



The Ktunaxa people have hunted, fished and gathered in this valley for thousands of years. These resourceful people left few traces. Petroglyphs can be seen from the water in a few locations, and arrowheads and other artefacts indicate favourite camping grounds. The Ktunaxa still live in the Creston valley and elders occasionally teach at the Tipi Camp on Pilot Peninsula.

Explorer David Thompson first saw the valley in 1808 but it wasn't until the 1880's that the area began to be frequented by Europeans and Americans - prospectors and miners drawn by the lure of silver and gold.



*Ancient native petroglyphs on the cliffs near Balfour*

Enormously rich silver strikes brought waves of men seeking fortune, followed by the railways and paddle-wheel steamers. There are signs of this frontier history wherever you go in the Kootenays, from sunken paddle-wheelers to abandoned miner's shacks.

Riondel's Bluebell Mine was the mining focal point on the east shore and has a storied history. Now decommissioned, it had the longest production run of any mine in British Columbia - the works include tunnels which extend for miles in all directions, including under the lake.

When the mining boom panned out it was orchardists that formed the next wave of immigration. The first orchards were planted in 1890, and from 1910 to 1930 many farms took root around the shores of Kootenay Lake. Their success was limited however, and with the arrival of small cherry disease in the valley and the farming boom in the Okanagan these farms largely faltered, and by 1945 most were out of business. You can read a more detailed history of interior fruit farming here.

More local history to follow, please stay tuned!