

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

Plan Big Complex Near Hudson Hope  
BC Forest Products Seek Tree Farm License  
*Peace River Block News*, February 5, 1964, p.1

Coal contract will be signed by Japan  
*Peace River Block News*, January 23, 1981, p.1

And so it began. With these newspaper headlines two very large resource development projects were started in northern British Columbia. In short order, new townsites were built, new industrial plants and transportation infrastructure were constructed, and workers and their families were moving in to begin the adventure of building lives and communities. While the townsites and industrial infrastructure were key to a provincial government economic policy of using resource development megaprojects as part of ‘province building’, in the towns themselves it was the people and their day-to-day activities and needs which created a sense of place and of community. This book is about Mackenzie and Tumbler Ridge. But it is more than a summary of forest or coal industry development; it is the story of the collective effort of local residents who helped to build a community in an instant town.

The resource industries involved in these two megaprojects were very different. Mackenzie is based around a renewable resource (forestry) while Tumbler Ridge is based upon a non-renewable resource (coal mining)—though each has a resource base estimated to last at least the next 100 years at current extraction rates. While nearly twenty years separated their start, these megaprojects, and the instant towns they created, share many common characteristics. They were both created in the post-Second World War era, were created to develop a local resource, required extensive supporting infrastructure, are relatively isolated in a northern provincial setting, and have experienced significant fluctuations in market demands for their resources. And, while Mackenzie was planned by private enterprise

### *Building Community in an Instant Town*

and Tumbler Ridge had significant government involvement, the design of the townsites and supporting civic facilities used similar social and land use planning principles.

Mackenzie and Tumbler Ridge are the most recent examples of a long tradition of resource-based instant towns in British Columbia. Historically, such instant towns have included the gold rush settlements of Yale and Barkerville, and mining towns such as Kimberly and Rossland. More recent examples include Elkford and Sparwood in south-western BC, Logan Lake in south-central BC, Tahsis and Gold River on Vancouver Island, and Fraser Lake and Granisle in the central-interior. British Columbia is indeed a province rich with examples of single-industry instant towns. While the historic settlements followed the haphazard and chaotic building patterns found in the rush which so often accompanies speculation and resource booms, the more recently built towns have used planning designs and concepts aimed at creating safe, desirable, and diversified places for people to live and work. In British Columbia, the specific lineage of planned instant town developments can be linked back to Kitimat—the first such town developed in the post-Second World War era.

### **Two Special Towns**

Mackenzie is located 200 kms. north of Prince George in north-central British Columbia (Map 1.1). The town was founded in 1966 in conjunction with the massive hydroelectric project which created the Williston Lake reservoir. The Mackenzie townsite was developed to be the processing centre for a new regional forest industry. At present, two large sawmill complexes (Abitibi-Consolidated and Slocan Forest Products), a pulp mill facility (Pope and Talbot), and a pulp and paper plant (Abitibi-Consolidated) provide nearly all basic sector employment. With a local population in 1996 of approximately 6,000 people, a service and local administration economy has also developed.

Mackenzie has recently experienced a new round of economic change and industry restructuring. In 1999, Donohue Industries completed an \$80 million takeover of Finlay Forest Industries. This was followed in March 2000, by a \$7.1 billion takeover of all Donohue's operations, including their Mackenzie holdings, by Abitibi-Consolidated. Both Donohue and Abitibi Consolidated are Quebec based forest products companies. Finally, in April 2000, an announcement was made that Norske Skog ASA was in negotiations for a \$3.6 billion sale of Fletcher Challenge Canada Ltd.'s

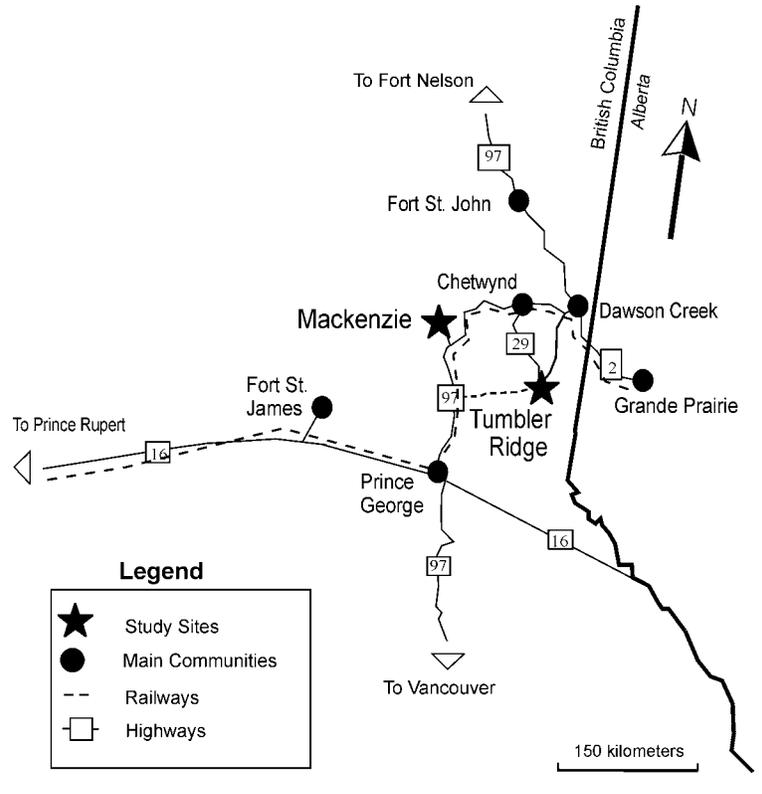
### *Introduction*

operations, including the Mackenzie pulp mill operation. In less than a year, Norske Skog ASA sold their Mackenzie holdings to American based Pope and Talbot. Such changes in ownership have of course occurred before. This new round sets the stage for the next chapter in Mackenzie's history.

Tumbler Ridge is British Columbia's newest town, founded in association with the province's last resource development megaproject. Located in north-eastern British Columbia, Tumbler Ridge is on the eastern foothills of the Rocky Mountains (Map 1.1). Regional coal resources have long been known about, but in the mid-1970s world prices and demand prompted a flurry of activity (Map 1.2). More than 15 coal claims by a variety of national and multi-national firms were staked in the region around present day Tumbler Ridge (BP Exploration Canada, 1979; Cinnabar Peak Mines, 1981; Denison Mines Limited 1982; Pacific 66, 1978; Petro-Canada, n.d.; Teck Corporation, 1981; Utah Mines, 1976). Out of this resource scramble, two mines, 'Bullmoose' (operated by Teck Corporation) and 'Quintette' (operated by Denison Mines) proceeded.

Construction of the Tumbler Ridge townsite began in 1981. The first commercial building (the Royal Bank) opened in 1982, a temporary school opened in September of 1982 at the Kilbourne construction site on Quintette property, and the first permanent elementary school opened in 1983. The first shipment of coal to the Ridley Island port in Prince Rupert was sent by rail in 1983. Global commodity prices and corporate restructuring have affected Tumbler Ridge almost since its opening. Since 1990, the economic viability of the mines, especially the Quintette mine, has been put in question as a result of a pricing conflict with the consortium of Japanese steel mills which purchase the coal. In 1997, new contracts which set new prices and volumes were signed. These new contracts guaranteed production until 2003. However, on March 1, 2000 Teck Corporation (which was by now managing both mines) announced it was moving up plans to close the Quintette mine on August 31, 2000. The smaller Bullmoose mine operation would continue for at least the short term. Since that announcement, local residents, activists, businesses, and local government officials

**Map 1.1**  
**North East Region**



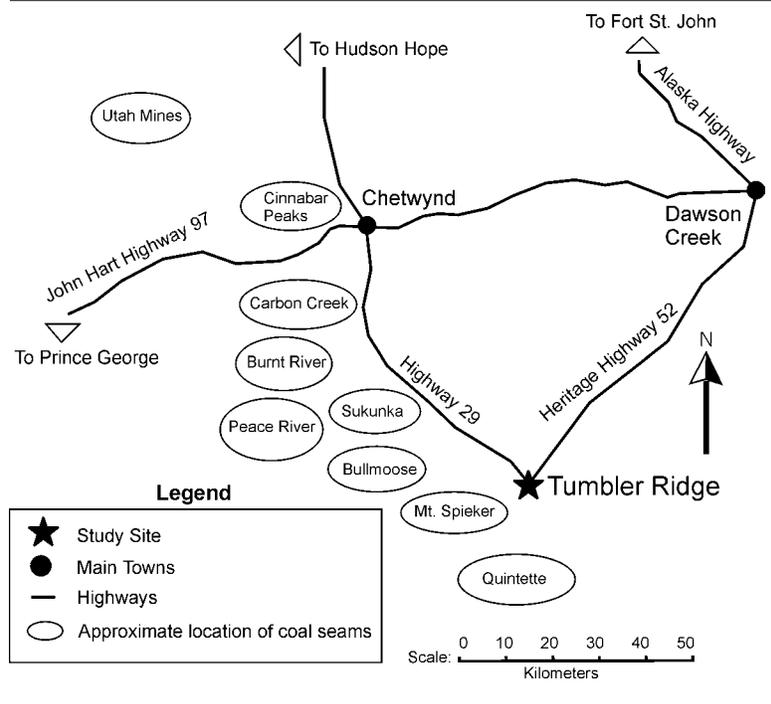
have been working with industry and senior government representatives to develop economic diversification strategies. As in Mackenzie, the years 1999-2000 mark the start of a new chapter in Tumbler Ridge's history.

### **A Social Geography of Community Development**

The study of human geography is the study of people and the places in which they live. It is an attempt to understand something of the character and sense of place which defines individual communities. For both Mackenzie and Tumbler Ridge, the challenge of single-industry dependence has been a fact of life. Over the years, residents and families in both towns have experienced the booms and busts of resource cycles and market de-

Introduction

Map 1.2:  
Regional Coal Mining Claims



mands. Such demands, and the local reaction to them, have been important in defining an identity and character for both towns. As such, residents are keenly aware of the interconnections between ‘community’ and ‘economic development’. Crisis *and* opportunity are not new challenges for residents, local governments, or community organizations. At present both towns are experiencing challenges, and in both cases a community is rising to meet these challenges and to take advantage of the new opportunities they present.

This book is a *social geography* inquiry into how the people of these towns have created a sense of community. Social geography, as one branch of human geography, explores some of the central social processes and outcomes responsible for creating and maintaining the local places within which we live. It is interested in the way social processes help to create a physical or *spatial* community, and the way social resources and phenom-

### *Building Community in an Instant Town*

ena are distributed within that community. Among the topics often considered in social geography are: work, housing, social services, and the role of gender in shaping our communities. When a large number of such issues interact, we can start to see patterns develop—patterns which help us to interpret why the community has evolved as it has. In this sense, the outcomes studied in social geography are said to be *socially produced*; they are the result of local activity, interaction, and debate. Implicit in all of this is an interest in *change*. Therefore, social geography also adopts something of an historical perspective when studying places. Community change, after all, happens *in* places *over* time. It is important to bear this in mind when examining any current issue or topic in a community's social geography.

#### **Defining Community**

In this book, a specific social geography theme is used to explore the towns of Mackenzie and Tumbler Ridge. That theme is 'community'. While we all use the word 'community' on a day-to-day basis, when we are pressed to define its meaning we often find it a slippery and complex concept. We run into questions about what (or who) to include or not include. For example, in any town, is there only one 'community'? In that same town, do all the people have the same background, views, opinions, capacity and knowledge, and the same participation in local activities and events? And, if communities are diverse and multi-faceted things, how can the 'community' come together to address challenges and opportunities?

We are interested in the word community because humans are communal animals. With few exceptions, we need to be part of a larger group. In this sense, community reinforces feelings of membership and belonging. It includes the social and geographic framework within which individuals experience and conduct most of their day-to-day activities. For its members, the community serves a range of basic functions. These functions include:

- interaction and social participation,
- social, collective, or mutual support,
- sense of identification, belonging, or solidarity,
- processes of socialization, or a shared sense of social place and social control,
- and economic organization, including production, distribution, and consumption.

### *Introduction*

These functions support both the individual and the group. They also help define the reciprocal relationship between the individual and the group. It is through their community that individuals organize their daily lives and make sense of the issues and concerns they encounter. This sense of community is not always tangible, however. One of the ways it can become tangible is if there is some threat or challenge to the community. Under pressure, people may energize their community bonds and membership to meet such challenges.

In addition to the general problem of defining community, it is generally recognized that there are two basic types of communities. These are *place-based communities* and *interest-based communities* (Halseth, 1998; Lee, 1982).

#### **Place-based and Interest-based Communities**

A place-based community refers to a geographically delimited population. Depending on the scale, we may be talking about a street block, a neighbourhood, or a small town. Living in the place defines the membership, and everyone knows their community boundaries. In this case, the assumption is generally made that the residents share a certain set of bonds as a result of sharing a common local environment.

Place-based communities are very important in our day-to-day lives. For example, the municipality within which we live creates sets of rules with respect to property uses and taxation which, if they change drastically, can affect us significantly. Place-based communities can become even more important in rural and small town British Columbia, where large distances separate settlements. In this case, there is often intense local identification with the small town. As well, many small towns in northern British Columbia rely upon a main industry or employer, something which also reinforces bonds between residents. Pressures on that industry, or changes in the way local operations are run, can have significant local impacts which are felt by all residents. This is certainly the case in Mackenzie and Tumbler Ridge.

In addition to place-based communities, we recognize community bonds formed out of mutual interests or concerns. Such communities of interest are bound together by an identification with a common issue. In this case, it is not necessary that community members live close by, rather they are held together by sets of relationships and personal ties. With interest-based communities, cohesive bonds may form which are not linked to direct

### *Building Community in an Instant Town*

face-to-face interaction. Such is the case where new modes of communication have created an expanded set of opportunities for creating interest-based communities.

This book is about the development and maintenance of a community in an instant town setting. As such, Mackenzie and Tumbler Ridge each form a place-based community. Residents are bound together by the circumstances of local events. Within these place-based communities we need to recognize that individuals may also develop interest-based communities. How these two types of communities interact is especially important in northern communities where outside pressures or stresses can generate situations where all residents must come together to decide upon a collective local response and future. Community development in this regard is generally considered to be holistic—it involves a wide range of inputs. Such inputs include local economic systems together with local institutions, political leadership, community spirit, and social structure. It is these inputs which will be explored in the chapters to follow.

### **Book Outline**

Single-industry instant towns are about work. They were purpose-built to house the workforce for a new resource industry. The main question in their development is how to promote a community landscape to support the workforce. The topics explored in this book address issues central to the community creation and development process.

The book is organized into four parts. The first part introduces Mackenzie and Tumbler Ridge as ‘Northern Resource Towns’. It provides a review of the town planning foundations for each town as well as community profiles which outline their social and economic character. The introduction includes a discussion which places the planning of Mackenzie and Tumbler Ridge into a longer history of instant town construction.

The second part of the book, ‘Industrial Society’, addresses issues of work. In this case, topics such as employment, income levels, and occupational characteristics are examined. In addition, the topic of housing is introduced. This is because the economic affordability of ‘housing the workforce’ is so central to resource towns. Finally, the topic of gender is covered as the resource industry workplace has historically been highly gender segregated. How the structure of work affects men and women will be explored.

### *Introduction*

Under the title of ‘Civic Society’, the third part of the book explores the role of government. Of particular interest is the role of local government. We emphasize this because local government plays a significant role in the creation and maintenance of a sense of community within small towns. This part includes a review of the development of local government institutions, as well as the establishment of local government services and facilities.

‘Civil Society’ refers to groups and organizations within places - the very foundations of what we so often refer to as community. This fourth part of the book includes a review of voluntary sector organizations in each town as well as capsule summaries of organizations which highlight the broad range of work and services they provide. Also included are introductions to a number of important local events which together form part of a busy annual parade of community activities and which play a role in creating an identity for the community.

The book concludes with a look at recent challenges faced by both Mackenzie and Tumbler Ridge. In many respects, it is through these challenges that the spirit and strength of the community is reflected. As such, they provide a touchstone for looking ahead to opportunities for each town.

### **Final Comment**

In writing this book, we believe strongly in two things. First, that the story of people creating a sense of home and community in Mackenzie and Tumbler Ridge is important. Considerable effort and planning over the past 50 years has gone into creating the social and land use concepts, principles, and designs upon which such towns should be built. These principles have been widely applied and continue to guide both policy makers and resource managers. As examples of state-of-the-art townsites, it is important to see how the instant town experiment works out for the people who live and work in them. Second, we believe this story has a wider relevance. While individual circumstances may vary, it is a story in which people from many of the small town and resource-dependent places in northern British Columbia and across Canada will see their own experiences reflected. The story of Mackenzie and Tumbler Ridge has lessons worth learning, and as places in northern British Columbia struggle with the impacts of resource industry restructuring, it is from the sharing of experiences and lessons that people can make choices about future directions for their own towns and communities.