

Clapperton Falls

SITE #110302

GC1TQE8

Written & Researched by Aline Lachapelle

SITE IDENTIFICATION

Nearest Community: Merritt, V1K 1B8
 Location: meters from cache box
 Geocache Location: N 50°13.885'
 W 120°37.473'
 Accuracy: 7 meters
 Letterboxing Clues: Refer to letterboxing clues page
 UTM: East 0669414;
 North 5567062 10U
 Geocache altitude: 1,000 m./3,282 ft.
 Overall difficulty: 1
 Terrain difficulty: 3
(1=easiest; 5=hardest)
 Date Established: n/a
 Ownership: Crown Land
 Access: • Gravel Road
 • Seasonal
 • 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

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Flowing in the canyon below the Coquihalla Highway north of Merritt is Clapperton Creek. It is a major tributary to the Nicola River, draining a large portion of the area on both sides of the highway from just north of Merritt to the Surrey Lake Summit. Snowmelt does influence the rate of discharge in this creek, but it flows year round. There are dams at the outflow of both Sussex Lake and Helmer Lake along Clapperton Creek that are used to regulate flow to provide irrigation water in the summer.

In addition to being important for agriculture, Clapperton Creek also provides a source of water for wildlife, as well as a band of riparian habitat along the stream shore where a variety of wildlife, birds and insects are able to take advantage of the more succulent vegetation and dense shrubs found closer to the water.

There are of course species which make the creek itself home, including several types of fish.

Rainbow trout, coho salmon, chinook salmon and steelhead are all species present in Clapperton Creek, though there are several barriers to fish passage that prevent the latter three species from journeying very far up the 29 km creek. This means that though there are rainbow trout present along the length of Clapperton Creek, the other three species can only be found downstream of the first barrier to fish passage, since they are anadromous. They mi-



Fairyslipper at Clapperton Falls



grate to the ocean but must return to their natal stream to spawn, and cannot swim upstream of the barriers. According to the B.C. Ministry of Environment's internet mapping program, "Habitat Wizard", there are two natural barriers to fish passage on Clapperton Creek in addition to the two lake outflow dams. One is a set of falls 2 km upstream from the confluence with the Nicola River, and another is found 5 km further upstream.

This second set of falls is known as Clapperton Falls, and is a hidden treasure that is relatively easy to access from the Coquihalla Highway's northbound lane. There is not an actual highway exit to reach the falls access road. The gravel pit is a good spot to park and begin to explore. The sound of the falls is enticing, and the overhanging perch from which the falls are best viewed is worth the effort to find. There are not established trails to find the falls, nor are there any guardrails to prevent a fall, so walking with caution and keeping pets and children close by is definitely recommended.

One type of plant found near the viewpoint of Clapperton Falls is Fairyslipper (*Calypso bulbosa*). According to the "Plants of the Southern Interior of B.C." book, this beautiful purple-flowered orchid is decreasing in numbers due to its sensitivity to trampling and picking. Fairyslipper is also considered a medicinal plant of importance to several Aboriginal groups, including the First Nations people of the Nicola Valley. Enjoy the beauty of both the falls and the flowers, and try to leave the spot as it was when you arrived.

Detailed access information:

- Located 14.5 km north of Merritt on Hwy#5, only accessible northbound.
- No marked exit, watch for a yellow gate at the Kirby gravel pit, make this right turn.
- Keep to the left at each road fork and park ~1.5 km in, at the gravel pit.
- This is a natural falls, with no safety barriers, please use **extreme** caution.
- Recommended to keep children and pets close at ALL times.

BIBLIOGRAPHY & SOURCES

- Habitat Wizard. Retrieved May 24, 2009, from B.C. Ministry of Environment Web site: http://webmaps.gov.bc.ca/imf5/imf.jsp?site=moe_habwiz
- Mussio, R., Mussio, W., & Stainton-Mussio, P. (2008). *Thompson Okanagan BC Backroad Mapbook Outdoor Recreation Guide 1st Ed.* Mussio Ventures Ltd.
- Pacific Salmon Species Information. Retrieved May 24, 2009, from Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada Web site: <http://www.pac.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/fm-gp/rec/species-especies/salmon-saumon-eng.htm>
- Parish, R., Coupe, R., & Lloyd, D. (1996). *Plants of Southern Interior British Columbia.* Edmonton, AB: Lone Pine Publishing.