

Reflections on the Old Swimmin' Hole by Tony Schinking

In my days as a boy we had two swimmin' holes, Sandy Beach and the Pier, both of which were in Tawatinaw Creek. Nobody called it Tawatinaw River, which it is officially.

The Athabasca River was not used for swimming because it was drummed into us from the time we were little that there were terrible undercurrents and whirlpools which would suck you down and drown you.

Of course, Baptiste Lake was there but it was a major excursion to go out there for the day and besides most families didn't have the means of getting there.

So therefore we used Tawatinaw Creek, and Sandy Beach was our first swimming hole because it was ideal for the small boys and girls. It wasn't more than 3 feet deep at any place and being at a bend in the creek it had a nice sandy shore on one side. You reached it by walking south on Highway 2 (it was mostly called the Colinton Highway then) and then following a trail that angled down to the creek.

I spent many a warm summer afternoon there with other boys of my age (no girls. We didn't play with girls). We played on the sand and lay in the water or in the shallow rapids imagining all kinds of fantastic things.

After we got a little older we progressed to the Pier which was upstream from Sandy Beach and just below George Hees property (an uncle of the George Hees who lived out west).

The reason it was called the Pier was because it was built by the CNR to support the bank at a bend to keep it from washing out the tracks. The top of the structure of timbers was about 6 or 8 feet above the water. But it seemed like 100 feet when you were making your first dive.

A pond of about 40 feet long and about 25 feet wide and about 8 feet deep was formed at this bend in the creek and was an ideal swimmin' hole.

When I first started going to the pier I couldn't swim but that was soon corrected because the bigger boys invariably threw you in and you had to swim. Thus you were initiated to the Pier.

I have many pleasant memories of the Pier: swimming, lazing in the sun or picking saskatoons or chokecherries or lighting a fire and roasting potatoes or wieners if we had them. I'll never forget someone putting a can of pork 'n beans on the fire without puncturing it first. Instead of having pork 'n beans internally we were covered with them.

Sometimes we would arrive at the Pier without our bathing suits but that didn't stop us. We would go in our birthday suits. One day, however, after doing this, we looked up and here some girls had arrived and saw our predicament and, of course, would not leave to let us come out of the water and get dressed. They stayed and stayed. We pleaded and threatened but to no use. Finally one of the braver ones, there

were 4 or 5 of us, jumped out of the water to chase the girls which ended in an impass and we got our clothes back.

Alas, Sandy Beach is no more; washed away by time. The Pier is also gone; eliminated by progress and now we have a modern pool with chlorinated water that we can use all year round, but it's not the same. I miss the Old Swimmin' Hole.