

FISH CREEK PROVINCIAL PARK

PARK NOTES

The Burns Family and the Bow Valley Ranch

A Family Treasure

The Burns Family owned the Bow Valley Ranch for four generations spanning seven decades until it was finally sold to the Alberta Government as a centre piece for Fish Creek Provincial Park. In 1902, the Bow Valley Rancho became Bow Valley Ranch (or Farm) when Pat Burns purchased it from William Roper Hull. The ranch served as the holding and sorting point for his cattle en route to his Calgary packing and distribution facilities. During that time, this historic ranch has played host to political meetings, visiting dignitaries, a strategic collection point for livestock, and a family home.



Portrait of Patrick Burns, 1927
Glenbow Archives, NA-1149-1

Building An Empire

It is difficult to discuss the history of Alberta ranching without some mention of one of Pat Burns' many ranches. At the height of his success, Burns could travel from Cochrane to the United States border and never leave his land. From humble beginnings, he began his ranching career with two steers that were given as payment for labouring on a farm. Gradually, as his astute and practical business sense grew, so did his land holdings.

The Business of Beef

Burns secured beef supply contracts for federal work camps, railway construction crews, and even mining camps in the Yukon goldfields. By 1914, his meat empire was a corporate giant that included beef, lamb, and pork varieties. The Burns Meats packing and supply networks included ranches, abattoirs, processing facilities, and retail outlets throughout Canada and as far away as Australia.



The Bow Valley Ranch House circa 1901 - 1902
Photo courtesy of the Provincial Museum and Archives of Alberta - Harry Pollard Collection

Senator Patrick Burns

As a greatly respected citizen and business figure, Pat Burns is perhaps best remembered as one of the "Big Four" businessmen who established the Calgary Stampede in 1912. For his many contributions to business and community he was called to the Senate in 1931. He served faithfully until his death in 1937, marking an end to a great Canadian who contributed immensely to the history of ranching, business, and the western Canadian way of life.

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