

The Mystery of the Ice River Guitar

The year was 1976 – I was a Park Warden in Yoho National Park. Dale Portman, another Warden and I were patrolling the Ice River Valley on Snow-mobiles.

We came across fresh snow-shoe tracks on the trail. Soon we came across a lone man walking up the trail. He had a large pack with rusty old cramp-ons hanging off it. We stopped him and found that he did not have any Park permits. He acted a little strange and didn't want to show us any I.D. We took him back on the snow machine and drove him to the R.C.M.P. In the Town of Field.

The Officer checked him out but found no Police records so let him go. There was a Hotel with a Bar in Field at that time. The stranger went into the Bar. A friend said that he was talking about two Wardens that man-handled and threatened him. Actually we were quite friendly with this very odd fellow.

A few weeks later we found a large supply of flour, rifle bullets and a meat grinder stored behind a shed at Leonchoil, the beginning of the Ice River Trail.

That summer I rode horseback from the Lower Ice River Warden Station to the Upper Ice River cabin. Both cabins had been broken into. There were several magazines with entries of a diary written in some of the pages. There was some food --- and a Guitar. The diary told of riding the C.P.R. Train. The Writer was able to get the train to stop at the Leonchoil Siding, close to the Ice River Trail head. This peculiar person packed supplies to both remote Warden cabins throughout the Winter. He wrote about going up the Valley to stay in an old abandoned Zinc Mine. He wrote of planning a Winter climb of Mt. Goodsir, a forbidding Mountain at the head of the Valley. We later found a 22 rifle behind the stove in the cabin. I packed out the Guitar and kept it at the Warden Office. When no one claimed it I took the Guitar home. That was 42 years ago!

A couple of years later – in the late Autumn I rode my horse to the Upper Ice River cabin on Boundary Patrol. I had our dog – Gem and my horse Red – and a rifle. Gem growled all night. Red pawed and snorted in the corral and did not eat a bite of hay. I was awake most of the night with my rifle close by.

We were being watched – by something – or someone?

In the morning I slowly circled the forest beside the cabin looking for bear tracks. The ground had a skiff of snow and I found no tracks – except what may have been the imprint of a boot heel. My horse was shaking and nervous. Gem was still growling and her hair was standing on end. My eyes were darting about the forest surrounding the cabin. I saddled up quickly and we made fast tracks down the Valley!

I will never know for sure what - or who was watching us. We never heard anything more about the weird stranger who broke into our cabins and left his curious diary.

Maybe he is still there??



*The Upper Ice River Warden Cabin – 40 years later
(photo by Perry Davis)*

The Ice River Guitar



*The Guitar is named 'Winston'. I looked it up.
Winston Guitars were made in Japan during the late Sixties and Early Seventies.*

*Don Mickle
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