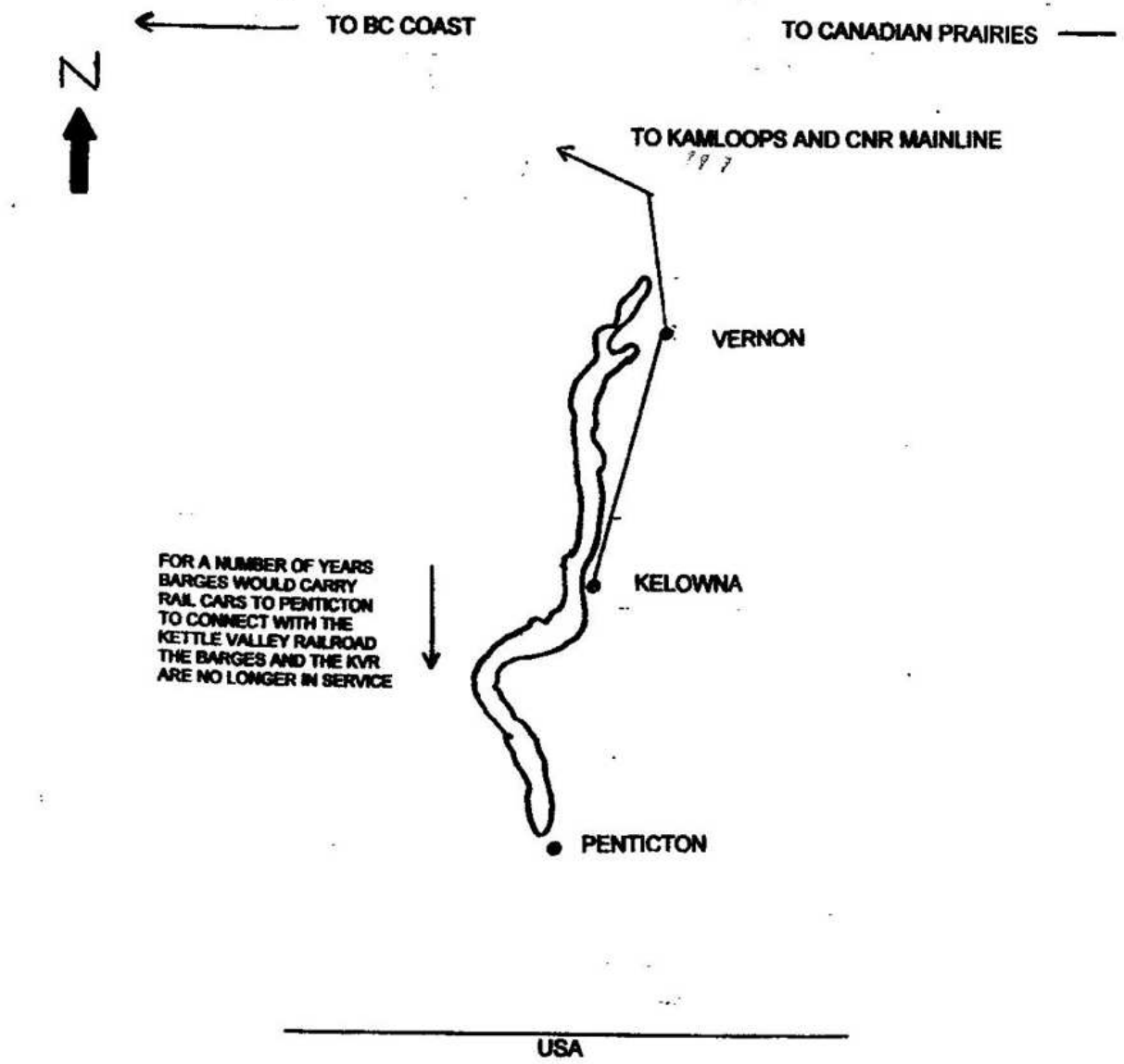
ICE HOUSE - KELOWNA BC - ARTICLE BY ELMER GRENKE

Writer's Notes

My father was the assistant Section Foremen in the Kelowna yards. The Section crew performed the work at the Ice House. Sometimes, the Ice House was referred as the Icing Station. In the early 1960's when I was still a student, I worked one summer in the Ice House. This article was based on my memory, which I believe to be accurate. Also, it was based on persons who still had some memory of the Ice House. Work was on an on-call basis and the crew would be called up at various times, usually in the evening. The Ice House work was in addition to the Section crews other duites. The overtime was appreciated, however, the summers for the crew were fairly arduous.

To understand the function and purpose of the Ice House, it is necessary to have some knowledge of the Kelowna area. Kelowna is situated at the centre of Okanagan Lake in south central BC. The lake is about 90 miles long. There is a lot of sunshine in the valley. This combination of a large supply of water and long, hot summers gave rise to a significant fruit growing industry. The amount of fruit produced far exceeded local demand. Consequently, a great amount of fruit was sent to other areas of Canada and perhaps to some parts of the USA. Kelowna was at the "end of steel" on a branch line from Kamloops. The ice house was at mile 118.5. Kamloops was situated on the CNR mainline. Kelowna was also connected to the CPR on a line which ran south from Sicamous to the junction at Armstrong. The two railroads then shared track right-of-way south to Vernon and Kelowna (refer to Map).

OKANAGAN VALLEY - BC



APPROXIMATE SCALE : 1 INCH = 20 M

Purpose of the Ice House

Before the advent of refrigerated railway cars, specially designed rail cars with sealed compartments at the top of the cars and hatches that opened at the top of these cars were used to transport fresh fruit and vegetables. Workers on an overhead platform would pour crushed ice into the top compartments. The ice would keep the fruit cool for a certain period of time. This method was definitely labour-intensive. The Ice House referred to in this article was built in the 1950's and torn down in the mid 1960's.

Description

The Ice House consisted of a tower approximately 60 ft. high. At right angle to the tower was a platform about 275 ft long and 25 ft wide. As of this date, no plans have been found so the dimensions are an estimate. Large blocks of ice were stored at the bottom of the tower in an insulated room. The large blocks of ice were shipped to Kelowna from Lucerne Lake in the Rockies by rail car. An elevator carried the blocks to a crusher at top of the tower. After the ice was crushed, it was sent down a chute that opened about 6 ft. above the surface of the platform. A steel plate covered this opening. A lever was used to lower the chute and control the flow of the crushed ice. Apparently, in later years, an ice-making plant was built in Vernon. The Ice house was painted a rusty red colour and stood out (refer to sketches and pictures).

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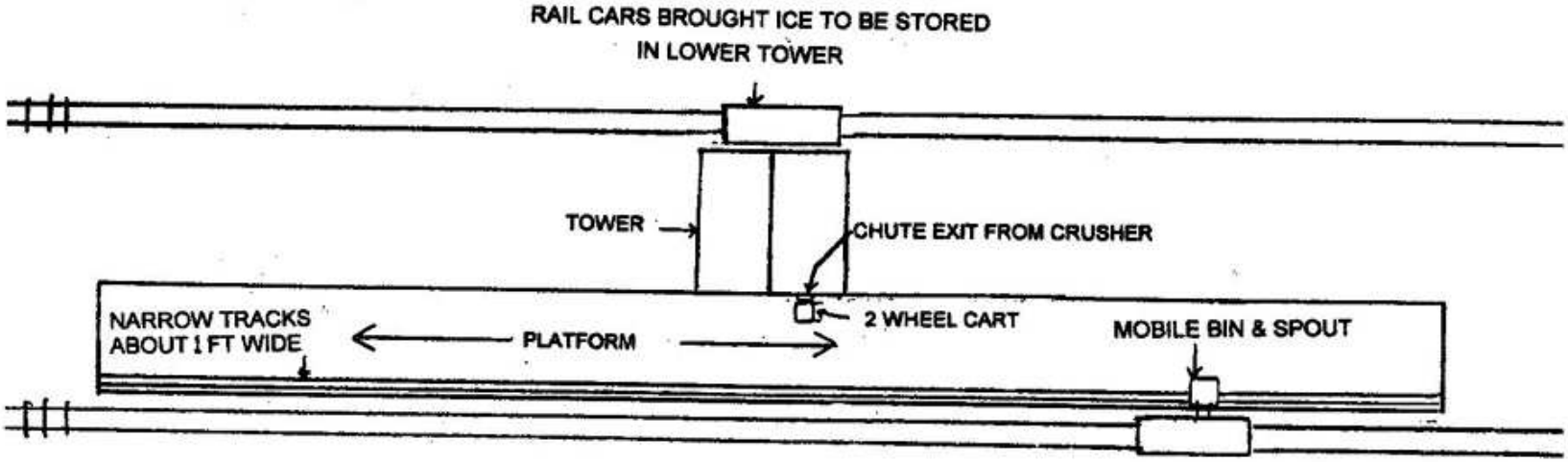
ICE HOUSE - KELOWNA BC

OVERVIEW



APPROXIMATE SCALE : 1 Inch = 30 Feet

CRUSHED ICE WOULD BE POURED INTO THE MOBILE BIN & SPOUT . THEN RELEASED INTO THE TOP COMPARTMENT OF THE RAIL CAR

Operation

At the beginning of the operation, a workman using large tongs would place the large block of ice on the elevator. The elevator would take the blocks up to the crusher. The crushed ice was poured into a chute which led down to the platform. Other workmen would place a large two-wheeled cart beneath the chute opening. A lever was used to control the flow of crushed ice into the cart. These carts were then pushed to the south edge of the platform. At the south edge of the platform there was a narrow set of rails about 12" apart. (Talk about narrow gauge!) A specially designed bin and spout ran on these rails. The bin and spout were moved on the rails and aligned with the hatches on top of the rail cars. A latch on the cart released the crushed ice into the bin and spout which, in turn, allowed the ice to flow into the top compartment of specially designed rail cars. When the top compartment was filled with Ice, the hatch was usually closed. How long the ice cooled the cars is not known. However, the railroad was able to re-ice the cars at certain points along the delivery route depending on the distance, the cargo and the weather. After all the cars were iced, the string was assembled by a switch engine, set out for pick up by the mainline locomotive and sent to other destinations (refer to sketch).