

THE TUMBLER RIDGE DINOSAUR FOOTPRINTS

In 2000 two local boys fell off their inner tube while descending rapids in Flatbed Creek. Walking back upstream on bedrock, they correctly identified a dinosaur trackway. They contacted palaeontologist Rich McCrea, who confirmed their find (which is the longest known accessible trackway in BC) and taught members of the Tumbler Ridge Museum Foundation how to look for further tracks.

Footprints have now been discovered in eight other canyons, in rock cuts, and in the alpine. Some of these are from an age (Turonian) in which no footprints have previously been found; others are well preserved, and show unusual features such as dew claws and skin impressions. There is one pathological footprint, “the dinosaur with the broken toe”, and other natural footprint casts are made up of fossilized oyster shells.

In 2001 BC’s second dinosaur bone was discovered right alongside the boys’ original trackway, in the same layer of rock. In 2002 BC’s first dinosaur bonebed was discovered in a nearby canyon, and excavation began in 2003. This is Western Canada’s oldest dinosaur material.

The Tumbler Ridge dinosaur footprints fall into three groups:

Theropods - These meat-eating dinosaurs were built for speed. Their trackways are narrow and show three-toed prints that are often longer than they are wide, often with claws at the end of the toes.

Ornithopods - These herbivorous dinosaurs left wider trackways; their footprints are wider than they are long, with three fairly blunt toes, and they occasionally left tiny hand prints.

Ankylosaurs - These armoured dinosaurs walked on all fours; the hind feet had four toes, and the front footprint resembles a crescent moon, with five toes.

The two best ways to currently enjoy the Tumbler Ridge dinosaur experience are:

- 1) Take a Museum Foundation tour to the Wolverine field site (1 hr) or the Cabin Pool field site (2 hrs). Tours run from June through August. For details and booking, call 242-3123.
- 2) Visit the Museum Foundation’s palaeontology displays in the Tumbler Ridge Community Centre.

The Peace Region Palaeontology Research Centre, the first of its kind in the province, is being developed and will offer tours in the future. This is where the palaeontologists work on preparing dinosaur bones and other fossils, and where the museum’s collections are housed.

The trail to the Cabin Pool on Flatbed Creek is marked. Far more will be seen and learned in the company of a guide, but the site can be visited unaccompanied. It is reached via the two kilometer long Flatbed Pools Trail. It begins just a kilometer from Tumbler Ridge, and has one narrow section and a total of fifty meters elevation change – please refer to the map. There are picnic tables and a fire pit near the Cabin Pool rock, which contains just under 200 prints (the largest collection of prints in BC). Some of these are well preserved, others are partly eroded and fainter, and thus identifiable only to experts. Most visitors will be able to identify a couple of dozen prints.

When walking on the rock, please take care not to walk directly on the prints. Walk across it at its uppermost section, and then down the rock as close to the creek as possible.

There are a few tracks on the smaller rocks above the main rock. Note two well preserved theropod tracks with dewclaw impressions at the upper (downstream) end of the main rock (this is not a short trackway, as both are left footprints). Towards the lower (upstream) end of this rock there are also many readily identifiable prints.

When water levels in Flatbed Creek are low, it is possible to wade through the creek just below Cabin Pool, (above the rapids) and head downstream for about eighty meters to the bedrock, where the boys’ original ankylosaur trackway is visible. Look for faint hand (manus) prints in front of each of the deeper hindfoot (pes) prints. Some of these prints are getting faint, after being subjected to annual floods. There are 26 prints in all. Do not cross Flatbed Creek when creek levels are high, and please be careful after heavy rainfall, as creek levels can rise quickly.

The Tumbler Ridge dinosaur material is of Cenomanian and Turonian Age, in rocks from the Upper Cretaceous Period. If you discover what you think may be a dinosaur footprint or bone, please do not remove it. Instead, please report your find to the PRPRC at (250) 242 DINO, or email prprc@pris.ca.

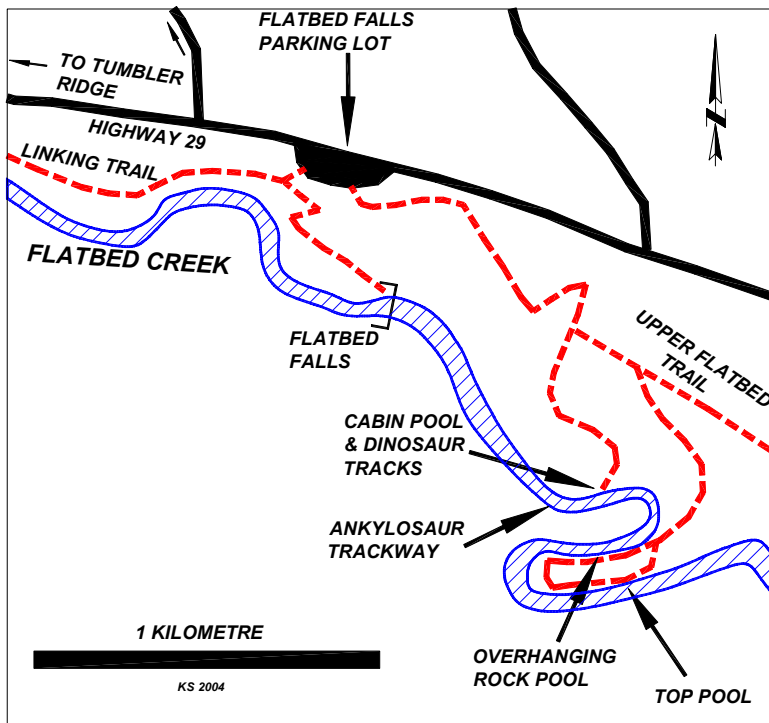
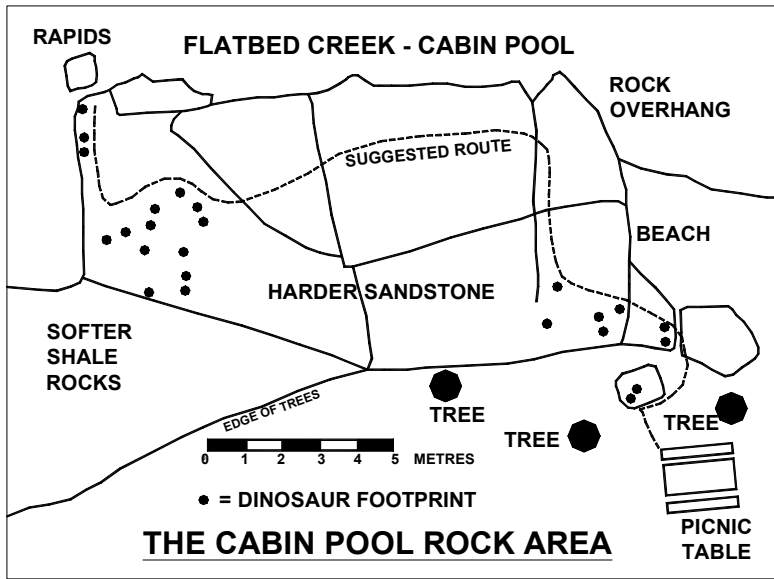
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TUMBLER RIDGE...ACCESSIBLE ADVENTURE

