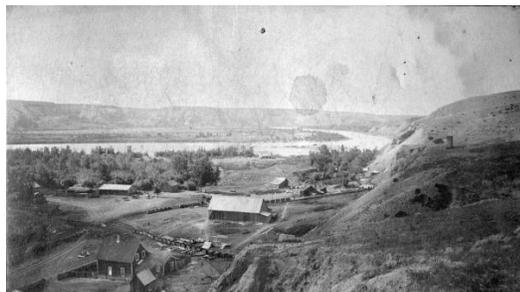


# INDIAN BATTLE PARK

## HISTORY



The river valley where the coal operation was located, 1883. The William Stafford home is at the left. Galt Archives 19738080001

The area of the river bottom where this park is located was originally called the Company Bottom, and refers to the hamlet of Coalbanks—the mining camp run by the Lethbridge Colliery.

The Oldman River Valley contained some key events. There were native camps, tree burials, coal

mines, steamer docks, pioneer homes, a sawmill, a brewery, a cemetery, an auto junkyard and floods.

In October of 1870 the last Indian Battle was fought between the Blackfoot and Cree Nations. In 1874 Nicholas Sheran quarried coal from an exposed seam on the west bank and it became the first commercial mine. His second mine, a drift mine, opened in 1881. Sir Alexander Galt and son Elliot became interested in the coal venture and organized the Northwest Coal and Navigation Company with Elliot as the manager. They opened drift mines, mined the coal and sent it to market, first by the river, then by railway.



Aerial of the river valley where the Indian Battle Park is today, 1972. Galt Archives 19760236153

The hamlet of Coalbanks included stables, a company store, bunkhouses, cabins, a burying ground and a communal well. The coal deposits were moved first by steamers down the Oldman River, then by railway. There was a sawmill at the river's edge started by mine superintendent William Stafford. For a time there was Noel's Brewery or Miner's Brewery which was owned and operated by Joseph Noel. The cemetery is the site of Henry Stafford's grave, who passed away in 1883 at the

age of 17, and that of Britt Stephens, a worker in the mines. In 1885 the mining community moved to the prairie top following the drafting of a town plan by Montague Aldous, a Dominion land surveyor, and approved by Elliot Galt.

Construction of the High Level Bridge, which spans the river valley, commenced in 1908 and finished a year later. Abe Bickman owned an auto junkyard on 22.6 acres on the west side, near the Highway #3 bridge from 1952-1977.

There were 14 floods in the river valley near Lethbridge between 1851-1995, in the years 1851, 1870, 1887, 1899, 1902 [three major floods that year], 1908, 1923, 1947, 1953, 1964, 1975, and 1995. In 1953, the homes of residents living in the river valley were moved to the prairie top. New park development in the river valley in 1960 and its name, approved by City Council, commemorates the Last Great Indian Battle. The city purchased 160 acres of the Company Bottom from the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1912, and named the area River Valley Tracts. Over the next 30 to 40 years various names were attached to the community: Coalbanks, Lower Town Riverside, Belly River Bottom, the Bottoms, the Company Bottom or simply, the Riverbottom.

## PHYSICAL LAYOUT



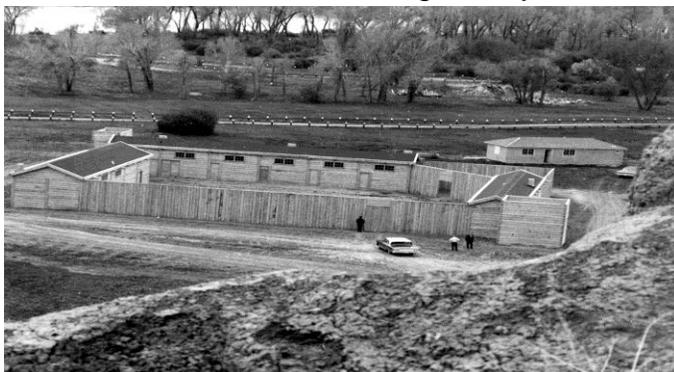
Aerial of the river valley, 1960. The road leads to where the Baroness Picnic Shelter is today.  
Galt Archives 19760219084

Indian Battle Park is situated on 116 [150] acres of floodplain south to north from the power house site near the Whoop-Up Bridge to the Highway 3 Bridge and west to east from the river bank to the coulee slopes.

## BUILDINGS/STRUCTURES

The Helen Schuler Nature Centre and Reserve is a portion of Indian Battle Park located between the High Level Bridge and Highway 3. The centre was opened in 1982 and offers an urban escape for the community and visitors. There are self-guided tours within the 200 acre reserve which supports wildlife and plants. There are interpretive programs for adults, children and families to learn about the river valley's ecosystem. The centre was named for the first president of the Lethbridge Naturalist Society, Helen Schuler.

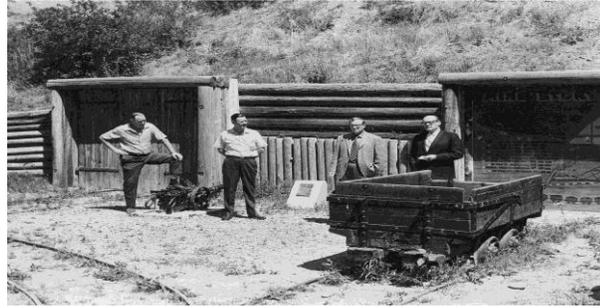
In 1966 the Kinsman Club, as part of their 1967 Canada Centennial project, built a replica of Fort Whoop-Up. The original fort, built in 1869 was situated further to the south at the confluences of the Oldman and St. Mary's Rivers. The Club believed there should be a place where the citizens of Lethbridge and visitors can better acquaint and learn of the area's colourful and interesting history.



Fort Whoop-Up Replica, 1966 Galt Archives 1989107002



The entrance to the 1<sup>st</sup> drift mine, 1963  
Galt Archives199710806268



The mine historical site interpretive display 1967  
Galt Archives19760214005

Another project of the club and in conjunction with the Gyro Club, was the Drift Mine #1 interpretive display close to the Helen Schuler Nature Centre and Nature Reserve. The display tells the story of coal discovery and mining operation in the river valley. A cairn with plaque “Here we begin to mine the coal” stands to the left of the kiosk entrance.

## ACTIVITIES



One of the many pathways throughout the park  
Photo City of Lethbridge

Asphalt and red shale paths wind through the river valley through the picnic area, by the roadway and by the river. Playground facilities include the rattle snake play area which includes a climbing wall, a spider web and beaver lodge. There are picnic spots and picnic shelters, as well as the Elks Compound complete with a fire pit, tables, horseshoe pits, a volleyball court and concession, which can be booked for family gatherings, parties or celebrations.