

# Iron horse stabled

## Roundhouses once held the mighty railcars that helped build North America

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Special to the Sun

Like a loon call echoing over a lake, the whistle of a train reverberating through majestic mountains is a haunting and nostalgic sound. Chugging through the Rocky Mountains, trains still ride the steel spine that was once the backbone of the new nation of Canada.

"I believe we can't move into the future without understanding our history," said Gordon Bell, owner of the Three Valley Gap Roundhouse and Railway Museum. "It's important that we preserve our history for future generations. I'm just doing my part."

Bell has answered the train's call by creating a home for the iron horses of the past that have been put out to pasture. His covered turntable complex is the largest in North America

with a diameter of 300 ft., and includes 100,000 sq. ft. of roof!

Located less than 20 km from Revelstoke near the BC/Alberta border, Three Valley Gap Roundhouse is in the heart of railway country. To this day Revelstoke still depends on the railroad for its livelihood and nearby Craigellachie, Eagle Pass, is where the last spike on the Canadian Pacific Railroad was driven in 1885.

### Vital home base

Roundhouses were a vital part of the old railway system. They were usually built every 100 to 200 miles apart because few steam locomotives ventured more than a few divisional points from their home base.

Most steam locomotives were designed for specific service such as freight or passenger, and they were in-

tended to go forward and seldom pulled a train backward. To solve this, a turntable mechanism was used to rotate the locomotives to the different workshops in the roundhouse for servicing. Work on Three Valley Gap's turntable will begin this summer.

Daily maintenance took place in the roundhouses, including regular greasing, oiling and cleaning. The locomotives were cumbersome and needed a lot of equipment to maintain them. The number of stalls in a roundhouse varied from as few as two to around 60, depending on its location and the number of trains working in the area.

Three Valley Gap's roundhouse has an inspection pit, a back shop, a pattern shop and a railway coach repair and carpentry shop.

If a train whistle gives you a chill down your spine, see-



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Three Valley Lake Chateau, shown here is home of North America's largest railway roundhouse. The Chateau is located just outside of Revelstoke, BC.

ing the imposing iron beasts will take you back to the romantic days when the west was opening up.

Three Valley Gap's Railway Roundhouse is home to an impressive display of railway equipment and trains, including a CPR Caboose, private coaches and a coal-fired steam engine built in 1922 that closely resembles Onderdonk's No. 2 locomotive "Curly" used in the CPR construction of the 1880s.

Not only are these iron horses lovingly sheltered in the covered roundhouse, but the entrance to their stable is a classical façade with imposing columns.

Bell has built a replica of the entrance of the Arlington Court building from Revelstoke. This structure was a hotel and lumber mill office built in 1912 and later converted to an apartment building which burnt down in 1976. Its surviving original columns made of cedar were then donated to Three Valley Gap where they are shown off.

It's not always easy, or even a priority, for communities to save artifacts from the past, but there is a human need to understand

where we come from.

At Three Valley Gap, Bell has taken it upon himself to preserve the history of this region. Sixty years ago, when a post-World War II boom had millions rebuilding for the future, apparently "useless" relics were forgotten, torn down, burned or simply left to decay.

"To me, it was crazy that all of these things were just being left behind to rot," said Bell. "When I saw all that stuff being destroyed that's when I wanted to tie in the historic part of this area to our hotel."

### Building collector

Bell began collecting heritage buildings and soon his collection came to include dozens of antique vehicles and memorabilia which can be enjoyed and relived at the Three Valley Gap Heritage Ghost Town.

The Three Valley Gap Lake Chateau complex not only includes the Roundhouse and Railway Museum, the Heritage Ghost Town and an Antique Auto Museum, but is home to a 200-room resort. Amenities include family suites, loft rooms, and a unique "cave" honeymoon suite, cafeteria, dining room, gift shop, heated indoor pool, a lake with a sandy beach, children's play area, gardens and much more. It is the ultimate modern family resort with a view to the past.

Nearby Revelstoke is also home to the Revelstoke Rail-

way Museum and for those train buffs who can't get enough of a good thing, they host Railway Days every year in August. Railway Days 2007 will be held from Friday Aug. 17 to Sunday Aug. 26.

The area is also home to many opportunities for recreation for the whole family. There are numerous hiking trails in nearby Glacier and Mt. Revelstoke National Parks, an 18-hole golf course and shopping in Revelstoke.

The resort towns of Banff and Jasper in the Canadian Rockies and the beautiful lakes and wineries of the Okanagan are within a half-day's drive.

Next time you hear a train whistle echoing through the mountains, if only in your imagination, you'll know that there is a place where the iron horses have found a home.

For more information, visit the following websites:

- Three Valley Gap Roundhouse - [www.3valleyroundhouse.com](http://www.3valleyroundhouse.com).

- Three Valley Gap Lake Chateau and Heritage Ghost Town - [www.3valley.com](http://www.3valley.com) Toll Free: 1-888-667-2109

- Three Valley Gap and many of BC's other unique tourist destination can also be sourced through Tourism British Columbia at [www.hellobc.com](http://www.hellobc.com) or call toll free 1-800-HELLO BC (435-5622).



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Roundhouses were once designed to service trains and were spaced every 100-200 miles apart.