

Place Names

Sawmill Bay

Sawmill Bay is a local name that does not appear on any map, either official or unofficial but it is one that is familiar to many people in the park, few of whom can pinpoint its location. All agree that the site was on the west side of the lake, north of the international boundary.

There are, however, a select few who do know the location of Sawmill Bay. It is less than four kilometre south of the Peace Park Pavilion by water and is immediately south of Dead Horse Point, the narrowest part of Upper Waterton Lake. The Lakeshore Trail cuts through a portion of the site.

The bay got its name from a commercial operation following the August, 1935 Boundary Creek forest fire. Park managers offered interested individuals a permit to operate a sawmill at this location in order to have the burnt trees removed. A succession of business people jumped at the opportunity. The harvesting of burned-over forest served a dual purpose: removal of the damaged trees and encouragement of new growth and creation of a business opportunity for those willing and able to set up a sawmill on site and sell what lumber and/or fire wood they could salvage. During this period, the majority of year round and summer residents used wood burning stoves and there was a ready clientele willing to pay for fire wood.¹

The cutting of dry timber in national parks had long been permitted by park regulations which limited the area to be harvested to two square miles per permit.² The Boundary Creek forest fire may have provided an exception to the size of the cutting by extending the harvest area to the entire burn site north of the 49th parallel. It was dirty work due to the charred condition of the trees and was undertaken with a great deal of determination with the use of horses. Jobs during the Great Depression were scarce. Logging began in the winter of 1935 and continued through at least 1946.³

In addition to dead trees cut for firewood, whole logs were harvested where possible. Area residents lost no time in getting permits to capitalize on the burned over area. In October, 1935, a small crew of men brought equipment and horses up the lake to the



Edwin Knox displays a piece of sawmill rubble found at the site.

(Photo: Chris Morrison)

location of the August fire and began getting out a large supply of logs for a new church building at Aetna, Alberta, south of Cardston. In December, Herman A. Kenley took his portable sawmill to Aetna and began sawing lumber from the logs “taken from the district where the great forest fire was at Waterton lakes summer.”⁴

By October, 1936, the Gold Brothers were booming logs down from the burn site and Waterton resident Arthur Frederickson, who already had an active wood and coal business in the townsite, had a crew of men cutting logs as well. According to *The Lethbridge Herald*, “the wood problem in Waterton has always reached serious proportions in the middle of a severe winter when wood was previously brought down from the Oil City vicinity....This problem seems to be removed for some time to come for during [the] summer, logs can be boomed down from the new location and during winter can be brought down the ice.”⁵



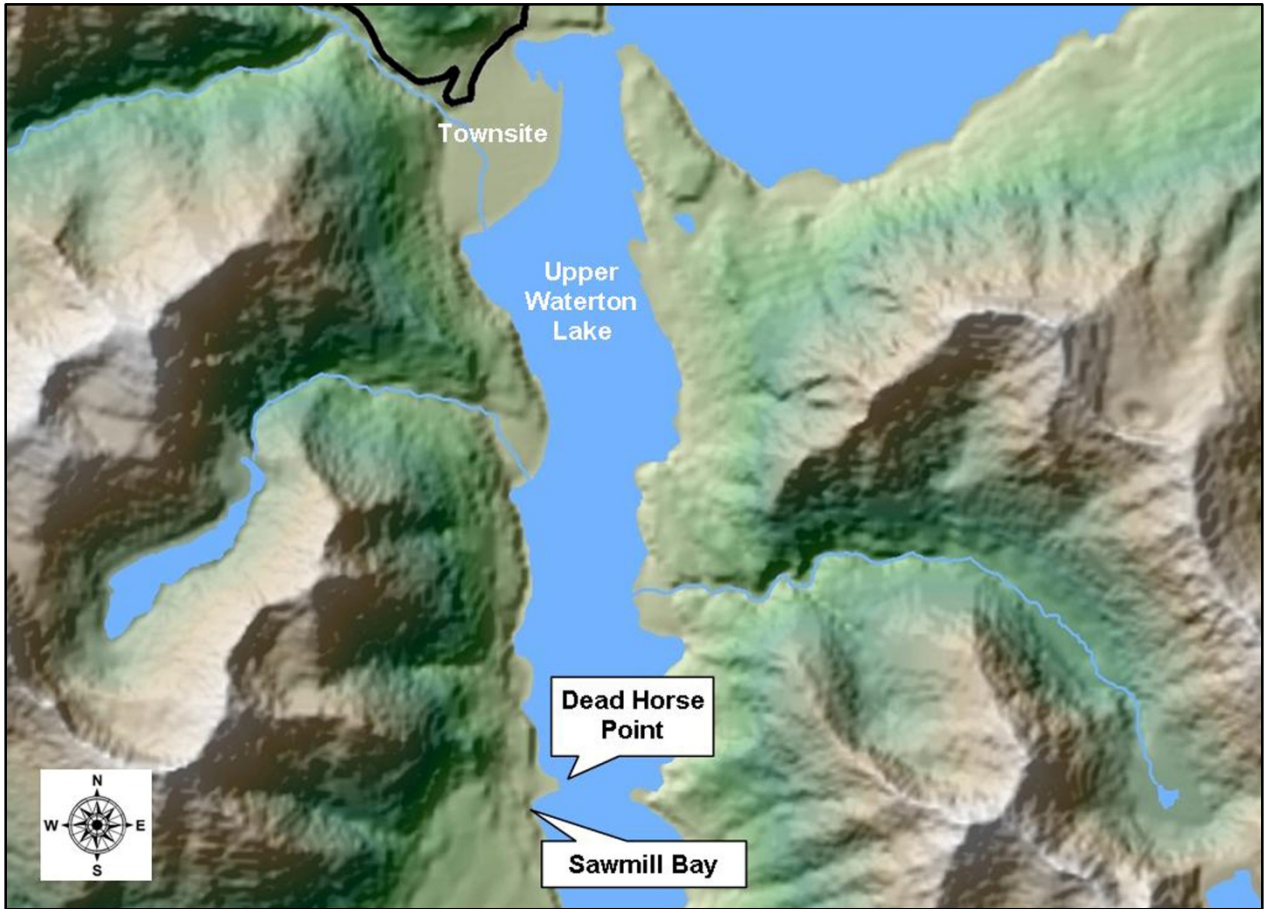
*Despite numerous cleanups over the years, the Sawmill Bay area is still littered with metal refuse.
(Photo: Parks Canada/Edwin Knox)*

By July, 1937, much wood from the Boundary Creek fire was said to have been removed by park residents and district farmers who applied for permits to take the logs and clear the lakeshore of burned trees. At the same time, the underbrush in the fire area was returning to its natural green state.⁶ Natural reforestation would take decades. Evidence of the fire is visible still to the trained eye in the younger forest in that section of the valley.

As the supply of accessible burned timber was reduced, Sawmill Bay was used less as cutters moved south to Boundary Bay where they resumed activity cleaning up the forest. Over

the course of at least 15 years from late 1935 to 1950, a number of men sequentially provided fire wood to residents from the burned area: Gerald Hadfield, Billy McEwen and Peter Larson, Noe Mongeon and Ron Simmons, C. E. Nelson, G. H. Gareau and F. A. Santo.⁷

Aerial photographs taken in 1939 reveal the presence of at least two structures at Sawmill Bay⁸ and today evidence of the mill remains only in the form of metal trash and rubble of crumbling dimension lumber. Over the course of many years, Sawmill Bay, rife with the remnants of mill equipment, was repeatedly cleaned up. In 1960 wardens began clearing the site of rubbish and old lumber.⁹ And again in the late 1980s, some of the metal was dumped in the lake, and some hauled away.¹⁰ Today small pieces of equipment can be still found at the site in the bushes just off the lakeshore trail. The name Sawmill Bay is still used.



¹ Only year round residents used coal and natural gas and propane would not be used for decades to come.

² Order in Council, P.C. 915, 30 April, 1915.

³ Bo Holroyd, *The Holroyd Journals: The Chronicles of a Park Warden 1919-1947*, compiled by Doug Eastcott, *unpublished*, 110. WLNP Archives, Box 111.1, Item 24.

⁴ "Mountain View," *Lethbridge Herald*, Dec. 20, 1935, 11. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 9.

⁵ "Wonderful Waterton," *Lethbridge Herald*, Oct. 22, 1936, 9. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 9.

⁶ "Wonderful Waterton," *Lethbridge Herald*, July 8, 1937. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 9.

⁷ "Wonderful Waterton" (excerpts), *Lethbridge Herald*, Oct. 22, 1936; Dec. 13, 1945; Aug. 15, 1946 and June 29, 1950. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 9.

⁸ Aerial photo no. A.6727-103, Mackenzie Air Services, Oct. 8, 1939, aerial photo collection housed in WLNP reference room.

⁹ Monthly Resource Conservation Reports, 1960. WLNP Archives, Box 114, Item 17.

¹⁰ Unrecorded conversation between Chris Morrison and Rod Kretz, Director and Operations Manager, Waterton Inter-Nation Shoreline Cruise Co. in Waterton, 2015; and telephone conversation, summer 2015, between Edwin Knox, Resource Management Officer II, Parks Canada, with Murray Neville, former park employee, 2015. Both Kretz and Neville personally participated in the site cleanup but at different and unspecified times.