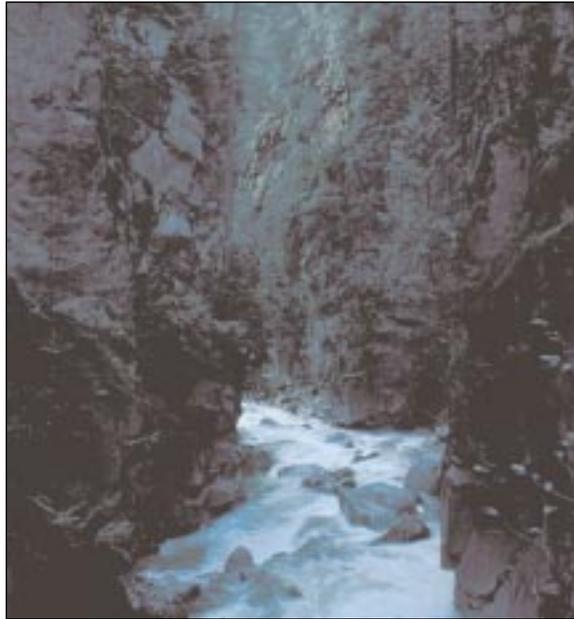




Coquihalla Canyon

RECREATION AREA



Welcome to Coquihalla Canyon Recreation Area. Located in a scenic area of the Cascade Mountains, this recreation area consists of a deep river canyon set in a coastal forest environment. The steep sheer rock walls of the canyon and the Coquihalla River offer an exciting visual experience. Many people are attracted to the area for its historic interest, however, there are also excellent opportunities for walking, fishing, viewing and photography. The recreation area complements the swimming, boating, picnicking and fishing opportunities already established at nearby Kawkawa Lake Provincial Park.

South Fraser

The Historic Kettle Valley Railway

In the early 1900s, the Canadian Pacific Railway decided a route was necessary to link the Kootenay region with the British Columbia coast by rail. Andrew McCulloch was hired as the chief engineer in May 1910. He had been involved in many CPR projects, including the Spiral Tunnels near Revelstoke.

McCulloch took on the challenging task of building the railway over three major mountain ranges. The Coquihalla subdivision included 38 miles from the Coquihalla Summit to the junction with the CPR mainline across the Fraser River from Hope. This section boasts the most expensive mile of railway track in the world: \$300,000 in 1914. The construction was done almost exclusively by hand with the assistance of a few horse drawn scrapers and some black powder. His assistant engineers nick-named the railway "McCulloch's Wonder".

The greatest challenge of this route was the Coquihalla gorge, just east of Hope, where the river had cut a 300-foot-deep channel in solid granite. Other engineers had suggested a mile-long tunnel by-passing the gorge, but McCulloch chose to build directly through it. Hanging in the gorge in a wicker basket, McCulloch surveyed the canyon for a straight line of tunnels that could be dug simultaneously. Cliff ladders, suspension bridges and ropes allowed workers to complete what is, to this day, regarded as a spectacular engineering feat.

The tunnels are known as the Othello Tunnels. McCulloch was an avid reader of Shakespearean literature and he used characters such as Lear, Jessica, Portia, Iago, Romeo and Juliet to name stations of the Coquihalla subdivision. The tunnels in the Coquihalla Canyon were near the Othello station – thus, Othello Tunnels. Many of the passengers on the Coquihalla line came expressly to see and photograph the station boards and to send postcards from the stations' post offices as a souvenir. This added an ironic touch of gentility to this adventurous journey.

The Kettle Valley Railway was officially opened on July 31, 1916. The line operated both freight and passenger service between Vancouver and Nelson, but the operation was plagued with snow and rock slides. In a two year period in the 1930s, the line operated for only a few weeks.

On November 23, 1959, a washout was reported just north of the tunnels. The 400-foot washout was too large to be filled in one day, and numerous other washouts added to the troubles of the maintenance crews. The line was closed and never reopened. It was officially abandoned in July of 1961. The tunnels and surrounding area became a provincial park in 1998.

Much of the modern four-lane Coquihalla Highway is built upon the original rail bed of the Kettle Valley Railway. Travelling at modern highway speeds it is difficult to imagine the formidable task of constructing a rail route through this rugged section of British Columbia.

As you drive along the highway, you may notice some small signs in the shape of an old steam locomotive,

with Shakespearean names. These signs commemorate the approximate locations of the KVR stations along today's Hwy 5.

Visitor Information

- ▶ Do not leave valuables in your vehicle. Take them with you.
- ▶ Placing aluminium foil under your campstove will help protect the tables. Be extremely careful with fire.
- ▶ For your safety, firearms are prohibited.
- ▶ Flowers, trees, shrubs and artifacts are part of the park's natural heritage. Do not damage or remove them.
- ▶ Keep pets on leashes at all times. They are not permitted in picnic areas. You are responsible for their behaviour and must dispose of their excrement.
- ▶ Refer to BC Environment's *Synopsis of Regulations* before fishing.
- ▶ Bicycles are not permitted in the tunnels

Filming Facts

In recent years, the tunnels have become a favourite location for movie producers. Some famous areas are:

- ▶ The sandbar used in scenes in the movie *First Blood*.
- ▶ The cliff used in the film *Fire with Fire*.
- ▶ Location of the huge log placed across the canyon for the rescue scene in *Far from Home – The Adventures of Yellow Dog*.
- ▶ The cliff above the stump at tunnel 2 was used in the spectacular canyon jump in the film *First Blood*.
- ▶ The cliff used in the filming of *Shoot to Kill*.

The entire tunnel section was filmed in scenes of the *National Dream*.

For More Information

BC Parks

<http://wlapwww.gov.bc.ca/bcparks>



Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection

