

CROWSNEST FISHING HOLES



BY VIC BERGMAN





Crowsnest Fishing Holes
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Crowsnest Fishing Holes



It's not unusual for popular trout streams to have stretches of their waters named by anglers. Alberta's Bow River is a good example, with places like *Must Be Nice*, *Policeman's Flats*, *Far & Fine*, and the *Trico Hole*.

The Crowsnest River also has stretches of water that have been named. Providing the anglers you are speaking with are familiar with these places, it's a good way of letting them know where you were fishing, and which pool or run might have been productive – or not!

I like the idea of having names attached to some of the waters I fish. It evokes a sense of history, tradition, and lore, and provides a connection to those anglers who visited these places long before me.



Horseshoe Bend on the Crowsnest River – Oct., 1983

There's always a reason why a fishing hole has been given a special name. Sometimes, it's named in honor of a person – perhaps an angler who frequented the place at one time. It could be named after a landowner whose property adjoins the river. The name could also refer to an access point or a nearby landmark such as a bridge. It could describe the surrounding landscape or a unique feature in the river. Other times, the name may have been inspired by an interesting or unusual event that occurred while someone was fishing there.



1923 Bridge Pool on the Crowsnest River – July, 2005
Angler: Bill Young

Fishing Holes on the Crow

Like the Bow, the Crowsnest River has various reaches, runs, and pools that have been named by anglers over the years. There's nothing *official* about any of these names, and the only maps you will find them listed on are those that are hastily-scribbled by someone on a scrap piece of paper or napkin. Some of these places have more than one name – it all depends on who you are conversing with. Anglers from another generation, or different circles of friends, may have a different name for the same stretch of water. Some Crowsnest River names go back decades and remain in use to this day. There are names of fishing holes on the river that have been forgotten and lost over time, and there are places that will come to have new names in the future.



Rainbow Ridge – 1989
Angler: Blair Spence

While selecting the photos for this article, I thought it might be interesting to include some of my *vintage* ones – pictures dating to the early 1980s. Others were taken as recently as this year. The surroundings in some of the early photographs have changed since I took them, but in most cases, the locations should be recognizable to anyone fishing here today.

The photos and comments begin on the lower river, where it enters the Oldman Reservoir, and progress upstream. The majority of places shown can be reached by walking along the river from bridges and other public access points. Please respect private property and be sure to obtain permission from landowners, prior to crossing their land.

While working on this piece, I contacted a number of long-time Crowsnest River anglers for information on various places along the river. I thank everyone for their response and help with this.



The Corrals – 2001
Angler: Peter Amundsen

Oldman Reservoir to Lundbreck Falls

The Stone House (a.k.a. The Drewry House, Rener's Farmhouse)

This historic home is located immediately downstream of the Todd Creek Day-Use Area. It was constructed in 1910 of locally quarried sandstone. The structure was spared during construction of the Oldman Dam. Upon completion of the dam in 1992, approximately 8 kilometers (5 miles) of the lower Crowsnest became flooded. Today, the Stone House stands next to where the river empties into the reservoir. At one time, the waters downstream of here produced some of the largest trout in the river. For those who remember watching Jim McLennan in his 1992 video, *Fishing Southern Alberta Trout Streams*, this is where he battles and lands a magnificent Crowsnest rainbow trout.



The Stone House – 1989

Eric's Bend

Named by Bob Costa in remembrance of his friend, Eric Brown. They met on the Crow and enjoyed fishing the river together, until Eric's passing in 2009.



Eric's Bend – 2019

Angler: Bob Costa



Eric's Bend – 2019
Angler: Bob Costa

Olson's

The stretch of river flowing next to the ranch once owned by Dennis and Rose Olson. Connelly Creek joins the Crow here.



Olson's – 2019

Horseshoe Bend

Named for its distinctive horseshoe-like shape. It's one of the best-known stretches on the river.



Horseshoe Bend – 2019

I was introduced to the Crow in the early 1980s by Dan Paskuski of Lethbridge. Dan had been fishing the river with his father since the late 1950s, and I was excited about the opportunity to come fishing here with him. Horseshoe Bend was one of the first places we fished together. At the time, I referred to it simply as, **Paskuski's Corner**.

Iron Bridge (a.k.a. Fisher's Bridge)

A popular access point for anglers fishing the lower Crow.



Iron Bridge – 1992

Family Pool (a.k.a. Graham's Bend)

When I asked Bruce Johnson of Pincher Creek why he gave it this name, he explained it was because he would sometimes visit this pool with his wife and family. They would picnic and fish here together.



Family Pool – 1995
Angler: Leigh Gibby

Highway 3 Bridge

A popular access point to the river.



Hwy. 3 Bridge, Lundbreck – 2019

Rat Hole

A deep pool located a short distance downstream of Lundbreck Falls Campground. Sometimes, it's used as a swimming hole by local kids from Lundbreck.



Rat Hole – 2019

Lundbreck Falls (a.k.a. The Falls)

One of the most popular and photographed places on the river. A provincial campground is located immediately downstream of the falls.



Lundbreck Falls – July, 1990

Lundbreck Falls to Highway 507 Bridge

Three Beavers Pond

This spot is located a short distance upstream of the CPR Bridge at Lundbreck Falls. It was named by Terry Venables and his father, Bryan, around 1982. On one of their first trips to the river, Terry and Bryan were enjoying a wonderful hatch of large mayflies on this pool. All the while, the two anglers were constantly entertained by three beavers, passing back and forth as the trout worked the hatch. Despite the beaver activity, Terry and Bryan managed to catch some fantastic fish that evening. Immediately downstream was a little run they named **Helm's Deep**, from Lord of the Rings.



Dusk at Three Beavers Pond – 2011



Three Beavers Pond rainbow trout – 1985

Not far upstream from Three Beavers Pond is the **A-Frame Run**. Several hundred yards above that is the **Honey Hole**, named by Jack Bengry of Lethbridge.

Throughout the 1980s, a group of anglers, including Don Anderson, Bill Clendon, Jack and Ilona Bengry, Terry and Bryan Venables, Evan Ritchie, Barry Mitchell, and others, often camped together along the river at Lundbreck Falls Campground or at nearby Hiawatha Campground. They would split up during the day, fishing different beats on the Crow, then gather around the campfire during the evening, swapping stories and telling tales.

Sulfur Hole (a.k.a. The Corrals, Al & Shirl's)

A train derailment at this location in 1982 resulted in a tanker car spilling its cargo of molten sulfur into the river. When the contents poured into the water, they solidified – blanketing the stream bottom with chunks of pure, bright-yellow sulfur. The clean-up and reclamation work was completed by the Canadian Pacific Railway soon afterward, but pieces of sulfur would be strewn along the stream bottom for years.



Sulfur Hole – 2017

There have been other train derailments at this location, including one in January, 2004. This time, one of the cars narrowly missed the river.



Sulfur Hole Train Derailment – 2004

Weigh Scales

The section of river upstream of the Sulfur Hole, toward the Burmis Weigh Station Scales on Hwy. 3.



Weigh Scales stretch in distance – 2017

Beside Manor Bed & Breakfast (a.k.a. Sara's)

Owned and operated by Shirley and Bill Sara, this popular B&B is located along the stretch of river upstream of the Weigh Scales.



The Beside Manor – 1992

The three-story home, constructed in 1904, was moved to this location from Lethbridge in 1978. The B&B opened in 1986.



Moving the house onto Sara’s property – 1978



House on the move



The house on its new foundation

Some of the runs and pools that have been named along this part of the river include: **Shirley's Rapids, Ted's Corner, Home Run, Doogie's Run, Willow Stretch, Linda's Pool, Dexine Island, Departure Bay, The Big Hole, S-Bend, John's Corner, Rock Pool, and Meadow Run.**



Home Run – 1993
Angler: John Scott Black



S-Bend – 2002
Angler: Robert Cormier



John's Corner – 1999
Angler: Tim Lysyk



Rock Pool – 1992
Angler: Jim McLennan



Upstream view of Meadow Run – 1992
Angler: Bob Costa

Cervo's (a.k.a. Villa Vega)

This long, winding stretch of river is located immediately upstream of Sara's B&B. Much of the north bank follows property which has been owned for many years by the Cervo family. On the south side of the river are the Villa Vega country acreages.



Cervo's – 2004
Angler: Gary Enzsol



Cervo's – 2001

Hopper Hole

This deep pool and the run below were given its name in 1992 by Bob Costa, after a great day of hopper fishing for big rainbows. In August, the grassy pastures and fields high above the river are often teeming with grasshoppers. All it takes to get them onto the water is some wind – a common occurrence around here.



Hopper Hole – 1992
Angler: Bob Costa

Highway 507 Bridge (a.k.a. Lee Lake Bridge, Burmis Bridge)

A popular access point to the river.



Hwy. 507 Bridge – 2019

Highway 507 Bridge to East Hillcrest Bridge



Hwy. 507 Bridge – 2003

Angler: Kelly Thomas

Home Run (a.k.a. John's Run)

Located a short distance upstream of the Hwy. 507 Bridge. The run was named by Bruce Johnson. When I queried Bruce about the name, he replied: "It was always a good place to stop and fish for a few minutes, while on my way home from fishing."

This piece of water is also affectionately known as **John's Run** by anglers like Clive Schaupmeyer of Coaldale. It was a spot Clive's friend, John Tunstall, used to love to fish. Whenever Clive or any others were there with John, they would let him have it to himself. According to Clive, "John could stand there for two hours and be in heaven."



Home Run – 2019

Dog Run (a.k.a. Gerry's Lawn Pool)

A run adjacent to the Nestle Inn Bed & Breakfast, owned and operated by Penny & Gerry Nichol.

Pink Bridge (a.k.a. Green's Bridge)

A popular access point to the river.



Pink Bridge – 2001

West Bank

A lovely stretch of water named by Clive Schaupmeyer.



West Bank – 1998
Angler: Bob Costa

Burmis Lake (a.k.a. Burmis T.U. Lease)



Burmis Trout Unlimited Lease – 2003

The day-use area at Burmis Lake provides easy walk-in access to the Burmis Trout Unlimited Lease. Since 2002, the Oldman Chapter of Trout Unlimited has maintained 2 kilometers of river frontage in this reach. Over the years, lease workdays have been organized to clean up old fencing and trash, and pull noxious weeds on the property. Kudos to people like Richard Burke, Mike Lamb, Clive Schaupmeyer, Malcolm Bennett, and other T.U. members, for their effort in obtaining and maintaining the conservation lease property. Their work has made it possible for anglers like myself and others to enjoy this spectacular stretch of water.

Block's Bridge (a.k.a. Silver Bridge)

A popular access point to the river. Named for Laverne & Sigrid Block, former owners of property along this stretch of river. Upon purchasing the land in the late 1970s or early 80s, they erected this bridge and constructed a 2.5 kilometer (1.5 mile) road to their ranch house.



Block's Bridge – 2019

Sipper's Alley

This run is located just upstream of Block's ranch house. The name was coined by Kelly Oikawa of Lethbridge around 1984. It's here where Kelly and I first experienced fishing for big Crowsnest River rainbows sipping selectively on small mayflies and caddis. Laverne Block used to come down to the water and provide advice on how to catch these wily fish.



Sipper's Alley – 1984
Angler: Kelly Oikawa

Leitch Collieries (a.k.a. The Collieries)

Refers to a section of the river across from the Leitch Collieries Historic Site. Accessible via the Nature Conservancy property on the south side of Hwy. 3, or by walking from the Burmis Trout Unlimited Lease parking lot. Don Anderson, Bill Clendon, and others, who frequented this part of the river in the early 1980s, had a couple of stretches they called **First Loop** and **Second Loop** – otherwise known as **The Loops**.



Leitch Collieries – 2019

Checkers Hole (a.k.a. Checkerboard Hole, Five-Star Pool)

According to Richard Burke of Lethbridge, it's named this from the railway sign where the tracks downstream of the East Hillcrest Bridge come into view of the river.



Checkers Hole – 2002

The **Five-Star Pool** label came from fisheries biologists in the early 1990s. While conducting a fish population survey on the river, the biologists were impressed by the large numbers of trout inhabiting the deep corner pool. On a scale of one to five, it received a Five-Star rating.



Hiking to the Checkers Hole – 1998
Anglers: Tim Lysyk & Bob Costa

East Hillcrest Bridge (a.k.a. Passburg Bridge)

A popular access point to the river. Byron Creek enters the Crowsnest River here.



East Hillcrest Bridge – 2019

East Hillcrest Bridge to Frank

Rainbow Ridge

This pool is located 5-6 bends upstream of the East Hillcrest Bridge. It was named one autumn afternoon in 1989, after a brief rain shower passed through, leaving a colorful rainbow arching over the river.



Rainbow Ridge – 1989

Angler: Blair Spence

Tipple Run

This long stretch of water flows past the old ruins of the Hillcrest-Mohawk Mine tipple. It can be accessed via the Hillcrest Trout Unlimited Conservation Lease parking lot, or by or walking upstream from the East Hillcrest Bridge.



Tipple Run – 2019

The Wall

This half-kilometer stretch of fast pocket water flows along a steep rock wall. The bank on the north side of the river was once covered in waste coal slag, more than 10 meters (30 feet) in height. The land was cleaned up and reclaimed by the provincial government in the late 1980s. Currently, the Oldman Chapter of Trout Unlimited maintains 2 kilometers of river frontage in this reach. It's walk-in access only into the Hillcrest Conservation Lease and can be accessed from the parking lot in Bellevue's Riverbottom.



The Wall – 2019

Richard Burke believes some of the oldtimers in the area like Jerry Aveledo, of Jerry's Sport Shop in Bellevue, Edo Scodellaro, also of Bellevue, and Joe Cocioloni of Pincher Creek were likely the ones who came up with the names for the *Tipple Run*, *The Wall*, and several other places such as *The Ridge* and *DePerio's*. Mike Lamb knew these anglers and interviewed them for *As the Crow Flies*, a Crowsnest River fly-fishing map he and Richard Burke published in 1994. During the 1980s, Mike was living along the Crow near Burmis Lake, while working as a reporter for the *Lethbridge Herald*, Pass Bureau. Mike was an ardent fly-fisher and wrote

numerous articles for the *Herald* about fly-fishing in Crowsnest Pass and of some of the anglers living here.

Toilet Bowl

There are several municipal sewage aeration lagoons located on the south side of the river, just upstream of The Wall. It's here, where the river makes a sharp turn at the rock escarpment, forming a deep, swirling pool, dubbed the *Toilet Bowl*. Despite its malodorous-sounding name, it's a pleasant place to fish.



Toilet Bowl – 2019



Hillcrest Trout Unlimited Lease – 2019

Drevenak's Hole

A deep pool named after a family who once lived in a house beside the river.



Downstream view of Drevenak's Hole – 2019

West Hillcrest Bridge (a.k.a. Hillcrest Bridge)

A popular access point to the river.



West Hillcrest Bridge – 2019

Funfer's Hole

A scenic run, just upstream of the West Hillcrest Bridge. Named after a family who once lived in a house next to the river.



Funfer's Hole – 1998
Angler: Linda Humphreys



Funfer's Hole – 1998
Angler: Linda Humphreys

1923 Bridge Pool (a.k.a. The Trestle)

A pool along the concrete remains of an old railway bridge, constructed in 1923. A CPR spur line crossed the river here, leading to the coal mine in Hillcrest.



1923 Bridge Pool – 2019



1923 Bridge Pool – 2019

Rodeo Grounds (a.k.a. Gymkhana Grounds, Swimming Hole)

This is where a small outdoor riding arena is situated along the river. The Old Slide Road provides easy access. Local kids from the Pass used to come swimming here, as far back as the 1920s or 30s.



Rodeo Grounds – 2019

Angler: Ernie Brazzoni

As a six-year-old boy, Ernie Brazzoni of Bellevue fished here with his older brother, Marcel, and his father, Olindo. There were many times where Olindo carried Ernie across the river, in order to reach some of their favorite fishing spots on the opposite side. Some seventy years later, Ernie continues to visit these waters.



Rodeo Grounds – 2019

Angler: Ernie Brazzoni

Frank Lake (a.k.a. The Slide)

It's not really a lake, but a widening in the river at the base of Turtle Mountain. Much of Frank Lake has become filled in with sediment over the past couple of decades and it's not as deep as it once was. A defined river channel is forming along the east and west end. In order to fish here, you have to scramble over massive rocks and boulders to get down to the water. It can be a bit unnerving fishing here, as loose rocks sometimes become dislodged from the mountain face, only to be heard tumbling down the steep slope.



Bird's-eye view of Frank Lake – 2019
Old Slide Road on the far right

The river at the outlet of Frank Lake is another favorite spot among anglers.



Frank Lake outlet – 2007
Angler: Terry Hruday

During the 1980s, I would occasionally bump into a local oldtimer, Elias “Eli” Hurtak, along this stretch of water. Eli lived in a small house along the Old Slide Road. He knew these waters intimately and probably fished along here more than anyone. In August, 1983, Eli caught a five-pound, six-ounce rainbow trout at Frank Lake. The fish went for a wet fly and took 20 minutes to land. Eli's catch earned him first place for best rainbow trout caught in a stream at the Willow Valley Trophy Competition that year. It was the seventh time in as many years Eli walked away with the same prize.

Big Rock

Located just upstream of Frank Lake, it's a popular swimming hole with local kids during the summer months. It fishes best once school starts in early September. Gold Creek enters the river a short distance upstream.



Big Rock – 2007

Frank to Crowsnest Lake

There does not appear to be many named fishing holes upstream of Frank. I spoke with a number of longtime Crowsnest River anglers and they could only recall one or two such places. At one time, there may have been other holes between Frank and Crowsnest Lake with names. If there were, they have been lost to the ages.



Crowsnest River, Blairmore – 2017

In the past, low-lying areas along the river in Blairmore, and upstream through Bushtown in east Coleman, were prone to flooding during spring runoff. In an attempt to prevent flooding in these towns, sections of the river were dredged and channelized many decades ago. Aside from this, other parts of the river were altered by the Canadian Pacific Railway. Coal-mining companies also changed the river's course, in order to make way for their operations.

Lost Lemon Campground

This popular campground is located along the Crowsnest River at the west end of Blairmore. York Creek enters the river here.



Lost Lemon Campground, Blairmore – 2019

Bushtown (a.k.a. East Coleman)

A historic part of Coleman, dating to the early 1900s.



Crowsnest River, Bushtown – 2019

The Meadows

At the end of Willow Drive in west Coleman, the river valley widens and becomes almost meadow-like in appearance. It's a beautiful area, with spectacular views of the High Rock and Flathead Mountain Ranges. Wildlife, including deer, elk, moose, bears, and mountain sheep inhabit the area.



The Meadows – 1993

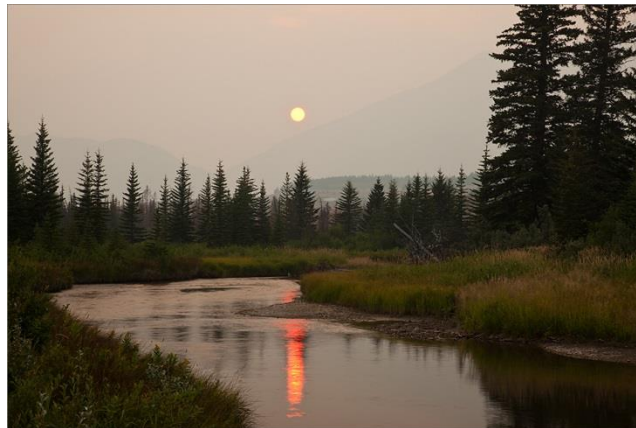


Crowsnest River, upstream of Willow Drive – 2017

Jim Prentice Wildlife Corridor

In October, 2018, The Nature Conservancy of Canada announced a campaign to protect a critical wildlife corridor between Coleman and Crowsnest Lake. The upper reaches of the Crowsnest River are located within this corridor. The corridor is to be named in honor of the late Alberta Premier, Jim Prentice.

Mr. Prentice spent his formative years in Crowsnest Pass, and it's where he developed a love and respect for nature. He spent seven summers working in the coal mines of Crowsnest Pass, to pay his way through university and law school. When Jim Prentice wasn't working in the mines or studying, he was fly-fishing the Crow and other trout streams in the area.



Sunset on the upper Crowsnest River – 2018

Crowsnest Lake

Situated near the Alberta – British Columbia border, it's the main source of water for the Crowsnest River.



Dusk at Crowsnest Lake – 1992

Final Thoughts

Anyone who fishes the Crow regularly likely has a favorite spot or two on the river they have named. Sometimes, we keep these names and places to ourselves, and that's okay. Sometimes, we'll share them with other anglers and friends. Only then, do the names of these fishing holes and their stories have a chance to be passed on to the next generation of Crowsnest River anglers.



Bedside Manor S-Bend – 2019

Anglers: (from left) Linda & Herb Vitale, Shannon Hauschild, Colin Sahs



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Human Mistake Works Out Well by Garry Allison (December 1, 1982)

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Photos:

Bill and Shirley Sara (Bedside Manor) – 1978 house move photographs

Special thanks to all the people listed below, who contributed to this article by providing information on various fishing holes and for sharing their stories and experiences on the Crowsnest River with me.

Contributors:

Don Anderson, Ernie Brazzoni, Richard Burke, Bill Clendon, Bob Costa, Bruce Johnson, Kelly Oikawa, Dan Paskuski, Bill and Shirley Sara, Clive Schaupmeyer, Don Townsend, Terry Venables, Herb and Linda Vitale.



“Eventually, all things merge into one, and a river runs through it. The river was cut by the world’s great flood and runs over rocks from the basement of time. On some of the rocks are timeless raindrops. Under the rocks are the words, and some of the words are theirs. I am haunted by waters.”

— Norman Maclean, **A River Runs Through It and Other Stories** (1976)