

# MONKMAN PASS MEMORIAL TRAIL



## DRIVING TOUR



## The Monkman Pass Highway Project

In the 1920s Alex Monkman had a vision of a trade route that went from the Peace Country to the West Coast via a low pass through the Rocky Mountains, south of what is now the town of Tumbler Ridge, B.C. He believed that it was the quickest, most economic and efficient route for the Peace Country farmers to market their produce. At the time, northwestern Alberta farmers were struggling with long export routes for their products.

He rallied successive governments to put a railway through the pass, but met with little support, and eventually shelved the idea. Yet Monkman refused to let his vision die, and in 1936 formed the Monkman Pass Highway Association. This group of determined pioneers led a drive to push a road through the pass and establish the trade route themselves.

Over the next three years, many people put heart and soul into the highway route, often labouring for only three meals a day and the chance to share in the adventure. They built a road from Rio Grande to Kinuseo Falls, and blazed a trail through the Monkman Pass.



*Nampa Road Crew, 1938*

Limited funds and challenging terrain posed surmountable problems, but the outbreak of World War II spelled the end of the project. Many of the participants dropped their tools and lined up to serve, and some made the ultimate sacrifice. Sadly the highway project came to a halt, but not before they had managed to

drive, push, pull, coax and claw a Model T truck, “the Pathfinder Car”, through the Pass, and carry a symbolic bag of grain to Prince George.

The Monkman Pass epic is a tale of bravado and dedication in the face of great odds. This sheer determination and courage is something that Western Canadians are famous for, and is one reason why the Peace Region is so successful today. The Monkman Pass Memorial Trail allows us to step back into the past and become connected with these timeless and inspiring struggles, and in the process pass through some of the finest scenery in North America.

The original Monkman Pass route began at Rio Grande, southwest of Beaverlodge. The driving tour comprises three sections:

1. Grande Prairie to Beaverlodge (59 km)
2. Beaverlodge to Tumbler Ridge (157 km)
3. Tumbler Ridge to Kinuseo Falls (65 km)

## 1. GRANDE PRAIRIE TO BEAVERLODGE

Two locations in Grande Prairie offer a convenient start for the driving route. The Heritage Discovery Centre **(1)** (780-532-5790) offers tourist information, and a small exhibit on the Monkman Pass. The Grande Prairie Museum **(2)** (780-532-5482) contains the Pathfinder Car, the only vehicle to have crossed the Monkman Pass.

Turn right off Hwy 43 onto Range Road 82 (Cemetery Road), 20.5 km west of the Grande Prairie Museum. The farm of Herman Trelle is reached on the right after 1 km, with the old windmill still visible. Trelle is the most famous farmer in the history of northern Alberta, five times the world wheat king in the 1930s. On the left is the old Lake Saskatoon Cemetery, containing the graves of Alex and Louisa Monkman **(3)**. Four km along this road is the charming 1911 St Andrew's Anglican Church **(4)**. In the early 1900s the view from here down (east) to the lake would have included the Lake Saskatoon community and the store built by Alex Monkman.

Continuing north from here, after another 5.6 km, the road swings left, as it passes the homestead of Alex Monkman **(5)** off the shore of Cutbank Lake, including the oldest dwelling in the South Peace Country (1906) and the barn (1916), currently being restored. From the homestead continue west for exactly 9.6 km along the dirt road, then turn left (south) for 4 km, to the top of Saskatoon Mountain **(6)**.

A side road here leads west for 1 km to a viewpoint. The historic Hinton Trail to the south swung past Nose Mountain, while the Monkman Pass Highway route led west through a gap in the mountains. Continue south down Saskatoon Mountain, turn right at the base of the hill, and it is 8 km to Beaverlodge, past the Beaverlodge Agricultural Research Station.

Once on the highway in Beaverlodge, it is just a short diversion to the right to the heart of the community, the Beaverlodge and Area Cultural Centre **(7)** (780-354-3600) located in what was once the community hospital. Courteous staff are keen to discuss the old days and to show off exhibits and Monkman memorabilia, which include a magnificent stained glass wall celebrating the art of Euphemia McNaught.

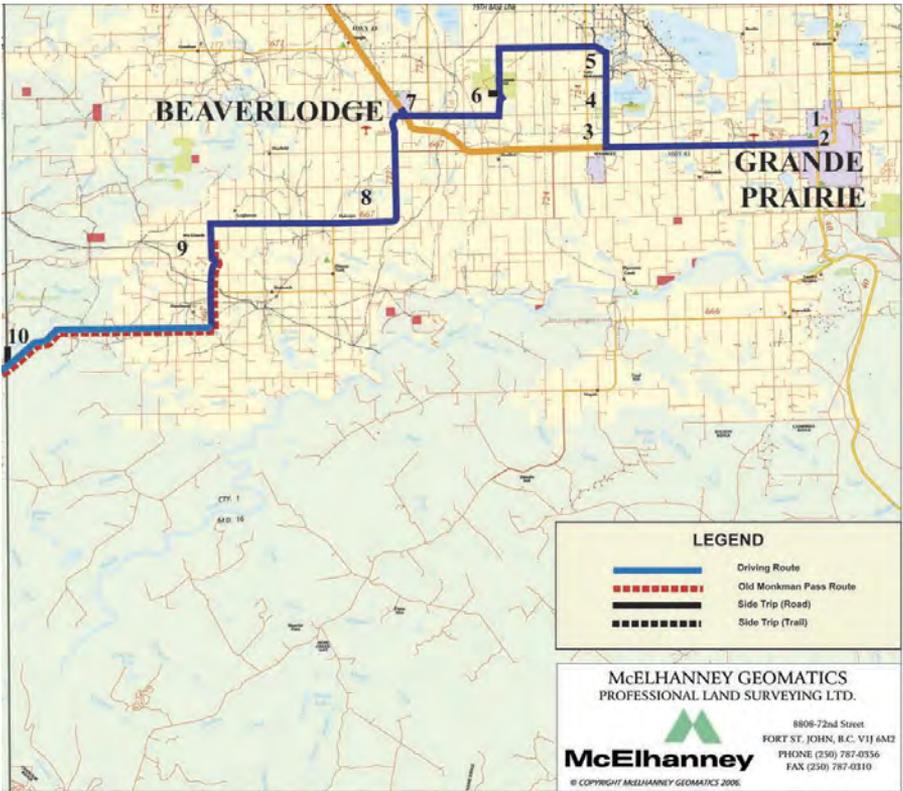


## 2. BEAVERLODGE TO TUMBLER RIDGE

The original Monkman Pass route began at Rio Grande, which is southwest of Beaverlodge. To get onto the road to Rio Grande, turn west out of Beaverlodge onto road 772 at the Monkman Pass sign at the southeastern edge of town. Turn south (left) after 1 km.

Euphemia McNaught is one of the most famous artists the region has produced, and passed away in 2002, aged 100. She was closely associated with the Monkman Pass epic, and some of her most evocative works celebrate it. The McNaught Homestead (8) (6.5 km from Beaverlodge) where she grew up is being restored and turned into a heritage site, along with a short trail to nearby McNaught Lake with its abundant birdlife.

After another 4 km the road swings right (east). Five km further on, in order to continue east, it is necessary to take a right turn where the road swings south. Continue east for 5 km, then turn left (south) for 1.5 km to Rio Grande, which was the starting point of the Monkman Pass Highway.



At Rio Grande there is a plaque and sign beside the community hall and church, commemorating the Monkman Pass Memorial Trail (9). The road follows the Monkman route from here to the BC–Alberta border. After 2 km the road crosses the Redwillow River, and after another 6 km turns right at a T junction. The BC–Alberta border (10) is reached after 21 km. Once across the border, you



*Model A Ford Ambulance crossing Redwillow River, 1939*

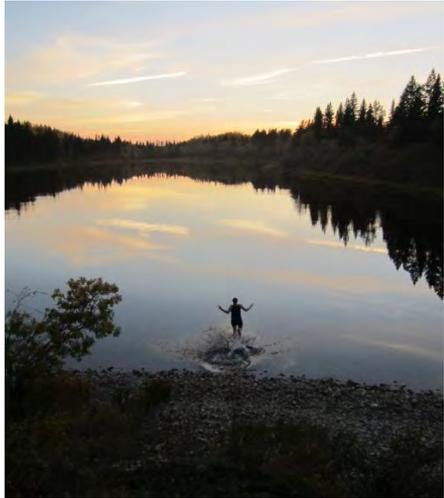
have entered the Tumbler Ridge Global Geopark, which was established in 2014. It highlights the Tumbler Ridge area as one of geological significance, including outstanding waterfalls, fossils and geological attractions.

Pause here to consider the toil of another epic adventure that preceded the Monkman Pass Highway by almost two decades. The Commission to delineate the BC–Alberta border is a fascinating, forgotten episode in the region’s history. A four metre wide swath was cut by the survey team along the 120th meridian in 1920 and 1922, and monuments were erected on prominent points. Over 80,000 pounds of material had to be carried by pack train, and 76 monuments were constructed. A road here leads right (north) just on the Alberta side of the boundary. If you follow it for 1.9 km, two Boundary Monuments can still be seen on the left, each close to the road on top of a tiny rise.



*Crossing corduroy, 1937*

Just under 2 km beyond the border, Gunn Lake (11) is on the left, a wetland area known in Monkman Pass times as the Big Slough. This was the first obstacle for the road builders to pass. There is a short track to the edge of the Big Slough near an old cabin. It is a good place for birdwatching.



*Long Lake*

Seven km beyond the Big Slough the road swings left and crosses Hiding Creek, known as Muskeg Creek to the pioneers. Beyond the bridge is a track on the left leading to a rustic camping area beside the creek (12).

After another 5 km look for a track on the right, leading to another appealing rustic camping area above the Little Prairie Lakes, which are kettle ponds and marshes well known to the pioneers, who established another of their camps here (13).

One km beyond the turnoff to Little Prairie Lakes is the trailhead for Long Lake (14). A short (270 metre) hiking trail leads to a peaceful promontory on

this attractive and unusual lake, which is a kilometre long, under 100 metres wide, and fairly deep with a stony beach. It and the Little Prairie Lakes were officially named by Guy “Doc” Moore, one of the pioneers, soon after the Monkman road construction. Its stony shore is a great place for a swim. Look for breeding Trumpeter Swans at the marsh at the eastern end of the lake.

Two km further on, the road is joined on the left by the Redwillow Forest Service Road. (A few kilometres down this road British Columbia’s first tyrannosaurid footprint was discovered in 2004 in a rock weighing five tons.) Continue right at the junction. This leads to the bridge across the Redwillow River and the Redwillow Forest Recreation Site after 2 km.

Turn left at the T junction onto the Heritage Highway (Hwy 52). After 6 km the Stony Creek Road branches off on the left, which gives access to the intriguing destination of Kruger’s Flats **(15)**, suitable for hiking, running or mountain biking along the old Monkman Pass route. The trail is shared with ATVs so please exercise caution.



*Cabin at Kruger’s Flats*

To get onto the trail, cross the bridge over Stony Creek after 300 m and park on the left in a large open cleared area after another 100 m. The trail starts at the far end of this clearing and initially parallels the creek. It winds for 3 km to Kruger’s Flats. Scenes along this route are virtually identical to 1938. There are even stretches of old corduroy over wet sections, and an old wooden bridge before the Flats, probably built shortly after World War II.

There are cabins in various stages of disrepair, with assorted artifacts to be found. Please respect the site and leave it as you found it for future visitors to enjoy. A stop at Kruger’s Flats was a must for all Monkman Pass travellers. Emil Kruger ranched here and kept a mink farm. The road forded the South Redwillow River here.

The next stop of interest, Stony Lake (16), is 18 km further along Hwy 52. The “Stony Lake: History, Trails and Recreation” brochure describes this area in detail. A road leads for 1.6 km to the forestry campsite on the northeastern shore of the lake, which is good for canoeing and fishing (pike), although its long reach and the prevailing westerly winds can make for large waves. An old track



*Stony Lake*

leads off on the left a few hundred metres before the road reaches the forestry campsite. Fairly soon it reaches the dammed up creek, which was nowhere near as wide or as difficult to cross in 1938. The trail continues on the far side. Options for reaching it include a short swim, or canoeing or boating to this point from the forestry campsite. Just downstream (to the left) on the far bank is the washed-up remains of an old bridge. Hiking the trail is another journey back in time, with the original ruts still visible for almost 2 km, along with stretches of corduroy at creek crossings. In places the work of the pioneers is still visible, where they converted the sidehill grade into a road using horse, plow and scoop, and pick and shovel. An offshoot to the right leads to the sandy shore of the lake at the site of the five cabins of Rudy Jacobs, who used to operate a tourist resort here in the late 1930s, another essential stopping point for the Monkman pioneers and early tourists. Just a few clearings, wooden items, tin cans and remains of old stairs remain.



*Honeymoon Creek bridge, 1939*

Five km beyond Stony Lake you will pass the Wapiti Forest Service Road on the left. The next road on the left is after another 1.5 km and makes for an interesting side trip. After 4 km this road becomes the old Monkman route, and at km 10 crosses Kinuseo Creek at a site well described by the pioneers, where a

honeymooning couple were given the honour of being the first to drive across

the new bridge. They called it Honeymoon Creek, a name which is now assigned to a tributary creek. There is another rustic campsite beside the creek **(17)**.

From here it is possible to mountain bike the remote 30 km to the next road crossing over Kinuseo Creek, near Kinuseo Falls, following the Monkman route almost all the way **(18)**. Before embarking on this venture, make sure that the western creek crossing is fordable, or else just do an out and back trip. There is one large washout at the halfway point; follow the well-used ATV trail.

Returning one kilometre from the Kinuseo Creek crossing and turning south provides an interesting diversion. The road initially leads beside the wetlands of Honeymoon Creek, then climbs up the slopes of Mt Clifford **(19)** to a gate after 8 km. From here a ditched road leads west up the ridge. This turns into an ATV track along an alpine ridge to the summit, which is reached after 4.5 km. This makes for great hiking or mountain biking; be sure to stay on the trail once in the alpine to protect the fragile tundra. The mountain views are spectacular and include the Bulley Glacier and Monkman Glacier, and much of the driving section of the Monkman Pass route. Return the way you came, back to the Heritage Highway, and continue towards Tumbler Ridge. From here the old route is not encountered again until near Kinuseo Falls.

Back on Hwy 52, after 15 km, watch out for a series of sharp switchbacks in the road. At the bottom of these is the Flatbed Creek Forestry Recreation Site **(20)**. This area is rich in First Nations history. A short trail leads south beside the upper reaches of Flatbed Creek to a bench overlooking a wetland. Launching a canoe here allows for a blissful paddle upstream for 45 minutes through this undisturbed valley.

The turnoff to Monkman Provincial Park and Kinuseo Falls is reached after another 20 km (see pg 10), followed by the junction with Hwy 52 from Dawson Creek after 11 km. The Tumbler Ridge turnoff (Mackenzie Way) is reached 1 km later, and 2 km along this road the Dinosaur Discovery Gallery (250-242-3466) **(21)** is on the right, along with the Peace Region Palaeontology Research Centre. The Gallery showcases some of the finds that have made Tumbler Ridge and the Peace Region famous for their fossils.

The Visitor Centre and Tumbler Ridge Community Centre are in the middle of town. The Community Centre houses the Museum Foundation's historic exhibits **(22)**, four of which celebrate the Monkman Pass Highway Association: the Chambers exhibit, the "Who was Alex Monkman" exhibit, the Euphemia McNaught art exhibit and the Leake exhibit. In an interactive exhibit there is precious footage of the first movie to be taken of Kinuseo Falls, by Prentiss Gray in 1927.

### 3. TUMBLER RIDGE TO KINUSEO FALLS

Return from Tumbler Ridge along the Heritage Highway (Hwy 52); turn right at the turnoff to Kinuseo Falls and Monkman Provincial Park after 14 km. The end of pavement is reached 3 km later. You will cross the Murray River, where there is a good boat launch. Three road bridges cross the Murray River between Kinuseo Falls and Tumbler Ridge, dividing the river into four stages, all of which can be attempted by canoeists who don't mind occasional patches of rapids.

Beyond the bridge there is a junction, where the Murray River Forest Service Road on the left leads to Kinuseo Falls. The interpretive brochure "Visiting Kinuseo Falls" describes the area and its history in great detail, and includes side trips to Barbour Falls and Nesbitt's Knee Falls. The road to the right leads to Mt Hermann (23), a driveable summit for 4WD vehicles, with fine views of the mountains through which the Monkman Pass route was built.



*The end of the road, 3 miles from Kinuseo Falls, 1939*



*Bridge across Kinuseo Creek, 1939*

27 km beyond the junction, the old Monkman route enters from the left, and it is possible to drive for 7 km along it. This road is rough in places, and initially winds along the shores of Serpent Lake. Somewhere here, "three miles from Kinuseo Falls," was the end the road, as far as the road crew got. From here on to Kinuseo Falls and beyond it was a pack train route or a blazed trail. The road ends at km 7.1 at Kinuseo Creek (24). This is the western end of the mountain bike route from the upper Kinuseo Creek crossing over 30 km to the east. Here a remarkable wooden bridge straddled the river. To the south is the Big Spring, a favourite resting and swimming point at a waterfall for the weary crews. Since the

1940s this land has been privately owned and is not accessible.

Once in Monkman Park, the cliff scenery gets better and the road winds down to cross a creek. Just before this is a parking lot on the left, and the trailhead for the Green Bowl and the Stone Corral Hiking Trail (4 km return trip). The Green Bowl **(25)** is less than one kilometre along the trail. Here the pioneers found feed for their hungry horses. The Green Bowl is sometimes an attractive expanse of cliff-lined water, sometimes a grassy flat, depending on beaver activity. Beyond, the trail gets steeper to and through the Stone Corral **(26)**, a wonderful limestone destination with an interpretive brochure, complete with a few small caves (be sure to take a flashlight).

From the same parking lot, cross over the road and enjoy the trails to Canary Falls and Lake Joan **(27)**. Ted Chambers named this lake after his infant daughter Joan in 1937. At the time she could fit neatly into a shoe box. The Kinuseo Falls turnoff is reached 2 km further on the right (continuing straight leads to the park campground and the trailhead for the hiking section of the Monkman Pass Memorial Trail). The road leads beside the Murray River,



*Lake Joan*

heading downstream, and first-time visitors still often catch the same sense of wonder that the pioneers enjoyed in seeing the water accelerate over a series of diagonal ledges before plummeting 70 metres into a large pool below **(28)**.

The first written reference to the falls is on a 1906 map by R.W. Jones, and the first known photos were taken by the Fay expedition of 1914. The first moving picture was taken in 1928 (it has miraculously survived) and in 1939 six elaborate tourist cabins were opened. They were later vandalized and were removed when the parking lot was built. A



*Kinuseo Falls tourist cabin, 1939*

1.5 km trail leads down to the Murray River with a view up to the falls **(29)**. It is possible to portage a canoe down this trail for a trip down the Murray River.

Currently, Wolverine Nordic and Mountain Society volunteers are following the ruts of the old Model A Fords to identify and hopefully reopen further stretches of the historic Monkman Pass route.

**CAUTION**

- In 2015 part of the driving tour is still on unpaved, sometimes rough roads, and therefore not always suitable for motor homes or small vehicles. Watch for industrial traffic, especially on the unpaved road sections and side roads.
- Some of the unpaved roads are radio controlled. Please drive with caution and pull well off the road when stopping or parking.
- Access to destinations may change, and certain destinations may become inaccessible in future.
- Grizzly Bear and Black Bear are commonly encountered.
- Weather conditions are unpredictable, especially in the mountains, and extreme weather conditions can occur at higher elevations.



*Louisa and Alex Monkman, 1906*

The Wolverine Nordic and Mountain Society (WNMS), the Tumbler Ridge Museum Foundation (TRMF) and the Tumbler Ridge Global Geopark (TRGG) have taken every effort to ensure that the information presented is accurate. These organizations take no responsibility for loss, inconvenience or injury sustained by any person using this brochure.

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*Text: Charles Helm; Concept: Kreg Alde*

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