

Cold Weather Hardships Bring Problems to Farmers

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Oldtimers may recall deeper snows, colder temperatures or higher winds than Whatcom county had last week. Most residents agreed Thursday, however, that they had never seen all three in such a wicked combination.

It started with the snow fall of a week ago. But it was the high winds and the near zero temperatures which followed that brought the misery.

Nearly 1,000 miles of roads in the county were blocked by drifting snow. Hundreds of families were isolated without power or telephone

communications.

The power failure put an end to the operation of electrically operated farm water systems, milking machines, cooking stoves, automatic furnaces and heating systems.

Folks were back to the horse and buggy days by Saturday morning.

Farmers chopped holes in the ice over the creek to water their stock, milked by hand and huddled around small oil and wood stoves and fire places. Some brought their calves into the house or moved the family

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to the barn, whichever was the warmer.

HOMES ABANDONED

The wind blew out windows and ripped off chimneys, making the heating problem even more complicated. Families abandoned their homes and moved in with the neighbors, sleeping on davenports and the floor.

With the roads closed milk trucks didn't get through. Dairymen filled up all their milk cans, watched the freezing milk push the tops off and finally had to dump two or three days' production.

Others filled up their bath tubs and every other possible container in order to minimize the loss. One is reported to have filled a wash tub with milk, let it freeze and then take the blocks of milk out and pile them up like wood.

Milk and egg production dropped off because of the cold, but the animals seemed to eat even greater quantities of high priced feed than usual.

ARMY MOBILIZED

A small army of men and machines was mobilized almost overnight to take the offensive against King Winter.

Every available bit of county and state road maintenance equipment was called into service and reserves brought up from other areas as fast as possible. Extra power and phone repair crews were brought in.

Men worked around the clock and around again and again and again until they were ordered to quit. Except for greasing and refueling the huge machines never stopped.

By Saturday the crews had punched their way into every town in the county and had started to clear the primary roads. In the Sumas area, they had to do the job over again every day as the northeaster covered the roads as fast as they were opened.

Monday saw almost all the county, except the area between Guide Meridian and Mount Baker highway, open to travel. By Wednesday the snowbound area had shrunk to the areas north of Lynden and the Sumas vicinity.

SLOW WORK

It was slow work. Some of the

roads had only a few small drifts blocking them and miles of clear driving in between. But others were drifted over as far as the eye could see.

After the drifts—some ten feet deep—had frozen, the big rotary plows couldn't bite into them. A bull dozer would smash into the drift, break it up and back out. Then the rotary would push in and throw the snow out. Then the dozer would smack it again.

Speed was figured in hours to the mile.

Life went on. Doctors and veterinarians had to make their calls. They took their cars as far as they could go and then got out and walked.

One veterinary is reported to have borrowed a horse and headed it into the northeaster to reach an isolated farm. But the horse balked after a short distance and refused to go on. That call wasn't made that day.

One woman was hauled to the North Bellingham hospital for the birth of a child. Two more were taken out of the isolated areas by the state patrol to Bellingham hospitals.

SUPPLY PROBLEMS

The cold ate into stocks of fuel with terrible rapidity. Fuel trucks followed right behind the plows, getting in the necessary coal and oil as fast as possible. Their operators worked day and night too.

Supplies of groceries ran short in some of the areas and emergency convoys were taken through behind bulldozers and plows.

A train got stuck in a drift north of Everson Saturday and an extra engine sent to assist became snow bound too. The trainmen abandoned the engines, and it was Monday before they were returned to Bellingham.

And the thaw was yet to come.