

Epsom & Canadian Northern Pacific Last Spike

Site Identification

Nearest Communities: Spences Bridge, BC
 Ashcroft, BC

Geocache Location: N 50 34.396
 W 121 18.219

Accuracy: 2 metres

Overall terrain: 3

Overall difficulty: 2
 (1=easiest; 5=hardest)

Ownership: Provincial Park

Access and Restrictions: From Spences Bridge
 19.5km to site, and
 from Ashcroft it is 15km.
 You can hike down from
 the large pullout with the
 point of interest plaque or
 take 4x4 trail from
 Highway 1. Beware of
 poison Ivy on the other side
 of the tracks. From pullout
 travel 0.3kms south/east to
 road entrance, follow trail
 until you arrive at a flat
 field before steep downhill
 descent.

Letterbox Clues: Beside 4x4 trail to the left,
 under large sage brush.

Parking Advice: Park at large pullout and
 hike down, or park on 4x4
 trail on the flat field before
 steep downhill descent.

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

Gold Country Communities Society
 PO. Box 933
 Cache Creek, BC.,
 V0K 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 most famous “last spike” The Canadian Northern Pacific was an extension of the Canadian Northern line, which signaled completion of the Canadian Northern line, the Canadian Pacific Railway run by businessmen and in 1885, but there were two railway entrepreneurs Donald others pounded in the Mann and William province. In June 1914 the Mackenzie. They wanted to Grand Trunk Railway expand their existing rail completed its expansion to the lines—mostly in the west coast, with the last spike Prairies—to compete with the placed near Fort Fraser, and lucrative Canadian Pacific on January 23, 1915 its rival, line, which meant moving the Canadian Northern east into Ontario and west to Pacific, hammered home its British Columbia. last spike between Spences Unfortunately, Charles Hays Bridge and Ashcroft. A “Stop of the Grand Trunk Railway of Interest” plaque off had the same idea at much the Highway One near the site same time, and the two commemorates the event, and companies found themselves the railroad. (The iconic green in unofficial competition to be “Stop of Interest” plaques first through the Rockies to which can be seen all over the the Pacific coast: the Grand province were started in 1958, Trunk to Prince Rupert and to mark the 100th anniversary the Canadian Northern Pacific of the founding of British to Vancouver. Columbia, and are a familiar The difficulty of building rail sight on B.C.’s highways. lines through the Rockies and There are now more than 130 the Interior, plus high labour around the province, with the and material costs due to most recent batch of a dozen World War One, meant that added to mark the province’s by the time the last spike was 150th anniversary in 2008.) pounded home, the Canadian Northern Pacific was heavily

in debt. In 1918, unable to pay the interest on its loans, it was taken over by the Canadian government and incorporated into its national railway system, which became Canadian National. The same fate befell the Grand Trunk Railway in 1920.

The CN line passes below the last spike plaque, following the west side of the Thompson River and cutting through Epsom Provincial Park. The 102 hectare park was created in 1997, and is one of the few places in the area giving public access to the Thompson. The road down to the park—the bottom third of which is only accessible by 4-wheel-drive vehicles—passes through sage and grassland benches which give way to cottonwood, willow, and underbrush closer to the river. There is also poison ivy on the far side of the CN tracks, so remember the warning “Leaves of three, let it be.” A shallow channel on the far side of the tracks separates the bank from a low sandbar, which during the spring runoff is covered by the Thompson. During the summer months river rafters can be spotted heading down the river towards Lytton.

Both the park and the viewpoint by the “Last Spike” plaque offer a stunning view north along the Thompson River, as well an opportunity to examine the silt cliffs, hoodoos, and terraces characteristic of this stretch of the Thompson. These were formed after the ice age, when deep beds of silt were deposited on the bottom of temporary lakes. When the ice dams which had formed the lakes melted, the water cut channels through the silt, leaving the geographic formations which we see today. Just to the south of Epsom, on the opposite side of the river, is the pumping station at Spatsum which supplies water to the Highland Valley copper mine.

Detailed access information:

The Canadian Northern Pacific Last Spike stop of interest plaque is located in a pull-off on the Trans-Canada Highway approximately 15km. south of Ashcroft/19.5km north of Spences Bridge.

Access to Epsom Park is via an unmarked access road just to the south of the Last Spike plaque; use caution when entering and exiting. Please note that the road is only passable in its lower section by 4-wheel-drive vehicles, and that the road stops short of the railway tracks; access to the other side of the tracks is by foot only.

Bibliography & Sources:

Lyons, C.P. (1986). *Trans-Canada Highway: Vancouver to Kamloops Through Historic Fraser & Thompson River Canyons*. Surrey, B.C.: Heritage House Publishing Company Ltd.

MacKay, Donald (1992): *The People's Railway: A History of Canadian National*. Vancouver & Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre.

McGill, David E. (1979). *126 Stops of Interest in Beautiful British Columbia*. Aldergrove, B.C.: Frontier Publishing Co. Ltd.

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