

A BRIEF HISTORY OF WHISTLER

- The first pioneers to live on the land that the Resort Municipality of Whistler now inhabits arrived in the 1880s. The Squamish and Lil'wat people have been the stewards of these lands and to this day these two First Nations people follow in the footsteps of their ancestors.
- The Whistler Museum & Archives works to collect, preserve, and share the history of the people who have come here after the 1880s and the Squamish and Lil'wat Cultural Centre (www.spo7ez.ca) will present the history of the First Nations people starting in "the long ago" to the present and into the future.
- We are excited to work together to share our diverse heritages and cultures and invite you to share in our celebration of life.

From the 1800s...

- Alta Lake, BC was the original name of Whistler. The lake itself was originally called Summit Lake as its creeks flow out of both north and south creating a chain of four connected lakes (Alpha, Nita, Alta, and Green).
- The valley was part of the traveling route known as the Pemberton Trail. The area was first surveyed and documented in 1858 by Hudson's Bay men looking for an alternate route into the Caribou area.
- In the 1860's British Naval Officers and Surveyors named what is now Whistler Mountain as "London Mountain."
- London Mountain soon became locally known as "Whistler" because of the shrill whistle made by the Western Hoary Marmots who lived among the rocks.
- One of the first settlers was John Millar, a trapper who ran a stopping house on the Pemberton Trail near today's Function Junction.
- In 1911, John Millar met Alex Philip on a trip to Vancouver to sell furs. He invited Alex and his wife Myrtle to experience the superb fishing on the chain of lakes near his cabin. Myrtle and Alex Philip, both from the state of Maine, had moved to the west coast and dreamed of opening their own fishing lodge and resort.
- The Philips visited Summit Lake several times over the next three years. Their journey from Vancouver took them three days. It began on a steam ship from Vancouver to Squamish, then by horse to Brackendale where they spent the night; then a two day hike up the rough Pemberton Trail with rented pack horses.
- In 1913 they purchased ten acres of land on the northwest corner of Alta Lake for \$700. By 1914, Rainbow Lodge fishing resort was completed. It had four bedrooms, a large living/dining area and a kitchen.
- Some of Myrtle's family, the Tapley's, came out from Maine to help with the construction.
- In 1914 the Pacific Great Eastern Railway (PGE) reached Alta Lake and opened the valley to the outside world.
- The legendary hospitality combined with a spectacular setting and excellent fishing, allowed the Philip's to expand Rainbow Lodge with cabins until it could accommodate 100 people. It soon became known as the most popular resort west of Banff and Jasper. The Philip's operated the Lodge until 1948 when they sold it to Alec and Audrey Greenwood. The main Lodge burnt down in 1977, but today the area has been preserved as Rainbow Park. Some of the original cabins and a replica of "the Bridge of Sighs" are still standing at the park.
- Alex Philip, an incurable romantic and writer of fiction novels, named the "Bridge of Sighs" and the "River of Golden Dreams and Romance".
- The Philip's both remained in the valley until their deaths. Alex died in 1968 at the age of 86, and Myrtle died in 1986 at the age of 95.
- Many other lodges were built around the lakes due to the summer tourist trade.
- The Alta Lake Hotel was owned by Russ Jordan from the early 1920's until 1930 when it burnt down. He left the valley for three years but returned to purchase land on Nita Lake to build and operate Jordan's Lodge. A new lodge at Nita Lake will replace Jordan's Lodge, with construction currently underway.
- Bert and Agnes Harrop built cabins and a floating tea room, known as Harrop's Point, in the 1920's. In 1945 owner Dick Fairhurst renamed the property Cypress Lodge. In the early 1960's he and his wife Kelly built new cabins and a main lodge. In 1972 the property was purchased by the Canadian Youth Hostel Association and it remains the Whistler Hostel.
- Cecilia (Cis) and John Mansell moved to Alta Lake in 1945. They built Hillcrest Lodge near today's Lakeside Park on Alta Lake...

They sold it in 1965 to the Mason Family and others who operated it as Mount Whistler Lodge for skiers. The main lodge was burnt in a fire practice by the fire department in 1986.

- Tourism was not the only industry in the valley during this time. Logging was also very profitable, especially with the arrival of the railway. For several years there were a few sizable mills and lumber operations: The Barrs at Parkhurst Mill on Green Lake, and the Gebharts with the Rainbow Lumber Company on Alta Lake.
- Other enterprising businesses included a mink and marten farm, as well as trapping and prospecting, which led to mining surveys up Fitzsimmons Valley by Jimmy Fitzsimmons. The shafts can still be found on the Singing Pass trail.
- During the early 1960's events took place that would change the valley forever. A group of Vancouver Businessmen formed the Garibaldi Olympic Development Association (GODA) to develop a site to host a future Winter Olympic Games.
- The site chosen was London Mountain in Garibaldi Provincial Park; with its base located in the community of Alta Lake.
- At this time there was no road, no electricity, no piped water or sewer in Alta Lake.
- In 1962 the Garibaldi Lifts Limited was formed with Franz Wilhelmsen as President. It had two main objectives: a) To finance and supervise required land/business studies; b) To erect and operate ski lifts on Whistler Mountain.
- From 1962 to 1965 Garibaldi Lifts raised funds and began development of the ski area on the south side of Whistler Mountain, known as the Creekside today. By the fall of 1965 a four person gondola to the mountain's mid-station, a double chairlift to the alpine tree line, and two T-bars had been installed, as well as along with a day lodge and several ski runs.
- By 1965 the Provincial Government had completed a narrow gravel road from Vancouver. It followed a rough service road under the large Hydro towers leading to Bridge River. Electricity in the Alta Lake community was not realized until a substation was built to power the ski lifts in 1965.
- GODA made a total of four separate bids for the Winter Olympics. In 1968 Vancouver/Garibaldi won the Canadian nomination for the 1976 proposed site. However, Montreal was bidding for the 1976 Summer Olympic Games, which they were awarded and the International Olympic Committee would not allow both summer and winter games in the same country.
- On August 27, 1965 London Mountain's name was officially changed to Whistler Mountain.
- On February 15, 1966, Whistler Mountain officially opened for skiing.
- The road was paved to Whistler in 1966, and to Pemberton in 1969.
- Whistler began experiencing faster growth than most communities in the province. In 1974 the Provincial NDP Government was interested in developing tourism in BC and took a number of steps affecting Whistler. This included a land freeze and a development study to identify the important community issues. The result of the study was the creation of the Resort Municipality of Whistler on September 6, 1975, the first resort municipality in Canada.
- In 1977, calls for development proposals for Blackcomb Mountain were issued and a community plan was visualized with the town center at the site where both Whistler and Blackcomb Mountains converge, the site that was then the community garbage dump.
- In January 1978, 53 acres of Crown Land were given to the municipality to develop the town centre. The Whistler Village Land Company was formed as a subsidiary company with the mandate to manage, develop and sell land within the town centre.
- The first sod for the village was turned on August 18, 1978 by first Mayor Pat Carleton.
- Blackcomb Mountain opened in December of 1980, creating one of the largest ski complexes in North America, with the two longest vertical ski drops on the continent.
- In 1985 Blackcomb's lift service was expanded to 5280 feet, making Blackcomb North America's only "Mile High Mountain".
- In 1992 Snow Country Magazine, one of North America's most prominent ski magazines, voted Whistler Resort the Number One Ski Resort in North America, the first of many accolades to come.
- In 1998 Whistler and Blackcomb Mountains merged under the direction of a company called Intrawest.
- On April 20, 1999 Whistler and Blackcomb became the first North American Ski Resort to top 2 million skier visits in one season.
- In October 2002, the passenger train service on the BC Rail tracks was closed and only freight trains used the railway tracks. Passenger service was resumed in May 2006 under the name of Whistler Mountaineer.
- In 2003 the year-round population of Whistler was counted at 9,850
- On July 2, 2003 Whistler, in partnership with Vancouver, won the bid to host the 2010 Winter Olympics. This development opens yet another chapter in the history of the mountain community.