

On the Trail of David Thompson

David Thompson and Charlotte Small arrived in this valley July 18, 1807. Follow the Thompson's Trail. Visit the place he first chose to build a warehouse on the edge of Lake Windermere. Then visit the site of Kootenae House, the first trading post on the Columbia River where Thompson began a successful 'commerce' with the people of the First Nations.

You begin this quest with a visit to the Windermere Valley Museum where you can learn of Thompson's early life in England, find out how Kootenae House was built and view his maps of the Windermere.

Leave the museum and join the main road heading toward the centre of Invermere. After passing through the only set of traffic lights in town, you will see the statue of Thompson and Small situated at the edge of the natural phenomenon known affectionately as "Pot Hole Park"

Erected by the Windermere District Historical Society in 2003, this centennial project celebrated the opening of the valley and many families who pioneered the area.

Return to the main road and travel southward through the town centre to 14 St. (the Invermere Inn will be on your right). Turn left and travel along 14 St. over the railway bridge and past the Bayshore condominiums until you come upon the first street on your left, Lower Lakeview Road. Leave your car and go by foot down the narrow one-way street. It was along this lane that the CPR built many small cabins (some of which are still here) and opened a summer tourist camp.

About three quarters of the way along the lane you will come upon a tall tree stump on your right. It is hollowed at the bottom and bears a plaque explaining that David Thompson and his men used this tree as a fireplace for cooking, etc... while they began to build a warehouse in the area.



Return to your vehicle and retrace your journey, going down the hill past the museum. Before the CPR overpass, turn left and follow directions toward Panorama. Once over the Toby Creek Bridge you will go right toward the village of Wilmer. It is along this road (again, on your right) that you will find the National Historic Site of Kootenae House. Although there are no buildings it is worthwhile to walk on the site, find the signs of the archaeological dig and from the left north east corner, look out over the present day route of the Toby Creek. Let your imagination take you back two hundred years to the days of David, Charlotte and the men and women who lived at Kootenae House.

Complete your tour with a visit to the village of Wilmer, for it is here that the Windermere Valley had its true beginning. Once housing numerous hotels, banks and even the local jail, Wilmer was the starting point for hundred of miners and prospectors seeking to make a fortune in gold. It was here that mining companies had their start and pioneer families arrived aboard the local steam ships to begin life in a new world.

To travel the Wilmer Loop continue northward from Kootenae House. Turn right at Main Ave. On your left is Delphine Lodge, the 1st hotel in Wilmer and a wonderful example of 'frontier' or western architecture with its tall, flat front. Drive 2 blocks and turn left onto Park Street. Ahead are the mountains which drew hundreds of miners in their search for gold. Again drive 2 blocks and turn left at West Ave. On the northwest corner as you turn is the early schoolhouse (due for restoration), and immediately on your right is the Conrad Kain Park and Monument. Further along on your right is a large, restored 'stopping house' that was moved from Radium. Travellers heading north or south rested here for a night or two before continuing their long journey. Look for the name above the door. Continue straight ahead to the end of the road before making your final left turn and completing the loop. The last building on your right is an early Wilmer church which has been transformed into a private home!

Before heading back to Invermere, consider travelling further north on the Westside Road until you come to the sign board that tells the story of the Columbia Valley Wetlands.... look for the Columbia River and imagine fur traders and natives alike paddling its waters.

