Place Names

Dead Horse Point/Dead Man's Point

Dead Horse Point, a rocky outcrop on the western shore of Upper Waterton Lake, defines the narrowest point of the lake, but the name does not appear on maps. It is directly across the lake from Black Tail Point which is on the eastern shore. Located about one and a quarter kilometres north of the international boundary, Dead Horse Point inspires thoughts of tragic events of the past.

The origin of the name has been associated with at least three different stories. One story about the name's origin was printed in the newspaper in 1928, but went back to an unspecified time and is painfully short on details: "Some years ago when a little logging was being done in the deep forest near here, two heavily harnessed horses, which for some unknown reason had become frightened, shied, broke loose and dashed away through the forest to the cliff edge over which they plunged headlong to instant death in the icy waters below."[1]

Dead Horse Point as seen from the south on Upper Waterton Lake. (Photo: Chris Morrison)

Another version of the location's name went back even farther. "Tradition states that years ago when a hunting party of Plains Indians were camped along Waterton Lakes, one of their horses escaped. The Indians gave chase, the horse raced down a rocky ridge that jutted out into the lake, and when finally cornered by the Indians, the horse plunged off the precipice into the lake and drowned."[2]

The third story was told by Canada Wayne Sommerfeldt.[3] Noting that tour boat commentators over the years have "some good stories about the origin of the name "Dead Horse Point," he pointed out that "none that I've heard are true or not entirely true." Like others, he could not provide a date for the incident that follows but was able to provide other details: "In the wintertime, [those operating a nearby sawmill] had their team of horses in another building up there at the cabin at Boundary Bay. Morning and night they would take the horses down onto the lake, chop a hole in the ice for the horses to drink. In the spring, Fat Hadfield, his name was Gerald Hadfield and he was affectionately known at Fat Hadfield, had had a real nice team of horses. They were

watering them one morning on the ice and the spring break up was just about there. The horses broke loose and ran out on the ice towards that point. Out there, the ice was honeycombed, like it does in the spring and both the horses went through the ice and drowned on that point. After we came back years later, we discovered it was called Dead Horse Point."

Whatever the truth of the naming of the site, the name Dead Horse Point adds a touch of legendary color to that prominent jut of land half way down the lake. The name is still in use.

Dead Man's Point

Another name that was applied to the same site for an indefinite period was Dead Man's Point. Its origin is factual even if use of the name has been abandoned. The story involved Peter Larson, a Danish immigrant and a veteran of both the First and Second World Wars. Upon being discharged, Larson hired on with the park in the summer of 1945 as an assistant park warden.[4] When that job ended in the autumn, Larson joined forces with Bill McEwen, a local old-timer, and purchased the fire wood business from Waterton resident Gerald (Fat) Hadfield. The wood harvest operation was located at Sawmill Bay, immediately south of the point on the west side of Upper Waterton Lake.
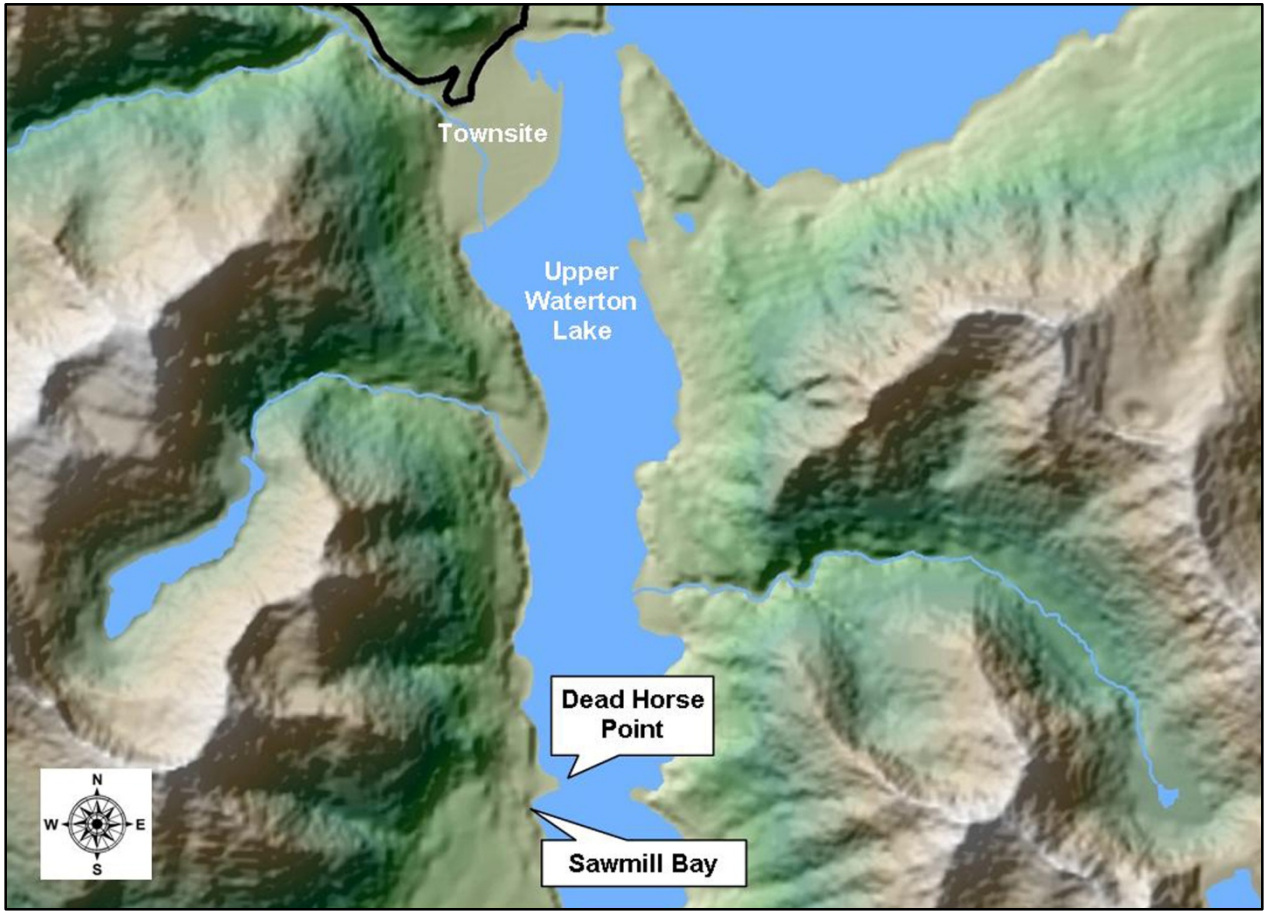
Larson and McEwen left their camp at Boundary Bay one day in September, 1945 with the intention of taking their inboard motor boat about a half mile north of their camp where their horses were corralled and awaited feeding. Almost immediately, and still close to shore, they encountered trouble with the rudder which caused the boat to run in circles. McEwen, who could not swim, grabbed the boat's bow rope and jumped over the side intending to pull the boat ashore. As he did so he called to Larson to cut the engine but his request, apparently, was not heard. The cold water was deeper than McEwen, a non-swimmer, had guessed. The water was up to his arm pits and he was forced to let go of the rope so he could get to shore. Larson then jumped into the lake from the opposite side of the boat where, unbeknownst to him, the water was over a hundred feet deep.

McEwen managed to quickly get to shore where he searched for some kind of long pole to reach his partner. But Larson, heavily clad and wearing a closely buttoned slicker, foundered for only a moment and then disappeared before the surface of the water. McEwen ran to the Boundary Bay warden's cabin to telephone for help. The search efforts of those responding, Warden Bo Holroyd and RCMP Constable Peters, proved fruitless despite hours of continually dragging that area of the lake.[5]

Larson's body was not recovered until July, 1946. The cold and deep water had prevented the body from rising to the surface until then. It was found a mere 200 yards from the scene of the accident on the west side of the lake at Dead Horse Point by John Hindman and Moe Mongeon. The location is the deepest and narrowest part of Upper

Waterton Lake. Coroner, Dr. James Key of Cardston, decided that an inquest was not necessary and the body was taken to Pincher Creek where a funeral service was held.[6] It is not known where Peter Larson is buried. He had no living relatives.[7]

The name Dead Man's Point is no longer in use.

Townsite

Upper Waterton Lake

Dead Horse Point

Sawmill Bay

[1] "Launch Trip on Upper Waterton Lake is Joy Not Soon Forgotten," *Lethbridge Herald*, June 30, 1928, 6. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 6.

[2] Bessie Annand, "Waterton Park is Boating Paradise; Cruise Unfolds Scenic Wonderland," *Lethbridge Herald*, July 27, 1960, 23. WLNP, Box 130, Item 6.

[3] Waterton Park Community Association Oral History Project, interview by Leslie Robertson with Canada Wayne Sommerfeldt, June 28, 1995, WLNP Archives, Box 117, binder.

[4] *Waterton Lakes National Park, Warden Service History to 1970*, ed. Rob Watt, (unpublished manuscript, June 1, 1993).

[5] Transcription of various newspaper reports from Sept. 22, 1945-July 31, 1946. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 6.

[6] The Waterton Lakes National Park cemetery was not developed until 1955.

[7] "Body of Pete Larsen [sic] Found at Waterton," *Lethbridge Herald*, July 31, 1946, page 2. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 6. Email to Chris Morrison from Farley Wuth, curator, Kootenai Brown Pioneer Village: "Unfortunately, the Town's Cemetery records for the period prior to December, 1950 are incomplete due to the records being lost in the Scott Block fire at that time."