

## RUNNING THROUGH THE HISTORY OF THE BEZANSON TOWNSITE

The original site of Bezanson along the banks of the Smoky River was a thriving pioneer settlement founded by Ancel Maynard Bezanson, an adventurer from Nova Scotia. Once it was established that the Canadian National Railway had surveyed their line through an area just beyond where the Simonette and Wapiti Rivers confluence with the Smoky River, Maynard (as he liked to be called) subdivided his "Townsite" directly on that rail line and shortly thereafter lots were advertised for sale. As the provincial government decided to locate the ferry 10 kms. downstream from the "Townsite", Bezanson saw to it that a road was built down the hill to a suitable place for the ferry system that he then put in place. By 1915, the "Townsite" had 20 buildings – Hall & Leonard General Store, Harwood Hotel, Mart Geary's Blacksmith Shop, Doran's Bakery and a Presbyterian Church that also served as the schoolhouse, to name a few. The development of the Bezanson Townsite was closely linked to the development of the south Peace area prior to the arrival of the railroad. It was on the route followed by settlers who came into the region via the Edson Trail and was a stopping point for the river boats operating on the Smoky and Peace Rivers. With the decision of the

Edmonton Dunvegan and British Columbia Railway to enter Grande Prairie from the north, virtually all hope was lost for the need for a town. In 1917, Maynard Bezanson and his family left the "Townsite" bound for Edmonton. With the Government's decision in 1922 to move the site of the ferry down river to where the bridge is presently, the "Townsite" soon disintegrated. Several buildings were either moved or dismantled and rebuilt at different locations with the most notable being the Church which was rebuilt as a Store at the current hamlet of Bezanson. In 1923 the last resident left the "Townsite".

The "Townsite" was designated a Registered Historic Resource in 1986. In 1988, with many distinguished guests in attendance, including Jim Bezanson, son of A.M. Bezanson, the Old Bezanson Townsite and Park officially opened. Many of the old building sites have been identified with markers. See if you can find them as you enjoy the spectacular views of the Smoky River. The campground has 20 camping stalls and a day-use area. A booklet, "Native Flowers, Shrubs & Trees of the Bezanson Townsite" that includes a map of the area, has been published and is available for sale at the Bezanson Store.

Thanks to all participants and volunteers in the  
2012 Bezanson Bog cross country running race.  
September 22, 2012 Bezanson Agricultural Society,  
Old Bezanson Town Site, Bezanson Bog 2012  
Wolves Cross Country Series



The Original Bezanson Town site  
courtesy of SPRA 1990-30.083



Monument dedicated to the Pioneer Women of  
the Peace Country

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providing us with information about the  
history of Bezanson town site.

