

SODA SPRINGS STATION

# The Ice in Ice Lakes

Serene Lakes hasn't always been the tourist and vacation mecca it is now. The lakes weren't even Serene Lakes. They were Ice Lakes before they were Serene and before that they were Lakes Sereno, Dulzura, & Sybil.

The "Ice in Ice Lakes" comes from the first industry here: ice harvesting. Although there is still ice in Serene Lakes and crushing snowfalls, there is no ice harvesting. It's a time gone by and pretty much unknown.

## Ice History

Before 1850 in California you'd have had to drink your Pepsi/Coke warm because there just was no ice. Whatever Baskin Robbins was selling then, it wasn't ice cream. In that year though, the first ice arrived all the way from Boston and immediately sold for \$12.50 per hundred pounds. Local merchants, seeing an opportunity, formed the Sitka Ice Co. and imported ice from Alaska.

A new ice company, the California Ice Company challenged Sitka's ice monopoly selling ice for 7¢ a pound, which was 3¢ less than Sitka's price. Sitka immediately undercut California's price with 5¢ ice. Then Sitka bought the California company out and raised the price to 10¢ a pound.

## The Serene Lakes Connection

The story of our local ice starts in 1849 all the way back in Nova Scotia. Benjamin B. Redding came to California as supercargo on a ship filled with goods to sell to the argonauts.

Eighteen years went by and B.B. Redding went from hunting gold to hard labor, to acting as a lawyer, representative to government conventions, member of the assembly, state printer, mayor of Sacramento, and California secretary of state. By 1868 he was land agent for the Central Pacific Railroad with the job of taking charge of and organizing the sale of lands granted to the company by Congress.

B.B. Redding was an imaginative guy, an avid fly fisherman, an entrepreneur, and probably liked ice in his drinks. When he saw three jewel like lakes surrounded by forest and grasslands just over the hill from where the railroad would be, he knew their potential. Those lakes could be good for ice harvesting and ice was in great demand in the cities. So, in 1866, Fitz William Redding Jr., brother of B.B. Redding, settled on Serene Lakes and built a small cabin right about where the two large lakes come together.

In 1868 the Summit Ice Co. was incorporated and began ice harvesting. We can only make an educated guess about the scale of operations since the old records of what became the Union Ice Co. are not available to be researched. They had a 450' long shed and outbuildings for the four or five dozen workers who probably earned \$2 a day plus board. They probably harvested several thousand tons of ice each winter.

## The enterprise didn't last long though

The elements were just too much for the company though. It spent three years harvesting ice and battling Serene Lakes winters before moving. The Truckee Republican said "It was found by experience, a somewhat expensive one, too, that the snow fell too deep at the summit to render the ice business profitable." The new location at Prosser Creek was "a paradise for icemen...with subfreezing temperatures, reduced snow fall, purity of water, and the natural sources of the Truckee River System." Locals know there is still way too much snow in Serene Lakes - except to have fun in.

*"About a mile and a half from Summit Valley there are... beautiful little lakes, with some ice houses broken down by last winter's snow, and abandoned by the company who have moved to Prosser Creek where they have as much cold weather but not so much snow."*

Truckee Republican  
August 26, 1872



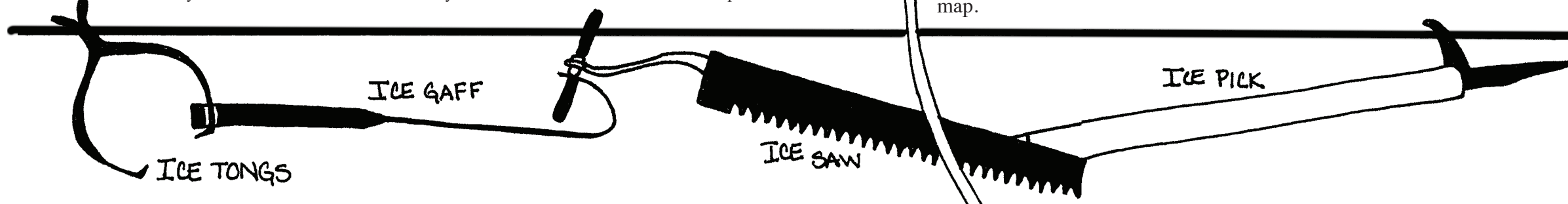
## Three Ice Lakes?

Indeed, there were three Ice lakes, until the dam a couple of hundred yards down Serena Creek was built in the 1940's. In addition, the main road was in a different place. It crossed a bridge where the two larger lakes come together before rounding the lower lake and heading for the Cedars and the Mark Hopkins estate. That estate, at old Soda Springs (real soda water coming out of a well), included a hotel so Mrs. Hopkins could invite her literary friends. The hotel is gone, but the estate buildings are still occupied. This map was made using the original 1866 gov't survey and the 1889 Placer County map.

## How to make ice An authentic & rewarding method with apologies to the refrigerator industry

- Clear your ponds of stored lumber (tree cutting is your summer activity).
- Boom out the ponds of floating debris.
- Wait until the ice is 10" thick – a month or so after the first ice forms.
- Keep your ice free of snow - it retards ice growth & hurts quality.
- Remove snow from your ice pond by hand until the ice supports horses.
- Scrape the ice with a shaving machine to remove snow.
- Exposed ice will glisten with a bluish hue.
- Really good ice is so clear you can read a newspaper through it.
- Use ice plows to incise 22" X 22" squares on your ice pond.
- Make repeated passes (5 or 6) until you can use an ice saw.
- Your 4' long hand operated ice saw should be sharp. Then saw away.

- Once the ice is cut, your workers (face spudders and switchers) will use splinters, chisels, bars and pickeroons to separate the ice and float it to the ice house.
- Good ice cutters cut and store 40-45 cakes of ice - 10,000 lbs - a minute
- Each cake of ice should be uniform in shape and weigh about 225 lbs.
- Your ice house should be below your pond so you can slide the ice into it.
- Insulate your ice house well – fill the foot thick walls with sawdust.
- Separate the stored ice using sawdust.
- The ice must be stored immediately so it doesn't freeze together.
- Well stored ice will keep for two years and get you through a bad winter if necessary.



## Imagine the Dreams He Had!

In 1866 Fitz William Redding Jr., age 20, became the first permanent settler in Serene Lakes.

What an adventure living in such an exciting time, the middle of the 19th century. It must have seemed like the entire world was changing so rapidly and that all things were possible. People could communicate with such speed! You could send a letter all the way from Saint Jo to Sacramento in 12 days by Pony Express and the soon to be completed telegraph line would speed message unbelievably faster. Already local telegraph lines let people send messages and get instant replies. The Transcontinental railroad was being built and soon you would be able to average ten or fifteen miles an hour cutting the months long cross-country journey to days. People could even fly using balloons as they demonstrated in the recent war. Steamboats plied the rivers and oceans, and clipper ships had made miraculously fast trans-oceanic runs. Factories were being built everywhere changing how people earned their livings. The wilderness was being vanquished. Waves of settlers were conquering the continent. Cities were springing up. The United States was growing unstoppably it seemed; having doubled in size and doubled again. There was so much in this rich land just for the taking. What an exciting time!

It was into this time that Fitz William Redding Jr. was born. He came from adventurous stock his ancestors having left England for New England and generations later for Canada. His father was a merchant ship owner risking his wealth on the oceans. His brother had left home at 16 to make his own way in life eventually heading for the gold fields in California. The stories Fitz William probably heard must have made him impatient for his own adventures.

*“In Sacramento  
June 22nd  
Fitz William Jr.  
son of F.W. and Mary A. Redding,  
a native of Nova Scotia,  
aged 21 yrs + 6 mths.”  
Sacramento Union June 24, 1867*

Fitz William must have had a lot of drive and enthusiasm to decide to settle in the wilderness alone and, being born into an age of wondrous and rapid change, what plans he must have had for his 160 acres. Add the optimism of youth and everything must have seemed possible. In September of 1866 Fitz William Jr. built a small 12X12 plank cabin and cleared an acre or so of land. Imagine the spot, directly across the lake from the lodge - lakefront southern exposure - no neighbors. He was all alone, but just over the hill in Soda Springs there were saloons, hotels, and workers' encampments.

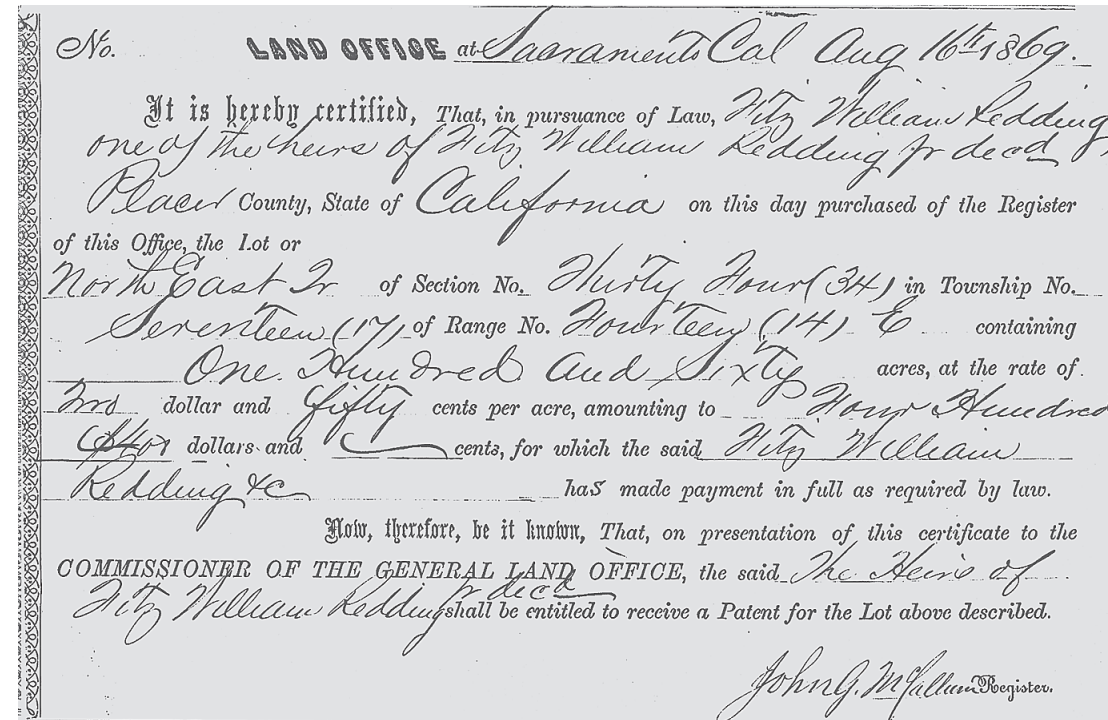
Imagine the work he had to go to as he conquered his part of the wilderness: hauling planks from summit sawmills and building his house, clearing an acre (visualize a football field) of trees and then - imagine this - getting the fish. He wanted to grow fish in the lakes so he hauled back “three or four hundred trout” to be stocked in Serene Lakes - his lakes. Besides farming fish he was also going to graze animals on the land. If that sounds improbable remember that Summit Station (Soda Springs) became the second largest sheep shipping station (say that three times real fast) in California.

Fitz William settled in for the winter of 1866-67 but must have been surprised by the snow because by early November he'd gone to live with his father in Sacramento. Was there also a girl waiting?

He returned in the spring but probably had trouble finding his cabin. Did he spend days looking for it sleeping on the snow getting cold and wet? Whatever the case, he soon became sick and returned to Sacramento. He died in June, 1867. His father patented the land in the name of his son. He got the 160 acres that included most of today's Serene Lakes for \$400 cash or \$2.50 an acre.

Imagine the dreams he must have had!

# The Ice in Ice Lakes



## How to Patent Gov't Land - 1869

- Patenting land means to buy it from the government.
- You need an official government survey for up to 160 acres.
- You must actually reside on the land for a year.
- You must erect a residence and make improvements.
- Patented land costs \$1.25 or \$2.50/acre
- Indians can't have any claim on the land.
- You must use the land for agriculture and not for trade.
- You must not own other land in the territory
- You can't own more than 320 acres elsewhere in the U.S.
- The land can have no valuable minerals or salt.
- It cannot be within a town or a mile of a military fort.

## Voyage of the Mary Jane

The idea was to do some mining of the miners. The limited stock company started by Yarmouth, Nova Scotia citizens Ebenezer Haley and Fitz William Redding Sr. bought a fast ship, the Mary Jane, and filled it with cargo to sell in California. It was a close call though, getting to California and except for the good fortune of picking up a Massachusetts Indian in the Galapagos, there might have been no B.B. Redding in California, no city named Redding, no ice harvested on Serene Lakes, and an empty Ice Lakes Lodge placemat.

Down to the equator and around Cape Horn the company had a normal voyage and must have been a really fun group since they held daily gatherings to sing temperance songs. At the Galapagos, the passengers took on water and beef, a Massachusetts Indian who had been left behind by a whaler, and then hunted down a deck load of 50 immense turtles. Surely the miners would want the giant creatures.

Trouble began when they were becalmed for 26 days west of Mexico. Food and water began to run short and were rationed. Soon there was no more. At that point the Indian mentioned he'd worked in a distillery as a child. Using his knowledge, a still was fashioned from the cook's largest kettle and a gun barrel which passed through a keg filled with cold seawater. The problem wasn't completely solved though but before human nature could take over, the winds picked up. Then their chief worry was “that all the gold would be exhausted from the mines before we reached them.”

The ship finally pulled into San Francisco on May 25th, 1850 after six months at sea. 25 other ships were in port with like cargoes so the Mary Jane's cargo was not a success except for the hardware, wagons, and turtles. The turtles “sold like hotcakes.” The Mary Jane herself sold for \$1300 and went off to the South Seas, unlike many other ships that were sunk, became stationary stores or even foundations for San Francisco buildings.

