

Travel

In the years following World War II, Park budgets were restricted. The wardens were issued pickup trucks, but because of shortages of ethylene glycol (antifreeze), and very limited budgets for snow removal, the trucks were put into storage from October to April. The west side road from Silver Grove to Boundary was not plowed in winter. Travel reverted to horses and a number of different conveyances. Cutters, logging sleighs, caboose, and my dad's favorite, a single horse and Hudson's Bay toboggan.

An exception to this list of conveyances was sled dogs. Warden Shorty Harrison assembled and trained a team of dogs. Some of them were crossed with wolves (wolf dogs). Dogs were much faster than horses for light patrol work, but special skill was required to drive them.

Also, wardens in the district of Crean and Kingsmere Lakes used freight canoes in summer.

Horses

Boundary District about 1944

My dad heard unusual noises from the horse pasture. When he went to check, he found one of the horses with its neck ripped open. It had been panicked by something (probably a bear) and had crashed into the fence or a sharp branch that had opened a large wound. It hadn't bled much but the wind pipe and jugular vein were hanging out of the wound. Dad got the horse into the barn and called Chief Warden George Davies for advice. It was spring and the roads were good. George made the trip from Waskesiu to Boundary in record time. The horse seemed otherwise okay so they would try and sew up the wound. The horse was immobilized as best they could. A large needle and some linen thread were secured from my mother's sewing kit. It took several hours fighting the scared and uncooperative animal to make a few crude stitches and close the wound. The only disinfectant available was a bottle of 'medicinal brandy'. The wound was washed with brandy and a measure of it was mixed with warm water and given to the horse. George decided the horse wasn't the only one needing something to relax from the ordeal. A good measure was reserved for the two would be veterinarians. The horse survived.

Boundary District 1943

My dad had recently joined the Warden Service and was scheduled to meet with his new boss Chief Warden George Davies. It was agreed that each of them would travel, George from Waskesiu and my dad from Boundary, and meet at a patrol cabin midway across the 57 trail. My dad was travelling with an open sleigh and a team of horses. It was an extremely cold day and the first time he had travelled that route. He was getting cold, but thinking he was near the meeting place he pressed on. It was farther than he thought and by the time he arrived he was shaking uncontrollably and becoming hypothermic. Had George not been there to meet him and make a fire, he would have undoubtedly perished. A rookie mistake.

Sturgeon Crossing winter 1951

Following the forest fire of 1950, the Park opened the burned area for logging. Burned over trees are dead, trunks scorched, branches burned off, but they can be harvested for lumber as long as it's done the first winter before the wood boring bugs get into them. As district warden of the burned area, my dad was responsible to supervise the logging and scale the timber cut. Loggers paid permit fees based on the quantity of material harvested. Piles of logs or lumber were measured with a specially graduated scaling rule. The result was marked on the pile with a lumberman's crayon and recorded on a special

tally sheet. When the tally was totaled, it determined the permit fees. My dad left home early one morning with his scaling gear, travelling to the logging camp with a team of horses and sleigh. Several hours later, the horses came galloping back into the yard, but no sign of my dad. My mother and my brother Dick caught up the horses and set out to retrace my dad's route. At every turn of the trail, they expected to find him hurt or worse. That didn't happen. At the camp, they found him in the camp kitchen finishing his lunch and just ready to settle into a serving of pie and coffee compliments of the camp cook. Dad had been working a considerable distance away from where he had tied his horses. He was totally oblivious to the fact they had broken away and gone home without him.

Wardens had their favorite horses. My dad had two I remember.

Buck came by his name honestly because of his buckskin color and because he liked to give his rider a few little buck jumps each morning when he was first mounted. Once the morning ceremony was out of the way he was a reliable mount with great endurance. Dad used Buck both at Boundary and Sturgeon Crossing.

Sparky was a horse with a sense of humor. Any time you would enter his stall, he would just accidentally on purpose lean your way and push you against the wall. A poke in the ribs would move him away. When being saddled, he would take a big breath of air expanding his girth and preventing you getting the cinch tight, resulting in a loose saddle. The trick was to wait until he had to exhale and yank the cinch tight. My dad used him both to ride as a saddle horse and to pull the Hudson's Bay toboggan. Sparky was with us at both Sturgeon Crossing and Silver Grove.

Christmas trip to Prince Albert

When we lived at Sturgeon Crossing, shopping was limited to Lemire's General Store at Park Valley and Godin's General Store in Big River. But, with Christmas approaching we really wanted a trip to 'the big city', Prince Albert (PA).

The wardens' trucks went into storage in October. One was left at Rabbitt Cabin for emergencies and for trips just like this. So for our Christmas trip, we got up in the wee small hours of the morning to harness and hook the horses, light a fire in the caboose stove, and head off for the four hour trip to Rabbit Cabin. There warden Emmett Millard would have the truck ready. The horses would be fed, watered, and put in the barn. With the Park truck, we would set out on the forty mile trip to Prince Albert. If travel went well, we would arrive in PA about the time the stores opened. The truck would be parked behind Eaton's Department Store and our bulk grocery order would be passed to Eaton's grocery department to be filled.

Then began our day: a trip to the doctor's office, the bank, and many of the stores along Central Avenue. When the shopping bags got full, it was back to Eaton's to add to the gathering pile in their warehouse. Lunch at Wing's Cafe was a novelty since we lived where there were no restaurants. We did more shopping and finally ended up back at Eaton's to load the mountain of goods gathered there: cases of canned goods, bags of flour and sugar, a big box of apples and cases of Christmas oranges. All these essentials were required to carry us through until spring. The load was carefully covered with horse blankets so none of the precious goods would freeze on the way home.

We headed back to Rabbit cabin where Signa Millard would always have a meal for us and many cups of her excellent coffee. Signa was of Scandinavian descent and her coffee pot was always on. She made it camp style, boiled, and it was recognized as being the best around. All our goods would be transferred

to the box on the back of the caboose and again carefully covered. With horses hooked and homeward bound, we would arrive about daylight. The day wasn't done yet. The horses had to be looked after, house fires lit, and all the day's acquisitions moved indoors. Finally, exhausted, we fell into beds some thirty hours after we had left them.

We were ready for Christmas.

Trucks

When Chief Warden George Davies was issued a truck for year around use, the Park considered a heater optional. If he wanted heat, he had to buy the heater and have it installed at his own expense. The same applied if he wanted a radio.

After the war, the wardens of the west side districts got war surplus vehicles. They were later replaced with three quarter ton Fargo pickups. Government procurement did not always ensure getting the best equipment for the task at hand. The Fargo trucks were big and cumbersome and were not equipped with four wheel drive or a winch even though all the roads on that side of the Park were dirt or mud. My dad always envied the Provincial Department of Natural Resources officers who were issued much more suitable four wheel drive Willys Jeep trucks.

In the spring or during rainy weather, travelling the Park roads meant learning the science of getting stuck and unstuck. Warden Emmett Millard developed his own system for unsticking the Fargo trucks. The Fargo had a protruding hub on the rear wheels. With his system, a chain would be hooked into the wheel, wrapped around the hub and extended out in front of the truck where it was hooked to a metal rod hammered into the ground. In low gear, the chain would wrap around the hub winching the truck forward. There was only room on the hub for a couple of wraps and the chain had to be reset every few feet. It was a slow but effective way to get unstuck.