

Black Canyon

Site Identification

Nearest Community:
Ashcroft, B.C.

Geocache Location:
N 50°40.624'
W 121°15.859'

Altitude:
664m/2,178ft
Ownership:
Crown Land
Accuracy:
2 meters

Overall Difficulty: 1.5
Overall Terrain: 2.5

Access Information and Restrictions:

Shared Crown Land, keep gate closed. If driving, keep to trail. Road ends at crest of hill, looking over the valley. Watch for cactus and cattle.

Parking Advice:

From Ashcroft on 97C 9 km south turn left onto dirt road. Look for the break between cement barriers just before the Barnes Lake turnoff. Park at the gate area if walking, and ensure that the gate is closed behind you. Do not block the gate.

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

Gold Country Communities Society
PO. Box 933
Cache Creek, BC.,
VOK 1H0

Tel: 1-877-453-9467
email: info@exploregoldcountry.com

For more site pages go to:
www.goldtrail.com

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Photo: Kurt Evans

The landscape of Gold Country is marked by the signs of a violent past; events which shaped the features of the country, but which happened so long ago that there is no record of their happening at all, apart from the scars they left.

The section of the Thompson River below Ashcroft containing Black Canyon has its share of scars, and the cause of one of them was well documented. On October 14th, 1880 a massive landslide—known as the Great, or North, slide—occurred on the east side of the river, just north of Black Canyon. Bishop Acton Windeyer Sillitoe, of the diocese of New Westminster, was traveling through the area with his wife, and Mrs. Sillitoe recorded the following: “Whilst we were sitting in the drawing-room one evening during our stay in Ashcroft, an extraordinary noise was heard. Some supposed it to be an earthquake . . . The next morning, however, we heard that the sound had been caused by a tremendous landslip three miles distant from where we were, and which had dammed up the river until it should have forced its way through this immense dam.”

The Bishop and his wife were not alone in traveling to the site, and what they saw was nothing short of incredible:

“We found that the dam was half a mile long and eighty feet high. The river above [to the north] had already risen forty feet over its usual level, and was almost dry below.”

The *Colonist* newspaper reported that the obstruction was as high as 120 feet in places. The river eventually rose to sixty feet on the north side of the dam, and the site where Ashcroft is now located was more than a foot deep in water. The newly erected Harper’s Mill, at the junction of the Bonaparte and Thompson Rivers north of Ashcroft, was in danger of being floated away by the backed-up

farmsteads were covered in water, and J.C. Barnes lost his home and several outbuildings. There was widespread fear that if the fine gravel and loam which made up the slide broke suddenly, the rush of water through the breach at the head of Black Canyon—a deep and narrow gorge carved out of bedrock—would cause massive damage as far downstream as Spences Bridge, 20 miles south. However, locals rushed to cut a channel through the top of the slide, which allowed the water through gradually, and within forty-eight hours the river was down to its usual level.

A smaller slide—known (fittingly) as the South Slide—occurred to the south of the Great Slide sometime prior to 1880. A ridge immediately east of Black Canyon separates the sites of the two slides, which can be seen clearly from the west side of the river. Both the Canadian National (CN) and Canadian Pacific (CP) lines run through the narrow confines of Black Canyon, with the CP carving its way through a 1,366 ft. tunnel in the canyon's west side, and the CP line running along the toe of the Great Slide site. It's an ideal place for trainspotting, and for reflecting on the forces which shaped our land.

BIBLIOGRAPHY & SOURCES

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Gowen, H.H. (1899). *A Memoir of Acton Windeyer Sillitoe*. New York and Bombay: Longmans, Green, and Co.

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(2002) Porter, M.J., Savigny, K.W., Keegan, T.R., Bunce, C.M., and MacKay, C. "Controls on Stability of the Thompson River Landslides". Retrieved May 2012 from BGC Engineering: http://www.bgcengineering.ca/files/publications/MJP_Ashcroft_Landslides_Final_0.pdf

Letterboxing Clues:

Travel from downtown Ashcroft 9 km on 97C South Bound. Look for break between cement barriers. Turn left onto dirt road. Park at the gate area. Walk through the gateway making sure to close the gate behind you. Follow road to the left until you reach a large tree and old flume. Follow the faint cow trail up hill heading North. Cache is hidden between two large rocks, close to dead trees near by. View of Black Canyon.