



# Gold Rush Trails Near Barkerville, BC

Imagine following the foot steps (and hoof prints!) of gold seekers from 150 years ago, riding trails where men toiled, searching for riches. You can do just that, around Barkerville in central BC – a National Historic Site of Canada and world-class living museum.

by TANIA MILLEN

**HOW IT WORKS:** Barkerville is located 85 km east of Quesnel, BC on Highway 26. Fill up on fuel before heading east from Quesnel or be prepared to pay higher fuel rates at the General Store in Wells.

There are five, one-horse paddocks located at Forest Rose Campground – a popular tent and RV campground located 2 km from Barkerville on the Bowron Lakes Road ([www.barkervillecampgrounds.ca](http://www.barkervillecampgrounds.ca)). Reservations are recommended. The campsite is very horse-friendly with a lovely horse-accessible gravel creek at the west end of the campsite, plus ample hand-grazing along roadways. Non-horsey campers enjoy having horses onsite.

**ACCESS:** Permission is required for horses

to travel through the town of Barkerville to the trails beyond. For safety, access is only permitted at specific times as commercially operated horse-drawn wagons traverse the narrow former Cariboo Wagon Road for about 1 km beyond Barkerville. Contact the friendly and accommodating Barkerville CEO for details ([www.barkerville.ca](http://www.barkerville.ca)). Dogs are not permitted.

There are gravel roads on both sides of Highway 26 to/from the campground, Barkerville and various trails so plan to ride right from the campground. Reduction Road provides access on the west side of Highway 26 between Forest Rose and Barkerville, while the Wells-Barkerville Winter Connector provides access to/from Barkerville on the east side of Highway 26.

**THE TRAILS:** The day trips summarized below will keep you busy for about five days but be sure to plan a few non-riding days to explore the quaint town of Wells and of course, Barkerville itself.

**Mount Agnes Multi-Use Route** – This straight-forward 16 km return route follows the 1860's Cariboo Wagon Road for a few kilometres beyond Barkerville, then forks left and continues to subalpine Groundhog Lake via a former mining road. Start by riding 2 km to Barkerville, then hand-walk your horses up 'the bulkhead' road through Barkerville town-site. Hop on and ride up to the court house in Richfield, then follow the signs for the Cariboo Wagon Road and Groundhog Lake. Most of the ride is uphill and it ends near a welcoming snowmobile cabin in the subalpine – a nice spot for lunch. There are several horse-accessible water sources plus a mid-ride rider-accessible shelter (not horse-friendly) for poor weather.

**Proserpine Mining Road** – This 16 km return ride follows a very rocky former mining road into the alpine east of Barkerville. It ends at about 1700 m and is the best route for views. Start by riding from Forest Rose Campground to Barkerville, following the eastern bank of Williams Creek to the Barkerville security fence. Ride east across the bridge over Williams Creek and continue up Conklin Gulch. After

Raised boardwalks line Barkerville's main street.



## PRODUCT REVIEW

### SHOULDER RELIEF CINCH

Anatomical girths have been around for awhile in the English tack world, but Total Saddle Fit's Shoulder Relief Cinch is the first anatomically shaped cinch I've come across for western riders. After trying one out on a 20 km mountain trail ride, it became the regular cinch on my tricked-out trail saddle.

The centre (forward portion) of the cinch sits in the girth groove, while the cinch ring ends allow the latigo to pull straight down, farther back than a regular cinch. This provides extra space behind the elbow, allowing it to move freely while discouraging cinch sores - particularly important for chubby horses or those with a forward 'girth groove'. The shoulder relief cinch also allows the saddle to be set farther back, reducing pressure on the top of the shoulder blade - encouraging free movement. Plus it helps keep the saddle in place when riding downhill.

The cinch is made of quality leather with removable neoprene or sheepskin lining and is under \$200. I'd recommend this cinch for riders looking for increased performance, those who struggle to keep their cinch or saddle in the correct place, or for chubby horses.

Find more information at [www.totalsaddlefit.com](http://www.totalsaddlefit.com)



about 2 km, follow a former mining road uphill to the right. The road winds up to the alpine on the Mt Proserpine ridge. Pick your spot for lunch.

**Old Cariboo Hudson Road/3100 Road Loop** – This 18 km loop ride follows a quiet Forest Service Road for 9 km then loops back along the Old Cariboo Hudson Road past Barkerville. It provides open valley scenery along Pleasant Valley Creek then passes south of Mount Conklin. This loop can be ridden in either direction and includes a 2 km ride between Forest Rose and Barkerville. For the clockwise route, start by riding south for 100 m on the Bowron Lake Road then turn east onto the 3100 Road. Continue about 9 km and turn right (west) onto the Old Cariboo Hudson Road. Ride northwest towards Mount Conklin then down through Conklin Gulch to a bridge over Williams Creek just outside the security fence at Barkerville. Close the loop by riding 2 km back to the Forest Rose Campground.

Other trails to explore include: **One Mile Lake Road** east of Wells, **Jack of Clubs Creek Road** west of Wells, **Sugar Creek Loop** north of Wells, **Cariboo Wagon Road** west of the Mount Agnes Multi-Use Route, and extended rides southeast along the **Old Cariboo Hudson Road**.

**LOGISTICS:** A day pass (\$15) or annual pass (\$30) is required to travel through Barkerville to access the trails beyond. Buy your pass at the gate. The best map – Wells Barkerville Mountain Trails map – was produced by District of Wells in 2011. It costs \$5 and is available at Tourist Information Centres in Quesnel, Wells or Barkerville ([www.wellsbarkervilletrails.com](http://www.wellsbarkervilletrails.com)).

**TIPS:** Horses need average fitness and should be prepared for rocky footing. Beware the many bugs and plan for bug protection for horses and riders.

Trails are frequented by hikers and mountain

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TopLeft: Horses are welcome to traverse the historic town of Barkerville, but permission is required. Right: The Richfield court house, where Judge Begbie maintained order during gold rush days.



Tania Millen Photos



Clockwise: Hand-carved wooden headstones in the Barkerville cemetery. Horse drawn carriages still ply the streets in Barkerville. Groundhog Lake was worth the 20 km round trip from Forest Rose Campground.



## CONSIDER SPECIALTY GEAR

Trail riders often 'trick out' their saddles to maximize comfort and usefulness. For longer rides or overnight trips, a few tack changes can make a big difference to both horse and rider.

Popular changes include: oversized stirrups to accommodate heavy footwear (hiking or rubber boots), tapaderos to keep feet dry and prevent sticks from getting jammed in the stirrups, shaped cinches to prevent girth galls, and extra latigo strings to tie on clothing and gear. A breastplate and back cinch help prevent the saddle from shifting. A gel or sheepskin seat pad – something I scoffed at for years, but now use every day – can increase comfort dramatically.

Carrying saddle bags is imperative, while horn bags are useful, too. Both should be sized and designed to accommodate your needs, and made from materials suitable for the rigours of the trails you ride (and expected weather!) If you can't find saddle bags or horn bags that you like, consider making your own from leather. It's simple and fun.

Finally, try all your gear on short trails before heading out on a longer trip, to ensure fit. Using the correct gear substantially increases horse and rider comfort and safety.

bikers who may be unfamiliar with horses. Try to be a good trail riding ambassador and be as helpful and pleasant as you can. Drivers in the area are very respectful of horses.

The best weather is from late June to early September but that's when the trails and campsites will be busiest as well.

Trails are maintained by volunteers who may not have cleared the latest windfall so either connect with locals to determine trail conditions, or carry an axe and saw.

Bears are prevalent in the area, so carry bear bangers, spray and an air horn plus ask the locals about recent sightings.

Barkerville townsite is open to the public

(no pass required) between 6 and 8 pm, so if you're hankering for a good feed, walk up to the Lung Duck Tong Chinese Restaurant. Good food in ample portions are a great way to end a long day on the trail.

Barkerville and Wells hold many special events throughout the season, including Canada Day events, ArtsWells, a cowboy/drover celebration, aboriginal days, and a mid-autumn moon festival. These are a great time to visit although campsites may be busy.

The Barkerville area has a distinctly relaxed vibe, so plan to kick back and play tourist while riding your horse through BC's gold rush history.