

4 FISHERVILLE & DEWDNEY TRAIL

Wildhorse Creek was the site of the first gold rush in East Kootenay. Gold was first discovered on this remote tributary of the Kootenay River in 1864. Miners and business people by the hundreds came to Fisherville to stake claims in hopes they would find their fortune. One modern-day gold miner said it was like “digging money out of the ground.”

They built the gold rush boom town of Fisherville, the first town in East Kootenay. It was named after Jack Fisher, an original miner to the area. The small town offered many services, including six general stores, four saloons, a brewery and many restaurants. The miners hastily scattered hundreds of their shacks and tents over the slope. By 1865 almost 5,000 people were scurrying over the Wildhorse Creek gravels. In their frantic search for the elusive yellow metal, they discovered that they had built Fisherville in haste on top of gold-rich ground. The town site was moved farther uphill and renamed Wildhorse. Fisherville buildings were torn down or burned as the miners furiously dug up the place to satisfy their desire to “strike it rich.” No one has ever accurately recorded how much gold the miners removed from Wildhorse Creek during the gold rush in the 1860s, but it was substantial.

Historically, most of the traffic to Wildhorse Creek travelled the established routes through the United States. The miners then travelled by boat up the Kootenay River. In response to all the mining activity going on in the then isolated East Kootenay, the Dewdney trail was built 1865. This packhorse trail became the first all-Canadian route. It was an overland passage, which traversed across the province of B.C. from Hope to Wildhorse Creek. Short sections of this old trail exist, but nature has reclaimed most of it and modern roadways have been developed along its track.

The final 2.5 km of Dewdney trail, leading almost to Fisherville, is in fair hiking condition. The trail winds above the cliffs of the B.C. Wildhorse FS Road. At about the 3-km sign on the left (west) side of the Wildhorse FS Road, a sign marks the Dewdney trail, where a few vehicles can park. The historic trail rejoins Wildhorse FS Road near

Rating easy

Time half day or less

Distance 2 km around Fisherville trail, forest trails, some old roads

Trail 1890's historic ruins, interpretive signs, paths and old roads

Map 82G/12 Cranbrook

Drive

Road any vehicle

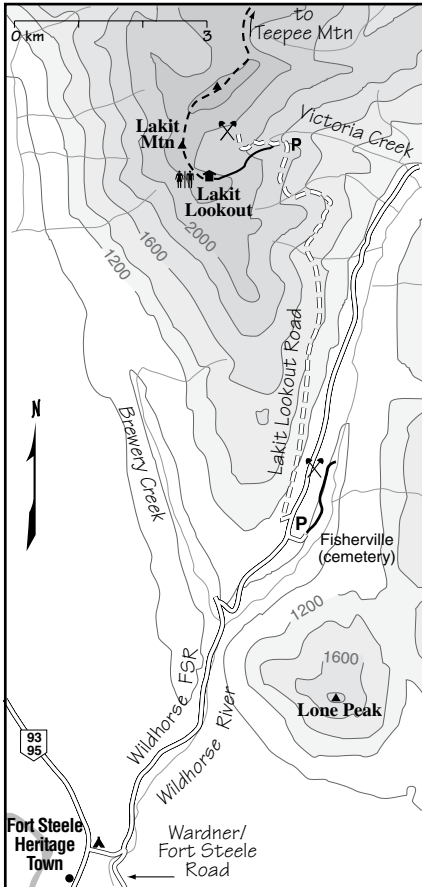
Road map page 23, 36

Follow the directions for Wildhorse FS Road on page 34.

- 0 km Drive north on the Wildhorse FS Road north
- 5.5 km Turn right at the switchback uphill. The road is steep for a short section, then switchbacks again.
- 5.8 km About 300 m past the switchbacks (between the 5 km and 6 km signs), turn right downhill (east) on to a small road. An obscure sign on the right marks Wildhorse Cemetery.
- 5.9 km Ample parking around the corner left from the cemetery



Brenda and Corrinne walk through the Fisherville cemetery.



the switchback at about 5.5 km, with another sign and parking area. The modern forestry road cuts through the cliffs along Wildhorse Creek, but the cliffs were an obstacle to the historic road builders, who built the Dewdney trail above this steep bank.

The East Kootenay Historical Association produces interesting pamphlets, which can usually be found at the Fisherville cemetery parking lot. Pamphlets are also available from the Chamber of Commerce in Cranbrook. These pamphlets describe historic Fisherville points of interest: the Wildhorse Cemetery, other grave sites, mining trenches and hydraulic excavations where Wildhorse Creek gravels were carved away for gold exploration. Follow the maps to primitive historic sites posted along the way.

If you wish for a more personal touch, contact the East Kootenay Historical Association, whose members are willing to lead a guided walk through the Fisherville site.