

Westbank Express....



The channel that ferries navigated through when Okanagan Lake iced over, c. 1950

The Winter of 1949 - 1950

by Gordon H. Ficke, edited by Darci Ritchey

"I looked forward to Jack Frost arriving to signal the beginning of winter; the intricate patterns that he created on those single pane windows in our house were beautiful!"

Frank Ficke remembered as he recalled the winters of the late 1940s, and particularly the cold winter of 1949-'50. Well, Jack Frost came, he saw, and he conquered the Okanagan. In December of 1949, the area received 71.4 cm of snow; the previous year only had 11.2 cm! Temperatures plummeted to the negative twenties in January 1950 and the lowest temperature that month was -31 Celsius – the coldest temperature ever recorded at that time.

To make matters worse, Okanagan Lake froze almost completely. The two ferries that provided transportation between Kelowna and Westbank, the Lequime and the Pendozi, had a mammoth task of keeping the water channel from freezing over. When it became too cold and ice jams occurred, dynamite was sometimes used to break them up. On a lighter side, a number of Westsiders enjoyed skating on the ice. Some folks even took their cars out for a spin, which was a risky endeavour.

Heritage Week Feb 19 - 23



Celebrate Heritage Week in your Community! Slap on your best pioneer duds and come on down to the Westbank Museum to get your photo taken - old fashioned style! Select from our variety of costumes or bring your own. You will receive digital copies of the photos.

Cost: by donation (suggested donation: \$10/group)

Costumes are limited.

Jack Frost wreaked havoc on Okanagan fruit trees as well. It got so cold that the bark on the apple trees popped like gunfire as it split. The Gorman Brothers started out as orchardists, but found their trees decimated after the winter of 1949/1950. They decided that if they couldn't grow apples, then they would make apple boxes, and thus, Gorman Bros Lumber & Box Company was born! From a small operation out of a shed, the company grew to be one of the largest employers in Westbank.

Frank Ficke and his twin brother turned thirteen on December 20th. His family had a log barn at their Green Bay Ranch (approximately where the Baptist Green Bay Bible Camp is today) where they stored the potatoes they grew on the property. They insulated the barn with sawdust, hoping it would help the potatoes survive the frost. "But," Frank lamented, "that sharp wind coming off Okanagan Lake still found its' way in...causing those potatoes to freeze." The coal oil heaters they used helped save the rest of the harvest. They continuously filled the coal heaters to keep them going 24 hours a day throughout the winter.

The extreme cold was particularly hard on the cattle at the ranch. Their diet consisted of only slough grass that provided little nourishment and didn't help to keep them warm. "It was a hardship for us," Frank admitted. At their barn in Glenrosa, the waterline that watered their animals froze. The family boiled pails of water on the kitchen wood cook stove to thaw out the waterline so that the animals had a constant drinking supply. The brothers sawed wooden scraps left over from Hitchner Bros. Sawmill (where the Glenrosa Firehall is today) and old pitch posts to burn in the kitchen stove. They were busy providing the wood they needed to cook their meals and keep their home warm throughout the winter.

"We always had cold hands and cold feet," Frank revealed. "We only had rubber gum boots to wear in the winter that provided very little insulation from the biting cold. By the second year we wore those boots, they were so tight that our feet became immediately numb when we faced the icy cold outside. Our mittens were made from old wool socks, and once they got wet from the snow, or pulling ice blocks out of the water for our icebox (no modern refrigerators at that time), our hands froze!" Ficke summarized their experience of one of the coldest winters of that era. "Despite the extreme weather conditions and the hurdles we had to overcome to keep warm and look after our livestock, etc., we survived!"

Westbankers Dorothy Gellatly and Bert Hewlett enjoying a day on the ice.

Date unknown



LOCAL EVENTS

WESTBANK

Winter Magic at the Gellatly Nut Farm

December 15m 4 - 7pm
Gellatly Nut Farm Regional Park
2375 Whitworth Rd

A family friendly festive get-together at Gellatly Nut Farm. There will be carolers, a fire pit to warm up, light display in the nut trees, and tours of the Heritage House. Come on down for a dose of holiday cheer!

West Kelowna Warriors vs Vernon Vipers

January 18, 7 - 10pm
Royal LePage Place
2670 Cameron Rd.

Support your local team and cheer them on! The games are a blast - there's always lots of prizes to be won, too!

Heritage Week Photoshoot

Feb 19 - 23, 9am - 4pm
Westbank Museum
2376 Dobbin Rd.

Bring your friends and family in for an old-fashioned photoshoot! Choose from our selection of pioneer costumes or bring your own! Cost is by donation. Costumes are limited. No appointment necessary.

PEACHLAND

Christmas Light Up

December 7, 4:30 - 7:30pm
Various Locations

Enjoy Christmasy events at the Peachland Art Gallery, Boys & Girls Club, and Visitor Centre! Gather in Heritage Park at 6:15 to watch Peachland light up the sky!

Breakfast with Santa

December 8, 9 - 11:30am
Peachland Community Centre
4450 6 St

Join Santa for breakfast, entertainment, and crafts!

Cost: \$10 for age 6 and up; \$5 for age 5 and under; free for children under 1 year

New Years' Dash and Splash

Jan 1, 10:30am Peachland
Community Centre 4450 6 St

Choose between a 2k walk or a 5k run, then take a dip in the lake (optional). 9:30 - 10:15 check-in/waiver. Cost: \$20 cash at the door; \$10 for children aged 5 - 12



Artefact of the Month

Gramophone Needle Tin Loud Tones 200 Needles

On a rainy day in August, a group of metal detecting enthusiasts searched the property of a Westbank resident (with his permission) in hopes of finding evidence of the Okanagan Fur Brigade Trail. While no solid evidence was found that the trail passed through there, it was clear that people had lived in the area for a while. Chris Bilocerkowec excavated a small, rusty, deformed box. Thinking it was just scrap metal, she almost threw it away – but something told her not to. She decided to polish it up and discovered it was a tin of gramophone needles! The brand “His Master’s Voice” was copyrighted by Emile Berliner in 1900. Berliner is credited with inventing the gramophone and the flat disc record. Before then, people listened to music using Thomas Edison’s wax cylinders. The Westbank Museum has a working gramophone that is about 100 years old!



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