"LUCERNE NO LONGER HAS AN EXCUSE TO EXIST":

Mobility and Landscape in the Yellowhead Pass

Ben Bradley

Lucerne was poised for posterity when it was established by the Canadian Northern Railway near the summit of the Yellowhead Pass in 1913. As a divisional point station on a new transcontinental railway, it was a crucial component of a massive new transportation system that was expected to transform the northern Prairies and British Columbia into what one promoter called the "New Garden of Canada."[1] However, Lucerne was abandoned in 1923, and for the next half-century its remnants posed a problem for the government agencies that were responsible for managing British Columbia's parks. They worried that westbound travellers developed negative first impressions of Mount Robson Provincial Park – and of British Columbia generally – due to their encounter with a cluster of derelict cabins and crumbling false-front stores. These agencies waged an intermittent campaign to "clean up" Lucerne, with their enthusiasm for the project waxing and waning according to the site's changing relations to the corridors of mobility that traversed it. They only strove to remove traces of the town that were visible to large numbers of passersby or that appeared likely to become so in the near future. The actual presence of trespassing in abandoned buildings inside Mount Robson Park was less of a problem than the possibility that these structures would disrupt travellers' views of park nature.

In this article, I examine how mobility, the tourist gaze, and park aesthetics intersected at a famous but little-studied section of the Canadian Rockies. Agencies of the state are shown to have engaged in a decades-long process of aesthetic patrol, vigilantly working to ensure that the remnants of Lucerne did not detract from travellers' experiences of sublime mountain scenery when they passed through the crown

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[1] F.A. Talbot, *The New Garden of Canada: By Pack Horse and Canoe through Undeveloped New British Columbia* (London: Cassell and Co., 1911).

jewel of British Columbia's provincial park system. Foregrounding the oft-overlooked relationship between mobility and the environment inside a major park offers a new dimension on both park management and tourism-related development in the mountains of western Canada. It demonstrates the degree to which tourists' experiences of the environment have been tightly linked to shifting infrastructures of mobility.

Many historians have examined the active role of government agencies in manipulating North American park environments so that they would appeal to tourists. The intrinsically ironic role that these agencies played in facilitating developments that made nominally pristine environments accessible to large numbers of people has drawn much attention, and historians have also shown that the imposition of certain landscape aesthetics in parks sometimes involved the selective elimination or obscuring of features and activities that might disrupt visitors' views of nature.[2] Some parks were managed as veritable Potemkin villages, with money and attention lavished on areas seen by large numbers of visitors while vast "backcountry" areas away from common view were ignored. The efforts of park agencies to hide or camouflage certain park features deserve careful scrutiny. As Craig Colten and Lary Dilsaver put it in their history of sewage lagoons and electrical substations in Yosemite National Park, "the landscape obscured is equally important as the landscape that is showcased."[3]

The ways that parks were shaped for mobile audiences also deserve closer examination. Since the late nineteenth century, most pleasure travellers have experienced the scenic attractions of North America as part of a fast-paced journey. The same transportation technologies and metropolitan corridors that facilitated long-distance commodity circulation generated relatively standardized landscape experiences that were shared by tourists, families, and business travellers alike.[4] Park

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[2] For Canadian examples, see Theodore Binnema and Melanie Niemi, "'Let the Line be Drawn Now': Wilderness, Conservation, and the Exclusion of Aboriginal People from Banff National Park in Canada," *Environmental History* 11 (2006): 724-50; Sean Kheraj, *Inventing Stanley Park: An Environmental History* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013); Alan MacEachern, *Natural Selections: National Parks in Atlantic Canada, 1935-1970* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001); Ron Rudin, "Kouchibouguac: Representations of a Park in Acadian Popular Culture," in *A Century of Parks Canada, 1911-2011*, ed. Claire E. Campbell, 205-33 (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2011).

[3] Craig E. Colten and Lary M. Dilsaver, "The Hidden Landscape of Yosemite National Park," *Journal of Cultural Geography* 22, 2 (2005): 30.

[4] Mari Hvattum, Brita Brenna, Beate Elvebakk, and Janike Larsen, eds., *Routes, Roads, and Landscapes* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011); Anne F. Hyde, *An American Vision: Far Western Landscape and American Culture, 1820-1920* (New York: New York University Press, 1991); Lucy R. Lippard, *On the Beaten Track: Tourism, Art, and Place* (New York: New Press, 1999); Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century*

managers strove to impose and maintain a naturalistic aesthetic along major corridors of mobility inside many parks because they recognized the travelling public as an important, impressionable audience. They were also aware that the "visits" of many park visitors involved little more than looking out of a window while passing through.

Mount Robson Provincial Park is one of British Columbia's oldest and most famous provincial parks. Located just across the continental divide from the even-more-famous Jasper National Park, it was traversed by several railways and different kinds of automobile road during the period between 1910 and 1970. Rather than focusing on the park's eponymous centre of attention – Mount Robson, the tallest mountain in the Canadian Rockies and one of the most iconic in North America – I examine the eastern part of the park: the section of the Yellowhead Pass between Mount Robson and the continental divide (which was also the subject of great interest and pride among Canadian nationalist writers during the early twentieth century).[5] Though peripheral, this area was imbued with special significance because it acted as a gateway to both park and province. It was the "front door" to British Columbia.

In the Yellowhead Pass, as elsewhere in the Rockies, steep terrain placed severe constraints on both mobility and agricultural settlement, exaggerating the "thinness" Cole Harris argues characterized British Columbia's ground transportation network.[6] Arterial routes were few and far between in the mountains and therefore tended to become heavily beaten paths that played crucial roles in shaping travellers' views of the landscape. Simply put, the vast majority of travellers saw the same things when they passed through the Yellowhead Pass (and other mountain passes). Government agencies recognized that travellers' landscape experiences were tightly structured by the infrastructure of mobility and strove to keep areas visible along main travel corridors free of eyesores. This process was more complicated at Lucerne than in most parts of the Canadian Rockies due to significant shifts in the infrastructure of mobility within the Yellowhead Pass.

(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986 [1979]); John R. Stilgoe, *Metropolitan Corridor: Railroads and the American Scene* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

5   Sean Atkins, "Divided Landscapes: The Emergence and Dissipation of 'The Great Divide' Landscape Narrative" (PhD diss., University of Alberta, 2011). On Mount Robson in art and literature, see Jane Lytton Gooch, *Mount Robson: Spiral Road of Art* (Victoria: Rocky Mountain Books, 2013).

6   Cole Harris, *The Resettlement of British Columbia: Essays on Colonialism and Geographical Change* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), chap. 6.

A BOULDER-STREWN STREET LAID OUT IN THE WILDERNESS

As the lowest, gentlest pass between the Canadian Prairies and the interior of British Columbia, the Yellowhead has a long history as a travel corridor.[7] In the 1870s, surveyors recommended that Canada's first transcontinental railway should traverse the Rockies that way, but the Canadian Pacific Railway followed a more southerly line instead. The Yellowhead was forgotten by political and business elites until the first decade of the twentieth century, when Canada's second and third transcontinental railways chose the route. Between 1908 and 1912, the Canadian Northern Railway and the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway raced across the northern Prairies towards the pass. They took very different approaches to railway building. The Grand Trunk Pacific (GTP) built a very high quality line so that its trains could cross the Prairies and the Pacific slope faster and more efficiently than those of its Canadian and American competitors. The Canadian Northern (CNoR) took a more frugal approach, building a rough but passable line that it aimed to improve as traffic and revenues allowed.[8] These different approaches shaped the ways in which travellers experienced the landscapes of the Yellowhead Pass for decades to come, albeit hardly as company managers anticipated.

The GTP reached the Rockies first, and in 1913 its line extended to Tête Jaune Cache, an old fur trade rendezvous at the western foot of the pass. From there the GTP continued west to Prince Rupert, while the Canadian Northern turned southwest towards Vancouver. Reaching the Rockies a year after the GTP, the CNoR had second pick of routes through the pass. Coupled with its frugal approach to construction, this made the CNoR line through the Rockies markedly inferior to that of the GTP.[9] Although the country between Edmonton and Tête Jaune Cache was unlikely to generate much traffic for years, the two lines were rarely more than five kilometres apart in the five hundred kilometres separating those points, and they were in almost constant sight of each other through the Rockies.

7   Shuswap Indian Band, *Our People between the Two Mountain Ranges: Shuswap Indian Band Traditional Land Use Survey* (Kamloops: Shuswap Indian Band, 2008); David Smyth, "The Yellowhead Pass and the Fur Trade" *BC Studies* 64 (Winter 1984-85): 48-73; Richard Wright, *Overlanders* (Saskatoon: Western Producer, 1985).

8   Frank Leonard, *A Thousand Blunders: The Grand Trunk Pacific Railway and Northern British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1996); T.D. Regehr, *The Canadian Northern Railway: Pioneer Road of the Northern Prairies, 1895-1918* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1976).

9   On railway construction in northern British Columbia, see Jack Boudreau, *Sternwheelers and Canyon Cats: Whitewater Freighting on the Upper Fraser* (Prince George: Caitlin, 2006); Leonard, *Thousand Blunders*, chap. 3; Marilyn Wheeler, *The Robson Valley Story: A Century of Dreams* (McBride: Sternwheeler, 2008), 1-12, 219-86.

Their parallel tracks exemplified what Richard White has identified as the overbuilding of North American railways, and have been referred to as the "most foolish, unnecessary and useless mileage of railroad in Canadian history."[10]

Both railways built divisional points in the Rockies. These were important stations where locomotives were serviced, crews changed, and running orders communicated. The GTP built its divisional point at the site of present-day Jasper, Alberta. The CNoR established its mountain divisional point thirty-five kilometres farther west, on the south side of Yellowhead Lake, where the GTP line ran along the opposite shore. This station was named Lucerne, perhaps in hope that a reference to Switzerland would draw pleasure travellers.[11] But the choice of Lucerne's location was due to pragmatic considerations rather than to the impressive scenery of Yellowhead Lake and Mount Fitzwilliam. The south shore of the lake offered a steady year-round water supply and a large, flat, well drained site to accommodate a depot, roundhouse, and switching yard.

Lucerne station was built as the government of British Columbia established Mount Robson Park in 1913, hoping the new railways would develop tourist facilities there. Lucerne station was inside the park but, because the CNoR charter predated the park, largely exempt from statutes restricting development. This gave the railway a "200-foot" (sixty-metre) right-of-way along its mainline and the right to erect buildings, clear timber, or realign watercourses within it. All the station facilities were located within this right-of-way, including several boxcar bunkhouses, making it both an island and an avenue of modern industrial bustle (see Figure 1).

The community of Lucerne was located east of the station on an isthmus pinched between small, reedy Witney Lake and the narrows of larger, deeper Yellowhead Lake.[12] It was very much a company town, with the CNoR employing all but a handful of its residents. Lucerne had a population of 250 in 1915, making it the biggest town in the northern Rockies, with the nearest communities of more than one thousand being Edmonton and Kamloops (see Figure 2). The settlement had about fifty log cabins and timber-framed buildings, including a store, laundry, pool hall, school, and boardinghouses along two broad streets. A few trappers

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[10] Regehr, *Canadian Northern*, 289. See also G.W. Taylor, *The Railway Contractors* (Victoria: Morriss, 1988), 58; Richard White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011).

[11] A similar strategy of landscape association had proven successful for the CPR. See E.J. Hart, *The Selling of Canada: The CPR and the Beginnings of Canadian Tourism* (Banff: Altitude, 1983).

[12] Marilyn Wheeler, *The Robson Valley Story* (McBride: Robson Valley Story Group, 1979), 4-7.

Figure 1. Lucerne station, looking east. The depot is left of centre, and the town of Lucerne can be made out in the distance beyond it, across Witney Lake. Jasper Yellowhead Museum and Archives (997.07.219.01). R.A. Matthews photograph.

whose traplines predated the park also had cabins there. Locomotive foreman Alex Gray recalled that Lucerne really was a one-horse town in 1916.[13]

Almost all of the buildings in the town of Lucerne lay beyond the CNOR right-of-way and, therefore, trespassed in Mount Robson Park, where residence was forbidden except with ministerial permission. The CNOR asked the provincial government to survey a formal townsite so that its employees' homes could be given legal standing, but wartime shortages prevented this. In the meantime, the province turned a blind eye to encroachment in Mount Robson Park. The railway erected a signboard on its depot platform to identify surrounding peaks but made few other efforts to shape or inform its passengers' views of the area. Its plans for tourist facilities in the park lay farther west, within view of Mount Robson. Photographs of Lucerne in the late 1910s suggest its scant prospects of becoming a tourist destination like Banff or Lake Louise. The writer Howard O'Hagan, who spent his teenage years there, described it as "not so much a town as a boulder strewn street laid out in the wilderness."[14]

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[13] Alexander Torrence Gray, "Lucerne, British Columbia, 1913-1924: Notes from a Slide Show," www.cnpensioners.ca/uploads/1/0/7/8/10783463/lucerne.doc.

[14] Wheeler, *Robson Valley Story* (1979), 6-9; Howard O'Hagan, "The Woman Who Got On at Jasper Station" [1963] reprinted in *Trees Are Lonely Company* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1993), 315-17.

Figure 2. Lucerne from the south. Part of the town can be seen in the centre and part of the station at the lower left, across Witney Lake. The GTP mainline runs along the opposite side of Yellowhead Lake. Jasper Yellowhead Museum and Archives (997.07.160.12).

By 1917, the GTP and the CNoR were in serious financial trouble. The federal government had secured much of their debt and ordered them to consolidate their lines between Edmonton and the Fraser River. The better-built GTP line should have been retained, but seeking compromise between operational and political considerations, Ottawa mandated that each company give up approximately half of its mainline. Sharing divisional point facilities was deemed impractical, however, so Jasper and Lucerne stations were both retained. The GTP's tracks were removed in the vicinity of Lucerne, and the CNoR's near Jasper. By 1919, however, both companies were absorbed into the government-owned Canadian National Railways (CNR), eliminating any reason to retain divisional points at both Jasper and Lucerne.

It took four years for the federal Board of Railway Commissioners to order Canadian National to consolidate its mountain divisional points at Jasper and to compensate its employees at Lucerne for any losses stemming from their transfer to Jasper.[15] The few Lucerne residents not employed by the railway were left to their own devices. The CNR salvaged material from Lucerne during the summer of 1923 and demolished structures it no longer needed. The handsome Canadian Northern depot was retained even though Lucerne station was demoted to a flag stop,

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[15] Library and Archives Canada, RG 43, Railways and Canals, series A-1-2, vol. 624, file 19926, Board of Railway Commissioners, order no. 33402, file 28025, 379.

meaning express passenger trains no longer stopped there. Lucerne's population peaked at three hundred in early 1923, but a year later it was only seventeen, twelve of whom were CNR track maintenance workers.[16]

The CNR helped its employees who owned homes in Lucerne to acquire new ones at Jasper, but it provided no incentive for them to demolish the structures they left behind. Most were left as they stood on the day each family moved away. Few were even boarded up. Something similar had happened when the Canadian Pacific Railway relocated its mountain divisional point from Donald to Revelstoke in 1897, but Lucerne's "afterlife" as a trackside relic of modern industrial failure located at British Columbia's front door and inside a provincial park was unique.

A MENACE IN MANY WAYS

British Columbia was littered with abandoned settlements in 1923. Most were former resource camps in isolated, "played out" corners of the province. Middlebrow enthusiasm for western Canada's "frontier" history was only starting to emerge, and few romantic conventions surrounded the kind of sites that, since the early 1950s, have commonly been called ghost towns.[17] Jarringly out of place inside a scenic mountain park, Lucerne was the kind of trackside feature from which tourism promoters and park managers wanted to divert passengers' attention. Michael Dawson shows that BC government agencies were increasingly cognizant of tourism's economic significance during the interwar years. Even departments not directly responsible for promoting tourism would have recognized Mount Robson Park as an asset that needed to be kept free of eyesores that might negatively affect travellers.[18]

The abandoned town of Lucerne caught the provincial government's administrative eye early in 1925, when the Surveys and Lands Records Branch (hereafter the Lands Branch) was asked how the buildings on the south side of Yellowhead Lake should be assessed for taxation purposes, given that the site was "almost entirely deserted."[19] Lucerne

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[16] These numbers are based on the 1923 and 1924 editions of the *Wrigley-Henderson British Columbia Directory*.

[17] Forrest Pass, "'The Wondrous Story and Traditions of the Country': The Native Sons of British Columbia and the Role of Myth in the Formation of an Urban Middle Class," *BC Studies* 151 (Autumn 2006): 3-38; Chad Reimer, *Writing British Columbia History, 1784-1958* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009), chap. 4.

[18] Michael Dawson, *Selling British Columbia: Tourism and Consumer Culture, 1890-1970* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), chaps. 1-2.

[19] British Columbia Archives (BCA), GR-1088, British Columbia Surveys and Lands Records Branch, box 34 (hereafter BCSL), file 21, Government Agent, Prince George, to Superintendant of Lands, 10 February 1925.

no longer played a significant role in moving trains through the pass, so there was no longer a reason to defer action against structures intruding upon Mount Robson Park. The Lands Branch asked for information about the site from the Forest Service, whose rangers patrolled the area. "Seeing that these vacated buildings are within Mount Robson Park," the superintendent explained to the chief forester, "it is not deemed advisable to allow them to remain on the premises as they will possibly become a menace in many ways … Have one of your Rangers … recommend what he considers the best method of disposing of the buildings."[20]

The Lands Branch was responsible for protecting British Columbia's Crown lands against trespass, squatting, and other encroachments. It was also responsible for British Columbia's handful of provincial parks. It is hardly surprising that its top official believed the abandoned buildings at Lucerne should be disposed of. But at this stage Lucerne was only a problem in principle: no one from the Lands Branch had inspected or received complaints about it. What made Lucerne a potential "menace" was its prominent location beside the CNR mainline. Even without visiting the abandoned town, Lands Branch officials recognized that it was plainly visible to railway passengers who traversed Mount Robson Park in daylight. Indeed, it was a veritable magnet for their attention, with its lakeside setting and impressive mountain backdrop. Worse, Lucerne was only few minutes by train from Mount Robson, the scenic high point of the CNR tourist experience and a featured landmark in the railway's promotional campaigns.[21] It was an unsightly reminder of modern industry and corporate failure that intruded on a visual-vehicular narrative of scenic mountain grandeur, and its presence also invited unfavourable comparisons between Mount Robson and Jasper National Park, just across the continental divide. Lucerne made British Columbia look bad to railway travellers, and provincial government agencies felt obliged to correct their view.

The Forest Service provided the Lands Branch with an inventory of fifty-one buildings in Lucerne but no map or recommendation for disposing of them. Because structures located in the CNR's former Canadian Northern right-of-way lay beyond its purview, the Lands Branch could not act without an accurate map.[22] A Lands Branch inspector returning

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20 BCSL, file 21, Superintendant of Lands to Chief Forester, 31 March 1925. See also Superintendant of Lands, memo for the Forest Branch, 28 March 1925.

21 Gabrielle Zezulka-Mailloux, "Laying the Tracks for Tourism: Paradoxical Promotions and the Development of Jasper National Park," in *Culturing Wilderness in Jasper National Park*, ed. I.S. MacLaren, 233-59 (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2007).

22 BCSL, file 21, J.M. Gibson, District Forester, to Chief Forester, 14 May 1925; BCSL, file 21, Superintendant of Lands, memo to Chief Forester, 3 July 1925.

home from Christmas on the Prairies visited Lucerne in the last days of 1925. Heavy snow prevented him from surveying the right-of-way, but, because he believed that "Lucerne no longer ha[d] an excuse to exist," he nevertheless recommended that the government "destroy the old buildings before they bec[a]me an eyesore."[23]

The following spring, Inspector J.W. Smith went to Jasper Park to learn how officials there dealt with trespassing and abandoned structures.[24] The superintendent of Jasper told him that Lucerne would have been destroyed had Mount Robson Park been under federal control, and, after speeding past Lucerne twice aboard CNR passenger trains, Smith agreed that it needed to be cleared. Still, he advised caution. He had learned that CNR employees formerly stationed at Lucerne believed they still owned their old homes. Lucerne was an eyesore, a blot on the park landscape, but care was needed when dealing with property rights – even if only perceived property rights.[25]

Notices of trespass were posted at Lucerne, Jasper, and other CNR stations around western Canada. Several former Lucerne residents and track maintenance workers still stationed there appealed to the Lands Branch to spare their homes. So did the Reverend Dr. George Salton of Melville, Saskatchewan, who had been renting one of the former boardinghouses as a summer camp for high school students.[26] The Lands Branch responded that owners of buildings trespassing on Mount Robson Park had ninety days to remove their property or see it revert to the Crown. Building sites were to be left in "safe and sanitary condition and properly cleared and all holes or excavations [were] to be filled in."[27] No unsightly traces of habitation were to remain. Only a couple of trappers, after proving their traplines predated the park, were given permission to keep their cabins at Lucerne.

In the summer of 1927, Inspector Smith reported significant deterioration in the situation at Lucerne: "there being no recent sign of occupation, several buildings being demolished, others partly wrecked, presumably by owners, and in some instances apparently looted of doors, windows, etc." The notices of trespass posted in 1926 had inspired pilfering and vandalism rather than an orderly clean-up. Smith recommended that all unoccupied buildings be "destroyed at the end

23 BCSL, file 21, undated inspection report cited in Surveyor General to Superintendent of Lands, 2 March 1926.
24 BCSL, file 21, Superintendant of Lands, memo to J.W. Smith, Inspector, 31 May 1926.
25 BCSL, file 21, Smith to H. Cathcart, Superintendant of Lands, 15 June 1926.
26 BCSL, file 21, George F. Salton to Minister of Lands, 23 September 1926.
27 BCSL, file 21, Superintendant of Lands to Government Agent, Prince George, 3 August 1926.

Figure 3. Photograph of Lucerne taken by Lands Branch inspector J.W. Smith in summer 1927, showing evidence of scavenging and approximating the view seen by train passengers.

of fire season" when they could be set ablaze without risk to the surrounding forest.[28] He included snapshots with his report, one of which approximated the view that greeted train passengers as they traversed the site. It showed buildings stripped of finishings, with litter and scraps of building material strewn about (see Figure 3).[29] All that prevented the Lands Branch from razing the town, Smith reported, was the need to survey the precise location of the cnr's former Canadian Northern right-of-way. Due to an oversight, this had not been part of his mandate in 1927. For the second year in a row the Lands Branch failed to clean up the trackside eyesore at Yellowhead Lake.

In June 1928, the ranger responsible for the Yellowhead Pass reported that vandals had broken "practically all the glass in doors and windows of houses remaining" at Lucerne.[30] This elicited no response from the Lands Branch. In fact, Branch files contain no expressions of concern about Lucerne's appearance for the next seven years. This is explained by a change to the cnr mainline. To improve operational efficiency in the Rockies, the company moved several sections of its mainline from the cnor to the gtp right-of-way, to which it still held rights. After new

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[28] bcsl, file 22, Smith to Cathcart, 30 July 1927.
[29] Smith's inventory and snapshots are the last items contained in bcsl, file 21, but they are clearly meant to accompany his 30 July 1927 report contained in file 22.
[30] bcsl, file 22, A.F. Leach, Forest Patrol, Red Pass, to G. Milburn, Government Agent, Prince George, cited in Milburn to Superintendent of Lands, 23 June 1928.

tracks were laid along Yellowhead Lake, where the GTP route skirted the north shore, the rails through Lucerne were removed. Thus the CNR bypassed the site, which was screened from passengers' view by lakeside timber. No longer deemed an eyesore by the Lands Branch, Lucerne could safely be forgotten.[31]

The Lands Branch's concern over the impression Lucerne might make on travellers re-emerged in 1935, when headquarters received a poorly worded but nevertheless worrying telegram from Edmonton businessman Fred Williams. It read: "Can the abandoned townsite of Lucerne be leased? Here is the idea, there about to start on a automobile road next summer from Jasper to Lucerne. I want to put a licensed hotel, garage, a filling station, a bungalow camp, etc."[32] The prospect of Mount Robson Park being thrown open to the motoring public posed a challenge for the Lands Branch. A road through the Yellowhead Pass was bound to be popular with auto tourists, who had been visiting Jasper in growing numbers ever since a road link from Edmonton had been completed in 1931. But such a road was also bound to run along the south shore of Yellowhead Lake, following the old Canadian Northern right-of-way that the CNR had recently abandoned. This meant it would run right past Lucerne's mouldering remnants.

Instead of rebuffing Williams's inquiry, the Lands Branch asked the Forest Service for an update on Lucerne and began investigating whether an automobile road was really going to be built through the Yellowhead Pass. The ranger who inspected Lucerne reported that six years of snowfall, scavenging, and squatting had left the site looking worse than ever and that the forest was gradually reclaiming the town. He recommended the abandoned buildings be "destroyed as they are a menace to a community, both as to health and fire danger … Now would be an ideal time." Someone at Lands Branch headquarters underlined "Now would be an ideal time," indicating that cleaning up Lucerne was again deemed a priority.[33]

In 1935, it was perfectly plausible that an automobile road might be built in Mount Robson Park. Touring roads, including the Icefield Parkway between Banff and Jasper, were being built elsewhere in the

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[31] That the BC Lands Branch's attitude towards Lucerne ran along the lines of "out of sight, out of mind" is evidenced by the fact that it turned a blind eye to several instances of long-term squatting there during the Depression. See, for example, BCSL, file 22, Superintendant of Lands to P. Brewski, 28 November 1936.

[32] BCSL, file 22, Fred Williams to Superintendant of Lands, 21 January 1935.

[33] BCSL, file 22, District Forester, Prince George, cited in Chief Forester to Superintendant of Lands, 5 April 1935.

Figure 4. Abandoned Canadian Northern depot and the road through the Yellowhead Pass, late 1940s. Jasper Yellowhead Museum and Archives (PA 26-11).

Rockies as relief work projects.[34] However, the Department of Public Works confirmed that no roads came or were planned within thirty kilometres of Lucerne. Fred Williams was curtly informed that, since the CNR would continue providing the only access to Mount Robson Park, and its express passenger trains did not stop at Yellowhead Lake, "the necessity for tourist accommodation [was] not apparent."[35] A clean-up along the south shore of the lake was also unnecessary. Dealing with Lucerne was thus deferred for the third time in a decade.

Lucerne was out of view and forgotten until the summer of 1942, when most of the abandoned structures were razed by a road-building crew comprised of Japanese and Japanese Canadian internees deployed on low-priority infrastructure projects in isolated parts of western Canada.[36] They left a couple of trappers' cabins where the town had been, as well as the crumbling Canadian Northern depot, but most of the former station and town were soon overgrown with brush (see Figure 4). A former CNOR employee who had lived at Lucerne during the early 1920s visited the site in the late 1940s and was bewildered to find "little evidence of its existence."[37]

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[34] Ben Bradley, "'A Questionable Basis for Establishing a Major Park': Politics, Roads, and the Failure of a National Park in British Columbia's Big Bend Country," in *A Century of Parks Canada, 1911-2011*, ed. Claire E. Campbell, 79-102 (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2011); C.J. Taylor, *Jasper: A History of the Place and Its People* (Markham: Fifth House, 2009), chap. 10; Bill Waiser, *Park Prisoners: The Untold Story of Western Canada's National Parks, 1915-1946* (Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1995), 71-73, 81-84.

[35] BCSL, file 22, Superintendant of Lands to Fred Williams, 24 June 1935.

[36] Waiser, *Park Prisoners*, chap. 5; Wheeler, *Robson Valley Story* (2008), 668-70.

[37] Gray, "Lucerne."

FROM PRIMITIVE TOURING ROAD TO SUPERHIGHWAY

The road that the wartime internee labourers built through the Yellowhead Pass was rudimentary. Barely a lane wide in most places, it followed long stretches of abandoned railway grade and was so poorly maintained in the 1940s and 1950s that it was usually only passable during the driest months of summer and fall.[38] Nevertheless, a few adventurous motorists drove from Jasper to see Mount Robson, and this trickle of tourist traffic generated dozens of inquiries about establishing roadside accommodations in the park. The Lands Branch rejected all such proposals, but the Forest Service leased a lot on the south shore of Yellowhead Lake, less than a kilometre east of Lucerne, to retired police officer George Crate. There he built a small lodge, guest cabins, and boathouse, using logs cut onsite and material salvaged from internment camps and the old Canadian Northern depot, which was demolished around 1951.[39]

In 1948, the provincial government transferred responsibility for Mount Robson Park from the Lands Branch to the Parks Division. Like their predecessors, Parks Division staff gave Mount Robson pride of place in the provincial park system and were committed to removing eyesores from landscapes visible from the rail and road corridors. They took a dim view of Lake Yellowhead Lodge, considering it more disorganized than rustic due to its buildings having been cobbled together from logs and salvaged lumber. The Crate family had also put hand-painted signs beside the road to catch the eye of passing motorists, and the Parks Division deemed this homespun commercialism inappropriate in a major wilderness park. Lake Yellowhead Lodge's ramshackle appearance did not fit the Parks Division's vision for development in Mount Robson Park, and when the lease came up for renewal in 1956 it purchased the camp for use as staff accommodation.[40]

The handful of cabins left in Lucerne were of little concern to Parks officials during the 1950s. Few motorists drove past the former town, and few who did noticed the site's being steadily reclaimed by forest. This began to change in the mid-1960s with plans to upgrade the road through

[38] Wheeler, *Robson Valley Story* (2008), 673-77; Yellowhead Highway Association, *The Saga of the Reopening of the Trans Canada Highway: Yellowhead Route* (Edmonton: Yellowhead Highway Association, 1948).

[39] Valemount Historic Society, *Yellowhead Pass and Its People* (Valemount: Valemount Historic Society, 1984), 317-18, 417.

[40] Ibid., 318. BCA, GR-1991 BC Parks and Outdoor Recreation Division, reel 1757 (hereafter BC Parks), Parks Use Permit contract for Lake Yellowhead Resort, May 1957; BC Parks, BC Government Travel Bureau to Provincial Parks Branch, 24 August 1956; BC Parks, Forester, Parks Branch memo to H.G. McWilliams, 21 August 1957.

Yellowhead Pass into a paved, all-season arterial highway. Preliminary clearing of the right-of-way along the south shore of Yellowhead Lake brought several old buildings into the motoring public's view and spurred the final round of bureaucratic anxiety about the effects on travellers of eyesores around Lucerne.

Park planners paid special attention to what motorists travelling on the future highway would see along the south shore of Yellowhead Lake. This area's proximity to the BC-Alberta boundary heightened its geographical and political significance, and the accessible lakeshore could also be developed into a recreational asset. As plans for the new highway were finalized, the BC Parks Branch began to groom Mount Robson Park to make a good impression on the motoring public. In the mid-1960s, it demolished the former Lake Yellowhead Lodge to make room for a picnic site and boat launch. Shortly after, the director of the Parks Branch gave instructions to "eliminate all … private dwellings in Mt. Robson Park."[41] This decision was part of what Paul Kopas identifies as a wider campaign during the 1960s and 1970s to eliminate evidence of industry and habitation in Canadian parks.[42] An "ecological" park aesthetic was ascendant, and the Parks Branch wanted motorists on the new highway to experience Mount Robson Park as the height of Canadian mountain scenery, without intrusions, disruptions, inconsistencies, or eyesores. Dozens of buildings in the park were identified as candidates for elimination, including a clutch in the vicinity of Lucerne.[43] Old cabins visible from the new right-of-way were demolished and burned if found unoccupied and not covered by a valid Parks Use Permit, which was required by any private residence or business inside a provincial park.[44] Parks Branch officials railed against one cabin at the former town of Lucerne, complaining that it resembled "a garbage dump."[45] However, it belonged to a trapper who possessed both a valid (and renewable) trapline licence and a Parks Use Permit, which allowed him to fend off the Parks Branch's clean-up campaign for years. Gradually, though, through abandonment and acquisition, almost all of the private buildings in the

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[41] BC Parks, Director to District Parks Officer, Kamloops, 18 January 1966.

[42] Paul Kopas, *Taking the Air: Ideas and Change in Canada's National Parks* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007), 11.

[43] A few of these buildings were recreational properties that had gained a foothold in the park, but most belonged to rural resource workers – including trappers and guides – and track maintenance workers who were employed on a seasonal or temporary basis by Canadian National Railways.

[44] BC Parks, District Park Officer, Prince George, to Director, 31 January 1967.

[45] BC Parks, District Park Officer, Prince George, to Director, 26 October 1967.

area around Yellowhead Lake came under the Parks Branch's control and were demolished.

CONCLUSION

In 2015, more than ninety years after Lucerne was abandoned as a divisional point station, there is only one old cabin left where the town once stood.[46] Surrounded by timber and dense brush, it is invisible to motorists passing by on Highway 16. It is also invisible to passengers riding aboard via trains, which roll along the north shore. No trace of station or town can be discerned at speed, and for most motorists travelling through the Yellowhead Pass, "Lucerne" refers only to a campground part-way between the BC-Alberta boundary and the roadside recreational complex below Mount Robson. This campground lies two kilometres west of where the town of Lucerne once stood.

From the late 1960s to the early 2010s, Parks Branch managers chose not to commemorate or even identify Lucerne with plaques or markers. Early in the second decade of the new millennium, however, the Parks Branch developed new roadside interpretive facilities for the eastern section of Mount Robson Park as part of the Yellowhead Pass National Historic Site. Six plaques are arranged in a ring at the eastern portal of the park, beside the parking lot where many motorists pause for a short break to contemplate the continental divide. Given the pass's long history as a travel corridor, it is no surprise that this new interpretive initiative stresses the intertwining of mobility and the environment. Travel and transport feature prominently as classic themes in western Canadian history. Half the text on the plaque entitled "Rails through the Rockies" is dedicated to Lucerne. It perfunctorily states that Lucerne was established by the Canadian Northern Railway in 1913 and then made "redundant" by the creation of the Canadian National, resulting in the transfer of railway employees to Jasper in 1923, which nearly doubled the population of that community. Thus Lucerne's history, as presented to the motoring public, spanned a ten-year period and ended abruptly when the station was severed from the main artery of mobility. Without an excuse to exist, the town naturally withered and disappeared.

Yet Lucerne had a longer and more complicated history. As an abandoned site and eyesore it moved park managers to clean it up, either by hiding it or remediating it to a natural-looking state. This complicated,

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[46] There are also two cabins on the north side of Yellowhead Lake, left over from when the CNR ran an ice-cutting operation there. BC Parks Branch, Area Supervisor, correspondence with author, 16 January 2014.

unromantic history is considered impolitic or irrelevant to travellers through the area today. Acknowledging it would draw attention to the active, crucial role that government agencies have played – and continue to play – in managing and manipulating not only the material landscape of Mount Robson Park but also travellers' views of it. Lucerne's many years as an aesthetic problem for various government agencies highlight the state's role as "stage manager" in the park and flag the fact that park landscapes are constructed, maintained, and carefully patrolled rather than natural, timeless, and essential. Given that Lucerne was erased from travellers' experiences of Mount Robson Park in the late 1960s, it is easy for present-day park planners to be silent about the challenges it posed for their predecessors who sought to impose and maintain a clean, naturalistic aesthetic along the various corridors of mobility that spanned the park. Nevertheless, for historians of mobility, landscape, and the environment, this long history of government agencies' mindfulness of the linkage between transportation infrastructure, the tourist gaze, and perceptions of nature shows how major travel corridors were accorded special significance in the management of parks during the twentieth century and, thus, played crucial roles in shaping popular experiences of nature.