

Beaver Lake



Story of 1939 Beaver Lake Fire

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Like so many other places on the Plateau, Beaver Lake got its start from logging. Early in the 20th century the Eastside lumber magnate Bratnober Lumber Company owned the land on the west end of the lake, while Weyerhaeuser Company owned the land around the east and south end. Between 1910 and 1920 both companies began actively logging around the lake.

Bratnober's operation shipped its logs to the mill in Monohon (near today's East Lake Sammamish Blvd and SE 33rd Street); Weyerhaeuser's logs went to the Snoqualmie Mill. There was a clever setup for loading the large logs onto the railroad cars. Heavy lifting cranes did not yet exist and the logs were too heavy to be lifted by hand. The logs were sorted in the 'millpond' on the far eastern side of the lake, then inventoried and recorded in a nearby 'tally shack' owned by Weyerhaeuser. The logs were next floated to a nearby spot, still on the far eastern side of the lake, where a spur of the railroad tracks went right into the lake. The logs were tied to the railroad car parked underwater on the tracks, then shipped to the mills.

Bratnober cleared the west side of the lake before Weyerhaeuser cleared the east side. Thus the first scattered development on the lake was on the west side, probably around 1920. The first permanent residents on the lake were Jake and Nora Lott, who came from Vancouver, BC. The Lotts had a cabin west of present-day West Beaver Lake Drive, and by 1922 were renting boats to fishermen. They also operated a small store and dance hall. By the mid-1920s the Beaver Lake Amusement Park owned land on the southwest shore of the lake, but it's unknown if there was an amusement park actually built there. If there was, it was gone by the early 1930s.

In the 1930s more summerhouses began springing up along the west side of the lake, including a community known as "the Colony", located near the south shore. In 1932 Gus and Lulu Bartels bought a large piece of waterfront land on the southwest shore and established the Four Seasons Resort. Jake Lott built or helped build 13 cabins for the resort (including a new cabin for himself in 1937 after his first cabin burned). Many of the cabins were nicely decorated with rented Frederick and Nelson furniture. Around 1936 the Four Seasons Lodge was built on the lake, with upstairs dormitories for men and women accessed by separate stairways from the dining room below, and a kitchen able to serve 150 people.



1939 was a pivotal year for Beaver Lake. Bratnober completed his logging operations on the west side of the lake by the late 1930s, and closed his Monohon mill in September 1939. Meanwhile, Weyerhaeuser likewise completed its logging operations on the east side of the lake about this time and in April 1939 platted its Beaver Lake property on the east shore of the lake for residential and recreational use. Beaver Lake was now open for use and development, and in the June 1939 the Red Cross Aquatic and Life Saving School held its first of many training schools at the Four Seasons Lodge.

In the 1940s and 1950s Bartel's Resort was the place to be on weekends and in the summer. "It was great," remarked Connie Del Missier of Mercer Island, who attended many a dance and summer event at Bartel's resort during this time. "Everybody who went to high school in Seattle in the '40s and early '50s went to dances at Beaver Lake."

"And in those days it was really going out in the country," she added. "We called one road 'whoopie road' because it was like riding a rollercoaster." 'Whoopie Road' was 228th Avenue SE, between SE 24th and today's Issaquah-Pine Lake Road.



In 1955, Dick Anderson bought the resort and renamed it Andy's Beaver Lake Resort. One of the first events under the new stewardship, according to a contemporary article in a December 1955 issue of the Issaquah Press, was an invitation to come to a meeting at Andy's Beaver Lake Resort on December 18 to organize the Beaver Lake Community Club. The Beaver Lake Community Club would go on to make its own mark on and around Beaver Lake.

Andy's closed the dance hall, but maintained the cabins and the lodge. In 1960 Anderson sold the resort to the Catholic Archdiocese of Seattle for use by the Catholic Youth Organization (CYO). The CYO established a youth camp there called Camp Cabrini. Camp Cabrini operated until 1985, when King County purchased the site for a park, now known as Beaver Lake Park.



But what may have been lost once the resorts were gone was made up by the work of the Beaver Lake Community Club. Ruth Shearer, now of Lacey, first moved to Beaver Lake in 1965 and fondly spoke of some of the

activities the club put on. "The Beaver Lake Regatta (held every summer in July or August) was a big community event," she said. "In the mornings there would be boat races around the southern end of the lake. There were canoe races, sailboat races, but no motorboats. There was also a raft race, but this was more for artistry. Swimming races were in the afternoon."

The Beaver Lake Community Club was also instrumental in bringing good public roads to Beaver Lake. Although a version of SE 24th from Pine Lake to the west end of Beaver Lake had been built by the early 1920s, for many years only a few scattered roads served the east side of the lake and those roads were bad. In the 1960s, Beaver Lake teamed up with the Issaquah School District and had King County build and improve the roads on the east side. By 1970 Beaver Lake also had its own water district and fire station.

Limited residential development began around Beaver Lake about 1960, though Ruth Shearer recalled Beaver Lake in 1965 with still more summer cabins than permanent homes. Development increased in the 1970s and the rural resort of Beaver Lake soon disappeared into another interesting chapter of Sammamish history.

---Phil Dougherty
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The 1939 Beaver Lake Fire

Between April 16 and 18, 1939, a massive brush fire burns more than 35 square miles in King County, on and east of the Sammamish Plateau. There are no casualties and property damage is relatively minimal, given the low population of the area and valiant efforts by firefighters to protect structures that are threatened. However, it is one of the largest brush fires (if not the largest) to strike King County during the 1930s.

On Sunday morning, April 16, 1939, a rancher living near the present day (2007) location of the Sammamish Highlands Shopping Center in Sammamish decided to burn a fern patch on his land. He may have failed to take into account how dry it was -- 1939 had seen an unusually dry, warm early spring on the Sammamish Plateau, and by mid-April fire conditions were more typical for July. Indeed, on the weekend of April 14-16 alone, about 80 brush and forest fires erupted in Western Washington, aided by particularly warm temperatures: On April 16 it was 77 degrees in

Seattle. Soon the rancher's innocuous fern patch fire mushroomed into one of King County's largest brush fires of the 1930s.

The fire quickly spread into the surrounding underbrush and raced south and east toward Patterson Creek and Beaver Lake. Volunteers from the Issaquah Rural Volunteer Fire Department, county road crews, mine crews, crews from the Washington Forest Fire Association, and Works Progress Administration (WPA) as well as 30 Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) enrollees from Camp Sultan raced to the scene to fight the fire, which first threatened the eastern shore of Beaver Lake. But then the winds changed from west to east and blew the fire into the northern shore of the lake.

In 1939 development was just beginning along the northern shore of Beaver Lake, and there were only a few newly built homes there. One of these homes was owned by Raymond Sinclair, a Seattle firefighter. He had just finished building the home the week before and had not even had time to move in. Sinclair's Beaver Lake neighbors called him that morning to warn him about the fire, but when he got to his cabin he found it burned to the ground. (Sinclair rebuilt and with his wife Marion moved to Beaver Lake in 1941; they were the third permanent family there.)

But firefighters were able to save several other threatened homes, though not without some heroics. That afternoon another cabin owned by M. R. Beck of Seattle was threatened by flames. The firefighters commandeered a fleet of boats (probably from the Four Seasons Lodge on the southwestern shore of the lake), rowed up behind the fire, set a backfire, set up five portable pumps on the northern shore of the lake and watered down the cabin and land until the flames had passed.

Shifting winds that Sunday forced firefighters to fight the same fire twice that day in the same area between Beaver Lake and Pine Lake. The Four Seasons Lodge at Beaver Lake was threatened, but firefighters kept the lodge and surrounding structures hosed down and it was saved. The unoccupied Warner ranch between Beaver Lake and Pine Lake was not so fortunate and the fire wiped it out. Flames continued to spread toward Pine Lake, though they evidently did not quite reach the lake itself. There is no record of "Frenchy's" Pine Lake Resort, on the eastern shore of the lake, being threatened by the fire. By Sunday night at least 12 square miles had burned, and with no end in sight, firefighters stayed up fighting the fire all that night and into Monday, April 17.

The firefighters faced more on Monday. The unusually warm weather continued, with temperatures again approaching 80 degrees. And by Monday the winds had changed again and now blew from the west at about 10 to 15 m.p.h., sending a wall of flame back toward Fall City and Preston. At one point firefighters found themselves surrounded by towering curtains of flame and had to fight their way out. Their problems were exacerbated when they found they did not have enough water to fight such an enormous conflagration and were left to carefully pick their battles.

Still, by Monday night it looked as though firefighters were finally getting the upper hand. The winds eased and slightly cooler, moister air was on tap for Tuesday, April 18. But shortly after sunrise on Tuesday morning the westerly winds kicked up again and reignited the fire for a grand finale. The fire again raced east, crossing the Redmond-Fall City highway for the first time and briefly threatening Fall City before firefighters were finally able to quell it for good at about 10 a.m., three or four miles west of Fall City.

The Beaver Lake Fire, as it was informally called, gets short shrift in most King County histories, probably because there were no casualties and property damage was relatively light -- only two homes and a few outbuildings were destroyed. Most of the damage was limited to underbrush and second-growth timber.

But the fire is vividly remembered by the people who fought it or were affected by it, and it was notable for its sheer size: At over 35 square miles, or roughly twice the size of today's city of Sammamish, it was one of the biggest brush fires in King County in the 1930s, if not the biggest. The fire was also notable for its capriciousness, as the winds changed direction several times during the fire's two day rampage, forcing firefighters to almost play a game of musical chairs in trying to guess where the fire would go next.

Sources:

"Blaze Covers 12-Mile Area In Beaver Lake Region," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, April 18, 1939, pp. 1, 6; "Brush Fire Precautions Tightened," *Seattle Daily Times*, April 18, 1939, pp. 1, 4; "Record Fires Hit District; 40-Mile Area Burned Over At Beaver Lake," *Issaquah Press*, April 20, 1939, pp. 1, 5; Ruth Shearer, *Beaver Lake Stewardship Handbook* (Published by Peggy Baschen, 1994), 6; Phil Dougherty interview of Archie Howatson, March 11, 2007, Issaquah, Washington.

By Phil Dougherty, March 29, 2007