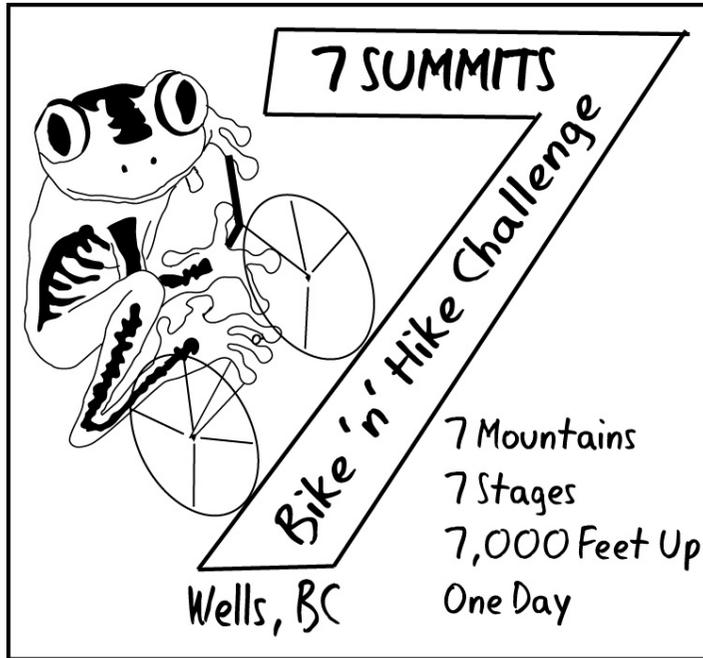


## Route Guide



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Written and produced by Dave Jorgenson, with the support of Barkerville Historic Park and the Wells Historical Society [www.whitegold.ca/biking.html](http://www.whitegold.ca/biking.html)

Welcome! This is an interpretive guide to the trails that you will be travelling during the Challenge. Its purpose is to explain and bring to life the sites and sights that you'll be passing. There is a lot to tell about this area, and many of the comments in this guide are a bare introduction to the subjects, but we hope that they help you to experience the route in a deeper and more meaningful way. Enjoy!

### Start - Barkerville:

In 1861 Williams Creek was known as Humbug Creek, but persistent work, notably by Billy Barker, broke the secrets of Williams Creek. The town of Barkerville was born and, literally, shaped the nation of Canada. The rush to Barkerville cemented Britain's interest in keeping British Columbia out of the hands of American expansionists, and the large gold reserves cemented the interest of Upper Canada in adding BC to the Confederation.

Heading uphill you leave Barkerville via its original front door at **Chinatown**. You are now travelling on the Cariboo Waggon Road, and immediately entering **Blackjack Canyon**, a strangely gold-free region of Williams Creek. It didn't take miners long though to discover that the original creek bed ran down the other side of what looked like a rock bluff but is actually a rock island (the large bluffs on your left). Miners dug down to bedrock on the other side, extracted the gold, and Williams Creek now runs down its original prehistoric route. You regain the creek at the head of the canyon

and at the foot of **Richfield**.

*(Photo – A long history of mountain biking is demonstrated by this photo from the turn of the previous century -1900's mountain bikers above Blackjack Canyon)*



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**Richfield Courthouse**, BC's oldest remaining courthouse, was the scene of notorious Judge Begbie's control over unruly miners in the 1800's. Richfield began at the Blackjack Claim and ran up to the Courthouse. It was a booming mix of all night saloons, stores, sluice boxes and miners' cabins, now gone to dust and overgrown with bush.

From here, the road now climbs steeply and relentlessly for the next few kilometres, passing above **upper Williams Creek**, which is a beautiful winter playground for snowshoeing and cross country skiing.

**Up from Richfield:** The road you're grunting up eventually flattens and joins a mine road feeding in from the right (you'll be riding that way later, so note this spot). A short distance up from here is a large boulder on the right and a pretty sub-alpine meadow on the left. You are at **Summit Rock**, which marks a watershed summit (you don't get to count this one!), where you pass from the Williams Creek watershed to the Jack of Clubs watershed. Signs here point across the meadow to two hiking trails, Groundhog Lake via Ditchline and Powderhouse. The Agnes route follows an ancient ditch line, and its wet, narrow trail is a beautiful place to walk and enjoy wildflowers. Stay on the historic road though, for cyclists, the ride ahead is fun, as you now roll up and down terrain, passing an emergency shelter which marks the turn off from the last remaining wild portion of the **Cariboo Waggon Road**, and eventually rejoining the ditchline trail at Cooper's Cabin.

The **Cariboo Waggon Road** leads, ultimately to the ghost town of Stanley, via Elk Mountain and Milk Ranch Pass. This is a great bike trip, for another day! From Stanley, you can ride on to Vancouver! The Cariboo Waggon Road, which originally ran from Yale to Barkerville was completed in 1865 by the Royal Engineers. Its main purposes were to aid in the transport of the literal tons of gold back to Victoria, and to help establish England's sovereignty over British Columbia. Its construction up through the nearly impassable Fraser Canyon and over the mountains to Barkerville was a feat of engineering in its day, and labelled the "8<sup>th</sup> Wonder of the World.

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From Stanley, it rose over the mountains to here, and came down the route that you just rode up. The road was so successfully laid out at that time that today's modern highway follows it along almost exactly the same route, except for the final section which was re-routed through Devil's Canyon in 1885 to avoid the deep snows common here in winter.

**Cooper's Cabin** comes up on your left and marks the spot where the ditch-line hiking trail rejoins the old mine road for the final pitch to Groundhog Lake. Not much remains of this cabin, built in 1897 by Bill Brown, famous for hand shovelling the drifts in the notorious Devils Canyon in the late 1800's! Bill eventually lived to be 100 years old despite his hard labour. Instead of a lonely cabin on a mountainside this was once a stopping place for people walking between Barkerville and Stanley, Van Winkle or upper Lightning Creek.

Not far from here the road gets steep and the large boulders make it difficult riding. Beautiful sloping meadows rolling downward to the road let you know you are getting close to the lake. Notice in these meadows some tragic single-track damage made by dirt bikes as they snaked over this wet lush landscape a few years ago. These tire tracks create unbroken paths for water to flow, accelerating erosion, and changing the ecology of the meadows permanently (*see photo right*). The road you're on makes for great alpine access, but when it leads to negligent riding techniques such as this it means disaster for us all.



### **Groundhog Lake**

The final 100 m pitch to the lake is exceptionally steep and bouldery. There is "hazard" flagging tape here, and if you don't think you're going to ride down this section on your return, you could leave your bike in the clearing to the right instead of pushing it up and walking it back. **Groundhog Lake** signals the end of your

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first biking stage. Ride up to the front of Groundhog cabin, on the left shore, built through a partnership with local snowmobile and ski clubs in this shared-use recreation area. Groundhog Lake was actually created by miners as a water catchment area. The water levels now are about 10 feet lower than they were in the early part of the 1900's. Today the lake fits perfectly as a beautiful alpine tarn lake set against the backdrop of the steep cliffs of Mount Agnes.

Leave your bike and helmet here. The best route to the summit is to circle the left shoreline of the lake and head up the col at the back before following the faint trail along the spine of Agnes. Agnes has two summit cairns. The first is a memorial cairn, but hiking a little farther you come to the “7 Summits” Cairn, with expansive views in



all directions and your first poker card. Follow the ridge as it travels east toward Bald Mountain. Stay as high as possible. As you approach the saddle, there is a good track restored by the Friends of Barkerville. It travels through broad meadows, with beautiful views of Mt. Burdett to the south. Eventually it joins what is now a quad track which leads you to the shoulder of Bald. Proceed across this more level ground to a wooden signpost

welcoming you to Bald Mountain. This is your second summit, and there are cards there in a tin. Bald Mountain is a broad rolling landscape and home to the 1861 Pack Trail that comes up from Keithley Creek way to the south.

Take a moment to circumnavigate the small tree island SE of the post. From here you can see Burdett, Mt. Tinsdale and Yanks Peak in the foreground, Mt's Kaza and Ishpa in the mid-ground and Mt. Matthew at Ghost Lake and the peaks above Quesnel Lake in the distant south. From this intersection you can travel south to Racetrack Flats and Antler Creek, northeast to the 1861 Pack Trail route down to Richfield, North along the spine of Powderhouse

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Ridge and ultimately back to Summit rock, or, **our route**.

Follow the flagging North, across the broad grass meadow, keeping 2 Sisters Mtn in your sights. Across this meadow, you'll strike the distinct mark of the Powderhouse Trail. Travel less than 1 km to the intersection with the **VanWinkle connector**. (Yellow sign points to Groundhog Lake). Turn left on this route Follow this route as it perfectly traverses back under the two summits you've just bagged, and above the invitingly lush meadows of the Jack of Clubs Creek headwaters. From Bald it's tempting,(and possible) to drop over the ridge at any point, and cross the wet meadows and go up the other side, but the worn trail, created by miners and packers is much more efficient, and ultimately, faster! The trail crosses more scarring by ATV's before climbing steadily on a traverse around a ridge of Agnes, through a pass at Barbara Lake (a dry pond) and descending back to the back door of the Groundhog Cabin.

The **Bike Route down from Groundhog Cabin** is one of the most technical and exhilarating parts of your entire trip. The first two kilometres down from the lake are winding, steep and covered with loose large boulders. Being on a double track road may lead you into a false sense of security, and this just adds to the hazard. Also remember, if you are one of the first riders going down, expect to meet stragglers still coming up on this section. Walking down some of the steepest parts is no sign of wimpiness!

Take this rolling mine road route back down past **Cooper's Cabin** and **Summit Rock**. Not too much farther, the road forks and the main route continues flat. The road from Barkerville, that you rode earlier, comes up on the right fork. **STAY STRAIGHT ON THE LEFT FORK**. You are now riding on the **Lowhee Ditch**. This is one of the most magnificent feats of construction in the Cariboo! Today, the edge has been bulldozed flat, and it has been made into a road, with water in the remnants of the original ditch appearing to your left.

These ditches were made to transport water over vast distances from various watersheds to mines. The **Lowhee** is over 16 km long, and

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took 3 camps of labourers 3 years to build! Ditches were built to exacting specifications; typically 7 feet wide at the top, 4 feet wide at the bottom and dropping at an exact rate of 9 feet to the mile. They were dug by hand and with dynamite, carved out of a wild landscape, sometimes through solid rock and sometimes supported on elaborate wooden trestles to shorten their route through steep ravine sections on this route. You can see 100's of metres of rock carved sections and the one climb on the route bypasses a section of collapsed trestle still visible below you. The idea was to keep the water as high on the mountain as possible so that when it reached your mine, you could develop the greatest amount of hydraulic pressure by diverting it into a pipe down to your mine site. Every mountain in the Cariboo hides at least one of these forgotten feats of construction. The Lowhee Ditch was one of the most complex, and now makes an amazing and pleasant bike traverse, high above Williams creek through a classic sub-alpine forest.

The trail eventually descends off this ditch and races down to the **Lower Lowhee Ditch**, and the Carnavon mine at the summit of Stout's Gulch. Watch for the **flagging tape and signs that mark the turnoff to Wells**. (If you miss this turn, you'll arrive at the closed, modern mine facility at the summit of Stouts Gulch, and the top of a road that could carry you back to Barkerville if you were inclined.) **Follow the sign to cross a ditch and ride a short brushy connector to the Cow Mountain Mine Road.**

This road is built on top of the **Lower Lowhee Ditch**, and was recently upgraded by International Wayside as an improved access



to a hard rock mining operation at the head of Stouts Gulch. Again you can see the remains of the original ditch in places. Almost immediately on your left you pass the wreckage of the **Lowhee Camp**. In the 1930's this was a large thriving camp used to service the hydraulic operations in the

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valley below. A short distance further you pass some of the original Hydraulic pipe, hand riveted by miners. This legacy of the early mining period lingers throughout the Cariboo. Many of the pieces are used as culverts on private roads!

As you cross the bridge over **Watson's Gulch** and over the next section of road, look across the valley. Use your imagination to draw a gently curving line from the tree line on the far side to your side. In 1860, that was the valley bottom! Miners removed up to 200 feet of gravel to reach down to bedrock (*see photo*) and many people believe that Lowhee Creek was the biggest gold producer in the Cariboo. Today, half of Wells is built on the spread out, washed out gravel remains of what was once the Lowhee Valley!

Just before you emerge on the front of **Cow Mountain**, there is some flagging at a 2 km sign on the road. Leave your bike here and hike the half kilometre to Pokey summit, a brushy summit, with a small aerial tower, cairn, and memorial to Pokey, a local dog hero! Your third card is in the summit cairn. You are on the summit of "Little Cow" actually, and Big Cow, to the southwest is an enormous ridge, with extensive sub-alpine meadows. In the 1800's cattle roamed these meadows, and were driven in small groups to the Butcher's Bench, between Barkerville and Richfield. Here they were slaughtered on a daily basis to feed the demands for fresh meat from the large mining community.

As you descend the upper pitch of Cow you have a perfect easterly view past Mount Patchett to the razor sharp edge of **Mount Kaza**, inside the Bowron Lake Chain. As you begin your descent of the second pitch you can look northeast, past Slide Mountain and see the bulk of **Mount Cochrane** rising in the distance north of the Bowrons.

Return to your bike, and proceed on the road to the front of Cow Mountain. There, the road drops steeply to the right and slices back and forth across the front of the mountain. About 500 m after passing the **mine portal at the 1400 level** (there are some buildings and trailers here), a diagonal road comes down from the right and

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slices below you to the left. **Turn left**, onto this road, instead of staying on the gravel all the way down. You are now heading down to the main mine processing site for Cariboo Gold Quartz Mine (*see 1940 photo on page 9*). Watch out for a couple of loose cables that stretch over top of the road, soon after you start on it. The various portals into the mountain were measured by their height in feet from the top! Thus the 1400 is higher on the mountain than the main portal at the 1600, where the main processing took place.

This grassy rutted road is a little technical. At one time it was a busy good road which led past a functioning water tower, Manager's houses, apartments, core shacks, and a sprawling collection of processing buildings. There are more than 100 km of underground tunnels in and under these mountains carved by miners between 1934 and 1960.



**Caution** - The road eventually brings you out to a long dismantled bridge crossing of Lowhee Creek. There is a possible, but technical ride down a narrow gravel, single

track ramp on the right to the creek, and across. Climb back out onto the Lowhee dike and glide down **Gold Quartz Drive** to the **Frog on the Bog** to check in on the completion of your first leg.

**WELLS** - In 1930, Jack of Clubs Lake ended at the large gravel expanse of the Lowhee Tailings. Clarke's Roadhouse, built in 1902 and the associated sawmill were the few signs of life before reaching Barkerville from this direction. In 1930 Fred Wells had a vision that a Hard Rock Mine could flourish here and hired planners to build a town to house the required workers. By the early 40's the town housed 4,000 people, stores were open 24 hours a day, and

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Wells was bigger than Quesnel or Prince George.

The ski hill in Lowhee Gulch hosted the Western Regional Ski Jumping Championships, there was a horse-race track on the meadow, stores sold fancy clothing, records and radios, there was a ticket office for Pacific Great Eastern Railway. Banks, Pool Halls, and movie theatres flourished, an enormous community hall housed a performance stage, ballet room and shooting gallery, there were



tennis courts, a hospital on the hill, and both an elementary and high school. Millions of dollars worth of gold left town at a time when most of the rest of the country was suffering unemployment and the Great Depression.

(Photo - Pooley Street in the

1930's).

### **Checkpoint #1 is at the Frog on the Bog.**

Head east along the highway, past Stromville, once a suburb of Wells, lined on both sides with houses, and now a good place to look for spring rhubarb in old, deserted gardens. Just after the corner at the One Mile turnoff, the next straight stretch was home to an interesting reminder of our Gold rush history. In the year 2001, a section of this highway dropped into the ground revealing a perfect rectangle of a mine shaft, abandoned, forgotten, and covered over for 100 years before revealing itself, and requiring numerous truckloads of fill to close back up to the surface again!

Further along, in the vicinity of the airport, there was a dredge operating on the meadow in the 1950's. Through a series of miscalculations the tail conveyor jammed and the dredge, in the middle of a gold harvest, filled with gravel, tipped backwards and promptly sank 30 feet into its own pond. The rumour was that it was filled with unclaimed gold, and due to a lack of technology, the wreck remained unsalvaged for some time. Finally, a new owner was able to dive on this intriguing piece of history but there is no report about how well he did! Turn left at the **Bowron Road**, ride through

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the once prosperous Ballarat claim, and turn left again at the T-junction to head towards **Bowron Lake**.

**Forest Rose Campground** is situated on the tailings of a large mine called by the same name and still being actively worked on the benches ahead of you on Valley Mountain. Three kilometres up the Bowron Road you come to the trailhead for the Yellowhawk Trail to **Mount Murray**. Leave your bike here, so we can shuttle it to the bottom of **Slide Mountain** for you. Hiking poles are strongly suggested for this section of the trail, some steep sections will require their use on the trail ahead.

The **Yellowhawk Trail** is a very old route to the summit of Mount Murray. You'll travel over a steep hill, enter the Yellowhawk Creek valley briefly, and begin a long diagonal climb across the front of the Beehive...a great backcountry ski spot in the winter. There are a number of steep uphill sections, but 'Heartbreak Hill' is the last one to lead you to a cabin built for skiers in the 1940's. Wood for this cabin was skied and dragged in during the winter on a route which began way back at the airport turnoff on the road to Barkerville at that time. Although there are a number of people who remember staying in this cabin on ski trips, today it is a pile of decaying logs and other 'historic debris'.



At the cabin site, you turn left and immediately plunge back downhill to cross a small draw and start up the actual slope of Mount Murray. As you reach the 'Whistlepig Sign' look to your right, where the **Cariboo mountains** within the Bowron Lake chain rise up beside you. Look behind you....**Barkerville** lies in the valley below, and far behind it **Mount Agnes** rises against the sky. Only a

few hours ago you were standing there!

*(Photo - C. Houser enjoying the view from Murray about 1910).*

The **Yellowhawk Trail** ends at a small pond near the summit.

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Follow the ridges and draws up to the right and summit Murray beside the radio repeater, pick up your card, and enjoy the 360 degree view.

Follow the ridges to the northeast now, The repeaters on the summit of Slide are ahead of you, and farther in the distance the twin tips of "The Two Sisters" Mountain rise behind it. As you stand at the headwaters of Alex Allen Creek, plan your route to the pass between Slide and the bulking end of the Murray complex. There is no point in going straight over the top of the last ridge section. Better to traverse high on the west face and aim for some landmarks that you pick out on the side of Slide, that will help guide you to the pass. The final ascent to **Slide** is a steep one, but your last one. This mountain is seldom ascended but affords a magnificent view due to its steep sides.

The trail down follows the southwest spine until you're well into the pine forest below, and then weaves around a steep cliff. As you get closer to Alex Allen Creek the trail continues to steepen, with the last 100 metres to the mine road worthy of a great deal of caution. At the old oil can, walk to your right along this overgrown road. Immediately you have to climb over a recent landslide before you get to a cleared single track path along the road. The end is about 1km ahead. Along this valley, in the moss, are remnants of mines



from every era. The most spectacular is a thick wood and sod dam near the mouth of the valley, perfectly intact, with a small chute at its base through which the creek still flows. As you reach the Bowron Road, you return to your bike. Look for it stashed along the trail

within view of the Bowron Road.

Ride back a short distance toward Wells before turning off on the

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**2200 road** at a large mine site. This site is home to an antique cable dredge still in working condition. This site has been producing gold continuously since the 1800's. Near here, in the 1970's a miner with a backhoe uncovered a long crevasse running across the flow of pre-glacier river. It had acted as a giant riffle in a sluice box and was packed with gold nuggets of all sizes, and never before seen by man until that day. A short uphill crank brings you to **8 Mile Lake** which is currently undergoing a major mining revival. It is a quiet lake, with a small campsite, in a beautiful setting at the bottom of Two Sisters and Slide Mountains.

As you pass the far end of the lake watch for a complicated intersection. Three roads come together here but you take the left fork uphill. This takes you up **Cornish Mountain** to Downey Pass. A good road running uphill from the pass could take you over Cornish Mountain on a great circle route to Wells via Hardscrabble Road, but **you go straight ahead**, downhill along the creeks to One Mile Lake. Stay alert. This road has ruts and loose gravel on many of the downhill corners, and beavers have flooded one section. This area was all mined at one time or another, and you can see huge piles of rock along the road which were handpiled by early miners.

Crossing the old bridge at One Mile, you rejoin the pavement. Look to your right. In 1938 you would be looking over the pasture at grazing cattle. As you race in toward Wells, past Stromville see if you can see the faint trace of the horse race track and baseball field which once existed between here and Moose Island.



Welcome to Wells. Finish by turning onto Camel Drive and congratulate yourself on a job well done!

### Need a wild Card for your Poker hand after your final check-in?

Optionally, you can ride **uptown** to the Wells General Store to pick up a 6<sup>th</sup> card for your poker hand. In its heyday, Wells had at least three

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shopping areas. **Pooley Street** was the heart of town, surrounded by 5 churches, and **Sanders Ave** ran off Pooley with an equally large array of businesses, banks, and the community hall, and 'The Tailings' were a third area. **The Community Hall**, lovingly restored now, housed a performance stage in a gymnasium, ballet room, roll-up dance floor, shooting gallery, dining rooms, and many more features. Its balloon construction and cantilevered bleachers, make it a wonder of construction even today. Wells, (still a gold producing town), is now also home to a burgeoning arts and music industry with a 26 year old School of the Arts, 6 Galleries, (operating in the telephone office, churches, meat market, theatre and boarding house), a professional theatre in the original Sunset Theatre, music festivals, and an associated residential renaissance. As the Gateway to Bowron Lake and Barkerville Park, this town is rebuilding its former glory and re-fulfilling Fred Wells' vision of community!

### Thanks for taking the Challenge!

[www.whitegold.ca/biking.html](http://www.whitegold.ca/biking.html)

#### Photo Credits

Women with Bikes - P0041 Barkerville Historic Town Archives

Dirt Bike ruts in Alpine - Dave Jorgenson

Women at Groundhog Lake- P3003 Barkerville Historic Town Archives

Hydraulic Mine operation - P3120 Barkerville Historic Town Archives

Cariboo Gold Quartz - WP01021 Wells Historical Society Archives

Pooley Street - WP00318 Wells Historical Society Archives

Houser on Mt. Murray - P2998 Barkerville Historic Town Archives

Old Mine Dam - Dave Jorgenson

Horse Race on Meadows - WP00713 Wells Historical Society Archives

### Biking in Barkerville

Barkerville is a Historic Park with specific regulations about bicycle access. For this special event we have permission to ride through Barkerville, subject to having all riding cyclists clear of the Richfield Courthouse by 9 am. If you come to Barkerville to ride on any other day you need to note the following rules, which protect the safety of horses and pedestrians inside the park:

Outside of Park operating hours, check in with Security to let them know you are riding through. Use caution and courtesy, and watch for workers, pedestrians, horse drawn and mechanical traffic. During Park operating hours from the beginning of May to the end of September, carry your bike carefully through the Visitor Information Center, tell the cashiers where you're going and proceed directly to the back road by walking past the Eldorado. Walk your bike to Richfield, not far for an athlete like you! Similarly, when you enter the park from Richfield, or by coming down Stouts Gulch, help keep the good name of Mountain Bikers by walking your bike and showing courtesy to park guests and staff. If you are including a visit to Barkerville in your trip. Leave your bike outside the gate before going shopping, or browsing.