

The McLean Brothers

SITE #110101

GC1TWQN

Written & Researched by Steve Thornton

SITE IDENTIFICATION

Nearest Community: Quilchena, V0E 2R0

Location/Parking: N 50°22.196'

W 120°20.889'

Geocache Location: N 50°22.223'

W 120°20.754'

Accuracy: 6 meters

Letterboxing Clues: Refer to letterboxing clues page

UTM: East 0688734;

North 5583180 10U

Geocache altitude: 809 m./2,654 ft.

Overall difficulty: 1

Terrain difficulty: 2

(1=easiest; 5=hardest)

Date Established: 1879

Ownership: Public Property

Access: • Public Road

• Year-round

• Vehicle accessible

• *Detailed access information on next page.*



In 1879, at the north end of Stump Lake, a shepherd named Jim Kelly worked for Peter Fraser. While sitting at the edge of a meadow, Kelly didn't know he was about to become a part of history. While the exact spot of his death is lost in time, the viewpoint on the Old Kamloops Road overlooks the lake of his home.

The McLean gang consisted of three of the McLean brothers, sons of the Scottish born Donald McLean, who was himself in possession of a fiery temper, and his native wife. The eldest McLean boy in the gang was Allan at 25, followed by Charles, 17 and Archie, 15, who at his young age was eager to prove himself to his older brothers. Seventeen-year-old Alex Hare, Métis son of a local rancher, joined them.

The boys had always been lively but were developing worsening reputations and the violence of their crimes was escalating. Charlie McLean bit off the nose of a native boy during an argument

and the gang beat a Chinese man near Savona nearly to death, so their habitual demands of local ranchers for food and escalating thefts were becoming more of a real danger. Doors were being locked from Kamloops all down the Nicola Valley.

In early December, local rancher William Palmer was out on the trail looking for a big black gelding that had been missing for four days. Seeing riders ahead Palmer investigated, finding his gelding under Charlie McLean and surrounded by the boys' guns. Pretending not to recognize his horse, Palmer survived the encounter, then went to seek backup in the form of Constable Ussher, the B.C. policeman assigned to the Kamloops district.

Constable Ussher had previously encountered the McLeans in his official capacity with little trouble and may have assumed that this time wouldn't be any different. He considered these boys as little more than juvenile delinquents, so

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he left Kamloops to confront them with only Palmer and another man, Shumway, who primarily acted as guide. Along the way, he also picked up John McLeod. As this small posse came across the gang's camp in a little clearing 16 miles south of Kamloops, a shot rang out. Not a warning shot; the ball grazed Palmer and lodged in McLeod's cheek. Ussher still believed that the situation could be contained and walked towards the gang while requesting their surrender and their guns.

Alex Hare advanced on Ussher with a knife in one hand and a revolver in the other. Ussher attempted to wrestle the weapons away from Hare, but was instead stabbed repeatedly. Fifteen-year-old Archie ended Ussher's life by shooting him in the head. The remainder of the posse retreated to Kamloops and a much larger, well-mounted and well-armed posse gathered to catch the McLeans.

The gang traveled south, intent on settling old scores, boasting and bragging of their "death list" to all they met. Near Stump Lake they found Kelly and shot him for unknown reasons, Kelly became their second murder. They accumulated arms and ammunition from all they passed. Allan McLean's plan was to enlist the Nicola tribe and start an Indian war, but the boy whose nose had been bitten by Archie was connected to the chief of the tribe and the McLean boys' father, Donald, had a less than stellar reputation with the natives, so although they were permitted to stay at the Indian rancherie at the head of the Nicola valley, they were not welcome.

The posse finally found the gang as they hid in the cabin at Douglas Lake. After failing to parlay surrender from the gang the posse attempted to burn them out of hiding, but the hay was wet and would not ignite. The boys had been without food and water for some time and were in pretty bad shape; soon, hunger and thirst drove the McLean boys out of the cabin with raised hands.

The prisoners were taken to Kamloops and then to New Westminster to stand trial. It took the jury only 20 minutes to reach a guilty verdict and they were sentenced to be hanged. The sentence was appealed and a retrial booked; the second jury also found them guilty and they were again sentenced to be hanged. During their incarceration the gang continued to behave in vicious and scheming ways and on Monday, January 31, 1881, they were finally hanged. It was the first time that three brothers were executed together in Canada.

Detailed access information:

- From Merritt, follow Hwy #5A nearly 53 km north to Stump Lake.
- At the north end of Stump Lake, turn onto Old Kamloops Rd.
- Park in rest stop on the right at approx. 4 km.

BIBLIOGRAPHY & SOURCES

Lindsay, F.W. (1963). *Outlaws of British Columbia*. Vernon, BC: Self.

Rothenburger, M. (1993). *The Wild McLeans*. Victoria, BC: Orca Book Publishers.