

The Smith's

SITE #120104

GC1V1ZA

Written & Researched by Angela Wynton

SITE IDENTIFICATION

Nearest Community: Merritt, V1K 1B8
 Geocache Location: N 49°51.555'
 W 120°43.553'
 Accuracy: 7 meters
 Letterboxing Clues: Refer to letterboxing clues page
 UTM: East 0663447;
 North 5525461 10U
 Geocache altitude: 1,052 m./3,453 ft.
 Overall difficulty: 1
 Terrain difficulty: 2.5
(1=easiest; 5=hardest)
 Date Established: 1887
 Ownership: Crown Land
 Access: • Gravel Road
 • Seasonal
 • Vehicle accessible
 • *Detailed access information on next page.*



There is a story nestled deep amid the golden hay of the Voght Valley. A story that begins in Scotland, passes from Spences Bridge to Voght Creek, returns to Spences Bridge and celebrates Grimes Golden apples.

On February 9, 1884, a young lass from Aberdeenshire, Scotland, Jessie Anne, 30 years and newly married, set out with her husband John Smith, a novice orchardist, on an arduous journey to the far west reaches of Canada. They would travel the entire trip with a Mr. James Teit, who was to work at his uncle's hotel and orchard.

Travelling by steamer across the Atlantic, the three were bound for Spences Bridge. From Boston by train they journeyed across the U.S.A. They experienced snow slides, accidents and long frightening mountain passes, finally arriving at Tacoma and then onto Victoria by steamer. By steamer to Port Moody, they would board a work train to the Interior, winding along precipitous curves above the mighty Fraser River. Abruptly stopping at Cisco, where there were no further tracks, only the

span of the railway bridge in mid-construction.

Here the journey became even more harried as young Jessie Smith climbed into the great basket strung by a cable. With John, James and a Mr. Burr, sent to bring them on the rest of their journey, the cable was loosed and the basket careened toward the pile of hay on the other side of the raging river.

By stagecoach they would travel the Cariboo Wagon Road, twisting high above the torrent, along rocky mountain ledges. It was now March 19, 1884 and by day's end they arrived at their destination, Spences Bridge. Here they would remain until the spring of 1887.

The arduous journey from Scotland to B.C. had certainly been an experience for Jessie and had somewhat prepared her for her new life as the wife of an orchardist, farmer and rancher. It was the fall of 1887 and they were to pull-up stakes and soon settle on 320 acres in the Voght Valley.

For more information or to report a problem with this site please contact:

Gold Country Communities Society
 P.O. Box 933 Cache Creek, B.C. V0K 1H0
 Tel: 1-877-453-9467

email: info@exploregoldcountry.com

For more site pages go to:
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Photos: Nicola Valley Museum & Archives Association

John & Jessie Smith

'We reached our homestead high in the mountain valley in the second evening. I got out of the wagon and looked around a large field surrounded by pine trees. Voght Creek... ran through the valley...a four roomed log cabin with a steep-pitched shake roof was near the creek,' Jessie writes. *'Our first winter in the valley was very cold and hard.'*

When spring came that first year, Jessie remarked to John, *"Is this the first time a plough has been put into this land since God created the world?"* But they soon worked the land successfully, growing oats, wheat, every vegetable imaginable and golden hay. They also raised cattle and dairy cows.

Tragedy struck. After their third child was born, Jessie became ill and bed-ridden for more than a month, almost losing a leg. She could remember nothing during her illness. Upon finally recognising her husband, John smiled, *"Thank God. The mists have rolled away."*

The life was lonely, winters severe and only Father Le Jeune visited on occasion. In the winter of 1893 the temperature dropped to -60 degrees Fahrenheit and

never warming past -35 degrees Fahrenheit during the day. By the following spring they had lost more than 100 head of cattle. *'The wind was cruel. It took all my time to keep the children from freezing to death,'* writes Jessie.

It was the following June when John went off with a group prospecting to Granite Creek. The Smith family, now four children, waited anxiously for their devoted father to return home for Jessie's birthday on July 17. When the stranger arrived, his words were less than reassuring, *"...didn't you hear. He was buried up to the neck in a slide at the mine. He isn't expected to live."*

It was sometime before John recovered from the worst of his injuries, returning home to finish his convalescence. Later that summer they would add another new family member. By the fall, James Teit would send word that his uncle, Mr. John Murray, had died and his orchard was for sale. The bid from the Smith's was accepted. By the next spring, after 10 years, inclement weather, challenges, losses and tragedies, the Smith's and their now five children were leaving the Voght Valley and returning to their original destination.

Now following another dream, they were leaving the golden hay fields for the gold and glory of award winning apples, Grimes Goldens. The golden apples would be the choice of the gold and glitter of British Royalty. And there lies yet another story in the heart of Gold Country.

Detailed access information:

- Accessible from either Hwy #5 or Hwy #5A.
- From Hwy #5A access either Coalmont or Kane Valley Rds.
- From Hwy #5 access via exit 256 to either Brookmere or Kane Valley Rds.
- For an alternate scenic route via Merritt take Coldwater Rd. south to either access road.
- Parking available in Davis Lake Rec site.

BIBLIOGRAPHY & SOURCES

Ward, A. & Campbell, J.M. (1989). *Widow Smith of Spences Bridge*. Merritt, BC: Sonotek Publishing.