



The Mackenzie Chamber of
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A Historical Overview of the Mackenzie & District Area

*"The current events of today
become the history of tomorrow."*

Mackenzie Discovered



Sir Alexander Mackenzie

In 1793 Sir Alexander Mackenzie, an explorer and surveyor of the Rocky Mountains, was the first recorded European visitor to have been in the Mackenzie area when he and his entourage camped near the town's current site. He and his crew traveled the waterways and portaged across the mountainous site in their quest for the Northwest Passage.



Sir Alexander Mackenzie Cairn

The town named a memorial landing site on Williston Lake for the famous explorer. The site, called "Alexander Mackenzie's Landing," is located 6 km outside of the town.

Although Sir Alexander Mackenzie was the first visitor to the region, the first people to actually inhabit and make use of the land were First Nations groups, fur traders, trappers, prospectors and missionaries.

Mr. Percy Gray—Photo Courtesy of the
Mackenzie and District Museum



Development Begins

In 1952 Percy Gray surveyed the land and water from a plane and saw the potential use of the natural resources in the area. He began a working relationship with a group of British and Swedish investors to develop the land for use in mining and forestry. Both Percy and the investors became involved with the WAC Bennett Government which eventually took over the development of the land and federalized all power-producing measures. Once the Bennett government began the building of the dam, there was a need to clear and harvest the merchantable timber on the bottomlands of the Parsnip, Peace, Finlay and Omineca Rivers. Independent saw mills popped up to meet this need. For more information on Percy Gray's flight, please visit the Mackenzie and District Museum or their website at www.mackenziemuseum.ca

Mackenzie's Past at a Glance

Crushing History

Along with the independent saw mills to process the timber, a new measure was implemented to help speed up the removal of the non-merchantable timber in the valleys that were to be flooded with the dam's construction and operation – the Tree Crusher. This 175-ton electrically-powered machine was manufactured by Le Tourneau. The machine arrived in November of 1964, but smooth operation of it was not mastered until August of 1965 when it was able to down 9 km² in a period of four months. The machine was designed to compress all wood materials into a compact splintered mat which, once air-dried, would allow for in-place burning with no additional preparation. The WAC Bennett Administration completed the dam in 1968 and the reservoir began to form in 1969. For more information on the Tree Crusher, please visit

www.mackenziechamber.bc.ca/tree_crusher.htm



The Tree Crusher Hard at Work Circa 1965



Mackenzie in the early 1970's – Photo Courtesy of the Mackenzie and District Museum

Instant Town

It was evident that a townsite would be needed to handle the forestry operations. By 1966, Alexandra Forest Industries, Carrier Lumber and Finlay Forest Industries came into the area and set up operations at the base of what would be Williston Lake. That same year, Mackenzie was incorporated as a municipality and Allan Sheppard was sworn in as the first mayor of the community along with six councilors to help guide the fledging community towards a solid township. Alexandra Forest Industries (later to become British Columbia Forest Products or BCFP), was charged with building the 'instant town.' By 1975, BCFP had completed the infrastructure required – schools, hospital, lights, water, sewers, homes, etc. – for a townsite. With the establishment of the essential services and housing, Mackenzie became a destination for new families who earned their livelihood from the forest industry.

Welcome to Mackenzie



Mackenzie of Tomorrow

The community continues to honor the town's history with the annual Alexander Mackenzie Days Festival each June. The Tree Crusher currently sits in the town as a symbol of the forest industry's importance to the town's way of life and has been the symbol on which the community is partially recognized in the tourism industry. With the general shift from natural resource-based economies, Mackenzie, like other communities, is in the process of diversifying the local economy to include tourism, mining, energy and bio-energy producers as well as the advancement of small business within the community. For more information about the community of Mackenzie, please visit the District of Mackenzie website at www.district.mackenzie.bc.ca



Aerial View of Mackenzie