

The David Thompson Memorial Fort: An Early Outpost of Historically Themed Tourism in Western Canada

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The David Thompson Memorial Fort was western Canada's first purpose-built historically themed tourist attraction. Constructed in Invermere, British Columbia, in 1922, it was part of a larger campaign by a politically connected land development company to establish a tourist trade that would spur economic growth in an underdeveloped region. The Memorial Fort was sponsored by the Canadian Pacific Railway and Hudson's Bay Company and was novel not only for using the past to draw tourists in a region where sublime mountain scenery was the staple attraction, but also for being intended to draw automobile-borne tourists to a region where railways had traditionally been the dominant mode of conveyance. Plans to make the Memorial Fort into a tourist-oriented museum faltered due to the collapse of the land company that had pushed for it. Nevertheless, the fact that it was built with support from powerful backers illustrates the growing enthusiasm for both historically themed tourism and the automobile as a way of experiencing it in Canada during the early interwar years.

Le fort commémoratif David-Thompson est la première attraction touristique de l'Ouest du Canada à avoir été érigée expressément en fonction d'un thème historique. Construit à Invermere (Colombie-Britannique) en 1922, le fort faisait partie d'une vaste campagne menée par une société d'aménagement des terres ayant des contacts politiques dans le but de mettre en place une industrie touristique qui stimulerait la croissance économique dans une région sous-développée. Commandité par le Chemin de fer Canadien Pacifique et la Compagnie de la Baie d'Hudson, le fort commémoratif était une nouveauté parce qu'il utilisait le passé pour attirer des touristes dans une région où la beauté des paysages de montagne constituait la principale attraction, et en plus, parce qu'il visait à attirer des touristes voyageant en automobile dans une région où le chemin de fer avait été jusque-là le mode de transport dominant. Les plans visant à transformer le fort commémoratif en musée ont fait long feu en raison de la faillite de la société immobilière qui les avait mis de l'avant. Néanmoins, le fait que le fort ait été construit avec l'appui de puissants commanditaires témoigne

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de l'enthousiasme grandissant tant pour le tourisme à caractère historique que pour l'automobile comme moyen de s'y adonner au Canada au début de l'entre-deux-guerres.

DREAMT UP in 1920, the David Thompson Memorial Fort was the first attempt to develop a historically themed tourist attraction in western Canada. It was intended to draw wealthy auto tourists who travelled over the Banff-Windermere Highway—the first scenic touring road through the Canadian Rockies—into the recently established village of Invermere, British Columbia. The “fort” had powerful backers, was built on a grand scale, and received a great burst of publicity when it was completed. It appeared poised to become a big success. However, it failed to become a profitable tourist attraction due to the collapse of the land development company that had coordinated its construction, Invermere’s persistent isolation, and the fact that “history” had yet to be cultivated into a tourist draw in western Canada, where sublime natural scenery had long been the staple attraction. The David Thompson Memorial Fort was a bold and risky departure from established regional patterns of tourism promotion, and its creators had no obvious model to emulate. Nevertheless, the fact that it was built with support from powerful companies like the Canadian Pacific Railway and Hudson’s Bay Company illustrates the high hopes that businesses and boosters pinned on both auto tourism and history-as-tourist-attraction during the early 1920s.

Though the David Thompson Memorial Fort failed to become a major tourist attraction, it merits serious attention because failure is an intrinsic and under-examined part of the history of both tourism and public history in Canada. Whether the approach is institutional, celebratory, or critical, most historical studies of tourist attractions and tourism-related businesses in Canada have focused on success stories, on tracing the development of themes and sites that remain popular with tourists today. This focus tends to emphasize the big players in the tourism industry that were able to gain market share and dominate their competitors. It also exaggerates how attuned and responsive tourism promoters were to changing tastes, travel patterns, and market conditions. Crucially, it overlooks the fact that many efforts to develop tourist attractions and tourism-related businesses were undercapitalized, incapable of conducting sustained publicity campaigns, and located “off the beaten path.” For every iconic Niagara Falls or famous Banff Springs Hotel there have been a clutch of tourist sites that achieved middling results or failed outright and are unknown to the general public today. A fuller understanding of tourism’s social and economic significance in Canada requires knowing more about these less-famous attractions and the mixed results that their backers experienced; about the “losers” and “ruins” of the tourism industry.¹ This

1 On the historical value of studying failed business ventures, see Patrick Fridenson, “Business Failure and the Agenda of Business History,” *Enterprise and Society*, vol. 5, no. 4 (2004), pp. 562-582. In the Canadian Rockies, the “disappearance” of the Great Illecillewaet Glacier and the Canadian Pacific Railway’s Glacier House resort from the tourist gaze due to the railway’s 1916 decision to tunnel beneath the avalanche-plagued Rogers Pass provides a dramatic example of how even a world-famous Canadian tourist attraction could “fail,” or at least be written off in a company’s search for larger profits. See David Finch, *Glacier*

approach is especially true for the Canadian Rockies, where tourism promoters' proximity to sublime mountain scenery and transcontinental railway lines is often treated as though it were a kind of license to print money.

The story of the David Thompson Memorial Fort also illustrates western Canadian tourism promoters' perceptions of and responses to rapidly changing travel conditions during the 1910s and early 1920s. Rates of automobile ownership grew exponentially during those years, and a popular culture of auto touring also emerged.² Like many tourism promoters, the parties that conceived and financed the Memorial Fort put great stock in auto tourism's potential to deliver an affluent class of pleasure travellers to their district. They used the growing enthusiasm for automobiles, good roads, and pleasure driving amongst wealthy and upper-middle-class North Americans to convince federal and provincial governments to build the Banff-Windermere Highway, but also recognized that this promised road would not necessarily deliver tourists right to their door. The flexibility of route and pace permitted by automobile travel generated new challenges and opportunities for those who sought to profit from tourists, to the point of creating a new geography of competition. The Memorial Fort was intended to draw tourists into Invermere by differentiating it from other nearby attractions, thereby helping to overcome the town's location off the district's main roads. However, while the Memorial Fort was an innovative response to the new spatial and visual imperatives of auto tourism, its reach was overambitious, going beyond the limits of what constituted an appropriately scaled and themed attraction at a moment when western Canada did not have a tradition of for-profit public history, let alone of oversize, eye-catching, historically themed tourist attractions. As an isolated outpost of North American tourists' emergent enthusiasm for the past, the Memorial Fort proved "ahead of its time," and no one in Invermere had the capital or expertise required to make it a permanent, profitable attraction.

Land, Leisure, and Lines of Travel

The origins of the David Thompson Memorial Fort must be understood in the broader contexts of resettlement, transportation infrastructure, and the halting pace of development in southeastern British Columbia around the turn of the last century. The construction of the "fort" was a response to an economic crisis in the upper Columbia River valley, a last-ditch effort to build a tourist trade that would fill in for stalled agricultural development and slumping real estate sales. There are parallels between the effort to make a tourist attraction out of the past in this isolated corner of the British Columbia Interior and the situation that Ian McKay

House Rediscovered (Revelstoke: Friends of Glacier and Mount Revelstoke, 1991).

2 The number of automobiles registered in the United States leapt from 194,000 in 1908 to 620,000 in 1911. In British Columbia, Alberta, and Saskatchewan, automobile registrations grew from 375 in 1908 to 4,800 in 1911 and then 24,000 in 1915. On the rise of auto touring, see Warren James Belasco, *Americans on the Road: From Autocamp to Motel, 1910-1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979); Tom McCarthy, *Auto Mania: Cars, Consumers, and the Environment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Christopher Wells, *Car Country: An Environmental History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012).

and other historians have described in the Atlantic provinces during the 1920s.³ In both cases, the tourist trade was viewed by regional elites as something that could help alleviate underdevelopment. The key difference between them was that the upper Columbia River valley had only been settled by Euro-Canadians for a few years when area boosters started to believe that aspects of its past could be used to attract tourists—indeed, the village of Invermere was not even a decade old when the scheme to build the Memorial Fort was first hatched. Thus the David Thompson Memorial Fort was a pioneering effort to develop a historical tourist attraction on what remained something of a frontier.

When the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) built its mainline through the Rockies, its first westbound crossing of the Columbia River was at the site of present-day Golden, BC. The Columbia valley upstream from Golden (to the south) had good prospects for logging, mining, ranching, and farming, but, as elsewhere in western Canada, large-scale resource extraction and agricultural colonization required the development of capillary transportation lines and control over local Native populations. In 1884 the 300 Ktunaxa and Secwepemc who lived in the upper Columbia and Kootenay river valleys were pushed onto a clutch of Indian reserves, including two located on the east side of Windermere Lake, a large widening of the Columbia. A crude colonization road was then built to connect Golden with Fort Steele, a mining settlement 230 kilometres to the south, and sternwheel steamboats began paddling both the upper Columbia and upper Kootenay rivers. These new transportation links did little to overcome the region's isolation, however, and resettlement proceeded slowly. There were only a few hundred non-Natives living between Golden and Fort Steele by the late 1890s. Most were transient prospectors, miners, and lumbermen, with only a few dozen ranchers and farmers.⁴

At the turn of the century the CPR chartered a branch line called the Kootenay Central that would run north-south through the upper Columbia and Kootenay valleys. As an inducement to build this line, the province granted the company hundreds of thousands of acres in that region.⁵ Needing someone to help sell

3 See especially Ian McKay, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994); Ian McKay and Robin Bates, *In the Province of History: The Making of the Public Past in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010). Examining a more metropolitan part of British Columbia, Michael Dawson argues that Victoria merchants' early efforts to cultivate a tourist trade were a response to local deindustrialization. See Dawson, "Victoria Debates its Post-industrial Reality: Tourism, Deindustrialization, and Store-Hour Regulations, 1900-1958," *Urban History Review*, vol. 35, no. 2 (2007), pp. 14-24.

4 Shuswap Indian Band, *Re Tsqwatstens-kucw ne Csaliken: Our People Between the Two Mountain Ranges: Shuswap Indian Band Traditional Land Use Study* (Invermere: Shuswap Indian Band, 2008), chap. 4; Art Downs, *Paddlewheels on the Frontier: The Story of British Columbia and Yukon Sternwheel Steamers* (Seattle: Superior, 1972), pp. 100-112.

5 This transaction was business as usual during British Columbia's era of railway mania, when governments offered generous cash subsidies and land grants in exchange for rail lines to "open up" regions to settlement and resource extraction. See J. A. Eagle, *The Canadian Pacific Railway and the Development of Western Canada, 1896-1914* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989); Frank Leonard, *A Thousand Blunders: The Grand Trunk Pacific Railway and Northern British Columbia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1996), chap. 1-2; Patricia E. Roy, "Progress, Prosperity, and Politics: The Railway Policies of Richard McBride," *BC Studies*, vol. 47 (Autumn 1980), pp. 3-28.

its new holdings, the CPR turned to engineer Robert Randolph Bruce, who had built steel bridges on its mainline and was then the manager of a silver mine in the mountains above Windermere Lake. Bruce agreed to act as the company's land agent and helped promote the Windermere district far and wide, especially to prospective orchard owners.⁶ Brochures and magazine articles described the district as another Okanagan, a salubrious Eden admirably suited to fruit growing, while downplaying its isolation and frigid winters. Bruce, the CPR, and the provincial government all targeted their pitch towards former British colonial officials and remittance men. They appealed to these leisure-seeking would-be gentlemen farmers by touting the upper Columbia valley as a "playground" full of opportunities for boating, angling, and big game hunting.⁷

The class of investors and settlers that Bruce and the CPR sought to attract could generally afford to come see the lay of the land for themselves, and a growing number were experimenting with a new type of overland transport: the touring automobile. The completion of an automobile road between Calgary and Banff in 1910 allowed a trickle of motoring enthusiasts into Canada's most famous national park. Officials in Ottawa were receptive to their lobbying for more and better roads within the parks, for the whims of well-heeled tourists had to be accommodated if parks were to compete for their business.⁸ An early adopter of the automobile, Robert Randolph Bruce became convinced that a parkway through the Canadian Rockies would help draw tourist-investors to the Windermere district. Using his business and political connections, he convinced the CPR, the federal government, and the government of British Columbia to cooperate on the construction of a scenic automobile road linking Banff and the upper Columbia valley through the Vermillion and Sinclair passes. Such a road would permit motorists from the western states and Prairie provinces to make loop trips through Banff. It also promised to be an attraction in and of itself: a 1911 brochure boasted that the Banff-Windermere road would deliver auto tourists "to the very heart of the Rocky Mountains, revealing Nature in her wildest, grandest

6 Thomas C. Meredith, "Boosting in British Columbia: The Creation and Rise of Invermere," *Urban History Review*, vol. 16, no. 3 (1988), p. 274; Winnifred A. Weir, "Robert Randolph Bruce, 1861-1942," *British Columbia Historical News*, vol. 30, no. 3 (1997), pp. 8-10.

7 See, for example, Robert Randolph Bruce, "Canada's New Playground," *Canadian Gazette*, January 26, 1911; Wilber D. Nesbit, "Another Playground for the World," *World To-Day Magazine* (1909). Also see the introduction to Daisy Phillips, *Letters from Windermere, 1912-1914*, Cole Harris and Elizabeth Phillips, eds. (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1984). On the importance of leisure and landscape perception to British emigrants seeking to maintain their social standing and imperial identity in BC's orchard districts, see Jason Patrick Bennett, "Apple of the Empire: Landscape and Imperial Identity in Turn-of-the-Century British Columbia," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, vol. 9, no. 1 (1998), pp. 63-92; Jean Barman, "Ethnicity in the Pursuit of Status: British Middle- and Upper-Class Emigration to British Columbia in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, vol. 18, no. 1 (1986), pp. 32-51.

8 Leslie Bella, *Parks for Profit* (Montreal: Harvest House, 1987) chap. 4; Amy Larin, "A Rough Ride: Automobiles in Banff National Park, 1905-1918," *Alberta History* (2008), pp. 2-9; W. F. Lothian, *A History of Canada's National Parks*, vol. 2 (Ottawa: Indian and Northern Affairs, Parks Canada, 1976), pp. 31-32; John Sandlos, "Nature's Playgrounds: The Parks Branch and Tourism Promotion in the National Parks, 1911-1929" in Claire E. Campbell, ed., *A Century of Parks Canada, 1911-2011* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2011), pp. 53-78.

moods.” Natural scenery was to be the road’s key attraction, building on the tourist image of the Canadian Rockies that the CPR had been cultivating for 25 years.⁹

Planning for the Banff-Windermere Highway

Construction of the Banff-Windermere Highway began in 1911. That year also saw the formation of the Columbia Valley Irrigated Fruitlands Company (CVIF), which purchased 200,000 acres of CPR land around Windermere Lake. The CVIF was backed by senior CPR officials as well as eastern bankers and politicians. Its president, J. S. Dennis, was head of the railway’s colonization department, and Robert Randolph Bruce served as vice-president and senior local representative. The CVIF established a new townsite called Invermere on the northwest corner of Windermere Lake and, to enhance its attractiveness to genteel tourist-investors, built recreational facilities that included tennis courts, a polo ground, horseracing track, and golf course. It also lobbied the CPR to develop a lakeside resort there.¹⁰

Completion of the Kootenay Central in 1914 should have brought a boom to the Windermere district, but instead it coincided with difficult times. Many British settlers departed at the outbreak of war in Europe, keen to support their home country and disenchanted by the false promise of orcharding in the shadow of the Rockies.¹¹ The CPR dropped out of the Banff-Windermere road-building partnership in early 1915, and the provincial government followed soon after. Ottawa had nearly finished its section of the 135-kilometre road, but the western section was far from complete, and in 1916 a heavy spring freshet destroyed the roadbed in the tortuous confines of Sinclair Canyon. With the Windermere district shedding settlers and land prices slumping, boosters, business owners, and investors grew desperate for the road from Banff to be completed. Robert Randolph Bruce’s political and business connections again proved invaluable for promoting the cause of roads and tourism, and he got the stalled project moving by brokering another deal between the provincial and federal governments. Ottawa agreed to complete the road in exchange for Victoria conveying it a ten-mile-wide strip of land along the surveyed right-of-way for use as a park. Road construction recommenced under federal supervision, and Kootenay National Park was established in 1920.¹²

Kootenay Park would be accessible by automobile road, not railway, leading many to perceive new opportunities for profit associated with the development of tourist facilities in and around it. The end of the war did not improve economic conditions in the Windermere district, but fast-rising rates of automobile ownership led Invermere boosters, merchants, and property owners to place more and more faith in auto tourism’s direct value to the district. Their perception is an early

9 British Columbia, Bureau of Provincial Information, *Columbia-Kootenay Valley and its Resources and Capabilities* (Victoria: King’s Printer, 1911), p. 14. On early tourism promotion in the Canadian Rockies, see especially E. J. Hart, *The Selling of Canada: The CPR and the Beginnings of Canadian Tourism* (Banff: Altitude, 1983).

10 Meredith, “Boosting in British Columbia,” pp. 276-278.

11 Phillips, *Letters from Windermere*.

12 The connections between the Banff-Windermere road project and the establishment of Kootenay Park are outlined in Lothian, *A History of Canada’s National Parks*, vol. 1, pp. 58-60.

example of what Michael Dawson has identified as a crucial shift in the mindset of British Columbia's tourism promoters during the interwar years, from seeing tourism as a means of luring investors to seeing tourism as having economic value in and of itself.¹³ Robert Randolph Bruce expressed this new attitude in a letter to national parks commissioner J. B. Harkin, criticizing the name chosen for Kootenay Park.

One might say that calling this park "Columbia" would be pandering to our [American] cousins across the line. Well, we want to pander to them all we can. We want their cars and their money and their business, and that is a good deal why this [Banff-Windermere] road was started originally. I know it, because it was me who started it.¹⁴

Bruce preferred "Columbia" to "Kootenay" because it would be familiar to American tourists, especially since the 1905 centennial of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark's western explorations had elevated them to the status of national heroes.¹⁵ The Columbia watershed played a special role in narratives about Lewis and Clark's western travels, serving as a kind of stage on which America's manifest destiny "naturally" played out. By 1920 many American auto tourists were seeking to retrace Lewis and Clark's expedition route along the emerging highway network of the western states. Bruce believed that naming the new national park "Columbia" would encourage them to steer their cars and tourist dollars north, towards the Windermere district.¹⁶ The timing was especially propitious for those who hoped to lure pleasure-seeking Americans across the border, for British Columbia had repealed Prohibition in the first days of 1921, while it had recently been imposed in Washington, Idaho, and Montana, and remained in place in Alberta.¹⁷

Kootenay National Park and the Banff-Windermere Highway were poised to become the first major auto-oriented tourist attractions in the Canadian Rockies, and various parties started preparing for an influx of auto tourists. The CPR made plans to run auto stages over the road. It also began building a series of lodges and bungalow camps along the highway and other roads in the mountain parks. One of the first was Lake Windermere Lodge and Cabins, which opened in 1920 on

13 Michael Dawson, *Selling British Columbia: Tourism and Consumer Culture, 1890-1970* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004), chap. 2.

14 Robert Randolph Bruce to J. B. Harkin, June 22, 1922, cited in Lothian, *A History of Canada's National Parks*, vol. 1, p. 59.

15 Carl Abbott, *The Great Extravaganza: Portland and the Lewis and Clark Exposition* (Portland: Oregon Historical Society, 1981).

16 Wallace Lewis, "On the Trail: Commemorating the Lewis and Clark Expedition in the Twentieth Century" in Kris Fresonke and Mark Spence, eds., *Lewis and Clark: Legacies, Memories, and New Perspectives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), pp. 206-207.

17 Stephen T. Moore, *Bootleggers and Borders: The Paradox of Prohibition on a Canada-U.S. Borderland* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), especially chap. 3. On alcohol's complicated role in the development of high-end tourist accommodations at Waterton Lakes National Park during the same period, see Ray Djuff, *High on a Windy Hill: The Story of the Prince of Wales Hotel* (Calgary: Rocky Mountain Books, 1999), chap. 2-4.

the lakeshore half a kilometre south of Invermere.¹⁸ The National Parks Branch acquired the hot springs located in the southwestern corner of Kootenay Park, just a short distance from where the Banff-Windermere Highway would exit the park. The springs contained traces of radium, thought to have curative properties, and the Parks Branch planned to develop them into a restorative natural attraction. Speculators and would-be entrepreneurs jockeyed to acquire roadside property around the hot springs, park gate, and point where the new highway would intersect the existing north-south road through the upper Columbia valley. This area was poised to become the tourism-oriented community known today as Radium Hot Springs or Radium Junction.

This nascent service centre posed a challenge to boosters and business owners in Invermere, for its proximity to the park gate and the district's main road junction would give it an advantage when competing for the future tourist trade. In 1920 Invermere was the largest community for 125 kilometres in any direction; it had a golf course and bungalow camp, and Windermere Lake was well suited for recreational activities like boating and swimming. Yet the village was somewhat off the motoring public's beaten path, being 15 kilometres south of Kootenay Park and on the opposite side of Windermere Lake from the valley's main road. As one historian of the district has put it, the road to Invermere was "the road to nowhere else."¹⁹ Invermere boosters recognized that, for their community to become the region's premier tourist destination, some kind of special attraction was needed to lure motorists past Radium and three kilometres off an arterial road—something with popular appeal that would differentiate Invermere from nearby tourist destinations that relied on mountain scenery. Searching for such an attraction, they latched onto the nineteenth-century fur trader and explorer David Thompson, who had come to their attention through the work of a local resident whom many of them knew personally: the insurance agent and amateur historian Basil G. Hamilton.

Discovering David Thompson and Kootenae House

Basil Hamilton had moved to the Windermere district from Ontario in the hope of profiting from the anticipated boom in land sales. The sluggish pace of development permitted spare time to read about the history of western Canada, and Hamilton soon became preoccupied with David Thompson, who had "discovered" the upper Columbia valley a century earlier and had more recently become the object of considerable attention amongst North American historians.²⁰

In 1806 the Montreal-based North West Company had instructed Thompson to find a trade route through the Rockies and into the Columbia River watershed.

18 E. J. Hart, *The Brewster Story: From Pack Train to Tour Bus* (Banff: Brewster Transport Company, 1981), chap. 8-9; Elsa Lam, "Wilderness Nation: Building Canada's Railway Landscapes, 1885-1929" (PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 2011), chap. 4; Windermere Valley Museum Society, "Lake Windermere Camp," *Valley History Newsletter* (August 2000), pp. 1-2.

19 Meredith, "Boosting in British Columbia," p. 273.

20 A short biographical sketch of Hamilton is contained in the February 2000 newsletter of the Windermere Valley Museum and Archives [hereafter WVMA]. His diaries and other papers are held at the Glenbow Museum Archives in Calgary.

In 1807 he reached present-day Windermere Lake and built a trading post called Kootenae House near its northwest shore, where he spent three winters. Thompson abandoned Kootenae House in the summer of 1810 and retreated to the prairies before receiving instructions to head immediately for the Pacific. He went north and re-crossed the Rockies via the Athabasca Pass, rejoining the Columbia at its northernmost point, where he wintered. Thompson reached the mouth of the Columbia in July 1811, only to discover an American trading post built just a few weeks earlier. He had failed to stake a claim over the entire Columbia watershed for the North West Company and for Britain, but his detailed maps and descriptions would buttress British claims to the Oregon country for the next 35 years. The North West Company continued to use the northerly Athabasca Pass as its main trade route through the Rockies, which made the upper Columbia valley a commercial backwater. Kootenae House soon disappeared from the landscape, apparently destroyed by fire. David Thompson also passed into obscurity, with financial problems and failing eyesight preventing him from writing his own place in history. He died in 1857, and his maps and notebooks were sold to the Upper Canada department of lands, where they collected dust for the next 30 years.

Thompson's elevation to the pantheon of North American explorer-heroes began in 1888, when the surveyor Joseph Burr Tyrrell, who had come across his long-forgotten maps and journals, published a pamphlet titled *A Brief Narrative of the Journeys of David Thompson in North-Western America*.²¹ This spurred other historians' interest in Thompson's western travels. He was brought to the attention of American readers in 1897 by the anthologist Elliott Coues, who deemed him "the greatest geographer of his day in British America," the "Canadian" equivalent to his contemporaries Lewis and Clark.²² Bored stiff in sleepy, isolated Invermere, Basil Hamilton read everything he could find about Thompson. He corresponded with Tyrrell and others who were interested in Thompson's western travels and scoured the shores of Windermere Lake and the Columbia River in a quest to identify the location of Kootenae House. He found it in 1910, two kilometres north of Invermere and well inland from the lake, near where Toby Creek flows into the Columbia. No obvious traces of the post remained, but careful examination revealed collapsed stone chimneys and the subsurface remnants of a palisade wall.²³ Hamilton desperately wanted Thompson to be commemorated in Invermere and proposed that a plaque, a cairn, and even a miniature reproduction of Kootenae House be erected in his honour. His argument was lent credence by the growing number of publications about Thompson's western travels, including

21 J. B. Tyrrell, *A Brief Narrative of the Journeys of David Thompson in North-Western America* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1888); Heather Robertson, *Measuring Mother Earth: How Joe the Kid Became Tyrrell of the North* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2007), pp. 78-81.

22 Elliott Coues, ed., *New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest: The Manuscript Journals of Alexander Henry, Fur Trader of the Northwest Company, and of David Thompson, Official Geographer and Explorer of the Same Company, 1799-1814*, 3 vols. (New York: F. P. Harper, 1897). Quotation is from vol. 1, p. xxii.

23 Hamilton's discovery of Kootenae House is outlined in Parks Canada, *Kootenae House National Historic Site: Commemorative Integrity Statement* (Ottawa: Parks Canada, 2007), p. 9. His efforts to trace its location can be followed in detail through the records in Glenbow Museum Archives, Basil G. Hamilton papers, file 11.

Tyrell's edited version of his journals, which the Champlain Society published in 1916. It quickly became the Society's most popular volume, spurring further interest in the history of western Canada.²⁴

Invermere boosters who believed their village needed a distinctive tourist attraction discerned a possible solution in the hero-explorer David Thompson. Educated North American readers were increasingly interested in the history of western exploration, and it was reasonable to assume this readership had considerable overlap with the fast-growing population of auto tourists. Commemorating David Thompson would generate publicity for Invermere and also make it stand apart from nearby tourist destinations that relied on mountain scenery and other relatively common natural features as their main attraction. Tales of adventure in the western wilderness had significant cross-border appeal, and exploration was an especially appealing theme for auto tourists who felt themselves to be engaged in their own journeys of discovery. However, more than a dour monument or plaque was needed to draw auto tourists into Invermere. By the fall of 1920 Robert Randolph Bruce was proposing to develop a major historically themed tourist attraction in the form of a life-size model of a nineteenth-century fur trade post.²⁵

A Typical Model Hudson's Bay Fort

The idea of using history to capture the attention and patronage of tourists and the motoring public was not entirely novel in North America in 1920. Historic buildings and battle sites that had been preserved for patriotic purposes in the eastern United States and Canada were some of the earliest tourist attractions. In the West, tourism promoters in Portland regularly linked Lewis and Clark to the scenic Columbia River Highway. Frontier and "Wild West" structures were also being built to catch the eyes and business of motorists passing along the highways and commercial strips of southern California.²⁶ However, history really started becoming a popular theme for attracting tourists in North America in the mid to late 1920s. In 1920 there was no precedent in western Canada for what Invermere boosters wanted to do. The David Thompson Memorial Fort scheme pre-dated the Historic Sites and Monuments Board's programme of marking western fur trade posts, as well as the campaigns to preserve old Hudson's Bay Company buildings

24 David Thompson, *David Thompson's Narrative of His Explorations in Western America, 1784-1812*, J. B. Tyrrell, ed. (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1916); W. Stewart Wallace, *A Sketch of the History of the Champlain Society* (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1957), pp. 4-5.

25 According to Bruce, he first discussed the scheme with the president of the HBC in the summer of 1920 (WVMA, David Thompson Memorial Fort collection, Bruce to Edward Fitzgerald, deputy chairman, Hudson's Bay Company, July 13, 1921).

26 John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Kevin Britz, "Long May Their Legend Survive: Memory and Authenticity in Deadwood, South Dakota; Tombstone, Arizona; and Dodge City, Kansas" (PhD dissertation, University of Arizona, 1999); Denise Meringolo, *Museums, Monuments, and National Parks: Toward a New Genealogy of Public History* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012); C. J. Taylor, *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Canada's National Historic Parks and Sites* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990); Jim Heiman, *California Crazy and Beyond: Roadside Vernacular Architecture* (San Francisco: Chronicle, 2001); Karal Ann Marling, *The Colossus of Roads: Myth and Symbol Along the American Highway* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

at Nanaimo and Fort Langley on British Columbia's densely populated south coast. Invermere boosters' plan to draw in auto tourists with a large historically themed attraction can be interpreted as innovative, in that it was "ahead of its time," or as desperate, in that they put so much faith in tourism as a cure-all for the district's economic woes. Either way, it certainly was ambitious.

The site selected for the "fort" was a grassy, elevated point that jutted out into Windermere Lake half a kilometre south of Invermere's village centre. Called Canterbury Point by British settlers, it was three kilometres south of the spot where Basil Hamilton had identified the actual remnants of Kootenae House. What the site lacked in historical accuracy, however, it made up for by its proximity to important tourist amenities, being sandwiched between the CPR's bungalow camp and the Invermere golf course. The point offered superb views up and down the lake and could be seen from the road that connected Invermere with the valley's main north-south road. It was also conveniently owned by the Columbia Valley Irrigated Fruitlands Company.

Robert Randolph Bruce drummed up financial support for construction of the fort. "What we want to erect," he explained to the deputy chairman of the Hudson's Bay Company, "is a miniature Hudson Bay Fort, on the very site where David Thompson built his first Fort."

It is intended to put up the building on stone and concrete so that it is good for over 100 years. The central building will be used for relics of the early history of the country, all of which will be very valuable one hundred years from now. Such a typical model Hudson Bay Fort will be of great interest historically.... We would want to get the Hudson Bay Coat of Arms over the gateway.... It will have Hudson Bay all over it [and] will be visited by many people, as it is on the main highway of the Banff-Windermere motor road now nearly completed.²⁷

Bruce was stretching the truth when he described the proposed "fort" as being located on the main road through the valley. He also knew that Basil Hamilton had proven that Kootenay House had been located three kilometres north.²⁸ Furthermore, the fort was to be a simulation, rather than a replica, because no images showed what Kootenae House had actually looked like. The new fort was to be an amalgam of surviving western fur trade posts, incorporating features that would lend it a picturesque air of verisimilitude. Bruce's effort to play up the HBC image of the project is noteworthy. He proposed to build a "typical model Hudson Bay fort" festooned with company insignia even though Kootenae House had belonged its bitter rival the North West Company.

Bruce's reference to constructing a fort that would be "good for over 100 years" was an engineer's way of promising the CPR and HBC they would get

27 WVMA, David Thompson Memorial Fort collection, Bruce to Edward Fitzgerald, deputy chairman, Hudson's Bay Company, July 13, 1921.

28 In 1917 Hamilton produced an annotated map of the Kootenae House site and sent copies to libraries, archives, and other Thompson enthusiasts. See University of British Columbia Library Special Collections, Basil G. Hamilton, "Skeleton Plan Showing Location of 'Kootenae House' Built by David Thompson, 1807" (Invermere, 1917).

a good return on any money they might donate for its construction. The “fort” was to be a durable, long-term asset for Invermere’s tourist trade, a permanent piece of economic infrastructure akin to a steel bridge. Bruce continued his track record of getting other parties to pay for regional tourism infrastructure, coaxing contributions of \$2,500 from the HBC and \$7,500 from the CPR. Construction got under way in the spring of 1922, supervised by a foreman from the CPR’s Kootenay Central branch line. The main building measured 40 by 60 feet, with walls 16 feet tall beneath the eaves of the split-log roof. It had a stone base like Fort Resolution and windows on all four sides. Inside, a large staircase led to a gallery that ran around three sides of the interior. The vaulted ceiling gave an impressive sense of spaciousness.



Figure 1: The David Thompson Memorial Fort, 1922.

Source: Courtesy of Windermere District Historical Society, A1182.

The main building was enclosed by timber palisades and a pair of bastions, and reached through an arched gateway similar to one Bruce had seen in photographs of Fort Chippewan. The historical accuracy of the “fort” was questionable, but there was no denying that it had an impressive effect on visitors. It was imposingly large, had a very scenic setting, and evoked a pleasant and convincing sense of the past. No contemporary buildings or utility lines intruded on the scene. The only traces of modernity that encroached on Canterbury Point were a few sand traps of the Invermere golf course.

The district board of trade and the CPR publicity department planned an elaborate opening ceremony that would promote Invermere as a tourist

destination. They had wanted the ceremony to coincide with the opening of the Banff-Windermere Highway, but, once it was clear that the road would not be completed until 1923, they instead organized a series of events that spanned the 1922 Labour Day long weekend. Politicians and senior managers from the CPR, HBC, and CVIF were invited to attend, as were dozens of journalists, historians, popular writers, artists, business owners, and members of genteel settler society from the Windermere district.²⁹



Figure 2: The interior of the David Thompson Memorial Fort, 1922.
Source: Courtesy of Windermere District Historical Society, A802.

The CPR and HBC both brought iconic, archetypically western artifacts for decorating the interior of the Memorial Fort. The railway loaned a collection of “Indian exhibits,” including masks, drums, lanterns embroidered with spirit symbols, and a pair of 12-foot totem poles. The HBC loaned artifacts related to the fort’s fur trade theme: old company flags, canoe paddles, a huge stuffed buffalo head, and a selection of other stuffed fur-bearing animals, including a grizzly bear, timber wolf, and beavers. A Union Jack hung from the rafters inside the “fort,” and a large HBC crest was placed over the main entrance, just as Bruce had promised his Winnipeg-based sponsors.³⁰

²⁹ “Bliss Carman Reads Poetic Contribution,” *Cranbrook Courier*, September 1, 1922, p. 1; “Gala Week at Lake Windermere,” *Cranbrook Courier*, September 8, 1922, pp. 1, 4.

³⁰ The HBC’s participation was part of a wider promotional campaign in which it represented itself as a central institution in Canadian history to modern consumers. Peter Geller, “Hudson’s Bay Company

The interior of the “fort” was stocked with artifacts and trophies meant to attest to the district’s wild past (and by extension its civilized present), but the real show went on outside, around the palisade walls and along the shoreline and crest of Canterbury Point.³¹ Promoted as “Pioneers’ Day,” the opening ceremony combined commemorative pageantry with the carnivalesque colonial exoticism of the popular week-long Indian Days held each July in Banff, and the Indian stampedes that were intermittently attached to the Calgary Exhibition.³² CPR publicity chief John Murray Gibbon (who was a Windermere landowner) had arranged for still photographers and a movie crew to be on hand for the weekend’s events, resulting in extensive visual documentation. The lodge at the CPR’s bungalow camp served as the muster station for spectators observing the day’s events and also as a kind of boundary between past and present. No automobiles were allowed beyond the lodge. Anyone wishing to step back in time to the valley’s pioneer days was compelled to do so on foot.³³

Pioneers’ Day began in the water just off Canterbury Point, with half a dozen canoes being paddled by local settlers dressed up as voyageurs. The largest boat contained bundles of HBC blankets, and on its centreboard sat James McKay, a rancher and sawmill owner whose starched collar and tall hat identified him as playing the role of David Thompson. The “voyageurs” paddled ashore and disembarked under the eye of officials from the CPR, HBC, and CVIF, as well as reporters, photographers, and a throng of spectators. Carrying bundles of trade goods, they climbed to the crest of the point, where they were received by Ktunaxa and Secwepemc men from the nearby reserves, including several riding on horseback and carrying lances, who were dressed in “traditional” garb like embroidered buckskin shirts and feathered headdresses. The white “traders” and

Indians’: Images of Native People and the Red River Pageant, 1920” in S. Elizabeth Bird, ed., *Dressing in Feathers: The Construction of the Indian in American Popular Culture* (Boulder: Westview, 1996), pp. 65-78; David P. Monteyne, “Constructing Buildings and Histories: Hudson’s Bay Company Stores, 1910-1930,” *Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada Bulletin*, vol. 20, no. 4 (1995), pp. 97-103.

- 31 The emphasis on “wildness” in these displays was similar to the conflation of history and primeval wilderness that Claire Campbell identifies in later Canadian historic sites. See Campbell, “‘It Was Canadian, Then, Typically Canadian’: Revisiting Wilderness at Historic Sites,” *British Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 21, no. 1 (2008), pp. 5-34.
- 32 Just as the David Thompson Memorial Fort was an amalgam of western Canadian fur trading posts, the opening day’s events were an amalgam of western Canadian pageants and celebrations. It borrowed the emphasis on friendly relations between Natives and fur traders from the Indian pageant organized for the 250th anniversary of the HBC held at Lower Fort Garry near Winnipeg in 1920, which was meant to show how the conquest of the wilderness in Canada had been peaceful, in contrast to the violence of the American West. The “best Indian” contest and parade was borrowed from Banff Indian Days, held annually since the early 1910s. Due to opposition from officials in the Department of Indian Affairs, Native participation the Calgary exhibition had been limited to one-off stampedes in 1912 and 1919. The stampede only became a regular feature of Calgary’s annual exhibition in 1923. See Geller, “Hudson’s Bay Company Indians”; Laurie Meijer-Drees, “‘Indians’ Bygone Past: The Banff Indian Days, 1902-1945,” *Past Imperfect*, vol. 2 (1993), pp. 7-28; Hugh A. Dempsey, “The Indians and the Stampede” in Max Foran, ed., *Icon, Brand, Myth: The Calgary Stampede* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2008), pp. 47-72.
- 33 Two silent movies produced by Fox Movietone News appear to have been made from the film shot that weekend, though both were mislabeled geographically: *Indians From All Parts of Western America Meet Here in Spectacular Pow-wow, Cranbrook, BC* (1922); and *Mountain Indians Hold Big Sports Day, Cranbrook, BC* (1922). Catalogued in Colin Browne, *Motion Picture Production in British Columbia, 1898-1940* (Victoria: British Columbia Provincial Museum, 1979).

“traditional” Natives went through the motions of exchanging furs and blankets before smoking a peace pipe to signify friendly relations between them.



Figure 3: Poster promoting the opening of the David Thompson Memorial Fort, 1922.

Source: Windermere Valley Museum and Archives poster collection.

After the pantomime diplomacy, the men headed towards the encampment local Native families had set up along the crest of the point. This consisted of a semi-circle of tipis with fire pits, cooking instruments, cradleboards, travois, and many ponies and horses. Joined by the Native women and children (also attired in “traditional” garb), the assembled party set out in a column towards the fort. Numbering around 70, they marched past photographers and the moving picture camera crew before being allowed through the gate of the fort by musket-bearing “voyageurs.” Once everyone was inside the palisade walls, the organized pageantry came to an end. Lunch was served from inside the fort. Local Natives were induced to pose for visitors’ snapshots and answer questions about their customs and material culture. Cash prizes were awarded to the event’s

Native participants in categories like “best teepee” and “best dressed squaw”—Banff Indian Days had featured similar contests for years.³⁴ While prizes were offered for costumes deemed particularly colourful or picturesque, everyone who participated received groceries and a small payment. These inducements may suggest that Invermere boosters hoped to make the pageant a recurring event, which would require good relations with local Native people. The awards were followed by a round of speeches. J. B. Tyrell praised the Memorial Fort as western Canada’s “first public recognition” of David Thompson. Robert Randolph Bruce promised it would become “a great museum.”³⁵

The elaborate opening ceremony must have made boosters and businesses owners in the Windermere district feel optimistic about the Memorial Fort’s potential for drawing tourists. Two of Canada’s biggest companies had paid to build a large, eye-catching historical attraction that was unique in western Canada, and Pioneers’ Day was publicized far and wide. The “fort” looked certain to help Invermere benefit from the stream of auto tourists expected to flow over the soon-to-be-completed Banff-Windermere Highway. That Robert Randolph Bruce and Basil Hamilton were both founding members of the British Columbia Historical Association in 1922 indicates how serious they were about developing the Memorial Fort into a major attraction. However, it soon became clear that no one in Invermere had the funding or expertise required to do so.

A Shuttered Attraction

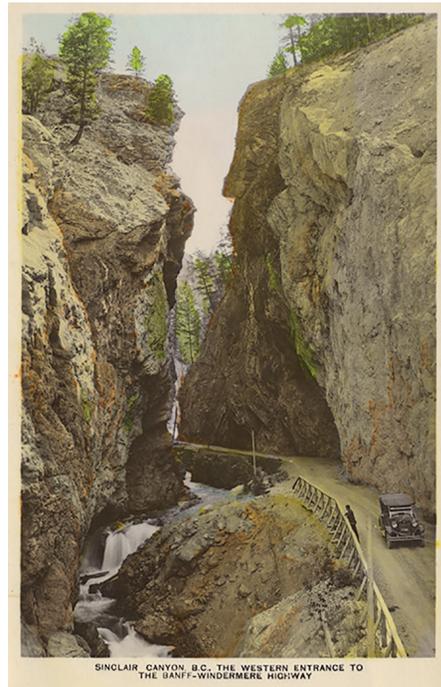
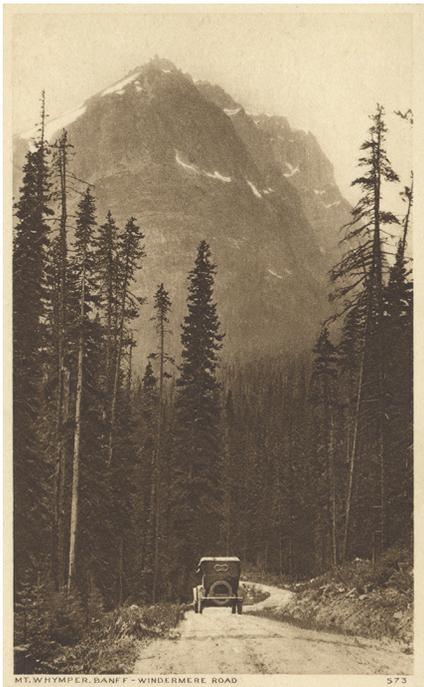
The Banff-Windermere Highway opened in June 1923. There were many fine vistas along it, and park wardens strove to attract deer and elk to the verges of the road for motorists’ viewing pleasure.³⁶ The road’s greatest kinesthetic thrill was its steep final descent to the Columbia valley, where it dove and wound through the Iron Gates and Sinclair Canyon. After hours or even days driving through glaciated mountains and sparse, high-elevation forests that were punctuated by only a couple rustic auto camps, passing through these claustrophobically narrow defiles to reach the built-up area around the hot springs and park gate filled auto tourists with a sense of returning to civilization.

More than a thousand automobiles passed between Banff and the upper Columbia valley in the summer of 1923. Motorists who left the valley’s main road and drove into Invermere could hardly avoid seeing the David Thompson Memorial Fort on the point across Windermere Lake. The view instilled a strong sense of romance in auto tourists who were primed to appreciate the value of history after traversing a sea of scenic but lonely mountains. Furthermore, travelling over rough roads in the open-top automobiles of the early 1920s put motorists in much closer proximity to the elements than railway travel did, which led many to feel a sense of kinship with nineteenth-century explorers. Such sentiments would

34 Meijer-Drees, “Indians’ Bygone Past.”

35 *Cranbrook Courier*, September 1, 1922, p. 1; Tyrell, *David Thompson: Canada’s Greatest Geographer*.

36 Tina Loo, *States of Nature: Conserving Canada’s Wildlife in the Twentieth Century* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006), pp. 28-29; Lothian, *A History of Canada’s National Parks*, vol. 3, pp. 76-78.



Figures 4 and 5: Postcards from the 1920s showing the natural scenery and exaggerated verticality of the terrain along the Banff-Windermere Highway.
Source: Author's collection.

be heightened for those who had read about the history of exploration and the fur trade in western North America. When Regina resident R. V. Bing visited Invermere, he described the fort as appearing “as solitary and lonely as when first built.” “In this enchanted spot the mind turns irresistibly to old forgotten days, and the rush and hurry of modern life seems vain and futile and very far away,” he recorded in his diary.

[W]ith only a very small effort of imagination one can again extend the wings of the palisades down to the water's edge, where several birch-bark canoes are drawn up on the shore, place some teepees round the outside of the stockade and people the enclosure with a motley throng of Indians and trappers.... All passed and gone these many years, spirits of those old adventurers, both white and red, and to a sympathetic mind a brief subconscious glimpse of their old time activities is for a moment allowed.³⁷

While the Memorial Fort was evocative from a distance, it proved disappointing up close. Bing strolled over to the “fort” after checking in at the CPR's bungalow

³⁷ Fort Steele Heritage Town Archive, R. V. Bing collection, 1923 travel diary, chap. 5. Also see John T. Faris, *Seeing Canada* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1924), pp. 160-161; M. O. Hammond, *Canadian Footprints: A Study in Foregrounds and Backgrounds* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1926), p. 279.

camp, only to find it unoccupied and locked up. “[F]rom what we could see through the windows the museum lacks exhibits,” he complained.³⁸

Invermere boosters had failed to develop a plan for operating the fort as a tourist attraction. It was an impressive-looking building, but hollow in the sense that it lacked both cultural apparatus inside and popular support from the community. No one in the village could replace the artifacts the CPR and HBC had loaned for the grand opening ceremony. No one had the skills to make displays about David Thompson or the fur trade. No volunteer historical society was formed, and no curator was hired. No one knew how to operate a museum, and this fact is not surprising, for there were none in the British Columbia Interior at that time.³⁹ Bruce tried to convince the Windermere Board of Trade, the HBC, and the CPR to take the fort over on a permanent basis but was rebuffed. He then tried to donate it to the National Parks Branch, and commissioner J. B. Harkin was willing to accept it until the Historic Sites and Monuments Board warned him it was “only a replica.” Lawrence Burpee, president of the new Canadian Historical Association, initially indicated that it was willing to accept the deed to the Memorial Fort, but ultimately demurred for lack of funds with which to maintain and promote the property. The fort proved impossible to give away. Even the CVIF denied responsibility for it.⁴⁰

The parties that for more than a decade had been driving the effort to make the Windermere district into a major tourist destination had run out of gas. Robert Randolph Bruce and the CVIF had coaxed and cajoled companies and governments into building the Banff-Windermere Highway, establishing Kootenay National Park, and constructing the David Thompson Memorial Fort, but by 1923 both were in dire financial straits, and Bruce, a widower, was also in failing health. The idea to develop the Memorial Fort into a major historical tourist attraction ground to a halt without their political connections and financial backing. No displays were assembled. No more pageants were organized. One year after it had opened, the Memorial Fort sat empty, without even a sign to explain its significance to curious onlookers. It had served as an historical tourist attraction for even less time than Kootenae House had served as a fur trade post.

The David Thompson Memorial Fort was intermittently used as a community hall during the 1920s, hosting social events like dances and the fall fair.⁴¹ Robert

38 Fort Steele Heritage Town Archive, R. V. Bing collection, 1923 travel diary, chap. 5.

39 On the absence of museums in the Interior prior to 1930, see Kathleen Trayner, “Historical Origins and Collective Memory in British Columbia’s Community-Based Museums, 1925-1975” (MA thesis, University of Victoria, 2003), chap. 1.

40 WVMA, David Thompson Memorial Fort collection, Bruce to Fitzgerald, July 13, 1921; Bruce to R. V. Beatty, president, Canadian Pacific Railway, July 4, 1922; J. Dennis, chief commissioner, CPR Department of Colonization and Development to Bruce, July 31, 1922; Bruce to Henry S. Fleming, October 12, 1923; J. B. Harkin, superintendent, Canadian National Parks to Bruce, August 18, 1922 and September 5, 1924. Quotation is from last letter cited.

41 WVMA, David Thompson Memorial Fort collection, “Memories Collected at the Feb. 18, 2000 Heritage Luncheon.” The first big community event hosted at the Memorial Fort was a February 1923 showing of the films made at its grand opening the previous summer. The second was a dance held after the opening ceremony for the Banff-Windermere Highway in July 1923. Art historian Leslie Dawn describes plans to exhibit W. Langdon Kihn’s CPR-sponsored portraits of Canadian Native people, but no newspaper report indicates this plan was pursued. See Leslie Dawn, *National Visions, National Blindness: Canadian Art and*

Randolph Bruce was rescued from the CVIF's failed development schemes in the Windermere district in 1926 when he was appointed Lieutenant-Governor of British Columbia. At his urging, the CPR occasionally sent crews to help maintain the exterior of the "fort," but by the late 1920s changing traffic patterns on the region's roads had the company keen to be free from its vague obligations to the site.⁴² The completion of an automobile road between Banff and Golden, BC, via the Kicking Horse Pass in 1927 made it possible for motorists to do a loop trip through Banff, Yoho, and Kootenay national parks without passing near Invermere. This new route resulted in a sharp decline in business at the CPR's Lake Windermere bungalow camp even as a growing number of auto tourists were visiting the Canadian Rockies. The 1929 announcement of the Big Bend road project between Golden and Revelstoke then effectively guaranteed that any future trans-Canada highway would bypass the Windermere district. The CPR sold its bungalow camp in Invermere that year and thereafter denied any responsibility for the Memorial Fort.⁴³

The fort's failure to put David Thompson in the public eye was a bitter disappointment for Basil Hamilton. Boosters and tourism promoters had seized upon his enthusiasm for the famous explorer, but for their own ends and with little success. He therefore sought official recognition for the real Kootenae House, located two kilometres north of Invermere. Hamilton acquired the property that contained the remnants of the post, and—after clarifying that the site being discussed was not the ersatz 1922 Memorial Fort—convinced the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada to purchase it from him.⁴⁴ Kootenae House was designated a national historic site in 1934 and marked with a stone cairn and bronze plaque.⁴⁵ For local businesses that hoped to profit by selling food, gas, and lodging to passing pleasure travellers, however, the authentic Kootenae House was little more of an asset than the shuttered simulation at Canterbury Point. It was located down an obscure side road that led into the hills above town, meaning auto tourists had actively to seek it out.

By 1940 the David Thompson Memorial Fort was in serious disrepair. The palisade walls were falling down. The foundation was spalling. The roof leaked. Ten years later the weathered, dilapidated structure resembled an actual nineteenth-century ruin. Local history enthusiasts and profit-minded private operators launched several campaigns to restore the forlorn fort during the mid and late 1950s, when tourism to the BC Interior was picking up rapidly and historically themed tourist attractions were proliferating in western Canada. Many tourism promoters in southeastern British Columbia invoked the image of David

Identities in the 1920s (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006), p. 146.

42 WVMA, David Thompson Memorial Fort collection, W. H. Cleland to Basil Gardom, superintendent, Construction and Repairs, Western Hotels, Canadian Pacific Railway, May 22, 1925 and May 31, 1927; Gardom to Cleland, June 3, 1927.

43 WVMA, David Thompson Memorial Fort collection, H. F. Matthews, general manager, Western Hotels, Canadian Pacific Railway to W. H. Cleland, secretary-treasurer, CVIF, February 11, 1929; Bruce to Cleland, February 20, 1929; Matthews to Cleland, April 23, 1929.

44 Parks Canada, *Kootenae House National Historic Site*, pp. 8-12.

45 *Ibid.*, pp. 22-24.

Thompson to lure auto tourists into their businesses and communities. One 1954 travelogue claimed that “all you need now to follow Thompson’s path is the family car and one of the road maps the oil companies are so eager to supply.”⁴⁶

Boosters and merchants in Invermere hoped to “rejuvenate” the old simulated fort in time for the 1957 sesquicentennial of Kootenae House, but the cost of making it into a museum proved beyond their means. Their requests for assistance from the provincial government, National Parks Branch, Historic Sites and Monuments Board, and—ironically—the Hudson’s Bay Company were all turned down on the basis that the “fort” was not an authentic historical structure.⁴⁷ Any lingering hopes that some tourism value could be salvaged from the crumbling Memorial Fort were dashed in 1963 when the provincial government announced it would develop a major historical tourist attraction at Fort Steele, a roadside “ghost town” located 115 kilometres south of Invermere. The David Thompson Memorial Fort was torn down in 1969 and Canterbury Point—which by then was known locally as Fort Point—was subdivided for summer recreational homes that were marketed towards well-heeled Calgarians, for whom Invermere was now just a four-hour drive away.⁴⁸

The construction and failure of the David Thompson Memorial Fort as an historical attraction shows how much, and also how little, ambitious boosters and tourism promoters could accomplish in a small hinterland community during the early interwar years. Robert Randolph Bruce and the CVIF used auto tourism’s growing popularity with wealthy North Americans to convince the provincial and federal government to build the Banff-Windermere Highway and then establish a national park along it. Subsequently, when it became clear that Invermere would have to compete for tourist dollars against other attractions and destinations in the region, they identified David Thompson and the history of western exploration as new and popular themes that would differentiate it from those competitors, and they found powerful corporate sponsors willing to pay for and promote the Memorial Fort. Even the large sums that governments and companies poured into developing tourist infrastructure for the Windermere district did not guarantee success, however. Isolation within western North America’s emerging network of arterial roads was a major problem. The upper Columbia valley was difficult to reach for motorists from coastal population centres, while Invermere and the Memorial Fort were located just far enough from the main road through the valley so as to be “off the beaten path.” The Memorial Fort might have proven capable of luring large numbers of auto tourists into Invermere if it had been permanently stocked with artifacts and displays to make it a proper museum, but there was no

46 J. H. Stewart Reid, *Mountains, Men, and Rivers: British Columbia in Legend and Story* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1954), p. 76.

47 WVMA, David Thompson Memorial Fort collection, W. C. Davidson, Secretary, Windermere District Board of Trade to Ralph Foreman, June 12, 1956; Davidson to Willard Ireland, Provincial Archivist, November 9, 1956; Davidson to Ireland, January 7, 1957; Davidson to H. G. McWilliams, BC Parks Division, February 11, 1957; W. C. Davidson, Secretary, Historical Association of East Kootenay, Windermere Section, to Ireland, March 2, 1957; F. B. Walker, executive assistant, Hudson’s Bay Company, Canada Committee, to Davidson, March 12, 1957.

48 “David Thompson Fort Demolished,” *Lake Windermere Valley Echo*, May 22, 1969, p. 1.

opportunity to do so. It had been sturdily built, but proved intrinsically unstable in the sense of being tied to the fortunes of Bruce and the CVIF. Big subsidies from governments and corporations could not make up for the tenuous nature of local support. Finally, the Memorial Fort stood alone not only in a geographic sense, but also in cultural and economic terms. There were no museums or purpose-built historical attractions in the Canadian Rockies or British Columbia Interior when it was built, and there would not be any for a decade afterwards. It was an innovative response to the new imperatives of auto tourism, but, as a historically themed tourist attraction, it anticipated a trend that had yet to develop fully in western North America. The failure of the David Thompson Memorial Fort was not inevitable, but neither is it surprising, given how much it predated similar developments in western Canada.