

MONKMAN PASS MEMORIAL TRAIL



HIKING ROUTE



The Monkman Pass Memorial Trail is dedicated to the pioneers that dared to follow a dream and take control over their own destiny.

These people did not just live in the Peace Country, they created it.



The Monkman Pass Memorial Trail Hiking Route is a new, unforgettable, class hiking destination that includes major waterfalls and rivers, lakes, temperate boreal forest, alpine meadows and optional alpine summits. The six day wilderness trail leads through magnificent, remote, untouched mountain terrain, suffused with inspiring, tangible history.

The Monkman Pass Memorial Trail comprises a Driving Tour from Grande Prairie to Kinuseo Falls via Tumbler Ridge, and the Hiking Trail from Kinuseo Falls over the Rocky Mountains to Hobi's Cabin on the Herrick River. The hiking trail is sixty-three kilometres long, and takes five to six days to complete. There are many possible side trips for the adventurous hiker that can make for an expedition of seven to ten days. For those seeking shorter trips, the return hike from Kinuseo Falls to the Cascades and Monkman Lake requires just three days.

The trail lies mostly within Monkman Provincial Park and for the most part follows the old Monkman route over the Rockies. Once at Hobi's Cabin on the Herrick River, it is necessary either to travel by river boat to Prince George, or to be ferried across the Herrick to a waiting vehicle. Alternatively, some hikers may wish to hike the trail from south to north and to be dropped off by boat at Hobi's Cabin.

The region traversed by the trail is rugged and remote and the trail is classified as "difficult". It will be a wilderness experience, initially with minimal facilities. Grizzly and black bears are numerous. Firearms and hunting are not permitted in the Arctic watershed in Monkman Provincial Park (approximately the northern two thirds of the park). GPS and satellite phone are considered essential items. Weather is unpredictable, and extreme weather conditions can occur at higher elevations. The hiking season varies but is typically late June till September. BC Parks, the WNMS and the TRMF have taken every effort to ensure that the information presented is accurate. These organizations take no responsibility for loss, inconvenience of injury sustained by any person using this brochure.



Monkman Falls

Historic photos by R. Leake and from the Ted Chambers album, used with kind permission of Joan Jones and Dale Chambers.

Monkman photo: Alberta Archives.

Colour photo credits: Kreg Alde, J. F. Bergeron, BC Parks, Charles Helm, Don Nesbitt, and Kevin Sharman.

Text: Charles Helm; Concept: Kreg Alde .

*Front cover photos: Top - Hugh Lake; Bottom - Shire Falls Camp.
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*Carl Brooks, Ted Chambers, Alex Monkman and Shorty McGinnis
The Trailblazer Crew, 1937*

In the 1920s Alex Monkman had a vision of a trade route that went from the Peace Country to the West Coast via a low pass through the Rocky Mountains that he knew of, south of what is now the town of Tumbler Ridge, B.C. He believed that it was the quickest, most economic and efficient route for the farmers of the Peace Country to market their produce. At the time, northwestern Alberta farmers were struggling with long export routes for their products.

He rallied successive governments to put a railway through the pass, but met with little support, and eventually shelved the idea. Yet Monkman refused to let his vision die, and in 1936 he and Crosby McNaught formed the Monkman Pass Highway Association. This group of determined pioneers led a drive to push a road through the pass and establish the trade route themselves.

Over the next three years, many people put heart and soul into the highway route, often labouring for only three meals a day and the chance to share in the adventure. They built a road from Rio Grande to Kinuseo Falls, and in 1937 the Trailblazer crew of Alex Monkman, Carl Brooks, Ted Chambers, and Shorty McGinnis blazed a trail through the Monkman Pass.

Limited funds and challenging terrain posed surmountable problems, but the outbreak of World War II spelled the end of the project. Many of the participants dropped their tools and lined up to serve, and some made the ultimate sacrifice.

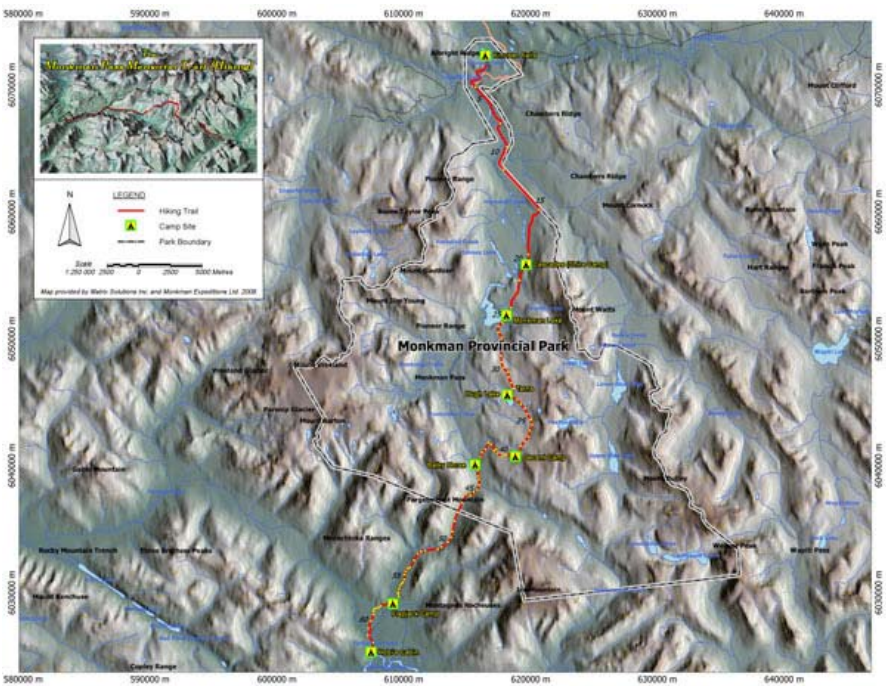
Sadly the highway project came to a halt, but not before they had managed to drive, push, pull, coax and claw a Model T truck, “the Pathfinder Car”, through the Pass, and carry a symbolic bag of grain to Prince George.

The Monkman Pass epic is a tale of bravado and dedication in the face of great odds. This sheer determination and courage is something that Western Canadians are famous for, and is one reason why the Peace Region is so successful today.

The Monkman Pass Memorial Trail allows us to step back into the past and become connected with these timeless and inspiring struggles, and in the process pass through some of the finest scenery in North America. In many ways Alex Monkman was the founding father of the Grande Prairie, being its first independent trader, one of the first grain farmers, the effective founder of the first Euro-Canadian settlement there, and its most visible citizen during the early twentieth century.



Trailblazer Crew on Forget Me Not Mountain, 1937



His exploits west into the mountains, and the band of volunteers he inspired, has provided Tumbler Ridge with some of its most unique history.

A permanent exhibit in the Tumbler Ridge Community Centre interprets his life and contribution to the region.



Brooks Falls

The hiking trail passes through remote, challenging terrain, subject to extremes of weather conditions which include heavy snowfall and flooding. It is for experienced hikers. Satellite phone and GPS unit are necessary items. The purpose of this list, which provides details on GPS locations for the entire length of the 63 kilometre route, is to ensure that hikers stay on the trail in the subalpine, alpine or recently constructed sections, and to enable hikers to identify their position accurately in case of the need for evacuation.

If hiking the trail from north to south, it begins at the Kinuseo Falls campground, two kilometres south of Kinuseo Falls. The first seven kilometres are fairly flat, as the trail follows the east bank of the Murray River until it reaches a suspension bridge. Here the pioneers crossed what they called the Slate River on horseback. Downstream after crossing the bridge is the first primitive campsite, Slate River Camp.

For the next seven kilometres the trail gains, follows, and then descends off a long limestone ridge. Although well below tree-line, the ridge-top has open or cliff-top sections which allow for fine views of the Monkman Creek valley and the surrounding peaks, dominated by Castle Mountain. Way across the valley you can also see Horsetail Falls. The second primitive campsite, Trot Camp, is reached just beyond km fifteen. The next few kilometres are through fairly enclosed forest, until you hear the roar below of the Cascades.

The Cascades are one of North America's finest, least known scenic treasures. Here the waters of Monkman Creek, after leaving Monkman Lake, fall eight or ten times in succession (depending on your definition of "waterfall"), separated by lake-like widenings. There are three points of access: the first is at about km seventeen, the second at about km nineteen, and the third is from the Devil's Creek crossing at about km twenty-one. Two primitive campsites have been built, one above Brooks Falls and the other where Devil's Creek joins the river. Trails are being improved each year; currently six of the Cascades are easily accessible. A side trail leads into and around an enormous sinkhole feature with a tiny pool of water at the bottom. If you have the time, plan to spend a day exploring this world of falling water and the grandeur of the surrounding scenery.



Upper and Lower Moore Falls

Cascades Two through Five are officially named for the members of the Monkman Trailblazer Crew: Chambers Falls, McGinnis Falls, Monkman Falls and Brooks Falls. Downstream are Upper and Lower Moore Falls, named after another dedicated pioneer, Guy Moore. Cascades One and Eight are unnamed. Across from the campsite above Brooks Falls there is an attractive tributary falls, Shire Falls. Each of the Cascades is uniquely wonderful; together they are sublime.

Before your trip, consider enjoying the historic photo of Moore Falls in the Tumbler Ridge Community Centre as well as the breathtaking footage of the Brooks – Monkman – McGinnis – Chambers sequence taken from a helicopter flying up the river. These can be seen on the Interactive Displays in the Community Centre and Dinosaur Discovery Gallery

From here it is four kilometres to Monkman Lake. The next feature is Hell's Half Acre, where the trail negotiates an assemblage of huge chunks of rock, the product of an ancient slide off Mt Watts, whose slopes rise to the east. This caused the pioneers on horseback considerable difficulties. From there it is a pleasant, fairly level walk to the serene shores of the lake, where there is a substantial primitive campsite. Monkman Lake is an attractive, large, remote body of water, surrounded by pleasing if not precipitous mountains, and is a welcome break after twenty-five kilometres of hiking. This is where Ted Chambers posed for his well-known "Just as I am" silhouetted photograph in 1937.



Ted Chambers on For Get Me Not Mountain, 1937

The rewards are many here. Fans of the Monkman Tarns claim that on a fair summer's day it approaches earthly perfection. There are many tarns of varying size and elevation, each with its own distinctive character, all of them brooded over by the big peaks and icefields. The pristine Monkman Glacier dominates the western horizon, seemingly held in place by the tough ramparts of Mt Vreeland on the left and Mt Barton on the right. To the south is the distinctive flat-topped massif of Ice Mountain, capped by a great ice sheet. Below lies the Monkman Pass, inviting contemplation of the brave and optimistic trailblazers of 1937.

From the Tarns area, a venture to the major peaks to the west can be considered. The prize is Paxton Peak, identifiable from a distance by the characteristic darker rock layers that cap its summit. The route requires rock scrambling, but can be done without technical gear. The summit

views are stupendous. Ambitious off-trail hikers will find much more to explore here, and could consider returning to Monkman Lake via Lupin Lake, or returning to km thirteen on the Monkman Lake trail by doing the lengthy traverse over Mt Watts. These routes are remote and challenging, and are sometimes more difficult than anticipated, as areas that appear to have gentle contours on the topographical map may turn out to be cliff-ridden and impassable.

From the Tarns area, the trail descends via another primitive campsite (Decent Camp) to rejoin the old Monkman Pass route and descend through the Fontoniko Creek valley. The mountain to the west was named Forget-Me-Not Mountain by the pioneers after they had climbed to its summit and been entranced by the fields of alpine flowers. The trail crosses a major tributary, Ice Creek, via a new bridge and then follows the shores of the creek. A campsite has been established at the southern boundary of Monkman Provincial Park (Balky Horse Camp).

From here it is less than eighteen kilometres to the end of the trail at Hobi's Cabin. Leaving the park, the trail continues down Fontoniko Creek, including two substantial creek crossings and a long overland section, where the trail follows the original route, past many slashes on the trees. A primitive campsite has been established once you cross the Fontoniko for the last time (Flapjack Camp). The trail then continues along the creek to end up at the historic Hobi's Cabin, where Henry Hobi lived in the days of the Monkman Pass Highway endeavour.



Herrick River, 1937

Prior To Departure, Please Check In At Or Call The Tumbler Ridge Visitor Centre (250-242-3123 Or 1-877-729-3466) For Current Trail Information And The List Of Emergency Telephone Numbers.



Monkman Lake from the Monkman Tarns

The following 1 : 50 000 topographical maps cover the Monkman Pass Memorial Trail Hiking Route:

93 I/14 Kinuseo Falls

93 I/11 Monkman Pass

93 I/6 Spakwaniko Creek

Further reading:

People of the Pass by Madelon Flint Truax, Beth Flint Sheehan
Publisher: Beaverlodge & District Historical Association, 1988.

Exploring Tumbler Ridge by Charles Helm
Publisher: Tumbler Ridge News, 2008.