

**Purcell Wilderness  
Conservancy  
Provincial Park**

# EARL GREY PASS TRAIL



In 1974 the Purcell Wilderness Conservancy was created, protecting 131,500ha of the Purcell Mountains. In 1995 the boundaries of the Conservancy were expanded to include areas on the east and west of the Conservancy, and the Fry Creek Canyon Recreation Area. The resulting 202,709ha are now designated as a Class 'A' BC Provincial Park. The Purcell Wilderness Conservancy Park and adjacent St. Mary's Alpine Park (9,164ha) protects a significant, wild and beautiful region within the Purcell Mountains.

## EARL GREY PASS TRAIL

The Earl Grey Pass Trail extends some 61km, crossing over the Purcell Mountains and connecting the East and West Kootenays. Hikers travel up the gentle slopes of the U-shaped Toby Creek valley, over the Earl Grey Pass and down Hamill Creek through magnificent stands of old growth cedar and hemlock. Conditions vary on this rigorous wilderness trail, and it should only be attempted by experienced, well-equipped hikers. Extreme care must be taken when using bridges, logs and cable cars or fording creeks. The trail traverses densely vegetated avalanche paths, meandering game trails and blow-down, and therefore can be difficult to locate in areas. Bears may be encountered anywhere on the trail and hikers must take precautions. Remember to store and cook food well away from campsites and make plenty of noise when approaching and crossing avalanche slide paths and creeks.

During a visit to British Columbia in 1908, Earl Grey, Canada's Governor General from 1904 to 1911, crossed the Purcell Mountains on a trail that connected the East and West Kootenays. He traveled up Toby and down Hamill Creeks, over a 2,256m pass which was later named in his honor. The trail Grey followed on horseback and foot was built by miners, and before them First Nation peoples used the route. The West Kootenay mining boom of the 1890's and early 1900's made the trail an important access and supply route from the east – cattle were even driven over it from Invermere.

The Purcell's so impressed Earl Grey that he had a cabin built for his family's vacation in 1909. The remains of the structure still stand on Toby Creek, one kilometer from the Eastern trailhead.

Use 1:50,000 scale topographic maps 82K/2, 82K/7, and 82K/8 with a compass to accompany this brochure.

## ACCESS

### Toby Creek – East end of Trail

Toby Creek is accessible by a secondary road north of Invermere. Follow the signs to Panorama Resort (18km). From the Resort, follow the main gravel road (20km) along side of Toby Creek to the abandoned Mineral King mine. After crossing the bridge over Jumbo Creek, just past the mine site, keep left and continue past a horse corral for about 1km. Take the right fork and follow it uphill to a parking area. It is a short (200m) walk to the Park Boundary and trailhead.

### Argenta– West end of trail

Argenta is accessible by secondary road from Highway 31 north of Lardeau. Follow the main road through the community for 4.5km beyond the Post Office/Community Hall to reach the trailhead.

## BACKCOUNTRY ETHICS

Help preserve the natural, undeveloped beauty of the Purcell Wilderness Conservancy by minimizing your impact. The following are guidelines to help reduce your impact while in the backcountry.

**Practice "No Trace Camping"**. Select your campsite away from the trail and water sources. Avoid using trees to build shelters. Use a

backpacking stove as much as possible, and when using a wood fire, please keep it small. Restore the site including fire-pits to its original state. Use Traditional Camps where impacts have already taken place.

**Avoid polluting the environment.** Use biodegradable soap for washing. Deposit human waste in a 15cm deep hole at least 60m from all water sources. Fill the hole with earth and replace the sod after use. Pack out all tins and plastic.

**Tread lightly.** Stay on the designated trail, as shortcuts can cause erosion. In meadows and areas with no obvious trails – spread out. Leave natural features and historical artifacts in place and never approach or feed wildlife. For safety, food and garbage caches and food preparation sites should be located 30m (downwind) from your tent site.

**Horses and Riders** may be encountered on the East side of the Pass. When meeting, all hikers should step 2 to 3m off the trail to allow horses to pass.

**Be prepared.** When hiking the Earl Grey Pass Trail you will be in a wilderness where weather and traveling conditions can change quickly. An average hiking time is 5 days.

For more information check out the website:  
<http://wlapwww.gov.bc.ca/bcparks/explore/parkpgs/purcell.htm>