

WEST OF THE BLINDMAN  
March 14, 1957

If you would like to have more birds on your premises, and have them in greater variety, there are a number of things you can do, but there is one that will be more effective than all the rest. You can erect nest-boxes and put out food and shoot the English Sparrows and provide nest-building material. All these things will encourage feathered friends, but the thing that really works is to get rid of the cat. The common domestic or house cat is one of the greatest predators of small and not-so-small birds on this continent - and the birds know it. Since I have seen ample and convincing proof of this right in my own front yard, if I had to choose between the family cat and a large number of birds he replaces around the farm buildings, the cat would go. We have no cat so I do not have to make the choice, but I can say that a farm cat is more easily done without than you would believe if you have always kept one.

You might expect that without a cat to control them, the mice would run away with the place. We have found that the mice have been less trouble in recent years than when we had a cat. The fact is that cats kill and eat many other forms of wildlife besides mice, from butterflies to rabbits, and including shrews and weasels, two of the mouse's very worst enemies. Either of these small mammals will kill more mice per day than the average cat, and a shrew or small weasel will go wherever a mouse can go, which is more than a cat can do.

The last cat we owned was a big white fellow called Weasel, because of his resemblance to that animal during his early kittenhood. In his later years he acquired the habit, common to his kind, of disappearing for days on end. Once or twice he limped home looking like he had been through a threshing machine. Finally there came a time when he didn't return at all. And as the weeks and months went by we began to find that we were better off without a cat. There were no more chickadee feathers beside the greenfeed stack; no more scolding by robin and wren and phoebe. The birds increased and the mice got fewer.

The weasels, we know, have been very effective mouse eliminators, and no doubt the shrews have helped in a more undercover way. One pair of weasels stayed for months and became so accustomed to us they were almost tame. One eventually drowned in the stock trough and the other took to stealing eggs - by the dozen. He rolled them out of the nests and across the hen house floor to an opening that led to some secret storehouse accessible only to himself. So far we have never lost any poultry to these bright-eyed, sharp-witted little animals. Just lucky, I guess.

Anyway, we do not contemplate acquiring a cat at any time in the foreseeable future. For myself, if I ever do own a cat again, it isn't going to be of the ordinary mouse and bird-catching variety. It will be a Siamese. I have long admired these fine super-intelligent, Oriental looking animals. Upon my retirement, I shall dip into my reserve in the old sock beneath the mattress and invest in one.

WEST OF THE BLINDMAN  
May 15, 1957

Where is the barefoot boy who used to wade the roadside ditches on the way to school, searching for frogs and frightening millions of tadpoles? He could once be found on any sunny morning in early summer, sauntering along, hands in pockets, picking dandelions with his toes, and flipping them this way and that. Shoeless and carefree, he loved the cool moist feel of the fresh-tilled fields of spring, but found September's stubble less to his liking.

Today he is a rare sight, even on a quiet country road, and if he is seen occasionally, he is usually found to be in the pre-school age group. Twenty to twenty five years ago, a large proportion of all youngsters under the age of fourteen who attended country schools, went barefoot all summer long, indoors or out, at work or at play, at school or at home, and quite often away from home as well.

Not only boys, but many girls too, enjoyed this freedom from foot attire, although they were by no means so keen on it as were the boys. They had to don shoes when the going got rough; their soles wouldn't callous like the boys'. Boys climbed trees, walked rails, stole second, ran backwards, pole vaulted and waded many miles in the course of a day, and when they had to put on their shoes they found their activities much hampered and restricted.

Many kids came barefoot to school before all the snow was gone from the roadsides and with the water ice cold in the ditches; and for all anyone can tell, it didn't hurt them a bit. In our house there was a rule. On the quarter-section across the road there was a hillside spring where the ice piled up all winter long and made a wonderful place for winter play. The rule was that we could go barefoot when the ice had all melted in the spring, or by the 24th of May; whichever came first. This made for some excitement if the weather was warm and it seemed we would see the last of the ice before the King's birthday. We watched it very closely, I can tell you.

Today that rule wouldn't work the same. The spring does not flow at anything like its former volume, and we would be going shoeless along about the first week of May.

There are some disadvantages to unshod feet as I remember. First, the rose bushes. In the woods you had to watch every step, although some boys developed such thick tough soles before midsummer that rose briars never bothered them. Another disadvantage was having to wash your feet every night before bedtime. If it was raining, or had been raining, this was easy. You just went out and ran around in some wet grass somewhere.

Then there were always stubbed toes. Many an adult who grew up in this part of the country can point to blunted digits to this day. Other hazards were rusty nails in grass-covered boards, and bits of broken glass. Looking back, it almost seems that any benefits were pretty well balanced by the drawbacks. Today's kids, if they are wise, will continue

to go about with shoes on. Still, if they do, they will be missing one of childhood's more pleasurable sensations.

WEST OF THE BLINDMAN  
May 22, 1957

It is quite a while since I have said anything about hawks in this column, but I see many of them every day this time of year, flying out over the fields where I'm working; falcons, marsh hawks, Red-tails, Rough-legged Hawks and Sparrow Hawks, and they all appear to be hunting mice. Sometimes one flies 'round and 'round a strawstack at all levels, and as close as he can get, literally trying to scare up a meal. And yesterday a broad-winged fellow caught a mouse a few yards from me as I rode on the tractor, and he proceeded to eat it on the spot.

All this may explain why, in the controversy over the value of hawks and owls, I take the part of the birds. Many hunters only see hawks as a menace to their game. I mostly see them as actual contributors to the income from this farm. I am well aware that some hawks take game and other birds. Even if they all did, we should not judge them on that basis alone. I would be gratified if the people who shoot hawks - and owls - would just see that there are two sides to the question. And certainly from my point of view, the good far outweighs the harm done by birds of prey.

Apart from some small songbirds and such animals as mountain sheep and goats and marmots, it is not easy to name a completely harmless bird or animal.

I know people who shoot robins and bluejays because they steal fruit from the garden.

Big game animals do damage to forests, to grazing leases, and sometimes to gardens and haystacks.

The predators; lynx, cougar, wolf and coyote, kill game and domestic animals.

Beaver flood meadows, wreck fences, dam culverts, and have even caused death to livestock which fell through the ice on beaver-made ponds.

Porcupines kill trees, chew harness and axe handles, (for the salt) and sometimes leave a painful profusion of quills in the muzzles of domestic stock; cows, colts, and more frequently, dogs.

Rabbits, gophers and mice cause damage in the forest and field. Most other rodents, from squirrels to chipmunks, are guilty now and then, of chewing on something we think they shouldn't. Squirrels are a nuisance around farm buildings and lakeside cottages. It would take pages to list their misdemeanors, yet many people find them attractive and appealing neighbors.

Weasels and skunks sometimes satisfy voracious appetites in the hen house, and the wrath of the poultry raiser is incurred on them and their kind forever. Members of this family also destroy many birds' nests, including those of waterfowl and upland game. As for the mink, some fishermen even begrudge him his diet of fish.

Bears are the bane of trappers and prospectors. The owner of many a snug cabin has returned to find that during his absence a bear has forced his way in and left the place a complete shambles. A tent left unattended is even more vulnerable. Bears also do some damage in the forest.

So if we are going to condone the killing of wildlife because of the harm they do, ignoring all the good, and ignoring also their esthetic values, we are going to end up with a far less interesting landscape than we now enjoy. It has been said before: nature produces no good or bad species. Each has a right to survival. And since man has it in his power to control to some extent, other forms of life, it behooves him to be very careful how he exercises that control.

#### WEST OF THE BLINDMAN

June 5, 1957

Another of our dwindling number of genuine old pioneers has gone from our midst. Mr. Clyde Lamb, who passed away on May 27, had almost made pioneering a career. He was born in a little place called Keokuk, in Iowa in 1875. He lived, for major parts of his life, in the Black Hills of South Dakota, on the wide plains of southern Saskatchewan, and for the past twenty three years in the northwest corner of Alberta's Blindman Valley.

Mr. Lamb saw the buffalo on the plains. He was a placer miner during the gold boom in the Black Hills. He was a cowboy in the days when all cowboys wore guns. He knew Wild Bill Hickok and he had seen Barnum and Bailey's circus in the days when Jumbo the elephant was a feature attraction. He worked on the big ranches in an era when ranches were really big.

Then he caught the homestead fever and tried his hand at tilling the land in South Dakota and Saskatchewan and finally, Alberta; always a part of the frontier. He never drove an automobile in his life but he had trekked many hundreds of miles driving oxen and mules and horses.

He was a good man and a fine neighbor. He will be very much missed, not only by his family and his friends and all who knew him, but he will be missed also by everyone who likes to remember the old days. As a link with a way of life that is gone and all but forgotten, his loss is irreplaceable. He never amassed wealth but he played his full share in the opening up of the west of these two countries. His part in this great adventure was positive and very real, living and working as he did, all his life, close to Mother Earth.

He was truly a pioneer.

WEST OF THE BLINDMAN  
June 12, 1957

Here are some origins of place names in and around the Blindman, Medicine and Battle River valleys.

Most of the information is taken from a booklet put out by the Geographic Board of Canada, and called simply, "Alberta Place Names". Further data was obtained from the "Jubilee Edition" of the **Rimbey Record** and from various other sources. Any comments may be considered anonymous. Since there is not room to mention them all this week, some will be left until next week's column.

Everyone knows, of course, that Rimbey was named for brothers Sam, Ben and Jim, and perhaps nephew Oscar. At first it was called Kansas Ridge, but when a post office was established in 1903, a name had to be found that was acceptable to the Department of the Interior, and "Rimbey" was chosen from a short list submitted.

Bentley was named in 1903 too, after the sawyer in a local sawmill. The story says that when a name for the post office was being chosen, the postmaster's name, MacPherson, was suggested. When the men at the sawmill heard this they decided to put up the name of their sawyer, George Bentley, and since there were more mill hands than homesteaders, Bentley got the nod over MacPherson.

Bluffton was named in 1922. Reasons for this choice are obscure, although the school was called Bluff Center, which was apparently a descriptive name.

Hoadley was known as "Haverigg" until 1924, after the railroad came. George Hoadley was minister of agriculture in the Alberta government of the day. I'm sure he would have been forgotten before now, if the name "Haverigg" had been retained. Who or what "Haverigg" was, I do not know, but it has a Scandinavian sound.

Leedale, before 1917, was called "Wittenburg", for the home in Denmark of Paul Broderson, an early settler. Many names across Canada which had a German sound, were changed during World War I. This may have seemed like patriotism at the time but it looks a little silly now. It does lend interest to our history however.

Of Forshee the book gives no definite origin, but says only, "There is a place of this name in Virginia."

Homeglen is another descriptive name and was suggested by James Burns, the first settler in the district.

Iola is another obscure one. This time the book makes two statements: "There are several post offices in the United States"; and, "Prior to 1907 the district was called Ednaville". Who Edna was, I do not know. I am thankful that it was changed. I have nothing against Edna as a name,

but I think most people will agree that "Ednaville" is something quite different.

Lavesta was named in 1911 after Vesta McGhee, daughter of the postmaster.

Lockhart was named for James Lockhart, early settler and first postmaster, in 1906.

Springdale is a descriptive name given to the post office in 1906.

Nugent, which is hardly a place at all any more, was the maiden name of the wife of M. Donovan, postmaster and storekeeper.

And Willesden Green was named in 1913 after a suburb of London, England, and former home of George Wager, the first postmaster.

More names next week.

WEST OF THE BLINDMAN  
June 19, 1957

Here are some more place name origins.

The Blindman River was so named by the Crees when a party of hunters belonging to that tribe went snow-blind along the river long ago. James Hector called it the Blindman in 1858.

Medicine River and Medicine Lake, together with the Medicine Lodge Hills, all have a common name source. The Crees held ceremonial dances in the hills and had at least two names for the river. One was "Muskiki" and the other a tongue-twister which meant "Sundance River". Medicine Lake is one of the sources of the river.

The Battle River carried that name as early as 1802 when it appeared on an Arrowsmith map. Cree and Blackfoot territory somewhat overlapped along this river and their frequent meetings were not always peaceful.

Turning northward, Breton was named for D.C. Breton, an early settler and M.L.A. It was the "Keystone Post Office" before 1927.

Winfield was named when the railroad arrived, after the Hon. Vernon Winfield Smith, minister of railways in the Greenfield government.

Pendryl was named in 1916, after an English family of that name.

Buck Lake was Minnehik until October 1954. That is, it was and it wasn't. It was Minnehik officially, but the more popular name of Buck Lake, which was the official name of all that water just behind the town, just sort of took over, and made the change inevitable. "Minnehik" is Cree for Tamarac. Buck Lake is an old name, for the Hudson's Bay Post built in 1800 at the mouth of Buck Lake Creek, was called Buck Lake House.

I have no data at all on Alder Flats; perhaps because the book I am using is dated 1928. No doubt it is a descriptive name. At any rate, today the town is rapidly overrunning the alder bushes.

Out to the east the name Ponoka is the Blackfoot term for elk.

Lacombe, as we all learned in our school days, was named to commemorate the life and work of Father Albert Lacombe, who, for more than half a century, was a force for good among Alberta's Indians. They loved and respected him as they did no other white man. Father Lacombe died at Midnapore, Alberta, in 1916.

Gull Lake is a translation from the Cree word "kiaskus". It was Gull Lake on Palliser's map of 1859.

Sylvan Lake has had many names. David Thompson, in 1814, called it "Methy Lake". On Palliser's 1859 map it is "Swan Lake". In Cree, it was "Wa-pi-sioo"; in Stony, "Ko-gamma". In the early days of settlement it was called "Snake Lake", and later, "Perch Lake". Since about 1907 it has been Sylvan.

Here is an odd one I couldn't resist including: "Ricinus. Latin name of the castor oil plant."

Here are the statistics. Of the twenty six place names mentioned this week and last: six are named for early settlers; four are descriptive; two commemorate the names of government officials. At least two are obscure. Six places have undergone name changes. Five are named for the first postmaster, or his birthplace, or for some member of his family. The three rivers have names going back one hundred years or more. They, two of the lakes, and the town of Ponoka, have names that are Indian in origin. One, Lacombe, is named for a person famous in Alberta history.

That just leaves Ricinus.

WEST OF THE BLINDMAN  
July 24, 1957

Highway Number 11 which runs from Red Deer west to Nordegg has for some time been known unofficially as the David Thompson Highway.

This is especially true of that portion between Rocky Mountain House and Nordegg. And the highway bridge across the North Saskatchewan River at Rocky has been the David Thompson Bridge - also unofficially until Alberta's Minister of Municipal Affairs, Hon. A.J. Hooke, made it official during Rocky's David Thompson Days early in July.

It has been suggested that Alberta begin naming some of her highways, and Highway 11 is a very good place to start. None in all the province can be more steeped in romance and history; none were travelled any earlier by white men; and none hold more promising attractions for the tourist of the future.

Travelers crossing the David Thompson Bridge will one day be able to drive right through to the Banff-Jasper Highway, following closely the route Thompson took when he set off to search for the headwaters of the Columbia almost one hundred fifty years ago.

An Alberta newspaperman, who, with a party from Rocky Mountain House, traversed the route early this summer, stated flatly that this will be the most scenic highway in North America. A road through this area has been a dream for many years, but it progressed to a definite possibility when the first motor vehicle took five days to make the trip from Rocky in 1941. Since that time only a few dozen people have been over the final stages of the route which terminates at Saskatchewan Crossing on the Banff-Jasper Highway.

The government has already constructed a fine new bridge over the swift-flowing Cline River, even before the road has been constructed that far. It stands there on a wilderness trail as a sort of proof of intention to put the road through at last.

Among the scenic attractions to greet the traveler when he is able to make the trip are the historic Kootenay Plains, where wild horses still roam; Windy Point, where the rocks are eroded smooth by winds that are strong and almost incessant. This spot affords a magnificent view of the river valley hundreds of feet below. Then there is Whirlpool Point on another ridge high above the swirling backwater of the North Saskatchewan; and Stelfox Mountain, named for Henry Stelfox, outdoorsman, conservationist and old timer of the Rocky area; and just before reaching the Banff Park gates there is the Big Timber, a forest of two and three century old pine and spruce trees. These are just some of the highlights of a trip that we hope will be possible in the not too distant future. For the people of central Alberta it will be a most impressive route into the mountain resorts of Lake Louise and Banff and Jasper.

#### WEST OF THE BLINDMAN

July 31, 1957

If you visit one of Alberta's national parks this summer; Banff, or Jasper or Waterton Lakes, you are going to see bears: little bears, big bears and middle-sized bears; black bears and brown bears; fat bears and thin bears; sleek bears and shaggy bears. Bears are almost as big an attraction in these parks as are the mountains or the waterfalls. Certainly the children seem to find them so. But they can also be a nuisance, even a danger, if they are not accorded the respect that is their due.

There is little reason to be afraid of any of the wild creatures to be found in the Blindman Valley or for many miles around, but in the parks it is different. Here many of the wild things have all but lost their fear of man. They soon learn that they are not molested here, and in close to the towns and trails and campgrounds some animals become quite tame and will eat from the hand. This is fine so far as the squirrels and chipmunks go, but when it comes to bears it is a very different story.

Signs are posted throughout the parks warning people that they are liable to a fine of up to \$500 for touching, feeding or molesting the bears, yet any day you may see a bear getting a handout through a car window or even from someone standing outside their car. People do not realize that even a smallish bear is equipped with a powerful forearm, complete with a sharp and very unsanitary set of claws, which, in all probability, have just been sorting over garbage. Every year some overly-brave tourist is hospitalized by one of these "tame" bears. Perhaps he was gingerly holding out a cookie to entice the bear to stand up for his picture; then, succumbing to an instinctive fear, snatched it away just as Bruin was about to take it. The average bear takes a dim view of such goings on, especially if repeated more than once. Or maybe the cookies were all gone before Dad had all the pictures he wanted and the bear was coaxed back to the car window to find nothing for him. The result could be the same in either case. A bear resents being teased and he may show his displeasure by taking a swipe at someone.

Between the tourists and the garbage cans the park bears are being badly spoiled. They no longer eat enough of their natural foods and their health and digestion and the condition of their fur all suffer. And a bear with ulcers cannot be expected to be very sweet-tempered.

A frequent and highly enjoyable sight about the parks during the tourist season is a mama bear with cubs, a combination to be shown respect anywhere at any time; but, unless I am in a car, I would much prefer to meet such a threesome well outside the park gates where bears still show a natural fear of man.

So when you visit a mountain park, don't feed the bears. Don't even stop your car if you don't want the paint scratched. If you are picnicking or camping at one of the campsites, don't go away and leave food of any kind in a tent, or any place where bears can smell it. Bears do not always enter a tent by the approved manner. And don't do what a man was seen doing in Yellowstone one summer. The park warden came upon him as he was pushing southward on the north end of a big black bear, trying to get Bruin under the steering wheel of his car, while the man's wife, in the other seat, coaxed with a cookie. The man explained to the warden that he wanted to get a picture of the bear sitting beside his wife driving the car!

WEST OF THE BLINDMAN  
October 2, 1957

A little over a year ago I wrote a column on that amazing little fellow, Jerry Potts; guide, interpreter and right hand man to Colonel McLeod of the Royal North West Mounted Police, who brought law and order to the West. Since then, Jerry Potts has been written about and made much of in half a dozen western Canadian publications. Jerry is no longer an unknown. He is fast becoming a legend and hero of the Old West. And I have to say it: he makes Davy Crockett look like a sissy.

This belated rise of fame by Jerry Potts is but a part of a great upsurge of interest in the early history of these western provinces. Pick up

almost any Canadian newspaper or periodical these days and it will likely contain something on our national, provincial or local history. **MacLean's** carries many a story from Canada's past, along with articles on our present and future. An Alberta publication, **The Farm And Ranch Review**, is an excellent source of interesting and entertaining material about the early days on the prairies. Another first-rate little magazine in this regard is **Canadian Cattlemen**. Devoted to stock-raising, as its name suggests, it nevertheless carries in every issue some fine articles on the past. Another very worthwhile publication is **The Beaver**, a quarterly put out by the Hudson's Bay Company. Subtitled "A Magazine of the North," its editors do not draw too fine a line between North and West, and as for history of a colorful nature, they include items from the whole northern half of the continent.

At the present time, Grant MacEwan, author, lecturer, conservationist and M.L.A. for a Calgary riding, has a series of articles in the **Western Producer** under the heading "Fifty Mighty Men". He is approaching the halfway point in the series and has included in his list, Captain Palliser, Chief Crowfoot, Jerry Potts, Louis Riel, Sitting Bull, Guy Weadick of Stampede fame, and many more. Mr. MacEwan portrays these men so vividly that you feel he must have known them all. A series of this sort has been overdue for years.

**The Calgary Herald** has a magazine section that devotes a goodly amount of space to Alberta outdoors, past and present.

And should you be interested in the history of British Columbia, almost any publication in that province will be of help. British Columbians are extremely conscious just now of their very colorful and exciting past. They are preparing for the biggest celebration in their history next year on the occasion of their hundredth birthday as a settled region.

It is to be hoped that this concern with our past is not a passing thing; that we will continue to keep ourselves aware of those who have gone before, the kind of life they had and the improvements they made for us. Such an awareness must make us more appreciative of our present way of life and imbue in us the desire to make of the future something better still.

WEST OF THE BLINDMAN  
November 27, 1957

Some big game hunters and outdoorsmen in central Alberta are viewing with alarm the government's decision, by Order-in-Council, to throw open this fall, the Alder Flats-Wolf Creek Game Preserve. No reason was announced for the move, but some reasons, having been voiced in the past, suggest themselves. The area of roughly two hundred seventy square miles is bound on the west and north by the North Saskatchewan River, on the east by Wolf Creek and on the south by the line between Townships 41 and 42. It is about thirty four miles long and averages eight miles in width. For that reason it is difficult to police, more especially at its southern end where the boundaries are less well-defined and roads are inadequate to say the least.

Opinions vary as to the amount of poaching done in the preserve in the past. Some, certainly, but likely not enough to be too significant in the overall picture. I myself believe that if the Game Branch found the area hard to police they had largely themselves to blame. I say this because they never went to any effort to make the area generally known to the big game hunters. While the boundaries of the preserve were always outlined in the official "Game Regulations Bulletin" which the average hunter never saw, no mention was ever made of the area on the pamphlets issued to the hunter with his license and it was never shown on the accompanying maps which purported to show the open and closed areas in the province. This tended to foster a defiant attitude on the part of some. Their reasoning, however faulty, went like this: "...if they don't tell us this area is closed to hunting, how can they pinch me for hunting in it?" I have heard that line many, many times and I have heard more than one hunter boast of being in the preserve with a gun.

The whole history of this preserve has been a controversial one. It has been opened and closed and opened again in the years since it was established. By and large, the local citizens appear to be in favor of it, and through the fish and game associations have kept it in existence. It seems just possible that the government has always considered it a nuisance and when they received some complaints of poaching last year, they jumped at this one as an excuse to arbitrarily wash their hands of it. I feel sure, that had they wished to, the Game Branch could quite easily have maintained its past status, or, if it was necessary, opened it on a strictly controlled basis from time to time. For instance, I was told by one of the many successful hunters into the region, that moose were on the verge of becoming over-populated there. If the Game Branch had ascertained that fact they could have possibly have allowed a certain number to be taken out; a policy they adopt for other animals in other parts of the province.

If it can be established, and I think it can, that the existence of a game preserve here is desirable for the conservation of big game, the people in those areas surrounding should cooperate in an effort to have it closed again at the earliest possible date. One open season may not be too damaging; several surely would.

There need be no excuse in the future for the hunting public to claim ignorance of the existence of the area. Controversy which its opening has stirred up and which is far from over, has made and will go on making the Alder Flats-Wolf Creek Game Preserve known all over Alberta. All the Department of Lands and Forests need do henceforth is to show it plainly on the maps and pamphlets issued with your big game license. They could try it anyway.