

The Fish Road

Here is a brief history of “The Fish Road” that this warm-up shelter is located on.

In 1940 this trail from Mafeking to Steeprock Lake was just a walking trail. From 1940 until 1945 two Englishmen named Bill Blowey and George McClennan were “Draft Dodgers.” To avoid getting drafted for the war they lived near Steeprock Lake and never came out till the war was over. They trapped in the area and had some contacts in Mafeking who would meet them periodically to trade them supplies for the fur that they had caught.

Commercial fishing on Steeprock Lake:

One of the people who used this trail was Cecil Rogers. He always had good horses. He widened the trail enough to get through with horses and sleighs, and soon it became known as “The Fish Road.” Someone had told him that it couldn't be done, so he did it. That's the kind of guy he was. If someone told him something couldn't be done he would do it. Two of the people who worked for Cecil Rogers at this time were Tim and Don Jacobson. From about 1948 till 1950 they would go up to Steeprock Lake in the winters with horses and sleighs to fish. They hauled their fish back to Mafeking every weekend. The main kind of fish that they fished for in Steeprock Lake was Whitefish, although they would take whatever they could catch. They would freeze the fish whole and stack them cross-ways on sleighs and pull them with horse teams to Mafeking to the fish packing plants. These were right next to the railroad tracks, from where the fish were shipped by rail. 4 to 5 foot long fish were common and even 6 foot fish were not unheard of. Later on, some of the people who lived in Dawson Bay used the Fish Road to fish at Steeprock Lake.

Also around the same time in the late 1940's and 1950's Hughie McPhail had a sawmill on the Fish Road that was located about 4.3 miles north of this warm-up.

In the early 1900's the railroad ended at Fishtown which was just South of Novra. Fish were hauled to Fishtown at this time to get shipped by rail. Also during this time people would come by barge from Winnipegosis and get dropped off in the Mafeking area to fish for the winter.

Once the railroad got to Mafeking, Mafeking became the main fish packing location for the area. The fish packing plants were located right by the railroad tracks. From the 1930's to 1950's the Booth Fisheries, Keystone Fisheries, and Armstrong Fisheries (later bought out by BC Packers) were the main packing plants. In the spring they would have "Ice Gangs" who would cut large blocks of ice on Lake Winnipegosis and bring them to huge icehouses by the fish packing plants. The ice was then covered with sawdust so they could keep ice in them all summer to pack fish in. The icehouses at the fisheries also were used to keep supplies cold that came in on the train in the summer. At its peak, there were 5 fish packing plants in Mafeking. Fish were brought with horse teams and sleighs from Lake Winnipegosis, Red Deer Lake, Swan Lake, Steeprock Lake, and even all the way from Cedar Lake to be packed in Mafeking and shipped by rail.

The lower portion of the Fish Road has remained in use as a timber access road and in the early 1990's had a sawmill set up on it. In more recent years the Fish Road has been used as a recreational trail by snowmobilers. This trail is now maintained by North Mountain Riders (est. 1997). Thanks to local sponsors and volunteers this warm-up shelter was constructed in the winter of 1999-2000. It was named the **Fish Road Warm-Up** to commemorate and help preserve the memory of the use of this historic route to haul fish to market.