**Travel developments**

Excerpts from *Reflections from Across the River: A History of the Area North of Athabasca,* published by the Northern Heights Historical Society in 1994



Page 11: Athabasca Landing **ferry** installed in 1906. Upgraded 1913.

Page 14-15: 1906-1913 **Roads.** Petition for construction of a truck road to Calling Lake using Thompson’s Road built the previous summer. This would give a direct, high road all the way and eliminate the hills (Payne’s, Gauthier’s and Howick’s) except the one on the north bank of the river [and encourage settlement north of the river]… **Since settlement was soon to be started at Calling Lake,** this would be another reason to have an extension of the railway across the river. However, the last portion of the road was never built.

Page 32: “A jolly fishing party left from the neighbourhood on Tuesday last with two teams for **Calling Lake.** In the party… They will be gone a week or more, staying until they get “good and ready” to come home.” *Northern News,* December 19, 1913.

Page 33: **Calling River** settlement. “Settlement in the Calling River are had its beginnings some years before the DGT line reached the junction where the Calling River flows into the Athabasca River. For many years previously, the area had been known to travellers on the Athabasca River, and before that to the Cree who passed through on their way to Lac La Biche for supplies. It was also the site of distribution during the signing of Treaty 8 in 1899. Charles Mair, secretary of the Half-Breed Scrip Commission, in his book *Through the MacKenzie Basin,* describes the Treaty Commission’s journey from Edmonton. They left Athabasca Landing June 3 and returned September 18, 1899, after the signing of the famous treaty. He wrote of their **stop at Calling River – “Kitoṓsepe” – on September 14, 1899,** where **1843 certificates for scrip were distributed, only 48 being for land.** He also wrote of an interview there with Marie Rose Gladue, then about 111 years old, who “remembered the **buffalo as plentiful at Calling Lake, that it was a mixed country, and that their supplies in those days were brought by way of Isle a la Cross, Beaver River and Lac la Biche.**” *Northern News* reported that Peter Pruden, a farmer there, had arrived about **1899.** Dominion Land Office homestead records show applications after 1914.

Page 118: 1914-1919 **Wabasca Trail:** a winter road used for hauling freight, followed the river to just south of Martin Hein’s Stopping Place, then angled northwest, followed Deep Creek a ways, then headed north over frozen muskeg. (Route still visible in 1993) Crossed Winter Lake, passed east of McCullough Lakes, joined the Calling Lake Trail at Five Mile Creek, five miles south of Calling Lake. From there, north to Wabasca.

Page 119: **Road to Calling Lake**. “Several homesteaders have been engaged in the self-imposed task of **clearing a roadway for the freighters hauling fish from Calling Lake.** This will mean a saving of three miles and is situated north of Thorn’s Store. (Harry Thorn opened the first store north of the river in fall 1913.) The new road is also being made with the idea of obviating the big hill close to Shank’s stopping place, which is encountered on the old route. The boys deserve the benefit they will undoubtedly receive as soon as the bulk of fish traffic is diverted to the new roadway.” *Northern News,* January 8, 1915

Page 127: In 1917, Oscar W. Crawford was general road foreman for Public Works Dept north of Athabasca, according to a letter at the PAA that estimated cost of $300 to repair three burned bridges north of the river.

Page 161: **Ice fishing at Calling Lake** - Among the ways to bring in extra cash. A few sold their catch right on the lake, often to James McIntosh. At times they packed the fish in ice and hauled to Athabasca. Jeff Cocke hauled to Edmonton to be shipped as far away as New York.

Page 162: “In 1926 **James McIntosh** started an enterprise at **Calling Lake** called “**Fresh Fish in Winter.**” He and **Mr. Menzie** were the first two fish buyers at Calling Lake to purchase fish from commercial fishermen. Later, **Stan Crawford** was a buyer, and others later still.”

In the early 1920s fishermen were paid 1.5 cents per pound. By late 1920s, the price was 3.5 cents. Some fishermen delivered to Athabasca by team on the first winter trail, known as **“fish camp trail.”** It went west of Calling Lake to the Athabasca River, and down the river to Athabasca. Fishing season usually opened December 1 and closed end of March.

Every fishing outfit consisted of three men. One looked after the horses, one cooked, one had to wash, dry and mend al the woollen mitts, which were used all day and had to last all winter. They had to have a license and were entitled to 600 yards of netting – 5.5-inch cotton-mesh nets. In evening, the had to put floats and leads on the nets and repair any nets torn during the day. Cotton nets ripped easily. It was a full-time job, seven days a week from 8 a.m. until dark. It took two hours with **team and caboose** just to get where nets were set. They built the cabooses by nailing canvas over a framework. They all had airtight heaters on them, to keep the fish from freezing and warm the fishermen on the lake.

Many hardships. Had to build log barns for horses, log shacks for themselves, all close to the lake. Feed for horses, wood, water from the lake. Horses watered through a hole in the ice. When lakes not frozen hard enough for horse teams, dog teams hauled the fish to camp.

Lawrence Devlin had a team break through the ice when coming back to camp one night. He lost one horse nad saved one. Jim Webb got the drowned horse out and used it to feed his dog team. At time 25-30 outfits were fishing. When looking across the lake, cabooses could not be seen; only smoke going straight up.

**By 1932 the lakes were fished out quite heavily.** That year Calling Lake was **restocked** with 13.25 million whitefish eggs from a government hatchery at Slave Lake. Soon fishing resumed.

A train of horse teams hauled the fish to Athabasca, making a round trip in four days. To speed delivery to distant markets, Arthur Brown of Colinton, AB used Reo trucks, meeting teams from Calling Lake at Kirkpatrick’s Stopping Place.

In **1934 McIntosh bought an airplane. Joe Irwin, pilot, could pick up 700 pounds of fish right on the ice and make a round trip to Athabasca and back in one hour.** In Athabasca, the fish were boxed and sent to Edmonton by truck, then on rail express to New York. Fishermen got five cents a pound; in New York they sold for over a dollar a pound.

Page 257: Petitions continue for bridge and free ferry, and free ferry begun 1930, and a cage installed in 1934 so people and goods could be shipped during spring and fall, between river crossings and ice crossings. 1936 news article says “A population of upwards of 2,000 is marooned except for a passenger cage that runs over a ferry cable carrying three or four persons and takes about 20 minutes to do the precarious return trip.”

Page 258: Northside area, I.D. #697, renamed “Local Improvement District #122” in 1930 and Art La Porte became general foreman until 1943, working with many local residents on road making and improvement. **Work on the Calling lake road continued in the 1930s.** Gauther’s bridge, two miles north of Athabasca, burned in spring 1932 and was never rebuilt; other routes found. Stopping places included **Bill and Margaret McPherson farm,** about 1933-1938, along original winter road to Calling Lake. Their farm was the **first as travellers journeyed south from Calling Lake.**

Page 263: **Anna Margaret (Devlin) Parker** re 1930s: … **Dad fished for many winters in Calling Lake** – hauling **fish in a sleigh and living in a caboose.** Times were tough!...

**Page 431: “Lovely Calling Lake Opened to Motorists by New Highway:** The new Calling Lake road is now passable for cars and a number of people have been up fishing and bathing in the lovely old Calling Lake, which promises to be one of Northland’s finest lakeside resorts. 150 miles straight North from Edmonton, the lake is teeming with the finest whitefish in Canada and for years large shipments have been made to New York & Chicago… Appreciation for the good work of road foreman Art Laporte, who stretched his appropriation to make the trail into a highway. Our fishermen also remember how the Edmonton trucks picked up the fish at the nets daily last winter, a convenience never before possible till the good work done on the road. Calling Lake is calling city tourists for camping, bathing, fishing and yachting de luxe.” (quoting *Athabasca Echo*, August 2, **1940)**

People who had to travel the long distance between Athabasca and Calling Lake with horses required two days to make a one-way trip. Many welcomed the stopover at **Max and Mary Shwaga’**s farm, about half way, for a time the last farmhouse along the road. After James McIntosh of Calling Lake purchased a truck, he often left it at the Shwaga arm and drove the rest of the way home with a team of horses. Some residents traveled to the Shwagas with a team and then caught a ride to Athabasca and back in the truck, returning to Calling Lake the next day.

Page 432: October 1945 meeting of Big Coulee residents called on government to take immediate action on building a bridge, but were told other areas in more urgent need. January 1947 Athabasca Board of Trade communicated, but was told entirely out of question due to extreme shortage of steel and greater urgency elsewhere.

Pages 452-3: **Moosehorn Coffee Shop,** owned and operated by **Chester and Hjordis Overholt** (Photos scanned) and their family, opened in the fall of **1948.** The coffee shop was located along the Calling Lake road on NW 08-70-22-W4 (land owned in 1990s by Craig Crawford – the buffalo pasture west of paved Highway 813). It was right along the bend in the old Calling Lake road, where it turned and ran back to Kidd’s Cabin Creek (south of later gas plant along Hwy 813). At that bend, the winter road from some sawmills met the main road. Moosehorn was built to serve the truckers hauling lumber from the area to Athabasca. Also served fishermen and others who travelled to and from Calling Lake. It was named Moosehorn Coffee Shop because **someone had shot a moose at that site and left a big set of antlers there. The antlers were on display outside the café.** A **well was dug to supply fresh water.** The building was erected fall 1948. A log cabin near McCullough Lakes (used years earlier by a crew of men who cleared the roadway to Calling Lake) with a roof of logs covered with birch bark or tar paper and a layer of clay was dismantled and hauled to the coffee shop site, reassembled, a lumber and tarpaper roof put on, and made ready to serve as the shop. There was a long dining area, a kitchen, and bedrooms. On one side of the dining area was a long counter with a bench to seat about 10 people. Mrs. Overholt served full, home-cooked breakfasts, dinners and suppers. She often woke in the morning to see the distant lights of an approaching lumber truck and had fresh hot pancakes and coffee ready on the wood-burning stove by the time the truck stopped outside. Hjordis remembered making a lot of doughnuts, which seemed to be everybody’s favourite – people passing through would often buy some to take home. A full meal cost $2 to $2.25 and pie and coffee about 25 cents.

Page 453: **Gravel roads.** Gylvia De Ford became general road foreman in 1943, with limited funds. Things began to improve in **1944-45**, with roads getting their first coat of gravel. The gravel was loaded out of the pits with fresnos pulled by horses, then loaded onto loadlifters, deposited into trucks and spread on the roads.

**Road to Calling Lake** was east of the present road and started at Deep Creek. Four-day return trip, hard at best – just a trail with corduroy over the muskegs. The very worst spots on the road were “improved” – the Big Muskeg, 1.5 miles across, was corduroyed but no dirt on top. Jakie Gislason mixed pine tar, creolin, creosote and grease (often bear) and smeared this on the horses to discourage flies… When the road became impassable, Jakie would leave the wagon, put the mail on the pack horse and ride to Calling Lake. Often had to pull a mired horse or wagon out of muskeg. Later by cars and trucks, Ford tractor. 1940-46 he also took mail once a month to Pelican Portage, 10-day round trip by boat or kayak I summer, or by pack and saddle horse, in winter with three ponies hitched tandem to a toboggan. Mont Kirkpatrick, then postmaster at Deep Creek, delivered to Calling Lake then. Oct 1961, he began to make trips twice a week to Big Coulee and Calling Lake. Delivered mail to Calling Lake for 48 years. Made and sold snowmobiles, motorcycle

Pages 531-534: “Without a doubt, the **opening of the bridge across the Athabasca River on June 9, 1952** was a most important event in the lives of northsiders. After years of waiting, the farming community could deliver produce, carry on business, and attend functions without delay, year-round. It was predicted the northside would show tremendous progress within 10 years.“ Extensive coverage of bridge opening and construction, which had run Dec. 1, 1950 to March 31, 1952. Replaced ferry system in place since 1906. Ferry dismantled in 1951. Cable cage added April 1934.

Pages 731-2: **Joe and “Buffalo” Day were instrumental in establishing a road between Calling Lake and the main road****.** They surveyed 30 miles of the main road. Work on this road was done manually and completed in 1933. Their **son Ed** was raised at Calling Lake and went to school there, taking correspondence for two years under tutorship of his mother. Started grade school at age 8. At 15, began working for Ellefson Lumber as a caterpillar operator, skidding logs for the sawmill. Later worked for other sawmill operators and began to work as a heavy duty equipment operator on road construction for different contractors. In 1969, his father, Joseph, his brother Gerald and Ed started big game guiding during the fall, which they did for six years. In 1975, Ed became a partner in Quint Holdings Ltd. – a road and oilfield construction business.

Page 741: Al (Boomer) Adair announced in April 1987 that **Calling Lake and Wabasca would be linked with a direct road,** 170 km, partly result of lobbying, including a 75-vehicle caravan from Athabasca to Wabasca to present a petition for all-weather road to Sandy Lake. 170-km. *Athabasca Advocate* April 21, 1987 quoted Adair saying road should be ready for full travel by early 1990s and possibly winter road in use earlier.

Page 756: “The end of the decade was marked by the **opening of the Wabasca-Calling Lake road on Sept. 23, 1989.”** Distance from Athabasca to Wabasca on Secondary Highway 813 was now 180 km, improving access for tourism, forestry and the oil and gas industry

Page 803: **New bridge across Athabasca River opened Sept. 1, 1993**. – Pleasant View Road, off Secondary Hwy 813 going east, was started in 1989 by County of Athabasca. Some of Frank Crawford’s equipment used. In 1992, the road was completed to the Calling Lake Connector Road (log haul route to AlPac) – 13 miles from the highway. Final portion built by Dept of Transportation and Utilities, Athabasca. It is one mile beyond the end of Pleasant View Road to the new bridge over the Athabasca River.