

VALLEY HISTORY AND THE WINDERMERE VALLEY MUSEUM

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Alex Ritchie

Alex Ritchie was down in the garage shining the family car, but there was a time when he applied the spit, polish and elbow grease to a stage coach. A real stage coach, pulled by horses and hauling passengers, express and mail through the mountains.

Indeed, Mr. Ritchie was also acquainted with the freight teams that rattled out of Calgary, making all of 20 miles a day hauling stuff for I. G. Baker Outfit.

Two years after he landed in Calgary, he came to B.C. (1898.) That was the year of high water, you'll remember— Mr. Ritchie hired on as a freight driver so he could get down into the Crowsnest country. They were cutting the railway right-of-way there then and things were hopping. Mr. Ritchie said he just went over to the stables in Calgary where the horses and mules were kept and the next thing he knew he was on the Baker payroll and

jogging toward Fort MacLeod with a load of powder for the railway construction. The freight train was hauled by horses and mules and they got up to 20 miles a day out of the critters until near Pincher Station, then the hills slowed them down to 10.

Ritchie followed the trail to Cranbrook, which wasn't much then, and on to busy Fort Steele, the mining town with navigation on the Kootenay. In 1897 he was at Windermere all decked out as the stage driver for Fulmer and Carefoot. Mr. Ritchie could recall little about Fulmer but he remembered Carefoot, well-known around Banff, had a horse ranch at Grand Valley. A right smart thing for a fellow who had an interest in the Cranbrook to Golden Stage.

This apparatus, pulled by four horses carried up to eight passengers. Most were prospectors. Mr. Ritchie said the coach was "just like a big democrat with a high seat in the front, a tail rack for luggage and a high boot at the front where the mail was left."

Fort Steele was about the busiest place along the line. It was also served by pack horses from Sandpoint, Idaho, some navigation from Jennings, Montana and freight teams from Golden.

These freighters traveled in convoys of three. This was both for company and protection for the shipments. The only protection the cargoes needed was from the drivers who were inclined on occasion to warm themselves of an evening, when they bunked under the wagons, by removing staves from certain barrels,

cutting little holes into said barrels to relieve the pressure, then replacing the staves.

Seems a fellow could do right well by himself of a chill evening. The whiskey came in 45 gallon barrels to the load.

Mr. Ritchie, of course, tells of that from hearsay. He hauled mail, express and passengers. If he had any cargo of the other type it was usually inside the passengers.

Ritchie handled the job alone and it was quite a trip. He was busier than a bus driver. He'd drive from Cranbrook to Wasa, 24 miles, then change horses. Next change was at Canal Flat, 28 miles, then Windermere, 30 miles, Brisco 50 miles, the Hog Ranch, 26 miles and then on to Golden. On route he'd spend the first night at Canal Flat, the second at Brisco.

The Stage stopped running in 1899, a year after the Crowsnest Pass branch of the C.P.R. went through. The Fulmer-Carefoot stage, that is. Mr. Ritchie thought Kimpton of Windermere ran a Golden to Windermere and Windermere to Cranbrook relay until the Golden to Cranbrook railway was built.

Alex Ritchie drove a team for H.E. Forster until 1903 then he worked for Randolph Bruce at the Paradise Mine.

The Ritchie's owned the Chamberlain Ranch and the Hammond Ranch from 1915 to 1935 when they sold the Chamberlain Ranch to Ken Marples. In 1927 he was married for a second time and built what was later the Dr. Coy house, then the Ian Weir home. (Strands Restaurant 2010.) They later lived on a small farm on Westside Road at Goldie Creek. (Little Royal Antler). He retired in 1946 and in 1951 they moved to Cranbrook.

Ritchie said a problem in the early days was trying to cash a cheque...one man said he would at 50% commission.

From- Furrows and Foothills
by Ken Liddell
August 1953

A Scientist Looks at Trout

by N. Vernon Wood
March 1945, "Valley News"

I got thinking of past fishing trips. I remember the time when trout for eating purposes was about as welcome as a flock of yellow jackets at a nudist convention, and how Sawbuck Smith forced a change of diet.

Smitty and I had sold ourselves down the river to a pair of Ichthyologists, which is the word they would have used to describe themselves. They came from some scientific institution or other and their mission in life was to study, weigh, measure, photograph and generally pry into the life and morals of trout, especially lake trout, only they called them Christivomer Namaycush. Imagine.

So Sawbuck and I packed a camp outfit on the cayuses and herded our scientists to Devils Lake, where Christy, what you call 'ems, run as high as 40 lbs. on the fin. We arrived just as a couple of Mounties and half a dozen local sports were pulling out after an unsuccessful attempt to locate the mortal remains of Walking Buffalo, a Stony Indian, who had gone through the rotten spring ice a couple of weeks earlier.

For the next ten days we fished. We also lived, ate, breathed and dreamed fish. Those scientific birds certainly had one track minds and the track was laid on fish, constructed of fish and traveled from fish to fish. And the hell of it was that our Pilgrims had bought the grub stake and on the theory that we would have plenty of fish, had omitted to stock up on beans and bacon and bully beef. It got to the point where I used to examine my face anxiously every morning. Not that I liked my face so much, but that I expected gills to break out.

One evening as we loafed around the campfire, Sawbuck turned the conversation to the late unlamented Walking Buffalo.

"The old son of a b.... Should be clean for once anyway," he said. "I'll bet the day

he went through the ice was the first time he'd been wet for twenty years." The Scientists were not amused and tried to bring the talk back to the life span of Christy, but Smitty broke in with " You know why them guys from town didn't find the corpse ? Because them big trout eat him. I betcha he didn't last moren two, three days, even if he was big an' plenty greasy." He kept this up until we crawled into our sleeping bags.

Next day, Sawbuck brought in a trout specimen that was fairly large and very heavy for its length and girth. After carefully weighing and measuring it, the boss scientist began to dissect it, to check on its feeding habits and so on. Suddenly he called us to the split log table we had made for him to work on. Reposing among the usual mess of half-digested cray fish, fingerlings and bugs was a dollar watch, three bachelor buttons and a piece of dirty red flannel.

Smitty took one look and said, " Walking Buffalo, by gawd ", " I've seen that old Ingersol of his a hundred times. Look on the back and see if it hasn't W.B. scratched on it. "

Sure enough it had. An hour or so later, the boss man called me to his tent. " Tex, how abut proceeding to the railway with a pack pony and procuring a supply of meat in cans etc. It has occurred to me that our diet has become somewhat restricted and monotonous. "

As I was saddling up, I asked Smitty how he'd managed to stuff his watch and other exhibits down that trout. " The watch was easy" he grinned, " I just stuck it in his gullet an' shook hell out of him, but that chunk of my underpants sure took some coaxin !! "

(Museum files)

Invermere , B.C.- May 30, 1925 **By B.G. Hamilton**

I had a long conversation this afternoon with Martin Morigeau, son of Baptist Morigeau, born on the east side of Windermere Lake in June 1888. He was educated in the mission School at St. Eugene Mission and later attended the first school ever erected in Windermere, B. C.

I told him that I had heard that he had been the discoverer of the Indian burial ground on Mrs. Adami's point, on the east side of Lake Windermere. He said that was true. He told me the circumstances were as follows :

It must have been about 1904 when out practicing with my .22 rifle one day I shot at a fish hawk. I hit it and it seemed to me from where I stood that the wounded bird sat down on a round stone. I went down the bank to pick the bird up and found that the stone was a skull. The other bones of the body were lying about. The body lay between bark with the head up towards the top of the hill. There were other bones lying about and remains of other bodies. They all appeared to be between bark. I went over and told Jimmie McLeod, the man who owned the place as to what I had found and also told him that there were things lying about. Amongst other things there seemed to be ornaments of copper , brass and such like around the necks of the skeletons. I did not think they were Shuswap. I do not know whether they were the Kootenay or not, but I am inclined to think they were members of a tribe who were here before the Kootenay came in. They and the Kootenay were deadly enemies. I do not know their names in English but the Kootenay call them a word I cannot spell. It sounds like " Koo-yu-kay." They are supposed to be all dead now except possibly two of them. One of them is a fellow called Bert Stone of St. Eugene Mission who is said to be descended from them through his mother. His father was a Kootenay. Then there is also the wife of Louis Arbel. Her name is Madeleine. Who is also thought to be descended from them.

About two weeks after my discovery of the bones , I went back with Percy Lake of Athalmer and gathered up some fourteen of the skulls of the skeletons I had discovered in 1904. We took them down to Athalmer. The jaws were of great size. The lower ones which we tried would fit over the jaw of any man we tried them on in Athalmer.

(Museum files)

The Lagrandeurs

Emery and Mose LaGrandeur first came to the valley from Pincher Creek, Alberta in 1922. Dad (Emery) trapped in the Kootenays with Harry Bone. He did stampede work and played violin in Gladys Pitts Orchestra. He lost his violin in a fire that destroyed the Pitts home in Windermere. He left the valley in the early 1930's and took a mechanics course in Quebec. (He spoke fluent French.) He next worked in Trail where he met and married my mother (also from Pincher Creek) in 1935. Brother Monty and I were born in 1937 and 1939. Dad joined the Air Force during the Second World War and our family returned to Pincher Creek. When the war ended, the family moved back to the valley. Dad worked at Gertie Tegarts Garage and for Simon Ronacher for a short time before starting his own garage in Windermere. I graduated from the Calgary General Hospital in 1959 and worked in Invermere for a year at which time I met Frank (who was with the R.C.M.P.) We married and moved to Nelson where I worked in Public Health. In 1967 we moved to Richmond and I went back to University and got a BSN. I worked in critical care and was Head Nurse in ICU for three years. I took my Masters Degree in counseling and have had my own business for many years. When Frank retired we bought property and built in Langley. We have five acres, raise sheep and have border Collies. I will retire in November 2002 and plan to teach skiing. We have two sons and one grandchild.

(By Julie LaGrandeur Denis)

The Wehrli's

Hulda and Robert Wehrli were born in Switzerland. They met on a ship traveling to the USA in 1933. A shipboard romance ! They were married in Invermere in 1936 and

shortly after moved to their farm in Brisco, which they named " Journey's End. " They remained in Brisco throughout their married life, except for about five years in the 1950's when they lived in Radium. Mom was a book-keeper with Stone and Gillis Sawmills. Dad worked as a logger and on the planer in Brisco. He also enjoyed prospecting and worked in a local mine for awhile. Farming was always his first love. "They sold the farm so that we would have access to high school. It was a most difficult decision for them and a sad day for all of us. At that time, there were no school busses to Invermere and they were adamant that we have an education. Both my sister and I were born in Invermere and attended schools in Brisco (a typical one room school, now in Invermere as part of their museum) Edgewater and Invermere. I went to Fort Langley for one year and when I came home, there was a school bus to Edgewater ! Dad passed away in 1986 and Mom in 1998, aged 82 and 94 respectively. Many anecdotal stories of my parents are in a "Brisco and Spillimacheen.... A History. "

(by Ursula Wehrli Recksiedler)

(compiled by Yvonne McKay Doane in
"Old Ghosts" June 14, 2002)

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(compiled by - Sandy McKay)