

TAKING THE ROAD Less Travelled

Trade the well-trod Trans-Canada Highway for the quieter, more meandering Highway 3 to experience a wholly different slice of the country

By Suzanne Morphet



Long before tourists and truckers took the Trans-Canada Highway through Canada's Rocky Mountains, they drove the much slower, more meandering Highway 3.

Today, this historic road, also known as the Crowsnest Highway, still leads less hurried travellers through small mountain towns and gorgeous scenery with few other vehicles.

Cruise the Crowsnest from Cranbrook, BC TO LETHBRIDGE, ALBERTA

Highway 3 begins at Hope, BC and ends at Medicine Hat, Alberta, making it more than 1,000 kilometres. But there's no need to do it all in one go. Last spring, I drove with a girlfriend from Cranbrook to Lethbridge and back over one week, with lots of time to explore.

Start your adventure in Cranbrook at St Eugene's Resort, a former residential school, now a resort owned by the Ktunaxa (k-too-nah-ha) Nation and Shuswap Indian band. In the spirit of reconciliation, learn the history behind the former school in the Ktunaxa Interpretive Centre or take a tour with a former resident. The expansive property includes a Les Furber-designed 18-hole golf course along the fast-flowing St. Mary River.



St. Eugene's Resort

Hit the road and take time for Kimberley

Once home to an enormous lead-zinc mine, Kimberley has transformed itself into an outdoor paradise for hikers, cyclists and skiers. It's worth the short detour from Highway 3. Even if you're not an avid mountain biker (and I'm not), you can pick up e-mountain bikes from Black Dog Cycle and Ski and you'll be amazed by how easy it is to peddle gentle trails through forests and wildflower meadows on two electric wheels.

Find your fancy in Fernie

When you arrive in Fernie, you've reached the Rockies. The town's architecturally grand brick buildings surprise and delight first-timers. Ditto for the town's coffee culture. Get caffeinated at Rooftop Coffee Roasters, then take a heritage walking tour or hike to Castle Rock for expansive views and breathe in the delicious scent of a sun-warmed conifer forest.

A big truck and a mountain that moves

Continuing east from Fernie, you'll go through Sparwood, BC and pass the world's largest tandem axle truck, a bright green behemoth built for open pit mining. It's no longer in use, but simply a tourist attraction.

Another, more sombre site, is the Frank Slide, just east of the



Check into the historic Prince of Wales Hotel for a taste of early 20th century hospitality. Rooms are small but the views over Upper Waterton Lake are huge. Kilted male staff serve afternoon tea along with dainty sandwiches and pastries in the Royal Stewart Dining Room.

To learn more about the park's natural and human history, take a boat tour with the Waterton Shoreline Cruise Company. You'll hear about the unusually severe wildfire in 2017 that blazed through almost half the park.

Head for the prairies

Drive back to Highway 3 and head northeast to Lethbridge, Alberta. Enroute, another small detour leads to Head-Smashed-In-Buffalo Jump, a UNESCO World Heritage Site where Plains people hunted bison for thousands of years.

Reaching Lethbridge, you've arrived in one of Canada's driest and sunniest cities. The Oldman River has cut deeply into the soft prairie soil over thousands of years, creating a lush valley, sweetly scented with cottonwood trees and alive with birdsong.



Cami Tanner, co-owner of
The Conscious Cafe

Lethbridge has a huge cattle industry, so I was shocked to discover a fully vegan restaurant, The Conscious Café, where just about everything is made from scratch, including sourdough bread. Their Ruby Reuben Revival sandwich will have you re-thinking beef.

Taking the less-travelled Highway 3 is a journey filled with surprises, unforgettable scenery and the chance to spend some quality time off the beaten path.



BC/Alberta border. In 1903, one side of Turtle Mountain slid away, burying homes, businesses and people under tons of rock. It was the deadliest

landslide in Canada's history, killing dozens of people asleep in their beds.

Wildlife and wildfires

A short detour from Highway 3 at Pincher Station brings you to one of the least visited national parks in Canada's Rockies, Waterton Lakes. Yet the scenery and the wildlife are no less spectacular or visible than in Banff and Jasper National Parks.

On my visit in late May, we watched black bears grazing by the roadside, fox kits playing on a sunny slope, mountain goats climbing sheer ridges and a bighorn sheep strutting down the middle of a road. And deer, plenty of deer!