

Statement of Heritage Significance

Quesnelle Forks

Description of Historic Place

Quesnelle Forks is a Cariboo Gold Rush ghost town, established in 1859 at the forks of the Quesnel and Cariboo Rivers in the Cariboo region of British Columbia. It is situated 13kms by road to the northwest of Likely. Quesnelle Forks is located in the traditional territory of the Secwepemc people.

This historic place includes a town site, a cemetery, a campground, trails, river frontage and a viewscape west in the direction of the original bridge over the Quesnel River. The site is bounded by steep hillsides and by the Cariboo and Quesnel Rivers. The whole area is at risk from ongoing natural and human caused deterioration.

The townsite contains 21 buildings in various states of preservation, ranging from arrested decay to full replication, connected by well-maintained low mobility trails to the cemetery and to a wilderness forestry campsite. Interpretive signs in Chinese and English are placed throughout the townsite. A low-mobility log building at the modern entrance to the historic place serves as a Welcome Interpretive Centre.

Heritage Values

This historic place has been valued by the Secwepemc people since time immemorial, as a gathering place along a significant travel corridor, and as an important place to harvest food and medicine.

Quesnelle Forks is valued for its long history of Chinese settlement, as one of the earliest mining camps in BC, and for its historic role as a regional supply centre with up to 5000 residents. In its heyday, it was known as the largest city northwest of San Francisco. By 1875 Quesnelle Forks had 200 Chinese merchants and miners, and had established one of the original Tong Houses in British Columbia.

The ongoing stewardship of Quesnelle Forks, the oldest town in the Cariboo, by the local community is evidence of the value placed on this historic landscape.

Quesnelle Forks is further valued for the presence of a historic cemetery with its significant Chinese section, containing a small log structure known as a “Naguta”, used for receiving, storing and honouring disinterred remains until they could be returned to their homeland in China. The Quesnelle Forks cemetery is also valued for its continuing use as an operating cemetery for the community of Likely.

Quesnelle Forks, named after early fur trader, merchant and explorer Jules Maurice Quesnelle, is also valued for its place in the history of the Cariboo Gold Rush that resulted in the establishment of the Province of B.C., and its place in the conversation, along with New Westminster and Victoria, when decisions were being made in 1866 on a capital city for British Columbia.

Quesnelle Forks is further valued for the continuity of its historic and modern-day placer gold mining activities.

Quesnelle Forks is valued for evidence of traditional Cariboo Gold Rush architecture including the use of local materials in rustic construction.

Today Quesnelle Forks has aesthetic and recreational value for its natural beauty, riverside views, fishing and picnicking opportunities, bird watching, salmon watching, and world-class kayaking and river rafting on two natural rivers.

Character Defining Elements.

Key character-defining elements of Quesnelle Forks include:

- 21 in-situ historic buildings, of which 18 are in various stages of preservation and restoration, including the Tong House.
- Physical evidence of traditional Gold Rush architecture including rustic construction style and local materials
- Hand-painted paper calligraphy homilies (sermons) posted on and in buildings throughout the town.
- Historic cemetery dating from 1860's, including grave markers, headboards, white picket fence and an Interpretive Kiosk; Chinese section with disinterred plots indicating where human remains have been removed and returned to China
- Small log ("Naguta") structure
- Interpretive Centre
- Log snake fence delineating boundaries of historic town site
- Natural wilderness setting with wild flora and fauna
- Campground
- Interpretive signage in English and Chinese
- Low mobility trails
- Original bridge pilings in the Quesnel River