

OFF TO GILLIES BAY

Named Ee-sum (clear, sandy bottom) in Tla'amin, Gillies Bay has always attracted admirers.

For early Van Anda settlers a trip to Gillies Bay was a welcome, but lengthy, beach destination and quite an adventure!

Violet Seaman (published in PR News 1947) reminisced about her summer expeditions to Texada's west coast as a girl.

After piling their wagon high with tent, blankets, food and games her family would set off from town on their day-long journey.

At times the family walked beside the wagon as the rough, rocky road proved a challenge for their "poor nag" pulling the load.

Priest Lake was the first "refreshment stop" for all as they gathered energy for the trek uphill. Many other "cool springs" along the way helped replenish spirits on a hot day.

Possibly stopping to visit at Hammond's 1890's log house and Burditt's farm, the family pushed westward past the small settlement at Paxton Road.

The mossy bluffs around Cranby Lake promised that the "glittering blue waters" were just a couple of miles away. The children raced ahead to be the first to "dig with bare toes" into the expansive sand flats.

At that time Gillies Bay was quite an isolated paradise. Pitching their tent by the beach in the shelter of a huge fir, the family was rudely awakened at 4 am the next morning by screams and black shadows on the top of their tent. It was, of course, the raucous crows who found delight in playfully sliding down their roof.

Like today, Violet noted that the crows congregated at their "Town Hall" at one corner of the bay, called there by "sentry crows" perched on the tallest trees. "The clamour was deafening."

One summer the children discovered a baby seal pup left alone at low tide. They fed it from a cloth dipped in milk and it became their pet all summer, even joining them on moonlight swims.

Although only a 10 minute drive today, a trip to Gillies Bay still evokes the magic Violet Seaman discovered almost 100 years ago.

Peter Lock

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