The origin of Fort Steele is closely linked to the discovery of gold on nearby Wild Horse Creek in the 1860s. The gold rush peaked in 1865 when an estimated 5,000 prospectors flooded into Fisherville combing the hills in search of their fortune. The gold strike was rich, as many men reportedly earned from $40,000 to $60,000 that summer.

One would-be miner named John Galbraith recognized the problems they would face, purchased a ferry over the Kootenay River and started a ferry service. A small cluster of buildings grew up around his ferry office and became known as Galbraith’s Ferry. Records indicate John Galbraith charged $5 per person and $10 per animal to use his ferry service, a huge amount of money at that time. The Galbraith family earned a lucrative income from the ferry operation until the first bridge was built in 1888. By that time, they were well established as the town’s founding family.

By the fall of 1865 the rich and easy-to-access gold diggings close to the surface were largely depleted. To make a profit, miners had to invest money in shafts or hydraulic equipment. Interested only in the quick profits of a new strike, most of the 5,000 miners moved on in search of better prospects. By 1882, only 11 settlers lived in the East Kootenay district. The completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway to Golden in 1885 encouraged settlers and prospectors to once more venture into the region.

As more people arrived, it was inevitable disputes over land ownership between the local Kutenax First Nation population and the new-comers would arise. The most serious dispute was between Chief Isadore of the Kutenax and Colonel James Baker over a piece of land called Joseph’s Prairie, the site of present-day Cranbrook. Tension peaked in 1887 when the local Constable Barnes of the British Columbia Provincial Police arrested two young members of Chief Isadore’s band for the murder of two miners. Constable Barnes of the British Columbia Provincial Police arrested two young members of Chief Isadore’s band for the murder of two miners.

The boom at Fort Steele began to slow in 1899, due largely to the efforts of Colonel James Baker, the local Member of the Legislative Assembly. The previous year, the long-awaited Crow’s Nest Line of the Canadian Pacific Railway had bypassed Fort Steele in favour of the fledgling community of Cranbrook. Fort Steele’s land values and population plummeted as Cranbrook attracted the tradesmen and merchants. Finally, in 1904, the Provincial Government offices were moved to Cranbrook and by 1910 Fort Steele was in a state of sharp decline.

In the late 1950s, local citizens devoted to bringing Fort Steele back to life petitioned the Provincial Government to protect the old town. In 1961, the Government declared Fort Steele an historic site. In 1989, The Friends of Fort Steele Society took over full management of operations for men only and Masonic North Star Lodge No. 30. Cultural activity flourished. Many big-name performers such as Pauline Johnson and the Metropolitan Opera Company performed at the Opera House. Resident’s musical, comedic, and “elocution” talents were regularly show-cased at evening get-togethers that often lasted until first light.

Today Fort Steele Heritage Town represents a typical turn-of-the-century town of the East Kootenays. Over 60 buildings and structures have been restored and reconstructed since the site was designated a heritage property in 1961. Generous public donations helped to furnish buildings, giving them a lived-in feel. The entire town is in fact a “living history site” and works continues year-round to bring Fort Steele’s history alive!

We now invite you to leap back into the 1890’s and experience this colourful history and everyday life during Fort Steele’s heyday.

A stroll down the historic streets brings the sounds of yesterday back to life - from the hammer on an anvil as the Blacksmith goes about his daily work to the horse’s hooves as they deliver goods across town. The smell of fresh baked goods and homestyle cooking at the City Bakery and International Hotel whets the appetite.

The resident’s polite greetings as they pass each other on the street will welcome you to the bustle of a prosperous town! This buzz of activity can often distract visitors from the spectacular backdrop of the Rocky and Purcell Mountains. There is lots to see and do for the entire family so step back in time to witness history and heritage and begin exploring yesterday today!
1. Visitor Reception Centre
This building is a replica of the Fort Steele Brewery, a prosperous business that opened here in 1896. It was sold several times before moving to Creston, BC to become part of the Columbia Brewing Company, makers of Kokanee beer. Fort Steele is recognized as the historic original location of this well-known brewery.

2. [3 North West Mounted Police Kootenay Post
A National Historic Monument signifies the establishment of the first North West Mounted Police post in British Columbia in 1887. Named “Kootenay Post”, it was located at the south end of the townsite. The one remaining original building is the Officer’s Quarters.

3. Stage & Express Office
This original building would have been a very busy place during the 1890’s. You can catch a horse-drawn wagon ride from here during the summer season. A great way to take a town tour!

4. Water Tower
A replica of the original water tower, built by the Fort Steele Water Works Co. Ltd. in 1897 which was originally located at the south end of Riverside Avenue.

5. Government Building
An original structure built in 1887 by the government of British Columbia, it contained the office of the Gold Commissioner, Government Agent, Mining Recorder, Judge of the Court of Revision and Appeals, District Registrar, and other administrative officials, as well as the courtroom.

6. Wildhorse Theatre
The home of five vaudeville stage shows during the summer season. It is not a reconstruction of an actual East Kootenay theatre but was built in 1972 to present turn-of-the-century entertainment, which was definitely a part of Fort Steele’s history!

7. Howard House
Built in the 1930s by the Howard Family, this house is an example of building construction during the “ghost town” period of Fort Steele, and was constructed as a response to the resurgence of mining at Wild Horse Creek during the great depression. Members of the Howard family resided in the house until the 1970s.

8. Geary & Doyle’s Livery Stable
During Fort Steele’s boom years there were several livery stables in town providing many essential services. Here, horses from coaches and freight wagons were fed, watered and groomed before they continued on their journey.

9. Eggel Ewan House
Built by John Ewan in the late 1890’s on a lot northeast of the present railway station, the house was moved to its current location to take advantage of water services. Reg and Doris Eggel were the last owners.

10. Wagon Shed
The sheds were attached to livery stables and protected the wooden horse drawn wagons, buggies, sleighs and other equipment from bad weather. See the variety of conveyances.

11. Jack Corrigan’s Harness Shop
The harness shop was another very important business in the 1890’s. Besides making and repairing harness, the harness makers were skilled in repairing shoes and boots and in doing other leather work.

12. Barr & Combs’s Blacksmith Shop
With the vast number of horses constantly needed for transportation, horse-shoeing kept ferriers and blacksmiths very busy. Fitting wheel rims on wooden wagon wheels by pre-heating them and then cooling them in water was also another common task. Fort Steele once had four blacksmith shops all in operation at the same time.

13. Pioneer Barber Shop
Barber shops, drug stores, hotels, general stores and livery stables all seemed to be social magnets. Men enjoyed a morning shave or haircut while discussing news of the East Kootenay and beyond.

14. Wolf Creek Cabin
Moved here in 1968 from Wolf Creek Ranch, located 20 miles north of Fort Steele, where it was used as a blacksmith shop.

15. Carlin & Durick General Store | Mrs. Sprague’s Dressmaking
Like today’s department store, it contained everything from clothing, shoes, mining supplies, general hardware, food, firearms, ammunition, medicines, tobacco, and jewelry. Today you will find dressmakers hard at work, sewing the latest fashions of the day.

16. Carlin & Durick General Store | Mrs. Sprague’s Dressmaking
This was the best known hotel and one of the largest operating in Fort Steele. Originally built in 1893-94 and then expanded 1897, it had 27 furnished rooms, a dining room, a bar, and a card room and hall. The hotel is now the home of the Riverside Photo Studio. Stop in and capture your trip back in time with a photo souvenir.

17. Gaibrath’s Ferry Office
John Gaibrath, one of the many prospectors heading for the gold rush at Wild Horse Creek, constructed this building in 1894. Rather than mining however, Gaibrath hastily began a ferry service to transport supplies for the miners using the Walla Walla Trail on the other side of the Kootenay River. He charged $5 per person, and $10 per head of livestock, a very large sum of money in the 1890’s, making him a very prosperous and influential business man.

18. Roosville Customs House
The Government of Canada constructed this building in 1898 and used it until 1916 at Roosville, located near the International Boundary in the Tobacco Plains.

19. McBride Hardware Store
Originally constructed in 1897, this store was destroyed in the fire of 1906. This replica building was constructed using turn-of-the-century techniques and reproduction tools.

20. Nuttall’s Paving Co.
The gold rushes of 1864 and 1870 brought prosperity and settlement to the East Kootenay region as services and amenities in towns such as Fort Steele sprung up to serve the newcomers. Try your hand at panning for gold with a little help from Nugget Norm but watch out as you may find yourself succumbing to gold fever as so many have in the past!

21. Mrs. Mather’s Ice Cream Parlor
A favourite stop! Choose from a variety of traditional ice cream flavors, and then sit in the shade and enjoy a summer’s day.

22. Dr. Grice’s Painless Dentistry
Despite its booming population in 1897, Fort Steele was never able to attract a resident dentist. The town was, however, visited periodically by travelling dentists such as Dr. J. Grice.

23. Dr. Watt’s Office
This building houses the office of Dr. Watt, a well known and popular figure in Fort Steele. Dr. Watt had a medical practice covering hundreds of square miles, like most pioneer physicians.

24. Dr. Watt’s Office
This original building dates to 1897. Dr. Watt, a well known and popular figure in Fort Steele, had a medical practice covering hundreds of square miles, like most pioneer physicians.

25. Dempsey House
Built in the 1930’s, this house was inhabited by the last family to permanently reside at Fort Steele. The Dempseys remained here until 1992 and during their years at Fort Steele they owned much of Riverside Avenue and operated several businesses, including the Kershaw & Son General Store.

26. Dr. Grice’s Painless Dentistry
Despite its booming population in 1897, Fort Steele was never able to attract a resident dentist. The town was, however, visited periodically by travelling dentists such as Dr. J. Grice.

27. Telegraph Office
The telegraph line began to provide the region with communication links to Spokane, Washington, Kasilof, Montana, Idaho, and the BC coast on September 3, 1887. In March of 1888 telephone lines were connected and Fort Steele had its own operating telephone network.

28. Prospector Newspaper Office
This building is a reconstruction of the original Prospector Office, a very important Fort Steele business in the 1890’s. The Prospector Newspaper was very informative for its day, however there were times when the paper would not arrive in Golden, BC, for up to 16 days! Now the same trip is a mere 3-hour drive.

29. Beasley’s Pioneer Drugstore
Mr. Beasley claimed there was “nothing cheap here, but your money’s worth every time”. This store sold items such as hand rolled pills full of morphine, opium, bromides, patent medicines, cosmetics, and drugs derived from the roots, leaves, flowers, or fruit of medicinal plants.

30. International Hotel
The International Hotel Restaurant is a reconstruction of the original International Hotel that was built on the same site during Fort Steele’s boom of 1897. The exterior was reconstructed from historic photographs. Since no photographs of the original interior have been discovered, the interior decorating is based on that of the Hotel Imperial, of which photographic do exist.
31. City Bakery, Mrs. Underhill, Proprietor
This building was built in 1992 to replicate the original City Bakery which sits right beside it. The Bakery houses a wood-fired brick oven measuring 15 ft by 15 ft by 8 ft and was patterned after one which has been in operation in Ontario since 1883. This oven is regularly used to bake the goods sold in the Bakery.

32. Original City Bakery
This structure is believed to be the remains of the original City Bakery. Besides functioning as a bakery, the building is reported to have been used as a laundry, a confectionery, and a cobbler’s shop.

33. St. Anthony’s Roman Catholic Church
Dedicated on October 31, 1897, this church welcomed its new congregation, although Roman-Catholic missionaries had already been active in the East Kootenays for many years. One of their main goals was to convert the Kootenay First Nations to Christianity.

34. School House
This building was Fort Steele’s second school house, completed in 1898 and moved to this site from across the highway after Fort Steele was established as a heritage site in 1981. The first school house became the Anglican Church, which still stands and has not changed much in appearance from when it was a school.

35. Pioneer Tinshop
The Tinshop is actually a movie-set prop built during the filming of “The Snow Queen” on location at Fort Steele Heritage Town. The building was left to Fort Steele once filming was completed and has remained a workshop for our Tinsmith ever since. Here you can watch heritage techniques of the trade while our craftsmen produce souvenirs such as tin whales and tin Christmas tree icicles.

36. Queen Cabin
The Queen brothers who lived here carried on another traditional business that pre-dates the gold rushes that saw the population of the area increase dramatically in the later half of the 19th century. As fur traders, they used their residence as a home base for their extended trips into the surrounding region to trap a variety of animals. This resource-based industry dates back over 200 years and is what drew European fur traders, including the surveyor and mapmaker David Thompson to the East Kootenays.

37. M. McInnes Meat Market
Malcolm McInnes operated a very successful business here. Conveniently located near the bridge, the meat market minimized the need for driving stock for slaughter through the streets of Fort Steele.

38. Taenhauser House
The original Taenhauser family house, which has long since burned down, was located across the street. The building also served as Joe Taenhauser’s “watch hospital” and jewellery shop.

39. Perry Creek Water Wheel
Originally located 25 miles west of Fort Steele, it was used between 1934 and 1936 to turn a turbine which powered water pumps in the Perry Creek Gold Mine.

40. McVittie House
Mr. Thomas McVittie McVittie surveyed the original townsite as well as much of the surrounding region. With the help of his brothers Archie and Harry, he built the original log home that now comprises the living room. He built his home with many modern conveniences, including the only flushable toilet in town. The restoration of the house, and adjacent survey office, was completed in 2015.

41. Assay Office
Mr. F. E. Leach arrived at Fort Steele from Golden in 1897 to take charge of the old Assay office. Assayers were used to analyze ore to determine the quantity of gold, silver or other metal in it. This building is a reproduction of Leach’s Assay office built with information taken from period photographs and from the Prospector Newspaper. The interior of the building was completed in 2015.

42. Presbyterian Church
Presbyterian missionaries came to the East Kootenay region in the wake of development which followed the completion of the CPR mainline through Golden in 1885.

43. Coventry Opera House | Masonic North Star Lodge No. 30
Completed in 1897, it served as the region’s main social and entertainment centre. On the first floor, events such as dances, dinners, concerts, and plays took place. The lodge remained active until 1944, long after Fort Steele’s decline, and had many members who played important roles in the region’s development.

44. Kootenay Gentlemen’s Club
This ‘exclusive’ club originally opened out of the second story of the Opera House until this building was constructed in 1900. The building has a reading room, card room, billiard room, and bar room.

45. Wasa Hotel | Museum
Here you can see informative displays of the history and heritage of Fort Steele, the surrounding region, and the people who lived here. This building, which opened in 1967, is a replica of the Wasa Hotel which once stood in the community of Wasa, just north of Fort Steele.

46. Bandstand
Although there never was a bandstand in Fort Steele, outdoor recreation and entertainment played a large and varied role in the leisure time of the region’s residents. The original Fort Steele Brass Band would have loved to have used such a bandstand on a beautiful sunny afternoon.

47. Johnson’s Blacksmith Shop
Johnson performed more general and light industrial work than the shop located on Main Street, indicated by the large size of the shop and openness of the interior which could accommodate wagons for repair.

48. Doyle Warehouse
A typical storage facility of the day.

49. Willcome House
The size and construction of this building is representative of either a working class family’s home or a bachelor’s living quarters.

50. Mather House
The Mather House is an original home, one of the 122 residences which had sprung up in Fort Steele by 1898. The Mathers owned and operated the well-known Windsor Arms Hotel.

51. Cohn House
This house has a running verandah, a typical feature of many houses built in the 19th century. Notice the Victorian ‘gingerbread’ details as well, located on the head posts holding up the verandah roof.

52. St. John the Divine Anglican Church
This church did not have its own minister until 1899. Sermons were delivered by Robert Gairdner, who had been appointed a licensed Lay Reader.

53. Dr. Hugh Watt’s House
Constructed by three prospectors who came to seek their fortunes during the gold rush, Dr. Watt took up residence here for 12 years. Notice the log construction with vertical logs, one of the many styles used to construct small homes during this time.

54. Anglican Vicarage
This was the personal residence of the minister and his wife. Built in 1899, it is the best surviving example of a stereotypical Victorian house in Fort Steele.

55. Hanson House
This house was built on speculation in the late 1890’s by Nils Hanson who also built and ran the original Wasa Hotel at Wasa, just north of Fort Steele.

56. Hoffman House
This renovated 1898 residence once served as the administrative office for the heritage site but is now home to our on-site caretaker.

57. Lambi House
This house was built in the winter of 1933-34 at nearby Ta Ta Creek. It was built in a Scandinavian style using simple hand tools such as a broad axe. The logs have underwater moss, harvested from nearby Ta Ta Lake,uffed between them as insulation. Today, it is the centre of domestic demonstrations including baking, cooking, quilting, gardening, and even ice cream making!

58. McLeod & Boesen Carpenter Shop | Notary Public Office | Township Office | Taenhauser’s Watch Hospital
The carpenter’s shop is used occasionally to demonstrate turn-of-the-century carpentry skills. Township offices were the fore-runners of today’s real estate agencies.

59. Fort Steele Railway Station
When the railway bypassed Fort Steele in 1898 and went through Cranbrook, Fort Steele’s decline began. In 1912, the CPR built a rail line adjacent to Fort Steele, but it was too late by then. This building contains some original material taken from the an older station that sat at the confluence of Wild Horse Creek and the Kootenay River southeast of the townsite.

60. Engine Shed
Historic railway equipment and stationary steam engines are displayed outside the engine shed.
Not To Be Missed

Programs, services and activities vary by season. Numbers indicate location on map.

THE KOOTENAY POST (2)
WATER TOWER (5)
GOSSIP TOUR (7)
ICE CREAM SHOPPE (21)
WASA HOTEL MUSEUM (45)

PHOTOGRAPHY STUDIO (17)
KERSHAW & SON GENERAL STORE (23)
CITY BAKERY (31)
HERITAGE GARDENS (10, 25, 51, 55, 56, 57)
HERITAGE TRADES (12, 13, 16, 35)

DRESSMAKER’S SHOP (16)
ENGINE SHED (61)
WILDFIRE THEATRE SHOW (7)
STEAM TRAIN RIDE (59)
HORSE-DRAWN WAGON RIDE (4)

PUBLIC WASHROOMS
Located in the Visitor Reception Centre (1), Wildhorse Theatre (7), International Hotel Restaurant (30) and Wasa Hotel (45). Please feel free to use the outhouses around town in addition to the washrooms!

MAP INFORMATION:
1. Visitor Reception Centre / Fort Steele Cafe
2. Kootenay Post / Officer’s Quarters
3. Barn
4. Stage & Express Office
5. Water Tower
6. Government Building
7. Wildhorse Theatre
8. Howard House
9. Geary & Doyle’s Livery Stable
10. Egge/Ewan House
11. Wagon Shed
12. Jack Corrigan’s Harness Shop
13. Barr & Comb’s Blacksmith Shop
14. Pioneer Barber Shop
15. Wolf Creek Cabin
16. Carlin & Durick General Store/Dressmakers Shop
17. Windsor Hotel / Riverside Photo Studio
18. Galbraith’s Ferry Office
19. Roosville Customs House
21. Mrs. Mather’s Ice Cream Shoppe
22. McBride Hardware Store
23. Kershaw & Son General Store
24. Dr. Hugh Watt’s Office
25. Dempsey House
26. Dr. Grice’s Painless Dentistry
27. Telegraph Office
28. Prospector Newspaper Office
29. Beaudell’s Pioneer Drugstore
30. International Hotel / Restaurant
31. City Bakery, Mrs. Underhill, Proprietor
32. Old City Bakery
33. St. Anthony’s Catholic Church
34. School House
35. Pioneer Tinsmith
36. Queen’s Cabin
37. M. McInnes Meat Market
38. Tenhauser House
39. Perry Creek Water Wheel
40. McVittie House
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42. Presbyterian Church
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54. Anglican Vicarage
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57. Lambi House
58. McLeod & Boesen Carpenter Shop / Notary Public Office / Tenhauser’s Watch Hospital
59. Fort Steele Railway Station
60. Fur Trade Post
61. Engine Shed