

## Mary Lafek, Pioneer

SITE #110102

GC1TTQX

Written & Researched by Luanne Baker

### SITE IDENTIFICATION

Nearest Community: Logan Lake, V0K 1W0

Location: N 50°20.907'

W 120°43.403'

Geocache Location: N 50°20.904'

W 120°43.364'

Accuracy: 7 meters

Letterboxing Clues: Refer to letterboxing clues page

UTM: East 0662015;

North 5579847 10U

Geocache altitude: 1,340 m./4,397 ft.

Overall difficulty: 1.5

Terrain difficulty: 1.5

(1=easiest; 5=hardest)

Date Established: c 1900

Ownership: Private Property

Access:

- Gravel Road
- Seasonal
- Vehicle accessible
- Detailed access information on next page.



*The Lafek Homestead. The roofs of the remaining buildings are just visible over the hillside.*

This is the story of Mary Lafek, who exemplifies the spirit and the stoicism of the pioneer women who often found themselves isolated, in foreign territory, and living in primitive conditions with little support.

Mary was born in Czechoslovakia in May of 1897 and came to British Columbia with her parents in 1902, where her father had secured work as a coal miner. While still a teenager, Mary met and married Jim Lafek.

The wedding ceremony took place at the Coldwater Hotel in Merritt, conducted by a judge who was just passing through town. On their wedding day, Jim brought Mary home to the cabin where he and his mother were living and she had to walk the five mile trail in her city shoes, unprepared for the April snow at Mamette Lake. The cabin had just two rooms but the young bride added a kitchen

and a remarkable greenhouse, where she cultivated every kind of plant imaginable. By herself, she later added a porch to the original cabin.

Times were hard in those years and there was hardly much more than a trail to their property. When Jim and Mary applied for assistance to bring a road in to the property, they were paid \$15.00 a month to build a road with a pick, shovel and wheelbarrow. The road is now known as Rey Lake Road.

Mary and Jim had two daughters. Their youngest, Vicky, was born in the cabin with no assistance from a doctor as it was just too hard to get to their property at that time.

Mary taught the two girls with the assistance of correspondence lessons from Victoria. She built a cabin beside the house to use as a schoolroom and shared this with some of the children who lived

For more information or to report a problem with this site please contact:

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in the area. She raised sheep and spun the wool, made all the clothing, rugs and quilts for her home and her family.

During the entire 56 years the Lafeks lived on the ranch they had no indoor plumbing, no phone and no furnace. An oil lamp and a wood stove provided light and warmth.

One cold night in 1975 Mary walked the five miles down the hill and went to the Rey Creek Ranch with the news that her husband had gone missing. He had headed out to check on the irrigation system and he had not returned home. The area was searched and a dive team came to inspect Rey Lake. Even the hounds could not pick up the scent of Jim. Jim Lafek has not been seen or heard from since that night. It is possible that he may have had a run in with a bear, or slipped off the dock at Rey Lake, but no one seems to know for certain. His departure remains a mystery.

Mary moved shortly after Jim's disappearance to be with her daughter Vicky in Fernie, British Columbia. She passed away shortly after that, on November 20, 1977. A true pioneer and quiet hero, it is women such as Mary who quietly established amenities and traditions in the rugged backcountry of our then young Province.

**Detailed access information:**

- Travel south of Logan Lake on Hwy #97C to Rey Lake Road.
- Stay right at each fork on Rey Lake Road for approximately 7 km.
- Rey Lake Road is public access, however, is bordered by private land throughout.
- Do NOT leave road and please respect all property owners' lands.
- Access ONLY from May through October, weather permitting, as road is not maintained.

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**BIBLIOGRAPHY & SOURCES**

Cleasby, H.S. (1958). *The Nicola Valley in Review*. In Nicola Valley Museum and Archives: Merritt, BC.

*Early History of Logan Lake*. A collection of historical documents by the Logan Lake Historical Society. In Logan Lake Library.

McBride, E. (2009). Personal Interview in 1975 with Mary Lafek.