

Canyon Calls, You May Want to Answer

by Jennifer Rhyne

It has been a deterrent since childhood - that quaking, trembling feeling that leaps into my throat at just the mere thought of looking over an edge from higher than 10 feet above the ground. While other children were flinging with joy on the monkey bars, shooting down plastic slides and dangling off chair-lifts at the ski resorts, I was sitting on the side-lines, wobbly with nerves. Likely due to my fears, the lure of high places became intoxicating (well, maybe not to the extreme where I wanted to conquer Mt. Everest, but enticing all the same!) The nervousness followed me into adulthood, and I began to question whether or not I would ever feel at ease in high places, and then I discovered the Fraser Canyon. Carving out the winding path of the Fraser River, detailed rock facets reach out to embrace the orange and golden hues of the endless sky, towering majestically above the waters below. It is a sight that can only be described as spectacular, and will literally take your breath away upon a glance. I, too, lost my breath, my fear of heights long forgotten, instead completely mesmerized by the chiseled canyon walls, the distant roaring river, and the charming communities dotting the edge.

At the heart of the canyon, lies the mighty Fraser River. The river was aptly named after the explorer Simon Fraser, who explored the river when it was still a secret wonder, known only to the aboriginal peoples and the ancient forests surrounding it. It stretches its brilliance from the snowy peaks in Mount Robson Provincial Park, flowing through 800 miles of breathtaking terrain towards open freedom, found in the white-capped waves of the Pacific Ocean. The path of the Fraser River is steeped in history, as optimistic gold rush pioneers followed its windy path, hoping that the river mapped its way to undiscovered gold. Settlements were formed along the riverbanks, which have evolved into the characteristic communities that exist today. The river embraces the land, and its fast, flowing waters continue to change and shape the land surrounding it. As a result, each community that has grown from the heart of the Fraser River is diverse and unique, stretching out from their deep roots of the past, to become the cherished havens that you see today. 2008 marks a celebratory year, for it is the 200th anniversary of Simon Fraser's exploration of the Fraser River. Excitement grows as the year gets closer, and the river's communities get ready to shine with many special events and festivals. 2008: Honouring the Fraser River and its Peoples, will be a celebration filled with opportunities to ride the river and explore the secrets of the many First Nations cultures along the way.

Yet, the Fraser River is not the only river to dance and sparkle its way through the walls of granite. Many are surprised to discover that over a dozen rivers twist and turn their way across the area surrounding the canyon, each with charm, character, and startling unique qualities. From the Thompson, Stein and heart-pumping Nahatlatch to name just a few, both novice and more seasoned rafters will find the adventure of a lifetime here, in what is known as the Rafting Capital of Canada. With the maze of waterways, turbulent rapids, and untouched scenery, it really is a no-brainer that the best way to explore the canyon is by rafting the rivers. While I may have a slight unease around high places, I certainly have no fear of water! Rafting the waterways not only opens your eyes to parts of the land that you will never witness from a car or train, but also forms a holiday memory that will last a lifetime. From thrilling, rushing challenges, to calming paddles through serene landscape, the one thing you can be guaranteed of on a rafting journey (other than awe-inspiring scenery), is that you will create bonds with fellow paddlers, your guide, or whoever else you are sharing your adventure with.

So there you have it. A brief description of an area that has made such a profound impact on me, it actually made me forget about my fears (maybe not all of them, but certainly the vertical ones!) The Fraser Canyon is an area that exceeds any expectations when you see it, and whether you choose to cruise through the scenery by car, RV, train, boat or river raft - there is no doubt that you will leave for home feeling like you captured a little piece of something special.