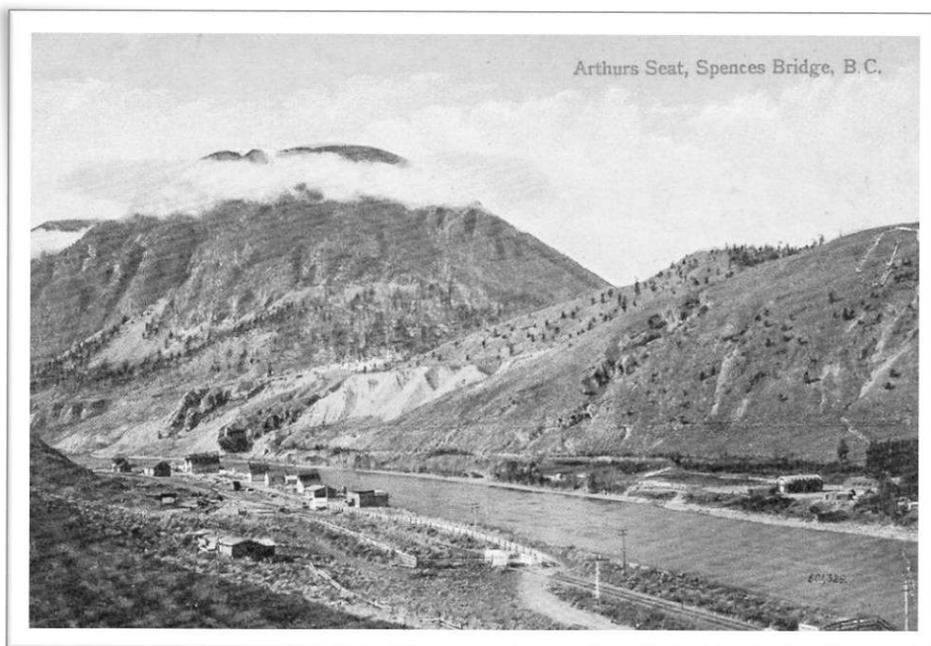


1905 GREAT LANDSLIDE

Spences Bridge, BC

This booklet was prepared to commemorate the landslide of 1905. The articles used are all of different perspectives, varying from writer to writer. Although some of this information conflicts between articles, it has been provided to illustrate a full picture of this days events

Prepared by Summer Student Sara Walkem
Cook's Ferry Indian Band
August 12th, 2015



VIEW SHAWNIKEN (ARTHUR'S SEAT) MOUNTAIN BEFORE THE SLIDE

August 13th 2015 marks the 110th Anniversary of the 1905 Great Landslide of Spences Bridge.

On this day around 3pm, a great rumbling was heard as Shawniken Mountain (Arthur's Seat) gave way, sending rock and debris to dam the Thompson River from bank to bank. The slide completely covered the First Nations village of approximately 100 people, situated at the foot of the mountain. Homes were destroyed, 18 lives were lost. Chief Lillooet (who was in his 90's at the time) was visiting this village; and lost his life during the slide. The slide destroyed the east bound Canadian Pacific Railroad tracks along the south side of the river. Luckily at this time the eastbound train was approaching the town just after the slide. The conductor was able to stop the train in time, before colliding with the debris. Accounts of the event say that the Thompson River rose 10-15 feet flooding the town. People worked frantically to create a channel, to allow water to pass through the slide's "dam". This process took about 4-5 hours of digging and shoveling. This slide was reported to have been the 3rd slide in approximately the same spot.

The 110th Anniversary of this slide marks the loss of several First Nations people as well as their village. Today the remnants of the slide can be found on either side of the river. The long horizontal "breaks" in the landscape mark where the land slid into the water. This memorial reminds us both of the lives lost, and the raw power this landscape holds.

1905 Great Landslide Spences Bridge, BC

NEWS CLIPPINGS FROM 1905

The daily province Monday August 14th 1905, Vancouver, B.C.

Catastrophe On The Thompson River: - Spences Bridge, August 14. An Indian village which nestled at the foot of a mountain on the bank of the Thompson River a mile below Spences Bridge was overwhelmed yesterday afternoon. Fifteen Indians lost their lives. The side of the mountain on the opposite side of the river from Spences Bridge, slipped into the river. It came down with a roar that could be heard a mile away. In half an hour the swift flowing river was converted into a lake. The slide stretched from bank to bank. The water rose between 70 and 80 feet. It came up almost a foot a minute. At one time it was 5 feet over the railway tracks. Last night at 8 o'clock it had receded until it was only halfway up the bank. At 3 o'clock this afternoon the swift river had once more worn its way through the wall of gravel and rocks and trees and by sunset the river will be at its normal level. (River up about 24 hours).

Excerpt from the *Widow Smith of Spences Bridge*
(Jessie Ann Smith) August 13th, 1905

Suddenly, just after 3 o'clock in the afternoon we heard a loud roaring noise. We hurried outside to see what was the matter. The sight we saw was fearful. A large part of the mountain on our side of the river and just below Murray Creek had broken away and was crashing down right across the valley. Rocks and earth were still crumbling down. The Thompson River was completely dammed and a great wall of water 15 to 20 feet high came rushing back upstream ...

The slide had caused terrible havoc. The Indian village of nearly 100 persons was across the river from the mountain and directly in the path of the wall of earth and water that swept across the village, destroying homes and property. People in the first houses never had a chance to escape. Fortunately many had attended service in the newly-built Anglican Church, which now lay scattered all over the ground. The service was over and people were walking towards their homes or pausing to visit with friends and children were playing down by the river when the slide occurred. Most of the people were able to scramble to safety on higher ground but there was a sad loss of 18 lives and as many people were seriously injured.

*EXCERPT FROM BRITISH COLUMBIA'S
MAJESTIC THOMPSON RIVER BY BERNIE
FANDRICH*

*A LARGE BLUFF OF ALLUVIUM AT THE BASE OF
ARTHUR'S SEAT BROKE AWAY
SUDDENLY...FILLING THE VALLEY BOTTOM
FROM BANK TO BANK...CAUSING A MIGHTY
WAVE 10 TO 15 FEET HIGH TO SWEEP UP THE
RIVER AGAINST THE CURRENT...THE WAVE
OVERWHELMED THE RANCHERIE ON THE
FLAT BELOW THE TOWN OF SPENCES BRIDGE,
KILLING TEN NATIVES AND INJURING
THIRTEEN. FIVE WERE BURIED ALIVE IN THE
SLIDE.*



The Daily Colonist, August 16th, 1905 - Tells of Slide at Spence's Bridge:

Graphic description of Disaster Which Wiped out an Indian Village.

A gentleman who was a passenger on Sunday's Atlantic express, which was passing the spot where the disastrous landslide near Spences Bridge occurred, furnishes the following graphic description of the event:

The slide occurred just as the CPR transcontinental express was approaching Spences Bridge, and gave the passengers the site of a lifetime. The towering bluff on the north side of the Thompson River about 200 feet high suddenly became detached and swept down into the river. The river is a quarter of a mile wide at this point, and the banks are about 40 feet high, but the channel was completely filled up with the mass of earth and debris that came down. The Indians had not a moment of warning and many were buried with the buildings the force of the water was so terrific that the railway track although nearly 100 feet above the bed of the river and 400 feet from the channel was covered with mud and debris. There are watermarks high up on the hill above the track. Some of the Indians when rescued were found to have been badly injured. Being cut about the head and covered with bruises. The rest of the church and one or two houses further from the rivers bank were piled up against the tracks embankment. The Thompson was backed up in the backflow flooded out the residences and stables on the edge of the River of Spences Bridge. Horses, cattle, and other livestock were caught up by the water and were rescued before the river got too deep.

Times Colonist, September 17th 1980

“THE HOUSES WERE SWEEP AWAY AND THE RESIDENTS HAD NO WARNING TO ESCAPE ... THE CHURCH WAS TORN FROM ITS FOUNDATION AND ITS ROOF CARRIED FOR 200YD. (180 M). THE ALTAR APARENTLY REMAINED INTACT. A GRAVESTONE WAS CARRIED 200YD. FROM ITS ORIGINAL LOCATION AND BY CHANCE HALTED UPRIGHT ON A PILE OF SAGEBRUSH”.

*The Daily World, August 14, 1905
Landslide Dammed the Thompson River,
Overwhelmed Indian Rancherie:-*

Eighteen Indians are dead and twelve injured as the result of a landslide near the Village of Spences Bridge on the C.P.R. The landslide descended into the Thompson River, damming it and sweeping the waters over the entire Indian Village about half a mile west of the railway station. The descent of so much sand and rock into the Thompson had the effect of backing the waters up and an immense wave, from 10 to 15 feet high started up the river carrying the ferry, boats and canoes before it. The River was completely dammed for four or five hours and rose 20 feet in that time before it found an outlet.

Three Indians fishing on the north side of the river were carried away with the slide and two others were carried up stream half a mile, where they were rescued.

This is the third slide that has occurred in almost the same place within recent years.



Slide at Spences Bridge 1905 – Ashcroft Journal Files

Many Indians killed and injured; reservation demolished

The most disastrous landslide in the history of British Columbia occurred about a quarter of a mile below Spences Bridge on Sunday afternoon last at 3:30 when the large bank of gravel broke away from the mountain on the north side of the Thompson River, hurling itself into the river and onto the Indian reservation on the south side completely demolishing every building and killing 16 people.

The dead who are all Indians include five women four children and seven men.

The new annex to the Clemes house has been converted into a hospital where 11 of the injured are now lying. At last reports they were all recovering slowly Dr. Sanson of Ashcroft and Dr. Ker of Spences Bridge are attending to the injured.

Three Indians who were fishing salmon directly under the slide are buried deep and their bodies will never be recovered.

When the slide struck the river it dammed it completely, forcing the water back in a wall 10 feet high for a distance of 500 yards. The ferry just back of the town was caught in the rush and carried several yards.



2013 Photograph of Shawniken Mountain (Arthur's Seat)

Septer, D. (2004) wrote:

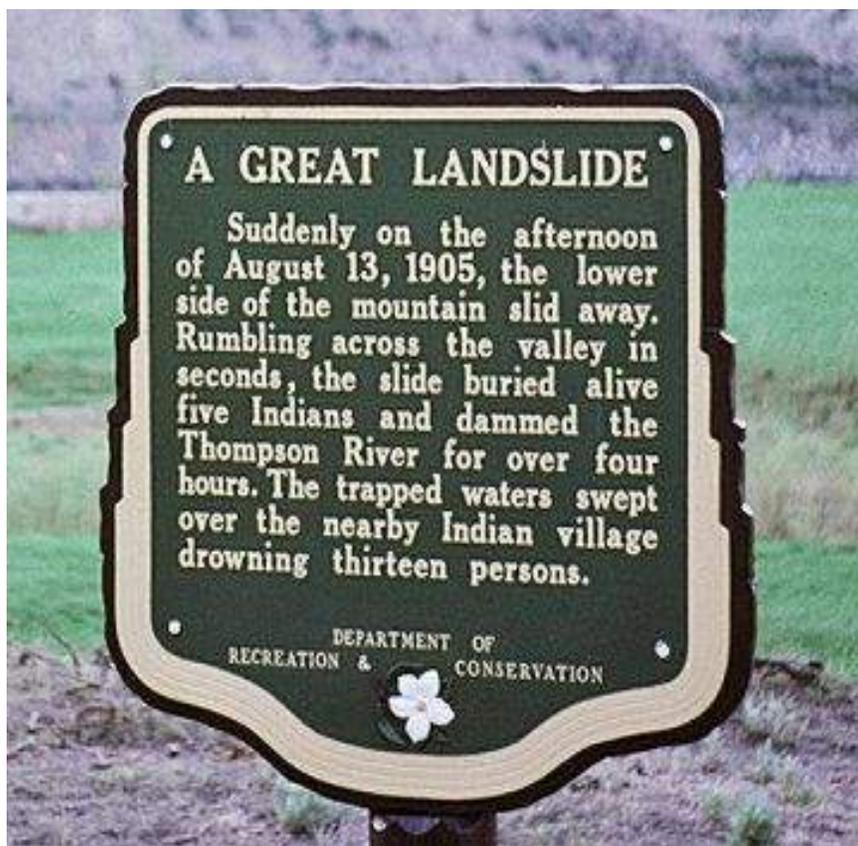
"It is uncertain how many people died in the slide and the flooding that occurred after the river was blocked. Ten Indians were first reported and killed and another 13 injured. The Vancouver Province reported the day after that 15 had died, and a brief account written 49 years later said 14. Five Indians were buried alive in the slide and 3 men and a woman out fishing were drowned. A later report in Na-na-kwa put the total number of fatalities at 18. The B.C. Ministry of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources (1993) also puts the death toll at 18. The historic sites plaque by the Trans-Canada Highway puts the toll at five in the slide and 13 in the flood".

Those (Known) lost in the slide:

- Chief Lillooett
- Jimmy Drynoch
- Mrs. Alice (Davie) Oppenheim
- Baby girl (Davie) Oppenheim
- William Davie
- Dora Davie
- Josephin Brush
- Mr. Wm Qualamasteut
- Mr. Oubtan

The Vancouver Daily Province, August 15th 1905.

Unpublished notes by H.J. Cambie, consulting engineer to the CPR, indicate that previous landslides had occurred at the site in 1880 and 1899. These slides were thought by Cambie to be caused by irrigation on the bench behind the landslide. The loose sands underlying the high gravel bank had been washed out gradually as a result of irrigation carried out at the top of the bank. It was thought that water from the irrigation ditches gradually worked out the loose lower sands and the heavier top material then slid away. Cambie is quoted as saying "the clays of this dry and arid part of the province which have been deprived by excessive evaporation during many centuries of nearly all their moisture will take up almost 60% of their own weight of water without changing their shape but if a trifle more is added they lose all cohesion and spread out quite flat. A lump of such clay the size of one's fist can be placed in a soup plate and water dropped on it will sufficiently saturate and it will then suddenly collapsed and flatten out as if it were all water. No doubt this is what happened to the bench about 200 feet above the Thompson".



Jessie Ann Smith (*The Widow Smith of Spence Bridge*) notes that “One young inhabitant of the reserve, Charles Walkem, assumed the leadership of the Cook’s Ferry Band after the disaster... After the landslide, Charles Walkem saw to the building of the new houses on the reserve and to the rebuilding of the church”

MARCH 1907: IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE SLIDE, ARCHIBALD CLEMES TRANSFERRED 7.56 ACRES OF LAND TO THE COOK’S FERRY INDIAN BAND; WHICH WAS CONVERTED IN 1969 INTO RESERVE LAND. THIS AREA WAS USED TO REBUILD THE VILLAGE LOST IN THE SLIDE. TODAY THIS LAND IS KNOWN TO AS SHAWNIKEN INDIAN RESERVE # 4B; WHICH INCLUDES 9 HOMES, THE OLD BAND HALL, AND THE ANGLICAN CHURCH.

Although this sign is no-longer standing, Cook’s Ferry Indian Band will be erecting a memorial in 2016. This memorial will commemorate The Great Slide of 1905.

CREDITS

Research done by CFIB Cultural Summer Student Sara Walkem overseen by Cultural Worker Pearl Hewitt

Layout credited to Sara Walkem

