

Joss House

Site Identification

Nearest Community:

Lytton, B.C.

Geocache Location:

N 50°13.765'

W 121°34.880'

Altitude:

199m/652ft

Ownership:

Private Property

Accuracy:

1 meter

Overall Difficulty: 1

Overall Terrain: 1

Access Information and

Restrictions:

Use stealth.

Parking Advice:

Park on street at Braeden Lodge on
Main St. Lytton.

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: GCCS

Lytton may be a small town but it has a big and generous history involving many cultures with many stories. It is rich with tales of the Secwepmec, the Americans, the British, the Italian, the Belgians, the Japanese and Chinese. It is in this small town, nestled deep in the Fraser Canyon, that east meets west, and traditional medicines blend and mix under the watchful eye of Buddha.

The Chinese have a long tradition of healing going back five thousand years. Emperor Shen Nong, who was also a teacher of agriculture, created the basis for traditional Chinese medicine, as it is known today. So revered was he for his knowledge and contributions to medicine and agriculture he is considered a deity to be prayed to for healing.

So when the Chinese came to Lytton during the Gold Rush and then some years later to build the railway, they brought with them much of their Chinese tradition, knowledge and compassion. For many of the Chinese workers, they not only laboured on the railway but also practiced traditional Chinese healing. And their fellow countrymen weren't the only benefactors of the ancient Chinese wisdom and medicine.

Local Belgian hotelier Lorenzo Hautier also shared and exchanged herbal knowledge with the Chinese healers. The Secwepmec, who too practiced traditional herbal medicine and healing, benefited along with other Europeans, the British and Americans who lived in, or passed through, Lytton. All shared and imparted their knowledge. However, all the wisdom and traditional healing could not keep the Chinese from the ravages of the many diseases that plagued their camps.

For the Chinese, as well as others, there was much suffering and much death due to the horrid outbreaks. In 1880 it was a year of death.

The Chinese began to believe that their plight was perhaps the result of forsaking their ancestors, so it was then in 1881 that they decided to erect a house where they could worship. They built a miao, a temple to the deities, where they could make offerings, burn incense and meditate. The miao soon became known as a joss house, a corruption of the word deus meaning god in both Latin and Portuguese.

Unfortunately, they did not secure the land title where they built their temple; therefore it was not technically their land. And next door neighbour, Giuseppe Taverna, knew it only too well. Taverna had his eye on the land. With an evergrowing family, the property would be ideal for continuing his back yard farming. He needed a bigger chicken coop and his vegetables, fruit trees and vines were running out of room to grow.

The temple goers submitted their application for the land in 1901, as did Taverna, and a bitter fight ensued. Government agents locally, provincially and federally were all involved in the dispute, as were respected businessmen. Even Thomas Earl was consulted and he was clear that the Chinese had been occupying the premises since 1881 and the application of 1901 should be respected. Letters were exchanged between lawyers, government agents, consulates and both applicants. Even Dr. Sun Yat Sen, the President of China received communications. The dispute would last until 1928 when a decision was made to sell the property and it was bought for the meagre sum of forty-two dollars by Giuseppe Taverna. The joss house was destroyed and he built his chicken coop. The traditions and medicine of the Chinese of old Lytton live on in history and their spirit and herbal healings are not all lost. Today the mix of herbal medicine and ancient tradition in Lytton is alive at the Buddhist retreat at Dragon.

Flower Mountain in the Botanie Valley. From a simple joss house on Main Street to the beauty of Dragon Flower Mountain, east does meet west with compassion, here in the heart of Gold Country.

BIBLIOGRAPHY & SOURCES

www.lionsgatebuddhistpriory.ca "A History of Healing in Lytton", *Lionsgate Buddhist Society*

Murray, George. "Gods in a Lytton Woodshed," *The Sunday Province*, date unknown
www.wikipedia.org

Letterboxing Clues:

Located to the right side of fishing shed. 16m approx from sidewalk to the back of the lot.