

STORIES FOR THE MALCOLM/ARDOCH LAKE COLLECTION

Here are some ice stories from Bob Watkins.

Les Grant who owned Fortune Lake Lodge was a good friend of the Watkins. In the winter Les would come to Malcolm Lake to cut ice for his icehouses. He would use the chain saw and cut the shape of the blocks but not cut right through. Bob and Ronnie M. were to use the ice chisel and cut it on through and then get the blocks out. Ronnie was standing on the ones that Les had already marked; he was chiselling around the edges of the blocks and didn't notice that he was back to where he started. He had cut his block loose and it was floating with him standing on it.

Another time, Les came down to the lake wanting to know if there was enough ice for blocks. Bob didn't know the answer so he went out with an ice pick to find out. Les was on shore and Bob picked only a little way out when Bob broke through into the water. He was standing in water on a muddy bottom up to his waist and hoisted himself back up to the ice. Les waited until Bob got out, said "Thanks for checking the ice!" and drove home.

Sometimes the freeze-up of Malcolm Lake would be glare ice and you could see the bottom clearly. On one such occasion, Bob, Doug Watkins and Leo Kenny decided to take their vehicles out on the ice to play around. Bob had a '46 pickup truck. The guys drove out and had made a lot of "donut" twirls. After a few minutes, they met over beside the dam for a chin-wag. They noticed that the ice was slowly caving in and they had better get off. Bob and Doug were careful to edge their trucks out of the area and get to shore. Leo "gunned" his vehicle but it just sat their spinning on the glare ice. The tires were so hot, they were burning a hole in the ice. Meanwhile, Bob and Doug were on shore enjoying Leo's frantic effort. Eventually, Leo calmed down and gave it a little gas to get moving to shore.

We usually had a warm spell in March which left water on top of the ice. On one of those occasions I was going across the lake by snow-machine through the shallow channel near Don and Brenda Martin's to check my minnow traps. There was a strong wind that had blown the water on the ice into big puddles. When I got part way, the snow-machine sank with me on it; there was only a couple of inches of ice there. I was wet to my waist. The only thing dry, was my hat! When I crawled out, I realized that the strong wind was making it too cold for me to get back home. The nearest place was where they were building the big log house out by the road. Luckily, guys were working on the house. Harold P. told me to take his truck home, so I did.

When I got in the house I asked Ina to run a hot bath as I was really cold. After I warmed up, I got my chest waders, a long rope and took the tractor and trailer over to the channel. I crawled out on the ice, dropped the rope and hooked onto the snow-machine. I jerked it out on shore. I loaded it into the trailer and headed home. I figured it would be ruined unless I got it looked at right away. I took the snow-machine to Winston Haines the same day. He pulled out the plugs, dried it out a bit and started it up. Lucky for me...it didn't hurt that machine...or me either!

THE CATTLE DRIVE by Ina Watkins

In the late 1930's and 1940's there was an event near Malcolm Lake that many people may not know about. In the fall of each year, an auctioneer named Charlie Hollinger would come to MacDonald's barn in Ardoch. All the farmers from the area would bring the cattle that they did not want to keep over the winter. Sometimes it was because they had too many to feed; sometimes it was because they had an ugly one they didn't like. The auctioneer would check each animal, offer a price and make deals. The farmers were responsible for getting the animals to Lavant Station for shipment by train to Toronto where Mr. Hollinger would take them to the Stock Market or Toronto Sales Barn. At Lavant Station there were corrals to keep the cattle until loading time.

The cattle drive would begin and guys would walk the purchased cattle from the different communities. Ina remembers being at school in Plevna when the cattle would be passing through heading to Ompah and then Lavant Station. The children liked to look out at the procession, but kept close to the door in case one of the livestock would get out of the group.

