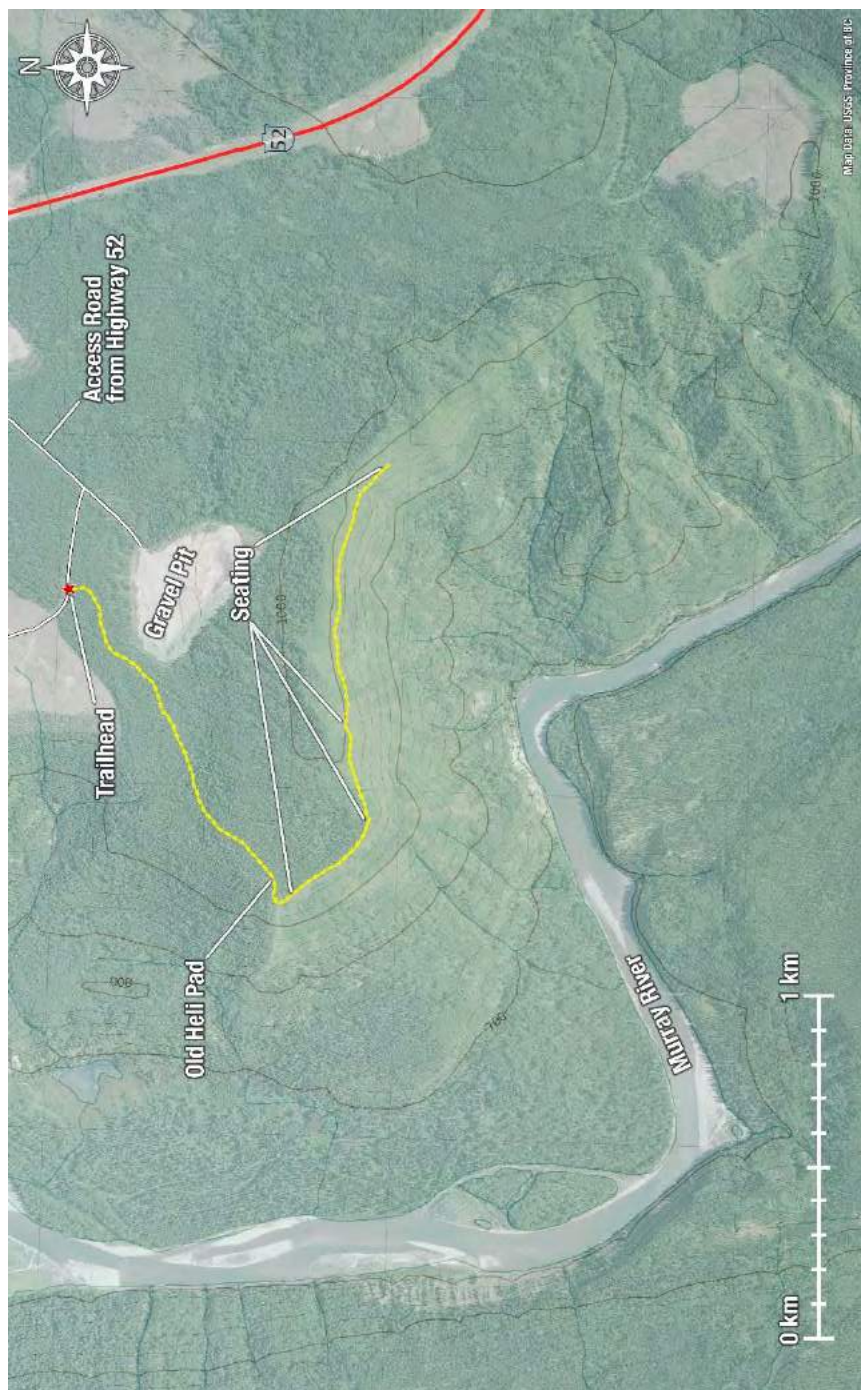


Murray Canyon Overlook



Rating: Easy
Time: 2 hours






MURRAY CANYON OVERLOOK

The Murray Canyon Overlook trail wanders through the forest for 1.25 km before coming to open slopes over 300 m above the Murray River valley. The trail is used by hikers, runners and mountain bikers. Viewpoints and rustic benches provide a good opportunity to observe the geomorphology of the Murray River Valley. The trail reaches a natural turnaround point at a bench with a magnificent view of the river, valley and foothills.

Time/Distance: 2 hours / 5.5 km return

Rating: Easy 

Directions to the Trailhead

From Tumbler Ridge, drive 31 km north on Hwy 52 towards Dawson Creek, then turn left onto a signposted gravel road. One kilometre along this road, turn right along a smaller signed road. The trailhead and parking are 250 metres along this road, on the left.

From Dawson Creek, drive west on Hwy 97 towards Chetwynd. After 18 km turn south (left) onto Hwy 52 towards Tumbler Ridge. Drive 69 km on this highway, then turn right onto a signposted gravel road. One kilometre along this road turn right along a smaller signed road. The trailhead and parking are 250 metres along this road, on the left.

Trail Description

Initially the trail leads through mostly pine and spruce forest, mixed with aspen, with many game trails. It climbs slowly onto a ridge, and after 1.25 km suddenly emerges onto the edge of the Murray River Valley. From here it traverses along the rim of the valley along an improved old game trail, with the river flowing over 300 m below, cutting an attractive canyon.

The trail is mostly flat from here to the turnaround point, with wonderful views all around. Many of the 69 wind turbines from the Quality Wind Project, the second wind farm built in B.C., can be seen from different sections of the trail.

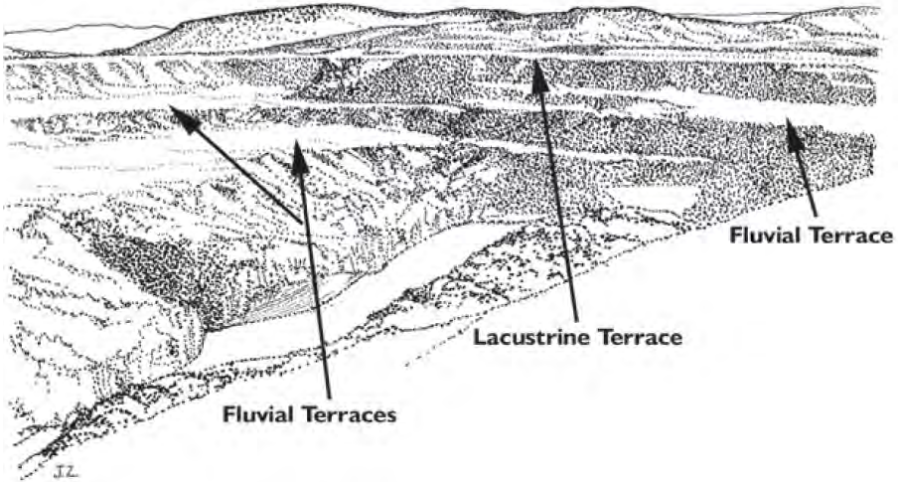


Mountain biking the Murray Canyon Overlook Trail

Geological Summary

Much of the landscape has been sculpted by the effects of ice. You are walking on glacial till, and in occasional places where the trail is sandy, this sand was deposited by wind at the edge of the glacier. In the Pleistocene Era, a massive ice sheet spread southwest across the prairies, with its great terminal wall just east of this area. In these ice ages, ice also advanced northeast from the Rockies in enormous quantities.

As the climate warmed, massive amounts of melt-water rushed through this area, and became impounded against the great ice wall to form Glacial Lake Peace. Mammoth, camel, bison and horse lived along its shores. The levels of this lake fluctuated repeatedly.

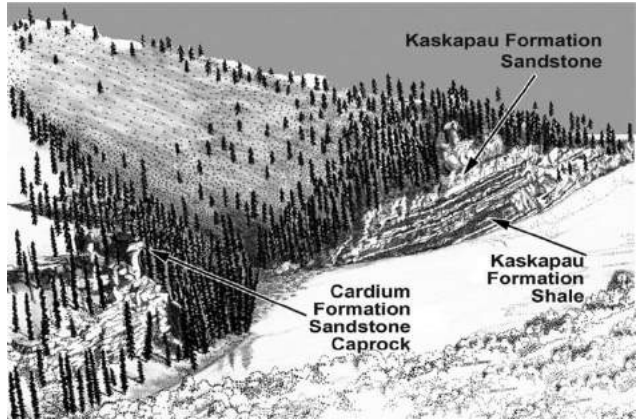


As you hike the trail, heading upstream along the rim of the valley, there are many views of the succession of flat terraces across the valley. The uppermost terrace is lacustrine, related to the shore of Glacial Lake Peace. The lower terraces are fluvial, corresponding to a series of floodplains which the river has cut through over time.



Terraces across the Murray River Valley

The Murray River has washed away much of the till and lake-bed to create this great valley. Today it cuts through the Cretaceous bedrock that forms the cliffs of the canyon. The lower darker cliffs are shales of the Kaskapau Formation. They are topped by a firmer layer of lighter coloured sandstone. Above this is a cap of thick-bedded sandstone of the Cardium Formation. Large blocks of this caprock have broken off in places and landed beside the river. There are many intricate rock formations in the canyon, which are best seen from river level. Taking a riverboat tour of the Murray River Canyon gives an excellent view of these rock formations, as well as the many tributary creeks that flow into the Murray River.



River boat on the Murray River below the trail



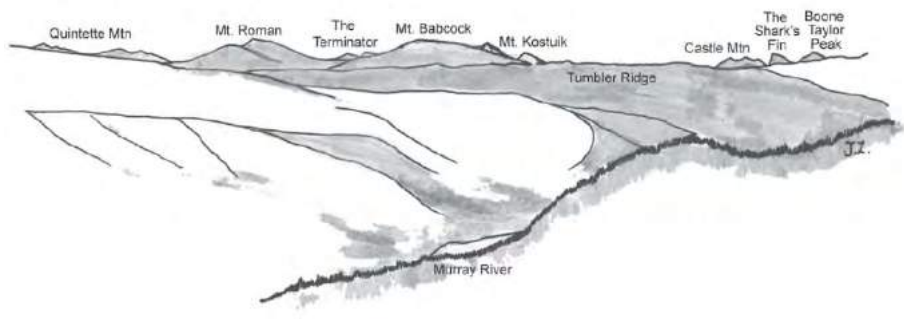
Sandstone blocks at river level



Eroded cliffs on the far side of the river

Away from the canyon sections, sand and gravel are deposited on the inside of each bend, while on the other side the river erodes the rock cliffs. The initial view, looking downstream down the valley, shows Mount Puggins in the distance, and two deeply cut side canyons on the far bank. Just across the valley the bluffs above the river show a number of wet areas. In winter these form a dozen icefalls. To the left of these bluffs springs have completely undermined the caprock, producing a highly dissected topography that

contrasts with adjacent flat terrace surfaces. The hilly summit across the valley is Mt Bennett, with Mt Bergeron further to the left, and the foothills and the peaks of the Rockies visible in the distance.



The slopes that the trail crosses are south-facing, fairly steep and exposed to the full force of the prevailing southwesterly winds, and are therefore warmer and drier than surrounding areas. This yields an open vegetation type interspersed with groves of aspen. In summer these open slopes produce a wealth of wild flowers. Butterflies defy the often windy conditions. A museum exhibit of a regional butterfly collection by biologists for Louisiana Pacific is on exhibit in the Tumbler Ridge Community Centre. Many of the rare species were collected from these slopes.



Runners enjoying the trail on the open slope



Aspen on the south facing slope in fall

The often windy conditions also explain the wind turbines, visible in the distance, of Capital Power's Quality Wind Project. This was one of the first wind energy projects developed in British Columbia.



Quality Wind Project looking towards Tumbler Ridge

The same conditions that make for excellent open trail-walking today, with extensive views, would have appealed to First Nations who inhabited the area over the last 10,000 years. Archaeologists have discovered stone artifacts close to the trail in two locations, suggesting that humans have travelled these well-worn game trails in the distant past as well as today. Rock overhangs nearer river level may have provided welcome shelter close to the abundant resources of the river below and game rich slopes above.

Birdlife is intriguing, with raptor sightings possible, and the excitement of knowing that the great Golden Eagle migration occurs above these ridges each spring and fall. The magnitude of this long-distance migration was first documented by Peter Sherrington in 1992. The birds of the forest are quite different from those of the open slopes.

The flow rate of the Murray River varies significantly, with a mean of 56 cubic metres per second, dwindling to ten in February, rising to 193 cubic metres in spring run-off, and with a maximum flood record of 872 cubic metres in 1990.

The river rises in the Hart Ranges of the Rocky Mountains at the Bulley Glacier, over 2600 m above sea level. It is a three day wilderness canoe trip from Tumbler Ridge down to the next bridge. It is inspiring to contemplate that in their 3500 km journey to the Arctic Ocean near Inuvik via the Mackenzie River, these waters cross no man-made obstacles, but instead just encounter a few river-wide ledges downstream, the Vermilion Chutes on the Peace River, and the Slave Rapids near Great Slave Lake. There are very few rivers left in North America that are as untouched. The Murray River is a resource to cherish.





After completing the trail, please consider returning this brochure to the box at the trailhead for others to enjoy.

Please pack your garbage out.

Travel in groups and carry bear spray.

For more information, contact:

Wolverine Nordic and Mountain Society

Kevin Sharman (250) 242-4860

Charles Helm (250) 242-3984

Photo Gallery website: www.wnms.ca

Tumbler Ridge Visitor Centre

(250) 242-3123

Tourism website: www.TumblerRidge.ca

Acknowledgements:

Text: Charles Helm, Kevin Sharman, Peter Sherrington, Sarah Waters

Geological Advice: Kevin Sharman, Peter Sherrington

Trail Design: Thomas Clark, Helm Family, Don Nesbitt, Fred Walkley

Artwork: Joan Zimmer, Darcy Jackson

Map: Kevin Sharman

Photographs: Charles Helm, Kevin Sharman, Birgit Sharman

© 2019 Wolverine Nordic and Mountain Society



Recreation Sites
and Trails BC