Abstract

This dissertation examines how popular experiences of nature and history in the British Columbia Interior were structured by automobility – the system of objects, spaces, images, and practices that surrounded private automobiles and public roads. The Fordist state poured massive resources into the provincial road network during the period 1920 to 1970, and in the process created new possibilities for leisure and for profit. Motoring was a new, very modern way of experiencing BC, and also an important economic engine. Making the province’s highways and the landscapes that were visible alongside them look appealing to the motoring public became a matter of concern for many different parties. Boosters, businesses, and tourism promoters who stood to benefit from increased automobile travel often cultivated roadside attractions and lobbied the state to do the same. Starting in the early 1940s, the provincial government established numerous parks along the Interior highway network: the two examined here are Manning and Hamber parks. Beginning in the late 1950s it did the same with historical sites: Barkerville, Fort Steele, and several others are examined here. These and other parks and historic sites were established, developed, and managed as roadside amenities, and were used to deliver lessons about nature and history to the motoring public ‘by the road.’ Drawing on a wide range of examples from across the BC Interior, including both successes and failures, this thesis examines how the motoring public’s common landscape experiences
were shaped by state-built infrastructure and by various groups’ efforts to manage, manipulate, and modify the landscapes that were visible by the road.
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It has been my good fortune to be writing this dissertation while environmental history has been on the rise in Canada, providing many opportunities to share aspects of this research to a receptive scholarly community. The Quelques Arpents de Neige migratory workshop and the Toronto Environmental History Network (TEHN) have both offered friendly venues to test-drive chapters from Part One of this dissertation. Generous support from the Network in Canadian History and Environment (NiCHE) also allowed me to attend several conferences and workshops where I presented some of this research. In Toronto I have particularly benefitted from a dissertation-reading group comprised of
Jennifer Bonnell, Jim Clifford, and Jay Young, three excellent historians who share my interest in environment, landscape, and infrastructure.

Though we have not had the pleasure of meeting in person, Chris Garrish and Andrea Laforet kindly allowed me to read their as-yet unpublished manuscripts on BC license plates and the market for native peoples’ coiled basketry.

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Abbreviations

BCA  British Columbia Archives
BCAA  British Columbia Automobile Association
BCMFL  British Columbia Ministry of Forests Library
BRAC  Barkerville Restoration Advisory Council
BX  BC Express Company
CHS  Cariboo Historical Society
CNPA  Canadian National Parks Association
CPR  Canadian Pacific Railway
CVA  City of Vancouver Archives
CVIF  Columbia Valley Irrigated Fruitlands Company
GTP  Grand Trunk Pacific Railway
HBC  Hudson’s Bay Company
HSMBC  Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada
LAC  Library and Archives Canada
PGE  Pacific Great Eastern railway
RHA  Revelstoke Historical Association
SYU  sustained yield unit
VPLSC  Vancouver Public Library Special Collections
UBCSC  University of British Columbia Library Special Collections
Chapter 1

Automobility and the Making of New Kinds of Experience and Place

in the British Columbia Interior, 1920-1970

The private automobile was one of the major commodities of the twentieth century. How and by whom they were made in factories has received much attention from social, labour, and business historians, and the association of cars with status issues has also been studied by cultural historians. However, much less attention has been given to how people actually used automobiles, especially in non-urban places, even more especially as they traversed wild places.

The study of the twentieth century has been much advanced by the concept of “Fordism,” a term that denotes the policies and practices associated with the standardization of products, produced in modern factories that often made use of assembly-lines and workers paid enough to be able to purchase the products they make — or, more generally, a regime of accumulation structured by state macroeconomic policies and influenced by a plethora of laws, customs, and understandings that together work to make for more reliable capitalist profits.¹ So far, most historians who have used the Fordist framework have focused on the production of consumer goods, rather than on their consumption. But consumer goods are not all the same. Automobiles were not consumed like pies at a sitting. They were used over time and space, and for multiple

purposes – for pleasure, for family, for work. In their flexibility and durability lay their
appeal, and their distinctiveness. The constellation of objects, spaces, images, discourses,
and practices related to automobiles – “automobility” – has come to be not only a
precondition of Fordist mass production but also a basic aspect of what one might call
“everyday” or “banal” Fordism. Automobility is a fundamental element of modern life.
This thesis examines automobility, but with a special focus on the people in the cars, the
motoring public. In most cases, neither their cars nor the roads upon which these cars
traveled were made by these people themselves. Increasingly, they moved along new
automobile highways provided by the state in cars sold to them by businessmen. Cars,
highways, and roadside sites became part of modern commonsense.

Few studies have noticed the ways in which the places through which such
citizens travelled were transformed through automobility. As motorists proceeded down
their roads they saw only some aspects of the places through which they travelled. The
roadside was not just the border of a new kind of road, but itself a newly created kind of
place – ribbon-shaped, often complexly planned, and crowded with various and particular
things, some of them deliberately constructed to take advantage of their roadside location.
Far from being just the “frame” or “window” for the landscape, the roadside was a vital
part of the landscape – indeed, a place in its own right. Motorists’ perceptions of places
were shaped by the road and the roadside. Natural, deliberate, and inadvertent processes,
many not inspired by or even under the control of the state, shaped their experiences and
become part of their vernacular commonsense. People living along the road also got to
have their say. The road and its sides came to be in literal fact a new kind of place, and
not just a way through space.
Yet of course the state cannot be relegated to the periphery of any adequate study of automobility. Often overlooked among Fordism’s more famous topics are state initiatives to stimulate consumption and legitimize its rule through the construction of roads and development of amenities like nature parks and historic sites – Fordism applied to the environment. Parks and plaques were ornaments for the state’s roads, and devices for shaping the experiences of motorists. Such experiences, much more than the motivations of state planners and politicians (which would be worthy studies of theses on their own), are the focus of this study. But where exactly is the environment itself in this story? Inside or outside the story?

Trying to cope with that further question is why this dissertation falls into two parts. There is the history of environment and there is the history of humans there, and these histories mingle but partake of different causalities. For instance a tree by the road will just grow unless stopped, maybe becoming a nuisance by blocking a view. But a historical plaque has to be conceived, made, erected, and maintained. It has seemed axiomatic to many that modern history is the history of capitalism, but the history of environment may or may not recognize that axiom, and when it does some of the conclusions based upon it are contingent. So this is partly a study in the history of Fordist capitalism and partly an exercise in history of environment, including of course the history of environmental perception.

Environment – both in its more natural and in its more modified aspects – came to be seen in particular ways because of motorists’ experiences as they used the road. But understanding it is even more complicated because of that dualism. People experienced nature as they drove, but they also encountered signs of the past – both theirs and others.’
How to analyze that second-order duality is a central problem in this study and the other reason why the text overall is divided into two large sections. This study will be operating at multiple levels, considering many kinds of evidence. It is highly significant that the eventual perspective of road and automobile users was in fact a perspective in common, albeit one subject to constant further alteration, both by natural and human agency.

This dissertation examines some of the ways that automobility – the constellation of objects, spaces, images, discourses, and practices surrounding the automobile and the roads along which it travels – shaped how residents of British Columbia and visitors from afar learned about that province’s Interior hinterlands during the twentieth century. The central argument is that the millions of motorists who travelled through the BC Interior during the period 1920-1970 encountered both nature and history ‘by the road.’ This is meant in two ways. First, ‘by the road’ is meant in the straightforward sense of the diverse landscape features that could be seen along the province’s arterial highways, including landforms, flora, and fauna; signs, buildings, and other man-made structures; and even entire villages and towns. More importantly, ‘by the road’ is also meant in the sense that private automobiles and public roads acted as a medium of landscape experience, a medium that had structuring and homogenizing effects, a medium that was part of the modern culture of time and space associated with the regime of capital accumulation known as Fordism. This thesis is very much focused on the empirical, on the material detail behind such singular abstractions as “the modern culture of time and space.” Pointing in the right direction and thus influential in this work is the dynamic and materialist definition of modernity offered by environmental historian Colin Duncan: “A society is modern to the extent that its constituent households consume little of what they
themselves produce and produce little of what they themselves consume.”² Twentieth-century automobility was the acme of modernity in this sense, because it typically involved people consuming ‘nature’ and ‘history,’ both of which they did not produce; it drew drivers and communities into contexts that were extra-local and responsive to economic and social rhythms that were global in scope; and, most obviously, because at its core was an object, and an objectified way of seeing, whose precondition was Fordism (and whose brand name was, on occasion, literally that of Ford).

For all the individualism and sense of personal autonomy that was associated with North American automobile travel, motoring was one of the century’s most commonplace and standardized activities, particularly after World War Two. Whether they drove for work, family, pleasure, or some other reason, motorists formed a kind of massive community in movement – referred to here as the motoring public – and their travels along the ‘beaten path’ of road networks that had been built and maintained by the state generated very specific shared landscape experiences. These common landscape experiences shaped and reshaped the image of North American places in the popular imagination. Communities, regions, and entire states and provinces came to be known by the roads that passed through them, and sometimes acquired reputations as places to be sought out or avoided by the motoring public. Sharing in these common landscape experiences was also an important part of being a modern North American: an active, observant citizen who was licensed to explore places located beyond one’s home community, or at least gain a passing knowledge of them. This dissertation examines the history of automobility and landscape experience in the hinterlands of the British

Columbia Interior, but the situation was not unique to this area. Places all over North America came to be known by the road during the twentieth century, although how this was the case has been largely overlooked by historians.

Motorists made many millions of trips along British Columbia’s highways and byways during the mid twentieth century, seeing the same things by the road and trying to make sense of them, whether on an active, passive, or subconscious level. They doubtless found a wide variety of wider meanings in the province’s roadside landscapes, depending on their life experiences and subject position – even in cases in which people saw the same things, they did not necessarily ascribe the same meanings to them. A full exploration of such interpretive diversity lies outside the scope of this thesis. Instead, the focus here is on automobility and the roadside as a common way of seeing and knowing the country, an underlying structure that tied people together as the motoring public, while also relating some sets of diverse places, things, and themes together materially and experientially, ‘flattening’ them in the sense of putting them on a single cultural plane. This study pays particular attention to two prominent types of roadside attraction: parks and historic sites, nature by the road and history by the road. The flexibility of travelling in a private automobile could provide motorists with a sense of freedom and discovery, yet it also had a kind of coercive effect, in that it required travelling along a network of fixed infrastructure that had been built and maintained by the state, often working in the interests of capital.

In British Columbia, as elsewhere in North America, the automobile was a profoundly political vehicle, closely bound up with liberalism. Automobile travel could simultaneously affirm a host of liberal values, including individualism, social hierarchy,
physical and social mobility, privacy, private property, consumerism, the normativity of the nuclear family, and, during the post-World War Two years, western Cold War notions of freedom. By extension, everything visible from British Columbia’s arterial highways constituted political theatre, or a public façade, through which a growing number of residents and visitors learned about and evaluated the province’s economy, communities, environments, and culture. Roadside landscapes were widely recognized as a means to communicate with a citizenry as well as a market, and were therefore imbued with special political, cultural, and economic significance. It was understood that the motoring public picked up ‘lessons’ as they viewed their surroundings while driving along BC’s highways – lessons that were sometimes explicit ones, but more often vague or implicit. These landscape lessons emerged as a matter of concern for many different parties, including businesses, boosters, conservationists, outdoor recreationalists, historical societies, politicians, and several agencies of the state. How the motoring public looked at things, and how things looked to the motoring public, became matters of pressing importance.

These parties generally agreed that automobile travellers should feel that they were free to experience British Columbia’s landscapes for themselves, ‘naturally,’ without any heavy-handed manipulation or restrictions on where they could go or what they could look at. It was also generally agreed that property owners whose land bordered on a public right-of-way had a right to sell things to passers-by, and to advertise their

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goods and services. However, as many of the following chapters will show, the state sometimes stepped in to regulate and manage the appearance of the landscapes that were visible along the roads it had constructed, in an effort to ensure that BC looked good to the motoring public. Sometimes it restricted certain industrial and commercial business activities. Other times it employed experts to manipulate roadside landscapes in a ‘behind the scenery’ effort to draw motorists’ attention towards certain features and away from others. And in still other instances, the state took a direct role in developing roadside amenities and attractions.

The next twelve chapters, grouped into two groups of six (on nature by the road and history by the road), examine the state’s top-down role in shaping the motoring public’s landscape experiences through the construction, maintenance, improvement, and replacement of arterial roads. This very expensive fixed infrastructure changed the province’s social and economic geography, and delineated the limits of the possible: motorists who exercised their ‘freedom’ to drive seemingly wherever they wanted were in fact restricted to the routes and types of road that the state had deemed appropriate. Most of the following chapters also pay close attention to motorists’ accounts of their roadside landscape experiences in the BC Interior. Their descriptions provide valuable information about the motoring public’s expectations and responses, and about how roads developed popular reputations.

Mostly, however, this dissertation is focused neither on the top nor the bottom. It mainly takes a ‘middle-down’ approach, documenting specific instances of how roadside landscapes were manipulated, modified, and managed by parties who consciously sought to shape the motoring public’s views. This was done for various reasons and by a range
of individuals, groups, and agencies. Frequently the goal was to make a profit, as when motel and gas station owners lobbied the state to preserve appealing parts of the environment (like certain plants, trees, and animals) that were located within view of a road that led to their community, in the belief that they would encourage motorists to drive that part of the road and patronize their establishments. Sometimes the goal was to project a certain image around a community, as when boosters, town councils, and historical societies cooperated to establish a museum or restore some landmark building. These efforts to differentiate a place in the eyes of the motoring public were often indirectly related to the profit motive, for cultivating distinctive roadside attractions – even ones that did not charge a fee to enter – would help lure travellers into town, where they were likely to spend money on food, gas, and lodging. In still other cases the goal of manipulating a roadside landscape was to deliver a pedagogical lesson to the motoring public, as when the BC Parks Branch tried to hide evidence of logging or mining near a highway inside a provincial park, or when the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada erected a roadside monument to commemorate some event that it deemed significant in BC’s past. These lessons about nature and history were usually imprecise or ambiguous. Nevertheless, whether their goal was to sell, promote, or instruct, these ‘landscapers’ were cultural producers, albeit in a manner more akin to set designers or stage technicians than authors or actors. Their actions shaped and in turn were shaped by popular tastes, but ultimately they sought to make BC look good to a massive, amorphous, capricious, and internally diverse audience: the motoring public.
The Place in Question, and its History

This dissertation uses the concept of automobility to bring many different aspects of British Columbia’s past together, thereby contributing to a fuller understanding of the province’s history. The history of Canada’s westernmost province has been approached in many ways, from studies of aboriginal communities and post-eighteenth-century European/First Nation contacts in the years following the explorations of James Cook (1778), George Vancouver (1792-3) and Alexander Mackenzie (1793), to books and articles on its mid-nineteenth-century heyday as a gold-mining frontier (with significant rushes in the Fraser Canyon in 1858 and the Cariboo in 1862) and on the emergence of its distinctive liberal traditions, culminating in its joining Canada as its sixth province in 1871. This thesis joins a small cohort of scholarly studies focused on the five decades beginning in 1920, ones in which a province whose economy has always depended upon the exploitation of natural resources was buffeted by the socio-economic storms of the twentieth century – ones that included massive popular disturbances in the 1930s, the election of a reformist Liberal regime under Duff Pattulo, and the 1945 election of a coalition government dedicated to preventing the social democratic CCF from coming to power, a mission partly achieved by initiating massive and popular infrastructure projects, including the construction and improvement of many highways. The coming to power of Social Credit under the leadership of W.A.C. Bennett in 1952 on a program of rural populism and highway development epitomized both the province’s left/right divisions and the central role in its politics of transportation infrastructure. Such “infrastructural liberalism” was part of the province’s pragmatic politics, but it also played an important symbolic role. In contemporary British Columbia, about 58 percent
of the population lives in metropolitan Vancouver or Victoria—that is, it is concentrated on ‘the Coast,’ the province’s extreme southwest corner. Much of the rest of the province is thinly settled, with many mountain ranges constituting a formidable barrier to overland transportation. Before completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) in 1885, and for many purposes long after that, travel to and from BC relied mainly on the Pacific Ocean, and until the 1930s, there was no way of driving all the way across the province en route to Canada. Jean Barman and Cole Harris have usefully characterized British Columbia as a fragmented archipelago of regions and sub-regions cut off from each other by mountains, glacier fields, forests, rivers, and lakes. In one study Harris describes BC’s road network in 1930 as “a weak complement to a system of inland transportation still based primarily on railways and steamboats.” It was not used for moving bulk commodities around, and was relatively inefficient for long-distance business or pleasure travel.

What might be considered a pattern of transportation infrastructure pragmatically related to the province’s topography and settlement patterns – it was and still is very difficult to build and maintain roads in much of BC’s rugged terrain, and most British Columbians then and now live by the Pacific – was often considered a reproach to modernity by its residents. British Columbians were becoming as enthusiastic as other North Americans about automobiles, roads, and driving, and at times as nationalistic as other Canadians about linking their province with the rest of Canada and their metropolitan cities with their rural hinterlands. Hence there were cultural as well as

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economic and political reasons for the enormous popularity of state road building in the 1920s and 1930s, followed by a far more massive program of highway development from the late 1940s through the 1960s – and they go a long way to explaining why the sounds of jackhammers, blasting, and paving equipment reverberated throughout so many of the years covered by this thesis. Joining the still small cohort of studies devoted to the social, cultural, and environmental history of twentieth-century BC, this thesis is even more unusual in focusing on the province’s Interior, which has hitherto received scant attention, yet which was also, as we shall see, the site of many automobility-driven transformations in the twentieth century.

Each chapter or suite of chapters in this thesis examines a previously unstudied aspect of the British Columbia Interior, yet they are all tied together thematically by the same roads, automobiles, and driving practices that connected them materially and experientially. Because every chapter presents an original contribution to the literature on twentieth-century BC, and because they try to capture past practices and experiences, rather than just ideas, they are highly empirical, a collage of microhistories that together provide a kind of archaeology of BC’s roadside landscapes. Thus there will be something of a dual action at work in this project: it is at once a study of automobility and modernity in the BC Interior, and a study of modernity in the BC Interior through the lens of automobility.

The British Columbia Interior is defined here as the southern half of the province (i.e., south of Prince George) lying between the summit of the Coast Mountains in the west and the summit of the Rockies in the east. About the size of contemporary Germany, the area has been sparsely populated due to a lack of arable land. Most of it is
mountainous and heavily forested. While the Interior is widely recognized as one of the province’s key regions, it has received a fraction of the attention that scholarly historians have paid to the more densely populated Coast. It is generally treated as a giant resource frontier and as a barrier to be traversed by lines of transportation.

Figure 1.1: The British Columbia Interior, showing key places discussed in the following chapters. Basemap from Wikimedia Commons.

The period being covered is from 1920 to 1970, when automobile ownership and automobile travel were seen as normal and almost without question as ‘good.’ During the
early part of this period, being part of the motoring public was an important marker of middle-class status. Similarly, the extent and condition of a state’s or province’s network of automobile roads was widely interpreted as a barometer of its modernity.

Unfortunately for the owners of the 25,000 automobiles registered in BC in 1920, its roads were embarrassingly primitive. Most roads outside of major centres were earth-surfaced, and the provincial road network was so fragmented that it was impossible to drive between many regions, including between the densely populated cities of the Coast and the hinterlands of the Interior. Fifty years later, BC had an extensive network of paved all-season arterial highways that facilitated year-round travel within and between every major region, as well as a much larger capillary network of logging and resource roads that reached deep into the province’s forests and mountains. More than half a million automobiles were registered in the province in 1970, for a ratio of one vehicle for every four residents. Automobile ownership was still associated with middle-class status, yet had gone from being a relatively exclusive option to being, effectively, a universally accessible one. Most of British Columbia’s working class had access to motor vehicles, and all but the very poorest families could afford to own a passenger vehicle and use it to take an occasional pleasure trip.

From 1918 to 1972 – from the end of the Great War to the fall of the Social Credit government and onset of the OPEC oil crisis – huge sums were poured into expanding and improving BC’s highway network. ‘Democratized’ automobile travel transformed the province’s tourism and service industries, and driving became one of the most important ways that British Columbians encountered the province beyond their home communities. Instead of learning about the BC Interior through other people’s literary and artistic
representations, motorists could now learn about it through automobile travel, which
provided seemingly unmediated first-hand experiences. The combination of private
automobiles and public roads could make the experience of travel seem free,
unconstrained, even empowering. Here was an antidote to the routines of everyday life –
a therapeutic way of getting in touch with oneself, with nature, and with the past. This
was a radically new way of viewing the province, and contrasted sharply with the days
before World War One, when long-distance travel had been far less common, pleasure
travel had been largely the purview of the wealthy, and almost all travellers had been
required to accommodate themselves to the pre-determined routes and timetables of
railway and steamboat companies (and dependent on guides if not so willing). Motoring
could make travellers feel like active explorers of the landscapes that surrounded them,
rather than passive consumers. However, “feel like” is the key term here. Most motorists
conceived of automobile traveling in this individualistic spirit, and even if it was not the
liberating experience some enthusiasts described it as being, it was at least one that
reflected the individual’s powers of free choice. An important point of this dissertation is
to suggest that the ‘freedom of the road’ and the landscape experiences that were
associated with it were more tightly constrained than they seemed to be. They shared
more with earlier experiences of transportation than is typically recognized.

Several Reasons Why This Topic Matters

At the same time this research on the roadside as a new place for new experience
identifies and makes a contribution to understanding a crucial but neglected area of
British Columbia’s history, it also makes a contribution to the general cultural history of
automobility in North America. This continent’s network of automobile roads is arguably the largest, most expensive artifact that humans have ever built, yet it remains uncharted territory for historians, at least relative to its social, cultural, and environmental significance. A century after Henry Ford started rolling Model Ts off his Highland Park assembly line there are still many significant topics and angles of analysis that historians need to explore. Far more has been written about automobile production and road construction than about how people used those cars to drive on those roads; more about how the automobile shaped urban areas than about its uses and meanings beyond the city limits. We know relatively little about the automobile as a vehicle for encountering the world. We also know little about regional histories of automobility. Too often the history of automobility in North America is treated in great, sweeping terms, as though it were monolithic. However, the trajectory followed in the British Columbia Interior was clearly not the same as that in Nebraska, New York, or Newfoundland. In fact there were distinct regional histories and distinct regional relations linking roads, driving, and landscape experience. This dissertation makes a contribution to the history of automobility in North America by avoiding the beaten historiographical path, by asking new questions, by focusing on particulars. It focuses closely on how the motoring public’s common landscape experiences were shaped in a specific hinterland region over the span of half a century, when automobility was ‘normal’ and almost universally seen as a good thing.

Historians’ general lack of interest in automobiles, roads, and driving may in part be explained by the fact that they remain so very familiar. Over the course of the twentieth century the practice of driving went from being an adventurous or even transgressive act to being one of the most commonplace and banal features of everyday
life. A characteristic of modernity is that what was once shockingly new can for many people gradually become familiar to the point of being taken for granted, and so incorporated into routine and common sense as to be thoroughly unremarkable. So it is today with flicking on a light, turning up the furnace, talking on the phone, drawing a bath, or hopping in a car for a drive. Hidden, or at least forgotten, behind the switch, dial, handset, faucet, and ignition key are enormous grids and networks of fixed infrastructure, complex social and technological systems that have been built up over decades, or, in some instances, over the span of more than a century. These modern systems and the logics they were designed around have shaped (and continue to shape) how millions of people interacted with, made use of, understood, and assigned meaning to the activities and experiences that they mediated.

In the case of ‘the automobile,’ it is particularly difficult to shake the myth of the freedom of the road. This is because of the very real flexibility that is permitted by driving a private automobile along a public road, which makes it difficult to consider the practice of driving as part of a larger system. Here the concept of automobility can be particularly helpful, for it insists that the automobile and the paths it travels along are merely the central points in an enormously complex, diffuse, and non-linear system, a system that has had wide-ranging and often unintended consequences while containing within it numerous contradictions, a system that for all its flexibility had coercive elements to it.6

The notion of automobility as a system is best illustrated by considering the practice of driving. Whether a sleek sports car or a giant logging truck, an automobile is

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an inanimate object, incapable of doing much more than slowly rusting away, let alone transforming society. Driving, however, brings together the vehicle-object, a fuel source, and a prepared path to travel along, as well as all the resources, labour, specialist knowledge, and wastes that were associated with producing and maintaining them, plus a disciplined operator who possesses certain mechanical skills, a knowledge of the behaviours expected by those who share the road, and a particular way of viewing their surroundings. With its emphasis on the social, the concept of automobility allows scholars to explore a wide range of interconnected phenomena while avoiding deterministic-sounding statements about how ‘the car’ changed this or ‘a road’ transformed that.

Automobility’s central importance to experiences of modernity in twentieth century North America can hardly be overstated. The automobile was at once the century’s quintessential object – the consumer durable par excellence – and its subject, carrier of symbolic and even political freight. It came to matter enormously what sort of car one drove, and if one drove at all. Cars became avatars of social distinction, paradoxically as they were also symbols of North American egalitarianism and ‘democracy.’ It also came to matter what sorts of roads were available to drive on, with autobahns, parkways, super-highways and expressways all testifying to the prowess and competence of governments (or, if they incurred heavier-than-expected costs or ran into practical difficulties, their unfitness for office). Automobility came to dominate urban and rural space by its presence and also by its absence. It facilitated unprecedented personal movement while paradoxically coercing people through innumerable laws and commonsense habits. It both obscured and established boundaries between locales, and
between the private and the public. It allowed people to commune with nature and the
countryside, while contributing to environmental destruction on a planetary scale.

Perhaps above all, the system of automobility was one of the key engines of twentieth-
century capitalism, not only in terms of automobile production and road construction, but
also in terms of how those vehicles and paths were subsequently used.

Many prominent theorists have identified automobility as having social
significance far beyond the concrete reality of the vehicle-object and the paths it moves
along. One of the most useful observations came from the philosopher Henri Lefebvre,
who called the automobile the epitome of modern objects, the “Leading-Object,” and
argued that the socio-technical system that had developed around it best represented the
proliferation of such systems in the shift towards a mass-consumption-driven or Fordist
moment of monopoly capitalism. In effect, he identified automobility and other such
systems as central to the survival of capitalism following the Depression and World War
Two. Other scholars could be cited here, but the point being emphasized is simply this:
there is a disjunction between the elevated significance that many key theorists have
attached to the system of automobility and the general lack of interest that empirically-
minded historians have shown in the subject. As Lefebvre put it in 1968, “inquiries into
the role and function of the motor-car are remarkably inconclusive to date; there are a

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90; Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York: Simon
and Schuster, 1982); Richard T.T. Forman, et al., eds., *Road Ecology: Science and Solutions* (Washington:
Island Press, 2003); John Urry, *Sociology Beyond Societies: Mobilities for the Twenty-first Century*

Lane, 1971), 68-109, especially 98-109. These systems were key to what Lefebvre called “the bureaucratic
society of controlled consumption,” in which the state, technocratic planners, and many capitalists
recognized that mass consumption was a necessary corollary to mass production if crises over
overaccumulation that might threaten established political and economic order were to be deferred or
avoided.
number of essays and studies on the subject that might serve as an introduction to our analysis [of automobility as a system] but most of them are more symptomatic than informative.” By this he meant that the literature was dominated by technical works, corporate and institutional studies, and ‘nostalgia trips’ about the routes and vehicles of yesteryear. To a large extent his framework still captures the situation today, but there have been several important developments in the historical literature in recent years.

Over the last decade, sociologists, geographers, and other theorists have been calling for mobility, flows, hybridity, nomadism, and other forms of in-between-ness to be cultivated as concepts of social and cultural analysis. They argue that the social sciences have traditionally fixated on neatly bounded entities, including bodies, identities, and nation states, and that this has proven inadequate for understanding key aspects of modernity. Here mobility is used in its broadest sense, to indicate the movement of people, objects, images, capital, ideas, and waste through environments, across social boundaries, and over national borders.

As the geographer Tim Cresswell has pointed out, much of this literature appears profoundly uninterested in the past. Historians need to participate in these discussions in order to provide temporal context as well as empirically grounded case studies against

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which theorists’ broader assertions can be tested. Within the discipline of history, several movements are afoot to develop new frameworks for understanding mobility’s significance to modernity. Some examine commodity flows. Others study energy regimes. And still others hope to wed approaches from cultural, social, and environmental history, as well as fields like cultural geography, with transportation history’s long tradition of empirical analysis in the areas of business, technology, and infrastructure. This strategy, it is argued, will provide new insights into familiar topics while also drawing attention to subjects that might otherwise go overlooked. This study locates itself in this latter, still coalescing body of work.12

This study is particularly influenced by a trio of histories that used railways as an analytical vehicle for gaining a better understanding of the cultural changes associated with the rise of industrial capitalism. Michael Freeman, Wolfgang Schivelbusch, and John Stilgoe have explored the wide-ranging and deep-seated cultural influence of railways and railway travel in Europe and America during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.13 They show that the railways that symbolically epitomized and concretely facilitated industrial capitalism also helped give rise to a new culture of time and space that was inextricably linked with it.14 The key to this was the sense of time-

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14 A culture of time and space is the set of experiential coordinates that are associated with a specific historical social formation. Many historians who have employed this concept have done so in a way that
space compression or “annihilation of space by time” that the railways generated by accelerating the circulation of commodities. In addition to transforming social and economic geography, natural environments, and long-familiar landscapes, the railways also mediated, in a very material sense, how their passengers experienced the places they passed through. Railway passengers experienced their surroundings through what Schivelbusch called the “machine ensemble” of locomotive, rails, and telegraph – a unitary system built and operated according to the capitalist logic of expanded markets and accelerated commodity circulation.

This logic subsequently structured the landscape experiences of railway passengers, who piggybacked along tracks that had been set down in a particular form and along a particular route in order to profitably speed natural resources, agricultural products, industrial manufactures, and other commodities between sites of production and sites of consumption. As railways became the dominant mode of long-distance overland travel, communities, regions, and entire nations came to be known in the popular imagination as they were experienced by travelers on the railroad. Schivelbusch coined

distances modern experiences of time and space from actual material and social conditions. For example, Stephen Kern’s oft-cited book The Culture of Time and Space, 1880–1918 (New Haven: Harvard University Press, 1983) is primarily an intellectual history of how artists’ representational techniques were influenced by new transportation and communication technologies. There is no attempt to establish links between these artists’ representations and wider economic or social changes; technology itself is treated as the motor of change in the realm of ‘high’ culture. The geographer David Harvey has argued that the time-space compression created by the accelerated circulation of commodities and capital (via transportation and communication technologies) has been the driving force behind modern cultures of time and space. However, his subsequent analysis focuses narrowly on production, urban space, and representations in the realm of ‘high’ culture, paying little attention to the household, the family, hinterland areas, the practices of everyday life, or the question of what most people actually did. Condition of Postmodernity, chapters 14–17. Also see Barney Warf, Time-Space Compression: Historical Geographies (London: Routledge, 2008).

15 Karl Marx, Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy (The Grundrisse), in Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels, Collected Works, Vol. 28 (New York: International Publishers, 1986), 448: “The more production comes to be based on exchange value, and thus on exchange, the more important for production do the physical conditions of exchange become—the means of communication and transport. By its very nature, capital strives to go beyond every spatial limitation. Hence the creation of physical conditions of exchange—of the means of communication and transport—becomes a necessity for it to an incomparably greater degree: space must be annihilated by time.”

16 Schivelbusch, Railway Journey, chapter 2.
the term “panoramic perception” to describe the sidelong view through the coach window, in which the railway passenger’s landscape experience was mediated by the form and logic of the machine ensemble. This rigidly structured mode of visual-vehicular perception made passengers into passive consumers who had no control over the route, pace, or schedule. It separated them from their surroundings, and made their landscape experiences almost entirely visual.17

Many cultural historians and historians of technology have drawn on Schivelbusch’s concept of panoramic perception. However, to apply it to automobile travel is problematic, for automobility was linked to a different moment of capitalism and has some very different characteristics than railway travel. The railway, as a system, was (and is) necessarily characterized by standardized time and hierarchical space, by rigidity, and by closed, top-down management. The route and means of travel were firmly conjoined. On the other hand, automobile travel, as a system, has characteristics that make it difficult to understand as a system. It was characterized by flexible time, ‘public’ space, dispersal, diffuseness – and by a general lack of management (except for a loosely enforced highway code). In automobile travel, the route and means of travel seemed to be quite separate: private automobiles moving along public roads. Unlike the railroad, the steamship, or the jetliner, the most common and familiar form of automobile – the passenger car – was typically a domesticated vehicle-object that was attached to the household (often quite literally, when kept in a garage, carport, or driveway). Indeed, until recently it was not uncommon for the family car to be given a name, the same way horses once were. The governments that built automobile roads did not own the cars and

17 Ibid., chapter 4.
trucks that travelled over them; nor did the companies that produced them, or the oil companies that sold fuel for them. Furthermore, the great difference in form between a semi-tractor truck and a luxury coupe, or a logging road and a multi-lane limited access highway, make it very difficult to envision them as parts of a unitary system.

Automobility, as a leading instance of Fordism, generated a new way for travellers to relate to their surroundings. The ability to travel on a schedule, pace, and route of one’s own choosing was a huge part of motoring’s appeal, whether for the sightseeing auto tourist or the commercial truck driver. The exhilaration of high speeds has received a great deal of attention from historians of automobility, but having the option to drive slowly, stop frequently, change route, and double back on one’s tracks was just as important, for it allowed motorists to recuperate the sense of foreground and connection to their built and natural surroundings that had been ‘annihilated’ by railway travel and its associated panoramic perception. Free from the tyrannical grip of the railway companies, and having the option to go slow or fast, to pause or go past, motorists felt themselves active participants in the landscapes they passed through, rather than passive consumers of an impersonal and rigidly standardized travel experience. They could discover (or rediscover) places that had been ‘in-between’ or off the beaten path within the rail network.

Furthermore, automobile travel could offer a more sensuous experience of landscape. Comparing motorists with railway travellers, the latter were more removed, even insulated from their surroundings. For both, the travel experience was primarily visual, but motorists were able to smell a field or a forest, to hear birds or a waterfall, to feel smooth and rough sections of the road. This was especially true in the days when
open- or soft-topped passenger cars were most common. Access by automobile was a new way of getting closer to nature: by camping, visiting parks, taking country drives, and so forth.\textsuperscript{18}

The automobile was also something of a time machine. It allowed motorists to recuperate some of the time that was seemingly annihilated in railway travel, making it possible to discern and contemplate historical landscape features like old buildings, trails, mines, mills, graveyards, and ghost towns. Furthermore, exposure to the elements and the unpredictability of travelling along haphazardly maintained roads caused motorists to believe they had a better sense of what travel had ‘really’ been like in the past, before the advent of locomotives and steamboats.

The cultural theorist Paul Virilio coined the term “dromoscopy” to describe the mode of visual-vehicular perception associated with automobile travel. He defined it as a new art where drivers use the automobile to project themselves through space, actively composing a quasi-cinematic series of “speed pictures” on the windshield through the use of the accelerator, brake pedal, and steering wheel.\textsuperscript{19} For the driver, dromoscopic perception is characterized by a sense of agency, of empowerment, of mastery over self, machine, and surroundings. This concept is useful for the way it distinguishes automobile travel from the panoramic perception and standardized landscape experiences produced by railway travel. However, Virilio exaggerates the degree of control in the hands of the


dromoscopic ‘artist,’ for the vast majority of automobile drivers have been restricted to travelling on public roads, and thus had a rather limited palette to work with. It was practically impossible to escape from the network of roads that had been built by the state, which decided their route and form according to its political, economic, and military priorities. Even so-called ‘off-road vehicles’ like jeeps and today’s sport-utilities are really only ‘bad road vehicles,’ incapable of going very far without a path that has been prepared and maintained for them at somebody’s considerable expense.

Thus while automobile travel has been perceived by most motorists as liberating and relatively ‘free’ because it was so much more flexible than travel by railway (or steamboat, or stagecoach), the closer look undertaken by this dissertation reveals that the practice of driving and the experience of landscapes by the road were *more tightly structured* than commonly recognized. The road and the automobile still formed a kind of machine ensemble that shaped the motoring public’s common landscape experiences. Everyone saw more or less the same thing, regardless of what kind of vehicle they were driving in. They were all seeing the same roadside landscapes, even if their readings of such shared experiences might be various.

*Historical Literature Review*

Scholarly histories about the production of automobiles and construction of roads in North America vastly outnumber the critical, detailed social and cultural studies of how people used those routes and vehicles. However, since the mid 1990s a number of important studies have been made of how automobility became intertwined with liberal subjectivity, national identity, citizenship, and a sense of shared interest amongst
motorists. American historians like Tom McCarthy, Jeremy Packer, Cotten Seiler, and Virginia Scharff have shown that motorists formed communities of mobile subjects that were tied together by the flexibility of private automobiles and by the sense of individual agency and freedom that were engendered by driving them along public roads. They join a number of historians who have explored the connections between automobility and national identity outside North America. Thomas Zeller’s work on the German *autobahn* and Peter Merriman’s work on Britain’s M1 motorway are particularly influential for this study because of the way they incorporate common landscape experience into the equation. In those countries, governments and agencies of the state made conscious efforts to shape their citizens’ driving experiences.

Most social and cultural histories of North American automobility have been carried out on the national scale, with locale, region, and metropole-hinterland relations receiving relatively little attention. Even histories about automobility in rural areas and

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small towns have tended to frame their studies on the national scale. However, there is a substantial body of work about the history of automobility in the American South that has demonstrated the value of taking a sub-national approach. The motoring experience was very different in the South than in wealthier regions like California, the Northeast, and the Midwest.

Many more North Americans have been inside a motel, gas station, or diner than inside an automobile factory, yet despite the fact that the roadside service industry is big business, it received minimal attention from historians until recent years. Historical geographers and cultural, business, and architectural historians have begun to give a better sense of the emergence and evolution of roadside commerce, especially the most common types of operations: those that sold food, gas, and lodging. While the rise of corporate franchises beginning in the late 1950s receives a great deal of attention, most of

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23 On automobility in rural America, see Michael Berger, The Devil Wagon in God’s Country: The Automobile and Social Change in Rural America, 1893-1929 (Hamden: Archon, 1979); Ronald Kline, Consumers in the Countryside: Technology and Social Change in Rural America (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).


25 John Jakle and Keith Sculle have produced an invaluable series of historical geographies about America’s common roadside commercial features, including America’s Main Street Hotels: Transiency and Community in the Early Auto Age (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009); Fast Food: Roadside Restaurants in the Automobile Age (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); The Gas Station in America (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994); Lots of Parking: Land Use in a Car Culture (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004); The Motel in America (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); and Signs in America’s Auto Age: Signatures of Landscape and Place (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2004). Also see Belasco, Americans on the Road; Catherine Gudis, Buyways: Billboards, Automobiles, and the American Landscape (London: Routledge, 2004); Chester Liebs, Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architectures (Boston: Little, Brown, 1985). For more closely focused studies of the changing landscape of roadside commerce in specific communities and along specific highway corridors, see Bennett, “Highways to Heaven”; Richard Longstreth, The Drive-In, the Supermarket, and the Transformation of Commercial Space in Los Angeles, 1914-1941 (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999); Karl Raitz, ed., The National Road 2 vols. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Thomas Schlereth, Reading the Road: US 40 and the American Landscape (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997).
these scholars have concluded that family-owned and -operated businesses persisted along even major highway corridors into the 1970s: roadside service was big business, but not dominated by big businesses. Books about roadside signs, billboards, and giant mascots have also demonstrated the importance of roadside landscapes as a way of communicating to the motoring public as consumers and as citizens. Finally, a considerable sub-literature generated by American historians has also been very interested in how roads and automobiles were used as a way for people to get in touch with nature, particularly in national parks, and to a lesser extent historical sites.26

As in the United States, most of the Canadian scholarly literature on automobility has focused on vehicle production, road construction, and urban areas, with users, uses, and hinterland areas receiving far less attention. However, in the last decade there have been several valuable studies of motoring, roads, and Canadian identity.27 Several books about the Trans-Canada Highway have shown that it was something Canada had to have in order to appear a modern nation-state, but was relatively ineffective as a device for nation-building. The dearth of regional studies on automobility in Canada is particularly


27 Dimitry Anastakis, Car Nation: An Illustrated History of Canada’s Transformation Behind the Wheel (Toronto: Lorimer, 2008); Daniel Francis, A Road for Canada: The Illustrated Story of the Trans-Canada Highway (Vancouver: Stanton, Atkins, and Dosil, 2006); David W. Monaghan, Canada’s New Main Street: The Trans-Canada Highway as Idea and Reality, 1912-1956 (Ottawa: Canada Science and Technology Museum, 2002); Robert Tremblay, “La Culture de l’automobilité au Canada: Modes de Vie, Aménagement des Paysages et Univers Symboliques le Long des Routes, 1945-2000,” Historical Assessment series (Ottawa: Canadian Science and Technology Museum, 2006). For a cultural and business history of the quintessentially Canadian drive-through business, the donut shop, see Steve Penfold, The Donut: A Canadian History (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).
surprising. A few social historians have looked at the complicated effects of road building in farming districts and northern hinterlands, but Stephen Davies’ 1987 dissertation on the early years of motoring in southern Ontario remains the only major academic work on the provincial scale.28

Canadian historians have shown far less interest in roadside commerce, roadside landscapes, and the culture of automobility than their American counterparts have.29 Nor have they shown much interest in how motorists used their automobiles for pleasure. Most historical studies of tourism in Canada do acknowledge the importance of the shift from railways to automobiles as the dominant mode of overland transportation, but do not ask how the rise of the motoring public and its new road experiences in general constituted a new factor in that industry.30 Various park historians have touched on this issue, but without paying it as much attention as it receives in this study.31

Writing about roads, automobiles, and driving in British Columbia has been left to amateur historians, including retired truck drivers and highway engineers.32 There is a

29 However, see Penfold, The Donut; Tremblay, “La Culture de l’automobilité.”
32 Andy Craig, Trucking: British Columbia’s Trucking History (Vancouver: Hancock Press, 1977); R.G. Harvey, Carving the Western Path: By River, Rail, and Road Through BC’s Southern Mountains (Surrey:
literature on the disruptive effects of railroad building on the province’s native people, but nothing similar for roads in the mid twentieth century. Historians who have studied tourism in BC have done excellent work on how tourism promoters tried to influence pleasure travellers’ consumption patterns through advertising campaigns that often incorporated landscape representations. However, they have paid little attention to actual tourists, their practices and experiences, or the state’s role in shaping them. Michael Kluckner among others has memorably written about BC’s roadsides as sites of memory and communication. However, it is only a slight overstatement to say that scholarly work on modern BC, as is the case for Canada as a whole, takes roads, automobiles, and driving for granted. This thesis seeks to transform this pattern. It proposes that what happened by the road, structured as it was by the state and its infrastructure-building programs, was a more open-ended, contingent and uncertain process than studies of the top-down manipulation of images allow. The roadside was both natural and historical,


free of access and bound to change. Bringing the insights of environmental historians into communication with those of their social, cultural, and intellectual history neighbours allows us to grasp in a new way that long revolution in political economy and sensibility constituted by automobility.

Method, Evidence, Outline

While the concept of automobility provides a useful framework for this study, it also poses a challenge because it invites consideration of a very wide range of phenomena. This study pieces together evidence about largely unstudied people, places, agencies, trends, and events in British Columbia’s past, all situated in their national and continental contexts. What holds the various parts, chapters, and sections together thematically is the same thing that held them together physically and experientially: automobiles, the provincial road network, and the practice of driving. We consider why the state built particular sections of road along a certain route and in a certain form, and how the route and form were changed over time (for a road is never truly completed: it is always something of a process, demanding continual maintenance). Most of the chapters are dedicated to a specific place, whether it be a highway corridor, a park, or a community, district, or region. Some of the roads, parks, historic sites, and roadside landscapes examined here are likely to be familiar to readers who have spent time in British Columbia, but others have disappeared and been more or less forgotten. As much attention is paid to instructive failures as to enduring successes, since the former often allow for a clearer appreciation of the forces contributing to the latter.
This dissertation can be seen as a kind of landscape history, not least because it shares many methods with historians who identify themselves as such. For the purpose of this dissertation, the term landscape is used in the sense of a dialectical relationship between people and their surroundings – in the sense of humans continually shaping and in turn continually being shaped by the built and natural environments.\(^{36}\) It incorporates aspects of cultural, environmental, visual, social, economic, and even architectural history. As a landscape history this thesis is concerned with the reciprocal relationships between culture and nature, meaning and material reality, perceiver and perceived. It is therefore concerned with what was there, how it was experienced, what those experiences were interpreted to mean, and how those interpretations led people to change (or preserve) what was there. It is about people’s past experiences of their surroundings, and how those experiences were shaped by specific actors, institutions, structures, broader social forces, as well as by nature itself.

In a sense, this is then a thesis about the everyday and the taken-for-granted. It seeks to make the familiar unfamiliar, to denaturalize the natural, to cast a quizzical eye on the commonplace and ‘commonsense.’ It wants the ordinary roads and roadside landscapes to seem as strange to the reader as they would look if they were to be viewed by someone unfamiliar with our North American way of life – a way of life that automobility has radically reshaped. It attempts to do this by focusing closely on material conditions ‘on the ground,’ the very stuff of common experiences, instead of speculating about the myriad possible meanings that automobile travellers might have taken away.

with them. The focus here is on concretely tangible structures and shared or common experiences. It is interested in the common, the ordinary, and the banal. Because this study examines aspects of BC’s history that have never been explored before, several chapters contain short ‘side trips’. Several indeed illuminate further the application of Fordism. For example some show how automobility helped expand the Interior forest industry after World War Two. Others tell us about its role in the development of the service industry, the emergence of new regional centres, and the state’s role in producing and circulating images of the BC Interior.

The twelve chapters forming the bulk of this thesis are grouped into two parts, both containing six chapters and both introduced by a short prelude. One part is more on the perception of the natural environment, the other more about perception of the past. The concluding chapter discusses both parts together. The chapters in Part One, Nature by the Road, use as case material the closely intertwined histories of two arterial highways and two large provincial parks. One pairing of highway and park was a great success, the other a striking failure. The chapters in Part Two, History by the Road, focus on how boosters, businesses, local historical societies, and agencies of the state worked to preserve historical landscape features and cultivate historical attractions along the highways of the BC Interior. Again we find a mix of failures and successes—the former illuminating the latter. Interestingly many of the amateur initiatives in constructing memories for the motoring public are not so easily classed as success or failure. With their frequent resort to semi-nostalgic, “old-timey” themes, these became familiar features of the roadside, but they do not lack interest, because they are amongst the most direct windows we have, windows not exactly into the meanings people attached to the
things by the road, but into the meanings people thought motorists might find catching. Many ordinary people living along the road were partly like fishermen along a river, hoping to lure custom, sometimes reaping large rewards, and other times none at all.

Many different kinds of evidence are used in this dissertation: travellers’ accounts, travelogues, tourism promotional materials, guidebooks, pamphlets, and maps. It is rare to come across an ordinary person’s written description about what it was like to drive around BC. Given that the twentieth century was marked by the ‘democratization’ of both automobility and photography, most motorists seem to have kept visual rather than textual records of their travels. This study draws on a collection of more than 700 historical photographs, snapshots, slides, and postcards trawled from websites like Ebay and Flickr over the last six years. Though often idealized, these landscape representations provide useful concrete information about when and how things by the road changed. It also draws upon more conventional sources: magazines, newspapers, and local histories. The main body of evidence, however, is drawn from government records, particularly those generated by the agency responsible for BC’s provincial parks, which was called the Parks Division from 1939 to 1957, when it was part of the Forest Service, and the Parks Branch after 1957, when it was part of the Department of Recreation and Conservation. It fell to this department to ensure that BC looked as good as possible in the eyes of the motoring public (or so believed, at any rate, many of its key figures). This very small branch of the state generated reconnaissance reports, development plans, surveys and studies, photographs, and correspondence on day-to-day management, all of which are quite revealing. We see in them—as we see in so many other documents of the time—the aesthetics and machinations of the state project of Fordism.
Part I

Shaping Nature by the Road in the British Columbia Interior

In Part I, the focus is on how the state initiative of park-making intersected with the state project of road-building. This prelude to its six chapters provides an overview of the Fordist context before moving into the case material, which elucidates the experiences of the consumers – the motoring public – rather than the motives of the state.

It is a truism amongst cultural and environmental historians that parks are admixtures of nature and culture, preservation and exploitation, where sections of paradise have often been paved over in order to put up the parking lots deemed necessary for visitors to appreciate the edifying nature of that paradise. Rather than belabour the constructed nature of park landscapes, the chapters in this first part of this dissertation take it as a given. They focus on specific aspects of how the relationship between automobility and the environment was managed in two of the largest, most accessible provincial parks in the BC Interior.

In British Columbia, as in most of North America during the twentieth century, the popular experience of nature was shaped by parks, and the popular experience of parks was in turn shaped by the manner in which visitors reached them. Many historians have discussed the relationship between railways and parks in the late nineteenth and twentieth century, but the relationship between parks, private automobiles, and public roads has so far not drawn as much attention.¹ Making parks accessible to the motoring

¹ Canadian historians have shown less interest in the place of automobility in parks than their American colleagues have. In the Canadian literature on park history, questions about the place of the
public was a good way for a government to extract value from areas it had set aside from industrial resource extraction. At the same time, developing parks along the highway network was a good way to encourage its use by consumers and citizens. In the post World War Two years, BC’s provincial parks were effectively an extension of the provincial highway network. Parks were established and managed as province-building devices.

The following chapters examine a pair of arterial roads and a pair of provincial parks: Manning Park and the Hope-Princeton Highway, which were a major ‘success,’ and Hamber Park and the Big Bend Highway, which were a major ‘failure.’ None of these parks, roads, or the regions in which they were located has received detailed attention from historians of British Columbia. By making previously inaccessible areas open to the motoring public, these roads made the unfamiliar and meaningless familiar and meaningful. These chapters suggest that BC’s provincial parks were to a large extent conceived and managed as extensions of the highway network, with the views of the motoring public foremost in mind. Nature was understood as something to be experienced through the medium of the private automobile and the state-built paths along which it travelled.

‘machine in the garden’ have tended to be pushed aside in favour of investigations of the politics of resource development: of mining, logging, and dam-building in and around parks, the deletion of portions of parks to facilitate these activities, and so forth. Roads, automobiles, and motorists are usually taken for granted, and when aspects of automobility are touched on it is usually in the institutional context of shifts in policy and management techniques because of a growing numbers of visitors who arrived by automobile. The shaping of park landscapes by and for the motoring public has gone largely overlooked. Also, it should be noted that historians have not paid much attention to provincial parks, focusing instead on national parks in and around the Rockies—the ‘crown jewels’ of the national park system. See MacEachern, Natural Selections, especially chapter 7; I.S. MacLaren, “Cultured Nature in Jasper National Park” Journal of Canadian Studies 34, 3 (1999); 7-58. E.J. Hart described the CPR’s role in earliest motor touring in The Selling of Canada, and provided a history of a major guiding and touring company operating out of Banff in The Brewster Story: From Pack Train to Tour Bus (Banff: Brewster Transport Co., 1981).
Chapters Two through Five look closely at the intertwined histories of Manning Provincial Park and the Hope-Princeton Highway. For more than half a century Manning Park has been one of most heavily visited, most popular, most ‘successful’ provincial parks in the BC Interior. Its location explains much of its fame and popularity. It is relatively near Vancouver and is traversed from east to west by the Hope-Princeton Highway. This road, which is a key section of BC’s southern transprovincial highway, was started in 1929, delayed for many years, and then opened to the motoring public in 1949. The chapters on Manning Park explore how its origins, planning, development, and management were all shaped by the highway that traversed it, the viewing habits of the motoring public, and their anticipated and actual aesthetic expectations.

Chapters Six and Seven tell the story of Hamber Provincial Park, an enormous park located in the mountains of east-central British Columbia. Hamber was traversed by the Big Bend Highway, which was also started in 1929 and completed in 1940, just before war finances took up the state’s attention. There were several noteworthy similarities between the two parks, but whereas Manning became one of BC’s most popular and familiar provincial parks, and was lavished with attention by the Parks Branch, Hamber Park was sorely neglected. Even though it was traversed by an important highway, it saw no development and was practically unknown to the motoring public. Hamber ended up being eviscerated in 1961 to make way for the logging industry and hydroelectric megaprojects. As the following chapters show, Hamber Park’s ‘failure’ was in large part the result of the motoring public’s intense dislike of the Big Bend Highway and the experience of nature that it provided.
These chapters look at the construction of what American park historian David Louter has called “windshield wilderness”: the situation whereby the vast majority of visitors to parks travel there and have their experiences shaped by the vehicles and infrastructure that rank amongst the most intrusive and extensive developments within the park. However, whereas Louter and other historians of North American parks focus on philosophical and institutional debates about the proper place of roads and automobiles in parks, the approach taken here is to look closely at people’s experiences of nature by the road.

British Columbia had the third largest park system in North America for most of the twentieth century, behind only the Canadian and American national park systems in terms of total area. In fact, for a few years it was even larger than the American national park system. However, due to the cavalier way BC’s provincial parks were created, most of its large wilderness parks were very isolated and difficult to access prior to the late 1940s. This inaccessibility was also a reflection of the primitive nature of the province’s transportation networks: while most of the American and Canadian national parks in the mountainous west were opened up to the motoring public during the interwar years, most of British Columbia’s large provincial parks remained isolated until World War Two or later. They were, in effect, symbols that brought little return to the province. For the large majority of British Columbians, the provincial parks were little more than names on a map. Postwar road building changed all this.

The late 1940s and early 1950s were an era in which designs for BC’s provincial parks were very plastic. There were no firm policies in place about recreation or

2 Louter, Windshield Wilderness.
conservation, about allowing cabins, concessions, and other developments in the parks, or about how to manage existing parks and establish new ones. The practical men of the Parks Division, most of whom had come up within the administrative structure of the Forest Service, focused on how to preserve timber and prevent forest fires. Preserving timber from the threat of fire was a paramount concern, except now the emphasis was on protecting timber for its scenic value rather than for its value as an extractable resource.

In 1957 the responsibility for BC’s provincial parks was transferred away from the Forest Service and over to the newly formed Department of Recreation and Conservation. This allowed the Forest Service to focus on the ‘productive’ aspects of the province’s forests, while the parks were reclassified as tourist assets. Then the Parks Division became the Parks Branch, and started to focus more on outdoor recreation, park interpretation, aesthetics, and scenery.

After World War Two, new highways were being built and old highways were being improved throughout the Interior of British Columbia. Many of the resulting changes in provincial and national parks occurred suddenly and on a large scale, putting unanticipated strains on the environment, park services, and parks staff. For example, when the new paved, all-season route of the Trans-Canada Highway opened through the Selkirk Mountains in 1962, the growth in traffic to and through Mount Revelstoke National Park was so great and so rapid that Parks Canada decided to close the park for two years in order to improve its winding parkway, to construct new buildings, campsites, and other services, and to thoroughly renovate existing ones.

Similar gusts of change occurred in the provincial parks. Until the late 1960s BC’s park planners and other staff were usually in the position of reacting to, rather than
planning for, new roads, increased automobile traffic, and their myriad effects. Only in
the early 1970s were ‘master plans’ drawn up to develop the facilities and policies needed
to cope with the existing levels of traffic, and with the projected steady growth in the
number of visitors to the parks in the future, the vast majority of them passing through in
automobiles. To a great extent the postwar growth of the park system, its systematization,
and the establishment of a park bureaucracy were the result of new and improved
highways and steadily rising rates of automobile ownership and automobile travel.

Several scholars have pointed out what is seemingly a major contradiction in
BC’s postwar parks policy: that although the number of provincial parks increased by
almost 200 in the years between 1949 and 1965, the total area of provincial parklands
actually decreased by nearly 2.5 million acres.3 While hundreds of roadside picnic sites,
campgrounds, boat launches, and other recreation-oriented areas were being added to the
provincial parks system, huge portions of larger parks were being deleted with the stroke
of a pen, most often in order to facilitate clearcut logging on an enormous scale before
the rising waters of a dam reservoir would flood out vast areas of the country. In this
light, how should the many small ‘parklets’ created in the 1950s and 1960s be
understood? They suggest that the provincial park system was to a large degree
considered an extension of the provincial highway network, with many small parks
adorning its roadsides. They also clearly demonstrate the domination of recreational use
values over conservation values within the BC government. However, the details are
unknown—while there has been little written on the history of the larger parks in BC,

3 See for example J.W. Wilson, Talk and Log: Wilderness Politics in British Columbia, 1965-95
(Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998); James Youds, “A Park System as an Evolving Cultural Institution: A Case
Study of the British Columbia Provincial Park System, 1890-1941” (MA thesis, University of Waterloo,
1978).
nothing at all has been done on these miniatures. Of interest in the following section will be the ‘systematic’ management of the parks: how decisions were made about where and how far apart to establish park facilities; the location and design criteria involved; the reactions of park visitors and the motoring public more generally. What other types of feedback did the Fordist state receive about these parks? How were the provincial parks promoted to British Columbians?

Finally, how were the provincial parks managed in order to deliver certain lessons about the environment, wilderness, nature, and humans’ places therein? How did parks staff and planners try to communicate to park visitors? Above all, how were BC’s provincial parks managed in a way that shaped the motoring public’s experiences of nature by the road? How did the Fordist state conceive, develop, and manage the provincial parks as assets linked to automobility? These are the key questions that frame the following chapters.
Chapter 2
The Road Towards a Park in BC’s Cascade Mountains, 1919-1941

Manning Park has been one of British Columbia’s most popular provincial parks for more than half a century. Probably the most important factor in its popularity has been the fact that it is traversed from east to west by the Hope-Princeton Highway, which links the Coast with the southern Interior and forms a vitally important section of BC’s southern transprovincial highway. Easy road access has allowed many British Columbians to become familiar with Manning’s scenic, natural, and recreational attractions. To the extent that a park’s success can be measured by the number of visitors, it has been one of BC’s most successful provincial parks.

A mark of Manning Park’s popularity is the fact that it is one of BC’s few provincial parks to have had a bit of its history documented. In 1991 the BC Parks Branch celebrated the park’s fiftieth anniversary by publishing Manning Park Memories, in which former park employees recounted its early days, when headquarters in Victoria seemed very distant and staff stationed in the park were allowed to respond to challenges with their own ingenuity.¹ These accounts illustrate the important role that staff working on the ground played in the park’s early years. However, they say almost nothing about how Manning Park’s history was intertwined with that of the Hope-Princeton Highway, or the fact the motoring public’s experiences of the park’s roadside landscapes was one of the most pressing concerns for the Parks Branch. This and the three following chapters examine the very close relationship between the park and the road, which have until now been treated as though they were separate. They show that the establishment, planning,

development, and maintenance of Manning Park were all bound up with the motoring public and their real and imagined views from the road. They also show that Manning’s success in terms of its popularity and prominent place in the public imagination was not natural or inevitable. To a large extent they were the result of a government agency that worked ‘behind the scenery,’ managing roadside landscapes so that they would provide motorists with appealing experiences of nature by the road.

This chapter examines Manning Park’s origins. It shows that the driving force behind the earliest proposals for a park in BC’s southern Cascade Mountains was the provincial government’s 1929 decision to build a second automobile road between the Coast and the Interior. The promise of a road spurred a loose coalition of boosters, merchants, orchardists, and trail riding enthusiasts to lobby the provincial government to preserve timber, wildlife, plants, and other natural landscape features so that they would be visible to the motorists who would one day travel along the Hope-Princeton road – even before the road was built, there was widespread concern for the impression its roadside landscapes would make on the motoring public. The road towards a provincial park in BC’s southern Cascade Mountains was not a smooth one. Park proponents were pitted against ranchers who wanted to graze their animals in the area, and it twice looked as though these ranching interests had won out. Park proponents’ arguments about the economic value of preserving natural scenery and landscape features along the road corridor were also weakened by a lack of progress on the actual road during the Depression. Ultimately, however, the state did decide in favour of a park. It established a game reserve in the Cascade Mountains in 1936, which formed the basis for Manning Provincial Park, which was created five years later.
Connecting BC’s Coast and Interior

To help set the stage for chapters that follow, and to illustrate the important role of state-built infrastructure in channeling the motoring public along certain routes, this section sets out the context of transportation in and around the Cascades Mountains. A road through British Columbia’s southern Cascade Mountains has been called “the longest delay in the joining of a transportation need to its solution in the history of the province.”¹ A wagon road via this route was first proposed during the gold rushes of the late 1850s, and a preliminary trail was blazed in 1860. However, plans to upgrade it were abandoned in favour of building the Cariboo Wagon Road through the Fraser and Thompson river canyons, which would provide access to the colony’s northerly gold fields. Railway surveyors examined BC’s southern Cascade Mountains during the 1870s while searching for a route between the Coast and Interior, but the Canadian Pacific Railway also ended up being built through the Fraser and Thompson river canyons. In the early 1910s, it appeared likely that the first automobile road linking BC’s Coast and Interior was going to be built through the Cascade Mountains between Hope and Princeton: several miles of right-of-way were even cleared on the outskirts of the two towns. However, this scheme was shelved at the outbreak of the Great War.³

In 1919 BC’s Liberal government announced its intention to build a network of automobile roads that would allow motorists to travel “from the Coast through the whole central part of British Columbia.”⁴ Fast-rising rates of professional middle-class

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¹ Harvey, The Coast Connection, 91.
² Ibid., 78-81, 90. Harvey shows that in the years before World War One the southerly Hope-Princeton route had been favoured by provincial politicians and engineers in the Department of Public Works. He concludes that “without the intervention of the war this route would have been built [first].”
³ Minister of Public Works Dr. J.H. King, speech before the Good Roads League of British Columbia, 6 October 1919, cited in Harvey, Coast Connection, 92.
automobile ownership and motorists’ desire to drive further for business, family, and pleasure led to calls for more and better roads. These calls were especially loud in the Interior, where the road network was primitive and badly fragmented. Railways continued to dominate personal transportation in the Interior during the interwar years, and several regions were still reliant on paddlewheel steamboats. Critics argued that the disconnected nature of BC’s road network retarded economic growth, benefitted the big railway companies, and signalled that the province remained a resource frontier, lagging behind its more progressive western neighbours. An array of interests urged politicians in Victoria to expand and improve the provincial road network, including boosters, boards of trade, small businesses, farmers, tourism promoters, automobile clubs, and the growing number of automobile owners who comprised BC’s motoring public.5

Most of these groups agreed that a road between the Coast and the Interior was one of British Columbia’s most pressing infrastructure requirements. It had not had one since the early 1880s, when construction of the CPR had been allowed to destroy the section of the Cariboo Wagon Road in the Fraser and Thompson river canyons. There were two feasible routes for such a road: one that would traverse the southern Cascade Mountains between Hope and Princeton, which would benefit BC’s southern Interior, and one that would skirt around the Cascades via the Fraser and Thompson canyons between Hope and Ashcroft, which would benefit the central Interior. Powerful regional interests lined up behind each route, and the lobbying was intense. With a provincial election due in the near future, the Liberal government promised new and improved automobile roads

5 On the primitive state of BC’s automobile roads in the interwar years, see Cole Harris, “Moving Amidst the Mountains,” BC Studies 58 (Summer 1983), 20-25. On BC’s earliest ‘good roads’ movement, see Taylor, Automobile Saga, chapter 10.
in a general sense, but avoided committing to either route, lest it lose votes in the region that did not receive the strategic road link.

The Liberals retained power in the 1920 election, but the three following years were a period of recession, and the government’s only action on a road between the Coast and the Interior was to conduct a number of exploratory surveys. This did not prevent boosters from suggesting that a decision on the route was imminent, or had already been made. For example, the 1922 edition of Wrigley’s *British Columbia Directory* asserted that the vital road link was sure to follow the Hope-Princeton route. The provincial government avoided making a firm commitment until 1923, by which time a number of developments in the central Interior had made building a road through the canyons between Hope and Ashcroft preferable to the more southerly route through the Cascades.6

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By 1923 the components of a transprovincial automobile road that would traverse BC’s central Interior were falling into place. The provincial Department of Public Works had stitched together several previously disconnected sections of road to form a 200-mile stretch of passable automobile road that went from Ashcroft and the Thompson River in the west to Revelstoke and the Columbia River in the east. This road ran parallel to the route of the CPR and passed through a number of well-established communities, including the city of Kamloops. In 1923 the federal government also agreed to build most of a touring road between Golden, BC and Banff, Alberta via the Kicking Horse Pass and Yoho National Park. Once this road through the central Rockies was completed, there would be only two gaps left in an automobile road running from Calgary to Vancouver: one between Ashcroft and the Coast, and another between the mountain towns of Revelstoke and Golden. These infrastructure developments gave the Fraser Canyon route an advantage over the more southerly Hope-Princeton route.

The man responsible for selecting the route of BC’s first automobile road between the Coast and the Interior was Minister of Public Works William Henry Sutherland, the long-serving MLA for Revelstoke. Sutherland was no doubt aware of how his home riding would be affected by each of the options put before him. The town of Revelstoke was an important transportation hub in the mountains of east-central BC. It was a divisional point on the CPR mainline; it had acquired a westward road link to Kamloops in 1922; and it appeared likely that an automobile road would one day be built to provide an eastward link with Golden, Banff, and the Prairies. The town’s merchants, boosters, and politicians recognized how important it was to be located on the main artery of traffic. They also recognized that the automobile was becoming an important vehicle for
touring and pleasure travel, and were trying to get a mountain parkway built in nearby Mount Revelstoke National Park. If the Fraser Canyon route was selected as the connection between the Coast and Interior, Revelstoke was likely to become an important point in BC’s emerging network of automobile roads. On the other hand, if the Hope-Princeton route were selected, Revelstoke would remain an automotive backwater. In early 1924 Sutherland approved construction of BC’s first Coast-to-Interior automobile road via the Fraser and Thompson canyons. This decision practically assured that BC’s first transprovincial highway would follow a central route that ran parallel to the CPR, and that this would subsequently be incorporated into a Canadian transcontinental highway.\(^7\)

Construction of the canyon highway began in 1924. After significant delays and cost overruns it became possible for motorists to drive between Hope and Ashcroft in the fall of 1926. The experience of driving the Fraser Canyon route during the interwar years is discussed at length in Chapter Nine. Here it will suffice to say that it quickly became an important shared landscape experience for BC’s motoring public, known for its sublime scenery and many traces of the historic Cariboo Wagon Road. For more than 20 years the canyon highway would be the only route for auto tourists, families, and business travellers who wanted to drive between the Coast and Interior. As the gateway to the Interior it played a vital role in shaping motorists’ perceptions of the province beyond Hope. Many found driving through the canyons a daunting, even intimidating experience. The road was winding and narrow in many places. In some spots the muddy,

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boiling Fraser River could be seen a thousand feet below down a near perpendicular drop, while dark cliffs towered overhead. The road featured all kinds of exotic engineering, including tunnels, a horseshoe-shaped bridge, hair-raising sections that traversed sheer rock faces on precarious grasshopper trestles, and curves like the one near Kanaka Bar, where vehicles made an arc of 220 degrees in a radius of less than 60 feet. The road was susceptible to closure due to intermittent disgorgements of rock, mud, and snow onto the precarious line of traffic. Sometimes the road surface itself would be washed down a cliff or into the river.

Some motorists found driving through the Fraser and Thompson canyons an adventure, a bracing journey into the sublime. Others found it nightmarish. Some relished the gloomy scenery; others preferred to drive the twisting road at night so that the headlights of oncoming vehicles would warn of their approach. Regardless, everyone who wanted to drive between BC’s Coast and Interior had to pass that way. Driving the canyon was an experience that tied motorists together as a community of travellers, consumers, and citizens. Canyon landscapes grew familiar to the point of being central to the motoring public’s experience of the Interior. Motorists became familiar with small canyon communities like Hope, Yale, Boston Bar, Lytton, and Spences Bridge, and with the many commercial operations that appeared along this vitally important section of road. They also became familiar with the hefty toll that the provincial government collected at the Alexandra Suspension Bridge near Spuzzum. The toll would draw

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8 Regarding early commercial operations along the canyon road, see Kluckner, *Vanishing British Columbia*, 114-122. So many unregulated auto camps were opened along BC’s main highways that Superintendent J.H. Mullin of the BC Provincial Police called on the health department to conduct special inspections of their “sanitary arrangements” lest they become “a menace” to the motoring public. “Report of the Superintendent of Provincial Police” in *British Columbia Sessional Papers, 1926-7* (Victoria: Queen’s Printer, 1927), S11.
complaints from motorists for the next 20 years, but there was no way around it for those who wanted to drive between the Coast and Interior without leaving Canada. The Fraser Canyon highway was the ‘beaten path’ In relative terms, those communities and districts that were far from or poorly connected to this main artery of automobile travel were marginal, situated ‘off the beaten path.’ The southwestern Interior was one such region. Its isolation was exaggerated by the provincial government’s stinging decision to avoid building through the southern Cascade Mountains in 1924. However, by the late 1920s no one expected this would remain the case for long, for it appeared likely that the province was going to build a second Coast-to-Interior road, this time between Hope and Princeton.

*Anticipating the Hope-Princeton Road*

The Conservatives defeated the Liberals in the 1928 provincial election, and Simon Fraser Tolmie – the son of a pioneering Hudson’s Bay Company fur trader – became premier. The Conservative victory was largely due to voters in Coastal cities turning away from the Liberals, who had acquired a reputation for bestowing too many favours on the province’s hinterland ridings. These favours typically took the form of expensive public works, amongst which the automobile road through the Fraser Canyon ranked foremost. However, the distribution of BC’s electoral ridings was heavily skewed in favour of rural and hinterland regions, and the new government ended up with more MLAs from the Interior than from the Coast. Seven of the 35 Conservative MLAs came from ridings located in the southern Interior, and this geographic bloc pressed the new
government to proceed with the construction of a second, more southerly automobile
road between the Coast and Interior.  

In the summer of 1929, less than three years after the Fraser Canyon highway had
been officially opened to the motoring public, Tolmie’s minister of public works
announced that construction would begin the following spring on a road connecting Hope
and Princeton via the Allison Pass. He declared that this second road link between BC’s
Coast and Interior would be completed by 1932 – a bold claim, especially after the delays
and cost overruns associated with building the canyon highway had helped bring about
the Liberals’ downfall. Building a road between Hope and Princeton would not be easy or
inexpensive, for the area was a knot of rugged mountains ranges and highlands, pierced
by only a few narrow river valleys. It was far more isolated than the Fraser and
Thompson canyons. Whereas the canyon route traversed communities that were already
serviced by the Canadian Pacific and Canadian National railways, there were no rail
lines, communities, farms, or mines in the mountains between Hope and Princeton, only a
few rough trails and a handful of prospectors’ cabins. To the vast majority of British
Columbians, the southern Cascades Mountains were an unfamiliar wilderness, even
though they were only 100 miles due east of Vancouver.  

Tolmie’s promised road had great appeal to ranchers, orchardists, and merchants
in the Similkameen and Okanagan valleys, for it would loosen the railway companies’
grip over transportation in the southern Interior. The mid 1920s had been boom years

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9 Conservative MLAs represented the ridings of Chilliwack, Similkameen, South Okanagan, Grand Forks-
Greenwood, Rossland-Trail, Nelson, and Creston.
11 On the CPR’s dominating influence in BC’s southern Interior, see Jeremy Mouat, “Nationalist Narratives
and Regional Realities: The Political Economy of Railway Development in Southeastern British Columbia,
1895-1905” in John M. Findlay and Ken S. Coates, eds., *Parallel Destinies: Canadian-American Relations*
for orchardists in the Okanagan and Similkameen valleys, but shortages of lake barges and refrigerated boxcars had caused valuable fruit to rot in the packinghouses, leaving producers frustrated with the railways’ high freight rates and inflexibility. During those same years, the orchardists, farmers, and land agents of the Okanagan Valley had adopted the passenger car and light delivery truck so enthusiastically that the region had one of BC’s highest rates of automobile ownership. However, these vehicles were only useful for short-distance transportation – for widening the range of local deliveries, moving fruit from orchard to packinghouse, and carrying prospective investors from hotels to nearby parcels of real estate. As in so many part of the Interior, the regional road network remained quite primitive, and the feasibility of driving between even nearby communities depended on the season and the weather conditions.

The road network of the southwestern Interior was even less convenient for motorists who wanted to drive between it and the Coast. After 1926, motorists making such a trip could choose between two long, roundabout routes. They could head north through the Nicola or Okanagan valleys to connect with the emerging transprovincial road that ran between Revelstoke, Kamloops, Ashcroft, and Hope. This was unpopular due to the toll at the Alexandra Bridge and the amount of time required: even in good conditions the drive between Princeton and Vancouver took twelve hours. The other

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possible route to the Coast involved heading south and crossing the border into America. By dropping into Washington State, motorists from BC’s southern Interior could travel from east to west faster and more safely on its better-developed road network – a situation that troubled many Interior merchants and hoteliers, who saw profits being lost to American competitors. Whichever of these roundabout routes they took, motorists from the southwestern Interior were faced with a trip that would take a full day and quite probably require an overnight stop.14

By building an automobile road through BC’s southern Cascade Mountains, the provincial government would reduce the isolation of rural areas and small towns in the southwestern Interior. It would allow orchardists and other agricultural producers to deliver their goods directly to the province’s major urban centres on a more flexible schedule than was offered by the railways.15 It would also make pleasure travel to the southwestern Interior faster, more direct, and therefore more appealing for residents of Coastal cities. With its warm, dry climate, placid lakes, and verdant valley bottoms, the southwestern Interior had strong potential for tourism and recreation-related development.16 Auto touring was fast becoming one of the most popular leisure activities

14 Craig, **Trucking**, chapter 4; Laurie Currie, **Princeton: 120 Years** (Princeton, BC: Similkameen Spotlight, 1990), 78. On the east-west road network in northern Washington State at this time, see Carlos Schwantes, *The Pacific Northwest: An Interpretive History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 290-295.

15 Selling orchard products during this period was intensely competitive. For producers who refused to participate in cooperative marketing schemes, the possibility of transporting fruit to the Coast by automobile must have been especially appealing. See David Dendy and Kathleen M. Kyle, *A Fruitful Century: The British Columbia Fruit Growers’ Association, 1889-1989* (Kelowna: BC Fruit Growers’ Association, 1990), chapter 3, especially 67-71. On labour activists and agricultural producers’ shared enthusiasm for rural roads in the United States during the interwar years, see Lawrence M. Lipin, “Cast Aside the Automobile Enthusiast: Class Conflict, Tax Policy, and the Preservation of Nature in Progressive-Era Oregon,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 107, 2 (2006): 166-195; Preston, *Dirt Roads to Dixie*, chapters 2-4.

16 On the Okanagan Valley’s image as a healthful Eden of rest, relaxation, and recreation, see Jason Bennett, “Blossoms and Borders: Cultivating Apples and a Modern Countryside in the Pacific Northwest, 1890-2001,” PhD dissertation, University of Victoria (2008). Communities in BC’s southern Interior
for middle-class North Americans, and hoteliers and merchants hoped to profit by selling food, gas, lodging, and other services to this new market. Many new auto camps, autocourts, gas stations, and other kinds of roadside commercial operations had sprouted up along the Fraser Canyon highway, and it was expected that similar businesses would flourish along a more southerly route between the Coast and Interior. Recognizing that the journey was as important at the destination, the garage owners, hoteliers, and would-be entrepreneurs of the southern BC Interior wanted the government to build the Hope-Princeton road so that it would appeal to auto tourists: they saw the surrounding mountains, forests, and rivers as important scenic assets. Thus support for the promised Hope-Princeton road came from a broad spectrum of society in BC’s southern Interior: from orchardists and other rural producers; from boosters, businesses, and boards of trade; and from middle-class families who owned (or aspired to own) an automobile.

Proposals for a Park on the Hope-Princeton Road

The announcement of the Hope-Princeton road project could not have had worse timing. BC was hit hard when world commodity markets collapsed in late 1929, for its economy was based on primary resource extraction, and much of the provincial government’s revenue derived from licenses and fees collected on mining, fishing, logging, and milling activity. Initially the crisis seemed nothing more than a particularly bad instance of the cyclical downturns BC’s economy had always been susceptible to, and the Conservative government’s response was the traditional one in such cases: to sharply reduce expenditures. Spending on public works was slashed, including for the

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known to have established municipal auto camps during the 1920s as a way of drawing auto tourists include Penticton, Rossland, and Cranbrook.
construction of automobile roads. As a result, the Hope-Princeton road project was shelved only a few months after construction had begun.

The unprecedented severity of the economic downturn was clear by early 1931. BC’s official unemployment rate hovered around 28 percent, and each westbound train brought more men looking for work. Concerned that unemployed, politically radicalized workers from hinterland mining towns and logging camps would congregate in Coastal cities and cause disorder, the provincial government did a turnaround on public works spending, and began taking steps to provide relief employment through road building projects. That summer, road construction camps were set up in several isolated locations around the province, including along the surveyed route of the Hope-Princeton road.

Over the following years relief work camps would be established at the Sumallo summit, Snass Creek, Cambie Creek, and Copper Creek.17 These camps achieved only piecemeal progress in terms of actual road construction, but were intended as much to keep unemployed men away from urban centres as they were to complete useful public works.18 The construction techniques that would have been used by professional building

17 There is a dearth of writing about the operation and day-to-day conditions of relief road building camps in BC during the Depression years, despite the fact that it had the largest number of these camps and the most men enrolled of any province. Two short accounts of life in camps along the Hope-Princeton are Jack Rainbow’s reminiscences in Dorothy Smuin, “Relief Camps of the Great Depression,” Report of the Okanagan Historical Society 63 (1999), 85-88; and Verna B. Cawston, “Happy Days in a Relief Camp” in Millicent A. Lindo, Making History: An Anthology of British Columbia (Vancouver: Lindo, 1974), 55-62. Richard A. Rajala discusses the BC Forest Service’s relief work programs and places them in the larger picture of relief work in BC during the 1930s in “From ‘On to Ottawa’ to ‘Bloody Sunday’: Unemployment Relief and British Columbia Forests, 1935-1939” in Dimitry Anastakis and Penny Bryden, eds., Framing Canadian Federalism: Historical Essays in Honour of John T. Saywell (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009): 118-150. Also see Laurel Sefton MacDowell, “Relief Camp Workers in Ontario during the Great Depression of the 1930s,” Canadian Historical Review 74, 2 (1999): 205-228.

18 In the summer of 1931, Minister of Public Works Rolf Bruhn told Premier Tolmie that “a large number of transient unemployed men from the larger centres may be placed on such work as the Lougheed Highway, North Thompson, Big Bend, Hope-Princeton, University area, West Coast Road, etc.” He explained that “[i]t is my opinion that in caring for the unemployed, especially single men and transients, that such men should be employed in various parts of the Province instead of concentrating them in camps in one locality.” UBCSC, Simon Fraser Tolmie collection, box 8, file 19, Bruhn to Tolmie, 17 June 1931.
crews in ordinary circumstances were rejected because they would have reduced the total amount of work available for the men residing in the camps. Minimal use was made of machinery or explosives; hand tools and horse-drawn scrapers were far more common than steam shovels and caterpillar tractors.19

Despite its commitment to finish the Hope-Princeton road by 1932, the provincial government’s first infrastructure priority during the early 1930s was to complete its share of the Big Bend Highway. This 200-mile-long road, which was to traverse an even lonelier wilderness than the southern Cascade Mountains, is discussed in Chapter Six. It was a joint provincial-federal project that involved building a road between Revelstoke and Golden via the horseshoe-shaped course of the Columbia River. It was meant to provide the final link in the transprovincial route across BC’s central Interior, thereby connecting the Pacific and the Prairies. Ottawa had partnered with Victoria on the Big Bend road project because it was expected to increase tourist traffic to the national parks in the Rockies, and to form part of a future Trans-Canada Highway. Prior to 1933 no federal support was available for projects deemed to be of mere regional or provincial significance, which included the Hope-Princeton road.

The provincial government’s focus on the isolated Big Bend road project drew criticism from boosters, businesses, and boards of trade in the southern Interior. In early 1932, a booster from Nelson complained to Premier Tolmie about the selection of the Big Bend route for a future Trans-Canada Highway. He argued that BC would be better

19 On the regression of road construction techniques in Canadian relief work camps, see Monaghan, Canada’s New Main Street, 15. The inefficient ‘make work’ practices in Canadian relief work camps engendered deep cynicism amongst their residents, as described in James Struthers, No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State, 1914-1941 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), 133-135; John Herd Thompson and Allen Seager, Canada, 1922-1939: Decades of Discord (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985), 268-269.
served by a more southerly transprovincial highway that traversed the Crowsnest Pass, the mining districts around Nelson, and the Cascade Mountains between Princeton and Hope. He also accused the Big Bend project of eating up a disproportionate amount of the funds available for relief work. Tolmie replied that construction of the Big Bend road would “not in any way interfere with the road which is being pushed through the Hope Mountains and through the Similkameen to Nelson and towns east.” However, this was untrue. The provincial government’s finances had become grossly overextended due to the costs associated with direct relief and relief work projects. By the end of summer 1932 BC was teetering on the edge of bankruptcy, kept afloat only by emergency funding from Ottawa, which feared that a provincial government defaulting on its debts would adversely affect the dominion’s access to credit. Tolmie ordered the suspension of all relief work projects except for those relating to the Big Bend Highway. The province’s other relief work camps were shut down, including those between Hope and Princeton. Tolmie did this against the advice of his minister of public works, a former road foreman who represented an Interior riding, who described it as an act of “absolute political suicide.”

It was during the early Depression years, when the Hope-Princeton road project was badly stalled, that it became intertwined with proposals to establish a provincial park in BC’s southern Cascade Mountains. Boosters, business owners, and tourism promoters in the southern Interior believed that in the short term a park might help spur the

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20 UBCSC, Simon Fraser Tolmie fonds, box 8, file 21, Tolmie to C.F. McHardy, 13 January 1932; Bruhn to Tolmie, 4 October 1932. Rolf Bruhn had formerly been the district engineer for the Salmon Arm area, and was a strong proponent of government-funded public works during the Depression, which put him at odds with most of his cabinet colleagues. He resigned over the issue in early 1933 and won re-election as an independent. See George M. Abbott, “Rolf Wallgren Bruhn: Pioneer and Politician,” Report of the Okanagan Historical Society 59 (1995): 87-95. Regarding the abrupt closure of road work camps in the southern Interior in 1932, C.F. McHardy complained that “[w]herever you go there is evidence of jobs half done, and left on a few hours notice.” McHardy to H.H. Stevens, 25 August 1932.
government to complete the promised road. In the long term, they expected that a provincial park would help lure pleasure travellers over the road, thus bringing increased commercial activity. None of BC’s other provincial parks were accessible from an arterial highway at this time, so getting one along the Hope-Princeton road would help differentiate it from the established Fraser Canyon route.

Martin Allerdale Grainger was the first to propose a provincial park along the route of the future Hope-Princeton road. A Cambridge-educated mathematician, Grainger had emigrated to BC at the tail end of the Klondike gold rush. After spending several years working in Coastal logging camps as a timekeeper and accountant, he penned a highly descriptive novel based on these experiences, called *Woodsmen of the West* (1908). He then served as secretary to British Columbia’s 1910 Royal Commission on Provincial Forest Policy, and as a ranger in the BC Forest Service, which was formed in response to the commission’s recommendations. Grainger rose in rank until he reached the position of chief forester in 1916. He held that position until 1920, when he departed to enter the private timber business.21

In the mid 1920s Grainger began a recreational routine that he called “my escape from business.” On Friday afternoons in the summer and fall he would leave his office in downtown Vancouver and catch a train to Hope, where he transferred to the CPR’s Kettle Valley branch line and another train which took him to Princeton, the small ranching and mining town at the confluence of the Tulameen and Similkameen rivers. A couple miles outside of town Grainger kept a small cabin and several saddle horses on the ranch of a

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local family who looked after his animals when he was on the Coast. From this base he
would spend the weekend riding in the high country between Princeton and Hope, before
returning to Vancouver on the last Sunday train, physically exhausted but mentally
revitalized. During the summer he would sometimes go into the mountains for weeks at a
highly evocative letters to others, coaxing them to come share the experience. Around 1927 he started writing articles for magazines and Vancouver newspapers that extolled the virtues of ‘roughing it’ in general, and the quietude and rugged scenery to be found in the Nicomen and Hozameen ranges of the Cascade Mountains in particular. He even tried to organize a ‘Skyline Club’ that would popularize trail riding in the area, but this scheme came to nothing. The 1929 announcement of the Hope-Princeton road project rekindled his enthusiasm for promoting the area.23

Twenty years spent working in the BC Forest Service and the timber business convinced Grainger that the promised road could have negative consequences for his mountain Arcadia. He therefore set out to convince provincial politicians and senior government officials to establish a park that would protect the area’s scenery and natural attractions against industrial depredations and crass commercial developments. Although Grainger had become familiar with the area while riding on horseback, he recognized that many middle-class British Columbians would use private automobiles and public roads to temporarily escape from the allegedly enervating and emasculating pace of modern city life. He therefore made the motoring public and its landscape experiences along the future highway corridor an important part of his arguments in favour of a park.

Grainger’s case for why a provincial park was needed in BC’s Cascade Mountains was laid out most comprehensively in a June 1930 letter to Minister of Lands F.P. Burden.24 He repeatedly emphasized his first-hand experience with the area, his

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23 Grainger’s letters to family and friends describing his travels in the Cascade Mountains were posthumously compiled in Riding the Skyline (Victoria: Horsdal and Schubert, 1994). His proposed Skyline Club echoed the Trail Riders of the Canadian Rockies, a CPR-organized club that had been formed in the early 1920s as a way of drawing well-heeled riding enthusiasts to Canada’s western national parks. See Hart, Selling of Canada, 105-106.

knowledge of it ‘on the ground.’ He explained that many trips riding along the surveyed route of the Hope-Princeton road had shown him “the great attraction the region it will pass through will have for our city people,” as well as for auto tourists from the western United States. He contrasted the future Hope-Princeton’s route through the “charming” open wooded flats of the upper Similkameen valley against the narrow, winding road that motorists were compelled to drive through the gloomy confines of the Fraser Canyon, which he described as “a trifle intimidating.” Grainger argued the canyon route, with its steep, rugged terrain, could never be more than a space for the motoring public to pass through, whereas the road through the Cascades had the potential to become a recreational destination in and of itself, the setting for “a multitude of summer cottages and tourist hotels.” He wrote that the Hope-Princeton road would pass between “the base of two of the finest mountain masses in BC – the ‘Three Brothers’ or Nicomen range on the north and the Hozameen on the south.”

No better country for hikers or horseback riders could be found than these two ranges – they hold their own easily with Banff or Jasper Park. *And the great point is that they will be right at the edge of the automobile road,* so that the hikers and riders who will motor out for the weekend or the many people who will have summer camps up there will have immediate access to some of the best upland and mountain scenery on this continent [emphasis added].

Anticipating how automobile access would transform the Cascades, Grainger argued that the area’s native flora and fauna needed to be preserved because they could help draw tourists and make a good impression on the motoring public. This was especially true along the valley floors where motorists would travel, and in the alpine areas that hikers and trail riders would seek to visit. “The essential thing,” he told the minister, “is to safeguard the wild life – the flowers, the feed, and the deer.” Describing
the large ungulates found in the area, he emphasized their lack of fear around humans and their value as future roadside attractions rather than as game for hunters:

Just as in the Yellowstone the deer are everywhere – big mule deer. It is their breeding region and they are very tame. I must have seen thirty to forty last weekend – at one time twelve in a meadow that I rode through. A doe and two fawns were on the road between two road gangs a quarter of a mile apart.

Grainger argued that a provincial park should be established preemptively, before completion of the Hope-Princeton road opened the country up to logging, mining, and roadside commercial developments, because once those operations gained a foothold in the area it would be almost impossible to superimpose a park over top of them. To support this argument, he cited events in BC’s recent past where potentially popular scenic attractions had been lost due to the destruction of forest cover.

Afterwards, too late, we are all sorry that places like the ‘Green Timbers’ near New Westminster have been lost to the public [due to logging]. Railway construction in the old days used to burn up the watersheds of timber through which it passed, so destroying future [tourist and commercial] traffic for the lines. At this stage, inadvertence could quite readily destroy one of the big attractions of the Hope-Princeton highway.25

As a former civil servant, Grainger knew to appeal directly to Burden’s political instincts. He suggested that preserving scenery and natural landscape features along the surveyed road right-of-way would show the middle-class motoring public that a forward-

25 Green Timbers was a stand of ancient rainforest located on the Pacific Highway between New Westminster and the border crossing at Blaine, Washington, in present-day Surrey. The 200-foot-tall trees that lined the highway were a very popular attraction for motorists driving between Seattle and Vancouver, but in spite of efforts to preserve some of the area as a park, logging began in the area in the late 1920s, with the last trees cut down in early 1930. David J. Sandquist, “The Giant Killers: Forestry, Conservation and Recreation in the Green Timbers Forest, Surrey, British Columbia to 1930,” MA thesis, Simon Fraser University (2000). Also, during Grainger’s tenure as head of the BC Forest Service significant forest fires had occurred along the lines of the Grand Trunk Pacific and Canadian Northern railways in northern BC. Marilyn Wheeler, The Robson Valley Story: A Century of Dreams (McBride, BC: Sternwheeler, 2008), 378-380. The damage caused by fires sparked along railway corridors was a major concern amongst professional foresters in Canada as early as the late 1910s: see Stephen J. Pyne, Awful Splendour: A Fire History of Canada (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), 185-192.
thinking, tourism-conscious government was at the province’s helm, a government that was cognizant of their desire to learn about BC’s myriad landscapes and get in touch with nature by the road. According to Grainger, establishing a large new provincial park astride the Hope-Princeton road would translate into popularity with the growing number of voters who owned or aspired to own a passenger car, and who wanted to use these vehicles to temporarily escape the pollution, bustle, and social instability of Coastal cities like Vancouver. Furthermore, he assured Burden that the creation of a park in BC’s southern Cascade Mountains would not interfere with logging, because there was little merchantable timber in the region, or with mining or hydroelectric development. He predicted there might be conflict with ranching interests, but argued there was plenty of open range in the region, enough that “any amount of stock can be pastured up there on readily available land without unnecessarily despoiling the feed and flowers of the land immediately adjacent to the new highway [emphasis added].”

Grainger predicted that the proposed provincial park would make the Hope-Princeton Highway a major tourist draw, not only with visitors from afar but also with British Columbians, who would appreciate the opportunity to see and learn about a scenic and unfamiliar part of their home province. The national parks in the Canadian Rockies were splendid places, he acknowledged, but they were too far away for most motorists from BC’s Coastal cities: “they could not be gone to by car in a weekend as a park in the Cascade Mountains could be.” Grainger concluded his letter to the minister of lands by suggesting that a new provincial park in the Cascades would be “in itself, in dollars and cents, a big justification for the expense of the Hope-Princeton highway.”

26 In the late 1920s Vancouver tourism promoters were also promoting Garibaldi Provincial Park as a recreational destination for city residents. Garibaldi had been established in 1927 in the Coast Mountains.
Grainger first suggested a park in the Cascade Mountains before the stock market crash of 1929. However, his idea did not gain support from boosters, business owners, and agricultural producers in the southern Interior until after the provincial government stopped work on the Hope-Princeton road project. His earliest allies in the park scheme were Princeton residents Bert Thomas and Edgar Burr. Thomas was the district road foreman and had worked for the Forest Service during Grainger’s tenure as chief forester. Burr owned the Similkameen Garage and had been the local Ford dealer since 1917. Both were members of Princeton’s fish and game club, and Burr is known to have enjoyed fishing at the Lightning Lakes, which were located near the Allison Pass and the surveyed route of the Hope-Princeton road. These men set out to build support for the park idea amongst Princeton’s business interests.27

Grainger also enlisted a powerful friend in the forest industry to help lobby Victoria for a park along the route of the Hope-Princeton Highway. H.R. MacMillan had been BC’s chief forester from 1912 to 1916, and had preceded Grainger into the private timber business after leaving that position. By 1930 his MacMillan Export Company was the leading international broker for BC timber products, and one of the province’s most

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powerful forestry interests. MacMillan had also taken to exploring the Cascade Mountains on horseback, sometimes with his old colleague Grainger, other times with his own family and friends. Writing to the minister of lands in the summer of 1930, MacMillan declared the mountains between Hope and Princeton “the best piece of high country available anywhere near Vancouver” and “suited to all forms of summer enjoyment.” He pointed out that the planned Hope-Princeton road would let residents of Coastal cities reach the area “within four or five hours by automobile,” and repeated Grainger’s assertion that “no resources of any importance would be withheld from exploitation” if the area was designated a park. MacMillan also made a strong business case for the park. He predicted lodges, gas stations, guiding outfits, and other commercial operations would flourish within and around its boundaries, allowing “quite a few people in the region to earn a steady living from the expenditures of travellers.” However, he warned that “if a park is not created and the wild life not protected, the area will probably be devastated very quickly.” Degradation of the scenery and the native flora and fauna visible from the road would reduce the area’s appeal to the motoring public, and thus threatened to stifle the development of a regional roadside service industry.

Grainger and MacMillan’s letters arguing for a new provincial park must have hit the desks of provincial politicians with greater effect than most people’s, but a number of organizations were also pressing for a park in the Cascade Mountains. Foremost amongst these was the Princeton Board of Trade, which Burr and Thomas had rallied to the cause. The board’s main priority was to ensure that Victoria followed through on the promised

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road from Hope. This mission was even emblazoned on its letterhead. A map of southern BC showed existing roads with a dotted line to indicate the future highway through the Cascades. Surrounding the map was script that read: “Complete the Vancouver-Nelson Highway: Shortest, Richest East-West Route.”

Provincial parks were not common in BC during these years, but Princeton’s business owners had two good reasons to support the creation of one in the Cascade Mountains. First, there was the argument put forward by Grainger that the presence of a provincial park would hasten completion of the Hope-Princeton road, with pressure from outdoor recreationalists and the motoring public expected to compel the government to make the new park accessible. Second, by the late 1920s there was an established pattern in western North America whereby the creation of new parks stimulated commercial development in nearby communities, especially of motoring- and tourism-related businesses. Princeton had few such businesses in 1930. It was relatively close to the cities of the Coast as the crow flies, but remained an isolated outlier in the Interior road network, its economy based largely on providing supplies and services to the ranches and coal and copper mines in the surrounding hills. The merchants on the Princeton Board of Trade believed the promised road link with the Coast would strengthen the town’s position as a regional transportation hub, and that the proposed park would bring higher property values and new opportunities for profit.31

Sheep vs. Scenery

When corresponding with the provincial government, the Princeton Board of Trade argued that a park was necessary in order to preserve the scenery, timber, plants, and wildlife along the surveyed route of the Hope-Princeton – that is, the natural landscape features they believed would make travelling over the completed road appealing to the motoring public. When they heard rumours that the government was going to permit domestic sheep grazing around the Three Brothers, they grew alarmed that flocks of sheep would damage alpine wildflower meadows and crowd mule deer out of the valley floors where the road had been surveyed to run. The Princeton Board of Trade asked the government to reserve the around the Three Brothers from grazing, and was supported by its counterparts in Kelowna, Penticton, Vancouver, and New Westminster. In the fall of 1930 Princeton merchants forwarded a petition with almost a hundred area residents’ signatures, urging the government to “save the Cascade region” by establishing a park. In 1931 the provincial government established a mile-wide reserve along the surveyed right-of-way, which was a tentative step towards preserving the landscapes along the future highway corridor. However, this was done more to prevent commercial development and industrial activity from interfering with road construction than to preserve scenery or natural landscape features. It did nothing to prevent sheep being herded through the area or grazed in the surrounding highlands.32

Opposing the proposed park were Willis and Sutherland, sheep ranchers out of Keremeos, 45 miles east of Princeton, who were backed by their local board of trade and

32 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1800, T. Hooper, Secretary, Princeton Board of Trade to Minister of Lands, 26 September 1930. Also see Grainger to Burden, 11 June 1930; Commissioner of Grazing to M.E. Lauder, Secretary, BC Sheep Breeders Association, 1 December 1930. The exact date that the roadside reserve was put in place is not clear, but its purpose is outlined in BCMFL, C.P. Lyons and D.M. Trew, “Ernest C. Manning Park: Reconnaissance and Preliminary Recreation Plan” (Victoria: BC Forest Service, 1943).
the BC Sheep Breeders Association. Willis and Sutherland had grazed their flocks in the Nicomen highlands north of Three Brothers Mountain for several summers before 1930. That year, eager to expand, they applied for additional grazing rights on crown land in the immediate vicinity of the Three Brothers, on the basis that the area’s many alpine meadows offered “some of the finest summer grazing in the province, which would furnish sufficient feed for thousands of sheep.”

The Keremeos sheep ranchers urged Premier Tolmie and his cabinet to take “drastic steps to frustrate the efforts of Mr. Grainger and his associates.” They accused park supporters of trying to further their own personal interests, and warned of dire economic consequences if the land around the Three Brothers was reserved for a park. “[I]nstead of increasing our flocks, we will have to go out of business entirely,” Willis claimed. Furthermore, if the provincial government created a new park on desirable rangeland, it would “establish a precedent which will keep stockmen from investing in this province.” The BC Sheep Breeders Association reminded the government that BC suffered a significant mutton deficit, and that this shortfall would continue to be filled by imports unless the province’s rangelands were expanded.

The provincial government was being asked to decide between the interests of a few established rural producers and a middle-class coalition comprised of small-town


34 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1800, Garnet E. Willis to Premier, 24 June 1930; Willis to William Atkinson, MLA [Penticton], 24 June 1930; BC Sheep Breeders Association to Commissioner of Grazing, 27 November 1930.
boosters and business owners, tourism promoters, and outdoor recreationalists.\textsuperscript{35}

Ironically, the dispute over whether the Three Brothers area should be used for sheep grazing or preserved for the viewing pleasure of trail riders and future auto tourists emerged at the very moment Premier Tolmie was setting out on a widely publicized two-week automobile tour of BC’s northern Interior. This tour to “The Land of the Golden Twilight” was intended to show off the province’s roads and attractions to American politicians, journalists, tourism promoters, and auto club representatives. Not surprisingly, however, the provincial government came down on the side of the Keremeos sheep ranchers. Governments of British Columbia had long favoured agriculture and ranching, which were seen as a stable social and economic counterbalance to the crisis-prone resource extraction industries that the provincial economy was so dependent on. This was especially true under Tolmie, the cattle breeder, veterinarian, and former federal minister of agriculture who styled himself as a down-to-earth friend of the farmer. Bigger flocks of sheep were deemed a more tangible and immediate benefit to BC’s economy than the preservation of scenery for middle-class motorists who might one day drive through the Cascade Mountains. In the late summer of 1930 the commissioner of grazing gave Willis and Sutherland permission to graze their sheep in the immediate vicinity of the Three Brothers. However, the decision came too late for the ranchers to lead their animals into the area that year.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{35} Cases of conflict between hinterland producers and metropolitan tourism promoters over the construction and use of automobile roads can be found in Hill, “A Serpent in the Garden”; Lipin, “Cast Aside the Automobile Enthusiast”; Preston, Dirt Roads to Dixie. Also see Karl Jacoby, Crimes Against Nature: Squatters, Poachers, Thieves and the Hidden History of American Conservation (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), chapter 1; Catherine McNichol Stock, Main Street in Crisis: The Great Depression and the Old Middle Class on the Northern Plains (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), chapters 2, 4.

\textsuperscript{36} On the state privileging agriculture in BC, see Laura Cameron, Openings: A Meditation on History, Method, and Sumas Lake (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997); Christopher
The following spring, the commissioner of grazing reversed his decision in the
face of intense protests by the Princeton Board of Trade and allegations that deer had
been indiscriminately shot along cleared sections of the road right-of-way during the
winter of 1930-1931. The sheep ranchers’ grazing permit was put in abeyance and
arrangements were made for the interested parties to participate in a field examination of
the disputed area. The commissioner of grazing led the trip and was accompanied by
Garnet Willis, a representative of the BC Sheep Breeders Association, Martin Allerdale
Grainger on behalf of the Princeton Board of Trade, and District Forester George P.
Melrose. The exact details of the July field examination are not known, but park
proponents appear to have put forward the stronger argument. In August 1931 an
executive order-in-council put a large area around Three Brothers Mountain under
tentative reserve “in order to maintain it in its natural state” pending a final decision on
grazing rights. The decision to make the reserve tentative rather than permanent was

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37 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1805, Princeton Board of Trade to N.S. Lougheed, Minister of Public Works, 25 March and 23 April 1931. Martin Allerdale Grainger forwarded a letter to the Minister of Lands complaining about the shooting of deer along the Hope-Princeton right-of-way west of Princeton, calling it “murder from the car doors.” Grainger to Burden, 22 January 1931. Bert Thomas expressed disgust that deer were being “killed from car doors on the new highway [right-of-way west of Princeton] as easily as bands of cattle.” GR-1991, reel 1800, Thomas to Lougheed, 23 March 1931. Later that year, in a letter to BC’s attorney-general, H.R. MacMillan reported hearing similar stories: “now over the newly constructed highway anyone can drive into and through the winter range. The result of this accessibility was shown by last year’s experience when hundreds of these deer were killed by all classes of people who drove in cars, shot from the highway and from the car windows, and in a fair number of instances left the dead animals lying where shot.” MacMillan to Pooley, 10 September 1931, cited in Drushka, *HR: A Biography*, 152. On conservationists’ efforts to preserve fish and wildlife in areas opened up to motorists, see George Colpitts, *Game in the Garden: A Human History of Wildlife in Western Canada to 1940* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002), chapter 5.

38 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1805, Deputy Minister to Willis and Sutherland, 20 March 1931.
likely tied to the halting progress on the Hope-Princeton road. Little had been achieved since it had been announced in 1929, and it was difficult to justify protecting the area’s scenery and natural attractions on a permanent basis without the road or the sightseeing auto tourists who were so central to the arguments advanced by Grainger, MacMillan, and the Princeton Board of Trade.

The tentative nature of the reserve encouraged Willis and Sutherland and the BC Sheep Breeders Association to continue pressing their case with bureaucrats and politicians. In the summer of 1934 their efforts paid off. The commissioner of grazing reversed himself a second time and issued a permit that allowed the sheep ranchers to conduct “experimental” grazing in the area around the Three Brothers – a technicality that did an end-run around the stipulations put in place by the 1931 order-in-council. This time the sheep ranchers were quick to move their animals into the area, leading to howls of complaint from boosters, tourism promoters, and boards of trade around the southern Interior. Okanagan newspapers printed editorials attacking the Tolmie government’s policies on roads, parks, and tourism promotion. New petitions supporting the establishment of a provincial park in the Cascade Mountains were delivered to Victoria. Penticton merchants warned that “[u]nless immediate steps are taken to stop another season’s grazing in this district the land will be spoilt for all time.” In response to these protests, Deputy Minister of Lands H. Cathcart instructed his staff to “refrain from issuing any permits for grazing purposes” in the reserved area around the Three Brothers. With both sides of the dispute mustering significant political support, the BC Game
Commission was asked to provide a scientific report on the environmental effects of domestic sheep grazing.\textsuperscript{39}

The director of Washington State’s game department was approached for impartial information on the subject, and in late 1935 he delivered a sixteen-page report to his British Columbia counterpart. The report was damning. It described the destructive effects of sheep grazing on flora, fauna, and landforms throughout the western states, from the crowding out of native game species to the severe erosion caused by the stripping away of ground cover. “I hope that the citizens of your province will heed this information and not allow one of the finest grazing countries that lies outdoors to be ruined by a few greedy individuals,” the report concluded.\textsuperscript{40} This report, accompanied by allegations from the BC Game Commission that the experimental grazing which had been allowed north of the Three Brothers in 1934 had “completely destroyed“ a considerable amount of mule deer habitat, were forwarded to Attorney-General Gordon Sloan, a member of BC’s new Liberal government.\textsuperscript{41} Sloan consulted with various departments and officials, including Chief Forester E.C. Manning, who recommended that sheep grazing be allowed to continue in the disputed Three Brothers area. Sloan ultimately decided that the tentative reserve over the Three Brothers area should be made permanent. The Three Brothers Mountain Game Reserve was established in 1936, in which it was forbidden to “hunt, trap, take, wound or kill any game.” No further grazing of domestic sheep occurred after the game reserve was officially put in place. This helped

\textsuperscript{39} BCA, GR-1991, reel 1800, Penticton Board of Trade to A. Wells Gray, Minister of Lands, 1 June 1935; Deputy Minister of Lands H. Cathcart to Chief Forester, June 1935.

\textsuperscript{40} BCA, GR-1991, reel 1800, B.T. McCauley, Acting Director of the State Game Dept of Washington to F.R. Butler, Office of the Game Commission, 17 December 1935. Also see Prof. T.T. McCabe, University of California to Butler, 23 December 1935.

\textsuperscript{41} BCA, GR-1991, reel 1800, McCauley to Butler, 17 December 1935; Butler to Attorney General Sloan, 3 January 1936.
protect the scenic and natural attractions that park and highway supporters considered so important, and was an important step towards a provincial park. Having to decide between rival interests in how the area should be used, the incipient Fordist state had come down in favour of those who proposed to make a park that would be a significant attraction along the future highway.

Traffic Delays

The Three Brothers Game Reserve promised to preserve scenery, wildlife, and appealing natural features in BC’s southern Cascade Mountains. However, the Hope-Princeton road project, which had been the driving force behind efforts to create a new provincial park, remained badly stalled. The provincial government had closed its Hope-Princeton relief work camps in the fall of 1932, only to have them re-open in 1933 when the Department of National Defence took charge of relief work camps nationwide.

Three years later, control of the relief work camps in BC passed back to the provincial government, which promptly shut them down again for lack of operating funds. Not

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42 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1805, Premier to Chief Forester [E.C. Manning], 2 June 1936; Manning memo to Premier, 5 June 1936.
43 The precise details of how the Department of National Defence took charge of and later handed back British Columbia’s relief work camps are unclear, but the provincial government apparently continued providing the plans, heavy machinery, and skilled labour required for these projects. See Lorne Alvin Brown, “The Bennett Government, Political Stability, and the Politics of the Unemployment Relief Camps, 1930-1935,” PhD dissertation, Queen’s University (1983); Thomas William Tanner, “Microcosms of Misfortune: Canada’s Unemployment Relief Camps Administered by the Department of National Defence, 1932-1936,” MA thesis, University of Western Ontario (1965), 50-51.
44 Relief work camps in BC held almost 6000 men in early 1936, nearly a third of the national total. Tanner, “Microcosms,” 50. On closing up one of the relief work camps along the route of the Hope-Princeton, see Cawston, “Happy Days in a Relief Camp.” The re-closure of the relief work camps led the Liberal MLA for Penticton to warn Premier Duff Pattullo that “[t]here is a well defined feeling existing throughout Southern B.C. that the Hope-Princeton project is deliberately held up by some interests while the Big Bend Highway is being pushed forward with all possible speed.” BCA, GR-1222, Premier’s Papers, box 15, file 10, Charles Tupper to Pattullo, 15 May 1936. The same month saw numerous letters delivered to the premier from southern Interior boards of trade urging that the road be completed and complaining of lost profits due to motorists driving between the Coast and the Interior by way of Washington State.
Surprisingly, little was accomplished on the Hope-Princeton road during the four intervening summers. When engineers from BC’s Department of Public Works evaluated the project in 1938, they found only 28 out of 89 miles of new right-of-way between the two towns had been finished to an acceptable standard. Forty-nine miles were in varying stages of completion, with some sections having been roughly graded, others requiring blasting, cutting, and filling, and still others having only been cleared of timber. Nothing tangible had been accomplished on the remaining 12 miles.45

Boards of trade from the southern Interior pressed the government to finish the promised road all through the Depression. However, the parallel lobbying for the creation of a provincial park faded after the Three Brothers Game Reserve was established in 1936. With the sheep menace fended off and the Hope-Princeton road nowhere near completion, the drive to preserve scenic and natural attractions for the viewing pleasure of future auto tourists lost momentum. For several years the Princeton Board of Trade disappeared from the scene entirely, for the town was faced with a violent labour conflict, and then with the closure of almost every mine in the district.46 The question of whether or not a provincial park should be established in the Cascade Mountains for the future pleasure of the motoring public seemed rather inconsequential in light of these problems. During the mid and late 1930s it was the orchardists and merchants in Okanagan towns like Penticton who took the lead in promoting completion of the Hope-Princeton Highway, and they tended to emphasize its economic value to agricultural producers.

45 Report by H.C. Anderson, Assistant District Engineer [Merritt], 30 November 1938, cited in Harvey, Coast Connection, 113. These numbers closely match the findings of the Penticton Board of Trade’s highway committee, which examined the Hope-Princeton right-of-way in October 1937. BCA, GR-1222, box 23, file 4, Penticton Board of Trade to Premier Pattullo, 29 October 1937.
rather than its potential tourism value. Lobbying for a provincial park died down until the outbreak of war made completion of the road again seem a possibility.\footnote{For example, see BCA, GR-1222, box 23, file 4, Penticton Board of Trade to Premier Pattullo, 25 March 1937; Penticton Board of Trade to Pattullo, 29 October 1937; Canadian Legion, Okanagan Zone to Pattullo, 31 October 1937.}

Figure 2.2: The Penticton Board of Trade took the lead in lobbying the provincial government to complete the Hope-Princeton road during the mid and late 1930s, and, like the Princeton Board of Trade before it, emblazoned the cause on its official letterhead.

Out of the blue in late 1939, the BC Forest Service and Department of Lands began receiving dozens of unsolicited requests for permission to establish autocourts, campgrounds, gas stations, and other motorist-oriented businesses along the surveyed route of the Hope-Princeton road, including at locations inside the Three Brothers Game Reserve. All of these requests were turned down with notification of the mile-wide reserve that had been put in place in 1931. However, similar queries continued pouring in through 1940. There was a widespread perception that the outbreak of war in Europe would spur the completion of a second automobile road between BC’s Coast and Interior.

Boosters and boards of trade from the southern Interior helped fuel this belief. In public meetings, petitions, newspaper editorials, and letters to the premier, they claimed that the Hope-Princeton Highway should be an urgent priority in Canada’s fight against Nazi Germany. They argued that BC needed an alternative to the route through the Fraser
and Thompson canyons, where two transcontinental railroads, several telephone and telegraph lines, and the province’s only Coast-to-Interior automobile road all crowded through a series of narrow and treacherous defiles. The canyon walls had a well-earned reputation for instability, and it was widely recognized that BC’s three most important transportation arteries were vulnerable to closure – even simultaneous closure – due to rockslides, washouts, heavy snowfall, or enemy attack.\textsuperscript{48} A sign of the strategic importance attached to the canyon route was the fact that the Alexandra Suspension Bridge at Spuzzum was one of just three road bridges in BC that were guarded by the militia. In the summer of 1940 the Greenwood Board of Trade argued that completing the Hope-Princeton road would insure against the threat of the canyon being blocked by “natural causes or sabotage.” Eighteen months later – and just ten days after the Japanese Navy’s attack on Pearl Harbor – the reinvigorated Princeton Board of Trade telegrammed the premier to point out that a “single bombing north of Hope would cut all railways [and] roads to [the] coast.” They urged him to persuade Ottawa of the need to complete the road between Hope and Princeton.\textsuperscript{49}

The possibility of getting federal funding was a major incentive for having the Hope-Princeton Highway declared a national defence priority. However, almost every

\textsuperscript{48} The road through the Fraser Canyon is known to have been closed to automobile traffic for more than one day due to rockslides or snowfall in August 1934, January 1935, February and October 1937, January 1938, and December of 1939. There may have been many more unreported closures, for there was no community newspaper in the canyon until the 1940s. Dirk Septer, \textit{Flooding and Landslide Events, Southern British Columbia, 1808-2006} (Victoria: British Columbia Ministry of Environment, 2007). During World War One the German military had identified the Fraser Canyon as a key weak point in Canada’s national transportation network. Martin Kitchen, “The German Invasion of Canada in the First World War,” \textit{International History Review} 7, 2 (May 1985): 245-260.

\textsuperscript{49} BCA, GR-1222, box 33, file 6, Greenwood Board of Trade to Pattullo, 5 June 1940; box 34, file 1, Princeton Board of Trade to Premier John Hart, 17 December 1941. Other groups continued to lobby for the highway on the basis that it could improve trade within the province. For example, the BC Fruit Growers Association regularly passed motions encouraging the government to complete the highway, because “at the present time it takes as long to deliver southern Okanagan fruits and vegetables to Vancouver as it does to Regina, Saskatchewan, thus canceling any advantage the close proximity of the Vancouver market.” Box 44, file 9, C.A. Hayden, Secretary, BCFGA to Hart, 19 February 1942.
other municipality and board of trade in British Columbia had a similar idea, and were lobbying for the improvement of local and regional roads that they claimed were vital to the war effort. BC’s fragmented ground transportation network had many gaps and bottlenecks. The Hope-Princeton road was being proposed as an alternative to an existing route, and thus was overshadowed by problems like the lack of a road to Prince Rupert, the only major port on the province’s poorly defended north coast.

Nevertheless, several senior officials in the BC Forest Service became convinced that construction of the Hope-Princeton Highway would recommence in the near future. One was George Melrose, who had been responsible for the Princeton district and the Three Brothers area during the sheep-grazing dispute of the early 1930s. In early 1941 Melrose was promoted to assistant chief forester, the second most senior position in the Forest Service, following the death of Chief Forester Ernest C. Manning in an airplane crash. In April of that year Melrose advised Minister of Lands Arthur Wells Gray that the Three Brothers Game Reserve was an area of “outstanding scenic beauty” that deserved to be enlarged and turned into a provincial park. He conceded that the area was “only moderately accessible at the present time,” but implied that improvements were imminent, noting that “the construction of the Hope-Princeton Highway will greatly enhance its accessibility.” Melrose may have believed that the government would want to complete the highway and establish a provincial park in the Cascade Mountains as a way of encouraging American auto tourists from the Pacific Northwest to visit BC, thereby bringing in hard currency that was needed for Canada’s war effort.50

50 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1800, Assistant Chief Forester G.P. Melrose to Wells Gray, Minister of Lands, 22 April 1941. On the provincial government’s efforts to lure American tourists to Canada during the early war years, see Dawson, Selling British Columbia, chapter 4. Several early Parks Division employees remembered Melrose as a key advocate for the establishment of a park in the Cascades. According to C.P.
Melrose’s recommendation was approved by both the deputy minister and minister of lands. At the suggestion of the MLA for the south Okanagan, the proposed park’s name was changed from “Three Brothers” to “Ernest C. Manning” in honour of the former chief forester, who had done much to further the causes of forest conservation and provincial parks during the Depression. (The fact that Manning had been in favour of allowing domestic sheep grazing in the Three Brothers area during the mid 1930s was conveniently overlooked.) Manning Provincial Park was officially established in June 1941, with Class A designation that provided the province’s highest level of protection from the intrusion of resource development. The press release that announced the new park described it as a “holiday land without peer,” and downplayed its inaccessibility by giving the impression that visitors could drive right in: “a short detour on the trip from Coast to Interior, a mere jaunt by auto or train from Vancouver, and one is at the gateway of this mountain paradise.”

The Forest Service had been officially responsible for British Columbia’s provincial parks since 1939. One of its first steps after the new park was established was to erect a small stone cairn with a bronze plaque in memory of Ernest C. Manning. The entire two-man staff of the recently established Parks Division was dispatched to set the monument in place beside the scenic Similkameen Falls, near the eastern boundary of the

Lyons, who was hired in 1941 as one of the first Parks Division staff, “[w]hatever influence was needed from the Forest Service in creating [Manning] park would have found strong support from George Melrose.” Lyons reported that for several years prior to 1941 Melrose had spent his holidays “doing horse pack trips through the Three Brothers Game Reserve;” during which he had “carried a movie camera and likely took the first films ever made” of the area. Ches P. Lyons, “Tough Going” in Manning Park Memories, 37. Also see Louise Shaw, “Memories” in Manning Park Memories, 29.

51 On E.C. Manning’s role in park development during the Depression, see Rajala, “From ‘On-to-Ottawa.’”
52 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1800, Charles Tupper, MLA [Penticton] to Wells Gray, 6 June 1941; BC Forest Service press release, 18 June 1941. In the late 1960s, timber baron H.R. MacMillan would complain that Manning Park “should have been named for [Martin Allerdale] Grainger. It was Grainger who discovered it, studied it and made it. I am quite sure that Manning never saw the area.” Drushka, HR: A Biography, 213.
park. They intentionally built the monument at a spot where it would be within view of the surveyed road right-of-way; thus with its very first action ‘on the ground’ in Manning Park, the fledgling agency that was responsible for BC’s provincial parks was trying to shape the views of the motoring public.\textsuperscript{53} However, although no one could have known it, it would be many years before motorists would see the roadside monument, for the completion of the Hope-Princeton Highway was still a long way off in 1941. The following chapter examines how boosters, botanists, businesses, tourism promoters, veterans’ organizations, and government agencies like the Parks Division envisioned the future relationship between the park and the public. A key question that ran through their many plans and schemes was whether the state should develop the park for a limited number of outdoor recreationalists – educated professionals like Martin Allerdale Grainger and H.R. Macmillan – or for the much larger number of people who would drive along the highway corridor through the park. There were class overtones to this question, as well as many practical considerations for how the park should be planned and then developed.

\textsuperscript{53} The monument was relocated several times over the following decades due to changing traffic patterns. When that section of road was resurveyed in 1947, it resulted in the cairn being located a “considerable distance off and above the road.” The cairn was subsequently moved to the park administration area on the Similkameen Flats, and later still a mile west down the road to the Pinewoods concession complex. BCA, GR-1991, reel 1800, C.P. Lyons, undated memo “Re: Public Works Department’s Assistance in Constructing Access to Campsites along the Hope-Princeton Highway” [mid summer 1947].
Completion of the long-awaited Hope-Princeton road had seemed imminent when Manning Park was established in 1941. However, there ended up being few significant changes on the ground during the 1940s. This chapter is about what happened in the interregnum between the creation of the park and the completion of the Hope-Princeton road in late 1949. It examines how the Parks Division and other interested parties envisioned the future relationship between the park, the highway, and the motoring public. It pays special attention to the Parks Division’s efforts to learn more about Manning Park’s landscapes, to publicize it, and to prepare plans for development inside it. The Parks Division was responsible for deciding what kinds of activities and facilities would be appropriate inside the park, including what place there would be for private businesses. These decisions would in turn shape the kind of visitors who use the park. Initially Manning Park was imagined as an area of refuge for well-heeled professionals who wanted to engage in strenuous, contemplative outdoor recreational activities. However, by the closing stages of World War Two the Parks Division has shifted its attention more towards the motoring public, a much larger and broader group that had very different viewing and travel habits. This was an early instance of what environmental historian Alan MacEachern has called “recreational democracy,” where agencies of the Fordist state saw it as imperative to provide recreational opportunities for as many people as possible, starting with the middle class.¹

Two factors explain why there was lots of planning but little actual development in Manning Park during the 1940s. First, the provincial parks ranked near the bottom of the Forest Service’s priorities during the war. Its energies and budget were almost entirely tied up in meeting the demand for strategic materials like plywood, dimensional lumber, and cellulose. A Parks Division had been created within the administrative structure of the Forest Service in 1939, during Ernest C. Manning’s tenure as chief forester, but it was very small and had little independence in its early years. During the war the Parks Division had only two permanent staff, no discretionary budget, and operated as a subunit of the Forest Economics Division. Its wartime activities were limited to reconnaissance work in some of the larger mainland parks, and making basic improvements to a handful of small but popular roadside parks on southern Vancouver Island.²

The second factor that held back development in Manning Park during the 1940s was more specific to its location. The widespread belief of 1939-1941 that the automobile road between Hope and Princeton would soon be completed proved to be mistaken. Instead of dedicating resources to finishing a project that had been started in 1929, prosecuted intermittently during the early 1930s, and abandoned since 1936, the provincial government kept the Hope-Princeton Highway on the backburner. The only work done on the road during the war years was by Japanese-Canadian men from the Tashme internment camp, which the BC Security Commission established on the A.B. Trites Ranch, in the mountains 14 miles east of Hope, in the summer of 1942. The Trites

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² On the Forest Economics Division’s role as a repository for the ‘odds and ends’ of the Forest Service in the 1940s, see Ralph Schmidt and John Parminter, An Early History of the Research Branch, British Columbia Ministry of Forests and Range (Victoria: Ministry of Forests and Range, Forest Science Program, 2006), 39.
Ranch was located just beyond the 100-mile coastal exclusion zone from which the Canadian government had expelled all Japanese nationals and Japanese-Canadians. It was located on the flats of the Sumallo River, many miles further inland than its nearest neighbour, and thus marked the easternmost incursion of agricultural settlement into BC’s southern Cascade Mountains. Only a handful of prospectors lived in the highlands between it and the outskirts of Princeton. The ranch’s isolation from any other community combined with its relative proximity to the services of the eastern Fraser Valley made it an ideal location for an internment camp. The presence of internees provided the provincial government with an inexpensive source of labour, and also with a security concern: a Princeton resident who hiked along the surveyed right-of-way in the summer of 1944 recalled having to wheedle his way past armed sentries stationed to the west of Princeton, at Tashme, and on the eastern edge of Hope.3

The use of internee labour indicated how low the Hope-Princeton road project ranked amongst BC’s wartime infrastructure priorities. The only other provincial road-building projects that used Japanese internees were inconsequential ones in isolated locations like the upper North Thompson River valley, the Yellowhead Pass, and exhausted mining districts in the Kootenays. Had Tashme not been located where it was, it seems probable that no work would have been done on the Hope-Princeton road during the war. As it was, only minor progress was achieved between 1942 and 1945. The internees were poorly housed and paid, short of dynamite and earth-moving machinery, and resentful over their treatment at the hands of the Canadian government. Not

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3 Princeton Book Committee, *Princeton: Our Valley* (Princeton, BC: Princeton Book Committee, 2000), 206. Bernard Webber, the MLA for Similkameen, reported traversing the route of the incomplete Hope-Princeton road over the 1943 Labour Day weekend with a party from the Penticton Board of Trade, but did not mention any sentries encountered along the way. BCA, GR-1991, reel 1800, Bernard G. Webber to A. Wells Gray, Minister of Lands, 9 September 1943.
surprisingly, they proved to be just as reluctant, unmotivated, and ineffective at road
building as the inhabitants of the relief work camps had between 1931 and 1936.
Manning Park remained inaccessible to all but the most dedicated outdoor recreationalists
during the war. When Parks Division staff needed to visit the park during these years,
they would arrange to meet the district forester or road construction foreman with a truck
in either Hope or Princeton, and then catch a ride as far towards the park as possible
before continuing in on foot.\textsuperscript{4}

\textit{Reconnaissance and Planning}

Lack of road access and curtailment of the motoring public’s pleasure travel
during the war did not dissuade the fledgling Parks Division from inspecting Manning
Park and formulating plans for its development.\textsuperscript{5} Nor did they prevent it from promoting
the new park to representatives of BC’s tourism industry and the wider public. During
these years the Parks Division acted as if completion of the Hope-Princeton Highway was
inevitable, if not imminent, which was rather presumptuous given the project’s troubled
history.

No formal attempt had been made to assess the area that would fall within
Manning Park’s boundaries prior to its establishment, which was typical of the cavalier

\textsuperscript{4} Nothing has been written specifically about Japanese-Canadian internees working on the Hope-Princeton
road. Regarding the general conditions in wartime road-building camps in BC and Alberta, see Bella, \textit{Parks
for Profit}, 96-102; Yon Shimizu, \textit{The Exiles, An Archival History of the World War II Japanese Internment
Camps in British Columbia and Ontario} (Wallaceburg, ON: Shimizu Consulting, 1993); Bill Waiser, \textit{Park
Prisoners: The Untold Story of Western Canada’s National Parks, 1915-1946} (Calgary: Fifth House,
1995), chapter 5.

\textsuperscript{5} On the effect of wartime rationing on Canadian automobility, see Jeff Keshen, “One for All or All for
One: Government Controls, Black Marketing and the Limits of Patriotism, 1939-1947,” \textit{Journal of
Canadian Studies} 29, 4 (Winter 1994): 111-143. On governments’ efforts to frustrate the motoring public’s
desire for pleasure travel during the war, see Bradley Flamm, “Putting the Brakes on ‘Non-Essential’
manner in which BC’s provincial parks were created prior to 1950. Thus the Forest Service’s first priority was to get a better idea of the flora, fauna, and landforms found inside the park. In the summer of 1943 the two assistant foresters attached to the Parks Division were instructed to conduct a detailed inspection of the new park. Based on their observations, C.P. (Ches) Lyons and D.M. (Mickey) Trew were to report on Manning’s recreational potential and make recommendations for future development. Lyons had recently graduated of the University of British Columbia’s forestry school, and Trew had worked in the Forest Service for several years, mapping forest cover through the interpretation of aerial photographs. Their reconnaissance of Manning was the first in what would prove to be a series of inspections the two men would make of BC’s larger provincial parks during the mid 1940s; their 1945 inspection of Hamber Park is discussed in Chapter Six. Ches Lyons would also play an important role in developing dozens of small roadside provincial parks during the postwar years, and in planning historically themed parks and roadside attractions during the late 1950s and early 1960; some of these activities are examined in chapters Twelve and Thirteen.

Lyons and Trew explored Manning Park for ten days, much of it spent riding near the tree line along mountain ridges and through alpine meadows. It is not clear whether they were instructed to focus on the park’s high country. They may have done so due to familiarity with Martin Allerdale Grainger’s newspaper stories about trail riding in the Cascades from the late 1920s. They may have felt that they already knew enough about the valley bottoms, for Lyons is known to have visited the Lightning Lakes in the mid 1930s. They may simply have been keen on mountain scenery, which was a key

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6 Photographs show that Lyons and a party of friends hiked to and camped at the Lightning Lakes on the 1936 Labour Day long weekend. University of Victoria Archives, Chester P. Lyons collection, box 4.12,
yardstick by which park values had traditionally been measured in western Canada.7 Whatever the reason, most of their report on Manning Park’s recreational potential focused on its high country. Their main recommendation was that several new backcountry trails be developed, and that existing ones be improved so that riders and hikers would be able to reach scenic vistas and alpine wildflower meadows. Trew and Lyons clearly expected that the park’s scenic high country would be its main attraction, drawing educated professionals like Grainger and H.R. MacMillan, who could afford to own or hire trail horses. They paid relatively little attention to the surveyed route of the Hope-Princeton road, although they did note that it appeared “exceptionally well designed for pleasure driving and will be regarded as a much safer road than the Fraser Canyon highway.”8

In terms of development, Lyons and Trew’s main recommendation was that a “park centre” be established on the uppermost flats of the Similkameen River, at a spot located between the highway right-of-way and the point where the Lightning Lakes drained into the Similkameen. The Lightning Lakes were a chain of small, shallow, placid lakes connected to each other by reedy marshes, and comprised the only significant body of still water in the park. Anglers from Hope and Princeton had been hiking in to fish for lake trout since the mid 1920s, and Trew and Lyons believed this would be popular with future park visitors.9 Several trails into the surrounding high

7 On the equivalency of ‘parks values’ with mountains in western Canada, see MacEachern, Natural Selections, 33-37.
9 The area around the ‘bend’ of the Lightning Lakes was so popular for fishing and camping that by 1945 the area was reported to have suffered “intensive damage from indiscriminate tree cutting, numerous camp fires, and the scattering of tin cans and bottles.” The Parks Division dispatched two of its staff to clean up
country also intersected on the valley floor nearby. Lyons and Trew concluded that the proximity of lakes and trails made this part of the Similkameen flats the most suitable location for the development of a “park centre.” It would be just a short drive from the future highway, yet not so close as to be within sight or earshot of passing traffic.

Although Trew and Lyons’ park centre was only vaguely defined, it was clearly geared towards the urban, educated, professional middle-class, a clientele that was expected to engage in independent, contemplative, and rustic types of outdoor recreation that required time, skill, and a degree of physical effort, namely fly fishing, hiking, and horseback riding. Trew and Lyons’ vision of the park centre as neither an exclusive resort nor an overly commercial roadside operation had echoes of the Arcadia for revitalizing ‘roughing it’ that Martin Allerdale Grainger had advocated in the late 1920s, a kind of refuge from modern city life. To avoid noise, crowding, and bustle, it was deemed necessary to separate park users and park facilities from the highway corridor and the general motoring public.

The 1943 reconnaissance of Manning Park was the state’s first in-depth inspection of the southern Cascade Mountains with scenery, outdoor recreation, and park values in mind. However, senior Forest Service officials appear to have been dissatisfied with the report, because a second inspection with a very similar mandate was ordered just two years later. In September 1945, E.G. Oldham and D.L. McMurchie – experienced staff from the Forest Service’s planning division who had recently been demobilized from the military – were instructed to undertake another reconnaissance of Manning Park. As in 1943, the objective was to assess the area’s recreational potential and the area and set up a “temporary camp ground” that would alleviate the problem until a more permanent campground could be established as part of the broader plan for development in Manning Park. BCA, GR-1991, reel 1800, C.P. Lyons memo to Gordon McKenzie and Dave Davidson, 16 August 1945.
formulate a preliminary development plan. Judging by Oldham and McMurchie’s
itinerary, it seems the problem with Trew and Lyons’ 1943 reconnaissance was where
they had focused their attention. Instead of exploring Manning’s high country, Oldham
and McMurchie devoted two weeks to inspecting the sections of the Sumallo, Skagit, and
Similkameen river valleys where the Hope-Princeton had been surveyed to run.10

Oldham and McMurchie concluded that “while Manning Park presents nothing of
a truly spectacular or definitely outstanding nature, its 170,000 acres do contain a variety
of scenery.” They emphasized that a linear swath of this scenery would abruptly become
accessible to the motoring public once the Hope-Princeton Highway was completed.
According to Oldham and McMurchie, Manning was singular amongst British
Columbia’s large provincial parks because of its proximity to Coastal population centres
and because future visitors would be able to traverse it by automobile.11

For Oldham and McMurchie, the corridor surrounding the surveyed highway
right-of-way was the section of the park that required the most attention in any
development plans. Practically everyone who entered Manning Park would see this
corridor, even if their ‘visit’ consisted of nothing more than driving through without
stopping. McMurchie and Oldham emphasized that all motorists would share certain
roadside landscape experiences, regardless of whether they were sightseeing tourists,
business travellers, or commercial truck drivers. For example, they described how every
eastbound motorist would perceive the transition from Coastal to Interior climate zones
while driving through the park. As they climbed towards the summit of the Allison Pass
and then began descending towards Princeton in the rain shadow of the Cascades, damp

11 BCMFL, E.G. Oldham and D.L. MacMurchie, “Preliminary Development Plan: Manning Park” (BC
Forest Service, September 1945).
groves of enormous cedars surrounded by dense underbrush were gradually replaced by a
drier, sparser cover of lodgepole pine, with patches of bunchgrass and sagebrush. The
high country that comprised the greater part of Manning Park was of secondary
importance in Oldham and McMurchie’s development plans because only a small
minority of visitors were likely to explore these areas due to limitations of time, money,
fitness, and skill. This vision of the park was more popular or democratic than Lyons and
Trew’s, at least to the extent that it focused on what the motoring public could expect to
see and do in a short time and with minimal expense.

Oldham and McMurchie’s 1945 report recommended three developments in
Manning, all of which would be located in the same part of the Similkameen flats that
Lyons and Trew had proposed for their “park centre.” There would be two lodges: one at
the Lightning Lakes and the other near the main trailheads into the mountains, with the
latter having a stable of horses available for guests to hire. These lodges would be located
away from view of the highway, but accessible from it via a mile-long road that led to the
Lightning Lakes. Combined, they would provide rooms for 30 overnight guests. The third
development they recommended was a roadside dining establishment adjacent to the
Hope-Princeton Highway at the point where the access road branched off towards the
lodges. It would offer light meals and refreshments to motorists passing through the park,
but not overnight accommodations. It would operate in conjunction with a gas station and
garage, which were deemed necessary due to the fact that there were no gas stations in
the 100 miles of highway between Hope and Princeton.
Oldham and McMurchie’s recommendations for development in Manning Park can be seen as complementing and contradicting those of Trew and Lyons. The 1943 and 1945 reports were quite similar in terms of the buildings and building sites they recommended, aside from Oldham and McMurchie’s addition of the roadside restaurant and service station. The most significant difference between the two reports was that Trew and Lyons deemed Manning’s wilderness or backcountry areas to be its most important feature, and given the park’s large size, rugged terrain, history of isolation, and relative inaccessibility at the time of their inspection, they cannot be faulted for that. On the other hand, McMurchie and Oldham believed that the most important area of the park would be the highway corridor, which was expected to carry large volumes of traffic.
between the Coast and Interior. In terms of planning, the 1943 reconnaissance had focused on how a small number of visitors would encounter the greater part of the park, whereas the 1945 report emphasized the importance of how the greater number of visitors would experience a small section of the park – that is, the ‘beaten path’ of the Hope-Princeton Highway corridor. The very fact that the second inspection was ordered indicates that during the late war years senior Forest Service officials were beginning to think of the provincial parks as state-provided amenities that all British Columbians had a right to access and enjoy. The fact that the second inspection was ordered also suggests that Manning was being singled out for special attention, that it was expected to be a showcase park that straddled a showcase highway.

*Publicizing the Park*

An important lesson that the Parks Division drew from a half century of national, provincial, and state park development in North America was that popular and accessible parks had the best chance of being permanent parks. Familiar and beloved parks were less susceptible to having their boundaries nibbled (or hacked) away at by other agencies of the state in order to facilitate logging, mining, grazing, dam construction, and other nominally more productive uses. Thus it was deemed important for British Columbians to know about and be able to visit their provincial parks, or at least know enough to *want* to visit them. Given that so many of BC’s large provincial parks remained inaccessible in the 1940s, the Parks Division’s efforts to generate publicity about the areas under its stewardship were a particularly important aspect of its early operations.
The Parks Division’s first effort to promote Manning Park occurred within the administrative structure of the Forest Service. Ches Lyons and Mickey Trew took many photographs during their reconnaissance of the park, and some were printed in the Forest Service’s 1943 annual report. Captions that described Manning as “ideal for auto tourists” and “accessible from the highway” were probably intended to suggest the park’s potential economic value to politicians and Forest Service officials. However, this was somewhat farcical given that the Hope-Princeton road project remained stalled, gasoline was being strictly rationed, and wartime propaganda was depicting driving for pleasure as frivolous and unpatriotic.12

In the summer of 1944, as the war in Europe was winding down, the Parks Division and the BC Government Travel Bureau collaborated to organize an exclusive horseback excursion into Manning Park for tourism promoters from Vancouver, including representatives of the British Columbia Automobile Association (BCAA). The goal of this excursion and the associated publicity campaign was to show that the provincial parks, and Manning Park in particular, were assets that could be used to help draw auto tourists to BC once the war was over and important infrastructure projects like the Hope-Princeton Highway could be completed. That the BCAA was invited to participate suggests that the Parks Division hoped to cultivate links with organizations that were lobbying for the expansion and improvement of the provincial road network.13

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12 British Columbia, Department of Lands, Forest Branch, Report of the Forest Branch (Victoria: Queen’s Printer, 1943), 17.
13 The Parks Division’s involvement in planning for postwar auto tourism fits neatly with Michael Dawson’s argument that during the late years of World War Two BC tourism promoters began setting the stage for increased travel to (and within) the province in the postwar years. Dawson, Selling British Columbia, 126-152.
Parks Division staff took photographs and made a film of the excursion. They distributed images to newspapers and magazines, and arranged movie showings for service clubs, boards of trade, and tourism promoters on the Coast and in the southern Interior – the film was first shown to a meeting of the Princeton Board of Trade. As a special touch, photographs from the trip were assembled into personalized commemorative albums and distributed to participants. In a thank-you letter to Assistant Chief Forester George Melrose, who had helped organize the excursion to Manning Park, the secretary of the Vancouver Tourist Association wrote that

> it was certainly an eye-opener to find out first hand that we had such breathtaking mountain scenery so close to Vancouver. After the war, when American tourists can get into the heart of scenic Manning Park in four hours driving time, we in the Vancouver Tourist Bureau will assist in no small way in selling the idea to incoming tourists and to our own citizens. I believe the money spent on this trip will prove to be money very profitably invested, as the party was made up entirely of men who are in a position to publicize the wonderful scenic beauty of Manning Park.14

Coverage in Vancouver’s daily newspapers triggered a deluge of inquiries from British Columbians who wanted to know how to get land for private cabins in and around Manning Park. “Can a person just walk in and stake land?” asked one correspondent, as though the park was a frontier thrown open to pre-emption. “If not now, when do you think it will be open?” The 1944 tour was considered such a publicity coup that the Parks Division planned for similar excursions to become annual events.15

The Parks Division encouraged other organizations to explore Manning Park during the mid 1940s. In the summer of 1945 it invited the Vancouver Natural History

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Society and staff of the Provincial Museum to make excursions into Manning Park to study the area’s flora and fauna and publicize their findings. This would help promote the park to outdoor recreationalists, while cultivating a sense of stewardship over it amongst amateur botanists, rock collectors, birdwatchers, and other naturalists.

Clifford Carl, the director of the Provincial Museum in Victoria, offered the Parks Division a preliminary copy of his findings in the belief that they might prove useful when planning development in the park. He specifically suggested they might be useful for coping with the large number of motorists expected to pass through the park once the Hope-Princeton Highway was completed. Several of Carl’s recommendations involved the preservation of roadside natural attractions. For example, he argued that road construction contractors should not be allowed to disrupt the beaver colony on the eastern Similkameen flats because he felt it might “prove a great source of interest to Park visitors.” He suggested that the picking of rare plants like alpine wildflowers and Pacific rhododendrons should be prohibited, and that this rule should be “rigidly enforced” – no doubt Carl was involved in getting BC’s wild rhododendrons protected by provincial statute in 1947. He also predicted the trout population in the Lightning Lakes would come under pressure once the park was easily accessible to motorists, and suggested several ways the lakes could be manipulated to increase their “general productivity” for sport fishing.16

16 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1800, G. Clifford Carl to Lyons, 5 January 1946. Also see G. Clifford Carl, C.J. Guiguet, and George A. Hardy, A Natural History Survey of the Manning Park Area, British Columbia Occasional Papers of the British Columbia Provincial Museum, No. 9 (Victoria: Queen’s Printer, 1952). In 1947 the province’s Dogwood Protection Act (1936), which protected the official provincial flower, was amended to also make it illegal to pick or damage wild rhododendrons, subject to a fine. Province of British Columbia, “Dogwood Protection Act Amendment Act,” Statutes (Victoria: Queen’s Printer, 1947), 65.
Carl warned that the future highway would have disruptive effects on the flora and fauna of the valley floors it passed through.

The highway through the Park, while a great boon to the traveller, is a potential destroyer of wildlife. Besides those species which will suffer by the actual construction of the road there are those such as Franklin’s grouse, ruffled grouse, and deer whose numbers are likely to be decimated by the resulting traffic. Of these the greatest sufferers will be the grouse, which are apparently unable to look upon a vehicle as a source of danger. In all likelihood large numbers of these birds will be killed by traffic in the first few years until they will only be seen in areas some distance from the highway.\(^{17}\)

To mitigate the anticipated carnage, Carl recommended that the Parks Division or Department of Public Works put up signs where the road entered the park, “asking the cooperation of the motorist by avoiding as far as possible the destruction of wild creatures on the road.” Staff of the Provincial Museum found BC’s southern Cascade Mountains so interesting that they made repeated visits over the following years, and published a booklet about the area in 1952; some of its findings are discussed in the next chapter.\(^{18}\)

The Vancouver Natural History Society also sent the Parks Division a report that summarized its findings in Manning Park. The author of the report, amateur geologist J.J. Plommer, added his own predictions about how the future highway might affect wildlife in the Cascade Mountains, and offered his opinion on potential developments. Plommer worried that Manning Park’s quietude and aura of wilderness would be disrupted if the Parks Division tried to open up scenic backcountry areas to “portly middle-aged

\(^{17}\) BCA, GR-1991, reel 1800, Carl to Lyons, 5 January 1946.

motorists” who were desirous of merely “parking the car […] where they can look at the country.”

I am afraid the motorists who are too lazy or who are incapable of leaving their cars are going to be disappointed with the scenery of the Hope-Princeton road. No wide vistas can be obtained from the road on the 60-mile drive from Hope, although there are many pleasant glimpses. For 30 miles into Princeton high open ground is traversed, but it is rather bare country. […] Consequently, if the motorist is to be interested, secondary roads will have to be built to carry him to scenic spots. […] I think it will be wise to forget the motor tourist for the time being and give him no encouragement.19

Proper park users, Plommer implied, would be refined enough to appreciate the time and physical effort that were often required to reach Manning’s scenic and natural attractions, whether they were located just a few yards off the highway or deep in the backcountry. They would be active citizens, getting to know their province up-close and in the flesh, rather than passive consumers of scenery. He specifically recommended that no road be built between the Hope-Princeton Highway and the Lightning Lakes, lest ease of access lead to “an invasion of too many fisherman” who would rapidly decimate the trout stock. Plommer could not have known it, but in 1946 a road to the Lightning Lakes was one of the key developments that Parks Division headquarters had concluded were necessary in order to make Manning Park appeal to the motoring public. However, before examining the development plans that the Parks Division had formulated by the end of the war, it is important to note several significant developments (and non-developments) that had occurred on the Hope-Princeton road project since 1943.

More Traffic Delays

The Hope-Princeton road had been resurveyed to modern Canadian highway standards in 1944. This was part of a plan for a second transprovincial highway that would span BC’s southern Interior from Hope to the Crowsnest Pass. During the mid 1940s the western provinces were keen for the federal government to help finance several Trans-Canada highways, rather than just one, and it was hoped that the Hope-Princeton might one day form part of a southerly route across western Canada. This scheme fell through in 1949, when it was announced that federal funding would only be available for a single Trans-Canada Highway. However, the completion of a good quality road across the southern Interior remained one of the provincial government’s main postwar infrastructure projects.²⁰

When they resurveyed the Hope-Princeton right-of-way, highway planners realized that it would be impossibly expensive to meet the federal government’s standards of curvature and gradient at several points on the western approach to the Allison Pass, and at numerous points between the Similkameen flats and Princeton. The terrain was simply too rugged to afford it. However, many sections were surveyed for realignments that would allow traffic to travel at higher speeds and with greater safety. It was also decided that instead of having a gravel surface the completed road would be paved, with gravel shoulders. An asphalt surface would allow heavy commercial vehicles

²⁰Harvey, *The Coast Connection*, 121-122; Monaghan, *Canada’s New Main Street*, 35-41. In a 1946 letter to the premier, the Nelson Board of Trade itemized the perceived advantages of a Trans-Canada route across the southern Interior over the Golden-Revelstoke-Kamloops-Fraser Canyon route. The southern route would be open to traffic all year whereas the Big Bend road was passable “not more than five months in the year.” It would serve “the most thickly populated area in the interior” whereas the Big Bend passed through a howling wilderness. It would also traverse an area “considerably more developed industrially” in terms of mining, smelting, hydro power, lumbering, and agricultural activities. Finally, being located closer to the US border, it would be more of a tourist draw. BCA, GR-1222, box 63, file 6, Nelson Board of Trade to Premier John Hart, 23 January 1946. Also see the organized campaign of letters and telegrams in favour of the southerly route delivered to Premier Byron Johnson in February 1949 in GR-1222, box 74, file 4.
like buses and multi-axle trucks to use the road, and would allow Public Works crews to use graders, truck-mounted plows, and sand spreaders to keep it open during the winter months. Little had been achieved in terms of actual construction during the war, but in the blueprints of BC’s transportation planners the Hope-Princeton Highway was shaping up to be one of the province’s most advanced and important highways. It had never been specifically intended as a parkway or touring road, but was increasingly projected to be a modern arterial highway, capable of accommodating both commercial traffic and pleasure travellers.

Early in 1946 the provincial government awarded four contracts for upgrading and completing the Hope-Princeton Highway. The minister of public works rashly promised the road would be completed by the fall of 1947, which wound up embarrassing the government for a couple years.21 Much of the existing road needed to be reconstructed, for it was now being built to higher standards than when work had begun in 1930. Noteworthy upgrades included building all bridges and culverts with steel and concrete, rather than timber. Engineers also decided to take a revised ‘high route’ across the face of the towering, treacherously frangible Skagit Bluffs, which required enormous amounts of blasting. This work caused long delays and added greatly to the project’s cost.

The mid 1940s brought another flurry of interest in establishing roadside businesses along the Hope-Princeton. This was a result of all the publicity about Manning Park, and also because most observers expected that road construction would soon start up again. Between 1945 and 1950 the Forest Service received more than a hundred requests for permission to build cabins, camps, autocourts, gas stations, and other

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21 Harvey, *The Coast Connection*, 123.
commercial operations along the Hope-Princeton corridor inside Manning Park. Many of these inquiries came from ex-servicemen, including 33 in 1945-1946. Several veterans’ organizations and agencies also contacted the Forest Service. For example, the provincial command of the Canadian Legion wanted to know “what locations will be available to discharged men and what procedure will be necessary in the matter of Auto Parks and Tourist Camps.” The Legion explained that this kind of information was “vital to our boys who are now waiting to locate and establish homes in this area.” This harkened back to post-World War One programs that had tried to settle returned soldiers on the land due to the perceived stabilizing, rehabilitative powers of rural life, except instead of farming, it was thought that the veteran of the 1940s would do better to open his own roadside business that catered to the needs and desires of the motoring public.22 However, the mile-wide reserve over unalienated crown land remained in place along the Hope-Princeton corridor, and Manning Park was closed to would-be entrepreneurs until the Parks Division could finalize its development plans and a policy for commercial concessions.23

In the summer of 1945 the Princeton sub-committee of the Provincial Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Committee delivered a memorandum to the Forest Service laying out what it believed to be an appropriate development scheme for

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22 Dawson shows that the number of autocourts, auto camps, and other roadside accommodation operations in BC doubled in the years between 1938 and 1946, from 300 to more than 600. However, he does not comment on who these new operators were, or why or how they opened their businesses. Dawson, Selling British Columbia, 133. Local histories and contemporary newspapers indicate that many of these operations were in fact opened by returned soldiers, with family members and/or gasoline companies acting as their partners and financial backers.

23 The Parks Division’s reluctance to have the roadside reserve lifted prior to completion of the highway is discussed in BCA, GR-1991, reel 1800, Lyons to F. Battye, 21 November 1945.
Manning Park.\textsuperscript{24} They argued that the park’s proximity to the population centres of BC’s Coast and northwestern Washington State “demands that it should be the first of our park areas to be singled out for early development as promising the quickest and surest returns.” The subcommittee expressed strong support for the land inside the park being kept closed to logging, mining, and grazing. “[N]ature has endowed British Columbia with ample and particularly attractive natural resources in the almost incomparable beauty of its scenery,” the subcommittee observed, and it would be shortsighted to allow those perpetual but non-renewable resources to be disrupted by industrial activity.

Echoing Lyons and Trew’s 1943 reconnaissance report and Martin Allerdale Grainger’s newspaper stories of the late 1920s, the subcommittee recommended that new trails be blazed into the high country and that several rustic backcountry cabins be built in order to provide shelter for hikers and trail riders. Echoing the 1945 reconnaissance report by Oldham and Macmurchie, they also suggested that a large roadside lodge with a “suitable and artistic design” should be built in the vicinity of the Allison Pass, along with a gas station and several small cabins.

The subcommittee praised the mile-wide reserve that had been placed over all crown land along the Hope-Princeton right-of-way, which prevented the sale or lease of the surface rights to any private party. They deemed it useful for preventing eyesores sprouting along the highway corridor inside the park.

It needs no stretch of the imagination to see that our Government is quite right in barring the sale or lease of parcels of land within the park to private individuals who might be likely, uncontrolled, to put up unsightly gas and repair stations and tourist camps, jerry built for economy, and capable of bringing in quick returns without regard for appearances, without regard to harmony with their setting. We

\footnote{BCA, GR-1991, reel 1800, F.W. Gregory, Secretary, Princeton Sub-committee of the Provincial Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Committee, memo to District Forester, Kamloops, 9 July 1945.}
too have often seen such places dotted along our highways, with their sole adornment consisting of advertising signs.

However, they argued that the reserve should be lifted as soon as possible because it threatened to stifle opportunities for returning veterans, who needed to start businesses right away, while their savings were intact and government loans were available. The passage of time would allow larger, better-capitalized interests to snap up the best parcels of land along the highway corridor when they became available. To avoid this, the Princeton subcommittee suggested that the provincial government partner directly with veterans in the development of roadside commercial operations.

Veterans were not the only ones waiting for information about business opportunities in Manning Park and along the Hope-Princeton Highway. Not coincidentally, around the same time that the Princeton subcommittee made this pitch to the Forest Service, the Princeton Board of Trade – which had been quiet on the subject of a provincial park since the mid 1930s – started lobbying Victoria for speedy completion of the highway and opening of the highway corridor to commercial development. When the Kamloops district forester visited Princeton in December 1945, he was approached by merchants, property owners, and would-be entrepreneurs who were “anxious to know what plans are being made for the development of tourist facilities on the Hope-Princeton road.” He described the town as “seething with plans for taking care of the flood of travel which they anticipate will follow the opening of the road,” and recommended that information about the government’s plans for development along the highway and in the park be relayed to the board of trade as soon as it was available.25

25 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1800, District Forester A.E. Parlow to Chief Forester, 31 December 1945; F.S. McKinnon memo to Chief Forester, 12 February 1946. Parlow also believed that the opening of the
Not everyone who wanted to set up a business that would cater to motorists driving on the future Hope-Princeton road was bound by the reserve on roadside crown land. This posed several challenges to the Park Division, which wanted to ensure that roadside landscapes in and around Manning Park would have a naturalistic aesthetic that met the motoring public’s expectations of a western Canadian mountain park. For example, Roy Tower and his family had acquired a 160-acre parcel that straddled the highway right-of-way and the Similkameen River near the eastern boundary of Manning Park. They purchased this property from an old prospector, Charlie Bonnevier, who had squatted there from 1905 until 1928, when the impending construction of the Hope-Princeton road had spurred him to acquire formal title to the land. By the fall of 1945 the Tower family were preparing to set up a roadside autocourt “complete with gas pump and lunch counter.” Parks Division staff met with Roy Tower to discuss his plans and their concern that his operation not constitute an eyesore so close to the park. They reported that Tower was “cooperative to our suggestions, even to the extent of submitting his plan of development for our criticism. Our policy would appear to be to cooperate with this man and through friendly relations endeavour to guide him in erecting a presentable establishment rather than a blot on the landscape.” The Parks Division decided that so long as the Tower family’s operation proved to be a “well run enterprise,” there would be

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highway would lead to administrative complications and an increased need for fire protection in and around Manning Park, and he therefore suggested that the Forest Service’s district boundaries be redrawn so that the park fell entirely within his district, instead of partly in the Kamloops district and partly in the Vancouver district. This proposal was supported by F.S. McKinnon, head of the Forest Service’s planning division, and the district boundaries were adjusted in the spring of 1946.
no reason to permit the development of a competing concession in the eastern part of the park.  

The Tower family had managed to purchase one of the very few alienated parcels of land along the Hope-Princeton right-of-way, one that was in an excellent location for drawing in future motorists. However, other would-be entrepreneurs attempted to establish roadside commercial operations using more creative methods of land acquisition. As early as 1942, the Princeton Board of Trade had warned the minister of lands that “the holders of some mining claims on lands adjoining the highway” were contemplating the use of subterfuge to open auto camps and gas stations in contravention of the roadside reserve. In 1946 a prospector named Hansen (or Hanson) started building unapproved tourist accommodations inside the boundaries of Manning Park, on a mineral claim that was located beside the highway near Cambie Creek. Learning of this, Chief Forester C.D. Orchard – the most senior official in the Forest Service – wrote directly to the deputy minister of mines to complain that Hansen was abusing his right to erect buildings on his mineral claim. In Orchard’s opinion the gas pump, four log cabins, and “advertising of tourist accommodation” were clearly unrelated to any real mining activity. The cabins also presented an aesthetic problem, in that they had been built in a slapdash manner. In a registered letter sent to Hansen the next day, Orchard notified him

27 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1800, J. Kirby, Secretary, Princeton Board of Trade to Minister of Lands, 21 March 1942.
that his buildings violated Parks Division regulations, and that the Department of Mines had been asked to investigate the legitimacy of his claim.28

The Parks Division expected that Hansen would be compelled to tear down or remove his buildings. Instead, they were surprised to learn that in spite of the reserve in place along the Hope-Princeton right-of-way since 1931, Hansen’s roadside mineral claim had, through an oversight, been upgraded to a crown grant. This meant the Department of Mines no longer had the authority to control what he did on the surface of his claim. Lacking an administrative tool with which to dislodge Hansen and remove his eyesore cabins, the Parks Division had no choice but to negotiate with him. It was not until the summer of 1949 and a payment of $3500 that Hansen agreed to let his claim lapse.29 Instructions were dispatched to Bob Boyd, the ranger in charge of Manning Park, that Hansen’s buildings were to be burned soon as the forest fire risk dissipated, and the site cleaned up so that no trace of them could be discerned by the motoring public.30

Hansen’s was not the only such case that the Parks Division confronted. Barely a year after it began, there was another threat of an unapproved roadside commercial operation appearing inside Manning Park. In the summer of 1947 the Parks Division learned that Alex Broomfield, a prominent Princeton businessman who had long operated the Hotel Princeton, was seeking a crown grant that would give him surface rights on a roadside mineral claim he had been holding since 1930. This mineral claim was located

29 The title to Hansen’s mineral claim was returned to the crown by Order-in-Council #1408 (31 August 1949). One year later, Order-in-Council #1545 (14 July 1950) deleted a portion of Manning Park on its western edge. This was done in order to remove several active mineral claims, crown grants, and other alienated parcels. None of these were visible from the Hope-Princeton, and thus there was less urgency to deal with them than with Hansen’s roadside operation.
near the eastern boundary of Manning Park, just a short distance from the Tower family’s property. Broomfield reported that he wanted to keep a private summer home, to which Parks Division staff were amenable. However, they heard rumours that Broomfield’s true intention was to build a cabin camp and gas station.31

Citing Broomfield’s track record with the Hotel Princeton, Ches Lyons believed he would build and operate “a very creditable concern, if permitted.”32 However, he and other Park Division staff were troubled by efforts to revive old mineral claims and grazing permits as a means of gaining toeholds for unapproved and aesthetically unregulated commercial operations in and around Manning Park. When Lyons delved into the overlapping mineral, grazing, and pre-emption records relating to the lot that Broomfield claimed to own, he found that it actually could be considered ‘vacant’ crown land due to the non-payment of a survey fee back in the 1910s. Lyons concluded that if Broomfield was allowed “to obtain [surface] rights by such a circumvention, then the door is thrown open to others. If Manning Park is to be developed and controlled as a park, a firm stand must be taken against such intrusions.”33 When Broomfield applied for surface rights and a Parks Use Permit in September 1947 the Parks Division turned him down, in spite of his promise “to put up such buildings as may be required” and the fact that he presented his application as a way of helping his son, a veteran who had fought during the war.34

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34 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1800, Harold W. McInnes [lawyer for Alex Broomfield] to Forest Service, 2 September 1947; McKinnon to Chief Forester, 18 September 1947; Chief Forester to McInnes [undated].
The Hansen, Broomfield, and several similar cases initiated a protracted correspondence between the Parks Division, Forest Service, departments of lands and mines, and Attorney-General’s office. For three years they discussed the legal niceties of prospecting, claim staking, crown grants, and other possible ways of acquiring surface rights inside BC’s provincial parks. Finally, in late 1949, following the resolution of the Hansen case, an order-in-council was issued that forbade prospectors and miners from erecting buildings, cutting trails, or building roads inside provincial parks without first acquiring permission from the Parks Division in the form of a Parks Use Permit. This affected all mineral claims in all provincial parks, but it must be emphasized that instead of concern over actual mining activity, the issue that sparked the discussion was the Parks Division’s concern that the highway corridor through Manning Park might end up being lined with unsightly roadside businesses over which it could exercise little control. This regulation would prove a valuable tool in the Parks Division’s efforts to impose and maintain a clean, naturalistic aesthetic along the highway corridor through Manning Park.

Making Appropriate Concessions

In late February 1946 F.S. McKinnon, the head of the Parks Division, sent the chief forester a lengthy report about commercial concessions in Manning Park that set out the first formal plan for development. Having reviewed the 1943 and 1945 reconnaissance reports and consulted members of the hotel and resort industry, he had concluded that the Hope-Princeton Highway would be “the artery from which all traffic in the park will originate and until such time as the popularity of the area is assured […]

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36 Order-in-Council #2055 (17 September 1949).
it appears to be a reasonable assumption that commercial development will be tied to the road.” He therefore recommended that a single concession be permitted inside the park: a large lodge with an estimated cost of $150,000. Instead of being located beside the Lightning Lakes, as both the 1943 and 1945 reports had recommended, the lodge would be built about a mile from the lakes, adjacent to the highway on the Similkameen flats. Associated with this roadside lodge would be a gas station and an autocourt. The proposed concession was clearly oriented towards the general motoring public, rather than hikers, anglers, and backcountry trail riders.37

McKinnon’s memo set out the minimum requirements expected of any future concession holder. Accommodations and dining facilities in Manning Park were not to be expensive to the point of exclusivity, like the railway hotels found in Banff and Jasper national parks, but nor were they to be overly commercial: “the service required must be of a high standard and at the same time provide for both medium and low rate accommodation.” The concession buildings were expected to blend in with their surroundings: low buildings with a simple, semi-rustic exterior finish were recommended, with a colour scheme to determined in consultation with Parks Division staff. The ground floor of the lodge was to include a dining room for 40, a snack bar for 50, kitchens, and public restrooms. The upper floor was to provide accommodations for at least 30 guests. Anticipating that winter sports would one day be popular in the park, the basement of the lodge was to be capable of accommodating facilities for the rental and storage of ski equipment.

The Parks Division insisted that a gas station be included in the concession on the Similkameen flats. In 1946 no service station had been issued a license to operate along the hundred miles of road between Hope and Princeton, although the Tower family intended to apply for one. Running out of gas would be a very real risk for motorists unfamiliar with the highway, and the planned concession site was almost equidistant between the two towns. Tire repair, a towing service, and basic mechanical repairs were also to be available at the service station. Within two years of the lodge and gas station opening, the concessionaire was expected to build an autocourt consisting of between 15 and 20 drive-up “cabin bungalows.” These detached cabins would be self-contained except for cooking and dining, thus allowing vacationers more privacy than was afforded by the lodge or a campground. Each cabin was to accommodate at least three people, and was to have hot and cold running water and a flush toilet. The concessionaire would be responsible for putting in an electric lighting plant, a water and sewer system (of the septic field type), and to provide “appropriate” landscaping of the grounds. Finally, several parking lots would be needed. The Parks Division identified parking as a common but complicated problem in North American parks: lack of parking space was “a continual source of annoyance to the motorist,” but “a mass of parked cars is at best an ugly sight.” In order to preserve a rustic “resort atmosphere” the Division decided that several parking lots should be spread out around the concession buildings, thereby maximizing visitor convenience while avoiding the appearance of a suburban supermarket. All these structures would be concentrated along a short stretch of the highway, thereby avoiding the appearance of a roadside commercial strip.
The concession was to operate on a 21-year Parks Use Permit, with the terms subject to review every five years. The concessionaire would pay the province a nominal fee for the first four years of operation and a percentage of the gross trade thereafter. Most importantly, the lodge and gas station were to be ready by the time the Hope-Princeton Highway opened to the motoring public. In early 1946 the Department of Public Works projected that the road would be completed by the fall of 1947, barely eighteen months away.

Advertisements for the Manning Park concession were published in the Vancouver Province and Sun, Victoria’s Daily Colonist, and Princeton’s Similkameen Star. Many requests were received for application packages and further information, as was a protest from the Canadian Legion, which objected strongly to the awarding of a single large concession in the park instead of several smaller ones. Since the closing years of the war, the Legion’s BC Provincial Command had been promoting small roadside businesses like gas stations, cafés, campgrounds, and autocourts as ideal opportunities for veterans returning to civilian life. British Columbia’s Interior road network had been expanded and improved during the war, and the expectation was that this trend would only accelerate in peacetime, as motorists bought new cars and used them for long-distance travel. The Legion argued that “monopolies” like the one being proposed for Manning Park would make it difficult to rehabilitate veterans and put them on a stable, independent financial standing. “No doubt you will appreciate that it is going to be somewhat difficult for a concern composed of veterans to tender on a concession ranging from $50,000.00 to $200,000.00,” they complained to the minister of lands. “Our
[Princeton] Branch feels it would be much better to give a number of smaller concessions and reserve them exclusively for veterans.”

In fact, one of the four proposals submitted to build and operate the roadside concession in Manning Park did come from a group of veterans. Their proposal included “attractive architect’s plans” and an explanation of how they intended to pool their individual resources while drawing a further $30,000 of financial backing from a major oil company. However, when Chief Forester C.D. Orchard reviewed the concession proposals, he observed that the veterans were “very badly handicapped” by the number of partners involved, which made for a potentially unstable arrangement that might threaten to “badly embarrass development and management.” He argued that the well-capitalized Armstrong Construction Company of Vancouver appeared to have “the best background of experience and the best financial set-up.” No special consideration was given to the veterans; what really mattered was construction experience and adequate financing to ensure that a respectable and aesthetically appropriate roadside commercial operation would be built in the park. Manning Park was set to become a kind of showcase, where the Forest Service could demonstrate the aesthetic, recreational, and economic value of BC’s provincial parks to political and business elites, as well as to the motoring public.

Interviews were held with the short-listed applicants in the fall of 1946. After discussing the project with Premier John Hart and the minister of lands, Orchard awarded the first concession in Manning Park to the Armstrong Construction Company, which was managed by a Mr. Galloway. In a letter to the Attorney-General’s department, which asked for a formal contract to be drawn up, Parks Division chief F.S. McKinnon pointed

38 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1800, Robert MacNicol, Executive Secretary, BC Provincial Command, Canadian Legion to E.T. Kenny, Minister of Lands, 3 June 1946.
out that the lodge concession in Manning Park was the “first-ever commercial enterprise to be approved in any of [British Columbia’s] provincial parks.”

The contract drawn up by the Attorney-General’s department was never actually signed, and the deal between the provincial government and the Armstrong Construction Company to build and operate the Manning Park lodge never consummated. There were two reasons for this. The first was the interminable delay in finishing the Hope-Princeton Highway. The timetable for concession development in Manning was tied directly to the timetable for completion of the road, as it would be in the interests of both the provincial government and the concessionaire to have the lodge open at the same time as the highway. As the Forest Service’s 1947 annual report tersely put it, “[t]he long-delayed completion of the Hope-Princeton Highway has had an adverse influence on developments in Manning Park. It was hoped the construction of the commercial resort would have been started during the summer, but nothing has been done to date.” This put the matter of concession development on hold into 1948.

By that time, boosters and business groups in the southern Interior were fuming at the delay in finishing the long-awaited Hope-Princeton Highway. For almost two decades they had been denied the economic opportunities associated with connection to a major arterial highway. They also complained about the government’s lack of development in Manning Park. In the spring of 1948 several boards of trade pressured the minister of public works and MLAs from the southern Interior to fund for a works program inside the park. A short ski run was cleared that summer, and an administration building was

40 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1800, McKinnon to Attorney-General’s Department, 1 Aug 1947.
erected on the Similkameen flats, about a mile east of the site of the proposed roadside lodge. However, by the end of the summer it was clear that the opening of the Hope-Princeton Highway remained a long way off. Several bridges still needed to be finished, and blasting and rock scaling continued at the Skagit Bluffs.

The second reason why the contract between the provincial government and the Armstrong Construction Company was never finalized involved a serious difference of opinion about appropriate uses of the planned lodge. In February 1948 Ches Lyons visited Vancouver to inspect the company’s plans for the lodge, gas station, and future autocourt. He found the architectural drawings to be “of almost no value,” with little attention having been paid to critical matters like the provision of heat, water, and electricity to the bungalow cabins. Lyons pressed Galloway and his draughtsman for an explanation, and eventually drew out the fact that Galloway believed “his major profit will accrue from operating a beer parlour” inside the Manning Park lodge.42

Public consumption of alcohol was a divisive topic in postwar BC. Since 1925 beer parlours had been the only public places where it was legal to drink in the province, and they were highly regulated. There was no bar in a beer parlour: beer was only served to patrons sitting at tables. Beer was the only drink served, and food, games, singing, dancing, minors, status Indians, and the intermingling of singles of the opposite sex were all forbidden. Almost all beer parlours were located in hotels, and although a few upscale hotels like the Hotel Georgia and Hotel Vancouver had their own, most were found in older establishments that were dingy, crowded, and inextricably associated with the

42 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1803, Lyons, undated memo included in McKinnon to Orchard, 1 March 1948.
working-class clientele that tended to frequent them. By middle-class standards, most beer parlours were not considered respectable establishments.43

The idea of having a beer parlour in the Manning Park lodge clashed with the Parks Division’s plans for the concession complex. It threatened to introduce an element of ‘rough’ working-class culture to a place where individuals and families were supposed get a sense of contemplative communion with nature, albeit in close proximity to a major arterial highway. It is not clear who Galloway thought might patronize a beer parlour located in the middle of a provincial park 50 miles from the nearest community. Presumably he intended to serve guests of the lodge and other visitors to the park, but it is unclear whether he envisioned a middle- or working-class clientele. Regardless, Parks Division officials deemed it inappropriate for public drinking to be mixed up with recreational activities like hiking, fishing, skiing, and camping. The mere possibility that a roadside beer parlour might one day be in operation in Manning Park seemed morally dubious and aesthetically unthinkable. In a letter to the chief forester, Parks Division head F.S. McKinnon confided:

My own thought on the matter is that no beer parlour be permitted. If the [concession area] develops as anticipated there will be large numbers of young people around the place and I do not think it would be desirable to promote the sale of beer to them. We older people are set in our drinking habits and if we must have our liquor can afford to bring out bottle with us but it would seem to be poor policy to have beer by the glass readily available to young people out for a weekend of recreation.44

43 It would not be until 1954 that cocktail lounges catering to the middle-class were permitted by the BC Liquor Control Board. Thus for more than a generation public drinking in BC was synonymous with beer, beer parlours, and their mainly working-class customers. See Robert A. Campbell, Demon Rum or Easy Money: Government Control of Liquor in British Columbia From Prohibition to Privatization (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1991; Robert A. Campbell, Sit Down and Drink Your Beer: Regulating Vancouver’s Beer Parlours, 1925-1954 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).
44 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1803, McKinnon, memo to Orchard, 1 March 1948.
McKinnon also pointed out that the myriad regulations that the BC Liquor Control Board imposed on beer parlours had the potential to cripple the Parks Division’s plans for development in Manning Park. Drinking establishments were forbidden near cabin camps and ski hills, and this threatened to explode the compact, centralized concession complex envisioned for the Similkameen flats. If Galloway received a beer parlour license prior to completion of the autocourt and ski hill, the economic feasibility, aesthetic coherence, and public reputation of the entire concession complex might be jeopardized.

Parks Division staff searched for a loophole that would allow them to escape from the agreement they mistakenly believed had been finalized with the Armstrong Construction Company in 1946. In early 1949 Galloway began pressing for clarification on when construction of the lodge could begin, and Ches Lyons was instructed to investigate the entire situation. He scoured through the paperwork on the Manning Park lodge project and reported his findings to the head of the Parks Division, who then forwarded them directly to the chief forester. Lyons found that no binding contract had been finalized with the Armstrong Construction Company, and that Galloway had consistently been told that his plans for the concession in Manning Park would need to be approved by Parks Division staff before a final agreement could be reached. He also discovered that neither Galloway nor the Armstrong Construction Company held a valid license to operate a tourist camp. Furthermore, Lyons reported that Premier Byron Johnson had, like his predecessor John Hart, taken a personal interest in how development was proceeding in Manning Park. Thus the stakes were very high for the Parks Division and the Forest Service. The possibility that they might end up with a
roadside beer parlour in the middle of what was expected to become a showcase provincial park was an unacceptable risk.⁴⁵

In February 1949 the Parks Division informed Galloway that it would not be issuing him a Park Use Permit to erect a concession building within Manning Park. Galloway demanded an explanation for the about-face, claiming his company had spent considerable sums on travel to and from to the park and on architectural plans. E.G. Oldham, who had conducted the 1945 reconnaissance of Manning Park, and who had recently replaced F.S. McKinnon as head of the Parks Division, bluntly informed Galloway that the decision was irrevocable. “[G]overnment policy has changed in regard to the awarding of concessions for the servicing of the public in Forest Service Parks” Oldham wrote, “and we now have to advise that in the future all concession buildings in Forest Service Parks will be built by the Government from public funds [emphasis added].”⁴⁶

Mortified at the thought of a beer parlour opening inside one of the province’s premier provincial parks beside a premier arterial highway, and worried about the amount of control they would be able to exercise over any privately owned and operated concession, the Forest Service and its Parks Division had made an important decision. They would go into the roadside accommodation, food, and gasoline business themselves, by building the Manning Park concession complex with public funds and then leasing its operation to a private party under strict conditions. Chief Forester C.D. Orchard was instrumental in convincing the premier and cabinet of the desirability of

⁴⁵ Manning was identified as one of BC’s “vitally important” and “outstanding” provincial parks in the Forest Service’s 1948 annual report. British Columbia, Department of Lands and Forests, Forest Service, Report of the Forest Service (Victoria: Queen’s Printer, 1948), 33.
having control over commercial development inside the provincial parks. Thanks to his arguments, the Parks Division was allocated a significant sum for construction of the Manning Park concession complex. The Fordist state would build this key piece of tourist and recreational infrastructure itself.

Not surprisingly, the government’s roadside lodge on the Similkameen flats was not finished in time for the completion of the Hope-Princeton Highway in the late fall of 1949. The road opening ceremony was held on 2 November at the summit of the Allison Pass, just a short distance from the new Department of Public Works maintenance yard. Graders, caterpillar tractors, and other large machines were lined up for the motoring public to see, including two new truck-mounted snowplows said to rank amongst “the largest pieces of snow plowing equipment on this continent.” British Columbians were encouraged to take pride in this mechanized equipment, which would be used to keep the mountain highway open year-round.47

A ceremonial gate with a golden padlock and provincial crest mounted on it were placed across the highway for the event. The road still needed to be paved, but that did not deter an estimated 6000 motoring enthusiasts from parking their cars along the verges of the highway on each side of the ceremonial gate. Many boosters and business owners from the southwestern Interior travelled to the opening ceremony in caravans.48 Following a round of speeches about public works, progress, and prosperity in postwar British Columbia, Premier Byron Johnson used a golden key to unlock the gate, officially

47 “Highway Brings Awakening,” Vancouver Province, 8 July 1949; “New Road All Weather: Giant Rotary Plows Will ‘Eat Up’ Snow,” Vancouver Sun, 2 November 1949, 42. A photograph of the snow clearing equipment lined up at the Allison Pass works yard is found in Harvey, Carving the Western Path: Routes to Remember, 98.

48 For example, the Oliver Board of Trade organized a party of between 30 and 40 cars from the south Okanagan, which joined an even larger caravan from the central and north Okanagan at Penticton before proceeding westward to Allison Pass. Oliver Chronicle and Osoyoos Observer, 2 February 1949, 1.
opening the long-awaited highway to the public. Accompanied by his packhorse, Charlie Bonnevier, the elderly prospector who had sold his plot of land near the eastern edge of Manning Park to the Tower family, was invited to be the first to step through the gate. “I’ve been waiting for this road for 54 years,” he told the premier while shaking his hand. Bonnevier’s appearance had been organized by Public Works staff, perhaps as a way of suggesting the new highway had thrown a long-isolated part of the province open to the motoring public, who were now free to seek pleasant prospects along it, albeit in a very different manner than Bonnevier had been doing for so many years.49 The official opening of the highway seemed to have been a great success, but that changed a few hours later.

That night, the unforeseen arrival of freezing temperatures led to the Hope-Princeton’s first fatal motor accident, when a car skidded on black ice and went over an embankment, killing three of its five occupants, who had attended the opening ceremony earlier in the day. It was widely agreed that the new Hope-Princeton was safer and easier to drive than the road through the Fraser Canyon, but this reminder of danger’s constant presence in the mountains provided an inauspicious start for the long-awaited highway. The accident was particularly embarrassing for provincial politicians and senior Public Works officials, who had organized an extensive publicity campaign around the new highway, one with newspaper advertisements that boasted how fast and safe and scenic it was. Minister of Public Works E.C. Carson, who was a personal friend of one of the deceased, and whose brother had died in a truck crash in the Fraser Canyon in 1937, assured the Vancouver Province that the new highway was “as safe as modern

49 Gordon Root, “Pioneer Prospector First Man on Road,” Vancouver Province, 3 November 1949, 30.
engineering can make it.”50 Boosters, tourism promoters, and roadside business operators in the southern Interior must have also been worried that the new highway might get a reputation for being dangerous. The Hope-Princeton Highway and the unfamiliar country that it traversed were still something of a blank slate to BC’s motoring public; their image in the popular imagination was still highly malleable. As the following chapter shows, the Parks Division recognized this fact. During the early 1950s it went to great lengths to impose an appealing naturalistic aesthetic along the highway corridor in Manning Park, with the goal of making both the park and the highway valuable assets to the Fordist state.

50 “New Highway’s Opening Marred by Three Deaths: Two Survive After Auto Plunges Down Bank” and “Road Safe: Carson,” Vancouver Province, 3 November 1949, 1. One of the many articles that emphasized the Hope-Princeton’s superiority over the Fraser Canyon route was A.J. Dalrymple, “Completion of the Hope-Princeton Link is a Boon to BC Farmers,” Farm and Ranch Review, 1 December 1949, 24-25.
Chapter 4

Manning Park and the Aesthetics of Automobile Accessibility in the 1950s

This chapter examines the Parks Division’s efforts to shape the motoring public’s experiences of nature by the road in Manning Park during the 1950s. Those efforts were intended to make the park more appealing, to make the highway seem a natural part of it, and to show provincial politicians and Forest Service officials that the Parks Division was capable of making British Columbia look good to residents and visitors alike. Most of Manning Park’s best-known attractions and facilities were put in place during this period. These landscape features would shape the motoring public’s impressions of the park and BC’s southern Cascade Mountains for decades to come, offering implicit and explicit lessons about roads, parks, nature, and modernity that generations of motorists absorbed while travelling along the Hope-Princeton Highway. Delving ‘behind the scenery,’ this chapter shows that most of the Parks Division’s key developments in Manning Park during the 1950s were predicated on shaping the motoring public’s views. It strove to draw motorists’ attention towards certain flora, fauna, and scenic vistas that were located beside or in close proximity to the highway corridor, while hiding evidence of industrial resource extraction that might suggest disconcerting contradictions about BC’s postwar economy.

Some agencies responsible for parks in North America had well-developed traditions of landscape design by the 1940s, and had engaged in extended debates about the proper place of roads and automobiles in parks.\(^1\) However, the agency in charge of

\(^1\) The Parks Division’s aversion to discussing the appropriate place of the automobile in BC’s provincial parks during the 1950s contrasts sharply with the policy debates going on in the American National Parks
BC’s parks had only existed since 1939, and was steeped in the pragmatism of the Forest Service. The Parks Division tended towards short, practical discussions that led to action on the ground, and did not produce formal policy guidelines for managing the relationship between roads, the motoring public, and park landscapes until the late 1960s. Thus the best way to understand the significance it attached to this relationship during the 1950s is to look closely at the concrete steps it took to preserve scenic features, cultivate natural attractions, hide or camouflage eyesores, and make park facilities blend in with their natural surroundings. This chapter shows that these were all done according to a ‘common sense’ that prioritized what was visible to motorists as they drove through Manning Park – that is, according to an aesthetic of automobile accessibility.

Making Attractions in Manning Park

In late 1949 newspapers and magazines from the Coast and southern Interior of British Columbia were full of stories about the new Hope-Princeton Highway, praiseful stories that tended to look at it with a chamber of commerce or booster’s mentality. The new highway was hailed as an engineering marvel, a vital artery of trade and tourism, a harbinger of prosperity for the southern Interior, and a tangible example of what could be accomplished by the pro-business coalition of Liberals and Conservatives that had been governing the province since 1941. The Vancouver Sun called the road a “superhighway.” According to Farm and Ranch Review, the new road had agricultural producers in the southwestern Interior “pulsing with the will for greater production,
quicker deliveries, [and] more efficiency in marketing and consumer distribution.” The magazine *Country Life in British Columbia* put the highway on the cover of its November 1949 issue. “The Hope-Princeton Road will give Southern British Columbia convenient access to the Pacific Coast over a smoothly surfaced highway,” the associated story declared. “It will be an economic boon [and] will give Coast residents access to areas hitherto little known.”

Motorists appreciated the faster travel times that the new highway allowed between the Coast and the southern Interior. However, there was little spontaneous enthusiasm for it as a scenic drive. The Cascade Mountains were unfamiliar to the vast majority of British Columbians: to them the area was an unpopulated, unhistoried, meaningless wilderness. Also, the new highway had not been designed to draw out the most appealing or striking features of its surroundings. Ordinary motorists’ descriptions of what it was like to drive through Manning Park on the Hope-Princeton Highway in the years immediately following the road’s completion are few and far between. However, one valuable source on auto touring in BC during the late 1940s and early 1950s are the diaries kept by Victoria grocer Leonard Coton, who drove extensively around the province in the postwar years. Coton’s detailed descriptions of these trips show him to have been a keen observer of changes related to the expansion and improvement of the provincial highway network. Coton was not merely an observer of BC’s changing roadside landscapes – he was also an enthusiast. For example, although he could afford to overnight in good hotels, he generally preferred to absorb ‘local colour’ by staying in

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small, family-owned and operated autocourts, or in historical accommodations like the Clinton Hotel, which was the oldest in the province.

Coton made an extended road trip through the Interior in the summer of 1950 or 1951, and recorded his thoughts about the Hope-Princeton Highway in his diary:

This highway, in all deference to those who built it and those who have used up gallons of ink writing about it since its opening, is far too highly rated. As a scenic highway it has little or nothing as compared with some of the other roads I have traveled on this trip – except perhaps for the occasional view across a canyon more or less obscured by roadside trees. […] Reading through the Govt. booklet again I think that the man compiling it must have had the same idea of the scenic value that I have, for all of his pictures illustrating the book are of the road itself; not one of the view from the road. […] Perhaps in years to come, those trees will be cut or blown down, and then this may be a scenic attraction; for now it is only a road which has shortened the distance from Vancouver to Princeton by over a hundred miles [emphases in original].

While Coton was not overly enthusiastic about the scenery along the highway, he did comment favourably on the new businesses being developed beside it, and on the fact that their owners appeared to appreciate the value of natural scenery.

What did impress me was the way in which private enterprise had seized on the opportunity of serving the traveling public. Housed in fine buildings which do not spoil the beauty of the road, cafés and gas stations are already in operation, with wide parking spaces to prevent any interruption of the traffic. The first I came to really had a beautiful set-up, a good parking place and a viewpoint from which they had taken the trouble to remove any trees which obstructed the lovely outlook.

Coming from a keen observer like Coton, the assertion that the scenery along the Hope-Princeton Highway was “overrated” is noteworthy, especially for how it echoed Oldham and McMurchie’s 1945 assertion that Manning Park contained “nothing of a

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3 BCA, MS-2723 Leonard A. Coton papers, diary titled “My latest and probably ‘last’ trip,” 49. The government booklet mentioned by Coton is likely British Columbia Government Travel Bureau, “British Columbia Presents: The Hope-Princeton Highway” (Victoria: Department of Trade and Industry, 1949).
4 Ibid., 49-50. This business was likely the Lake family’s Falls Café and Auto Court, which had opened half a mile east of the Tower family’s cabin camp.
truly spectacular or definitely outstanding nature” and J.J. Plommer’s 1946 prediction that many motorists would be “disappointed with the scenery of the Hope-Princeton road.” Even more striking is the fact that Coton made no mention of Manning Park, for he usually described real and potential roadside attractions in painstaking detail. Coton’s lack of interest in Manning Park suggests a dearth of things to see and do during the first few years that it was accessible by automobile; it offered few sights and attractions that could catch the attention of the motoring public.5

Staff of the Parks Division felt much the same way as Coton. Even though the plans they had produced during the late 1940s had identified the highway corridor as the most important part of Manning Park, they regarded it as neither intrinsically scenic nor particularly interesting, and deemed this a problem due to the prominence of both the road and the park. Consequently, they set out to improve the motoring public’s experience of driving through the park by cultivating a series of differentiated roadside attractions during the early 1950s. They sought to draw the motoring public’s attention towards certain landscape features, and divert it away from others. They also expended a considerable amount of time and money developing the concession complex on the Similkameen flats, which came to be known as Pinewoods, and trying to make it blend in with its surroundings.6

The Parks Division had identified several locations beyond Manning Park’s original

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5 Oldham and MacMurchie, “Preliminary Development Plan”; Plommer, “[Manning] Park Report.”
6 As the 1950 annual report of the Forest Service put it, Manning Park was finally accessible to the motoring public, and the Park Division was directing its efforts towards developments that would “directly welcome the visitor and give him an opportunity to stay and enjoy various park attractions.” British Columbia, Department of Lands and Forests, Forest Service, Report of the Forest Service (Victoria: Queen’s Printer, 1950), 35.
boundaries where it was interested in cultivating roadside attractions. Most of these sites were located to the west of the park, where the highway ran through the confines of the upper Sumallo and Skagit river valleys. For example, the view from the towering Skagit Bluffs, 30 miles east of Hope, was considered worthy of special emphasis. When the Department of Public Works started paving the Hope-Princeton in the summer of 1950, the Parks Division convinced it to build a roadside pullout at the western end of the bluffs. This made it safe and easy for eastbound motorists to pull off the highway, get out of their vehicle, and peer into the gorge of the Skagit River. The elevated view from the Skagit Bluffs was one of the most impressive and popular along the Hope-Princeton Highway, but without the pullout it would have been invisible to the motoring public due to the crash barriers set up along the edge of the precipice.

Figure 4.1: Postcard of the Skagit Bluffs and roadside pullout, early 1950s.

7 This apparent overstepping of the Parks Division’s jurisdiction was not as unusual at it might seem, for the mile-wide crown land reserve that had been in place along the highway corridor in 1931 was retained after November 1949. This led to interdepartmental rumblings that the Parks Division might be asked to administer roadside aesthetics and recreational developments along the entire Hope-Princeton Highway. See for example BCA, GR-1991, reel 1801, D.M. Trew, undated report “Manning Park Boundaries and Hope-Princeton Highway” [fall 1949].
A second potential attraction beyond Manning’s western boundary was a remnant of the gold rush-era Dewdney Trail. In 1859 the discovery of placer gold on Rock Creek near the porous border with the Washington Territory had convinced BC’s colonial government of the need for an improved transportation route between the Coast and the boundary country east of the Cascade Mountains. In 1860 the detachment of Royal Engineers who had been sent to the mainland colony began surveying a wagon road from Hope to Rock Creek, and Edgar Dewdney won the contract to blaze a preliminary four-foot-wide trail between Hope and Vermillion Forks, the site of present-day Princeton. However, by the time this section of trail was completed the plan to improve it into a wagon road had been cancelled, for the Rock Creek rush had collapsed, proving a short-lived ‘flash in the pan,’ as would so many other regional gold rushes in colonial BC. The Royal Engineers instead turned their attention to the Fraser Canyon and the Cariboo Wagon Road, which would connect the Coast with the colony’s northern gold fields.8

Dewdney’s trail through the Cascades did not fall completely into disuse. For decades it was used by travellers who needed a direct route between the Coast and southwestern Interior, including prospectors, trappers, ranchers, and hunters. Many sections of the trail were destroyed by rockslides, forest fires, and, after 1929, road construction, but several sections remained intact into the late 1940s. The most prominent of these was a gracefully curving and ascending stretch that was located 17 miles beyond Hope, right beside the Hope-Princeton Highway.

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8 These earliest plans to build a road between BC’s Coast and southwest Interior via the Cascades are best described in Susan Allison, A Pioneer Gentlewoman in British Columbia: The Recollections of Susan Allison Margaret Ormsby, ed. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1976), chapter 1; Brian Titley, The Frontier World of Edgar Dewdney (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999), chapter 1.
No other section of the old Dewdney Trail was so conveniently located in terms of visibility from the new highway. A longer section located several miles further east had been reported to the Parks Division as being especially well preserved, but it was on a slope far above the highway, making it very difficult to discern (let alone reach) from the road. Furthermore, it was only visible to westbound motorists. Because the highway in that area comprised “a series of sharp curves […] bordered on one side by the river and the other by steep mountainside,” Parks Division staff decided that “a dangerous traffic situation” might result if a sign was put up to indicate this relic of BC’s gold rush days to the motoring public. Therefore no attempt was made to mark the more easterly section of the Dewdney Trail, let alone to preserve it. The Parks Division instead focused on preserving the plainly visible and easily accessible section of trail beside the highway as an historical attraction. As will be shown in the chapters in Part Two, old trails and transportation routes that were associated with BC’s gold rush days had been a favourite topic for commemoration in the Interior since the late 1920s.9

Three sites located just off the highway between miles 21 and 23 out of Hope were also thought to merit preservation for (and from) the motoring public. On the flats at mile 23 there was a grove of wild, pinkish-red California rhododendrons that marked the northernmost range of the species. Along with wildflowers in the high alpine, this grove was one of the areas that in 1946 had inspired Provincial Museum Director Clifford Carl to call for strict rules forbidding the taking of certain species of flora in and around Manning Park.10 By 1950 the Parks Division had decided that Rhododendron Flats was one of the most unusual and interesting natural attractions along the Hope-Princeton

9 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1801, Lyons to Stuart Lefeaux, Secretary, Metropolitan Parks Planning Committee (Vancouver), 15 July 1952. Also see GR-1991, reel 1803, Boyd to Chief Forester, 24 May 1952.
corridor, and that roadside signs, a small parking lot, and a trail would soon be required in order to indicate the presence of the grove to motorists and allow them to safely pull off the highway to visit. At the same time, it was clear that if the rhododendron grove was marked and made easily accessible for the motoring public, special protection would be needed to dissuade amateur botanists and overenthusiastic gardeners who might be tempted to take home a bud or branch in hopes of starting a wild rhododendron bush in their backyard. However, it would be difficult to do anything so long as it was located outside Manning Park.

Just to the west of Rhododendron Flats, between miles 21 and 22, there was a grove of a very different kind. Located between the highway and the meandering course of the Sumallo River was a stand of enormous Western red cedars and Douglas firs with a lush undergrowth of sword ferns and mosses. Shaded by the bluffs that loomed on the south side of the Sumallo valley, and kept damp by the heavy precipitation on the windward side of Cascades, this small grove had been untouched by forest fires or loggers for centuries and was one of the few stands of very tall Coastal-type forest located beside the new highway. In their 1943 reconnaissance report, Lyons and Trew had noted that this grove was “all the more spectacular because of the immature growth that precedes it from Hope.” Although Sumallo Grove was located outside Manning Park’s original boundaries, they believed it would “undoubtedly be associated with [the park’s] attractions.”

There was another potential attraction located at mile 21, on the bluffs across the river from Sumallo Grove. This was the potential attraction most likely to require

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decisive action on the part of the Parks Division if it was to be preserved for the motoring public’s viewing pleasure. The best description of it is found in the booklet *A Natural History Survey of the Manning Park Area*, which the Provincial Museum published in 1952 to disseminate the findings of its expeditions into BC’s southern Cascade Mountains. This booklet described numerous environmental changes associated with automobile traffic that Clifford Carl had not anticipated in his 1946 report to the Parks Division. For example, several alien species of weeds had been introduced along the verges of the highway. Black bears had been observed scavenging deer that had been struck and killed by automobiles, and bear scat had been found containing picnic site detritus like cellophane and tin can labels. Pika, yellow-bellied marmots, and other small, rock-dwelling mammals had expanded their range along the highway right-of-way, where blasting and filling had created new habitat for them. On the other hand, the wandering garter snake population had fared poorly: “snakes were sometimes seen by day basking on the newly made [asphalt] road, where they suffered a high mortality from traffic.”

None of these changes inside Manning Park elicited the same level of concern that was expressed for the mountain goats living outside the park on the rocky bluffs across from the highway at mile 21. Prime mountain goat range extended southwards from this location deep into the Skagit range of the Cascades, and a healthy population of around thirty goats had regularly been observed on the bluffs up until 1949. However, that fall museum staff reported finding a kid “dead at the base of a high cliff, killed

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12 G. Clifford Carl, C.J. Guiguet, and George A. Hardy, *A Natural History Survey of the Manning Park Area, British Columbia* Occasional Papers of the British Columbia Provincial Museum, No.9 (Victoria: Queen’s Printer, 1952), 6, 64, 71, 108. The completed highway was dangerous for domesticated animals too. One evening in September 1950 a car struck and killed Spider, the favourite saddle horse of Manning Park Superintendent Bob Boyd. Several horses belonging to the Parks Division had apparently broken out of their corral and were heading ‘home’ to the ranger station along the familiar highway right-of-way when the collision occurred. BCA, GR-1991, reel 1803, Boyd telegram to Chief Forester, 25 September 1950; Boyd to Oldham, 6 October 1950.
accidentally or possibly shot and unrecovered.” Investigations revealed that the mountain goats frequented the higher parts of the bluffs during the spring and summer, but wintered lower down, close to the highway on talus slopes and the rocky shoulders of the bluffs. Bill Robinson, a prospector who had a cabin at mile 19, reported hearing shots on numerous occasions, which suggested that sniping from the highway right-of-way was common. Museum staff found this especially deplorable because the steep terrain made recovery of any goat that was shot “virtually impossible.” Several roadside signs had been put up along the Hope-Princeton in Manning Park to notify motorists that hunting was forbidden in the park, but this protection did not extend to the mountain goats at mile 21. Staff of the provincial museum concluded that

[t]he area is now so easily accessible that it will be most surprising if increased hunting pressure does not drive or eliminate goats from the immediate environs of the highway. Sportsmen who desire to add this animal to their trophies should not expect to take it from a public thoroughfare. However, when such a trophy presents itself, rare is the hunter who will pass up the opportunity. For this reason some well-publicized restrictions should be imposed in order to maintain goats on ‘Robinson’s Ridge,’ where they may be enjoyed by everyone passing along the road.14

The Parks Division’s interest in preserving and drawing the motoring public’s attention towards the clutch of scenic, natural, and historical attractions located to the west of Manning Park conveniently coincided with the fact that it also wanted to divert their attention away from a major eyesore at the point where they entered the park from

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13 Carl, Guiguet, and Hardy, A Natural History Survey, 79.
14 Ibid., 80. Roadside signs to remind motorists that hunting was forbidden in Manning Park are described in BCA, GR-1991, reel 1803, F.R. Butler, Commissioner, Office of the Game Commission to Chief Forester, 22 September 1950. Operational records of the BC Provincial Police from the Fraser Canyon in the 1940s suggest that contraventions of the Game Act were amongst the most common crimes involving automobiles. It was seemingly quite common for BC motorists, including both rural residents and day-trippers from the city, to carry loaded rifles in their cars, as if prepared to shoot animals seen beside the road, despite the fact it was illegal to shoot firearms from a car or a road right-of-way. See BCA, GR-1388 Yale Division, BC Provincial Police; also MS-2793 BC Provincial Police Veterans Association papers, Constable Tom Scales’ daybooks, box 6, folder 1.
the west. There is a strong propensity for forest fires in the arid pine forests of the
Cascade Mountains, especially the high elevation areas around Allison Pass. An area on
the western approach to the pass had suffered a very large fire in the late 1860s, another
in the 1910s (sparked during a short-lived copper prospecting boom in the area), and then
a third during the tinder dry summer of 1946. In July of that year the fire risk had led
the Forest Service to order road construction crews to cease all burning of brush and slash
along the Hope-Princeton right-of-way. However, a fire broke out the following month,
and within days a forested area “one mile long with the greatest depth of about half a
mile” was burning on Manning Park’s westernmost edge, on steep slopes that hemmed in
the highway right-of-way. Observing the fire from an airplane, the Kamloops district
forester had predicted the burnt-over area would be a “most conspicuous feature, in full
view of any person driving through the park.” He recommended that in future all forest
fires in Manning Park be attacked immediately, otherwise “we stand a chance of losing a
million-dollar asset for the sake of saving a very limited expenditure.”

It was not until the Hope-Princeton Highway opened in late 1949 that this thrice-
burnt-over area was, as Ches Lyons put it, “revealed” – that is, made visible to the
motoring public. The forests on the western approach to the Allison Pass had had 25
years to regenerate since the last big forest fire when Manning’s boundaries had been
established in 1941, and thus were covered with young green pines. However, after the
fire of 1946 and the opening of the Hope-Princeton in 1949, the sight that greeted

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15 In 1869 Susan and John Allison had been forced to travel through the Skagit River valley when the forest
all around was on fire and the air heavy with smoke. They reported that the fire destroyed prime hunting
16 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1800, Parlow to McKinnon, 24 August 1946. Forest Service headquarters in
Victoria subsequently instructed Manning Park’s recently-appointed superintendent Bob Boyd to fight all
fires in the park without concern for the expense, assuring him that the cost would be borne by the Service,
rather than counted against the meager budget of the fledgling Parks Division.
eastbound motorists as they entered the park was the scorched earth and thousands of charred snags known as the Big Burn.17

According to Lyons, the Big Burn presented motorists with “such a frightful, desolate sight” that Parks Division staff working in Manning Park decided to put up a large roadside sign that would explain its presence while simultaneously using its shocking appearance to encourage fire safety on the road and in the woods. In the spring of 1950 Lyons, Mickey Trew, and Superintendent Bob Boyd set up a large sign on the western edge of the burnt-over area that read: “ONE CAMPER MADE THIS 5700 ACRES LOOK LIKE HELL! DON’T YOU BE CARELESS!” The Department of Public Works objected strongly to this sign. Not only had it been erected within the highway right-of-way without permission, but, as Lyons recalled, “Hell was a pretty strong word to display to public gaze in those days.” Thus the sign was redesigned and re-erected (again without permission from Public Works) as the 20-foot-tall Manning Park Gallows, from which a 10-foot-long cigarette swung by a noose, with a sign below that read: “THE GUY WHO DROPPED IT SHOULD ALSO BE HANGED.”18

Ironically, given that the Manning Park Gallows was meant to explain and reduce the impact of an enormous eyesore, the sign quickly became a roadside attraction in and of itself. To get their message about protecting the province’s forests across to the

17 Ches P. Lyons, “Tough Going” in Manning Park Memories, 42.
18 Ibid. Photographs show that the sign on the gallows eventually changed from “the guy who dropped it…” to the more gender-neutral “the one who dropped it.” Ironically, it is unlikely that the 1946 forest fire was actually caused by a discarded cigarette. In 1950, Assistant Superintendent Davey Davidson was asked to write up a mile-by-mile description of the Hope-Princeton corridor for the Forest Service’s Public Relations Division, which was producing a “travelogue” of the route through Manning Park. When describing the Big Burn, Davidson tersely noted that “careless campers left their lunch fire burning.” Ches Lyons, who had helped fight the fire in 1946, had the opportunity to look over and revise Davidson’s statement prior to sending it to the Public Relations Division, and the fact that he made no changes to the section on the Big Burn suggests that Davidson’s statement about the cause of the forest fire was accurate. BCA, GR-1991, reel 1803, D.L. Davidson for R.H. Boyd to Chief Forester, BC Forest Service, attn: C.P. Lyons, 12 April 1950; Lyons to Boyd, 24 April 1950.
motoring public, Trew, Lyons, and Boyd had built an eye-catching colossus that borrowed from the whimsical styling of the carnival fairway or commercial strip. “This was a car stopper for sure!” Lyons remembered. “It was photographed and displayed in magazines near and far. I don’t think there has ever been a forest fire sign with more impact than that one.” Superintendent Bob Boyd reported that he had “observed the clicking of cameras” at the gallows all through the summer of 1950, and heard many comments like “we have seen your signs and our campfires will certainly be put out.” Because permission had never been given by (or sought from) the Department of Public Works to erect the Manning Park Gallows within the highway right-of-way, park staff played dumb as to its origins. “We have not been informed who or what department was responsible for this type of sign, ‘perhaps it does not matter,’” Boyd slyly wrote to Parks Division headquarters in the fall of 1950, when advising that he was removing the sign for the winter “in order that the gospel of Forest Protection may continue with the signs again taking their place next summer.” The Forest Service’s public relations officer received so many favourable comments about the eye-catching gallows sign that he recommended the Parks Division re-erect it in 1951, with or without permission from Public Works.¹⁹

¹⁹ BCA, GR-1991, reel 1803, Boyd to Parks Division re: F.P. Road Signs, 17 October 1950; David K. Monk for Eric Druce, Forester, Public Relations Division, Forest Service to E.G. Oldham, 30 October 1950.
The Manning Park Gallows gave the motoring public a plausible explanation for why the slopes that hemmed in the Hope-Princeton Highway were scorched and denuded of living timber. However, it did nothing to hide this enormous eyesore from view, nor did it reduce the painful fact that for many years travellers heading into the Interior would enter one of BC’s premier provincial parks in an area reminiscent of a city destroyed by wartime firebombing. Furthermore, having the entrance to Manning Park marred by evidence of an enormous forest fire had the potential to raise troubling questions about the Parks Division and Forest Service as stewards of the province’s natural environments. Some kind of large and prominent markers would eventually be needed to indicate the points where motorists entered and exited Manning Park, but it was unlikely that the motoring public would come away with a positive impression of the park if the western portal marker was located in the midst of a desolate, burnt-over valley.
Extending Manning Park westward along the route of the Hope-Princeton Highway could solve two interrelated problems for the Parks Division. First, the clutch of potential roadside attractions that it had identified outside the park’s original boundaries would be brought under its jurisdiction. Second, the park’s entrance would no longer coincide with the unsightly Big Burn. Mickey Trew first raised this idea in 1949 as part of a general analysis of Manning’s boundaries. He suggested that a mile-wide parkway be established along the Hope-Princeton corridor for approximately ten miles beyond Manning’s original western boundary. Trew reasoned this would give the motoring public “at least an impression of ‘park’ before coming to the desolation of the burned area.” He also noted that the section of road that would fall within the proposed parkway ran alongside the Sumallo and Skagit rivers, and thus was “attractive in its own right.”

Trew’s parkway proposal gained widespread support amongst his colleagues in the Parks Division, as well as from Deputy Minister of Lands George P. Melrose, who had been involved with the Manning Park area since the sheep grazing disputes of the early 1930s, and who had recommended its creation as a provincial park in 1941.

Parkways had been popular features in North American parks since the 1920s. Typically, a parkway was a road that had been designed and engineered in order to emphasize (and obscure) certain aspects of the surrounding landscape for the pleasure of those who travelled along it. The Hope-Princeton Highway was not a parkway, but the fact that it went past several scenic, natural, and historical attractions in the corridor west of Manning Park made it ‘close enough’ for the Parks Division. Furthermore, by 1950 it

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21 On the history of scenic parkways, see Carr, Wilderness by Design; Louter, Windshield Wilderness; Mauch and Zeller, The World Beyond the Windshield.
was clear that an adjustment of the park’s western boundary was the only affordable way to minimize the visual impact of the Big Burn. The Forest Service’s chief of reforestation had determined that the cost of clearing the thousands of charred snags in the burnt-over area and replanting the slopes with seedlings was far beyond the Parks Division’s budget. By establishing a new parkway along the Hope-Princeton corridor through the upper Skagit and Sumallo river valleys, the Parks Division could gain an inexpensive aesthetic buffer zone, whereby motorists heading into the Interior would drive past a series of interesting, accessible, and clearly-identified roadside attractions before reaching the burnt-over area on the climb towards Allison Pass. Even if motorists chose not to stop at any of these attractions, being aware of their presence in the park might reduce negative reactions to the scorched landscape that followed.

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22 The minimum area Harold McWilliams believed would need to be cleared, piled, burnt off, and then reforested just for safety purposes (lest snags be blown down onto the highway) was 230 acres, or approximately 300 feet on either side of the road. The cost of this work was estimated at $300 per acre, for a total cost of $69,000. For aesthetic reasons, McWilliams recommended that clearing and replanting be done on an area more than double that size. See BCA, GR-1991, reel 1801, H.G. McWilliams, undated report “The Possibilities of Reforesting the Burn” [fall 1949]. Despite the fact that the clearing operation would improve safety on the highway, the Department of Public Works was surprisingly unhelpful when proposals were made to remove the snags along the roadside. Initially it refused to allow timber to be loaded onto trucks stopped in the highway right-of-way, and after relenting on this issue provided certain safety conditions were met, declined to have its staff assist in the planning for such an initiative. GR-1991, reel 1803, Oldham to N.M. McCallum, Chief Engineer, 22 January 1952; McCallum to Oldham, 25 January 1952.

23 The perceived aesthetic, experiential, and management advantages of the parkway scheme are laid out in BCA, GR-1991, reel 1801, C.P. Lyons, undated report “Recommendations for the Proposed Parkway adjoining Western Boundary of Manning Park” [September or October 1950]. Also see BCMFL, [no author], “The Planning of Manning Park” (1950).
Figure 4.3: Manning Park in 1952, showing the parkway extension along the Hope-Princeton Highway corridor on the park’s western edge. Map by Eric Leinberger, courtesy of *BC Studies*.

The mile-wide, 4500-acre parkway was grafted onto Manning Park in late 1950, increasing its total area to over 175,000 acres. At the stroke of a pen the park’s western boundary had leapt ten miles towards Hope. The Parks Division thus gained control over a series of potential roadside attractions on the western approach to Manning, with which it could create an aesthetic buffer before the Big Burn. “No Hunting” signs were quickly placed beside the highway near the goat crags at mile 21. Several tourists caught picking wild flowers at the Rhododendron Grove were charged under the provincial Dogwood and Rhododendron Protection Act, and park staff publicized news of these prosecutions in order to notify motorists that plundering of Manning Park’s botanical attractions would not be tolerated. By the winter, park staff were busy identifying sites inside the parkway

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25 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1803, C.J. Wagner, telegram to Chief Forester, 22 July 1952. The rhododendrons had been protected by statute since 1947, when British Columbia’s Dogwood Protection Act was amended.
that required a “clean-up” in order for their appearance to be consistent with the
dnaturalistic aesthetic that the Parks Division wanted to impose along the highway
corridor. For example, they deemed the abandoned Department of Public Works road
construction camp at Snass Creek an eyesore. They also concluded that an old trapper’s
cabin half-hidden in the bush at Cayuse Flats “should be destroyed,” as its owner had
recently died and his trapline tenure was expected to lapse. Wherever possible, the Parks
Division strove to remove traces of road construction, industrial activity, and recent
habitation from the motoring public’s view. The creation of the 1950 parkway extension
was one of its earliest and most successful efforts to shape motorists’ experiences of
nature by the road.26

Animal Attractions

The mountain goats at the Sumallo bluffs were not the only charismatic
macrofauna that the Parks Division identified as deserving special attention in the early
years that Manning Park was accessible by automobile. They also tried to manage the
movements of other mammals that many visitors hoped to see by the road in large,
mountainous parks, including beavers, deer, and bears.27 The beaver ponds at the eastern
end of the Similkameen flats, known as Dead Lake or the windy Joe beaver ponds,

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26 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1801, D.B. Turner, Director of Conservation, Department of Lands and Forests, to
George P. Melrose, Deputy Minister of Lands, 26 October 1950; Turner, minutes of “Meeting held in Mr.
Melrose’s office, November 10, 1950”; C.P. Lyons, undated report “Parkway Problems” [October or
November 1950].

27 On large mammals as North American park attractions, see Alice Wondrak Biel, Do (Not) Feed the
Bears: The Fitful History of Wildlife and Tourists in Yellowstone (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas,
2006); J. Keri Cronin, Manufacturing National Park Nature: Photography, Ecology, and the Wilderness
provide a particularly good example of the importance the Parks Division attached to
cultivating animals as roadside attractions in Manning Park.

As early as 1946 Clifford Carl, the director of BC’s Provincial Museum, had
recommended that road construction not be allowed to disrupt the beaver colony on the
Similkameen flats because the animals might prove popular with future park visitors. In
1951 the head of the Parks Division indicated his interest in having “beaver planted in the
immediate vicinity of our [concession] developments in Manning Park,” and that year’s
annual report of the Forest Service declared that there would be “an effort to make beaver
and deer more abundant and easily seen by those who wish only to see, study, or
photograph.” In the summer of 1954 park planner Ray Lowery was sent to study whether
the Windy Joe beaver ponds could be made into a new natural attraction.28

After studying the site and the beavers’ behaviour, Lowery concluded that the
Windy Joe beaver ponds had the potential to form “a unique roadside attraction” that
would enhance the “tourist attractiveness” of Manning Park.29 However, he emphasized
that the site would need to be carefully developed and managed. The highway ran along a
terrace above the surface of the ponds. Although the beavers appeared untroubled by
passing traffic, they would quickly submerge and retreat to the safety of their lodges
whenever they observed an automobile stop on the verge of the road, much to the
disappointment of sightseers and nature lovers. Lowery determined that a small parking
lot could be cleared beside the highway at a location that retained an elevated area and a
screen of timber between the parking lot and the ponds. The timber and the hump of land

28 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1800, Carl to Lyons, 5 January 1946; reel 1805, Oldham to F.R. Butler,
Commissioner, BC Game Commission, 23 April 1951; British Columbia, Department of Lands and
29 BCMFL, R. Lowery, “Development of Beaver Pond Viewpoint, Manning Park” (Victoria: BC Forest
would allow motorists to pull off the highway and exit their vehicles away from the beavers’ wary gaze, before walking through the brush to a viewpoint overlooking the ponds.

Building the parking lot would involve enlarging a small gravel pit that had been created during road construction, with the excess rock to be feathered along the nearby verges of the highway. For safety, Lowery recommended that timber posts be driven into the ground around the perimeter of the parking lot, which would prevent motorists from reversing onto the road or accidentally driving into a reedy back channel of the ponds. He also suggested that the general appearance of the ponds, the proposed viewpoint, and the parking lot area could be improved. “Numerous dead trees killed by [highway construction] should be removed from the fringe of trees between the parking lot and viewpoint and the ponds,” he reported. “Visibility, appearance, and safety will all be improved by the destruction of these snags.” Picnic tables and interpretive signs with “interesting facts about beavers” would also be needed. Recognizing the beavers’ wariness of humans, Lowery even suggested that a stuffed beaver mounted in a glass case could be incorporated into the interpretative apparatus, thereby ensuring that all motorists who visited the viewpoint would get to see at least one.30

Finally, Lowery considered how the beaver ponds could be maintained as a permanent natural attraction. The dams were quite old, and the water in the ponds so still and nutrient-laden that plant growth would eventually make it impossible for beavers to live there anymore. In effect, the ponds were gradually retrograding into reedy meadows. This was a natural process and there were several abandoned beaver meadows located

30 Ibid.
along the Similkameen flats, but Lowery argued that “this beaver pond next to the highway warrants special efforts to ensure a continued production of beaver.” The beaver colony’s self-destructive development activities could not be allowed to jeopardize the Parks Division’s plans for a roadside natural attraction. Possible solutions included putting sandbags on top of the existing beaver dams in order to raise the level of the ponds by several feet, or dynamiting a channel that would allow water from the Similkameen River to enter the ponds, thus establishing a continuous water supply. To discourage the beavers from relocating to new habitat, Lowery recommended cutting and burning most of the existing pond-side vegetation and replacing it with plantings of alder, willow, aspen, and cottonwood, which are beavers’ preferred food. Experiments also determined that when the beavers were disturbed, they were not as inclined to submerge and leave the area and would return sooner if an attractant like aspen boughs was available. In 1957 the Parks Division built a roadside beaver viewpoint based on Lowery’s recommendations, minus the stuffed beaver under glass.31

The sedentary habits of beavers distinguished the Windy Joe beaver ponds from other instances where the Parks Division manipulated animal habitat in order to produce natural attractions for motorists passing through the park. Most large mammals found in the southern Cascade Mountains ranged far and wide, making them unreliable park attractions. The Parks Division therefore deemed it necessary to learn more about their wanderings and find ways of guiding them towards (or away from) certain areas of the park. For example, in the mid 1950s the Parks Division studied the use of salt licks as a way of attracting mule deer to the western Similkameen flats, which was the centre of

development in the park, where many motorists pulled off the highway to picnic, buy gas, use washrooms, or dine at the new Pinewoods concession complex.\footnote{Ibid.} Seeing deer in this part of the valley was common but by no means assured. Following the commercial success of Walt Disney’s \textit{Bambi} in 1947, making deer more visible to the motoring public seemed a good way to increase the park’s appeal to families with young children while demonstrating that the presence of people and automobile traffic had not disrupted wildlife populations in the Cascade Mountains. Yorke Edwards, the Parks Division’s first biologist, argued that in order to provide the public with “the most enjoyment possible” it was necessary to learn more about the distribution of deer in Manning Park and how their movements could be influenced by the use of chemical attractants. “Studies such as this,” he wrote, “will make deer more available to the public.”\footnote{Yorke Edwards’ undated, handwritten, initialled comments attached to ibid. Regarding the significance of \textit{Bambi} for wildlife and park policy during the late 1940s and early 1950s, see Matt Cartmill, \textit{A View to a Death in the Morning: Hunting and Nature Through History} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), chapter 9; Ralph Lutts, “The Trouble with Bambi: Walt Disney’s Bambi and the American Vision of Nature,” \textit{Forest and Conservation History} 36, 4 (October 1992): 160-171.}

The tests were conducted on a pine flat close to the ranger station in the summer of 1956, and determined that sodium bicarbonate, sodium acid phosphate, and sodium chloride were the most effective deer attractants. Harold McWilliams, who had recently been put in charge of the Parks Division, instructed park staff to place salt licks “where there is public access,” which meant around roadside campgrounds, picnic sites, and the Pinewoods concession complex – all of which were on the valley floor near the highway corridor, and all of which the deer were otherwise likely to avoid due to automobile traffic and other human activities. McWilliams also instructed that signs be erected to
indicate the presence of deer, but only in areas where visitors could reasonably be assured of seeing the animals.34

The Parks Division conducted a second taste test during the summer of 1956, but with the intention of making a different kind of large mammal less visible to park visitors. Black bears had been loitering along the roadside and visiting areas of Manning Park that were frequented by humans ever since the completion of the highway. To determine whether commercially-available cat and dog repellants were effective on black bears, six tin pails half-full of Rogers Golden Syrup were hung from trees near the park’s garbage dump, which was located in an old gravel pit left over from highway construction. Within an hour the pails had been torn down and licked clean by the bears that frequented the dump area. Another half dozen pails of syrup were then put out after being treated with a variety of cat and dog repellants. There was no change in the results: within a short time all the pails were torn down and licked clean. The experiment was repeated twice more with the same frustrating results, convincing park staff that domestic pet repellants would not dissuade bears from coming into areas of Manning Park where human visitors tended to congregate.35

The dump was a grey area in the Parks Division’s efforts to manage the relationship between bears, humans, and automobiles in Manning Park. Park staff allowed visitors to drive into the dump area to watch bears scavenging through the copious amounts of garbage deposited there, provided they remained inside their cars and kept their windows rolled up. A letter from Superintendent Bob Boyd to the chief forester suggests that the dump was treated as an informal park attraction during the early 1950s.

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34 McWilliams’ undated, handwritten, initialled comments also attached to ibid.
35 Ibid.
“On the writer’s recent trip to one of our large National Parks, they were reluctant to allow me to visit their garbage disposal area,” Boyd complained. “We, in Manning Park, invite out tourists to look at the animals frequenting the [dump] area.”

This practice no doubt contributed to black bears becoming comfortable around cars and humans in the park. When they started visiting picnic sites, campgrounds, and the built-up area on the Similkameen flats, the Parks Division decided to take action to combat what was termed “the bear problem.” The main step taken by park staff was to increase the frequency of garbage pickup in areas where human visitors regularly left food scraps; apparently there had been some problems with this during the early 1950s, when the Parks Division received complaints that “overflowing cans are a common sight in [provincial parks in] the Fraser Canyon, Okanagan, and Hope-Princeton areas.” However, collecting the garbage more frequently did not dissuade bears from visiting areas of the park that they had come to associate with a reliable food supply. The summer months during the 1950s saw numerous instances of overturned garbage cans, stolen food, slashed tents, and broken car windows. Several visitors suffered minor bear-related injuries, but the casualty rate for bears was worse. For example, in 1956 one yearling had to be shot, and another that had been entering the garbage room at the park administration building was frightened away only after the door handle had been wired to deliver a strong electrical shock. Two attempts were made to lasso a young bear that had been spotted “begging for food beside the highway,” but without success. Had park

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36 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1803, Boyd to Chief Forester, 8 December 1953. Also see Lloyd Brooks, Planning Section to Ray Lowery, 20 July 1953.
37 BCMFL, “Public Reaction Survey, 1954” (Publicity Section, Parks and Recreation Division, BC Forest Service).
38 Spalding, “Wildlife Investigations.” In 1952 a visitor asked the BC Forest Service to reimburse her medical bills after being bitten on the arm by a yearling bear at a picnic site “near Pine Lodge on the Hope-Princeton Highway.”
rangers caught that bear, they intended to subject it to a “treatment” they had heard “is very satisfactory in Wyoming, where it has been used on bears which cause trouble around human habitation”:

a) catch the bear and tie him down securely
b) beat the animal with a strong paddle and at the same time make a loud noise, eg: beating on a washtub;
c) set the animal free.39

Unfortunately, the Parks Division did not track animal mortality rates along the Hope-Princeton Highway corridor during the 1950s, so it is impossible to calculate the motoring public’s impact on deer, bear, and other wildlife populations. Regarding the seemingly intractable problem of bears frightening visitors and making a mess in Manning Park’s roadside campgrounds and picnic sites, Parks Division chief Harold McWilliams could only suggest that one day a nature interpretation centre – another roadside attraction – might be established at Pinewoods, “with a summer attendant who should instigate a programme to educate the public not to feed the bears.”40 This was probably the inspiration for the Manning Park Nature House, an interpretive facility that is discussed in the next chapter. Ultimately, the Parks Division’s efforts to make beavers and deer visible to the motoring public while discouraging bears from frequenting park areas where visitors tended to congregate were meant to demonstrate that the highway, automobiles, and motorists passing through Manning Park had not disrupted these animals’ habitat or corrupted their behaviour. The managed presence of certain large mammals in close proximity to the highway corridor showed visitors that Manning Park

40 Ibid.
was not a *Bambi*-type scenario, where the presence of “Man” brought death and destruction to the woods.

**Fending Off Eyesores**

Suppressing eyesores was an important complement to protecting scenery and developing attractions in the Parks Division’s effort to impose and maintain a naturalistic landscape aesthetic along the Hope-Princeton corridor through Manning Park in the 1950s. The Big Burn near Allison Pass was far and away the largest eyesore in the park, but most of the sites/sights that the Parks Division deemed eyesores involved industrial structures and activities that were visible to motorists travelling along the highway. Unlike the Big Burn, the presence of dilapidated road construction sites, mining camps, and logging operations inside the boundaries of a provincial park could not be pithily explained away by an eye-catching sign. The provincial parks had nominally been set aside as exemplary environments, and most British Columbians expected them to be unmarred by pollution, industrial resource extraction, or recent human habitation.

As noted above, one of the Parks Division’s key aims was to naturalize the highway’s place in the park by erasing the infrastructure associated with its construction. After paving was completed in the summer of 1951, the Parks Division asked the Department of Public Works to remove or demolish the empty buildings at its former Copper Creek construction camp. The Parks Division expressed concern that the abandoned buildings represented a fire hazard, might draw transients, and “detract[ed] from the otherwise very scenic highway.”

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41 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1803, Oldham to Chief Engineer, Department of Public Works, 23 Aug 1951.
the highway had only recently been completed and was not a natural part of the park, magically transporting travellers through a pristine wilderness. This was another instance where the Parks Division asserted aesthetic jurisdiction over the highway corridor outside Manning Park: Copper Creek was located a short distance beyond the park’s eastern boundary. Eventually the Parks Division was given permission to demolish these buildings and clean up the site. Other road construction camps located inside the park were similarly ‘sanitized’ during the 1950s. Several were turned into roadside campgrounds, as will be discussed below. Ironically, the Parks Division was trying to erase evidence of twentieth-century road building at the same time it was cultivating a remnant of the nineteenth-century Dewdney Trail as a roadside historical attraction.

Unsightly road construction camps could be dealt with through cordial interdepartmental negotiations, but the presence of active resource extraction operations inside Manning Park was much trickier to manage. Although Manning was a Class A provincial park, pre-existing resource tenures had not been extinguished when it was established – as a form of property, they were considered sacrosanct. This resulted in numerous traplines, mineral claims, and timber licenses being grandfathered within the boundaries of the park, with the Parks Division having relatively little control over them. Similarly, the western parkway extension of 1950 was superimposed over several active mineral claims, including the Hillside claims that served as the Canam Mining Corporation’s base camp for its prospecting operations in the surrounding hills. By 1949 Canam had built a bunkhouse, workshop, and several other buildings on the Hillside claim, as well as a rough jeep road that connected it with several promising copper claims
located seven miles to the south in the Skagit range of the Cascade Mountains.\textsuperscript{42} None of these actions drew the attention of the Parks Division, even though part of the jeep road had been cut through an isolated part of Manning Park without authorization. However, when the mining company used a bulldozer to cut a new access road between its Hillside base camp and the Hope-Princeton Highway in the summer of 1950, it trespassed (albeit perhaps unwittingly) on Manning’s new western parkway extension. The company had failed to apply for the Parks Use Permit that was necessary to authorize industrial activities like road construction.

Canam’s act of trespass was especially problematic because its new access road was plainly visible to the motoring public. Furthermore, under the right lighting conditions motorists could discern buildings in the Hillside base camp through the intervening timber. After Ches Lyons and Bob Boyd inspected the site in July 1950, they wrote to Canam and suggested the situation could be resolved and a Parks Use Permit granted for the offending access road provided the mining company agreed to relocate “a few hundred feet at the start of your [access] road” and also “move the [Hillside] camp a short distance to the west where it would be hidden from view.”\textsuperscript{43} The mine manager replied that he wanted to clear up any objections to the company’s operations in and around Manning Park, but felt it necessary to avoid “unnecessary expenditure of stockholders’ money.”\textsuperscript{44} Even though it would be costly, he agreed to relocate the new access road as per the Parks Division’s recommendations. However, he claimed that shifting the entire base camp would be impossibly expensive. Instead, he proposed to

\textsuperscript{42} This chronology of the Hillside claims is drawn from BCA, GR-1991, reel 1801, C.P. Lyons, undated report “History of the Hillside and Lone Pine Mineral Claims” [late spring 1950].

\textsuperscript{43} BCA, GR-1991, reel 1801, Lyons to G. Allan MacPherson, Canam Mining Corporation, 31 July 1950.

\textsuperscript{44} BCA, GR-1991, reel 1801, MacPherson to Lyons, 8 August 1950.
hide it from the motoring public through a careful program of camouflage. Canam offered to paint the buildings in its Hillside camp so that they would blend in with the surrounding forest, put down grass seed in areas not used by vehicles, and plant more trees or a hedge between the camp and the highway. The proposed cover-up convinced the Parks Division to issue the mining company a Parks Use Permit, with the proviso that it seek approval for any future changes that might draw attention to its operations inside the park.45

Managing eyesores associated with logging activity also occupied the Parks Division’s time. As early as 1943, the Penticton Board of Trade and the MLA for the Similkameen riding had complained that “the attractiveness” of the road between Hope and Manning Park’s western boundary was being “seriously interfered with” by a logging operation and sawmill based in the Tashme internment camp. This operation, with its dry sort and heaps of slabs and sawdust, was located right beside the surveyed highway right-of-way, and even though it was more than ten miles from Manning’s original western boundary it was still deemed an “eyesore” that threatened to detract from the new park. No steps were taken to clean up the sawmill, which had been permitted by the BC Security Commission that oversaw the internment camp. After the Hope-Princeton Highway was completed in 1949, the fact that numerous parties actually possessed the right to cut timber inside Manning Park became a far more pressing concern for the Parks Division.46

46 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1800, Bernard Webber, MLA, Similkameen to A. Wells Gray, Minister of Lands, 9 September 1943; Penticton Board of Trade to Gray, 11 September 1943; M.W. Gormley to Melrose, 16 September 1943.
Like many if not most of BC’s provincial parks, Manning contained numerous berths for which the provincial government had issued timber licenses. These berths had been staked out and the licenses issued decades before the park was created, but the timber they covered had never been of any real commercial value due to the area’s inaccessibility. Over time these renewable timber licenses were bought, sold, and swapped between logging companies and timber brokers, but no timber was actually cut. However, with the rise of truck logging and the push to complete the long-awaited highway between Hope and Princeton during the late 1940s, long-isolated timber berths in the southern Cascade Mountains abruptly became more accessible and valuable, including those inside Manning Park which were covered by grandfathered timber licenses.

Anyone holding a valid timber license had the right to cut down the trees in the area they had been allotted. However, building an access road for getting machinery in and hauling timber out required the issuance of a Parks Use Permit by the Parks Division. Because Manning Park was so far from the nearest sawmills in Hope and Princeton, logging companies and timber brokers with holdings inside the park regularly approached the Parks Division or another branch of the Forest Service to see whether an exchange could be arranged. Licenses covering timber berths located inside Manning Park were typically traded for permission to cut an equivalent amount of timber on crown land that was more accessible, had a desirable mix of tree cover, or was close to other berths that were available to be logged.

In the summer of 1952 sawmill owner Hugh Leir approached the Forest Service to see whether it was interested in arranging such an exchange. Leir had acquired the
licenses over several large timber berths inside Manning Park. These berths were clustered along Cambie Creek, near the centre of the park, including one that bordered on the Hope-Princeton right-of-way. In 1952 Leir indicated that he was willing to give up his right to log inside Manning Park in exchange for timber located closer to his sawmills in Princeton and Penticton. Staff from the Kamloops Forest District were willing to approve such an exchange, but only for one of Leir’s licenses: the one that gave him the right to log the berth adjacent to the future highway. Apparently the Forest Service did not think it worth stopping Leir from cutting down trees in areas of Manning Park that would be hidden from the motoring public by the contours of the terrain.

Leir was not satisfied with this offer. He considered his licenses on Cambie Creek to be worth more than just the value of the timber they allowed him to cut, because they were located in a prominent section of a showcase provincial park. He apparently hoped to use the licenses as a political bargaining chip towards acquiring a large tree farm license near Penticton, in the Okanagan Forest District. Leir protested the Forest Service’s decision to his MLA, Kelowna hardware salesman W.A.C. Bennett, who had recently been elected premier of British Columbia, but to no avail. Much to the displeasure of the Parks Division, Leir’s logging crew cut down all the timber on the easily accessible berth that bordered on the highway in late 1953, even though Forest Service staff were cruising for a suitable tract to offer in exchange. Leir then walked away from Manning Park, selling his remaining licenses on Cambie Creek to a Princeton

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49 On the scramble to acquire tree farm licenses and related forms of long-term, large-scale forest tenure in the early 1950s, see Hak, Capital and Labour, chapter 2; Drushka, Tie Hackers, chapters 8-9.
timber broker. When the broker approached the Parks Division a few years later about swapping the remaining “Leir licenses” for timber located elsewhere in the southwestern Interior, he was flatly turned down. According to the Parks Division, “the aesthetic values we tried to protect have been lost and there is no further point to an exchange.” To hide the evidence of industrial resource extraction, the Parks Division developed the cut-over area as the Cambie Creek campground.50

The result of the dispute over Hugh Leir’s timber licenses was disappointing for Parks Division staff, especially because the proposed timber swap had been out of their control, with negotiations handled by other offices within the Forest Service. It was just the first salvo in what would prove to be a fusillade of similar negotiations in the coming years. The threat of logging-related eyesores in Manning Park remained a thorny problem until the early 1970s, and some of the Parks Division’s later efforts to manage logging operations so as to maintain a naturalistic aesthetic along the highway corridor through the park are discussed in the next chapter. However, the Parks Division drew one important lesson from the Cambie Creek incident: it could not rely on other branches of the Forest Service to preserve scenic and natural landscape features in the provincial parks. In following years, the Parks Division would strive to keep all negotiations regarding timber exchanges ‘in house,’ thereby allowing it to pursue its aesthetic priorities without interference from other, more production-oriented branches of the Forest Service.

Roadside signage was another tricky issue during the first years that Manning Park was open to motorists, falling partly in the realm of development and partly in the

realm of potential eyesores. The idea that the provincial government should put up road
signs was still fairly new in British Columbia during the early 1950s; only in 1946 had it
taken responsibility for erecting traffic signs along public highways. Previously, the task
of drawing the motoring public’s attention to grades, curves, constrictions, intersections,
distances, directions, hazards, and other noteworthy aspects of the province’s roads had
been left to local boards of trade and automobile owners’ associations like the BCAA.51

Complaints about roadside signage and how it affected the motoring public’s
landscape experiences had been common fare in North America for 20 years before the
government of BC deemed it necessary to erect its own traffic signs. Since the early
1920s scathing criticism had been heaped on billboards that blocked out scenic vistas,
and on the visual clutter generated by the superabundance of signs along commercial
strips. Critics of the North American roadside accused commercial signage of ruining the
countryside and turning public highways into unappealing “buyways.”52 Yet because
BC’s road network was being rapidly improved and expanded during the postwar years,
more and better roadside signs were deemed urgent priorities by tourism promoters,
traffic planners, and many motorists. Paved highways like the Hope-Princeton allowed
substantially higher speeds than a gravel surface, and facilitated travel in all kinds of
weather, at all hours of the day, in all seasons of the year. It was becoming much easier
for motorists to travel between communities and regions that had previously seemed

51 In a 1946 speech to the Legislature the minister of public works praised the BC Automobile Association
for the “splendid work” it had done over the years installing road signs throughout the province. “It is felt,
however, that in view of the tremendous increase in traffic and the necessity to standardize the signs in
order to avoid confusion that this work should be carried out under one authority.” He therefore used the
occasion to announce that a branch of his department would “devote its efforts solely to the maintenance
and installation of necessary road signs.” BCA, GR-1222, box 63, file 6, undated speech by the Minister of
Public Works to the Legislature [1946]. Also see Jakle and Sculle, Signs in America’s Auto Age, chapters
3-4.
52 Gudis, Buyways, chapters 10-12; Jakle and Sculle, Signs in America’s Auto Age, chapters 7-8.
connected, distant, or far off ‘the beaten path.’ Thus there was an increased need for motorists to have clear, reliable information about road conditions, directions, and the availability of roadside services.

This was especially true in the hinterlands of the Interior, where communities and businesses offering food, gas, and lodging were sometimes few and far between. Traffic signs were needed in more places, and had to be more visible and legible. For the sake of clarity, they also had to be consistent in terms of style, size, and placement, which led the Department of Public Works to set out standards for when, where, and how to place traffic signs along the province’s public right-of-ways. In effect, the state took responsibility for facilitating the safe and efficient circulation of private automobile traffic over the province’s public road network: of families, tourists, business travellers, and commercial vehicles.

Putting up signs along roads in provincial parks called for special tact. Too many signs could distract travellers from roadside scenery and natural attractions, and remind them of the towns and cities that many of them were seeking a temporary escape from. On the other hand, too few signs could lead to confusion and frustration. Furthermore, signs might be seen to resemble advertisements. In Manning Park, there was a tension between the myriad practical uses for signs and the Parks Division’s desire to maintain an uncluttered, naturalistic aesthetic along the Hope-Princeton corridor. In the early 1950s it received many complaints from motorists who believed more signs were needed along the highway in order to provide useful information like the distance to the Pinewoods
concession complex. The road was still unfamiliar to most drivers, and there were few traces of human activity in the 100 miles between Hope and Princeton. Many motorists arrived in the park weary from a long day of driving, especially if they had travelled westward along the section between Princeton and Manning’s eastern boundary, where there were numerous steep grades, S-curves, and hairpin turns. At night, when traversing a highway corridor that was almost completely bereft of lights, anxiety could set in that the concession complex had accidentally been missed in the dark. Many drivers bound for the Interior made the mistake of turning off the highway at the Department of Public Works yard near the summit of Allison Pass, mistaking it for Pinewoods, which was located several miles further east. And of course, motorists were always concerned about the level of gas in their tank during the long and rather lonely drive between Hope and Princeton.

During the early 1950s motorists tended to complain about the absence, rather than the presence of signs along the highway corridor in Manning Park. Some asked for signs to identify prominent natural features seen by the road, like creeks, rivers, and mountain peaks. Others requested signs that would indicate the approach to natural attractions like the Rhododendron Grove or Windy Joe Beaver Pond, for without advance notice drivers were likely to shoot past the pullout before realizing it was there. One motorist suggested that the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada be asked to erect a cairn with “explanatory plaque” at the roadside remnant of the Dewdney Trail. A

53 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1803, Mrs. Wendell Farris to Oldham, 24 April 1952. In this case, the chief of the Parks Division responded by explaining that the number of approach signs was limited by regulations set down by the Department of Public Works.

54 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1803, Stuart Lefleaux, Secretary, Metropolitan Park Planning Committee [Vancouver] to Historic Sites and Monuments Board, c/o Dr. W. Sage, cc: E.G. Oldham, Parks Division,
gardening enthusiast from Vancouver complained to Chief Forester C.D. Orchard about the lack of signs warning people not to pick wildflowers in the park. “I am very much interested in the preservation of the natural beauties and the wildlife of British Columbia,” she told him, without a hint of irony, when explaining why she believed more roadside signs were needed in Manning Park.55

The Parks Division was reluctant to act on these requests for more signs in Manning Park. Several signs for identifying natural features were shipped to the park in 1952, but had still not been put up several years later.56 During the early 1950s, when it was still considered acceptable for visitors to drive to the park’s garbage dump to view the bears that congregated there, the Parks Division decided against putting up a roadside sign that would identify the dump as an attraction. Instead, the access road was marked by a small, discretely placed sign, with another partway along the access road warning motorists habituated to visiting the dump to stay inside their vehicles when bears were around.57 The Parks Division’s reluctance to have too many signs in Manning Park can also be seen in its response to Superintendant Bob Boyd’s spring 1953 request for 50 posters with fire protection messages on them. Boyd explained that he wanted to put these eye-catching signs up in campgrounds, picnic sites, and along trails. However, Parks Division headquarters replied that even though the posters were considered effective in raising public awareness of the need for fire safety, “we want to post the barest minimum of signs and posters in parks.” They also added that “the rather
outstanding [Manning Park Gallows] that we have erected on the highway probably does more to encourage the public to be careful with fire in our forests than any number of posters.” In the end, Boyd was sent ten posters, with instructions that they only be put up in “out-of-the-way places.”

It is unclear why Parks Division staff were so reluctant to put up signs in Manning Park during the early and mid 1950s. On a practical level, it is known that the Department of Public Works had to give permission for any signs to be erected within the highway right-of-way, even for signs that pointed out the park’s scenic, natural, and historical attractions (the Manning Park Gallows was repeatedly put up in contravention of this regulation). It was not for staff stationed in the park to apply for such permission, and the planners and experts at headquarters in Victoria apparently held off applying for permission to erect signs in Manning Park until they had developed consistent design standards for signs across BC’s fast-growing provincial park system. More generally, the restraint shown in erecting signs helped maintain an uncluttered naturalistic aesthetic, and gave the motoring public a sense of discovering the park’s roadside landscapes for themselves.

*Development at Pinewoods*

The Pinewoods concession complex was the part of Manning Park that most needed roadside signs, and where the Parks Division took greatest care to ensure that any signs put up would blend in with their surroundings. The main buildings at Pinewoods were built between the summer of 1949 and the spring of 1951. Most construction was let

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out by contract, but Parks Division and other Forest Service staff cleared the 10-acre building site, installed the water and sewer works, and built the foundations for the main buildings. They also graded a large parking lot with direct access from the highway. The Forest Service’s 1949 annual report stated that during the summer “more improvements were undertaken [in Manning Park] than the total in all previous years,” but predicted that “[e]ven this amount of work will barely meet the basic requirements of the visiting public.”

Pinewoods Lodge was the first building completed at the concession complex, and contained a café, restaurant, lounge, and washrooms. Natural, site-appropriate materials were used extensively in its construction and décor. Peeled pine logs were used for the exterior walls, while interior touches included pine beams and wall paneling, two massive river rock fireplaces, and several ornately carved wood reliefs that depicted animals native to the area. When Pinewoods Lodge officially opened in June 1950, newspapers from the Coast and the southern Interior sent reporters to cover the event. Tourism promoters and automobile associations also sent representatives to the opening ceremony. The Parks Division made Chief Forester C.D. Orchard the guest of honour, for his arguments in favour of using public funds to develop BC’s key provincial parks had been instrumental in convincing the government to shoulder the cost of building the concession complex. Also in attendance was timber baron H.R. MacMillan, who had supported Martin Allderdale Grainger’s efforts to have a provincial park established in the Cascade Mountains in the early 1930s (Grainger had passed away in late 1941, just a few months after the park had been created). According to the government press release

issued for opening day, Pinewoods Lodge had been constructed at a cost more than $100,000, and was being leased to a group of Vancouver businessmen for a period of five years.60

By the fall of 1952 the Pinewoods concession complex consisted of the lodge; a two-storey building next to it which housed concession staff; four two-unit drive-up cabins; four smaller “economy cabins;” a small garage and workshop (which were tucked out of sight in the treeline); and a gas station selling Imperial Oil products. All of these buildings were built in a rustic style similar to the main lodge, making extensive use of pine logs. Except for the gas station and the small, single-unit cabins, all the buildings were located on the south side of the highway.

![Figure 4.3: Postcard showing the Pinewoods concession complex in the summer of 1951. The access road to the gas station can be made out at lower centre.](image)

In addition to using a rustic, ‘log cabin’ building style, the Parks Division made other efforts to have the Pinewoods complex blend in with its surroundings. All electrical

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60 For a discussion of guests who should be invited to the opening of Pinewoods, see BCA, GR-1991, reel 1803, Oldham to Public Relations Division, BC Forest Service, attn: E. Druce, 5 May 1950.
and telephone lines were placed in underground conduits so that no unsightly utility poles or overhead wires would remind visitors of the built-up areas they had left behind. Furthermore, when the telephone line was strung between Hope and Pinewoods, special arrangements were made with the BC Telephone Company so that the line would run high on the hillside at mile 17, out of view of motorists who stopped to look at the historic roadside remnant of the Dewdney Trail.61 Grass seed was sown around the Pinewoods complex immediately after the main buildings were finished, and in 1951 and 1952 a more careful “improvement” program of landscaping was undertaken. Rockeries were constructed at the two-unit drive-up cabins. The area around the buildings and parking lot was planted with native species of plants and shrubs. Wildflower seeds gathered from the park’s highlands were sown throughout the complex.62 Cumulatively, these efforts were intended to make the concession complex seem less modern and appear more rooted on the Similkameen flats. After 1952 the Parks Division had more than just the motoring public in mind when it came to the appearance of the Pinewoods concession complex: Premier W.A.C. Bennett found it convenient to use Pinewoods Lodge for private political meetings, as it was located midway between Vancouver and his Kelowna constituency.63

The Department of Public Works maintained the Hope-Princeton as an all-weather, all-season highway, but Pinewoods closed during the winter months from 1950 to 1955. Traffic volumes were not high enough to justify keeping the dining facilities

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61 On keeping the utilities associated with park concessions out of sight from visitors, see Colten and Dilsaver, “The Hidden Landscape of Yosemite National Park.”
open, and there were few attractions to entice visitors to stay overnight in the park. In
1952 a short ski run with a jury-rigged rope tow was opened behind the ranger station one
mile east of Pinewoods, but it was only for day visitors. It was not until the Parks
Division added more skiing facilities in 1955 that the Pinewoods concession holder could
be coaxed into attempting year-round operations. 64

Pinewoods absorbed most of the funding for development in Manning Park, but
the Parks Division also constructed a series of roadside campgrounds along the Hope-
Princeton corridor. This had been planned as early as 1947, when Ches Lyons pointed out
that the location of future campgrounds should be decided before construction of the
highway in the park was finished because the Parks Division did not have the machinery
or manpower to build “safe and attractive” access roads. Lyons argued that access to each
campground had to be carefully planned because “the manner and direction in which the
branch road leads off the highway is a strong influencing factor on [a campgrounds’]
public popularity.” Motorists were likely to avoid a campground if its turn-off was
located on a section of road with sharp curves, steep grades, or poor visibility. Lyons
identified seven sites for possible campground development, three of which were former
road building camps. Thus campground development was intended to do double duty for
the Parks Division, providing outdoor visitor accommodations while covering up traces
of recent construction activity.65

64 Improvements were steadily made to the skiing facilities in Manning. A road was built to the Gibson
Pass, where slopes were cleared of timber so that longer ski runs could be had. Rope tows and ski lifts were
added, parking lots were enlarged, and a warming shelter was built where snacks and hot drinks were sold
by the Pinewoods concessionaire. In the early 1960s there was even a suggestion that Manning Park be
nominated as the venue for the 1968 Winter Olympics.
65 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1800, C.P. Lyons undated memo re: Public Works Department’s Assistance in
Constructing Access to Campsites Along the Hope-Princeton Highway [summer 1947].
Camping was an activity the Parks Division was very keen to encourage. It was deemed “a most constructive recreational activity,” involving woodcraft, time spent outdoors, and a “feeling of freedom and spaciousness.” Most importantly, camping provided an affordable way for “lower income groups” to stay in the park: the provincial parks were dedicated to the enjoyment of all British Columbians, and during the 1950s and 1960s campsites were available at no cost on a first come, first served basis. As early as 1951 the Parks Division was predicting that more campsites would be needed in Manning Park due to its proximity to Coastal population centres and its location astride a major provincial highway.  

Manning Park had four roadside campgrounds open by the summer of 1951: Skagit, Cambie Creek, Muledeer, and Coldspring. As with the Pinewoods concession complex, the campgrounds were designed around the assumption that their users would be motorists. Each was laid out around a gravel-surfaced, one-lane loop road that provided just enough room for passenger cars and pickup trucks to safely manoeuvre along but not enough room to pass, turn around, or drive too quickly. Vehicles were intended to move slowly in one direction, and tangents, right angles, and intersections were avoided, resulting in simple, calm traffic patterns that were unlikely to confuse drivers or cause congestion. Campgrounds were designed so that their tenting areas were separated from the highway by a screen of brush and timber that blocked the view and muffled the sound of passing traffic. A natural screen was also retained between individual campsites, thus providing campers with a modicum of privacy. The campsites had a standardized form and were largely self-contained. Each had its own fire pit,

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garbage can, and heavy-duty picnic table, plus a slightly raised and thus well-drained spot where a tent could be set up. Firewood, water pumps, and pit toilets were centrally located. Each campsite also had its own parking spur: campers could drive right to the edge of their campsite, but not into it, because the Parks Division positioned logs, large rocks, and posts in order to prevent this. It was not until the mid 1960s that the growing popularity of RVs, camper vans, and pop-tent trailers led to the development of drive-in and pull-through campsites in several of Manning Park’s roadside campgrounds. This stirred up debate amongst park staff, with some seeing it as a necessary response to campers’ popular tastes and others seeing it as a disruption of the egalitarian atmosphere that had been cultivated in the campgrounds. Either way, RV campers were just as dependent on the automobile to reach Manning Park as their tenting neighbours were.

The Parks Division had considerable success managing and manipulating the landscapes visible from Hope-Princeton Highway so that they would appeal to the motoring public. It cultivated a series of free, accessible attractions along the highway corridor; explained or covered over eyesores; and developed visitor facilities that looked relatively harmonious with their surroundings. The park was not an exclusive resort, but nor was it overly commercialized – it was a democratic space, in the sense of being open to anyone who could afford the automobile and time off work necessary to get there. Even the many motorists who did not stop at Manning Park’s roadside amenities could pick up vague lessons about nature by the road. Manning appeared to be a valuable asset for the province, providing opportunities for rest and recreation while facilitating the province’s burgeoning culture of mass automobility. In the following years, aesthetic
continuity – keeping the landscapes along the Hope-Princeton Highway corridor looking more or less the same – was one of the Parks Branch’s main goals.
Chapter 5
Maintaining Appearances in Manning Park, 1955 to 1970

This final chapter on Manning Park and the Hope-Princeton Highway examines the BC Parks Branch’s efforts to maintain the naturalistic aesthetic it had managed to impose along the highway corridor during the early and mid 1950s. This was not an easy task because the late 1950s and 1960s saw steep increases in both the volume of traffic passing over the highway and the number of people who stopped in the park. Like park agencies elsewhere in North America, the Parks Branch struggled to cope with problems associated with the continuing growth of auto tourism and the popularity of recreational activities like camping.¹ These included traffic hazards in the park; heavy use of existing visitor amenities; and the need for new facilities, utilities, and infrastructure. There was also sustained pressure from logging and mining interests to allow industrial operations that were likely to create roadside eyesores inside the park. The Parks Branch did not develop a formal management plan for Manning Park during these years. It continued to respond on an ad hoc basis, but always with the motoring public’s experiences of nature by the road as a key concern.

Each success in imposing a naturalistic aesthetic along the Hope-Princeton corridor fed into an ongoing process of maintenance that was intended to meet the motoring public’s expectations, not only of what a provincial park should look like generally, but also of what Manning Park should look like specifically. The park and highway were becoming familiar to many British Columbians by this time, and had a

¹ See especially Carr, Mission 66.
reputation that was in need of protection. Controversies flared up over new structures and activities that Parks Branch officials deemed incommensurate with the highway corridor’s established aesthetic, including gravel pits, telephone booths, and aluminum-skinned trailers. When sections of the highway were widened and realigned during the 1960s, the signs, pullouts, parking lots, and camouflaging devices that were associated with roadside attractions and eyesores had to be relocated, expanded, or redesigned. With the passage of time, and the passage of millions of motorists along the highway corridor through the park, the motoring public’s shared experience of Manning’s roadside landscapes acquired more and more cultural and political significance, compelling the agency responsible for the park to continue meeting, to the best of its abilities, the expectations it had done so much to create since the late 1940s.

*Surveying Manning’s Popularity*

In the mid and late 1950s the Parks Division conducted a number of reviews and studies to learn more about who was using Manning Park and how. The first of these came in 1954, when the Parks Division received an unsolicited critique of the park from within the administrative structure of the BC Forest Service. George Wood was a planner who had worked for the Forest Service since the 1940s, including on several park-related projects. In 1954 he decided to quit the Forest Service, and before departing took it upon himself to write a review of BC’s largest and most popular provincial parks.2

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2 BCMFL, George A. Wood, “Report on Recreational Reconnaissance of Skagit and Klesilkwa Valleys, Skagit Forest” (BC Forest Service, 1952). Two of the three other reconnaissance projects that Wood participated in prior to 1954 were also in the Cascade Mountains. Regarding the Forest Service’s plans for a park in the upper Skagit River valley outside of Manning Park, see Philip Van Huizen, “’Panic Park’: Environmental Protest and the Politics of Parks in British Columbia’s Skagit Valley,” *BC Studies* 170 (Summer 2011), 71-80.
Explaining that he hoped to provide his former colleagues “something to chew on” regarding park planning policy, Wood acknowledged that his report represented his personal views, and that “many of my ideas do not fit in with orthodox thinking here in the [Planning] Division.” Noting that the government had established 20 new provincial parks since 1940, Wood was perturbed by the fact this had not been done according to consistent criteria or in conformity with the logic of a system. Most of BC’s provincial parks, including all of the larger ones, had been created by politicians who issued executive orders-in-council without first bothering to consult government agencies and experts about issues like access, boundaries, management strategies, and potential land use conflicts.3

Wood cited “public recreational use” as his main criteria for assessing each park’s value within a wider system. By this yardstick he found most of BC’s large parks wanting, including Manning Park. Wood conceded that Manning was very important due to its proximity to Coastal population centres and the fact that it was traversed by a major highway. It was one of the most heavily visited parks in British Columbia, and vital in terms of its prominent place in the public eye. Nevertheless, Wood was skeptical about the park’s value in terms of qualitative recreational use. “To a large measure at present Manning is not a park playground as are many other units of our system, but instead a park where the main users are transients. Manning Park to the public is a sylvan interlude on a journey.” Most visitors, he suggested, were “going through Manning Park, not to it [emphases in original].”

Most motorists travelling on the Hope-Princeton Highway drove straight through Manning Park without stopping. Others paused on the long drive through the Cascade Mountains, and would pull off the road to view the park’s attractions, to picnic, to dine or use the washrooms at Pinewoods Lodge, and sometimes even stay overnight. However, Wood asserted that only a small percentage of these visitors treated Manning as a recreational destination in and of itself, with even fewer exploring beyond the immediate environs of the highway corridor. “Heavy use of the high country is not foreseeable until the public can reach it by automobile,” he predicted. “Even then it seems doubtful if the country beyond road’s end would be subject to really intensive use.” Looking at Manning Park from this perspective called its boundaries into question. Why did the park need to be so large when visitors were almost exclusively confined to the narrow linear corridor surrounding the highway? If Manning was merely a “wayside park for travellers,” did its backcountry deserve to be closed off to new logging and mining activity? Did the large tracts of the park that almost nobody visited merit continued protection?

Wood was also critical of Manning Park’s scenery and attractions, despite the Parks Division’s myriad efforts since 1949. “The park lacks the spectacular,” he asserted. “Even the feature of naturalness is typical of a great deal of roadside land through which our BC highways pass. […] Apart from the riverside picnic and campgrounds, Manning Park, to a majority of the public, offers little.” Wood also complained that the Lightning Lakes were too small, shallow, and reedy for important recreational activities like swimming and boating, and that any visitor who wanted to see them was compelled to walk a mile and a half from Pinewoods. A rough jeep road had been cut into the area, but the Parks Division kept a locked gate across it to prevent people driving in. Wood
suggested that in order for Manning to become a destination for intensive recreational activity (and thus justify its size), new access roads had to be built so that the motoring public could reach attractions like the Lightning Lakes and the alpine meadows in the high country. Otherwise, he implied, the greater part of the park deserved to be deleted so as not to impede logging, mining, and other more tangibly productive uses of the land.

George Wood succeeded in providing something for his former colleagues to chew on. His claim that Manning was a kind of giant drive-through was largely impressionistic, for there had been no detailed studies of park visitors and their practices, but in the following years the Parks Division conducted a series of surveys and studies in order to learn more about the people who visited the park and how they used it. The most comprehensive was conducted in the summer of 1956 by park planner Gordon Taylor.

Nearly 600 visitors were asked about where they had come from, where they were going, the amount of time they had spent in the park, their reasons for stopping, and for general comments and complaints. Taylor’s study divided visitors into three groups: campers, overnight guests at Pinewoods, and day visitors, with the latter category including picnickers, diners at Pinewoods Lodge, and anyone who pulled off the highway at attractions like Sumallo Grove and the Windy Joe beaver ponds.4

The results of the survey confirmed that, as had long been suspected, the large majority of visitors to Manning Park were British Columbians. Residents of the province made up 80% of overnight campers, 60% of overnight guests at Pinewoods, and 82% of day visitors. Amongst British Columbians, residents of the Vancouver region accounted

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4 Taylor spoke to 150 day visitors and 250 campers, which he estimated to represent 1.7% and 7% of their respective totals during the 21 days he was conducting the survey. He also received completed questionnaires from 192 motel guests, representing 13% of the guests at Pinewoods during the same period. BCMFL, G.D. Taylor, “E.C. Manning Provincial Park Visitor Study, 1956” (Victoria: BC Forest Service, Parks and Recreation Division, 1957), 4-6.
for 85% of campers, 75% of guests at Pinewoods, and 75% of day visitors. Americans made up 12% of the day visitors, 15% of campers, and a disproportionately high 34% of the guests at Pinewoods. Undifferentiated “Canadians” made up the balance of visitors to Manning Park; traffic surveys conducted on the Hope-Princeton Highway suggest most of them were from the Prairie provinces.⁵

Taylor interviewed 250 overnight campers for the 1956 survey. Camping had exploded in popularity since the end of the war, and campers were considered fairly intensive recreational park users due to the amount of time they spent outdoors. Taylor interviewed campers at the Skagit, Coldspring, Cambie, and Muledeer campgrounds, and noted that he had to start these interviews earlier in the day in Manning than in most other provincial parks “because of the tendency for many campers to get away to an early morning start” – that is, to pack up their tents and hit the road. When broken down by census categories, campers’ occupations were reported as 22% labourers, 16% manufacturing and mechanical, 12% transport and communication, 12% commercial-financial, 11% professional, 10% management, 8% service, and 6% clerical. It appears the ‘fatherly’ head of each campsite was approached for his significant details, with women excluded from the figures. The predominance of campers under age 16 and between the ages of 25 and 40 indicated that Manning Park’s campgrounds were especially popular with young baby boom families. Asked why they chose to camp rather than stay in autocourts or hotels, most campers indicated “change from an urban environment” and “escape from suburbia” as their most important reasons, which

⁵ Ibid., 8-9.
reflected the large percentage who came from the cities of the Coast. Less than one in ten indicated that they camped for purely financial reasons.

Few respondents had negative things to say about their visit to Manning Park. Of the complaints received, most related to crowding. Simply put, there were too few campsites in each campground, and too few campgrounds in the park. Campers found it frustrating to drive long distances only to find the park’s campgrounds filled to capacity (or beyond). However, campers also reported that they preferred the campsites to retain a modicum of privacy and self-containment, and for campgrounds be kept “as natural as possible” without “too many frills” that would dilute the “roughing it style.” Respondents also indicated little enthusiasm for communal cookhouses, group campsites, or campsites being squeezed closer together. The Parks Division concluded the only way to accommodate the growing number of overnight campers in the kind of conditions they had become accustomed to was to develop new campgrounds and expand the existing ones, in a pattern that echoed the suburban sprawl many campers were trying to get a break from.6

Officials at Parks Division headquarters in Victoria must have been pleased to confirm that Manning Park was being enjoyed by working- and middle-class British Columbian families, with a good percentage of non-resident tourists thrown in. As an amenity provided by the state, it was demonstrating its value as a site for recreational democracy and as a device for encouraging travel on the province’s highway network. Manning’s popularity also seemed to confirm the wisdom of the Parks Division’s postwar

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development plans and its efforts to manage the motoring public’s experiences of park landscapes. Even complaints about crowding were evidence of the park’s popularity.

However, the 1956 survey did provide some troubling support for George Wood’s claim that visitors treated Manning Park as a convenient roadside stopping place rather than a destination for outdoor recreation. Gordon Taylor concluded that “[o]ne of the most striking factors at Manning Park is the very short time all groups spend there.” Campers spent an average of 1.8 days in the park, with 80% staying only one night. A similar pattern was found at Pinewoods, where 84% of guests stayed only one night. Manning’s campgrounds and cabins were being used more as overnight stopping places than as bases from which to explore the park’s backcountry. Probably the most disappointing finding was that 86% of day visitors – deemed to be those motorists who actually stopped inside the park boundaries – did so for less than one hour. Here was strong evidence to back Wood’s 1954 assertion that Manning Park was just an overblown “wayside park” that represented little more than a “sylvan interlude” on road trips between the Coast and Interior. Furthermore, the short period of time that most visitors spent in Manning Park suggested that it wasn’t even particularly effective as a wayside stop. If, as George Wood had suggested, recreational activity was a good yardstick for measuring the value of a park, then Manning’s lack of holding power was troubling.

Taylor’s 1956 visitor survey was followed by a number of other studies about recreation and travel in Manning and other nearby provincial parks. Cumulatively, they suggested four important findings. First, they showed that British Columbians made up the majority of park visitors and were the most intensive recreational users. Thus it was mainly British Columbians who absorbed lessons about the nature of the province when
they travelled along the Hope-Princeton Highway and stopped in Manning Park. Second, the studies drove home the fact that visitors gained access to Manning Park exclusively by automobile: none of the surveys mentioned visitors entering the park by another mode of conveyance. This tied in with the third important finding: that park visitors confined themselves to the vicinity of the highway corridor: to roadside attractions, roadside picnic sites, roadside campgrounds, and the roadside Pinewoods concession complex.7

Little use was being made of the park’s high country where Martin Allerdale Grainger and H.R. MacMillan had predicted riders and hikers would flock to escape from the pollution, bustle, and enervating routines of modern city life. Even the Lightning Lakes, which were a one-mile walk from Pinewoods, were visited by a miniscule percentage of park visitors. Taylor placed some of the blame for this situation on the lack of roadside signs to mark the location of trailheads into the park’s backcountry. More importantly, he suggested that visitors were being dissuaded from exploring “areas off the highway” by over-protective park staff who refused to issue campfire permits to hikers and trail riders.8 This was a veiled criticism of Superintendent Bob Boyd, a long-time Forest Service employee who had been in charge of Manning Park since 1946, the year of the fire that caused the Big Burn. Boyd had kept the prevention of forest fires at the top of his agenda, which led Taylor and several other experts based at Parks Division headquarters to complain about an “unwritten policy” in Manning Park that seemed to

“actively discourage [visitors] from entering the wilderness.” It was difficult to get campfire permits, they pointed out, and the maintenance of trails and development of backcountry campsites had been “consistently passed up in favour of developments considered to be more pressing in terms of number of potential users [emphasis in original].” Park planner Robert Ahrens suggested that the “ultra protectionist attitude” of staff stationed in Manning Park needed to be moderated so that access to the backcountry could be opened up, thereby helping to generate “public support in maintaining the existence of ‘wild parks.’” This would help deflect criticisms of Manning as a drive-through for the motoring public.9

Fourth, and finally, the surveys and studies conducted in the mid and late 1950s confirmed that nearly all campers, motel guests, and day visitors who stopped in Manning Park did so for short periods. Parks Division staff interpreted this as a failing, as a sign there was little in Manning Park that encouraged people to stay for any length of time. This led to a series of new developments in the park. Skiing facilities were expanded. A tennis court was built at Pinewoods. A road was cut up the side of Blackwall Mountain to a scenic viewpoint. Another road was built to the Lightning Lakes, and a complicated engineering project transformed them into a larger, deeper, more recreationally appealing body of water, with beaches and facilities for boat rentals. Ironically, most of these new scenic and recreational attractions were closely tied to the Pinewoods concession complex and the highway corridor, even though several of the Parks Division’s technical experts were stressing the importance of opening up the park’s backcountry.

Traffic Problems

The growing number of visitors to Manning Park went hand in hand with a heightened volume of traffic on the Hope-Princeton Highway. By the mid 1950s it was becoming clear that motorists pulling on and off the highway within the boundaries of the park were creating hazardous conditions. Problems were identified at several locations, including the access roads for picnic sites and campgrounds, and in the vicinity of the bustling Pinewoods concession complex. Not only were park visitors interfering with the safe, efficient flow of traffic, but changing traffic conditions were changing the motoring public’s experiences of nature by the road in Manning Park.

In the summer of 1956, Pinewoods concession manager Rene Pelletier pleaded with Parks Division headquarters and the St. John’s Ambulance Society for more first aid equipment in the park. A few days earlier he had attended the fifth major automobile accident in less than two months: a car had gone off the highway and crashed into a telephone pole, cutting Pinewoods’ only means of communication with emergency medical assistance. Pelletier had had to summon park staff to the accident scene by flagging down a passing motorist to deliver a message to the administration building. The injured motorists were extracted from the “totally demolished” car and transported to hospital in a Parks Division vehicle. “One day we will have a crack-up involving several people at once, perhaps again disrupting communications,” Pelletier predicted. “I dread to think of the loss of life which might ensue because of insufficient [first aid] equipment.”

A year later, Superintendent Bob Boyd wrote to Parks Division headquarters to report on another serious accident that had occurred on the Hope-Princeton, and to

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register his concern about unsafe traffic patterns along the highway corridor through the park. “I am well aware that the traffic on the highway is none of my concern,” Boyd wrote, “but no doubt you will have read in the papers of the casualties on the Hope-Princeton Highway during the past weekend.” The latest accident had occurred in spite of the fact that RCMP officers were enforcing speed limits on the highway through the use of radar guns. Boyd pointed out that Pinewoods Lodge advertised the presence of a first aid post, but it was equipped to help visitors suffering from run-of-the-mill recreational injuries like stings, cuts, burns, and sprains. Concession employees had no way to cope with traumatic injuries resulting from traffic accidents, even when supported by park staff who had access to splints and stretchers. The closest ambulance to Pinewoods was located 50 miles to the west in Hope, where there was no hospital, while the closest hospital was 50 miles to the east in Princeton, where there was no ambulance. Boyd suggested that an RCMP constable and ambulance crew be stationed at Pinewoods or the nearby park administration area. He also recommended that each highway access point in Manning Park be examined for safety in light of the much higher volume of traffic that was traversing the park than when most of its roadside facilities and attractions had been developed in the early 1950s.\footnote{BCA, GR-1991, reel 1801, Ranger R.H. Boyd to McWilliams, Forester, 19 August 1957.}

Parks Division headquarters commended Boyd for the assistance he and his staff had provided to the motoring public in times of emergency, and for the initiative he had shown in reporting his concerns about traffic safety in the park.\footnote{BCA, GR-1991, reel 1801, D.A. Shaw for Forester, Parks Branch to R.H. Boyd, 23 August, 1957.} However, they were unable to do much in response to his specific recommendations. Stationing a police officer or ambulance at Pinewoods was beyond the purview of the Parks Division, and
the fact that the RCMP had been operating a radar trap along the highway corridor when
the latest accident occurred suggested they were aware of the need for traffic enforcement
in the area. Reorganizing access to park facilities would be very expensive and might
spread development along the highway corridor, which was contrary to the plan for
visitor services to be concentrated at Pinewoods.\footnote{Pinewoods concession staff and Manning park rangers would continue to act as first responders to accidents and other emergencies on the highway for many years. For a description of how Ranger Tom Moore went “beyond the call of duty” in one such instance, see BCA, GR-1991, reel 1801, Mrs. R. Lindenbach to Superintendent of Parks Board, 25 November 1965. In the winter of 1966-67, as a result of a growing number of car crashes on the Hope-Princeton, the Pinewoods concession operator requested that the Parks Branch relocate Manning’s first aid post to the administration area so as to get “the sick and maimed out of the Lodge building.” R.H.A. [Ahrens], undated, handwritten notation on memo by R. Lowery, 3 February 1967.}

However, Boyd’s concerns about traffic safety in the park were shown to have been well-founded a few years later, when it was discovered that the Parks Division had never received legal permission for seven points of access to the Hope-Princeton Highway in the vicinity of Pinewoods.\footnote{BCA, GR-1991, reel 1805, P. Bishop, District Engineer, Department of Highways to Director, Provincial Parks Branch, 20 October 1961; Bishop to Department of Recreation and Conservation, 18 December 1961.}

Pinewoods was not the only place where a traffic hazard existed in the park. As part of BC’s 1958 Centennial celebrations, two large sign-sculptures were erected at Manning Park’s portals: one of a black bear at the eastern portal, and one of a yellow-bellied marmot at the western. Within a few years the bear was reported to be causing dangerous traffic conditions. This eye-catching roadside colossus – a huge carved wooden bear standing atop a massive stone-and-timber base – was very popular with the motoring public and lured many motorists onto the shoulder of the road in order to take photos, just as the Manning Park Gallows had during the early 1950s. However, there was nowhere safe to pull off the highway at the east portal, which caused several accidents. Parks Branch headquarters was urged to set aside funds so that small parking...
lots could be cleared on each side of the highway at the entrance portal, pursuant to approval from the Department of Highways.\textsuperscript{15} When the necessary improvements were made to the eastern park portal in 1965, it was decided that a similar parking lot should also be cleared for the giant marmot at the western portal.\textsuperscript{16} In the late 1960s several serious automobile accidents also occurred at the Windy Joe beaver pond. There it was found that the same terrain which helped hide visitors from the view of the wary beavers also obscured cars as they pulled out of the parking lot and into traffic moving at 60 miles per hour. Access to this roadside natural attraction was subsequently redesigned for greater visibility and safety, and for good measure the parking lot was enlarged to accommodate more vehicles.\textsuperscript{17}

There was an urgent need for improved highway safety in the vicinity of Pinewoods by the mid 1960s. In the summer of 1966 Parks Branch chief Harold McWilliams approached the Department of Highways with a number of concerns about traffic conditions on the Similkameen flats. More and more vehicles were entering, exiting, and turning across the highway in order to access the lodge, cabins, gas station, and other roadside services and attractions. “[W]e are experiencing a good number of rear end collisions and sideswipes” McWilliams reported. “[A]lthough none has been serious to date, it is beginning to be of some concern.”\textsuperscript{18} In the late 1960s the Department of Highways made a number of significant improvements to the highway on the

\textsuperscript{15} BCA, GR-1991, reel 1801, Director, Parks Branch to C.C. Hammond, 12 September 1961; H.G. McWilliams, Director, Parks Branch to C.J. Velay, Engineering Division, 19 August 1964; McWilliams to R.J. Vitch, District Superintendent, Department of Highways, 20 November 1964.


\textsuperscript{17} BCA, GR-1991, reel 1805, Kerry Joy, Park Officer, Interpretation, memo re: Manning Park Beaver Pond Roadside Attraction, 21 November 1969.

\textsuperscript{18} BCA, GR-1991, reel 1801, McWilliams, Director to Mr. Godfrey, Chief Engineer, Department of Highways, 25 August 1966; Godfrey to McWilliams, 1 September 1966.
Similkameen flats, including the addition of acceleration, deceleration, and left-turn lanes at Pinewoods so that it would be safer to pull on and off the highway. This greatly improved safety around the concession complex, but changed the area’s ambience, making it seem more like a highway interchange. When the park’s roadside services and attractions conflicted with modern standards of highway safety, it was the efficient flow of traffic that won out, leaving the Parks Branch to cope as best it could.

Eyesores Old and New

The widening of the Hope-Princeton Highway on the Similkameen flats was the most significant change to the highway inside the park during the 1960s. However, other more prosaic forms of roadwork were constantly going on. For example, the maintenance crews stationed at the Allison Pass works yard cleared ditches and culverts during the fall, spread sand and salt in the winter, and cut brush along the verges of the road in spring and summer. These routine activities sometimes came into conflict with the Parks Branch’s desire to maintain a naturalistic aesthetic along the highway corridor through Manning Park. For example, in the spring of 1956 Superintendent Bob Boyd notified headquarters that the Department of Highways planned to resurface 20 miles of the Hope-Princeton inside the park. Gravel for making asphalt would need to be excavated from old and new borrow pits located along the highway right-of-way, including a previously unexploited pit right beside the access road to the Muledeer campground. Boyd complained about the growing number of roadside borrow pits in the park, some of which were prominent eyesores. “As you are aware,” he wrote, “in the past the Department of Public Works has allowed their contractors to trespass into Manning Park
and leave behind them gaping holes and unsightly banks.” Such work threatened to undo
the Parks Division’s efforts to erase evidence of highway construction from the park’s
roadside landscapes.\(^{19}\)

The Parks Division could not prevent construction crews from excavating within
the road right-of-way, so in order to minimize and mitigate the resurfacing project’s
impact on roadside aesthetics in Manning Park, it was forced to negotiate with the
Department of Highways. The head of the Parks Division informed his counterpart in
Highways that he would appreciate “any special consideration which can be given to the
preservation of aesthetic qualities along the roadside.” He also asked to be kept appraised
of all future plans for roadwork along the Hope-Princeton corridor in Manning Park,
especially regarding the location of potential borrow pits.\(^ {20}\) Less than a month later, the
Parks Division requested that no further material be taken from quarries and gravel pits
located along the highway edge, for “they were developed in the past without adequate
forest screen area between the highway and the excavation.” Furthermore, the Parks
Division asked that restoration plans be drawn up for each pit that was visible from the
highway. After several years of negotiation, Highways agreed to screen these eyesores
from the view of the motoring public with strategic plantings of native trees and shrubs.\(^ {21}\)

Another noteworthy clean-up effort in Manning Park during the late 1950s
involved the Big Burn. In 1957 the Forest Service’s head of reforestation arranged for
300 acres of scorched and desolate mountainside visible from the highway to be cleared
of snags and replanted with 18,000 seedlings. Six years later, after the seedlings had

\(^{19}\) BCA, GR-1991, reel 1803, R.H. Boyd to E.G. Oldham, 4 April 1956.
\(^{20}\) BCA, GR-1991, reel 1803, Oldham to Mr. Bowering, Chief Engineer, Department of Highways, 16 April
1956.
\(^{21}\) BCA, GR-1991, reel 1803, Oldham to Bowering, 10 May 1956.
taken hold and the slopes were becoming steadily greener, the Parks Branch replaced the famous Manning Park Gallows with a less eye-catching, more didactic sign that informed the motoring public a government-funded reforestation program was underway.  

While there were successes in hiding and cleaning up old eyesores in Manning Park during the late 1950s, BC’s postwar resource boom meant that the Parks Branch was faced with many new real and potential eyesores. Mining and prospecting activity remained a problem. Along the highway corridor, most of the potential eyesores associated with mining activity were fended off with the regulations enacted in the early 1950s that required a prospector to acquire a Parks Use Permit before erecting buildings on mineral claims inside a provincial park. However, the rapidly rising price of copper during the early 1960s caused a flurry of claim staking in and around the park, including in several locations where the Parks Branch wanted to avoid any trace of industrial activity. For example, in 1961 the Parks Branch asked the Department of Mines to disallow a mineral claim that had been staked at Rhododendron Flats because “attractions at this point are very much in the public eye.” Three years later, a similar request was made regarding several claims staked near the giant bear sign-sculpture at the eastern park portal. The Parks Branch informed the Department of Mines it was “reluctant to have possible mineral claim workings as the first sight to greet the traveller as he passes through the entrance to Manning Park.” Just a few weeks later, Parks Branch staff were

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chagrined to learn that prospectors were trying to stake mineral claims over the entire Cambie Creek campground.23

The aesthetic and jurisdictional challenges posed by timber licenses that allowed logging inside Manning Park became ever more complicated during the late 1950s. A key factor in this was the March 1957 transfer of the Parks Division from the Forest Service to the government’s new Department of Recreation and Conservation, where it was renamed the Parks Branch. Severed from the Forest Service, the Parks Branch could no longer offer to swap sensitive timber berths inside provincial parks for access to timber on crown land elsewhere in the province. Had there been time to formulate new policies, it might have been possible to compensate for this loss of an exchangeable land base, but timber prices remained high throughout this period and a steady stream of applications to cut and haul timber inside provincial parks meant that Parks Branch staff were run off their feet just trying to keep up. High timber prices and lax enforcement of logging regulations during these years contributed to a cavalier attitude amongst many loggers, which led to several blatant cases of trespass in provincial parks.

A particularly egregious and untimely case of trespass occurred in Manning Park during the summer of 1958, when a skid road was cut through an area that was prominently visible to the motoring public. A shake and shingle mill in Hope had acquired licenses that allowed it to cut a stand of Western red cedar on timber berth X65469, which straddled the boundary of Manning Park in the ‘parkway’ that had been added on in 1950. A small portion of X65469 was located inside the park but the rest was outside. To complicate things further, the berth also straddled the administrative

boundary between the Vancouver and Kamloops forest districts. The small amount of timber that was to be logged inside the park was out of view of the highway and under normal circumstances would have been accessed by an old logging road that predated the parkway. Thus the Parks Branch did not need to issue a Parks Use Permit for an access road, and had no objections to the shingle mill’s plan to log the section of X65469 within the park.

The summer of 1958 was very dry and hot, and in August the Vancouver Forest District was closed to all logging and hauling operations due to the fire risk. This meant the shingle company’s loggers could not cut timber on the portion of its berth that was located outside the boundaries of Manning Park; nor could trucks be driven on the logging road that provided access to the berth. However, no such closure was in place in the Kamloops Forest District, which included Manning Park. By his own description, the owner of the shingle mill decided that “in order to get our logs to our mill we had to make a cat road through a section of the Park, because the existing road was in the Vancouver Forest District.” A caterpillar tractor was used to clear a rough, narrow road through half a mile of “log jams and flooded areas” between the Hope-Princeton Highway and the section of the timber berth that was located inside the park. Logs were then skidded along the cat road to a loading boom that had been set up in a small clearing “right on the edge of the highway.” Logs were stacked there before being loaded onto trucks that would carry them to the shingle mill 20 miles away in Hope. The cedars being cut on X65469 must have been enormous, for the mill owner indicated that a loaded logging truck typically carried between three and five pieces of timber.24

When Superintendent Bob Boyd discovered this act of trespass inside Manning Park he ordered the logging crew to get out: having a skid road visible from the highway was considered a major disruption to the look of the park. This struck the shingle mill owner as unreasonable and he appealed to senior Forest Service staff for permission to continue using the skid road as a “back door” to berth X65469. He argued that the loading boom did not interfere with traffic on the highway, that the cat road had not damaged any merchantable timber in the park, and that being allowed to use the cat road for winter skidding would eliminate the cost and inconvenience of plowing the old logging road. “The cat road has already been made,” he concluded, and therefore the Parks Branch ought not meddle with it being used for maximum efficiency.25

This argument was no way to placate the Parks Branch. E.G. Oldham, who was the head of the Parks Branch in 1958, wrote directly to the owner of the shingle mill and summarized the situation as he saw it: “you found it convenient to ignore Park Regulations in order to circumvent Forest Protection Regulations, and bulldozed a road through a public park without wasting time applying for authority.” Oldham pointed out that unauthorized construction of an industrial road was a serious violation of the Provincial Parks Act, and that the shingle company had flaunted the Parks Branch’s authority by not applying for the necessary permits. The company was instructed to “discontinue unauthorized industrial operations in Manning Park beyond the boundaries of X65469.”26

A minor logging operation that ought to have been invisible to the motoring public had abruptly become a prominent eyesore inside the park. The cat road was

25 Ibid.
problematic in and of itself, but even worse was the possibility that motorists would see enormous, freshly-cut cedars being skidded along it, stacked in a cold deck, and being loaded onto logging trucks, all within the park’s clearly-demarcated boundaries. The crude work of hauling and loading logs was supposed to have occurred away from view. The most – and the worst – that anyone driving along the Hope-Princeton Highway should have seen was the occasional logging truck pulling onto the highway from an access road.

To make matters even worse, the summer of 1958 was the high travel season for BC’s ’58 Centennial year. For two years, government publicity campaigns had been encouraging British Columbians to hit the road and get to know their province’s scenic landscapes and natural, historical, and recreational attractions – these efforts and some of the ‘58 Centennial events are discussed in Chapter Twelve. As one of the two highways linking the Coast and the Interior, it was crucial for the Hope-Princeton corridor to be in top aesthetic condition. This was especially true inside a popular provincial park, where people expected to see nature unsullied by industrial activity. In preparation for the 1958 travel season the Parks Branch had even rushed the construction of the eye-catching bear and marmot sign-sculptures that marked where the highway entered Manning Park. The shingle company’s unauthorized activity inside the park just a short distance from the giant marmot portal threatened to make the Parks Branch look bad to the motoring public at the very moment when it was trying to make the best possible impression. Unfortunately, the Parks Branch’s records do not indicate what penalties, if any, were applied to the shingle company.
It was rare for logging operations to trespass so blatantly inside Manning Park. More often, the Parks Branch’s efforts to limit the visual impact of logging activity on motorists’ park experiences involved cordial negotiations with timber companies and brokers who were willing to swap timber licenses that covered certain prominent locations in Manning Park for the right to cut a roughly equivalent amount of timber in some out-of-the-way section of the park. In most cases, these negotiations ended amicably and with better aesthetic results than had been the case with Hugh Leir’s timber licenses on Cambie Creek.

For example, in 1960 an American timber broker approached the Parks Branch to see whether it was interested in acquiring timber licenses that covered several berths inside Manning Park. In exchange, he hoped to get cutting rights for a more accessible stand of timber elsewhere in the southwest Interior. Minister of Recreation and Conservation Earle C. Westwood indicated that he was very interested in this proposal because he wanted “not to have any more logging in Manning Park.” However, he pointed out that the Parks Branch was overwhelmed with work and that it would be some time before any of its staff could cruise the berths in the park, assess their value, and locate a suitable plot of timber for exchange. The minister therefore recommended that the broker “consider logging this area in Manning Park but leaving T.L. 12861, which is on the highway and my Department would find an equivalent value of timber adjacent to the other licenses [emphasis added].”27 The minister responsible for parks was comfortable with logging inside Manning Park so long as it could not be discerned by the motoring public, and was willing to give the license holder more timber inside the park in

order to avoid logging within view of the highway corridor. Having been cut off from the
Forest Service, the Parks Branch could only swap timber within the parks. This became
the standard procedure for dealing with timber berths that were aesthetically important
due to their relation with the highway corridor.28

Around 1960 the Parks Branch also started coming under pressure to allow
logging in areas of Manning Park that were not covered by grandfathered timber licenses.
Most of this pressure came from the Princeton district, where the economy had been hit
by the closure of a brewery and several mines, including the massive Copper Mountain
operation. “I have been informed by a person who is in close contact with the Interior
loggers that these people are looking with longing eyes at timber stands within this park,”
Superintendent Bob Boyd warned Parks Branch headquarters in the summer of 1960.
“No doubt these loggers and mill men will do everything within their power to obtain
more timber and pressure may be brought to bear upon us.”29

Boyd’s intelligence proved correct. In the summer of 1961, the Princeton
Chamber of Commerce began lobbying the minister of recreation and conservation to
permit logging in areas of the park that were located away from the highway corridor and
rarely seen by visitors. Where Princeton’s merchants had lobbied so hard for a park in the
1930s, they now lobbied for logging to be allowed in areas away from the motoring
public’s view. The chamber argued that access to timber in Manning Park was required
because “lumbering remains our only sizeable payroll” after the collapse of the area’s
mining industry. It took the position that there were bound to be some stands of timber in
the park that were “completely inaccessible to the public [and] over-mature and

28 See for example BCA, GR-1991, reel 1801, McWilliams to H. Daniel Oliver, Shepherd and Oliver,
Barristers and Solicitors [Vancouver], 16 October 1964.
decadent.”30 The minister replied that the sale and cutting of timber was specifically prohibited in Class A provincial parks except where timber rights predated the park and in rare instances where it was deemed “necessary or advantageous to the preservation of the recreational value of the area.” Even if it were possible to give Princeton timber interests permission to log inside Manning, he would not do so, because almost all the merchantable timber was located in “the lower valleys and roadsides where its removal would seriously mar the landscape and depreciate the recreational value of the area.” Allowing this timber to be cut would reduce the park’s appeal to the motoring public, which in the long term would “adversely affect the economy of Princeton and the entire province.” However, the minister promised that any timber cleared as part of the Parks Branch’s ongoing program of recreational development in the park (for access roads, ski runs, new campgrounds, etc.) would be disposed of to the advantage of Princeton’s forestry companies.31

Thus in 1964, when a severe windstorm hit the Cascade Mountains and caused extensive timber blow-down inside Manning Park, Princeton logging companies were quick to lobby for the right to help ‘clean up.’ They argued that “the timber down is of good grade” and that an extensive salvage operation had to be organized before the fallen trees started to rot.32 Extremely intense and localized gusts of wind had knocked down large swaths of timber at several locations in the park, including at the Mountain View

30 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1801, Harry Elias, President, Princeton and District Chamber of Commerce to Earl Westwood, Minister of Parks and Recreation, 26 June 1961.
32 By the summer of 1968 Blue River Sawmills had acquired all of the outstanding timber licenses within Manning Park, including several which gave them the right to log on berths that were located close to the Hope-Princeton corridor. The company and the Parks Branch eventually came to a mutually satisfactory agreement whereby the company’s diverse holdings in the park, including the right to cut in prominent areas near the highway, were given up in exchange for the right to log on one large parcel of timber in the isolated Castle Creek section of the park, which was located adjacent to one of the company’s active logging operations outside the park’s boundaries.
picnic site and the new Hampton campground. The campground was not affected too badly, but almost no trees were left standing at the picnic site, where picnic tables, signs, and a pair of prefabricated pit toilet structures were wrecked by falling trees. In light of Mountain View’s popularity with the motoring public, something needed to be done to mitigate the unsightly mess left by the storm, and quickly, before the summer travel season began.33

Despite the minister’s 1961 promise, Parks Branch staff were opposed to letting loggers work on the site with their cats, skidders, and multi-axle trucks. However, the Parks Branch lacked the machinery needed to clear the downed timber itself. Manning Park’s new superintendent Tom Moore came up with a solution that echoed the placement of the Manning Park Gallows at the Big Burn in the early 1950s. Moore suggested that the Mountain View picnic site be left as it was, except for the relocation and replacement of the demolished toilets and picnic tables. A large interpretive sign could then be erected to describe the natural phenomena of blow-down and explain its role in forest succession.34 This was a quick, inexpensive way to turn an eyesore into an educational experience, almost a natural attraction in and of itself, while at the same time emphasizing that the Parks Branch was not responsible for the unsightly appearance of the popular picnic site. Senior Parks Branch staff approved Moore’s proposal, with the qualification that “if the idea had drawbacks, we can, as they become apparent, clean up the site.” Rather than let Princeton loggers ‘clean up’ a prominent and sensitive part of

33 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1801, Moore to Director, Parks Branch, att: C.J. Velay, 30 December 1963; D.B. Turner, Deputy Minister to McWilliams, Director, Parks Branch, 3 January 1964.
34 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1801, Moore to Director, Parks Branch, 27 January 1964; Moore to Director, Parks Branch, 27 February 1964.
the park, the Parks Branch contracted them to clear 75 acres of timber for the planned ski hill development at Gibson Pass, in the mountains southwest of Pinewoods.\(^{35}\)

Other infringements on the naturalistic aesthetic that the Parks Branch was striving to maintain in Manning Provincial Park occurred at the Pinewoods concession complex, where the battle against perceived eyesores involved a surprising level of micromanagement. During the busy summer months, Parks Branch headquarters in Victoria would sometimes contact the park superintendent to remind him to mow the lawns in the concession complex. In 1963 the director of the Parks Branch wrote to indicate his displeasure with signs offering “Groceries for Camping” that the Pinewoods concessionaire had placed in several park campgrounds during the previous summer. This could not be repeated, the director warned, because “advertising of any nature violates the aesthetic purpose of these campsites.”\(^{36}\)

Long grass and advertising were not the only problems discerned at Pinewoods. Shiny, modern surfaces that stood out from the area’s rustic aesthetic were particularly troublesome. During a visit to Manning Park in the fall of 1958, Parks Branch chief E.G. Oldham was perturbed by two “incongruous features” he observed at Pinewoods. First, he insisted that the metal garbage cans placed around the parking lots be made more rustic-looking. He instructed that they be painted dark brown and have the word “refuse” neatly stenciled on them in yellow lettering, which would make them consistent with the Parks Branch’s approved colour scheme for signage. The second, more troubling


\(^{36}\) BCA, GR-1991, reel 1801, D.A. Shaw for Director, Parks Branch to Boyd, 19 January 1959; McWilliams to Moore, 22 Aug 1963.
incongruous feature was the freestanding red-and-white, metal-and-plastic telephone booth that the BC Telephone Company had recently installed in front of Pinewoods Lodge. Superintendent Bob Boyd was ordered to “get rid” of the modern-looking telephone booth and have it replaced by a wall unit in the lobby of the gas station across the highway. However getting rid of the modern-looking telephone booth proved to be more difficult than repainting a few garbage cans.37

The Pinewoods concessionaire had asked the BC Telephone Company to install a public telephone at a location where the motoring public could have access to it 24 hours a day. He reported that because there was no outside phone at Pinewoods it was a common occurrence for people to “bang on the door and get the management up at two or three in the morning to use the phone [inside the lodge lobby] with such messages as ‘I’m on my way home dear.’” Superintendent Boyd had supported the concessionaire’s request, not realizing the telephone company would install one of its standard booths in such a prominent location. Explaining the situation to his supervisors in Victoria, he suggested that because “this type of structure is universal and has now become part of the public service [in the park], I do not think we should be too critical, and accept it as it is and keep in mind that Pinewoods is serving 98% roadside traffic and 2% park users.”38

Chief park planner Robert Ahrens chided Boyd for this lapse in aesthetic judgment, pointing out that “the structure may be universal, but not in parks it isn’t [emphasis in original].”39 Ahrens began negotiating with the telephone company, trying to get the modern looking booth replaced with something more in keeping with Pinewoods’ rustic aesthetic and natural surroundings. “The larger Provincial parks are

39 R.H.A. [Ahrens], undated handwritten comments on ibid.
dedicated and designed to provide the public with an atmosphere and experience which cannot be duplicated in the everyday surroundings of most people,” Ahrens explained. “For this reason it is not the policy to permit erection of such improvements as outside telephone booths.” Ahrens even suggested it would be better to have no phone at all. The phone company eventually agreed to replace the brightly coloured metal-and-plastic telephone booth with a less prominent, less modern-looking wall-mounted unit at the gas station. The BC Telephone Company was so cowed by Ahrens’ resolute stance in the Pinewoods telephone booth controversy that in the summer of 1960 it expressly sought the Parks Branch’s approval when the Department of Highways requested a public telephone booth for its works yard at Allison Pass.

The BC Telephone Company may well have been involved in another problematic eyesore along the Hope-Princeton corridor through Manning Park. Its telephone line ran along the highway right-of-way for most of the distance between Hope and Pinewoods. In the summer of 1966 park staff discovered that someone – either the telephone company or the Department of Highways – had sprayed a chemical herbicide along the highway right-of-way as a cheap, quick way of controlling brush. The right-of-way extended 50 feet from each side of the centerline, but overspray was found to have damaged plants 60, 75, and in a few instances 100 feet from the centerline. Within the park boundaries the worst damage was found between the giant marmot at the western portal and Pinewoods, with “a most ugly avenue of defoliation in the first half mile above

41 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1801, McWilliams to W.G. Manley, 20 June 1960. The Northwest Telephone Company later incurred the wrath of Parks Branch headquarters when it stored a large antenna beside the Pinewoods gas station for almost a year while waiting to install it at a microwave transmission station on nearby Blackwell Mountain. The antenna was “an eyesore and unsightly in this area,” Ahrens complained to superintendent Tom Moore, before ordering the telephone company to remove it immediately. Moore to Director, Parks Branch, 12 Aug 1963.
the west park entrance.” Outraged park staff reported that “even almost bare rock faces and road cuts are being sprayed,” resulting in the loss of “fine patches of Pentstamon and other wild flowers.” Similar damage was reported to have occurred several years earlier, and park staff reported getting “quite a lot of complaints from travellers [about] the unsightly mess. To these people, the park is anything they see—but especially the few feet either side of the road [emphasis added].” When news of this linear eyesore was relayed to the deputy minister of recreation and conservation, he ordered an investigation to find out who was responsible for the “ugly blighting and desecration of the roadside.”

“Elimination of this sort of thing is essential,” he wrote, “not only for the Park as such but for the many thousands of travellers who enjoy driving through Manning.” Unfortunately, Parks Branch records do not indicate whether the culprit was ever identified or what action was taken to prevent further damage to roadside foliage from the overzealous herbicide application.42 However, the incident demonstrates how the Parks Branch’s desire to maintain a naturalistic aesthetic along the highway corridor could be at cross purposes with other agencies that were charged with moving people and things through the park in an efficient manner.

Signage along the highway corridor and at other points inside the park remained a tricky issue between the late 1950s and 1960s. BC’s provincial park system lost its most famous sign when the Manning Park Gallows was decommissioned in the early 1960s, although this was partly made up for by the addition of the enormous, eye-catching bear and marmot sign-sculptures at the park portals. Most of the problems involved more commonplace signs. During the late 1950s the Parks Branch still had not come up with a

cohesive plan for marking roadside attractions and natural features along the highway corridor. In the summer of 1955 the head of the Parks Division had contacted his counterpart in the Department of Public Works with a proposal to erect a number of signs along the right-of-way. “Ever since the completion of the Hope-Princeton Highway,” he explained,

it has been our hope that some day an informative roadside signing program could be undertaken in the Manning Park area. This factor was one of the foremost reasons in extending the westerly boundary of the park [in 1950] to embrace a number of interesting historical and physical features. […] We visualize a sign system carrying a uniformity of design which would give them a distinctive character. Only one sign for a feature is intended, and all the parking required would be a shoulder width on either side of the highway, sufficient to park two or three cars at a time. Small ‘approach’ signs a mile on either side would also be necessary.43

The Parks Division indicated that it would soon request permission to erect four “experimental” roadside signs in the park: at the Skagit Bluffs, the Windy Joe beaver ponds, the “Goat Crags” at the Sumallo bluffs, and the remnant of the Dewdney Trail at mile 17 beyond Hope, where there had been “repeated requests for some type of informative marker” and where the BC Telephone Company’s line had been “purposely re-routed above the old road with this idea in mind.” However, for unknown reasons these signs were never put up. Grumblings were soon being heard inside the Parks Branch that echoed motorists’ complaints about the lack of signs to identify natural features and attractions along the highway corridor in Manning Park.44

The lack of signs in the park became an especially pressing problem in the lead-up to British Columbia’s 1958 Centennial celebrations. In January 1957, Pinewoods

43 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1803, Oldham to N.M. McCallum, Chief Engineer, Department of Public Works, 7 June 1955.
concession manager Rene Pelletier urged that signs be put up along the highway corridor to identify mountains, rivers, historical sites, and other prominent landscape features that were visible to the motoring public. He also suggested that some kind of museum be built at Pinewoods as a way of encouraging motorists to stop and spend more time (and money) at the concession complex. The director of the Parks Branch assured Pelletier that the marking of historic sites located in provincial parks like Manning was expected to “receive early attention” from the ’58 Centennial Committee and its historic sites subcommittee.45 The subcommittee’s activities are discussed at length in Chapter Twelve but here it will suffice to note that it was assigned the task of identifying and marking sites that were deemed to be of historic significance to British Columbia, and that Ches Lyons played a key role in its work. Several of the first markers were erected along the Hope-Princeton Highway, including two inside Manning Park. One, titled “The Dewdney Trail,” was set up beside the roadside remnant of the old trail at mile 17. The site was deemed a perfect fit for the ’58 Centennial due to its association with the gold rushes of the 1860s and the construction of transportation infrastructure in the BC Interior.

Standardized markers ended up being erected all around the province in the lead-up to the summer of 1958, and the program was considered a great success. This likely reinforced the belief amongst Parks Branch planers that signs in the provincial parks needed to be standardized. According to planner Ray Lowery, the provincial parks needed a “sign system” in which signs would be “uniform in every respect.” It was imperative that local park staff not put up signs of their own innovation because parks that broke away from a systematic marking scheme “invariably end up like a dog’s

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45 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1803, Pelletier to McWilliams, 10 January 1957; McWilliams to Pelletier, 18 January 1957.
breakfast.” Signs were to be “aesthetically pleasing” and relatively few in number, for “too many signs spoils the effectiveness of all of them.” Lowery also argued that the use of proscriptive signs should be “severely limited” because they impinged on visitors’ experiences of the parks as areas of refuge from the everyday routines of the modern city, where they could enjoy themselves in “an atmosphere of congeniality and freedom.”

Additions, Renovations, and Interpretation at Pinewoods

Rene Pelletier’s 1957 suggestion that a museum should be built at Pinewoods coincided with a similar idea inside the Parks Branch for some kind of interpretive facility to be established in Manning Park, which had proven one of BC’s most popular provincial parks. For several years wildlife biologist Yorke Edwards had been arguing that these kinds of facilities could provide visitors with a better appreciation of the park’s landforms, flora, and fauna. In the spring of 1957 he convinced headquarters to give him a small budget with which to build the Manning Park Nature House, a free public park interpretation centre that was located beside the main parking lot at Pinewoods.

The Manning Park Nature House was not actually a house, or even a permanent structure – at least not for the first few years. Instead, Edwards was given a heavy old canvas camp tent that had a wooden frame and floor. He later recalled that the original display furniture for the Nature House consisted mainly of boxes scavenged from the park dump, where he and his student assistant “dug with the bears.” Although the Nature House was small, it was jammed full of educational materials about Manning Park’s natural landscape features, including exhibits about rocks, trees, and wild flowers, and

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46 BCMFL, Ray Lowery, “Some BC Provincial Park Development Standards” (Victoria, [1950s])
photographs of birds, beavers, mountain goats, and deer. According to Edwards, the Nature House did not have many visitors prior to grade schools being let out for summer vacation; he recalled that in early June 1957 most of his visitors seemed to have been “distressed” motorists “needing a toilet.” However, due to its strategic location beside the highway and the main Pinewoods parking lot, the Nature House quickly became Manning Park’s most popular roadside attraction, recording 13,000 visitors in the summer of 1957. Ironically, the popularity of the Nature House interpretation centre was largely a result of its location at the centre of development in Manning Park, where many motorists stopped to patronize the gas station, dining facilities, public telephone, and washrooms. The fact that it was free also helped.47

A survey conducted at the Nature House in July 1957 entailed 483 questionnaires submitted in a two-week period, and found that 80% of visitors were residents of British Columbia. Two-thirds came from the Vancouver region, one in six were from Vancouver Island, and another one in six were from the Interior.48 Of the remaining 20% of visitors to the Nature House, two out of three were Americans and one out of three were Canadians. Most visitors reported that they were just passing through the park, but almost everyone who left comments indicated that they had a positive impression of the Nature House, and considered their visit to have been an educational or otherwise interesting experience. Visitors suggested that similar interpretive facilities should be established in other provincial parks, that the Nature House should be enlarged and made permanent, and that it should be better publicized to the motoring public with roadside signage.

Visitors’ positive responses to the Nature House suggest that they appreciated the opportunity to learn more about the scenery and natural landscape features they saw when driving along the Hope-Princeton. In 1960, its last summer under canvas, the Nature House had 39,000 visitors. The following year the Nature House was moved to a permanent building that contained 26 “freshly designed and constructed exhibits.” This new roadside attraction was credited for much of the 38 percent increase in visitors to the park in 1961.49

In addition to the establishment of the Nature House, 1957 also saw construction begin on a 24-unit motel at Pinewoods.50 In an attempt to make this large, modern structure appear somewhat rustic and blend in with its surroundings, rough-finished pine siding was used for the exterior surfaces. Architecturally, the motel’s multi-unit layout marked a significant shift away from the detached autocourt-style cabins that had been built at Pinewoods in the early 1950s. This shift was in keeping with a wider trend in the roadside accommodation industry: a multi-unit motel building did not offer guests the same sense of privacy or hominess that the older detached structures had, but it used less space and was cheaper to build and maintain. The new motel was accompanied by a 175% increase in parking facilities at Pinewoods. The park’s popularity and the rising volume of traffic that passed through it along the Hope-Princeton Highway demanded

50 When construction of the new motel building was proposed, the Minister responsible for provincial parks suggested that more of an effort should be made to attract “transient overnight guests” through lower standards and pricing. However, Parks Branch staff were loathe to see the new motel become overly commercialized, and fended off the Minister’s recommendation by pointing out that any perception that Pinewoods was “in direct competition with private industry” would lead to severe criticism from the BC Auto Court and Resorts Association. BCA, GR-1991, reel 1803, Lloyd Brooks to McWilliams, 19 March 1957.
more amenities at Pinewoods and more places for motorists to park while partaking of them.  

The new parking lots and motel building substantially enlarged the Pinewoods complex’s footprint on the Similkameen flats. As a result, plans were drawn up in the spring of 1958 for another round of landscaping in the area. Parks Branch headquarters instructed that the landscaping be kept simple and relatively sparse in order to “duplicate the alpine meadows” found in Manning’s high country. The first step called for the area to be graded with a cat and scraper. “It is not intended to give the area a ‘billiard table’ appearance,” the report warned, “but to produce an undulating profile similar to that found in […] the higher sections of the park.” Seventy small coniferous and deciduous trees – mostly pines – were then transplanted to the concession complex. Due to the growing volume of automobile traffic and complexity of traffic patterns at Pinewoods, special care was taken to ensure that the trees were planted “in locations where they do not interfere with drivers’ vision.” However, no effort was made to screen the new multi-unit motel from the motoring public. Watering the lawns and plantings at Pinewoods during the arid summer months proved to be so time consuming that by the summer of 1967 plans were being drawn up for the installation of an underground sprinkler system. Parks Branch records give no signs of hesitation about these various new developments: they were simply a ‘democratic’ response to the park’s steadily growing popularity with the motoring public. However, between the new motel, the widened highway, and the

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51 On planning the new “more workable” motel building and parking spaces, see BCA, GR-1991, reel 1803, Brooks, Planning Section to McWilliams, [Chief] Forester, Parks and Recreation Division, 27 July 1956; Brooks to McWilliams, 19 March 1957. On the changing form of North American roadside accommodations, see Belasco, Americans on the Road, chapter 6; Jakle, Sculle, and Rogers, The Motel in America, chapter 2.  
growing number of parked cars, Pinewoods was looking less and less rustic and more and more like a roadside commercial strip.

By 1958 Pinewoods was outstripping the utilities that had been set up less than a decade earlier. Water consumption was increasing at such a pace that it would soon overtax the capacity of the small creek-fed reservoir that supplied the concession complex. This was especially problematic because the busy summer travel season, which saw the greatest water use in Manning Park, coincided with the critical low water months in the Cascade Mountains. These factors combined to leave insufficient water in the park’s reservoir for emergency firefighting during the period of highest forest fire risk. Most of the increased demand came from the new crescent-shaped motel, which had a three-piece washroom in each unit. New on-site laundry facilities aggravated the problem, as did the need to irrigate the lawns and landscaped areas around Pinewoods so that they would stay green and attractive.54

When the Parks Branch started investigating ways to get more water to the Pinewoods complex, it also looked into the problem of the growing volume of wastewater being flushed away. There were worries that the septic field installed in 1949-1950 might soon be overwhelmed, causing sewage to bubble to the surface of the lawns that surrounded the buildings at Pinewoods.55 An inspector from the South Okanagan Health Unit visited Pinewoods in the summer of 1959 to consult with Parks Branch staff about reorganizing Manning’s supply and distribution of water. He was full of praise for

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54 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1804, C.J. Velay for Director, Parks Branch to D.A. Shaw, Operations Section, 17 November 1958. On the technical, legal, and diplomatic complexities of supplying Pinewoods with enough potable water, also see Shaw to McWilliams, 20 January 1958.

their plans to build a new reservoir and chlorinate the drinking water drawn from it, and supported their plan to develop a sewage treatment lagoon. No one criticized the expanded facilities at Pinewoods, which were the cause of the growing amount of water being consumed (and flushed) in the park. Instead, the problem was narrowly defined as a question of efficiency, of how best to store, distribute, and then dispose of the amounts of water deemed necessary for the smooth, profitable operation of the concession complex.\textsuperscript{56}

The growing volume of solid waste generated in Manning Park was also troublesome. By the early 1960s the park dump, which was located in a large gravel pit left over from the construction of the Hope-Princeton road, was nearly full. This, combined with the persistent problems associated with its clutch of attendant bears, led the Parks Branch to investigate the possibility of installing an incinerator to dispose of garbage left in the park; trucking it away was deemed too expensive.\textsuperscript{57} An incinerator salesman calculated that Pinewoods, the administrative centre, and the park’s various campgrounds, picnic sites, and roadside pullouts generated almost 4000 pounds or two tons of garbage each day during the high summer travel season. Even if these figures were inflated in order to make a sale, the amount was still substantial.\textsuperscript{58}

The growing number of visitors and visitor services in Manning Park required additional park staff, which put pressure on the administration area down the road from Pinewoods. Having more seasonal and year-round Parks Branch employees stationed in the park led to crowding in the existing staff cabins and bunkhouses, and the need for

\textsuperscript{56} BCA, GR-1991, reel 1804, Dr. D.A. Clarke, Medical Health Officer, South Okanagan Health Unit to Shaw, 28 July 1959. Also see Shaw to Boyd, 14 July 1959.

\textsuperscript{57} On the incineration of garbage as a way of dealing with Manning Park’s “bear problem,” see BCA, GR-1991, reel 1801, McWilliams to Moore, 24 April 1963.

\textsuperscript{58} BCA, GR-1991, reel 1801, D.W. Onions, Sales and Service, Plibrico (Canada) Ltd. to McWilliams, Director, Department of Recreation and Conservation, Parks Branch, 26 August 1965.
additional housing soon became urgent. In the early 1960s an experiment was conducted with trailer accommodations, but due to space constraints the first trailers were set up at a location where they could be seen by motorists driving along the Hope-Princeton Highway. Parks Branch headquarters was very unhappy with this arrangement. Like the standardized phone booth that the BC Telephone Company had installed at Pinewoods, aluminum-skinned trailers were very modern looking and hard to camouflage. Shiny rectangular metal boxes provided a flexible and inexpensive solution to the shortage of staff housing, but they clashed with the older buildings on the Similkameen flats, whose rustic styling and natural materials helped them blend in with their surroundings. Furthermore, trailer homes were closely associated with the housing found at mines, logging camps, and large construction projects like smelters, pulp mills, and hydroelectric dams – all of which were commonplace in the BC Interior during the 1950s and 1960s. On the basis that the trailers contributed to “scenic defacement of the highway,” Parks Branch headquarters ordered that they be relocated to an area of the administration centre that was “out of view of the highway.”

The enormous popularity of camping during the postwar years meant that Manning Park’s campgrounds were also in dire need of expansion, maintenance, and renovation by the mid 1950s. In 1956 the ranger in charge of maintaining Manning’s five campgrounds described them as practically bursting at the seams between the Canada Day and Labour Day long weekends. The heaviest use occurred at the Skagit campground, which was the first one reached by motorists bound for the Interior. It was

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reportedly filled to more than double capacity on some weekends. Most campers simply doubled up in one cramped campsite, but some carved out their own unauthorized sites, cutting down branches, clearing brush, and using their cars to push aside the logs, rocks, and posts that the Parks Branch had strategically placed in order to restrict the movement of automobiles in the park’s campgrounds. Others set up their tents and trailers in spaces that were not intended for camping, including picnic sites, parking lots, and along the verges of the highway.60

The Cambie Creek campground also experienced significant overuse, to the point that Superintendent Tom Moore described it as “a dust bowl” and “literally worn out” in 1964. In order to prevent further deterioration, he recommended that the campground be kept closed during the following summer so that the existing campsites could be rehabilitated and new campsites, water taps, and toilets added.61 When funding for this work proved unavailable, Moore complained the Cambie campground was “a disgrace to our park.” He reported that use had increased to such an extent that much of it did not even register in the official camper tallies because staff did not have time “to count the cars that have hacked their way some distance into the bush.” Parks Branch headquarters acknowledged that Cambie was turning into “an embarrassment,” but the development of new recreational attractions and visitor facilities ate up so much of the park budget that it was several years until the campground was rehabilitated and expanded.62

The crowding in Manning Park’s campgrounds during the summer travel season indicates the growing popularity of camping in BC during the 1950s and 1960s, and also

61 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1801, Moore to Director, August 1964.
the park’s familiarity to the motoring public. However, crowded, dusty, worn-out campgrounds where visitors hacked out their own campsites were antithetical to the experience of nature that the Park Branch wanted overnight campers to have, and that many campers had come to expect in the park. Campsites were supposed to blend in with their natural surroundings, and were supposed to provide campers with privacy and quietude. Unfortunately, the archival records do not indicate whether crowded campgrounds and hacked-out campsites were the result of campers being sociable and gregarious, or of campers who insisted on putting up a tent for the night, whatever the consequences might be for nature, their neighbours, or those who were charged with maintaining Manning Park.

Exiting Manning Park

In 1970 Manning Park was the most heavily visited provincial park in the BC Interior. By this yardstick, it was one of BC’s most successful parks. Millions of British Columbians and visitors from outside the province had travelled through it since the completion of the Hope-Princeton Highway in 1949. Some of them had stopped in the park to experience its scenery and natural attractions, or to spend time at its picnic sites, campgrounds, and concession complex. But even those who drove straight through the park without stopping picked up implicit lessons about nature from the landscapes that were visible by the road. Roadside features like the Skagit Bluffs, the Rhododendron Grove, the Manning Park Gallows, the Windy Joe beaver ponds, and Pinewoods Lodge had become part of the motoring public’s common landscape experiences. So had relatively undifferentiated stretches of the highway corridor where the Parks Branch had
prevented miners and loggers from cutting down timber and digging up rocks, or had hidden evidence where they had done so.

To most motorists the naturalness of Manning Park would have seemed a perfectly natural state of affairs. After all, few knew anything of the park’s history, or realized how closely it was intertwined with that of the highway that carried them through the Cascade Mountains. Few knew how carefully and consistently an agency of the state had managed, manipulated, and modified the park’s landscapes in order to shape their views of nature by the road.

The construction of the Hope-Princeton Highway had been behind the movement to establish the park during the 1930s, when park proponents had used the economic importance of the motoring public’s views to argue in favour of preserving the area’s flora, fauna, and scenery. After Manning Park was established, the Parks Division and Forest Service had decided that the park should be developed with an eye towards the ‘democratic’ motoring public instead of a much smaller number of well-heeled outdoor recreationalists. Then, after the long-awaited highway was finally completed, the Parks Division went to great lengths to make driving through the park an appealing experience, to make the park an asset to the province. The naturalistic aesthetic it imposed along the highway corridor helped encourage the motoring public to use the new road and partake in tourist and recreational activities while travelling between the Coast and Interior. The park was so heavily visited, and the highway so heavily travelled, that they both created a struggle to meet the motoring public’s expectations of nature in the park.

Manning Park proved a valuable asset to the Fordist state, even though a strange asset, in that it generated little in the way of direct revenue. In fact the case is even
stranger. In building and sustaining Manning Park and the roads it needed, the state had had to deal with several complicating factors which involved expense as well as political complications. The Fordist state had had to convince politicians and other state officials of the value of nature by the road; resolve conflict with sheep ranchers, loggers, miners, and would-be roadside entrepreneurs; and cope with nearly a decade of delay in completing the highway between Hope and Princeton. In thus facing all these pressures associated with successful mass tourism and mass recreation, with automobility, we see the Fordist state in generous mode. But in the next case considered in Part One we see another side of the same state – not only less generous but in the end actively destructive, even of its own achievements.
Chapter 6
The Roundabout Route to a Park in BC’s Big Bend Country, 1925-1941

This and the following chapter examine the intertwined history of the Big Bend Highway and Hamber Provincial Park. There were a number of noteworthy similarities between Manning and Hamber parks, even though they were located on opposite sides of the BC Interior. Both were large mountain parks. Both were traversed by an important arterial highway. Both were established in 1941, but had their origins in the province’s ambitious road-building program of the late 1920s. Many of the same individuals, agencies, and interests were involved in their establishment and management. But whereas Manning became one of BC’s most popular and familiar provincial parks and shaped many residents’ and visitors’ experiences of the province’s environments, few people were aware that Hamber Park even existed. If Manning shows how ‘successfully’ the state could shape the motoring public’s experiences of nature by the road in the BC Interior, then Hamber illustrates how badly the same relationship could go wrong. Where Manning was made into a significant asset for the Fordist state, Hamber was left in limbo for many years after it was established, and ultimately done away with in order to facilitate uses deemed to be more valuable.

Hamber was one of the biggest failures in the history of Canadian parks, which may explain why it has been almost completely overlooked by historians, environmentalists, and park advocates. On the rare occasion Hamber has been discussed, it has been mentioned only briefly, with its evisceration attributed to the rise of the pulpwood economy and hydroelectric dams during the 1960s, BC’s supposed era of
megaprojects, when governments chose to make the Big Bend country a ‘sacrifice area’ where irreparable damage was done to extensive swathes of land in the name of progress and the greater good. However, the story is not quite so simple. As this and the following chapter show, timber cutting and dam construction were important factors in Hamber Park’s failure, but automobility and landscape experience were central to its establishment, the half-hearted manner in which it was managed, and also its eventual truncation.

When examining the ways that driving through provincial parks shaped popular experiences of nature by the road in the BC Interior, there are five reasons why Hamber merits attention before other parks whose histories were also intertwined with a highway. First, Hamber’s story is almost entirely unknown. Historians, environmentalists, and park advocates have paid scant attention to its story, and it is completely absent from local histories about the three closest communities, Golden, Revelstoke, and Valemount. Second, Hamber’s enormous size and strategic location make it significant to the larger history of parks in the mountains of western Canada. When Hamber was established in 1941, it was the second largest park in BC and one of the largest in North America. It had been designed as a kind of land bridge and was contiguous with most of the other parks in the Canadian Rockies, thereby forming an enormous park area that stretched 215 miles from Mount Robson in the north to Radium Hot Springs in the south. Third, the establishment, management, and eventual deletion of Hamber Park illustrate the “easy come, easy go” attitude that many BC politicians and government officials had towards parks in the mid twentieth century.¹ Significant deletions were made from several of

¹ Wilson, Talk and Log, 93-98.
BC’s other large provincial parks during the post World War Two years, but Hamber’s story shows that even a large park that was traversed by an arterial highway could be vulnerable to having its boundaries chopped away at. Fourth, Hamber deserves attention because parks that ‘failed’ deserve to be treated as integral rather than peripheral to the history of provincial parks in British Columbia, and of North American parks more generally. They provide important context for the many success stories, for the parks that were popular and are still in existence today, the parks that many people are familiar with and care about. Examining a park that ‘failed’ helps denaturalize BC’s existing provincial park system.² Fifth, and finally, the different relationships between automobility and landscape experience in Hamber and Manning parks illustrate how the BC Parks Branch, as an agency of the Fordist state, was selective in using its power to shape motorists’ experiences of nature by the road. While Manning shows how far the Parks Branch could go to make BC look good to the motoring public, Hamber shows how little it would do when facing countervailing pressure.

This first chapter on Hamber Park examines the events that led to its establishment during the period 1927-1941. Of the chapters in this dissertation, this is the one with the greatest amount of high-level political manoeuvering, some of which was rather intricate. This is also the chapter that most involves different levels of the state: both federal and provincial. It shows that Hamber was created as part of a larger scheme whereby the provincial government hoped to saddle the federal government with the expensive responsibility of building and maintaining automobile roads in the extremely

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² Plans going astray are a staple theme in park histories, but relatively little attention has been paid to ‘failed’ parks: parks that were proposed, but never actually established, or parks that were established and then either largely or entirely deleted. One important study of a ‘failed’ national park in Canada is Jennifer Brower, Lost Tracks: Buffalo National Park, 1909-1939 (Edmonton: AU Press, 2008).
rugged mountains of eastern BC. To understand how roads, parks, and the motoring public’s experiences of nature by the road became so politically intertwined, it is necessary to start in the late 1920s, when a network of automobile roads was starting to take shape in the central BC Interior and the mountains of western Canada.

The Politics of Road Building in BC’s Eastern Mountains

The summer of 1927 saw the completion of two important automobile roads in British Columbia. As discussed in Chapter Two and Chapter Nine, the new road through the Fraser and Thompson river canyons gave BC’s motoring public their first direct link between the Coast and the Interior. On the opposite side of the province, a touring road was completed through the Rocky Mountains via the Kicking Horse Pass, thereby linking Banff with Golden, BC. These new sections of road meant that passable east-west roads were in place between Vancouver and Revelstoke and between Golden and Calgary. The only ‘gap’ remaining in a transprovincial road across BC’s central Interior was between the towns of Revelstoke and Golden, a distance of less than 80 miles as the crow flies.

The road connecting Golden and Banff (and thus Yoho and Banff national parks) had been built between 1924 and 1927 by BC’s Department of Public Works and the engineering service of the National Parks Branch. Many tourism promoters and proponents of a Canadian transcontinental highway expected these agencies would continue cooperating by sending their construction crews west to begin work on a road through the jagged Selkirk Mountains that separated Revelstoke (elevation 1575 feet above sea level) and Golden (2625 feet). However, the federal government was opposed

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3 Harvey, Carving the Western Path, 86; Monaghan, Canada’s New Main Street, 14-15.
to a route that traversed the Selkirks via the notorious, avalanche-plagued Rogers Pass (4365 feet), despite the fact that such a road would have allowed auto tourists to visit formerly famous but by 1927 little-visited Glacier National Park. 4 Robert Harvey, the historian of ground transportation in BC, cites provincial Public Works records that suggest the federal government rejected the idea of building an automobile road through the Rogers Pass because they anticipated difficulty with snowplowing. This, he argues, was clearly disingenuous, for the idea of keeping mountain roads open during the winter months was unheard of in western Canada during the late 1920s. 5

Harvey posits that the Canadian Pacific Railway used its political clout to dissuade Ottawa from participating in the construction of a road through the Rogers Pass. 6 The company had already been inconvenienced by BC’s decision to build an east-west automobile road that ran parallel to its mainline between Vancouver and Revelstoke, which cut into its profitable passenger service. After the sections of road through the Fraser and Kicking Horse canyons were completed in 1927, the Selkirks were the only place left where the railway company could literally head BC’s emerging transprovincial highway off at the pass. Another factor that could explain the federal government’s reluctance to build a road through the Rogers Pass were the CPR’s widely-publicized difficulties with avalanches in the pass, where hundreds of its employees and passengers

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5 Harvey, Carving the Western Path, 86-90. Harvey cites BC Department of Public Works files 3880-2 and 3880-3, Golden-Revelstoke Road, Columbia District, 24/09/28 - 30/12/39.

6 Harvey, Carving the Western Path, 89-90.
had been killed since the 1880s. The Selkirks’ infamous reputation for death and destruction provided a very real reason to question the wisdom of building an automobile road there.7

Although the Rogers Pass was effectively barred to an automobile road, fast-rising rates of middle-class automobile ownership and the growing economic importance of auto touring made it difficult for politicians and public works officials to ignore the roadless gap between Revelstoke and Golden. By the late 1920s the national parks in the Canadian Rockies were crawling with auto tourists, who pressured politicians and bureaucrats to provide them with more and better roads within and between the parks. This, combined with lobbying from business groups and motoring associations for the construction of a Trans-Canada Highway, drove Ottawa to find a way through – or around – the barrier of the Selkirks. Victoria was willing to go along for the ride, for it hoped to draw more auto tourists into the central Interior, and was happy to have financial assistance when building roads in such difficult terrain.8

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7 Ibid., 90. Harvey argues that the road engineers of the late 1920s had the technical knowledge and tools necessary to locate and build a route that would have minimized damage from avalanches and heavy spring runoff. Using survey information from the 1950s that calculated the cost of road construction in the Rogers Pass as being approximately the same as in the Fraser and Thompson canyons, he estimates that the cost of building through the Rogers Pass in the late 1920s would have been about the same as building around the Big Bend. Ibid., 105.

8 On auto tourism in Canada’s mountain parks during the 1920s, see Djuff, High on a Windy Hill, chapters 2-4; Hart, The Brewster Story, chapters 8-10; W. F. Lothian, A History of Canada’s National Parks vol. 2 (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 1976-1981), especially 31-32; Sandlos, “Nature’s Playgrounds.”
In 1929 Ottawa approached Victoria with a proposal for a different route between Revelstoke and Golden. Instead of pushing a road through the infamous Selkirks, it proposed that the two levels of government split the cost of building a road that skirted around them. This meant following the horseshoe-shaped course of the Columbia River – known as the Big Bend – as it traced its way round the northern end of the Selkirk range. By following the water grade of the Columbia, this roundabout route would avoid the steep grades associated with traversing a high-elevation mountain pass. It would also avoid interfering with the CPR mainline. An agreement was quickly reached whereby BC’s Department of Public Works would build the western section of this road, from Revelstoke to the site of Boat Encampment (a nineteenth-century fur trade rendezvous located at the peak of the Bend), while the National Parks Branch would oversee

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9 Charles Stewart, Minister of the Interior telegram to Nelson Lougheed, Minister of Public Works, 4 October 1929, cited in Harvey, *Carving the Western Path*, 87-89. Specific details of the agreement are discussed in LAC, RG84-A-2-a Parks Canada, reel T-10445, Stewart to Lougheed, 27 November 1929; Lougheed to Stewart, 10 December 1929.
construction of the eastern section, from the outskirts of Golden to Boat Encampment. The proposed road would not pass through any of the existing national parks, but the federal government justified its participation on the basis that the Big Bend road would be an important link in a future Trans-Canada Highway, and would tie Mount Revelstoke National Park more closely to the other national parks in the Rockies. The road around the Big Bend was envisioned as a means of encouraging auto tourism and pleasure travel in western Canada, rather than as a commercial route.

The perceived advantages of the Big Bend route are difficult to discern, aside from the fact that it would allow road builders to avoid the steep grades and avalanche threat associated with traversing the Selkirks. A road running parallel to the Columbia between Golden and Revelstoke would be more than double the length of a road through the Rogers Pass. For 200 miles it would traverse a veritable howling wilderness, for there were no farms, mines, or logging camps in the Big Bend country, only a handful of trappers’ cabins. Little had changed in the Big Bend country since the days of the fur trade, when Hudson’s Bay Company brigades had crossed over the Athabasca Pass to Boat Encampment, from whence they continued down the Columbia River. Lewis Freeman, an adventure writer who descended the Columbia from Golden to Revelstoke in 1921, described the Big Bend country as a primeval wilderness. “Only in rounding the Big Bend of the Columbia does the voyageur of today encounter conditions comparable to those faced by those of a hundred years ago,” he concluded. “[N]ow, just as much as in years gone by, an upset with the loss of an outfit is more likely than not to spell disaster and probably tragedy.”

10 Lewis W. Freeman, Down the Columbia (New York: Dodd, 1921), xvi. Also see A.P. Coleman, “Notes on the Geography and Geology of the Big Bend of the Columbia,” Transactions of the Royal Society of
Although a road around the Big Bend of the Columbia would be immune to avalanches, the Big Bend country still experienced heavy snowfall, especially on the western slope of the Selkirks, where between 15 and 40 feet of wet, crushingly heavy snow fell annually. Furthermore, a series of rapids and narrows between Revelstoke and Golden prevented steamboat navigation on the Columbia. This meant that during the short construction season all work camps would need to be supplied by pack trains cutting their way through forests full of enormous timber and jungle-like undergrowth laden with spiny Devil’s Club. The two governments’ timetable called for this ambitious project to be completed by the summer of 1932, which was hopelessly unrealistic, given that it had taken just as long to complete much shorter roads through the more accessible Fraser, Thompson, and Kicking Horse canyons. As with BC’s 1929 decision to build a new Coast-to-Interior road link between Hope and Princeton, the two governments could not have chosen a worse moment to begin such a large and difficult project.

Construction of the Big Bend Highway began in the spring of 1930. Progress was slower than expected from the start, partly due to the area’s difficult terrain and inaccessibility and partly due to the sharp downturn in the economy that followed on the heels of the stock market crash of 1929. However, whereas the provincial government put most infrastructure projects on hold in 1930, including the Hope-Princeton road, it continued working on its section of the Big Bend road. As noted in Chapter Two, Victoria had made a commitment to Ottawa that it would complete its share of the project, and for either government to walk away from the project would have led to a major loss of credibility. Indeed, in the spring of 1931 federal officials worried about the

political optics of being outpaced by the province during that year’s construction season. However, the province put fewer resources into the work than initially planned, and construction on the western section soon fell far behind schedule.  

Progress on BC’s section of the Big Bend road ground to a snail’s pace after it converted its construction camps into relief work camps during the summer of 1931. Publicity photos showed off the handful of steam shovels and caterpillar tractors that were being used on the project, but hand tools and horse-drawn scrapers were far more common. By the spring of 1932 the provincial government was in such a precarious financial situation that it could no longer meet its limited public works commitments, and only emergency federal funding allowed it to keep its Big Bend relief work camps open that year. That did not prevent J.M. Wardle, the head of the National Parks Branch’s engineering service, from complaining about a “decided slackening” in the province’s efforts. Writing to National Parks Branch headquarters in August, Wardle observed that the provincial government had had a “most disappointing” construction season, during which they had “really made no progress in opening up new [road] grade.” Wardle predicted the provincial government was “gradually work[ing] around to a point where they will ask the Dominion to take over the west leg of the road as well as the east.” Whether or not this was the case is impossible to say, for the Department of National Defence took control of relief work camps nationwide in 1933. This meant Ottawa was

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12 LAC, Parks Canada collection (graphic materials), 1979-195 NPC, box SC 184, Big Bend Highway album.
paying for construction of the entire Big Bend Highway, with the National Parks Branch supervising work on the eastern section and the Canadian Army overseeing the western.\textsuperscript{13}

\textit{Early Proposals for a Park in the Big Bend Country}

It was during the summer of 1932, when BC was in its direst financial straits and looked as though it might abandon work on the Big Bend road project, that the federal government approached the province about protecting a significant natural attraction along of the surveyed right-of-way. In August, J.M. Wardle asked the BC Department of Lands to establish a quarter-mile-wide reserve along 20 miles of the eastern section of the road, between Boat Encampment and the north end of Kinbasket Lake. In this stretch the road would traverse an extensive tract of tall, ancient firs and cedars which Wardle believed would be “very impressive to people from the Prairies and Eastern Canada, who have never seen big trees.” He wanted BC to protect this scenic timber from logging so that it could serve as a natural attraction (or distraction) for motorists who would one day be driving through 200 miles of unpopulated wilderness.\textsuperscript{14}

Wardle’s desire to preserve scenic roadside timber in the Big Bend country as an attraction for future auto tourists was in keeping with the times. Since the end of the Great War, conservationists, natural historians, boosters, and tourism promoters had campaigned (with varying degrees of success) to protect stands of tall, scenic timber in other road-accessible locations on the Pacific slope, including the redwoods of northern

\textsuperscript{13} LAC, RG84-A-2-a Parks Canada, reel T-10445, Wardle to Harkin, 31 August 1932.
\textsuperscript{14} BCA, GR-1222 Premiers’ Papers, box 97, file 2, J.M. Wardle, Chief Engineer to H. Cathcart, Deputy Minister of Lands, 31 August 1932 cited in Cathcart to Wardle, 10 April 1933. The strip Wardle requested in August 1932 was to be a quarter mile wide on each side of the road, as described in box 15, file 7, Cathcart to Pattullo, 4 June 1935. It is worth noting that Chief Engineer Wardle approached the BC government about the scenic timber reserve without first getting approval from J.B. Harkin, commissioner of the National Parks Branch. See LAC, RG84-A-2-a Parks Canada, reel T-10445, Wardle to Harkin, 19 September 1932.
California, the rainforests of Washington’s Olympic peninsula, and Green Timbers south of Vancouver.\textsuperscript{15} Tall timber was not just an asset for the tourism and roadside service industries. It was also laden with symbolism, as a marker of the land’s natural fecundity or virility. During the 1920s there was even an informal competition between Pacific Northwest politicians to show whose forests could produce the tallest flagpole.\textsuperscript{16}

Wardle said nothing to suggest the National Parks Branch wanted a new national park in the Big Bend country. However, provincial politicians and officials in BC’s Department of Lands may have wishfully interpreted his request for a scenic roadside timber reserve as an overture towards the establishment of a fifth national park in the mountains of eastern British Columbia. After all, the situation closely echoed their experience with the Banff-Windermere Highway in the late 1910s. The economic downturn that followed the war had put the province in the position of being unable to complete its section of the touring road between Banff and the Lake Windermere district that it had committed to build in partnership with Ottawa. This dilemma, which is discussed in Chapter Eight, was resolved with an arrangement whereby the federal government agreed to finish BC’s share of the road in exchange for 500 square miles of provincial crown land, which formed the basis for Kootenay National Park. In the early 1930s it seemed reasonable for a similar arrangement to be made with the Big Bend road. Auto tourism had become much more popular during the intervening years, and the road


between Revelstoke and Golden was expected to form a key section of a future Trans-
Canada Highway.¹⁷

British Columbia’s deputy minister of lands avoided answering Wardle’s request
until he had received a report on timber resources in the Big Bend country. The report
concluded that the feasibility of profitable logging in the area north of Kinbasket Lake
was uncertain. The area was very far from sawmills and it was impractical to float logs
down the turbulent Columbia, even at high water. Furthermore, most of the older trees
were riddled with heart and butt rot.¹⁸ With this information in hand, the deputy minister
informed Wardle that the provincial government was not opposed in principle to the
preservation of scenic timber along the Big Bend Highway. However, he pointed out that
implementing the proposed roadside reserve would not be simple.¹⁹ Over the years
numerous timber licenses had been issued in the Big Bend country, including several in
the desired roadside strip between Kinbasket Lake and Boat Encampment. No cutting had
actually been done, for the area was too isolated, but sawmill companies and timber
brokers clung to these licenses as speculative investments, which made it impossible to
say when the relevant timber rights might revert to the province. This was especially true
now that a road was going to provide access to the area. Furthermore, the deputy minister
questioned how future loggers would be expected to get at timber berths located adjacent
to the proposed scenic reserve – a logger’s right to access the berth covered by their
timber license was considered sacrosanct. Cutting skid roads through the proposed timber
reserve was bound to have a deleterious effect on its scenic value.

¹⁷ On the Banff-Windermere Highway and the origins of Kootenay National Park, see Lothian, History of
Canada’s National Parks vol. 1, 58-60.
¹⁸ BCMFL, W.A. Johnston, “Big Bend, Columbia River Reconnaissance” (Victoria: BC Forest Service,
1932).
There the issue remained for the balance of 1933, during which BC’s unpopular Conservative government was wiped out by the Liberals led by Thomas Dufferin “Duff” Pattullo. Pattullo, it is important to note, had been BC’s minister of lands between 1919 and 1926, when the land base for Kootenay National Park had been transferred over the federal government. Thus he was familiar with the idea of providing provincial crown land for national parks in exchange for the federal government completing roads that constitutionally fell under the purview of the province. Pattullo also favoured more active state intervention in the economy through an extensive public works program, and had campaigned on the promise of “work and wages” in place of handouts and relief camps. However, he inherited an empty treasury and large debt that made it difficult to raise new funds. BC therefore continued to rely on federal aid for public works. The Big Bend road, where Ottawa had taken charge of the entire project, was the most glaring example of the province’s fiscal dependency.20

In January 1934 federal Minister of the Interior Thomas G. Murphy wrote directly to Premier Pattullo to apprise him of progress on the Big Bend road project and to draw his personal attention to the National Parks Branch’s desire for a roadside timber reserve between Kinbasket Lake and Boat Encampment. “This Department is naturally interested in the scenic attractions of the Big Bend Highway,” Murphy explained, and the stand of tall timber the road would pass through was “probably the only stretch of virgin timber of fairly large size along the whole route of the Trans-Canada Highway from the Atlantic to the Pacific.” If protected from unsightly logging operations, it would “add very greatly to the beauty and attractiveness of this section of the Trans-Canada Highway.”

strongly of the opinion,” he told the new premier, “that the whole of Canada will be interested in having at least one strip of virgin timber along the Trans-Canada route.” Murphy urged Pattullo to protect the timber, and predicted a “storm of protest from the general public” if BC allowed loggers to mar the forest scenery along the future Big Bend Highway.\footnote{BCA, GR-1222, box 97, file 2, Murphy to Pattullo, 26 January 1934 and 9 June 1934.}

Pattullo agreed that a scenic timber reserve was a good idea, for it would make driving the future highway more appealing to auto tourists. However, he pointed out that the need to buy back valid timber licenses was a major stumbling block to its implementation. It was fine for the National Parks Branch to desire unspoiled forest scenery along the new highway, but unfair to expect the impoverished province to bear the cost of acquiring it. He suggested that if the preservation of tall timber along the Big Bend road was really a matter of national significance, then Ottawa should arrange to purchase the valid timber licenses in the area. By stalling on the scenic reserve and coaxing Murphy to make further expenditures along the road corridor, Pattullo may have hoped to goad the federal government into proposing a new national park in the Big Bend country.\footnote{BCA, GR-1222, box 97, file 2, Pattullo to Murphy, 15 February 1934, forwarding A. Wells Gray, Minister of Lands, memo for Pattullo, 13 Feb 1934.}

Pattullo’s position must have struck Murphy as rather ungrateful, given that Ottawa was paying for all the work on the Big Bend road. Murphy raised the stakes by pointing out that his department had agreed to participate in the project in 1929 on the basis that it was intended “primarily to increase the revenue from tourist traffic.” Therefore it was “of first importance that the scenic advantages of the road be duly capitalized.” Motorists would not find the drive between Golden and Revelstoke an
appealing experience if there were no distinctive scenic or natural attractions along the road, and this called the justification for continued federal involvement in the project into question. “The magnificent stand of virgin timber along this section of the highway is an outstanding feature, so much so that it has been featured in many articles which have appeared in various periodicals and newspapers,” wrote Murphy. The motoring public was expecting to see big timber undisrupted by logging along the Big Bend section of the nascent Trans-Canada Highway. For the province to jeopardize this was tantamount to repudiating the 1929 joint construction agreement with Ottawa. Murphy likely expected this veiled threat to quit work on the Big Bend project would bring Pattullo to heel and convince him to preserve the scenic timber desired by the National Parks Branch.23

If this is what Murphy had expected, he must have been taken aback by the response he received. “The time has come,” British Columbia’s Minister of Public Works Frank MacPherson wrote in November 1934, “when the Canadian National Parks can advantageously assume the whole of the Columbia-Revelstoke Highway, together with a strip of land 1/4 mile wide on either side of the road which will be available for park purposes” [emphasis added].” The provincial government contended that because the construction of the Big Bend Highway was now “wholly a Federal undertaking” and because the completed road would form “an integral part of the National Parks System” by connecting Mount Revelstoke National Park with Banff and Yoho to the east, it was only logical for Ottawa to establish a new national park or parkway along the road and take permanent responsibility for its maintenance. MacPherson stated that as soon as Ottawa agreed to BC’s proposal for a new national park (or parkway) along the Big Bend

23 BCA, GR-1222, box 97, file 2, Murphy to Pattullo, 8 September 1934.
road corridor, legislation would be passed similar to the 1919 bill that had transferred the 500 square miles of provincial crown land to the federal government for the creation of Kootenay National Park. Given that Pattullo had been BC’s minister of lands in 1919, it seems likely that he had a direct hand in this scheme. How exactly the quarter-mile-wide corridor was decided on is unclear, but it clearly indicates that the province wanted to retain control of resources that were located beyond the view of the motoring public.

BC had much to gain and little to lose from such a scheme. Were a national park established along the Big Bend road, the provincial government would be relieved of the cost of maintaining almost all the roads between Revelstoke and the continental divide. Well-heeled auto tourists would also be more likely to drive westward from Banff to visit BC’s central Interior, which would bring increased spending on goods and services, and contribute to the province’s coffers through the gasoline tax. Little would be lost, for the forests of the rugged and unfamiliar Big Bend country were of little commercial value in the days prior to the development of long-haul truck logging techniques. However, the fact that the province offered only a narrow strip of roadside land for the park suggests it was reluctant to relinquish control of the timber resources that would be made accessible when the road was completed.

MacPherson’s proposal came out of the blue, and was received with great surprise in Ottawa. Thomas Murphy and the National Parks Branch had asked for scenic timber to be protected along a 20-mile section of the Big Bend road, but had never expressed a

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24 BCA, GR-1222, box 15, file 7, [Frank M.] MacPherson [Minister of Public Works] to Murphy, 10 November 1934, attached to Department of Public Works to Pattullo, 30 May 1935. It should also be noted that prominent BC politicians and business interests had lobbied the federal government to take over construction of the entire Big Bend Highway project prior to MacPherson’s proposal of November 1934. For example, Senator R.F. Greene, who had represented Kootenay-area ridings in the Conservative provincial government of Richard McBride and the Conservative federal government of Robert Borden corresponded with Prime Minister Bennett on the subject in July 1934. LAC, MG26-K, R.B. Bennett papers, reel M-1336, Greene to Bennett, 26 July 1934; Bennett to Greene, 30 July 1934.
desire to have a national park in the area, let alone maintaining the Big Bend Highway in perpetuity. The federal government did not respond directly to BC’s offer of land for a new national park between Golden and Revelstoke. Instead, in the spring of 1935, Pattullo and members of his cabinet began receiving public requests for the tall timber along the Big Bend Highway to be preserved as per the National Parks Branch’s 1932 request. Revelstoke city council, regional boards of trade, and various western automobile associations all expressed concern that Victoria’s haggling over the scenic roadside timber might have an adverse effect on Ottawa’s willingness to complete the road project. More than 30 miles of the western section still had to be built, and it was widely expected that the Department of Defence would soon return responsibility for relief work camps to the provinces.25 Acting as a political go-between, the Revelstoke Board of Trade informed Pattullo that the province’s proposal for a new national park was considered a non-starter in Ottawa. The federal government had no interest in any arrangement where it would be responsible for maintaining the road.26

Ottawa’s rejection of the province’s proposal for a new national park left the terms of the Big Bend road’s completion up in the air. The National Parks Branch had nearly finished building the eastern half, and the province pleaded for it to take over work on the western section too. In the lead-up to the 1935 construction season, Thomas

25 These groups were also unanimous in their desire for the National Parks Branch to supervise the remaining road construction. Not only were its engineers believed to build better roads than the army and BC’s Department of Public Works, but the living conditions were said to be better in their camps. See for example BCA, GR-1222, box 15, file 7, E.A. Boyle, Secretary, Big Bend Highway Committee, Revelstoke Board of Trade to Pattullo, 13 and 27 April 1935; Thomas King, MLA [Golden] to Pattullo, 19 April 1935. Regarding the widespread expectation that the Canadian Army would not continue operating relief work camps after 1935, see Rajala, “From On-to-Ottawa,” 125.
26 BCA, GR-1222, box 15, file 7, Boyle to Pattullo, 27 April 1935. Also see W.A. Gordon, City Clerk, City of Revelstoke to F.M. MacPherson, Minister of Public Works, 11 May 1935.
Murphy delivered an ultimatum to Pattullo. Murphy pointed out that once the eastern section of the road was completed the federal government would be under no further obligation to work on the Big Bend project. He was willing to have the National Parks Branch complete the project, but only after a satisfactory agreement had been reached between the two governments. Ignoring the province’s November 1934 proposal for a new national park, he laid out three conditions deemed essential for such an agreement. First, the province had to agree to maintain the Big Bend highway if Ottawa completed it. Second, the province had to agree to preserve “in perpetuity” the strip of tall, scenic roadside timber between Kinbasket Lake and Boat Encampment. Third, the province had to agree that “should the Dominion at some time in the future apply for Mount Assiniboine Park area, Mount Robson Park area, a sea level park area, or an area west of Waterton Lakes Park for an extension of [the] National Parks system, the Province will transfer same free of all encumbrance.” The nationalization of Mount Robson and Mount Assiniboine provincial parks was a topic the two governments had been mulling for years.

On its surface, Murphy’s telegram appeared to dispel any possibility of a new national park or parkway in the Big Bend country, for the provincial government’s proposal was completely ignored. However, Pattullo recognized that the completion of the Big Bend road remained linked to the establishment of new national parks in the mountains of British Columbia, as evidenced by Murphy’s third condition. There was still a possibility for a compromise whereby Ottawa could have some or all of the areas that it did desire for national parks provided it also took responsibility for the road.

27 BCA, GR-1222, box 15, file 7, Murphy telegram to Pattullo, 28 May 1935.
between Golden and Revelstoke, whether as a road passing through a new national park or as part of a federally-maintained network of touring roads that would link the national parks in and around the Rockies. The premier tried to stall, requesting time to collect information from his ministers and reiterating that his government would be happy to cooperate as per the terms it had proposed in November 1934. However, Murphy insisted “that definite arrangements be made immediately.”

Pattullo had little choice but to shelve his scheme for a new national park in the Big Bend country. The province was desperate for Ottawa to continue work on the road, and the summer construction season and a federal election were both fast approaching. The provincial government’s offer of a strip of roadside land had been rebuffed, and if an agreement was not reached soon the terms of the road’s completion might need to be negotiated with a new administration in Ottawa. Pattullo’s ministers reported no insurmountable problems meeting the conditions laid out in Murphy’s telegrams, although the Department of Public Works optimistically recommended that he agree to maintain the Big Bend road only to the extent it did not form part of a future “parks highway system.”

Pattullo telegraphed the minister of the interior in the first days of June and agreed to maintain the completed highway and preserve the scenic roadside timber between Kinbasket Lake and Boat Encampment. The only point on which he equivocated was the question of turning over provincial parks and other crown land for national parks.

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28 BCA, GR-1222, box 15, file 7, Pattullo to Murphy, 30 May 1935; Murphy telegram to Pattullo, 1 June 1935.
29 Although the federal government had agreed to help build the Big Bend Highway under the Mackenzie King administration of 1926-1929, King was known for his lack of interest in highway building or assisting the provinces with their own infrastructure projects. The expectation that King would soon be prime minister again may have driven Pattullo to conclude a deal with Thomas Murphy as soon as possible. See Monaghan, Canada’s New Main Street, 14-15.
He said his government would be “glad to cooperate” on this matter, but that further
discussion would be required regarding the developments Ottawa would undertake in
exchange.\textsuperscript{30} This was enough to satisfy Murphy, and responsibility for the relief work
camps on the western section of the Big Bend road was transferred from the Canadian
Army to the National Parks Branch.\textsuperscript{31} In the spring of 1936 the provincial government
finally put the tall roadside timber between Kinbasket Lake and Boat Encampment under
the protection of a crown reserve. Congratulatory messages poured in from tourism
promoters, boards of trade, and motoring associations, thanking Pattullo for his foresight
in preserving such an important natural attraction.\textsuperscript{32}

Discussions about parks, scenery, and natural attractions along the Big Bend
Highway disappeared from Premier Pattullo’s correspondence with the federal
government after R.B. Bennett’s Conservatives lost the October 1935 election to the
Liberals. However, the failure of BC’s 1934 park proposal did not put an end to the idea
of a protected scenic corridor between Golden and Revelstoke. Boosters, tourism
promoters, business owners, and park supporters lobbied for scenic and natural landscape
features to be preserved along the entire road. For example, in 1937 the Canadian
National Parks Association (CNPA) asserted that the motoring public had a “moral right”
to see “alluring forest scenery” when travelling along the future Big Bend Highway. The
CNPA argued that publicly-funded automobile roads in the mountains of western Canada
should be used to “attract the world’s tourist trade” rather than “provide cheap

\textsuperscript{30} BCA, GR-1222, box 15, file 7, Pattullo telegram to Murphy, 4 June 1935.
\textsuperscript{31} The transfer formally occurred on July 6, 1935, eleven days after federal Order-in-Council PC #1765
allocated $275,000 for the continuation of work on the western section of the road. On the politics of region
and the ‘deserving’ unemployed that were involved in meshing the Army and National Parks Branch’s Big
Bend workforces, see LAC, RG24 Department of National Defence, Unemployment Relief, vol. 3145,
Project 101.
\textsuperscript{32} BCA, GR-1222, box 15, file 7, Murphy to Pattullo, 19 June 1935; Pattullo to Murphy, 10 July 1935;
Alberta Motor Association to Pattullo, 16 July 1936.
transportation for the lumberman,” and proposed that logging be forbidden “within sight of the highway.” Ironically, the CNPA also suggested that the National Parks Branch should pressure Victoria to establish a 400- to 800-foot-wide provincial park along the length of the Big Bend road.33

Another advocate for scenic preservation along the Big Bend Highway was Revelstoke booster Earle Dickey. Dickey worked for Revelstoke’s municipal power utility as a electrical engineer, and was also a photographer, the chairman of the local board of trade’s tourism and publicity bureau, and a correspondent for the *Vancouver Sun.*34 In a story submitted to the *Sun* in June 1937, he argued that a “fringe” of roadside scenery needed to be protected along the entire highway corridor between Revelstoke and Golden in order to stave off the “real menace of forest mutilization [sic]” posed by the logging companies about to gain access to the Big Bend country. The following month Dickey spoke before Revelstoke city council to promote the cause of roadside scenic preservation. People accustomed to living in a heavily forested district were likely to overlook “the scenic value of trees,” he warned councillors. “Does an auto trip from Osoyoos to Trail, or from Kamloops to Ashcroft appeal very strongly to you?” he asked, invoking two arid and sparsely forested areas of the Interior. “Would the prospect of a motor journey through bleak, burnt-up Saskatchewan fill you with enthusiasm? I don’t think so! Yet visualize our Big Bend Highway with the timber gone and we have just

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33 Blackened Stumps,” *Canadian National Parks Association Newsletter* 43 (Fall 1937); LAC, RG84-A-2-a Parks Canada, reel T-10445, W. Selby Walker, Executive Secretary, CNPA to J.B. Harkin, 15 April 1935. The CNPA had already played an important role in improving transportation in the Selkirk Mountains, having convinced the federal Board of Railway Commissioners to order the CPR to improve its facilities for shipping motorists’ automobiles between Revelstoke and Golden in the early 1930s. These activities are described in Walker to Harkin, 17 December 1935.

34 On Earle Dickey’s promotional and postcard photography in the Revelstoke area, see Cathy English, *Reflections: Four Decades of Photography by Earle and Estelle Dickey* (Revelstoke: Revelstoke Museum and Archives, 2010).
such another picture.” Dickey believed the dense, damp forests of the Big Bend country could make driving between Revelstoke and Golden a special experience, singular even amongst the surrounding national parks, which were characterized by sparser forest cover. Its appeal to the motoring public would be greatly reduced were evidence of logging or other industrial activities visible by the road.35

When addressing Revelstoke city council, Earle Dickey emphasized that he was not alone in advocating the preservation of scenery along the Big Bend Highway. He had the backing of the local board of trade and the local branch of the Native Sons of British Columbia, a nativist organization that usually dedicated itself to promoting BC’s Anglo-Celtic heritage.36 He also claimed to represent the general public opinion around town, telling council that many Revelstoke residents had approached him to indicate their support for preserving forest scenery and promoting auto tourism in the region. Local boosters and merchants had been cognizant of auto touring’s economic value for two decades, as shown by their lobbying for the construction of a mountain parkway in Mount Revelstoke National Park in the 1910s. However, much like the Princeton board of trade on the other side of the Interior, they looked to the motoring public as an economic lifeline following the collapse of the forestry and mining industries in the early 1930s.37 Much like the board of trade in Princeton, they came to see the preservation of

35 BCA, MS-0560 William Earle Dickey papers, box 1, file 1, Earle Dickey to William Short, provincial editor, Vancouver Sun, 22 June 1937; “Revelstoke Fights to Save Timbers,” unidentified newspaper clipping from a Thursday after 22 July 1937.

36 While historians have examined the Native Sons’ efforts to protect and promote historical sites they deemed essential to the province’s colonial heritage, there has been no mention of any involvement in campaigns to preserve natural attractions. See Robert Leece, “Making BC History: The Native Sons of British Columbia,” BC Historical News 29, 1 (Winter 1995-96): 30-33; Forrest Pass, “The Wondrous Story and Traditions of the Country: The Natives Sons of British Columbia and the Role of Myth in the Formation of an Urban Middle Class,” BC Studies 151 (Fall 2006): 3-38.

37 Revelstoke merchants had shown interest in auto tourism even before the town received its first road link to the ‘outside world.’ In 1916 they had convinced the federal government to establish Mount Revelstoke
roadside scenery – whether in the form of a park or otherwise – as being good for business, for it would help lure pleasure travellers who would purchase food, gas, lodging, and other goods and services. The better the quality of the highway, both in terms of engineering and the scenery and natural attractions along it, the better business would be for local commercial interests. They supported preserving the scenic and natural landscapes along the Big Bend road corridor, even if it meant restricting how timber resources could be used. Neither Dickey nor the Canadian National Parks Association publicly called for a new park to be established along the Big Bend Highway, but it is noteworthy how their arguments in favour of protecting natural landscape features echoed the Pattullo government’s proposal of November 1934.

Driving the Big Bend Highway

Work on the Big Bend road project plodded along between 1935 and 1939. The defeat of R.B. Bennett’s Conservative government by the Liberals under Mackenzie King did not change Ottawa’s parsimonious view of public works projects. Road building was still treated as a make-work project, rather than a way to stimulate consumption in both the short and long terms, and the use of heavy machinery and efficient construction techniques was kept to a minimum. Construction proceeded with the same lack of urgency as it had since 1930.38

38 Monaghan, Canada’s New Main Street, 14-15.
Not only did the western section of the road need to be completed, but much of what had already been built between Revelstoke and Boat Encampment had to be realigned and reconstructed to meet the National Parks Branch’s standards of grade, curvature, width, and permanence. When a National Parks Branch engineer had inspected the western section prior to its handover by the Canadian Army, he deemed only 22 of the 58 miles built north of Revelstoke to be passable to civilian automobiles.39 Photographs show the western section looking more like a logging or mining road than a touring road, with hairpin curves, inadequate drainage, narrow, crooked bridges, and grass growing between ruts in the road surface.40 Completion of the highway was also slowed by the need to build a large steel bridge over the Columbia River at Boat Encampment, and the fact that the National Parks Branch continued doing much of the work on a relief basis. Most of the reconstruction was carried out by crews using hand tools to clear brush, level out sidehills, dig ditches, and enlarge culverts.

The Big Bend Highway opened to the motoring public on 29 June 1940, a full decade after construction had begun. There was much fanfare in Golden and Revelstoke in the lead-up to the opening ceremony. Four days before the opening, the Revelstoke Review published a special souvenir issue that described how the town was decorated with banners and festive lighting for the occasion. It boasted that many local businesses had undergone “face lifting operations” in anticipation of an influx of auto tourists,

39 LAC, RG84-A-2-a Parks Canada, Reel T-10445, road superintendent to General McNaughton, 16 November, 1934, cited in Deputy Minister of Interior, memo re: Big Bend Road to J.B. Harkin, 28 November 1934.
40 LAC, Parks Canada collection (graphic materials), 1979-195 NPC, box SC184, Big Bend Highway album.
including service stations, hotels, and two new autocourts. The opening ceremony was held at Boat Encampment and was presided over by Premier Pattullo. It was attended by several hundred tourism promoters and highway boosters from the Coast, the Interior, and the Prairies, including a “See BC First Caravan” that was jointly sponsored by the Vancouver Chamber of Commerce and the BC Government Travel Bureau. In order to maximize publicity around the event, a party of journalists had been given special permission to drive between Revelstoke and Golden prior to the official opening of the road so that they could have their stories ready for publication on that date. A souvenir program deemed the completion of the highway an event of no less national significance than the driving of the last spike of the Canadian Pacific Railway near Revelstoke in 1885. With the Big Bend Highway finally open to the motoring public, the only ‘gap’ remaining in a trans-Canada automobile road was in northern Ontario, where crews were working to complete a road through 150 miles of rock and muskeg.

The opening ceremony for the Big Bend Highway also saw the unofficial unveiling of what would become the route’s best-known roadside curiosity. While working as a timekeeper at one of the relief work camps, Revelstoke resident Peter Fuoco had noticed a large cedar stump that vaguely resembled a human head. In his spare time he carved out eyes, a nose, and a mouth, and fashioned a wide-brimmed hat out of scrap lumber. Impressed by Fuoco’s handiwork, the construction foreman had the 10-foot-tall

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41 “New Face Given City for Big Bend Opening,” *Revelstoke Review Big Bend Souvenir Edition*, 25 June 1940, section one, 7. Tourism promoters on both sides of the Rockies had been ‘boosting’ the highway for several years by that point, and boasting about how the “finest adjectives [were] in demand” to describe its scenery. H.H.C. ‘Torchy’ Anderson, “Steadily Push Big Bend Highway to Completion,” *Calgary Herald*, 7 August 1939, 1-2.

42 Ibid.

43 VPLSC, British Columbia Government Travel Bureau, “Official Program: Fourth Annual ‘See BC First’ Motor Caravan” (Victoria: BC Government Travel Bureau, 1940); Monaghan, *Canada’s New Main Street*, 23.
‘head’ guillotined from the base of the stump and trucked to Boat Encampment, where it was positioned atop a bank that overlooked the approach to the steel bridge over the Columbia. The head was accompanied by sign that warned passersby: “Don’t be Wooden Headed! Drive Carefully: You’ll live to enjoy the scenery more and longer.” This whimsical, eye-catching roadside colossus reminding motorists about traffic safety; it also marked the apex of the Big Bend. As the approximate midway point between Golden and Revelstoke, Wooden Head indicated to motorists that they were turning back south, towards civilization.44

The BC Government Travel Bureau made the Big Bend Highway the centrepiece of its 1940 tourism promotion campaign. This was part of a stream of advertising that Canadian governments directed towards American tourists during the first years of World War Two; even at war, the province was promoting itself as a destination for auto touring.45 On billboards and in brochures and magazine advertisements the road was described as “a splendid new highway extending for 200 miles through a scenic wonderland,” providing travellers with “a thrilling travelogue of mountain peaks, glaciers, and entrancing views of the mighty Columbia River.”46 A few of these promotional materials mentioned the area’s ties to the nineteenth-century fur trade, which had been a favourite historical theme amongst western Canadian tourism promoters since the 1920s due to its connotations of discovery and adventure. Most, however, emphasized the primeval nature of the Big Bend country and the way the new road offered the

45 Dawson, Selling British Columbia, 122; also chapter 4 on the economic importance of promoting BC as a destination for American tourists during the early war years.
46 UBCSC, British Columbia Government Travel Bureau, Advertising Campaign for Promotion of Tourist Travel, 1940 (Victoria: BC Government Travel Bureau, 1940).
motoring public a chance to experience a wilderness that had previously been inaccessible to all but the hardiest adventurer, a “virgin territory” that offered “a unique travel experience with all the thrill which attaches to the new and unexpected.” “The scenery here is magnificent,” one pamphlet boasted. “[E]very tangent of the highway reveals fresh vistas of glittering peaks, rank behind rank into the dimness of infinity, a vast new playground thrown open for the first time by the completion of the Big Bend section of the Trans-Canada Highway.”

For all the publicity about the new road and the landscapes that were visible along it, doubts soon began to emerge about how splendid and thrilling the drive around the Selkirk Mountains really was. The trip between Golden and Revelstoke was an endurance test, taking from six to eight hours. In many places the twisting, undulating, gravel-surfaced road was barely two lanes wide. In hot, dry weather it was incredibly dusty, which made driving unpleasant and sometimes hazardous. Furthermore, the dust raised by passing vehicles coated the roadside foliage, making the immediate scenery drab and lifeless. The provincial government’s promotional materials neglected to mention that in 1940 there were no services available in the “200 miles of virgin territory” traversed by the Big Bend Highway, although plans were afoot to develop a few strategically located lodges and gas stations. The Revelstoke Review acknowledged the absence of roadside services, but argued this was one of the new road’s most appealing features:

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48 The dusty, scenery-deadening conditions along the road are recalled in Donovan Clemson, “Goodbye to the Big Bend,” BC Motorist 9, 1 (January-February 1970), 4; Harvey, Carving the Western Path, 99; Parkin, “Disappearing Highway,” 31.

49 A May 1940 BC Department of Lands report on the suitability of lands adjacent to the Big Bend Highway for gas stations and other roadside services identified three points as best: Kinbasket Lake on the
Today your modern traveller is anxious to penetrate into the unknown [where] nothing spoils the wilderness […] For those who think that neon lights and gaily illustrated billboards are the acme of modern accomplishment and living, the Big Bend is not their highway. For on this carefully planned route there is not even a humble ‘hot dog’ advertisement. You are not harassed by being directed to Mac’s or Joe’s fine foods or to dine-and-dance nite spots […] These modern outcroppings of the great national desire for travel, food, and entertainment simply do not exist, are not allowed to mar the perfection of a virgin wilderness.  

Despite the Department of Public Works’ best efforts to keep the road surface in good shape, washboard and potholes were common, and rocks and debris fell onto the road in numerous places. Detours and delays were frequent at creek and river crossings, where heavy runoff from the looming mountainsides damaged culverts and bridges. Even during the summer months, weather conditions in the mountains could suddenly turn wintry, posing another hazard for travellers. Furthermore, the Big Bend Highway was only open half the year: it was closed to the motoring public from late October to mid May due to heavy snow. Until the road was clear, motorists who needed to get between Revelstoke and Golden had to ship their cars by rail, just as they had done in the late 1920s and 1930s.

As early as 1941 there were hints that the Big Bend Highway might fail to become popular with the motoring public. “I have just been over that stretch of road,” one BC resident wrote to Premier Pattullo, “and have been told that you have had the consummate nerve to spend money advertising the Big Bend in American newspapers
and magazines. You should be ashamed of yourself!” 51 Austin Cross, travel writer for the
Ottawa Citizen, savaged the new road in his series of articles on the nascent Trans-
Canada Highway. “It is positively the loneliest road in North America,” he complained,
with “not a town, not a village, not a hamlet, not two houses together, not a suggestion of
civilization.” Structurally, the road was “villainous [...] built by people whose minds
must be back in the 1920s.” Instead of having a smooth surface and wide verges, like
most major highways in densely-populated southern Ontario, the road was rough, narrow,
and winding. Instead of every tangent of the highway revealing new scenic vistas, a
seemingly endless and impenetrable forest crowded claustrophobically close to the right-
of-way, with open views few and far between. In terms of scenery, Cross declared “the
much-touted Big Bend Highway could play second fiddle to many another British
Columbia turnpike.” He concluded with a word of advice for his readers: “Next time
anybody suggests going over the Big Bend Highway by car, I’ll tell you what to do. You
run to the freight agent at Golden, tell him to put your car on a freight train, that you are
riding [train] No. 3 over the Selkirks, and that you’ll pick up your car in Revelstoke.” 52

There were even rumblings of dissatisfaction in Revelstoke, where boosters had
been promoting the road for years and bending over backwards to present every aspect of
it in a positive light. For example, one month after the official opening ceremony, the
Revelstoke Board of Trade reported to Premier Pattullo that “travel over the new
highway is exceeding our wildest expectations and there have been over four hundred
cars a day using this road since it opened.” However, they pointed out, “not a day goes by
that we do not have two or three accidents.” This was not the fault of the highway itself,

51 BCA, GR-1222, box 34, file 5. W.B. Hill to Pattullo, 31 August 1941.
52 Austin F. Cross, “The Big Bend Highway,” Ottawa Citizen, 20 December 1942.
the board asserted, but rather the drivers, “most of whom are from the Prairies and not accustomed to driving mountain roads.” The following summer, a Revelstoke resident who drove to Golden and back reported that there were “too many chuck holes and too much washboard to make the journey a happy one.” He believed that with some improvement the new road could be “a humdinger of a tourist attraction,” but that in its present state it did a disservice to BC’s reputation with the motoring public. As evidence, he cited an encounter with an American motorist who had told him “one trip over that road was enough for a lifetime.”

By the summer of 1941 the Revelstoke Review was full of worrisome stories and anxious editorials about the highway. Some of the concerns expressed seemed relatively minor. For example, an editorial titled “Road Signs Needed” claimed that travellers who came over the unfamiliar Big Bend Highway were “ready to launch a vigorous complaint over the absence of adequate signs.” Motorists wanted signs to identify hazards like sharp curves and narrow bridge approaches, as well as points of scenic, natural, and historical interest. Two weeks later a far more serious topic was being addressed after two women from Winnipeg drowned when the car they were travelling in struck a boulder that had fallen onto the road, went over an embankment, and landed upside down in the Columbia. This followed a similar accident the previous fall, when a family of three on their way from Vancouver to Calgary died after their car went over an embankment north of Revelstoke. The editor of the Review called for greater safety measures that would

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53 BCA, GR-1222, box 34, file 5, Revelstoke Board of Trade to Pattullo, 21 July 1940. On Prairie residents’ supposedly hazardous driving habits on the Big Bend Highway and BC’s mountain roads in general, see “The Prairie Motorist,” Winnipeg Evening Tribune, 14 September 1940; Golden Memories Book Committee, Golden Memories (Golden, BC: Golden and District Historical Society, 2000), 233.

54 “Tourist Thinks Big Bend Highway Needs Much Improvement,” Revelstoke Review, 17 July 1941.

55 Revelstoke Review, 24 July 1941.
help protect the new road’s reputation with the motoring public. The Big Bend section of
the Trans-Canada Highway was very much in the public eye, he wrote. Even though it
was safe provided it was driven the way a mountain road ought to be, “it will have to be
guarded as much as possible against unfavorable publicity.” Anything that could be done
to increase the impression of safety would help. “Prairie motorists are not accustomed to
driving on mountain roads and the smallest incline contributes to their mental hazard,” he
asserted. “One way to eliminate much of this inherent fear would be to place guard rails
along sections where the highway skirts the Columbia.”

No doubt the editor of the
Review was worried the long-awaited highway might get a bad reputation that would
dissuade pleasure travellers from driving over it. For those who wanted to increase
Revelstoke’s tourist and roadside service trade, the only thing worse than having the
highway labelled boring or unappealing would be for motorists to speak of it as an unsafe
‘killer’ road. Boosters and businesses concerned about the Big Bend Highway’s image
with the motoring public did not have to look far to find roads with bad reputations.
Several sections of road in the BC Interior, including the highway through the Fraser and
Thompson canyons, had already earned fearsome reputations due to their steep grades,
sheer drops, winding alignments, propensity for rockfall, and history of spectacular


56 Revelstoke Review, 7 August 1941; “Two Winnipeg Women Drown,” Winnipeg Evening Tribune, 29
July 1941; “3 Die in BC Crash,” Winnipeg Evening Tribune, 2 October 1940, 2.
57 See BCA, GR-1222, boxes 24, 33, and 34 for complaints about dangerous conditions on BC’s Interior
roads during the late 1930s and early 1940s. On the canyon highway’s reputation for dangerous traffic and
geological instability, see Craig, Trucking; A.J. Dalrymple, “Completion of Hope-Princeton link is a Boon
to BC Farmers,” Farm and Ranch Review, 1 December 1949, 24; Septer, Flooding and Landslide Events.
A Gambit Towards a New National Park

Despite the early bad publicity for the Big Bend Highway, or perhaps because of it, Premier Pattullo made another attempt to get Ottawa to take partial responsibility for improving and maintaining the road. In an election campaign speech to a crowd in Revelstoke in August 1941, Pattullo promised he would press the federal government to finish the Big Bend Highway “in a permanent manner.” Specifically, he wanted Ottawa to pay the estimated one million dollar cost of paving the road. This was not just an empty promise to local motorists and business interests who were concerned about the reputation of ‘their’ long-awaited road: Pattullo actually followed up on it. However, it was difficult for BC to obtain the political leverage necessary to extract such a commitment from the federal government now that the road was open, gas and tire rationing were in place, and the national economy was geared towards the war effort.

When pondering how to get Ottawa to pay for improvements to the Big Bend Highway, Pattullo must have reflected on how the situation with parks, roads, and natural resources in the Big Bend country had evolved since the mid 1930s. When he had become premier, the National Parks Branch had been lobbying to have scenic timber preserved along the northeastern portion of the road, but had shied away when the province offered a narrow strip of land for a linear national park or parkway between Revelstoke and Golden. However, there was clearly a lingering interest in absorbing Mount Robson and Mount Assiniboine provincial parks into the national park system, as had been indicated in Thomas Murphy’s 1935 telegrams laying out Ottawa’s conditions.

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58 Revelstoke Review, 7 August 1941.
for completing the western section of the Big Bend road. The province had little to lose by turning over these parks, but past discussions of this idea had been sidetracked by disputes about mineral resources and the federal government’s insistence that Mount Robson and Mount Assiniboine were too small to become national parks in and of themselves.\(^59\) However, this could be interpreted as implying that the federal government would be inclined to take over significantly larger areas. Thus one possible way to get Ottawa to take partial responsibility for improving the Big Bend Highway was to establish a large new provincial park in the Big Bend country and then make it available to the federal government as a national park. A new national park astride the Big Bend section of the Trans-Canada Highway could even be justified as a war asset: by drawing more American auto tourists to western Canada, it would bring in hard currency that could help finance Canadian military purchases.\(^60\)

The creation of provincial parks remained a cavalier process in BC during the early 1940s, and Pattullo had the executive authority to establish a new park that might prove tempting to Ottawa. According to his biographer, Pattullo was a firm believer that brevity was a virtue in day-to-day government affairs, and made many policy decisions “instantly, rather than pondering them at length.”\(^61\) Abruptly, with little consultation, and in the middle of an election campaign, Premier Pattullo issued an executive order in mid-

\(^{59}\) In fact, such a move would be popular with voters in northern BC, where boosters and businesses had been lobbying for the nationalization of Mount Robson Park in the belief it would spur construction of a road through the Yellowhead Pass. Some of the correspondence on this topic is reproduced in Marilyn Wheeler, *The Robson Valley Story: A Century to Remember* (McBride: Sternwheeler Press, 2008), 661-662.

\(^{60}\) The federal government was already arguing that the Big Bend section of the emergent Trans Canada Highway would play a vitally important role in mobilizing the western national parks as war assets. See “Canadian Parks as War Asset,” *Winnipeg Evening Tribune*, 26 April 1940, 17. The importance attached to luring American tourist dollars northward during the early years of World War Two is discussed in Alisa Apostle, “Canadian Vacations Unlimited: The Canadian Government Tourism Industry, 1934-1959” PhD dissertation, Queen’s University (2003), chapter 3; Dawson, *Selling British Columbia*, 120-126.

September 1941 that created a huge new Class A provincial park in the Big Bend country. It was named Hamber, after Lieutenant-Governor Eric Hamber, a former timber baron.62

Hamber Provincial Park consisted of archetypal British Columbia wilderness. It was mountainous, glaciated, densely forested, cleft by icy, fast-running watercourses, and uninhabited except for a couple of trappers. The park was 2.4 million acres in size, making it considerably larger than Banff National Park. Its boundaries encompassed the eastern slope of the Selkirks and the western slope of the Rockies (and thus the eastern half of the Big Bend Highway), extending from the CPR mainline in the south to the vicinity of the Yellowhead Pass and the Canadian National Railways mainline in the north. Large areas of the park had never been surveyed or accurately mapped. Perhaps most importantly, Hamber bordered up against Mount Robson Provincial Park in the north, Jasper and Banff national parks on the east, and Glacier and Yoho national parks in the south. The archival records do not explain how the boundaries of the park were determined, but the fact that it connected so many existing parks suggests that it was intentionally designed as a kind of strategic land bridge that the federal government would be unable to say ‘no’ to.

Pattullo must have felt confident this magnanimous (and spontaneous) gesture would finally convince Ottawa to take over BC’s provincial parks in the Rockies, for an

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62 Order-in-Council #1305, 16 September 1941. Hamber Park was created by an executive order because the Legislature had been dissolved on 21 July in preparation for an October election. The fact that Pattullo waited until after the dissolution of the Legislature to create a provincial park as large and strategically located as Hamber suggests he may have been involved in backroom negotiations with the federal government regarding its takeover as a national park. The only trace of consultation with his ministers or staff is a report by the deputy minister of lands which described the proposed park’s boundaries and stated that “available information does not disclose any very valuable natural resources capable of profitable development in this area.” BCA, GR-1991, reel 1754, H. Cathcart, memo for A. Wells Gray [Minister of Lands], 10 September 1941.
unbroken chain of national parks covering both slopes from Mount Robson in the north to Radium Hot Springs in the south was bound to prove a great tourist draw, even in wartime. Underlying this gesture was the expectation that if the federal government did take over Hamber and BC’s other provincial parks in the Rockies, it would be obliged to improve and maintain at least half of the Big Bend Highway, which traversed Hamber for nearly 100 miles between Boat Encampment and the vicinity of Golden. A new automobile road through the Yellowhead Pass in northern BC was another possible expectation. It had also been suggested that a road up the Canoe River valley between Boat Encampment and the Yellowhead Pass might one day form a jumping-off point for a road to Alaska, which was one of Pattullo’s favourite pet projects.63

There was surprisingly little fanfare about the creation of Hamber Park, which was in sharp contrast to the outpouring of publicity for the opening of the Big Bend Highway the previous summer. In fact, aside from a booklet that contained vague descriptions of the Big Bend country’s geology and role in the fur trade, the provincial government appears to have made absolutely no effort to promote the enormous new park. There were no stories about it in the Vancouver dailies, or, even more surprisingly, in the weeklies in Revelstoke, Golden, and Banff. Only the Canadian National Parks Association seemed to take notice: its 1941 newsletter reported that BC had made the “valuable scenic area” located between the main national and provincial parks in the Rockies and Selkirks into a provincial park.64 Given that Hamber had been created in order to be handed over to Ottawa for a national park, the provincial government may

64 “Progress Report 1941,” Canadian National Parks Association Newsletter 113 (1941).
have intentionally kept quiet about it so that its transfer to the federal government could be announced as a *fait accompli*.

However, Pattullo’s gambit soon fell apart. The federal government showed no interest in taking over Hamber or any of BC’s other provincial parks in the fall of 1941. Not only was the war effort the most pressing matter, but Mackenzie King wanted to have national parks spread around the country, rather than concentrated in the mountains of BC and Alberta. Indeed, in 1938 King’s minister responsible for national parks had informed BC’s minister of lands that funds were unlikely to be forthcoming for more national parks in the Rockies.65 But probably the most important factor in Hamber’s failure as a gambit towards a new national park in the Big Bend country was a lack of opportunity to discuss the subject. Duff Pattullo’s government won its third term in power in the fall 1941 provincial election, but with a substantially smaller margin of victory than had been expected. On December 3, at the provincial Liberal party convention, Pattullo was unceremoniously pushed out of the premiership by members of his own government, not even three months after Hamber Provincial Park had been established. Pattullo’s lieutenant and long-time finance minister John Hart was installed as premier at the head of a Liberal-Conservative coalition that would govern BC until 1951.66

It is unclear whether a tentative proposal for Hamber to be incorporated into the national park system was made before Patullo’s abrupt departure from power. Either way, losing the man who had been the architect of the scheme to have a new, highway-

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66 Fisher, *Duff Pattullo*, 343-351.
accessible national park in BC’s Big Bend country would likely have scuttled any plans that had been discussed. Then, just four days after Pattullo was pushed out as premier, Japan attacked the American Navy’s Pacific fleet at Pearl Harbor. In September 1941, when the United States had not been directly involved in the war, it might have seemed a fair gamble that the Canadian government would look favourably on the establishment of an enormous new park along the route of the nascent Trans-Canada Highway, for it could have served an asset by helping lure American auto tourists northwards, thereby bringing in hard currency that was vitally important to Canada’s war effort.67 However, that all changed in the first week of December 1941. After the United States had been drawn into the war and its enormous number of automobile owners were bound to have their own pleasure travel curtailed, the immediate economic rationale for establishing Hamber Provincial Park and protecting scenic and natural landscape features along the Big Bend Highway had been lost.

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67 Dawson, *Selling British Columbia*, 120-126. It is worth noting that when Pattullo had visited Revelstoke in August 1941, just weeks prior to Hamber’s creation, he had been approached by a local delegation of business owners who were concerned about the need to make the Big Bend Highway more appealing to auto tourists. *Revelstoke Review*, 7 August 1941, 1.
Chapter 7

Long, Wild, and Boring:
The Failure of Both Hamber Park and the Big Bend Highway, 1941-1973

This chapter examines Hamber Provincial Park’s protracted decline and eventual failure, a trajectory that began almost immediately after the park was created. It also lingers in the Big Bend country after the park was eviscerated in 1961 in order to show what happened to the region’s environment once it was out of the motoring public’s view. The previous chapter showed that Hamber’s origins were closely wrapped up with the politics of road construction and the perceived economic value of natural roadside scenery, and those themes are present in this chapter as well. However, the main focus is on how road access transformed the isolated Big Bend country. At the same time the Big Bend Highway brought the motoring public into the region and allowed them to contemplate nature by the road, it also allowed loggers and sawmill operators to contemplate profitable timber cutting in the area, and engineers to imagine the possibility of building dams on the Columbia River. Prior to the mid 1930s, logging and mining had effectively been impossible in that isolated region due to the difficulty of getting equipment in and raw materials out. Completion of the highway between Golden and Revelstoke in 1940 opened up a whole new realm of possibilities, making the Big Bend country a contested terrain. The motoring public’s dislike of the long, monotonous Big Bend Highway ultimately helped tip the scales in favour of industrial uses.

During British Columbia’s postwar resource boom Hamber Park was subjected to many of the same pressures from logging and mining companies as Manning, the other
large provincial park in the Interior that was traversed by an arterial highway. However, Hamber proved far more susceptible to their advances than did Manning. This was in large part due to the Big Bend Highway’s bad reputation with the motoring public and the Parks Division’s decision not to cultivate roadside attractions in the park or even indicate its existence. The chapter contends that the motoring public’s negative impressions of nature by the road in the Big Bend country left Hamber Park vulnerable to incursions by industrial resource extraction and megaproject schemes.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, a handful of historians and park advocates have touched on Hamber Park’s history, but only on its truncation in 1961, giving the impression that this was the result of rapacious resource extraction companies pressuring an acquiescent state into freeing up forest land for logging and hydroelectric development.¹ However, no one has asked how such a large, accessible, and strategically located park could be so vulnerable to these industrial incursions, especially at a time when the popularity of BC’s provincial parks was growing by leaps and bounds. This chapter shows that the motoring public’s experience of nature by the road along the Big Bend Highway corridor was the key to how the Parks Division managed Hamber Park during the 1940s and 1950s, and also to British Columbians’ lack of familiarity with the park. It shows that Hamber’s failure was made possible by the antipathy that motorists and the Parks Division held towards the long, monotonous road.

Figure 7.1: Hamber Provincial Park in relation to the Big Bend Highway and other parks in the Rocky and Selkirk Mountains. From the pamphlet British Columbia Lands Branch, “Hamber Park, British Columbia, Canada” (Victoria: Queen’s Printer, 1942).
Early Responses to Hamber Park

In the last days of 1941, the provincial government found itself stuck with an enormous, largely unknown provincial park of questionable utility, and without Duff Pattullo, who had been the architect of the scheme to have it incorporated into the national park system. After the loss of Pattullo, there was little enthusiasm for Hamber Park elsewhere in the provincial government, including in the Forest Service, which had been responsible for provincial parks since 1939. Pattullo had not consulted with senior Forest Service officials prior to issuing the executive order that established Hamber Park, and thus news of its creation came as a surprise to them. Not only had their professional expertise been slighted, but Hamber conflicted with the Forest Service’s plans to reconstruct the Interior forest industry on a mechanized, sustained yield basis, for it locked up large amounts of timber that had only recently been made accessible by the Big Bend Highway.

The idea of implementing the principles of sustained yield forestry in BC had been debated since in the late 1920s, when it had become clear that the province’s forests were being cut at a rate much higher than natural regeneration. To avoid rapid depletion of forest resources and the potential collapse of the provincial forest industry, the rate of cutting and rate of regeneration had to be balanced over the long term, thus providing a sustained yield of timber, profits, jobs, and government revenue. Sustained yield forestry involved scientific understanding of forests and tighter government regulation of timber cutting in order to achieve social and economic stability and the best long-term use of the
province’s most abundant natural resource. It was a conservationist policy, concerned with efficiency and long-term profitability rather than habitat, ecology, or biodiversity.²

Ernest C. Manning was widely regarded as progressive and conservation-minded during his six-year tenure as BC’s chief forester, and in addition to promoting provincial parks he did much to further dialogue on the subject of sustained yield forestry. However, it was under C.D. Orchard, who became chief forester after Manning’s untimely death in 1941, that the first formal proposals on the topic were made to the premier and cabinet. The key policy change resulting from these discussions was that in the early 1950s the provincial government started offering forestry companies large-scale, long-term timber tenure on crown land in the form of tree farm licenses. In exchange, the license holders were expected to make major investments in production-boosting logging technology and processing facilities that would put the crisis-prone forest industry on a more stable long-term footing.³ This restructuring of the forest industry was one of the cornerstones of Fordism in postwar BC, and had profound social, cultural, economic, and environmental implications, particularly in the hinterlands of the Interior.⁴

The implementation of sustained yield policies was still many years away in 1941, but even amidst the frenzy of wartime logging there was a growing consensus about the need for a long-term view of forestry in BC. Many believed that the provincial government should take an active role in facilitating production by doing reforestation work, conducting scientific research, educating the public about fire hazards, and, most concretely, by building and maintaining expensive fixed infrastructure like highways and

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³ Ibid.; Drushka, Tie Hackers, chapters 7-8; Hak, Capital and Labour, chapter 2.
⁴ Ibid.; Barman, West Beyond the West, 285-287.
forest access roads, which would reduce the forest industry’s reliance on seasonally-navigable waterways for moving timber from the place where it was cut to the place where it was processed. However, during the early 1940s the idea of restructuring the province’s forest industry along sustained yield lines did not necessarily point towards a future of large companies and corporate concentration. At that moment, wise resource use seemed to be most closely associated with the small operators who were using flexible truck logging techniques to cut timber selectively.

Along with the wartime accord that the state imposed between labour and capital in BC’s forest industry, the many new highways and other public works built in the province’s hinterlands during the war and the late 1940s seemed to provide a model for how the forest industry could be restructured. This expanding network of arterial roads made it easier for forestry companies to reach timber that had been considered inaccessible and unmarketable when moving logs from ‘stump to dump’ had been an elaborate, labour-intensive process involving the use of horses, steam-powered skidders, logging railroads, and river drives. Wartime labour shortages encouraged forestry companies to adopt flexible, labour-saving technologies like gas-powered chainsaws, caterpillar tractors, multi-axle trucks, and portable sawmills. Experimental truck-and-cat logging operations showed that mechanization not only reduced the need for labour, but also allowed timber to be cut and hauled out of previously inaccessible locations, including on steep slopes and across swampy terrain. These new logging technologies and techniques promised to increase production and profits, and reduce the seasonality traditionally associated with timber cutting, making logging a full-time, year-round occupation. This emerging blueprint for a flexible, mechanized, less crisis-prone forest
industry made large tracts of Interior forest suddenly appear useful for more than just their scenic value.\textsuperscript{5}

Within weeks of Hamber Park being created, a memo was circulating around Forest Service headquarters that recommended its protective status be downgraded from Class A to Class B, which would allow the minister to permit new industrial activity within its boundaries.\textsuperscript{6} This memo was written by the assistant to F.S. McKinnon, head of the Forest Economics division, which the infant Parks Division operated under during the early 1940s. Thus the man who was in charge of BC’s provincial parks appears to have been set against Hamber from the start. Nothing in McKinnon’s own name conclusively shows this to have been the case, but it seems unlikely that his assistant would have circulated a memo calling for a brand new park to have its protective status reduced without his approval, especially given that Pattullo remained premier at that moment.

The proposal to demote Hamber to Class B status was blocked by Assistant Chief Forester George Melrose, who had recently played a key role in establishing Manning Provincial Park.\textsuperscript{7} This disagreement about what to do with Hamber was indicative of a larger split within the Forest Service. Some senior officials saw the provincial parks as valuable scenic and recreational assets that had to be protected, developed, and made accessible in order to encourage tourism, outdoor recreation, and enthusiasm for BC’s myriad natural landscapes. Others saw them as a useful device for garnering good publicity for the Forest Service, but were opposed to them permanently locking up large swathes of potentially valuable resources. The fact that most of BC’s large provincial

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\textsuperscript{5} Hak, \textit{Capital and Labour}, chapter 6; Rajala, \textit{Clearcutting}, chapters 1-2.
\textsuperscript{6} BCA, GR-1991, reel 1754, H.J. Hodgins, Assistant Forester [assistant to F.S. McKinnon, head of Forest Economics Division], memo re: Hamber Park, 6 November, 1941.
\textsuperscript{7} A handwritten note on ibid. indicates the issue was discussed with “G.P.M.” and no further action taken.
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parks were the result of seemingly impetuous decisions by politicians in Victoria did little to strengthen the position of the former group. To most senior Forest Service officials, Hamber was another example of a large park being established without due consideration for its long-term effects on the forest industry.⁸

The abrupt manner in which Hamber Park had been established also provided awkward moments for Forest Service field staff. Several were embarrassed to learn of the enormous new park from irate loggers and timber brokers who had read about it in the provincial gazette and were concerned that it would prevent logging in the recently opened-up Big Bend country. Staff of the fledgling Parks Division were dismayed at having been left out of the decision making process. When the Forest Service’s Kootenay district office asked them how to deal with rumours of a huge new park north of Golden, they could only confirm that the park really did exist and point out, with obvious chagrin, that “this office was not notified until the park was established so it was impossible to advise you beforehand.”⁹ Pattullo’s failure to consult the Forest Service prior to creating Hamber Park appears to have generated a sense of antipathy towards the park at various levels of the agency responsible for managing it. This inauspicious beginning would colour subsequent debates about what to do with Hamber, and may well have shaped the mindset of the Parks Division staff who made recommendations for how it should be developed, managed, and publicized. In the early 1940s, Hamber Park was something of an albatross around the neck of the Parks Division, doing little to further the cause of

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⁸ On the emergence of the ‘multi-use’ approach to the province’s forests and parks in the Forest Service during the 1950s, see Wilson, *Talk and Log*, chapter 5.
⁹ BCA, GR-1991, reel 1754, K.C. McCannel, Assistant District Forester, Nelson to Chief Forester, 8 October 1941; C.P. Lyons to McCannel, 14 October 1941.
provincial parks within the BC Forest Service or the provincial government more generally.

While Forest Service staff were dubious about Hamber Park, loggers and sawmill operators in the Golden and Revelstoke districts were actively antagonistic. The upper Columbia River valley had supported several large forestry operations in the 1910s and 1920s, including the Columbia River Lumber Company, which had had an extensive logging railway and huge sawmill on the valley flats just north of Golden. These operations had collapsed in the late 1920s after they exhausted the supply of easily accessible timber, and then the Depression forced most of the smaller mills and logging operations out of business.10 However, by the early 1940s the region’s remaining small operators, buoyed by high wartime demand and prices, believed that a revival of the regional forest industry would be possible through small, flexible truck logging operations and the development of logging roads that branched off the Big Bend Highway. Truck logging techniques and the new highway had opened up access to timber had previously been impossible to log profitably, creating a new resource where previously the forests of the Big Bend country had had no economic value. Ambitious truck loggers and sawmill owners complained that by cutting off access to these resources, Hamber Park threatened to stifle the region’s economic revival before it began.

These complaints spurred members of BC’s Liberal-Conservative coalition government to ask questions about the enormous new park, which had never been discussed in the legislature. Thomas King, the MLA for Golden, was an important ally of

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10 On the sudden collapse of the forest industry around Golden in the late 1920s, see Drushka, *Tie Hackers*, chapters 4-5; Golden Memories Book Committee, *Golden Memories*, 59-61.
the district’s truck loggers.11 Writing to the minister of lands, he suggested that Hamber Park be downgraded to Class B protective status so that small logging companies could get at the many stands of timber in the Big Bend country that were deemed “over mature” or “decadent,” meaning they had passed their peak commercial value and were becoming susceptible to rot, disease, insect infestation, fire, and blowdown. King argued that large volumes of timber could be cut in Hamber without “detract[ing] from the value of this territory” because the small, selective truck logging operations that were becoming common in the Interior during the 1940s did not “lay the country waste” the way high-lead cable logging did on the Coast.12 Instead, truck loggers tended to ‘cream’ the timber berths to which they had access, selectively removing the trees of highest commercial value (typically cedar and pine) while leaving the rest standing. Truck loggers and their supporters like Thomas King argued that this kind of operation would have little effect on the scenic value of a park as large and heavily forested as Hamber, provided it was done carefully so as to avoid damage to the ground cover and minimize the amount of slash (timber debris) left behind. Thus by the closing days of World War Two the Parks Division was facing pressure from multiple directions to allow new logging operations in Hamber Park: from the regional forest industry, from members of the provincial government, and from within the Forest Service.

11 A dry goods merchant, King had made a tidy profit from supplying the federal government’s construction and relief work camps on the Big Bend Highway during the 1930s. He also appears to have had a side interest in the logging industry: an account submitted to a local history of Golden indicates that he owned a logging camp in the Blaeberry River valley north of town during the late 1930s. Golden Memories Book Committee, *Golden Memories*, 299.
12 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1754, King to E.T. Kenney, Minister of Lands and Forests, 6 April 1945. On the controversy over high-lead logging, which was said to impair regeneration and increase the risk of fires, see Hak, *Capital and Labour*, 48; Rajala, *Clearcutting*, chapter 5. Regarding the prevalence of “over mature” timber in the Big Bend country, see BCMFL, D.E. Clark, “Reconnaissance Survey: CNR Lands and Canoe River Valley” (Victoria, 1913); W.A. Johnston, “Big Bend, Columbia River Reconnaissance” (Victoria: BC Forest Service, 1932).
Another important factor in the earliest plans for managing Hamber Park was the lack of roadside services along the Big Bend Highway. When the road opened in 1940 there were no roadside commercial operations in the 200-mile drive between Revelstoke and Golden. In fact, the only buildings that motorists drove past during the first couple years were abandoned road construction camps and a solitary ranger’s cabin that the Forest Service had built at Boat Encampment. The lack of services was not a major problem during the war because few motorists were able to make the trip due to tire and gasoline rationing. For those who did, the absence of food, gas, lodging, washrooms, and designated places to pull over for a break had to be dealt with through a mix of planning and improvisation. However, those motorists who were unfortunate enough to run out of gas, break down, or get in an accident on the lightly travelled road found themselves in a very difficult situation. It was clear that the Big Bend Highway’s reputation with the motoring public would suffer if roadside commercial services were not in place once the volume of traffic began to pick up.

The provincial government had recognized the need for roadside services even before the highway was open, and had identified several locations that appeared suitable for commercial development. However, there were significant barriers to establishing roadside services between Revelstoke and Golden. Parcels of private property were few and far between in the Big Bend country, for the area had never seen settlement or industrial development that merited the creation of townsites or surveyed lots. Alienated

13 BCA, GR-1222, box 34, file 5, Minister of Lands, memo to Premier Pattullo, 30 May 1940.
14 The only colonial-era communities in the Big Bend country were the short-lived gold rush towns LaPorte and Frenchtown, which were located between the site of present-day Revelstoke and Downie Creek. See John Willis Christian, “Kootenay Gold Rush: The Placer Decade, 1863-1872,” PhD dissertation, Washington State University (1967); E.O.S. Scholefield and F. Howay, *British Columbia from the Earliest Times to the Present* vol. 2 (Vancouver: S.J. Clarke, 1914), chapter 14.
land was far less common than renewable resource tenures on crown land, like timber licenses, mineral claims, and trap lines. Prospective entrepreneurs would have also recognized that for a business to be successful on the Big Bend Highway, it would need to be located far enough from Golden and Revelstoke that potential customers would not drive past in favour of the services available in those communities. Yet at the same time, distance from those centres would increase the cost of building, staffing, and supplying any roadside business.

Most importantly, anyone who contemplated opening a commercial operation along the Big Bend Highway would have been reluctant to make a large investment when the volume of traffic that would pass over the road under ordinary, peacetime circumstances remained unclear. It seemed reasonable to believe the road would gradually be improved, given that it provided the most direct link between the Coast and the national parks in the Rockies, and formed part of the nascent Trans-Canada Highway. It might even be paved one day, as Duff Pattullo had promised in 1941. Furthermore, polls conducted just after the war indicated that large numbers of Prairie residents intended to visit BC for a vacation. Nevertheless, many Canadians recalled the economic slump that had followed immediately after World War One, and were reluctant to invest in new business ventures until postwar economic conditions were clearer.15

15 The Gallup poll on Canadians’ desires and expectations for postwar vacation travel can be found in “Half Adult Canadians Took No Holiday this Summer,” Winnipeg Evening Tribune, 26 September 1945, 3. Regarding BC tourism promoters’ wartime efforts to encourage travel to the province after the war, see Dawson, Selling British Columbia, chapter 4, especially 120-130. Ordinary Canadians’ expectations and anxieties about postwar economic conditions remain poorly understood. Peter S. McInnis’ study of the debate between academics, senior bureaucrats, and industry and union leaders during the late war years offers little information on popular opinion. “Planning Prosperity: Canadians Debate Postwar Reconstruction” in Greg Donaghy, ed. Uncertain Horizons: Canadians and Their World in 1945 (Winnipeg: Canadian Committee for the History of the Second World War, 1997), 231-260. Joy Parr has suggested that Canadian households had more modest expectations of the postwar years than their...
As would later occur along the Hope-Princeton and many other highways in the BC Interior, the first roadside commercial operations on the Big Bend Highway were family owned and operated. By the summer of 1945 three family-run businesses were in seasonal operation between Revelstoke and Golden. On the western section, the Nichols family had a combined gas station, tearoom, and store plus three small overnight cabins beside the highway at Downie Creek, 40 miles north of Revelstoke. On the eastern section, the Chapman family had built an auto camp 70 miles north of Golden, on the gravel delta where the Middle River flowed into Kinbasket Lake. It consisted of a gas station, lodge, and half dozen small cabins. Finally, at Boat Encampment – the apex of the bend – Joe McKinnon and his sons (who had no known relationship to F.S. McKinnon of the Forest Service) had acquired a piece of property at the foot of the large steel bridge over the Columbia River, where they built a combined lodge and gas station.16

Little is known about the operations at Downie Creek and Kinbasket Lake, but the fact that several members of the McKinnon family worked on the construction of the Big Bend Highway during the 1930s helps explain how they became familiar with the isolated Boat Encampment area. The McKinnons were also long-time supporters of the provincial Liberal party. During the 1920s Joe’s older brother Hector had served as district road foreman whenever the Liberals were in power, and in Revelstoke’s summer

American counterparts, who expected a return to the boom years of the 1920s. Domestic Goods: The Material, the Moral, and the Economic in the Postwar Years (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), chapter 1, especially 30-31. However, Jeff Keshen cites polls that indicate Canadian servicemen became increasingly optimistic about their postwar prospects following the defeat of Axis forces in Europe and the federal government’s creation of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Saints, Sinners, and Soldiers: Canada’s Second World War (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 261-262.

1943 by-election Joe was narrowly defeated as the Liberal-Conservative coalition candidate. These political connections probably helped the McKinnons acquire the strategically located property at Boat Encampment, but opening a roadside service station was not a major leap for the family, as Joe had been running Revelstoke’s billiard parlour and cigar store since the early 1920s. By the time his four sons decided to enlist in the armed forces, the McKinnons’ lodge at Boat Encampment had a lunchroom with snack bar and booths, six small bedrooms, and a pair of gas pumps selling Shell Oil products.17

Joe McKinnon looked after the operation at Boat Encampment while his sons were serving in the military. In October 1944, when it was clear that Allied forces were going to defeat Germany, he wrote to Premier John Hart asking for special permission to cut “decadent” timber inside Hamber Park. McKinnon predicted an influx of traffic after the end of the war, and in preparation wanted to add several guest cabins and a garage to his operation. However, it was doubtful whether the necessary lumber could be purchased in Revelstoke due to rationing. Even if it could be, the cost of trucking it 100 miles north was prohibitively high due to gas rationing. It would be easier haul in a portable sawmill and make lumber from logs cut nearby – after all, Boat Encampment was surrounded by suitable building material. McKinnon acknowledged that cutting timber inside a provincial park would not be permissible under ordinary circumstances, but argued that by “taking timber here and there throughout [a] large acreage” his cutting would “not in any way be even noticeable.” Cognizant of the motoring public’s views, he promised the

premier he would only cut timber “away from the road and in no way […] mar the beauty of the park.”

Joe McKinnon’s request to cut timber on crown land in Hamber Park tied the need for roadside services on the Big Bend Highway to the larger debate within the Forest Service about how timber resources inside Hamber Park should be managed. In late October, Assistant Chief Forester George Melrose sent a memo to the premier stating “it would seem quite possible to authorize the cutting requested.” Melrose believed it was desirable to have public accommodations at Boat Encampment, which was just across the Columbia River from the new park. His only concern was that the services offered by the McKinnons should be of a “proper standard” and not “an eyesore or a detriment to the park,” and he therefore recommended that they only be given permission to cut timber in the park after submitting construction plans for approval by the Parks Division. By giving special permission for small-scale timber cutting in Hamber, Melrose aimed to help a tenuous and very isolated business provide much-needed services at the edge of a new and undeveloped park, while at the same time giving Premier Hart a way to help a political ally.

Before the McKinnon family could submit their plans for expansion at Boat Encampment, George Melrose was promoted out of the Forest Service to a senior position in the Department of Lands. This allowed the question of whether timber could be cut in Hamber to be revisited. With park advocate Melrose out of the picture, the legislators and Forest Service officials who saw Hamber as an impediment to the

18 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1754, Joe McKinnon, Boat Encampment Service Station to Premier John Hart, 12 October 1944.
expansion of the region’s forest industry were able to use the McKinnons’ request as a wedge to get the protective status of the entire park reconsidered. In March, the premier was informed that Chief Forester C.D. Orchard had concluded the only way Joe McKinnon’s request could be granted was if Hamber’s protective status was reduced to Class B. This was not entirely true: it conveniently overlooked the fact that the Forest Act gave the minister responsible for provincial parks the authority to allow timber to be cut inside a Class A park provided it was done to improve access or visitor appreciation.20 However, after discussing the issue with the minister and chief forester, Premier Hart issued an order-in-council in late May, which downgraded Hamber to a Class B provincial park. This meant new industrial activity like mining and logging could be conducted within its boundaries so long as the Parks Division issued the necessary Parks Use Permits.21 The archival records do not make it clear whether the McKinnons actually cut timber inside Hamber Park, but within a few years they had built several tourist cabins behind their lodge at Boat Encampment.22

The 1945 Reconnaissance Report

By the summer of 1945 the war in Europe was over, and an increase in auto tourism and pleasure travel was widely anticipated as part of the transition back to peacetime conditions in North America. After many years of tire, gas, and parts rationing, driving ranked high amongst the things Canadians and Americans were looking forward to doing, both for work and for pleasure. That year saw a 30 percent increase in the

21 See undated, handwritten notes on ibid.
22 BC Government Travel Bureau, “Auto Courts and Resorts in British Columbia” (Victoria: Department of Trade and Industry, 1951), 82.
number of American tourists crossing into BC at the border crossings south of Vancouver, meaning at least 100,000 more visitors to the province than in 1944. By February 1946, the agency responsible for disposing of America’s surplus military materiel had received more than half a million requests to purchase cars and trucks. Canada’s national parks in the Rockies were expected to remain a popular destination for North American tourists, and the Trans-Canada Highway was expected to see heavy traffic. In addition to auto tourists, this traffic was expected to include many business travellers and western Canadians who were maintaining family links: by 1950, 250,000 residents of British Columbia or 22 percent of the province’s total population had migrated there from the Prairies. Many British Columbians had also moved from the hinterlands of the Interior to the cities of the Coast.²³

Hamber Park needed to be inspected before the Parks Division could begin formulating plans for its development, so in August 1945 Ches Lyons and Mickey Trew were dispatched to conduct a reconnaissance. They had explored most of the large parks in the BC Interior since their 1943 inspection of Manning Park, including Wells Gray, Tweedsmuir, and Garibaldi. None of these parks had been accessible to motorists when Trew and Lyons had examined them. Hamber therefore represented something of a departure from their reconnaissance routine, in that it had been superimposed over an already-existing highway. In fact, their instructions specifically called on them to inspect Hamber Park and the Big Bend Highway corridor. These instructions were issued just a few weeks before the Parks Division dispatched E.G. Oldham and D.L. McMurchie to

Trew and Lyons’ reconnaissance report was profoundly unenthusiastic about the Big Bend country. This was despite the fact that they had spent only a day and a half travelling through it, and acknowledged making no attempt to explore beyond the immediate vicinity of the highway right-of-way. Whereas their inspections of much smaller parks like Manning had lasted a week or more and involved extensive exploration on foot, horseback, and by canoe, their reconnaissance of 2.4-million-acre Hamber Park consisted of a leisurely drive along the Big Bend Highway with intermittent stops to examine potential scenic, natural, and historical attractions located near the road. Lyons himself would later refer to the inspection as having been only “cursory in nature.”24 Dissatisfaction with the experience of driving the Big Bend Highway was a key factor in shaping Trew and Lyons’ conclusions, which in turn reinforced senior Parks Division and Forest Service officials’ disinterest in developing and promoting Hamber Park. This early disinterest helped justify the downgrading of Hamber’s protective status, and would later make it easier to avoid developing and publicizing the park.

The bulk of Lyons and Trew’s report was devoted to evaluating the Big Bend Highway corridor. They described the highway as:

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24 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1754, Lyons undated memo re: commercial concessions in Hamber Park and Big Bend Highway [1946].
well built from a constructional point of view, but poorly located from the aesthetic point of view. In general it is above and beyond view of the river and often separated by a narrow fringe of timber. There are many cases where a better location would have been possible so as to improve the view and break the monotony of the drive [emphasis added].

While the road was decent, and the country had some features that could be considered scenic or otherwise interesting, the relationship between the road and the surrounding landscapes made the drive between Revelstoke and Golden an unappealing experience. The road ran through a steep-walled and heavily forested valley. As a result, for long stretches it was impossible for motorists to see the Columbia River below or the glaciers and mountain peaks above.

The road was no parkway. It had been built by three different agencies, each working under very difficult conditions, and sharing between them no coherent vision for how the road should mediate between motorists and their surroundings. The engineering service of the National Parks Branch had been responsible for the largest part of the project over the longest period of time, and of the three agencies involved had the most experience building roads that ‘played up’ the country they traversed. However, when it had been assigned responsibility for the western section of the Big Bend project in 1935, it had inherited a ‘road’ in extremely primitive condition – barely more than a logging road in many places – and had been under pressure to quickly improve it while showing the utmost economy and employing relief workers who had little or no experience building modern roads. Although the road around the Big Bend had originally been conceived of as a nationally significant touring road, auto tourists and their viewing

26 Unfortunately, there has been no study of the Canadian National Parks Branch’s engineering service or its approach towards road building and landscape experience.

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habits had been forgotten during its decade-long construction. No money had been available for fancy landscaping frills like roadside pullouts, scenic viewpoints, or the pruning of timber in order to improve the motoring public’s experience of nature by the road.

When Trew and Lyons complained that the Big Bend Highway had a “tendency to being monotonous,” they were echoing the verdict of many motorists in the early 1940s: the drive between Revelstoke and Golden was long, taxing, and ultimately unappealing due to the lack of roadside services, scenery, and attractions. “A discussion of the scenic values of the Big Bend usually draws much difference of opinion,” Trew and Lyons observed, “[but] as compared with other areas in the Province or in nearby Alberta, it is not outstanding.” Compared to the parkways and scenic highways found in many large parks in western North America, including nearby national parks like Banff, Kootenay, and Yoho, the Big Bend Highway was a failure.27

“The present attractions along the road are few,” Trew and Lyons noted, “due primarily to the lack of cleared look-out points and pointer signs.” The Silvertip Falls a few miles north of Revelstoke were attractive enough that roadside picnic tables and a staircase leading to a viewing platform had been built in the mid 1930s. However, a few years later a forest fire had burnt most of the surrounding timber, “leaving but snag and rock,” and the picnic area had subsequently been allowed to fall into disrepair.28 Further north, on the Columbia River above Downie Creek, were the impressive 12 Mile, Priest, Rockslide, and Death rapids. These raging cataracts were linked to BC’s nineteenth-

28 “Beauty Spot at Revelstoke Fire Victim,” Calgary Herald, 12 August 1936, 5. These structures can be seen in the photos contained in LAC, Parks Canada collection (graphic material), 1979-195 NPC, box SC184, Big Bend Highway album.
century fur trade and gold rush days by tragic and gruesome stories involving drownings, starvation, murder, and cannibalism. In a single incident, seventeen men had drowned at Death Rapids in 1866. However, Trew and Lyons pointed out that while the rapids were audible when parked beside the road, they were not visible from it when driving past, being separated from the right-of-way by up to 800 feet of timber and brush. There were no marked trails between the river and the road, so motorists sped past without realizing they were missing interesting natural and historical features. A similar situation existed on the eastern half of the highway, where only a short section of the three-mile-long Surprise Rapids south of Kinbasket Lake was visible from the road.

The Columbia Valley was particularly steep, narrow, and damp on the western slope of the Selkirks, with dense underbrush crowding up against the road. Open vistas were few and far between from Revelstoke to Boat Encampment, and for long stretches the road undulated through a seemingly endless and impenetrable forest. Trew and Lyons reported that impressive mountains along the western section of road, including Mount Begbie, Downie Peak, and Frenchman’s Cap, were only momentarily visible to motorists. “Glaciers and snowfields can also be seen, but like the peaks they are but quick glimpses.” They also observed that logging had been done on a few timber berths located between Revelstoke and Downie Creek during the war, but this industrial activity was “little noticed from the road.”

Even the captions that Trew and Lyons applied to the photographs pasted into their reconnaissance report emphasized the paucity of scenic views along the Big Bend

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29 Scholefield and Howay, *British Columbia from the Earliest Times* vol. 2, 240, citing the *British Columbian* of 2 and 6 June 1866.
Highway and the fleeting nature of the few that were available. For example, a photo of Frenchman’s Cap and the Columbia River taken from a point where the road traversed a large cutbank near Downie Creek was labeled “one of the few open vistas along the road.” This was one of the few places where the river could be seen together with an impressive mountain backdrop, and had already proven one of the most popular views along the road. By 1945, photographs taken from similar perspectives by Earle Dickey, Byron Harmon, and others had been published in magazines and newspapers, distributed as postcards, and used to illustrate government publicity brochures. Another photo in Trew and Lyons’ report was captioned as a “potential scenic vista;” a third showed a mountain peak “glimpsed through the trees;” and a fourth was of “a scenic vista barely visible from the road [emphases added].” In order to view these scenes for more than a fleeting moment, and to take the pictures included in their report, Trew and Lyons had had to repeatedly park their car at a safe location beside the road and backtrack on foot.31

The eastern section of the Big Bend Highway – the section located within Hamber Park – was considered a bit more scenic (or at least less monotonous) than the western section. Between Golden and its hairpin turn around the northern tip of the Selkirks at Boat Encampment, the Columbia River flows through the Rocky Mountain Trench, a

31 Photos of Frenchman’s Cap from the cutbank near Downie Creek were used in the BC Government Travel Bureau’s 1940 advertising campaign, and for the cover of its first Big Bend Highway pamphlet. Byron Harmon’s photos of this view were printed in many Prairie papers, including the two-page spread “Mountaineering by Motor” in the Winnipeg Evening Tribune, 6 July 1940. Earle Dickey’s photos of this view were published in many magazine and newspaper articles, including “The New Northwest Passage,” Drumheller Mail 25 June 1936; Torchy Anderson, “Bonanza Highway: Big Bend Road Stirs Ghosts,” Vancouver Province [late summer 1940]; E.A. Grubb, “The Big Bend Highway: Canada’s Great New Mountain Road,” Meccano Magazine (March 1940); and Corday Mackay, “Along the Big Bend Highway,” The Beaver 277 (December 1946). Dickey’s photos were also used to illustrate several promotional pamphlets published by the Revelstoke Board of Trade, including “In the Switzerland of America: Revelstoke British Columbia, Western Gateway to Canada’s Famous National Parks” (1947). Correspondence relating to how these and other popular images of the Big Bend Highway were distributed can be found in Revelstoke Museum and Archives, Earle and Estelle Dickey collection. Also see English, Reflections.
fault line that runs along the western front of the Rockies for a thousand miles from Montana to the Yukon. The Trench section of the Columbia valley is wider, less steep, and more U-shaped than the V-shaped western slope of the Selkirks. It is also a bit drier due to the rain shadow effect, and the forests correspondingly less dense. These factors allowed for slightly better views from the highway between Golden and Boat Encampment. Also, between Boat Encampment and Kinbasket Lake the road passed through the ancient timber that the National Parks Branch had been so keen to preserve during the early 1930s, and Trew and Lyons deemed this part of the drive “rather attractive.” Furthermore, the eastern section of the road skirted along the shore of Kinbasket Lake, giving impressive views of Mount Trident and other glaciated peaks of the Adamant range on the opposite side of the lake. However, Kinbasket Lake was deemed to have little recreational potential. Being glacier-fed it was icy cold and heavily silted, which prevented swimming and sport fishing. Also, the strong winds that blew through the valley made boating hazardous. Indeed, the lake had had a notorious reputation for many years, especially since September 1930, when a party of provincial land surveyors had disappeared while rafting on it, presumed to have drowned.32

The Columbia River could be seen from the road in several places south of Kinbasket Lake, but these views were considered “not outstanding,” and only a few brief glimpses of the Surprise Rapids were possible. Trew and Lyons believed the Bush Lakes midway between Kinbasket Lake and Golden were “really the most attractive spot on the

road,” calling them “the type of lakes which are painted with a rising morning mist and a 
moose feeding offshore or flights of ducks and geese coming in to feed.” Unfortunately, 
these picturesque lakes could not be counted amongst Hamber Park’s scenic attractions 
because they were “so effectively screened off by a narrow belt of trees that the average 
[highway] traveler does not know they are there.”33 Trew and Lyons also noted that there 
were several timber licenses covering berths located within view of the road between the 
Bush Lakes and Golden. These would be unsightly if logged, so Trew and Lyons 
suggested the Parks Division approach the license holders and offer to swap the berths 
visible from the highway for timber located in less prominent sections of the valley.34

Given that it was impossible to predict the volume of tourist traffic that would 
pass over the highway in peacetime, Trew and Lyons argued that the three existing 
roadside commercial operations were adequate for the time being. However, they 
reported that none of these operations had settings that would inspire visitors to stay in 
the Big Bend country for very long. The auto camp at Downie Creek had “no particular 
view,” although its forested setting made for a pleasant overnight stop. The area around 
Boat Encampment was deemed “pleasant,” with good views up the Canoe River valley 
available from the steel bridge over the Columbia, but otherwise there were “no 
outstanding attractions” that would hold visitors for more than a night’s stay. Excellent 
mountain views were available from the Middle River Auto Camp on Kinbasket Lake, 
but the camp itself was located on a “rather barren delta” of gravel deposits and patchy 
brush. Trew and Lyons considered the Bush Lakes to be the only area in Hamber Park

34 Ibid., 21. Several such timber swaps had already been proposed along the Big Bend road: see BCA, GR- 
1991, reel 1754, R.C. St. Clair, District Forester [Kootenay] to Chief Forester, 9 June 1945; McKinnon to 
St. Clair, 9 July 1945.
that was suitable for a new commercial operation, but as noted above, the lakes could not be seen from the highway, and it was unlikely that a business located away from the road would draw enough customers to survive.\textsuperscript{35}

Although Mickey Trew and Ches Lyons were not particularly enthusiastic about the scenic value of the Big Bend Highway, they concluded that because it formed “part of the Trans-Canada highway and hence a major road in the Provincial system, it should be aesthetically developed and protected as a whole.”\textsuperscript{36} They identified the first priority as the need to develop designated roadside stopping places along the highway corridor. They recommended that the picnic site and viewing platform at Silvertip Falls be repaired, and that campsites be established at Downie Creek, Goldstream River, Boat Encampment, the Bush Lakes, and several points along the shore of Kinbasket Lake. These basic facilities would provide a respite for motorists undertaking the long drive between Revelstoke and Golden; they would also reduce the forest fire hazard posed by travellers pulling off the road to cook and camp wherever they found it convenient – as an office of the Forest Service, the Parks Division was always cognizant of fire protection issues. The proposed developments would help ameliorate the wearying experience of undifferentiated wilderness in the Big Bend country, for as identifiable points of human activity, they would help break the “monotony” of the drive, even if the motoring public chose not to stop at them.

Trew and Lyons also concluded that the Parks Division should take steps to increase and improve the scenic aspects of the Big Bend Highway corridor, both inside and outside the boundaries of Hamber Park. Because the Parks Division had little

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 13-18.  
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 21.
manpower or equipment in the 1940s, they suggested that the best way to accomplish this would be to coordinate with other government agencies. The Department of Public Works could be asked to build a series of roadside pullouts that would allow motorists to safely exit the flow of traffic in order to rest and gaze towards mountain peaks, glaciers, tall timber, the Columbia, and other scenic natural features. The regional office of the Forest Service could be asked to assemble a “mobile crew” that would work on the “improvement of scenic vistas” by cutting down trees and clearing brush along the highway corridor, thereby providing better sightlines between the road and the surrounding country. To help make the cutting of roadside timber inside a provincial park politically palatable, Trew and Lyons assured that “key views can often be opened up by cutting a minimum of trees.”

The proposed program of scenic improvement was expected to have the greatest effect on the eastern section of the road, where narrow fringes of timber could easily be thinned or removed to provide the motoring public with better views of the Columbia River, the Bush Lakes, and the mountains on the opposite side of Kinbasket Lake. The proposed mobile work crew would also erect roadside signs to identify natural features visible from the road, and build trails that would allow motorists to reach attractions that were located a short distance from the right-of-way, such as the rapids on the western section of the Columbia. Cumulatively, the renovations proposed by Trew and Lyons were intended to improve the motoring public’s experience of nature by the road along a highway corridor that was not considered intrinsically scenic – a kind of redemption through stagecraft.

37 Ibid., 22-26.
While Ches Lyons and Mickey Trew were thorough in their evaluation of the Big
Bend Highway corridor, albeit not overly enthusiastic about its appeal to auto tourists,
they were positively brusque in their treatment of Hamber Park itself. “No trip was made
into Hamber Park beyond the road route,” they explained, “because the nature of this
park together with its history and local information did not warrant such a reconnaissance
at this time.” They were critical of the provincial government’s seemingly spontaneous
decision to create the park in September 1941, because the area’s value had only been
considered to the extent that “its physical features appear[ed] to be well adapted for park
purposes” – that is to say, it had mountains and bordered up against other large parks.
“The fact that the west slopes of the Rockies are generally rugged, steep, and of poor
recreational value was apparently overlooked,” Trew and Lyons complained, and they
cited the opinion of unnamed foresters and surveyors “who are familiar with the region”
that the Big Bend country was unsuitable for a park. “This fact is important because it
means that the Provincial Park System is saddled with some 3,800 square miles of park
which are, except for spot areas, utterly useless for park purposes [emphasis added].”
Hamber was not especially scenic or suited to recreational activities. Nor was it easily
accessible to residents of the densely populated Coast. Wilderness, in and of itself was
not park-worthy.

Putting the proverbial cart before the horse, Trew and Lyons suggested that “few
people have ever heard of Hamber Park, and except for loggers no one seems to care.”
This overlooked the fact that pleasure travel along the Big Bend Highway had effectively
been impossible during the war years, as well as the Forest Service and Parks Division’s
failure to promote or develop the park in the years following its establishment. That Trew
and Lyons expected British Columbians to care about a park that almost no one had heard of let alone visited suggests they may have had their minds made up about Hamber before setting out on their field reconnaissance, or had been given guidance from their superiors in the Forest Service that they were to find against the park.  

Lyons and Trew concluded that “from the purely technical point of view there is not enough overall park value involved to warrant [Hamber’s] retention as a park.” Access beyond the highway corridor was extremely limited. Little of the area’s scenery could actually be seen. There were no alpine meadows or other areas of open country. Big game was scarce, and fishing was poor in lakes and rivers laden with glacial silt. The only recreationalists who might appreciate Hamber were the hardy mountaineers of the Alpine Club of Canada, for whom the many unscaled peaks in the park’s vast backcountry presented exciting challenges. However, even these dedicated outdoor enthusiasts would find it difficult to reach the mountainous interior of the park due to the dense forests that climbed high up the valley walls.

Trew and Lyons recommended that Hamber Park be cancelled. They arrived at this conclusion even though they acknowledged that “present knowledge of the area included in Hamber Park is skimpy and by round-about information.” They recognized that cancelling a relatively new park that in terms of area made up nearly a quarter of the total provincial park system might pose “an awkward problem to the Government,” and therefore proposed two ways to ameliorate the park’s deletion. The first option called for a series of small roadside recreational reserves to be established between Golden and Revelstoke, which would contain campgrounds, picnic sites, viewpoints, and scenic

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38 Ibid., 3.
39 Ibid.
attractions – this would dovetail with their general recommendations for development along the highway corridor. In the second option, Hamber would be replaced with a new Class B park that would take the form of a half mile-wide parkway running along the highway corridor from Revelstoke to the outskirts of Golden – this echoed British Columbia’s November 1934 proposal for a new national park in the Big Bend country, although nothing in Trew and Lyons’ report suggests that they were familiar with this failed scheme. Ironically, they recommended that a more careful reconnaissance of Hamber’s “largely unmapped” interior be conducted prior to its cancellation. This would allow any sites deemed worthy of protection to be put under a recreational reserve, such as the hot springs in the northern Canoe River valley. Trew and Lyons also suggested that the high-elevation area around scenic Fortress Lake be offered to the federal government for incorporation into Jasper National Park, which surrounded it on three sides.40

The Parks Division’s first inspection of the Big Bend country gave the region a failing grade on two counts. Not only was the Big Bend Highway a long, tedious drive, but Hamber Park – at least as it was experienced from the highway corridor – had no visible attractions or accessible recreational features that could make it useful to the larger provincial park system. Compared with nearby national parks like Banff and Yoho, Hamber had few of the features that had come to be expected of North American mountain parks since the 1880s. It did contain many (if not most) of the physical features associated with mountain parks – prominent peaks, glaciers, lakes, tall timber, and large furry mammals – but most of them were not visible (as scenery) or accessible (as opportunities for recreation) from the main line of travel through the park. Since the

40 Ibid., 3-6.
1920s, a certain kind of visual-vehicular relationship between road corridors and the surrounding environment had come to be considered ‘normal’ in the parks of western North America. Auto tourists and pleasure travellers expected roads with wide verges, or at least a large number of scenic viewpoints and open vistas, supplemented by clearly demarcated natural and historical attractions, and interspersed with roadside services like food, gas, and lodging. Hamber Park and the Big Bend Highway clearly failed to meet these expectations.41

As the Parks Division’s experts on reconnaissance and development plans, Ches Lyons and Mickey Trew’s unenthusiastic assessment of the Big Bend country provided valuable ammunition for those within the Forest Service who saw Hamber Park as a barrier to the reconstruction of the region’s forest industry. Even though the park had already been downgraded from Class A to Class B, thereby opening it up to logging outfits from the Golden and Revelstoke areas, Trew and Lyons suggested that the limited amount of appealing scenery along the highway corridor could be protected (and even improved) with policies that did not require the presence of a large provincial park. They found no convincing argument in favour of retaining Hamber. However, as the subsequent lack of development inside the park would show, senior officials in the Parks Division and Forest Service were not bound to follow the recommendations that Trew and Lyons put forward in 1945.

41 On mountain scenery as an aesthetic norm for Canadian national parks during this period, see MacEachern, *Natural Selections*, 4-6, 38-40. On motorists’ expectations of scenery and road quality in North American parks more generally, see Barnett, “Drive-By Viewing”; Carr, *Wilderness by Design*; Colten and Dilsaver, “The Hidden Landscape of Yosemite.”
Hamber in Limbo

It is unclear why senior Forest Service officials did not pursue the cancellation of Hamber Park in 1945. They may have believed it would be impossible to convince politicians to eliminate such a new park, especially given that it had just been downgraded to Class B status. They may also have believed that the park provided a way of managing roadside landscapes along the Big Bend section of the nascent Trans-Canada Highway – the fact that the eastern half of the highway ran through Hamber provided a way to regulate commercial and industrial development until some other technique for managing roadside aesthetics could be developed.

Senior Forest Service staff were not in a rush to eliminate Hamber Park, but they were in no more of a hurry to implement the modest developments Trew and Lyons had recommended in their 1945 reconnaissance report. No mobile crew was sent out to improve the motoring public’s views or cultivate roadside attractions along the Big Bend Highway corridor. No campgrounds, picnic sites, or scenic pullouts were built. No signs were erected, not even at the points where the highway entered and exited the park. The provincial government did not even bother to produce promotional brochures or pamphlets about the park. Hamber was effectively left in limbo for the next decade. As a result, most motorists had no idea that they were traversing one of North America’s largest parks when making the lonely drive between Golden and Boat Encampment.

There were discussions within the Parks Division about scenery, natural landscape features, and recreational and commercial development in Hamber Park and the Big Bend country during the immediate postwar years. However, nothing came of them. For example, the lack of basic roadside camping and picnicking facilities could
have been alleviated with only a small outlay of time and funds, and motorists’ actions made the need for these facilities abundantly clear. In the spring of 1947 the BC Government Travel Bureau asked the Parks Division for information about recreational developments along the province’s main road corridors, including the Big Bend Highway. Ches Lyons forwarded a list of picnic and campsites found between Golden and Revelstoke, none of which had actually been developed by the provincial government. The Revelstoke Board of Trade had repaired the picnic site and viewing platform at Silvertip Falls, and travellers had carved out the handful of roadside ‘campsites’ Lyons identified along the highway. Motorists often stopped overnight at former road construction camps, where there was a good source of drinking water and it was possible to set up tents (or sleep in their cars) behind the dilapidated shells of abandoned buildings. Motorists had also cleared their own rough campsites beside the highway near Downie Creek, in the vicinity of Boat Encampment, and at two points along the shore of Kinbasket Lake.42

The forest ranger stationed at Golden was troubled by the lack of designated places to camp along the Big Bend Highway. In the fall of 1947 he informed the Parks Division that during the tourist season a very considerable number of people travel with trailers or camping units along the Big Bend Highway through Hamber Park. […] They search in vain for good camping places and end up making camp wherever there is room [beside the road] to park their car or trailer. Practically every small level spot, gravel pit, etc. has its overnight occupant every night for a period of about two months.

He recommended that several official roadside campsites be established between Golden and Revelstoke, and identified eight suitable sites that were already being used, half of which were within the boundaries of Hamber Park. At very little expense, the ranger argued, these unauthorized stopping places could be improved and enlarged to provide the motoring public with camping facilities that were neater, more sanitary, and less of a fire hazard.43

These suggestions received a sympathetic ear from Ches Lyons, who had already complained to his superiors about the lack of recreational development along the Big Bend Highway. However, Lyons informed the forest ranger at Golden that no funding would be available for campsite development in the coming year. No designated campsites were established along the highway, inside or outside the boundaries of Hamber Park. By the early 1950s, when the motoring public was becoming accustomed to the presence of government-maintained picnic sites and campgrounds at regular intervals along BC’s main highways, the absence of these facilities in the 200 miles between Golden and Revelstoke marked the Big Bend Highway as a kind of secondary road and reinforced the impression that the surrounding country was a howling wilderness.44

Lyons and Trew’s enthusiastic recommendation that the Bush Lakes area be developed similarly came to naught. Several government agencies received applications to establish auto camps along the Big Bend Highway after 1945, but these were turned down on the basis that the three pioneering commercial operations first had to be on a

44 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1754, Lyons to Coles, 21 November 1947. For a critique of the lack of scenic improvement and recreational development along the highway, see Lyons memo to F.S. McKinnon, 15 July 1946.
steady footing. However, the Parks Division gave special attention to a proposal from J.H. Munro of Golden, who wanted to build a hunting lodge at the Bush Lakes. Ches Lyons supported the idea of a commercial concession at the Bush Lakes, but believed an “easily accessible” roadside operation that offered food, gas, and affordable accommodations to “casual travellers” would be preferable to a lodge that catered to an exclusive clientele of big game hunters. Munro was told that he was free to apply for a Park Use Permit that would allow the construction of a small lodge near the Bush Lakes, but was also informed that there had been a reserve over the area for many years, lest it be inundated as a consequence of a dam that the CPR had once proposed to build at Surprise Rapids, a narrow point in the Columbia River valley south of Kinbasket Lake. Munro was told it was “questionable” whether this development would ever occur, but that the Forest Service would not be responsible for reimbursement should the dam be built and the Bush Lakes area flooded. Thus Munro was gently warned away from pursuing a development that the Parks Division considered inappropriate at the scenic Bush Lakes.

Two months after Munro had been warned away from the Bush Lakes, Ches Lyons and Parks Division chief F.S. McKinnon visited the area in order to assess its

45 For example, see BCA, GR-1991, reel 1754, McKinnon to W.F. Currie, 23 November 1945; E.G. Oldham, Forester, Parks Division to Ernest Evans, Assistant Commissioner, BC Government Travel Bureau, 25 March 1949.
46 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1754, Lyons, undated memo re: commercial concessions in Hamber Park [spring 1946].
47 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1754, Assistant Chief Forester C.C. Ternan for C.D. Orchard to J.H. Munro, 30 May 1946. The Canadian Pacific Railway is known to have examined the hydroelectric potential of the Surprise Rapids area of the Columbia River valley in the late 1920s; presumably it was these studies that led to the reserve along the valley floor above that point. See Freeman, Down the Columbia, 88-90. It is unclear why Munro believed the Bush Lakes area would be a good setting for a hunting lodge, as most accounts describe the Big Bend country as severely deficient in terms of big game. See the Golden Rod and Gun Club’s contribution to Golden Memories Book Committee, Golden Memories, 72-76; Charles E. Kay, Brian Patton, and Cliff A. White, “Historical Wildlife Observations in the Canadian Rockies: Implications for Ecological Integrity,” Canadian Field Naturalist 114 (2000): 561-583.
potential for commercial and recreational development. McKinnon came away convinced it was the only location in Hamber Park that was suitable for a new commercial concession. He considered none of the auto camps between Golden and Revelstoke to be “attractively located, modern, or offer[ing] attractions that can hold people for any period of time,” but believed that a roadside commercial operation at the Bush Lakes could be all of these things, provided a way was found to tie the lakes and the highway closer together. McKinnon and Lyons concluded that a successful commercial operation at Bush Lakes would need to “command attention without appearing obstructive” – that is, it had to be prominently visible to the motoring public while blending in with its natural surroundings. They decided the best way to accomplish this would be to realign a short stretch of the highway and cut down a swath of roadside timber so that motorists would be able to see the lakes while driving past – the profitability of any commercial venture would be closely linked to the view from the road. Motorists’ curiosity would be “aroused by suitable thinnings [of timber]” and then culminate in a roadside “look-out point” that the commercial concession would be located beside in the expectation that it would draw many customers by offering services like food, gas, and washrooms.48

The fact that McKinnon and Lyons did not dwell on the possibility of a dam affecting the proposed roadside commercial operation at the Bush Lakes suggests that their warning to J.H. Munro had been disingenuous. It also suggests that the possibility of dam construction in the Big Bend country was not taken seriously in the immediate postwar years. Staff of the Parks Division were likely unaware that in 1944 the Canadian and American governments had asked the International Joint Commission to do an in-

depth study of how the upper Columbia River could be dammed in a manner that would
reduce flooding in Washington and Oregon states while maximizing the downstream
generation of hydroelectricity. The commission’s engineers determined that most of the
Columbia’s potential storage capacity was located in BC, particularly in the sparsely
populated Big Bend country, where the river had a relatively gentle fall in elevation over
the course of 200 miles, and was fed by numerous tributaries that delivered meltwater
from glaciers and heavy snowpack.

Ultimately, nothing came of the scheme to develop the Bush Lakes as a natural
attraction or as the setting for a commercial concession. No one came forward with a
plausible proposal for a roadside business at the Bush Lakes, and the idea of realigning a
stretch of highway in order to improve the motoring public’s view of the lake was
deemed impractical due to the cost. Thus the section of Hamber Park that had been
identified as the most scenic and best suited to recreational development failed to receive
a backcountry lodge or even basic park facilities. Nevertheless, the fact that the Parks
Division preferred the idea of a popular roadside concession over J.H. Munro’s more
tangible proposal for a hunting lodge is further evidence of how it was becoming oriented
towards middle- and working-class motorists in the immediate postwar years. This
decision was made at the same time plans were being drawn up for a concession complex
in Manning Park that was not too exclusive but also not too commercial. It also
demonstrates the extent to which the Parks Division believed automobile traffic was the
key to development and visitor experience in provincial parks that were traversed by
arterial highways. In Hamber, as in Manning, motorists and park visitors were practically
synonymous.
Hamber Park’s publicity-free status continued during the postwar years, in increasingly sharp contrast to the provincial government’s efforts to promote the growing number of provincial parks that were located near major highways. The government’s publicity and tourism promotion agencies appear to have produced no brochures, booklets, or pamphlets about Hamber. Nor did it appear in publications about the nearby national parks. One of the few privately published travel guides that mentioned the park was the booklet *Milestones in Ogopogo Land* (1957), but this was explained by the fact that Ches Lyons was the author. As noted previously, no signs or markers were erected at the points where the Big Bend Highway entered Hamber Park, and as a result most motorists were not aware that they were traversing a provincial park for nearly 100 miles between Boat Encampment and the outskirts of Golden. It is highly unlikely that the Parks Division overlooked this most basic form of publicity. Instead, it appears that a conscious decision was made to avoid drawing public attention to Hamber’s existence.

Hamber received no more recognition on the rare occasion that the Big Bend country was written about in newspapers and magazines. For example, a 1946 article in the historical magazine *The Beaver* went into great detail about the region’s ties to the fur trade, listing famous figures in Canada’s past who had crossed the Athabasca Pass and descended the Wood River to reach the Columbia at Boat Encampment, including David Thompson, George Simpson, and Paul Kane. The article also discussed the rugged scenery along the road, describing it as “unchanged since Thompson’s day [….] spectacular, and even threatening.” However, nothing was said of Hamber Park; it did not even appear on the map included with the story. Newspapers failed to mention the existence of the park in the fall of 1947, when the Historic Sites and Monuments Board
of Canada designated Boat Encampment a national historic site, and the following summer, when the official cairn and plaque were unveiled across the highway from the McKinnon family’s service station, in a small pullout between Wooden Head and the steel bridge over the Columbia.49

With few commercial services or designated stopping places, and no informative signs, most motorists who drove between Revelstoke and Golden experienced the Big Bend country as a featureless, meaningless, timeless landscape – a seemingly endless journey through dense forests punctuated by a few brief glimpses of the icy Columbia and distant snow-capped peaks. There were no elevated vistas that offered motorists a chance to look out over a wide expanse of land, endowing a magisterial sense of ownership; no reverential views upwards towards looming mountain peaks; just mile after mile of dark, dense, undifferentiated forest.50 Even animals were few and far between. Moose, mountain caribou, and bears were the most common large mammals in the Big Bend country, but they were relatively scarce and rarely seen, doubtless to the disappointment of many auto tourists, who were accustomed to spotting and perhaps even photographing animals when driving through the Rockies. The mosquitoes, on the other

49 Corday Mackay, “Along the Big Bend Highway,” The Beaver 277 (December 1946), 15-16; “Big Bend Historic Site Announced,” Vancouver Province, 15 October 1947, 31. Also see “Mountain Hamlet is Memorial to the Fur Trade,” Vancouver Sun, 17 January 1953, 11. Regarding the positioning of the cairn in relation to the highway and the Forest Service’s insistence that ample parking space be provided for curious motorists, see BCA, GR-1991, reel 1954, R.G. McKee, Forester, Kamloops to D.H. Ross, 31 August 1948.

hand, were “horrific,” swarming in dense clouds around sloughs and back channels of the Columbia, and discouraging motorists from exiting their vehicles.  

Figure 7.2: A typical section of the Big Bend Highway. Library and Archives Canada, Parks Canada collection, E010836789.

With few traces of human activity other than the road itself, driving the Big Bend Highway was a journey into the wilderness sublime, but with more reason for worry and fear than admiration and awe. For many stretches, the Big Bend Highway was little more than a narrow shelf carved into the wall of the Columbia River valley, where a car that went off the road could go over a cliff and end up disappearing into the river or dense brush, potentially never to be found. Crashes did not grab headlines the way they did during the summers of 1940 and 1941, but there was an intermittent stream of accidents

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on the highway, including some of a spectacular nature.\textsuperscript{52} Such events reinforced the highway’s reputation as simultaneously monotonous and dangerous. Many other roads in the BC Interior carried similar risks, but whereas a route like the Fraser Canyon highway was heavily travelled and had homes and businesses interspersed every few miles along it, the Big Bend Highway was one of the province’s loneliest drives, lightly patrolled and sporadically maintained. The monotony of the scenery combined with the road’s relatively primitive condition and the loneliness of passing only a handful of occupied buildings during many hours of driving instilled an elevated sense of isolation and vulnerability. As if to emphasize the potential for danger, vehicles that wrecked along the Big Bend Highway were typically pushed onto the verge and abandoned due to the prohibitively high cost of hauling them away. Stripped of salvageable parts, their mangled remains reminded passersby that mechanical and medical assistance was very far away should a mishap occur.\textsuperscript{53}

Between the outskirts of Revelstoke and Golden, the road was a thin, tenuous, unpaved line of modernity that ran through a wilderness that struck many as desolate and even repellent.\textsuperscript{54} It is impossible to say how motorists’ experience of driving the Big Bend Highway might have been different had they known they were traversing a provincial park between Golden and Boat Encampment. However, it seems reasonable to

\textsuperscript{52} For example, in May 1944 one Canadian soldier was killed and several others badly injured when their truck skidded on a patch of ice and crashed through the railings of the Goldstream River bridge. “Soldier Killed on Army Convoy,” \textit{Winnipeg Evening Tribune}, 25 May 1944.


\textsuperscript{54} As environmental historian William Cronon notes, prior to the nineteenth century the connotations of the word “wilderness” were anything but positive. It typically referred to landscapes that were fearsome, repellent, or terrifying. “The Trouble with Wilderness, or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” in Cronon, ed., \textit{Uncommon Ground: Re-thinking the Human Place in Nature} (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), 70. On the changing cultural meaning of mountain scenery, also see Nicholson, \textit{Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory}. 

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assume that knowing that they were inside a park would have lent a different meaning to motorists’ experiences of nature by the road. As much as parks were associated with ‘nature,’ and despite Hamber’s lack of recreational facilities and designated attractions, being aware of the existence of a park might have gone some way to endowing the landscapes visible by the road with cultural value, and thus provided a degree of reassurance in the midst of a forbidding environment. Despite the presence of the so-called highway, the Big Bend country was not a modern landscape, tamed for the pleasure of the motoring public. Nor was it an anti-modern landscape, full of scenic wonder and recreational opportunities. It was simply numbing: long, wild, and boring.

*Plotting the Big Bend Highway’s Future*

By the late 1940s Canadians’ perceptions of what constituted a proper highway were rapidly changing. So-called highways with narrow, dusty, unpaved surfaces that were closed to traffic half the year were no longer considered up to date or truly modern.55 Every time a new highway like the Hope-Princeton opened to the public, or significant improvements were made to an older road (like the one through the Fraser Canyon), the shortcomings of the Big Bend Highway were thrown further into relief. The provincial government made no significant improvements to the road around the Selkirk Mountains in the immediate postwar years. Not surprisingly, the Department of Public Works found it difficult to maintain such a long road through such rugged and sparsely populated country. Every summer the snow that had accumulated on the mountainsides melted, resulting in freshets that wreaked havoc on culverts, bridges, and the surface of

the road. Washouts were common. One Golden resident who regularly travelled the highway with her family recalled “gaping holes straight down into the canyons below, scary stuff to drive over.” As maintenance crews struggled to keep the road passable, the motoring public’s views of their surroundings took a back seat to more basic structural priorities.\textsuperscript{56}

Many western Canadian motorists shared the experience of driving along the Big Bend Highway and viewing the surrounding forests and mountain, just as they had on the road through the Fraser Canyon. It was a landscape experience they had in common, one that in most cases was deemed a negative one. The Big Bend Highway’s reputation as a road to avoid spread by word of mouth amongst tourists and casual travellers. Truckers avoided the roundabout route, which impeded the growth of long-haul trucking in western Canada. Greyhound initiated a summer bus service between Calgary and Vancouver via the Big Bend Highway in 1941, but after the completion of the Hope-Princeton in 1949 routed the majority of its buses between the Prairies and the Coast via the Crowsnest Pass and emergent southern transprovincial highway.\textsuperscript{57}

Boosters, businesses, and communities in other parts of BC were not shy about using the Big Bend Highway’s unpopularity and perceived shortcomings as ammunition in their campaigns to have the provincial government designate a new route for BC’s section of the Trans-Canada Highway. As early as 1946, the Nelson board of trade urged Premier John Hart to drop the central route between Hope, Kamloops, Revelstoke, and

\textsuperscript{56} Golden Memories Book Committee, \textit{Golden Memories}, 215.
\textsuperscript{57} On the southern transprovincial highway, Greyhound actually employed its own private snowplows to keep the treacherous Cascade Highway section between Rossland and Grand Forks passable in the winters. Harvey, \textit{Carving the Western Path: Routes to Remember}, 98-100; Tom Lymbery, “Greyhound and Gray Creek,” \textit{BC Historical News} 43, 1 (Spring 2010): 21-23.
Golden as the Trans-Canada and replace it with a high quality highway through the southern Interior. Communities and businesses in northern BC also zeroed in on the Big Bend road when lobbying for a highway to be built through the Yellowhead Pass, the lowest and gentlest pass through the Canadian Rockies. In 1947 the head of the organization promoting the Yellowhead as a new Trans-Canada Highway route travelled to Victoria to meet with the premier and minister of public works. Describing the drive between Golden and Revelstoke, he complained “I have never in my life motored over such an uninteresting and monotonous road.”

These efforts to convince Victoria to designate a new route for BC’s section of the Trans-Canada were part of a larger postwar campaign to get Canada’s transcontinental highway improved to modern standards. Driving all the way across the country had only become possible during the war, with the completion of the Big Bend Highway and a stretch across northern Ontario. But compared to the numerous transcontinental routes available in the United States, Canada’s road between Atlantic and Pacific was primitive, indirect, and of little practical value for any but the most adventurous of auto tourists. Support for an upgraded transcontinental highway was particularly strong in the western and Atlantic provinces, where regional road networks remained underdeveloped. Backing this scheme were an array of automobile associations, tourism boosters, the nascent trucking industry (which had expanded rapidly during the war), and industrial groups that

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shared an interest in encouraging Canadian automobility, including car manufacturers, petroleum companies, and the construction sector.\textsuperscript{59}

Ottawa was initially not inclined to participate in a project to modernize the Trans-Canada. Constitutionally, road building was the domain of the provinces, and the federal government saw its involvement in road construction and other large-scale public works projects during the 1930s was seen as an emergency measure. However, pressure from provincial governments and lobby groups built to the point that by the federal election of 1949 all three major national political parties were calling for the Trans-Canada to be rebuilt to higher standards of safety, speed, and permanence. Later that year, concerns about a possible economic downturn convinced the reluctant Keynesians in the Liberal government of Louis St. Laurent to bring the Trans-Canada Highway down from its ‘pantry’ of economic stimulus projects.\textsuperscript{60}

Under the terms of the Trans-Canada Highway Act, passed in December 1949, the federal government agreed to help the provinces build a high-quality transcontinental highway that would follow “the shortest practicable east-west route.” Ottawa would pay half the cost of new construction and the entire cost of any sections of the highway that ran through national parks or Indian reserves. The act set out standards that had to be met in order for road construction to be eligible for federal funding. The improved highway had to be paved and capable of being kept open to traffic all year round. Major bridges were to be of steel and concrete so that heavier vehicles could be accommodated.

\textsuperscript{59} Francis, \textit{A Road for Canada}, 68-70; Monaghan, \textit{Canada’s New Main Street}, 25-30.
Minimum standards of curvature, gradient, and sightlines were established to maximize safety and ensure the steady flow of traffic.\footnote{On the origins and key terms of the 1949 Trans-Canada Highway Act, see Monaghan, \textit{Canada’s New Main Street}, 35-40. On engineers’ efforts to improve safety on North American highways in the postwar years, see ibid, 56; Jakle and Sculle, \textit{Motoring}, chapter 8; Packer, \textit{Mobility Without Mayhem}, chapter 1.}

There was some flexibility in the implementation of these standards, in recognition of the need to accommodate regional differences in terrain, climate, and other environmental conditions.\footnote{Regarding the proposed construction standards and the question of how rigidly they would be enforced, see Monaghan, \textit{Canada’s New Main Street}, 54-56.} However, even though the unique difficulties that British Columbia would face when building such a road were acknowledged, it would clearly be a very expensive endeavour to upgrade the Trans-Canada in the province’s mountainous Interior, including in the Big Bend country. Furthermore, it was difficult to reconcile the Big Bend Highway’s circuitous route around the Selkirks with the goal of having the modernized Trans-Canada follow the “shortest practicable east-west route.” In 1952 – just twelve years after the Big Bend Highway had opened to the motoring public – engineers, surveyors, and planners from BC’s Department of Public Works began investigating options for a revised Trans-Canada Highway route between Revelstoke and the BC-Alberta boundary. The key question was whether it would be better to pave and otherwise improve the Big Bend Highway to modern standards, or to find a replacement route through the jagged, avalanche-prone Selkirks.\footnote{Harvey, \textit{Carving the Western Path}, 99-105. In 1953 the MP for Kootenay West told Parliament that tourist traffic had fallen off on the Big Bend Highway due to its poor state of repair. “Big Bend Repair Declared Urgent,” Edmonton Journal, 14 May 1953, 44.}

The Parks Division and Forest Service were not consulted about whether the Big Bend Highway – half of which was located in Hamber Provincial Park – should be improved to modern highway standards. During the late 1940s and early 1950s their main
concern in Hamber was to manage logging operations and other eyesores so that they would not have a negative effect on motorists’ views when travelling along the Big Bend Highway corridor. The goal was largely the same as in Manning – to keep logging hidden from view – but the situation in Hamber was complicated by its Class B park status. Not only were many long-dormant timber licenses grandfathered within the park, but forestry companies were also free to apply for the right to cut timber on other crown land. Not surprisingly, most applications asked for permission to log at sites located close to the highway.

Pressure to allow logging inside Hamber became increasingly intense during these years. Thousands of returned veterans set up as small producers, spurred by high demand for dimensional lumber for use in suburban home construction, and using mechanical skills picked up during the war along with surplus trucks, halftracks, and other equipment divested by the federal government. Between 1945 and 1950 the number of sawmills operating in BC more than doubled, with most of the increase accounted for by the proliferation of small truck logging operations in the Interior. 64 Although the Interior forest industry was characterized primarily by small truck logging and gypo sawmill operations in the first postwar decade, this period also saw the beginnings of large scale corporate influence with the emergence of a market for pulp wood.

In 1950 the American Celanese Corporation formed a Canadian subsidiary called the Celgar Development Company, with plans to develop the first pulp mill in the BC

Interior at the town of Castlegar, which was located at the confluence of the Kootenay and Columbia rivers 150 miles south of Revelstoke. Although the Celgar pulp mill did not begin operating until 1961, its presence was felt throughout the southern Interior many years earlier. In order for the pulp mill to be built, the company needed to secure enough timber to supply it with a steady volume of wood fibre. Celgar bought several sawmills on the Columbia during the early 1950s, including ones at Castlegar, Naksup, and Revelstoke. The point of these acquisitions was not to acquire production facilities, but to eliminate future competition and gain control of the timber licenses held by each sawmill company. In 1952 Celgar began negotiating with the provincial government for access to even more crown timber, and in 1958 was granted Forest Management License 23, which gave it exclusive cutting rights on nearly 3.5 million acres of land in the Columbia River basin between Boat Encampment and Castlegar. The river and the region’s developing road network were to be used as a conveyor belt for feeding a steady supply of wood fibre to the pulp mill’s chemical digesters, with the best grades of saw logs diverted to the company’s sawmills as market conditions dictated.

In the Columbia River valley, as elsewhere in the province during the early and mid 1950s, the stage was being set for corporate concentration, following which the small truck logging operators who had developed nimble, flexible timber harvesting techniques would become contractors for the large corporations that controlled vast tracts of timber. These large, integrated companies would be able to clearcut or cut selectively as the

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market and terrain dictated, to break free of the seasonality associated with labour-intensive horse logging and river driving, and, with the emergence of pulp mills in the Interior, to profitably utilize sizes, species, and qualities of timber that had previously been considered undesirable. Though it was only beginning to fall into place in the early 1950s, the Interior forest industry’s simultaneous centralization and flexibility would be important for resource extraction activity in Hamber Park, because it meant Big Bend timber would become appealing to both small and large players.

The BC Forest Service and Parks Division were barely able to keep up with the number of applications to cut timber in Hamber Park in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The majority involved the southernmost portion of the park, close to Golden, where the park had been superimposed over dozens of valid timber licenses and leases. Most of these were quickly snapped up by the larger forest companies in Golden, but small operators also applied for timber licenses and the Park Use Permits that would allow them to build logging roads and operate portable ‘gypo’ sawmills inside the park. By the mid 1950s several logging operations were active inside Hamber. The largest belonged to Selkirk Spruce Mills, whose timber licenses spanned a long stretch of the Big Bend Highway 15 miles north of Golden. Selkirk Spruce Mills eventually had two portable sawmills and a planer mill located on its timber leases inside the park. More typical of the area’s many small truck-logging operations were the brothers Walter and Adolph Roosdahl, who hauled a home-built, diesel-powered gypo mill to their timber licenses near Surprise Rapids.67 Small operators like the Roosdahls tended to ‘cream’ their timber

67 The Roosdahl family later built a small café and gas station beside the highway near their camp. The terms of their timber lease and Parks Use Permit would not have allowed such a roadside commercial operation, but to the Parks Division’s surprise the Roosdahls had managed to acquire a rare parcel of
berths, selectively removing the most valuable timber before roughly processing it in preparation for hauling to faraway planer mills in Golden or Revelstoke. This was especially common at isolated locations like Surprise Rapids. However, further south, especially around Golden, clearcutting was becoming common by the mid 1950s.

Overwhelmed by the number of logging applications it received, the Parks Division never had time to draw up a formal policy regarding who would be allowed to cut where, when, and in what manner inside Hamber Park. However, it was agreed that the allowance of new logging operations in Hamber should take into consideration the fact that it was an enormous Class B park with extensive forest cover, few accessible attractions, and dubious scenic value. The Parks Division usually acquiesced to new logging activity in the park, provided it would not create eyesores that would be visible to motorists travelling along the Big Bend Highway. It engaged in a few strategic timber swaps in order to preserve scenic roadside landscapes, but not with the same urgency as similar deals in Manning Park during the same period.

Within the Parks Division, Mickey Trew spoke in favour of allowing new resource extraction operations inside Hamber’s boundaries. In a 1949 report to the head of the Parks Division, he argued the agency “should not object to exploitation of resources which do not conflict with the aesthetic values along the Big Bend Highway. […] Our main concern in clearing applications for Timber Sales should be to ensure that logging operations are not obvious from the highway.” After all, he continued, Hamber had been “set aside for a reason only remotely related to its recreational values” and

therefore “should not be a park to start with [emphasis added].” In addition to constraints on where logging was done, Trew also wanted some control over how it was done. He considered forest fires the only serious threat to Hamber Park’s limited scenic value, and recommended that logging operations inside the park be subjected to rigid enforcement of slash disposal regulations in order to minimize the fire risk.68

Trew changed his mind about logging standards later that summer, after concluding that timber could only be cut profitably in such an isolated area if enforcement of the forestry regulations was relatively lax. He proposed that Hamber’s protective status be further downgraded, from a Class B provincial park to the level of a forest reserve, or, if that proved politically impossible, that it be effectively treated as such. “The only areas I would worry about,” he recommended, were “the old original [1936 timber] reserve from Boat Encampment to Kinbasket Lake” and the shores of Kinbasket Lake itself. Trew deemed the rest of the Big Bend Highway “a long, dreary, and disappointing drive,” and predicted the provincial government would not modernize or retain it as part of the Trans-Canada Highway. He was, in effect, questioning the Parks Division’s entire management policy for Hamber Park: if the motoring public was likely going to be re-routed away from the Big Bend country, then it made little sense to worry about the aesthetic effects of logging along the existing highway corridor.69

The Parks Division relinquished control of the timber licensing process in Hamber to other Forest Service offices in the early 1950s, and also relied on their field staff to supervise logging along the Big Bend corridor. Thus the archival records pertaining to resource extraction operations inside the park contain only the most

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contentious files. However, these files show that the motoring public’s experiences of nature by the road remained the key consideration in managing Hamber Park, just as it was in Manning and other provincial parks traversed by arterial roads during this period.

For example, in the summer of 1949 the Parks Division received an application from Henry Sigalet of Golden to cut cedar poles on the lower slopes of Mount Trident, across Kinbasket Lake from the Middle River Auto Camp. Though this would have been a selective cutting operation, Parks Division staff were concerned it would be “impossible to conceal [from motorists] and could conceivably spoil the aesthetic values of a very beautiful piece of parkland.” Not only would the skid roads and lakeside landings associated with the proposed logging operation leave ugly scars, but when the timber applied for was inspected, it was found to consist largely of “decadent Upper Columbia cedar.” From the outside, these trees appeared to be perfect for utility poles, but most were riddled with rot “from roots to crown” – in fact, many were “just hollow shells.” Even if this timber were logged selectively, large amounts of unsightly waste would be generated from culls (trees cut down but then left behind after being found rotten) and long butting (trees cut high above the ground to avoid rot in the base). Furthermore, allowing 40- to 90-foot-long cedar poles to be hauled along the narrow, winding highway during the tourist season was expected to create a significant traffic hazard.70

Parks Division staff felt it would be useful to have an access road into the Mount Trident area for firefighting purposes, but ultimately concluded that their first priority

70 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1754, G.W. Minns, Assistant Forester, Nelson to Chief Forester, 25 August 1949. Also see Minns to Chief Forester, 5 August 1949 regarding the complexities of managing logging operations in hilly sections of the eastern Columbia River valley, where several elevated sections of the highway gave motorists brief glimpses of expansive tracts of timber.
should be “aesthetic considerations […] in general, and round Kinbasket Lake very much in particular” – at least until development plans for Hamber Park were finalized. They therefore recommended that Sigalet’s timber license application be disallowed.71 When he appealed the decision, park planner Robert Ahrens was asked to review the file. He agreed with his colleagues’ arguments against allowing logging at that location, and also noted that very strong wind gusts were common in the Kinbasket Lake section of the Rocky Mountain Trench. Even if only the best cedar poles were removed, the remaining timber would be left susceptible to blowdown that might render the entire area “unsightly.” Ahrens therefore upheld the decision to disallow logging on the lakeshore slopes below Mount Trident.72

In addition to pressure from forestry companies to allow new logging operations inside the park, including in areas that could be seen from the Big Bend Highway, the Parks Division also had to deal with pressure from other agencies of the state that wanted to open Hamber up to resource extraction industries. The boldest attempt at an incursion came in 1950, when the deputy minister of mines asked the chief forester to delete the portion of Hamber Park that encompassed the eastern slope of the Selkirks – that is, the portion of the park located to the west of the Columbia River. The Department of Mines wanted to encourage prospecting in that “extremely rugged” and “practically […] inaccessible” part of the Big Bend country, and specifically wanted to facilitate the development of a promising mineral claim on the west side of Kinbasket Lake, at a steeply sloped point near the shoreline that would be prominently visible from the

71 Ibid.
72 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1754, Ahrens, undated report “Examination of Timber Sale Application X47686” [late 1949].
highway. The Parks Division fended this request off on the basis that the area around the
lake had a “recreational potential which is now made more available since the Trans-
Canada Highway is being routed through the park.” However, the Department of Mines’
proposal served as a reminder that other government agencies viewed Hamber Park as an
area that would be better used for resource extraction. Given that the Parks Division had
not done any actual development work at Kinbasket Lake, its decision to defend
Hamber’s existing boundaries was likely as much about preserving its own authority as it
was about protecting scenic values.73

Mickey Trew supported the Department of Mines’ request. In an internal Parks
Division memo he argued that mineral exploration should be encouraged in Hamber
Park, even if it meant allowing a mineral concentrator to be built on the shore of
Kinbasket Lake, which he optimistically suggested would be “barely noticeable” from the
lonely highway. Trew also argued that decadent timber should be cut wherever possible
inside the park. He had recently flown the entire length of Hamber Park, and had come
away convinced that it did not merit being kept as a park. He acknowledged that
Hamber’s enormous backcountry contained many valleys and mountain peaks “of high
scenic value,” but claimed these were so inaccessible, scattered, and overshadowed by
the more outstanding and easily accessible scenery of the nearby national parks that
Hamber’s retention “en masse” could not be justified. “[T]he fact that people travelling
the Big Bend [Highway] are either coming from or going to these choice park areas
makes their appreciation of the limited values in Hamber Park very secondary,” Trew
asserted. Even at Kinbasket Lake, he complained, “there is nothing but scenery that can

73 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1754, John Walker, Deputy Minister of Mines to C.D. Orchard, Deputy Minister of
be said to have recreational value, and this is mountain vistas that, except for [forest] fires can not be adulterated to any appreciable extent.” Trew reiterated his position that the Forest Service “should administer Hamber Park as we would a Forest Reserve,” and “not worry too much about the non-existent recreational values.” “I have always been of the opinion that the creation of a park in that area was an act of misguided judgment in days gone by,” he explained. “The back country on either side of the road in the Park is generally inaccessible. […] A few tourist camps or lodges is about the best development that country can have. It is not a resort, or otherwise popular, recreational region.”

In spite of these persistent and pointed critiques of Hamber Park from within the Parks Division and elsewhere in the provincial government, it was easier to do nothing with the park than to develop or delete it. The uncertain future of the Big Bend Highway did not encourage decisive action on the matter. One of the key ways this inertia played out was a continuing lack of promotion. In fact, the Parks Division sometimes took active steps to discourage outside parties from publicizing the park. For example, in 1950 the Ontario Government Department of Travel and Publicity was dissuaded from mentioning Hamber Park in any of its promotional material about the Trans-Canada Highway in BC. “[We] must stress that the recreational values of this park are little known [and] large tracts of the central and northern parts are still unexplored,” Parks Division headquarters explained. “[T]he remoteness and comparative inaccessibility of this vast area do not recommend it for early development [emphasis in original].” Over the following decade,

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74 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1954, D.M. Trew to E.G. Oldham, 21 July 1950. Also see Trew to Oldham, 18 May 1950. Trew was not the only critic of Hamber Park within the Forest Service. In his 1954 critique of BC’s fast-growing provincial park system, rogue planner George Wood concluded that Hamber “should be deleted.” The only part he deemed worthy of retention was the area around Kinbasket Lake, which he called the “high point” of the Big Bend Highway, even though it had “little to offer […] apart from scenery.” BCA, GR-1991, reel 1754, G.A. Wood, report, 1954.
the Parks Division received numerous letters of inquiry from people who were interested in visiting Hamber for camping, fishing, hunting, hiking, and climbing, but in most cases took steps to discourage them from venturing beyond the highway right-of-way, pointing towards the park’s inaccessibility, lack of development, and the superior scenery that could be seen by the road in the nearby national parks.  

The Parks Division’s efforts to dodge publicity and dissuade potential visitors to Hamber suggest that it hoped to avoid having people know or care about the park. Possible explanations for the Parks Division’s efforts to keep Hamber out of the public eye in the early 1950s include a lingering sense of resentment towards the park within the agency, and a more general dissatisfaction with the experience of nature by the road that the Big Bend Highway provided the motoring public. However, by the mid 1950s a number of more concrete reasons to prevent the motoring public from knowing or caring about Hamber Park were also beginning to emerge.

**Development Plans in the mid 1950s**

The situation with roads, parks, and resource development in the Big Bend country started changing rapidly after 1954. Suggestions that Hamber Park should be deleted began to make sense for reasons other than its lack of appeal to the motoring public and desirability to logging companies. The driving force behind this change was the growing likelihood that large dams would be built along BC’s section of the Columbia River.

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75 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1754, Oldham to Ontario Government Department of Travel and Publicity, 17 May 1950; Parks and Recreation Division to Dorothy Swindelle, 20 August 1956; Director, Provincial Parks Branch to Walter H. May, 17 March 1959; Director to D. Brewer, 30 November 1960.
In 1951, Andrew McNaughton, Canada’s representative on the International Joint Commission, identified a narrow point in the Columbia valley at Mica Creek, 75 miles north of Revelstoke, as the single best site for a storage dam. A 700-foot-high impoundment dam built at this point would be able to hold back an enormous volume of water: approximately 15 million acre feet, with one acre foot being the volume of water necessary to fill an acre-sized area to the depth of twelve inches. This would go a long way towards regulating the downstream flow of the river. However, it would require inundating large areas of the Columbia, Canoe, Wood, and Bush river valleys, in the process destroying Boat Encampment, Kinbasket Lake, and the eastern section of the Big Bend Highway.76

In February 1954, McNaughton met in Victoria with Robert Sommers, the Social Credit government’s minister of lands, forests and mines. Sommers was receptive to McNaughton’s proposal for a major program of hydroelectric development on BC’s section of the Columbia River, believing that cheap electrical power would help attract industrial developments like smelters and pulp mills to the province’s Interior. However, other members of the government, including Premier W.A.C. Bennett, were reluctant to wait for the integrated international development scheme favoured by McNaughton. Victoria remained receptive to ‘feelers’ put out by private power developers.

Later that year the provincial government was approached by the Kaiser Aluminum Company and the Puget Sound Utilities Council, a consortium of power developers.

76 John Sweetenham, McNaughton vol. 3 (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1969), 237. Also see Neil Swainson, Conflict Over the Columbia, The Canadian Background to an Historic Treaty (Ottawa, Kingston, and Montreal: Institute of Public Administration of Canada and McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1979), 54-56, 62. Andrew McNaughton may have been familiar with the Big Bend country prior to joining the International Joint Commission, for while serving as a general in the Canadian Army he had been instrumental in convincing R.B. Bennett to have the Department of Defence take over provincial relief work camps in the period 1933-1936.
utilities from Washington State. These companies proposed to fund the construction of an impoundment dam at Mica Creek, and to turn it over to the provincial government upon completion. The key gain for the Americans, on top of flood control, would be a better regulation of river flows so that hydroelectric dams on the American section of the Columbia could produce optimal amounts of power all year round. Regulating the flow of the Columbia at Mica Creek, they pointed out, would also make power-generating dams feasible elsewhere on BC’s section of the river, such as the narrow points at Downie Creek and Revelstoke Canyon. This proposal did not advance very far, even though it promised considerable benefit to BC without the province having to come up with the estimated 250 million dollars needed to build the enormous dam at Mica. However, the idea of a large dam at Mica Creek was subsequently incorporated into the discussions that led to the Columbia River Treaty.77

These earliest proposals for a dam at Mica Creek led park planner Robert Ahrens to study how such a development might affect Hamber Park. His main concern was that talk of dams in the Big Bend country would generate increased pressure from forestry companies to throw Hamber open to unrestricted logging. However, he noted that “interest waxes hot and cold over such projects, sometimes for many years until conditions arise which enable plans to materialize,” and therefore recommended that the Parks Division keep a tight grip over its power to approve where and how logging and other resource extraction activities could be done within the park, at least until it was clear whether or not a dam (or dams) would actually be built. Ahrens also noted that the Parks Division’s efforts to keep logging in the Big Bend country hidden from the

77 Swainson, Conflict Over the Columbia, 54-56.
motoring public through the use of forested screens had so far proven quite successful, with most cut-over areas “scarcely discernable to the public passing through the park.”

The following years were filled with intense, sometimes acrimonious constitutional and diplomatic wrangling between the federal and provincial governments about which dams should be built in which sequence in order to provide the best return on investment while not angering the Americans or impinging on the other level of government’s powers. However, the important point here is that all of the schemes proposed for the development of the Columbia River in BC involved a large dam at Mica Creek, which would cause extensive flooding in the Big Bend country, including within the boundaries of Hamber Park. It is also worth noting that proposals for dam development in the Big Bend country stirred up less controversy than did proposals affecting the upstream and downstream sections of the BC’s Columbia River valley, where flooding threatened to disrupt dozens of small communities, destroy good agricultural land, and dislocate hundreds or even thousands of people. If there was any section of the Columbia valley that a large number of British Columbians could be convinced was an ‘empty,’ unproductive wilderness and therefore a good location to sacrifice for such a megaproject, it was the Big Bend country. It contained no communities, only a handful of buildings, no designated recreational areas, and no scenic,

79 The political, legal, and diplomatic aspects of this wrangling are described in Mitchell, W.A.C. Bennett, chapters 8-9; Sherman, Bennett, chapters 9-10; Swainson, Conflict Over the Columbia; Swettenham, McNaughton, vol. 3, chapter 6.
natural, or historical attractions to which the motoring public had developed a strong attachment. As far as most motorists would have known, the region also contained no parks, for it had no picnic sites, no campgrounds, no boat launches, no scenic viewpoints, and no signs to indicate Hamber’s existence. The only thing it did contain was the much-maligned Big Bend Highway, which many western Canadian motorists would be happy to see drowned, provided it was replaced by a more modern road between Golden and Revelstoke.

In early 1955 the provincial government assured Ottawa that it remained enthusiastic about the Mica Dam project, but there was still no guarantee that dams were going to be built on BC’s section of the Columbia River.\(^{81}\) British Columbia saw more than its fair share of megaproject proposals during the first two postwar decades, and many similarly grand schemes had come to nothing. The presence of the Trans-Canada Highway was a major stumbling block to the Mica Dam project, one that political, social, and environmental historians who have studied the Columbia River development in Canada have tended to overlook. They have similarly failed to acknowledge the presence of Hamber Provincial Park, although they can hardly be faulted for this, given the cavalier attitude the Social Credit government had demonstrated towards provincial parks that stood in the way of industrial development. For example, in 1955 1.15 million acres were deleted from Tweedsmuir Provincial Park in order to facilitate hydroelectric power production for the Alcan aluminum smelter at Kitimat. The following year, dam builders

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\(^{81}\) At an early 1955 hearing of the External Affairs Committee, BC’s Attorney-General Robert Bonner assured the federal government of the province’s intention to press ahead with damming the Columbia. This may have been intended to indicate that the province would be asking for the Trans-Canada Highway to be rerouted away from the Big Bend country. Swainson, *Conflict Over the Columbia*, 62.
were given permission to raise scenic Buttle Lake in Strathcona Provincial Park by 30 feet.⁸²

The larger of these two stumbling blocks was abruptly removed when BC’s Department of Highways submitted the results of its surveys for a future route of the Trans-Canada Highway between Revelstoke and the BC-Alberta boundary. After carefully examining five possible alternatives to the Big Bend route, and considering factors like the cost of construction and future maintenance, directness, reliability, appeal to tourists, and utility for commercial truck traffic, the highway engineers determined that for approximately the same cost of bringing the Big Bend Highway up to modern standards of gradient, curvature, permanence, and safety, a far more direct route could be built through the Selkirks via the Rogers Pass.⁸³ At 90 miles long, a highway between Golden and Revelstoke via the avalanche-scarred pass would be less than half the length of the Big Bend route. Better yet, at least from the provincial government’s perspective, most of this route would traverse Glacier and Mount Revelstoke national parks. Under the terms of the Trans-Canada Highway Act, this meant the federal government would be responsible for funding almost all of the new construction, including an elaborate series of avalanche defences that would be required near the summit of the pass in order to keep the highway open to traffic in winter.

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⁸² The deletion and reclassification of large sections of Tweedsmuir Park in order to facilitate Alcan’s Kemano aluminum smelter development has received little attention from historians, but is outlined in Bev Christensen, Too Good to Be True: Alcan’s Kemano Completion Project (Vancouver: Talon Books, 1995), 79-101. The controversy over raising Buttle Lake is discussed in Wallace Baikie, Strathcona: A History of British Columbia’s First Provincial Park (Campbell River, BC: Ptarmigan, 1986), 96-100; Arn Keeling and Graeme Wynn, “‘The Park is a Mess’: Development and Degradation in British Columbia’s First Park,” BC Studies (2011): 119-150.

⁸³ The possible alternatives to the Big Bend and the engineering challenges and cost analyses associated with them are described in Harvey, Carving the Western Path, 99-105.
The engineers’ conclusion that modernizing the Big Bend Highway would cost the same amount as replacing it with a new road through the Rogers Pass placed the decision on the future route of the Trans-Canada Highway in the mountains of eastern BC back in the hands of provincial politicians. In March 1956, the government of British Columbia notified Ottawa that it wanted its section of the Trans-Canada Highway re-routed through the Selkirk Mountains via the Rogers Pass. This obliged Ottawa to pay the entire cost of constructing a new highway through Mount Revelstoke and Glacier national parks, plus between 50 and 90 percent of the sections of the road located outside the boundaries of those parks. Just as importantly, re-routing the Trans-Canada Highway made the unpopular, roundabout Big Bend Highway expendable, thereby opening the Big Bend country up to dam development. Barely fifteen years after the Big Bend Highway had opened to the motoring public and been hailed as an achievement of no less significance than the driving of the last spike on the Canadian Pacific Railway, the provincial government had manoeuvered Ottawa into paying for another road between Revelstoke and Golden. Undeveloped and unfamiliar Hamber Park was now the only remaining impediment to the construction of dams that would turn the Big Bend of the Columbia into an enormous reservoir.

84 It is also worth noting that their report was completed at the very moment Ottawa was prodding the provinces towards completing the modernization of the Trans-Canada Highway. Since the passage of the Trans-Canada Highway Act in 1949, progress on the project had been embarrassingly slow due to the fact that most provincial governments (BC included) had focused on improving their internal road networks. To spur the provinces along, in 1956 the federal government offered to pay 90% of the cost of building the most difficult 10% of the road in each province, on top of the 50/50 split in costs promised in the 1949 Act. Regarding Ottawa’s efforts to speed up work on the Trans-Canada Highway in the mid 1950s, see Francis, A Road for Canada, 94-101; Monaghan, Canada’s New Main Street, 67-77.

85 Monaghan, Canada’s New Main Street, 70-71. It is unclear whether the squabbling between Victoria and Ottawa over damming the Columbia River was connected to the provincial government’s decision to re-route its section of the Trans-Canada through the Rogers Pass, but Robert Harvey, who was a senior engineer in BC’s Department of Highways during the mid 1950s, recalled “a feeling [around the department that] it was the Columbia River hydro-electric potential, not anything the road men could do, that swung the pendulum.” Harvey, Carving the Western Path, 103.
After more than a decade in limbo, things started changing rapidly in Hamber Park following the provincial government’s decision to ‘replace’ the Big Bend Highway. Beginning in the summer of 1956 Hamber Park was thrown open to logging, including in areas that were visible from the highway and around scenic highlights like the shores of Kinbasket Lake. Construction of a dam at Mica Creek was now “only a question of time,” park planner Robert Ahrens explained in a November memo to the head of the Parks Division, and it was unclear whether the Big Bend Highway would be kept open after the new road through the Rogers Pass was completed. The huge dam being proposed at Mica Creek “promised to raise water over Kinbasket Lake by approximately 200 feet,” meaning large tracts of timber that had previously merited preservation as roadside scenery were suddenly destined to end up underwater. Backtracking on the position he had staked in 1949 and reiterated through the early 1950s regarding the need to closely control logging activity along the scenic shores of Kinbasket Lake, Ahrens concluded it was “better to take the timber now than to leave it for flooding later.” “It is doubtful if logging on the west shore of Kinbasket Lake would further detract from the scenic aspect of the lake once flooding takes place,” he noted dryly. There was no longer a good reason to block applications to cut timber along the lakeshore or higher up on the slopes, even in particularly scenic areas, as an the lower slopes of Mount Trident. An oral agreement was soon reached whereby the Forest Service automatically approved all applications to cut timber below 2450 feet above sea level, which was expected to be the

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maximum height of the future reservoir, without consulting the Parks Division.\textsuperscript{87} By the fall of 1957, the district forester responsible for the Big Bend country was also calling for the bureaucratic formality of issuing Parks Use Permits for logging roads and other forestry-related developments in Hamber Park to be dispensed with, in order to accelerate timber cutting in what loggers and Parks Branch staff were referring to as the “flood area.” Concern for the motoring public’s experiences of nature by the road went out the window.\textsuperscript{88}

The exact parameters of the flood area were uncertain for some time. In January 1959 the engineering company which the provincial government had hired to evaluate the Columbia River’s development potential delivered a report that demonstrated the feasibility of damming the river at as many as five narrow points between Golden and Revelstoke. After much debate and deliberation, it was decided that instead of building a series of small- and medium-sized dams, it would be better to build two very large dams. The first would be an 800-foot high impoundment dam at Mica Creek – fully 100 feet higher than what Andrew McNaughton had proposed in 1951. This would be followed by a power-generating dam downstream at Revelstoke Canyon, just a few miles north of the town. The latter dam’s reservoir would stretch almost all the way back to Mica, and was expected to flood out the western section of the Big Bend country. In effect, the Columbia River between Golden and Revelstoke would be turned into a pair of massive lagoons. On the Mica reservoir, a northerly ‘arm’ would stretch 60 miles up the Canoe River valley, almost to the headwaters of the Fraser and North Thompson rivers, while

\textsuperscript{87} This undated oral agreement is described in BCA, GR-1991, reel 1754, H.G. McWilliams, Director, Provincial Parks Branch to D.B. Turner, Deputy Minister, Department of Recreation and Conservation, 25 April 1961.

\textsuperscript{88} BCA, GR-1991, reel 1754, Forester, Parks Branch to District Forester, Nelson, 11 September 1957.
other tributary river valleys like the Bush, Wood, and Sullivan would be turned into fjord-like bays.⁸⁹

As it became increasingly clear that one configuration of dams or another was going to be imposed on the Columbia River between Revelstoke and Golden, and that the resulting inundation would destroy large sections of the Big Bend country, clearing the heavily forested valley floor became a urgent priority. This meant abandoning the pretense of managing Hamber as a provincial park – there was no point worrying about protecting scenery and natural landscape features along a highway that was likely to be underwater within a decade. As more and more logging activity was permitted inside park boundaries, the limited restrictions that remained in place were loosened further, and old commitments that had been necessary to get the road built in the first place were jettisoned with little discussion. Despite Duff Pattullo’s 1935 promise to preserve the tall, ancient roadside timber between Kinbasket Lake and Boat Encampment “in perpetuity,” the reserve over it was cancelled in February 1959 so that the timber could be made available for logging.⁹⁰ Around the same time, the Parks Division offered no objection to the Department of Lands lifting the forty-chain-wide reserve that offered a degree of control over logging and other industrial activities along the western section of the Big

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⁸⁹ Potential dam sites identified by 1959 included Calamity Curve north of Golden, Surprise Rapids, Mica Creek, Downie Creek, and Revelstoke Canyon. The consulting engineers initially recommended that the first dam be built at Surprise Rapids in order to provide storage capacity and downstream flood control, followed by a relatively low dam at Mica Creek that would provide further storage. Power generating dams would then be built at Downie Creek and/or Revelstoke Canyon. Crippen-Wright Engineering Ltd. for British Columbia, Department of Lands and Forests, Comptroller of Water Rights, “Hydro-electric Development of the Columbia River Basin in Canada” (Vancouver: Crippen-Wright, 1959); Swainson, Conflict Over the Columbia, 105.

Bend Highway corridor. This meant timber could now be removed right up the verges of the road. The following spring, permission was given to log around the scenic Bush Lakes, on the basis that there would be “no conflict with recreational values.”

No Parks Branch staff were stationed in Hamber Park; the nearest regional office was in Nelson, 150 miles south of Revelstoke. Although the Parks Branch became part of the new Department of Recreation and Conservation in 1957, it maintained a friendly working relationship with the Forest Service, relying on its staff to supervise logging operations inside Hamber. However, the Forest Service’s field staff were overextended themselves, and by 1958 it was clear that “many abuses” of the Parks Act and Forest Act were occurring within Hamber’s boundaries. These included unauthorized construction of logging roads, unapproved operation of portable sawmills, excessive slash being left behind, unsatisfactory disposal of sawdust and other waste products, abandoned mill sites left in messy condition, and sawmills burning wood waste without the catch screens necessary to prevent the emission of burning embers, which could be carried aloft on the high winds of the Columbia valley, potentially to ignite forest fires. “Usually when regulations are drawn to the attention of the offenders the offence is discontinued,” D.L. McMurchie, the head of the Parks Branch observed. However, a lack of supervision combined with the marginal profitability of logging in the Big Bend country and a sense of urgency due to anticipated dam construction led to a general breakdown of control over forestry operations in the park. As these “administrative difficulties” piled on top of the anticipated exit of auto tourists and pleasure travellers from the Big Bend Highway.

corridor, McMurchie began ruminating about the “the elimination of a large potion of the park.”

**Looking Forward to the Rogers Pass**

News that the Big Bend Highway was going to be replaced by a shorter, paved, all-season road through the Selkirks was met with widespread enthusiasm by western Canadian motorists, tourism promoters, business groups, and journalists. Many magazine and newspaper articles about the future highway took the opportunity to disparage the unpopular roundabout road that existed between Revelstoke and Golden. For example, in the summer of 1956 *Vancouver Province* reporter Paddy Sherman was invited to observe surveyors and engineers finalizing the right-of-way location in Rogers Pass. “This is the right place,” one of them assured Sherman. “There was no mistake when they decided to put the Trans-Canada through here. The mistake was made 35 years ago when they decided to [build] the Big Bend highway.” The engineer went on to describe how nearly 60 feet of snow had fallen at the summit of the pass during the winter of 1950-51, and how advanced engineering techniques would allow the future highway to be kept open in an area plagued by such heavy winter precipitation, plus avalanches and the subsequent spring runoff. Admiring the peaks that loomed above the floor of the pass, Sherman predicted the completed highway would be “the loveliest scenic drive in Canada,” and reported that boosters and businesses in Revelstoke were already promoting the Selkirks

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92 Problems with logging in Hamber Park in the late 1950s are described in BCA, GR-1991, reel 1822, W. Roosdahl, Roosdahl Contracting Ltd. to Department of Recreation and Conservation, 17 September 1958; John Robertson, R.H. Pollock Construction Ltd. [Golden] to D.L. McMurchie, Director, Provincial Parks Branch, 21 November 1958; McMurchie to Robertson, 16 December 1958; McMurchie to W. Hepper, District Conservation Officer [Nelson], 19 December 1958; Hepper to McMurchie, 21 April 1959; Marc W. Gormley [Professional Forest Engineer] to McMurchie, 29 April 1959; Hepper to McMurchie, 8 May 1959. Quotes are from McMurchie to Hepper, 19 December 1958.
as a “tourist mecca” and “mountain paradise.” “Soon you will be able to drive in comfort through Rogers Pass […] in just an hour or two,” he promised his readers. 93

In the next edition of the *Province*, Sherman described the history of Glacier National Park, which would be traversed by the future highway. Glacier was one of Canada’s oldest national parks, and had been a very popular tourist attraction around the turn of the century. This had been due to the many glacier fields and mountain peaks that were visible from the Canadian Pacific Railway, for unlike the Columbia River valley, the forest cover at such high elevation was relatively sparse and provided wide open vistas. However, Glacier’s scenic highlights had been invisible to the travelling public since 1916, when the CPR completed the five-mile-long Connaught Tunnel beneath the summit of the Rogers Pass. The tunnel allowed trains to avoid steep grades and hazardous avalanche paths, but had the concomitant effect of ‘burying’ one of the most scenic and popular sections of the railway journey. Sherman predicted tourists would quickly “rediscover” Glacier Park once it was open to automobile traffic, leading to developments like ski hills, restaurants, and motels. Thus replacing the Big Bend section of the Trans-Canada Highway would not only allow faster year-round travel, but would also restore travellers’ access to one of Canada’s oldest and most scenic national parks, and help build BC’s service and tourism industries. 94

BC’s other major daily, the *Vancouver Sun*, also referred to the perceived shortcomings of the Big Bend Highway when discussing the advantages of re-routing the

93 Paddy Sherman, “Rogers Pass, Where Slide Killed 66: Soon It’ll be Tourist Mecca,” *Vancouver Province*, 16 July 1956, 3
94 Paddy Sherman, “Glacier Had Luxury Hotels When Vancouver Had Shacks,” *Vancouver Province*, 17 July 1956, 3. On Glacier as one of Canada’s most famous tourist attractions between the 1880s and 1910s, see Hart, *The Selling of Canada*. The ‘disappearance’ of the Rogers Pass area as a tourist attraction between 1916 and 1962 is touched on in Finch, *Glacier House Rediscovered*. 310
Trans-Canada Highway through Rogers Pass. As part of a 1959 series of articles about summer travel in western Canada, the *Sun* identified the Big Bend Highway as the last “weak link” in an otherwise safe and scenic drive between the Coast and the national parks in the Rockies. The existing road between Revelstoke and Golden was “gravel, narrow, twisting, and lonely,” the paper complained. “Some of these faults might be forgiven if it were scenic, but it is not. *Most of it is just a road through the trees and plainly boring* [emphasis added].” Similarly, in an article about the “fantastic speedway” being built through the Selkirks, *Sun* columnist Jack Scott boasted that the new road would eliminate “the loop of 193 nasty miles of washboard, dust, and gravel known far and wide as the Big Bend.”

These kinds of stories became more frequent as work proceeded on the new highway. When it was reported that construction was costing more than a million dollars per mile, *Province* columnist Eric Ramsden justified the expense by citing a study on travel patterns in western Canada which suggested less than three percent of auto tourists who visited Banff National Park continued westward into British Columbia. Ramsden claimed this tourist deficit was “chiefly because of the unpaved, circuitous Big Bend road.” He argued this would be corrected by the new highway being built through the Rogers Pass, which would offer motorists “breathtaking scenery and a wide modern road” in contrast to “the slightly-less-than-exciting Big Bend gravel road.” He emphasized that the influx of tourists expected to pass over the completed Rogers Pass route would increase business for roadside commercial operators in the BC Interior and

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help fill the province’s coffers through gas taxes, fishing and hunting licenses, and other travel-related expenditures.  

In the spring of 1960, Weekend Magazine, a colour supplement distributed to more than a million Canadians with their Saturday newspaper, ran an illustrated story about summer road trips on the Trans-Canada Highway. Few specific places were mentioned but the article singled out two conspicuous “gaps” in a modern, tourist-friendly transcontinental road. One was the absence of a highway along the scenic north shore of Lake Superior. The other was the lack of a paved road through the mountains of eastern British Columbia. “[F]or the moment, the notorious Big Bend Highway (and that last word is used advisedly) is the only all-Canadian way over the Rockies for a car,” the article complained:

Stories have circulated for years about gibbering patients being held in Calgary hospitals until they have regained sanity after a car ride over the Big Bend. I drove it and can half believe the stories. But [with completion of the Rogers Pass route] we will be able to forget about such things, for Canadians will have their nation-wide highway, dreamed of for so long.

Bob Metcalfe rejoiced in the impending demise of the Big Bend Highway in a story he wrote for Imperial Oil Review. The route between Golden and Revelstoke had always been a “highway horror,” he explained, and “nobody is shedding a tear” that it would soon be made redundant. “Only loggers, miners, sportsmen, and the adventurous and foolhardy will use it after this year,” he predicted, “and then the Columbia River power project will deliver the coup de grace.”

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98 Metcalfe, “Goodbye to the Big Bend,” 16-19.
Metcalfe drove the Big Bend on the first day of November 1960, the day after it had officially been closed for the winter. His account of the trip is noteworthy for describing the road during its last days as the main link between Golden and Revelstoke, and also for providing a rare description of the seasonal routine whereby the handful of businesses along the Big Bend Highway closed up for the winter. Metcalfe left Golden in the late afternoon, and soon had what he called “a Big Bend grip on the wheel and a Big Bend stare on the road,” with dense timber looming up against the road, punctuated here and there by glimpses of the dark, boiling Columbia down the embankment. Metcalfe told of cars that had their windshields cracked, or their springs, shocks, and axles broken by the poor condition of the road surface, and of motorists rumoured to have gone into shock or lost their reason after the drive. However, he claimed, there had been relatively few fatal accidents on the Big Bend road, which he attributed to “the fact that motorists freeze into prayerful attention to their driving as soon as they bounce onto the road.”

Metcalfe repeatedly emphasized the loneliness of the drive, reporting that motorists saw the “faint flicker from lanterns in only two or three windows” when driving between Revelstoke and Golden. Metcalfe found the Middle River Auto Camp at Kinbasket Lake sealed up for the winter, but was able to get a coffee at Boat Encampment, where the staff were busy preparing the lodge for winter – an elaborate procedure, given that buildings in the Big Bend country could be completely buried by snow. However, the owners of the gas station and motel at Downie Creek told him they intended to stay open through the winter in order to serve loggers and the road.

99 Metcalfe was not entirely correct on this point. See for example, in August 1958 a Greyhound bus went over a 75-foot embankment near Mica Creek, killing one passenger and injuring many others. “16 Bus Crash Victims Still in Hospital,” Saskatoon Star-Phoenix, 6 August 1958, 1; “Jury Finds Bus Death Accidental,” Vancouver Sun, 14 August 1958, 40.
construction crews who were starting to upgrade the section of road between Revelstoke
and the Mica Creek dam site.

Metcalf described himself as “shaky,” “shuddering,” and speaking “a hoarse
octave higher than normal” when he pulled into Revelstoke around midnight. He reported
having been “glued to the wheel for eight long dark hours and 190 incredibly long
miles—my attention riveted to a roadway that has curled the hair of many a more intrepid
motorist.”

I’d churned through yards of muddy gravel, forded mountain ‘run offs’ the size of
small streams, bounced over teeth-rattling washboard and potholes, dodged rocks
from slides, hugged cliffs where the road hung over roaring water far below,
inhaed up and down steep tortuous grades and over creaking wooden bridges.

Most western Canadian motorists did not need to have the reasons for celebrating the
demise of the Big Bend Highway spelled out in such detail, as its reputation for
dreariness and monotony had spread far and wide since 1940. The road’s impending
replacement by a modern highway through the Rogers Pass seemed a concretely tangible
marker of postwar progress, promising a faster, safer, easier, year-round drive, along a
paved road with wide verges that traversed a national park with mountain scenery of the
‘classic’ western Canadian variety.

Motorists and journalists were not the only ones anticipating the replacement of
the Big Bend so-called highway in the late 1950s and early 1960s. As hinted at in Bob
Metcalf’s account of his November 1960 drive, BC’s Department of Highways needed
to widen, straighten, and pave the road between Revelstoke and Mica Creek before work
could begin on dam construction. Ironically, the western section of the Big Bend road
was going to be improved in order to build the dam that would destroy the eastern
section. In January 1959, the Department of Highways asked the Lands Branch to lift the twenty-chain “recreational reserve” or scenic buffer along the western section of the highway in order to expedite re-construction. The Parks Branch raised no objections, and when asked to identify sites it wanted retained for recreational purposes, could only come up with one potential campsite that would not be flooded by the future Revelstoke Canyon dam.100

With the highway through Hamber Park due to become a dead-end road, the Parks Branch began preparing for a wholesale retreat from the Big Bend country. When staff answered inquiries from parties who were interested in exploring Hamber’s enormous backcountry while road access to the region was still possible, they betrayed a sense of exasperation with the park, responding that “no good topographic maps of this particular area have ever been published […] The greater part is still shown blank on most large scale maps. […] Our Branch has not undertaken any recreational development in this park. It remains virtually a wilderness.” In September 1960, the head of the Parks Branch began circulating a confidential consultation document on the topic of deleting Hamber Park.101

Forestry companies and the BC Forest Service were also drawing up plans for the Big Bend country in response to dam development and the pending destruction of the Big Bend Highway. In February 1961 Minister of Forests Ray Williston wrote to his colleague Minister of Recreation and Conservation Earle Westwood to sketch out these plans. From the perspective of Williston and senior Forest Service officials, the Big Bend

100 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1754, H.G. McWilliams, Director, Parks Branch to C.T.W. Hyslop, Superintendent of Lands, 6 January 1959; Ahrens to R. Broadland, 6 January 1959.
country was “underutilized.” After being adversely affected by the forest industry’s boom-bust cycle during the 1920s and 1930s, the Golden district had largely been bypassed by the industry’s expansion and stabilization during the 1950s. Long hauls, rugged terrain, and the prevalence of so-called decadent timber in the wet belt of the Selkirks and the Rocky Mountain Trench made logging a risky business for small operators, with fluctuating employment levels and frequent bankruptcies. However, consolidation in the late 1950s had resulted in the emergence of two large companies: Selkirk Spruce Mills and Kicking Horse Forest Products. Both proposed to build large, modern sawmills in Golden provided the government assured them access to a steady long-term supply of timber. About five million cubic feet of timber was being cut annually in the eastern section of the Big Bend country, and Forest Service studies suggested double that amount could be cut on a sustained yield basis, which would be enough to justify expanded production facilities in Golden.

Williston argued that in order to have a larger, more stable forest sector in the region, it was “essential that the supply of raw material be brought under sustained yield forest management.” He proposed that a 2.2-million-acre Kinbasket Sustained Yield Unit (SYU) be established in the eastern part of the Big Bend country, corresponding more or less with the boundaries of Hamber Park. The proposed SYU would contain approximately half a million acres of “accessible productive forest,” which would provide a long-term resource base, plus 55,000 acres of timber in the projected flood area.

behind the Mica Dam, estimated to contain 25 million cubic feet of marketable timber. Here, Williston argued, was a chance to put the forests of the Big Bend country to efficient industrial use in both the short and long terms. The future reservoir area would need to cleared one way or another, and the liquidation of this timber was bound to be a huge task, taking at least five years at the current rate of cutting. Giving Selkirk Spruce Mills and Kicking Horse Forest Products preferential access to this timber would spur the modernization of production facilities in Golden, which in turn would bring a degree of long-term economic and social stability to the community and a steady stream of revenue to the provincial government. As long as the eastern section of the Big Bend Highway remained above water, it could serve as the artery for hauling timber south towards Golden. Williston did not explicitly identify Hamber Park as an impediment to the proposed Kinbasket SYU, but impressed on his junior cabinet colleague the “urgent” need for a decision on land use in the area, since expanded timber processing facilities would need to be in place by the time reservoir clearance got underway.104

The impending completion of a modern highway through the Rogers Pass and the Forest Service’s plans for large-scale logging in the Big Bend country combined to remove the last reason for continuing the charade that Hamber Park had become. In the spring of 1961 the province pressed forward with elimination of the park. In the briefing document that recommended Hamber’s deletion to the director of the Department of Recreation and Conservation, and was presumably to be passed on to the responsible

104 Ibid. Williston so outranked Westwood in the ministerial hierarchy of W.A.C. Bennett’s cabinet that a recommendation or request from the former was likely to be interpreted as an instruction by the latter, as Richard Rajala has shown in his recent study of a conflict between the Forest Service and the BC Fish and Wildlife Branch in the late 1960s. “‘This Wasteful Use of a River’: Log Driving, Conservation, and British Columbia’s Stellako River Controversy, 1965-72” BC Studies 165 (Spring 2010): 31-74.
minister and the cabinet, the chief of the Parks Branch was unable to explain why the park had been created in the first place. “There is no report,” he complained, “not even a general analysis on the park potential of the area which would outline the purpose of its dedication.” Scrutinizing the branch’s files on Hamber revealed only that it had been created because the federal government had deemed Mount Robson Provincial Park too small to become a national park in and of itself during the 1930s. This, the Parks Branch chief tersely concluded, “would seem to be a questionable basis for establishing a major park.”

The Parks Branch chief also pointed out that several earlier reports had recommended Hamber’s deletion or drastic reduction in size, including Ches Lyons and Mickey Trew’s 1945 reconnaissance of the park and highway, and a report by Trew based on aerial surveys conducted in 1950 and 1951. Not only did the park lack accessible, high quality scenery, it also had limited recreational appeal. Even the Alpine Club of Canada had deemed the area recreationally deficient. In the early 1950s it had considered building base camps in Hamber’s alpine areas for exploring the Clemenceau Icefield in the Rockies and the Adamant Range of the Selkirks, but the dense forests that climbed high on the mountain slopes made access to these areas so difficult that Hamber was “written off” for climbing expeditions.

Parks Branch headquarters predicted little public opposition to Hamber’s cancellation – after all, it was essentially unknown to British Columbians. More

106 Ibid. Twenty years later, the ACC had managed to establish several permanent base camps near the Adamants. The difficulties associated with reaching these isolated camps are described in Charles Scheideman, Policing the Fringe: The Curious Life of a Small-Town Mountie (Madeira Park, BC: Harbour, 2009), 39-48.
worrisome was the fact that deleting the 2.4 million acre park would reduce the total area of the provincial park system by nearly a third, which was bound to draw attention following on the heels of controversial hydroelectric developments in Tweedsmuir and Strathcona parks. There was a risk that the Parks Branch, the Department of Recreation and Conservation, and the government would be exposed to embarrassing criticism about how BC’s parks were being managed – partly on the basis of an emerging environmental politics, but also because of the widespread popularity of the provincial parks during the postwar years. Driving through Hamber Park on the Big Bend Highway had never made BC look particularly good, but getting rid of the park could still make the provincial government look bad.\\footnote{On criticism of the provincial government for allowing dam construction to affect scenic Buttle Lake in Strathcona Park, see Keeling and Wynn, “The Park is a Mess.”}

Senior Parks Branch officials devised a plan to minimize the potential political fallout from Hamber’s cancellation, while at the same time leveraging it for maximum institutional gain. The Parks Branch had been trying to get a large provincial park established in the Cariboo region of BC’s northern Interior since the mid 1950s. The proposed park would have encompassed the Bowron Lakes, a chain of scenic lakes that was expected to become a prize recreational destination for boaters and backcountry campers. It would also be located a short distance from Barkerville, a gold rush-era ghost town that the Parks Branch had been developing as a major historical tourist attraction since 1958 (as discussed in Chapter Twelve). However, the Forest Service had repeatedly blocked the Parks Branch’s desire for a park in the Bowron Lakes because it wanted to encourage pulp mill development in the Cariboo, and saw the area as a potentially
valuable source of wood fibre. Since Minister of Forests Ray Williston had indicated his desire to make the eastern section of the Big Bend country a sustained yield forest management unit, the Parks Branch hinted it would be willing to expedite the oft-discussed cancellation of Hamber Park on the condition that the Forest Service drop its opposition to a new park at the Bowron Lakes. The proposed Bowron Lakes park would be one-tenth the size of Hamber, but according to Parks Branch headquarters would offer “a far superior park area.” On the verge of being sacrificed to facilitate dam development, Hamber could finally do something positive for the Parks Branch, by serving as a bargaining chip towards a new park in the Cariboo. In turn, establishing a park at the Bowron Lakes could be used to divert public attention away from a significant decrease in BC’s total park area.

On 6 June 1961 almost all of Hamber Park was deleted by executive order-in-council. Only a 56,000-acre rump was retained around Fortress Lake, isolated high in the Rockies, surrounded by Jasper National Park on three sides, and accessible only by floatplane or a difficult hike from the Alberta side of the continental divide. Unwittingly echoing Hamber’s origins as a political gambit aimed at encouraging the federal government take over BC’s provincial parks in the Rockies, the Parks Branch even suggested that Ottawa might be convinced to incorporate its remnants into Jasper National Park. As a distraction or salve to anyone who might have known or cared about Hamber, Bowron Lakes Provincial Park was established in the Cariboo at the same time the enormous bulk of Hamber was deleted. However, the Parks Branch’s concern that

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108 Postwar plans for the development of a pulp wood economy in the Cariboo region and northern BC, are discussed in Bernsohn, *Cutting Up the North*, chapters 18-20; Hak, *Capital and Labour*, 38-41.
deleting Hamber might provoke a public outcry proved unfounded. The evisceration of the park drew nary a whimper from the public, for few realized it had ever been there, and the few who did either saw it as an impediment to logging or associated it with the interminable and profoundly unpopular Big Bend Highway.

The Parks Branch’s 1961 annual report tried to frame the “reduction” of Hamber Park to one fiftieth of its original size as a positive thing. Although the total area of the provincial park system was now smaller than it had been in 1940 (despite the fact that the number of parks had increased from 46 to more than 150 during the intervening years), the Parks Branch asserted there had been an important park management principle behind the decision to drastically reduce Hamber Park. The provincial park system could now be said to consist of “land of the highest recreational content only,” with Hamber’s truncation demonstrating that the Parks Branch was willing to make “drastic adjustments” to the areas it was responsible for “in the light of proper recreational assessment.”

In a sense, the provincial park system had been purified, and would no longer be burdened by a huge park that was unappealing and largely inaccessible to the motoring public. Ironically, this was precisely the kind of park that a growing number of environmentalists and outdoor recreationalists were beginning to extol as ‘wilderness areas,’ free from the cars, crowds, and concessions found in such popular parks as Manning.

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112 On the rise of the wilderness movement in the Pacific Northwest during the 1960s, see Clayton, “Making Recreational Space,” chapter 6; Keeling and Wynn, “The Park is a Mess”; Louter, *Windshield Wilderness*, chapters 3-4; Phil Van Huizen, “Panic Park.”
The summer of 1962 saw dueling opening ceremonies for the new Rogers Pass section of the Trans-Canada Highway. In late July, Premier W.A.C. Bennett declared the highway finished at a ribbon-cutting ceremony in Revelstoke. Two months later, Prime Minister John Diefenbaker declared the highway open at a ceremony at the summit of the pass in Glacier National Park. In the populist blacktop politics of the early 1960s, both men were keen to claim credit for a crucial piece of highway infrastructure that they knew would appeal to auto tourists, business travellers, and commercial truckers alike. Neither ceremony acknowledged that the opening of the Big Bend Highway in 1940 had been similarly celebrated as a crucial step in the ‘completion’ of a Canadian transcontinental highway. Neither ceremony acknowledged that by ‘re-opening’ Glacier National Park the new highway had also eased the way for the destruction of its much larger provincial counterpart.113

The Rogers Pass section of the Trans-Canada Highway proved more popular with the motoring public than its biggest boosters could have predicted. With its smooth asphalt surface, wide verges, passing lanes, and gentle curves and grades, the road was perfectly suited to the large, heavy, low-slung touring cars of the late 1950s and 1960s, with their automatic transmissions, high compression engines, and huge windshields. The relationship between the new highway and the surrounding landscapes provided motorists with a radically different experience of nature by the road than had been offered by the old route between Revelstoke and Golden. Whereas the Big Bend Highway had been a

113 The dueling opening ceremonies are described in Francis, A Road for Canada, 1-6. The falling out between Bennett and Diefenbaker over the terms of the Columbia River Treaty is described in Mitchell, W.A.C. Bennett, 300-315.
long, hard, monotonous 200-mile drive, a veritable existential journey through a seemingly endless and impenetrable forest, the Rogers Pass route seemed to have been designed so that it would be easy to view a changing panorama of surrounding mountains while in motion. The interplay of sun, cloud, and glacier-generated mist sometimes created spectacular light effects in the high-elevation pass. This, in combination with the open nature of the terrain and the high speeds allowed by the paved surface, gave the motoring public an impression of cruising along at the top of the world.

The new highway implicitly gave the motoring public a lesson about progress made possible by expert planning, heroic infrastructure, and active government. Newspapers and magazines described how engineers had carefully studied the environment of the pass before designing the highway’s winter defences. Hidden on the slopes above the road was a network of unmanned sensors that monitored air temperature, humidity, and the depth, density, and stability of the snow pack, and transmitted this information to Glacier National Park’s administrative and road maintenance complex. Lower down the slopes, but largely undetected by passing motorists, were static defenses consisting of berms, dikes, and catch basins designed to contain and deflect snow slides. Motorists were most cognizant of the structures that had been built within the highway right-of-way near the floor of the pass, including the series of bunker-like reinforced concrete snowsheds that sheltered the road as it traversed major avalanche paths. During the winter a fleet of trucks and graders patrolled the highway, clearing snow and spreading sand and salt. Perhaps the most unusual and eye-catching roadside structures were the concrete gun emplacements around the summit of the pass, which reminded motorists of the state’s ongoing effort to keep traffic flowing steadily.
through the mountains. In the winter a Canadian Army artillery unit from Calgary used these to position mortars and howitzers for firing high explosive shells onto the pass’s numerous cornices and avalanche paths, dislodging the accumulated snowpack before it let loose in uncontrolled torrents that could threaten the highway. The triumphal nature of the new highway with its electronic monitoring system, massive earthworks, and concrete battlements was further emphasized by Parks Canada’s decision to make roadside historical attractions out of the ruined timber snowsheds that had been part of the CPR mainline prior to its tunneling beneath the summit of the pass. These and other scenic pullouts, picnic sites, and interpretive signs developed along the new highway corridor through Glacier Park heightened its contrast with the Big Bend Highway, where motorists had traversed a landscape bereft of designated stopping places or explanatory information.114

Postcards and photographs printed in magazines and newspapers showed all manner of automobiles travelling through the Rogers Pass, even in winter months, including transport trucks, passenger buses, station wagons towing camper trailers, and inexpensive, underpowered Volkswagen Bugs. These kinds of images emphasized that the new route allowed the motoring public to travel through the Selkirks in safety and with ease at any time of the year. Modern engineering and technology was shown to have tamed a dangerous environment that half a century earlier had proven fatal for hundreds of railway workers and passengers, and to have done so without hiding or destroying the

114 See for example BC Motorist 2, 3 (September-October 1963), 22; Canada, Department of Northern Affairs and Natural Resources, National Parks Branch, “The Rogers Pass Section, Trans-Canada Highway” (Ottawa, 1963); Frank Coutant, Rogers Pass: The Impossible Road Through the Impassable Canadian Rockies: The Most Spectacular Mountain Highway in the World (Vancouver: [n.p.], 1963). The closest thing to an environmental history of the Rogers Pass remains Woods, Snow War. A general outline of development in Glacier Park after 1957 can be found in Lothian, History of Canada’s National Parks, vol. 1, 44-45.
area’s scenic assets. The route through Glacier Park and the Rogers Pass was regularly deemed the scenic high point of a motor trip over the Trans-Canada Highway. Edward McCourt, an English professor at the University of Saskatchewan who drove across Canada with his family in 1965, described the road through the Rogers Pass as “child’s play for even the timidest tourist to drive.” With its smooth surface and long sightlines, the highway was so modern that reaching the “romantic” scenery around the summit of the pass struck McCourt something of “an anti-climax.”

We encountered no dizzying switch-backs, dodged no falling rocks, peered into no bottomless abyss lying just beyond the highway’s edge. [...] Mountains all around us, of course, close enough and high enough to occasion that slight constriction of the throat which always afflicts the plainsman when he can’t see a hundred miles in every direction. But definitely not overpowering.

Once the highway through the Rogers Pass opened in the summer of 1962, the road around the Big Bend of the Columbia was abandoned to logging trucks, construction machinery, and the occasional hunter or prospector. Away from the motoring public’s view, work on the enormous dam at Mica Creek proceeded through the mid and late 1960s. Flooding the Big Bend country was BC Hydro’s biggest project on the Columbia River, but in some ways the easiest, for whereas dam development on the Arrow Lakes section of the Columbia involved negotiating for over 1200 private properties, relatively few people would be affected by the much larger reservoir in the Big Bend country. The province acquired 25 privately owned properties, including several at Boat Encampment, plus fifteen trap lines, a dozen mineral claims, and numerous timber berths. Only four

115 The art historian Peter White has described the highway through the Rogers Pass as symbolically representing “the end of the province’s historic isolation and its emergence as a fully modern society.” Unfortunately, he does not consider how representations of the new road might have been related to western Canadian motorists’ experiences of driving the old Big Bend Highway between Golden and Revelstoke. White, *It Pays to Play*, 19-21.

property owners residing on their properties were displaced by the project.\textsuperscript{117} An instant town called Mica Village was established six miles downstream from the construction site, and causeways were built so that oversize dump trucks could begin hauling fill material from a ridge up the Wood River valley, twelve miles north of the dam. In 1965 survey crews and fallers cut out the high water line of the future reservoir (2450 feet above sea level), and operations to clear as much of the timber below that line as possible were underway between 1966 and 1973.

In order to speed and spread the economic benefits of reservoir clearance, forestry companies from the town of Valemount near the Yellowhead Pass were encouraged to extract marketable timber from the Canoe River valley, which was too far north for crews from Golden or Revelstoke to reach. These small operators banded together as the Canoe Valley Development Association in order to finance the construction of access roads into the valley, and soon had a handful of gypo sawmills at work.\textsuperscript{118} Government agencies continued to find it difficult to exercise control over logging practices in the Big Bend country. Many violations of the Forest Act were reported amidst the frenzy of cutting. In 1971 50,000 acres of timber north of Golden were destroyed by a forest fire that was fueled by excess slash that loggers had left on the ground. Standing timber was not the only thing being haphazardly removed from the future reservoir area: so were certain species of wildlife. In 1967 and 1968 the moose hunting season in the Big Bend country was extended through the winter in order to exterminate bulls, cows, and calves that

\textsuperscript{117} BC Hydro, \textit{Columbia Construction Progress} #27, 76.

\textsuperscript{118} The best description of these operations is Alex Osadchuk’s contribution to Valemount Historic Society, \textit{Yellowhead Pass and its People}, 535-536.
would otherwise be displaced by timber clearing operations and the subsequent flooding.\textsuperscript{119}

A tourist brochure published in Golden in 1970 or 1971 informed curious motorists that until the Mica Dam was completed the Big Bend country could still be visited “by those who are not afraid of travelling on a dusty gravel road.” However, the brochure also imparted a little backroad driving wisdom, warning that it was best to travel the Big Bend Highway on weekends because “huge logging trucks operate on weekdays.”\textsuperscript{120} One of the few motorists who left a description of driving the road between 1962 and 1973 was Donovan Clemson, a farmer and prize-winning photographer from the north Okanagan.\textsuperscript{121}

Wishing to travel the Big Bend Highway one last time “before it goes underwater,” Clemson and his family made the trip in the summer of 1969. Clemson acknowledged that most motorists had found the old road “a weary, lonely stretch,” with few attractions and a general lack of differentiated scenery due to the fact “the whole route was through heavily forested wilderness.” However, he asserted that the area’s quietude and lack of bustle could be considered positive features so long as the Department of Highways had recently graded the road and a rainfall had suppressed the superabundant dust. The Clemsons found the eastern section of the road “pretty much as it was in former times,” with traffic almost non-existent, aside from logging trucks. The primitive condition of the road between Golden and Boat Encampment gave a sense of

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{119} Golden Memories Book Committee, \textit{Golden Memories}, 61, 73. \\
\textsuperscript{120} Golden and District Historical Society, \textit{Kinbasket Country: A History of Golden and the Columbia Valley} (Golden, n.d.). \\
\end{flushright}
“driving back into the past,” but the area around Boat Encampment had changed dramatically since the Clemson family’s last visit. Wooden Head remained on his perch overlooking the road, inspiring Donovan Clemson to take a few last photos of this familiar eye-catching roadside curiosity. However, the area’s former peace and quiet was disrupted by heavy blasting up the nearby Wood River valley. As they turned south towards Revelstoke, the Clemsons found themselves caught up in a convoy of massive dump trucks that were hauling fill to the dam site.

South of Mica the old highway had been realigned and rebuilt to handle 175-ton loads, with new steel and concrete bridges and a paved surface that caused Clemson to wryly observe that these upgrades “would have pleased the old Big Bend motorists who had to rattle along in the dust.” Realignment generally involved moving the road higher up the walls of the valley, away from the river, which led to several former roadside attractions disappearing from view. For example, Silvertip Falls could not be discerned from the improved road. Clemson concluded his article by speculating that “much of the criticism levied against the now hardly used route was actually prompted by the rapid spread of hard-surfaced highways elsewhere, which made a gravel surfaced major road something of a curiosity.” Clemson’s 1970 article was singular for its faintly nostalgic approach to the Big Bend Highway, and few others bothered to reflect on the old road’s comparative merits. Most everyone else appears to have seen nothing being lost with the flooding of the monotonous Big Bend country. Indeed, just a few years later Clemson
himself was describing the road in less charitable terms, recalling it as “singularly lacking in interesting landmarks.”

The Mica Dam became operational in March 1973. The diversion tunnels that had been redirecting the Columbia around the construction site were closed off, and the river began slowly but inexorably backing up behind the completed dam. The reservoir took three years to fill to capacity, and at maximum level had a surface area of 130,000 acres, or approximately three quarters the size of Manning Provincial Park. It was initially called McNaughton Lake, before complaints led to it being renamed Kinbasket after the scenic natural lake which it had destroyed. Sections of the Columbia, Canoe, Wood, and Bush river valleys that had formerly been located inside the boundaries of Hamber Park were inundated, destroying the eastern half of the old Big Bend Highway and the abandoned roadside service centres at Boat Encampment and Middle River.

The reservoir destroyed the habitat of moose, elk, deer, mountain caribou, wolves, bears, beavers, river otters, migratory birds, and Columbia River sturgeon. A report by BC’s Department of Fish and Wildlife calculated that 207 miles of valley bottom and 71 miles of tributary creeks and streams were to be flooded, destroying “most of the high quality wildlife habitat in the valley systems of the reservoir area,” including approximately 12,500 acres of wetlands, riparian areas, and open bodies of water on the valley floor (excluding Kinbasket Lake). Little in the way of flats or wetland habitat was left, except in the uppermost Bush and Cummins river valleys. Furthermore, the reservoir acted as a barrier to the surviving large mammals, many of which migrated seasonally from one range area to another. The reservoir’s barrier effect was exacerbated by debris

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floating on its surface, by timber left standing along its shores, and the fact that most of its shoreline was extremely steep. Unfortunately, both the immediate and long-term effects of flooding on animal populations are poorly understood because the Department of Fish and Wildlife’s studies in the 1950s and 1960s treated animals as resources that could be ‘used’ by hunters, trappers, and anglers. They focused on the reservoir’s impact on ‘useful’ animals like beavers, deer, and bears, which were relatively common elsewhere in the Interior, while paying little attention to rare or vulnerable species that should have been expected to suffer particularly adverse effects from the flooding, like sturgeon and mountain caribou. Even less well understood is how the creation of a 200-mile-long body of relatively still and warm water in the Rocky Mountain Trench changed the region’s climate.123

By destroying the eastern half of the Big Bend Highway, the Mica Dam made access to the remaining productive timber in the Rocky Mountain Trench north of Golden much more difficult than it had been since 1940. Carving out a new network of logging roads along the shores of Kinbasket Reservoir took many years and was very expensive. Treating the reservoir like an inland sea, logging companies borrowed some of the techniques of Coastal logging operations, relying on ferries, tugboats, barges, and

123 BCMFL, G.R. Peterson and L.L. Withler, “Effects on Fish and Game Species of Development of Mica Dam for Hydroelectric Purposes” (Victoria: British Columbia Fish and Wildlife Branch, 1965), 24-27, 30. Also see British Columbia, Fish and Game Branch, “Report to the BC Game Commission on a Preliminary Survey of the Effects of the Mica Creek Development Upon Wildlife” (Victoria, 1954). Just a few years after the Mica and Arrow dams on BC’s section of the Columbia River were completed, biologists were warning that the new reservoirs, clearcutting for pulp wood, and high-elevation truck logging operations were having a deleterious effect on mountain caribou populations. Recognizing the negative impact that these dams had on the Columbia River sturgeon took many more years. See L. Harding, “Our Mountain Caribou: An Endangered Species?” BC Outdoors 31, 2 (1975): 24-31; A. Prince, “Local Knowledge of Columbia River Fisheries in British Columbia, Canada” (Cranbrook, BC: Columbia-Kootenay Fisheries Renewal Partnership, 2001), 6-19.
booms. The high costs associated with logging in the Kinbasket SYU following the inundation of the valley floor contributed to further consolidation of the forest industry in Golden. Evans Forest Products acquired Kicking Horse Forest Products in 1969 and Selkirk Spruce Mills two years later, giving it control over most of the timber in the southern reservoir area. Evans was a large, integrated operator, a regional monopoly capable of dominating the district’s smaller forestry companies. It contracted them to deliver timber to its plywood plant in Golden and its sawmill ten miles north of town, at the point where the new Trans-Canada Highway diverged from the old Big Bend route.

The public relations arm of BC Hydro, the provincially owned power utility that built and operated the Mica Dam, promised that the Kinbasket Reservoir would offer the public “boundless recreational opportunity.” It used similar language to what had been used to describe the Big Bend Highway back in 1940:

> When filled, the reservoir behind Mica Dam will for the first time provide access to a vast wilderness area of spectacular beauty. [...] With a few years allowed for banks to stabilize, a newly-created lake 135-miles-long, in magnificent virgin surroundings, will await lovers of the wilderness. [Completion of the Mica Dam] marked the unlocking of the door to a vast, unspoiled wilderness region of British Columbia that is rich in forest resources and perhaps without equal in recreational potential [emphases added].

However, the reservoir proved inimical to recreational activities. Because the Mica Dam held back such a large percentage of the Columbia River’s flow, the reservoir’s seasonal surface level fluctuated by nearly 100 feet, far more than those behind British Columbia’s other large dams. The fluctuating water level eroded the

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steeply sloped ‘shoreline’ or drawdown zone, creating an unsightly moonscape that was scoured free of vegetation and littered with dead stumps. The surface of the reservoir remained matted with floating debris for many years; the water remained icy and turbid; the valley remained plagued by high winds. Sedimentation and changing temperature structures killed most of the desirable game fish, while big game and fur-bearing animal populations had been decimated by flooding of the valley floor, where marshy areas and flats had provided a vitally important ecological niche. Road access was limited, and most recreational boaters who might have been willing to brave the floating debris were scared off by reports of underwater trees left standing on the valley floor at the time of flooding sometimes coming loose and shooting out of the lake like ballistic missiles launched from a submarine. Furthermore, by regulating the flow of the Columbia, the Mica Dam destroyed potential downstream attractions like the fearsome Priest, Death, and 12 Mile rapids. This loss became permanent when the power-generating Revelstoke Canyon Dam became operational in 1984, turning the western half of the Columbia River valley into an 80-mile-long reservoir that stretched all the way back to Mica. The state had permitted the Columbia to be turned into a pair of massive storage lagoons between Revelstoke and Golden, a kind of sacrifice zone, but most British Columbians were oblivious to the fact because no trace of the dams or reservoirs was visible from the new route of the Trans-Canada Highway. Out of sight and out of mind, the Big Bend country was again an unfamiliar wilderness to most British Columbians.

If few people were aware of Hamber Park’s existence between 1941 and 1961, even fewer have heard of it today. On the rare occasion Hamber is mentioned, the focus is on its unfortunate history after 1945, with its origins in the intertwined politics of roads
and national parks going overlooked. Yet Hamber’s truncation in 1961 takes on a new significance in light of the fact that the provincial government created the park in the hope of giving it away: Hamber had been a gambit to convince the federal government to incorporate it and BC’s other provincial parks in the Rockies into the national park system. In retrospect this may seem a questionable basis for establishing such an enormous park, but it made sense in the context of BC’s sustained campaign to get Ottawa to build, improve, and maintain automobile roads in the rugged terrain of the Selkirk and Rocky mountains.

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Shaping and Trashing Nature by the Road as Activities of the Fordist State

Whereas Manning and many other BC provincial parks became popular with the motoring public in the post-World War Two years, and helped shape the image of the province in the popular imagination, Hamber Park was essentially unknown, invisible. This illustrates the importance of the Parks Division as an agency of the state. In the case of Hamber Park the Fordist state can be seen directly intervening in the fate of the environment by giving permission to make severe modifications to an enormous swath of country. Even though Hamber was accessible to the motoring public many years before Manning and the other large provincial parks in the Interior were, the Parks Division (and the Forest Service) chose not to promote it, to develop it, or to manipulate and modify its roadside landscapes in a way that would make BC look good to the motoring public. The Parks Division chose to develop Manning as a showcase park astride a modern arterial highway, but left Hamber in limbo along a highway that had proven very unpopular with
automobile travellers. As shown in Chapter Four, the Parks Division invested great energy to improve motorists’ experiences of nature by the road while driving through Manning Park on the Hope-Princeton, but effectively wrote nature by the road along the Big Bend Highway off as irredeemable. Almost no one knew Hamber Park was there precisely because the state chose never to promote it, develop it, or even put up roadside signs that would have indicated to the motoring public that they were travelling through it. So far from Hamber and the Big Bend Highway being seen as assets by the state, the state went on to destroy its own investment in it in order to build a massive dam. Moreover, during the lead-up to and long period of dam construction the state gave loggers more and more leeway to do as they pleased in the Big Bend country. Here we see a whole other priority of the Fordist state push aside an earlier one. It could be argued that we also see the Fordist state had come to valourize abstract growth above all other considerations. In this it was showing its indifference to the fates of particular places. In sacrificing Hamber Park, the Big Bend Highway, and much of the Big Bend country for timber harvesting and a hydroelectric megaproject, the state was, in a sense, thinking liking a capitalist.

When compared to the success story of Manning Park and the Hope-Princeton Highway, the intertwined failures of Hamber Park and the Big Bend Highway invite speculation about how things might have turned out differently. For example, what might have happened if Hamber had been made a national park, or actively promoted and protected as a provincial park? Could the landscapes visible along the road have been ‘improved’ into a scenic asset, rather than an oppressively monotonous feature of the drive between Revelstoke and Golden? How might the presence of a popular park along
the Big Bend section of the Columbia River have affected plans to build a dam at Mica Creek?

These kinds of questions show how examining a failed park can offer insights into the history of more ‘successful’ parks. Their stories show there was nothing natural or inevitable about decisions to accept or reject areas for national parks. What happened in the Big Bend country is particularly noteworthy because of the great size of Hamber Provincial Park and because of the forests and highway that were drowned beneath the surface of the Kinbasket Reservoir. Moreover, all this happened just a short distance from the ‘crown jewels’ of Canada’s national park system.

The whole story in Part I of this dissertation has been about how the Fordist state, explicitly favouring automobility for its citizens, was willing to build and to destroy massive infrastructure, and to shape and destroy the natural environment. This raises further questions: how has this story been told – and not told?
Part II

Shaping History by the Road in the British Columbia Interior

Part II of this dissertation examines how British Columbians and visitors from afar learned about history by the road in the BC Interior – that is, history as it was presented to the motoring public by the provincial road network and parties who manipulated roadside landscapes with the intention of shaping their views. The Fordist state plays an important role in the following chapters, both as a maker of roads and a designator and developer of historic sites that it hoped would attract, inform, and inspire the motoring public. In fact, some of the later chapters in Part II will show the same agencies and individuals who had a hand in managing Manning and Hamber parks doing similar things with roadside historical attractions like the ‘ghost towns’ of Barkerville and Fort Steele. However, most of the chapters in Part II show that profit-seeking businesses played a much greater role in shaping the motoring public’s experiences of history by the road in the BC Interior than they did in shaping popular experiences of nature by the road.

In a few instances these were big, well-capitalized businesses. For example, the David Thompson Memorial Fort discussed in Chapter Eight was built in the early 1920s by a major land-holding company supported by the Canadian Pacific Railway and Hudson’s Bay Company. Ironically, this ambitious would-be historical tourist attraction proved a major failure. More often it was local boosters and small businesses that cultivated history by the road in the BC Interior. In the interwar years, dozens of family-owned and operated roadside businesses like autocourts, hotels, and gas stations sought to
differentiate themselves in the motoring public’s eyes (and thereby capture some of their trade) by placing relics of BC’s fur trade and gold rush days in front of their establishments, or by boasting about the fact that they were operating out of buildings with real historical links to the province’s frontier past. Some even developed private roadside museums. This pattern continued throughout the postwar years, even as the state began to play a very active role in developing major roadside historical tourist attractions.

As in Part I on nature by the road, the Fordist state is present here in multiple roles, as a builder of roads, a manager of roadside landscapes, a developer of roadside attractions, and a promoter of automobile travel. During the interwar years the provincial government did not get involved in cultivating history by the road in the BC Interior, except to the extent that the roads it built and maintained made certain places accessible to the motoring public. Instead, the federal Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada was the agency of the state that tried to shape motorists’ views of the past during the interwar years. It erected a series of cairns along the arterial roads of the Interior, most notably along the Fraser Canyon and Cariboo highways. Scattered amidst a much larger number of roadside relics, ruins, and small businesses that tried to associate themselves with BC’s past, these contributed to making modern roads also serve as avenues into the past.

Even in the first postwar decade, when it was developing many parts of the provincial park system as roadside amenities, the provincial state took a hands-off role in shaping the motoring public’s experiences of history along the highways. Parks, it would appear, had demonstrated their potential value as a means of encouraging automobile travel and providing certain lessons about the nature of the province. It was only in the
late 1950s that the provincial government began to actively manipulate roadside landscapes in order to shape the motoring public’s experience of history by the road. However, when it did, it quickly got involved in a major way, setting up an elaborate system of roadside markers, supporting the development of local museums, and most ambitiously, developing a series of major roadside historical attractions.

A good number of environmental and cultural historians have engaged with automobility’s important role in shaping parks and visitors’ experiences of nature inside them. Similarly, a number of historians interested in tourism have pointed out that visiting museums and historic sites became a common aspect of the North American (auto) touring experience during the interwar years. However, precisely how popular understandings of the past were shaped by private automobiles, public roads, and the motoring public’s travel and viewing habits has received little scholarly attention, even from those who are specifically interested in the history of commemoration and public history. We know a fair bit about automobility as a means of getting in touch with nature, but little about it as a way of getting in touch with the past.

Furthermore, the history of commemoration, historical sites, ‘heritage,’ and public history has received far less attention in British Columbia (and western Canada generally) than it has in central and Atlantic Canada. In BC most of the literature on these topics

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2 None of the essays in Nicole Neatby and Peter Hodgins’s recent anthology about public history in Canada are about western Canada. Neatby and Hodgins, eds., *Settling and Unsettling Memories: Essays in Canadian Public History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012). It must be noted that several historians of BC have recently conducted valuable studies of history-writing and history-collecting. However, these focus on literary and archival work, rather than historical sites and the popular experience of ‘history on the ground.’ Robert Budd, “‘The Story of the Country’: Imbert Orchard’s Quest for Frontier Folk in BC, 1870-1914,” MA thesis, University of Victoria (2005); Forrest Pass, “Pacific Dominion: British Columbia and the Making of Canadian Nationalism, 1858-1958,” PhD
has been about what cultural historian Douglas Cole has called “captured heritage”: the
appropriation (often outright taking) of native peoples’ material culture, such as
ceremonial masks and totem poles, and the manner in which it was displayed in
museums, galleries, and other venues.³

The Canadian literature on the history of historical sites and public history does
provide one particularly useful concept for understanding important aspects of how
history by the road emerged, was cultivated, and was commonly experienced in the BC
Interior. In their study of how Nova Scotia’s image was recast to appeal to middle-class
tourists from the northeastern United States in the early twentieth century, Ian McKay
and Robin Bates coin the term “tourism/history” to describe an easily digestible yet
essentializing way of representing history, a way that evokes a vague yet palatable sense
of pastness.⁴ Tourism/history was produced by a range of interconnected interests,
including agencies of the state, large companies like railways, and a bevy of historians,
archivists, and promoters. To help differentiate Nova Scotia from other possible touring
destinations, the province was represented as a place to escape from the routines of
modern everyday life, a land of Innocence, an unchanging province of history. McKay
and Bates emphasize that the production of tourism/history was not just a literary project.
It was necessarily accompanied by the development of a concretely tangible tourist
infrastructure that included museums, historical sites, monuments, and other historically
themed attractions. They also point out that transportation networks – first railways and
later automobile roads – played a key role in delivering consumers (i.e., tourists) to and

³ Douglas Cole, Captured Heritage: The Scramble for Northwest Coast Artifacts (Vancouver: Douglas
and McIntyre, 1985).
⁴ McKay and Bates, In the Province of History, especially chapters 1-2.
through these sites/sights, although precisely how the themes of tourism/history and the form of its associated infrastructure were shaped by transportation systems and tourists’ travel patterns and viewing habits are not pursued in depth.

In this study, “history by the road” is used instead of tourism/history in order to emphasize the fact that everyone who drove along the highways of the BC Interior during the middle decades of the twentieth century saw the same historical landscape features – not just tourists. These landscape features ranged from the ‘natural’ remnants and detritus of yesteryear, through the modest efforts of roadside business owners to lure in customers by displaying antique stagecoaches, right up to elaborate ‘ghost towns’ that the state had decided to develop as major regional tourist attractions. As much as any tourist from afar, citizens of British Columbia were likely to pick up certain implicit and explicit lessons about their province’s past when driving past these elements of the roadside. Identifying, preserving, developing, and promoting historical and historically-themed roadside landscape features was as much a way to shape the views of citizens as to steer the consumption patterns of tourists.

In British Columbia, most of the earliest efforts to commemorate historical events and personalities and to mark and preserve sites and structures that were associated with them were driven by such early twentieth-century nativist organizations as the Pioneer Society and the Native Sons and Daughters of British Columbia. Based in Coastal cities, these organizations tended to focus on historical topics and themes with a Coastal bent, including maritime navigators, the remnants of old fur trade posts like Fort Victoria and Fort Langley, and overland explorers who managed to reach tidewater, like Alexander Mackenzie, David Thompson, and Simon Fraser. These organizations were more
concerned with filiopietism, patriotism, and showing off their enthusiasm for the British Empire than with attracting tourists.

Residents of the Coast also dominated the membership of the more scholarly BC Historical Association, which was formed in 1922 in order to “encourage historical research and public interest in history [and] promote the preservation of historical sites and buildings.” Prior to the late 1920s, history enthusiasts in BC’s major population centres showed relatively little interest in visiting, promoting, or preserving historically-significant sites in the hinterlands of the Interior, most of which were only accessible by expensive railway and steamboat journeys. The land-based fur trade, the gold rushes of the late 1850s and 1860s, and turn-of-the-century railroad construction seemed either too distant, too recent, too commercial, or too polyglot (too American, too Asian) to be deemed important. The BC Interior – a veritable sea of sterile mountains, a hinterland region of a hinterland province – seemed historically and geographically marginal to most national and imperial grand narratives. It had been the site of no major imperial squabbles, the subject of no major diplomatic incidents, the home of no ‘great men.’

The railway companies played an important role in shaping how travellers perceived BC’s environments and communities for most of the first four decades of the twentieth century. However, their myriad publicity materials tended to say little about the Interior’s past. They continued to sell their touring customers an image of BC as a scenic but essentially timeless wilderness, a land dominated by the forces of nature. Where it could be glimpsed, history by the rails was fleeting. For example, railway passengers who travelled through the Fraser and Thompson river canyons could discern traces of the old

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Cariboo Wagon Road, but there was no practical way for them to linger or explore. Even the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada (HSMBC), a quasi-autonomous advisory board that advised federal bureaucracies on questions of historical commemoration, ignored British Columbia during in its first few years.  

Until the mid 1920s, BC’s past and its historical landscape features were generally not seen as assets for drawing tourists or otherwise stimulating economic activity. Thus the Interior’s status as a commemorative backwater made it ripe for new ‘discoveries’ as the provincial road network was expanded and improved in the interwar years, allowing ever-larger numbers of motorists to travel to ever more corners of the province. As the following chapters show, the HSMBC erected cairns beside the Banff-Windermere Highway, the Fraser Canyon Highway, and the Cariboo Highway around the time each of them was thrown open to the motoring public. However, during the interwar years the development of historical tourist attractions and the cultivation of popular historical images around certain communities and regions within the BC Interior was driven primarily by small-town boosters, rural and small-town business owners, small-town journalists, and amateur historians. This period of the ‘amateur’ is examined in chapters Eight through Eleven.

As noted above, agencies of the state played a relatively minor role, even though the state was responsible for building and maintaining the roads along which most of these historical attractions were developed. Adorning the highway network with historically-themed attractions was not yet seen to merit the Fordist state’s attention. Thus during the interwar years the cultivation of history by the road was not a top-down

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process. Instead it was mainly a response to new opportunities for profit that were associated with automobility. Artifacts, old buildings, and other historical landscape features were pressed into service as a means to differentiate a community or district in the eyes of the motoring public, and also to secure its place in the popular imagination. Such ‘recoveries,’ it was hoped (only sometimes realistically) would generate increased economic activity. Few who cultivated history by the road in the BC Interior tried to get a specific idea across to the motoring public. Instead they simply tried to evoke a vaguely historical atmosphere – a sense of old-timey-ness – by gesturing toward a few common themes, such as exploration, pioneering, and the importance of transportation on a resource frontier. Chapter Eight examines an ambitious but ultimately unsuccessful attempt to establish a major historical tourist attraction in the village of Invermere in the early 1920s, which was meant to draw auto tourists travelling through the Rockies on the new Banff-Windermere Highway. Employing the form of a travelogue, chapters Nine and Ten examine the cultivation of history by the road along the Fraser Canyon and Cariboo highways during the interwar years, paying particular attention to how the motoring public could experience these roads as corridors into the province’s past.

The last three chapters – chapters Eleven through Thirteen – examine history by the road in the BC Interior during the post-World War Two years, focusing on the growing role of the state. Chapter Eleven examines the first postwar decade, which was a period of massive economic growth in the Interior, driven largely by the forest industry and state-funded infrastructure building. It shows that many British Columbians were uneasy about the rapid and dramatic changes that swept the Interior during these years,
and called for the preservation of familiar historical landscape features that provided concretely tangible links to the province’s past.

Chapters Twelve and Thirteen examine the period 1955 to 1970, during which the provincial government started playing a very active role in cultivating history by the road. It supported the development of local museums, established an extensive network of standardized roadside historical markers, churned out reams of motoring-related promotional materials, organized historically-themed celebrations that travelled along the province’s highways, and developed a series of major historical tourist attractions, including the Barkerville and Fort Steele ‘ghost towns,’ which in the late 1950s were placed under the control of the BC Parks Branch. The state did this for multiple reasons. Developing a ‘system’ of roadside historical attractions was, in a manner similar to developing a system of roadside provincial parks, a way of encouraging the motoring public to travel along the highway network the state had built with such heady abandon since the end of World War Two, consuming goods and services while contemplating their role as citizens. It was a way of building up the province’s tourist industry, and of diversifying certain regional economies. Finally, preserving historical landscape features and developing historical attractions which suggested that industrial resource extraction, modern transportation networks, an active state, and the rugged individual had a timeless, even essential place in British Columbia were ways to soothe some Interior residents’ concerns about Fordist modernity.
Chapter 8
The Banff-Windermere Highway and the David Thompson Memorial Fort,
1920-1940

This chapter examines the first attempt to develop a major historical tourist attraction in the British Columbia Interior. Dreamt up in the early 1920s, the David Thompson Memorial Fort was closely tied to the Banff-Windermere Highway, which was the first scenic touring road in the Interior. The supposed ‘fort’ was the centerpiece of an ambitious scheme to draw wealthy auto tourists into the isolated village of Invermere, located in the upper Columbia River valley 70 miles south of Golden. However, the scheme ultimately failed, partly due to the collapse of the large land development company that had organized the project, and partly due to the fort being more of an attraction than was justified by Invermere’s marginal place in the Interior road network during the early 1920s. There simply were not enough pleasure travellers driving along the roads of southeastern BC to merit the grand scale of the fort. As a piece of tourist infrastructure, it was years ahead of its time; an eye-catching, oversize, historically themed tourist attraction constructed before such developments were common in western North America, let alone in isolated hinterlands like BC’s upper Columbia River valley. Tourism promotion materials still presented British Columbia as a place to experience nature and wilderness. In the early 1920s BC did not yet have a tradition of history by the road.

Although the David Thompson Memorial Fort failed as an historical tourist attraction, it merits attention in the history of history-by-the-road in the BC Interior for
three reasons. First, for the way it linked auto tourism and one of the province’s earliest
touring roads with land colonization schemes, townsite boosting, national parks, and
popular trends in North American historical writing. Second, for the way it spanned what
historian Michael Dawson has identified as an important transition in the mindset of BC’s
tourism promoters: a shift from seeing tourism as a means of luring potential investors to
seeing tourism as having economic value in and of itself.¹ And third, for the way it helps
delineate the limits of the possible during the early 1920s, when a mass culture of middle-
class automobile travel was only beginning to emerge in western Canada.

Land, Leisure, and Lines of Travel

The origins of the David Thompson Memorial Fort can best be understood in the
broader context of regional development, transportation infrastructure, and travel patterns
in eastern BC around the turn of the last century. When the Canadian Pacific Railway
built its mainline through the Rockies, its first crossing of the Columbia River was at the
site of present-day Golden. As described in the chapters on Hamber Park and the Big
Bend Highway, the Columbia River valley between Golden and Revelstoke was
unsuitable for settlement or logging and showed poor prospects for mining. However,
upstream, to the south of Golden, the Rocky Mountain Trench was broader, less densely
forested, and saw less precipitation than in the Big Bend country. This section of the
Columbia was navigable and the Purcell Mountains that made up the western wall of the
Trench contained promising outcroppings of silver, lead, and other valuable minerals.
These factors made the upper Columbia valley and the upper Kootenay River valley (just

¹ Dawson, Selling British Columbia, chapter 2.
to the south of it, and also in the Trench) appear suitable for logging, mining, ranching, and even farming. As elsewhere in BC’s mountainous Interior, agricultural colonization and large-scale resource extraction required the development of transportation lines and immobilization of local native populations.

In 1884 the 300 Kootenay and Shuswap who lived in the upper Columbia and Kootenay valleys were forced onto a clutch of small Indian reserves. Two of these reserves were located on the east side of Windermere Lake, which like Kinbasket Lake to the north was essentially a large widening of the Columbia River.² A crude colonization road was then built to link the railhead at Golden with Fort Steele, a small gold mining town on the Kootenay River 140 miles to the south. In the 1890s sternwheel steamboats began travelling between Golden and the headwaters of the Columbia, while boats based in Jennings, Montana paddled up the Kootenay into BC, serving Fort Steele and several mining camps. Colonization of the upper Columbia and Kootenay valleys was hobbled by the limitations of transportation, and the region remained sparsely populated at the end of the century. In the late 1890s there were only a few hundred whites living in the Rocky Mountain Trench between Golden and Fort Steele. Most were transient lumbermen, prospectors, and miners, with only a few dozen ranchers and farmers having moved into the region.³

² The establishment of Indian reserves in the uppermost Columbia and Kootenay watersheds in order to make way for land sales and colonization is outlined in Cole Harris, Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002), 210, and more thoroughly in Shuswap Indian Band, Re Tsqwatsstens-kucw ne Csaliken: Our People Between the Two Mountain Ranges: Shuswap Indian Band Traditional Land Use Study (Invermere: Shuswap Indian Band, 2008), chapter 4. Some of the constraints and pressures placed on residents of Indian reserves in the BC Interior are discussed in Keith D. Smith, Liberalism, Surveillance, and Resistance: Indigenous Communities in Western Canada, 1877-1927 (Edmonton: AU Press, 2009), especially chapters 5-6.
³ On early transport in this section of the Rocky Mountain Trench, see Art Downs, Paddlewheels on the Frontier: The Story of British Columbia and Yukon Sternwheel Steamers (Seattle: Superior, 1972), 100-
The promise of a railroad through the upper Columbia and Kootenay river valleys sparked a modest land rush at the turn of the century. The federal and provincial governments offered land grants and cash subsidies for the construction of a rail line connecting Golden with the future route of the BC Southern, which was expected to run through the Crowsnest Pass in order to tap the mineral wealth of BC’s southern Interior. Lured by these incentives, the CPR chartered a branch line called the Kootenay Central Railroad and in 1904 began surveying a route between Golden and Cranbrook, which had supplanted Fort Steele as southeastern BC’s main transport hub and administrative centre (a point that will be returned to in Chapter Thirteen). Upon commencement of these surveys, the CPR was granted tens of thousands of acres in the upper Columbia and Kootneay river watersheds, to do with as it pleased.4

Needing someone to help sell its new holdings in the area around Windermere Lake, the CPR turned to Robert Randolph Bruce, an engineer who had overseen the construction of steel bridges on its mainline during the early 1890s. In 1900 Bruce was the manager and part owner of the Paradise silver mine located in the Purcell Mountains above Windermere Lake. He agreed to act as the CPR’s main land agent in the district in exchange for a five percent sales commission. His knowledge of local conditions proved

an asset when he convinced the railway to run its Kootenay Central branch line along the western shore of Lake Windermere. The company’s surveyors preferred the eastern side, where the colonization road was located and the terrain was more favourable, but Bruce convinced the company it would be difficult to develop a townsite there due the presence of the two Indian reserves. As a result, the Kootenay Central was surveyed to run along the west side of the lake; this bifurcation of rails and road would have important consequences for tourism-related development in the district.5

Bruce promoted the Windermere district far and wide, especially to prospective orchard owners. BC saw widespread, often fraudulent orchard land promotions during the 1900s, with almost every valley in the southern Interior being touted as another Okanagan. In brochures, newspaper ads, and magazine articles, the CPR and the provincial government described the Lake Windermere district as a salubrious Eden admirably suited to fruit growing, while downplaying its isolation, sandy soils, and cold winters. Like many Interior land agents, Bruce targeted his pitch towards moneyed British interests: former colonial officials and remittance men who were interested in clean, easy agricultural work that was said to allow lots of leisure time, and who had the capital necessary to set up an orchard and wait five years for the trees to begin producing. Bruce appealed to these would-be gentlemen farmers with magazine articles like “Canada’s New Playground,” which touted the valley’s majestic scenery and potential for recreational activities like boating, angling, and big game hunting.6

6 Robert Randolph Bruce, “Canada’s New Playground,” Canadian Gazette, 26 January 1911, cited in Meredith, “Boosting in British Columbia,” 274. In a similar vein, Wilber D. Nesbit called the upper
The class of investors and settlers that Bruce and the CPR hoped to attract could generally afford to come see the lay of the land for themselves. It was therefore deemed important to develop amenities that would help convince visitors of the area’s future prospects. Thus land development, boosterism, tourism promotion, and the trappings of genteel society became closely intertwined in the upper Columbia valley prior to 1914. By that time a growing number of wealthy travellers were experimenting with a new type of overland transport: the passenger automobile.

The completion of an automobile road between Calgary and Banff in 1910 allowed a trickle of wealthy motoring enthusiasts into Canada’s most famous national park. Alberta automobile owners started lobbying for more roads inside Banff and between it and the other national parks in the Rockies. Officials in Ottawa proved responsive to these requests, which was not surprising, given that the national parks had been playgrounds for the wealthy since their inception. Well-heeled motorists were gaining access to other western parks and scenic attractions like Yosemite, Yellowstone, Mount Rainier, and the Grand Canyon, so the Canadian parks administration had to accommodate their fashions and whims in order to compete for their business.7


Robert Randolph Bruce was one of the first automobile owners in the upper Columbia valley. The passenger car was an invaluable tool for land agents, and it probably appealed to his engineering background. Bruce recognized auto touring’s growing popularity with wealthy North Americans and became convinced that a scenic automobile road or parkway through the Canadian Rockies would help attract a desirable class of tourist-investors to the Lake Windermere district. Using his business and political connections, he convinced the CPR, the federal government, and the government of British Columbia to cooperate on the construction of a touring road between Banff and the upper Columbia valley via the Vermillion Pass and Sinclair Canyon. Such a road promised to become an attraction in and of itself, and would make it possible for motorists from the Prairies and the western states to undertake a loop trip through Banff and the national parks in Montana. According to a brochure published by the BC government, the Banff-Windermere road promised to be “one of the most attractive scenic routes in the world” because it would bring auto tourists “to the very heart of the Rocky Mountains, revealing Nature in her wildest, grandest moods.”

Planning for the Banff-Windermere Highway

Construction of the Banff-Windermere Highway began in the spring of 1911. The provincial government and CPR worked on the section in British Columbia, and the federal Department of the Interior on the section located in Alberta. That year also saw the formation of the Columbia Valley Irrigated Fruitlands Company (CVIF), which

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8 Taylor, Automobile Saga, 77-78.  
purchased 200,000 acres of CPR land around Lake Windermere. The CVIF was backed by eastern bankers, federal politicians, and senior CPR officials; its president, J.S. Dennis, was head of the railway’s colonization department. Robert Randolph Bruce was a partner, serving as vice-president and senior local representative. At the CVIF’s behest, the village of Invermere was incorporated on its holdings around the northwest corner of Windermere Lake. To make its properties more marketable, the CVIF planned to build an irrigation system that would deliver water to lakeside benchlands. To enhance the area’s attractiveness as a destination for tourist-investors, the company cultivated the trappings of gentlemanly English country life, including tennis courts, a polo ground, horseracing track, and nine-hole golf course. The CVIF also tried to coax the CPR into building a lakeside resort at Invermere.10

The completion of the CPR’s Kootenay Central branch line between Golden and Cranbrook in 1914 should have marked the beginning of an economic boom in the upper Columbia valley. Instead it coincided with difficult times. Many British settlers abandoned the Windermere district at the outbreak of hostilities in Europe, keen to support their home country and disappointed by the false promise of orcharding in the Rocky Mountain Trench.11 The evaporation of British investment capital created serious problems for the CPR, the CVIF, and for BC’s economy in general. The railway company dropped out of the Banff-Windermere road-building partnership in 1915 and the provincial government slashed its expenditures on public works, including touring roads that were expected to cater to wealthy motoring enthusiasts. Ottawa had nearly

10 Meredith, “Boosting in British Columbia,” 276-278.
finished its share of the project when Victoria stopped work, but the western section was still far from complete. The western section suffered a major setback in June 1916, when a quick spring thaw caused flooding that destroyed the roadbed in the tortuous confines of Sinclair Canyon.12

With the Lake Windermere district shedding settlers and land prices stagnant, local boosters and business owners grew desperate to have the road to Banff completed. Robert Randolph Bruce and his politically connected partners in the CVIF got the project moving again by brokering another deal between the provincial and federal governments. Ottawa agreed to complete the Banff-Windermere Highway in exchange for Victoria permanently giving it a ten-mile wide strip of crown land along the surveyed right-of-way for use as a national park. The two governments signed the Banff-Windermere Road Agreement in 1919. The following year saw the establishment of 340,000-acre Kootenay National Park and the recommencement of road construction under federal supervision.

Kootenay was the fourth national park in BC, and differed from the others in that it was not traversed by a railroad and had not been carved out of the Dominion Railway Belt. Instead of railroad companies and exclusive resorts, Kootenay National Park was associated with private automobiles and a public road, albeit one that had been partly financed by the CPR and was tied to the development of its former holdings around Lake Windermere. It was widely recognized that visitors would experience it in a very different way than they did other national parks in the Rockies. It was also widely

12 Septer, Flooding and Landslide Events, 55. At a time when pleasure driving was still seen as the purview of elites, the provincial government’s decision to halt construction of the Banff-Windermere road may have been intended to forestall criticism from middle- and working-class critics. See Lipin, “‘Cast Aside the Automobile Enthusiast.’”
recognized that there would be new opportunities for profit associated with this automobile-accessible park.\textsuperscript{13}

The end of the war did little to improve conditions in the upper Columbia Valley. British investment capital was scarce and the CPR did little to encourage agricultural settlement. It used the Kootenay Central primarily to haul lumber and utility poles, as well as ore from its massive Sullivan lead-zinc mine located north of Cranbrook.

Grasping for an economic lifeline, boosters, businesses, and landowners around Lake Windermere started changing their view of tourism, gradually placing more emphasis on its direct value and less on its role in delivering potential investors to the area. They began to focus on drawing auto tourists from the western provinces and states that had benefited from the wartime boom in mining, forestry, grain farming, and land values. Rising rates of middle-class automobile ownership and the development of a popular North American ‘car culture’ during the immediate postwar years reinforced the view amongst Invermere boosters that auto tourism had substantial value in and of itself.

Robert Randolph Bruce succinctly expressed their new attitude towards auto tourists in a letter he sent to national parks commissioner J.B. Harkin, in which he criticized the name Ottawa had chosen for Kootenay National Park.

One might say that calling this park ‘Columbia’ would be pandering to our [American] cousins across the line. Well, we want to pander to them all we can. We want their cars and their money and their business, and that is a good deal why this road [between Banff and Lake Windermere] was started originally. I know it, because it was me who started it. […] So I humbly think I am entitled to express my opinion as to what this area should be called.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{13} The connections between the Banff-Windermere road project and the establishment of Kootenay Park are outlined in Lothian, \textit{History of Canada’s National Parks}, vol. 1, 58-60.
Bruce argued that ‘Columbia’ was a preferable name to ‘Kootenay’ because it would be familiar and appealing to American auto tourists, particularly those from the western states, who associated the Columbia River with their own country and its history. This had been especially true since the 1905 centennial of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark’s western explorations. Many books and articles had been written about their expeditions in the lead-up to the centennial, which was celebrated with an exposition in Portland that proved a major tourist draw. Lewis and Clark were elevated to the status of American heroes, and their western travels were celebrated in a way that equated territorial expansion with economic growth and national greatness. As the largest watershed west of the Rockies, the Columbia River played a special role in these narratives as a stage on which America’s manifest destiny ‘naturally’ played out. The Columbia’s special resonance with educated middle-class Americans was particularly strong given the intellectual cachet of the frontier thesis, first put forward by history professor Frederick Jackson Turner in 1893, which posited that westward expansion into ‘new’ and ‘free’ lands had been profoundly important in shaping American culture. Furthermore, by 1920 the construction of automobile roads in the western states allowed American motorists to retrace much of Lewis and Clark’s expedition route.


Although Bruce had targeted Britons in his pre-war efforts to sell land in the upper Columbia valley, he knew there were close ties between BC’s southern Interior and the ‘Inland Empire’ centred around Spokane. Americans from eastern Washington, Idaho, and Montana were familiar with the southern Interior and not inclined to think of it as a foreign country. Luring visitors from the Inland Empire would be relatively straightforward, whether they wanted to see newly-accessible roadside scenery or partake in a few beverages that were forbidden in their Prohibition-afflicted homeland. The challenge was to draw tourists from the Great Plains and Pacific Coast states. As Bruce saw it, a name as familiar to Americans as ‘Columbia’ would make the idea of driving across the border seem inviting, whereas a less familiar name like ‘Kootenay’ exaggerated Canada’s foreign nature.17

Kootenay National Park and the Banff-Windermere Highway were poised to become the first major auto-centric tourist attraction in the BC Interior. The CPR planned to have its concessionaire, the Brewster Transport Company, operate auto stages between Banff and Invermere. Instead of building an expensive resort hotel in the park, the CPR decided to develop a series of rustic lodges and bungalow camps along the route of the Banff-Windermere road. These camps were smaller, less formal, and cheaper to build and operate than a hotel. One of the first CPR bungalow camps was Lake Windermere Lodge and Cabins. It was built in 1920 on the lakeshore just south of Invermere, in the


expectation that Kootenay National Park and the impending completion of the road to
Banff would draw large numbers of auto tourists to the Lake Windermere district.18

Invermere boosters and the CPR were not the only parties who expected an influx
of auto tourists to the upper Columbia valley. The National Parks Branch began
negotiating to purchase a privately owned hot spring that was located in the
southwesternmost corner of Kootenay Park. The springs were cramped between the
Banff-Windermere right-of-way and the steep walls of Sinclair Canyon, just a short
distance from where the highway exited the park and met the old north-south
colonization road, which had been improved to accommodate automobile traffic. The
spring water contained traces of radium, thought to have curative properties, and the
National Parks Branch planned to build a pool and change rooms that would make the
springs into a restorative natural attraction. Speculators and would-be entrepreneurs
jockeyed to acquire roadside property around the hot springs, the park gate, and the point
where the highway would intersect the old north-south colonization road. The area
around Kootenay Park’s southwestern boundary was poised to become the service- and
tourism-oriented community known today as Radium Hot Springs.19

This nascent resort community threatened to compete for the district’s future
tourist trade, and thus posed a challenge to merchants, hoteliers, property owners, and
other business interests in Invermere. Radium would straddle the Banff-Windermere
Highway near the park gate and a key junction in the region’s emergent road network,

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while Invermere was located eight miles south of the park gate and on the opposite side of the valley from the old colonization road. Although Invermere was the largest community for 70 miles in any direction, it was somewhat off the motoring public’s beaten path. For it to become the premier tourist destination in the upper Columbia valley, some kind of attraction was needed to lure motorists off the main road, across the Indian reserve, over the bridge that crossed the Columbia River, and into the village.

Invermere already had a golf course and CPR bungalow camp, and Lake Windermere was well suited for recreational activities like boating and swimming. However, when work resumed on the Banff-Windermere Highway in 1920 there was an uneasy sense amongst local boosters that the village needed something more distinctive, something with popular appeal that would differentiate it from the region’s other potential tourist destinations, all of which relied on scenic and natural attractions. Casting about for such an attraction, Invermere boosters latched onto the work of a local resident with whom many of them were personally familiar: the insurance agent, notary public, and amateur historian Basil G. Hamilton.20

**Discovering David Thompson and Kootenaie House**

Basil Hamilton had moved from Ontario to the Windermere district in the mid 1900s expecting to profit from the anticipated boom in land sales. However, the sluggish pace of local development provided him with considerable spare time. He started reading about the history of western Canada, and soon became preoccupied with the fur trader and cartographer David Thompson, who had ‘discovered’ the upper Columbia valley a

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20 This plan was quite novel, for the use of the eye-catching roadside structure or curiosity to attract customers was still in its infancy at this time. Gudis, *Buyways*; Heiman, *California Crazy*; Marling, *Colossus of Roads*. 
century earlier, and who had recently become an object of considerable attention amongst North American historians.  

In 1806 the Montreal-based North West Company had instructed Thompson to find a viable trade route through the Rockies and into the Columbia River watershed in order to secure the Oregon country against rival American fur traders and the Hudson’s Bay Company. In 1807 Thompson crossed the Rockies via the Howse Pass and travelled up the Columbia to a large widening of the river that he called Kootenae Lake (present-day Lake Windermere). His men built a trading post called Kootenae House near the northwest shore and wintered there for the next three years. This was the first fur trading post in the Columbia watershed, and served as Thompson’s base for exploring the region and developing trade with its native residents, including Kootenay, Shuswap, and Flathead tribes. However, Kootenae House was abandoned in the summer of 1810 after the Peigans who lived on the eastern side of the Rockies – and who resented being cut out as middlemen between white fur traders and the tribes to the west – prevented Thompson from using the Howse Pass, effectively cutting off his line of supply.

Thompson retreated eastward, but while still on the prairies received instructions from Montreal to hurry for the Pacific. The North West Company had learned that the American fur trader John Jacob Astor intended to sail around Cape Horn and up the Pacific Coast to establish a trading post at the mouth of the Columbia. This would have profound ramifications in the struggle between Britain and the United States to expand their empires on the Pacific slope, and by extension for British companies’ trading rights west of the Rockies. It was imperative that Thompson reach the mouth of the Columbia

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21 A short biographical sketch of Hamilton is contained in the February 2000 newsletter of the Windermere Valley Museum and Archives.
first and bolster British claims to the territory between the Rockies, the Pacific, Spanish California, and Russian Alaska.

Thompson headed north in search of an alternate route across the Rockies. His party followed the Athabasca River to its headwaters, and in December 1810 crossed the continental divide via the Athabasca Pass. All but three of Thompson’s men deserted before reaching the Columbia River at a point they named Boat Encampment. The dense timber, deep snow, and scarce game made further travel impossible, and they spent a lonely, miserable winter in a crude hut, building a canoe that would allow them to descend the river in spring. When Thompson and the remnants of his party finally arrived at the mouth of the Columbia they found Astor’s men entrenched in a trading post they had built just a few weeks earlier. Thompson had failed in his mission, but his detailed maps and descriptions of the Columbia watershed buttressed British claims to the region until 1846, when the Oregon Treaty fixed the 49th parallel as the boundary between British and American empires west of the Rockies.

The North West Company decided to keep using the Athabasca Pass as its route between the prairies and the Columbia, and thus the valley upstream from Boat Encampment became a commercial backwater. Fur traders briefly visited Kootenae House once or twice in the late 1810s, but it was destroyed soon after, apparently by fire. It soon disappeared from both the landscape and the institutional memory of the North West Company, which was absorbed by the Hudson’s Bay Company in 1821. David Thompson also passed into obscurity. He took up farming in Williamstown, Upper Canada, and did survey work for the colonial government, but the HBC downplayed his contributions to the exploration of western North America, probably because he had left
the company on bad terms before going over to its Montreal-based rival. Financial
business problems and failing eyesight then prevented Thompson from writing his own place in
history. He was completely blind by 1851, before he could complete a narrative based on
his travels, and died in poverty six years later. His original maps and field notebooks
were sold to Upper Canada’s department of lands, where they collected dust for the next
30 years.

David Thompson’s elevation to the pantheon of North American explorer-heroes
began in 1887, when the young Canadian surveyor Joseph Burr Tyrrell found his long-
forgotten maps and journals in the files of the Ontario lands department. Having worked
on railway surveys in western Canada, Tyrrell was familiar with some of the country
Thompson had explored and greatly impressed by his accomplishments. In 1888 he gave
a presentation on Thompson to the Canadian Institute in Toronto, and published a
pamphlet titled A Brief Narrative of the Journeys of David Thompson in North-Western
America.\(^{22}\)

Tyrrell’s pamphlet spurred other historians’ interest in David Thompson. In 1897
his western travels were brought to the attention of American readers by Elliott Coues,
who published three volumes of selected entries from the journals of Thompson and
fellow NWC employee Alexander Henry. This publication was read widely, for Coues
had an established reputation as an anthologist, having previously published collected
writings by Lewis and Clark, John Audobon, and Zebulon Pike. This work helped

\(^{22}\) J.B. Tyrrell, A Brief Narrative of the Journeys of David Thompson in North-Western America (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1888); Heather Robertson, Measuring Mother Earth: How Joe the Kid Became Tyrrell of the North (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2007), 78-81. Tyrrell’s discovery of Thompson’s journals conveniently coincided with literary attempts to Canadianize the history of Britain’s colonial possessions west of the Great Lakes, which included lionizing the Montreal-based North West Company. See Doug Owram, Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856-1900 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), chapter 9.
familiarize readers on both sides of the border with David Thompson, positioning him as the ‘Canadian’ equivalent to his American contemporaries Lewis and Clark. Coues deemed Thompson “the greatest geographer of his day in British America.”

Bored stiff in sleepy, isolated Invermere, Basil Hamilton read everything he could find about Thompson. He corresponded with J.B. Tyrrell and T.C. Elliott, a prolific amateur historian from Walla Walla, Washington, both of whom were working on books about Thompson’s western explorations. During his spare time, and using information from Thompson’s journals to help guide him, Hamilton scoured the western shore of Lake Windermere and the Columbia River in an effort to identify the original location of Kootenae House. He found it in 1910, about two miles north of Invermere and well inland from the lake, on a grassy terrace near where Toby Creek flows into the Columbia. No obvious trace of the trading post remained above ground level, but careful examination of the site revealed three collapsed stone chimneys, scorched timber foundations, and the subsurface remnants of a palisade wall.

This discovery deepened Hamilton’s interest in David Thompson and Kootenae House. He began writing prodigiously – almost obsessively – on the topic, seeking information from historians and archivists, while at the same time promoting Thompson’s legacy for Canada, British Columbia, and, not least, the Lake Windermere district.


24 Correspondence between Hamilton, Tyrrell, and Elliott can be found throughout Windermere Valley Museum and Archives, Basil G. Hamilton collection; and also in Oregon Historical Society Research Library, T.C. Elliott papers, box 2, folder 7.

Hamilton suggested that Thompson should be commemorated in Invermere, and proposed that plaques, cairns, and even a miniature reproduction of Kootenae House be erected in his honour. His argument was lent credence by the growing number of scholarly publications about Thompson’s western travels. T.C. Elliott published *David Thompson: Pathfinder and the Columbia River* in 1911, and Thompson was also central to his book *The Fur Trade in the Columbia River Basin Prior to 1811* (1915).26 In 1912, Elliot visited the site of Kootenae House with Frederic Howay, the New Westminster jurist and amateur historian of British Columbia, and Howay included a photograph of the site in *British Columbia from the Earliest Times to the Present* (1914).27 Thompson’s reputation on the Canadian side of the border was given a major boost in 1916 when J.B. Tyrrell convinced the Champlain Society to publish his edited version of Thompson’s journals. It quickly became the Champlain Society’s most popular volume; such success convinced the society to devote more attention to the history of exploration and the fur trade in western Canada.28

Aware that North American middlebrow readers were increasingly interested in the history of western exploration, and had considerable overlap with the middle-class motoring public, Invermere boosters who felt their village needed some kind of

26 T.C. Elliott, *David Thompson: Pathfinder and the Columbia River* (Kettle Falls: Scimitar Press, 1911); *The Fur Trade in the Columbia River Basin Prior to 1811* (Seattle: Washington State Historical Society, 1915). Elliott also published several articles about Thompson in regional historical journals like *Oregon Historical Quarterly.*


28 David Thompson, *David Thompson’s Narrative of His Explorations in Western America, 1784-1812* J.B. Tyrrell, ed. (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1916). Tyrrell’s protracted efforts to annotate and then get Thompson’s narrative published are described in Robertson, *Measuring Mother Earth*, 216-217, 284-285. In his short history of the Champlain Society, W. Stewart Wallace described Tyrrell’s book on David Thompson as “the Society’s most successful volume” and “the most important single volume ever published with regard to the history of the Canadian west.” According to Wallace, Thompson’s *Narrative* was so popular and persistently sought after that by the 1950s some members subscribed to the Champlain Society just to get a copy of it. W. Stewart Wallace, *A Sketch of the History of the Champlain Society* (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1957), 4-5.
distinctive tourist attraction saw a possible solution in Basil Hamilton’s enthusiasm for commemorating David Thompson. Here was a popular, topical, and international theme that could serve to distinguish Invermere from nearby tourist destinations that relied entirely on mountain scenery and natural features like hot springs. They decided to capitalize on Thompson’s heroic reputation as an explorer, geographer, and nation-builder by tying him concretely to the modern-day village of Invermere. By the fall of 1920 they were proposing to build a major historical tourist attraction in the form of a life-size replica of a nineteenth-century fur trade post.\(^{29}\)

*A Typical Model Hudson’s Bay Fort*

This scheme was not entirely novel. Sites and routes associated with the history of exploration and the fur trade had demonstrated their value as tourist attractions elsewhere in western North America. Many of America’s earliest ‘named highways’ drew on historical themes. For example, boosters and tourism promoters in Oregon regularly linked Lewis and Clark to the scenic Columbia River Highway east of Portland. In western Canada, the Winnipeg Motor Club had leased Lower Fort Garry from the HBC in 1913 in the hope of developing it as a tourist attraction.\(^{30}\) However, there was no precedent in British Columbia for what Invermere’s tourism promoters wanted to do. The memorial fort scheme pre-dated by several years the Native Sons’ campaigns to preserve Fort Langley in the Fraser Valley and the old HBC bastion in Nanaimo. It also pre-dated

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\(^{29}\) According to Bruce, he first discussed the scheme with Sir Robert Kindersley, president of the HBC in the late summer of 1920. Windermere Valley Museum and Archives, David Thompson Memorial Fort collection, Bruce to Edward Fitzgerald, Deputy Chairman, Hudson’s Bay Company, 13 July 1921.

the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada’s program of marking western fur trade posts. Whether Invermere boosters’ plan to draw tourists with a large historical attraction is seen as ingenious or simply desperate, it certainly was ambitious.\textsuperscript{31}

The site selected for the replica ‘fort’ was a grassy, elevated point that jutted out into Lake Windermere. Called Canterbury Point by the area’s British settlers, it was located just south of Invermere’s village centre, three miles from the spot where Basil Hamilton had found the remnants of Kootenae House. What the site lacked in historical accuracy it made up for by its proximity to important tourist amenities: the property was sandwiched between Invermere’s golf course and the CPR’s bungalow camp, and was owned by the CVIF. It was a scenic and highly visible location. It offered excellent views up and down the lake, and could be seen from the road that connected Invermere with the north-south road through the valley.

The CVIF offered free land for the proposed historical attraction, and Robert Randolph Bruce drummed up financial support for its construction. “What we want to erect,” he explained in a July 1921 letter to the deputy chairman of the HBC, “is a miniature Hudson Bay Fort, on the very site where David Thompson built his first Fort.”

It is intended to put up the building on stone and concrete so that it is good for over 100 years. The central building will be used for relics of the early history of the country, all of which will be very valuable one hundred years from now. Such a typical model Hudson Bay Fort will be of great interest historically. [...] In this connection we would all very much appreciate suggestions and criticism from you, and any data that you have got in connection with old forts that might help us get out a proper plan. I have a collection of photographs which comprise Fort Resolution, Fort Chippewan, and Fort Edmonton, and this [enclosed] sketch has been made from little bits out of each. We would want to get the Hudson Bay Coat of Arms over the gateway. [...] It will have Hudson Bay all over it [and] will

be visited by many people, as it is on the main highway of the Banff-Windermere motor road now nearly completed.32

Bruce was stretching the truth when he described the proposed ‘fort’ as being located on the main road through the valley. He was also telling a fib by stating that Canterbury Point was “the very site” of the original Kootenae House: he knew full that Basil Hamilton had proven it was located three miles to the north. Furthermore, the fort was to be a simulation, rather than a replica: it was impossible to say what Kootenae House had actually looked like because no images of it existed, although Hamilton’s archaeological detective work had provided a general sense of its layout.33 The new fort was to be an amalgam of surviving western Canadian fur trade posts, incorporating features that would lend it a picturesque air of verisimilitude. Bruce’s effort to play up the HBC-ness of the project is also noteworthy. He proposed to build a “typical model” HBC post festooned with company insignia, despite the fact that Kootenae House had been an outpost of its bitter rival, the North West Company.

Bruce’s reference to constructing a fort that would be “good for over 100 years” was an engineer’s way of promising the CPR and HBC they would get a good return on any money they might donate for its construction. The ‘fort’ was intended to be a durable, long-term tourist attraction, a permanent piece of economic infrastructure, much like a steel bridge. In light of the slow, halting pace of development in the district, it can also be interpreted as an assertion of the permanence of white settlement in the upper

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32 Windermere Valley Museum and Archives, David Thompson Memorial Fort collection, Bruce to Fitzgerald, 13 July 1921.
33 In 1917 Hamilton produced an annotated map of the Kootenae House site, and sent copies to libraries, archives, and other Thompson enthusiasts, including J.B. Tyrrell. UBC Library Special Collections. Basil G. Hamilton, “Skeleton Plan Showing Location of ‘Kootenae House’ Built by David Thompson, 1807” (Invermere, 1917).
Columbia valley. David Thompson had abandoned the original Kootenae House, but the new ‘fort’ would be located near the heart of a settler community that was anchored by agricultural settlement and plugged into metropolitan networks of transportation and communication. It would simultaneously commemorate and redeem Thompson, while providing a rallying point around which local settlers could renew their dedication to nation, empire, and agricultural colonization.

Bruce coaxed contributions of $2500 from the Hudson’s Bay Company and $7500 from the CPR for construction of the lakeside ‘fort.’ Logs were felled and peeled during the winter of 1921-1922 and construction got under way in the spring, supervised by a foreman from the CPR’s Kootenay Central line. The main building measured 40 by 60 feet, with walls 16 feet tall beneath the eaves and 26 feet beneath the peak of the steeply pitched split-log roof. It had a stone base like Fort Resolution and windows on all four sides. Inside, a large staircase led to an 8-foot wide gallery that ran around three sides of the interior, and the vaulted ceiling gave an impressive sense of spaciousness. Heat was provided by a large stone fireplace in the western wall, but the building was not wired for electricity; Invermere had no power-generating facilities until the 1930s.
The main building was enclosed on three sides by 8-foot-tall palisades anchored by a pair of bastions, and was reached through an arched gateway similar to the one Bruce had seen in photographs of Fort Chippewan. The “miniature” fort was twice as large as the largest building at Kootenae House, and its many glass windows allowed in far more natural light than would have been the case in 1807. However, if any Invermere boosters harboured concerns about the historical accuracy of the ‘fort,’ they could not deny that the completed building had an impressive effect. It was imposingly large, had a very scenic setting, and was convincingly ‘old timey,’ in the sense of immediately evoking a general and pleasant sense of pastness. It incorporated features that seemed typical of a nineteenth-century Canadian fur trade post, and no contemporary buildings or
utility lines intruded on the scene. The only traces of modernity that encroached on the site were a few sand traps of the Invermere golf course, but they blended in nicely with the dry, grassy slopes of Canterbury Point.

As the ‘fort’ neared completion, plans were hatched for an elaborate opening ceremony that would generate publicity for Invermere and the Banff-Windermere Highway. Initially the opening ceremony was planned for Dominion Day 1922, but was pushed back in the hope that the opening of the fort could coincide with the opening of the long-awaited road from Banff. Once it was clear that the road could not be completed until the following summer, the CPR’s publicity department and the Windermere District Board of Trade organized a series of events that would span the Labour Day long weekend. Senior managers from the railway, the HBC, and the CVIF were invited to attend. So were the historians J.B. Tyrrell and T.C. Elliott and popular Canadian writers like the poet Bliss Carman and novelist Frederick Niven. These honourary guests were joined by dozens of politicians, business owners, and reporters, as well as members of genteel settler society from the Lake Windermere district.

Guests from afar reached Invermere by special trains from Golden and Cranbrook, then were driven between the station, hotel, and Canterbury Point in large touring cars. The CPR had loaned a collection of “Indian exhibits” for decorating the interior of the fort, including masks, drums, lanterns embroidered with spirit symbols, and a pair of 12-foot totem poles. The HBC also loaned artifacts suited to the fort’s historic fur trade theme: old company flags, a huge stuffed buffalo head, and a selection of other stuffed fur-bearing animals, including a grizzly bear, timber wolf, and beavers. Local trophy-hunting enthusiasts complemented these with the hides and horns of deer
and mountain goats. A large Union Jack hung from the rafters inside the ‘fort,’ and an
HBC crest was placed over the main entrance, just as Bruce had promised his Winnipeg-
based sponsors.\textsuperscript{34} The HBC’s participation in the ‘fort’ project, it should be noted, was
part of a wider promotional campaign in which it cultivated the image of being an
important institution in Canadian history with modern consumers.\textsuperscript{35}

The interior of the ‘fort’ was stocked with Indian artifacts and animal cadavers
that attested to the area’s wild past (and by extension its civilized present), but the real
show went on outside, around the palisade walls and along the shoreline and crest of
Canterbury Point.\textsuperscript{36} This part of the event combined commemorative pageantry with the
carnivalesque exoticism of Banff Indian Days. Posters advertised the opening day as
“Pioneers’ Day,” which along with an associated “Indian Pageant” was to mark the
“opening of the Hudson’s Bay Fort in commemoration of the first white settlement in BC
by David Thompson.”\textsuperscript{37} John Murray Gibbon, publicity chief for the CPR (and a
landowner in the Lake Windermere district), was present and had arranged for
photographers and a movie crew to be on hand for the weekend’s events, which resulted
in extensive visual documentation. The lodge at the CPR bungalow camp served as the
muster station for spectators and honourary guests observing the day’s events. It also

\textsuperscript{34} On the symbolic connections of large wild mammals and turn-of-the-century myths of western
superabundance, see George Colpitts, \textit{Game in the Garden: A Human History of Wildlife in Western
Canada to 1940} (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002), chapter 4.
\textsuperscript{35} Peter Geller, “‘Hudson’s Bay Company Indians’: Images of Native People and the Red River Pageant,
Culture} (Boulder: Westview, 1996): 65-78; David P. Monteyne, “Constructing Buildings and Histories:
Hudson’s Bay Company Stores, 1910-1930,” \textit{Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada Bulletin} 20, 4
(December 1995): 97-103.
\textsuperscript{36} The emphasis on ‘wildness’ in the displays at the opening of the David Thompson Memorial Fort was
similar to the conflation of eighteenth and nineteenth century history with primeval wilderness that Claire
Campbell has detected in later historic sites in Canada. Claire E. Campbell, “‘It was Canadian, Then,
Typically Canadian’: Revisiting Wilderness at Historic Sites,” \textit{British Journal of Canadian Studies} 21,1
(2008): 5-34.
\textsuperscript{37} Windermere Valley Museum and Archives, poster collection, “Gala Week: Lovely Lake Windermere,
B.C.” (1922).
acted as a kind of boundary between past and present, nineteenth century and twentieth century. No automobiles were allowed beyond the lodge: spectators who wished to step back in time to the valley’s pioneer days were compelled to do so on foot.38

Pioneers’ Day began in the water just off Canterbury Point, with half a dozen canoes being paddled by eminent local settlers dressed up as voyageurs. The largest boat contained bundles of HBC blankets, and on its centerboard sat James McKay, local

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38 Three silent movies produced or owned by Fox Movietone News appear to have been made from the film shot that long weekend, though each seems to have been either mislabeled geographically or reworked in some manner: *Indians From All Parts of Western America Meet Here in Spectacular Pow-wow, Cranbrook, BC* (1922); *Mountain Indians Hold Big Sports Day, Cranbrook, BC* (1922); and *Picturesque Celebration of Arrival 100 Years Ago of Sir George Simpson Who Held Province for Canada, Fort St. James, BC* (1926). These movies are catalogued in Colin Browne, *Motion Picture Production in British Columbia, 1898-1940* (Victoria: British Columbia Provincial Museum, 1979), and the associated descriptions leave little doubt that the film used to make them was shot at Invermere in August 1922.
rancher and sawmill owner, whose light breeches, starched shirt collar, and tall hat identified him as playing the role of David Thompson. The ‘voyageurs’ paddled ashore and disembarked under the eye of officials from the CPR, HBC, and CVIF – the fort’s benefactors, or modern-day chief factors, as it were – as well as reporters, photographers, and a throng of spectators. Carrying bundles of trade goods, they climbed to the crest of the point, where they were received by Kootenay and Shuswap men from the nearby reserves (including several riding on horseback and carrying lances) who were dressed in ‘traditional’ Indian garb like beaded gauntlets, elaborately embroidered buckskin shirts, and feathered headdresses, with a few incongruous Stetsons thrown in.

The white ‘traders’ and ‘traditional’ Indians went through the motions of exchanging furs and blankets before smoking a peace pipe to signify friendly relations between natives and newcomers. Notably, no claims of discovery or imperial possession were reenacted, perhaps because there was no historical record of Thompson having undertaken such a ritual, or perhaps because the organizers believed this might offend the local natives who had been invited to play the role of historical hosts. It was important to stay on good terms with these Kootenay and Shuswap families in case similar events were to be organized in the future. Indeed, Invermere boosters may have hoped that the reenactment and pageant would become recurring events once the Banff-Windermere Highway was completed, akin to the week-long Indian Days that was held each July in Banff, or the Indian stampedes that were intermittently attached to the Calgary Exhibition.39

39 Just as the David Thompson Memorial Fort was an amalgam of western Canadian fur trading posts, the opening day’s events were an amalgam of other western Canadian pageants and celebrations. It borrowed the emphasis on friendly relations between natives and fur traders from the Indian pageant organized for the 250th anniversary of the HBC held at Lower Fort Garry near Winnipeg in 1920, which was meant to
After the pantomime diplomacy, the ‘voyageurs’ and native men headed towards the encampment that local native families had been encouraged to set up along the crest of the point. The encampment consisted of a semi-circle of tipis with fire pits, cooking instruments, cradleboards, travois, and many dogs, ponies, and horses, which stirred up clouds of dust on the thin, sandy soil. At the edge of the encampment the men were met by a priest riding on horseback and carrying a large wooden cross. Father Evans of the local Catholic parish played the role of Pierre-Jean de Smet, the Jesuit missionary who had travelled through the upper Columbia valley in 1845, planting crosses as he went as a way of staking a spiritual claim to the territory on behalf of the church. ‘De Smet’ gave his blessing to the proceedings, then led the party into the tipi village.

Joined by native women and children (also attired in ‘traditional’ garb), the assembled party, numbering around 70, set out towards the fort, marching in a column past photographers and the moving picture camera crew. Led by the white ‘traders,’ ‘Father de Smet,’ and native chiefs and elders, the party was allowed through the gate of the fort by musket-bearing guards. Once everyone was inside the palisade walls, the morning’s organized pageantry more or less came to an end. More peace pipes were smoked, lunch was served from inside the fort, and local natives were induced to pose for visitors’ snapshots and answer questions about their customs and material culture. Some of the white spectators strolled back to the CPR lodge (and the twentieth century) for drinks and cigars. They were followed by a few of the event’s native participants, who show how the conquest of the Canadian wilderness had been peaceful and orderly, in contrast to the violence of the American west. The ‘best Indian’ contest and parade was borrowed from Banff Indian Days, held annually since at least the early 1910s. Due to opposition from officials in the Department of Indian Affairs, native participation the Calgary exhibition had been limited to one-off stampedes in 1912 and 1919. The stampede only became a regular feature of Calgary’s annual exhibition in 1923. See Geller, “Hudson’s Bay Company Indians”; Laurie Meijer-Drees, “‘Indians’ Bygone Past:’ The Banff Indian Days, 1902-1945,” *Past Imperfect* 2 (1993): 7-28; Hugh A. Dempsey, “The Indians and the Stampede” in Max Foran, ed., *Icon, Brand, Myth: The Calgary Stampede* (Edmonton: AU Press, 2008): 47-72.
were asked to pose for more photographs, but not permitted inside the lodge or onto the verandah.

After lunch, prizes were awarded to the event’s native participants in categories like “best teepee,” “best dressed buck,” and “best dressed squaw.” A similar contest had been a regular feature of Banff Indian Days. Cash prizes were offered in order to encourage enthusiastic participation by Kootenay and Shuswap families from the nearby reserves. All natives who attended the event received groceries and a small payment, but the biggest rewards were reserved for those whose costumes were deemed particularly colourful or picturesque. Photographers were on hand throughout the event, making images that could be used in newspaper, magazines, and other promotional materials.40

The final event of Pioneers’ Day was a speech by J.B. Tyrrell. It was presumably given in the early evening, prior to the big, whites-only community dance that was held inside the ‘fort’ and led by orchestra players that the CPR had brought in from its Palliser Hotel in Calgary. Thus the audience was unlikely to have included any of the native people who had participated in the day’s previous events, and this was just as well, for whereas the earlier events had shown a degree of respect for natives and their culture (at least to the extent they could be commodified and put to use for tourism promotion), Tyrrell’s speech borrowed a page from nativist organizations like the Native Sons of British Columbia. In it he endeavoured to demarcate clear boundaries between wildness and civilization, nature and culture, red and white.41

40 In Banff it was the local board of trade that came up with these payments, as well as various groceries and camp supplies. Presumably its equivalent did the same in Invermere, perhaps in partnership with the CPR, HBC, and CVIF. Meijer-Drees, “Indians’ Bygone Past,” 11-13.
41 According to Patricia Roy, there was a pronounced sharpening of racial boundaries in BC’s white settler ideology during the immediate postwar years. See The Oriental Question: Consolidating a White Man’s Province, 1914-41 (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003), chapters 2-3.
Tyrrell began by valorizing David Thompson as an explorer and cartographer, ranking him amongst “the immortals who explored this continent,” including Columbus, Champlain, and “the men who found a way for steel through these mountains.” He argued that Thompson was more than just a discoverer: he had been a harbinger of civilization. “The Canadian people, in their great business of transforming barbarian wildernesses into prosperous communities, have entered into his labors,” Tyrrell declared. After many years in obscurity, Thompson was finally becoming known to the educated middle-class, and Tyrell praised Invermere’s memorial fort as “the first public recognition of the debt that civilization owes him.”

Tyrrell argued that Thompson’s explorations had been “preparatory to the Columbia Valley and others becoming safe and agreeable for their present dwellers,” by which he meant white settlers, rather than the Kootenay and Shuswap families who lived on the paltry reservations along the opposite shore of Lake Windermere. As he saw it, natives’ role in western history was to serve as a foil against which white progress could be measured. Natives had once threatened Thompson and his men “with extermination,” but had subsequently been pushed to the margins of settler society, where they were widely expected to vanish through assimilation or extirpation. Tyrell presented Thompson as a dedicated servant of empire and a deeply religious man who “exemplified the Christian virtues during nearly thirty years in the wilderness.” He concluded that Thompson deserved to be “held in everlasting homage.”

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42 Tyrrell’s speech was reproduced in a pamphlet printed in Invermere. J.B. Tyrrell, “David Thompson: Canada’s Greatest Geographer: An Appreciation” (Invermere, 1922). Richard Glover, who edited and wrote the introduction to the Champlain Society’s 1962 edition of David Thompson’s Narrative, has criticized Tyrrell for his “beatification” of Thompson as a “seemingly faultless Sunday School hero” (xii).
Tyrrell avoided mentioning the fact that Kootenae House, the supposed “first white settlement in BC,” had only been used for three years before it was abandoned. To acknowledge the short-lived nature of Kootenae House might have stirred up uneasy feelings amongst Invermere residents who were disenchanted by the slow pace of development since 1900 and troubled by the fleeting nature of the district’s white population. As the day’s events had demonstrated, native peoples’ cultural traditions were unsettlingly persistent in spite of their confinement to reservations and the recent removal of many of their children to the Catholic-run St. Eugene’s Mission Indian residential school near Cranbrook, 70 miles to the south. Amidst the celebratory air of progress that permeated Pioneers’ Day, it would be impolitic to hint that the Windermere district’s ‘whiteness’ was not natural or permanent, or to point out that local boosters and business interests were desperately pinning their hopes on new-fangled auto tourism.

Boosters, business owners, and tourism promoters in the Lake Windermere district must have felt optimistic about the future after the opening ceremony for the David Thompson Memorial Fort. Two of Canada’s biggest companies had paid to build and publicize a large, eye-catching historical attraction that was unique in British Columbia. It seemed certain that the ‘fort’ would help businesses in Invermere profit from the influx of pleasure travellers expected to drive over the completed Banff-Windermere Highway. Robert Randolph Bruce and Basil Hamilton were both founding members of the BC Historical Association in 1922, and Hamilton sat on its executive council, which indicated how serious they were about making the memorial fort a major historical tourist attraction. However, it soon became clear that no one had a plan for how this should be done.
More than a decade after construction had begun, the Banff-Windermere Highway opened to the motoring public in June 1923. Premier John Oliver and Lieutenant-Governor Walter Nichol attended the ribbon-cutting ceremony at the summit of the Vermillion Pass, as did Robert Randolph Bruce, Basil Hamilton, and many of the same traditionally-attired Indians who had been at the previous summer’s opening ceremony in Invermere. The completion of the first scenic touring road through the Canadian Rockies spurred a flurry of roadside development in the upper Columbia valley. The National Parks Branch built a series of campgrounds along the road in Banff and Kootenay parks, and private operators opened a clutch of cabin camps, tea rooms, lodges, and gas stations around Radium Hot Springs. More than a thousand automobiles passed between Banff and the upper Columbia valley that summer, averaging between 15 and 20 cars per day. The ‘highway’ was in fact a gravel road barely wide enough for two passenger cars to pass each other, but there were many fine views along its route, which traversed relatively open high country with sparse forest cover due to the altitude and rain shadow effect. Park wardens distributed salt licks along its route in order to attract elk, deer, and other animals to the roadside for the motoring public’s viewing pleasure. Generally the mountain scenery visible from the road was picturesque. It was only in the steep descent to the Columbia valley, where the road wove through the narrow defile of Sinclair Canyon, that motorists were likely to experience a sublime sense of unease.43

Many auto tourists who visited Invermere or stayed at the CPR’s Lake Windermere bungalow camp found time to look around “Fort Point,” as Canterbury Point

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was coming to be known. An early description of seeing the Memorial Fort is found in the travel diaries of R.V. Bing, a land speculator from Regina who made a road trip through the Canadian Rockies in August 1923. As he left the main road and drove across the Indian reserve towards Invermere, Bing reported having “a good view of the fort,” which he described as “an exact reproduction of the old Hudson’s Bay post known as Kootenay House.” Invermere’s other buildings were hidden by hills and trees, making the fort appear “as solitary and lonely as when first built.” This initial view of the fort made a profound impression on Bing, who had apparently read accounts of the previous summer’s opening events. “In this enchanted spot the mind turns irresistibly to old forgotten days, and the rush and hurry of modern life seems vain and futile and very far away,” he wrote in his diary.

With only a very small effort of imagination one can again extend the wings of the palisades down to the water’s edge, where several birch-bark canoes are drawn up on the shore, place some teepees round the outside of the stockade and people the enclosure with a motley throng of Indians and trappers. […] All passed and gone these many years, spirits of those old adventurers, both white and red, and to a sympathetic mind a brief subconscious glimpse of their old time activities is for a moment allowed. […] As evening fell one could almost imagine a thin curl of smoke escaping from the chimney, and catch the faint cry of joy from a belated voyageur when the lamps were lit and the windows glowed in welcome, a beacon and guide to all lake travelers. 44

After long stretches of driving through high mountains on uncrowded roads that were punctuated by only a few rustic auto camps, the steep descent to the Columbia valley floor and approach to Invermere filled auto tourists with a sense of returning to civilization. Primed to experience an exaggerated sense of history after traversing a sea of scenic but lonely mountains and forests, the view of the fort across Lake Windermere

44 Fort Steele Heritage Town Archive, R.V. Bing collection, 1923 travel diary, chapters 5 and 7. Also see John T. Faris, Seeing Canada (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1924), 160-161; M.O. Hammond, Canadian Footprints: A Study in Foregrounds and Backgrounds (Toronto: Macmillan, 1926), 279.
must have instilled a strong sense of romance. Indeed, as Bing’s 1923 description suggests, after traversing the Rockies in closer proximity to nature than was possible when travelling by railroad, many motorists were inclined to feel a sense of kinship with nineteenth-century fur traders who had endured many hardships in their travels. This feeling would be especially heightened for those who had read about the history of exploration in western North America. Engaged in their own journeys of discovery (of sites/sights made accessible by public roads and private automobiles), auto tourists of the early 1920s were likely to have an exaggerated appreciation of David Thompson’s adventures in the wilds of British Columbia.

Bing found the Memorial Fort highly evocative when viewed from a distance, but disappointing up close. After checking in at the CPR’s bungalow camp, he strolled over to the fort, only to find its door locked. “[F]rom what we could see through the windows the museum lacks exhibits,” Bing complained. Caught up in the rush to get the building up, Invermere boosters had neglected to develop a plan for operating the ‘fort’ as a permanent historical attraction. It is not surprising that no one in Invermere knew how to set up or operate a museum, for there was not a single one in the BC Interior.45

The failure to follow through with the planned museum was also tied to questions about the ownership of the fort structure. Originally it had been intended to deed the Memorial Fort to the district board of trade. However, Bruce recommended it be given to the HBC and CPR, which made sense in terms of tourism promotion, what with the railway company’s bungalow camp being located next door. While Bruce was negotiating with the fort’s two main sponsors, one of his CVIF colleagues tried to

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45 Fort Steele Heritage Town Archive, R.V. Bing collection, 1923 travel diary, chapter 5.
convince the National Parks Branch and the Canadian Historical Association to take responsibility for the site. The CHA, which until recently had been called the Historic Landmarks Association, indicated that it was willing to accept the deed to the fort but pointed out that it had no funds for maintenance or promotion. National Parks Commissioner J.B. Harkin also expressed interest in taking responsibility for the fort, until he was warned away by members of the new Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, who informed him it was “only a replica.”

None of these efforts to find a long-term benefactor was successful, and it soon became unclear whether anyone had the right to deed the ‘fort’ to anyone else. Furthermore, the boosters who had been promoting the Lake Windermere district as a tourist destination for more than a decade had lost their wind. After coaxing and cajoling various companies and governments into building the Banff-Windermere Highway, establishing Kootenay National Park, and constructing the David Thompson Memorial Fort, Robert Randolph Bruce and the CVIF were both in dire financial straits. Bruce, a widower, was also in failing health. Without their political connections and financial backing, the plan to make the fort a major historical tourist attraction quickly ground to a halt. No more reenactments or pageants were organized. No displays or collection of artifacts were assembled. No explanatory signs or plaques were put up. Less than a year after being opened, the Memorial Fort sat empty, a large, old-timey-looking building with no informative apparatus to explain its significance to visitors.

46 Windermere Valley Museum and Archives, David Thompson Memorial Fort collection, Bruce to Fitzwilliam, 13 July 1921; Bruce to R.V. Beatty, president, Canadian Pacific Railway, 4 July 1922; J. Dennis, chief commissioner, CPR Department of Colonization and Development to Bruce, 31 July 1922; Bruce to Henry S. Fleming, 12 October 1923; J.B. Harkin, superintendent, Canadian National Parks to Bruce, 18 August 1922 and 5 September 1924. Quote is from last letter cited.
The Memorial Fort had served as an historical tourist attraction for even less time than the original Kootenae House had been used as a fur trade post. However, it did not fall into complete disuse. It was intermittently used as a community hall during the 1920s, hosting social events like dances, the fall fair, and fundraisers. It was also used for young people’s athletic activities like tumbling, basketball, and badminton. Sometimes it was used as a Masonic temple; sometimes moving pictures were shown. Secluded from the village center and fringed with trees, Fort Point was a popular place for Invermere residents to go walking. Sometimes the door to the fort was left open, allowing it to be used for surreptitious courting.47

Though supposedly built to last a hundred years, the ‘fort’ proved difficult to maintain. Sand blew in through the chinking in the log walls, and a colony of bats made their home in the rafters, depositing droppings on the plank floor. Robert Randolph Bruce occasionally prodded his friends in the CPR to carry out minor repairs to the building, but his efforts were half-hearted. Beset with financial troubles and slowly losing his sight, Bruce was rescued from his failed development schemes in the Lake Windermere district in 1926, when he was appointed Lieutenant-Governor of British Columbia. He had limited involvement with Invermere thereafter, but CVIF secretary Howard Cleland acted as volunteer caretaker for the ‘fort.’ The CPR occasionally sent crews to help maintain the exterior of the building, but by the late 1920s changing traffic patterns on the region’s roads had the railway company keen to be free from its vague obligations to the site.48

47 Windermere Valley Museum and Archives, David Thompson Memorial Fort collection, “Memories Collected at the Feb. 18, 2000 Heritage Luncheon.”
48 Windermere Valley Museum and Archives, David Thompson Memorial Fort collection, W.H. Cleland to Basil Gardom, superintendent, Construction and Repairs, Western Hotels, Canadian Pacific Railway, 22 May 1925 and 31 May 1927; Gardom to Cleland, 3 June 1927.
In 1927 the completion of an automobile road between Banff and Golden via the Kicking Horse Pass made it possible for Prairie auto tourists to do a loop trip through Banff, Yoho, and Kootenay national parks without driving past Invermere. This led to a sharp decline in business at the CPR’s Lake Windermere bungalow camp, even as a growing number of middle-class westerners were acquiring automobiles and using them for pleasure travel. Highway counts conducted in 1927 showed that traffic on the main north-south road through the upper Columbia valley rarely exceeded 50 vehicles per day during the summer travel season. This was followed by the 1929 announcement of the Big Bend road project between Revelstoke and Golden, which effectively guaranteed that the Lake Windermere district would be bypassed by any future transprovincial highway. That year the CPR sold its Lake Windermere bungalow camp to a finishing school for girls, made a few final repairs to the neglected David Thompson Memorial Fort, and thereafter denied any responsibility for the site.49

The fort’s failure to promote David Thompson’s legacy in the upper Columbia valley was bitterly disappointing to Basil Hamilton. Local boosters and tourism promoters had seized upon his enthusiasm for the famous explorer, but for their own ends and with little success. To rectify this situation, Hamilton tried to obtain a measure of official protection and recognition for the site of the real Kootenae House, which was located a couple miles north of Invermere.

In the mid 1920s Hamilton acquired the twelve-acre lot that contained the remnants of the original Kootenae House. In 1929 he approached the Historic Sites and

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49 Windermere Valley Museum and Archives, David Thompson Memorial Fort collection, H.F. Matthews, general manager, western hotels, Canadian Pacific Railway to W.H. Cleland, secretary-treasurer, CVIF, 11 February 1929; Bruce to Cleland, 20 February 1929; Mathews to Cleland, 23 April 1929. The 1927 traffic count is cited in Harvey, The Coast Connection, 101.
Monuments Board of Canada to see whether the federal government would consider purchasing the site. After confirming that the site being discussed was not the ersatz Memorial Fort, which had already been rejected as unsuitable for a national historic site, the board responded that it was interested. The HSMBC had recently designated several western fur trade posts as national historic sites, in an effort driven by Judge Fredric Howay, the prolific amateur historian of British Columbia who had represented western Canada on the board since 1923. The site of Kootenae House was deemed an excellent candidate for designation even though few traces of the post could be discerned on the ground. Hamilton’s property was associated with a popular ‘Canadian’ explorer-hero, and being near the Banff-Windermere Highway was relatively accessible. The site’s proximity to modern transportation routes, Kootenay National Park, and the village of Invermere set it apart from many of the other fur trade posts that had been designated national historic sites, which tended to be in isolated northern districts.50

Basil Hamilton did not live to see Kootenae House receive the official protection and commemoration he felt it deserved. He passed away in 1933 before a deal could be finalized with the federal government. However, his widow Maude continued negotiating with Judge Howay and National Parks Commissioner J.B. Harkin. The HSMBC designated Kootenae House a national historic site in 1934, and the following year Maude Hamilton donated the property to the federal government. In 1938 the site was marked with a bronze plaque mounted on a stone cairn. Frederic Howay and T.C. Elliott both spoke at the ceremony to unveil the commemorative cairn, emphasizing the

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50 Parks Canada, “Kootenae House National Historic Site,” 8-12. Judge Howay and the HSMBC’s broader activities in BC during the mid and late 1920s are discussed in Reimer, Writing British Columbia History: 1784-1958, chapter 4; Taylor, Negotiating the Past, 86-90; Taylor and Payne, “Western Canadian Fur Trade Sites.”
significance of David Thompson’s explorations for both Canadian and American history. Their speeches were followed by a reading of Bliss Carman’s popular poem “David Thompson,” which had been inspired by the poet’s CPR-sponsored visit to Invermere for the 1922 opening of the Memorial Fort. Basil and Maude Hamilton’s efforts to get David Thompson publicly commemorated in the upper Columbia valley were not forgotten. The plaque that identified Kootenae House as the “first trading post of the white man on the Columbia River or its tributaries” was accompanied by a second, smaller plaque that acknowledged the Hamiltons’ patriotism for identifying the site and donating it to the government.51

Kootenae House was more accessible to tourists than many of Canada’s other national historic sites related to western exploration and the fur trade. However, it was not exactly on the motoring public’s ‘beaten path.’ The upper Columbia valley was a BC hinterland, tied more closely to Alberta and the Inland Empire than to the cities of the Coast. Furthermore, the authentic site of Kootenae House was located down an obscure side road. The cairn and plaque erected by the HSMBC had an air of seriousness and permanence to them, but no pointer signs were put up along the district’s main roads to indicate the presence of the monument. Auto tourists had either to seek it out or stumble across it serendipitously. For local business owners who hoped to profit by selling goods and services to the motoring public, the authentic site of Kootenae House was no more useful an attraction than the shuttered simulation at Fort Point.

The David Thompson Memorial Fort was falling into serious disrepair by the time the real site of Kootenae House received official recognition from the Canadian

government. No local service group or sports club could afford to maintain it in good condition during the Depression. No local historical society was organized to take charge of it. None of the companies that had been involved in its construction wanted anything more to do with it. Indeed, with the CPR’s former bungalow camp closed and relatively few tourists driving into Invermere, there was little reason for anyone to look after the fort. By 1940 the palisade walls were falling down, the bastions were in very poor condition, the stone foundation was spalling in places, and the roof leaked. Invermere residents were further divorced from the David Thompson Memorial Fort in 1947, when the new Memorial Community Hall opened in the village centre. The local golf club was coaxed into taking trusteeship over the fort in 1948, but by then it was widely expected that the building would either collapse or be torn down. However, as will be shown in Chapter Thirteen, there were several attempts to restore the forlorn fort during the mid and late 1950s, by which time new and improved automobile roads had made Invermere less of a backwater and more of a recreational and tourist destination.

The David Thompson Memorial Fort’s failure as an historical attraction in the early 1920s shows how much, and also how little, could be accomplished in a small hinterland community prior to the emergence of the mass culture of auto touring and the development of an interregional road network in the BC Interior. The provincial and federal government had built the Banff-Windermere Highway, and powerful corporate sponsors had built and publicized the fort, but their support was not enough to overcome Invermere’s relative isolation. The upper Columbia valley was inaccessible to motorists from BC’s Coastal populations centres, and the village of Invermere was located just far enough from the main road through the valley to be off the motoring public’s beaten path.
Neither the Memorial Fort nor the authentic site of Kootenae House was tied closely enough to the roadside to succeed as an historical tourist attraction. Furthermore, the Memorial Fort stood alone – there were no other historical attractions in the BC Interior in the early 1920s. It was a singular node of old-timey-ness, as isolated in cultural and economic terms as it was within the provincial road network. As will be shown in the following chapters, it was only in the mid and late 1920s, after BC’s motoring public gained easy access to the Interior, that it became common for boosters, businesses, and agencies of the state to cultivate and promote history by the road in that region.
Chapter 9

The Fraser Canyon Highway, BC’s Premier Drive Into the Past, 1925-1945

The highway that ran through the Fraser Canyon and into the Cariboo was the first and most important ‘historical’ automobile road in the British Columbia Interior. What made it the premier drive through the province’s past during the interwar years were the many historical and history-themed landscape features that the motoring public passed by when driving between Hope, the gateway to the Interior, and Barkerville, the historical capital of BC’s northern gold fields. Most of these landscape features were ruins, relics, and remnants, the detritus of a hinterland economy that had been stagnant for decades. But interspersed amongst these weathered and decaying traces of times past were roadside markers, monuments, and museums that had been created by boosters and business owners who hoped to benefit from the passage of the motoring public.

A few of these monuments were erected by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, but otherwise the state played a minor role in cultivating history by the road along the Fraser Canyon and Cariboo highway corridor during the interwar years. The provincial government’s lack of involvement is particularly noteworthy, given that it built and maintained this stretch of road and was becoming increasingly involved in tourism promotion during these years.¹ There were no attempts to follow Invermere’s lead and develop ambitious historical attractions along this highway corridor during the interwar years. Instead, what made the Fraser Canyon and Cariboo highways BC’s premier drive into the past was the sheer number and variety of historical and history-

¹ On the provincial government’s growing involvement in promoting the tourist trade during the interwar years, see Dawson, Selling British Columbia, chapter 2-3.
themed landscape features that were visible to motorists travelling along it. The motoring public shared the experience of driving past them in sequence, making the entire highway corridor seem historically meaningful.

This and the following chapter examine the motoring public’s experiences of history by the road along the Cariboo Highway during the interwar years. They show that these shared experiences were not part of an organized, top-down, expert-driven process, even though they were structured by a state-owned and -maintained highway. Instead, they were largely the result of rural people and small-town residents who responded to new opportunities made possible by new and improved automobile roads and the needs and desires of the motoring public. These chapters try to capture the experience of driving between the Coast and the Cariboo during the interwar years by adopting the form of a travelogue. Beginning at Hope and working northward to Barkerville, the intention is to show how the Cariboo Highway gained a popular reputation as a corridor for experiencing history by the road.

This chapter examines history by the road along the southernmost section of the Cariboo Highway – the section between Hope and Ashcroft, which was commonly referred to as the Fraser Canyon Highway. It begins by examining why the state selected the canyon route for the first road link between BC’s Coast and Interior, which requires going over some of the ground covered at the start of Chapter Two. It then outlines some of the intersections between scholarly and popular historical writing and BC’s emerging culture of middle-class automobility during the mid 1920s. The last section details the cultivation of history by the road amidst the sublime natural scenery that motorists saw when driving along the Fraser Canyon Highway. The next chapter will continue
northward from Ashcroft, examining history by the road along the central and northern sections of the Cariboo Highway as far as Barkerville. Together, these two chapters explore how the environment, the built landscape, and the efforts of boosters, businesses, and historians converged to shape the motoring public’s shared experiences of history by the road.

Selecting the Canyon Route

During the early and mid 1920s British Columbia’s motoring public was swollen by an influx of new middle-class automobile owners. The passenger car went from being the rich man’s plaything to a more practical machine that was affordable to most professionals as well as a growing number of tradesmen, shopkeepers, and farmers. Motoring enthusiasts from the Coast united to speak with a more powerful political voice in early 1924, when the Victoria, Vancouver, and New Westminster auto clubs merged to form the Automobile Club of British Columbia. It and BC’s other regional motoring associations were joined in their lobbying for the expansion and improvement of the provincial road network by an array of businesses, boards of trade, and municipal governments. They agreed that the provincial government should prioritize the construction of an automobile road connecting the population centres of the Coast with the rural, resource, and recreational hinterlands of the Interior. Not only did the lack of a Coast-Interior road link retard the development of BC’s nascent tourism and roadside service industries, but it suggested the province was not fully modern.

As described in Chapter Two on the intertwined origins of Manning Park and the Hope-Princeton Highway, provincial politicians could choose between two viable routes
for the first road between BC’s Coast and Interior. One was a southern route that would climb through the Cascade Mountains between Hope and Princeton. The other was a more central route that would skirt around the Cascades via the Fraser and Thompson river canyons. By 1923 a number of factors had aligned in favour of the latter route. It would connect with an automobile road that spanned most of the central Interior, from Ashcroft in the west to Revelstoke in the east. Furthermore, as the Banff-Windermere Highway neared completion, the federal government had promised to help build another, more northerly touring road through the Rockies, which would connect Banff and Golden via the Kicking Horse Pass and Yoho National Park. Ottawa appeared to be copying the American government’s policy of linking its western national parks with touring roads, and thus the presence of Glacier and Mount Revelstoke national parks in the Selkirk Mountains augured well for federal assistance on a road between Golden and Revelstoke.

Another important advantage to following the Fraser and Thompson river canyons was that such a road would connect with the Cariboo Road at Ashcroft. Located 60 miles west of Kamloops, Ashcroft had been the railhead for supplying the scattered ranches and mines of BC’s northern Interior since the 1880s. Each summer, cargo was unloaded at the town’s rail yards and transferred onto large freight wagons that were pulled by teams of up to a dozen oxen or heavy draught horses.

Passengers and mail had traditionally been carried northward in horse-drawn stagecoaches. Freight did not move during the winter but sleighs were used for personal transportation and mail delivery. This pattern of north-south transport had started changing in 1910, when the BC Express Company (BX) added a pair of powerful Winton Six automobiles to its Cariboo stage service. Ironically, this earliest experiment with
automobile stages on the Cariboo Road was driven by a boom in railroad construction. Work was getting underway on two new railroads: the Grand Trunk Pacific (GTP), which would traverse northern BC from east to west, from the Yellowhead Pass to Prince Rupert, and the Pacific Great Eastern (PGE), a north-south-running line which would link Vancouver with the GTP at Prince George. Huge quantities of construction material were being transported northward from Ashcroft in preparation for these projects, as well as surveyors, engineers, and land agents. Many people were convinced that BC’s northern Interior, which had been in the doldrums for many years, was on the verge of a boom in agricultural settlement and resource extraction that would make it the “New Garden of Canada.”

The anticipated boom failed to materialize, largely due to the war and the failure of both railway companies. The GTP line across northern BC ended up a branch line of the federally owned Canadian National Railways, while the PGE was taken over by the provincial government. Cash-strapped Victoria could not afford to complete the PGE’s southernmost section into Vancouver or its northernmost section through the Cariboo, causing the line to be derided as the “railway from nowhere to nowhere,” the “Please Go Easy,” and the “Prince George Eventually.” With no direct rail link between the Coast and the northern Interior, demand remained strong for transport along the Cariboo Road, and Ashcroft remained the gateway to the northern Interior. By 1918 a few freighters were experimenting with trucks, and within a few years gas-powered vehicles had

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3 On the GTP as a “corridor of corporate failure,” see Leonard, A Thousand Blunders. The interwar history of the PGE has received little scholarly attention, but outline histories of its activities during this period can be found in J.F. Garden, British Columbia Railway From PGE to BC Rail (Revelstoke: Footprint, 1995); Lorraine Harris, British Columbia’s Own Railroad (Surrey: Hancock House, 1982); Adolf Hungrywolf, Route of the Cariboo: PGE/BC Rail (Skookumchuck: Canadian Caboose Press, 1994).
supplanted the draught animals and freight wagons that had plied the road since the gold
rush of the 1860s, putting many teamsters, blacksmiths, leatherworkers, wagon makers,
and animal breeders out of work. By selecting the canyon route for the first automobile
road between the Coast and the Interior, the provincial government could do double duty
in BC’s emerging network of automobile roads, facilitating both east-west and north-
south traffic. As the Kamloops-based boosters of the BC Trans-Provincial Highway
Association argued in a 1923 pamphlet, a highway through the Fraser Canyon promised
to connect with “every highway in the Interior.”

There was a third reason for building BC’s first automobile road between the
Coast and the Interior via the Fraser and Thompson river canyons, a reason whose
significance is difficult to quantify in terms of cost or potential economic value. The
canyon route had already been the most important transportation route between the Coast
and the Interior for more than half a century. In 1858 the discovery of placer gold in the
canyons had drawn tens of thousands of fortune-seekers from California and further
afield, which led to the establishment of the mainland colony of British Columbia. Four
years later, the discovery of extensive gold fields on the northeastern Cariboo Plateau led
the colony to build the Cariboo Wagon Road, which linked the town of Yale, the
uppermost point of steamboat navigation on the lower Fraser River, and the diggings 400
miles to the north, where the town of Barkerville emerged as the commercial and
administrative centre. The debt incurred for this project spurred the union of British
Columbia and Vancouver Island in 1866, and the united colony’s subsequent decision to

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4 Robin Skelton, *They Call It The Cariboo* (Victoria: Sono Nis, 1980), chapter 16.
5 University of British Columbia Library Special Collections, BC Trans-Provincial Highway Association,
“Fraser River Highway: The Only Route for Provincial Highway” (Kamloops: BC Trans-Provincial
Highway Association, 1923).
enter confederation with distant Canada. The 1871 Terms of Union promised a railway to the Pacific within ten years, and the Canadian government’s surveyors ultimately determined the railroad should follow the Fraser and Thompson canyons between Kamloops and the Coast. The construction of the railroad through the canyons in the early 1880s destroyed the southernmost section of the Cariboo Wagon Road, which had been the most difficult and expensive to build, and also the most famous. In the 1910s, the Canadian Northern Railway built its transcontinental line parallel to the CPR’s between Kamloops and Vancouver, causing further damage to the fragmented remnants of the old wagon road. However, the high cost of building a railroad on the ‘wrong side’ of the canyons contributed to Canadian Northern’s postwar insolvency and incorporation into Canadian National alongside the failed GTP. Containing two transcontinental railroads, the Fraser and Thompson canyons formed one of the most important transportation corridors in all of Canada. It was so crucial to the national economy that the German general staff had deemed it a prime target during the Great War.\(^6\)

Squeezing an automobile road through the canyons alongside tempestuous rivers and a pair of transcontinental mainlines posed serious challenges. However, for politicians facing pressure from the motoring public and an array of business interests to connect the Coast and Interior by road, the proposed canyon route must have been appealing for its familiarity and long association with travel and transportation. Since the 1860s, the vast majority of people who had travelled between BC’s Coast and Interior had done so by traversing the Fraser and Thompson canyons. The canyon route was the traditional way between the province’s metropolitan centres and its mountainous

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\(^6\) Kitchen, “The German Invasion of Canada.”
hinterlands. Most British Columbians who travelled long distances – whether for work, family, or pleasure – were familiar with its imposing terrain, sublime scenery, and clutch of small communities. For more than half a century, travelling through the canyons had been one of the most widely-shared and important landscape experiences in British Columbia. In comparison, the Cascade Mountains between Hope and Princeton were an unfamiliar wilderness. As the boosters of the Kamloops-based BC Trans-Provincial Highway Association put it, building an automobile road through the canyons would allow motorists to “travel historic ground.”

Building Anticipation

In May 1924, the Liberal government of John Oliver announced that the first automobile road between BC’s Coast and Interior would be built through the Fraser and Thompson river canyons from Hope to Ashcroft, following essentially the same route as the gold rush-era Cariboo Wagon Road. Contracts were let in October and construction commenced soon after. However, progress on the new road was slower than expected. In addition to being stuck with the third pick of routes through extremely difficult terrain, road builders had to contend with the presence of two railroads in the steep, narrow confines of the canyons, and faced harsh financial penalties for any disruption of train service.

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8 Prince George Citizen 15 May 1924, 1; 16 October 1924, 3. In the months prior to the official announcement, there was widespread speculation that the pendulum had swung away from the Hope-Princeton route, which had been the government’s preferred route before and for several years after the war. For example, “Fraser Canyon Favoured for Highway Link,” Prince George Citizen 18 March 1924, 1.
traffic. There were also significant cost overruns. Several sections cost triple the original estimate.⁹

The contractors who built the automobile road through the Fraser and Thompson river canyons were doubtless aware of the irony of constructing a new road in the very place where a wagon road had been built at considerable expense 60 years earlier. Provincial road engineers who had studied the possibility of restoring the former wagon road in 1919 had been scathing in their criticism of the unnecessary damage both railway companies had done to the old route. They reported that 44 of 77 miles between Yale and Spences Bridge had been damaged beyond use: five by the flood of 1894, thirteen by construction of the Canadian Northern in the early 1910s, and the balance by construction of the CPR in the early 1880s, including 19 of 25 miles “practically entirely destroyed” in the Thompson canyon.¹⁰

Since the 1880s, railway passengers had glimpsed the remnants of the Cariboo Wagon Road as they sped through the canyons. A few short sections remained usable for local travel after completion of the CPR, but even this became difficult after the flood of 1894, which badly damaged the original Alexandra Bridge over the Fraser River near Spuzzum. The bridge’s deteriorating suspension cables were dynamited in 1912, further contributing to the impression that the visible remnants of the wagon road were the ruins of a bygone age. As one railway passenger put it in 1916,

one sees relics of it here and there from the train on the far side of the canyon, a streak along the face of an almost perpendicular cliff, a flimsy looking bridge across a gully, half-destroyed by time, a bit of cribbing to support the road along

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⁹ Technical aspects of building the canyon road are outlined in Harvey, *Coast Connection*, 90-99.
¹⁰ Harvey, *Coast Connection*, 90-91. Regarding the federal government’s responsibilities and actions relating to the Cariboo Wagon Road during the days of railroad construction, see Harvey, *Carving the Western Path*, 58-66.
the side of a precipice; it looks scarcely possible for any one to have travelled over such a road and reached the end of the journey alive!11

Most railway passengers assumed that the Cariboo Wagon Road had been made redundant by the railroad and abandoned as the ‘natural’ result of progress, as the days of animal power were replaced by the age of steam. The railway companies’ publicity departments did nothing to disabuse travellers of this notion: the CPR and CNR both sold scenic grandeur on their BC lines, not history. It was only after the Great War that their mile-by-mile guidebooks began to make occasional references to historical figures like the explorer Simon Fraser, who had travelled through the canyon in 1808. References to the gold rush-era wagon road were very rare in railway publicity materials, despite the fact that traces of it were plainly visible from the train. The railways’ decision to incorporate exploration and the fur trade into their guidebooks while ignoring the Fraser River gold rush and the Cariboo Wagon Road suggests the extent to which the fur trade-era exploration of western Canada was becoming part of Canada’s dominant national narrative in the early 1920s, whereas BC’s gold rushes were relegated to the status of events of merely regional significance.

The railway companies’ publicity departments downplayed the gold rushes of the 1850s and 1860s at the very moment historians of British Columbia were asserting they were the pivotal events in the province’s past. This was most clearly the case in the multi-volume *British Columbia From the Earliest Times to the Present* (1914), written by provincial librarian E.O.S. Scholefield and New Westminster jurist Frederic Howay. The

1858 Fraser River gold rush marked the transition between Scholefield’s first volume on BC’s ‘ancient’ history and Howay’s second volume on its ‘modern’ history. In effect, the Fraser Canyon was portrayed as the birthplace or crucible of British Columbia. Howay devoted eleven of his sixteen chapters to gold seekers, the gold mining economy, gold-driven conflicts, regional gold rushes, and the colonial government’s responses to them. He described the Cariboo Wagon Road as “the Appian Way of British Columbia,” and presented it as BC’s key colonial institution, at once an instrument of communication, civilization, commodity extraction, and agricultural colonization.¹²

By the early 1920s, some of the key ideas presented in British Columbia From the Earliest Times were trickling into middle-brow and popular historical writings that were closely intertwined with automobility in British Columbia’s middle-class consumer and literary cultures, including pamphlets, guides, travelogues, and such books as Early History of the Province of British Columbia (1926), written by Bruce McKelvie, a newspaperman and senior ‘officer’ of the Native Sons of British Columbia.¹³ The daily newspapers in Vancouver and Victoria contained hundreds of stories about auto touring, scenic landscapes, and the history of western North America during the mid and late 1920s. For example, the Saturday edition of the Vancouver Sun devoted an entire section to auto styling, auto fashion, and auto touring, prominent within which was a regular column called “Outlines of the History of British Columbia.”¹⁴ Local companies even used motifs from the province’s past in their advertisements. For example, for their

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¹² Scholefield and Howay, British Columbia from the Earliest Times to the Present. Howay referred to the Cariboo Wagon Road as “the Appian Way of British Columbia” in many speeches, articles, and books, but seems to have first used the phrase in British Columbia From the Earliest Times to the Present vol.2, 96.
¹³ Bruce McKelvie, Early History of the Province of British Columbia (Toronto: Dent, 1926).
¹⁴ This column was attributed to Felix Penne, which was the pen name of the popular Vancouver poet, newspaper writer, and literateur John Francis Bursill.
“Romance of British Columbia” campaign, Shelly’s Bread placed quarter-page ads with images and text about the early fur trade, heroic explorers like Simon Fraser and David Thompson, and the challenges of travelling through inhospitable wilderness.

Several new scenic drives beckoned to Coastal motorists during the early 1920s, including the Whytecliffe Parkway in West Vancouver, the road to the resort at Harrison Hot Springs, and the parkway that promoters were proposing to build to the top of Grouse Mountain. However, there was a sense of being cooped up in the southwesternmost corner of the province, with nowhere to go for an extended pleasure drive except southward into the United States. While the Canadian government was promoting the national parks in eastern BC to American auto tourists, they were effectively off-limits to motorists from BC’s major population centres. The 1920s were the heyday of the “See America First” movement in the United States, yet motorists from BC’s Coast could not even reach the Interior of their own province without driving through Washington State. Completion of an automobile road through the Fraser and Thompson canyons was expected to provide a bevy of new opportunities for auto touring within British Columbia, thus allowing motorists from the Coast to better know the communities, natural environments, and history of the Interior hinterlands.\(^{15}\)

The completion of an automobile road between BC’s Coast and Interior promised to throw new light on the province’s history, for auto tourists would be able to travel at a slower pace than in trains and pause for closer inspection wherever an interesting historical landscape feature caught their interest. The recent valorization of western themes in middlebrow Canadian historical writing had middle-class motorists from the

\(^{15}\) Shaffer, See America First.
BC’s Coast primed to explore the Interior hinterlands with an eye towards both natural scenery and the history of discovery and adventure. For example, a 1925 article in *Pacific Coast Motorist*, the magazine of the Automobile Club of British Columbia, eagerly looked forward to the new canyon route, and played up its associations with the gold rush-era Cariboo Wagon Road. “That we are living in a different age will be appreciated as we drive over the reconstructed road,” the author predicted, “thinking twenty and thirty miles an hour as slow travelling.”

The Canadian Pacific Railway stole from the road its most dangerous sections through the canyons – the portion which visitors most admired and dreaded. For forty years that section has been abandoned; its well travelled roadbed has been a weed and grass grown stretch; its stone embankments a home for the pack rat; its bridges and wooden supports food for beetles and bugs. Now in 1925, a new Cariboo Road comes into being to replace the old one and to be used not by the slow-paced mules, or by creaking, groaning freight wagons, but to be used by vehicles unknown when the old road existed, and by people who come to see the land the pioneers discovered. The tourist, as he passes Chapmans Bar, may imagine the scene of 1858, when those bars were covered with struggling men, endeavouring to wrest some of the treasures from the golden goddess. Or we may see the old road itself, crowded with a throng of men, freight wagons, and stages, hurrying into the wilds of Cariboo to continue the struggle [emphasis added].

By early 1926 it was widely expected that the new road through the Fraser and Thompson canyons would open that summer. Anticipation was keen amongst Coastal motorists as well as Interior boosters, businesses, and would-be roadside entrepreneurs, who were eager to be connected to Coastal markets and western North America’s emerging interregional highway network. The canyon road was celebrated as a province-building project of profound historical significance. For example, the *Prince George Citizen* predicted the completion of the road would be “one of the most important events in the history of this province,” equivalent to the driving of the last spike on the CPR near

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Revelstoke in 1885. The Native Sons of British Columbia objected strenuously when a
Vancouver-area MLA suggested that Rudyard Kipling be invited to preside over the
future highway opening ceremony. The Native Sons did not object to the idea of the arch-
imperialist Kipling attending the event, but insisted that any ceremonial place of honour
in “the restoration of the old provincial highway” should be reserved for actual
“pioneers” who had worked along the old wagon road during the gold rush days,
including former stagecoach drivers and roadhouse keepers, “men and women who have
been identified with the development of British Columbia.”

A delay in completing the new Alexandra Suspension Bridge at Spuzzum made it
impossible to open the highway during the summer of 1926. However, the bridge was
finished by September, finally making it possible for motorists to drive between Hope
and Ashcroft, from whence they could continue eastwards to Kamloops or northward to
the Cariboo. The Thompson Canyon section of the road was still not finished, so the trip
initially required a roundabout detour via Lillooet, which involved traversing the
infamous Big Slide and negotiating several long, steep grades on Pavilion Mountain. The
road through the Fraser Canyon was officially declared open in May 1927, but it took
another sixteen months for the section between Lytton and Spences Bridge to be
completed. The delay stemmed from the need to traverse a number of unstable dry slides
and build elaborate bank retention structures in places where the road could only be
routed along a narrow strip between the railroad and the fast-flowing Thompson River.

Construction of the southernmost section of the Cariboo Highway (which was
often called the Canyon Highway, to distinguish it from the section north of Ashcroft)

had been the second largest road project in BC’s history, and had covered the same
ground as the first: the Cariboo Wagon Road of the 1860s. The steepest grades had been
eliminated, a series of tunnels had been blasted through impassable granite bluffs, and
many new bridges and cribbings had been built. However, the new automobile road was
no wider, and in some places significantly narrower, than the old wagon road had been,
and in several places it clung to sheer cliff faces on precarious-looking grasshopper
trestles. The road was a highway in name only, more akin to the touring road between
Banff and the Lake Windermere district than to the broad, concrete-surfaced highways
that were starting to appear between major cities in the United States.

Figure 9.1: The Fraser Canyon Highway, late 1920s. Back of postcard reads “This place just
opened up.”

The new Alexandra Suspension Bridge was a key part of the road, carrying
motorists over the Fraser River at a narrow point in the gorge just upstream from
Spuzzum. The new bridge was located at the same spot as the 1863 bridge of the same
name, and was loosely styled after it, although its towers and abutments were of reinforced concrete rather than piled timber, and its deck was twelve feet higher than the original’s. Crossing over the muddy, inexorably churning river was one of many dramatic points in the drive through the canyon, especially after the original timber decking was replaced by a steel grate through which it was possible to peer directly down into the fast-flowing water. The Alexandra Bridge was also memorable because a hefty toll was charged to cross it, much to the chagrin of Interior tourism promoters and motorists of modest means.\footnote{Passenger cars were charged one dollar to cross the bridge in the late 1920s, which was equivalent to two hours’ wages for a skilled tradesman. BC’s earliest long-haul truckers complained that the toll on freight was punitively high, and alleged that it was meant to insulate the railroads (including the government-owned PGE) from competition. Craig, \textit{Trucking}; Kluckner, \textit{Vanishing British Columbia}, 115.}

The canyon route had many features that emphasized the power of nature. For long stretches, dark, frangible cliffs loomed above the narrow road. It was common to see evidence of rockfall, and traffic was frequently stopped (sometimes for days or even weeks) so that boulders or slides could be cleared away, particularly after high winds, precipitation, or a freeze-thaw cycle. Fog, rain, and snowfall were not uncommon in the timber-clad Fraser Canyon, which could be damp and gloomy even when points to the east and west were sunny and dry. This was due to the surrounding mountains, which caused weather systems coming off the Pacific to cool and release their accumulated vapour. In stark contrast, the Thompson Canyon, which was in the rain shadow of those same mountains, was one of the hottest and most arid places in Canada, with sparse pine forests, sagebrush, cacti, rattlesnakes, and unstable benches made up of sandy soil and gravel deposits. Heavy precipitation was rare there, but even a brief storm could cause

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landsides and washouts due to the parched earth’s inability to absorb large amounts of water.\footnote{Dozens of significant road closures resulting from rockfall, landslides, washouts, debris torrents, avalanches, and floods in the Fraser and Thompson canyons during the period 1926-1945 are cited in Septer, \textit{Flooding and Landslide Events in Southern British Columbia}.}

Both canyons were intersected by ravines, gorges, defiles, and talus slopes, which had required the construction of many bridges, trestles, and winding detours. In most places the new automobile road was located far above the canyon floor due to the presence of the railroads, which ran along the water grade; in several spots motorists could see the river and railroads more than a thousand feet below, down near-perpendicular cliffs. In other sections, as around Sailor Bar in the Fraser Canyon and Tank Hill in the Thompson, the river boiled and swirled just a few feet below the road surface. Every few years these low-lying sections would be flooded by summer freshets.

To give the motoring public a sense of reassurance, road builders had placed timber railings and thick, thigh-high rock walls along many of the road’s highest, tightest, most precarious and dizzying sections, and on the approaches to tunnels and bridges. Nevertheless, for many motorists of the interwar years the experience of driving along the canyon highway was accompanied by a not entirely irrational sense of dread: of going over the edge of the precipice, of being crushed from above without warning, of colliding with a car coming around a near-blind corner. The landscapes visible along the canyon highway were scenic, yet intimidating and fear-instilling. The drive provided a sublime landscape experience in the classical sense of the word, for the way it inspired contemplation of oblivion and one’s own mortality while at the same time providing a series of scenic and kinesthetic thrills.
Hundreds of motoring enthusiasts set out to explore the long-awaited road between BC’s Coast and Interior in the fall of 1926. One of the first was Edmund Wragge, a young lawyer who made an ambitious road trip from Nelson in the west Kootenays to Vancouver and then north to the Cariboo. “The road, if it could be called one, was a one-way track, very twisty and near the edge of the cliff or river bank,” Wragge recorded in his diary. When traversing the most frightening stretches of the road, one of his companions sat on the floor of the car “so as not to see the tightrope road we were driving on.” Nevertheless, at the end of the trip Wragge deemed the Fraser Canyon highway “a beautiful ride.”

During the late 1920s and early 1930s, the canyon section of the Cariboo Highway was only kept open from May to mid November due to the lack of snow-clearing equipment and the fact that it was seen primarily as a touring road. In 1927, tolls were collected from 8000 passenger cars at the Alexandra Bridge, for an average of 45 vehicles per day. Six years later, in the depths of the Depression, tolls were collected from 20,000 vehicles, including almost 1000 commercial transport trucks, for an average of 90 vehicles per day. In 1936, when the high price of gold was driving a boom in the north Cariboo, 3000 of the 24,000 vehicles that paid the bridge toll were transport trucks. Traffic volumes spiked each summer, with five times more vehicles using the bridge per day in July and August than in the late spring or early winter. In 1937, it was reported that approximately twenty percent of the passenger cars that crossed the bridge during the summer months had license plates from American states.

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For all the increased traffic and growing number of roadside businesses located along the highway, driving the canyon remained an adventure, especially for motorists making their first trip through. In 1931, Vancouver schoolteacher Ernest Harris drove north to visit his sister, who was teaching at Horsefly in the Cariboo. He described the canyon section of the Cariboo Highway as “a narrow shelf hacked out of the mountain side,” and concluded that driving between the Coast and Interior was “still an adventure,” not dissimilar from the exploits of a hero-explorer like Simon Fraser. The element of danger lent the automobile journey between BC’s Coast and Interior an aura of adventure. During the late 1920s and 1930s, damaged vehicles, injuries, and fatalities were not uncommon, at least in proportion to the volume of traffic on the highway. Sometimes they were the result of driver error, other times the unlucky but inevitable effect of erosion in such a perpendicular environment. However, the province’s newspapers rarely sensationalized such accidents or represented the road as a poorly-engineered ‘killer’ road, in contrast to their later treatment of the Big Bend Highway.

For many motorists, the sense of adventure associated with driving the new automobile road was heightened and given an air of romance by the knowledge that it followed a route very similar to (and in some places the exact same as) the Cariboo Wagon Road, which it also closely resembled in many places. During the late 1920s and

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22 Ernest A. Harris, “Memories of Motoring in the 1930s,” British Columbia Historical News 22, 4 (Fall 1989), 14.

23 For example, in 1937 Fred Carson of Pavilion, a pioneering commercial trucker on the canyon section of the Cariboo Highway, was killed when he missed a turn near Boston Bar and plunged over the edge of the road. His brother, E.C. Carson, would serve as BC’s minister of public works from 1946 to 1952. Craig, Trucking, 113-115; “Fred Carson Killed; Truck Leaves Road,” Prince George Citizen 21 October 1937, 1.

Regarding motorists’ precautions and superstitions when driving the canyon route, see Craig, Trucking; Kluckner, Vanishing British Columbia, 120.
1930s traffic volumes were light enough that pleasure travellers could find spots to stop their car safely on the verge of the highway in order to contemplate (and photograph) scenic vistas, sleepy villages, old or ruined buildings, and traces of the gold rush-era wagon road. Thus the motoring public’s experience of driving along a modern arterial road was closely linked to historical narratives that involved journeys of discovery, fortune hunting, and struggles against nature – not only during the gold rush, but also during the days of Simon Fraser and the construction of Canada’s first transcontinental railroad. Whether they thought about the romance of bygone days or saw history as a steady march of progress, driving through the canyons inspired many motorists to contemplate British Columbia’s past. As will be discussed in the next chapter, the highway’s association with the gold rushes of the nineteenth century was especially heightened during the mid and late 1930s, when a spike in gold prices caused a modern-day rush to the Cariboo gold fields.

With its intermingling of sublime scenery, intimidating terrain, and landscape features that evoked the province’s past, the Fraser Canyon highway became British Columbia’s premier drive, synonymous with both its history and natural environments. It was a more distinctly British Columbian landscape experience than motoring through the Rockies, where the scenery had long ago been colonized and Canadianized by the CPR and National Parks Branch. As the only automobile route between the Coast and Interior, the canyon highway was one of the most important and widely shared landscape experiences amongst British Columbia’s motoring public, and remained so until at least the 1950s (and quite probably into the 1990s). The rest of this chapter describes the drive northward from Hope to Ashcroft, focusing on motorists’ experiences of history by the
road: that is, landscape experiences that were shaped by roads, cars, and the practice of driving, and that evoked a sense of connection to the past. Motorists who travelled on the highway saw many roadside landscape features that were simply old, but by the mid 1930s they also saw many things that had been intentionally placed or arranged beside the road in order to evoke a general sense of old-timey-ness.

![Figure 9.2: Postcard of the Fraser Canyon between Hope and Yale, late 1920s or 1930s.](image)

Motoring Through the Canyons

Motorists heading inland from Vancouver and other Coastal centres began to sense the narrowing of the Fraser River delta around the farming community of Chilliwack, as the sawtoothed peaks of the Skagit Mountains loomed ever larger to the south. The village of Hope, 100 miles east of Vancouver, effectively marked the boundary between the Coast and Interior, for by that point the Cascade Mountains were closed tight around the Fraser, constricting its channel and making its muddy waters rush
and churn, hinting at the cataracts found upstream. It was common to see huge trees being swept downriver during the annual freshet, and motorists might have pondered how far they had come from. The Fraser struck journalist Bruce Hutchison as boiling, swirling, tearing, jealous, “forever hostile and beyond taming […] too furious, stark, and lonely for mere beauty.” He found the gateway to the canyon “angry with the scowl of black hills […] melancholy with perpetual shadows.” One auto tourist described the river as “swift and evil […] fierce and repellant.”

Hope had been established as an HBC trading post in the late 1840s, and in 1858 had been the uppermost point of navigation for sternwheel steamboats carrying fortune-seekers bound for the Fraser River gold diggings. By the late 1920s it was a small, sleepy village of 250. However, the new automobile road and motorists’ penchant to pause in Hope for food, gas, and lodging before heading up-canyon spurred the development of new roadside businesses, including rustically-styled stopping places like the Cariboo Auto Court and Restmore Lodge, where passers-by could shop for native crafts and watch Teddy the soda-drinking bear, who was kept chained in a pen beside the road.

Hope was home to the oldest church in British Columbia, a timber-frame Gothic Revival church that had been built by Anglican missionaries in 1861. In 1925, while work was underway on the new automobile road through the canyon, the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada also erected a stone cairn on the edge of the village centre, between the highway and a riverbank where sternwheelers had once tied up. The bronze plaque mounted to the cairn commemorated Hope as a former HBC post.

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There had been relatively little business activity in the canyon communities above Hope since the construction of the CPR in the early 1880s, aside from a couple years of bustle during construction of the Canadian Northern in the early 1910s. Most of the buildings in the canyons were old and many of them were in run-down condition. Due to the damp climate in the Fraser Canyon, structures that were not carefully maintained tended to deteriorate and be reclaimed by the bush. Motorists could see the remnants of old rancheries along the highway, as well as cribbings, retaining walls, and other traces of the 1860s wagon road, which reinforced the impression of picturesque old-timey-ness amidst the rugged terrain and sublime natural scenery. The old and the new rubbed elbows in the confines of the canyon due to the lack of room for road building: many of the businesses that sprang up to cater to the motoring public were located on or close to the site of roadhouses that had sprung up to provide food, lodging, and animal shelter during the colonial gold rush days.

Ten miles beyond Hope, motorists passed the Emory Lodge and Auto Court near the point where Emory Creek flowed into the Fraser. Emory Bar had been one of the richest placer diggings in the lower canyon during the 1858 Fraser River gold rush, and in the 1880s the riverside flats had been made into a steamboat port and massive supply depot for the Canadian government’s railroad construction crews. Motorists who drove through the Fraser Canyon during the 1930s got a tangible reminder of its gold rush past, for the Depression pushed hundreds of unemployed men to try their hand at panning and sluicing for gold at places like Emory Creek. From 1935 to 1939, the provincial government operated a tent camp just across the highway from Emory Lodge, where young men were taught to prospect for placer gold, stake mineral claims, and “look after
themselves in the hills." Upon graduation, these modern-day fortune seekers were encouraged to accept a grubstake of tools and gear and free transportation to Quesnel Forks, a ghost town in an isolated corner of the Cariboo gold fields.25

A few miles upriver from Emory Lodge was the village of Yale. Like Hope, Yale had been established as an HBC trading post in the 1840s. It was also home to a gold rush-era church that was one of BC’s oldest: St. John the Divine, which had been built in 1863. Yale had supplanted Hope as the head of navigation on the lower Fraser after the arrival of more powerful sternwheelers capable of fighting their way upriver as far as the cataracts around Lady Franklin Rock. On the waterfront visitors could spot heavy iron rings that were bolted into the rocks where steamboats had once tied up.

Yale’s history was substantially more rollicking than Hope’s, for it had been a centre of commerce, administration, and debauchery during the gold rush days and then again during the railroad construction of the 1880s. Its role as a port and transshipment point had left a legacy of fine old buildings, including the All Hallows Girl’s School, an Anglican boarding school that had operated from 1884 until 1920.26 Shortly after the new automobile road through the canyon was completed, the Crawford family purchased the former school and established the All Hallows Auto Camp on the grounds. In their

25 The camp became part of the Dominion-Provincial Youth Training Program and trained between 50 and 200 young men each year, as described in British Columbia Department of Mines, Annual Report of the Minister of Mines (1939), 6-7. Quote is from Annual Report of the Minister of Mines (1935), 31. A similar training camp operated on the Fraser River north of Quesnel for several years, but closed down after the large Cariboo Gold Quartz mine went into operation near Barkerville, causing a local labour shortage. Regarding the province’s offer of free transport to isolated Quesnel Forks, which was intended to discourage ‘graduates’ from returning to Coastal cities plagued by unemployment and unrest, see Lesley Cooper, “Dominion-Provincial Placer Mining Training School, Quesnel Forks, 1938-1939,” Likely Cemetery Society Newsletter (1993-1994).

advertising, the Crawfords promoted Yale as “one of British Columbia’s most interesting and historical places.”

Yale was one of the first sites in western Canada to be marked by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada – it was at the top of Judge Frederic Howay’s list of priorities when he joined the board in 1923. The following year an oblong boulder was erected beside the surveyed route of the new highway at a point overlooking the riverfront. The plaque affixed to it commemorated Yale as the “beginning of the Cariboo Wagon Road” that had extended 400 miles northward to Barkerville and the gold fields. Combined with the dull roar of the fast-flowing Fraser and the grey walls of the canyon that crowded in on every side, the monument might have elicited a sense that essential aspects of the landscape and the journey through the canyon remained unchanged from the gold rush days.

The plaque and cairn at Yale were officially unveiled in 1925, while construction was still underway on the automobile road through the canyon. The ceremony was organized by Judge Howay, who got his friend Justice Denis Murphy of the BC Supreme Court to be the guest speaker. Murphy was the son of BC pioneers, having been born at 141 Mile House on the Cariboo Wagon Road. In his speech, he outlined the wagon road’s social and economic importance to the gold colony and recounted what it had been like growing up beside it. The commemorative plaque did not mention the troublesome fact that the canyon section of the old wagon road had been destroyed by the railroads, but Murphy touched on the topic, lamenting the “tons of dynamite [that had] blasted its road-

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27 Vancouver Public Library Special Collections, Vancouver Sun Resort, Hotel, and Travel Information Bureau, “Road Map of the Famous Cariboo Highway and Okanagan Valley Route” (Vancouver: Vancouver Sun, 1941).
28 Taylor, Negotiating the Past, 89, n.97.
bed into the face of Heaven that the way should might be clear for the iron horse.” He was pleased that the new automobile road would allow the motoring public to explore BC’s central and northern Interior. “Almost from where we stand can be heard the crash of falling trees and the reverberations of mighty blasts, for men are busy rebuilding the old road,” Murphy observed. “Soon again will it stretch in a long white ribbon from Yale to Cariboo.”

Motorists passed several Indian reserves and rancheries on the stretch of road between Yale and Spuzzum, a village just downstream from the Alexandra Bridge. A small hotel was built beside the road at Spuzzum, as well as a general store and gas station that advertised itself as the “home of Indian Baskets.” Native women from up and down the canyon brought hand-woven coiled cedar baskets to the store at Spuzzum, where they were displayed for sale to passing motorists. The coiled baskets of southwestern BC had been of interest to anthropologists for several years; Franz Boas and his co-researcher James Teit of Spences Bridge had written several scholarly articles about them. However, the white middle-class motorists who stopped for gas, soda, and souvenirs in Spuzzum were more likely to be familiar with romantic images of the ‘vanishing American’ produced by photographers like Edward Curtis, or tales of violent conflict between civilization and savagery as depicted in western films and popular adventure stories like _The Black Canyon: A Story of ’58_ (1927), a novel by Bruce

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30 This advertisement is in the folding pamphlet Vancouver Sun Resort, Hotel, and Travel Information Bureau, “Road Map of the Famous Cariboo Highway and Okanagan Valley Route.”

McKelvie that was set in the Fraser Canyon during the gold rush days. Native crafts had significant appeal to auto tourists, and the baskets sold at Spuzzum were particularly popular with Americans from cities on the Pacific Coast. They were at once exotic, authentic, regionally distinctive, and expected to grow in value as native cultures inevitably ‘faded away’ through assimilation. As features of the roadside landscape, native culture and communities were seen as intrinsically historical, a kind of living fossil.

As noted above, the new Alexandra Suspension Bridge, located just upstream from Spuzzum, was one of the most prominent structures along the new road. Many motorists paused there for a brief respite or to photograph the bridge, whose concrete towers and gleaming suspension cables contrasted sharply with their gloomy natural surroundings. In the late 1920s the Department of Public Works gave the Professional Engineers Institute of British Columbia permission to erect a ten-foot-tall cairn beside the bridge’s western approach, in order to commemorate the Royal Engineers who had surveyed and supervised construction of the canyon section of the Cariboo Wagon Road. Like the cairns that the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada had erected in Hope and Yale, it was located right beside the highway so that it would catch the eyes of

passers-by. Guidebooks and travelogues commonly failed to distinguish between the 1926 bridge and the similar-looking 1863 structure it had replaced, further conflating the new automobile road with the old wagon road.34

The HSMBC cairn at Yale and the cairn to the Royal Engineers at the Alexandra Bridge both cultivated the historical theme of heroic infrastructure, valorizing the colonial roads and road builders that had made it possible to travel long distances affordably and predictably through difficult terrain, thereby allowing the resettlement of the land and exploitation of its resources. Roads and road builders were part of a continuous and ongoing process of opening up the country, and represented order, material progress, scientific and administrative enlightenment, and modernity. By implication, heroic status also extended to the railroad builders of the 1880s, who had helped ‘forge a nation;’ to the railroad builders of the 1910s, who had put an end the CPR’s monopoly over national ground transport; and to the highway builders of the mid 1920s, who had made it possible for the motoring public to enjoy the landscapes of the Interior at their own pace, free from the railway companies’ inflexible routes and impersonal timetables.

One mile north of the Alexandra Bridge, on the east bank of the river above Chapmans Bar, was Alexandra Lodge. In 1926 a group of veterans from Vancouver had formed a partnership called Cariboo Hotels Limited, purchased that parcel of land, and commissioned an architect to design a roadside lodge. Going with the fashion of the time,

34 For photographs showing the monument to the Royal Engineers and its location in relation to the highway, see City of Vancouver Archives, Major Matthews collection, image BR P32; Library and Archives Canada, Department of Mines and Technical Surveys collection, 1960-125 NPC, image TS 11281; University of Washington Library Special Collections, Asahel Curtis Photo Company collection, image CUR1556. It is unclear when exactly this privately-commissioned monument was erected, or by what process it was permitted within the highway right-of-way, but it was there in June 1930 as shown in the Automobile Club of Southern California’s movie With the International Caravan to the Land of the Golden Twilight (1930).
which emphasized the breezy informality and privacy of auto touring, the partners also built a clutch of small cabins on the hillside behind the lodge and its accompanying gas station. Alexandra Lodge was located on the site of a roadhouse that had operated from the late 1850s to the mid 1880s. It had modern features like electrical lighting (provided by a creek-driven Pelton wheel) but its heavy timber beams, large porch, and balcony gave it a rustic appearance that echoed the roadhouses of the past – an association that was actively cultivated by its proprietors.35

Past the gloomy Black Canyon and the dizzying precipices around Hell’s Gate, the new automobile road helped revitalize the village of Boston Bar, which had been an important stopping place on the Cariboo Wagon Road before being bypassed by the CPR, which ran on the opposite side of the Fraser. By 1930 Boston Bar had two roadside stopping places: the Shady Rest Auto Camp, and the Harrington family’s Boston Bar Hotel, which had a beer hall and large garage and catered to the commercial truck drivers who started frequenting the highway around 1930. Charles Harrington also operated a wrecker and was regularly called on to retrieve vehicles that had gone over the edge of the road, been damaged by falling rocks, or otherwise disabled between Spuzzum and Spences Bridge. On a flat just north of Boston Bar, motorists passed the ruins of the old Boothroyd roadhouse, which had been a popular stopping place during the 1860s.36

The highway reached its greatest heights – and some of its most dramatic and cringe-inducing points – in the vicinity of Boston Bar, at Jackass Mountain, China Bar Bluff, and Nicaragua Bar Bluff. These sections of the road were so high and the walls of the canyon so steep that it was almost impossible to view (let along photograph) the side

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35 Kluckner, *Vanishing British Columbia*, 118-120.
of the canyon on which the road was located. Old photo albums are regularly found to contain photographs taken from the same points of view due to the lack of safe places to pull over. Traces of the old wagon road could be spotted here and there amongst this sublime scenery, and motorists must have wondered that stagecoaches, mule teams, and heavily loaded freight wagons had ever passed that way. The new highway seemed to have been constructed “on the very bones of the gold road,” journalist Bruce Hutchison reported after driving through the canyon in 1930. “In places you can see abandoned stretches of the old road itself, narrow with steep grades, clinging to the canyon side, and a few ruined houses that once glittered with light as the stagecoaches stopped to changes horses.” For Hutchison these relics elicited a pleasing sense of old-timey-ness, a spirit of yesteryear and of the romance of travellers who had struggled against distance and inhospitable environments in their quest for hidden treasure.

In the evening, when the shadows move suddenly down the mountains, and the mountains turn into a flat wall of darker darkness at arm’s length – then even a stranger, standing by the old road on the lip of the canyon, with the steady gurgle of the Fraser far below, can surely hear the sound of the stagecoaches rolling along in the dust, the beat of hooves, the marching feet.\(^\text{37}\)

After descending from the road’s summit on Jackass Mountain, drivers negotiated several twisting stretches in the vicinity of Kanaka Bar, then traversed a series of Indian reserves and rancheries on the approach to the village of Lytton. Several small native graveyards were visible along that section of road, mute testimony to the canyon’s long history of occupation. The traditional graveyards whose wooden statues, colourful banners, and mortuary poles had fascinated travellers and photographers during the gold rush years had long since disappeared, replaced by picturesque European-style cemeteries.

with white crosses and white picket fences. Whether the old graveyards had been picked clean by souvenir hunters and anthropologists or retroactively Christianized at the prompting of missionaries is unknown. However, as at Spuzzum, the motoring public saw evidence that local native culture had not died out. On the Lytton Indian reserve, Rose Skukai operated a roadside store where she sold hand-woven cedar baskets, moccasins, buckskin, and other native handicrafts to passing motorists.38

Many motorists paused at the village of Lytton to view the confluence of the Thompson and Fraser rivers, with the blue-green waters of the former inexorably absorbed into the muddy, sullen flow of the latter. Roadside businesses in the vicinity of Lytton included the Gladwin Auto Court and Siska Lodge, another favourite stopping place for truck drivers. The Thompson Canyon section of the highway had fewer stopping places than the Fraser Canyon, perhaps due to the delay in opening it, or the difficulty of getting a steady supply of potable water. However, by the mid 1930s auto camps had opened at Bighorn and Shaw Springs, and in Spences Bridge a new garage and filling station had been built beside the old railway hotel.

Cactus, sagebrush, and a clutch of soft fruit orchards attested to the Thompson Canyon’s blazing summer heat. The sharp contrast between the damp, gloomy Fraser Canyon and the sunny, arid Thompson Canyon played an important role in shaping the motoring public’s landscape experiences along the southernmost Cariboo Highway. Due to the paucity of forest cover and the generally lower level of the highway in the Thompson Canyon, motorists had better views of the river, railroads, and surrounding

38 Laforet, “The Market in Coiled Basketry.” For a photo of Rose Skukai’s store in the early 1940s, see Lytton Museum and Archives, Gwen Miller collection, image A1997.04.097. I thank Andrea Laforet and Richard Forrest and Dorothy Dodge of the Lytton Museum and Archives for sharing information about Rose Skukai’s store.
mountains. The effect was not entirely reassuring. As one motorist but it, “[t]he Fraser Canyon is clothed, wherever the cliffs are not perpendicular, with lush growth of trees, but the steep rocks of the Thompson Gorge stand out, bare and menacing.”39

The climate of the Thompson Canyon preserved old and neglected structures that would have rotted and collapsed in the Fraser Canyon. Weathered, sun-bleached structures like cribbings, fences, corrals, cabins, and the small picturesque churches found on several Indian reserves could be seen along the road between Lytton and Spences Bridge. There were no state-sanctioned historical monuments along this section of the highway, and no roadside businesses are known to have actively cultivated associations with the gold rushes of the nineteenth century. As a result, the motoring public’s sense of old-timey-ness was particularly ‘natural’ and uncontrived in the Thompson Canyon. Western movies had fallen from favour in Hollywood during the late 1920s, but they had been popular enough over the previous decade to make sagebrush and dry, rocky landscapes synonymous with the frontier and the wild west.

Just outside Spences Bridge the motoring public received a final reminder of how dangerous the canyon environment could be. Evidence of a massive landslide was visible on the opposite side of the river from the highway. Older motorists might have recognized it as the Drynoch Slide, where in 1905 the lower section of a mountainside had broken away, wiping out a native rancherie, temporarily blocking the Thompson, and causing eighteen fatalities. After more than 70 miles of tense, tiring driving through the confines of the two canyons, with their geological instability and unsettling

39 W. Gordon Coombs, By Truck and Bus, and Romance of Age (Nanaimo: Evergreen, [n.d.]), 33.
perpendicularity, this landmark probably caused many motorists to give a sigh of relief on exiting the Thompson Canyon just past Spences Bridge.40

Driving the Fraser Canyon Highway was one of the most widely shared and popular landscape experiences for BC’s motoring public during the interwar period. The canyon road became imbued with special cultural significance because of the sublime natural scenery that was visible along it, because important events in the province’s past had occurred there, because it was the gateway to the Interior for motorists from the Coast, and because it was BC’s only road link between the Coast and the Interior until 1949. “Whether you ran from Vancouver to Bralorne or Kamloops or Vernon or Clinton or Prince George or Vanderhoof, or even Burns Lake, the [canyons] were there to contend with,” was how one early commercial trucker recalled it.41 Furthermore, nature and history by the road seemed inseparable in the landscapes visible along the canyon highway. The motoring public, which during the interwar period still consisted largely of white, educated, middle-class automobile owners, could see themselves as part of a continuum, retracing the steps of Simon Fraser, the fortune-hunting gold prospectors of 1858, the stagecoach drivers of the 1860s, and turn-of-the-century railroad builders. They could imagine themselves facing the same risks that were associated with travelling through a dangerous, seemingly eternal environment. Every decaying old building, hair-raising precipice, and trace of the old Cariboo Wagon Road seemed redolent of romance and adventure. And every bridge, tunnel, and elaborate work of engineering seemed part of a heroic effort to open up the riches of the BC Interior.

40 Septer, Flooding and Landslide Events, 35-6.
41 Craig, Trucking, 85.
Chapter 10

To the Gold Fields: The Cariboo Highway Above the Canyons, 1925-1945

This chapter picks up where the previous one left off: on the Cariboo Highway between Spences Bridge and Ashcroft. It begins with a short side-trip to the east, to show how boosters and history enthusiasts tried to shape the motoring public’s experiences of history by the road in Kamloops, the largest community in BC’s central Interior. It then returns to Ashcroft and continues northward across the Cariboo Plateau toward Barkerville, the traditional capital of the province’s northern gold fields. Barkerville had been the biggest population centre west of Chicago and north of San Francisco during the mid 1860s, but by the 1920s was on the verge of becoming a ghost town. Taking in Barkerville’s atmosphere of romance and decay was a way that many motorists capped off a visit to the northern Interior during the interwar years. A growing number of people deemed it to have value as a historical tourist attraction, a kind of living link to BC’s gold rush past.

The focus is on how the motoring public’s shared experiences of history by the road during the interwar years were shaped by public roads and private automobiles, and by the actions of boosters, businesses, and agents of the state, all of whom manipulated historical landscape features and set up new historically themed attractions. The journey along the central and northern sections of the Cariboo Highway was a popular excursion for BC motorists and visitors from afar during the interwar years, though not as widely shared as the experience of driving through the Fraser and Thompson canyons. Instead of being characterized by sublime scenery and a sense of unease in an intrinsically unstable
environment, this drive involved long distances travelling through the rolling terrain and relatively undifferentiated scenery of the Cariboo Plateau.

The Cariboo’s economy had been stagnant for decades. Sizeable communities were few and far between, and there were few traces of the modern utilities, modern building styles, and modern consumer culture that were becoming part of everyday life for middle-class residents of Coastal cities like Vancouver. These factors all helped to make historical landscape features stand out along the the Cariboo Highway. For many motorists they generated a sense of travelling through another time. These feelings were encouraged by boosters and roadside business owners who hoped to make the region’s stagnation and backwardness into an asset.

Ashcroft to Kamloops

In the vicinity of Ashcroft the Cariboo Highway traversed a series of dry, grassy benches above the Thompson River. It was there that motorists began to see evidence of the Interior’s ranching industry: barbed wire fences, a few irrigated hayfields, corrals, and cattle. On the outskirts of Ashcroft, they reached a highway junction where they had to choose between heading north towards the Cariboo or turning east towards Kamloops and the central Interior. The junction was located a short distance from Ashcroft Manor, a famous ranch and stopping place on the old Cariboo Wagon Road. By the late 1930s an autocourt, service station, and teahouse had been established amongst the ranch buildings, and the words “Ashcroft Manor” had been spelled out in huge white letters on the roof of the main house in order to catch the attention of passing motorists. The manor house burned down in 1943, but the gold rush-era roadhouse survived.
At nearby Cache Creek, the owners of the TU Auto Camp, which was located in a shady, inviting stand of trees beside the highway, put up a large sign to advertise their services and surrounded it with an eye-catching arrangement of old ox yokes, freight wagon wheels, and sun-bleached cattle skulls. Postcard photographs show that the TU Auto Camp also displayed an old stagecoach beside the highway at Cache Creek, keeping it in a lean-to enclosed with chicken wire to protect against the weather and vandals. For motorists heading northwards, these roadside relics were the first of many they would see that alluded to the days of horse-drawn stagecoaches and freight wagons rolling along the Cariboo Wagon Road. Whether they were haphazardly heaped in a pile of old farming equipment or artfully displayed with the intention of catching the motoring public’s attention, these kinds of relics evoked a sense of kinship with the travellers of yesteryear:
the fortune seekers, camp followers, and pioneer agriculturalists who had trudged along the same road that motorists of the interwar period sped over.¹

In addition to linking the past with the present through the theme of journeying, these regionally distinctive relics tied in with the plaques and monuments that had been erected along the Fraser Canyon Highway, like the cairns the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada had placed at Hope and Yale. They also connected with broader trends in North American popular and consumer culture: western themes were very popular in dime novels and pulp magazines during the interwar years, though their popularity in cinema declined.² By the mid 1920s, contrived pioneer, wild west, and cowboy-and-Indian motifs were common fare along the highways and suburban thoroughfares of southern California, the frontier of roadside commercial architecture. Autocourt units, souvenir stands, and cafés were being designed to look like covered wagons, log cabins, palisaded forts, tipis, southwestern adobe villages, and cowboy hats. The proliferation of such history-themed fakery served to exaggerate the scarcity and elevate the significance of genuine western relics, historic buildings, and places. For many auto tourists of the interwar years, visiting a hinterland region that had seemingly been bypassed by modernity – a hinterland like BC’s Cariboo country – provided an opportunity to experience ‘the real thing,’ landscapes that were replete with genuinely old

¹ The TU Auto Camp’s roadside display dated from at least the summer of 1930, as indicated by the description of it in Douglas C. Mitchell, “Through the Land of the Golden Twilight,” Touring Topics 22, 9 (September 1930), 19. Touring Topics was the house journal of the Automobile Club of Southern California. C.P. Lyons confirms that the stagecoach was the property of the TU Auto Camp in Milestones on the Mighty Fraser (Toronto: Dent, 1949), 132.
buildings, authentic relics, and myriad traces of past efforts to wrest wealth from what to a large extent remained an isolated and sparsely populated resource frontier.\(^3\)

Many people who lived in these kinds of hinterland districts recognized that their homes, places of business, and everyday surroundings were considered vaguely reminiscent of the past by visitors who came from bustling urban centres. Some discerned opportunities to profit from the motoring public’s desire to see and experience things that seemed regionally distinctive and historically authentic, yet at the same time familiar in the sense of fitting into contemporary trends in popular literary and cinematic culture. One way they tried to profit from the desires of this new and highly mobile market was to collect, preserve, display, and promote artifacts, buildings, and landscape features that were likely to evoke a sense of connection to a locale or region’s past, in the expectation that these would help lure customers into their businesses. During the interwar years, this was typically done along the Cariboo Highway by individuals and families, with minimal involvement by the state, academic experts, or big business. Except in a few instances where a local board of trade was involved, there appears to have been little coordination amongst these boosters and small business owners. Yet by 1930, boosters and businesses all along the Cariboo Highway were trying to draw in the motoring public through the use of eye-catching relics that made reference to BC’s gold rush days and the Cariboo Wagon Road. It seems likely that they saw what worked for a neighbour, or were influenced by newspapers, magazine stories, and movies. It also seems likely that these historical themes were selected because material associated with them was readily at hand: stagecoaches and freight wagons had been used on the region’s roads well into the

1910s, and, as will be shown below, many of the roadside businesses located along the Cariboo Highway were in fact housed in buildings that dated from the gold rush days.

Ashcroft boosters latched onto these regional symbols with particular enthusiasm. As early as 1929 a “giant hoarding” beside the highway at Ashcroft pronounced it the “Gateway to the Golden Cariboo.”\(^4\) A few years later, they were proposing to repatriate a famous nineteenth-century Cariboo relic, the Dufferin Coach, from the Coast so that it could be used as a roadside tourist attraction.

In 1876 Lord Dufferin, the governor-general of Canada, had been dispatched to BC to dampen growing secessionist sentiments over the lack of progress on the transcontinental railroad promised in the 1871 Terms of Union. These sentiments were especially strong in the Interior, so he and Lady Dufferin made a trip from Yale through Ashcroft to Kamloops and back, travelling all the way in a distinctive four-horse stagecoach that the BX Company had built especially for the occasion. The BX Company subsequently reserved the Dufferin Coach for use by visiting dignitaries, mining magnates, and wealthy hunting parties.\(^5\) When the BX Company replaced its horse-drawn coaches with automobiles in the 1910s, it sold or gave away its stagecoaches, including the Dufferin Coach. Its exact whereabouts during the 1920s are unclear and were a topic of concern amongst Cariboo boosters and history enthusiasts, but by 1935 the coach was in the custody of the New Westminster chapter of the Native Sons of British Columbia, who used it once a year for the city’s May Day celebrations. Learning of this, the editor of the *Ashcroft Journal*, R.D. Cumming, grumbled that it was “a humble ending for a

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once famous coach – one that has part of the early history attached to its frame.”

Cumming found it galling that such an important relic of the BC Interior was located in a city on the Coast, and complained “it isn’t likely that anyone living in New Westminster today knows what the Dufferin Coach is,” he complained. “To them it is merely a waggon.” He also expressed doubt as to whether the coach was being properly cared for, what with being housed in “a large warehouse where it collects the year’s cobwebs and dust and where any day it may be destroyed by fire.” Cumming proposed that the Dufferin Coach be put on exhibit year-round, ideally somewhere along the automobile road that linked the Coast and the Interior. He suggested that it be displayed where tourists and BC residents alike would have an opportunity to see it and learn of its connection with our past history. If New Westminster wants to keep the historic coach, we suggest it should be housed in a dignified shelter in a conspicuous place […] with an inscription telling its history to all. [However] the logical place for the Dufferin Coach would be at Yale where it began its historic journey over the Cariboo Road [emphasis added].

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6 “The Dufferin Coach,” *Cariboo Observer*, 5 January 1935, 2 (reprinted from unidentified edition of the *Ashcroft Journal*). By 1935, the Dufferin Coach had been an object of concern for Cariboo boosters and history enthusiasts for more than a decade. In late 1923, the editor of the *Prince George Citizen* was indignant over reports that the district mail contractor had acquired the Dufferin Coach, stripped its retractable roof off, and was towing it behind a gas-powered caterpillar tractor on the winter mail run between Quesnel and Prince George. He deemed the original coach “one of the marvels of the west,” and recommended it be brought to the attention of “some of the historical associations on the coast […] before it is shaken to pieces or backed up on some vacant lot and lost sight of.” Projecting forward to a day when the Coast and Interior would be connected by an automobile road, he also asked “[w]hat more fitting than to have it as the first vehicle to pass over the Fraser canyon link in the provincial highway when it is constructed?” Whether this was actually the Dufferin Coach or another former BX stagecoach is unclear. Four years later, in 1927, Quesnel booster Louis LeBourdais tried to start a campaign to have the Dufferin Coach restored and put on display beside the Cariboo Highway as a relic of the gold rush days. He claimed the Dufferin Coach had been one of the last stagecoaches in regular use, making the summer run between Quesnel and Barkerville until 1922, after which it was purchased by a rancher and used for hauling firewood, before being recognized and purchased by an unidentified resident of Quesnel. “Lord Dufferin’s Coach Carries Quesnel’s Mail,” *Prince George Citizen*, 8 November 1923, 4; “Dufferin Coach Should be Saved as Historical Relic,” *Prince George Citizen*, 31 March 1927, 7.
Cumming hoped that the provincial government might one day be convinced to “undertake to display [the Dufferin Coach] under proper cover where it might be preserved for all time for the admiration of future generations.” However, this was wishful thinking. The provincial government demonstrated no interest in supporting local or regional efforts to cultivate history by the road during the interwar years. It had established the Provincial Archive in 1908 and by the mid 1930s had printed many brochures, travel guides, and other promotional materials that were oriented towards pleasure travellers, some of which involved historical themes. However, during the interwar years Victoria took no action ‘on the ground’ to preserve old buildings or other historical landscape features that were seen along the arterial roads of BC’s hinterlands. The fact that Ashcroft boosters imagined a day when the state might get involved with such ventures indicates the high economic value they placed on roadside historical attractions for drawing auto tourists.7

Recognizing that help was unlikely to be forthcoming from the metropolitan centres of the Coast, Cumming took it upon himself to cultivate historical attractions that would help lure the motoring public into Ashcroft. Through his editorship of the Journal, Cumming spearheaded a campaign to restore and protect an old freight wagon that had been used on the Cariboo Wagon Road until the 1890s, but had long been abandoned behind an old blacksmith’s shop. Local residents raised funds and donated their time to help restore the wagon and erect a shelter that would protect it from the elements. The

7 Regarding the establishment of the Provincial Archives, see Reimer, Writing British Columbia History, 49-54. Good examples of the motorist-centric promotional materials produced by the provincial government during the interwar years are the following pamphlets by the British Columbia Bureau of Provincial Information: “Highways, Motor Camps, and Stopping Places in British Columbia” (Victoria, 1929); “Touring in British Columbia: A Manual of Useful Information (Victoria, 1930); “British Columbia’s Picturesque Highways” (Victoria, 1933).
freight wagon was displayed beside the road leading into Ashcroft, echoing the
stagecoach kept beside the highway at nearby Cache Creek and serving as a prosaic
substitute for the famous Dufferin Coach. Cumming also opened a museum on the second
floor of the Journal building, which consisted of his own private collection of artifacts,
photographs, and old papers. It opened in the summer of 1935 and was the second
historical attraction in the BC Interior to be referred to as a museum; the first, which was
located a few miles north in Clinton, is discussed below.8

Motorists who turned east at Ashcroft followed a dusty, twisting road along the
arid benches of the Thompson River valley towards Kamloops. The landscapes visible
from the highway between Ashcroft and Kamloops held relatively few old buildings or
other relics that might evoke a sense of history amongst the motoring public. On a bench
midway between the two towns, travellers saw the sun-bleached remnants of Walhachin,
a short-lived orcharding community that had been abandoned during the Great War.
During the 1920s and 1930s that failure was deemed too recent to qualify as ‘historical,’
but in later years a myth developed around the ruins of Walhachin that attributed its
abandonment to tragic wartime casualties amongst its male British settlers, rather than the
less romantic explanation that it had failed due to an inadequate supply of water for
irrigation.9

Kamloops was not traditionally considered part of the Cariboo, but it was the
largest community in the central Interior and a key hub in the province’s railroad and

8 Kathy Paulos, “Family Grateful for Tangible Evidence of Their History,” Ashcroft-Cache Creek Journal 6
September 2011, 3; Brian Belton, Bittersweet Oasis: A History of Ashcroft, The First 100 Years (Ashcroft:
Village of Ashcroft, 1986), 25-26. Cumming had also used the Journal to publish a collection of ‘wild
west’ tales: R.D. Cumming, Skookum Chuck Fables: Bits of History, Through the Microscope (Ashcroft:
9 Patricia Badir, “‘Our Careless Performance of Praise’: Loss, Recollection, and the Production of Space in
Walhachin, BC,” BC Studies 133 (Spring 2002): 31-68; Riis, “The Walhachin Myth”; Joan Weir,
Walhachin: Catastrophe or Camelot (Surrey: Hancock House, 1984).
highway networks. Boosterism, automobility, and history by the road were as closely intertwined there as in any other community in the Interior. As a farming and ranching centre and the location of many businesses and government offices, Kamloops had large, organized contingents of boosters, automobile owners, and good road advocates, as evidenced by the locally-based BC Trans-Canada Highway Association, which had lobbied in favour of building the province’s first Coast-Interior road via the Fraser and Thompson canyons. It also had a sizable contingent of educated, middle-class history enthusiasts. When the BC Historical Association was established in 1923, eight of its 93 original members resided in Kamloops, which was twice as many as claimed by any other Interior community.10

The provincial government’s efforts to expand and improve the Interior road network during the mid 1920s stimulated many Kamloops residents’ enthusiasm for regional history. For example, the former newspaperman and amateur historian M.S. Wade produced two manuscripts about the Cariboo gold rush and Cariboo Wagon Road in the years immediately after the completion of the highway through the Fraser Canyon.11 Other Kamloops history buffs found an outlet for their enthusiasm in collecting and displaying artifacts that were associated with the district’s past. The Thompson Valley Historical Association was formed in 1936, while work was plodding along on the Big Bend Highway, which promised to deliver streams of Prairie auto tourists to BC’s central Interior. One of the association’s goals was to build a museum that would encourage motorists to stop in Kamloops and patronize local businesses. Amidst the

10 British Columbia Historical Association, First Annual Report and Proceedings (Victoria, 1923), 33-34.
11 Both manuscripts were published posthumously. Mark S. Wade, The Overlanders of ’62 John Hosie, ed., Archives of British Columbia Memoir no. IX (Victoria: King’s Printer, for Archives of British Columbia, 1931); Mark S. Wade, The Cariboo Road Eleanor E. Eastick, ed. (Victoria: Haunted Bookshop, 1979). Regarding the importance of region in Wade’s historical writings, see Pass, “Pacific Dominion,” chapter 7.
dislocation and upheaval of the Depression, many educated, middle-class Kamloops residents probably also found it reassuring to celebrate frontier archetypes that embodied the liberal ideals of boldness and self-reliance, including explorers, gold prospectors, and pioneer ranchers.

The historical association gathered so many objects and papers that they deemed significant to Kamloops’ past that they soon needed a place to store their collection. This happily coincided with one of their colleagues discovering that a decrepit log cabin located on the Kamloops Indian reserve might have been the last remnant of the second Fort Kamloops, which the Hudson’s Bay Company had built in 1842. With funds donated by the HBC, the dilapidated structure was dismantled and trucked to Riverside Park in downtown Kamloops. There it was reassembled with a new roof, porch, and other minor improvements added for good measure. It was located at a prominent spot in the park, close to the municipal auto camp that the city had been operating since 1924 and the cairn and plaque that the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada had erected in 1925 to commemorate the fur traders whose early operations in the area had helped keep it British territory.

“Old Fort Kamloops,” as the modest little building was referred to, served as the original home of the Kamloops Museum, which was the third museum in the BC Interior. It opened to the public on Dominion Day, 1937, and was staffed by volunteers during the summer tourist season. Two large dugout canoes were placed beside the ‘fort’ to remind visitors of the North and South Thompson rivers’ historic importance as fur brigade routes. With its fur trade theme and proximity to both downtown Kamloops and the municipal auto camp, Old Fort Kamloops proved very popular during the summers of
1937, 1938, and 1939. It was so successful that it was deemed too small for continued use as a museum, especially with the Big Bend Highway on the verge of completion. The city’s boosters and history enthusiasts had ambitious plans for their local museum, and in late 1939 they relocated it to a large Victorian home near the city centre, which it shared with the city library. Old Fort Kamloops remained in Riverside Park for the next ten years; its use during the postwar years is discussed in the next chapter.12

*Into the Cariboo*

Returning from Kamloops to the road junction near Ashcroft, motorists heading north towards the Cariboo turned to the right. The highway climbed steadily between Ashcroft and Clinton, with the arid climate, steep sidehills, and sparse pines of the Interior dry belt gradually giving way to the cooler climate, rolling hills, and firs and spruce of the Cariboo Plateau. Ranching dominated the economy of the south Cariboo, and traces of it were visible everywhere along the highway. Hay and oats were the dominant farm crops, and evidence of browse could be seen in stands of roadside timber. Split-rail fences were common in many places, while in others a lack of fencing allowed cattle and horses to stray onto the road right-of-way. Motorists saw few sizeable rivers or lakes along this section of the Cariboo Highway: the road and the Fraser River ran parallel to each other in a north-south direction, but were separated by many miles of intervening country. The Cariboo Plateau was ‘big sky country,’ akin to the Prairies. No

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12 This information is drawn from Kamloops Museum and Archives, historical article collection, file 187, “Riverside Park”; Susan Cross, “Museum Prepares Move Into New Millennium,” *Kamloops Daily News* 15 May 1999, C12; Kathleen Trayner, “Historical Origins and Collective Memory in British Columbia’s Community-Based Museums, 1925-1975,” MA thesis, University of Victoria (2003), 48-52. The 1939 decision to relocate the museum to a larger building ties in with the fact that the Kamloops Board of Trade was vigourously lobbying Victoria to upgrade the highway between Kamloops and Revelstoke in anticipation of a flood of auto tourists travelling over the Big Bend Highway. See BCA, GR-1222, box 24, *passim.*
mountains loomed on the horizon, let alone overhead, and there were few elevated points from which motorists could get a good view. Sparsely populated and rather monotonous, it lacked the vistas, exaggerated verticality, and dramatic natural features typically associated with the BC Interior in tourism promotion materials and the popular imagination.

Unable to bank on the Cariboo’s natural scenery as a tourist draw, boosters and the owners of gas stations, cafés, hotels, and auto camps sought to make driving through the region seem like a trip through yesteryear by cultivating associations with its past. Almost all of the historical landscape features that were visible along the Cariboo Highway north of Ashcroft were related to BC’s gold rush era and the old Cariboo Wagon Road, which in many places was essentially the same road that the motoring public drove along. Boosters and roadside business operators frequently displayed or otherwise made reference to stagecoaches and freight wagons, which were the historical equivalents of modern-day passenger cars and commercial trucks, and to the series of roadhouses that had served teamsters, travellers, and animal teams until just a few years earlier, sometimes embellishing on these with ‘wild west’ tales about stick-ups, stolen safeboxes, and secret caches of gold.

Clinton, located 25 miles north of Ashcroft, was one of the most intact and intrinsically old-timey towns in the Cariboo, for the scourge of fire had spared most of the log cabins and false-front stores that lined its main street, which formed part of the Cariboo Highway. Clinton had a stable population of about 400 and was the commercial and administrative centre for a much larger ranching district. It was common for cowboys to ride into town and there were hitching posts in front of most businesses and
government buildings. Postcards show that by 1940 the motoring public was greeted at
the edge of town by a display of old wagon wheels, freight wagons, and a well cared-for
BX stagecoach, which echoed the gold rush-era motifs seen beside the highway at
Ashcroft and Cache Creek.\footnote{On the history of Clinton’s old timber framed buildings, see Peter Charles, \textit{At the 47 Mile: A History of the Village of Clinton} (Victoria: Orea, 1990).}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{clintonStagecoach.png}
\caption{Postcard showing stagecoach on display at Clinton.}
\end{figure}

The town’s most prominent landmark was the Clinton Hotel. It had been built as a
roadhouse in 1861, and its owners proudly promoted it as BC’s oldest hotel. Guests
experienced it as a relic in and of itself. In the 1930s the old roadhouse looked essentially
the same as it had at the turn of the century, despite the addition of diesel-electric lighting
and a summer ice cream parlour. Clinton also had a small privately owned museum at the
Payne family’s Pine Tree Auto Camp, located just across the road from the Clinton Hotel.
It is not clear exactly when the Payne family established their museum or how they
operated it, but a photograph from 1931 shows a hand-painted sign advertising it to customers of the family’s gas station. Another photograph shows the museum as a wood-frame garage crammed full of items related to the Cariboo gold rush and wagon road, including patent medicine and liquor bottles, blacksmith’s tools, rifles, ox shoes, and gold pans. A modest private collection displayed for the enjoyment and edification of passing motorists and customers of the gas station and auto camp, it operated without support from any government agency or local historical society. This was the first historical attraction in the BC Interior known to have described itself as a museum, predating R.D. Cumming’s private museum in Ashcroft by at least four years and the museum housed in Old Fort Kamloops by six.14

Twelve miles north of Clinton, the highway skirted the edge of the Chasm, the most prominent roadside natural attraction above the Fraser and Thompson canyons. Eight hundred feet deep and 2000 feet across, the gorge stretched as far back towards the Bonaparte River valley as the eye could see from the point where most motorists stopped. The view from the mouth of the Chasm offered the motoring public a dramatic interlude after driving through relatively monotonous country, and it was a popular place to picnic and take photographs. Members of the Auto Club of Southern California who stopped at the Chasm in 1930 described it as “a miniature replica of the famed Grand Canyon of the Colorado.” Noting the lack of nearby development, they wryly observed that “[i]f it were located within a 100 mile radius of Los Angeles, an appelatory title would long since have been thrust upon it and its charms and allurements highly commercialized and exploited.” BC tourism promoters were not above such flim-flammetry: while working for

14 BCA, C-01211 “Cariboo Museum, Pine Tree Auto Camp, Clinton, BC”; Vancouver Public Library Special Collections, Phillip Timms collection, “Pine Tree Auto Camp,” #19225.
the Provincial Bureau of Information, newspaperman and popular historian Bruce McKelvie claimed he could discern the figure of an Indian brave in the wall of the canyon, which he deemed the “spirit of the Chasm.”15 The Chasm was so popular with the motoring public that Chief Forester E.C. Manning established Chasm Provincial Park in 1940, the first park along the route of the Cariboo Highway.16

Northbound motorists passed 59 Mile House and 70 Mile House in the vicinity of the Chasm. These were the first of a series of roadhouses whose names derived from their distance from Lillooet on the original Cariboo Wagon Road. The fortunes of the Cariboo’s roadhouses had waxed and waned since the gold rush of the 1860s. They had gone bust in late 1870s, boomed briefly in the 1890s and again in the early 1910s, then endured hard times due to labour shortages during the Great War. Following the war, roadhouses seemed poised for another boom due to the growing volume of automobile traffic between Ashcroft and points north. Many operators adapted to serve the motoring public. For example, the Crosina family sold gasoline from a pump on the porch of 153 Mile House, as well as tires and Ford Model T parts.17

However, passenger cars and cargo trucks did not need to stop every 10 to 15 miles the way horse-drawn stagecoaches and freight wagons had. Furthermore, the extension of the Pacific Great Eastern railway northward to Williams Lake in 1920 and Quesnel a couple years later cut into freight hauling out of Ashcroft. The Cariboo’s

16 In 1939, the Forest Service official responsible for the Clinton area recommended that a recreational reserve be placed over the Chasm, or at least the section where the highway ran along its edge. Manning went a step further, replying that “[f]rom my knowledge of the place it is quite evident that all the area between the highway and the edge of the chasm should be reserved as a park. I believe the development of this site by us would be most popular.” BCA, GR-1991, reel 1821, A.E. Parlow, Kamloops District Forester to Chief Forester, 2 May 1939; Manning to Parlow, 10 May 1939.
17 This overview of the roadhouses north of Ashcroft is drawn from Branwen Patenaude, Trails to Gold: Roadhouses of the Cariboo vol. 2 (Surrey: Heritage House, 1996); Irene Stangoa, Cariboo-Chilcotin: Pioneer People and Places (Surrey: Heritage House, 1994).
historic roadhouses were in decline even as motorists from the Coast started driving through the region. Many reverted to use as private homes. Several were lost to fire. Others were bypassed by road realignments that were intended to accommodate the new automobile technology: long tangents with the occasional steep section were deemed safer for the motoring public than the “erratic ramblings” of the old wagon road, which had meandered this way and that, staying as level as possible in order to avoid overtaxing draught animals. As more and more sections of the Cariboo Highway were realigned for safety and efficiency, motorists saw a growing number of spots where the old wagon road diverged from the path of the modern automobile road, running parallel to it for a short distance before disappearing behind trees or hills, only to rejoin it further along. Punctuated by ranches and roadhouses, the wandering old way reminded them of the Cariboo’s long history of fortune-seeking travellers.  

Starting in the 1920s, several Cariboo roadhouses tried to add extra income by operating as dude ranches that allowed people from the cities of the Coast a chance to try their hand at riding, roping, and range living. Others promoted the Cariboo as a destination for big game hunting and sport fishing. The motifs associated with these recreational activities further enhanced the old-timey atmosphere found on the grounds of many roadhouses. Animal skulls and horns were mounted on gateposts and outbuildings. Wagon wheels, old carts, surplus saddlery, and other eye-catching relics that might

18 Quote is from Clemson, Old Wooden Buildings, 70. Though they lamented the gradual disappearance of roadhouses along the Cariboo Highway, the boosters D.M. and Louis LeBourdais were strongly in favour of improved roads, and were pleased to see “long tangents replac[ing] the twists and turns that were such characteristic features of the old road.” D.M. and Louis LeBourdais, “The Road that Gold Built,” Macleans 1 June 1928, 12.

otherwise have been discarded, but that vaguely suggested the bygone days of the open
range, were displayed around the yard. The farmer-photographer Donovan Clemson
worked in the Cariboo as a young man and recalled that during the late 1920s “the relics
of the [wagon] road, apart from the roadhouses, were not uncommon. A number of
stagecoaches were to be seen, some of them repainted and displayed at stopping places.”
The material for creating such old-timey displays was readily at hand, or under foot:
Clemson recalled that while working at one ranch he discovered several old ox shoes in
the dirt outside a former blacksmith shop.\(^{20}\)

Even the Cariboo roadhouses that offered modern goods and services like
gasoline, ice cream, soda, and indoor plumbing tended to be weather-beaten and look a
bit down at the heels. These were undercapitalized businesses, often ancillary to a larger
ranching operation, and usually kept afloat by family labour. Few brought in enough
money to adequately maintain their buildings, let alone expand or improve them. The
construction of a new lodge at 100 Mile House on the Bridge Creek Ranch was a singular
event during the interwar years, explained by the fact that the 15,000-acre ranch was
owned by the Marquess of Exeter, a wealthy British aristocrat who sent his second son to
take charge of its operations in 1930.\(^{21}\) The new 100 Mile House Lodge was a rustic-
looking log structure styled loosely after its namesake, with electrical lighting, running
water, and many windows. A restored BX stagecoach was displayed at the end of the new
lodge’s main driveway, the fences of which were adorned with old wagon wheels. Many


\(^{21}\) That son, Martin Cecil, became president of the Cariboo Stockmen’s Association in 1943 and played an
instrumental role in developing the town of 100 Mile House during the postwar years. However, he is best
known as the long-time leader of the quasi-religious movement the Emissaries of Divine Light, which
began using the 100 Mile House Lodge as one of their main meeting places in 1948. Unfortunately, the
only historical work about Martin Cecil is an Emissaries-sponsored hagiography: Chris Foster, *One Heart,
One Way: The Life and Legacy of Martin Exeter* (Denver: Foundation House, 1989). The construction and
operation of 100 Mile House Lodge as a public stopping place are detailed in chapters 6-10.
Cariboo old-timers expressed regret when the original 100 Mile House burned down in April 1937, but there was no real loss to the ranch: the dilapidated building had been empty for years, used only as a bunkhouse for extra hands hired on during the annual round-up.22

Central and North Cariboo

One of the oldest roadhouses in the central Cariboo was the 122 Mile House at Lac La Hache, midway between 100 Mile House and Williams Lake. When members of the Auto Club of Southern California stopped there for lunch in 1930, they imagined themselves transported back to the days of the gold rush:

Could we have rolled back the years we would have found in the identical setting a stagecoach party refreshing itself much in the same manner as were we. […] These hostelries in the days of their splendour were the stage stations along the Cariboo Road, wherein the weary, dust-laden stagecoach passenger was rested and refreshed. Many of them stand today, as then, providing comforts within their log walls in an atmosphere still pregnant with romance of times gone by.23

The 122 Mile House evoked similar responses from some long-time Cariboo residents. For example, when the inveterate Cariboo booster and history buff Louis LeBourdais stopped there in 1935 he was pleased to find the old roadhouse still operating. However, he lamented the fact that “a gasoline pump has taken the place of the watering trough” formerly used by oxen and horses. Even worse, a tennis court had been built in the yard where teamsters and stagecoach drivers had tended to their animals in the days of his childhood.24

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24 Vancouver Province, 7 December 1935, 7.
The community that developed around the 150 Mile House had been the commercial and administrative centre of the central Cariboo from the 1880s through the war years. However, it was bypassed by the PGE and after 1920 was supplanted by the new town that sprang up at Williams Lake. The 150 Mile House itself remained a popular roadside stopping place: when Edmund Wragge and his friends stayed there in the fall of 1926, they found the accommodations “unchanged from the stagecoach days, but clean and with good meals.” In the mid and late 1930s it was especially popular with commercial truck drivers. A few miles to the north was the 153 Mile House, run by the Crosina family. Built in 1902, the 153 was not an especially old roadhouse, but it was part of an active ranch, had a gas pump, and Lilly Crosina sold local native people’s beadwork, buckskin, and birchbark baskets from her general store.25

The stockyards built around the PGE station in Williams Lake were an important part of the new town’s role as the ‘capital’ of the central Cariboo after 1920. Cattle were driven there from ranches to the north and south, and from the very sparsely populated Chilcotin country on the west side of the Fraser River. Williams Lake was a brand new town, with modern-looking hotels and autocourts – it had no tangible links to BC’s nineteenth century fur trade or gold rushes. However, local boosters compensated for this by organizing the Williams Lake Stampede, which became an annual invocation of the wild west. The event was originally held as an informal gathering of the region’s many native and non-native cowboys, but by the mid 1920s included organized rodeo sports, a colourful parade through the town centre, and carnival sideshows, all accompanied by a great deal of spirited festivity. Like its counterpart in Calgary, the Williams Lake Stampede

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Stampede was a spectacle wrapped up in nostalgia for the bygone days of the open range. Branding the town with classic western motifs like cattle, corrals, and cowboys helped draw visitors during the summer touring season.\textsuperscript{26}

As if the Cariboo Highway corridor between Hope and Barkerville was short of designated historical sites, the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada erected a cairn and plaque beside the road at Alexandria, 45 miles north of Williams Lake, in July 1936. It commemorated the nearby site of Fort Alexandria, a fur trade post that had been established by the North West Company in 1821. Judge Frederic Howay organized the dedication ceremony and invited local rancher Harry Moffatt (who had arrived in the Cariboo in 1875) to unveil the monument. However, there were few traces of Fort Alexandria left on the landscape to hold curious motorists in the area for more than a few minutes: the last original buildings had been torn down for firewood more than a decade earlier. There was little else to see at Alexandria, which was primarily a crossroads, where a number of ranch roads intersected the main highway.\textsuperscript{27}

The north Cariboo was even more sparsely populated than the southern and central, and had relatively undifferentiated scenery along the highway corridor: scrubby forests and rolling hills with an occasional glimpse of the muddy Fraser River. After passing through small, scattered ranching communities like Soda Creek, Australian, Australian,


\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Prince George Citizen}, 2 July 1936, 6; 9 July 1936, 3; Irene Stangoe, \textit{Looking Back at the Cariboo-Chilcotin}, (Surrey: Heritage House, 1997), 13-14.
Kersley, and Dragon, motorists finally reached the town of Quesnel, which had a population of 450 in the late 1920s. Located at the confluence of the Quesnel and Fraser rivers, it was the commercial and administrative centre of the north Cariboo. Quesnel had supplanted Barkerville as the region’s ‘capital’ in 1913, when the district courthouse and most government offices had been relocated there after pressure from the local board of trade and in the expectation that the PGE would soon reach the town.\(^{28}\) Quesnel was also an important junction in the emergent road network of the northern Interior. The Blackwater and Nazko ranching districts were located on the west side of the Fraser River. Prince George, the gateway to northern BC, was located 75 miles to the north. And in the highlands to the east were the famous but long quiescent Cariboo gold fields.\(^{29}\)

The PGE reached Quesnel in the early 1920s but the town remained sleepy due to the low price of gold. Tourism and selling goods and services to motorists from outside the immediate district were economic afterthoughts until motorists started arriving from points south in late 1926. Local boosters and business owners quickly latched onto the district’s history as a way of catching the motoring public’s attention and patronage.

The Quesnel Board of Trade established what one visitor called an “open-air museum” at the intersection of Front Street and the new road bridge over the Fraser River, where historical relics were displayed to catch the eye of passing motorists. This was the most important intersection in Quesnel. Front Street was the town’s main

\(^{28}\) The limited administrative functions centred in isolated, shrinking Quesnel Forks had similarly been relocated to 150 Mile House on the Cariboo Wagon Road in 1908. Marie Elliott, *Gold and Grand Dreams: Cariboo East in the Early Years* (Victoria: Horsdal and Schubert, 2000), 166.

\(^{29}\) This information is drawn from Quesnel Old Age Pensioners Organization, *A Tribute to the Past* (Quesnel: Old Age Pensioners’ Organization, Branch #77, 1985).
commercial street and also the local section of the Cariboo Highway. All motorists passing through town went this way.  

The first artifact put on display was an old HBC freight canoe, which was hauled ashore and mounted in cement cradles near the foot of the bridge. When members of the Auto Club of Southern California drove through Quesnel in the summer of 1930, they found a signboard that explained how natives had hewn the canoe from a single cottonwood at Takla Lake, 300 miles to the northwest. The boat measured 51 feet in length and with a crew of seven had been capable of carrying three tons of trade goods.  

Later that summer, the BC Institute of Mining and Metallurgy arranged to have the waterwheel from an old Cornish pump transported to Quesnel from a gold mine in the hills, where it had not been used since the turn of the century. The 20-foot-tall

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waterwheel was placed between the old freight canoe and the new bridge, and a small plaque identified it as “a memorial to the pioneer prospectors of the Cariboo.” The dedication ceremony held in July 1930 was attended by Premier Simon Fraser Tolmie, whose father William had arrived on the Pacific Coast in 1833 in the employ of the HBC, and by Lieutenant-Governor Robert Randolph Bruce (now almost completely blind), who 30 years earlier had gotten started in the Lake Windermere district through his ownership of the Paradise silver mine.\(^{32}\)

Quesnel’s roadside collection of historic artifacts gained a third feature in August 1932, when the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada unveiled a cairn and plaque there. This monument was unique along the Cariboo Highway in that it did not involve the fur trade, gold rush, or Cariboo Wagon Road. Instead it commemorated Quesnel as the northernmost point reached by the Collins Overland Telegraph, which had been under construction through northern BC on its way towards Alaska and Siberia before the scheme was scuttled by the laying of the first trans-Atlantic cable in 1867. At the unveiling ceremony, the local board of trade presented Judge Howay with a gold nugget stickpin in recognition of his unstinting efforts to commemorate and promote the history of BC generally and of the Cariboo district in particular. (The following year, the Royal Society of Canada honoured Howay by awarding him the J.B. Tyrell Historical

\(^{32}\) A copper plaque explained that Cornish pump had been donated by a mining company that had last used it around 1900, and that its move had been paid for by the Mining Institute with assistance from the provincial government and the CPR. *Cariboo Observer*, 31 May 1930, 1; “Cornish Pump Dedicated,” 5 July 1930, 1. On the use of waterwheels to provide power for mills and mines in the BC Interior, see Wallace L. Liddicott, *Waterwheels in the Service of British Columbia's Pioneers* (Keremeos: Wallace L. Liddicott, 1996).
Medal for his many historical writings and efforts to make the history of western Canada better known to the public.)^{33}

The driving force behind the monument commemorating the Collins Overland Telegraph at Quesnel was Louis LeBourdais, the telegrapher, newspaper correspondent, good road advocate, history enthusiast, and all-round Cariboo booster. Born in Clinton in 1888, LeBourdais had been raised at several locations around the Cariboo because his father’s job as a telegrapher entailed rotating postings. Louis became a telegrapher too, and after several postings in the southern Interior he returned to Quesnel as an operator and lineman in the mid 1910s. His duties required considerable travel around the district, as did his involvement with several small gold mining ventures. These travels, combined with LeBourdais’s active Freemasonry and important role in communicating news and business information, led to him becoming familiar with many Cariboo old-timers and business owners. By 1927 he was the president of the Quesnel Board of Trade, which involved frequent correspondence with public works officials and politicians in Victoria about the condition of the district’s roads.^{34}

There is no evidence that Louis LeBourdais was particularly keen to promote the history of the Cariboo region before the mid 1920s. He appears to have recognized that the district’s frontier past was a potential economic asset only after motorists from the Coast began venturing northward on the Cariboo Highway. In 1928, Louis and his brother co-authored an article about the road for *Macleans* magazine, focusing on its new

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^{33} “Cairn Unveiling Drew Crowd to Quesnel Friday,” *Prince George Citizen* 25 August 1932, 1-2, 7; “Unveiling Ceremonies of the Collins Telegraph Cairn,” *Cariboo Observer* 27 August 1932, 1.

section through the Fraser and Thompson canyons. They described the history of BC’s early gold rushes and emphasized the important role that transportation played in developing the country’s natural resources. Like many writers, the LeBourdais brothers conflated the new automobile road with the old wagon road, writing that “[i]t was the motor car that brought the Cariboo Road back into its own again, perhaps not in the same picturesque sense as of old, but certainly as an indispensible section of the highway system.” They also represented the new highway corridor as replete with landscape features that evoked the romance and adventure of the gold rush days. For example, they pointed out that many traces of the Cariboo Wagon Road were visible to present-day motorists, serving “as a fitting reminder of the indomitable spirit of the men who had carved it there.” They also encouraged their readers to imagine the travellers of yesteryear, who had slogged along the road without the benefit of motorized vehicles or an inclination to contemplate the scenery:

Today, with the exception of a few weeks in winter and early spring, when snow or mud renders the road impassable, a horse is an uncommon sight on the Cariboo Road. Where once freight outfits, pack trains, and stagecoaches passed in earlier days, and where a man on foot, his back bending beneath the weight of a heavy pack, was not an object of curiosity, a hundred cars of all makes and sizes now speed on their way past prosperous-looking farms and ranches – the erstwhile roadhouses of the gold rush and later freighting days.35

Louis LeBourdais was involved in other publications and events that promoted the Cariboo country and celebrated its past. For example, he acted as master of ceremonies for the August 1932 unveiling of the HSMBC’s roadside cairn in Quesnel, then wrote an article about the event for the Vancouver Province. Between January and April 1935 he contributed a series of stories to the Province based on the reminiscences.

of pioneer Harry Jones, who had arrived in the Cariboo in the early 1860s and served as the district MLA from 1903 to 1906. 36 Probably the most prominent publicity campaign that LeBourdais was involved in occurred in the summer of 1936, when the BC Chamber of Mines had him organize a “Cariboo Days” event in Vancouver as part of the city’s golden jubilee. He arranged a parade through the streets of downtown Vancouver, which consisted of old stagecoaches, freight wagons, a mule train, and men dressed and bewhiskered in the style of nineteenth-century teamsters and prospectors.

Using his myriad connections, LeBourdais managed to borrow several authentic relics of the Cariboo Wagon Road for this event. These included an old set of ox yokes; a freight wagon alleged to have belonged to China Charlie, “the last of the bull-team operators;” the six-horse BX stagecoach that was usually displayed outside the new 100 Mile House Lodge; and the famous Dufferin Coach owned by the New Westminster chapter of the Native Sons of British Columbia. 37 Winding through the streets of downtown Vancouver, the Cariboo Days cavalcade was a spectacle that emphasized the importance of gold mining in BC’s past, and by extension spoke to its natural place in the contemporary economy. As will be discussed below, BC’s gold mining industry experienced a boom during the Depression. LeBourdais continued promoting the Cariboo and its history even after he won a seat in the provincial legislature, having stood as the

36 “Cairn Unveiling Drew Visitors to Quesnel Friday,” Prince George Citizen 25 August 1932, 1.
37 “Cariboo Week to Feature Stage Coach Days of Old,” Cariboo Observer 18 July 1936, 1; “LeBourdais Proves Himself Good Showman,” Prince George Citizen 23 July 1936, 1-2. The original plan had been to assemble “the biggest road map ever attempted […] an immense road map descriptive of the highway facilities from Ashcroft to Hazleton, with all branch roads of importance.” However, this scheme was shelved in favour of displaying old-time wagons and stagecoaches, which by the mid-1930s were familiar to many British Columbians as motifs of the Cariboo. “Envoys of Vancouver Jubilee Arrived in City on Sunday,” Prince George Citizen 14 May 1936, 1. The ox-team freighter identified as “China Charlie” was probably Chew Doy Foo, who returned to China from Quesnel in 1918. His farming, freighting, and mining activities are recalled in W.M. Hong, And So That’s How It Happened: Recollections of Stanley and Barkerville, 1900-1975 Gary and Eileen Seale, eds. (Quesnel: W.M. Hong, 1978), 197-199.
Liberal candidate for Cariboo in the 1937 election. For example, in May 1941 he organized an “old time fiddlers’ ball” in Quesnel to help raise funds for war bonds, and arranged for staff of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation to record the event. Describing the evening as “reminiscent of the Cariboo gold rush days of the 1860s,” the *Cariboo Observer* declared LeBourdais “one of the most ardent gatherers of historical data of his native country.”

From Quesnel to the Gold Fields

Departing Quesnel for the main Cariboo gold fields, motorists drove two miles north along the Fraser River before turning eastwards onto the Barkerville road. The road climbed steadily from the valley floor: in the 55 miles between the two communities the elevation went from 1500 to 4000 feet above sea level. Barkerville was located on the outermost edge of the Cariboo Plateau, close to the mountains where winter came early and stayed late. Snow could stay on the ground into June at such a high elevation, and freezing temperatures could come at any time of the year.

Cottonwood House, located on a ranch 18 miles east of Quesnel, was the only gold rush-era roadhouse left on the road to Barkerville. The Boyd family had owned the ranch and roadhouse since 1874, and proudly showed visitors the guest register that dated back to the mid 1860s. By the late 1930s Cottonwood House had a gas pump out front and colourful metal signs on its walls that advertised soda and cigarettes. However, its squared log construction and weathered façade were still evocative reminders of the days when stagecoaches and freight wagons had stopped there to look after their animals.

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38 “Dance at Quesnel to Make History,” *Prince George Citizen* 29 May 1941, 2.
Indeed, motorists travelling between Quesnel and Barkerville could not help but notice Cottonwood House, for the road passed right through the centre of the ranch, squeezing between the old roadhouse and the clutch of barns and outbuildings that crowded around it. Members of the Auto Club of Southern California who paused at Cottonwood House in 1930 described it as infused with “the Cariboo’s romantic history.”39

Fifteen miles beyond Cottonwood House, eastbound motorists started to see evidence of the district’s placer mining history inscribed on the landscape. Hydraulic monitoring had been the preferred method of mining in the Cariboo gold fields since the 1890s. A monitor was a cannon-like nozzle capable of shooting enormous amounts of pressurized water, which was directed so as to wash away entire hillsides, pushing auriferous gravel through a series of wooden channels and riffled sluice boxes that separated out and captured the heavy gold. Hydraulic monitoring created deep, gaping, boulder-strewn gulches, and the waste rock was deposited wherever was most convenient, creating moonscapes and filling rivers with tailings that altered their courses and caused flooding and washouts. Only a few men were needed in the pit of a hydraulic operation but a substantial amount of work went into building and maintaining the network of dams, ditches, flumes, and penstocks that delivered a steady supply of water with sufficient pressure to create a jet capable of washing away tons of overburden and gravel every day. The hydraulic mine on Lowhee Creek five miles west of Barkerville was the largest in BC, and was fed by more than 20 miles of ditches and flumes.40

40 The best descriptions of hydraulic monitoring in the Barkerville district during the 1920s and the roadside detritus of old mining operations are found in Hong, And So That’s How It Happened, especially 39-42. Hydraulic placer mining’s long-term effects on the landscape are described in Michael Kennedy, “Fraser River Placer Mining Landscapes,” BC Studies 160 (Winter 2008-2009): 35-66.
Evidence of hydraulic and other mining operations was visible all along the road to Barkerville: washed-out gulches, huge piles of churned-up gravel, culverts, ditches, rusting pipes, old bunkhouses, and roads and trails that led towards active and abandoned camps, dams, and pits. These industrial landscape features were particularly prominent because the district’s forest cover was scrubby, patchy, and sparse as a result of local logging operations, firewood cutting, and forest fires. The drive between Barkerville and Quesnel was far from being one of BC’s more appealing drives through nature.41

Motorists driving to Barkerville also passed the remnants of several gold-rush era communities, including LaFontaine, Van Winkle, and Stanley. Almost nothing was left of Van Winkle: the town had been purchased by a mining company and burned down to make space for tailings extracted from Lightning Creek. LaFontaine was also completely abandoned: by 1930 only a few subtle traces could be spotted moldering in the bush. However, there were still 20 or 30 people residing at Stanley, which had a post office, the Kwong Lung Kee general store, and the old Grand and Lightning hotels. Stanley had been larger than Barkerville at the turn of the century but had subsequently suffered a precipitous decline. When Edmund Wragge drove through in the fall of 1926 he described it as an “old camp […] where some placers were still being worked in a small way.” Four years later, members of the Auto Club of Southern California found Stanley “practically deserted […] a relic of the past.”42

41 Regarding the long history of forest fires in the Cariboo gold fields, see BCMFL, W.W. Stevens, “Reconnaissance Between Quesnel and Barkerville” (Victoria: British Columbia Forest Service, 1923).
42 Wragge, “Motoring from Nelson to the Cariboo,” 33; Mitchell, “Through the Land of the Golden Twilight,” 21. On the stagnant economy of the Cariboo gold fields during the 1920s, see Elliott, Gold and Grand Dreams, chapter 10; Robin Skelton, They Call it the Cariboo (Victoria: Sono Nis, 1980), chapters 13-15. Regarding Lowhee Gulch and other small- and medium-scale placer mining operations during the 1920s, see Hong, And So That’s How It Happened, especially chapters 1 and 17.
Several placer mining operations were intermittently active in the twelve miles between Stanley and Barkerville during the late 1920s, the largest being the Lowhee hydraulic outfit. Generally, however, the area was quiet due to low gold prices and a consensus that the most promising ground had been thoroughly gone over. The rough, narrow road to Barkerville was lightly travelled during these years, even during the summer months when the ground had thawed enough for placer mines to operate. Inactivity, roadside detritus, and the presence of dilapidated ‘ghost towns’ like Stanley lent the Cariboo gold fields an air of decay. For motorists who made the drive between Quesnel and Barkerville, it must have seemed like a trip into the past, a once-bustling resource frontier now bypassed by modernity and in seemingly inevitable decline, with traces of the gold rush days still discernable here and there along the road.

There was little to dispel this impression of decay upon entering Barkerville. Gold mining, which was essentially the district’s only industry, had been in decline for decades, its downward trend only punctuated by an occasional localized and short-lived excitement. Barkerville had around 150 year-round residents during the mid 1920s, including 35 to 50 Chinese bachelors, most of whom were quite elderly and resided in the Chinatown at the upper end of the townsite. Barkerville was cramped along a narrow strip of creekbed, hemmed in between famously auriferous Williams Creek and steep, wooded bluffs. Its narrow main street was lined by weathered log cabins and old timber-framed buildings, some of which were still connected by elevated wooden sidewalks.43

43 On the Chinese population of Barkerville and Stanley, see Hong, And So That’s How It Happened, chapters 4-5, 19. The 1920 Wrigley’s British Columbia Directory listed only 100 Barkerville residents, but this total did not include women, children, or Chinese. The total population might well have been 50% or even 100% larger than this in the summer of 1920. Regardless, most Barkerville chroniclers agreed that the town experienced a slow but steady decline in population over the following decade. See Hong, 189-191; Skelton, They Call It the Cariboo, 216.
It was rare for motorists to visit the gold fields prior to the completion of the highway through the Fraser and Thompson canyons. However, it was common for the few who did make the journey to comment on Barkerville’s antiquated atmosphere. For example, the *Prince George Citizen* reprinted the words of a Victoria journalist who visited in 1921:

Here is a town which has preserved the appearance and the spirit of the early sixties and the environment of the days when the history of the west was being made […] Although robbed long ago of the glamour which accompanies a boom city, Barkerville is today almost identical in appearance to the Barkerville of the early gold rush days. [The town] has no new buildings; nearly all of them are relics of its earliest years. 44

The reporter suggested that Barkerville’s air of authentic old-timey-ness might one day be turned into an economic asset by helping to lure sightseers from the Coast. However, he emphasized that for this to happen the provincial government would first need to improve the Interior road network so that well-heeled tourists could reach the gold fields by their preferred mode of travel, the private automobile.

Two years later, the *Citizen* reported that Barkerville was “about to become a mere memory.” A mining company proposed to purchase all the buildings in town and demolish them so that it could wash out the mile-long Conklin Gulch that drained into Williams Creek directly above the townsite. This would fill Barkerville with thousands of tons of gravel, which would then be sifted through with dredges. Nothing ultimately came of this scheme, but the idea was not unusual: numerous BC mining towns had been destroyed in order to get at the mineral wealth beneath them, including nearby Van Winkle. More noteworthy than the proposal itself was the *Citizen*’s response to it. While

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44 “Barkerville is Replete With Interesting Things,” *Prince George Citizen* 18 October 1921, 4, 8.
its story implied that the destruction of Barkerville would be regrettable, it did not suggest the dredging scheme should actually be blocked. The monetary value of the minerals in Conklin Gulch was deemed to outweigh the cultural value of the decaying townsite: industry clearly trumped history. In 1923, Barkerville was seen to merit no more special consideration than other dead or dying mining communities. Such losses were a ‘natural’ feature of a regional economy that was dependent on the extraction of a finite resource. It was only after the completion of the Fraser Canyon Highway made it possible to drive between BC’s Coast and northern Interior that Cariboo merchants began to think of Barkerville as having tourist appeal that might rival the value of gold.45

One of the first motorists to drive from the Coast to Barkerville was lawyer Edmund Wragge, who made the trip in the fall of 1926. Coming from the Kootenays, he was prone to notice mining activity, but discerned little along the road from Quesnel to Barkerville, just “some small workings here and there.” When he and his friends arrived in Barkerville they were impressed by the old buildings that lined its narrow dirt-surfaced main street and found the town redolent of BC’s frontier days. The first thing they did was check in at the Kelly Hotel,

the old original log hotel which we were told was unchanged from the sixties when it was built. Meals were served at a long table as they always had been, the piano which had been packed in during the golden days was still there, and some beautiful glass that no doubt had come around Cape Horn by sail was still to be seen.

A resident whom Wragge described as “a real old timer” agreed to show the party around. He led them to the lower end of town to see the cemetery, where Wragge identified a headboard that marked the resting place of one of the Overlanders – a famous

45 “Old Barkerville Town Will Disappear Before Dredges,” *Prince George Citizen* 2 March 1923, 3.
party that had travelled overland from Canada West to the Cariboo in 1862. They also
drove a mile up Williams Creek to the abandoned site of Richfield to see the old district
courthouse, which had not seen court in session since 1913. “The building was not in
good shape, as it had not been used for many years,” Wragge observed. The courthouse
was one of the last vestiges of Richfield, and had a romantic air that inspired Wragge to
contemplate the difficulties of administering British justice in a rough-and-ready mining
frontier. When he peeked through the courthouse windows, he thrilled – and his sense of
lawyerly decorum bristled— at the sight of old records scattered about and the judge’s
bench coated with cobwebs.46

As a small but growing number of pleasure travellers drove to the north Cariboo
during the late 1920s, boosters and business owners started seeing auto tourism as a
valuable addition to the region’s otherwise stagnant economy. They therefore began
showing interest in preserving and promoting Barkerville’s aura of the bygone gold rush
days. The town was regionally distinctive yet tied in with interwar North American
popular culture’s enthusiasm for frontier and wild west themes. It could help draw auto
tourists from the Coast and points further afield, thus bringing increased business for
merchants, hoteliers, and roadside commercial operators all along the Cariboo Highway.
Such a scheme called for relatively little expenditure on the part of regional boosters. So
long as auto tourists remained keen on western historical themes, the two key ingredients
for making Barkerville into a historical attraction were the provincial government
maintaining the Cariboo Highway in good condition, and Barkerville residents

46 Wragge, “Motoring from Nelson to the Cariboo,” 30-32.
maintaining the townsite more or less the way it was, neither improving it too much nor allowing it to deteriorate much further.

In the spring of 1927, just months after the canyon highway had opened to automobile traffic, a front-page editorial in the *Cariboo Observer* (which was owned by a Quesnel hotelier) expressed concern that Barkerville residents were failing to recognize the potential tourism value of their built surroundings and the economic importance of preserving them. The editorial bemoaned the loss of community spirit in Barkerville and its residents’ failure to consider the impression that unkempt (or incinerated) buildings might make on visitors from afar. Specifically, the *Observer* warned about the lack of an active volunteer fire brigade in Barkerville, where an “epidemic” of roof fires occurred “nearly every spring” due to the buildup of creosote in metal stovepipes that resulted from burning pitchy spruce firewood. “In the days of the old-timers, aside from the conscious necessity of keeping a fire brigade ready for action at a moment’s notice, there was a feeling of public spirit among them, not only of complying with the law of self-preservation, but of keeping the appearance of the city within the bounds of respectability [emphasis added].”

The *Observer* described how a “close observing tourist” who had visited Barkerville in 1926 had remarked that “the town should be put in a museum.” People visiting from afar recognized the townsite’s special historic value, but locals seemed to take their surroundings for granted, tolerating dilapidation and the risk of fire. The Cariboo’s respectable, middle-class boosters and tourism promoters were frustrated by Barkerville residents’ lack interest in preserving or promoting the townsite. It had the

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potential to be made into a historical tourist attraction, yet was in the hands of backwoods types who were apparently incapable of appreciating its value in the modern economy. The fact that many Barkerville residents were elderly, impoverished, and/or of Chinese ancestry only sharpened the sense that the town’s occupants were themselves relics of a bygone age.

In late 1927, the *Cariboo Observer* took another subtle dig at Barkerville residents for their failure to recognize the value of the area’s old buildings. It reprinted a story from the *Vancouver Province* in which the BC Historical Association expressed alarm at the condition of the old Richfield courthouse, located one mile up Williams Creek from Barkerville. Describing the courthouse as a “unique relic of the great gold stampede” and “one of the most important landmarks of the province,” the BCHA complained that it sat unprotected and uncared for “in the wilderness [and] ruins of the old town.” The front of the building was overgrown with brush, and miners had heaped tailings against the back.

In the building, entirely unprotected, are documents of almost priceless historical value – old court records and other papers that tell the romantic history of the gold days. […] These, as well as many other historical objects still preserved in the neighbourhood, should be protected for posterity. […] No other relic of the gold rush equals the old courthouse in historical importance.48

The BCHA proposed that the old courthouse be made a “historical museum,” and announced its intention to send a delegate to Quesnel and Barkerville in an effort to stir up interest in such a scheme. Cariboo boosters must have found it reassuring that Barkerville’s potential value as a tourist attraction was being recognized by experts from the Coast, if not by Barkerville residents themselves. However, nothing seems to have

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48 “Richfield Courthouse Receives Attention,” *Cariboo Observer* 5 November 1927, 4, reprinted from unidentified edition of the *Vancouver Province*. 
come of this first proposal to establish a museum at Barkerville. Given the recent failure of the overambitious David Thompson Memorial Fort in Invermere, the BCHA executive may have deemed it impractical to establish a museum in a small hinterland community that was isolated within the Interior’s emerging network of arterial roads.

Figure 10.4: Barkerville, 1930. Courtesy of University of Washington Library Special Collections, Asahel Curtis collection.

The BC Historical Association failed to galvanize interest in establishing a museum at Richfield, but its former president Frederic Howay did manage to obtain a measure of official recognition for Barkerville through the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada. In August 1929, a cairn and plaque were unveiled beside the road to Quesnel on the lower outskirts of town. Instead of the usual country rock, the Barkerville
cairn had been specially fashioned from quartz stone taken from Williams Creek, which flowed through town and had been the richest of the many auriferous creeks in the Cariboo gold fields. The plaque commemorated Barkerville as the northern terminus of the Cariboo Wagon Road, which tied it to other monuments, relics, and historical landscape features seen along the Cariboo Highway. For motorists entering the townsite, the monument looming above the road was a reminder of the many fortune-seekers who had passed there before them, reaching the gold fields after long, difficult journeys through canyons, mountains, and forests. It also indicated that auto tourists had arrived at their destination, striking tourist gold at the epicentre of what many scholarly and popular historians deemed to be the most important event in BC’s past.

The ceremony to unveil the monument at Barkerville was treated as a special occasion in the north Cariboo. In Quesnel, 55 miles to the west, the village commissioners declared a local holiday and most of the town’s shops closed for business. The *Cariboo Observer* called the influx of motorists and dignitaries to the district the “Rush to Barkerville,” and predicted the event would “surpass anything of this nature that has taken place since the sixties – the days of the real gold rush.” Louis LeBourdais was on the organizing committee for the ceremony, and managed to convince the police to designate the narrow, winding road between Quesnel and Barkerville a one-way route on the Saturday morning of the event. This was to make the drive safe and convenient for visitors and avoid any bad publicity that might stem from a head-on collision.

“Considering the number of cars,” the *Observer* later reported, “there were surprisingly few accidents. Several went into the ditch, but neither cars nor occupants were injured.”
A grandstand was built on the hillside around the cairn and covered in bunting. Cariboo politicians past and present attended the ceremony, along with Judge Howay and Provincial Librarian John Hosie. The guest of honour was 86-year-old Harry Jones, “the oldest pioneer of the district,” who had arrived in Barkerville in 1863 and still lived down the road in Stanley. After pulling away the Union Jack that had been draped over the cairn, Jones said a few words about the gold rush days, describing his memories of digging in the gravels of nearby Williams Creek and life in Barkerville before the great fire of 1868 destroyed most of the original town. After the afternoon ceremony, horses were raced along Barkerville’s main street, and two dances were held that night: one in the old Theatre Royal and another in an open-air pavilion built especially for the occasion. On Sunday morning Barkerville was treated to its first view of a flying machine, when a seaplane stationed at Prince George circled over the town. The plane landed a few miles away at Bear Lake, and many residents motored over during the day to take in the spectacle of modern air transportation.

The Cariboo Observer deemed the unveiling ceremony and the weekend’s associated events an enormous success, proudly reporting that Quesnel had been “overrun with motor cars and tourists.” It estimated that 1000 visitors travelling in 250 cars had attended the unveiling – “not a spectacular crowd for a big city, but for Barkerville, with its narrow gauge streets and lack of open spaces, it was a problem to accommodate them all comfortably.” Over the course of the weekend, the sleepy old town had been turned into “a seething mass of humanity” and for a couple days it had seemed as though “the historic mines of Cariboo had been re-discovered.” The large number of motorists who had come to Barkerville from communities outside the Cariboo seemed to bode well for
future tourist interest in the district’s gold rush past, illustrating the town’s potential value as an historical attraction.⁴⁹

However, while the Historic Sites and Monuments Board’s cairn and plaque gave Barkerville an official stamp of approval as an historically significant place, and the success of the unveiling ceremony stirred the hopes of the region’s tourism promoters, there were substantial constraints on the volume of tourist traffic to the old capital of the gold fields. The biggest problem was its distance from major population centres. Barkerville was more than 500 miles and three days’ drive from Vancouver, at the dead end of a rough, 55-mile-long road from Quesnel. It could not be incorporated into a loop trip, so, like it or not, visitors were compelled to backtrack through country they had already seen. The town consequently saw no tourism-related development during the late 1920s and early 1930s: things carried on as they had since the end of the Great War, when placer gold mining had last gone bust. Barkerville’s population hovered between 100 and 200, depending on the season. No one opened a business that was oriented towards the motoring public, like the autocourts found in the Fraser Canyon and elsewhere along the Cariboo Highway. Gasoline could be purchased from a hand pump on the porch of the old Kelly Hotel, but there was no garage in town. Barkerville did not even have electricity.

A few members of the Auto Club of Southern California stayed in Barkerville one chilly night in June 1930. They described it as the “sole survivor of the towns at the end of the Cariboo Road” and “charged with the memories of old and better days,” but

concluded it was a “ghost city,” destined to crumble and disappear in the not-too-distant future.\footnote{Mitchell, “Through the Land of the Golden Twilight,” 21.} Provincial Librarian John Hosie, who sat on the BC Historical Association executive council, also travelled to Barkerville in the summer of 1930. Instead of meeting local residents to encourage them to protect the town’s old buildings or establish some kind of museum, he was on a salvage mission, scouring through the derelict gold commissioner’s office and the Richfield courthouse in search of historically significant papers to remove to the safety of the archives in Victoria. Some work was being done to spruce up at least one prominent building in Barkerville that summer, although not with the intention of making the town more appealing to the motoring public: the Anglican Diocese of the Cariboo made extensive repairs to St. Saviour’s, the large Carpenter Gothic church at the foot of main street. St. Saviour’s was one of the oldest and most distinctive-looking buildings in Barkerville, having been built just after the great fire of September 1868. With its crenulated bargeboards, lancet windows, and unpainted board-and-batten siding, the church was also a favourite of visiting photographers. Another one of Barkerville’s old buildings was put in good shape in 1931, when Masonic lodges from around BC donated funds to help repair and restore the town’s Masonic Hall, which also dated from the late 1860s.\footnote{Hosie’s visit and the restoration of St. Saviour’s are both in \textit{Cariboo Observer}, 23 August 1930, 1. Regarding the Masonic Hall, see Marshall, \textit{Cariboo Gold}, 32-33.}

The journalist Bruce Hutchison visited Barkerville in 1930, and was inspired to pen a highly romantic description of the town as an epitome of old-timey-ness. “When I first saw Barkerville it was a ghost to make you shudder deliciously,” he declared. He described staying in the Kelly Hotel, where he played billiards “on a table carted on the backs of mules over the Cariboo Road.” While visiting the decrepit Theater Royal he
imagined the miners and townsfolk of yesteryear watching “melodramas and dancing girls.” He met the prospector Fred Tregillus, who had come to the Cariboo 50 years earlier, and Dea ‘Jack’ Song, cook at the Kelly Hotel, who had arrived seven years before Tregillus. Hutchison devoted evocative prose to the town’s atmosphere of decay. With its slumped economy, lack of modern utilities, old-fashioned frontier architecture, and array of weathered, neglected, and deteriorating surfaces, Barkerville exuded an air of both past greatness and inevitable decay. Hutchison described its main street thus:

The single street of drunken cabins was crushed between the churned gravels of Williams Creek and the shoulder of the hill. No house was in place, none level, all mounted on tipsy stilts. […] The rain drummed on the broken roofs and the creaking sidewalks, and it trickled in eerie sound from the eaves. Every black cabin door was filled with presences that you did not seek to discover.52

Whether or not they detected eerie presences, most visitors to Barkerville in the late 1920s and early 1930s would have agreed that the town’s best days were far behind it. With its isolation, aging population, and aging timber buildings, Barkerville appeared to be on its way to becoming another ghost town of the gold fields. That the boom times of the 1860s might ever return seemed to be out of the question. However, the Depression of the 1930s spurred a new gold rush to the Cariboo gold fields, which temporarily breathed some life into the old town beside Williams Creek.

A New Cariboo Gold Rush

The cratering of BC’s forestry, mining, fishing, and farming industries during the early 1930s drove hundreds of unemployed men to try their hand at panning and sluicing

for gold in the Interior’s old placer diggings. There had always been a handful of prospectors working in these areas, but few worked at it full time, for the price of gold was very low, having been fixed at the same rate for many decades. The days of making a fortune washing gravel on one’s own or with a couple partners were assumed to be far in the past, something only read about in history books. However, with jobs desperately scarce, one of the few plausible ways to make money was to dig it up from the earth, and it was common wisdom that the best way to find ‘pay dirt’ was to look in places where it had been found before.

The initial wave of unemployed gold seekers made their way to the diggings by jumping PGE freight trains bound for the Interior. Most of these smallest-scale miners had little practical mining experience and were only equipped with basic hand tools. Living rough in tents and old cabins, they eked out a living sifting through tailings and ‘sniping’ in patches of ground previously passed over. Barkerville resident H.G. Lockwood described conditions in the gold fields in a 1933 booklet that was intended to provide prospective migrants with sober advice, unvarnished by the blandishments of boosters and mine promoters. “Very few people have any money,” he reported. “Rumours and newspaper reports of prosperous business conditions are greatly exaggerated. There is no employment to be had […] until the [hydraulic] mining companies start to work after the snow has gone.”53 Many hydraulic operations expanded during the early 1930s, while abandoned ones were restarted. Many men who had drifted to the gold fields found seasonal employment with these operations, digging ditches, cutting timber, and maintaining flumes. However, the growth of these gravel-sifting

operations was soon overshadowed by the development of hard-rock lode mining midway between Stanley and Barkerville.54

The initial wave of unemployed men to the north Cariboo was followed by a much larger influx that began in the summer of 1934. The event that sparked this new rush to the Cariboo gold fields had nothing to do with the government of British Columbia, or even the government of Canada. In January 1934 the American government passed the United States Gold Reserve Act, which outlawed most private possession of gold bullion and increased the official price that the treasury would pay for gold. The price of a troy ounce of gold, which had been fixed between $18 and $21 USD from the 1860s to 1930, was raised overnight to $35 USD – a great increase, even without accounting for the depressed commodity prices of the mid 1930s. This spike in the price of gold led to a flurry of prospecting and mine development around North America, including in BC. It suddenly became feasible to mine ground that had long been considered played out, including ‘poor man’s’ placer diggings like those found in the Fraser Canyon and the north Cariboo. Gold mining was the only sector of the provincial economy that saw strong growth through the 1930s: the value of gold mined in the province leapt from $3 million in 1929 to $14 million in 1935 and $24 million in 1940. Placer mining accounted for some of this increase, but the vast majority of it came from

54 The boom in gold mining in British Columbia during the 1930s has received little attention from historians, who have understandably tended to focus on the broader economic, social, and political problems that wracked the province. Three accounts of working in BC’s gold fields during the Depression years are Harris, Ten Golden Years; Rolf Knight and Phyllis Knight, A Very Ordinary Life (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1974), chapter 7; Ludditt, Campfire Sketches. Also see Charles Miller Wallace, “The Spirit of the Pioneers Still Rules: Arizona’s Automobile Gold Rush of the 1930s” Journal of Arizona History 38, 4 (Winter 1997): 355-374.
new lode mining operations that were concentrated in two isolated areas: the rugged
Bridge River valley near Lillooet, and the Barkerville district.\textsuperscript{55}

The development of the Cariboo Gold Quartz (CGQ) mine on the shore of Jack of
Clubs Lake, five miles west of Barkerville, was a rare bright spot in the BC economy
during the 1930s. The CGQ was a large, well-financed lode mining operation that bored a
series of tunnels following veins of gold-laden quartz beneath Cow and Island mountains.
Prospector Fred Wells had staked the original claims in 1926, but had had difficulty
finding financial backers due to the low price of gold and skepticism about the viability
of lode mining in the Cariboo. Undeterred, Wells found enough backers to develop a
small mine, which began producing in the fall of 1932 with good results. Attracting more
investors, the operation expanded in 1933, and again 1934 after the passage of the United
States Gold Reserve Act. By 1935 the CGQ mine had the capacity to crush more than
200 tons of ore per day.

The Cariboo Gold Quartz company established a new townsite a short distance
from its main mine plant. The town was named Wells and it became the fast-growing,
modern counterpart to sleepy, weather-beaten Barkerville. Visitors and journalists
regularly commented on the contrast between the two towns: even the provincial
Department of Mines juxtaposed the new against the old in a series of side-by-side
photographs printed in its 1936 annual report.\textsuperscript{56} The streets of Wells were broad and laid
out according to a plan, with ample space for parking. Its buildings were made of modern

\textsuperscript{55} Statistics drawn from Barman, \textit{West Beyond the West}, 256, 376. Regarding the gold mines around
Lillooet, see Lewis Green, \textit{The Great Years: Gold Mining in the Bridge River Valley} (Vancouver: Tricouni,
2000). The American government outlawed the private possession of gold as part of a campaign against
deflation, which had been encouraging the wealthy to hold onto their savings and reap the benefits of high
interest rates instead of injecting capital into America’s depressed economy.

\textsuperscript{56} British Columbia, Department of Mines, \textit{Annual Report of the Minister of Mines, 1936} (Victoria:
Department of Mines, 1937), 4.
materials and in a modern style; they included workers’ dormitories, stores, hotels, a school, a movie theatre, a garage, and a hospital with an x-ray machine. Wells also had modern utilities, with electricity supplied by the diesel generators at the CGQ mine. The town’s population reached 2000 by the end of 1934, and had doubled four years later. Schemes to draw auto tourists into the gold fields were quickly forgotten amidst this industrial boom.57

People from all over western Canada headed to the Cariboo goldfields in search of work during the mid and late 1930s. For example, Bill Tower, who went on to build Tower Ranch, the first autocourt on the Hope-Princeton Highway, moved his family from southern Saskatchewan to Quesnel, where he found work as an engine mechanic, repairing the trucks that travelled the Cariboo Highway. Newspaper and magazine articles frequently described the boom as reminiscent of the 1860s, despite the fact that most of the people moving to the gold fields were seeking waged employment rather than hunting for their fortune in the district’s creek beds.58

The boom in Wells affected other communities along the Cariboo Highway and across the northern Interior generally. The expansion of the CGQ mine and construction of a new town required large amounts of machinery, cement, lumber, and other construction materials. The thousands who worked in the mine and lived in Wells needed a steady supply of food, fuel, and consumer goods. All of this material had to be trucked in, which resulted in a sharp increase in traffic on both the PGE and the Cariboo Highway. Many old roadhouses stayed open through the 1930s by serving the growing number of cars, trucks, and busses that travelled the highway. Demand for meat, milk,
and produce was higher than the region’s ranchers and other agriculturalists could supply, and many farm and ranch families in the Cariboo were able to add an automobile to their stable during the Depression. All this activity played a key role in the expansion of BC’s nascent trucking industry. Any man who could acquire a truck tried to get work hauling to and from the mines or in some ancillary industry. As one Barkerville resident recalled, “[a]nything that resembled a truck was pressed into service.” In the early 1930s most of BC’s long-haul truck drivers were self-employed and came to independent agreements with their customers. However, by the end of the decade the need for reliable delivery of large volumes of material to Wells and the CGQ had led to the emergence of trucking lines that owned a fleet of vehicles, signed long-term contracts with their customers, and hired or subcontracted drivers as required.59

The importance of the CGQ mine for BC’s economy led the state to improve the road between Quesnel and Barkerville. Several earth-surfaced sections were graveled, and at Devil’s Canyon, a dangerous section near Stanley, the road was realigned and a slope stabilization program was undertaken. Keeping the road passable in winter was also a priority, for unlike placer mining, which was impossible in subzero temperatures, lode mining could be done all year round. To help the CGQ operate through the long Cariboo winters, the Department of Public Works deployed caterpillar tractors mounted with plow blades to clear snow from the Quesnel-Barkerville road. Communities in the gold fields had traditionally ‘hibernated’ from freeze-up through spring thaw, but a steady flow of truck traffic allowed mining to continue all winter in Wells.60

59 Harris, Ten Golden Years, 64. On the expansion of trucking in the central and northern Interior during the 1930s generally, see Craig, Trucking, chapter 6.
60 Regarding the provincial government’s efforts to improve the Quesnel-Barkerville road and keep it open all year round, see Ludditt, Campfire Sketches, 21-23; Skelton, They Call It the Cariboo, chapter 16.
The boom in Wells brought a wave of publicity about the Cariboo gold fields. Many newspaper and magazine stories referred to the region’s important place in British Columbia’s past. Seemingly every journalist who visited Wells also visited Barkerville and commented on the historical parallels between the two communities, whether for better or worse. Many wrote that history seemed to permeate the district. For example, many described how the southern part of Wells had been built on top of tailings from the famous Lowhee Creek hydraulic mine. Sometimes, in a process akin to archaeology, history was even dug up from the ground, when new mining operations discovered traces of old ones. A dramatic example of this occurred at Last Chance Creek, on a hydraulic operation owned by Bill Hong. While washing away a hillside, the monitor crew uncovered a famous but long-forgotten mine shaft from the 1860s, from which more than 40 pounds of gold nuggets had supposedly been taken in one day. Exploring the 80-foot-long tunnel, the pit crew found artifacts left behind by their nineteenth-century counterparts, including candlesticks, decaying picks and shovels, and wheelbarrows that had been built without nails, only whipsawn lumber and hand-carved wooden pins.61

During the mid and late 1930s, boosters, journalists, politicians, and mining promoters used BC’s historic gold rushes and popular figures like the ruggedly independent prospector to present the public with reassuring messages that pointed towards an economic recovery and rosy future. Just as gold mining had been central to the founding of British Columbia (as had been described in many scholarly and popular histories, and commemorated by numerous cairns and plaques), so would it play a central role in rescuing the province from the Depression. When the BC Chamber of Mines

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61 Futcher, *The Great North Road to the Cariboo*, 80-81. Also see Wragge, “Motoring from Nelson to the Cariboo,” 32.
commissioned Louis LeBourdais to organize the 1936 Cariboo Days event in Vancouver, its goal was as much to promote and naturalize mining’s place in the province’s present-day economy as it was to celebrate its foundational role in the province’s past. With its stagecoaches, freight wagons, and men dressed like nineteenth-century prospectors, the event was akin to a parade of veterans, presenting the mining industry as a bulwark against economic and social instability, and reassuring British Columbians that their province was laden with resource wealth just waiting for enterprising individuals to discover it. Ironically, gold mining was presented as rescuing the province from a terrible downturn in its resource-dependent economy despite the fact that gold had proven about the least reliable commodity on which to base long-term prosperity and community stability. This was evidenced by the many moldering ghost towns and mining camps in the Cariboo, the Similkameen, the Boundary country, the Omineca, and the Kootenays.

Within the Cariboo, the benefits derived from the revitalized gold mining industry accrued primarily to Wells and Quesnel, with Barkerville largely overshadowed. In the first months of 1934, several buildings in Barkerville were even jacked onto sledges and skidded down the icy road to Wells. A little money was put into maintaining and repairing buildings in Barkerville, but several landmark buildings were lost during the mid and late 1930s. For example, the old Royal Cariboo Hospital and the Masonic Hall both burned down in 1936; only the latter was rebuilt. When the crumbling town hall was condemned the following year, local old-timers held one last dance to celebrate its association with the “rip-roaring days of the early gold excitement” before it was demolished. The famous Theatre Royal was also condemned in 1937: it had served as Barkerville’s community hall for several years, but was in such poor condition that its
outer walls had to be propped up by poles. Before the old theatre was torn down, local residents salvaged its ornamental mirrors, heavy velvet curtains, and other historic features, which they sold to raise funds for a modest new community hall on the same lot. In 1938, the Barkerville telegraph office, which had been in the same place for more than 50 years, was relocated to Wells, the undisputed new capital of the Cariboo gold fields.62

Barkerville did see an increase in population and business activity during the mid and late 1930s. The town’s winter population tripled from around 125 in 1929-1930 to almost 400 in 1934-1935. Several vacant lots were purchased, and squatters built cabins and shacks at the lower end of town, below St. Saviour’s Church. In her 1938 travelogue on the Cariboo Highway, Winnifred Futcher accused the CGQ and Wells of having “robbed Barkerville of much of its prosperity,” yet reported finding residents of the old town “confident that this state of affairs will soon be reversed.” “Nearly every cabin in town is occupied,” she observed. “Even the Board of Trade is being revived.” New mines opened and old ones were expanded or reactivated. Prospectors were working in the surrounding hills, long-time residents were selling old claims, and supplies were being trucked in all year round. At several points between Stanley and Barkerville, elaborate timber trestles were built to carry flumes and siphons above the road. On the outskirts of Barkerville, within view of the HSMBC cairn that had been unveiled in 1929, tailings from the new Shamrock Mine were carried above the road on an elevated conveyor belt. Barkerville’s narrow main street was crowded with cars, trucks, wagons, and caterpillar tractors. During the late 1930s so many visitors to Wells made the extra trip to see

historic Barkerville that resident Fred Ludditt toyed with the idea of building a lodge to accommodate them.\textsuperscript{63} Illicit activities like gambling and moonshine production flourished, harkening back to the ‘wild west’ days of the 1860s, albeit not in a fashion that many respectable, middle-class boosters and tourism promoters would have cared to publicize. Yet the town remained home to a disproportionately large number of elderly single men, many of whom would have been candidates for the Provincial Home for Aged Men in Kamloops if not for their Chinese ancestry.\textsuperscript{64}

Most first-time visitors to Barkerville during the mid 1930s found it highly evocative of older and better times. However, many who had become familiar with the town during the 1920s and early 1930s found that the changes associated with the new mining boom had disrupted its romantic association with the gold rush of the 1860s. “[T]he street lights alone, perhaps more than any other feature, seemed to bring it into the twentieth century,” recalled Fred Ludditt.\textsuperscript{65} Journalist Bruce Hutchison was struck by the many changes when he returned to Barkerville in the late 1930s, nearly a decade after his first visit, when he had found it a “ghost to make you shudder deliciously.” Men could be seen working all along the road between Stanley and Barkerville. He found Wells “raw […] a young man’s town” seemingly sprung up overnight, an agglomeration of “modern conveniences suddenly dumped into the wilderness.” Barkerville remained an old man’s town, but had nevertheless changed too much for Hutchison’s liking. Several of the fine old buildings that had caught his fancy during his first visit, including the Theater Royal,

\textsuperscript{63} Futcher, \textit{The Great North Road}; Skelton, \textit{They Call it the Cariboo}, chapter 16, especially 215-217. Pictures of flumes and trestles crossing above the Quesnel-Barkerville road can be found in Hong, \textit{And So That’s How it Happened}, 78, 99, 102, 108, 123. A photo showing the proximity of the Shamrock Mine to the road and the Historic Sites and Monuments Board cairn is BCA A-05444.

\textsuperscript{64} Davies, \textit{Into the House of Old}, 69-71; Ludditt, \textit{Campfire Sketches}, 21; Marshall, \textit{Cariboo Gold}, 33; Skelton, \textit{They Call it the Cariboo}, 217.

\textsuperscript{65} Ludditt, \textit{Campfire Sketches}, 31.
were gone. Automobiles lined its narrow main street. A new power line brought
electricity from the big mine at Wells. Enough basic maintenance had been done to
disrupt the town’s aura of decay. “Barkerville is no longer the ghost town we used to
know,” Hutchison lamented.

It has been repaired, reroofed, cleaned up, painted, so that only the old [St.
Saviour’s] church at the end of the street, beautifully brown and weathered,
remains as an authentic touch of the gold rush – the church and the miles of gravel
along the creek, where gold was washed. […] We drove away from Barkerville
secretly sad at its rebirth.66

During the late 1920s the biggest impediment to making Barkerville into a
historical attraction that would lure auto tourists into the Cariboo had been the
combination of isolation, dilapidation, and lack of local interest in preserving old
buildings and other relics of the gold rush era. Few who visited Barkerville during those
years would have guessed that a modern-day gold rush might threaten to efface many of
the remaining traces of the gold rush of the 1860s, which were so central to Barkerville’s
romantic appeal. Even those who were intimately familiar with the boom and bust cycle
of British Columbia’s resource economy could not have predicted such a reversal of
fortune. However, anyone who knew about the history of gold mining in BC would have
recognized that the boom was almost certainly bound to be followed by a bust.

From 1939 to 1941 the federal government encouraged gold mining to help
finance the purchase of armaments from the United States. However, gold was not
designated a strategic war material and gold mining companies found it difficult to retain
workers and get supplies, particularly after America entered the war in late 1941. The
value of gold production in British Columbia dropped from $24 million in 1940 to $7

million in 1945. Small and medium-sized placer operations were amongst the first to close, and hundreds of people left Wells after the CGQ mine was forced to scale back production.67

Auto tourism in BC was severely curtailed after 1941, but Cariboo boosters and business owners nevertheless worked to maintain existing and potential historical tourist assets during the war. For example, in 1942 the Quesnel Board of Trade took steps to tidy the grounds of the outdoor museum on Front Street, and made repairs to the old Cornish pump waterwheel. That same year, a lobbying campaign convinced the provincial government to fund a clean up of the neglected Barkerville cemetery. Three years later, the provincial government issued an order-in-council that officially designated the abandoned courthouse at Richfield “an historical object.” This protected the old building against damage by local mining operations, though it did nothing to preserve it against vandalism or the elements, or to help explain its historical significance to the occasional visitor who travelled the mile up Williams Creek from Barkerville.68

Many people lingered in Wells and Barkerville at the end of the war, hoping that the boom times of the mid and late 1930s would return. However, the price of gold remained fixed in the face of postwar inflation and BC’s gold mining industry failed to rebound. Hydraulic operations virtually disappeared, and although the CGQ mine stayed open into the 1950s it had a fraction as many employees as during the late 1930s. People drifted away in search of other opportunities, for most of the province was experiencing a major boom. By 1950 the populations of Barkerville and Wells had dwindled to 70 and

67 Barman, West Beyond the West, 375.
68 “To Preserve Cemetery,” Prince George Citizen 6 August 1942, 7; “Trade Board Meeting Here Well Attended,” Cariboo Observer 13 June 1942, 1; “Courthouse at Richfield Diggings to be Preserved,” Cariboo Observer 10 February 1945, 1.
400 respectively, and Stanley was practically abandoned.\textsuperscript{69} Having teetered on the edge for decades, it appeared inevitable that Barkerville would join the ranks of the Cariboo’s ghost towns. However, as the next two chapters will show, a coalition of boosters, roadside business owners, and history enthusiasts eventually managed to convince the provincial government to develop a major historical tourist attraction at Barkerville, more than 30 years after it had first been suggested that “the town should be put in a museum.”

\textsuperscript{69} Skelton, \textit{The Call It the Cariboo}, chapter 17.
Chapter 11

A Sense of Crisis Amidst Prosperity:

History by the Road in the BC Interior, 1945 to 1955

This chapter examines history by the road in the BC Interior in the first decade after World War Two. Rather than focus on the motoring public’s experiences of history in the landscapes that were visible along a particular highway corridor or in a specific community or region, as previous chapters have done, it examines history by the road in the broader social and economic context of the postwar boom – a boom that for all its prosperity and optimism was accompanied by a sense of anxiety and even crisis amongst segments of BC’s hinterland population.

British Columbia did not experience a recession during the late 1940s the way it had after World War One. Demand for most of its natural resources either increased or remained steady. In most parts of the province the first postwar decade was characterized by rising incomes, high employment, and a sense of optimism. The provincial government poured huge sums into building new roads, expanding the electrical grid, and extending the PGE northward from Quesnel, which helped stimulate economic growth, especially in BC’s hinterlands. These kinds of state-built infrastructure projects also served as tools for province-building, tying BC’s regions closer together, ameliorating some of the disparities between them, and in the process taking some of the edge off traditional regional identities. This period also saw plans for the development of road networks on a continental scale with the passage of the Trans-Canada Highway Act (1949) and the National Interstate and Defense Highways Act (1956). For many residents
of British Columbia’s hinterlands, the new road infrastructure was the most concretely tangible expression of how Fordism played out in the province.\(^1\)

After a couple years of shortages, postwar prosperity was also strikingly expressed by the proliferation of new automobiles travelling over the province’s roads – new Fords, Chevrolets, and Chryslers; new sedans, coupes, and station wagons; new pickup trucks and semi-tractors. There was no automobile manufacturing in BC except for a few small plants that made logging trucks and other specialized machines for the forest industry. However, the province did produce lead, zinc, asbestos, and aluminum that were used in the automobile industry, and oil exploration was underway in the Peace River country. BC also produced paper products that were used to make the newspapers and magazines that helped promote North America’s postwar culture of mass consumption, advertising automobiles and modern lifestyles that revolved around their use. In BC, as in most other parts of North America, the ‘democratized’ automobility of the postwar years seemed to epitomize the triumph of liberal capitalism.

However, even though the provincial government strove to modernize the provincial highway network and increased its support for the tourism industry, its new hands-on involvement in the economy did not extend as far as the cultivation of history by the road – at least not during the first postwar decade. From the late 1940s to the late 1950s it was left to private individuals and private organizations to shape the motoring public’s experiences of history in the landscapes visible along BC’s arterial highways, just as it had been during the interwar years. However, as this chapter will show,

boosters, boards of trade, and roadside business operators were joined in their efforts by a growing number of local and regional historical societies, many of which had their origins in the undercurrent of anxiety about the pace and scale of change during the postwar years.

British Columbia’s postwar prosperity and atmosphere of material progress combined with Fordism’s rhetoric of egalitarian all-in-it-togetherness to obscure the fact that the benefits of the resource and infrastructure-building boom were unevenly spread. The postwar boom had ‘losers’ as well as ‘winners.’ Several industries went into decline during and after the war, dragging communities down with them. For example, the collapse of gold and silver mining had negative consequences for parts of the Kootenays, the Bridge River valley, and the area around Wells and Barkerville. Coal mining did not decline as sharply, but several large mines did shut down as railways switched over to diesel fuel and coal declined as a source of domestic heating. Some communities and districts remained isolated or peripheral to the provincial road network. On the otherwise roadless central Coast, residents of the Bella Coola valley famously took it on themselves to carve the impossibly steep ‘Freedom Road’ up the Heckman Pass in order to gain a tenuous connection with the Chilcotin country and the Cariboo Highway 300 miles away at Williams Lake.

Furthermore, hundreds of British Columbians were displaced by postwar infrastructure projects. This typically resulted from the government expropriating private properties in order to build a new road or improve an existing one. However, one particularly dramatic example was the Kenney Dam, which was built in the early 1950s. The dam was designed to reverse the flow of the Nechako River so that it could be used
to produce electricity for the new Alcan aluminum smelter at Kitimat. Many people in the Nechako and Ootsa Lake watersheds lost some or all of their homesteads to this megaproject. Members of the Cheslatta Indian Band fared worst: they were given only a couple weeks to leave their reserves, after which their homes were razed and their cemeteries inundated. For these and other residents of the province’s hinterlands, the pace and scale of postwar change was more than just disorienting, it was positively threatening. The feeling of being left out, or worse, cast aside in a seemingly inexorable march of progress generated undercurrents of anxiety and even a sense of crisis.²

*Crisis Amidst Prosperity in BC’s Forest Industry*

After the wartime collapse of the gold mining industry, the economy of BC’s northern Interior might have returned to the doldrums of the 1920s if not for the expansion of the forest industry. As described in previous chapters, the growth of logging and sawmilling in the Interior during the late 1940s and early 1950s was driven primarily by petty producers: small, undercapitalized operators who used flexible truck logging techniques to selectively cut the most valuable trees in a given timber block. Hundreds of truck logging operations and ‘gypo’ sawmills sprang up around the province, providing work for thousands: between five and twenty-five men worked on a typical Interior gypo operation. In 1947 there were 61 sawmills operating in the Quesnel district alone, nearly

² The dispossession and displacement stemming from the construction of the Kenney Dam has received far less scholarly attention than that which stemmed from the construction of dams on the Columbia and Peace rivers during the 1960s. See Jean Clark Giesbrecht, *Heritage Lost: A People’s History of the Ootsa Lake Region, 1905-1975* ( Likely: Quesnel Lake Publishing, 1994); Cyril Shelford, *From Snowshoes to Politics* (Victoria: Orca, 1987), chapter 13; J.E. Windsor and J.A. McVey, “Annihilation of Both Place and Sense of Place: The Experience of the Cheslatta T’En Canadian First Nation Within the Context of Large-Scale Environmental Projects,” *The Geographical Journal* 171, 2 (June 2005): 146-165.
twice as many as the previous year. By 1952 there were 180 mills within a 30-mile radius of the town.\(^3\)

This boom was closely associated with the widespread availability of gas-powered technologies like chainsaws, caterpillar tractors, and surplus army trucks, and the development of small truck-portable sawmills that could be hauled right into the bush. It was also closely linked to the construction of a capillary network of logging roads, and, less obviously, to the improvement of secondary and arterial highways so that they could accommodate trucks hauling heavy loads of timber. The expansion of BC’s Interior forest industry went hand-in-hand with the expansion of the Interior road network during the postwar years – the same network of roads that invited a growing number of working- and middle-class motorists to explore the landscapes of their province, learning about nature and history by the road.

Even though BC’s postwar forestry boom was heavily reliant on fixed infrastructure built by the state, it was imbued with a kind of frontier mentality. Truck loggers and gypo sawmill operators saw themselves as the modern-day equivalent of the prospectors, teamsters, and pioneer ranchers of the late nineteenth century: small bands of men – often family and friends – who were determined to be their own bosses and eschew waged employment in the cities of the Coast. These petty producers prized ruggedly masculine liberal values like independence, self-reliance, innovation, and personal initiative. They called for level playing fields and equal opportunities, and preferred to imagine they were not dependent on government policies or political favours. Nevertheless, truck loggers were constantly clamouring for the Forest Service and the

\(^3\) Bernsohn, *Cutting Up the North*, 58.
Department of Public Works to build more and better roads that would help ‘open up’ the country.\(^4\)

The Interior forest industry had traditionally been concentrated along the province’s east-west rail lines, but with the rise of flexible truck logging techniques after World War Two it expanded into areas where it had not been prominent before, including the Cariboo. Trucks loaded with logs, poles, and lumber became a common sight along the region’s main roads, including the Cariboo Highway. From the spot where it was fallen, timber was typically skidded a short distance to a diesel-powered portable sawmill where it was sawn into dimensional lumber colloquially known as ‘northern inferior’ due to its rough, irregular quality. Much of this green lumber was subsequently trucked to another, larger mill – a planer mill – where it would be re-cut to more precise dimensions and then stacked in enormous piles to dry before being shipped to market by railcar.

The Cariboo saw some of the most dramatic growth in the Interior forest industry. By the early 1950s, planer mills, plywood plants, and drying kilns had been built at multiple points along the route of the PGE, including at 70 Mile House near Clinton, 100 Mile House, Williams Lake, and Quesnel. The growth of the forest industry in the Cariboo was only overshadowed by its spectacular growth in northern BC. Prince George became the undisputed capital of northern BC’s forest industry after 1952, when the ‘Prince George Eventually’ finally reached town. As the most important junction in northern BC’s transportation network, Prince George was considered a prime candidate

\(^4\) Bernsohn, *Cutting Up the North*, chapter 10; Drushka, *Tie Hackers*, chapters 7-8; Hak, *Capital and Labour*, 51-64. Gordon Hak has concluded that fathers, sons, and brothers were at the core of most Interior truck logging and gypo sawmill operations. “Companies were owned by one man or perhaps a few partners who were close to their operations and their workers and involved in the day-to-day physical activities of producing logs.” *Capital and Labour*, 37, 53.
for a pulp mill. So were crossroads communities like Quesnel in the northern Interior, Kamloops in the central Interior, and Castlegar and Cranbook in the southern Interior.\(^5\)

The Interior forest industry began to consolidate in the early 1950s, as the provincial government implemented sustained yield forestry policies that were intended to make more efficient long-term use of the province’s timber resources. Many policies associated with this shift benefitted large operators backed by international capital, particularly the establishment of tree farm licenses, which provided perpetually renewable tenure over enormous tracts of forest. Big mills bought up small mills and their associated timber leases, then contracted truck loggers and other small operators to build their logging roads and do their cutting and hauling. By the early 1950s truck loggers and other petty producers associated with the Interior forest industry were growing anxious that they are being squeezed out by government policies that unfairly favoured the big players. In communities around the Interior there was a sense of crisis even in the midst of an economic boom. Petty producers were concerned about losing their traditional access to resources and markets, while hinterland liberal ideals of egalitarianism, independence, and self-mastery seemed to be under threat from anonymous bankers, indifferent politicians, and technocratic experts who were based in distant metropoles. In 1952 this growing undercurrent of anxiety helped propel the populist, pro-free enterprise Social Credit party to power.\(^6\)


The simultaneous growth and consolidation of the forest industry also led to jockeying between companies, communities, and districts, as high demand and new techniques combined to challenge traditional boundaries and understandings of region. Territorial disputes broke out all over the province, with highways, bridges, and other fixed infrastructure playing strategic roles. For example, early proposals for the construction of a pulp mill in Prince George were accompanied by discussions about how to get a steady year-round supply of wood fibre. One proposal called for a tree farm license that would encompass the Willow River watershed, including its headwaters in the highlands around Wells and Barkerville. The nearby Bowron Lakes area was also identified as a reservoir of long-term timber supply. These proposals caused agitation in Quesnel, which was the traditional entrepot for those sections of the Cariboo Plateau. Loggers, mill owners, and merchants in Quesnel objected to the notion of a Prince George pulp mill snatching the rights to timber they considered rightfully theirs. A study by the Forest Service had noted the difficulty of moving timber from the Bowron and upper Willow watersheds to Quesnel, but that had been before the development of truck-logging techniques made it feasible to haul large volumes of timber overland. Forest companies and forest workers based in Quesnel argued they should be allowed to cut, haul, and process any timber taken from the upper Willow and Bowron watersheds. They asserted the only barrier to this was the state of the Quesnel-Barkerville road, which they wanted the provincial government to improve so that it could accommodate heavy logging trucks.7

7 For a feasibility study of logging in the Willow River watershed and Bowron Lakes district during the interwar years, see BCMFL, W.W. Stevens, “Reconnaissance Between Quesnel and Barkerville” (Victoria: British Columbia Forest Service, 1923).
Crisis Amidst Prosperity in BC’s Roadside Service Industry

British Columbia’s postwar boom was not driven exclusively by the forest industry. The mining of base metals such as lead, zinc, and copper remained strong. The construction of power transmission lines, pipelines, smelters, mills, waterworks, new and improved roads, and schools and government buildings provided employment for thousands. There was also substantial growth in the service and hospitality sector, where a general increase in business travel was overshadowed by an enormous increase in auto tourism, sightseeing, and pleasure travel.

The postwar boom in pleasure travel was made possible by savings accumulated during the war, steadily rising incomes, increased rates of working- and middle-class automobile ownership, and the annual paid vacation time that was built into most postwar union contracts. It was facilitated by the improvement and expansion of the provincial highway network and encouraged by the development of public amenities like the provincial parks, with their free campsites and scenic, natural, and recreational attractions. It was also encouraged by the myriad promotional efforts of roadside business operators, automobile manufacturers, and oil companies who stood to profit from increased consumption of their goods and services. Furthermore, the provincial government took an increasingly active role in promoting tourism during the postwar years, treating it as an industry that merited direct support. The provincial government conducted extensive publicity campaigns through the British Columbia Government Travel Bureau. The bureau promoted BC in print and on film, at tradeshows and on billboards, to visitors from afar and also to British Columbians, who were encouraged to
hit the road and become more familiar with their own province: to see BC first, to “know
British Columbia better.”

While many aspects of the postwar boom in pleasure travel and auto tourism were
novel, particularly the working class being brought into the motoring public, it should be
considered part of a longer trajectory. In terms of tourism promotion, Michael Dawson
has shown that BC’s boosters and businesses never completely abandoned the field
during the Depression or the war years. Their work planted seeds of curiosity and desire
that came to fruition during the postwar years. Beyond advertising’s role in stimulating
consumption and steering travel patterns, it is also important to consider the changing
social geography of western Canada. In 1951 a quarter million British Columbians – fully
twenty percent of the province’s total population – had moved there from the Prairie
provinces, most of them since 1930. Also, a large percentage of the people living in
Coastal cities and fast-growing regional centres like Kamloops and Prince George had
migrated there from BC’s smaller hinterland communities. Given how many residents of
the province’s cities and suburbs were in fact people from rural and small-town
backgrounds, it seems reasonable to believe that much of the in-province and inter-
province travel that passed for tourism during the postwar years actually revolved around
the maintenance of family links and ties to hinterland communities and rural activities
like fishing, hunting, and camping. For many westerners the arterial highways of the BC

8 The slogan “Know British Columbia Better” is from a BC Government Travel Bureau advertisement in
the 1948 edition of “The Traveller’s Digest,” a guidebook published in Banff. On the provincial
government’s publicity efforts during the postwar years, see Dawson, Selling British Columbia, chapters 4-
6; Duffy, Evergreen Playground; David Mattison, “The British Columbia Government Travel Bureau and
Motion Picture Production, 1937-1947” in Gene Walz, ed., Flashback: People and Institutions in Canadian
Film History (Montreal: Mediatexte, 1986): 79-104.
9 Dawson, Selling British Columbia.
10 Barman, The West Beyond the West, 273.
Interior provided an affordable way to keep in touch with friends and family, wherever they might be located, while enjoying themselves en route.

The postwar years held great promise for BC’s roadside commercial operators. As shown in the chapters on the Hope-Princeton and Big Bend highways, there were flurries of interest in opening new lodges, autocourts, gas stations, and cafés even before the end of the war. These kinds of businesses were seen as ideal for veterans and other undercapitalized operators. Like truck logging, they provided an opportunity to be one’s own boss in an industry that appeared poised for a boom. As during the interwar years, most of the roadside commercial operations opened during the first postwar decade were owned by families, occasionally with financial backing from an oil company. Family-owned operations dominated the service sector in the BC Interior all through the 1950s and 1960s; only in the 1970s did corporate franchises start to gain a foothold in major centres. These small businesses faced new opportunities and challenges as the provincial government poured money into modernizing the highway network, and as the rapid motorization of BC’s working class vastly expanded the market for food, gas, lodging, and other roadside services.

As with the Interior forest industry, there were reasons for anxiety in BC’s roadside accommodation and service industry even in the midst a major boom. For established operators, the postwar boom brought many more potential customers, but it also brought greater competition. New businesses sprang up along existing highway corridors, while new highways changed the motoring public’s established travel patterns. The Hope-Princeton Highway provides an excellent illustration of this. From 1926 to 1949 every automobile that had driven between BC’s Coast and Interior had gone by way
of the Fraser and Thompson canyons. As shown in Chapter Nine, the drive through the
canyon was one of the province’s most widely shared and culturally significant landscape
experiences. By offering motorists a more direct route between the Coast and the
southern Interior, the Hope-Princeton Highway spurred the growth of the roadside service
sector in the Similkameen and Okanagan valleys and the Boundary country. The south
Okanagan underwent some of the greatest changes, with a profusion of fruit stands, ice
cream vendors, and lakeside motels and campgrounds. The Hope-Princeton also diverted
a significant proportion of the traffic that had traditionally passed through the canyons.
Business owners along the canyon route complained about Manning Park’s free
campgrounds and elaborate government-owned concession complex. They accused the
provincial government of unfairly competing against them, and of acting as a commercial
monopoly along the Hope-Princeton corridor. They even complained about the roadside
signs that the Parks Division put up to indicate the distance to Pinewoods Lodge,
claiming they were a type of advertising forbidden elsewhere in the province. Once the
Department of Public Works turned its attention to modernizing the highway through the
Fraser and Thompson canyons, these same business owners complained about the detours
and delays associated with construction, claiming they were driving the motoring public
away and thus driving small operators out of business.11

BC’s postwar highway modernization program led to the expropriation of many
properties that bordered on existing highway rights-of-way, including those that belonged
to businesses that depended on the motoring public for their profits. Every widening,
realignment, bypass, or restriction on commercial signage that affected established

11 See for example BCA, GR-1222, box 84, file 2 passim.
roadside businesses seemed to generate a bevy of complaints. For the owners of these businesses, the modernization of BC’s road network was a double-edged sword. They wanted good roads, because a road that was not up to the motoring public’s expectations might get a bad reputation that would steer potential customers away. But they also had to worry about detours and delays that might drive motorists away in the short term, and about the potential loss of some or all of their property to expropriation.

British Columbia’s roadside commercial operators also had reason to worry about how the province’s highway corridors looked to the motoring public. They regularly complained that the government was not doing enough to keep roadside landscapes in appealing condition. For example, they complained about litter, wandering livestock, junkyards, logging clear-cuts, gravel pits, the presence of signage, the absence of signage, traffic going too slow, traffic going too fast, unregulated roadside development, and all manner of perceived eyesores. For them, the appearance of BC’s roadside landscapes was an important business concern, for it shaped the popular reputation of roads, regions, and communities with the motoring public.

Changes Along the Canyon Highway

In 1946 the toll charged to cross the Alexandra Suspension Bridge near Spuzzum was eliminated after 20 years of complaining by pleasure travellers, commercial truck drivers, and Interior tourism promoters. The removal of the toll symbolically declared the BC Interior open for business and invited the motoring public to enjoy the ‘freedom of the road’ after five years of gas rationing and proscriptions against pleasure travel.

12 See for example the editorials in the issues of Northwest Digest for January-February and September-October of 1958.
Removing the toll eliminated a material barrier to the rapidly growing number of automobile owners in BC’s Coastal population centres who might want to visit family, go sightseeing, or participate in recreational activities in the Interior. Politically, cancellation of the toll was necessitated by the impending completion of the toll-free Hope-Princeton Highway: the government could not give the impression of favouring the new route into the southern Interior over the established route into the central and northern Interior.¹³

Figure 11.1: Unimproved section of the Fraser Canyon Highway, 1961. Courtesy of University of Victoria Archives, Chester P. Lyons collection.

During the late 1940s the provincial government began to improve the road through the Fraser and Thompson canyons, which had comprised part of the Trans-

¹³ For a sampling of wartime and postwar correspondence on the toll charged at the Alexandra Suspension Bridge, see BCA, GR-1222, box 34, file 2, Motor Carrier and Fleet Owners of Western Canada to Premier Patullo, 18 June 1941; box 55, file 5 passim. The text of the speech announcing the cancellation of the toll can be found in BCA, GR-1222, box 63, file 6, undated 1946 speech by the Minister of Public Works to the Legislature.
Canada Highway since 1940. By 1951 motorists from the Coast who travelled beyond
Hope could drive over paved surfaces all the way to Clinton in the north, Kamloops in
the east, and Princeton in the south. Hope went from being a sleepy village to an
important junction point, where motorists chose which route to follow into the
mountainous Interior. By 1949 it had 21 campgrounds, autocourts, motels, and hotels,
providing accommodations for up to 400 travellers. By the late 1950s local boosters were
styling Hope as BC’s “gateway to holidayland.”14

Modernization of the Fraser Canyon Highway affected the motoring public’s
experiences of history by the road. Stone retaining walls, timber cribbings, and other
traces of the Cariboo Wagon Road that had been familiar to motorists since the late 1920s
were destroyed or obscured by lane widening, realignments, and efforts to stabilize the
frangible cliffs that loomed above the highway. “The old road can still be seen, but is
now mixed with long stretches of new highway,” the perambulating Victoria grocer
Leonard Coton recorded in his diary in the early 1950s. The new paved surface also
allowed motorists to travel at higher speeds. This, in combination with a steady growth in
both the volume of traffic and the size of vehicles on the road, made it difficult to
experience the canyon’s landscapes at the leisurely pace that had previously been
possible.15

Instead of parking on the side of the highway wherever they pleased, as had
generally been possible during the interwar years, motorists who travelled through the
Fraser Canyon during the postwar years were effectively restricted to stopping at places
that the Department of Public Works had intentionally set aside for that reason. For safety

14 Road Victory Won, Hope Seeks Power,” *Vancouver Province,* 2 November 1949.
15 BCA, MS-2723 Leonard A. Coton papers, diary titled “My latest and probably ‘last’ trip,” 3.
purposes – and often at the urging of tourism promoters, the Parks Division, or the BC Government Travel Bureau – Public Works constructed a series of paved pullouts at points where there were scenic views or interesting natural features like a waterfall. This work was akin to what was being done at the Skagit Bluffs, the Rhododendron Grove, the roadside remnant of the Dewdney Trail, and other points of interest along the new Hope-Princeton Highway. The Parks Division also established several small roadside parks in the Fraser and Thompson canyons during the early 1950s, including Emory Creek, Skihist, and Goldpan. With their picnic sites, free campgrounds, and pit toilets, these stopping places quickly became popular with the motoring public.

Although the canyon highway was considerably improved during the late 1940s and 1950s, the drive never lost its sense of the sublime, the possibility that danger – and thus adventure – might be looming around every corner. Sections of the road remained narrow and precarious, especially when compared to new highways like the Hope-Princeton. For example, the tunnels in the Fraser Canyon remained incapable of accommodating two full-size cars side-by-side. The Alexandra Bridge retained its steel open-grate deck, which allowed motorists to look down into the churning river. The cringe-inducing one-lane grasshopper trestle that swung out over the abyss at China Bar Bluff remained in place until the early 1960s.

During the postwar years the experience of driving through the Fraser and Thompson canyons was increasingly dominated by natural scenery. There was still history by the road, but it was increasingly difficult for motorists to discern. One travelogue writer made a rather dangerous recommendation to tourists who wanted to get a sense of what travel through the canyons had been like during BC’s gold rush days:
Leave your car at one of the viewpoints on the fine new paved highway north of the suspension bridge and scramble down the rocky bank to the old [wagon] road. You will find at almost any place you happen to choose examples of engineering skill that will astonish you. [...] Reconstruct in your imagination the narrow road clinging to the rocky abutments and following their steep grades. Put yourself in a six-horse stagecoach and go rocketing around those curves and down those grades at top speed. Then you will have some idea of what was done here [emphasis added].

In the early 1950s Leonard Coton complained that “Lytton, for all its great history, was a disappointment to me.” The town had lost most of its gold rush-era buildings to fire, and had done nothing to identify or interpret the few that remained. Coton believed local residents ought to “make some attempt to interest the tourists” by cultivating “places and things which might perpetuate those old days.” Conversely, he heaped praise on Ashcroft and Cache Creek, where boosters and businesses continued to have old stagecoaches and freight wagons “well displayed by the roadside,” evoking the romance of the Cariboo Wagon Road.

The motoring public’s shared landscape experiences became more tightly structured in the Fraser and Thompson canyons during the late 1940s and 1950s. Historical landscape features gradually became concentrated at a limited number of state-designated stopping places, primarily in the form of monuments, plaques, and markers, like the HSMBC cairns at Hope and Yale. The combination of higher speeds and higher traffic volumes even discouraged many travellers from pulling off the highway at these spots. Furthermore, several sections of the canyon highway were realigned to keep traffic off the ‘main street’ of communities like Yale, Spuzzum, and Lytton, as well as several Indian reserves. This was done to reduce the hazard associated with high-speed traffic

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17 BCA, MS-2723, “My latest and probably ‘last’ trip,” 6, 9-10.
passing through built-up areas with pedestrians and intersecting driveways. It was probably no coincidence that the market for hand-woven cedar basketry and other native handicrafts went into steep decline around the time the canyon highway was realigned to bypass Spuzzum, where the old general store had been selling these goods, as well as the Lytton Indian reserve, where Rose Skukai’s roadside store was located.  

Ironically, Indian motifs grew more popular even as the changing form and route of the highway detoured the motoring public away from interaction with native people. For example, an old boarding house in Lytton rebranded itself the Totem Motel and Auto Court during the early 1950s. The Tee-Pee Café opened near Boston Bar around the same time. Having moved to BC from southern Ontario, the Koropecki family recognized there were good prospects for another roadside café in the canyon. They bought a 15-acre parcel that fronted on the highway and built a wood-frame, stucco-coated café in the shape of a 30-foot-tall tipi, which they painted with southwestern Indian motifs like cattle skulls and cacti. With its whimsical styling, the Tee-Pee Café became a popular canyon landmark and one of BC’s most eye-catching roadside businesses. The Koropeckis operated the café until the late 1950s when the Department of Highways expropriated their property and demolished the Tee-Pee in order to modernize that section of the canyon highway.

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19 Some tourism promoters conducted a campaign to make totem poles the premier symbol of British Columbia during the postwar years. From 1952 through 1954 a stylized thunderbird totem pole was even stamped on the province’s passenger license plates. See Dawson, Selling British Columbia, 165-175; Christopher Garrish, Tales From the Back Bumper: A Century of British Columbia’s History as Seen Through the Province’s License Plates (Victoria: Heritage House, forthcoming [2013]), chapter 3.
20 June Koropecki, Life in the Tee-Pee (Lytton: Freedom Graphics, 2010). The Koropeckis were doubtless inspired by the Wigwam Villages, an American auto court franchise that became famous during the interwar years for its tipi-shaped cabin units.
The Totem and the Tee-Pee were part of the wave of roadside commercial development that swept BC during the first postwar decade. They were joined in the Fraser and Thompson canyons by more than twenty new businesses that sprang up around Hope, Yale, Boston Bar, Lytton, and Spences Bridge. Most of these new businesses strove to emphasize how new and modern they were, largely as a way of differentiating themselves from older operations, many of which were run-down and lacked what many travellers were starting to consider basic amenities, like heated cabins, electric lighting, flush toilets, and hot showers. Most of the roadside accommodations built in BC during the first postwar decade were cabin-style autocourts, but motels grew in popularity after 1950. They required more capital to build, sometimes having two stories, as well as washrooms for each room. Motels also tended to use new types of signage, including illuminated signs and neon, to catch the attention of fast-moving motorists.

Guidebooks and accommodation guides show that many of the roadside commercial operations that opened along the canyon highway during the late 1940s and early 1950s eschewed the cultivation of historical associations, instead choosing names that were related to a scenic or natural feature. There were a handful of Kanyon View Cafés for each Gold Nugget Auto Camp. Stopping places that played up their connection to the province’s past, like Alexandra Lodge, became fewer and further between during these years. With the widened road, faster traffic, and changing roadside commercial forms, the landscapes that were visible along the canyon highway corridor lost much of their power to evoke the trudging prospectors, creaking freight wagons, and racing stagecoaches of the gold rush days. The canyon route retained its sublime scenery and
many of the kinesthetic thrills of the interwar years, but was becoming streamlined in terms of history by the road.

Changes Along the Cariboo Highway

The motoring public’s experiences of history by the road were also affected by changes along the plateau section of the Cariboo Highway. As indicated above, the scale and pace of postwar change were especially dramatic in the Cariboo, and thus the contrast between past and present especially sharp. These changes generated a sense of crisis in some circles, a sense that important and sometimes irreplaceable links to the past were disappearing in an era of big business and big government. Some Cariboo residents lamented the loss of pioneer values. Others worried about the effects of commercial and industrial eyesores on scenic landscapes. Still others grew anxious about the loss of old buildings and other historical landscape features, many of which had been familiar to the motoring public since the late 1920s. The absence of familiar roadside landmarks could be quite obvious along the Cariboo Highway due to the region’s relatively undifferentiated scenery and the great distances between towns.

Gold rush-era roadhouses were becoming fewer and further between along the Cariboo Highway during the postwar years, continuing the decline that had briefly been arrested by the gold mining (and trucking) boom of the 1930s. Several old roadhouses were demolished or bypassed when sections of the highway were paved, widened, or realigned in order to allow heavier loads, higher speeds, and greater safety. For example, the 59 Mile House near Clinton burned down shortly after it was bypassed by a highway realignment, causing many neighbours to suspect a case of “insurance fire.” Also lost
during the immediate postwar years were the 74 Mile House north of the Chasm and the 122 Mile House at Lac La Hache. The original 83 Mile House was also bypassed, but its owners were able to get a bank loan that allowed them to build a motel and diner beside the highway’s new alignment. In 1955, Kersley House, a former roadhouse located 15 miles south of Quesnel, was destroyed by a fire, along with numerous relics contained inside.\footnote{Patenaude, \textit{Trails to Gold}, vol.2 16, 30; “Fire Destroys Kersley House,” \textit{Cariboo Observer} 17 February 1955, 1.}

Other historical landscape features were threatened or obscured by their proximity to new roadside commercial developments. For example, in the late 1940s a service station selling British American Oil products was built at Alexandria, right beside the

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.9\textwidth]{service_station_cairn Alexand.jpg}
\caption{Service station and HSMBC cairn at Alexandria, mid 1950s. Courtesy of University of Victoria Archives, Chester P. Lyons collection.}
\end{figure}
cairn erected by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada in 1936. In the early 1950s that section of highway was widened and paved, and as a result the service station parking lot was the only practical place for motorists to pull over and leave their car while looking at the cairn that commemorated fur trade-era Fort Alexandria. Furthermore, the sign for the service station was located at the foot of the broad mound which the cairn sat atop, which could be seen to imply that the monument was somehow sponsored by the commercial operation. At some point in the late 1950s a sign advertising five-cent pony rides was placed in the parking lot beside the mound, further distracting from the historic monument. The cairn was effectively subordinated to the service station.22

Even the Chasm, the Cariboo’s most famous natural attraction, became less visible to the motoring public during the postwar years. In the late 1940s it was bypassed by a major realignment of the Cariboo Highway north of Clinton. Where formerly every vehicle passing along the highway had traversed the edge of the Chasm, it was now located more than a mile down a side road from the main travel corridor. Away from view, the guardrails along the precipice were allowed to fall into disrepair, and nothing was done to indicate that it was part of a provincial park. Motorists who took the extra time to seek out the Chasm were “horrified” to find sawdust, garbage, and even wrecked

22 An overview of the situation at Alexandria is provided in BCA, GR-1661, box 4, file 5, J. Hatter, Director, Fish and Game Branch, Department of Recreation and Conservation, to Deputy Minister D.B. Turner, 21 July 1964; H.G. McWilliams to Lawrie Wallace, 29 July 1964. Thank you to Leslie Middleton and the volunteers at the Quesnel and District Museum and Archives for tracking down information on this roadside business.
cars dumped over the precipice. Complaining to the BC Government Travel Bureau, they blamed workers at a nearby sawmill for these “acts of vandalism.”

By the late 1940s the town of Quesnel was an important centre of the Interior forest industry. It was strategically located, what with being on the Fraser River, the PGE mainline, and the Cariboo Highway, and at the junction of several secondary roads that led into heavily forested districts. Quesnel got a new plywood plant in 1950 and had many planer mills – only Prince George, 75 miles to the north, had more. There were proposals to dam the Quesnel River for hydroelectric power, and talk that a pulp mill might be built one day, which would bring hundreds of year-round industrial jobs.

Quesnel’s population leapt from 650 in 1941 to 1500 a decade later. It was becoming a more stable and prosperous town, one of the emerging regional centres associated with BC’s booming resource economy, the kind of town that local boosters believed could afford civic amenities like a swimming pool, an indoor ice rink, and a museum that would encourage auto tourists to stop over for a few hours.

Quesnel still had its open-air ‘museum’ on Front Street, but it was in embarrassingly bad condition. By the end of the war the old HBC freight canoe was on the verge of disintegrating, and the local board of trade struggled to maintain the Cornish pump waterwheel, which the Cariboo Observer referred to as the town’s “most famous landmark.” Only the dour stone-and-bronze HSMBC monument that commemorated the Collins Overland Telegraph seemed impervious to the elements. Furthermore, the growing volume of cars and trucks that travelled along Front Street – which remained a

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section of the Cariboo Highway – made it less safe and less appealing for motorists to stop and look at these artifacts of the fur trade and gold rush days. Quesnel’s boosters and tourism promoters concluded that the town required a new historical attraction.24

In 1946 Quesnel residents were invited to submit proposals for a memorial that would honour district residents who had served in the war. A front-page editorial in the *Cariboo Observer* suggested the most fitting memorial would be a civic building that would house a library, restrooms for visitors to town, and a “museum of Cariboo relics.” Cariboo MLA Louis LeBourdais was expected to throw his support behind this scheme, but he passed away before it got very far. Doubtless to the surprise and disappointment of many of local boosters and history enthusiasts, LeBourdais willed his personal collection of gold rush-era papers and artifacts to the provincial archives in Victoria, including old firefighting equipment from Richfield, the yokes for a freight team of oxen, and original insulators from the Collins Overland Telegraph line. Losing these valuable items to a repository on the Coast was a setback for Quesnel’s museum supporters, and the scheme was shelved for several years.25

The idea of building a museum in Quesnel was resurrected in 1950, when village commissioners revived their plan to construct a public restroom for the convenience of visitors to town. The washroom proposal inspired several community groups to argue that a museum should be constructed in conjunction with it, including delegations from the district’s Women’s Institutes and the North Cariboo Growers Co-operative, both of which offered to help raise funds for it. Despite these offers of financial support, the joint

washroom/museum scheme bogged down for reasons that are unclear. However, this second proposal for a museum brought Quesnel’s various history enthusiasts together, and they began collecting artifacts and old documents. Cognizant of the fact that much of Quesnel’s business district had been consumed by fire in 1916, they arranged for these relics to be stored in the basement of the post office, which was one of the town’s few brick structures. This cooperation eventually led to the establishment of the Cariboo Historical Society, which is discussed below.26

Many Quesnel residents supported the idea of developing a new historical attraction in town. However, it was important that the town not be mistaken for a historical relic in and of itself. In 1950 the local board of trade and several unnamed “old-timers” chastised journalist Bruce Hutchison for describing Quesnel as a “former ghost town” in Macleans magazine. They appreciated getting “a welcome piece of publicity,” but insisted that Hutchison (who they pointedly referred to as a “coast newsman”) had gotten a key part of his story wrong. “Quesnel has never before been labelled a ghost town,” sniffed the editor of the Cariboo Observer. “Residents could not argue with the description ‘sleepy little hamlet’ […] but the ghost town idea rankles.” Quesnel was an up-and-coming community, an important transportation hub, and an emerging industrial centre. By no means was it to be confused with moldering, isolated places like Stanley, Barkerville, or Quesnel Forks.27

The rapid postwar growth of regional centres like Quesnel, Williams Lake, Kamloops, and Prince George was accompanied by an increasingly modern look, with new mills, new government buildings, new hard-surfaced main streets, new traffic lights, new schools, and new hospitals. The town’s population continued to grow, and with it, the demand for services and amenities. The museum became a symbol of this growth, and a testament to Quesnel’s past and future.28

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27 “Writers Turn Eyes to Central Interior,” Cariboo Observer 8 June 1950, 9.

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new signs and advertisements, a growing volume of car and truck traffic, and a growing number of homes with electricity, indoor plumbing, telephones, and oil furnaces. Amidst these transformations, which were proudly trumpeted in local newspapers, some smaller, older Interior communities that had been bypassed by the postwar boom – communities that did not get a large new sawmill, or were situated away from the main highways – became increasingly appealing to history buffs, auto tourists, and tourism promoters. The relative scarcity of such sleepy, ‘old-timey’ places increased their perceived cultural and economic value. Barkerville was one of those places. It had slipped into decline after the gold mining boom fizzled, and by the late 1940s was back on its way to becoming a ghost town. The old government assay office was condemned and demolished in 1947, as were the former HBC store and the Scott Saloon, the latter of which had been one of a handful of buildings to survive the great fire of 1868. The remaining residents of Barkerville and Wells were not shy about taking windows, sashes, and other useful fixtures from abandoned buildings, and sometimes tore down disused cabins for firewood. The badly dilapidated structures in Chinatown, the uppermost section of the townsite, were particularly susceptible to this fate. Antique collectors and souvenir-hunting tourists entered unused buildings and took away almost anything that was portable.  

In Stanley, where only a handful of people lived after the war, the old Grand Hotel (which was owned by Bill Hong of Wells) was consumed by flames in 1948. No one was hurt, but none of its many old fixtures and furnishings could be saved. Eight months later, in January 1949, an overheated stovepipe caused a fire in the attic of Barkerville’s famous Kelly Hotel, which had been built in 1870. Disaster was avoided in

28 Skelton, *They Call It the Cariboo*, 219.
that case because the building’s tin roof slowed the spread of the fire, allowing time for the Barkerville and Wells volunteer fire brigades to arrive and save the hotel with only minimal damage. The Kelly family had made the hotel saloon into a kind of informal repository for gold rush-era artifacts collected by local history enthusiasts. While firefighters directed by Bill Hong were busy battling the blaze, volunteers raced to remove these treasures to the safety of the street, suggesting local awareness of the need to preserve the town’s historic features. In 1951 the Boyd family sold Cottonwood House on the Quesnel-Barkerville road, severing ties with a famous landmark their family had owned since the early 1870s.29

The loss of old buildings and other historical landscape features along the Cariboo Highway corridor was part of a broader trend in BC during the first postwar decade. Historical landscape features that had become familiar to the motoring public as a result of being located alongside the province’s arterial highways (which tended to follow the route of earlier trails and wagon roads) were disappearing at an alarming rate. These sites and structures had become important parts of a shared ‘BC’ culture since the late 1920s, a culture that revolved around landscape experiences structured by public roads, private automobiles, and the practice of driving. The loss of familiar historical landscape features was particularly obvious in districts with relatively flat terrain, like the Cariboo, where the gently rolling plateau lands allowed highway engineers greater leeway for new alignments than was possible in mountainous areas where roads were constrained by steep natural contours. The loss of familiar historical landscape features was also acute on the approaches to town centres, where property was both affordable and desirable for the

construction of new roadside commercial operations, fuel depots, timber sorting yards, and light industrial plants.

In the Cariboo, as in many parts of the Interior, postwar prosperity prompted the replacement and renovation of old, weathered structures, which had been neglected during the war years (when materials were scarce) and the Depression (when cash was scarce). It was often easier to build a brand new home or business than to refit an older one with insulation, electrical wiring, a new heating source, and the pipes needed for running water and indoor toilets. Some old buildings were torn down, but many more were left to weather, decay, and collapse under the weight of accumulated winter snow. In the midst a boom that was driven by resource extraction and the construction of modern infrastructure there seemed to be little thought of preserving (let alone restoring) old buildings and other landscape features that were associated with the province’s past. For some Cariboo residents these losses stirred up great concern. These distinctive and evocative landmarks were part of local and regional identities. They were often also part of a popular image that boosters, tourism promoters, and roadside business owners had been cultivating since the late 1920s – that is to say, they were historical, and also had a history of being recognized as historical. A district or community or highway corridor that lost a significant proportion of its distinctive roadside landscape features, whether they were scenic, natural, or historical, was at risk of becoming undifferentiated, of losing its appeal, of failing to meet the motoring public’s expectations. Having invested time, energy, and money in cultivating and promoting a romantic, old-timey image around their region, the boosters, tourism promoters, and small business owners of the Cariboo had
good reason to worry about the ‘thinning’ of history by the road, for they had little else to fall back on.

**Responses to the Crisis**

The tension between new and old, progress and prudence, the impulse to modernize and the impulse to preserve, was writ large in the pages of *Northwest Digest*, a bimonthly magazine established in Quesnel in 1945.³⁰ *Northwest Digest* focused on northern BC and the northern Interior and represented the interests of small-town merchants, independent construction contractors, and petty producers like truck loggers. Its main fare consisted of stories (and advertisements) related to logging, farming, ranching, commercial hauling, hunting, and fishing. The magazine was enthusiastic about opening the province up to new resource extraction activity through the construction of highways, railways, logging roads, air strips, and power lines. It was also generally enthusiastic about the provincial government taking an active role in the economy through the construction (and maintenance) of this fixed infrastructure. While the magazine was unwavering in its support of free enterprise, it was sometimes critical of government policies that seemed to unfairly favour large corporations.

*Northwest Digest* was also in favour of tourism, conservation, and outdoor recreation. It regularly promoted the Interior and northern BC as destinations for pleasure travel and sightseeing, and printed editorials about the importance of preserving these regions’ attractions, whether they be scenery, wildlife, game fish, totem poles, or historic

³⁰ Originally published as *Cariboo Digest*, the magazine underwent several name changes. It was rebranded *Northwest Digest* in the early 1950s, then *British Columbia Digest* in the 1960s, and finally *BC Outdoors* in the early 1970s.
buildings. It also printed many stories about BC’s history. A frequent contributor of history-themed articles was Art Downs, who was especially keen on the history of transportation: his first article, about sternwheel steamboats on the lakes and rivers of the BC Interior, was published in 1950, in the same issue that had a multi-page history of Quesnel. Downs took over the journal in 1955 and was the publisher and editor for many years thereafter. Though it had a ‘frontier mentality,’ Northwest Digest was not uncritical. It ran stories that highlighted some of the unevenness and contradictions of the postwar boom, and complained about eyesores and wasteful practices.

A 1951 editorial by Quesnel resident F.W. Lindsay captured Northwest Digest’s concern about the neglect of BC’s past so well that it merits full inclusion here. Titled “We Never Think,” it criticized British Columbians for their failure to recognize the cultural and potential economic value of the province’s ghost towns, old buildings, and other historical landscape features.

We admire the United States and its people for the reverence and homage they pay their heroes. We in British Columbia, however, are far more practical. We don’t honor our dead, we don’t cherish our shrines or our history. We cherish nothing but the Dollar (spelled with a capital, as though it were either Holy or Royal). We cherish dreams of hydro plants, paper plants, pulp plants, and other kinds of plants which grind out money and industrial diseases of many sorts. We never think of painting a fence around a graveyard, or protecting the oldest courthouse in BC, or keeping green the memory of [the] gallant company of adventurers who lie so silently in the bedraggled burying ground at Barkerville.

One time there was a war-canoe at Quesnel. It was a relic of past times. It rotted and fell away. In the central and eastern provinces the memories of the past are part and parcel for the present and future history. […] Throughout the east there are countless small and well kept museums and these prove to be among the greatest tourist attractions.

There must be some tourist attraction in ancient history and relics. If there is not perhaps someone would explain in words of not more than one syllable why the Americans buy Indian totem poles from Massett and Sandspit and Bella Coola and other points to use in their parks and museums.

If money is the chief end of man in British Columbia it seems as though we are defeating our own ends by letting the past die out. Yale is a forgotten town
and Soda Creek and all the towns between. The thousands of [gold rush-era] argonauts are forgotten. One wonders what tourist will come as far north as Quesnel to see a hydro-electric plant? […] Cariboo is the cradle of BC. The next generation may well wonder what kind of insensate creatures preceded them. A stone cairn stating “Alexander McKenzie passed here” will be a mute testimony to our lack of imagination. […] For years a handful of people in Barkerville have tried to keep some of the points of historic interest intact. [However] the Richfield courthouse above Barkerville is now a skeletal structure whose walls have been profaned, whose windows have been broken and whose history has been all but forgotten. Imagine a building such as that in Washington or Oregon falling into such disrepair. […] There is no museum in Quesnel. One or two people have saved historical curios throughout the years but there is no building in which to house them.

It is not enough that roads are being built and the country opened up in the interests of Industry. There should be more to life than jobs and the creation of jobs. Possibly if there were a little more accent placed upon the pioneer and a little less upon [economic] security we might have time to glance about us and get our house in order.

We personally feel greatly embarrassed whenever a tourist points at the Quesnel cemetery and says, ‘Is THAT your cemetery?’ We feel like crawling under a stone whenever a tourist talking about Barkerville says ‘Well why the dickens don’t you people do something about it?’ And we feel like screaming when some large rotund politico says ‘Of course these things will be attended to… but first of all we must look to the future.’

In 1953 the *Prince George Citizen* echoed elements of Lindsay’s eloquent lament with an editorial titled “Keep Our History Alive.” Like Lindsay, the *Citizen* pointed towards the potential tourism value of BC’s historic sites and landscape features. Unlike Lindsay, it offered a specific prescription for how value could be extracted from them. It recommended that more markers and interpretive signs be erected along the province’s arterial roads in order to make those features legible and meaningful to tourists, the vast majority of whom travelled by automobile.

British Columbia’s colorful past will be lost to the motoring public if something is not done to preserve and mark our historic sites. The BC Automobile Association asks are we missing the boat in not providing a running commentary on signs along the highways telling tourists some of the highlights of our early days.

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31 F.W. Lindsay, “We Never Think,” *Northwest Digest* (March 1951), 8.
The people in the province have been so preoccupied with building the future that already many historic sites have been destroyed. In those instances all that can be done is to ‘mark the spot’ [after the fact]. Buildings connected with our pioneering days need to be rebuilt and preserved. The entire town of Barkerville, for example, could be made into a historic site with so much attraction that tourists would drive miles out of their way to see it. The Windermere Valley is filled with stories of David Thompson and his trips of exploration [yet] little or nothing is left as a record of his adventures in the Kootenays.

In every community there are forgotten stories of our past. This province is a treasure trove of exploratory history. The men who first crossed our mountains and came down our valley deserve to be remembered. […] The Fraser Canyon, the famous Cariboo, and Fort George regions are literally abounding in sites of historic interest, and we might ask why more of these sites are not marked. A running commentary on signs beside the highway would greatly add to tourist enjoyment of Central BC [emphasis added].

It is noteworthy that the Citizen did not specify the people it thought should be responsible for this ambitious program of historic site marking and interpretation.

Rather than wait for some government agency (or the BC Automobile Association) to step in, or rely on the munificence of business owners to cultivate historical attractions that would help lure pleasure travellers into this or that town for a few hours, middle-class history enthusiasts in many parts of the Interior banded together to work for the preservation of historical landscape features that were at risk from demolition through development or decay. The Cariboo Historical Society (CHS) was formed in Quesnel in 1951 with Alvin Johnston of the North Cariboo Growers Cooperative serving as its first president. It had three main goals: to collect documents and artifacts related to the district’s past, to build a museum where this collection could be displayed to the public, and to work for the preservation of the district’s old buildings and other historical landscape features. Members of the Cariboo Historical Society were

particularly concerned about the dwindling number of gold rush-era structures along the Cariboo Highway and in the vicinity of Barkerville. In 1951 the CHS acquired a substantial collection of artifacts from the Boyd family when they sold Cottonwood House on the Quesnel-Barkerville road. They also marked several historical sites with wooden signs during the early 1950s; unfortunately, no list of these markers can be found.  

Though based primarily in Quesnel, the Cariboo Historical Society established chapters around the north and central Cariboo, including in Alexandria and Williams Lake. With encouragement from the CHS, the Wells-Barkerville Historical Society was formed in 1952, with Hazel Kelly serving as president and Bill Hong as vice-president. The formation of a historical society in the gold fields revived talk of building a museum in Barkerville, a scheme that had been proposed several times since the town had become accessible to auto tourists in the late 1920s. Other historical associations were formed in BC’s hinterlands during the early 1950s. In the southern Interior, the Boundary Historical Society formed in 1951. Like the CHS, it took a regional perspective: its membership was centered in Grand Forks, but took an interest in a region extending along the southern transprovincial highway corridor from Rock Creek to Nelson. In northern BC, the Prince George Rotary Club formed a “Canadian history committee” in 1951, with the goal of getting northerners to donate artifacts for a future museum.  

Many of these new historical societies wanted to establish their own museum, but only a few managed to do so during the early 1950s. For example, the South Cariboo

33 Regarding the markers erected by the Cariboo Historical Society during the early 1950s, see “Rbt. Barlow Passes Suddenly,” *Cariboo Observer* 15 July 1954, 1, 4.  
Historical Society opened a museum in Clinton in September 1953, timing the opening ceremony to coincide with the annual rodeo. The museum was housed in Clinton’s former schoolhouse, a brick building that had been built in 1892 and donated by the provincial government. Most of the artifacts were provided by the Payne family, who had owned the Pine Tree Auto Camp and its associated private museum since the early 1930s. R.D. Cumming, the newspaperman and history enthusiast who had set up his own private museum in the offices of the Ashcroft Journal during the 1930s, was invited to address the opening ceremony. The new museum inspired one local resident to erect a roadside cairn of his own design, fashioned from fieldstone gathered at various points along the original Cariboo Wagon Road.36

Clinton remained one of the most intrinsically old-timey towns on the Cariboo Highway, and the Clinton Hotel remained its most famous historical landmark. Nevertheless, the narrow strip of highway that comprised the town’s main street saw significant changes during the early and mid 1950s. Hitching posts disappeared as the growing speed and volume of automobile traffic made it unsafe to ride horses into town. Utility lines were strung overhead. Several false-front stores that lined the highway were remodeled, their logs and whipsawn lumber covered over with stucco and tin siding. Others were torn down and replaced by modern-looking autocourts and gas stations.

Kamloops also received a new museum in the mid 1950s. In 1955, residents of the fast-growing city approved a plebiscite calling for the construction of new homes for the museum and library, which had outgrown the large house they had shared since 1939. As with the recent proposals for a museum in Quesnel, the plan for a new Kamloops

36 “Notes and Comments,” British Columbia Historical Quarterly (July-October 1953), 249, 254.
museum was closely linked to the postwar growth in auto tourism, as indicated by the
inclusion of public washrooms and an office for the local tourism bureau.

A noteworthy feature of the new Kamloops museum was the way it salvaged Old
Fort Kamloops, the town’s first museum, and incorporated as a kind of artifact and
display case. Old Fort Kamloops had been left in Riverside Park when the museum first
relocated in 1939; how it was used in the following decade is unclear. However, in 1949
it had been jacked up, loaded onto a flatbed truck, and transplanted to the front yard of
the second Kamloops museum. When the third Kamloops museum was being built in the
mid 1950s, Old Fort Kamloops was disassembled for the second time in less than 20
years, trucked to the new museum site, and reassembled inside the building on the second
floor, where it housed displays about exploration, the fur trade, and gold rushes in the
central Interior.37

The opening of these new museums must have been inspiring as well as
frustrating for Barkerville boosters, who were not faring well in their quest to get a public
museum in the heart of the Cariboo gold fields. The situation there was quite different
than in fast-growing regional centres like Quesnel, Kamloops, and Prince George. Simply
put, no one in Barkerville or Wells had any money. Those communities were shrinking
rather than growing: there were only around 60 people left in Barkerville and 400 in
Wells. Many Barkerville residents were quite elderly and too poor to relocate even if they
had wanted to. The Wells-Barkerville Historical Society counted local business and
property owners as members, including Bill Hong and George and Hazel Kelly, but their
ventures were generating a small fraction of the income that they had received during the

37 Trayner, “British Columbia’s Community-Based Museums,” 55-64.
boom of the 1930s. Old-timers like the Tregillus and Wendle families donated important records and artifacts, but preserving (let alone restoring) Barkerville’s many historic buildings was beyond the means of the district’s boosters, business owners, and history enthusiasts. The poor condition of the Quesnel-Barkerville road and the fact that motorists would need to double back along the same route if they visited the gold fields were also strikes against the development of a historical tourist attraction.

Lack of progress in getting a public museum at Barkerville inspired long-time resident Fred Ludditt to establish the Barkerville Historic Development Company in 1953. Ludditt owned one of the last hydraulic mines in the district, but harboured dreams of making the Barkerville townsite into a tourist attraction. He imagined leasing or purchasing its remaining dilapidated properties and then fixing them up in a manner that would appeal to auto tourists who were interested in ghost towns and western historical themes. He hoped to raise funds for this scheme from private investors, and probably expected members of his family who owned a construction company in Quesnel to assist with the repair and maintenance work. However, Ludditt was unable to do much more than put up a few signs that identified some of Barkerville’s oldest remaining buildings.38

Between Ludditt, the Wells-Barkerville Historical Society, and the Cariboo Historical Society, many people hoped to breathe some life into the two declining towns by playing up their gold rush past. They scoured the district looking for relics of the nineteenth century, trying to prevent them falling into the hands of antique dealers and souvenir hunters who would take them out of the region (or even out of the province). Large items collected by members of the Wells-Barkerville Historical Society were kept

38 On Fred Ludditt’s efforts, see Ludditt, Gold in the Cariboo; Skelton, They Call it the Cariboo, 219; BCA, GR-1661, box 17, file 1, James McKelvie to Charles V. Axine, 22 August 1964.
in a disused warehouse, while most of the small artifacts continued to be stored in the saloon of the Kelly Hotel. In the mid 1950s the Kelly family began operating the saloon as a kind of private museum, with several hundred visitors each summer, each paying two dollars to enter.

Visitors to Barkerville continued to be impressed by the many weathered buildings that lined its narrow main street and the town’s general atmosphere of old-timey-ness. However, there continued to be complaints about local residents’ perceived lack of business acumen and appreciation of the town’s value as a tourist asset. Some visitors called for the townsite to be placed under the control of experts who would know the best way to preserve, promote, and extract value from its aura of the past. For example, an Edmonton lawyer who visited Barkerville in 1954 was appalled at the condition of the old Richfield courthouse. The building was badly weathered and nearly overgrown with trees and brush on every side. Believing that the courthouse deserved to be preserved “in view of its great historical background,” the lawyer promised to lobby the BC Bar Society and provincial government for some kind of restoration program.39

Anyone who worried about the future of old Barkerville or who doubted the need to act quickly to preserve it as a tourist attraction had only to look at Quesnel Forks for a sobering example of what might be in store. Quesnel Forks was a former gold mining community located 30 miles south of Barkerville and 50 miles upriver from Quesnel. It had been an important mining centre during the early 1860s but after being outstripped by the communities along Williams Creek had become a backwater, populated mostly by Chinese merchants and miners. It saw a brief resurgence in placer mining activity during

the first years of the Depression, but after 1934 most of its remaining residents left for waged employment in Wells. In January 1954 the *Cariboo Observer* reported that the last resident of Quesnel Forks, 57-year-old Wong Kuey Kim, had passed away suddenly:

Wong Kuey Kim was born in Quensel Forks and during his lifetime he saw it gradually fade into another of British Columbia’s ghost towns. […] Since 1950 he had been the sole resident of Quesnel Forks, and even he did not live there steadily. Away for a time, he moved back to the Forks last fall to spend the winter. On Jan. 20 his body was found on the Likely Road […] He had collapsed and frozen to death about a mile and a half from his home. With his passing, silence has descended on Quesnel Forks and it is likely that the once busy community will soon join the ranks of such Cariboo settlements as LaFontaine on the Barkerville Road, where only mounds in the snow mark the locations of the cabins that once housed hundreds of gold seekers.40

Stanley, which had only a handful of residents by the mid 1950s, was poised to go the way of LaFontaine, Quesnel Forks, and Richfield. It was not unreasonable to expect that Barkerville, with its small and steadily shrinking population, would follow close behind.

In May 1958 the Clinton Hotel, the oldest hotel in British Columbia, burned down with the loss of four lives. Built in 1861, it had been one of the most famous roadhouses on the Cariboo Highway, a prominent landmark and favourite subject for photographers driving through town. Many travellers had gone out of their way to visit the Clinton Hotel in order to take in its old-timey ambience. For example, in the early 1950s Leonard Coton had made a point to overnight there in spite of its paper-thin walls. A tourist who drove through Clinton a couple months after the fire remarked that the town was “not very prosperous looking” and could “ill afford to lose its principal attraction, the old roadhouse, heirloom from a vanished age.” Clinton still had an historical tourist attraction

in the form of the museum that had opened in 1953, but it was not as eye-catching or
evocative as the old hotel, which to the motoring public had been a familiar, authentic,
and materially tangible link to the days of the gold rush and Cariboo Wagon Road.41

The destruction of the Clinton Hotel did not mean its end as an historical
attraction. Shortly after the fire, a franchisee of the Standard Oil Company purchased the
lot where the hotel had stood and in its place built a modern service station with canopies,
floodlights, and a glassed-in front. In an effort to profit from the motoring public’s
familiarity with the site, the service station owner invited customers to visit a rustic
cabin-style shelter that he had built around back, which contained a scale diorama of the
old hotel, historical photographs, a map of the Cariboo Wagon Road, and several artifacts
that had been saved from the fire. “Here! See Model of BC’s Oldest Hotel!” a sign out
front beckoned to passing motorists (with “model of” in smaller letters than the rest).
Standard Oil’s BC head office later lobbied the provincial government to erect a special
commemorative marker at the site. For years the Clinton Hotel lived on as a kind of a
phantom attraction, a place where, as the Prince George Citizen had put it in 1953, all
that could be done was to “mark the spot.” As during the interwar years, private
businesses played an important role in cultivating history by the road along the Cariboo
Highway.42

Ironically, the Clinton Hotel burned down one day after the ’58 Centennial
Stagecoach Run had passed through town, with an authentic gold rush-era stagecoach and

41 “Landmark Gone, 3 Perish as Famous Hotel Burns,” Prince George Citizen 20 May 1958, 12; Cariboo
Observer 22 May 1958, 1; W. Gordon Coombs, By Truck and Bus, and Romance of Age (Nanaimo:
42 Bruce Ramsey and Ormond Turner, Inn-Side British Columbia by Automobile (Vancouver: Standard Oil
Company of British Columbia and British Columbia Hotels Association, 1962), 13; BCA, GR-1661, box
23, file 3, Lawrie Wallace to W.P. Anderson, Assistant to the President, Standard Oil Company of British
Columbia, 19 September 1961.
rollicking wild west pageantry. The Stagecoach Run was one of the many history-themed and highway-related events that the provincial government organized to mark the hundredth anniversary of the mainland colony of British Columbia. The state began playing an increasingly active role in cultivating history by the road in the BC Interior during the late 1950s, treating museums, monuments, ghost towns, and other historical landscape features as cultural and economic assets. As the next chapter shows, the Centennial celebrations of 1958 played a pivotal role in that shift.
The state began playing a direct role in cultivating history by the road in the British Columbia Interior during the late 1950s. This chapter revolves around the year 1958, which marked the hundredth anniversary of the founding of the mainland colony of British Columbia. The Social Credit government decided to construct a major province-building initiative around the ’58 Centennial, a kind of cultural counterpart to the large-scale infrastructure projects the state had built since the end of the war. It arranged for an elaborate series of Centennial celebrations to be spread around the province, and many of these had historical themes. Many of those that did drew on themes, symbols, and objects that would have been familiar to many motorists who had driven around the province’s Interior since the late 1920s.

This chapter begins by showing that many of the ’58 Centennial’s historically themed events were organized around and performed across the provincial highway network, and that BC’s motoring public was strongly encouraged to get out and learn more about their province by the road. It then examines two permanent roadside historical attractions that had their origins in the ’58 Centennial: the Stop of Interest historical markers, and Barkerville Historic Provincial Park. These were significant initiatives by the Fordist state. The Stop of Interest marking program involved distributing historically themed markers all along the province’s arterial highway network. This was a relatively low-cost and riskless project, but the decision to develop
Barkerville as a major historical tourist attraction was a very expensive and rather risky project, given its distance from major population centres and major arterial roads. Boosters and business owners and history enthusiasts had schemed to make Barkerville into some kind of tourist attraction for decades, but to no avail. Only long-term backing from the state could make this possible. Although Barkerville was far off the ‘beaten path’ of BC’s main highways, the decision to develop it as a tourist asset was closely linked to other Fordist state projects in the Cariboo highlands, including the development of the pulpwood economy.

In her study of BC’s various centennial celebrations between 1958 and 1971, Mia Reimers has argued that the ’58 Centennial’s panoply of historically themed events aped the American wild west popular culture of the 1950s. These events certainly did occur in the context of the second golden age of the Hollywood Western, and amidst a torrent of western-themed comic books, pulp novels, and television programs that were as popular in BC as anywhere else in North America. However, it is important to recognize that many of the key historical themes and symbols that were employed in the ’58 Centennial celebrations had already been in use for decades in the BC Interior, as shown in previous chapters. Stagecoaches, wagon roads, roadhouses, palisaded forts, and ruggedly individualistic gold prospectors were already part of a well-established tradition of history by the road in BC.¹

¹ Mia Reimers, “BC at its Most Sparkling, Colourful Best’: Post-war Province Building through Centennial Celebrations,” PhD dissertation, University of Victoria (2007), 141-142. The period from the mid 1940s to the late 1950s is usually identified as the second golden age of the Western movie genre, as epitomized by the films of John Ford and John Wayne. Westerns were also popular fare during the early years of television. Popular shows included Bonanza, Gunsmoke, The Lone Ranger, The Roy Rogers Show, and Disney’s made-for-TV Davy Crockett movies. Hollywood had even used the BC Interior as the setting of one of its innumerable westerns: in 1950 20th Century Fox released The Cariboo Trail, starring Randolph Scott as a would-be cattle rancher and Gabby Hayes as his grizzled gold prospector sidekick. Set
Aside from the state’s considerable role in organizing and paying for most of the ‘58 Centennial’s history-themed celebrations, it was tone more than any specific theme that distinguished them from earlier such events, such as the unveiling ceremonies for the various cairns the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada had erected in BC since the mid 1920s. As Reimers points out, the provincial government strove to generate a party atmosphere around the ’58 Centennial. The events associated with it were supposed to be lively, fun, casual, and optimistic, rather than serious-minded, didactic, and patriotic. Indeed, publicity materials often referred to the Centennial as “British Columbia’s 100th birthday party.” As consumers and as citizens, British Columbians were encouraged to get out and get to know their province better, to partake in pleasure travel, sightseeing, and outdoor recreation. They were encouraged to get in their automobiles and explore the ‘new’ frontiers that the expansion and improvement of the highway network had thrown open up since the end of the war, including the many amenities that had been developed alongside those highways.

Preparing for BC’s ’58 Centennial

In late 1955 the provincial government began preparing to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the 1858 establishment of the mainland colony of British Columbia, which had been precipitated by the Fraser Canyon gold rush. The cabinet struck a central committee to organize Centennial events, and appointed Deputy Provincial Secretary

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2 Reimers, “BC at its Most Sparkling.”
Lawrie Wallace, a former schoolteacher and principal from Vancouver Island, to serve as its chairman. The Provincial Secretary’s office was primarily concerned with the administration of government records, like statistics, printing, and the provincial archives. It was also charged with a variety of odds and ends that did not fit other ministries and departments, including the designation of official historical sites. However, it had no budget or staff dedicated to this task, as indicated by the provincial government’s hands-off approach to history by the road during the interwar years and the first postwar decade.3

The provincial government’s decision to organize the ’58 Centennial celebrations and to begin planning them three years before the actual centennial was no doubt influenced by events during the summer of 1955. In western Canada 1955 marked the golden jubilee of Alberta and Saskatchewan’s provincehood, and both provinces organized historically themed celebrations. The government of Saskatchewan, for example, erected a series of interpretive markers and promoted historical tourist attractions like Fort Battleford, which had been made into a museum in the late 1940s. In the western United States 1955 was celebrated as the sesquicentennial of Lewis and Clark’s explorations. More monuments and markers were erected in their honour, museum exhibits were organized, lots of publicity was generated, and legislators and

3 The Provincial Secretary, who was a cabinet minister, was nominally responsible for enforcing the province’s Historic Objects Preservation Act (1948), which was followed by the Archaeological and Historic Sites Protection Act (1960). The Act of 1960 gave the Provincial Secretary the power “to designate any site, parcel of land, building, or structure of any kind” as an official archaeological or historic site. No one without a permit from the minister was allowed to “destroy, deface, move, excavate, or alter in any way” these sites, on the threat of a fine. It was not until 1977 that responsibility for historic sites was transferred from the Provincial Secretary’s office to another department with more staff and resources. BCA, GR-1661, box 1, file 1.
tourism boosters lobbied for a stretch of interstate highway between Missouri and Washington State to be designated the Lewis and Clark Memorial Highway.⁴

Enthusiastic public responses to these state-sponsored commemorative events prompted BC’s government to prepare its own show for 1958. As an exercise in cultural province-building, the ’58 Centennial celebrations could serve a variety of purposes. First and foremost, they would complement the government’s efforts at social and economic province building through investment in fixed infrastructure. As discussed in the previous chapter, both the Social Credit government and the Liberal-Conservative coalition that preceded it had spent enormous sums on the provincial road network since the end of the war, particularly in the Interior and northern BC. Long-delayed links had been completed, like the Hope-Princeton section of the southern transprovincial highway. Important roads had been paved, like the highways through the Okanagan valley and the Fraser Canyon. The replacement of unpopular and outdated roads like the Big Bend Highway was being considered. These and other infrastructure projects were transforming BC’s social and economic geography. For better or worse, they seemed to embody progress and modernity. Not surprisingly, the ’58 Centennial ended up being more closely linked to highways than to power lines or the PGE railway.

The Centennial celebrations could be used as a kind of pedagogical device for educating British Columbians (especially the many new British Columbians) about the nature of the province’s regions, landscapes, and economy. They could draw attention to

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how much things had changed over the previous century (a more stable economy, permanence, material changes like electricity and automobiles) and also to how much things had stayed the same (the resource economy, state-built public works, liberal values). By valorizing frontier archetypes like the solitary prospector, the stagecoach driver, and the pioneer rancher, the celebrations could also address the sense of crisis that had arisen amongst many the province’s petty producers, small business owners, and others who were concerned about the pace and scale of postwar change. Representing these as timeless BC archetypes that were essential to the province’s past (and by extension its future) could soothe anxieties about the place of the individual or the ‘little guy’ in the province’s fast-changing modern economy. Furthermore, by playing up historical themes that were related to exploration, discovery, and travel, like old trails and wagon roads, the Centennial celebrations could encourage British Columbians to hit the road and travel around their province during the summer of 1958.

When the Social Credit government started planning the ’58 Centennial celebrations in 1955, it likely recognized that they could be used to raise its profile, for it had only burst onto BC’s political scene three years earlier. Unveilings, grand openings, and ribbon cutting ceremonies would occur in every corner of the province, and each would associate Social Credit with postwar prosperity and progress. Premier W.A.C. Bennett and his cabinet ministers had already been involved in many road-opening ceremonies, often taking credit for projects initiated under the previous government. It was an important element of Social Credit’s populist image to be seen as a ‘blacktop government’ that ‘got things done’ in an efficient, impartial manner, at least compared to the Liberal and Conservative parties, with their long history of patronage scandals. The
construction of roads and other public works had especially strong appeal for the party’s power base in BC’s hinterlands, rural areas, and small towns. Furthermore, in an era of democratized automobile ownership, roads were a topic that tied most British Columbians together, to the point of appearing apolitical.5

Much of the planning and execution of British Columbia’s ‘58 Centennial celebrations revolved around highway infrastructure, auto touring, and a new culture of easy interregional automobile travel. In fact, the provincial highway network was the stage on which many of the most attention-grabbing centennial events played out. The best example of this was the Centennial Stagecoach Run. The Stagecoach Run involved a gold rush-era stagecoach being taken on a tour of the province, with Barkerville as its ultimate destination. The Centennial Committee managed to borrow an authentic BX stagecoach for the tour, loaned by Lord Martin Cecil, owner of the Bridge River Ranch and 100 Mile House Lodge. (This was the same stagecoach that Louis LeBourdais had been permitted to use for the BC Chamber of Mines’ 1936 Cariboo Days parade in Vancouver.) The stagecoach was in aesthetically good condition, and was to be carefully transported between towns on a trailer, but needed some restoration work to make it roadworthy for the short sprint it would make into each of its scheduled stops. Throwing historical accuracy to the wind, the Stagecoach Run was organized to begin at the provincial legislature in Victoria, with half of its scheduled stops at major population

5 Mitchell, *W.A.C Bennett*, 260-262; Stephen G. Tomblin, “W.A.C. Bennett and Province-Building in British Columbia,” *BC Studies* 85 (Spring 1990): 45-61. Public works had traditionally been a tool for patronage and political favouritism in British Columbia. Through the 1950s, the Social Credit government strove to distance itself from its Liberal and Conservative rivals by taking a less partisan approach. In 1952 Premier Bennett appointed Phil Gaglardi, a Pentecostal minister from Kamloops, as his minister of public works and subsequently as BC’s first minister of highways. Gaglardi showed he was a man of the people as well as a man of the cloth through his penchant for speeding, a sin that showed he was as enthusiastic about BC’s new and improved highways as the rest of the motoring public. On public works, patronage, and favouritism in BC, see Harvey, *The Coast Connection*; Harvey, *Carving the Western Path*. 520
centres on the Coast. However, from Hope northward the stagecoach caravan travelled along the Cariboo Highway, retracing the approximate route of the old Cariboo Wagon Road through communities like Yale, Ashcroft, Clinton, and Quesnel. The Stagecoach Run posed for photographs outside the famous Clinton Hotel the day before it burned down.⁶

Figure 12.1: The '58 Centennial Stagecoach Run outside the Clinton Hotel. From British Columbia Centennial Committee, Report of the British Columbia Centennial Committee (Victoria, 1959).

At once a travelling spectacle and a spectacle of travel, the Stagecoach Run was extremely popular. No doubt some of its popularity stemmed from stagecoach imagery in

⁶ Reimers, “BC at its Most Sparkling,” 156-161.
cinematic representations of the wild west, but it also drew on themes and symbols that would have been familiar to anyone who had motored along the Cariboo Highway since the late 1920s. At each stop, the stagecoach was unloaded from its trailer, hitched to a well-trained team of horses on the edge of town, then blazed into the town centre (or community hall parking lot, local high school grounds, etc.) at full speed, often accompanied by a group of local riders. Its crew dressed in old-timey-looking pioneer-style attire, and outriders and other local participants were encouraged to do the same. Local organizing committees were invited to use the stagecoach’s arrival to stage mock hold-ups, shoot-outs, and vigilante trials, which were meant to evoke the rough and ready, wild west atmosphere of the gold rush days. Reprising its role as a carrier of the royal mail, the stagecoach delivered messages from Premier Bennett to mayors, councils, and local Centennial committees. Vancouver Province librarian and popular historian Bruce Ramsey was invited to ride ‘shotgun’ on the tour, and he co-wrote a movie script based on the experience, which the CBC made into Ride of the Last Stagecoach (1959).7

BC’s new and improved highways played a central role in other historically themed ’58 Centennial events. The Historic Caravan involved a pair of semi-trailers that were painted with historical murals and loaded full of artifacts and displays from the Provincial Museum being taken to schools and community halls in more than 250 communities. The “Magic Nugget” was a gold rush-themed children’s play that visited schools all around the province. The BC Centurama was a history-themed song-and-dance show that also travelled around the province. The Changing of the Guard had engineers from the Canadian and British armies touring the province while dressed like

the Royal Engineers who had built the canyon section of the Cariboo Wagon Road during
the early 1860s. The Vintage Car Run – which was one of the Centennial’s more
anachronistic history-themed events – involved a caravan of 35 automobiles dating from
before 1920 being driven along the southern transprovincial highway from the Crowsnest
Pass to Vancouver, “basically following the old Dewdney Trail.”

The ’58 Centennial celebrations incorporated other events that revolved around
the themes of travel and transportation infrastructure. These included the inaugural run of
the PGE from Prince George to Dawson Creek; the Canadian National Railways Museum
Train; and the Fraser River Brigade, in which a flotilla of canoes retraced Simon Fraser’s
1808 descent of the river that would be named after him. When Princess Margaret visited
the province, her itinerary involved a veritable whirlwind of travel, including legs
covered by jet, seaplane, ship, train, and automobile. The princess even succumbed to
BC’s stagecoach mania at Williams Lake, which she visited to open the annual stampede.
After arriving at the PGE station, she and Lieutenant-Governor George Pearks
spontaneously agreed to be taken to the rodeo fairgrounds aboard a restored BX
stagecoach that had been restored by a local storekeeper. They were taken along the main
street of Williams Lake, which was lined by hundreds of waiting spectators. However,
the team was unaccustomed to pulling a coach and grew frightened. The horses sped
along the street, barely under control, pulling the old stagecoach so fast that most of the
crowd failed to realize the princess was aboard. The following day, Margaret was flown
from the Cariboo to the Okanagan and the fast-growing city of Kelowna, home of
Premier Bennett. There she presided over the opening ceremony for the new floating

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bridge over Okanagan Lake. The ceremony involved cutting a ribbon, unveiling a pair of bronze plaques, and driving across the bridge in a gleaming open-top limousine accompanied by the grinning premier.⁹

It was BC’s growing transportation network, and especially its network of modern highways, that made these province-building Centennial events possible and held them together. To a large extent it was also the provincial highway network that allowed residents of British Columbia and visitors from afar to participate in the celebrations. The central Centennial Committee, the BC Government Travel Bureau, and an army of private tourism promoters distributed reams of publicity material that urged BC residents to “see BC first” in 1958, while inviting auto tourists from around western North America to swing by for a visit.¹⁰

The provincial highway network and the ‘freedom of the road’ were so central to the ’58 Centennial celebrations that it only made sense for the motoring public to help promote the event. In 1956 the central Centennial Committee planned to order one million Scotchlite bumper stickers that would be given away to BC residents and visitors who entered the province in 1957 and 1958. They eventually scaled this purchase back to just half a million transparent windshield decals showing Century Sam, the Centennial’s cartoon gold prospector mascot. The Motor Vehicle Branch distributed these decals to passenger car owners along with their 1957 license plates. The following year the actual license plates were used to advertise the Centennial: all 1958 passenger plates used the official Centennial colours – gold and green– and had “1858 - Centenary - 1958” stamped

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¹⁰ Advertising and publicity for the ’58 Centennial are outlined in Report of the British Columbia Centennial Committee, 143-148.
across the bottom. This was the first time BC had printed a special slogan on its license plates.\textsuperscript{11}

The ’58 Centennial events cited above may have been spectacular, but they ultimately were ephemeral; a clutch of touring shows that crisscrossed the province over the course of 1958 before shutting down for good. Yet the provincial government also took steps to develop a more permanent legacy from the Centennial celebrations. It distributed grants to nearly every community in the province, and these were typically used for projects like the construction or repair of community halls, cenotaphs, pioneer cemeteries, libraries, municipal parks, and recreation facilities. Several communities put these grants towards the construction of local museums, including Ashcroft, Grand Forks, Hazelton, Kaslo, Prince Rupert, and Princeton, which will be touched on in the next chapter. The provincial government also took a direct role in several ambitious, large-scale, permanent developments that would shape the motoring public’s experiences of history by the road for decades to come. The rest of this chapter examines two of these long-lasting developments: the Stop of Interest historical site marking program, and Barkerville Historic Provincial Park.

\textit{The Stop of Interest Marker Program}

The planning for the ‘58 Centennial celebrations resulted in one of BC’s most focused and sustained discussions about history by the road. A panel of experts consisting

\textsuperscript{11} BCA, GR-1448 BC Centennial ’58 Committee, box 13, G.B. Rae, President, Screencraft Advertising Ltd. to L.H. McCance, Executive Secretary, BC Centennial Committee, 2 October 1956; box 21, George G. Fleming to L.H. McCance, Executive Secretary, BC Centennial Committee, 11 September 1956; Doug Horan, Publicity Director, BC Centennial Committee to Local Centennial Committee Chairmen, 17 December 1956. Also see Garrish, \textit{Tales From the Back Bumper}, chapter 3.
of archivists, planners, and historians was convened to discuss practical aspects of conveying lessons about the province’s past to the motoring public through roadside landscape features. They examined and assessed past efforts to cultivate history by the road, and considered how the ’58 Centennial could be used to improve the province’s existing patchwork of marked historic sites. Their deliberations merit careful scrutiny, for they led to the Stop of Interest program, a site-marking program that had widespread and long-term effects on how (and what) the motoring public learned (and continues to learn) about BC’s roadside landscapes. The gold-on-green Stop of Interest markers have been familiar to British Columbians for more than half a century, yet have so far eluded historians’ attention. This section shows that the Stop of Interest markers were conceptualized, implemented, and managed as a pedagogical system that was organized around the provincial highway network.12

One of the central Centennial Committee’s first steps was to create a subcommittee dedicated to commemorating, promoting, and popularizing British Columbia’s past. Chaired by Provincial Archivist Willard Ireland, the subcommittee was divided into two sections: publications and site marking. On the publications side, UBC history professor Dr. Margaret Ormsby was commissioned to write a scholarly history of the province that would supplant Howay and Scholefield’s *British Columbia from the Earliest Times to the Present* (1914), which had been out of print for decades. The

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12 The ’58 Centennial historic site subcommittee’s activities are summarized in *Report of the British Columbia Centennial Committee*, 118-132. This summary includes the locations and inscriptions of the 38 markers that were erected in 1958.
Provincial Archives also offered research assistance and technical advice to authors and historical societies as a way of encouraging the writing of local and regional histories.13

The other side of the subcommittee – the side dedicated to historic site marking – was assigned the task of organizing a marking program that would make BC’s landscapes more historically ‘legible’ and meaningful to residents and visitors alike. The ’58 Centennial historic sites subcommittee was chaired by Provincial Archivist Willard Ireland, who also edited British Columbia Historical Quarterly. Deputy Provincial Secretary and Centennial Committee chairman Lawrie Wallace also sat in on several meetings. As a former teacher and the main liaison between the central Centennial Committee and the cabinet, Lawrie was doubtless keen to know what kinds of ‘lessons’ the site-marking program would offer the public.

The subcommittee had three citizen members, all of whom were white, middle-class experts from the Coast. Madge Hamilton had worked for many years as a research assistant at the Provincial Archives, and since retiring had advocated for the preservation of old buildings in Victoria. Bruce McKelvie was a retired newspaperman and popular historian who also lived on southern Vancouver Island. He had been a senior official of the Native Sons of British Columbia, a speechwriter for Conservative premier Simon Fraser Tolmie, and the first head of the Provincial Information Bureau, which was the precursor to the BC Government Travel Bureau. Dr. Walter N. Sage had recently retired as professor of history at the University of British Columbia, and had been BC’s

13 Though written under the aegis of the ’58 Centennial and intended to be accessible to a general middlebrow readership, Ormsby’s history of British Columbia was by no means an uncritical tale of progress. See John Norris, “Margaret Ormsby,” BC Studies 32 (Winter 1976-77): 11-27; Reimer, Writing British Columbia History, chapter 6. The ’58 Centennial Committee and the BC Archives produced a guidebook that would help historical societies and individuals who wanted to write local histories: So You Want to Write Your Community’s History! (Victoria: BC Centennial Committee and BC Archives, 1957).
representative on the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada since Frederic Howay passed away in 1943.14

The subcommittee also had two staff members. Wilson Duff was curator of anthropology at the Provincial Museum in Victoria. An expert on the native groups of BC’s North Coast, he had been working for several years to get legislation that would protect the province’s archeological sites.15 The other staff member was Ches Lyons, who had played an important role in BC’s provincial parks since the early 1940s, including the reconnaissance and planning of several large parks, as well as dozens of smaller roadside parks. In 1956 Lyons was in charge of special projects for the Parks Division, which to a large degree entailed driving around looking for places to establish new parks. Having thoroughly surveyed BC’s main highway corridors for the Parks Division, he was probably the province’s leading expert on the cultivation of public roadside attractions. In addition to his very popular book on BC’s flora and fauna, he had authored two guidebooks about the central and southern Interior: Milestones on the Mighty Fraser (1949) and Milestones in Ogopogo Land (1957). Lyons would play a key role on the ’58 Centennial historic sites subcommittee, including overseeing the implementation of its decisions ‘on the ground.’

The subcommittee first met in September 1956 to decide on general policies for selecting and marking sites that were deemed to be of special significance to British

14 McKelvie and Sage took radically different approaches to writing BC’s history. McKelvie, who constantly emphasized romance, adventure, conflict and myth, epitomized the popular approach to the province’s past. Sage, on the other hand, epitomized the professional or academic approach. On Sage, see Reimer, Writing British Columbia History, chapter 5. On McKelvie, see Twigg, The Essentials, 80-81. 15 Regarding Duff’s efforts to get provincial legislation that would protect BC’s archeological sites, see Charles E. Borden, “Wilson Duff: His Contributions to the Growth of Archeology in British Columbia,” BC Studies 33 (Spring 1977): 3-12.
Columbia’s past. Ireland outlined the province-building nature of the planned Centennial events, and described the steps he had already taken to encourage participation by local and regional historical organizations. He had contacted every museum and historical society in BC, asking them to report whether they had identified any potentially marker-worthy sites in their area, or had formulated any special plans for 1958. Several groups had already replied that they intended to mark sites associated with the gold rushes of the late 1850s and 1860s. For example, the Boundary Historical Society planned to erect a cairn beside the southern transprovincial highway at Rock Creek in order to commemorate the local gold rush and subsequent blazing of the Dewdney Trail. The Cariboo Historical Society had an elaborate plan to place stone tablets and bronze plaques at former roadhouses and other stopping places along the route of the Cariboo Wagon Road. This scheme was already well advanced: the CHS had identified 28 suitable locations, and received permission from most of the property owners who would be involved.

To avoid duplication and identify regions of the province that were densely or sparsely marked, Ireland distributed copies of an inventory of BC’s existing historic site markers and monuments. This inventory, which had been compiled by the Parks Division and the Government Travel Bureau, showed that historic sites in BC had been marked by all three levels of government, as well as by community boosters, service groups like the Rotarians, historical associations like the Okanagan Historical Society, and by

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16 Except where indicated otherwise, the following is drawn from BCA, GR-1448, box 1, Minutes of First Meeting of Historic Sites and Publications Sub-Committee, 25 September 1956.
17 BCA, GR-1448, box 1, Leo Mader, Boundary Historical Society to Willard Ireland, 15 August 1956; Alvin Johnston, Cariboo Historical Society to Ireland, 15 September 1956.
professional organizations – for example, the cairn commemorating the Royal Engineers beside the Alexandra Bridge.

The inventory also showed that marked historical sites were unevenly distributed, both geographically and in terms of the themes they covered. They were concentrated on the Coast, with relatively few sites marked in the province’s hinterlands. The Cariboo Highway corridor was well covered, but several regions of the Interior were very sparsely marked, including the Okanagan and Similkameen valleys, the Boundary country, and the west Kootenays. There were only three marked historic sites in the northern half of the province. The marked historic sites in the Interior were almost exclusively related to three themes: western exploration, the fur trade, and gold rushes. The inventory also showed that almost every monument, cairn, plaque, and other historical marker that had been erected in the BC Interior prior to 1956 was located beside or in close proximity to an arterial road.18

After reviewing the inventory, the subcommittee discussed how the ‘58 Centennial could be used to improve the province’s patchwork of marked historic sites. Every member of the subcommittee wanted to know whether funds would be available for protecting, preserving, and restoring old buildings and other landscape features. “Are

18 BCMFL, S.E. Park, “A Recreational Inventory of British Columbia: Historic Sites and Monuments” (Victoria: BC Forest Service, Parks and Recreation Division, 1956). The Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada had erected 37 monuments in BC, 12 of which were located in the Interior. Five were located along the Cariboo Highway, at Hope, Yale, Alexandria, Quesnel, and Barkerville. Four were spread across the Kootenays, at Fort Steele, near Invermere at the original site of Kootenae House, on the Banff-Windermere Highway at the summit of Sinclair Pass, and on the southern transprovincial highway at the Castlegar ferry. There were also markers at Riverside Park in Kamloops, at Boat Encampment on the Big Bend Highway, and at Westbank on a bluff overlooking Okanagan Lake and Kelowna. Except for the Collins Overland Telegraph monument at Quesnel, all of these markers commemorated people, places, and events associated with western exploration, the fur trade, and the gold rushes of the 1850s and 1860s. The provincial government had erected 29 markers around BC, but only five in the Interior: at Kamloops, Revelstoke, and Grand Forks, at the site of Fort Sheppard near Trail, and at Lillooet, to mark the original start of the Cariboo Wagon Road.
we interested in the preservation of old houses?” asked Sage. McKelvie wanted to know whether funds would be available to clean up neglected colonial-era cemeteries, like the ones in Yale and Barkerville, and native cemeteries like the ones that motorists saw beside the highway in the Fraser and Thompson canyons.

The citizen members of the subcommittee were eager to support these kinds of projects, reflecting the anxiety amongst BC’s middle-class history enthusiasts about the disappearance of familiar historical landmarks. They agreed that old buildings and other concretely tangible landscape features helped evoke a sense of connection between the present and the past. “Looking at a sign is not as interesting as living history,” was how Lyons summarized this argument. However, Ireland tried to dampen their enthusiasm. He explained that the subcommittee’s mandate was limited to identifying and marking historic sites. It would not receive funding for projects that involved purchase, preservation, restoration, or reconstruction. Experiments with these kinds of project elsewhere in western Canada had shown that they could be very expensive, and required consultation with professional architects, engineers, and curators.19

With the subcommittee’s mandate apparently settled, conversation turned to the form of the markers. Stone cairns and bronze plaques like the ones the HSMBC had been using since the 1920s were deemed “inadequate” for British Columbia’s ‘58 Centennial: they were too didactic and too old-fashioned. Furthermore, although they were very durable, they were rather expensive to build. Wooden markers like the signboards that

19 See Taylor, Negotiating the Past, 144-146 regarding the spiraling cost of restoration projects at Manitoba’s Lower Fort Garry and Saskatchewan’s Fort Battleford in the early 1950s. Closer to home, the planned restoration of Fort Langley in the Fraser Valley had proven beyond the limited means of the Native Sons of British Columbia, who by the 1950s were trying to convince the federal government to take over the project.
had been used in Saskatchewan’s 1955 golden jubilee celebrations were inexpensive and allowed a lot of information to be displayed, but were vulnerable to vandalism and the elements. Lyons reported that recent marking programs in the United States had found that cast aluminum was “absolutely the best” material for free-standing signs. Aluminum was durable, light (a tenth the weight of bronze), and could be made in different colours and finishes. Lyons proposed to use aluminum signs with a forest green background, gold lettering, and a dappled, rustic-looking finish. As mentioned above, gold and green were the official ’58 Centennial colours, representing gold and timber, mining and forestry, the foundations of the province’s past and present-day economies.

It was agreed that the ’58 Centennial markers should be standardized, just like the traffic signs put up by the Department of Highways and the “sign system” that the Parks Division was developing for use in BC’s provincial parks. They would need to be securely mounted at least six feet above the ground to protect against vandalism and theft; Ireland worried the signs “could make a nice souvenir.” They would also have to be prominent and eye-catching, with lettering big enough to be legible to motorists inside a parked car (for the benefit of the elderly and infirm, and for when the weather was inclement). A pair of pointer signs would be associated with most markers, in order to give the motoring public advance notice that they were approaching a government-designated roadside attraction.

The subcommittee devoted considerable attention to the question of where the markers should be located, both in terms of which regions and which kinds of places. The ’58 Centennial celebrations were meant to be a province-building exercise, so ideally the unevenness of previous marking efforts would be ameliorated. “We should try to serve
each of the principal areas of the province,” Sage declared. “We must sell BC to the people of the province and to tourists, in that order.” That meant BC’s hinterlands were due for a large percentage of the new markers, which neatly meshed with the fact that the provincial economy was being driven by a hinterland boom in resource extraction and infrastructure building. Lyons recommended that the markers not be so abundant that the public would become indifferent to them. He reported that between 50 and 100 was usually enough to “saturate a state.”

It was unanimously agreed that the provincial highway network would be the skeleton around which the ‘58 Centennial historic site-marking program would take shape, just as it had been with the provincial park system since the end of the war. Ches Lyons told the subcommittee that marking programs in the United States had discovered that marked historic sites located away from arterial roads received far less attention from the public than those that were located alongside them.

You want as many people as possible to see these [markers] adjacent to heavily travelled highways. For our purposes we have to stick to highways. […] The new trend in the eastern states is to develop off the highway parking and bolster the desire to stop by putting in drinking fountains or picnic sites. […] You must get [motorists] off the shoulder of the road. You must not antagonize the highway department.

Lyons stressed the need to consult with the RCMP and the Department of Highways regarding traffic safety before proceeding with the development of each roadside stopping place, which was ironic, given what he and his colleagues had done with the Manning Park Gallows just a few years earlier. Lyons also suggested that the Hope-Princeton Highway corridor through Manning Park could serve as an ideal “testing ground” for the Centennial marking program. The Parks Division had already developed
a series of popular roadside attractions along the highway, and sites like the remnant of
the old Dewdney Trail 17 miles east of Hope were good candidates for historic markers.
They had been familiar to motorists for a few years, so it would be possible to gauge
whether the addition of a marker resulted in increased visitation or held people’s attention
longer.

Everyone on the subcommittee acknowledged the importance of tying the
marking program to BC’s road network. “We must mark things on the highways,”
remarked Sage. “You want them where they can be seen,” McKelvie chimed in. Lawrie
Wallace emphasized that the sites to be marked “must be accessible.” Although the
history experts on the subcommittee had dedicated themselves to preserving archival
records and writing about BC’s past, they all recognized that the general public’s
understanding of the province’s history was inextricably tied to landscapes experienced
by the road.

They also recognized that harnessing the ’58 Centennial site-marking program to
the provincial highway network would impose certain constraints. Some historically
significant sites were located far from any major road. For example, there were no paved
roads in northern BC’s isolated Omineca country, where there had been a major gold rush
during the 1870s. Many historic sites were located near a major highway, but not close
enough to be visible from it. Others were better off hidden from the motoring public:
archaeological sites, for example. Wilson Duff specifically asked that pictographs, burial
caves, pit house depressions, middens, and other sites related to the ancient history of
BC’s native peoples be left unmarked in order to protect them from souvenir hunters and
amateur archaeologists. Finally, the subcommittee anticipated there might be problems
marking historic sites that were located along roads or stretches of road that were congested, constricted, or otherwise dangerous.

Willard Ireland specifically identified the highway through the Fraser and Thompson canyons as the kind of road that might prove difficult to adorn with new historical site markers. It was important to have a few markers in the canyon because it had been the 1858 Fraser River gold rush that had spurred the establishment of British Columbia. The tortuous terrain that the highway passed through practically invited stories about heroic infrastructure, struggles against nature, and the development of public works by a forward-thinking state. Furthermore, new markers were needed in order to meet the motoring public’s expectations. The communities and landscapes visible along the canyon highway had been familiar to the motoring public since the mid 1920s, but, as described in the previous chapter, the modernization of the road had obscured many of its familiar historical features. Traces of the old Cariboo Wagon Road were becoming fewer and further between, and several monuments erected during the interwar years had been bypassed.

However, even though the canyon highway had undergone substantial improvements since the end of the war, it remained intrinsically dangerous due to its combination of high traffic volumes, tight curves, narrow tunnels, and unstable terrain. Ireland suggested the best way to mark historic sites in the confines of the canyons might be to put up large, detailed interpretive signs at a couple of places where motorists tended to stop for food, gas, and lodging (like Hope, Lytton, and Ashcroft), and then put up smaller roadside pointer signs that would identify specific places mentioned on those large signs. This would reduce the need for motorists to exit and enter the flow of traffic.
The first meeting of the ’58 Centennial historic sites subcommittee ground to a halt once the discussion veered towards the Fraser and Thompson canyons. All the subcommittee members were personally familiar with that highway corridor, and recognized how familiar it was to the motoring public, having been BC’s most important automobile road for 30 years. The experts on the subcommittee unanimously agreed it was necessary to mark sites associated with the 1858 gold rush and the Cariboo Wagon Road, though they each had specific places in mind, ranging from the old Anglican churches in Hope and Yale, to overgrown pioneer cemeteries, to traditional native salmon fishing spots. With its long history of history by the road, the canyon highway clearly illustrated how the ’58 Centennial marking program could be used to shape the motoring public’s shared landscape experiences, provided it was done in accordance with the structure and form of the road and the prevailing traffic conditions.

Restoration Reconsidered

The second meeting of the ’58 Centennial historic sites subcommittee took place two months after the first, in November 1956. The main item on the agenda was to draw up a budget for submission to the central Centennial Committee. However, chairman Willard Ireland found it impossible to proceed without first clarifying the subcommittee’s position on preservation and restoration projects.

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20 In 1930, while head of the Provincial Information Bureau, Bruce McKelvie had even organized a tour of the Cariboo Highway, with a caravan of more than 50 participants that included Premier Tolmie, Lieutenant-Governor Robert Randolph Bruce, and politicians, tourism promoters, and representatives of motoring clubs from around the Pacific Northwest.
21 The following is drawn from BCA, GR-1448, box 1, Minutes of Second Meeting of the Historic Sites and Publications Sub-Committee, 21 November 1956.
This topic required further discussion because many letters had been received from local and regional historical societies who requested the subcommittee’s assistance to preserve or restore old buildings and other structures. Many of these requests came from the province’s hinterlands. For example, from the north Cariboo came calls to help preserve the old townsite of Barkerville; these are detailed below. In the east Kootenays, history enthusiasts around Cranbrook wanted help preserving the ghost town at Fort Steele; their campaign is outlined in the next chapter. A proposal was received to restore deteriorating totem poles in the Skeena River valley – poles that the Canadian National Railways and Department of Indian Affairs had already restored and cultivated as a trackside attraction during the late 1920s.22

Most of these proposals involved the preservation or restoration of old buildings, but several pursued the popular theme of frontier transportation. Pleas were received from Kaslo and other isolated communities along Kootenay Lake for help to save the SS Moyie, a CPR sternwheeler that had begun service in 1898 and was coming due for retirement: the completion of new mountain roads promised to make the province’s remaining lake steamers redundant. The Kootenay Lake Historical Society had recently been formed to press the case for preserving the Moyie. From communities along the Arrow Lakes came similar calls regarding the Moyie’s sister ship, the SS Minto, which had also begun service in 1898. The CPR had pulled the Minto ashore in 1954 and sold it to the village of Nakusp for one dollar. The Arrow Lakes Historical Society had tried to raise funds to preserve the vessel, but had fallen short of its goal, and was asking Victoria for help. In both instances, recently-established historical societies hoped to make steam

22 Darling and Cole, “Totem Pole Restoration.”
vessels that had been central to the economy and the rhythm of everyday life in their
districts into distinctive historical attractions, akin to what the City of Penticton and
Penticton Gyro Club had done in 1951 when the SS *Sicamous* had been hauled ashore at
one of the city’s beaches and turned into a museum.23

The members of the ’58 Centennial historic sites subcommittee deemed many of
these projects worthwhile, and were disappointed that they fell outside their purview.
Ireland reminded them that the subcommittee did not have funds for such ambitious
projects. He explained that expensive endeavours involving preservation or restoration
would need to be treated as “special projects” and proposed directly to the central
Centennial Committee.

In the course of this discussion, Dr. Sage cited Invermere’s crumbling David
Thompson Memorial Fort as an example of the risks associated with giving money to
boosters and history enthusiasts in small, isolated communities. According to Sage, the
CPR had built the ‘fort’ as a “memorial to Thompson which was to be a tourist
attraction.” However, the company’s generosity had been for naught, because (according
to Sage) local residents had subsequently allowed the large, impressive-looking structure
“to go to wrack and ruin.” Sage reported that some Invermere residents wanted to repair
the fort; their campaign to restore the neglected replica is discussed in the next chapter.
However, he concluded it was unlikely to ever succeed as a historical tourist attraction
because it was located “off the main highway.” Sage presented this as a cautionary tale,
to make the subcommittee think twice before throwing their support behind ambitious

23 The Kootenay Lake Historical Society’s efforts to preserve the *Moyie* are described in Robert D. Turner,
*The SS Moyie: Memories of the Oldest Sternwheeler* (Victoria: Sono Nis, 1991), 54-55. On the decline of
BC’s lake and river steamers, see Robert D. Turner, *Sternwheelers and Steam Tugs: An Illustrated History
of the Canadian Pacific Railway's British Columbia Lake & River Service* (Victoria: Sono Nis, 1984).
projects in communities that were ‘off the beaten path,’ like Kaslo, Nakusp, and Barkerville.

With the parameters of its work settled, the subcommittee turned its attention to getting historic site markers erected in time for the 1958 summer travel season. Ches Lyons had done more research on aluminum signs. One particularly appealing feature was the fact that they could be cast much larger than was possible with bronze: an impressive amount of text could be put on a 32- by 40-inch aluminum plaque, which would weigh only 40 pounds. However, Dr. Sage had reservations about using such a modern material. As BC’s longtime representative on the Historic Sites and Monuments Board, he preferred the traditional monument form of stone cairn and bronze plaque, which had a certain gravitas about it. However, he was eventually brought around to the aluminum idea. Citing the Aluminum Company of Canada’s recent development of a smelter at Kitimat, he acknowledged that “[a]luminum certainly is a product of BC.”

Lyons recommended that the subcommittee take a long-term view and look beyond 1958 to a moment when the provincial government would establish an agency with permanent responsibility for marking, interpreting, preserving, and promoting BC’s historic sites. A matrix would need be designed for casting the standardized ’58 Centennial markers, and it could be used for years to come – even decades – provided special care was taken to ensure that its form was not too specific to the year 1958. Lyons suggested that the markers erected in 1958 have a special badge to indicate they had been part of the ’58 Centennial celebrations. He promised to draw up some preliminary designs and share them at the next meeting.
With agreement on the general form of the markers, the subcommittee turned its attention to questions of location. McKelvie and Sage reiterated the need for careful distribution of the markers. “Victoria and Vancouver are hogging too much,” Sage argued, while “nobody pays attention to Vanderhoof.” McKelvie concurred, suggesting that residents of the province’s hinterlands tended to “feel very neglected” by politicians, bureaucrats, and experts based on the Coast. It is unclear whether they were referring to the planning for the ’58 Centennial or to the general political economy of British Columbia’s postwar boom. Either way, the subcommittee agreed that it was important to prioritize the province’s hinterlands, where the resource boom was underway, where Social Credit’s power base was located, and where anxiety about the pace and scale of postwar modernization was greatest.

Lyons had been studying how to distribute and erect the centennial markers. He suggested the cheapest, most efficient way would be to have a mobile Parks Division crew travel along the province’s main highways, putting up the markers and any associated pointer signs, picnic tables, and pit toilets as they went. He reported that the Department of Highways was enthusiastic about the marker project and had promised to cooperate. “There seems to be a new attitude in the Highways Department – now we request things and everyone wants to help,” he observed, no doubt recalling the difficulties he had encountered when trying to develop roadside attractions and put up signs in Manning and other provincial parks during the early 1950s. However, he warned the subcommittee that even with support from Highways, it might prove impossible to put up certain desired markers. For example, markers could not be put up at locations where there was not enough room to develop safe off-the-shoulder parking, or at places
where it would be dangerous to have vehicles pulling on and off the highway, interfering with the smooth flow of traffic. Ultimately, traffic conditions and the structure of the road would determine which sites were feasible to mark.

The second meeting of the ’58 Centennial historic sites subcommittee concluded with a suggestion by Ches Lyons that the signs be used to mark what he called “points of interest.” The subcommittee liked the name “point of interest” and approved this idea. It was not too solemn, nor too specific in the sense of identifying a precise site: a marker could speak to the general history of a community, district, or entire region. It would also allow for more than just historical events and personalities to be marked. A large majority of the markers would have historical themes, but a few noteworthy scenic, natural, and even industrial features could also be drawn to the motoring public’s attention. Over the following 18 months “points of interest” evolved into “Stops of Interest,” reflecting how closely the marking program was tied to the highway network and the viewing habits of the motoring public.

**Parallel Marking Committees**

After its first two meetings, the ’58 Centennial historic sites subcommittee became dormant for more than a year, not convening again until February 1958. During the interval Ches Lyons drove around the province investigating potential locations for historical markers and other points of interest. With Willard Ireland’s approval, he organized a technical committee comprised of experts drawn from government agencies including the Parks Branch, the Forest Service, the provincial museum and archives, and the departments of mines and highways. This technical committee’s goal was to assemble
a list of potential and existing roadside pullouts that could feasibly accommodate the Stop of Interest markers.

There were several reasons for Lyons to sideline or bypass the ’58 Centennial historic sites subcommittee. McKelvie and Sage were both in poor health. More importantly, the citizen members of the subcommittee were experts on British Columbia’s history, but not on highway planning, traffic engineering, right-of-way regulations, or the management of landscape aesthetics. They were unlikely to know, for example, that the Department of Highways intended to make major improvements to Highway 16 between Prince George and Prince Rupert over the following few years. Plans to widen and realign sections of the road made it impractical to erect roadside markers along that corridor in 1958, because anything put up might need to be relocated or torn out just a couple years later. Most of the bureaucrats on the technical committee had no background in researching or promoting BC’s history, but they did know how to coordinate roadside developments. Lyons later explained the genesis of the technical committee in a report on the ’58 Centennial marking program:

In attempting to fit theoretical plans to conditions as found in the field it was apparent that certain governing factors existed. Few historic sites such as a building, campground, trail, etc. occur adjacent to the highway system. If they do, it often is impossible to provide a suitable parking area. […] In general we are forced to choose certain viewpoints already constructed and adapt the text theme to what can be seen. […] Most viewpoints selected have exceptionally scenic views which should stimulate interest in stopping at them. Most lend themselves very well to photography in which the marker sign can be photographed as part of the view [emphasis added].

Dozens of signs had to be cast and installed in time for the 1958 summer vacation season, and Lyons urged the subcommittee to approve the shape, finish, and colours of

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24 BCA, GR-1448, box 1, C.P. Lyons, undated draft of statement on “Historic Sites Marking Programme.”
the markers as soon as possible. However, the citizen members of the subcommittee objected to being rushed. They complained that they were being treated as a kind of rubber stamp committee, with Lyons and his technical committee having effectively taken control, making important decisions about locations and topics and even proposing the wording of some markers. They were also very upset that the draft marker Lyons had submitted to them had “Department of Recreation and Conservation” stamped on it, rather than an acknowledgement of the Centennial committee’s work. Sage, a professional historian who had sat on the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada for fifteen years, was the most vocal in his displeasure. “We are in favour of the erection of these signs as fast as possible but we want a chance to check each inscription,” he insisted. Sage also criticized the “inconsistent” and sometimes “corny” tone of the proposed marker inscriptions. “I have not seen anything here that would get past the Historic Sites Board,” he huffed. “It is amateurish.”

The archaeologist Wilson Duff sat on both the subcommittee and the technical committee, and he tried to assuage Sage’s concerns. He reminded the subcommittee that the ’58 Centennial was meant to be colourful, playful, and imbued with a sense of optimism. In the midst of an economic boom, it was an opportunity for British Columbians new and old alike to learn about their province, its past, and its landscapes. It was not intended to fixate on obscure dates or dull details about the ‘great men’ of BC’s past. Duff also defended the draft marker inscriptions Lyons had submitted, arguing that Lyons was “always going for the public appeal” because he was conscious that their audience would be the motoring public, who learned about history by reading works of

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25 Except where noted otherwise, the following is drawn from BCA, GR-1448, box 1, Minutes of the Third Historic Sites Subcommittee, 5 February 1958.
popular literature, visiting museums, and observing the landscapes they travelled through, rather than by reading dense academic texts or memorizing the dates and other details inscribed on solemn stone monuments.

Lyons and Duff believed that adopting a casual style akin to a travelogue or guidebook would ultimately make the ’58 Centennial Stop of Interest markers more effective. Not every marker had to take the same tone: some could be heroic, romantic, or tragic while others could be wry, whimsical, or told with a wink. Some could be about progress, others about failure. It was of prime importance that they not be boring. Mixing up the tone of the markers and keeping their messages relatively simple would encourage motorists to stop and look at them, which would help generate memorable and meaningful experiences of history by the road.

In the end, the citizen members of the historic sites subcommittee resigned themselves to the fact that the technical committee and the Parks Branch were in the driver’s seat due to the fact that roads and traffic would play such an important structuring role in the Centennial marking program. Their third meeting ended with a discussion of the inscriptions for the first ten signs. Members voted on their preferences and suggested minor revisions here and there. There were differences of opinion about the most significant person or event to commemorate at each roadside stopping place. Mostly there were questions about the distribution of markers. Did the Dewdney Trail really deserve to be marked in two places along the southern transprovincial highway: in Manning Park and also in the city of Trail? Should so many markers be clustered in the Fraser Canyon and along the Hope-Princeton Highway, the province’s two road links between the Coast and Interior? “You must mention Kelowna,” insisted Centennial
Committee Chairman Lawrie Wallace, who no doubt wanted to ensure that Premier Bennett viewed the marking program favourably.

The two committees worked through the spring of 1958 in order to have markers in place for the summer travel season. Rising costs associated with the casting process resulted in the number of markers being scaled back to 38, and this was probably just as well, because erecting the signs proved to be a slow and troublesome process. The Parks Branch staff responsible for putting up the markers found that not every pullout was ideally suited to accommodate them. For example, the pullout on the outskirts of Yale which had been deemed suitable for a Stop of Interest marker was located just a few hundred yards from the cairn that the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada had unveiled in 1925. Field staff questioned whether it was appropriate to have the two markers so close together, especially as they both commemorated Yale as the southern terminus of the Cariboo Wagon Road. A marker was deemed very desirable at Ashcroft Manor, but there were concerns that having cars entering and exiting the flow of traffic at that point would cause a serious hazard. At the “Fraser River View” on the outskirts of Hope, the gateway to the BC Interior, the Department of Highways had cleared a pullout where it was possible to get a panoramic view of the river with snow-capped mountains looming in background. However, getting the best possible view would require cutting down a significant number of trees that were located outside the road right-of-way, beyond the jurisdiction of Highways. Similarly, trees had to be removed around most of the Stop of Interest pullouts in the Cariboo, where ridges and hills that could provide

26 BCA, GR-1448, box 1, Minutes of the Fourth Meeting of the Historic Sites Subcommittee, 14 February 1958; Minutes of the Fifth Meeting of the Historic Sites Subcommittee, 21 March 1958; Minutes of the Seventh Meeting of the Historic Sites Subcommittee, 14 May 1958.

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scenic vistas were few and far between. At Westbank, in the central Okanagan, trees had to be cut down on an Indian reserve in order to provide a good view of Kelowna and the new floating bridge across Okanagan Lake. At another viewpoint overlooking Okanagan Lake, which was deemed suitable for a marker about the legendary lake monster Ogopogo, the view was marred by the presence of utility poles and telephone lines. The pullout for a viewpoint overlooking scenic Shuswap Lake had frequently been used for illegal dumping, and the surrounding brush was described as having a “bad garbage situation.”

A list of urgently needed markers produced in May 1958 shows the two committees scrambling to ensure that each major highway corridor received its ‘fair share’ of Stop of Interest markers. The main highways through the Kootenays and on Vancouver Island were deemed to need more. It was also considered important to have more markers in the Okanagan, which, as mentioned above, was the premier’s riding. Along the Cariboo Highway it was deemed unacceptable to have a markerless gap of 200 miles between Ashcroft and Quesnel, even though there was an HSMBC cairn at Alexandria. The gap was ‘plugged’ with a marker that commemorated the sternwheel steamboats that had plied the upper Fraser during the days of the Cariboo Wagon Road, which was put up at a viewpoint overlooking the river near the sleepy hamlet of Soda Creek.

Thirty of the 38 Stop of Interest markers erected in 1958 were located in the Interior. Twenty-five of those 30 involved the three historical themes that had traditionally been associated with the Interior: exploration, the fur trade, and the gold

27 BCA, GR-1448, box 1, undated list of 34 proposed viewpoints.
rushed. Considerable attention was paid to the history of resource extraction and transportation. Ten markers were directly related to mining, ranching, and pioneer farms. A dozen involved trails, wagon roads, steamboats, roadhouses, and other transportation-related topics.

Figure 12.2: Postcard showing Stop of Interest marker at roadside pullout above Osoyoos on the southern transprovincial highway. Note the smaller plaque mounted beneath the main one, stating it was erected as part of the 1958 Centennial celebrations.

Many Stop of Interest markers were accompanied by picnic tables and a Garbage Gobbler. The Garbage Gobblers were colourfully painted, dinosaur-shaped concrete garbage cans that the Parks Branch had fabricated as a way of reducing littering along British Columbia’s main highways. Getting out of the car and ‘feeding’ the Garbage Gobbler was meant to be fun for small children, who were unlikely to be interested in reading markers about the province’s past. The presence of the whimsical Garbage Gobblers emphasized the notion that the Stops of Interest were fun and playful, rather
than solemn and serious. These stopping places provided motorists with an opportunity to get out of the car, stretch their legs, and learn a quick but memorable lesson about the history associated with BC’s roadside landscapes. The pullouts, the Stop of Interest markers, and their attendant Garbage Gobblers were jointly maintained by the Parks Branch and the Department of Highways.

The ’58 Centennial Stop of Interest markers proved very popular with the motoring public. The central Centennial Committee and the Parks Branch both deemed the program a great success. More markers were erected in the following years, particularly in the lead-up to the centennial celebrations in 1966, 1967, and 1971. Ninety-one markers had been put up by the end of 1966, when the Parks Branch published a brochure that invited motorists to “Stop, Look, and Learn” whenever they spotted one by the road. Another 35 Stops of Interest would be added over the following fifteen years. They continued to take a mixed tone and to cover a range of topics, from trees and totem poles to pulp mills to train robbers. As a system, the Stops of Interest remained closely tied to the province’s arterial highway network, just as their name suggested they must be. Individually and as a system they did very little (probably nothing, in fact) to help draw auto tourists to British Columbia. Yet on a banal level they must have subtly shaped innumerable motorists’ experiences of history by the road (and to a lesser extent nature by the road) in the BC Interior. Motorists with no interest in BC’s history might stop and look at one of these markers and remember what they read, for the landscape visible from each roadside pullout served as a kind of mnemonic device, linking an easily-digestible

idea about the past to a particular place. Motorists who had more than a passing interest in BC’s past were likely to link the Stop of Interest markers and the limited repertoire of themes that they employed together with other historical landscape features that were visible by the road, whether they were relics, other monuments, a museum, or one of the growing number of large-scale historical tourist attractions that appeared in the Interior beginning in the late 1950s, like Barkerville Historic Provincial Park.

Calls to Restore Barkerville

The Stop of Interest program was the British Columbia government’s first and most systematic step towards playing an active role in shaping the motoring public’s experiences of history by the road. However, the markers were not the only permanent historical attractions that resulted from BC’s ’58 Centennial celebrations. The government also decided to develop a major historical tourist attraction at Barkerville. The rest of this chapter examines the government’s ‘restoration’ efforts at Barkerville during the late 1950s and 1960s, while the following chapter examines several similar projects that were initiated during the 1960s, some of which succeeded and some of which failed. The focus is on how attempts to develop historical tourist attractions were connected to the state’s expansion and improvement of the provincial highway network, the continued growth of auto tourism, and, more broadly, to the ongoing postwar resource boom.

The Parks Branch played an important role in most of these endeavours. During the late 1940s and 1950s it had proven itself to be the government agency with expertise in developing scenic, natural, and recreational attractions and managing landscape
aesthetics in dozens of parks. Thus it was no surprise that the government turned to the Parks Branch to do something similar with history by the road during the late 1950s. At Barkerville, the Parks Branch was charged with imposing, maintaining, and promoting an old-timey aesthetic that evoked the atmosphere of BC’s gold rush days.

The '58 Centennial was an incentive for the provincial government to step in and develop Barkerville as a major historical tourist attraction, but pressure from Cariboo boosters, business groups, tourism promoters, and history enthusiasts had been building for many years. During the mid 1950s organizations from all around BC lobbied the provincial government for help preserving old buildings and other historical landscape features that were considered especially representative, iconic, or otherwise useful for attracting tourists. Some of the most intense and sustained lobbying came from the northern Interior, where the roadhouses associated with the gold rush and wagon road of the 1860s were fast disappearing, and where Barkerville was more or less a ghost town. The groups lobbying Victoria to step in and take action at Barkerville included the BC Historical Association, the Cariboo Historical Society, the Wells-Barkerville Historical Society, Quesnel’s village commissioners, the Anglican Diocese of the Cariboo, the Chinese Freemasons, and the Wells and District Board of Trade.

A few history enthusiasts from Quesnel even organized what they hoped would be a headline-grabbing publicity stunt. They surreptitiously removed the rot-riddled headboard that marked the grave of Chartres Brew, British Columbia’s first police chief, from the overgrown Barkerville cemetery, in the hope that someone would mistake its removal for an act of either theft or desecration. The resulting press coverage was expected stir up public interest in the deteriorating townsite, and thus encourage the
provincial government to take steps to preserve it. However, the stunt fizzled when no one noticed that the historic headboard had gone missing.  

Many BC newspapers printed articles, editorials, and photo features that supported these boosters and historical societies. For example, *Northwest Digest* continued to devote attention to ghost towns and historical landscape features. Publisher-editor Art Downs ran stories about the history of the northern Interior all through 1957 and 1958, focusing on familiar favourites like the fur trade, the gold rush, pioneer ranchers, and frontier transport. The January 1958 issue of *Northwest Digest* carried a guest editorial titled “Barkerville: Is it Worth Preserving?” which was written by journalist Stan Rough, who usually worked for newspapers in Terrace, Kitimat, and Prince Rupert. The editorial began by describing the Rough family’s trip to Barkerville in the summer of 1957. It praised the private museum in the Kelly Hotel and deemed the old cemetery and St. Saviour’s Anglican Church to be of “special interest” for visitors. Rough described meeting old-timers who were “veritable encyclopedias” of local history, including Mr. and Mrs. Wendle, who had married in Barkerville in 1910, and Fred Tregullis, age 95, who had arrived in town in the 1880s. Nevertheless, he concluded that “[a] visit to Barkerville today is rather a disappointment.”

Barkerville at the present time is a nondescript collection of old buildings that a fire could wipe out in a few hours. […] There are no facilities for tourists to eat or stay overnight. The road to the old [Richfield] courthouse where Judge Begbie held court is almost overgrown [and] the building is now just a windowless frame. Today Barkerville tells little of its former bustling days. Second growth has covered up the surrounding hillsides and underbrush has partly covered the churned-up gravel on the floor of the narrow valley itself.  


“Why save Barkerville with its weather beaten church, windowless houses, and false-front stores?” Rough asked rhetorically. “Why not leave Barkerville to burn down some day or its buildings to collapse one by one under the weight of winter snows?” In response, he invoked what had been a common refrain amongst scholarly and popular historians of British Columbia since at least the 1920: Barkerville had to be saved because the Cariboo gold rush had been the foundational event in BC’s past.

Thousands of men and women, on foot, horseback, snowshoes, pack train and stagecoach made their way to the gold camps in the Cariboo. Bruce Hutchison in his fine book The Fraser calls them the Argonauts who in their search for gold were unconsciously opening up a vast country, for in their wake would come the farmer, logger, and rancher. This is why it is so tragic that a priceless historical heritage should be left to decay. Barkerville is the spirit of the pioneers who played so vital a role in opening so majestic a province.

Rough saw the dilapidated townsite as an irreplaceable link to the province’s past, to a frontier patrimony of rugged individualism epitomized by the figure of the solitary gold prospector. The gold rush and wagon road had not been characterized by monopolies like the Hudson’s Bay Company or the Canadian Pacific Railway. In those adventuresome, romantic days there had still been room for personal initiative, for the individual who could strike it rich through hard work, innovation, and a bit of luck. At the same time, the town of Barkerville and the Cariboo Wagon Road were closely associated with permanence and stability, for they had spurred agricultural colonization and the resettlement of the BC mainland. Furthermore, the Cariboo gold rush had demonstrated the importance of a state that actively facilitated individual enterprise. Not only had BC’s colonial government established institutions of law and order on the mainland, like the police, courts, mineral licenses, and tax collection, but it had also borrowed large sums in order to build the trails, wagon roads, and bridges that would
open up the country, facilitating resource extraction and agricultural colonization, and also the fulsome exercise of personal initiative and enterprise.

Stan Rough’s lament echoed F.W. Lindsay’s 1951 editorial that had criticized the future-mindedness of BC’s postwar boom. By embracing the new and failing to attend to the old – including historic places like Barkerville – residents of the northern Interior were neglecting not only their patrimony but also a potential economic asset. There had to be a practical, constructive use for a ghost town seemingly bypassed by modernity, some way to salvage value from its weathered structures. Allowing its dilapidated old buildings to rot, burn, or collapse would be wasteful, for the town’s atmosphere of authentic old-timey-ness clearly seemed to have the potential to draw tourists from within BC and further afield. It seemed like only a few ingredients were missing to make Barkerville into a significant historical attraction. The most important were the preservation and/or restoration of its oldest, most distinctive buildings, and the modernization of the road from Quesnel.

The Quesnel-Barkerville road was closely intertwined with both auto tourism and truck logging during the mid and late 1950s. In fact, it was seen as imperative to get both kinds of traffic into Wells and Barkerville. Production at the Cariboo Gold Quartz mine was rapidly tailing off as the veins of gold-bearing ore beneath Cow and Island mountains played out. Almost all of the other mines in the district had shut down due to low prices and rising costs. Logging activity was picking up, and there were rumours that a planer mill might be built at Wells, but the growth of the district’s forest industry was hobbled by the primitive condition of the road from Quesnel. Loggers, mill owners, and merchants from the north Cariboo petitioned the province to improve the Quesnel-
Barkerville road so that it could accommodate heavy multi-axle logging trucks. Throwing its support behind these efforts, the Wells Board of Trade pointed out that luring more auto tourists to Barkerville would strengthen the case for improving the road while at the same time drawing customers for the handful of commercial businesses left in the gold fields.31

Ralph Chetwynd was an important ally for the various groups that were lobbying for the preservation and promotion of Barkerville. Chetwynd was MLA for the Cariboo riding and minister for trade and railways in BC’s Social Credit government. In a February 1956 speech to the legislature he recommended that the province allocate $10,000 to help preserve the crumbling townsite.32 The preparations for the ’58 Centennial celebrations gave his proposal a boost: the central Centennial Committee recommended that the province undertake a special project to preserve and interpret the Barkerville townsite. Senior Parks Branch officials threw their support behind this idea, as did the deputy minister of recreation and conservation. More than 30 years after motorists from the Coast had first been able to drive to Barkerville, it appeared that a government-supported preservation scheme was in the cards.33

32 “Seeks Grant for Barkerville,” Cariboo Observer 16 February 1956, 9. Ralph Chetwynd was something of a Cariboo ‘old timer’ himself, and familiar with the changes the region had undergone since the turn of the century. He had come to BC from Britain in 1908, and after first settling in Ashcroft had gone on to manage a large orchard at Walhachin until the outbreak of war. In the interwar years he got into ranching and the cattle transportation business in the central Cariboo, which meant doing considerable business with the PGE railway. From 1942 to 1952 he was the PGE’s director of public relations, and was made minister of trade and railways after being elected on the Social Credit ticket in 1952.
33 An outline of the ’58 Centennial Committee’s initial plans for Barkerville can be found in British Columbia Centennial Committee, Report of the British Columbia Centennial Committee, 133-136. For examples of Parks Branch officials advocating a restoration program within the structure of the Department of Recreation and Conservation, see BCA, GR-1991, reel 1725, D.L. MacMurchie, Forester, Provincial Parks Branch to C.P. Lyons, 6 August 1957; D.B. Turner, Acting Deputy Minister, Department of Recreation and Conservation to Lyons, 6 August 1957. Regarding Cariboo residents’ continued involvement with Barkerville after the townsite’s ‘takeover’ by the provincial government, see Elliott,
Ralph Chetwynd passed away in early 1957, before the scheme had advanced very far. However, Barkerville boosters’ cause was picked up by his colleague Ray Williston, the MLA for Prince George. Williston was minister of lands and forests and one of the Social Credit government’s most powerful cabinet ministers. A former schoolteacher and principal, he had served as minister of education from 1953 to 1956, as well as honourary president of the BC Historical Association. He also sat on the central ‘58 Centennial Committee. He was no doubt aware that forestry interests in the north Cariboo were keen to have the Quesnel-Barkerville road upgraded to accommodate heavy logging trucks. On Williston’s recommendation, Premier Bennett gave approval to develop Barkerville as a major historical tourist attraction. The timing for state involvement in such a project was propitious, for the Cariboo Gold Quartz mine in Wells stopped production on its main shaft below Cow Mountain later in 1958.34

Planning Barkerville as an Historical Tourist Attraction

A big part of what differentiated the provincial government’s development scheme at Barkerville from the Stop of Interest site-marking program was the expense involved. Properties in the townsite would need to be purchased or expropriated, and any Barkerville museum would need to be staffed during the busy summer travel season. It is noteworthy that the ’58 Centennial historic sites subcommittee was not invited to get

review of Barkerville Days; BCA, GR-1661, box 17, file 1, James McKelvie to Charles V. Axine, 22 August 1964.

34 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1725, W.A.C. [Bennett], undated handwritten notes on Willard Ireland, Honorary Secretary, British Columbia Centennial Committee to Premier Bennett, 6 November 1957. Other documents that refer to the involvement of the premier and senior cabinet members are McWilliams to Land Commissioner, Quesnel, 7 May 1958; Ireland to C.W.T. Hyslop, Superintendent of Lands, 18 November 1957; Ray Williston to Bennett, 22 November 1957. On Williston’s role on the ’58 Centennial Committee, see Williston and Keller, Forest, Power, and Policy, 92-93.
involved in the Barkerville project. The government did not need experts on BC’s history for this undertaking – what it needed were experts in engineering, architectural preservation, and the management of landscape aesthetics.

The Provincial Secretary’s office had a reserve placed over the townsite as a preliminary step towards its purchase and long-term ‘restoration,’ but the Parks Branch was responsible for the planning and on-site work. Over the previous decade it had supervised several major construction projects, including the Pinewoods concession complex in Manning Park. Furthermore, it was widely expected that the Parks Branch would one day be assigned responsibility for managing BC’s most significant and accessible designated historic sites – a move made more likely by its recent transfer from the Forest Service to the Department of Recreation and Conservation.

Ches Lyons was sent to investigate Barkerville’s development prospects in June 1958, accompanied by Dennis Podmore, the Parks Branch’s expert on property acquisition. Their only explicit instruction was to acquire the Kelly family’s private museum collection: according to the head of the branch, “the whole project hinge[d] on this purchase.” Over the summer of 1958 Lyons and Podmore drew up an ambitious three-step plan for developing Barkerville as a major historical tourist attraction. The first and most pressing step was to make the site safe and appealing for visitors. The second step was for the province to acquire and stabilize the town’s remaining gold rush-era buildings, which would be accomplished over the span of two or three years. The third step was to return, over the span of a decade or more, the townsite to its appearance during the 1870s (following the fire of 1868, which had destroyed most of the town).

The Parks Branch’s first step was to institute a major clean-up of Barkerville.36 “Years of neglect and indifference had resulted in the town becoming littered with unsightly debris,” Lyons reported. “This atmosphere of disrepair stimulated vandalism and enhanced the general public belief that anything which could be picked up was available for the taking.” Residents had been dumping garbage along the edge of Williams Creek for many years, which was both unsightly and unsanitary. Campers had also carved their own unofficial campsites around the outskirts of town, leaving behind litter and unsanitary latrines. The water system for the town’s fire hydrants had fallen into disrepair, as had the power line from Wells. Lyons complained that the utility poles erected in the 1930s were “most unsightly” and recommended they be removed. There was only one café in town, and not a single public toilet. The Barkerville cemetery was badly overgrown, with many of its old headboards almost illegible.

“Emergency measures” undertaken in 1958 included clearing a large parking lot at the lower end of town, building a rudimentary ten-unit campground, and installing five pit toilets around the townsite. The Parks Branch got the Forest Service to donate better firefighting equipment to the volunteer fire brigade in Wells, which helped protect Barkerville’s old wooden buildings against their traditional nemesis. Brush and weeds were cleared from the town’s overgrown alleyways, revealing artifacts that had been protected from souvenir hunters by a luxuriant growth of stinging nettles. Brush was also removed from the cemetery, and several of the most badly weathered headboards were temporarily removed for repair. The Parks Branch erected a series of signs around the townsite to identify buildings, mineral claims, and other landscape features that were

36 The following is drawn from BCA, GR-1991, reel 1760, undated Ches Lyons report to BC Centennial Committee [summer 1958]. Also see Report of the British Columbia Centennial Committee, 133-135.
associated with the 1860s gold rush. Although these plywood signs were considered a short-term fix, they were carefully designed to “enhance the pioneer atmosphere.”

Parks Branch staff continued this “systematic” clean-up campaign through the 1958 summer travel season and into the fall. Lyons reported that giving the town a “cared for look” reduced the incidence of vandalism and trespassing. It also made for “very good public relations” with the few remaining Barkerville residents, impressing on them the high cultural value that the government placed on the town. Parks Branch staff made a point to consult with local history enthusiasts, property owners, and old-timers, including Bill Hong, Fred Ludditt, and the Kelly, Wendle, and Tregullis families. Cultivating good relations with the town’s remaining residents helped bring in more historic artifacts and information that could be used in the planned restoration program. It was also helped pave the way for an amicable program of property acquisition: the provincial government intended to purchase or expropriate all of the privately owned lots in town.

Ches Lyons’s development plan called for Barkerville to be divided into three distinct zones. The historic upper town, where most of the oldest buildings were located, would be preserved and gradually returned to its appearance during the 1870s, after the great fire of 1868 had wiped out all but a handful of its original buildings. The lower section of town, which contained mostly newer structures, would be cleared and made into an area dedicated to visitor facilities. Separating the historic ‘old town’ and the visitor facilities zone would be a small administration area with an office, workshops, service yard, and eventually an indoor interpretative centre. Separating visitor services from the oldest section of town was seen as vitally important: having cars and tents and
camping facilities visible to visitors would interfere with the old-timey atmosphere that was desired.  

After acquiring the Kelly Hotel and its associated museum, the Parks Branch set out to secure the other buildings in Barkerville. The province already controlled nearly half of the lots in the ‘old town’ above St. Saviour’s Church due to non-payment of taxes. More than a dozen buildings in that section of the townsite dated from the nineteenth century, including the Nicol and Kelly hotels, the Chinese Masonic (or Tong) Hall, and several cabins, houses, and false-front stores built of logs or whipsawn lumber. As an inducement to sell, residents of the upper part of Barkerville were offered Parks Use Permits that would allow them to continue living in their homes rent- and tax-free for as long as they liked. For example, in exchange for selling his small cabin for use as an exhibit called the “Prospector’s Cabin,” Eugene Giddings, a trapper in his eighties, was given permission to reside in a larger, newer cabin, where he lived until he passed away in the early 1960s. Fred Ludditt helped the Parks Branch negotiate with several recalcitrant old-timers who resented the government’s sudden interest in their isolated community. The Parks Branch also demolished several decrepit and long-abandoned cabins that had been condemned by Fire Marshal Bill Hong – most were located in the Chinatown at the uppermost end of the townsite.  

The provincial government could acquire the old buildings in the upper section of Barkerville at a leisurely pace, for they were effectively unsellable to anyone else due to the reserve placed over the townsite. However, there was a pressing need to get control 

37 For an architect’s interpretation of Ches Lyons’ recommendations, see BCA, GR-1661, box 1, file 6, Raymond O. Harrison to Barkerville Restoration Advisory Council, 10 October 1959.
38 On Eugene Giddings’ real estate transaction with the provincial government, see Harris, Ten Golden Years, 98-99.
over the properties in the lower part of town, downstream from St. Saviour’s Church. Barkerville lacked space for new developments because it was cramped between Williams Creek and the steep surrounding hillsides. The Parks Branch wanted to raze or remove the buildings and other structures in the lower town so that it could build parking lots, campgrounds, administrative facilities, and an indoor interpretive centre. Furthermore, almost all of the buildings in lower town dated from the mining boom of the 1930s and thus were incommensurate with the 1870s aesthetic that Lyons envisioned for the townsite.

Clearing lower Barkerville would be relatively inexpensive because most of its cabins, warehouses, and outbuildings had been erected without legal title to the property they sat on. Technically, their owners and occupants were squatting. However, in order to maintain local goodwill, Lyons and Podmore recommended that the government deal leniently with the handful of squatters still living in the lower town, by offering to purchase their buildings and other improvements or help relocate them to lots that would be offered for sale along the road from Wells. In several cases in which the ‘owners’ of empty unauthorized buildings could not be contacted – for example, when they were believed to be in China – the buildings were simply torn down and the remnants burned.

In order to properly tell visitors “the Barkerville story,” Ches Lyons also recommended that steps also be taken to preserve historic landscape features that were located beyond the immediate vicinity of the townsite. He identified Cottonwood House, eighteen miles east of Quesnel, and the remnants of Stanley, seven miles west of Wells, as sites that could be made into satellites of the main restoration effort at Barkerville. The Richfield courthouse, located one mile up Williams Creek from Barkerville, was also
deemed particularly worthy of preservation. For decades the solitary, abandoned courthouse had captured visitors’ imaginations, and there had been several proposals to preserve it or turn it into some kind of museum. Provincial Archivist Willard Ireland had recently brought the “deplorable condition” of the courthouse to Premier Bennett’s attention, describing it as a kind of desecrated temple where vandals and transients had “wreaked havoc,” leaving the building’s interior a shambles with “obscenities […] written on its walls.”39

By getting control of these Barkerville satellites and preserving their atmosphere of the bygone days, the Parks Branch could arrange for the motoring public to travel a veritable corridor of historical landscape features from the moment they turned off the main highway at Quesnel. Cultivating a series of related historical attractions along the Quesnel-Barkerville road would evoke journeying along the old Cariboo Wagon Road. For most motorists the detritus left over from the 1930s mining boom would be indistinguishable from relics of the 1860s: ditches and culverts; churned-up creeks; collapsing cabins; the moldering remnants of old flumes and trestles; heaps of tailings partially grown over with brush. Having a series of historical attractions would help make the 55-mile drive to Barkerville (and the need to double back along the same route) less daunting to casual auto tourists. Given all the work he had undertaken with roadside attractions in provincial parks, as well as with the ’58 Centennial Stop of Interest marker program, it is no surprise that Lyons recognized the importance of treating the road as an experiential corridor.

39 BCA, GR-1991, reel1725, Ireland to W.A.C. Bennett, 6 Nov 1957.
Publicity about the government’s plans for Barkerville was intentionally minimized during the summer of 1958 in order to make property acquisition easier. Nevertheless, guest registers kept in St. Saviour’s Church and the museum in the Kelly Hotel saloon indicated that about 5000 sightseers visited Barkerville that summer. Most were British Columbians: approximately one third came from the Cariboo and northern BC, and another third from the cities of the Coast. The small, rudimentary campground that Parks Branch staff had hastily set up on the lower edge of town was full every night, and usually occupied well beyond capacity on weekends. As experience in provincial parks like Manning had shown time and time again since the end of World War Two, such heavy use was a strong indicator that the site would be very popular, and that more facilities would soon be required.

_Barkerville Historic Park_

Barkerville Historic Park was established as a Class A provincial park in January 1959. Ranger Les Cook, who had previously worked in isolated Wells Gray Provincial Park and on the Stop of Interest marking program was appointed its first superintendent. Shortly after, Deputy Provincial Secretary Lawrie Wallace organized the Barkerville Restoration Advisory Council (BRAC) as an arms-length agency that would coordinate the restoration program between the cabinet, the Parks Branch, other government departments, and the Cariboo’s various historical and business associations.40

Council members included Wallace, Provincial Archivist Willard Ireland, Minister of Lands and Forests Ray Williston, Minister of Mines Ken Kiernan, and a

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40 Barkerville Historic Park was established by Order-in-Council #26, 12 January 1959.
handful of professional publicity men from Vancouver who had been involved in planning and promoting the ‘58 Centennial events. The BRAC generally stayed in the background, working to get good publicity and substantial budget allocations for Barkerville Park, while allowing the Parks Branch considerable leeway in planning and day-to-day management. However, BRAC did deliberate on Barkerville Historic Park’s larger role in the economy of the northern Interior. At one of its first meetings, a motion was passed stating that for Barkerville to fulfill its potential as an historical tourist attraction, “it would be desirable to have the road [from Quesnel] hard-surfaced to make the drive an attractive one.”

The provincial government spent $35,000 acquiring property at Barkerville in 1958 and 1959. Another $13,500 was spent to purchase Cottonwood Ranch on the Quesnel-Barkerville road, which included the 1864 roadhouse, several large barns, and 20 acres of fenced-in fields. Attendance at Barkerville leapt from 5000 in 1958 to 10,000 in 1959 and then 25,000 in 1961. Visitation was spurred by coverage in magazines like Northwest Digest and Beautiful British Columbia, the lavishly illustrated full-colour quarterly that the provincial government started publishing in 1959. Beautiful British Columbia was a veritable catalogue of BC’s roadside attractions. Its first edition had a story titled “Barkerville Lives On!,” and stories involving the Cariboo Highway corridor were common fare during the 1960s. Northwest Digest encouraged readers to visit the

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41 Regarding the Barkerville Restoration Advisory Council, see BCA, GR-1661, box 3, file 3, E.F. Fox, Public Relations Department, BC Electric to Wallace, 19 October 1959, forwarding George Towhill, Public Relations, Canadian National Railways to Fox, 16 October 1959; J.A.L. Godfrey, Secretary, Quesnel and District Board of Trade to Wallace, 19 November 1959.

42 Regarding the protracted negotiations to acquire Cottonwood House, see BCA, GR-1661, box 1, file 3, “Report of the Barkerville Restoration Advisory Committee to the Legislature,” 19 February 1962. Regarding attendance in the park’s earliest years, see box 1, file 9, Wallace to Donald Mitchell, Manager, Mitchell Press, 7 March 1961.
park, donate artifacts, press the government for adequate funding, and complain about any developments that seemed to prioritize commercialization over historical authenticity.43

There was little change in Barkerville’s appearance in 1959 and 1960. About 25 old-timers remained in town, and its narrow main street was still lined with utility wires and parked automobiles. Most of the Parks Branch’s work happened out of view, with staff and contractors repairing the town water system and the roofs and foundations of many old buildings. A handful of relatively intact old buildings had displays of artifacts and mannequins set up in their front rooms so that visitors could peer through the windows and see tableaux of the 1870s – Eugene Giddings’ cabin was one of these. However, the pace of development started picking up in 1961 when the Parks Branch began preparing for a large influx of visitors during the summer of 1962, which would mark the centennial of the discovery of gold on Williams Creek.

In the park administration area, work got underway on a new interpretation centre that would replace the museum in the Kelly Hotel saloon. A washroom building with running water and flush toilets was built beside the main parking lot. In the upper town, several buildings were jacked up and shifted to empty lots where they better fit the Parks Branch’s restoration plan; historical photographs were used to show how the street and storefronts had looked during the 1870s. The Parks Branch experimented with trucking abandoned buildings in from Quensel Forks, but this proved impractical due to the long

distance and rough roads involved. Trees and brush were cleared from around the Richfield courthouse, and repairs were made to its roof, windows, and foundation.\textsuperscript{44}

Figure 12. Barkerville Historic Provincial Park, 1961, with St. Saviour’s church at centre. Note the new roof on the building at centre right, where tin has been replaced with wooden shingles. Courtesy of Mark Faviell.

There was nowhere in Barkerville for visitors to purchase food or drinks, and the park lacked a venue for performances. To solve these problems, the Parks Branch decided to build replicas of several disappeared historical buildings. An empty lot across from St. Saviour’s Church was used to build the Wake-Up-Jake Saloon Café, where a concessionaire would sell visitors refreshments and light meals. A few doors further up main street, major renovations and additions were made to the 1930s-era community hall so that it could serve as a ‘new’ Theatre Royal, which was eminently suitable as the hall was located on the site of the original theatre. Parks Branch staff also built a replica of a

\textsuperscript{44} BCA, GR-1661, box 1, file 5, C.P. Lyons, “Barkerville Programme Report” (1960).
Cornish pump waterwheel beside Williams Creek in order to demonstrate old gold mining techniques to visitors.\textsuperscript{45}

Special funding provided for Barkerville’s centennial allowed the Parks Branch to start making the park’s historic zone look the way it had during the 1870s. The goal was have visitors feel that they were stepping back in time when they entered the townsite. Utility lines were pulled down and the poles removed. Efforts were made to eliminate the presence of automobiles. In the lower town, several squatters’ cabins built during the interwar years were loaded onto sledges and skidded away with a caterpillar tractor during the winter of 1961-1962. The remaining buildings were demolished to make way for more parking lots and a larger campground. The debris left behind was burned and the site was planted with grass seed. By the spring of 1962 most traces of the 1930s-era lower town had been erased from the park. Spruce saplings were planted around the campgrounds, parking lot, and administration buildings to provide natural-looking screens between the park’s different zones. Road access to the park from Wells was reorganized around this time. Motorists entering Barkerville no longer passed by the cairn that the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada had erected beside the original road in 1929. The cairn ended up cut off from traffic, isolated on the hillside above the park’s new parking lots.

Preparations for Barkerville’s centennial year extended beyond the boundaries of the park. In May 1961 Parks Branch staff helped the Wells Volunteer Fire Brigade demolish a number of dilapidated cabins and shacks that were located on crown land in and around Wells, and that had been abandoned since the district’s mining boom ended in

\textsuperscript{45} British Columbia, Department of Recreation and Conservation, \textit{Annual Report} (Victoria: Department of Recreation and Conservation, 1962), 40.
the 1940s. These buildings were considered eyesores, as they were visible to motorists driving along the Quesnel-Barkerville road. They were also deemed fire hazards, and had been condemned by fire marshal Bill Hong.  

Fifty-five miles west of the park, a large, eye-catching sign was put up at the point where the Quesnel-Barkerville road split off from the main Cariboo Highway. It showed a prospector discovering gold in his pan amidst a mountain setting, and listed the amenities available at the end of the road, like campgrounds and the hotels and cafés in Wells. Further afield, Parks Branch staff erected more than a dozen “Cariboo Wagon Road” signs with a wagon wheel motif along the highway between Yale and Quesnel. These signs were placed near major communities, prominent historical landmarks, and places where traces of the famous wagon road could still be discerned.

The boards of trade in Wells and Quesnel urged the premier and senior cabinet ministers to improve the Quesnel-Barkerville road in the lead-up to the 1962 centennial. Though it was now surfaced with gravel for its entire length, the road still had many rough, steep, winding, and narrow sections. The fact that tourists had to share such a road with loaded logging trucks was considered dangerous. Tourists were said to frequently complain about the condition of the road, as well as the lack of a loop trip option. Many were said to have turned back for Quesnel before reaching Barkerville. The petitioners

46 BCA, GR-1661, box 1, file 4, E.W. Bassett, Deputy Minister of Lands to Wallace, 12 May 1961; Wallace to Bassett, 10 August 1961.
48 The need for motorists to come and go from Barkerville on the same road was seen as a major shortcoming. The government received several proposals to make a loop trip possible through the construction of new roads to the south of Barkerville, linking it with Williams Lake. See for example BCA, GR-1991, reel 1725, K.F. Phillips, Secretary, Williams Lake and District Board of Trade to Department of Recreation and Conservation, 14 December 1962; J.A. Dennison, Senior Maintenance Engineer, Department of Highways to Phillips, 18 December 1962; Broadland to R.L. Colby, BC Government Travel Bureau, 4 September 1964; GR-1661, box 17, file 1, W.M. Hong to P. Gaglardi, Minister of Highways, 26 April 1966.
warned that the poor condition of the road would “greatly color the impression of our province gained by visitors.” One BC resident who wrote to compliment the government for its restoration work at Barkerville also criticized the road. “It is the worst stretch for dust that I encountered anywhere in a wide circuit of the province this summer. I am reliably told that U.S. visitors will not drive over it.” He predicted the road would prove to be “the greatest hindrance” to the success of Barkerville Park, a veritable Achilles heel.49

Cariboo boosters had good reason to worry about how the region’s roads would shape its reputation with the motoring public. In May 1961 the Vancouver Sun had printed a very unflattering article about a trip that columnist Jack Scott and cartoonist Len Norris had recently taken along the Cariboo Highway. Scott declared himself “deeply disturbed” by the changes that had occurred along the highway corridor since the end of the war. He deplored it as “an unholy mess […] a route on which stretches of unparalleled beauty are punctuated by clots of ugly, helter skelter slums.” The famous Clinton Hotel was gone, as were many other gold rush-era roadhouses that Scott had become familiar with during the interwar years. The surviving relics of the old days were now “fatally embraced in the new, the cheap, the temporary.”

In their place is a jumble of jerry-built motels and drive-in burger joints and auto wreckers who advertise their wares with the piled-up corpses of broken cars and haphazard shacks and trailers and cheerless coffee shops loud with rock and roll, and garages, banks, and supermarkets built without a thought to complementing terrain or landscape, and bleak hotels with loud, grim beer parlors and lumber yards and piles of tires and the junk of rusted machinery apparently calculatingly placed to be on exhibit and a mass of crude signs.50

49 BCA, GR-1661, box 18, file 6, Quesnel and District Board of Trade and Wells District Board of Trade to Wallace, 19 January 1961; Pete Lowden to Barkerville Historic Restoration Committee, August 1961.
This scathing criticism grabbed the attention of boosters, tourism promoters, and other Cariboo residents who recognized the economic importance of tourism and the motoring public’s views from the road. Newspapers from around the northern Interior called for the provincial government to implement zoning restrictions that would provide a degree of control over roadside development, thereby fending off eyesores and maintaining an uncluttered, old-timey aesthetic.\textsuperscript{51}

The provincial government added a significant natural and recreational attraction to the Wells-Barkerville district in the lead-up to the 1962 centennial. Bowron Lakes Provincial Park was established in the fall of 1961, and was the first large park in the Cariboo. Like Barkerville Historic Park, it was only accessible from the Quesnel-Barkerville road – its administration centre was located 20 miles north of Wells. As shown in Chapter Seven, Bowron Lakes Park was part of an exchange that had been engineered between the Parks Branch and the BC Forest Service. The Parks Branch expedited the evisceration of Hamber Provincial Park in the monotonous Big Bend country, and in return the Forest Service relinquished its claims to the timber in the picturesque Bowron Lakes chain, which could have been used to feed the pulp mills being planned for Prince George and Quesnel. By facilitating the deletion of 2.35 million acres from Hamber Park (which was probably unavoidable anyway), the Parks Branch managed to preserve a 240,000-acre wilderness area that was expected to prove popular with canoeists and backcountry campers. Bowron Lakes Park promised to increase tourist traffic in the area around Quesnel and Wells during the summer months, thus adding another reason to improve the road.

Barkerville’s 1962 centennial drew on many of the same themes as BC’s ’58 Centennial celebrations, including rugged individualism, frontier transportation, and the struggle to wrest resource wealth from an isolated, seemingly hostile environment. There were a few significant changes to the appearance of the townsite, but the most dramatic change was not structural: it was the Parks Branch’s decision to make the park an open-air ‘living’ museum by adding actors dressed in period costume. Seeking to inject a spirit of optimism and boom times into the old ghost town, the Parks Branch encouraged its interpreters to play up the ribald and rough-and-ready aspects of Barkerville’s gold rush history as an ethnically polyglot but largely homosocial populace that was mainly comprised of transients and sojourners who were united only by their quest to get rich quick. Entry to the park was free in the early years, but starting in 1962 visitors willing to pay a small fee could watch a period costume song and dance performance at the replica Theatre Royal, complete with a troupe of high-kicking hurdy gurdy girls. Most observers concluded that these additions did not to detract from the site; instead they helped bring history to life. Premier Bennett visited Barkerville in August to officiate over the opening of the park’s new indoor interpretive centre. The timing for another celebration of BC’s long history of resource-based boom towns could not have been better: earlier that summer the government had announced that Canadian Forest Products and the British Reed Paper Group would be proceeding with their plans to build the first pulp mill at Prince George.52

Thanks to promotional campaigns by the provincial government and Cariboo tourism promoters, Barkerville was an enormously popular tourist destination in 1962. It even outdrew the Provincial Museum in Victoria, with attendance more than quadrupling to 107,000. The park’s campgrounds, parking lots, and other visitor facilities were overflowing throughout the summer, as were private campgrounds, autocourts, motels, and diners in Wells and Quesnel.

Coastal media outlets were full of praise for Barkerville Historic Park. Vancouver radio host Dorwin Baird declared that the townsite had been brought “back from the dead.” He congratulated the Parks Branch for its “excellent and restrained” work, and for avoiding an overly commercial “Knott’s Berry Farm approach.” The *Vancouver Province* attributed Barkerville’s “tremendous feeling of atmosphere” to the recently-implemented prohibition on automobiles in the old town and the Parks Branch’s myriad other efforts to “keep all signs of modernity out of sight.” *Vancouver Sun* columnist Jack Scott, who in 1961 had bemoaned the loss of historical landscape features along the Cariboo Highway, reported that Barkerville “exudes the authentic atmosphere of the dramatic events that transpired here. […] The fears of some old-timers that it might develop into another cute Disneyland or Knott’s Berry Farm now seem unfounded. […] You step from your car directly into the past. It is as ageless as the silent mountains that rim the valley.”

Criticisms of the Barkerville experience inevitably revolved around the Quesnel-Barkerville road, rather than the park itself. For example, the *Sun* complained about “the choking dust cloud that greets the motorist, thoroughly spoiled by the asphalt ribbon of

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53 BCA, GR-1661, box 17, file 9, transcript of broadcasts on CKWX by Dorwin Baird, 20 and 21 August 1963; box 18, file 5, clipping of Jack Scott article from *Vancouver Sun* 13 July 1962; clipping of Mike Tytherleigh article from *Vancouver Province* 14 July 1962, 5.
the Cariboo Highway, when he hits the first leg of the [road] eastward from Quesnel.”
Like the Barkerville Restoration Advisory Council and the boards of trade in Quesnel and Wells, these complainers wanted the road paved and otherwise brought up to modern standards. Auto tourists making the journey to Barkerville were interested in learning about the history of the gold rush and the Cariboo Wagon Road, but not in driving a road that evoked the travel conditions of the nineteenth century.\(^{54}\)

Barkerville’s popularity as a tourist destination and its novelty as BC’s first living museum generated lots of positive publicity, as well as important word of mouth. Its visitor facilities had been overwhelmed in 1962, yet as many or more visitors were expected to come in the following years. Preparing for another influx in 1963, the Parks Branch had two concession trailers set up in the park’s main parking lot: one selling souvenirs and the other snacks and light meals. The trailers were brought in because the Wake-Up-Jake Saloon Café had been unable to cope with visitor demand in 1962 and the nearest other dining facilities were five miles away in Wells – too far to be of use for most visitors.\(^{55}\)

The Parks Branch’s food service plans proved to be prudent, as Barkerville recorded 130,000 visitors in 1963, nearly 25,000 more than the previous year. However, these ‘emergency’ preparations stirred up concern in Wells and Quesnel. In an editorial titled “Whither Barkerville?” the *Cariboo Observer* worried that the park was starting to drift in the direction of “the many pseudo historical attractions that flourish to the south.” It reported “disturbing rumours” that restoration might be sidelined in favour of

\(^{54}\) Jack Scott article from *Vancouver Sun* 13 July 1962. Also see Fern E. Crockett, letter to the editor, *Northwest Digest* 18, 2 (March-April 1962), 54.
\(^{55}\) BCA, GR-1991, reel 1725, McWilliams to Cook, 29 May 1963.
developing commercial concessions that would threaten to “cheapen the entire effort.”

The Observer argued that the government would do better to prioritize “expansion of the Barkerville exhibits [and] improvement of the Barkerville Road.” Lawrie Wallace and the Barkerville Restoration Advisory Council helped dispel the Observer’s concerns by explaining the pressures associated with rapidly increasing visitation. However, this did not satisfy the merchants of the Wells Chamber of Commerce, who were more concerned about what they perceived as unfair competition than matters of authenticity or atmosphere. Writing on behalf of the chamber, Fred Ludditt complained that the government’s decision to allow the sale of meals and souvenirs inside the park put it in direct and unfair competition with cafés and shops in Wells that had been established prior to Barkerville becoming a provincial park.56

Clearing Automobiles from Barkerville’s Main Street

During the early and mid 1960s one of the biggest challenges to making Barkerville Historic Park look, sound, and feel convincingly old-timey was the continuing presence of automobiles in the historic townsite. This was particularly true along its narrow main street, which was lined by most of its oldest and most famous buildings. It was difficult for visitors to imagine themselves stepping back in time to the

56 “Whither Barkerville?” Cariboo Observer 15 May 1963, 1; “Cleaning the Air,” Cariboo Observer 4 July 1963, 1; BCA, GR-1661, box 1, file 3, Alfred W. Ludditt, Wells and District Chamber of Commerce to Wallace, 15 July 1963. The Parks Branch later came into direct conflict with the Wells-Barkerville Historical Society over the aesthetics of roadside commerce in the area around the park. In 1964 park Superintendent Les Cook heard rumours that members of the historical society wanted to set up some kind of roadside information booth and souvenir stand on a parcel of roadside property just outside the entrance to Barkerville Park. Not only would this be a potential traffic hazard due to cars stopping on the side of the road, but it would be a potential eyesore, “a good start for a ‘shack town’ right at the entrance to the park.” This was particularly troubling after all the Parks Branch’s work to clear the lower town and clean up the road corridor between Wells and Barkerville. Cook recommended that the department of lands or highways be asked to find some way to thwart any such roadside commercial activity. BCA, GR-1661, box 17, file 3, Cook to Wallace, 4 March 1964; Broadland to Wallace, 7 May 1964.
1870s when there were cars and pickup trucks parked up and down the street and in front of picturesque old buildings like St. Saviour’s Church and the Masonic Hall. However, Barkerville’s main street was a public right-of-way, leading up Williams Creek to the site of old Richfield and dozens of mineral claims. Most of these claims had been dormant for years and the road above town was in poor condition, practically overgrown in some spots. However, the establishment of Barkerville Park had not extinguished these mineral claims – in fact, several were grandfathered inside the park. Nor had it extinguished miners and prospectors’ right of access to the area above town. The road that traversed the historic townsite and led up to Richfield remained a public right-of-way after 1959.

Prior to Barkerville being made a provincial park, the Department of Mines had expressed concern about how this would affect prospecting and mining operations in the surrounding hills, particularly if the price of gold were to rise in future. They worried park staff might try to prevent the use of Barkerville’s narrow main street by vehicles that needed access to mineral claims above the townsite. “Hauling on the roads [of Barkerville] must not be denied,” a senior Mines official had insisted in a November 1958 memo. He also suggested that active mining operations in the vicinity of the park would heighten, rather than disrupt, the old-timey atmosphere that the Parks Branch wanted to cultivate. “Current mining activities as items of tourist interest should be welcomed and in no way hampered through the presence of the park, for they are of as great interest value as the relics of the past.”

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57 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1725, S.S. Holland, Geologist, Department of Mines to Dr. H. Sargent, Chief, Mineralogical Branch, Department of Mines, 18 November 1958; K.B. Blakey, Chief Gold Commissioner, Department of Mines to McWilliams, 9 December 1958; McWilliams to Blakey, 18 December 1959; McWilliams memo to the Minister re: establishment of Barkerville Historic Park, 19 December 1958. The use of public roads in and around the new park was not the only point of conflict between the Parks Branch and Department of Mines in the late 1950s. There was considerable debate about mining operations in and
From 1958 to 1961 the Parks Branch carefully avoided conflict with miners, prospectors, and the Department of Mines over the use of public roads inside Barkerville Park. As noted above, there were still a few dozen old-timers living in the townsite, some of whom owned cars and pickup trucks, so this was relatively easy to do. Motorists were allowed to drive into the townsite and up and down its main street. However, tourists and sightseers were encouraged to leave their cars in the parking lot at the lower end of town and proceed through the townsite on foot in order to take in its old-timey atmosphere. Many visitors complained about the incongruous presence of automobiles and other modern features like power lines. For example, one visitor who otherwise showered compliments on the new park recommended that the Parks Branch ban parking on Barkerville’s main street. “This is for the benefit of the shutterbug,” he explained. “It spoils our pictures of these old buildings to see a row of new cars along the street.” The director of the Parks Branch responded that “our plan is to construct a parking area below [St. Saviour’s] church and confine cars to it. […] As time goes on more and more uncompatible things such as electric light poles and modern buildings will be removed from the old town.”

It was in the lead-up to Barkerville’s 1962 centennial that conflict broke out between the Parks Branch, miners, and the Department of Mines. The initial flashpoint was the mile-long road that led up Williams Creek from Barkerville to Richfield. In 1960 around the new park. For example, a dredge operating on Williams Creek just downstream from the park entrance threatened to change the course of the creek, which might flood the new campground and picnic site. The dredging operation also left unsightly trenches and tailing piles. When Parks Branch staff complained, officials from the Department of Mines responded that the churned up heaps of gravel left by active mining operations were no more “unsightly” than Barkerville itself. BCA, GR-1991, reel 1725, Cook to McWilliams, 14 April 1959; Lyons to Cook, 22 April 1959; Cook to McWilliams, 27 November 1959. BCA, GR-1991, reel 1725, Roger Pease [New Westminster] to Director, Parks Branch, 11 July 1961; McWilliams to Pease, 1 August 1961.
the minister of recreation and conservation had requested that the boundaries of
Barkerville Park be extended to encompass the old Richfield courthouse. However, it was
unclear whether the road between the historic townsite and the solitary courthouse could
actually be made part of the park. It might have been a remnant of the old Cariboo
Wagon Road, but it was also a public right-of-way and classified as a mining road by the
Department of Highways. As a result, the Richfield courthouse was made a separate
provincial park – one of the smallest in BC – until the problem of connecting it with
Barkerville Historic Park could be resolved.

The Parks Branch had three reasons to want control over the mile-long road
between Barkerville and Richfield. The first was safety. Many visitors to the park walked
up to Richfield, and although motor vehicle traffic was light on the road there was still
concern about the potential for accidents. Pedestrian and vehicular traffic were thought to
not mix well due to the road’s narrowness, lack of verges, short sightlines, and generally
poor condition.59 The second reason involved the aesthetics of commerce inside the park.
Controlling the road would let the Parks Branch restrict the activities of a couple miners
whose claims bordered on the right-of-way, and who had started private roadside gold-
panning businesses, inviting visitors to try their hand at panning in a trough full of
Williams Creek gravel in exchange for a small fee.60

59 BCA, GR-1661, box 1, file 5, Westwood to Black, 29 January 1960; Black to Westwood, 5 February
1960; GR-1991, reel 1725, 5 July 1960; Cook to C.P. Lyons, 26 October 1960. The new park was
established by Order-in-Council #457, 24 February 1960.
60 Doubtless recalling the difficulties the Parks Branch had encountered with renegade businesses operating
on roadside mineral claims in Manning Provincial Park, Ches Lyons recommended that BRAC chairman
Lawrie Wallace contact the department of mines to find out about the legality of these gold panning
operations. Wallace complained directly to Minister of Mines Ken Kiernan, who also sat on the BRAC.
These ‘mining’ operations were drummed out in 1962, when the Parks Branch began operating its own
free, hands-on gold panning display beside Williams Creek. This in turn led to more complaints from the
Wells Chamber of Commerce to the effect that the government was impinging on private enterprise in the
The third reason that the Parks Branch wanted control over the road was to run a stagecoach service between Barkerville and Richfield. BC’s stagecoach mania remained strong after the ‘58 Centennial celebrations, and in the summer of 1961 the Parks Branch began operating a replica four-horse, twelve-passenger BX stagecoach within the boundaries of Barkerville Park. Visitors were taken for rides up and down the main street and over to the old cemetery, but the distances involved were fairly short. The Parks Branch wanted to offer longer rides during the 1962 centennial year. Specifically, it wanted the option of taking visitors up Williams Creek to see the old Richfield courthouse, which was otherwise inaccessible to children, the elderly, and other visitors who were unable (or unwilling) to make the two-mile return walk.

However, for safety reasons, and also for aesthetics, the Parks Branch first needed to have control over the road. It would not be safe or feel very authentic for tourists riding in a replica nineteenth-century stagecoach to meet pickup trucks loaded with drilling gear, ore samples, and modern-day prospectors. In a memo to Parks Branch headquarters, Superintendent Les Cook argued that the road leading to the moldering and overgrown remnants of Richfield should be treated as a historical artifact in and of itself. The road would need repairs before it could safely accommodate a loaded stagecoach, and Cook recommended this work to be done by a crew of men using hand tools, because using a caterpillar tractor threatened to “lose the authenticity of the old road.”

Lobbying from the Parks Branch and the Barkerville Restoration Advisory Council convinced the Department of Highways to legally close the streets of Barkerville vicinity of Barkerville Park. BCA, GR-1661, box 1, file 3, Alfred W. Ludditt, Wells and District Chamber of Commerce to Wallace, 15 July 1963; file 4, Wallace to McWilliams, 6 January 1961; Lyons to Wallace, 31 January 1961; Wallace to Kiernan, Minister of Mines, 10 March 1961.

to vehicular traffic in June 1962, just in time for the influx of visitors for the town’s centennial year. A gate was placed across the road at the park administration building, and only park staff, other government employees, and mineral claim holders with valid Parks Use Permits were allowed to drive through. Even then, drivers were obliged to take the back street in order not to disrupt the main street’s old-timey atmosphere. This closure was originally meant to be seasonal and temporary, with the townsite closed to traffic until the last day of September 1962. However, the Parks Branch’s decision to keep Barkerville an open-air ‘living’ museum made it necessary to extend the ban: it was impossible to reconcile a streetscape populated by actors dressed in period costume with the passage of heavy-duty pickup trucks. The prohibition on unapproved automobile traffic in Barkerville Park’s historic zone was made permanent in the fall of 1963. The following summer the Parks Branch began running its replica BX stagecoach between St. Saviour’s Church and the Richfield courthouse.62

There were problems enforcing the ban. Several local old-timers were slow to accept the regulations that the Parks Branch had imposed over the townsite and its main right-of-way. For example, in August 1963 Superintendent Les Cook reported that Bill Hong continued to drive his pickup truck into and around the townsite in order to conduct his duties as the district fire marshal. “[W]e have to do a fair amount of explaining to visitors as to why his vehicle can be parked in town […] while everyone else has to walk,” Cook complained. The ban on automobile traffic also led to strained relations among park staff, prospectors, mineral claim holders, the Department of Mines, and

62 The traffic restrictions put in place in 1962 are described most thoroughly in BCA, GR-1991, reel 1725, Wallace to Department of Highways, 31 May 1963. Traffic was permanently banned inside the park (except with Parks Branch permission) by Order-in-Council #1997, 5 August 1963.
anyone else with business in the hills above Barkerville. Shouting matches erupted between park staff and miners who failed to check in at the administration building or keep off the historic main street. There were accusations of intimidation and threats of lawsuits.63

Similar conflicts occurred when Barkerville’s campgrounds filled beyond capacity, which was common during the high summer travel season: the park had 175,000 visitors in 1966. Motorists who arrived at Barkerville late in the day and found its small campground full were often reluctant to return to Quesnel – a 55-mile drive on a gravel road – and therefore set up their tents in the picnic site, in a corner of the museum parking lot, or just outside the park gates. This led to more complaints from frustrated park staff and chastened campers, as well as from the Wells Chamber of Commerce. The strain of dealing with miners and tourists who refused to drive or park or camp where they were supposed to contributed to Superintendent Cook’s decision to transfer to Parks Branch headquarters in Victoria, where he oversaw the Stop of Interest marker program in the lead-up to BC’s ‘67 Centennial events. These difficulties continued all through the 1960s. Furthermore, every uptick in gold prices stirred up worries in the Parks Branch about a new influx of miners. Particularly worrisome was the prospect of diamond drilling and caterpillar stripping being done within view of the old Richfield courthouse. Although the Parks Branch had been given the power to restrict certain activities within the park – even to restrict miners’ usually-privileged right to come and go to from their claims via a public right-of-way – there were limits to this power. The provincial government had found a way to extract tourist gold from isolated, dilapidated Barkerville, 63 BCA, GR-1661, box 17, file 7, Cook to Wallace, 5 August 1963.
but that did not mean it was willing to put a stop to miners’ search for real gold in the surrounding hills.

After being turned into a provincial park, Barkerville quickly proved a valuable asset to the Fordist state, a piece of tourist infrastructure that was capable of drawing many thousands of visitors over the Cariboo Highway and then up the rough dead-end road from Quesnel. It helped increase certain kinds of economic activity in the northern Interior, bringing extra profits for many merchants and owners of roadside businesses. It had also helped justify other economic developments, including improvement of the Quesnel-Barkerville road, which benefitted the region’s forest industry, and the establishment of nearby Bowron Lakes Park. By its popularity it also seemed to be offering visitors an appealing, resonant, or at least entertaining and easily palatable lesson about BC’s past. Imposing and then maintaining an appealing old-timey aesthetic in the townsite was not without certain difficulties. Nor was it a quick or inexpensive process – the ‘restoration’ of Barkerville continued into the 1970s, with extensive work done not only in the historic townsite but also at Richfield and Cottonwood House, the park’s two satellite attractions. Nevertheless, Barkerville Historic Park proved such an asset to the Fordist state that it decided to pursue the development of similar facilities in other, more accessible parts of the Interior, as show in the following chapter.
Chapter 13

History on the Highways:
The Proliferation of Major Historical Tourist Attractions, 1958-1970

This final chapter examines history by the road in the BC Interior during the late 1950s and 1960s, when the landscapes visible along several of the province’s arterial highways were increasingly ‘filled in’ with historical attractions. The state played an active role in shaping the motoring public’s experiences of history by the road in more and more regions during this period. It did this through site-marking programs and the development of several more history-themed provincial parks along the lines of Barkerville. It also churned out reams of history-themed publicity material and helped numerous local historical societies establish their own museums. Most of this chapter examines the state’s efforts to develop major roadside historical attractions during the 1960s. Fort Steele, for example, proved a major asset, in that it became a popular tourist destination. On the other hand, the Columbia Village project that was planned for Revelstoke never got off the ground. However, it was not only the state that developed (or tried to develop) these kinds of attractions during the 1960s. This chapter also shows that boosters and roadside businesses continued to play a significant role in shaping the motoring public’s experience of history by the road in the BC Interior.

This chapter focuses on three districts, all of which were located in the mountains of BC’s eastern Interior: the Lake Windermere district, the Revelstoke district, and the Kootenay River valley just to the north of Cranbrook. These areas saw enormous changes during the 1960s, many of which were linked to state-supported megaprojects. During the
1960s the Celgar pulp mill started operating in Castlegar, at the confluence of the Kootenay and Columbia rivers, and construction also commenced on a pulp mill midway between Cranbrook and Invermere. The highways that led into these communities were frequently crowded with logging trucks, and when the wind was right they would be awash with sulphurous emissions colloquially referred to as ‘the smell of money.’ Even more dramatically, the Kootenay and Columbia river valleys saw the construction of several enormous dams and the associated clearance of massive reservoir areas during the 1960s. These corporate and state-sponsored megaprojects overshadowed a series of smaller but nevertheless important infrastructure projects, like the making of new highways and modernization of existing ones. In the eastern Interior, the highway between Revelstoke and Golden via the sublime Rogers Pass was the new road that received the most attention, but, as will be seen below, changes to the provincial highway network affected other districts too.

**BC’s Many Schemes for History by the Road**

On the heels of the ‘58 Centennial celebrations, the provincial government was inundated with requests and proposals from boosters, business owners, tourism promoters, and history enthusiasts who were looking for help to mark, preserve, restore, and promote old buildings, ghost towns, and other historical landscape features. The Centennial’s many history-themed events and projects had made old-timey frontier, pioneering, gold rush, and transportation-related themes more popular than ever before. Barkerville in particular suggested the potential economic value of regionally distinctive historical attractions. The ’58 Centennial celebrations had also underlined the importance
of tying historical attractions to the highway network – indeed, there was little other option by the late 1950s, for automobiles had eclipsed railways and steamboats as the dominant mode of passenger transport in almost every corner of the province.

Publicity generated around the government’s establishment of Barkerville Historic Park and its ambitious plans to ‘restore’ the townsite to the way it had looked during the 1870s spurred lobbying for similar developments in other districts. Boosters, business interests, politicians, and key agencies of the Fordist state began to see history-themed tourist attractions as valuable components of regional development, helping to build up a district or community’s service sector. As the Social Credit government continued its program of expanding and improving the provincial highway network, boosters and business owners in hinterland communities argued that it should also help spread the economic benefits associated with auto tourism by developing similar historical tourist attractions in other regions.

Pitches and proposals were received from every corner of the province. Some came from districts where selling goods and services to the motoring public was already an established part of the economy. For example, from the Fraser Canyon and Cariboo highway corridors came calls for the government to preserve St. John the Divine Anglican church in Yale and the roadhouse at Ashcroft Manor, both of which dated from the 1860s. In the Okanagan, the owners of the O’Keefe Ranch near Vernon asked for help preserving the small village that had grown up around the centre of the ranch since 1867.¹

¹ BCA, GR-1661, box 1, file 2, Oscar Lohm [Yale] to Westwood, 31 August 1961; file 3, Mary O’Keefe to Les Cook, Barkerville Historic Park, 2 December 1963; box 4, file 5, Bill Hartley, MLA [Merritt] to
Other proposals came from parts of BC where auto tourism had not previously been an important part of the local economy, but where new and improved highways made it feasible for boosters and business owners to imagine it becoming one. For example, the government received several preservation proposals linked to the modernization of the southern transprovincial highway in the Boundary country and west Kootenays. A couple dangerous or roundabout sections of road in those adjacent regions were being replaced with new high-elevation mountain routes during the 1960s. These upgrades encouraged history enthusiasts in Grand Forks to ask for assistance preserving one of the area’s few remaining Doukhobor communal villages, while from Castlegar there were calls for government help to preserve the suspension bridge over the Kootenay River at Brilliant, which had been built by Doukhobors in 1913. The Trail local of the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers offered to donate the old Miners Hall in Rossland to the provincial government for use as a mining museum.

Deputy Provincial Secretary Lawrie Wallace received so many requests for assistance that in late 1962 he asked the cabinet for instructions on how to deal with them. The government still had no coherent policy on historical sites, and although the Provincial Secretary’s office was nominally responsible for them, it lacked the necessary staff and budget to do anything on the ground – hence the Parks Branch being in charge.

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2 In the early 1960s the infamous Old Cascade Highway between Grand Forks and Rossland was replaced by the Blueberry-Paulson route through the Bonanza Pass (5000 feet above sea level). In the mid 1960s, the Salmo-Creston Skyway was built through the avalanche-strewn Kootenay Pass (5800 feet above sea level) in order to replace the seasonal car ferry that operated between Nelson and Kuskanook on Kootenay Lake.

of Barkerville and the Stop of Interest marker program. Wallace believed many of these requests were worthy of the government’s consideration. He also believed that some of BC’s most accessible and intact historic sites could be tied together to form a system of historical sites, akin to what had been done with the provincial parks since the end of the war, and with the Stop of Interest markers since the ’58 Centennial. For example, he deemed a proposal for the government to purchase and restore Ashcroft Manor desirable not only because of the site’s intrinsic historical value, but also because it was located near an important highway junction that Coastal motorists bound for both the central and northern Interior had to travel past.4

Wallace was supported by Parks Branch director H.G. McWilliams, who recommended the creation of a new agency within the administrative structure of the Department of Recreation and Conservation that would be responsible for BC’s historic sites. As he imagined it, this agency would manage and maintain the province’s existing historical parks, plaques, monuments, and markers. It would also advise and coordinate local historical societies that wanted help preserving historical landscape features and operating museums. Like Wallace, McWilliams also believed BC’s historical sites needed to be organized and managed as a system in order to achieve “desirable standards of authenticity and continuity.”5

The cabinet instructed Wallace to focus on the large projects that were already underway, like Barkerville, while leaving small projects in the hands of local historical societies. He was to avoid initiating new projects without first getting cabinet approval:

4 BCA, GR-1661, box 1, file 3, Wallace to Black, memo re: Acquisition of Historic Sites Policy, 12 December 1962.
5 BCA, GR-1661, box 1, file 3, H.G. McWilliams to Wallace, 16 December 1963.
the creation of government-supported historical tourist attractions remained a political process. These kinds of developments could not be set up just anywhere, for they constituted expensive, long-term commitments, and with the growing importance of the tourism industry had to be incorporated into larger economic development strategies. The designation of official historic sites in BC continued on an ad hoc basis through the 1960s. Inquiries and proposals were directed to the Provincial Secretary; quasi-governmental bodies like the Barkerville Restoration Advisory Council worked behind the scenes to get budget allocations and good publicity; and the Parks Branch carried out the reconnaissance, planning, development, and day-to-day management.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the provincial government continued to erect Stop of Interest markers during the 1960s. More than 90 had been erected by 1967, with fully two-thirds of them located in the Interior. Dozens of local museums were also established in the Interior during the late 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s. Most of them benefitted from funding programs that were associated with the 1958, 1966, 1967, and 1971 centennial celebrations. Most were also supported by local boosters, businesses, and boards of trade in the expectation they would help hold pleasure travellers in this or that locale for a while, thereby increasing expenditures on food, gas, lodging, and other goods and services. Almost all of the new museums were located beside major thoroughfares where they would catch the eye of the motoring public.

For example, Princeton’s Pioneer Museum, which was one of the town’s ‘58 Centennial projects, was located near the centre of town on a lot donated by autocourt owner Elmer Burr, whose father Edgar had supported the establishment of a park along the route of the Hope-Princeton Highway during the early 1930s. The museum initially
consisted of an old log cabin that was adorned with wagon wheels and deer antlers and
crammed full of artifacts and displays about prospecting, the Dewdney Trail, and pioneer
ranchers like the Allison family. In 1967 another round of centennial funding allowed the
museum to add a modern building where its artifacts and historic papers could be stored
in a less flammable setting. Far to the north, the Cariboo Historical Society finally
managed to open a museum in Quesnel in the mid 1960s, helped by the fact that
Barkerville had become a major tourist draw. The Quesnel Museum shared a building
with the local tourist information bureau, and was located beside the Cariboo Highway in
a municipal park named after long-time booster and MLA Louis LeBourdais.⁶

The growing role of government agencies, historical societies, and local museums
in cultivating historical attractions and landscape features along the Interior’s main
highways did not mean an end to the role played by roadside commercial operators.
Businesses kept trying to profit from the motoring public’s enthusiasm for old-timey
western themes. After 1958 dozens of campgrounds, autocourts, motels, diners, cafés,
and other roadside businesses in the BC Interior were inspired to use wild west themes
and iconography to catch the attention of passing motorists. The province’s roadsides
became festooned with references to explorers, prospectors, cowboys, pioneers,
stagecoaches, wagon wheels, old trails, and the frontier. Quesnel alone had the Old
Cariboo Cabin Camp, the Billy Barker Inn, the Gold Pan Motel, and the Mule Train Auto
Court. The Interior also gained a clutch of privately owned roadside museums, curiosity
collections, and simulated forts, whose owners were trying to cash in on the province’s
new tourist gold rush (or ‘old rush’). Typically in these cases no actual historical building

⁶ On the history of Princeton’s Pioneer Museum, see Gloria Stout, “Museums Have History Too,”
Princeton BC News (Summer 2010), 3.
was involved. Ironically, this proliferation of replicas and simulations occurred even as
authentic relics of the nineteenth century continued to disappear, like the old roadhouses
along the Cariboo Highway.

The proliferation of historical and history-themed landscape features and roadside
attractions in the BC Interior was accompanied by a flood of publications related to the
province’s past, including travelogues, pamphlets, road guides, brochures, and popular
histories. These were usually inexpensive, soft-cover publications that could be tucked
into a glove compartment alongside road maps and insurance papers. They eschewed
most ‘boring’ conventions of scholarly historical writing, like the focus on political and
economic history that characterized Margaret Ormsby’s *British Columbia: A History*
(1958). Instead they told rollicking stories about the romantic, adventuresome, rip-roaring
days of the fur trade, the gold rush, and railroad construction. Common themes included
crime and conflict, hostile environments, heroic infrastructure, and ruggedly masculine
individuals. Lost mines and lost caches of gold were also popular topics, as if the
landscape held treasure just waiting to be discovered by some especially lucky or
discerning individual. These publications were typically illustrated with historical
photographs and maps that showed how ghost towns, historic sites, and the transportation
routes of yesteryear related to BC’s modern-day highway network. They were, in that
sense, guides to history by the road.\(^7\)

\(^7\) Many of these publications were written by individuals who had helped cultivate roadside history in other
ways. The two guidebooks written by Ches Lyons – *Milestones on the Fraser* (1949) and *Milestones in
Ogopogo Land* (1957) – have already been mentioned; both were reprinted several times. Barkerville
booster Fred Ludditt published *Gold in the Cariboo* (1958) and *Barkerville Days* (1969). Bruce Ramsey,
who had been allowed to ride shotgun on the ’58 Centennial Stagecoach Run, wrote a handful of popular
Columbia* (1963), and *History by the Highways* (1966). Art Downs of Northwest Digest wrote two very
popular books about transportation in the Interior: *Paddlewheels on the Frontier* (1967) and *Wagon Road
The David Thompson Memorial Fort Revisited

British Columbia’s southeastern Interior became a popular destination for sightseers and outdoor recreationalists from southern Alberta during the 1950s. This influx of pleasure travellers was partly due to upgrades made to the highways that traversed the Rockies via the Kicking Horse, Vermillion, and Crowsnest passes. Tourism promoters in the east Kootenays organized publicity campaigns to lure auto tourists into their communities, and several of these campaigns invoked the image of David Thompson, the famous ‘Canadian’ explorer-hero. Motorists were encouraged to think of themselves as retracing Thompson’s path when driving across western Canada. One travelogue claimed that “[a]ll you need now to follow Thompson’s path is the family car and one of the road maps the oil companies are so eager to supply.”

Proposals to build large dams in the Kootenays stirred up interest in Thompson’s travels. Stories in newspapers and magazines helped cultivate a sense of urgency amongst tourists and outdoor recreationalists to see the country as he and other early explorers had seen it. In 1954 the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada commemorated Thompson’s exploration of the Kootenay and Columbia rivers by erecting a cairn and plaque at their confluence, the town of Castlegar, which was to be the home to the future Celgar pulp mill. The 1955 sesquicentennial celebrations of Lewis and Clark’s

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North (1969). Former Barkerville resident F.W. Lindsay, who wrote the 1951 article in Northwest Digest that had lamented the future-mindedness of the BC’s postwar boom, published a series of booklets about BC’s gold rush days, including Cariboo Story (1958), Cariboo Yarns (1962), Outlaws (1963), and Cariboo Dream (1972). During the early 1960s he and his wife Florence also operated Siska Lodge, a few miles south of Lytton, which was one of the oldest and most popular automobile-era stopping places in the Fraser Canyon. Beautiful British Columbia, the full-colour quarterly magazine that the Department of Recreation and Conservation started publishing in 1959, also ran dozens of stories that described and showed pictures of BC’s various roadside attractions, including ghost towns and other historical landscape features, as well as its growing number of museums, markers, and designated historical sites.

explorations in the American west also reminded BC tourism promoters of David Thompson’s value as an object of historical interest.9

Revived interest in David Thompson drove tourism promoters in the Lake Windermere district to propose restoring the David Thompson Memorial Fort, the failed historical attraction in Invermere that had essentially been abandoned since the late 1930s. The imposing structure had deteriorated to the point of being deemed an eyesore and a detriment to the district’s tourist trade, rather than an asset. Stone-throwing children had broken most of its windows, and in the mid 1950s the district fire marshal, unimpressed by its failing roof, had declared it unsafe for human occupation. Nevertheless, there were still some sound timbers in the building. Local boosters and business owners hatched a scheme to make the old simulated fort the nucleus of a new museum about David Thompson, just in time for the 1957 sesquicentennial of Kootenae House. The Windermere Board of Trade set out to “rejuvenate” the fort in 1956, more than a year before the provincial government started getting involved in the restoration of Barkerville.

The Windermere Board of Trade initially tried to solicit corporate donations that would cover the cost of repairing the fort’s foundation, roof, and windows. It approached the Hudson’s Bay Company and the Canadian Pacific Railway, which had built and publicized the fort during the early 1920s, but was rebuffed by both. Representatives of the two companies explained that they had received so many similar requests that they had decided to retreat from supporting historical restoration projects. The HBC also cited historical accuracy as a reason why it could not sponsor the restoration of the ‘replica’

fort that it had helped build during the early 1920s. They pointed out that David
Thompson had been employed by the North West Company when he established
Kootenae House in 1807, and not the HBC.

Failing to find a corporate sponsor, members of the Windermere Board of Trade
joined with a handful of local history enthusiasts to form a branch of the East Kootenay
Historical Association. Under this guise, they approached the National Parks Branch, the
Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, and the BC Historical Association for
assistance, but again to no avail. They asked Provincial Archivist Willard Ireland whether
he thought the provincial government might be interested in making Fort Point into a
park with the Memorial Fort as its central attraction. He put them in touch with the Parks
Branch and the ’58 Centennial Committee, but neither agency was interested in restoring
Invermere’s forlorn fort.10

The only option left was to raise funds locally. A “save the fort” campaign set out
to raise $5000 to repair the crumbling structure. However, the value of lakefront property
in Invermere had increased sharply since 1950. The land at Fort Point was ripe for
development, and its owner wanted a substantially higher price than local tourism
promoters and history enthusiasts could expect to raise. In 1958 the fort and four acres of
surrounding land were sold to a trio of building contractors from Calgary: Tom
Andruschuk and the brothers Don and Doug Sinclair. Recognizing the southeastern
Interior’s growing popularity as a tourism destination, they planned make the fort into a

10 Windermere Valley Museum and Archives, David Thompson Memorial Fort collection, W.C. Davidson,
Secretary, Windermere District Board of Trade to Ralph Foreman, 12 June 1956; Davidson to Ireland, 9
November 1956; Davidson to Ireland, 7 January 1957; Davidson to H.G. McWilliams, Forester, Parks
Division, 11 February 1957; W.C. Davidson, Secretary, Historical Association of East Kootenay,
Windermere Section, to Ireland, 2 March 1957; F.B. Walker, Executive Assistant, Hudson’s Bay Company,
Canada Committee, to Davidson, 12 March 1957.
historical attraction by ‘restoring’ it. As will be shown in the next section of this chapter, they were simultaneously involved in a similar scheme at Fort Steele, 70 miles to the south. The ambitious contractors made some repairs to the fort, including the roof, and used it to store construction materials. Ultimately, however, they were unable to carry out the intended restoration and put the property back up for sale in 1960.11

Figure 13.1: The David Thompson Memorial Fort, 1954. Courtesy of University of Victoria Library Archives, Chester P. Lyons collection.

The property at Fort Point flipped between property speculators until 1966, when it was purchased by a developer who had concrete plans to subdivide and build recreational housing. Invermere village council made one last push to interest the provincial government in preserving the David Thompson Memorial Fort, which would

require disassembling it, relocating it to a new location, and then rebuilding it. “I might as well be honest with you,” Provincial Archivist Willard Ireland replied. “This building has for years posed a problem. [I] cannot feel any justification for its preservation.” Not only was Fort Point not the true site of David Thompson’s first trading post west of the Rockies, but the 1922 Memorial Fort was not an accurate replica of Kootenae House. Furthermore, as Dr. Walter N. Sage had warned Ireland in 1957, the fort seemed unlikely to succeed as a tourist attraction due to its being located away from the main highway through the upper Columbia valley.\(^{12}\)

The Memorial Fort was demolished in the spring of 1969. Long-time Invermere residents might have missed it as a familiar feature of the lakeshore, but local business owners had little reason to regret its disappearance. For decades it had been an albatross, a reminder of the village’s failure to develop a substantial tourist trade during the interwar years. More importantly, by 1969 the old ‘fort’ was completely redundant: thanks to special centennial funding, a museum had finally been opened in Invermere. The Windermere Valley Museum was located near the centre of town, beside the main road that connected it to the highway. The new museum was a modest affair, but in the fashion of the time had several old buildings displayed on its grounds, including a couple log cabins that had been salvaged from autocourts built along the Banff-Windermere Highway during the 1920s. By this point, auto tourism had become such an accepted part of everyday life and the regional economy that even old tourist facilities were deemed worthy of inclusion in the local museum. Furthermore, by the time the David Thompson

\(^{12}\) BCA, GR-1661, box 4, file 2, A.R. Miller, Secretary, Invermere Village Council, to Ireland, 19 July 1967; Ireland to Miller, 3 August 1967; “David Thompson Fort Demolished,” Lake Windermere Valley Echo, 22 May 1969, 1.
Memorial Fort was torn down, the state had developed Fort Steele into a major historical tourist attraction 70 miles to the south, in the Kootenay River section of the Rocky Mountain Trench.

*Fort Steele Historic Park*

After Barkerville, Fort Steele was the biggest, most expensive, and most ambitious historical tourist attraction developed in the British Columbia Interior during the postwar years. Like Barkerville, it was a ghost town ‘restored’ by the provincial government. It was tied even more closely to the expansion and improvement of the provincial highway network than Barkerville was. Whereas the former capital of the Cariboo gold fields was developed into a popular historical attraction in spite of its being the isolated terminus of an unpaved, dead-end secondary road, Fort Steele was located just a few minutes’ drive from the southern transprovincial highway. After 1965, it was also traversed by an important new north-south highway.

Like Barkerville, Fort Steele traced its origins back gold rushes of the 1860s. Wild Horse Creek, a tributary of the upper Kootenay River, was the site of a placer rush between 1864 and 1867. However, as was so often the case, the rush was short-lived. By 1880 there were only a handful of miners left in the district, as well as the Galbraith family who operated a cable ferry across the fast-flowing Kootenay River. In the mid 1880s the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway far to the north brought another flurry of activity to the upper Kootenay and Columbia river valleys. Prospectors found promising outcroppings of silver, lead, and zinc in the Purcell Mountains. Hydraulic monitors were used to scour more gold from the district’s auriferous creek beds. Logging
companies staked claims to large tracts of timber. Ranchers brought in herds of cattle to graze on the broad, grassy valley floor. A colonization road was built to link Galbraith’s Ferry and the CPR mainline at Golden, 140 miles to the north. Sternwheel steamboats began plying the upper Columbia and Kootenay rivers, and it was widely expected that a railroad would soon be built through the Crowsnest Pass so that Canadian companies would control the resource wealth of BC’s southeastern Interior, instead of allowing the benefits to flow across the border to Spokane and Helena.

The growing number of white ‘settlers’ moving into the upper Kootenay River valley led to tension with the area’s native residents. To forestall any violence that might delay or complicate the resettlement of the region, the federal government dispatched a division of the North West Mounted Police to the vicinity of Galbraith’s Ferry. The first NWMP post in British Columbia was built in 1887 under the supervision of Superintendent Sam Steele. The detachment stayed in the area for one year, during which Indian reserves were demarcated, the ferry across the Kootenay River was replaced by a bridge, and the name of the community was changed to Fort Steele.

For the next decade Fort Steele was the commercial and administrative centre of BC’s southeastern Interior, surrounded by a growing number of ranches, logging camps, and mining operations. However, the town’s prosperity was short-lived. At the turn of the century the CPR’s east-west running BC Southern branch line was built ten miles to the south, bypassing Fort Steele. The new town of Cranbrook quickly eclipsed Fort Steele: by 1902 their respective populations were 2000 and 150. In 1904 the district courthouse and other government offices that had been located in Fort Steele were moved to Cranbrook, and two years later a fire wiped out much of the older town’s remaining
commercial section. Many of Fort Steele’s remaining buildings were subsequently allowed to fall into disrepair, and others were relocated. For example, most of the buildings from the former NWMP post were moved to the St. Eugene’s Mission Indian residential school, located midway between Fort Steele and Cranbrook. By the 1920s the only NWMP structure left at Wild Horse Creek was a log building that had served as the officers’ quarters. It was used as a private residence, then as a storehouse, and eventually as a chicken coop.

The CPR’s north-south running Kootenay Central branch line was built through Fort Steele in 1912, but the bulk of the district’s rail and road traffic went between Cranbrook and the fast-growing town of Kimberley, located on the opposite side of the valley from Fort Steele, where the CPR subsidiary the Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company of Canada (Cominco) was developing the enormous Sullivan lead-silver mine. There were enough farms, ranches, and hydraulic gold mining operations left around Fort Steele to keep a school and several businesses open, including a post office, a general store, and the Windsor Hotel with its associated saloon. However, Fort Steele’s glory days were behind it. As the town gradually faded, many of its buildings were boarded up, abandoned, and left to decay.13

Few auto tourists drove through Fort Steele during the interwar years due to its location on an obscure, poor-quality side road. Like the David Thompson Memorial Fort built in Invermere in 1922, the old townsite was just far enough off the ‘the beaten path’ to dissuade casual travellers from visiting. One motorist who went out of his way to visit in the early 1920s was Regina land agent R.V. Bing. “Now almost deserted [Fort Steele]

has a history which in interest is second to none of the inland towns of the province [...] and still bears silent but eloquent record to these stirring times,” he wrote in his diary. On their way north to see the Banff-Windermere Highway, the Bing family paused in Fort Steele to purchase camping supplies at the general store. The storekeeper, who Bing described as “a real old-timer of the place,” regaled them with stories about the town’s past, “when large finds of gold were common and the place was crowded with prospectors, lumbermen and trappers.” Crossing the rickety bridge over the Kootenay River, Bing imagined Sam Steele holding it single-handed against a mob of rowdy American miners. However, Fort Steele showed few obvious traces of the gold rush days: Bing reported there were “no buildings of any interest left standing.”

In 1929 the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada erected a cairn and plaque at Fort Steele to identify the site of the 1887 NWMP barracks. Few motorists saw this monument, however, for Fort Steele was situated on a secondary road that ran along the ‘wrong’ side of the upper Kootenay River valley. For the next 30 years it was a place that auto tourists either intentionally sought out or stumbled upon after making a wrong turn, a special discovery that provided a romantic contrast to bustling mining and railroad towns like Cranbrook, Kimberley, and Fernie. Less than 50 people lived in Fort Steele at the end of World War Two. The town’s school closed in 1954 when students started being bussed to Cranbrook. The beer hall in the decrepit Windsor Hotel lasted only a couple years longer.

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14 Fort Steele Heritage Town Archive, R.V. Bing collection, 1921 travel diary, chapter 18; 1923 travel diary, chapter 3.
15 Miller, *Fort Steele*, 6-8.
The ‘58 Centennial Committee erected a Stop of Interest marker at Fort Steele to commemorate the Wild Horse gold rush and Galbraith’s ferry – the site was hard to pass over, what with its connection to both gold mining and transportation. However, this was not enough to satisfy boosters, businesses, and history buffs from the east Kootenays. After the provincial government’s plan for Barkerville became public knowledge, they lobbied for a similar development at Fort Steele, which was the largest, most intact, and most accessible of the region’s numerous ghost towns. In many ways Fort Steele was an ideal site for the development of a major historical tourist attraction. It was located just a short distance from the southern transprovincial highway, the city of Cranbrook, American border crossings, and the national parks in the Rockies. It could be incorporated into loop trips along the Banff-Windermere Highway and through the Crowsnest and Kicking Horse passes. Fort Steele’s biggest drawback remained its location on the opposite side of the Kootenay River valley from the arterial road that connected Cranbrook with Kimberley and points further north. The forlorn David Thompson Memorial Fort, located 70 miles to the north, bore testament to the folly of developing a large historical attraction away from the motoring public’s view.

The first proposal to ‘restore’ Fort Steele came in 1958 from Tom Andruschuk and the Sinclair brothers, the contractors who owned what was left of the David Thompson Memorial Fort. Through a mixture of preservation and reconstruction, they hoped to make Fort Steele look like “a thriving Gold Rush Community […] exactly as it was at the turn of the century.” They purchased the boarded-up Windsor Hotel, which had been built in 1894 and was one of the few large buildings left in Fort Steele. They then applied to purchase all the vacant crown land in the townsite. However, their
application was turned down, probably because government officials doubted the ability of small private operators to carry out such an ambitious project.\footnote{BCA, GR-1661, box 20, file 5, D.C. Sinclair to McWilliams, 10 August 1960; Windermere Valley Museum, David Thompson Memorial Fort collection, Richard T. Andruschuk to Windermere Valley Museum, 11 December 2007.}

By 1959 the \textit{Cranbrook Courier}, \textit{Nelson Daily News}, and East Kootenay Historical Society were all lobbying the provincial government to make Fort Steele into a major historical attraction by ‘restoring’ it. Several boards of trade threw their support behind this proposal. They argued that the Kootenays deserved to have their own state-operated historical tourist attraction, particularly because the region had suffered a series of economic setbacks. Several coal mines had recently closed in Fernie, and preliminary negotiations for the Columbia River Treaty had cast a pall of uncertainty over the region.

Figure 13.2: Boarded up buildings beside the road through Fort Steele, 1957. Courtesy of University of Victoria Library Archives, Chester P. Lyons collection.
– indeed, some of the hydroelectric schemes proposed for the upper Kootenay River would have resulted in Fort Steele being inundated. The fact that Nelson-Creston MLA Wesley Black was Provincial Secretary and therefore responsible for BC’s historic sites was seen as a political factor in favour of the scheme.17

In response to this regional lobby, the minister of recreation and conservation declared that the government was “definitely interested in determining what might be done to perpetuate, in some degree, the colourful history of Ft. Steele.” However, he warned that it might be impossible to do a “sufficiently authentic” restoration because a greater proportion of Fort Steele’s oldest buildings had been destroyed than had been the case at Barkerville. Ches Lyons was dispatched to inspect the dusty, run-down townsite in the spring of 1960.18

Unlike the dozens of elaborate reconnaissance reports that Lyons had produced since the early 1940s – including for Manning, Hamber, and Barkerville parks, as well as the ’58 Centennial Stop of Interest program – his report on Fort Steele was a straightforward inventory. He identified about 50 structures in the townsite, including numerous homes (most abandoned, a few still occupied), an array of collapsing sheds, lean-tos, and outhouses, and several larger buildings, including the Windsor Hotel, Masonic Hall, and Catholic and Presbyterian churches. Less than a dozen buildings appeared to date from the nineteenth century, while the newest, the disused Fort Steele Garage, had been built during the 1930s. Lyons made no recommendation about the

17 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1750, J.D. McMynn, Secretary-Treasurer, Associated Boards of Trade and Chambers of Commerce of South-Eastern British Columbia, to Earle C. Westwood, Minister of Recreation and Conservation, 10 December 1959. Wesley Black, it is also worth noting, had been a teacher in Creston for fourteen years before getting elected on the Social Credit ticket in 1952, and may well have been predisposed towards the preservation of historical sites for educational purposes.  
advisability of trying to duplicate at Fort Steele the kind of effort then underway at 
Barkerville, or how the site might be developed as a provincial park. The cursory nature 
of his report suggests the cabinet had already decided to proceed with a ‘restoration’
development program that would give the east Kootenays a major historical tourist 
attraction.19

One of the most important factors – if not the most important factor – in the 
government’s decision to proceed with a ‘restoration’ project at Fort Steele was the fact 
that significant changes were planned for the road network in the district north of 
Cranbrook. Since the end of the war there had been a huge increase in the volume of 
automobile traffic in the upper Kootenay River valley, including many heavy trucks 
hauling logs and rough-cut lumber to the large Crestbrook Timber sawmill in Cranbrook. 
In the late 1950s Crestbrook applied for a tree farm license that would cover a huge area 
in the upper Kootenay and Columbia river watersheds, and began seeking financial 
backing to develop a pulp mill, which, if approved, would lead to an even greater volume 
of timber being hauled on the region’s roads.

All of this traffic was funnelled along the main street of Kimberley, the bustling 
mining town on the opposite side of the valley from sleepy Fort Steele. To safely speed 
the flow of traffic in the upper Kootenay River valley, provincial traffic engineers 
planned to divert vehicles away from Kimberley by upgrading the road through Fort 
Steele. It would be turned from an unpaved secondary route that carried little in the way 
of commercial, industrial, or tourist traffic into the main highway corridor northward

“gossip” within the government that future legislation would put Fort Steele “and other locations in the 
province” under the control of the Parks Branch, see box 3, file 3, minutes of the first meeting of the 
Barkerville Restoration Advisory Council, 13 October 1959.
from Cranbrook, a paved, limited access highway with modern standards of curvature, gradient, and sightlines. A key feature of this project would be the construction of a large new bridge over both the Kootenay River and Kootenay Central Railway at Fort Steele and the realignment of the road through the dilapidated townsite.20

This infrastructure plan promised to transform the relationship between the motoring public and the ‘ghost town’ at Fort Steele. For decades the trickle of traffic that passed through Fort Steele had travelled through the centre of the townsite on gravel-surfaced streets before descending a steep cutbank, making another sharp turn, and crossing over a set of railroad tracks at the foot of the narrow, timber truss bridge over the Kootenay River. This was an antiquated set-up by the late 1950s, even for a secondary road. The proximity of steep hill, sharp turn, level crossing, and bridge was very unsafe, and the bridge itself was inadequate for use by loaded logging trucks and commercial transports. Although the streets of Fort Steele were broad and essentially bereft of local traffic, they were unsuitable for large vehicles or high speeds. To improve the situation, the Department of Highways planned to carve a broad new right-of-way through the centre of Fort Steele, which would lead to a wide concrete bridge over both the Kootenay River and the CPR’s Kootenay Central branch line. This would effectively bisect the townsite, and require the expropriation of many properties. The fact that the state was planning an extensive property acquisition program at Fort Steele made it feasible to contemplate its ‘restoration.’ The townsite was set to go from ‘off the beaten path’ to an easily accessible centre of attention, and thus a potential asset.

20 On Crestbrook Timber’s plans to become one of the major forestry firms in the southern Interior, see Drushka, *Tie Hackers*, 181-182; Crestbrook Forest Industries, *Our First 100 Years, 1898-1998: From Cranbrook Sash and Door Co. to Crestbrook Forest Industries Ltd.* (Cranbrook: Crestbrook Forest Industries, 1998).
Industrialist Bill Mead was an important supporter of making Fort Steele into a roadside historical attraction. Mead owned a metallurgical company in California and was also the biggest private landowner in the vicinity of Fort Steele: he owned the Wild Horse Ranch on the north edge of the townsite, which he used as a summer home and hobby ranch. In May 1960 he contacted BC’s Department of Recreation and Conservation with an offer to donate some of his property in support of his vision for turning the decaying townsite into a ‘living museum’ that would reproduce “in strict detail [the] town of Fort Steele in its early days.” Mead wanted to turn the collection of weathered old buildings into a “working, income-producing village in the style of 1860” that would provide “honorable and remunerative work” for people like leatherworkers and blacksmiths, whose “hand craft skills” were no longer sought after “in this Machine Age.” He argued that a living museum would be more appealing to tourists than one characterized by static exhibits and didactic signboards. As a more or less self-sustaining operation, it would also greatly reduce the cost of restoring and maintaining Fort Steele’s old buildings. As examples of the kind of development he envisioned, Mead cited Williamsburg in Virginia, Westfield Village in Massachusetts, and Arkla Industries Village in Emmet, Arkansas.21

Mead knew that a new highway was going to be built through Fort Steele, and recognized that the townsite would be carved in half. He therefore suggested that the section on the north side of the future highway (where most of the community’s oldest structures were located) should be made into an “historic zone” that tourists would pay a fee to enter. As Mead visualized it, the provincial government would purchase all the

private properties in that section of the townsite, and then allow a non-profit foundation to lease stores and workshops to craftspeople who would sell their products to tourists. These artisans would live in prefabricated aluminum-skinned homes in a residential zone located on the south side of the highway. Mead predicted Hollywood studios would clamour to rent the historic townsite as a movie set, provided it was “rebuilt” with a high enough degree of verisimilitude. “[I]f Fort Steele is recreated as outlined above, it would be an additional fabulous attraction for British Columbia,” he declared.22

Mead’s scheme (and offer to donate land for it) piqued the interest of the Provincial Secretary’s office and the Barkerville Restoration Advisory Council. They identified two key themes that could be commemorated at Fort Steele: placer gold mining and the “world-famous” Royal Canadian Mounted Police. The North West Mounted Police, the predecessor of the RCMP, had only been stationed at Wild Horse Creek for one year, but incorporating the force into any historical attraction at Fort Steele would tie the site to the popular wild-west theme of ‘law and order’ and to other police-related historical attractions in western Canada, like Fort MacLeod in Alberta and Fort Battleford in Saskatchewan. When the RCMP commissioner was asked for assistance with the project, he promised full cooperation. Commemorating the RCMP’s tenuous historical relationship with BC’s southern Interior would give the force an opportunity to generate good publicity about itself. In 1960 it was struggling with a protracted campaign of nude protests, arsons, and bombings in the Boundary country and west Kootenays, waged by the radical Doukhobour sect the Sons of Freedom.23

22 Ibid.
23 BCA, GR-1661, box 20, file 5, Mead to Wallace, 26 September 1960; Wallace to Mead, Mead to Wallace, 11 October 1960; Wallace to Mead, 4 November 1960; Mead to Wallace, 30 December 1960.
The provincial government spent $10,000 to acquire private property at Fort Steele in the winter of 1960-1961, and in the spring established Fort Steele Historic Park as a 140-acre Class A provincial park. Shortly thereafter the Fort Steele Restoration Foundation was created as an offshoot of the Barkerville Restoration Advisory Council, with many of the same government ministers, bureaucrats, and publicity men involved. However, as at Barkerville it was the Parks Branch that did most of the planning and day-to-day groundwork.24

Fort Steele saw relatively little development during the early 1960s. Barkerville was the Parks Branch’s first priority, and it was impossible to proceed at Fort Steele until the Department of Highways had finalized its plans for the new highway through the townsite. The Parks Branch had only partial control over the park in these years. Several long-time residents continued living within its boundaries, and a light but steady flow of automobile traffic continued to traverse the townsite’s gravel-surfaced streets. Approximately 100 cars passed through the park each day in the summer months during the early 1960s; traffic engineers projected that number would grow twelvefold once the new highway redirected traffic away from Kimberley.25

The Parks Branch drew up tentative plans for developing Fort Steele, and set about securing and stabilizing its various old buildings. The foundations of many structures were repaired and the former NWMP officers’ quarters were relocated to the park from Bill Mead’s Wild Horse Ranch. The decaying log building was carefully

jacked up, loaded onto an oversize trailer, and deposited in the northwest corner of the park near the old Historic Sites and Monuments Board cairn. In response to reports of vandalism, trespassing, and overzealous ‘souvenir hunting,’ one of Fort Steele’s remaining residents was hired to act as caretaker. He was instructed to warn away anyone seen tampering with government property – which meant most of the buildings in the townsite – and to report offenders’ license plate numbers to the RCMP detachment in Cranbrook.26

Many auto tourists went out of their way to visit Fort Steele during the early 1960s, their curiosity aroused by the government’s announcement that it intended to ‘restore’ the ghost town. However, publicity had outstripped the actual work on the ground and many visitors left disappointed, including some who reported having “driven considerable distances to see the old town.” Little had been done to identify or explain the significance of the weathered buildings that lined Fort Steele’s streets. Most were boarded up to prevent vandalism, and thus were eyesores as much as attractions. Furthermore, there were no picnic tables or public toilets. The general store was the only polite option available to visitors who needed a washroom, but its limited septic capacity was at risk of being overwhelmed. Expecting a rapid increase in visitor numbers – especially after attendance at Barkerville had leapt from 25,000 in 1961 to 107,000 in 1962 – area residents and the MLA for Cranbrook urged the Parks Branch to install interpretive signs and basic visitor facilities like were found in BC’s other roadside parks. One wag from Cranbrook suggested the provincial government jumpstart the stalled

development at Fort Steele by opening a wild west-themed casino “like what they have at Reno.”

Shortly after Fort Steele Historic Park was established, landowner Bill Mead’s motives for supporting it were revealed to have been not entirely altruistic. He asked for the park boundaries to be adjusted so that he could retain a strip of land bordering on the surveyed route of the future highway. Mead hoped to develop commercial operations on the edge of the park, like a motel, gas station, and diner. He also planned to subdivide part of the Wild Horse Ranch into half-acre lots for recreational summer homes. He even had an idea for a roadside attraction of his own: a frontage road he called the “Fabulous Mile of Architecture,” where examples of North American architecture would be displayed, ranging from pioneer log cabins to a “Frank Lloyd Wright type space building made of aluminum.” Parks Branch staff worried these developments might detract from the historic park and make a bad impression on the motoring public. To maintain an uncluttered, rustic aesthetic along the approaches to Fort Steele Park, they asked the Department of Highways to exercise strict control over access points and commercial development for a couple miles in each direction along the future highway corridor.

It was difficult for the Parks Branch to make plans for Fort Steele Park, let alone proceed with restoration work, so long as the Department of Highways had not finalized its plans for the new bridge crossing. While waiting for decisions from Highways, staff at Parks Branch headquarters in Victoria made a scale model map of the townsite, on which

they moved around little blocks that represented old buildings and other structures that could be incorporated into the historic section of the park. In 1963 Highways confirmed that motorists would need to enter and exit the park from a single access point: there could be no interference with through-traffic, no confusing sprawl or unapproved access points like at the Pinewoods concession complex in Manning Park. Unfortunately, Highways could not indicate precisely where the entrance should be located until the design of the new bridge was completed. The Parks Branch therefore kept most of its plans on hold.  

The Department of Highways started expropriating properties at Fort Steele in the winter of 1963-1964. The Parks Branch asked it to preserve all of the old buildings it expropriated, including those on the south side of the future highway right-of-way, because they could be jacked onto trailers and relocated to help fill in the historic townsite, where there were many empty lots. There was far more room to manoeuvre large trucks and trailers around Fort Steele than in the cramped confines of Barkerville, and by the early 1960s it was feasible to move very large buildings in this manner, including the Masonic Hall and Presbyterian Church.

The Parks Branch began building a timber palisade around the edge of Fort Steele Park during the 1964 summer tourist season, despite the fact that the 1887 NWMP post had lacked such fortifications. This was intended to achieve several things. First, it would catch the motoring public’s attention: peeled log palisades were shorthand for the wild west, having been stock features of Hollywood westerns for decades. Second, the

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palisades would hide the park’s new service yard and administrative area from visitors. Third, they would help screen parts of the historic townsite from the future highway corridor. By obscuring the sights and sounds associated with high-speed automobile traffic, the palisade walls would create a sense of separation between past and present.

The location of the main palisade gate depended on the location of the main highway entrance to Fort Steele Park, which had yet to be determined. The gateway to the historic section of the park was considered a very important feature, for it would act as a kind of gateway to the past, the point where visitors should get a sense of leaving the twentieth century behind in the parking lot. Parks Branch planners wanted to build impressive bastions or blockhouses around the gate. When they learned that the Kamloops Museum and Kamloops Tourist Bureau were building a palisade to enclose their new outdoor ‘ranch museum’ in Riverside Park (near the former site of Old Fort Kamloops) they struck up a correspondence about the design of convincingly old timey-looking blockhouses. Completing Fort Steele’s palisade was repeatedly delayed when the Parks Branch’s preferred locations for the gateway were found to conflict with the Department of Highways’ plans for access to the park.30

Allan Hunter of Cranbrook was hired as Fort Steele Park’s first curator in 1965. Like Bill Mead, he had been a major supporter of making Fort Steele into a historic attraction. Hunter had been collecting historical artifacts related to the east Kootenays since the 1950s, and at one point had purchased the Windsor Hotel in order to prevent it being demolished. As a local property owner, he had helped the provincial government

30 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1750, N.O. Blackburn to T.R. Broadland, Planner, Historic Sites, Department of Recreation and Conservation, 26 November 1964; McWilliams to Wallace, 25 March 1965; McWilliams to G.V. Sandiford, Secretary-Manager, Kamloops Tourist Bureau, 22 July 1965.
negotiate the purchase and expropriation of properties from recalcitrant old-timers, much like Fred Ludditt had done in Barkerville. In his role as park curator, Hunter continued to collect artifacts ranging from diaries and agricultural implements to stagecoaches and old buildings. He also coordinated the appearance of the historic townsite with Superintendent Norman Blackburn. Their goal was to make Fort Steele Park reacquire some of its look from the boom times of the early and mid 1890s.

One of Hunter’s priorities was a “general clean up” of the historic townsite. This entailed removing old cars, gas pumps, metal signs that advertised pop and cigarettes, and other items that were deemed incommensurate with an 1890s look. Several buildings identified as being “in very bad condition” were torn down and burned after being stripped of salvageable material. However, Hunter believed that too much ‘cleaning’ might disrupt Fort Steele’s atmosphere of picturesque decay. He insisted that a handful of badly dilapidated structures be fenced off and left to molder so as to “portray an authentic ghost town atmosphere.” “These buildings are always very fascinating to visitors,” he explained, “and good camera subject material.”

The summer of 1965 saw the Parks Branch salvage an artifact that would serve as a signature landmark for Fort Steele Park. A large, weathered waterwheel from a Cornish pump had been found at an abandoned gold mining operation up nearby Perry Creek. After being jacked onto a flatbed trailer and hauled to Fort Steele, the waterwheel was unloaded in the southwesternmost corner of the park on a bluff overlooking the Kootenay River – a location that would be very prominent once the new highway bridge was built. The waterwheel was a veritable beacon of old-timey-ness, a familiar icon of BC’s gold

mining history that echoed the waterwheels auto tourists might have seen at Quesnel and Barkerville. Park staff expected it would “catch the public’s eye when approaching,” thus providing motorists a few extra moments to consider pulling off the highway to visit the historic park.32

The Department of Highways finalized its plans for the new Kootenay River crossing and highway through Fort Steele during the winter of 1965-1966. After the spring thaw, contractors began preparing the roadbed and building the concrete bridge abutments. The new road would traverse part of the townsite in a cut, which required substantial excavation. The Parks Branch convinced the construction contractors to deposit the resulting waste material inside the park. The fill was dumped outside the palisade wall, and then graded with a caterpillar tractor to create a parking lot with room for approximately 300 vehicles. Topsoil was stockpiled for future landscaping projects, and barriers were erected to prevent motorists driving into restricted areas of the park.

The commencement of highway construction pushed the Parks Branch’s program of ‘restoration’ and development into high gear. They rushed to complete the palisade wall and its elaborate blockhouses and gate. Construction started on a new but old-timey-looking museum building that would house artifacts, archival materials, and interpretive displays. Contractors working for the Parks Branch scrambled to move buildings into, out of, and within the park. The town’s remaining residents had their homes relocated to the south side of the highway during this period. To help fill out the park’s emerging historical townscape, it was proposed to truck in old buildings from as far north as the Lake Windermere district. Park staff even considered salvaging old beams from the 1922

32 BCA, GR-1991, reel 1750, McWilliams to Wallace, 1 September 1965; McWilliams to Wallace, 23 March 1966.
David Thompson Memorial Fort in Invermere. They recognized that the structure was “in no way authentic,” but it nevertheless contained some large, weathered, and structurally sound timbers that could be incorporated into the restoration work at Fort Steele Park.33

At Fort Steele the Parks Branch could prepare for a day when motorists would no longer pass through the park. Unlike Barkerville, there would be no miners driving around in incongruous-looking pickup trucks. This meant it would be safe to offer rides around the historic townsite on horse-drawn wagons and stagecoaches. As at Barkerville, supplying historic buildings with electrical power posed a problem. Superintendent Norman Blackburn worried how “photogenic types” might react to the presence of utility poles, overhead wires, and electrical transformers inside the park. It would be expensive


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to dig trenches for underground conduits, so the preferred method for keeping modern utilities out of sight was to build pedestrian friendly, antique-looking wooden boardwalks along the park’s main streets and suspend the cables from the underside.\(^{34}\)

The Parks Branch briefly considered adding a dash of exoticism and local colour to Fort Steele Historic Park by constructing a “typical Indian village” in partnership with the federal Department of Indian Affairs. However, it instead decided to build a two-mile loop of railroad track in the northeast corner of the park. Steam locomotives had become rare sights in British Columbia since the switch to diesel power during the late 1940s and 1950s, and the travelling public was less and less familiar with railways due to the sharp postwar decline in passenger service. Transportation-related themes had been common at BC’s roadside historical attractions since the late 1920s, so operating a short railroad with antique locomotives at Fort Steele seemed a perfectly appropriate way to draw in visitors. It is not clear whether anyone appreciated the irony of commemorating railways at Fort Steele when the CPR’s decision to have the BC Southern bypass the town in the late 1890s had been responsible for its decline.\(^{35}\)

The new steel-reinforced concrete bridge over the Kootenay River at Fort Steele opened to the motoring public in May 1967, seven years after the Department of Highways had started planning to reorganize the highway network in the district north of Cranbrook. The removal of automobile traffic from the streets of Fort Steele Historic Park allowed the Parks Branch to accelerate its program of restoration-related development. It also made for a dramatic change in visitors’ experiences of the park.

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\(^{34}\) BCA, GR-191, reel 1751, Blackburn to Broadland, 24 January 1967.

Engine noise and the dust stirred up by passing vehicles were eliminated. Without chromed, tailfinned automobiles driving through the park, it was much easier for visitors to imagine the historic townsite as representative of frontier life in the 1890s. The Parks Branch started making plans for Fort Steele to be an open-air ‘living’ museum like Barkerville.

Once the motoring public was cut off from the centre of the park, an effort had to be made to draw them in. Signs were needed along the new highway to notify motorists that they were approaching a government-designated historical attraction, and to indicate the location of the park entrance. When these signs were slow to arrive, Superintendent Norman Blackburn received many complaints from auto tourists who overshot the turn-off. “The travelling public is on to our large entrance sign too quickly,” he reported to headquarters. “[T]hey have to turn around and come back, or just pass on by and think about coming for a visit the next time they visit this part of the world.” The heavier traffic, higher speeds, and lack of pullouts on the new limited-access highway made doubling back difficult or unappealing for many motorists, and correspondingly increased the need for signs to advertise Fort Steele.36

The official opening ceremony for Fort Steele Historic Park was held on 24 June 1967. Premier W.A.C. Bennett flew in to officiate over the event, which included opening the new museum building, which would be visited by three-quarters of the 100,000 visitors to Fort Steele Park that year. The official opening of the park was coordinated to coincide with the ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new bridge over the Kootenay River, which in some ways had made the park and restoration project possible.

Furthermore, these events were timed to fall on the day of the groundbreaking ceremony for the new $42 million Crestbrook Forest Industries pulp and paper mill at Skookumchuk, located 20 miles north of Fort Steele. The mill was a joint venture by Crestbrook Timber, Mitsubishi, and the Honshu Paper Manufacturing Company, which owned seven other paper mills around the world.

Fort Steele Historic Park proved very popular, drawing an average of 125,000 visitors per year during the late 1960s. As a tourist attraction it had several advantages over Barkerville. First, it was not so isolated: it was close to Cranbrook, which was one of the province’s emerging regional administrative centres, and also to the southern transprovincial highway. Also, it was not at the end of a dead-end road: it was close to several major highways. In fact, the same high-quality, limited-access road that carried large numbers of working- and middle-class pleasure travellers past the park during the summer months also permitted heavy logging trucks to haul timber from the region’s forests to the massive Crestbrook plant at Skookumchuck on a year-round basis.

In addition to drawing in tourists and other members of the motoring public, Fort Steele Park helped create a sense of continuity around some of the myriad changes that were transforming the environment and economy of the east Kootenays. In commemorating the gold rushes of the 1860s and 1890s, it suggested antecedents to the massive tree farm licenses and pulp mills of the 1960s. In commemorating Sam Steele and the North West Mounted Police it suggested antecedents for an active state that helped create the conditions necessary for resource extraction to proceed in an ‘orderly’ manner. And in commemorating travel by stagecoach and steam locomotive it suggested
the profound importance of transportation infrastructure to the province’s past and by
extension to its present and future as well.

*Three Valley Gap and Columbia Village*

Barkerville and Fort Steele were the big success stories in developing historical
tourist attractions in the BC Interior, outstanding examples of what the Fordist state could
accomplish once it decided to take an active role in cultivating history by the road for the
benefit of the motoring public. As major destination-type attractions, these ‘restored’
ghost towns complemented the dozens of modest Stop of Interest markers that were being
systematically erected along BC’s arterial highway corridors. They helped draw tourists
to districts of the province where tourism had not previously been an important part of
the economy. However, not every ghost town-type of historical attraction that was
developed in the Interior during the 1960s was supported by the provincial government,
and not every ghost town-type of historical attraction that *was* supported by the
provincial government paralleled Barkerville’s and Fort Steele’s success. As noted at the
start of this chapter, several private museums and curiosity collections were established
along the highways of the Interior during the late 1950s and 1960s. There were also
several proposed historical attractions that failed to come to fruition even though they
were supported by the government. This final section of the chapter examines two such
developments in the Revelstoke district: the privately-owned ghost town at Three Valley
Gap, and the failed Columbia Village outdoor museum.

The Revelstoke district saw many significant changes during the 1950s and
1960s. In 1952 local loggers and sawmill operators were faced with a threat to their
livelihoods when the provincial government announced it would grant Columbia Cellulose an enormous tree farm license in the Selkirk Mountains, which would be used to supply the pulp mill it intended to build at Castlegar. This was followed by news that the Big Bend Highway would be replaced by a modern highway through the Selkirks; the little-noticed evisceration of Hamber Park; the opening of the new highway through the Rogers Pass; major renovations to Mount Revelstoke and Glacier national parks; massive timber clearing efforts in the High Arrow and Mica reservoirs; highway upgrades to the north and south of town; and finally the construction of two enormous dams on the Columbia River, one upstream and one downstream from Revelstoke.

Amidst these changes, the Revelstoke district also saw a large amount of new roadside commercial development. In anticipation of increased traffic passing over the Rogers Pass section of the Trans-Canada Highway, new autocourts and motels were built on the edge of town, existing ones were expanded and renovated, and a couple full-service hotels opened in the town centre. New gas stations, diners, banks, and government buildings were built, and Revelstoke even got a small shopping centre. The town even gained a new mascot: Wooden Head, the most famous roadside landmark from the Big Bend Highway, was salvaged from Boat Encampment before it was flooded out, and relocated to a new perch overlooking the Trans-Canada Highway at Revelstoke. Amidst the boom and bustle, the members of the Revelstoke Historical Association (RHA) dreamt of opening their own museum, where it would be possible to display the collection of artifacts they were storing in the basement of the local health centre.

The first major historical tourist attraction built near Revelstoke was attached to a roadside commercial operation at Three Valley Gap, twelve miles west of town, near the
summit of the Eagle Pass. The Trans-Canada Highway at Three Valley Lake resembled a section of the dreaded road through the Fraser Canyon. The CPR had claimed the easier route along the north side of the lake in the 1880s, so in the early 1920s provincial road-building crews had carved out a narrow shelf of a road along the base of the steep, unstable bluffs on the south side, thereby providing Revelstoke with its first road link to Kamloops and points west. With heavily forested mountains closed in on every side, unstable cliffs looming above the road, and a dark, icy lake below it, the drive along Three Valley Lake presented motorists with a brief but real sense of danger. In fact, the scenery at Three Valley Lake was so sublime that the CPR had convinced the federal government to designate it a national park for a few years in the mid 1880s. Yet Three Valley had never amounted to much. It had been the site of a large sawmill before World War One, a relief work camp during the 1930s, and then a Japanese internment camp during World War Two, but had never acquired a substantial population.

Gordon and Ethel Bell purchased a parcel of land bordering on the highway at the east end of Three Valley Lake in 1956, a couple years after it was announced that the Trans-Canada Highway was going to be modernized in the mountains of eastern BC. In 1960 the Bells opened a small roadside motel and café called Three Valley Gap, and in keeping with the times incorporated a number of popular historical themes and symbols into the operation. Their logo, for example, was a bearded, pistol-packing prospector leading a burrow loaded with a pick, shovel, and gold pan. The Bells also built a very small ‘museum’ in a shed located across the parking lot from their motel and café. Gordon Bell was keen on vintage automobiles, so a Model T Ford was one of the first artifacts put on display.
Business increased sharply after the paved, all-season Rogers Pass route replaced the unpopular, roundabout Big Bend Highway in 1962. The Bells expanded their operation incrementally, enlarging the café and motel, adding gas pumps and a souvenir shop, and buying another 20 acres of land. They also expanded their collection of historical artifacts, gradually assembling their own private roadside ghost town. In addition to collecting old farm implements, house fixtures, wagons, and vintage automobiles, the Bells acquired several historic buildings from the region between Revelstoke and Salmon Arm. They had an array of smaller buildings, including pioneer log cabins, a Finnish-style duplex barn from Malakwa, and the old one-room schoolhouse from Craigellachie, which had been scheduled for demolition to make way for highway widening. The largest structure that they salvaged was the three-storey Hotel Bellevue, which had been located in the town of Sicamous, 30 miles to the west. The hotel had closed in the early 1950s after being bypassed by a realignment of the Trans-Canada Highway. The Bell family disassembled it and had the pieces trucked to Three Valley Gap where it was rebuilt for display, rather than for guest accommodations.

The Bell family arranged their “Frontier Mountain Town” so that some of the old buildings faced onto the highway, where they would catch the eye of passing motorists – providing a hint of what lay within was thought to be the best advertisement. Driving in the confined, heavily wooded mountain terrain around Revelstoke could be tiring and lonely, and many motorists welcomed the opportunity to pull off the highway for an hour to take in an historical attraction, even though they had to pay a fee for the privilege of
entering the simulated ghost town. Three Valley Gap became a familiar sight and popular stopping place on the drive across BC’s central Interior.\(^{37}\)

![Figure 13.4: Postcard showing the Frontier Mountain Town at Three Valley Gap, 1960s.](image)

The Bell family’s development at Three Valley Gap was the most elaborate private historical attraction developed in the BC Interior during the postwar years. It was also a purely synthetic affair. Their Frontier Mountain Town was not meant to be a reconstruction of any specific place or period, and all of the artifacts and old buildings had been brought to the site from elsewhere. Three Valley Gap’s commercial success reflected the general enthusiasm for old-timey ghost towns in the BC Interior following the ‘58 Centennial celebrations. It also emphasized the importance of being located in a spot that was visible to the motoring public and easily accessible from a major arterial highway. Indeed, Three Valley Gap was not the only historical attraction developed along

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the Trans-Canada Highway corridor between Salmon Arm and Revelstoke. In 1963 the owners of another private roadside museum that had been established near Revelstoke contacted the provincial government with an offer to sell their “complete stock of relics” to help furnish Barkerville and Fort Steele historic parks. At Craigellachie, 25 miles west of Revelstoke, there was a provincial Stop of Interest marker and a federal Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada cairn to commemorate the driving of the last spike on the CPR in 1885.38

These roadside attractions were developed during a period when the Revelstoke district was becoming more familiar to western Canada’s motoring public. Many business and pleasure travellers had been reluctant to pass that way during the late 1940s and 1950s due to the Big Bend Highway’s roundabout route and infamous reputation for monotony and loneliness. Commercial truck drivers had effectively been barred from the Big Bend route. However, the new Rogers Pass section of the Trans-Canada Highway quickly became an important route for motorists travelling between BC and the Prairies. The new road was appealing to pleasure travellers because it traversed two national parks and provided excellent views of the surrounding mountains and glaciers, as well as the thrill of passing beneath deadly avalanche zones via massive concrete snowsheds. It was appealing to business travellers and commercial truckers because it provided a more direct route between Calgary and the Coast. Tourism and roadside commercial services became much more important to Revelstoke’s economy during the 1960s, and this coincided with local history enthusiasts’ desire to salvage historical landscape features

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38 BCA, GR-1661, box 12, file 5, C.F. Upper to Wallace, 2 June 1963.
that were going to be destroyed by the reservoirs associated with the Columbia River Treaty dams.

According to the preliminary terms of the Columbia River Treaty, the High Arrow Dam would be the first major dam built on the Columbia in BC. It would be located a few miles north of Castlegar, and would create a reservoir that at full pool would extend 150 miles upstream, reaching all the way to the southern outskirts of Revelstoke. High Arrow would be a storage dam, like the Mica Creek dam that was to be built next. It was meant to regulate discharge from Upper and Lower Arrow lakes, which were essentially large widenings of the Columbia, like Kinbasket and Windermere lakes further upstream. This would eliminate the seasonal flooding that plagued downstream areas and maximize power generation at Grand Coulee and other hydroelectric dams on the Columbia in the United States.

The announcement of the High Arrow Dam spurred historians and history buffs to begin salvaging records, artifacts, buildings, and landscape features that were deemed to be significant to or representative of the region’s past. In 1960 the BC Historical Association urged the provincial government to collect historical information about the many small communities that were going to be partially or entirely inundated by the High Arrow reservoir, “including moving historical buildings where judged advisable.” In a similar vein, Wilson Duff and the province’s new Archaeological Sites Advisory Board asked BC Hydro to fund surveys of archaeological sites in the proposed reservoir areas, starting with the one that would form behind the High Arrow Dam.39

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39 BCA, GR-1661, box 1, file 4, John E Gibbard, Secretary, BC Historical Association to Wesley Black, 23 December 1960; file 5, Wilson Duff to Wallace, 4 Nov 1960.
BC Hydro had drawn up elaborate plans for clearing the High Arrow reservoir area by the time construction got underway in early 1965. Huge swathes of standing timber were going to be removed, as well as buildings, people, and communities. Two thousand people were expected to have their homes, farms, and businesses flooded out by the High Arrow component of the Columbia River Treaty megaproject. BC Hydro, the provincial crown corporation responsible for building and operating the dams, had departments to coordinate property expropriation and resettlement. It planned to rebuild several of the Arrow Lakes’ larger villages on higher land, which would entail moving some homes and businesses and replacing others. However, a handful of communities were not going to be rebuilt – very small places like Arrowhead, Arrow Park, and Renata. As a result, several hundred displaced people were expected to move to new residential subdivisions that BC Hydro had staked out in Revelstoke, Nakusp, and Castlegar.  

In 1965 BC Hydro planners contacted the BC Parks Branch and the Provincial Secretary’s office about the possibility of developing some kind of tourist information centre and “regional museum” beside the Trans-Canada Highway at Revelstoke. This proposal was promoted by James Wood Wilson, who was in charge of long-term planning for the power authority’s resettlement department. Wilson told Deputy Provincial Secretary Lawrie Wallace that BC Hydro was “quite willing to look out for and make available to a Museum any buildings and effects of historical value which we acquire in the [expropriation] process.” He suggested that the museum could record the

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40 Loo, “People in the Way”; Parr, Sensing Changes, chapter 5; Porteous and Smith, Domicide, chapter 5; Meg Stanley, Voices From Two Rivers: Harnessing the Power of The Peace and Columbia (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre and BC Hydro Power Pioneers Association, 2010), chapters 6-10; J.W. Wilson, People in the Way: The Human Aspects of the Columbia River Project (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973).
history of “development” in the Arrow Lakes region through the use of “full size original exhibits.” He suggested that mining machinery, logging equipment, agricultural implements, old buildings, and railway rolling stock would be appropriate artifacts for such a museum. He even pointed towards Columbia Cellulose as a company that might be willing to donate forestry-related artifacts. Several of the sawmills it had purchased in the Arrow Lakes region during the late 1940s and early 1950s in order to acquire their timber licenses had become surplus to its operations since the Celgar pulp mill began production in Castlegar in 1961. Thus local deindustrialization could provide useful assets for a major roadside historical attraction.41

Wilson asked the Parks Branch to decide quickly about the development of a major government-backed historical tourist attraction at Revelstoke. He cited four reasons why the matter had to be dealt with urgently. First, “strategically located land” was becoming scarce in the Revelstoke area. There had been intense commercial development and property speculation along the Trans-Canada Highway corridor since the mid 1950s, and property prices were likely to become further inflated as work commenced on the High Arrow and Mica dam projects. Second, private parties were known to be collecting historical artifacts in the region – here Wilson was probably referring to the Bell family at Three Valley Gap. Third, there was a concern about vandalism. The longer that old buildings sat vacant, the greater the chance that they might be damaged or even destroyed. Fourth, and most importantly, BC Hydro’s property acquisition program in the Arrow Lakes region and along the Columbia River south of

41 BCA, GR-1661, box 7, file 3, J.W. Wilson, Regional Development Coordinator, BC Hydro and Power Authority to Wallace, 17 March 1965; Wallace to Wesley Black, Provincial Secretary and Minister of Municipal Affairs, 18 March 1965.
Revelstoke was rapidly accelerating after being held in abeyance for several years while awaiting ratification of the Columbia River Treaty.

A huge clearcutting effort would soon be underway in the flood zone, and BC Hydro’s demolition contractors were expected to begin bulldozing and burning the structures on expropriated properties during the winter of 1965-1966. Wilson wanted to ensure that any old buildings and other structures that were considered especially valuable or representative would be identified and marked for preservation before these clearances got underway. “[W]e would not like to destroy anything that could contribute to the Museum,” he explained.42

Senior Parks Branch officials were keen on the idea of a third major historic park in the Interior. The Cariboo Highway corridor had Barkerville and the southern transprovincial highway had Fort Steele, but there was no equivalent attraction along the Trans-Canada Highway. Bob Broadland, who was in charge of the historic provincial parks, deemed Revelstoke “a natural for a regional museum” due to its location on the Trans-Canada and proximity to popular national parks. However, he questioned who should be the “prime mover” of any proposal for a major historical attraction at Revelstoke: BC Hydro, the Revelstoke Historical Association, the city of Revelstoke, or the Parks Branch. Broadland also pointed out that the Parks Branch was already spread thin in its efforts to mark, protect, and in a few cases restore BC’s accessible historic sites. It was busy with Barkerville, Cottonwood House, Fort Steele, and several properties on the Coast, and was also organizing another round of Stop of Interest markers in preparation for the 1966 and 1967 centennials.

42 BCA, GR-1661, box 7, file 3, Wilson to Wallace, 18 May 1965
Even with BC Hydro’s offer to donate old buildings, the development of a large new historical attraction at Revelstoke would likely be as expensive and complicated as the ‘restoration’ efforts at Barkerville and Fort Steele. At those sites, the provincial government had acquired, through a mixture of purchase and expropriation, relatively intact ghost towns that contained streets and alleys, old buildings, artifacts, and other historical landscape features. By comparison, “Columbia Village,” as the outdoor museum proposed for Revelstoke came to be known, would be purely synthetic, akin to the Bell family’s Frontier Mountain Town at nearby Three Valley Lake.

Suitable land would need to be acquired and cleared for the museum. All of the old buildings and other artifacts would need to be transported to the museum site from around the Revelstoke and Arrow Lakes region, and then arranged in a convincingly evocative manner. In this sense, Columbia Village would closely resemble Upper Canada Village in southeastern Ontario, which had opened in 1961. There old buildings had been plucked from sites that were going to be inundated by the Saint Lawrence Seaway megaproject, and then assembled on former farmland near Highway 401, the main highway corridor between Toronto and Montreal. No one in the Parks Branch appears to have had any serious qualms about the authenticity of this kind of project. No complaints had been voiced at Fort Steele, where old buildings were being shuttled hither and thither, or at Barkerville, where squatters’ cabins had been removed from the lower town and replicas had been built of landmarks like the Theatre Royal. However, this kind of
development was bound to be expensive and time-consuming when conducted on a large scale and with buildings and other structures being transported over long distances.\textsuperscript{43}

In the summer of 1965 the cabinet gave the Parks Branch approval to begin planning for the acquisition of land, buildings, and historical artifacts for the Columbia Village project. Bob Broadland travelled to Revelstoke to meet with BC Hydro’s property acquisition department and members of the Revelstoke Historical Association. They took him to sites where a museum could be developed, and showed him many of the old buildings and other structures that were scheduled to be demolished in the flood zone between Revelstoke and the village of Arrowhead, 25 miles to the south. Arrowhead was located at the point where the Columbia flowed into Upper Arrow Lake. It had been the site of a very large sawmill in the 1900s, so had a good number of turn-of-the-century buildings. It had also been an important transshipment point for the Canadian Pacific Railway, with a large wharf and barge slips where a branch line from Revelstoke met the CPR steamboats that plied the lakes. The Revelstoke Historical Association (RHA) had already identified a clutch of historically significant or architecturally representative buildings that they wanted to save from demolition and flooding, including cabins, houses, barns, and former businesses. Knowing how adept contractors were becoming at moving large structures by truck and trailer, Broadland added several more buildings to this list, including Arrowhead’s general store and Anglican Church. In his report to Parks

\textsuperscript{43} BCA, GR-1661, box 7, file 3, J.W. Wilson to Wallace, 7 April 1965; Broadland to R.H. Ahrens, Chief, Planning, Parks Branch, 9 April 1965. For offers to donate buildings and structures that would otherwise be demolished as part of BC Hydro’s reservoir clearing program, see Wilson to Wallace, 7 April 1965; H.L. Keenlyside, Chairman, BC Hydro and Power Authority to Wesley Black, 14 April 1965.
Branch headquarters, he urged that a museum site be found soon so that the selected buildings could be jacked up, loaded onto trailers, and moved to safety.\textsuperscript{44}

However, the Columbia Village project was struck by a series of delays at the very moment it needed to be expedited. These delays were related to financing and site acquisition. A significant setback was suffered in early 1966 when BC Hydro – an arms-length crown corporation – refused to match the financial contribution that the provincial government might make towards the development of a regional museum at Revelstoke. In a letter to Deputy Provincial Secretary and BRAC chairman Lawrie Wallace, James Wood Wilson pointed out that the power authority had never offered to help pay for Columbia Village. It was willing to donate old buildings and other effects that it had acquired through expropriation; to donate surplus land for a museum site; and even to have its contractors help move buildings from the flood zone to the museum site. But it had never promised cash for the project. Soon after, Wilson quit his job at BC Hydro to teach planning at Brock University in Ontario. With his departure, the Columbia Village scheme lost its biggest supporter inside BC Hydro.\textsuperscript{45}

Enthusiasm for the project was growing in Revelstoke even as it became less and less clear who was going to pay for it. The Revelstoke Historical Association predicted Columbia Village would quickly outdraw Barkerville, what with the hundreds of thousand of motorists who passed through town each year on the Trans-Canada. The RHA saw Columbia Village as a living museum, with actors in period costume, buildings

\textsuperscript{44} BCA, GR-1661, box 7, file 3, McWilliams to Wilson, 24 September 1965; Broadland to McWilliams, 12 Oct 1965. On the history of Arrowhead and other communities along the north end of Upper Arrow Lake, see Milton Parent, \textit{Silent Shores and Sunken Ships} (Nakusp: Arrow Lakes Historical Society, 1997).

that visitors would be allowed to enter, and an active streetscape. For a centerpiece attraction, they envisioned a restored sternwheel steamboat that could take visitors for short cruises on the future High Arrow reservoir – a ride into the past that would be appropriate to the Arrow Lakes’ history the same way stagecoaches were to Barkerville’s.

The RHA presumably intended to restore the weathered hulk of the SS *Minto*, which had been beached at Galena Bay on Upper Arrow Lake since the late 1950s. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Nakusp-based Arrow Lakes Historical Society had made an effort to turn the old CPR paddlewheeler into a local historical attraction, but had been forced to give up on this scheme. The *Minto* had subsequently had much of its engine work and ornamental trim removed before it was purchased by John Nelson, a local history enthusiast who hoped to restore it one day. The RHA had also collected many historic artifacts that could be used to furnish buildings that were rescued from the flood zone. These were stored all around town, in members’ basements, attics, barns, and sheds. The existing Revelstoke museum – a space in the basement of the local hospital – was too small to store them all, let alone display them.46

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46 BCA, GR-1661, box 7, file 2, J.P. Corrigan, City Clerk [Revelstoke] to Black, 15 April 1965; Frank Sampson, President, Revelstoke Historical Society to Black, January 1966. Regarding the remains of the SS *Minto*, see BCA, GR-1661, box 3, file 1, Broadland to Ireland, 23 October 1967.
The Revelstoke Historical Association’s vision for Columbia Village was more or less in line with what planners and engineers at the Parks Branch had in mind. In a report to the director of the Parks Branch, Bob Broadland predicted that a large ghost town-type of outdoor museum at Revelstoke would become “one of the major tourist attractions adjacent to the Trans-Canada Highway.” He also suggested that transportation and infrastructure-related themes like steamboating on the Arrow Lakes and the construction of the CPR through the Rocky and Selkirk mountains were especially appropriate for such a museum, given its setting. By the mid 1960s heroic infrastructure as the key to unlocking the resource wealth of the BC Interior had been a common theme in scholarly and popular historical writing for at least 30 years. Furthermore, after reaching Revelstoke by way of the Kicking Horse and Rogers passes (if coming from the Prairies) or the Fraser and Thompson river canyons (if coming from the Coast), motorists were
likely to be primed for narratives about how the prospectors and railroad builders of yesteryear had struggled with rugged environments.\footnote{BCA, GR-1661, box 7, file 2, Broadland to McWilliams, 15 Sept 1966.}

Bob Broadland’s enthusiasm for the Columbia Village project was not enough to overcome the problem of finding a site that was available, accessible, and big enough to develop a synthetic ghost town. The Parks Branch estimated that it needed 75 acres of relatively flat land to assemble Columbia Village, but suitable properties had become prohibitively expensive along the Trans-Canada Highway corridor near Revelstoke. Several properties were identified as potentially useable, but they proved either to have significant shortcomings or to be tied up with BC Hydro’s dam development program. For example, the city of Revelstoke offered to donate a 90-acre lot located several miles north of town on the old Big Bend Highway. It had the necessary amount of flat land, and although it was a fair distance north of the Trans-Canada Highway, Broadland predicted the Mica Dam would one day be a tourist attraction in and of itself, thus helping to draw motorists up that way. However, the Columbia River was constricted, rocky, and fast-flowing at that point, which would make it impossible to develop the steamboating feature that Broadland and the RHA agreed would be a major draw for the future attraction.

Local boosters and history enthusiasts scrambled to help the Parks Branch find a suitable site for Columbia Village. These included Mayor Arvid Lundell, a former Social Credit MLA and publisher of the \textit{Revelstoke Review}, and RHA member Estelle Dickey, widow of arch-Revelstoke booster and postcard photographer Earle Dickey, who had lobbied municipal, provincial, and federal governments to preserve scenic timber along
the Big Bend Highway corridor during the 1930s. Several promising parcels of crown land proved to be scheduled for inundation by the reservoir, including one that would have had enough space to develop a large campground in conjunction with the museum. Another had been claimed by the city of Revelstoke for a new municipal dump. Still others had been reserved for the resettlement of Arrow Lakes residents who were going to be displaced by the flooding. Even the 90-acre lot located a few miles up the Big Bend Highway turned out to be reserved by BC Hydro, which planned to use it as a source of fill material for the Revelstoke Canyon Dam, a power-generating dam that was scheduled to be built after High Arrow and Mica were operational.48

The delays associated with an uncertain funding structure and difficulty finding a museum site need not have proven fatal to the Columbia Village project. Barkerville Park had not been built in a day, and the ‘restoration’ of Fort Steele had been delayed for five years due to uncertainty about the new highway that was going to be built through the townsite. Unfortunately, the delay in finding a suitable location for Columbia Village coincided with construction of the High Arrow Dam running six months ahead of schedule. As megaprojects go, High Arrow was relatively simple to build. It was just a short distance from Castlegar, did not have any power-generating facilities, and was only 170 feet tall (versus 800 feet for the dam planned at isolated Mica Creek). In February 1967 Estelle Dickey warned the Parks Branch that “[w]e can expect to have the water up here […] by 1968.” Members of the Revelstoke Historical Association hurried to rescue

48 BCA, GR-1661, box 7, file 2, McWilliams to Wallace, 3 Aug 1966; G.W. Fitzpatrick, Senior Community Planner, Land Division, BC Hydro to Wallace, 21 Aug 1966; Estelle Dickey to Ireland, 19 Sept 1966; Arvid Lundell to Black, 1 Oct 1966; Dickey to Ireland, 8 Oct 1966; R.W. Gross, Manager, Land Division, BC Hydro to Wallace, 12 Oct 1966; Dickey to Wallace, 10 April 1968; Wallace to Keenlysde, 29 May 1968.
artifacts from the flood zone, even though they lacked a permanent place to store them. They urged the Parks Branch to finalize a location for Columbia Village so that the old buildings BC Hydro had left standing at Arrowhead and other points inside the reservoir area could be relocated before it was too late.49

During the spring of 1968, as the floodwaters began to rise behind the completed High Arrow Dam, BC Hydro’s demolition contractors made one last sweep through the valley, burning and bulldozing all the homes, barns, and other old structures that had been left standing at Arrowhead, Sidmouth, 12 Mile, Greenslide, Mount Cartier, and other formerly populated points between Revelstoke and Upper Arrow Lake, including the old buildings that the Park Branch and RHA had indicated they wanted for Columbia Village. With the museum project now apparently dead in the water, the Nelson family allowed BC Hydro to tow the hulk of the sternwheeler SS *Minto* offshore at Galena Bay and set it ablaze, destroying what could have been Columbia Village’s signature attraction. The *Minto*’s Viking funeral became a popular symbol of the passing of an era, as the region was transformed by paved highways, pulp mills, hydroelectric dams, and the enormous reservoirs that formed behind them. Few residents of Revelstoke and the Arrow Lakes appear to have known that there had been plans for the *Minto* to be incorporated in a major government-supported historical attraction in Revelstoke. Making the loss especially frustrating for Revelstoke’s history enthusiasts and tourism promoters was the fact that BC Hydro had prevented the RHA and the Bell family at Three Valley Gap from using their meager resources to salvage at least a few old buildings from the flood zone.

The Parks Branch was surprisingly reluctant to abandon the Columbia Village scheme, even after it had lost the materials with which to assemble the museum. Robert Ahrens, who was director of the Parks Branch in 1968, channeled the American government’s anxiety about losing face by withdrawing from South Vietnam when he argued “we don’t feel that we can simply pull out and leave the [Revelstoke Historical] Association entirely to its own devices.” The Parks Branch encouraged the RHA to seek funding from the recently established Columbia-Shuswap Regional District, and promised Bob Broadland would be available to “assist in the planning of your Museum [emphasis added].” The idea of a large outdoor museum at Revelstoke staggered along
for a few more years, but in the spring of 1969 the Parks Branch informed the Revelstoke Historical Association that no more help would be forthcoming.\textsuperscript{50}

It seems probable that the Columbia Village scheme would have gone forward if the Parks Branch had been able to acquire a suitable piece of property close to the Trans-Canada Highway. Yet even without a major historical attraction on the Trans-Canada, the highways of the British Columbia Interior seemed to be awash with old-timey ghost town parks, outdoor museums, living museums, and local museums, plus an array of monuments, markers, and state-designated historical sites. As mentioned in the section on Fort Steele, the Kamloops Museum Association and Kamloops Board of Trade collaborated to build an open-air museum with palisade wall in Riverside Park during the late 1960s. It was used to house wagons, tractors, and other large artifacts that were too big to store in the city’s 1955 museum. In the early 1960s a palisaded “frontier town” was built near Cultus Lake Provincial Park in the Fraser Valley. In Prince George, a group of history enthusiasts and tourism promoters decided to build a replica of the North West Company’s 1807 Fort George trading post. When they learned that Fort George had been a modest collection of storehouses, they deemed this too boring, and proceeded to build a large stockade with eye-catching blockhouses and a palisade. In the late 1960s there was even a proposal to turn the entire village of Clinton into a roadside historical attraction, with eye-catching palisades at the points where the Cariboo Highway entered the village and all the storefronts that lined the highway renovated in a manner that would make the village look the way it might have during BC’s gold rush days. By 1970 history by the road had become big business in the BC Interior.

\textsuperscript{50} BCA, GR-1661, box 7, file 2, Ahrens to Dickey, 18 Oct 1968; file 1, Ahrens to Wallace, 20 February 1969; Ahrens to Wallace, 28 February 1969; Wallace to Dickey, 3 March 1969.
Chapter 14
Looking Back on British Columbia By the Road

Popular experiences of nature and history in the British Columbia Interior during the mid-twentieth-century were, this thesis has shown, closely bound up with and structured by automobility – the system of objects, spaces, images, and practices that surrounded private automobiles and public roads. Motorists experienced the Interior in a very different way than passengers riding aboard stagecoaches, steamboats, and railways had. Though they were ‘free’ to follow a route, pace, and schedule of their own choosing, pausing when and where they liked, they nevertheless came to see and know the province ‘by the road’: by the road in the sense of driving along a network of roads that was built and maintained by the state, and also by the road in the sense of viewing roadside landscapes which in many cases had been prepared for them by planners, boosters, and business people.

As the motoring public became a larger, broader, more politically and economically important group over the course of the century, the manner in which its constituents viewed the province became a pressing concern for the incipient and then fully-formed Fordist state. Good roads and appealing roadside landscapes were treated as assets that could draw auto tourists and stimulate other types of consumption; they were also a way to legitimate the state in the eyes of its motoring citizens. Starting in the early 1940s, the provincial government sought to develop a park system that would be accessible to the motoring public, and established a variety of parks along arterial highways. As two of BC’s largest, most automobile-accessible parks Manning and
Hamber stand out as interesting cases that reveal the intricacy of the interests and agendas that could converge on park development and management. Beginning in the late 1950s, the government undertook a similar program with historic sites, which—provided they caught the motoring public’s interest at the right time and in the right way—also came to serve as roadside amenities. Part of automobility was, then, a public pedagogy that involved learning new, modern ways of experiencing time and space, and, by extension, nature and history. State-built infrastructure and the selective efforts of various groups to manipulate and modify roadside landscapes shaped the specific sort of nature and history that motorists could imagine.

An enormously complex and diffuse system, automobility was one of the major economic motors of twentieth-century British Columbia, even though the province had only a peripheral role (as a supplier of raw materials) in the production of automobiles. In BC, as in most parts of North America, it was automobile travel—people’s actual use of automobiles and roads, and consumption of goods and services associated with doing so— that played the bigger role. A society did not need to make automobiles in order to be remade, in good measure, by them. People drove in the BC Interior for all kinds of reasons. Some hauled timber, produce, and freight. Others commuted to work. Some drove to visit friends and family. Others drove for pleasure, for recreation, for an escape from their everyday routine. Whether they drove for one, all, or none of these reasons, motorists were all part of a larger community which this study has identified as the motoring public. As citizens and as consumers, they shared interests and experiences that were specific to the province, regions, and communities in which they lived. At the same time, they also shared many interests and experiences with other North American...
motorists, making them part of a much larger motoring public and a broader culture of automobility. For residents of British Columbia and for visitors from afar, driving became an important and very modern way of experiencing and imagining the Interior.

For all the flexibility and sense of freedom that was commonly associated with travelling by private automobile, the state determined much of what the motoring public saw by the road because it selected, prepared, and maintained the paths that all automobiles had to travel along. The private automobile was, in practice, effectively inseparable from the public road network. Motorists who chose to travel between BC’s Coast and Interior had little choice but to travel by way of the Fraser Canyon until the Hope-Princeton Highway was completed in 1949. Similarly, it was impossible for motorists to drive around the Big Bend of the Columbia until the state built a road there in the 1930s, and impossible again after the state allowed it to be flooded out in the early 1970s. To be clear, this is not to suggest that the state determined the meanings that the motoring public attached to their landscape experiences. Rather, it is simply to contend that the landscapes visible by the province’s arterial roads formed a public façade that was imbued with special cultural, political, and economic significance precisely because of the fact that it was seen by so many people, that it was part of a common or shared experience. Thus the opening ceremonies that were organized for the Banff-Windermere Highway in 1923, the Big Bend Highway in 1940, the Hope-Princeton in 1949, the Rogers Pass route in 1962, and the new bridge over the Kootenay River at Fort Steele in 1967 were not just photo opportunities for grandstanding politicians: they were also very real instances of the Fordist state opening new possibilities to the motoring public and to capital.
The Fordist state did not make decisions about the expansion and improvement of the provincial highway network in isolation. Almost all of the preceding chapters have shown instances where politicians and government agencies were lobbied by parties who wanted the development of road infrastructure steered to their advantage. These included roadside business owners, tourism promoters, agricultural producers, land companies, and forestry companies. They were joined by myriad other parties who had interests in promoting automobile travel and in making the BC Interior look good to the motoring public, including automobile dealers, automobile associations, boosters, outdoor recreationalists, and history enthusiasts.

Just as automobile roads were a pressing economic concern in mid-twentieth-century British Columbia, so were the shared experiences and ‘lessons’ that the motoring public picked up while travelling along them and viewing the surrounding landscapes. Every chapter in this dissertation has demonstrated how this was so. Perhaps the best evidence of the pervasiveness of this Fordist pedagogy can be found in those cases where people expressed their concerns about the ‘view from the road’ even before the road in question had been built, as with the Hope-Princeton and Big Bend highways, and with the new section of road through Fort Steele. Studying automobility as a system – simultaneously an imposing socio-economic structure manifest in physical structures, a political practice generating rival and enduring political interests, and a way of experiencing time and space that often translated into a miscellany of not-always-harmonious or even rational aesthetic choices and preferences – helps to illuminate new relationships and formulate new questions about the past. If, in isolation, a debate about a certain park or a historic site might be interpreted as a purely local contest between rival
interests, once that struggle is placed in its more general context, we can appreciate not only the clash of opinions, but the shared languages of aesthetic naturalism and recreational history in which they were expressed. For all the undoubted multiplicity of agents and events at work in automobility in British Columbia, there was a structure of policies, practices and expectations that, when mediated by the Fordist state, lent to this history patterns and principles that a narrow emphasis on the local and contingent would be likely to overlook.

Fordism provides an important unifying theme, because manipulating, modifying, and managing roadside landscapes so that they would appeal to, attract, and reassure the motoring public was seen as a legitimate (even necessary) way to get the best possible return from the province’s expensive modern highway infrastructure. The accumulation and legitimation functions of the modern state were smoothly aligned in successful projects, such as the establishment of Manning Park and the ‘restoration’ of Historic Barkerville and Fort Steele, but it may be as revealing of the underlying structures at work to note the moments when such an alignment was not in place, such as the ‘failure to launch’ of Columbia Village; the long, strange fiasco of Hamber Park and the Big Bend Highway, in which fragmentation within the state itself led to an incoherent policy outcome; or the David Thompson Memorial Fort, in which an ambitious project of commemoration failed in large part because it emerged before the full maturation of Fordist automobility in the BC Interior.
An important element of Fordism and modernity in mid-twentieth-century Canada was the ideal of “recreational democracy,” the notion that all citizens were entitled to enjoy time off for leisure – particularly if it had an element of healthful self-improvement to it, as with participation in outdoor sports, or strenuous, contemplative encounters with nature. Whether rattled by urban turmoil or worn down by the drudgery of the farm, British Columbians were believed to require therapeutic places where they could recover their depleted energies, all the better to engage anew with the stresses and strains of modern life.

Martin Allerdale Grainger’s excursions on horseback into BC’s southern Cascade Mountains exemplified the therapeutic practice of roughing it, as he sought mental revivification in the high country. These kinds of activities had a long history in BC, going back to the trails and alpine huts that the CPR built around its mountain resorts in the 1880s. However, mass automobility brought new antidotes to modernity within the reach of masses of people, ranging from the Sunday drive to the extended car camping trip. Automobility was often hailed as a triumph of democracy and planning because private automobiles and public roads made accessible to the masses places and experiences once enjoyed only by an elite. That Manning Park’s roadside campgrounds should be free of charge and designed so that a screen of brush and timber separated campers from the highway (and from each other) suggested the down-to-earth ways recreational democracy was realized in practice. It was deemed important, in the apt phrase of planner Roy Lowery, to provide visitors with an “atmosphere of congeniality and freedom.”
However, as motorists travelled to and through these special places in droves, especially after World War Two, their sheer numbers made any definitive escape from modernity an ever-more-unlikely prospect. As shown in chapters Four and Five on Manning Park, the Parks Division struggled to keep up with visitor demand almost from the moment the Hope-Princeton threw the park open to the motoring public. The park’s ‘success’ gradually threatened to undermine the naturalistic, anti-modern aesthetic that had helped make it so popular in the first place. (The same thing happened at Barkerville Park, when attendance rose more than tenfold in its first four years as a provincial park and threatened its cultivated atmosphere of old-timey-ness.) By the 1960s there was a growing likelihood that British Columbian motorists might ‘escape’ from the everyday routines of their home communities only to find themselves on a busy highway bound for a dusty, crowded campground, passing natural and historical attractions with overflowing parking lots along the way. The landscapes of the province’s parks and historic sites were not static, even though they were presented and often perceived as such. Working ‘behind the scenery’ as aesthetic managers, the Parks Branch strove to maintain appearances and meet the motoring public’s expectations of nature and history by the road.

British Columbia’s park planners believed the motoring public deserved a break from industrial capitalism itself when they visited or passed through parks and officially-designated historic sites. It was deemed improper to have too many reminders within parks of the resource extraction industries that drove the province’s economy, and that of the Interior in particular. Even though logging and prospecting were allowed inside the provincial parks under certain strict conditions, it was vitally important that evidence of these activities be kept hidden from the motoring public by buffer zones, and access
roads were to be kept to a minimum and made as inconspicuous as possible. Evidence of road construction and recent habitation were also hidden from view. Even such benign modern phenomena as utility lines, aluminum-skinned trailers, and telephone booths seemed examples of “scenic defacement,” to be kept away from view of the highway. The working premise seemed to be that the motoring public should experience their surroundings (although not the highway) as something untouched by the very modernity that had allowed them access to such sites.

As shown in Chapter Three, the Parks Division initially considered developing Manning Park as a therapeutic space where well-heeled city dwellers might restore themselves in its alpine heights. One early park supporter even disparaged the motoring public, deeming most too lazy and uncultured to get out of their cars in order to properly encounter the park. However, the rise of recreational democracy as an ideal of the Fordist state during World War Two entailed a demand that the park be re-planned as a more democratic space, oriented towards the more numerous and ‘democratic’ motoring public. This meant a new aesthetic of nature, one that replaced the elite pursuit of the park’s rarefied high country with an emphasis on the scenes and attractions that would be visible to all motorists as they travelled along the highway, which ran on the valley floor.

The Parks Division assigned great significance to the look of the highway corridor in Manning Park, and devoted much time and effort to planning and policing it. They worried about “unsightly commercialism,” and that the owners of auto camps and other roadside businesses in the vicinity of the park would disrupt the naturalistic aesthetic they were attempting to impose. It was important that human interventions that were visible to the motoring public not clash with their natural surroundings – that they not be a “blot on
the landscape.” Unspoken but understood was the sharp distinction between a blot and an asset, an eyesore and an attraction. Ideally, human interventions would blend in with their natural surroundings, as the Fordist state tried to do when it built the Pinewoods concession complex.

Chapters Four and Five showed that Pinewoods, as the most built-up part of Manning Park, and the place where motorists were most likely to pause, was the site of controversies over signage, hazardous traffic conditions, expanded visitor facilities, and overwhelmed utilities. However, the earlier debate over a would-be concession holder’s plan to establish a beer parlour in Manning Park’s concession complex is especially noteworthy for how it revealed certain assumptions about class and propriety. Importing elements of ‘rough’ working-class culture into ‘nature’ was deemed tantamount to its desecration. Nature was a sphere implicitly imagined to be one congenial not to beer-drinking workers but to their more refined and temperate social betters. A beer parlour in Manning Park was both a morally and aesthetically dubious proposition, one that threatened to corrupt the park’s value as a state asset. The fear of not having complete aesthetic control over the concession complex in such a showcase provincial park ultimately drove the state to assume responsibility for its development.

In their role as aesthetic managers, park staff manipulated many aspects of Manning’s roadside landscapes with the intention of shaping the motoring public’s views. They removed trees in some places and planted them in others. They built parking lots, and access roads that made it easy for motorists visit places like Sumallo Grove, Rhododendron Flats, and Lightning Lakes. They manipulated animal habitat in order to make some species more visible to motorists, and others less visible. Park planners even
supplemented real animals with representations of animals, such as the eye-catching bear and marmot sign-sculptures that marked the entry points to Manning Park, and the stuffed animals displayed in the Nature House interpretation centre. Perhaps the best example of the lengths the Parks Division would go to was the 1951 addition of the mile-wide, ten-mile-long parkway to the park’s western boundary, which gave it control over a series of scenic, natural, and historical roadside attractions, while at the same time serving to downplay or minimize the potential impact of the desolate Big Burn on motorists’ experiences of nature by the road.

When nature by the road failed to conform to pre-existing scripts or appeal to the tastes of the motoring public, state planners’ verdicts could verge on the absolute. Hamber Park was downgraded from Class A to Class B status just a few years after it was established, and ultimately disappeared, in large part because the experience of driving the Big Bend Highway had been widely deemed highly unpleasant. In a way, the undifferentiated, seemingly endless, almost claustrophobic forests of the Big Bend country were too natural – too unimproved – for their own good. Neither the road nor the surrounding landscapes made BC look good to the motoring public. Judged harshly in a damning reconnaissance report that had been drawn up by bureaucrats who spent a scant 36 hours exploring the section of it visible from the Big Bend Highway (the same park planners who had lavished attention on Manning just a couple years earlier), Hamber Park was handicapped from the outset by the aesthetic experiences afforded by the lonely, gravel-surfaced, roundabout road that had made it accessible. The Parks Division’s half-hearted attempts to effect a “redemption through stagecraft” proved unavailing, and Hamber was kept in limbo through the 1940s and 1950s, unknown to the
public, until the state found a higher purpose for the Big Bend country. As both Manning and Hamber provincial parks illustrated, a certain “normal” nature in western Canada depended intimately upon a particular visual/vehicular relationship.

In their internal communications and by their myriad actions ‘on the ground,’ British Columbia’s park planners readily admitted that the ‘nature’ experienced by the motoring public was confined to the sights visible from the highway – a strip that was sometimes just a few feet wide, as in many parts of the densely wooded Big Bend country, and that other times stretched as far back as the eye could see, as along the shores of icy Kinbasket Lake. Parks were first and foremost what the motorists saw, not the land as it actually was beyond sight of the highway – those ‘backcountry’ areas were managed in a much different way than the familiar public façade of the highway corridor. Under conditions of modernity, the visual – whether on television or through the windshield – triumphed over the other senses; and under such conditions, visuality and virtuality were not easily distinguished from each other. To a high degree roads and parks conformed to the rules of the society of the spectacle. Those that failed according to these rules – Hamber Park providing a key example – might ultimately be extinguished, not because they were not “natural” but because insufficient effort had been vested in making them appealing “spectacles.” Had the Parks Division lavished attention on Hamber the way it did on Manning, and had the Big Bend Highway been paved, widened, and lined with scenic pullouts and roadside businesses, it seems reasonable to imagine that the evisceration of the park and flooding of the highway might have been more difficult than they were. Instead, no one cared about the park because no one knew it was there, and few motorists were likely to shed a tear for the long, wild, and boring Big Bend Highway.
The ‘nature’ of the BC Interior was something that many residents of the province and visitors from afar came to respect and even revere during the period 1920-1970, as suggested by the complaints that ordinary motorists made to the government about developments that they believed transgressed its essential qualities. Yet, as the case of Hamber Park suggested, such reverence only went so far, and was contingent. Even the sublimity of a spectacular stand of tall and ancient timber, which one level of the state had assured another that it would preserve “in perpetuity,” offered no protection if later there were more profitable uses to be made of the land. In the space of three decades, the provincial and federal governments went from agreeing that the ancient roadside timber between Kinbasket Lake and Boat Encampment should be preserved as an attraction (or distraction) for Canadians travelling along the Trans-Canada Highway, to perfunctory acceptance of its destruction by logging, fires, and flooding in order to advance a ‘high modern’ hydroelectric megaproject.

Modernity and History by the Road

Whereas the establishment, development, and management of BC’s provincial parks was controlled by the state, historical sites and history by the road came from a variety of sources, and were not organized or managed in such a top-down manner. As shown in chapters Eight through Eleven, most who cultivated history by the road in the BC Interior during the interwar years and first decade after World War Two were entrepreneurs and boosters who wanted both to commemorate the adventurers and explorers of the past and to use such commemorations to advance their own business interests, whether by drawing motorists directly into a roadhouse or auto camp, or by
getting them to linger in a certain community awhile. Robert Randolph Bruce of Invermere was a forerunner, albeit on a very ambitious scale, of a vast army of ‘historical entrepreneurs,’ many of whom looked to the state to support their schemes to cultivate history by the road, indirectly in the early twentieth century, and more directly after 1945.

The idea of employing the past as a device for luring auto tourists was highly novel in the BC Interior during the early 1920s, as evidenced by the manner in which the David Thompson Memorial Fort was built and then promoted. Invermere boosters correctly recognized the importance of making the ‘fort’ look convincingly like an historic fur trading post – their village needed something eye-catching, distinctive, and evocative to compete for auto tourists’ business against other communities that were more advantageously located in relation to the region’s roads. However, all the pageantry and publicity that was associated with its grand opening ceremony was part of a one-time event, rather than part of a tangible plan to make the fort serve as a long-term tourist attraction. Similarly, J.B. Tyrrell’s speech at the opening ceremony – a story with natives serving as foils against which white progress could be measured – might have gone over well with any nationalists and nativists in the crowd, but would not necessarily be useful for luring auto tourists. Indeed, Tyrell’s solemn efforts to emphasize David Thompson’s devotion to the British empire might have been a turn-off to some auto tourists from south of the line.

Though the Memorial Fort very quickly failed as a historical tourist attraction, such sites offered visitors the enticing possibilities of time-travel – the annihilation of space by time characteristic of modernity answered, in a sense, by the recuperation of time by space. Space/time compression, such time-machines suggested, could, if only in
some special places and times, be set to one side. In this form of history-making, one endeavoured to construct pleasant, accessible, and profitable nodes of “old-timey-ness,” wherein the stresses and storms of modernity were stilled.

History in this form often took the form of isolated and pleasing phenomena – special events, roadside curiosities, plaques, markers – that singly and together conveyed a sense of history as recreation, offering a way of enjoying that vague, soothing quality here called old-timey-ness. Quaint wagon wheels by the road; old canoes and waterwheels displayed near a town centre; folksy, at times whimsical and friendly provincial plaques celebrating long-gone characters – none of these demanded any critical reflection about the province’s often tumultuous past. It was important that history be eye-catching, interesting, and fun, but not necessarily accurate or profound. Those whose stories could be presented as humorous or uplifting were commemorated, whereas those for whom modernity had imposed punishing costs – such as the Kootenay and Shuswap families living on reserves near Invermere, or the old Chinese bachelors of Barkerville – were largely forgotten. That modernity might be disorienting, frightening, and even tragic was not a theme boosters, roadside entrepreneurs, or the state were likely to develop in their treatments of either nature or history. Even stagnant areas whose economic backwardness was palpable – for example, the Cariboo Plateau during the mid and late 1920s, and the area around Fort Steele in the late 1950s – could be converted into attractions if they were easily accessible and historicized the right way. Boosters and roadside business owners could transmute stagnation and backwardness into distinctive, eye-catching assets that would draw in the motoring public. Old buildings and the detritus of the Interior’s gold rush and wagon road days could be made into old-timey-ness.
Where a region’s natural scenery failed to inspire, as in the Cariboo, old-timeyness might replace it as a draw for the traveling public.

State history-making was less common that entrepreneurial history-making in the BC Interior during the interwar years, but what little there was tended, unsurprisingly, to sing the praises of order, material progress, and scientific and administrative enlightenment, all underwritten or directly organized by an active, benevolent state. The Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada’s roadside cairns at Yale and Barkerville and the cairn to the Royal Engineers at the Alexandra Bridge all celebrated the theme of heroic infrastructure, with the state and its agents having opened up the Interior to commodity extraction, communication, and colonization. For motorists driving along the Cariboo Highway, which for long stretches ran along the route of the old Cariboo Wagon Road, these monuments were likely to seem particularly evocative, especially given the number of stopping places in between them that had (or claimed) direct links to BC’s gold rush days. Within this rolling narrative, monuments such as the one at Quesnel which commemorated the construction of the Collins Overland Telegraph placed BC within the much larger picture of the west’s beneficent modernization and unification of the entire world. It was typical that the HSMBC monument unveiling in Barkerville in 1929 involved a large motorcade heading over the Quesnel-Barkerville road, and was accompanied by the first appearance of a flying machine in the district. Stories that diverged markedly from this official narrative – such as those involving the colonial appropriation of native land – were excluded.

As emphasized in Chapter Eleven, the government of British Columbia did not actively involve itself in cultivating history by the road until the late 1950s, even though
it was lobbied to do so in the first postwar decade by boosters, historical societies, roadside business operators, and people who were anxious about the pace and scale of change in the BC Interior. There were occasional gestures. For example, when the elderly prospector Charlie Bonnevier and his packhorse were invited to play a prominent role in the opening ceremony for the Hope-Princeton Highway in 1949, their carefully-orchestrated appearance highlighted the new highway’s credentials as a state project that built and improved upon the past while throwing open new prospects to the motoring public. Also, in Manning Park the Parks Division called on history to provide a roadside attraction, by drawing the public’s attention to the remnants of the gold-rush era Dewdney Trail seventeen miles beyond Hope. It was characteristic of history-by-the-road that this site was selected as an attraction due to its visibility. In this instance, the preservation of the trail was limited to the section that was visible from the new highway, even as more-intact portions that were away from the motoring public’s view were ignored and allowed to fall into disrepair.

History by the road became increasingly recreational during the postwar years. Repeatedly, one comes across depictions of the BC Interior that closely resemble Hollywood’s western movies, with “old-timeyness” converted into palisaded picturesqueness. Stagecoaches, covered freight wagons, grizzled prospectors – they had long been scripted as parts of the Interior’s public history, yet as history became more and more recreational, BC’s history was undoubtedly influenced by Hollywood’s massively influential ‘wild west.’ It was entirely fitting that early advocates of the Fort Steele project contemplated the site’s future as a movie set for Hollywood, and that its peeled log palisades, although filling such functions as concealing a service yard and
administrative area from visitors, were also designed after taking account of pre-existing stereotypes of the wild west.

Starting in the late 1950s, the Fordist state came to play more of a direct role in shaping popular experiences of history by the road. Especially after the province’s centenary celebrations in 1958, the state played an even more dynamic role in developing roadside historical tourist attractions. Ironically, the restoration of historic Barkerville, which had a somewhat disadvantageous location with respect to the Interior highway network that might have counted against success, was possible only because of the Fordist state, for which it was just one of several development projects in that district. This town-sized monument to rugged pioneer individualism and gold-mining entrepreneurship was possible only because the modern state had the capacity to create it: over the previous three decades each local effort to establish a museum or preserve the townsite had come to no avail. Contrary to appearances, Barkerville was of a piece with a state embarking on a slew of huge megaprojects, such as new dams in the Kootenay and Columbia River valleys and only slightly less impressive renovations in the province’s transportation infrastructure. By the 1960s these kinds of major historical tourist attractions were big business in the Interior, important components of regional development.

The official reading of the past almost always placed its occurrences within a paradigm of beneficent and necessary progress. Barkerville on one reading might have been seen as an indication of modernity’s broken promises and the human costs of a boom-and-bust resource economy, but in this framework it stood, especially after its 1962 transformation into a living museum, for the spirit of optimism, the buoyancy of
unfettered enterprise, and the essential place of the little guy in BC. The Fordist state used historical sites to valorize frontier archetypes, thereby offering assurance to the small producers and businesspeople concerned about the Interior’s headlong rush into Fordist modernity. It was similarly fitting that Fort Steele Historic Park was crafted in large measure as a monument to the gold rushes of the 1860s and 1890s, those antecedents of the province’s post-1945 resource boom, and that it also entailed commemorating Sam Steele and the Mounties, who had allowed resource extraction to proceed in an orderly, profitable way.

History by the road still had to look appealing to the travelling public, and had to function smoothly within the province’s tourism and transportation infrastructure. The Stops of Interest erected in 1958 and the following years were of no use or interest if they did not align with attractive, distinctive, or at least characteristic landscape features. When they thought about roadside attractions, the planners in the Parks Branch and the Department of Highways understood their role as one of adapting historical “themes” to certain pre-determined “viewpoints.” With this systematic marking program, probably more than with any other instance of history by the road in the BC Interior, history can be seen quite literally as an extension of the highway network.

A pivotal argument of this thesis is that while all of North America was affected by the long cultural revolution that was automobility, each region was affected in markedly different ways, according to its position within an emerging continent-wide transportation network and the distinctive legacies of its past. Automobility in BC’s Interior hinterlands had its own shape and raised its own issues. In many respects, it may
be easier to appreciate the salience of automobility in such places, where often ‘the highway’ was clearly a community’s most concretely tangible (if not only) connection to the wider, modern world, than in densely-settled cities. For British Columbia historians, too long accustomed to writing the history of the province while neglecting the rural and wild areas of the Interior, the questions raised by automobility should be foregrounded. Understanding the swift rise and long endurance of the Social Credit government in the 1950s and 1960s, for example, which was seemingly out-of-step with other indications of the province’s persisting class-based divisions, makes more sense if we remember that for many British Columbians, even working-class British Columbians, the modernization of the highway network and cultivation of appealing roadside landscapes and amenities were powerful, even moving indications of a government that had grasped the practical interests and popular desires of ‘the people’ of the Interior. Good roads and good government were tied closely together in the middle decades of the twentieth century, and resourceful, ribbon-cutting, blacktop-minded politicians could deftly insist that the voting public appreciate the connection.

As we come to appreciate automobility in ways that go beyond the limits of this dissertation, the hypothesis that it played a central role in entrenching Social Credit rule in the 1950s and 1960s is likely to become even more plausible. Consider the example of truck logging, so far relegated to obscurity by historians of BC and the Pacific Northwest. Few historians would deny the great regional significance of the forest industry, yet without a Fordist infrastructure of paved arterial highways and access roads built by the Forest Service the Interior forest industry could hardly have undergone its postwar modernization. The massive expansion of the Interior forest industry – by many
indications a fundamental mainstay of BC’s postwar economy, and also one of its biggest environmental changes – is a topic that needs to be considered as much in the context of automobility as in that of the forest industry narrowly defined.

Forestry capitalists were just one group among many parties that sought to turn the new configurations implicit in automobility to their own advantage. Some had their own, relatively modest economic objectives, and historians of British Columbia need to learn more about the development of the province’s roadside service industry. For the various owners of roadside businesses along arterial routes like the Fraser Canyon and Cariboo highways, proximity to ‘the road’ meant proximity to that most cherished of postwar dreams – a middle-class lifestyle. Many such dreams were dashed against the cold realities of a market that saw major fluctuations between the mid 1920s and late 1940s, yet others paid off, particularly with the explosion of pleasure travel after World War Two. At a time when corporations were becoming dominant as never before, the roadside offered niches in which families and individual entrepreneurs could enjoy a modest competence. In a political and symbolic sense, they testified to the persisting power of individualism, even at a time when corporations as ‘individuals’ dwarfed all competitors. And such small businesses, often united in local service clubs and boards of trade, could in turn help their fellow citizens appreciate that publicly-funded highways meant opportunities for little people as well as for the major corporate interests that were often their biggest beneficiaries. Many small towns developed signs and symbols that solidified their links to the road, so that far from appearing to be a project taking place in the narrow interest of a particular group, the expansion and improvement of the provincial highway network could appear to be the economic salvation of all groups.
Automobility was also a culture – a vast system of signs, symbols, and practices. It meant that some sights became sites – honoured and respected beacons of the beautiful, surrounded by markers, often provided by the state, which authenticated their superior aesthetic status. Beauty might lie in the eye of the beholder, and this thesis has taken care to document cases in which individuals stubbornly insisted on finding beautiful that which the mass of British Columbians found dull and uninspiring (and vice versa). Yet, when beauty became a business – when drivers *en masse* determined the fate of a given destination, whose reputation for dullness or excitement often preceded it – then supra-individual logics came into play. Hierarchies of place developed, as pre-existing aesthetics of the sublime and the beautiful were brought to bear upon particular scenes and sites. Images, imagery, image-making practices: no matter how seemingly ethereal and abstract such entities, they had, this thesis shows, real-world traction, as projects mounted by the state succeeded and failed in part according to how they looked and the emotional and aesthetic experiences they provided. There was even, one might say, a politics of beauty at work in postwar British Columbia (soon to become *Beautiful* British Columbia, as was stamped on all provincial license plates after 1964) – one that mandated a government concerned about its popular legitimacy to provide buffer strips along the roadside, so that evidence of its equally passionate concern to maintain capitalist accumulation, in the shape of clearcut logging and other manifestations of environmental devastation, remained out of sight. It fell to the Fordist state to effect such compromises, ones that scholars have developed at a high level of abstraction, but ones that, as this thesis has demonstrated, were literally enacted on the ground and by the road, ultimately becoming a commonsense part of everyday life in the modern world.
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