

COLUMBIA & WESTERN RAILWAY BED



Heritage Register – Site

- 1) **Historical Name:** Columbia & Western Railway Bed
- 2) **Common Name:** Rail Grade
- 3) **Location:** A 22 kilometre rail bed from Rossland to Trail Creek Landing. The railway bed from Rossland to Trail Creek Landing wound from the Le Roi Mine on the western part of Rossland, past the southern part of the Centre Star Mine and along what is now Centennial Trail to Elmore Ave and Butte St. From there, down Railway Street south to Second Avenue to the Railway Station. From there it went west to Georgia Street and, east of Park Street, south to Kootenay Avenue and west to Davis Street and the south to what is now the beginning of the Rail Grade Trail.
- 4) **Date of Construction:** 1895/96

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Description:

The Columbia & Western Railway was a 22 kilometre, 13 foot wide rail bed from Rossland to Trail Creek Landing using three foot (914 mm) narrow gauge rails. The elevation change from Trail to Rossland was 2300 feet (701 metres). This steep 4 – 4.8% grade required four switchbacks to get the train up the hill. In 1899, when the narrow gauge rail was replaced with standard gauge, two spiral loops were introduced into the switchbacks to reduce the grade. A “wye” was added around Elmore Avenue and Butte Street so the Columbia & Western trains could turn around. In railroad terminology, a wye is a triangular joining arrangement of three rail lines with a railroad switch at each corner connecting to each incoming line.

Heritage Value:

The Columbia & Western Railway has historical significance for Rossland and the development of its mines. It was one of the major transportation links between the rich ore deposits on Red Mountain and the smelter in Trail. Without the building of the railway, it would have been challenging to bring equipment up the 13 kilometres to the mines to load and then transport the ore down to the Columbia River.

In 1895, Fritz Augustus Heinze announced that he would be building a smelter in Trail and a railway to the Rossland mines to more easily transport the ore to the smelter. Construction of the Columbia & Western Railway began in late 1895. The 22 kilometre railway was completed by June of 1896. In December of that year, the three times daily Rossland–Trail passenger service commenced.

In late 1896 a competing railway, the Red Mountain Railway, was built by Daniel Corbin from Northport, Washington, to Red Mountain. These two railways underscored the urgency of getting the ore from Red Mountain to smelters, either in Trail or Butte, Montana. The two railways were also a response to the Canadian versus American competition for the ore.

Upon completion of the line in 1896, the trains were the major carriers of freight and passengers up to Rossland from the connection at Trail Creek Landing with the steamers on the Columbia River from Revelstoke and Northport, Washington. The construction of this railway opened up access for passengers to travel beyond the local area for both goods and mining equipment.

In addition, it contributed greatly to the increase in the population, making it easier for new workers, prospectors and investors to reach the Red Mountain mines and what was to become Rossland. The completion of the rail lines made it possible to ship lower grade ores because competition between the two railways reduced rates.

The sale of the Columbia & Western Railway in 1898 for \$600,000 to Canadian Pacific Railroad (CPR) illustrated the economic importance of this area. In July 1899, CPR completed converting the route to 4 feet 8+1/2 inches (1,435 mm) standard gauge. To gain 701 metres (2,300 feet) elevation in 22 kilometres, the line still included up to 4.8 per cent grades and tight curves.

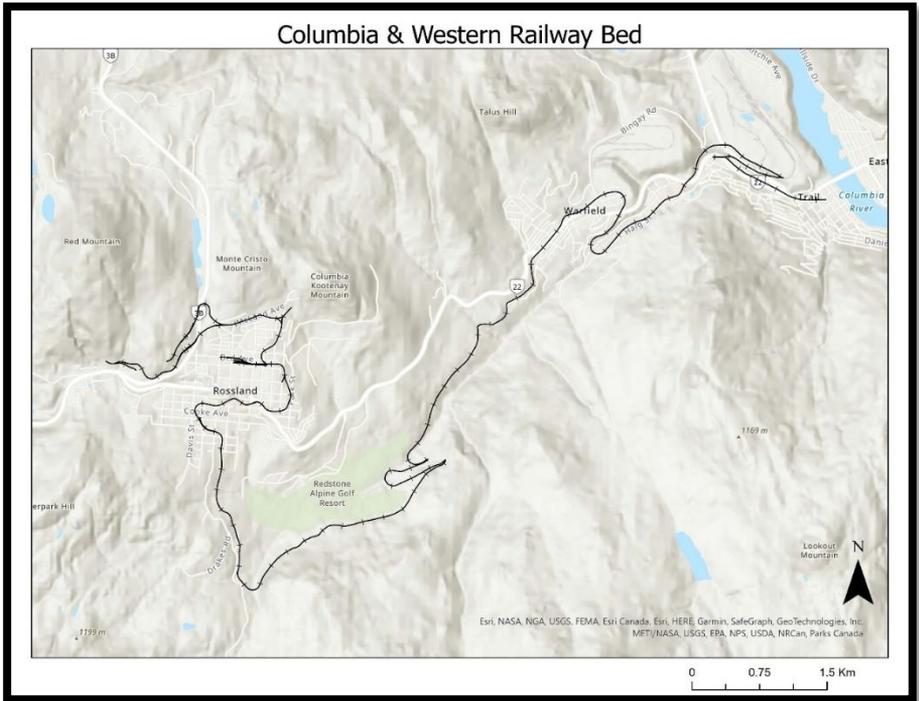
In Rossland, the CPR station was on the flats between Second and Third Avenues, between Washington and Queen Streets. The CPR yards included a rail yard, a two-stall engine house, storage facilities, and a freight shed.

When the Le Roi mine closed in 1929, big ore trains ceased on the Rossland–Trail section. Highway improvements ended passenger service on this route in 1936. However, the three times a week freight train continued. In 1951, CPR rebuilt the original station but this replacement was demolished in 1973.

CPR abandoned its Rossland railway line in 1966 but, today, the railway bed is still continuous from Rossland to Warfield and there is evidence of the area used for two of the switchbacks. The railway bed is used extensively by hikers, bikers and cross-country skiers.

Character Defining Elements:

- Original rail bed exists today from Union Street, between Spokane and Washington Streets, and Warfield.
- Remaining railway ties.



HISTORY

As explained in *Rosslund: The Golden City*, the transportation of ore from the mines in the early years was an almost insurmountable task. It involved loading the ore on mules for the 13 kilometre trek to Trail Creek Landing. At Trail Creek Landing the ore from the pack trains was transferred to a shallow-draught, wood-burning, river boat. Both the S. S. Columbia & the S.S. Kootenay were plying the Columbia River, making stops at Little Dalles, but it is more than likely that the ore was transported down river aboard the “Illecillewaet.”

The “Illecillewaet” was a scow with a paddle wheel at the stern and a winch at the bow, which was used to complement the sternwheel in fast water. Stout iron bars had been drilled into solid rock on the shore and the crew would go on the beach to make fast a cable to these iron bars, so that the boat might pull itself along by winding the cable on a drum using the winch.

The ore was conveyed in this manner to the Little Dalles for trans-shipment to the smelter at Butte, Montana. The cost was prohibitive and, had not the owners known it before, that first shipment showed that only very cheap transportation or a smelter close at hand would make the camp productive.

The Columbia & Western Railway went from Rossland to Trail Creek Landing starting from the Le Roi Mine on the western part of Rossland.