

## COLUMBIA LAKE QUICK REFERENCE SHEET

### JUST A FEW AMAZING THINGS ABOUT OUR AMAZING LAKE!

- . Maximum length – 13.5 km (8.4 mi)
- . Maximum width – 2 km (1.2 mi)
- . Typical depth – 15 ft
- . Average July water temperature – 18 C – making it the largest warm water lake in East Kootenay
- . Surface Elevation – 808m (2,650 ft)
- . Area – 6,815 acres (2,758 hectares)
- . Freezing – last year, it was observed the lake froze on December 7, 2016 and thawed on March 29, 2017.
- . Columbia Lake is fed by several small tributaries. East side tributaries include Warspite and Lansdown Creeks. West Side tributaries include Dutch, Hardie, Marion and Sun Creeks. Columbia Lake also gets a considerable amount of water at the south end where water from the Kootenay river enters the lake as groundwater. The water balance of Columbia Lake is still not fully understood. The Columbia Lake Stewardship Society continues to do research in this area.
- . Columbia Lake got its name from the Columbia River. The river was so named by American sea captain Robert Gray who navigated his privately owned ship The Columbia Rediviva through its waters in May 1792 trading fur pelts.
- . Columbia Lake is the source of the mighty Columbia River, the largest river in the Pacific Northwest of North America. The Columbia River flows north from the lake while the neighbouring Kootenay flows south.
- . For approximately 100 km (60 mi) the Columbia River and the Kootenay River run parallel and when they reach Canal Flats, the two rivers are less than 2 km (1.2 mi) apart. Historically the [Baillie-Grohman Canal](#) connected the two bodies of water to facilitate the navigation of [steamboats](#) (although only three trips were ever made through it). Hence the name – Canal Flats.
- . Columbia Lake is home to a variety of fish including mountain whitefish, burbot, kokanee, rainbow trout, bull trout and cutthroat trout. Large numbers of salmon used to swim up Columbia River to spawn in Columbia Lake. This yearly migration of salmon was stopped with the construction of the Grand Coulee Dam in Washington in 1941.
- . Waterfowl are plentiful on Columbia Lake including Canada geese, several species of ducks and blue-listed species such as the Great Blue Heron. The lake is also an important stop on the Pacific Flyway, a key migratory route for waterfowl. In the fall, more than 15,000 waterfowl have been counted in a single day migrating through the wetlands, of which Columbia Lake is part, and in the spring more 1,000 tundra swans on a single day. Coots, geese, ducks, bald eagles, and osprey also have been recorded in significant numbers in the wetlands.
- . The largely unroaded east shore of Columbia Lake remains pristine and is a prime grazing area for Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, elk and mule deer.

**COLUMBIA LAKE – OURS TO ENJOY, OURS TO PROTECT**

Sponsored by the Columbia Lake Stewardship Society

## **A SHORT HISTORY OF COLUMBIA LAKE**

First Nations have been present in the Columbia Valley for over 10,000 years and the lake and area around inhabited by members of both the Ktunaxa and Shuswap cultural groups in the pre-colonial period. The Spirit Trail (also known as the Plains of Nativity) passes along the east side of the lake. Indigenous peoples included this trail as one of their favoured routes to points east of Canal Flats, namely Whiteswan Lake and into the Kananaskis country.

The Ktunaxa people have a creation story that begins in the animal world when the creator announced the coming of humans. " At that time a large sea monster started causing a disturbance in what is now Columbia Lake and a war party was assembled. The monster escaped from the lake into the Kootenay River (which at that time flowed into Columbia Lake), and led everyone on a chase around the Kootenay and Columbia River circuit, round and round again. Finally, the chief of animals, Natmuqcin, a giant, pushed over a mountain top, blocked the Kootenay River from flowing into Columbia Lake, and corralled the sea monster. Red-headed woodpecker came and killed the monster and the animals feasted. After creating the white, black, and yellow people out of the sea monster's remains, Natmuqcin looked at all the blood on his hands and let it fall to the grass saying, "this will be the red people, they will remain here forever. They will be small in number but powerful". (Reference – Cross Wilderness Centre)

The explorer and fur trader David Thompson is credited with being the first European to see the lake, in 1807. He set up a fur trade post (Kootenae House) near present day Invermere and explored the upper Columbia region. In 1811, he became the first European to travel the entire length of the Columbia River. He was known to some native peoples as "Koo-Koo-Sint" or "the Stargazer." He travelled some 90,000 km mapping 4.9 million square kms of North America along the way. Thompson has been described as the "greatest land geographer who ever lived.

One of the next Europeans to record his observations about the lake was the Belgian Jesuit missionary Pierre-Jean de Smet. In 1845, on one of his frequent journeys around the inland Northwest, DeSmet camped at the northern end of Columbia Lake near the Hoodoos. In a letter dated Sept. 9, 1845, DeSmet wrote that the lake was in the "rugged and gigantic mountains where the Great River escapes."

In 1864, the Kootenay Gold Rush began as gold was discovered in Wild Horse Creek near the Kootenay River at Fort Steele. Thousands of settlers arrived to the area to stake their claim.

In 1889, William Baillie Grohman, a wealthy adventurer and business promoter built a canal to link the Kootenay River to Columbia Lake at Canal Flats to promote easier flow of trade. The canal was an expensive failure, being used only three times. In 1902, Captain Frank Armstrong of the sternwheeler North Star deliberately blew out the canal's lower lock gates with dynamite to allow the transit of his vessel.

The railway built up the valley in 1912 and put an end to the paddle-wheel era. Today the CPR rail running along the west side of the Lake connects Golden to Cranbrook.

...and the story continues.... its history is ours to preserve, its future ours to protect!

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