

Transportation in the Chilcotin

Accessing the Chilcotin

The only way to access the Chilcotin was by horse and wagon, and later by automobile.

For years people, horses, and cattle were forced to ford the rivers and streams between the Cariboo and Chilcotin country prior to a bridge being built on the Chilcotin River at Hanceville in 1890, and later one built over the Fraser River in 1902.

When Chilcotin Stage hauled mail and passengers to and from the Chilcotin, it's said that to save his horses, the driver made his passengers start ahead of him to walk up the long, steep hill above Hanceville so that they would be waiting at the top by the time he reached them with his wagon or sleigh. He would do the same at Sheep Creek, making his passengers get out and walk the three miles and 1,400 feet up the steep hill above the Fraser River while he went ahead and waited at the top where he rested his team until his passengers caught up.

Though Fred Becher brought the first Cadillac into the country in 1913 and hired a chauffeur to run it for several years as a taxi between 150 Mile and Hanceville, in 1920 automobiles were uncommon. If you needed the doctor from Alexis Creek, he arrived by horse and cutter. But by the end of the decade there were cars everywhere and horse drawn vehicles were out of date except during the winter. Snow plows didn't come into use until the 1940's so horse drawn sleighs were used instead.



Photo courtesy Doug Gritner

Tommy Hodgson got the contract to haul mail from 150 Mile to Alexis Creek in 1914. He and his sons hauled freight and mail every week for 30 years. Eventually his runs took him beyond Riske Creek and Hanceville to Tatla Lake, Chilanko Forks, Kleena Kleene, Tatlyoko, Anahim Lake and Bella Coola. He and his sons battled steep winding roads, potholes, ruts, dust, rocks and mud that could bog a vehicle to its

fenders. In winter Tommy used a four horse team and sleigh to battle wind and cold and drifted snow to get the mail and freight through.

Stan Dowling's Worst Trip Ever

Stan Dowling took the first truck over the Chilcotin Road from Williams Lake to Anahim Lake in 1936 where he owned a trading post. One trip in 1937 was his worst ever in the middle of a snowstorm. He had a sleigh tied on top of his load and had arranged for cowboys to meet him at Tatla Lake with another sleigh and two teams hoping he could at least drive that far. He kept driving, shoveling a path for his tires through drifts as the wind continued to howl until he reached Tatla Lake on the third day. He set out on the fourth day and made McClinchy Ranch after another long, hard day of shoveling snow that just kept piling up. The next three nights he and the cowboys and horses were forced to camp in the snow with little food and only snow for water for the horses. At Cariboo Flats they had to leave one loaded sleigh behind in order to hook up all four horses to the remaining sleigh and fight their way through the drifts. In all, it took Dowling nine days to complete the gruelling trip and reach his destination with only half the freight.

Today, thankfully, Highway 20 is paved and kept plowed along its entire length throughout the winter.



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