

Concerning “Lake Balls”



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Earlier this year the BC Forest Discovery Centre was gifted several items from Bruce Wilkinson, in memory of his father Gordon Wilkinson. Gordon was a pilot for 60 years, accumulating over 17,000 flight hours on 14 different types of aircraft and 62 individual airplanes and flew for two major forest companies including BC Forest Products.

Two of the donated items were “lake balls”, found at Hayden Lake.

According to author Mr. Kindle, lake balls are.

Ball shaped structures composed chiefly of aggregations of various kinds of plants or plant fragments and sometimes a variety of other materials, occur in certain lakes. They are not found in most lakes, though apparently common in localities where they do occur. Few references to them have come to the writer’s notice in papers dealing with American Lakes. The earliest of these appears in Thoreau’s *Walden* (1889 [?], p.205). In Flint’s or Sandy pond near Concord Mass., Thoreau found “curious balls, composed apparently of fine grass or roots, of pipewort perhaps, from half an inch to four inches in diameter, and perfectly spherical.”

Source:

Concerning “Lake Balls,” Cladophora Balls” and “Coal Balls”

E.M. Kindle, *The American Midland Naturalist*, Vol.15, (Nov. 1934)



Lake ball on the souther shore of Ogii Lake, Arhangay, Mongolia

Also known as Larch Balls, Wikipedia describes them as.

A structure created when Western Larch needles floating in a lake become entangled in a spherical shape due to the action of waves and is a form of lake ball. Typical specimens are 3 to 4 inches (8 to 10 cm) in diameter more rarely larger ones are found.

Western Larch (*Larix occidentalis*) is found in the valleys on the lower slopes of mountains in BC's southern Interior. Its new needles are soft green, turning golden yellow in the fall, and broadly triangular in cross section. They are long, clustered in bunches of 15 to 30 on stubby, woody projections which remain on the twig after the needles fall.

Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations, Tree Book



From the Backpackingcountry's Blog.

Larch balls are among the mysteries of nature. It would be virtually impossible for a human being to form a large ball by weaving ½-inch long needles from a western larch or tamarack tree. Yet, if a person is lucky, balls of larch needles can be found along the lakeshores in the Clearwater Valley of western Montana near Seeley Lake.

In early October as the transformation toward winter begins in the natural environment, the short green needles of the western larch turn to a brilliant yellow. When they finish their tribute to the past season, they fall to the ground. Or the wind drifts them into a nearby lake.



As the needles gravitate towards shore, wind action stirs up waves. Then they lap against the shoreline and the needles start clustering together. The back and forth and around action of the waves rock the clumps into spherical shape. It takes a certain combination of weather, shallow and sandy shoreline and lack of freezing temperatures to allow the larch balls to form.

The Native Americans relate many of nature's phenomena with a spiritual connection. The larch ball is the subject of one such belief.

"In the past, before the white man came to claim the land, the Flathead Indians crossed the Seeley-Swan Valley to reach their hunting grounds in the South Fork of the Flathead

River Valley located in today's Bob Marshall Wilderness. If an Indian found one of these rare larch balls, the lucky finder could have the ability to place all of his wrong-doings, or "sins", into the ball – cleansing him and allowing a new start in life. Still, it was a risk to pick up a "sin ball" which had already had sins placed in it.

The Indian brave that picked it up would be given all the sins held within."

Author – Addrien Marx

Source:

Backpackingcountry's Blog
November 27, 2010

Lake balls are also found on BC's Conkle Lake and, as per the Permaculture Blog's post "The Mysterious Kedron Ball", are found all over North America and the world.

Saturday, 18 May 2013

The mysterious Kedron Balls

Hello friends! It is a long weekend, and we are busy with getting the garden ready for planting in the next 2 weeks or so. I will post how everything looks and what we did soon, but for now I wanted to share something that isn't directly Permaculture related, but still makes me think about patterns and motion.

A colleague of mine brought in a phenomenal little thing to work the other day. It is called a Kedron Ball. The Kedron lakes are two lakes in New Brunswick, consisting of Little and Big Kedron lake. I personally know Big Kedron lake well, as it is where friends and I go for our annual fishing outing. Little Kedron lake isn't far from there, but I have never been.

It is Little Kedron that produces the Kedron balls. These balls are made off pine needles and other woodland debris that ends up in the water and sinks to the bottom. There, small whirls and currents swirl the debris and pack it together. The end result you can see in the photo below.

Truly a phenomenal freak of nature brought on by motion and patterns in current.

I am wondering whether anyone has ever seen anything like this anywhere else in the world. Little Kedron lake is the only lake in New Brunswick that I know off that produces these little mysterious balls.



The mysterious Kedron ball

1.) Pam Wells 5 July 2013 at 17:56

Hi there... I just found about 100 of these things in Alligator Lake, Maine, USA... Really cool.

2.) Anonymous 17 September 2013 at 09:09

We have them in Montana too

3.) Anonymous 3 July 2014 at 20:36

i have 3 nicely formed Kedron Balls i got myself about 10 years ago... can only find them at the northern tip of the lake...

4.) Anonymous 8 August 2015 at 18:09

We just found one in Lake Hortonia, Vermont, USA

5.) Unknown 1 January 2016 at 14:30

You find them in the Cairngorms in Scotland. Nan Shepard wrote about them in her wonderful book *The Living Mountain*

6.) Unknown 1 February 2016 at 07:26

I found them in Hayden Lake which is on the coast of BC, and I thought they were rare, but apparently more common than I thought

Unknown 25 December 2016 at 22:54

Duff I also have one of these strange balls that my father got from hayden lake 40 plus years ago

7.) Anonymous 13 March 2016 at 15:32

Found some this weekend in the Scottish Highlands....cool.

8.) A Matter of Taste 30 May 2016 at 22:00

We found a couple of these on Conkle Lake British Columbia. We called them Conkles. Never seen any others as well.

9.) Anonymous 26 August 2016 at 07:14

Friends found one of these washed up on the shore of Panther Pond (lake) in Raymond, ME. Someone else found one in another western Maine lake. In all my years on the lake, I have never seen one!

Source:

Permaculture Beginnings

A blog about Permaculture and sustainable living exploring technical and social aspects.

Saturday, 18 May 2013

Neil

Neil Malbon

Collections Curator, BC Forest Discovery Centre

April 14, 2021

