



Horsepacker Ben Nelson, who disappeared in the Toodoggone country in 1939, named this "Hungry Mtn.," although on most maps today it appears as Lagopus Mtn. (Lagopus is the genus of ptarmigan)

Axel Elmsted staked and worked properties all over the Babines, from 1915 to 1939.

Danny Moore Basin
 Danny Moore was a prospector in the 1910s

The Valhalla claims belonged to Ben Nelson in the 1930s

Extensive tunnels and shafts were dug at the "Silver King" property at the head of the valley. Originally staked by Paddy Higgins around 1915, it went through a series of owners but never made money. Attempts to revive it in the 1980s led to public outcry to protect the area.

Joe L'Orsa Cabin
 Joe L'Orsa first proposed a Wilderness Park in the Babines in 1973.

The Cronin mine produced until 1972. The park boundary was drawn to exclude the area around it.

The Cronin road was extended some time around 1960 to access claims in Hyland Basin.

James Cronin bought claims here in 1909. He died in 1925 following a fall from his horse in Silver King Basin.

A truck road to the Cronin mine was constructed in 1952 when a mill was built. Prior to that, supplies for the mine were horse-packed in over Hyland Pass

The Fletcher-Gardiner trail commemorates Al Fletcher and Lefty Gardiner. In the 1950s Fletcher had the first riding territory in the Babines; subsequently he retired and successfully promoted a ban on goat hunting in the area from 1971 to 1986.

The "horse and tractor" road into Silver King Basin was completed in 1946.

Built by Red McCabe in 1919, using a grant under the provisions of the Mines Development Act. McCabe held claims in the Carson Basin - Copper Lakes area.

The present road was built in 1970 to facilitate sampling work around the old "Harvey Mine".

As early as 1905 C.G. "Peavine" Harvey was staking here. His wife and son helped work the claims. Their ranch at Driftwood included the fossil beds.

Prospector Jim Carson held the Shamrock claims here in the 1910s and 1920s

Einar Blix's "Trails To Timberline" is not only the bible for Bulkley Valley hikers, but its publication in 1977 did much to increase the recreational usage of the Babines.

Paddy Higgins called it Victoria Basin, but the Messner family, which held claims here from 1926 - 1964, called it Lorraine Basin.

A road was built up to the claims in 1958 by Frank and Mel Messner

The connector trail from the Little Joe claims to the Victoria claims was built in 1929

The Little Joe claims in this area were worked from 1923 to 1941

This trail was constructed in 1926 with Dept. of Mines money.

Formerly known as the "Little Joe Trail" and, in its lower sections, the "Gale and Linton Trail." (BL Gale and HC Linton held claims just west of Harvey.) The original trail began down at the second bridge above Harvey's ranch, but was obliterated by logging in the 1950s and 60s.

The Big Onion (aka Astlais Mtn., just off the map) was so nicknamed by Axel Elmsted, Tommy Haig and Ben Benson in 1917 when they found mineralization there. Mining to Ben was "peeling the onion," and this was the BIG one. Originally within the recreation area, the Big Onion was left outside the new park.

Historical Names of Babine Mtns. Park
 Scale: 1: 60,000
 (C) Morgan Hite, Hesperus Arts (www.hesperus-wild.org), July 2012.
 Projection/datum: UTM Zone 9 North/NAD83
 This map and accompanying text are licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License.



A Graphical Guide to Joe L'Orsa's History of the Babines

by Morgan Hite

In 1990 Joe L'Orsa wrote a 29-page typed manuscript detailing the “History of The Babine Mountains Recreation Area.” It was an extensive collection of historical facts, assembled to bolster the argument that the area be made into a park. For the Babines were not yet the park we know them as today. In that year the Babines were a Recreation Area, and park designation was still teetering on the slippery brink of government approval. It would not come for nine more years, after the completion of the Bulkley LRMP process, and, sadly, after Joe's death.

In a sense, Joe spent his life researching this manuscript. Much of it was drawn from his personal knowledge: his father, Fort L'Orsa (who is buried in Silverking Basin), was a horsepacker and logger who built trails and delivered supplies to miners in the Babines, and Joe grew up in and around the those mountains. It was also drawn from reading numerous annual reports from the Ministry of Mines.

On this map I've attempted to relate much of the information he collected about the many distinctive names in the park. Most of them derive from the miners and prospectors that worked the area in the 1920s. Prospectors were active in the area before the railway came through in 1913, with the first recorded claims in 1905 on Harvey Mountain. The McCabe Trail, for example, we find is named for Red McCabe; the Fletcher-Gardiner trail for Al Fletcher and Lefty Gardiner; Higgins Creek for Paddy Higgins; and the Cronin Mine for James Cronin.

There was constant fever about the mining potential of the Babines in those days. It frequently was imagined that rail access to the valley, and then road access, would make those mineral deposits finally worth mining. Despite the hype, only the Cronin mine ever made any money. Nonetheless, money from the Ministry of Mines, and money invested in claims that never paid off, built many of the trails we enjoy today.

The park boundary we know derives from a line Joe drew in 1973. In proposing a park, he circled the area at the 3500' elevation level, which was considered the upper limit of valuable timber – he knew he needed to make the proposal acceptable to logging interests. This line became first the outline of an “integrated management unit” and later a “recreation area.” When in the early 1990s park designation looked immanent, the Ministry of Mines assessed the recreation area and suggested that “extreme mineral potential” remained at the Big Onion (Astlais Mtn.) and the zone around the Cronin mine. These were both then cut out of Joe's original line, and, in compensation, other areas west of the original line were added in.

By the way, if anyone knows who “Little Joe” was, after whom Little Joe Creek, the Little Joe Lakes, and the Little Joe Trail were named, let me know!