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Attraction

CANADIAN MUSEUM OF RAIL TRAVEL



Cranbrook



cranbrookhistorycentre.com

THE CANADIAN MUSEUM of Rail Travel at the Cranbrook History Centre had an accidental start. “The museum started in 1976 with the plan to get a single rail car and turn it into a gift shop,” senior tour guide Don Kirk told my tour group on a visit to the museum. But when the volunteers started to work on the old car, they found a surprise. Layers of paint and wallpaper were hiding the Jazz Era Art Deco woodwork of a historic 1929 Trans-Canada Limited car.

The find changed the direction of the museum and those involved began to wonder if other forgotten rail cars still existed. Scouring the countryside they began locating cars—some had been repurposed as holiday cottages, while others were found

sidelined in disrepair. A few finds, including all the interior furnishings of one car, had been secretly saved by old train buffs who hoped the cars would someday be restored.

In all, they found seven cars from the luxury line, which operated for two years between Montreal and Vancouver, at a cost of between \$190 and \$250 for a single and \$800 to \$1,200 for a family of four (\$15,000 to \$22,000 in today’s dollars). The Trans-Canada Limited was forced to end its run during the peak of the Great Depression.

One of the highlights of the rail museum is the knowledgeable staff. Kirk explained that many old trains were dismantled for wood and parts, but the layers of paint probably saved

not just the seven sleeping train cars from the 1929 Trans-Canada Limited but also the gorgeous wooden 1907-1914 Soo-Spokane train. Running between Minneapolis, Minnesota and Spokane, Washington through Canada on the Crowsnest Pass, the Soo-Spokane has intricate stained glass and Edwardian style woodwork.

With 28 railway cars (13 are currently on display to the public) Cranbrook’s Canadian Museum of Rail Travel is an incredible place to explore the heyday of rail travel. Three different guided tours include the three-car Soo-Spokane; a comparative tour of trains from 1927 to 1970; or a tour of the seven-car Trans Canada Limited.

- Diane Selkirk