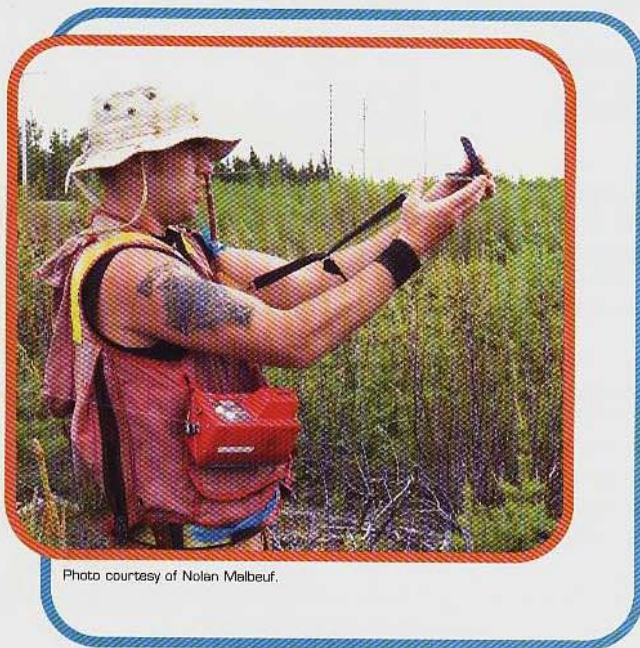


Photo courtesy of Nolan Malbeuf.

"I count trees for a living," says Nolan Malbeuf. That's how he describes his occupation as a regeneration surveyor for Mistik Management Ltd., a Meadow Lake-based forestry company jointly owned by NorSask Forest Products Inc. and Millar Western Pulp.

Sounds about as exciting as an English final? Guess again.

Malbeuf has had his share of hair-raising episodes while out in the woods surveying recently planted seedlings. Bear sightings? You bet. But bears have nothing on the fear and panic that startling other woodland creatures can induce.

"With bears you can usually see them coming, but deer lie down when they're afraid. They pop up out of the bush and I can tell you, it's a rush. All of a sudden you hear these massive pounding steps, there are trees flying around and then a big animal rushes past you," says

Malbeuf. "I've been scared out of my wits a few times."

Another rush for Malbeuf: Since going into business as a regeneration surveyor seven years ago, he's been able to hire staff, his younger brother Chet, and provide for his growing family, wife Natalie and their three-month old daughter, Calia.

Malbeuf, 25, started his subcontracting business when he was 19. After graduating from Valley View School in Beauval, he didn't have any long-term career plans, just an ambition to be his own boss and to do work he enjoyed. He learned of a week-long regeneration survey course offered by Mistik and enrolled. Malbeuf's been working for them ever since.

While counting trees sounds a bit simple, it's actually a science and an essential part of the forestry industry. Whenever trees are harvested, new trees must be planted to restock the area. Malbeuf goes into areas where harvesting and planting have taken place and calculates how many trees are growing in that area. He turns that information over to Mistik, which then determines if more trees need to be planted in that area.

"I got into this as a way to make money, but the forest is a place of solitude for me," says Malbeuf. "I only need three things: a hip chain, which is a box with thread in it that counts metres, a compass to know where I'm

going and my data cards to record the trees. Chet determines where the plots are, I follow him and count the trees and number of species and record the data."

As with any job, there's a temptation to simplify the process. In Malbeuf's case, he and Chet decided they'd get their work done faster if they didn't have to walk all the way into the forest and back.

"We came up with a brilliant idea to ride bikes. To be honest, it was harder to ride than walk the three kilometers to the survey area," says Malbeuf. By the time they made it back to their camp they were beyond exhausted. And their day was far from over, as it turned out. "We couldn't find the key to the truck and realized we left them in the backpack left in the bush. I was so exhausted and hungry, but I had to go back and get the keys. After I found the keys, I needed a 20-minute break before I could summon the courage to ride back."

Because his occupation is seasonal, Malbeuf, who is Metis, has the time and resources to pursue his other ambition: becoming a teacher. He's a full-time student completing his third year of a Bachelor of Education in La Ronge, though the Northern Teachers Education Program offered by the Universities of Saskatchewan and Regina.

"I work surveying on weekends and during the seven-week summer break and whenever I have time between classes. The schedule can be hectic from time to time," says Malbeuf. Will one career replace the other eventually? Probably not. "I love what I'm doing. By subcontracting, I can work when I want."

