

Trail • Rossland **News**

By Craig Baird
News Editor

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The uniqueness of the Rossland Range



Jack Mitchell photo

An Old Glory hike done on April 5, 1936.

Hiking is a part of the community fabric of Rossland. With trails leading out of town from several vantage points, it is hard not to be a hiker.

One of the most popular and challenging hikes for a would-be hiker is Old Glory, the highest mountain of the Rossland Range.

To understand how impressive Old Glory is, and the effort required to hike it, one simply has to hear a story from Rossland's early history.

Years ago, a new staff member was being escorted up to the Old Glory weather station. As the individual was escorted on snowshoes they topped Unnecessary Ridge.

Upon seeing Old Glory rising impressively above him, the new staff member quickly announced that he was quitting and he turned back to go home.

The Old Glory weather station was built in 1942. Rossland resident Bart Dudley was the first operator for the station that same year. Over the years, another Rossland resident, Wilf Gibbard, led his packhorses up and down the steep trails of the mountain to keep the station occupants supplied. Many hikers also enjoyed the benefits of the fully stocked station over the years.

The station burned down in January of 1968.

William Russell Raithby, the last operator of the station, fled the fire in light clothes and bare feet and spent 26 hours in an unheated forest hut. Three rescuers ventured up the hill in freezing temperatures, high winds and total darkness to save him. They spent five hours keeping him warm and bandaging his frostbitten feet before the weather cleared and a helicopter could be brought in to remove him.

RECREATION ON THE ROSSLAND RANGE

The Rossland Range provides an extensive number of recreational activities for all seasons. Snowboarding and snowshoeing are very popular in the winter, while hiking, horseback riding, berry picking and bear watching are popular in the summer.

The Rossland Range is also one of only three areas in the West Kootenays that is suitable for ski touring and snowshoeing, while being readily accessible from a maintained public highway in winter.

WILDLIFE OF THE ROSSLAND RANGE

Some of the rarest species of wildlife in B.C. call the Rossland Range home. The Old Glory area is also known to be in the territory of at least two grizzly bears.

Grizzlies in the area are a recovering population that lives at the very southern edge of the grizzly range for B.C.

The Rossland Range is considered to be one of the last undisturbed islands of high elevation grizzly bear year-round habitat in the southern region of B.C.

Bobcats have also been sighted in the forested areas around the Rossland Range.

Many believe that the motorized recreational use of the area is having a negative impact on the animals that live there, possibly causing them to seek other areas for their home.

Many outdoor enthusiasts are attracted to the area to view the animals that live there.

THE ECONOMIC SIDE OF THE ROSSLAND RANGE

Many people live and work in the region because of the opportunities for recreation in both winter and summer, which provides an economic windfall to the municipalities of the area.

The Red Mountain ski area uses a large part of the Rosslund Range, as does the Black Jack ski club.

The Rosslund Range is a key component in offering recreation activities to attract people to invest in the area.

FRIENDS OF THE ROSSLUND RANGE

The Friends of the Rosslund Range (FORR) is a non-profit group, which promotes and fosters understanding, appreciation and stewardship of the Rosslund Range among residents and visitors. FORR seeks to share the limited alpine lands in the Rosslund Range with historical users, while considering wildlife and environmental values.

FORR hopes to establish the Old Glory Alpine area for non-motorized recreational activity to preserve the eco-system. Several programs are funded by the group including the collection and distribution of the history of the Rosslund Range to residents. FORR also sponsors hikes for all community members and visitors to the Old Glory peak.

As well, the group runs interpretive programs to education people within the region about the economic and health benefits of retaining natural areas with their ecosystems intact.

For those who want to learn more about the Rosslund Range and its history, join the 2007 community hikes to Old Glory peak. Hikers will learn about the history of the Old Glory Forest Service Lookout, the weather station and enjoy the hike to the highest peak in the Rosslund Range. Those interested are asked to be prepared for a strenuous hike of five to eight hours. Bring water, food, be bear aware and dress in layers for the hike. Two dates are available, Aug. 11 and 25. Meet at the Old Glory Trailhead at 8:30 a.m. or call Suzanne Paquin for more details at 362-6809.