

## **Bluerock Creek Trail**

The Bluerock Creek Trail follows one of several tributary streams of the Sheep River and leads to the site of an old sawmill camp. Such sites are not rare in these stream valleys. Many stories survive from the days when lumber camps operated on Bluerock Creek, Dyson Creek, and Junction Creek.

Many of these camps were run by men and their families who worked to supply nearby areas with lumber. The last camp closed in 1955, ending a period of sporadic and rather unprofitable logging.

## **Centuries of Change**

**(Stop 1)** Long before people explored here, forces of nature changed the land. The sandstone ridges along the canyon are made of ancient marine sediments that accumulated and hardened into thick layers of rock during the Cretaceous geological age, millions of years ago. Mountain building, and erosion by flowing water, requiring further millions of years, helped create valleys like this one.

Three major glaciations — long periods of time when thick ice sheets covered the land — caused more recent changes. Glaciers slowly moved down mountain sides, scraping rock and filling V-shaped valleys with gravel and silt.

Ahead of you, notice where the forces of glacial meltwater and seasonal run-off have deposited gentle slopes of ground-up shale, sand and clay. These slopes act as seed beds, so that in the last few hundred years tall thick forests of lodgepole pine and Engelmann spruce have established themselves. The climatic effects of solar radiation, temperature, precipitation and chinook winds all affect the type of vegetation that grows here today.

However, fire and man's past activities show their effects as well. Watch for signs such as old stumps and clearings further along the trail.

## **First Loggers**

**(Stop 2)** Logging along the Sheep River began shortly after the first settler arrived at what is now Turner Valley. John Lincham, the first member of parliament for Calgary-Okotoks, established a logging camp on Junction Creek about 1900 and began to float logs down the Sheep River to his mill at Okotoks. Straight across the canyon from here you can see the valley of Junction Creek.

Lincham's crews harvested timber along Bluerock Creek as well. His operation finished in 1910 when a rash of forest fires spread through the area, stopping further harvesting. About 30 years passed before loggers returned to this part of the Sheep River.

## **Mid-Century Felling**

**(Stop 3)** This old stump is a good spot to take a breather. In 1947 two lumberjacks wrestled with a 60 pound Hornet chainsaw to fell the 50-foot spruce that lived here.

Can you guess which way it fell? The men used axes to limb branches and Swedesaws to "buck up" - that is, to saw the tree into workable lengths. The "skidder" then hitched the logs to his horse and hauled them off to the mill site.

Unlike other areas along the Sheep River, where 1940's loggers salvaged poles from earlier forest fires, green timber was cut here. Regulations ensured that trees with less than 10 inches stump diameter were left to grow - resulting in the forest we see around us today. A selective pattern of removing trees also left younger growth to check erosion and prevent silt from washing into Bluerock Creek and the Sheep River.

## **The Saw Mill**

**(Stop 4)** "Whoa, easy, girl."

The skidder quieted his draft horses, before unhooking the load of logs and heading his team back into the forest.

The aroma of freshly sawn spruce spiced the air as logs met the 40-inch saw blade of Napp Lefavre's mill. A "75" Case steamer chuffed smoke and another rough slab was cleaved off. Five men including a fireman and an engineer operated Lefavre's mill on this site in 1947. Wages were \$1.00 a day - take it or leave it. On a good day the mill could saw as much as 12,000 board-feet of rough lumber.

A cluster of board and canvas bunk-houses, and a cookhouse, sat near the edge of this clearing. Traces of an old bridge, over which the lumber was trucked out, can be seen along the creek below. Slabs and sawdust were discarded down the slope. Notice the skid trails leading into this site and a few other remnants partially hidden in the grass - rusty bolts, old boards and cinders.

Lefavre's cutting area was not a large one. Like most other '40's mill operators in the Sheep River area, he closed down after a few years of operation.

## **Clean Up**

**(Stop 5)** The logging camps along the Sheep River eventually had to close because of dwindling profits and shrinking payrolls. Local markets didn't provide sufficient demand. Cheap and efficient transportation to Calgary was lacking. And hauling timber to Turner Valley was dangerous and time consuming because of steep slopes and narrow mountain roads. The last operation to close was Maclean's camp in 1955.

Forestry regulations were obviously less stringent than they are now. Rusting scrap, slabs and sawdust were left on several of the old mill sites.

Piles of rotting logs remained on some stream banks. However, in the late '50's and '60's, forestry crews cleaned up the sites and prepared them for forest reclamation.

## **Resources For Tomorrow**

**(Stop 6)** The thud of axes and the whine of saws are rarely heard in these forests now. The land along the Sheep River, and tributaries like Bluerock Creek, are now zoned for recreation. These forests are relatively young, and the timber here won't be harvested for many years. Just as campgrounds and trails are carefully designed and located, any future logging also will be carefully planned and controlled.

### Trail Quiz

We hope you've enjoyed the walk along Bluerock Creek trail. Now, let's see what you remember! To help us design future trail guides, we'd appreciate some feedback from you.

Answer true or false by checking the appropriate box.

1. Much of the available timber in the vicinity of Junction Creek and Bluerock Creek has been logged at one time or another.  
 T                       F
2. All available timber was cut from Bluerock Creek in the 1940's.  
 T                       F
3. Moving water has contributed to the development of forests in the Sheep River valley.  
 T                       F
4. The canyon walls in Bluerock Creek prevented early loggers from getting in to cut timber.  
 T                       F
5. The last logging camp in the Sheep River area was John Lineham's.  
 T                       F
6. Logging may again take place in the Sheep River area if it is properly controlled.  
 T                       F
7. Land zoning means that a number of compatible uses can occur at one time.  
 T                       F

**Answers:    T        F        T        F        F        T        T**