

TheOvens

Site Identification

Nearest Community: Clinton, BC
 Geocache Location: N 51 05.951
 W 121 35.311
 Altitude: 979m/3211ft
 Accuracy: 2 metres
 Overall terrain: 2
 Overall difficulty: 2
(1=easiest;5=hardest)

Ownership: Crown Land
 Access Information and Restrictions: In downtown Clinton, turn off of Highway 97 west onto McDonald Rd. winding onto Clinton Station Rd.; follow the road up and across the tracks taking your second left after the tracks; follow this for approx 130 meters. Take a left onto old 4x4 trail. Walk a little further pass cache location to view a tiny water fall at bottom of the hill.
 Letterbox Clues: Follow old 4x4 trail, 90 meters on right. Behind rock oven and junipers. Ammo can.
 Parking Advice: Pull well off dirt road.

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: Marcie Down

While the sappers of the Royal Engineers were successful in building and completing the Cariboo Wagon Road, the planners for the Pacific Great Eastern railway were far from following in their tracks.

The PGE, incorporated in 1912, was named for the Great Eastern Railway of Great Britain. It would travel from the north shore of Burrard inlet through the interior to Prince George and provide freight and passenger service. Wood products, cattle, minerals and sundry goods would be moved expediently. Such was the plan.

The PGE was plagued with problems. Track was laid from the North Shore to Whytecliffe and service resumed in 1913. The next leg, Squamish through to Clinton, started service in 1916. However, progress

stopped as the company ran into serious financial difficulties and by 1918 was reluctantly purchased by the provincial government.¹

The route was scenic, but apparently avoided major hubs, thus requiring additional travel to carry goods and cattle to be loaded. Neither did it cross with other rail lines to transfer passengers or freight. It was referred to as the train that goes “from nowhere to nowhere”.

Perhaps for many it seemed purposeless, but for those around Clinton it was an economic engine.² With the need to move cattle to market, the railway was a boost, shortening distance and time. By the 1930’s, with completed tracks to Quesnel, all manner of goods were able to travel north and south.

With the soda works around the lakes in the area, the train

proved a great way to freight the cargo to the modern homemaker of the 30's and 40's.³

Used in laundry and for cleaning, the soda removed grease and oil. Area lakes also produced Epsom salts, a welcome relief for the tired and weary.

Not only were ranchers and soda companies happy with the railway, so too were forestry workers. With an increase in millworks, during the '50s and 60's there being more than twenty saw mills, the timber and lumber became easier and faster to ship to market. Clinton prospered.

However, there is another bit of history that goes along with this often-controversial railway. Small construction camps were required to house and feed the rail workers. These hardy men were often of foreign extraction, hailing from China, Italy, Greece and Eastern Europe. They had come west at the invitation of the Canadian government.⁴

What they brought with them to the west was an ancient cooking method – stone ovens. Since their discovery, a great deal of interest has arisen as to the ethnic origin of these earthen ovens. What is known for certain is they have been used by rail construction crews throughout North America and Australia.

Some claim they were built by the Chinese, but the Chinese seldom baked, as their cooking methods were generally by steam or flame. While many cultures, including Moors, Greeks and other Europeans, used these Neolithic stone ovens, it is most likely the ovens at railway camps were built by Italians and possibly Greeks.

They were constructed by using rocks and stones of the immediate area. The dome shaped cooker would generally be about a meter high and two meters wide.

*First, a fire is built inside. After it burns down, the coals are raked out. The oven floor is swept clean and then sprinkled with corn meal or flour. Next the loaves are placed inside after closing the flue hole in the rear of the oven's roof; the door is sealed with a piece of metal or a damp cloth.*⁵

The process took two to three hours to prepare the oven. The actual baking required a mere fifteen to twenty minutes, due to the remarkable heat maintained within the dome. Voila, pane fresco!

It is here, above the tracks near Clinton Creek, such an archaeological gem lays hidden in history. Imagine more than 100 years ago, railway crews enjoying hot golden-crust bread baked in a stone oven in the heart of Gold Country.⁵

Author's Notes

¹ See www.llbc.leg.bc.ca Legislative Report, March 12 to 17, 1919 (9 Geo. 5)

² Clinton served as the hub for the surrounding area inc. Big Bar, Kelly Lake, Pavilion Lake, etc.

³ See *Last Chance Lake Soda Works*, Gold Country GeoTourism Adventures Field Guide Volume 1

⁴ Wynnton, A., Field Guide Agriculture in Alberta: Hoes to High Tech, site page *First Farmers: Encouraging Emigration, Inviting Immigration*, 2011 at www.geotourismcanada.com

⁵ Costello, J., *Gold Rush Archaeology: Excavating the Mother Lode*, Archaeology 34 (1981)

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