



Ghost Town of Lille

(Gold Creek Access)

Crowsnest Pass, Alberta

The scattered remains of a once-thriving ghost town add a sense of intrigue to this excellent hike.

Difficulty:	<i>Easy</i>
Length:	<i>6.3 km (3.9 mi) from Frank Slide Interpretive Centre parking lot to Lille townsite</i>
Elevation gain:	<i>140 meters (460 ft)</i>
Maximum elevation:	<i>1475 meters (4840 feet)</i>
Map:	<i>Blairmore G/9</i>

Trailhead:

Turn north off Highway 3 (Crowsnest Highway) onto the paved Frank Slide Interpretive Centre access road at Frank. One kilometer from the highway, instead of making the switchback up to the interpretive centre, continue straight on a gravel road after crossing a metal cattle guard. Drive on the gravel road for a approximately 250 metres and take the rough road cutting northwest (left) at the Attention Anglers sign. Follow this road for 100 metres to a large meadow (cut line). Park in the meadow. The hiking route to Lille continues on this road, which leads in short order back into the forest on the opposite side of the meadow.

Trail information:

Follow the rough and often mucky road for 1.5 kilometres, keeping left at any significant junction, until reaching a more substantial gravel road. Turn north (left) and stay on this road for the remainder of the hike, keeping left at a junction in less than a kilometer. Nearing the 3.0 kilometre mark, the road drops steeply to Green Creek, which is shallow but must be forded, and the first crossing of Gold Creek. Vehicular bridges were destroyed in the flood of 1995 and footbridges were constructed in 1997. At both crossings of Gold Creek, the footbridges are upstream of the former vehicle bridge sites. After the first crossing of Gold Creek, the road takes a short, but demanding, climb before settling into a series of roller coasters before reaching the second crossing of Gold Creek. Once you are across Gold Creek the second time, it's a gentle kilometer stroll to a minor ford of Morin Creek and the southern edge of the former Lille townsite.



Trail note:

Almost the entire hike has free-range cattle, which must not be disturbed. If the footbridges on Gold Creek succumb to spring floods, two fords of Gold Creek will be required. Gold Creek is swift and icy in the early season.

Historical Background:

In 1901, J.J. Fleutot and C. Remy, of Gold Fields Ltd. of British Columbia were prospecting on Gold Creek for the elusive yellow mineral, but found major coal deposits instead. The company began work on the coal seams that same year at a site named French Camp. Backed by French capital, Fleutot organized West Canadian Collieries Ltd. and established the townsite of Lille, which was named after the French city. The Frank and Grassy Mountain Railway was completed in 1903, only to be severely damaged in its lower sections in 1903 by the Frank Slide. Lille grew rapidly, and by 1906 had a hospital, a four-room school and a hotel. In 1911, the census showed a population of 303. In 1912, the world coke market suffered a drastic decline, and Lille's boom days were over. West Canadian Collieries closed the mine and Lille faded into history.

To the untrained eye, the Lille townsite looks little more than a large cow pasture. With minimal searching, numerous depressions, remnants of building foundations and a few rusty fire hydrants outline a series of streets, and begin to give the town some shape. On a grassy bench above Gold Creek, the cement foundation of the Lille Hotel is particularly prominent. The two-storey hotel, complete with bar, was the centerpiece of Lille's social life. By the slack coal piles along Gold Creek stand the remnants of 50 Bernard coke ovens. Although the site has been ransacked over time, the ovens stand out singularly as a silent testament to the hardy folks who braved this wilderness at the turn of the century. Lille has been designated an historic site and must be left undisturbed.

