

Buchanan Fire Lookout



A View from the Top

As one of five retired fire lookouts restored for the BC Forest Service's centennial anniversary in 2012, the Buchanan Lookout has plenty to offer by way of a high elevation adventure. Located at 1912 metres (6272 feet) on Mount Buchanan in the Selkirk Mountains northeast of Kaslo, this impressive structure overlooks spectacular views of Kootenay Lake, Kokanee Glacier Provincial Park, Goat Range Provincial Park, and the Purcell Wilderness Conservancy. Both the mountain and lookout were named after local pioneer lumberman George Owen Buchanan.

Originally built in the early 1940s, the Buchanan Lookout began as no more than a braced-pole tower with a viewing platform and a tent at the bottom for equipment storage and living quarters. Improvements were made in 1949 when a pre-fabricated wooden tower was installed with a 14'x14' standard lookout cabin and perimeter catwalk to maximize surveillance. The new wooden tower and cabin was transported up the mountain by packhorses. By 1958, an access road was completed, making the lookout fully accessible by truck, and in 1965 the wooden structure was replaced with an 18-foot concrete block tower.

The Buchanan Lookout remained operational until 1982, after which it became a popular destination for recreationists due to the 12-km access road and the unobstructed views from the top. It is one of only a few such high elevation sites in the province that can be reached by high clearance two-wheel drive vehicles. The site rapidly became well used by sightseers, hikers, astronomers, mountain bikers and snowmobilers.

In 1986, the Buchanan Lookout was officially established as a recreation site with the existing old structure, but no interpretive signage. In the early 1990s, with funding from the Community Forest Program, the lookout tower was rebuilt, a new metal catwalk and exterior metal stairs were installed, and an interior interpretive display was added. A 2-km loop trail was also constructed which offers an excellent alpine hiking opportunity and access to several breathtaking rock bluff viewpoints, especially to the east and south. On a clear day, visitors may be able to look down on the Balfour - Kootenay Bay Ferry crossing the lake.



Buchanan Fire Lookout Recreation Site

Please obey all posted signs, rules and regulations, respect others and enjoy your stay!

Recreation Sites and Trails BC has recently undertaken a project to restore abandoned fire lookouts and establish them as recreation sites to preserve the historical, cultural and heritage values of these spectacular areas and provide unique public recreation opportunities. During the field season of 2012, a number of formerly abandoned lookouts were restored to their original structures and celebrated as part of the 100th anniversary of the BC Forest Service.



BC
FOREST
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1912-2012

This program will continue in the years to come as suitable lookouts and effective partnerships are identified.

Pack it In. Pack it Out!
Please take your garbage with you.
Leave the area cleaner than you found it.

Please stay on designated trails only!

Weather conditions can change extremely fast. Be prepared.
Please be respectful and courteous to everyone you encounter.

Please report all forest fires.
Phone toll-free: 1 800 663 5555

For More Information
www.sitesandtrailsbc.ca



Recreation Sites
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Buchanan Fire Lookout Recreation Site

Visitors Map and Guide



Recreation Sites
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Fully restored lookout in 2012.



Firefighting instruments

Fire lookout living quarters circa 1950s and 60s.



From Kaslo, head west on highway #31A for 11 km to the Blue Ridge Forest Services Road, then follow signs. Follow the main road for 11.9 km to the lookout, staying right at the 7.0 km junction. This road is suitable for 2wd vehicles.

By 2007, the lookout tower had degraded to the point where it had to be closed to the public for safety reasons. A full restoration was completed by Recreation Sites and Trails BC in 2012, with assistance from the Village of Kaslo, the Kaslo Community Forest, the Trailblazers Society, and many individual volunteers. The restoration included rebuilding the lookout to current safety standards and replacing the dated and damaged interpretive signage with redesigned and more informative displays.

The second floor of the restored structure has been set up as a diorama to represent a functional fire lookout from the 1950s and 60s. The interior of the lookout is closed to the public, but can be viewed from the outside catwalk through windows on all sides of the building. Many old authentic living quarters items, photographs and fire observation instruments were donated by the BC Forest Service, as well as from individuals, families and community archives.

The self-guided interpretive signage describes: aspects of forest fire detection in the early days, what it was like to live and work in a fire lookout, a chronology of the Buchanan Lookout, tools of the firefighting trade, and the changing face of modern forest fire management in BC.

In addition to the heritage significance of the lookout itself, the Buchanan Lookout Recreation Site offers the 2-km Buchanan Viewpoint Trail, a handicap accessible toilet, and two small campsites with picnic tables and fire rings for overnight stays - **no drinking water is available**. Four directional panoramic signs along the trail identify significant local landmarks such as mountain peaks, glaciers, major drainages, etc.

