

Big Bar Reaction Ferry

Written & Researched by Amy Thacker

SITE #080302

GC1TQCK

SITE IDENTIFICATION

Nearest Community: 70 Mile House, V0K 2K0

Geocache Location: N 51°10.978'
W 122°07.799'

Accuracy: 6 meters

Letterboxing Clues: Refer to letterboxing clues page

UTM: East 0560808;
North 5670531 10U

Geocache altitude: 306 m./1,005 ft.

Overall difficulty: 1

Terrain difficulty: 2

(1=easiest; 5=hardest)

Date Established: 1894

Ownership: BC Ministry of Transportation & Infrastructure

- Access:
- Gravel Road
 - Year-round
 - Vehicle accessible
 - *Detailed access information on next page.*

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:
www.goldtrail.com or
www.GeoTourismCanada.com

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A reaction ferry is a ferry that uses the current of the river to propel the vessel across the river. The ferry consists of two steel pontoons with a wooden deck bridging them, to allow operation in rivers with strong currents. These vessels require overhead cables suspended from towers anchored on either bank of the river. A “traveler” is installed on the cable and the ferry is attached to the traveler by a bridle cable. To operate the ferry, the bridle cable is adjusted so that the pontoons are angled into the current causing the force of the current to move the ferry across the river.

Big Bar is the site of British Columbia’s first aerial ferry or tramway, and a reaction ferry has been in service here since 1894. In those days there was a small population of ranchers on the west side of the river. After an accident destroyed one of the reaction ferries, a rancher hooked a chair onto the overhead cable and pulled himself across with his arms. The aerial portion was

then constructed here in the early 1920s. Local storytellers say that before the aerial portion was constructed, ranchers were known to hang from the cable and traverse across using the strength of their arms. Winter dances at the Big Bar (Howling Dog) Community Hall across the river were the possible incentive!

At one time there were over thirty reaction ferries in operation on the rivers of British Columbia, although mostly on the Fraser and Thompson Rivers. Today, only a few remain in operation.





Big Bar Ferry, 1920

The Big Bar ferry crossing time is ten minutes and its capacity is two vehicles and twelve passengers. There is no crossing fee. The schedule is “on demand” from 7:00 am to 7:00 pm, except for a noon to 1:00 pm lunch break and 5:00 pm to 6:00 pm supper break. The ferry is closed over the winter. The aerial tramway, for passengers only, operates when the river water is low or icy.

If you choose to take the ferry across to the west side of the Fraser and travel on to Lillooet, a very slow 64 km, be sure you start out early, have food, water and a dependable four wheel drive vehicle. The vistas are unique and spectacular and worth every hair-pin curve and white-knuckle minute! This route should be taken on a clear day between July and early October. Have your camera ready and bring a picnic lunch to be enjoyed at one of the many scenic picnic areas between

the turn off and Lillooet. Alternatively, you could arrange with the ferry operator to bring you back across the river. The ferry operator’s post is the house you can see on the hill above the ferry slip. He will generally come down the driveway to greet you as you approach the ferry.

The original Big Bar Ferry ran directly from the mouth of Big Bar Creek, it is now a mile or so north of its original location.



The Mighty Fraser River

Detailed access information:

- From Clinton, drive 9 km north on Hwy #97N to Big Bar Rd.
- Follow the signs to Big Bar Ferry, approx. 72 km.
- Do not leave gravel road with any motorized vehicles.

BIBLIOGRAPHY & SOURCES

Brundage, M. (2009). Personal Interview.

Ministry of Transportation and Highways. (2002). *Frontier to Freeway: a short illustrated history of roads in British Columbia*. Retrieved April 9, 2009 from Ministry of Transportation and Highways website: <http://www.th.gov.bc.ca/publications/frontiertofreeway/frontiertofreeway.pdf>