

The Old Bridge

SITE #040103

GC1TTXQ

Written & Researched by Wendy Fraser

SITE IDENTIFICATION

Nearest Community: Lillooet, V0K 1V0
 Location/Parking: N 50°42.702'
 W 121°54.771'
 Geocache Location: N 50°42.714'
 W 121°54.778'
 Accuracy: 5 meters
 Letterboxing Clues: Refer to letterboxing clues page
 UTM: East 0576748;
 North 5618352 10U
 Geocache altitude: 222 m./727 ft.
 Overall difficulty: 1
 Terrain difficulty: 1.5
(1=easiest; 5=hardest)
 Date Established: c 1911
 Ownership: District of Lillooet
 Access: • Public Road
 • Year-round
 • Vehicle accessible
 • *Detailed access information on next page.*



After enduring the rigors of the Harrison-Lillooet Trail in 1861, prospectors and their stubborn mules faced another obstacle, crossing the Fraser River at Lillooet. As one 1860s gold-seeker recorded in his diary, *“The Fraser River flows by here with great rapidity and the want of a bridge is greatly felt, the only method up to the present time for conveying passengers and goods across is by boats, while cattle and horses have to swim across.”*

Known today as The Old Bridge, this span was built circa 1911. It is a suspension bridge of steel cables and wood with “dead-men” (cable ends) embedded in the rocky banks of the Fraser. The middle section of the bridge is held up by cables. The bridge replaced a truss bridge, which in turn replaced a winch ferry that was powered by the river’s current and was in use from the 1860s to 1888.

Otis Swart and Pete Diablo helped to build The Old Bridge. They

vividly recalled the intensive labour that went into building this span, *“Everything was handmade in those days,”* said Swart. Both men lived to see The Bridge of the 23 Camels constructed down river from this site in the 1980s.

In 2003, the District of Lillooet and the provincial Ministry of Transportation completed a restoration of the bridge, which is for pedestrian-use only. Then working with the Lillooet Naturalist Society, the District decided to make the bridge “bat friendly.”

With assistance from the local Lions Club, bat houses were built and installed under the bridge deck as part of the restoration project. Lillooet is home to eight confirmed species of bats, five of them are listed by British Columbia as endangered, threatened or at risk. The Old Bridge provides new roosting options that help mitigate the loss of bat habitat due to development. On a summer’s evening at dusk, it is a

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Looking up river at the Lillooet Bridge, 1911

pleasure to watch the bats perform their aerial acrobatics above the river. And despite popular myth, bats are not blind. In fact, they have excellent vision and navigate and pursue food using their own advanced sonar systems.

The Old Bridge also overlooks a white sturgeon fishing hole. Of the three remaining white sturgeon populations in the world, the Sacramento, the Columbia and



the Fraser, the Fraser River stock is the only remaining wild stock. These monstrous fish, relics from the Jurassic period, can attain lengths in excess of six metres and weight more than 600 kilograms.

Stocks in British Columbia had plummeted to near extinction levels by the early 1900s because of intensive commercial fishing. In 1990, the Province identified white sturgeon as ‘*Species of Special Concern*’ and has subsequently upgraded the species to ‘*Imperiled*’ putting the sturgeon on B.C.’s Red list. In

1994, commercial fishing of sturgeon was closed and a catch-and-release system was initiated to help stabilize the population. At the annual Lillooet Sturgeon Derby, competitors can still test their skills by trying to catch a fish bigger than they are, but then it is back into the river for the sturgeon.

The Old Bridge is also popular with Lillooet residents who “do the bridges,” a 10 kilometre walk taking in spectacular riverside views from both the Old Bridge and the Bridge of the 23 Camels.

Detailed access information:

- From downtown, travel north to Old Mill Plaza, turn right and cross the C.N. Rail tracks.
- Follow Old Bridge Rd. for approx 1km.
- Alternately, access the Old Bridge via Davis Rd., off Hwy #99.

BIBLIOGRAPHY & SOURCES

(1980-1981). Archive files. *Bridge River-Lillooet News*.
 Birch-Jones, V. (2004). New Homes for Bats at a Canadian Bridge. *Bats Magazine*.
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 Francis, D. (2000). *The Encyclopedia of British Columbia*. Madeira Park, BC: Harbour Publishing.