EXPLORING DIRT
With Dan & Carm

TRACKS, TRAILS & FORGOTTEN TALES
TTFT

CHASING HISTORY ONE STORY AT A TIME



Volume 1 October, 2026

Our Story

From Backroads to Forgotten History

We're Dan & Carm, storytellers and explorers with a love for the backcountry, forgotten places and the history hidden all around us.

Our adventures began in 2020, like they did for many people during the COVID years. We needed to get out of the house and find something to do! Armed with our 1999 Jeep Cherokee Sport, we started exploring the Forest Service Roads around the Okanagan, looking for beautiful views and new places to discover.

It didn't take long before we were hooked! The mountain lakes, incredible camping spots, winding dirt roads and breathtaking scenery had us falling in love with the backcountry. Shortly after, we purchased our 2005 Dodge Ram 1500 SLT, affectionately named "Walter," who has been our trusty chauffeur ever since.

After watching others share their off-road adventures on YouTube, we thought, why not? We could do that too! And in 2023, Exploring Dirt with Dan & Carm was born.
What started as a way to share our adventures soon became something more. As we explored farther Off The Beaten Path, we began discovering old cabins, abandoned buildings, crumbling foundations, forgotten roads and rusting machinery scattered throughout the mountains.

Naturally, the questions started. What was here? Who lived here? What happened to this place?
We began researching the places we discovered and soon found ourselves fascinated by the incredible history of British Columbia. Ghost towns, abandoned railways, mining communities and the people who helped shape our province. There were so many stories waiting to be told!
We started incorporating history into our Exploring Dirt videos, but quickly realized that some of these stories deserved more than we could share during an off-road adventure.
And so, in September 2025, Tracks, Trails & Forgotten Tales was born!

Since then, we've spent countless hours digging through archives, old newspapers, historical photographs and books. We've visited museums, connected with historians and explored places where thriving communities once stood. From forgotten mining towns and abandoned railways to historic sternwheelers and the people behind the stories, we've discovered just how much history is waiting to be shared.

One of the most rewarding parts has been meeting incredible people who share our passion and have generously helped us along the way.

Today, our two channels each have their own purpose. Exploring Dirt takes you along on our backcountry adventures, exploring remote roads, abandoned places and whatever we might discover around the next corner.
Tracks, Trails & Forgotten Tales takes a deeper look into the history, uncovering the stories of the places, people and events that helped shape British Columbia.
Together, they've become Beyond the Map Media, bringing our love of exploration, history and storytelling under one name.

And now, we're excited to share even more with you through our monthly newsletter!
Along with our latest videos, we'll be sharing special history features, museums worth visiting, books we've discovered, travel tips and a look at what's coming up on our adventures.
What began as a couple of people looking for somewhere to go in 2020 has turned into a journey we never imagined. We've made wonderful friendships, explored incredible places and learned so much along the way. And the best part? There's still so much more to discover!
Thank you for being part of our journey. We hope you'll continue exploring, discovering and learning alongside us.

Dan & Carm

BEYOND THE MAP MEDIA

History Feature

The D.A. Thomas

The Rise and Fall of the Peace River's Greatest Sternwheeler.

She was the largest, most luxurious and arguably the most impressive sternwheeler ever to navigate the Peace River. Yet for all her elegance and grandeur, the D.A. Thomas would become one of the least profitable vessels to operate on its waters. Her story is one of ambition, changing fortunes, dangerous river passages and an unfortunate ending for a ship that was once the pride of the North. The Peace River: Highway of the North Long before roads and railways reached the remote northern regions of British Columbia and Alberta, the Peace River was one of the great transportation highways of the North. For generations, Indigenous peoples travelled and traded along its waters.



In 1793, explorer Alexander Mackenzie travelled through the region, and in the years that followed, the North West Company established trading posts along the river. Later, the Hudson's Bay Company continued the fur trade, relying on York boats, scows and rafts to transport people, furs and supplies during the summer months, while dog teams provided transportation through the long northern winters. With approximately 700 miles of navigable river between Hudson's Hope and the junction of the Peace and Slave rivers, interrupted by only one major rapid, the waterway was a natural transportation route. For more than a century, these traditional methods served the region. However, as settlement increased and northern resources attracted greater interest, the demand for larger, faster vessels grew. Several steamboats operated on the Peace River before the arrival of the D.A. Thomas, including the Northern Call, Pine Pass, Lady Mackworth and Athabaska River. But none would match the sheer size and luxury of the vessel that arrived in 1916. Nigel Hannaford.

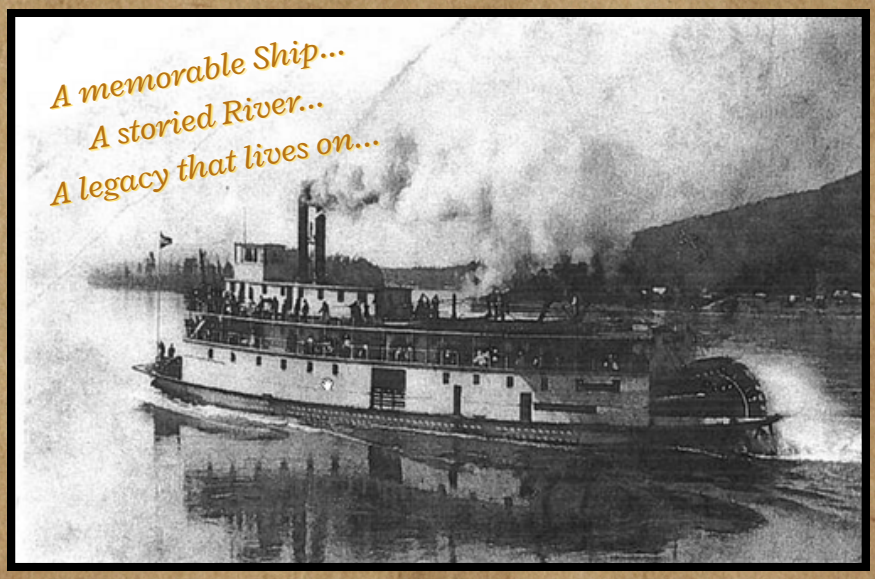






A Grand Vision for the Peace River The story of the D.A. Thomas began with British industrialist David Alfred Thomas, later known as Lord Rhondda. Through his Peace River Development Company,

Lord Rhondda was actively exploring the potential of coal deposits near Hudson's Hope. He envisioned an expanding industrial future for the region, and a large sternwheeler would provide the transportation capacity needed to support those ambitions. In 1915, he commissioned the construction of a vessel that would bear his former name, D.A. Thomas. George Askew of Vancouver was hired to build the enormous sternwheeler at Peace River Crossing. Constructed primarily from locally sourced timber, the vessel was fitted with two main engines and boilers imported from England. Completed in less than a year, she was launched in 1916. At 167 feet long and 40 feet wide, the D.A. Thomas was a remarkable vessel for a northern river. She could carry approximately 200 tons of cargo and accommodate as many as 360 passengers, with 36 comfortable staterooms. But it was her luxurious interior that truly set her apart.



The staterooms were arranged along either side of a spacious central room. One section served as a dining area, while the other was an elegant lounge furnished with leather armchairs, carpeting and potted plants. Passengers enjoyed fine linens, in later years bearing the woven Hudson's Bay Company monogram, and meals served with silver dinnerware. For a vessel operating in the remote northern wilderness, such accommodations were extraordinary. Lord Rhondda had also anticipated changes in fuel technology. Four tanks were installed to hold crude Alberta oil, with plans to eventually convert the vessel to oil-burning operation. Ironically, despite being built to support the development of coal and oil resources, the D.A. Thomas would never burn either fuel. Instead, she relied entirely on cordwood, consuming enormous quantities to keep her boilers operating. This appetite for fuel would become one of her greatest financial burdens. A Ship Too Grand for Her Purpose The First World War disrupted Lord Rhondda's development plans, and the grand vessel was eventually sold to the Lampson Hubbard Trading Company. For three years, the company attempted to operate the D.A. Thomas commercially. However, it soon became apparent that the vessel was simply too large and expensive for the amount of business available along the river. Her impressive passenger capacity, luxurious accommodations and enormous fuel requirements were better suited to a much busier transportation route. After sitting idle for two years, she was sold again in 1924, this time to the Hudson's Bay Company. The HBC hoped to return the great sternwheeler to profitable service, but the decision would prove costly.

Continued on next page

Continued from Page 2

By the 1920s, water levels on the Peace River were considerably lower than they had been earlier in the century. Navigating a vessel measuring 167 feet long and 40 feet wide through shallow channels, shifting sandbars and dangerous stretches of river was becoming increasingly difficult. The D.A. Thomas was simply too big for the river she had been built to serve. Dangerous Waters and Disaster In 1924, the Hudson's Bay Company appointed Captain John Cadenhead to command the D.A. Thomas. During his two years as captain, he undertook one of the vessel's most memorable challenges: an attempt to ascend the dangerous rapids of the Peace River Canyon. The canyon was one of the greatest natural obstacles to navigation on the upper Peace River, and taking such a large vessel into its turbulent waters was an extraordinary undertaking. But the D.A. Thomas's troubles were far from over. The following year, under the command of Captain Myers, the vessel would fail to complete even a single trip. While travelling downstream from Hudson's Hope, the pilot struck rocks in mid-channel while Captain Myers was asleep. The impact tore a large hole in the hull. Despite frantic efforts to control the flooding and reach shore, the damage was too severe. The D.A. Thomas sank in deep water just 50 feet from the riverbank. By the time she settled, the water had reached her main deck. Passengers were evacuated in lifeboats, while a cargo of cattle was forced to swim to shore. For a vessel once celebrated for her elegance and luxury, it was another humiliating setback. A month later, George Askew, the man who had originally built the D.A. Thomas, returned to raise her from the river. The great sternwheeler survived, but her days on the Peace River were numbered. One Last Journey In July 1929, the D.A. Thomas ran aground once again, this time near Fort St. John. After years of costly repairs, groundings and navigation difficulties, the Hudson's Bay Company finally decided to remove her from the Peace River altogether. The plan was to transfer the vessel to the Slave River, where Fort Fitzgerald would become her new operating base. In 1930, under the command of Captain Cowley, the D.A. Thomas began what would become her final journey. Travelling downstream, she reached Fort Vermilion before continuing toward one of the most dangerous sections of the route: Vermilion Chutes. Here, the river drops approximately 30 feet over a distance of just one mile, creating powerful, turbulent water that posed a serious challenge even to experienced riverboat crews. As the enormous sternwheeler plunged through the chutes, the force of the water tore away half the blades of her paddlewheel. Remarkably, this was the only significant damage she sustained.



Following repairs, the D.A. Thomas continued on her journey, completing the final 300 miles toward Fort Fitzgerald. After surviving the Peace River Canyon, a sinking, repeated groundings and the dangerous Vermilion Chutes, it seemed that the great sternwheeler might finally find a new beginning. But it was not to be. The End of a Riverboat Era After reaching the Fort Fitzgerald area, the D.A. Thomas became stranded on mudflats approximately one mile above the settlement. There she remained. The once magnificent vessel, built at enormous expense and outfitted with the finest accommodations, was abandoned where she lay. Over time, her valuable equipment was salvaged. Her engines were removed and put to work in a lumber mill, while much of her wooden upper structure was dismantled and used as firewood. The riverboat that had once carried passengers in luxury was slowly reduced to a decaying wooden hull. By 1937, the remains of the D.A. Thomas presented a sad sight along the riverbank. A dilapidated wheelhouse stood near the shore, while rotting wooden ribs protruded from the mud, marking the final resting place of what had once been the largest vessel to operate within the Mackenzie River watershed. For sixteen years, the D.A. Thomas had represented the ambition and optimism of northern development. Yet her story also demonstrated the challenges of navigating the great rivers of the Canadian North, where changing water levels, unpredictable currents and remote operating conditions could defeat even the grandest of vessels. She was the last and greatest of the Peace River sternwheelers, a floating symbol of an era when rivers were the highways of the North. Today, the story of the D.A. Thomas is a reminder that even the most impressive achievements of their time can disappear, leaving behind little more than photographs, historical records and the stories of those who travelled aboard them. And what a story she left behind.





Historical source and acknowledgement: Canada West Magazine, Vol. 6, No. 2,

MUSEUM HIGHLIGHT

PRINCETON MUSEUM



If you love British Columbia history, the Princeton Museum & Archives is definitely worth a visit!

Located in the heart of Princeton, this wonderful museum is filled with fascinating exhibits, historical photographs, artifacts and stories that bring the rich history of the Similkameen Valley to life. From early pioneers and mining to railways and the communities that helped shape the region, there is so much to discover.

We recently had the pleasure of spending time researching in their archives for our Allenby and Copper Mountain episode of Tracks, Trails & Forgotten Tales. The incredible collection of historical photographs and records helped us bring this fascinating piece of BC history to life.

A special thank you to the museum staff (Todd) for their hospitality, assistance and dedication to preserving our history.

Whether you're a history enthusiast or simply passing through Princeton, we highly recommend stopping in. You never know what fascinating piece of history you might discover!

www.princetonmuseum.org



Left - The Mills Owl Slot Machine – 1897

This beautifully carved oak cabinet is a Mills Owl slot machine, manufactured in 1897 by the Mills Novelty Company of Chicago, Illinois. Once located in the historic Granite City Hotel in Granite City, BC, this remarkable piece of mining-era history is now preserved and on display at the Princeton Museum.

Introduced in 1897, the Mills Owl was one of the earliest successful mechanical upright cabinet slot machines. Unlike earlier battery-operated electric models, its mechanical design proved more reliable and convenient. One of its unique features was a bell that rang whenever a winning payout occurred.

The machine featured an ornate oak cabinet, a distinctive five-way coin head and a colourful lithographed tin wheel decorated with a circle of owls. The Owl became so successful that Mills Novelty Company eventually adopted the owl as its trademark.

From the bustling days of Granite City's mining boom to its present home at the Princeton Museum, this fascinating machine offers a glimpse into the entertainment enjoyed in British Columbia's early mining communities more than 125 years ago.





Left & Above - The Norman Family Cabin – 1880s

A Glimpse into Princeton's Pioneer Past

Tucked inside the Princeton Museum is an original log cabin dating back to the 1880s. Known as the Norman Family Cabin, it was once home to Lily Allison, daughter of early Princeton settler John Fall Allison, her husband John Norman, and their six children.

Built by John Norman using locally harvested fir logs, the cabin originally stood on a bench overlooking the west bank of the Similkameen River, approximately 10 miles from Princeton along the route toward Hedley.

John Fall Allison arrived in the Similkameen Valley in 1860 and became an important figure in the region's early settlement and ranching history. His daughter Lily married John Norman, and together they raised their family in this modest log home.

The cabin was eventually donated to the Princeton Museum by descendants of the Norman family, ensuring that this remarkable piece of local history would be preserved for future generations.

Today, visitors can step inside the cabin and experience a glimpse of everyday life in the Similkameen Valley more than 140 years ago. It is a wonderful reminder of the families who helped shape the region and the simple homes in which they lived.

If you're visiting Princeton, the museum is well worth a stop!

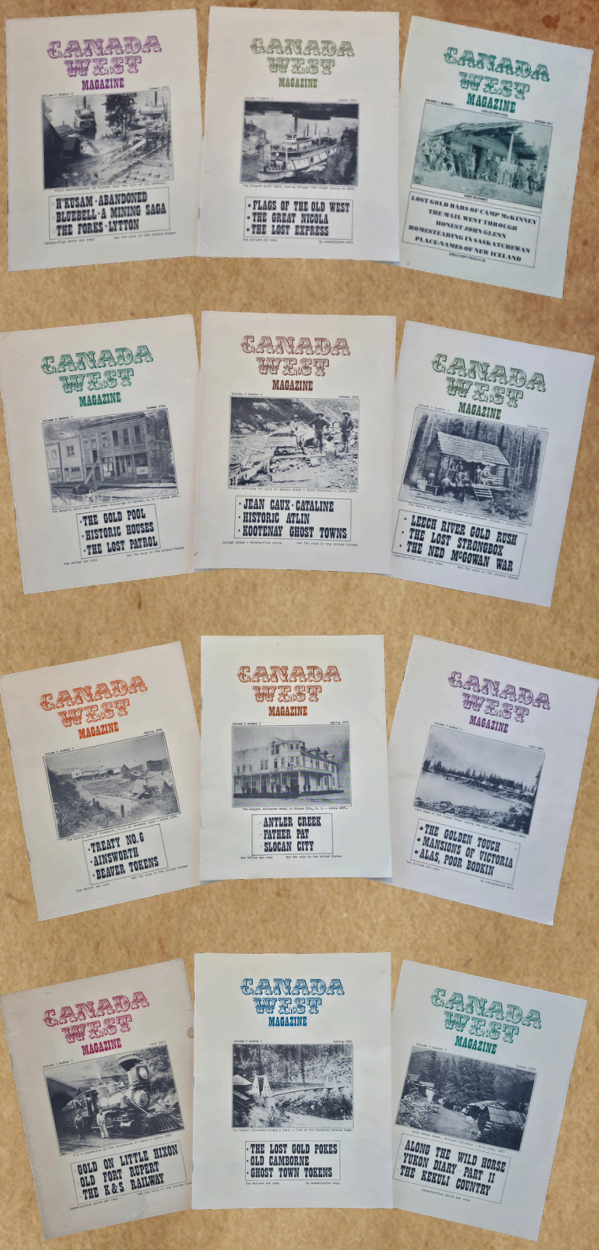
NEW ON OUR SHELF

CANDA WEST MAGAZINE

We're excited to have added 18 issues of Canada West Magazine to our growing collection of historical resources! Founded in 1969 by BC historian Bill Barlee, this publication is filled with fascinating stories of ghost towns, mining camps, pioneers, sternwheelers and communities from years gone by.

The magazine changed ownership in 1976 when Barlee sold it to Garnet Basque and T.W. Paterson, before eventually returning to Barlee. Our newly acquired collection includes issues published both before and after the sale, offering a wonderful glimpse into the magazine's history.

These publications are a fantastic addition to our research library, and we look forward to uncovering more forgotten stories within their pages!





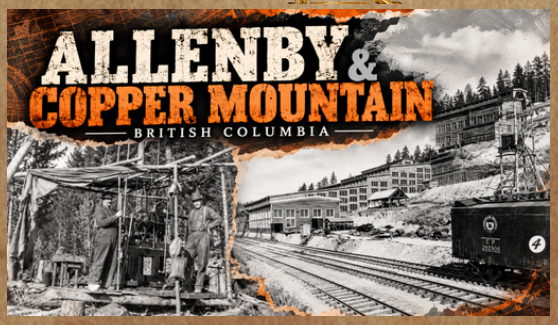
EPISODE SHOWCASE

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LOVE WHAT WE DO?

HELP FUEL OUR ADVENTURES & STORIES!

YOUR SUPPORT HELPS KEEP US EXPLORING, RESEARCHING, AND SHARING THE FORGOTTEN STORIES AND HIDDEN HISTORY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA AND BEYOND!

IF YOU'D LIKE TO HELP FUEL OUR NEXT ADVENTURE, YOU CAN SUPPORT OUR WORK THROUGH EITHER OF THE PLATFORMS LINKED BELOW.

YOU CAN ALSO SHOW YOUR SUPPORT BY CHECKING OUT OUR HISTORY HUNTERS STICKER COLLECTION! A FUN WAY TO SHARE YOUR LOVE OF HISTORY AND ADVENTURE WHILE HELPING US CONTINUE DOING WHAT WE LOVE.

EVERY CONTRIBUTION AND PURCHASE, BIG OR SMALL, HELPS KEEP THE STORIES ALIVE!
THANK YOU FOR BEING PART OF OUR JOURNEY!

Dan & Carm

PATREON

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