

Balfour & The Balfour Recreation Commission History

The community of Balfour, BC, was established in May 1889 by Charles Busk when he staked a two hundred acre claim at the mouth of the Outlet. The community was named after the British statesman, Lord Balfour, whose family had interests in mining claims in the area. He immediately set to work establishing roads and subdividing the claim into lots. By April 1892 all but four acres had been sold. By this time the community already included the St. Michael and All Angels church, the Balfour House Hotel, a general store, post office and telephone service.

Many settlers of this time used Balfour as a "home" community while working across the lake for the smelter at Pilot Bay. Others were engaged in logging, mining and farming to support themselves, and more were employed by the sternwheelers and steam launches which transported passengers and goods along Kootenay Lake.

The construction and opening of the CPR Kootenay Lake Hotel in 1910 gave a momentary buoyant effect to the Balfour economy. Unfortunately the building closed in 1920 and was razed in 1929. Many residences in Nelson still showcase the materials used in the construction of this Tudor-style structure.

The establishment of the Kootenay Lake ferry helped to re-establish the Balfour economy, and it is now known as the western terminal of the "longest free ferry ride in the world."

In the late 1920's or early 1930's the Women's Institute of Balfour initiated the building of "Woodland Hall" which served the community as a meeting place for over twenty years. By 1949 the "new hall", now known as the Balfour Community Hall, was adopted as a project by the Women's Institute, and successfully reached completion in 1958. In 1961 the Women's Institute decided to turn over the management and maintenance of the Balfour Community Hall to the Balfour Recreation Commission.

At this time it is unclear when or why the Balfour Recreation Commission was first formed. From anecdotal reports it is clear that the Commission was in place as a viable community group by the 1960's. The Balfour Recreation Commission was first registered as a Non-profit Society in December 1963, only to be struck off the register in 1972 for non-compliance with Society rules and regulations. In May 1975 the then Board of Directors were successful in re-instating the Balfour Recreation Commission as a Non-profit Society.

It is important to note, that as a Non-profit Society, the Balfour Recreation Commission is unique in the Kootenays (perhaps in all of BC) in the sense that it has no taxing authority and therefore has always relied upon community support to maintain and fund its activities.

The land around the Balfour Hall (4 lots) was donated by the owners of the Balfour Beach Inn and was later designated as "Centennial Park" to coincide with the opening of the original Balfour tennis courts as a Centennial project.

By 1985 it was recognized that it was essential that measures should be taken which would benefit the Balfour area and help in reversing a downward trend in the local economy. The Balfour Recreation Commission was requested to pursue the idea of a golf course development to provide recreation and employment opportunities.

After many meetings with Lands, Parks & Housing, the Department of Highways and the Regional District, steps were initiated to procure 80 acres of Crown Land north of Highway 3A and west of Highway 31 for use as a nine-hole golf course for the benefit of the residents of the community.

A referendum held in May 1987 to allow golf course development costs to be subsidized through local property tax was unsuccessful. Instead the Board of Directors of the time resorted to raising development funds (\$250,000) through private loans and donations. Many residents of Balfour and area, while unwilling to see additional property taxes imposed, were more than willing to support this endeavor by donating/loaning amounts of \$1,000 or \$5,000 so that this project could proceed.

The Balfour Golf Course has been operating successfully ever since its opening ten years ago

In 1991 the Board of School District #7 (Nelson) was seeking to dispose of the property known as the former Balfour School. It is a one-room wooden frame building finished on the exterior with wooden shakes, stained reddish-brown. Many members of the community felt that this building and the site it stands on have a heritage affiliation. The Balfour Recreation Commission was successful in 1993 by securing title to this property for future community use. The building has been used for day-care purposes, square-dancing, and currently houses our fitness center (furnished with donations from the community). This is also the location for monthly meetings of the Board of Directors of the Balfour Recreation Commission.

By 1998 the Balfour Recreation Commission recognized that provision of a public boat-launching facility was desired by many and when the opportunity to apply for title to the Balfour Wharf arose, the Board applied for and received title to this property. We are currently looking for ways and means to create this area as a fully functional boat launch area (the current ramp was designed in Victoria and does not take into account the river

current, was built to be used only during the spring "high-water" mark, also has no accommodation for parking vehicles and boat trailers). In addition to redesigning this facility, the Board is looking at developing another sandy beach, protected by a sand-bar from the river currents, as a public swimming beach.

Since the completion of the Balfour Golf Course, the Board of Directors of the Balfour Recreation Commission has attempted to "share" golf course revenues on a 50/50 basis between the Golf Course needs and improving or maintaining other recreation facilities. In 1998 we were exceptionally fortunate in that we could replace the tennis courts which had deteriorated due to age and misuse during the winter months. We were also able to finance completion of the regulation size soccer and ball field. None of this would have been viable without donations of time, materials and labour from local citizens and business.

It is essential to recognize that all facilities operated by the Balfour Recreation Commission are some distance from each other. While there are benefits to having every facility in the same area, there are other benefits to having some areas designated for specific purposes. A major concern for the Board of Directors at this time is that any new facility should be functional on a year-round basis in order to be more cost-efficient. The Board is investigating ways and means of accomplishing this goal without creating disruption to the recreational activities which we offer.

In summary, Balfour and area is a unique community which supports the Balfour Recreation Commission in providing recreational opportunities to all, regardless of age, physical ability or personal belief.

The Board of Directors of the Balfour Recreation Commission hopes that you will read this brief history in the true Community Spirit with which we have attempted to present it.