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Brookmere

Site #120102   GC1V1YV   *Written & Researched by Angela Wynton*

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The last remaining Kettle Valley Railway watertower still stands in Brookmere, near the foundations of the railway buildings.

High above the Voght Valley is a barely populated sleepy little community. Brookmere's golden years long past, its heydays and glory are now nestled between the pages of history. At nearly four thousand feet, quiet Brookmere is brimming with the stories and tales of miners and railway workers of long ago.

Originally known as Otter Summit, mining claims were staked in numerous areas following Voght Creek to the Coldwater River, up and around the mountainside and numerous creeks. Small mining was prevalent in all directions from the summit. Elevated gold concentrations were discovered in the stream sediments, as well as there being multi-element stream sediment anomalies.

As the Nicola Valley continued to grow with the copper, coal, gold and silver mining, so did the need for transporting the minerals and ores. As well, there was greater demand to provide goods and services to the many growing small mining towns popping up all over the valley. However, eventually the labour required to extract the gold became greater than the reward and the gold mining in the area dwindled. Recently, the search for gold and minerals has been revived with 17,114 hectares being explored in the Brookmere Project.

The Canadian Pacific Railway had built its railway tracks into the Kootneys but there was no line connecting the railway to the far west. After much competition, in 1910 the Kettle Valley Railway system began construction. And it was only because of the perseverance and constant direction of Chief Engineer Andrew McCullogh, lover of all things Shakespearean, that the railway was completed by July 1916. The construction was met with high costs and a great deal of hardship and would be known as the most expensive railway in the world.

But it was the need for a branch line to connect the Kettle Valley

Brookmere, c 1925.

rail line with the Canadian Pacific rail line and bypass the extreme winter conditions of the Coquihalla Summit that Brookmere came to be.

Harry Brook, originally from Illinois, had pre-empted land in the area and was well known as a happy-go-lucky rancher and butcher. His ranch was idyllic with fresh water from the local creek feeding the small lake. The area would also prove ideal as the midway stop for a train station and engine maintenance and bypass the winter extremes.

Brookmere soon grew to be a major mountain railroad town with a water tower, turntable, three-stall round-house, section house and a station house. After an engine explosion in 1947 the roundhouse was replaced by a four-stall.

A hotel was erected; a post-office established and soon commercial enterprises and services arrived. Railway workers built houses, families grew and the village was alive and bustling with the activities of the railway line. Brookmere was a healthy and happy railway community.

Unfortunately, it would not last. With the growth of the automobile came the building of roadways and highways and the demise of train transportation. It was nearly fifty years later in 1964 that the last passenger and freight train went through Brookmere. There is no longer a hotel or station house, no roundhouse, only vestiges of what once was. The only surviving water tower from the Kettle Valley line is still standing as a towering reminder and an old caboose is being re-vitalized.

Brookmere may be quiet but it echoes the tales and glamour of the railroad history of the times. Today some of the original houses still stand and the families and their descendants keep the stories and the memory of Brookmere alive. Every August, rail fans, railroad-ers, and friends from all-over return to Brookmere to celebrate their railroad heritage, history and respect for the great trains and railway systems that helped build the province. Yes, those golden years of trains and gold mining still live on in the historical sleepy town of Brookmere, high in the hills of Gold Country.

A caboose on display as a tribute to the rich railway history of the community.

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