



Welcome To Fort Steele

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BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA



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HISTORY HIGHLIGHTS

The Story of Fort Steele

The origin of Fort Steele is closely linked to the discovery of gold on nearby Wild Horse Creek in the 1860's. 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 need for providing a crossing 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 Ktunaxa First Nation population and the newcomers would arise. The most serious dispute was between Chief Isadore of the Ktunaxa 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. The murders had taken place almost three years prior to the arrest. Chief Isadore and 30 armed men broke open the Government Building jail in Galbraith's Ferry and released the Ktunaxa prisoners.

Superintendent Samuel B. Steele and 75 members of the North West Mounted Police were sent to resolve the problems. They established the first post west of the Rockies, Kootenay Post. After dismissing the criminal charges against the 2 Ktunaxa men and mediating the land problems, the NWMP departed in 1888.

The residents of the area petitioned the Dominion Government to change the settlement's name from Galbraith's Ferry to Fort Steele in honour of the Superintendent of 'D' Division.

After the departure of the North West Mounted Police, things were fairly quiet at Fort Steele until

1892 when major deposits of silver, lead, and coal were discovered nearby. Prospectors flooded the valley once more and the hills were dotted with campfires each evening.

Fort Steele became the region's commercial, social, and administrative centre and quickly grew to over 1,000 people. In 1898, the local "Prospector" newspaper listed the town's thriving businesses, including 11 hotels, 4 restaurants, 4 general stores, a hardware store, a brewery, and a wide assortment of other establishments ranging from a Chinese drug store to tailor shops and barristers.

Entrepreneurs installed telephone and telegraph services in 1897. In the spring of 1898, a waterworks system was installed along Riverside Avenue, reducing some of the townsfolk's dependence on barrels of muddy water hauled up from the Kootenay River.

A number of fraternal organizations were established, including the exclusive "Kootenay Club" 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.

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 1950's, 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 park with a mandate "to preserve, present, and manage for public benefit the historic settlement of Fort Steele . . ."

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 work 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!

Managing History

Established in 1989, The Friends of Fort Steele Society took over full management of operations in 2004 under a long-term contract with the Province of BC. The Friends are striving to build a sustainable future for Fort Steele by continuing conservation initiatives, building community partnerships, developing a sustainable funding model, and providing visitors an experience that truly enables them to be part of a day in the life of Fort Steele in its heyday.

As a non-profit organization, our support network is our greatest asset in achieving this goal. From our 800 members, to our volunteers, community partners, board of directors, and dedicated staff, our society stands poised to see Fort Steele thrive and prosper into the future for visitors to enjoy for generations to come.



Please note that we are on Mountain Standard Time (same time as Alberta)

PETS

Pets on a leash are welcome! Animals are not permitted in food service areas. Please pick up after your furry friends.

SAFETY

Boardwalks may be slippery if wet or frosty. Surfaces may be uneven so please step carefully!

NO SMOKING

Smoking is not permitted anywhere in Fort Steele. One aspect of Fort Steele's history we do not wish to recreate is the devastating fire of 1906!

Fort Steele Townsite Directory

● Historic Fort Steele Structure, original site
 ◆ Reconstructed Fort Steele structure
 ▲ Reconstructed East Kootenay structure
 ▼ Constructed after 1961
■ Historic Fort Steele structure
 ★ Historic East Kootenay structure
 ❖ Constructed 1905-1961

1. Visitor Reception Centre ▼

This building is a replica of the Fort Steele Brewery, a prosperous business that opened here in 1898. 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.

4. 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!

5. 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.

6. 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.

7. Wildhorse Theatre ▼

The home of live 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!

8. 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.

9. 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.

10. Egge | 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 Egge were the last owners.

11. 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.

12. Jack Corrigan's Harness Shop ◆

The harness shop was another very important business in the 1890's. Besides making and repairing harnesses, the harness makers were skilled in repairing shoes and boots and in doing other leather work.

13. Barr & Comb's Blacksmith Shop ■

With the vast number of horses constantly needed for transportation, horse-shoeing kept ferrisers 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.

14. 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 Kootenays and beyond.

15. 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.

16. 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.

17. Windsor Hotel | Riverside Photo Studio ●

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.

18. Galbraith's Ferry Office ●

John Galbraith, one of the many prospectors heading for the gold rush at Wild Horse Creek, constructed this building in 1864. Rather than mining however, Galbraith hastily began a ferry service to freight 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 1860's, making him a very prosperous and influential business man.

19. 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.

20. Nugget Norm's Gold Panning 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. 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.

23. Kershaw & Son General Store ●

Formerly the Canadian Bank of Commerce. Henry Kershaw moved his business into this building in 1906 after the Kershaw business block burned to the ground in Fort Steele's 1906 fire. Mr. Kershaw also owned a coffee shop directly across from this building for a few years. A forerunner to the Tim Hortons and Starbucks we all know today!

24. Dr. Hugh 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, Kalispell, Montana, Idaho, and the BC coast on September 3, 1897. In March of 1898 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. Bleasdel's Pioneer Drugstore ◆

Mr. Bleasdel 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 photographs do exist.

Fort Steele Townsite Directory

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 1961. 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 craftsman produces souvenirs such as tin whistles 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's site 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 Thane 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 Leech'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 operated 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. Willicome 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 1890's. 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 1898. Sermons were delivered by Robert Galbraith, 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 1899 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, stuffed 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 | Townsite Office | Taenhauser's Watch Hospital ▼

The carpenter's shop is used occasionally to demonstrate turn-of-the-century carpentry skills. Townsite offices were the forerunners 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.

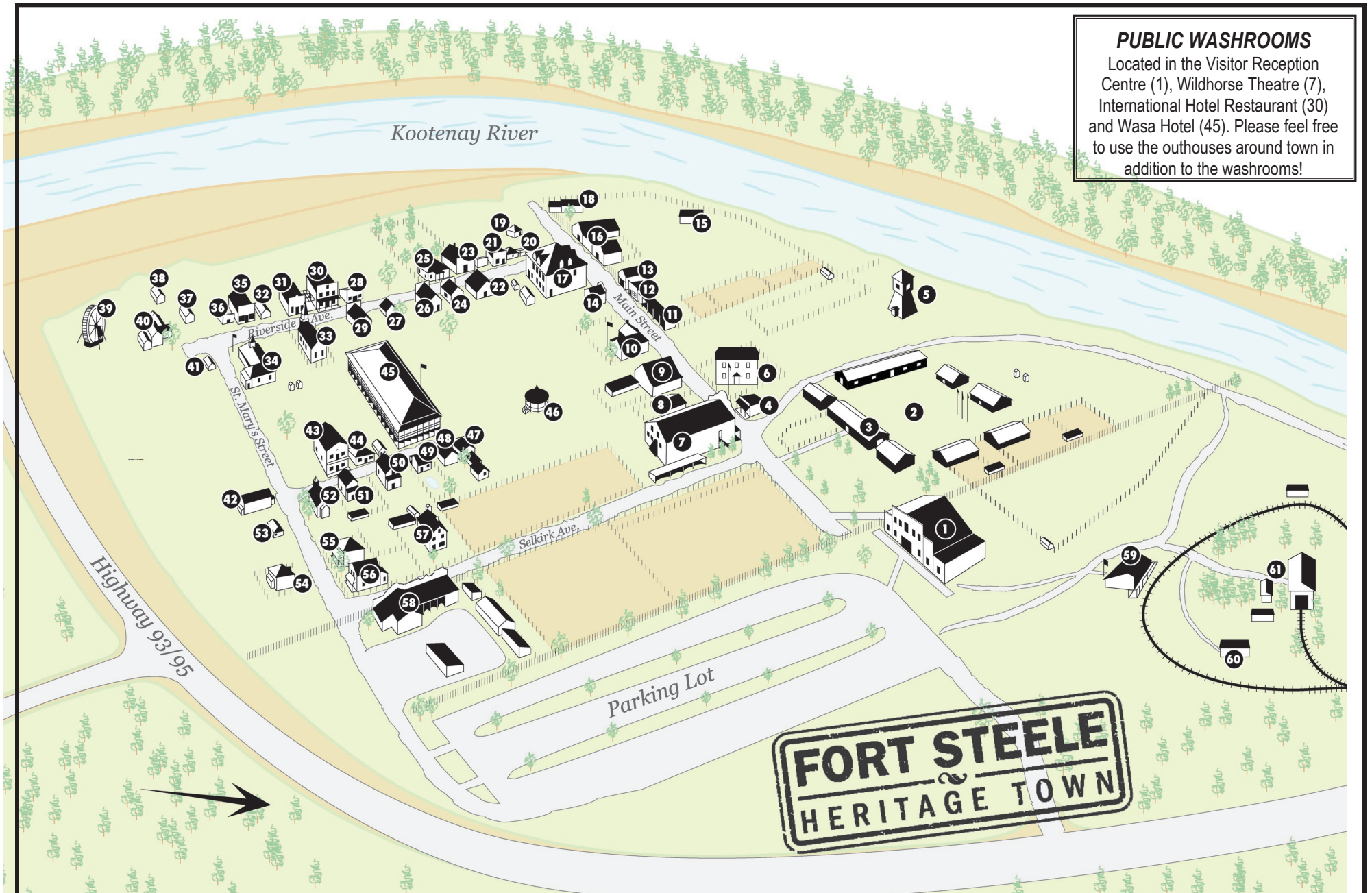
60. Engine Shed ▼

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) <input type="checkbox"/>	PHOTOGRAPHY STUDIO (17) <input type="checkbox"/>	DRESSMAKER'S SHOP (16) <input type="checkbox"/>
WATER TOWER (5) <input type="checkbox"/>	KERSHAW & SON GENERAL STORE (23) <input type="checkbox"/>	ENGINE SHED (61) <input type="checkbox"/>
GOSSIP TOUR (7) <input type="checkbox"/>	CITY BAKERY (31) <input type="checkbox"/>	WILDHORSE THEATRE SHOW (7) <input type="checkbox"/>
ICE CREAM SHOPPE (21) <input type="checkbox"/>	HERITAGE GARDENS (10, 25, 51, 55, 56, 57) <input type="checkbox"/>	STEAM TRAIN RIDE (59) <input type="checkbox"/>
WASA HOTEL MUSEUM (45) <input type="checkbox"/>	HERITAGE TRADES (12, 13, 16, 35) <input type="checkbox"/>	HORSE-DRAWN WAGON RIDE (4) <input type="checkbox"/>



MAP INFORMATION:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 20. Nugget Norm's Gold Panning Co. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. Bleasdell'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 Tinshop 36. Queen's Cabin 37. M. McInnes Meat Market 38. Taenhauser House 39. Perry Creek Water Wheel 40. McVittie House 41. Assay Office 42. Presbyterian Church | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 43. Coventry Opera House/Masonic North Star Lodge No. 30 44. Kootenay Gentlemen's Club 45. Wasa Hotel / Museum 46. Bandstand 47. Johnson's Blacksmith Shop 48. Doyle Warehouse 49. Willicome House 50. Mather House 51. Cohn House 52. St. John the Divine Anglican Church 53. Dr. Hugh Watt's House 54. Anglican Vicarage 55. Hanson House 56. Hoffman House 57. Lambi House 58. McLeod & Boesen Carpenter Shop / Notary Public Office / Taenhauser's Watch Hospital 59. Fort Steele Railway Station 60. Fur Trade Post 61. Engine Shed |
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