

HANNA: RAIL TALES AND PRAIRIE TREASURES

Roundhouse ● Four Corners ● Hanna Pioneer Village and Museum

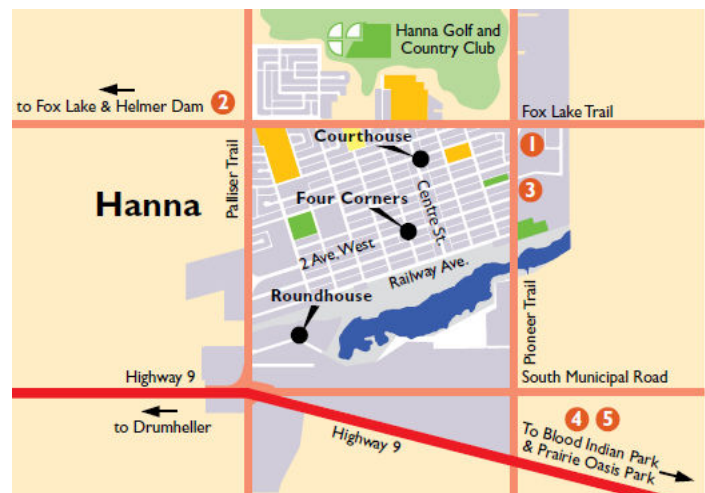


Imagine the changes in Hanna between 1912 and today

This tour takes you by car or on foot through the railway history of Hanna. The federal government's push to cover the prairies with homesteaders instead of cattle barons encouraged the construction of railways. One of these was the Goose Lake Line, Canadian Northern Railway's link between Saskatoon and Calgary. Hanna became the line's divisional point. Your journey starts at the Visitor Information Centre and nearby train caboose and follows the development of a town into a bustling railway traffic centre. The route then leads to the Four Corners in downtown Hanna, where the railway's arrival sparked real estate speculation, business growth, and big dreams. Your next stop is the Hanna Pioneer Village and Museum, where a friendly tour guide leads you through the region's past.

Hanna

- Explore the Four Corners on Hanna's main street
- Search for intricate details on Hanna's oldest brick buildings
- Walk or drive through Hanna's railway history
- Enjoy a fascinating guided tour through Hanna Pioneer Village and Museum
- Examine Alberta's largest collection of dolls at the Doll Palace Museum



The Town of Hanna

In the spring of 1912, Hanna was still grassland – home to pronghorn, coyotes, and a few Ranchers and the unfenced cattle. Just getting to Hanna was an ordeal for reluctant settlers, forced to unload their worldly belongings at distant rail stations such as Bassano, Stettler, Olds, and Castor. Then, with purchased horse and wagon, they creaked along on a rough track to a dry landscape where isolation and hard work beckoned.

All that changed when the Canadian Northern Railway (CNoR) announced the location of its Goose Lake Line, linking Calgary to Saskatoon. This new rail line crossed open range, the odd wagon trail and the homesteads of a handful of hardy pioneers in one of Alberta's remotest areas.



Hanna's Train Station in 1913. It has since been renovated and serves as the community Visitor Information Centre

The CNoR owners had scouted the Alberta prairie well and – figuring money could be made moving farmers' crops to market – rapidly built a web of prairie rail lines north of the Canadian Pacific Railway mainline. As a result, prairie farms, ranches and communities blossomed. With the railway came railway towns, set only 10 to 16 km apart because trains needed to stop frequently for maintenance and water. These closely-spaced towns meant most farmers had only a short distance to haul their grain to trackside elevators.

On the Goose Lake Line, Hanna was more than just a routine stopping point. Located at a junction where several railways converged, the new town became the third largest divisional point in Alberta, behind only Edmonton and Calgary.

Between the spring of 1912 and the following winter,

meadowlark songs were drowned out by hammers and saws as cowboys, farmers, bankers, and businessmen arrived to make their fortunes and build a town from scratch. This miracle on the prairie was essentially complete on November 13, 1913, when a crowd gathered at the station to listen for a faint steam whistle, signaling the arrival of the town's first passenger train and mail delivery.



Examine Hanna's train roundhouse, which awaits restoration

At the west entrance to Hanna, off **Highway 9**, stop at the Visitor Information Centre, near the caboos. Every freight train arriving in Hanna had a caboose like this at the rear.

CANADIAN BADLANDS TOURING ROUTES

The caboose provided shelter for the crew, an office for the conductor, and sometimes even living quarters. Today, cabooses, with their end lights, have been replaced by a flashing rear-end device and sensors built into the tracks. As cars and buses eliminated the need for train passenger service, the railway reverted to its initial, primary role – hauling freight. As a result, Hanna’s train station closed in the 1980’s.

Hanna’s train station is one of the only two railway buildings left from the town’s early days. Called a standard second class station, it boasted the usual necessities: an office for the station master, a baggage room, a general waiting room, and a separate ladies’ waiting room. Upstairs living quarters allowed the station master to meet every train, regardless of the hour.

After leaving the Visitor Information Centre, take **Palliser Trail** north to **Roundhouse Road**. Turn right, follow the road to the east side of the **roundhouse**. While you can look at the old

railway roundhouse from here, please respect private property by not entering the building or its grounds.



This turntable was used to rotate trains back onto the tracks after servicing

Each divisional point on a railway line had a roundhouse to repair and maintain train locomotives. Hanna’s roundhouse was built in 1913, and housed two, 30-man crews working around the clock to service 15 or more engines. This heavy workload declined as steam engines gave way to diesel engines, and eventually rural roundhouses were replaced by maintenance facilities in major centres. Hanna’s roundhouse closed in 1961 and today stands as a unique reminder of when trains ruled the prairies.

During the heyday of Hanna’s roundhouse, skilled craftsman – machinists, boiler makers, carpenters, blacksmiths and welders –

were needed to maintain steam locomotives. Other workers loaded coal, carted away cinders and handled freight cars. Thus until the 1950s, nearly half of Hanna’s population was linked to the railway.

The busy flow of locomotives into the roundhouse’s 15 work bays sometimes produced unexpected excitement. If, say, a train engineer approached the bay too quickly, the locomotive could jump the end blocks and crash through the far wall. This could be rather disconcerting for the shop foreman, whose office sat behind stall number 11. Luckily, no one was injured in one notable incident, in which a water car smashed through a wall at 50 km per hour. From the road, see if you can spot changes in the roundhouse’s brickwork, a telltale sign of a “miscalculation”.

After the roundhouse closed, the space was used first by an implement dealership to build farm plows and rock pickers and later by a cattle auction market, complete with stalls and bleachers.

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Private owners are currently investigating new business opportunities and restoration of this fascinating old building.

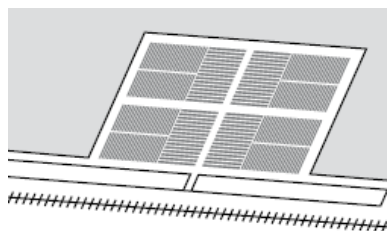
Side Trip

Auctions for livestock, equipment and estate goods provide great live entertainment and an insight into the social networks of rural communities like Hanna's. Enjoy the auctioneer's patter, but don't worry about accidentally heading home with a 1,000 kilogram heifer or a rusty tractor; to bid you must register and receive a numbered card. Watch for posters in town shop windows or ask at the Visitor Information Centre about the next auction and driving directions

Return to **Palliser Trail** and head north, turning right onto **2nd Avenue**. As you go east, notice the regular arrangement of Hanna's streets and avenues. More than 80% of prairie towns built next to a rail line were planned by railway companies, which chose one of six plans. The Canadian Northern Railway favoured the 1st plan, which is still evident in Hanna's layout: a central street running to the tracks and smaller lots facing onto the central street. Overtime, businesses bought multiple lots to make room

for hotels, dairies, lumber yards, and machine shops.

The railway's surveyors laid out the town in the typical prairie grid pattern, with streets running north to south and avenues east to west. The main business street was, not surprisingly, called Main Street, later renamed Centre Street and then McCrea Drive.



The CNOR owned Hanna's land and sold it to buyers for residential and commercial business sites. It intended to sell business lots on Main Street for a premium. But when prospective buyers met on the train bound for Saskatoon (where the sale was held in 1912), they agreed to buy the cheaper and larger lots on 2nd avenue, thus creating a new "main street".

In late 1912, the first businesses, harness shops, clothing and general stores, meat markets, banks and various offices – opened in

downtown Hanna. Places of entertainment soon followed, including the Empire Theatre and Memorial Hall, which held plays, dances, and other community events. Now a Royal Canadian Legion on **2nd Avenue** and **2nd Street West**, the Memorial Hall is a two-storey brick building, designed in 1926 by architect J. de Jurowski, who also designed Hanna's first brick school along with many homes and other buildings. Although recent additions to the legion's façade mask the beauty of the detailed brickwork, notice how the castle-like crenellated roof line, arches and fan windows hint at the earlier craftsmanship.

Like many early prairie downtowns, Hanna's wooden structures were susceptible to devastating fires. Not surprisingly, the original Empire Theatre (directly east of Memorial Hall) burned down in 1917, its replacement a highly-popular place to attend movies, dances and plays for many years. Attendance waned in the 1980s and the deteriorating theatre finally

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closed its doors and was demolished in the late 1990s. A park now commemorates this space.



Imagine attending a movie or dance at Shackers Theatre

While sitting on a park bench, imagine the street in front of you as it was a century ago. The road consisted of sticky prairie soil that clung to boots and wagon wheels. Strollers and shoppers chatted on the wooden sidewalks or peered into the windows of the boomtown-style storefronts. To your left, Dr. Grant hurried out of his office and pharmacy to deliver another baby. Across the street, Harry Smith called to a man on horseback that his new cowboy boots were ready for pick up.

The streets are now paved and the sidewalks made of cement, but many of the original buildings still stand



This dusty downtown street attracted horse drawn crowds

behind fresh paint, vinyl siding, and new windows & doors. Try to discover some of these old landmarks as you continue east along **2nd Avenue**. Look for brick work, the boomtown fronts typical of Western movie towns, small windows that have been enlarged and modern facings on older-style buildings. You may have to take your detective work into the alleys to see the real building behind its new face.

The hub of Hanna's business district has always been the **Four Corners** – the intersection of **2nd Avenue** and **1st Street West**. On the north-west corner stands the National Hotel, built in 1912-13 and welcoming visitors and locals to its 64 bedrooms, meeting rooms, dining room, bar and barbershop. For many years, the hotel had two bars; one for women and their escorts,



Need a drink? The National Hotel was the favourite watering hole of local farmers

and the other for men only. Changes to provincial liquor laws in 1967 abolished this segregation, and the separating wall was removed, creating one large bar.

The two-storey brick building on the north-east corner of the intersection opened as the Union Bank in 1912, giving away later to the Royal Bank of Canada, then a town office and finally a law firm. Look closely at the detailed brickwork, most noticeable on the second floor's corners and near the roof line; only the Royal Canadian Legion has fancier brickwork.



Look for the impressive brickwork on the old Union Bank

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On the southwest corner of the Four Corners is Hanna's once-aspiring skyscraper. The base and walls of the Robertson Block (1912) were designed to carry three storeys, but only two were ever built. Notice the builder's attention to detail: the decorative diamond shape inlay pattern in the second-storey walls, the shingle inlay over the windows (added later) and the brick arches, with their central keystones, over the entrances. Hanna's first brick building, began life as a men's wear store and has since housed retail stores, a photo studio and offices, including that of a provincial police officer.



Look for the Robertson Block, Hanna, ALTA, the longest standing brick building in Hanna

A two-storey wooden building has sat on the intersection's fourth corner since 1912, when the Johnson Corner Drug Store began selling medicines, magazines, candy, tobacco,

and stationary. Eventually, F.A. Mathe turned the drugstore into the Cash Meat Market, which provided roasts and chops to town residents, most of whom had no home freezer. The building's second floor held meetings, weddings, and dances in Fleming Hall. Look for the west-side door that once opened for revelers and wedding guests.



The Corner Drug Store has seen many businesses operate within its walls

For a century, Hanna's business district has served townspeople, farmers, and railway men. Today, the old harness and butcher shops have been replaced by auto dealerships and grocery stores, serving a motorized market that now extends to more than 100 kilometers away.

Business launches and failures, births and deaths, wheat price fluctuations and community activities were the daily grist that filled the

pages of the Hanna Herald. Herb McCrea was a young, determined man when he decided to start a newspaper in the fledgling town. Disembarking from the train in Bassano, about 160 km to the south, he loaded his hand press and type cases on a sleigh and set off, arriving in Hanna in time to print his first edition on Christmas Eve, 1912.

The next stop on your journey is the **Hanna Pioneer Village and Museum**, where knowledgeable guides are eager to show you more of Hanna's fascinating past. To reach the site, continue east on **2nd Avenue** and then go **north on Pioneer Trail**. As you arrive, notice the wooden sidewalks, which a century ago would have kept women's long skirts from dragging in the prairie mud. The tour begins in the main museum building with an introduction to the history of Hanna and surrounding communities. You can examine an eclectic array of artifacts: a battered miner's lamp, an intricately decorated handbag, a fine old gramophone and a time capsule's contents.

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Explore the many historic buildings in the Hanna Pioneer Village and Museum

Your next stop is the Telephone Building, built in 1912 and the oldest building on the site. Here you'll find Mrs. Jarvis' beauty shop recreated in one room and the Richdale Post Office in another. Across the street is the 1919 Ranch House, a fancier, two-storey home of a well-to-do rancher and his family. Imagine huddling next to the double-sided kitchen stove to warm up after a long day of chores in the harsh prairie winter.

Long winters added to the isolation of far-flung homesteads and ranches. A trip to Hanna was an event, when friends could be visited and the latest news heard. Head up the Pioneer Villages' street to Johnston and Company's General Store, where farm wives once traded eggs for flour and sugar and farmers purchased harness and new tools. As

you walk across the squeaky floor, imagine the bustle of shoppers, the swish of paper and strings as the storekeeper wrapped up parcels, and the smell of tobacco, horses and perfume. Look around and see how many product labels you can identify. Some things have hardly changed, other, like the banana container, are totally different.



Check out the wide range of products in this old general store

A place you don't want to be too familiar with is the Jail Cell, just outside the general store. A cage with two bunks, this cell once sat in a fire hall. Be sure to ask your guide about the great escape.



Think you could escape from this tiny jail cell?

Older visitors might have mixed feelings about the next building on the tour. The Vetford School was a typical one-room prairie school house – with strict discipline, pledges of allegiance to the British Flag and boys on one side and girls on the other.

Nearby, the tiny Hanna Hospital and its historical medical equipment harkens back to the Spanish Flu Epidemic of 1918. Imagine lying in a ward of 36 patients, while a handful of nurses tried to keep up with medications, cleanings, and feedings. A display of early medicines is more reminiscent of a health food store than a pharmacy. The nursery is full of handmade toys, furniture, and items from the Eaton's catalogue.

Next door is St. Mark's Lutheran Church, still occasionally used for weddings. If you're lucky, the guide will let you ring the bell, which at one time would have summoned worshippers from far and wide.

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Ring the bell in St. Mark's Lutheran Church

Your next stop is the Archives, a treasure trove of photos, particularly of the area's railway history. Maps show rail lines, towns and homesteads, many of which are now only memories, thanks to economic-driven consolidations. The owners of today's farms and ranches – often many townships in size – would have trouble believing governments once thought a quarter-section of land could support a family in this dry country.

Not far away is a 1911 blacksmith shop with a working forge, a small barn for work horses and milk cows, and the Trenaman Building, owned by an early Hanna businessman. A bandstand has been moved here too, after hosting countless Saturday band concerts and providing a raised platform for rodeo announcers to excitedly call out the thrills and spills of

bronc and bull riders. Among this cluster of buildings is a 1913 power windmill, which an ingenious farmer built to harness the ceaseless prairie wind. Look inside to see the windmill's belts and wheels, used to power a water pump, grind grain and perform other farm tasks.

Side Trip

Rodeos have arisen from the daily activities on working ranches to become a highly-popular sport in countless prairie towns such as Hanna. Bronc and bull riders, calf ropers and barrel racers compete for prizes that range from hundreds to thousands of dollars. Enjoy the excitement at the All Girls Rodeo in the spring, the Hand Hills Stampede in early summer and the Hanna Indoor Pro Rodeo (check with Travel Alberta for other area rodeos). Much of the bucking and bull stock come from the nearby, historic Calgary Stampede Ranch, which maintains some of North America's best rodeo bloodlines and provides animals for professional rodeos throughout Western Canada.

A tractor shed and a quonset contain some of the Pioneer Village's most interesting farm equipment. A lovingly restored steam engine, for example, was once hired out for fall grain threshing. Such harvesting equipment often had to be modified to handle the relatively short stalks of grain on this dry prairie.

Check out the hulking Oil Pull Rumley, a heavy, powerful

machine that could clear and plow land at a constant speed of 5km/h, on a diet of kerosene and water. Tractors such as this and others in the museum's collection quickly replaced four-legged horsepower, allowing farmers to work larger plots of land.

Railway enthusiasts will wish they could test the speeders and the velocipede. Although they look fun to drive, workers riding them to check for rail and tie problems were often chilly in these open-air vehicles. They would undoubtedly have eyed the nearby, restored Model-T Ford with envy.

Your final tour stop is the brilliant red Railway Station, which features a restored stationmaster's living quarters, a waiting room and a ticket wicket. Outside is a caboose – once heated by a coal stove and lit by coal oil lamps – that provided a travelling home for rail workers.



Relive Hanna's rich railway history

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There's a lot more to see in Hanna. If you'd like to wander around at your leisure, pick up a historic town walking guide at the museum or Hanna's Visitor Information Centre.

While Hanna's roots are in the railway and farming past, it remains a vibrant community; witness the new subdivision on the north edge of town. Agriculture is now joined by coal mining, power generation, and petroleum exploration as

mainstays of the local economy. And don't let looks deceive you – the man walking downtown in cowboy boots could as easily be an oil and gas worker as a ranch hand. Hanna is full of surprises.

Side Trip

Enjoy a light lunch or afternoon tea at the Doll Palace Museum (400 Pioneer Trail). The museum is home to over 4,000 dolls – some more than a century old – a popular gathering spot for locals. Be sure to try the famous sticky buns. Phone ahead (403-854-2756) for reservations.

Side Trip

For a prairie town, Hanna loves its water sports. From northwest Hanna, it's a quick drive or a 3-km cycle on a shale path to Fox Lake, where you can relax on the beach, canoe, or watch shorebirds, ducks, and pelicans. At nearby Helmer Dam, you can fish for stocked rainbow trout from shore or a non-motorized boat. Less than 20 minutes away, Prairie Oasis Park, and its 1,300 acre lake are perfect for swimming, sunbathing, windsurfing, and waterskiing.



Take in a rodeo at Hanna



Take a summer break at Prairie Oasis Park



Marvel at unique birds in the Canadian Badlands



Call 1-800-ALBERTA or visit canadianbadlands.com for more Canadian Badlands Touring Routes.

CANADIAN BADLANDS TOURING ROUTES

Visitor Information Centre's

Travel Alberta
1-800-ALBERTA
Travelalberta.com

Town Of Hanna

Highway 9
403-854-4433
Hanna.ca

Oyen

Intersection of Highways 9 and 41,
1-800-ALBERTA
Travelalberta.com

Drumheller

60 – 1 Avenue West
1-866-823-8100
Traveldrumheller.com

Accommodations

Visit the Alberta Hotel & Lodging Association online at **explorealberta.com** for approved accommodation or contact 1-800-ALBERTA. Reservations highly recommended.

Camping: In Hanna and nearby Fox Lake, Prairie Oasis Park, Delia, Handhills Hideaway, Michichi, Little Fish Lake, Drumheller and Blood Indian Park.

Bed & Breakfasts/Guest Ranches/Hotels: Several bed-and-breakfasts are found near Hanna and Delia and in the Drumheller Valley.

Distances and Driving Times to Hanna

Calgary: 220 km, 2 hours, 10 min
Edmonton: 300 km, 3 hours
Red Deer: 200 km, 2 hours
Medicine Hat: 240 km, 2 hours, 20 min
Oyen: 114 km, 1 hour, 10 min
Drumheller: 90km, 50 min

*This map is not intended for navigation.
Pick up an Official Alberta Road Map at a
Visitor Information Centre or call
1-800-ALBERTA*

Events

April:
Hanna Music Festival

May:
All Girls Rodeo
Big Stone Rodeo

June:
Hand Hills Stampede
Car Show and Drag Races
Quilt and Craft Show

July:
Canada Day Celebrations
Old Time Music Jamboree
Hanna Rod and Gun Show

August:
Fall Fair and-Parade
Motorcycle Christmas Toy Parade

September:
Hanna Indoor Pro Rodeo

October:
Ducks Unlimited Banquet and Auction

November:
Community Wide Craft Sale

December:
Christmas Carol Festival
Skate with Santa
Family Christmas celebrations

Spring to Fall
Farmer's Market

May to September:
Wild Bird and Game Hunting

Attractions:

1. Hanna Pioneer Village and Museum 403-854-4244
2. Fox Lake/Helmer Dam 403-854-4433
3. The Doll Palace Museum 403-854-2756
4. Prairie Oasis Park 403-779-2155
5. Blood Indian Park 403-779-2155

