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## CANADA'S NATIONAL PARKS

J. B. HARKIN

*Commissioner of Canadian National Parks*

Canada has a very extensive system of national parks, aggregating a total area of nearly 10,000 square miles. This great area—larger than the principality of Wales, nearly twice the size of the county of York and one-third the extent of Scotland—comprising fourteen reservations and some of the most remarkable scenic regions in the Dominion, has been set aside by the federal government for the “perpetual use, benefit, and enjoyment of the people.” It constitutes an important recognition on the part of the government of the great principle which is coming each year to be more and more widely recognised, not only on the North American continent but throughout the civilised world—the principle of the right to national ownership of natural scenery of unique attraction. These great reservations form too, in Canada, an interesting expression of the developing sense of national consciousness and are an evidence of her instinctive but growing “love of the land”.

The largest of these national reservations—Jasper national park in the northern Rockies—covers 4,400 square miles or an area approximately equal to that of the counties of Surrey, Suffolk, Middlesex, Gloucester, and Warwickshire combined. The use of the term “park” in connexion with such vast territory must seem incongruous to anyone familiar only with the parks of older countries, where the word usually denotes a reserve of formal and ordered beauty limited in extent. On the North American continent, however, the term “National Park,” inadequate though it is felt to be, has come to have a special and clearly recognised significance; this in spite of the fact that it is used to cover several kinds of reservations. In its broadest meaning a national park is a public reservation of land which for one reason or another is of common national interest. Such reserves vary in Canada from great regions, characterised by outstanding scenic beauty or unique phenomena of nature, to small areas preserving sites memorable in national history or bearing remains of aboriginal occupation.

*Origin of Movement.*—The national parks movement had its origin on this continent and may be said to be a logical development of the general movement for the conservation of natural resources.

In adding up the national assets it became clear that exceptional scenery must be taken into account, not only because it has the power of enriching and increasing the life of the people, but also because it can be made to augment the economic wealth of the country. It was clear, too, that this form of wealth was as much in need of protection as many other resources; that the earth and the riches thereof could be thoughtlessly squandered quite as readily in the case of natural beauty as in the case of timber or minerals or other resources of the land.

With the advance of commercialism and the increasing power of wealth there has been, it is only too true, in all lands, ruthless destruction of priceless beauty or alienation of scenic glories from the enjoyment of the people.

"This first day of May," wrote Ruskin, from Switzerland, in 1869, "I am writing where my work was begun 35 years ago, within sight of the snows of the higher Alps. In that half of the permitted life of man I have seen strange evil brought upon every scene that I best loved, or tried to make beloved by others. The light which once flushed these pale summits with its rose at dawn, and purple at sunset, is now ambered and faint; the air which once inlaid the clefts of all their golden crags with azure is now defiled with languid coils of smoke, belched from worse than volcanic fires; their very glacier waves are ebbing and their snows fading, as if Hell had breathed upon them."

All these considerations gave grounds for alarm and suggested the necessity for taking steps towards the formation of a policy of conservation.

The special form that the movement has taken in Canada is due to the Canadian spirit, a spirit as yet perhaps only dimly recognised by Canadians themselves. It is a spirit vague and inarticulate but reaching out in such efforts as the national parks movement for clearer expression. To understand it one must remember that love of country in Canada is not based, as in older lands, upon the settled peace of the country-side with its quiet beauty of copse and garden and farm. It is a love born in the breasts of those adventurous spirits who came first and conquered the wilderness—a love of the primitive, the untamed, and the wild. In their struggles to make a home in this new country the forefathers of present-day Canadians had to conquer the wilderness and they came at length not only to lose their fear of the wilderness but to love it with a deep though usually unsuspected passion that has been transmitted to their sons. The swift onrush of settlement in the last half century has been pushing the wilderness farther and farther back, changing the face of primitive nature, sweeping out of sight much of the virginal beauty that once characterised the

whole land. The great forests, the untainted rivers, the rich heritage of wild life of all kinds—these tend everywhere to disappear. To preserve out of its vast area, for the generations to come, a certain share of primitive nature is the meaning of the national parks movement. These great reservations exist to preserve examples of the original Canada, the Canada that existed for hundreds of years before man be-

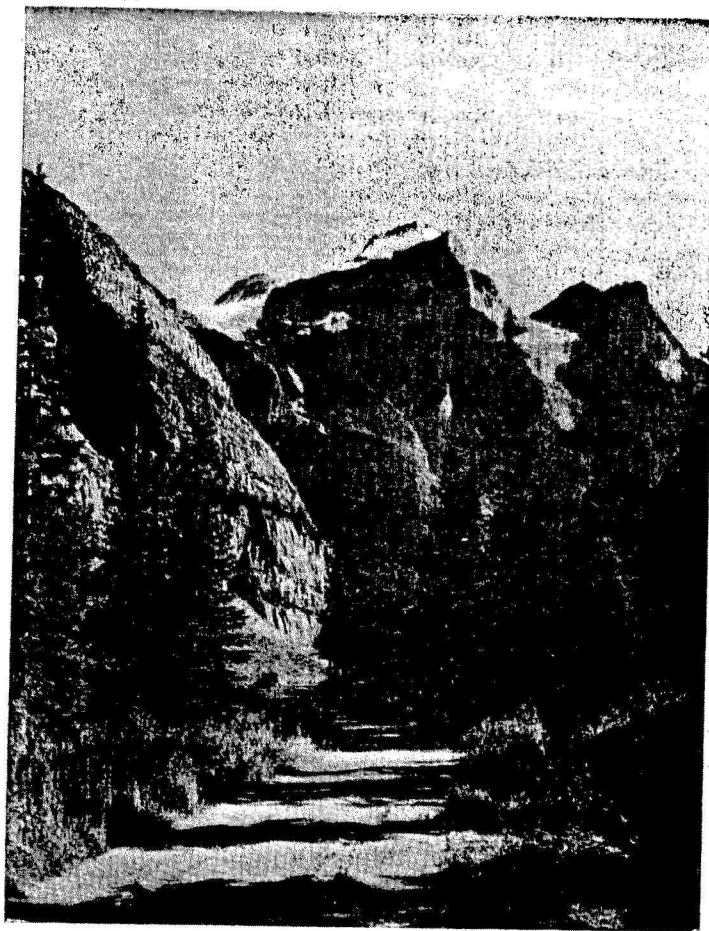


FIG. 7. MOTOR ROAD, MORaine LAKE, BANFF NATIONAL PARK

gan to destroy its natural beauties. Everywhere else, it is recognised, nature must gradually but inevitably give way to the economic pressure of civilisation, but in the national parks at least, primitive beauty may remain untouched and unscarred by the hand of man. The parks it may be said are the sanctuaries of the original and the wild.

*Development.*—The development of the national parks movement has been a gradual growth covering a period of approximately two score years.

Canada's first national park, Rocky Mountains park, of which Banff is the centre, was established in 1886 almost immediately following the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway across the continent. The construction of the line through the Rocky mountains opened up to Canada and to the world an area of such wondrous beauty and grandeur that practically everyone who saw it declared it should be preserved intact for the enjoyment of future generations. Action was promptly taken by the Canadian parliament and in 1885 the first reservation was set aside in the vicinity of Banff. This was followed the next year by other reservations in the neighbourhood of Lake Louise, Field, and in the heart of the Selkirks.

Later the Banff reservation was so enlarged as to include the Lake Louise region and the other two reservations became known respectively as Yoho and Glacier parks.

At the outset the main impulse was to set these areas aside; to mark them as public possessions. What specific purposes the parks could serve, what ideals should mould them; what policy should be adopted for development—these objectives were only dimly understood. The policy has had to be gradually evolved. Switzerland years before had demonstrated that mountain areas of supreme beauty were a distinct commercial asset and from the outset this aspect was kept in view. While those who are associated with the work have long since ceased to regard the commercial side as the most important consideration they have never disregarded the part it plays.

Tourist traffic is sufficiently important to make the national parks an economic factor in the prosperity of the country and to give them a rightful place in any list of natural resources.

*Other Objectives.*—While such additions to the prosperity of the country are of great importance, there are other aspects of the parks which have come to be considered of equal if not greater value to Canadians themselves. The recognition of these values has been a gradual growth, developing with the use of the parks themselves. For many years the government was content with having set the areas aside and with having marked them as public possessions. Later, as the fame of the Rockies grew and visitors began each year

to increase in number, developments in the way of roads and trails and provision of various public utilities were found necessary. The hot springs at Banff became noted for their therapeutic qualities and a small town grew up in the Bow valley. Adventurous spirits were each year penetrating farther into the mountain wilderness and coming back with stories of wonderful peaks and alpine glories beyond. To meet the demands of those who wished to follow them, trails had to be built. The penetration of the forests by travellers brought, too, a new danger—the danger of forest fires—and an adequate and comprehensive fire protection service patrolling the whole area became necessary. Gradually other reservations were added as new regions were opened up, notably Waterton Lakes park in southern Alberta, a delightful though small reserve of 226 square miles adjoining the international boundary, and Jasper national park, a huge reservation in the northern Rockies in the country opened up by the construction of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway.

*Wild Life.*—About 1910 it was brought to the attention of the government that the big game of the parks was suffering as a result of steady encroachments on the part of Indians and others and that its disappearance was threatened. The parks had been nominally wild life sanctuaries since their inception but no adequate provision for the enforcement of game regulations had been made. With surprise and concern it was realised that the Bighorn sheep (*Ovis Canadensis*), the most interesting native animal of the Rockies, and the wild goat (*Oreamnos montanus*), once numerous in these regions, were being steadily exterminated. Even the trails built for the convenience of tourists and for forest protection had contributed to the ease with which they could be attacked. A national park, however, from which either the original fauna or flora had disappeared, it was realised, would be no national park at all. A complete system of patrols and inspections was consequently established with surprisingly successful results. Within less than two years the wild life began to come back and its original numbers have gradually been restored. Nowhere perhaps has the value of the sanctuary in the conservation of wild life been more clearly demonstrated than in the national parks. These reserves throughout Canada form breeding places for all kinds of wild life, which is now beginning to spread beyond their borders and to stock the surrounding districts. The absence of persecution or violence of any kind has also freed the animals from the fear of man and they are becoming noticeably tamer each season. Deer and even bear come within a few yards of human habitation and readily allow themselves to be fed while Bighorn sheep will permit visitors to come within camera range. Wild life is perennially interest-

ing and the pleasure of being able to establish such close contact with beautiful wild creatures and to have the opportunity of photographing or studying different species in their native haunts has now become one of the great attractions of the parks. For an increasing number it is proving more satisfying than the instinct for the chase.

*National Museums.*—The national parks of Canada are thus coming to be national museums of primitive America, and as such their importance from the educational point of view steadily increases. For the student of science in many branches, they afford unequalled opportunities for study, and each year they are being more widely used in this respect. They conserve exhibits of our various land forms, our waters, and the wild life of every kind which they support under absolutely natural conditions and in natural descent. Each year it is growing clearer that the most complete conservation of these values is of great importance to science and to education in the future, when primitive conditions may exist no more. Already the parks are proving a valuable adjunct to education and are becoming, more and more, fields for scientific study and exploration. The American Association for the Advancement of Science last spring passed a resolution asking the governments of Canada and the United States to develop their two national park systems as one, in the interests of science and popular education, and to preserve the integrity of the parks for all time. The Royal Society of Canada passed similar resolutions.

*Recreation.*—The purpose of the national parks that appeals most to the general public is to provide large areas of magnificent natural scenery as a refuge from the pressure of modern business life, a way of escape into regions of natural beauty for the renewal of bodily strength, for the recreation of spiritual power, and the re-awakening of those spiritual interests which have so much to do with the sustained happiness and energy of life.

The impulse to escape from the crowded city into great open regions, to camp among the mountains or amid the quiet restfulness of the forest or beside some beautiful lake or stream is sending increasing thousands each year to the national parks. Whether they are sought for aesthetic, educational, or recreative reasons, the parks are serving a national need. Those who are in charge of the national parks have come to see that it is a mistaken notion that only the comparatively few cultured and highly educated people have aesthetic appreciation of these places of great natural beauty. It is realised that aesthetic appreciation is a natural instinct and a very democratic possession.

Everywhere it is being admitted that provision for this impulse is the finest economic wisdom and this provision demands the con-

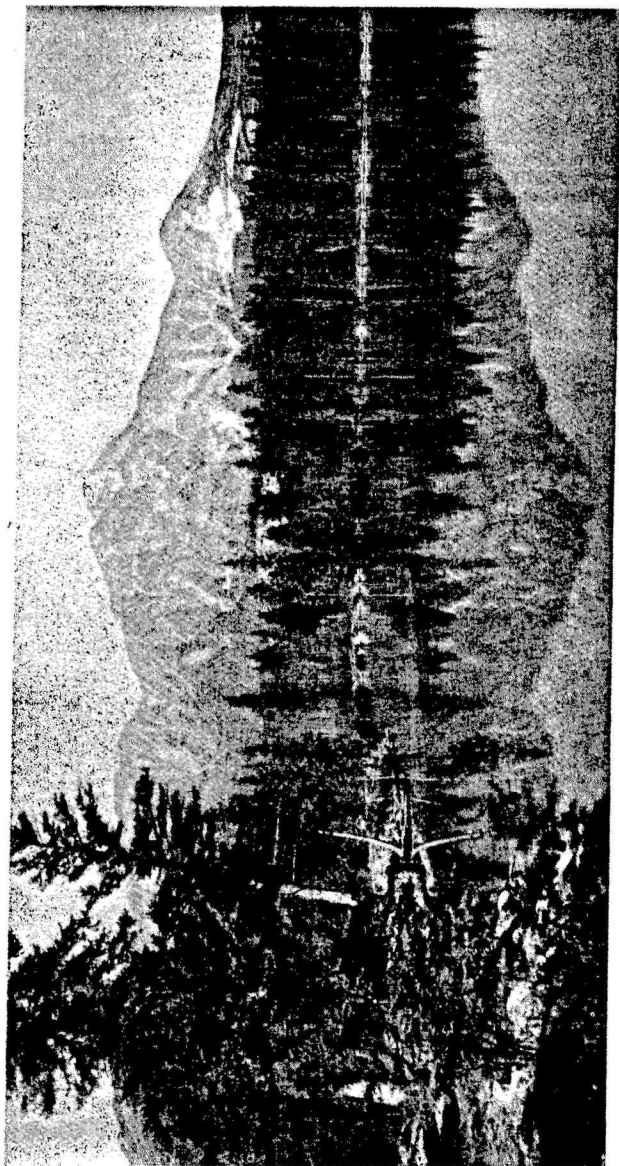


FIG. 8.

BEAUVERT LAKE AND PYRAMID MOUNTAIN, JASPER NATIONAL PARK

servation of the nation's scenic glories as not only the cheapest but the most obviously successful and satisfying means of meeting this need. In other departments of national life great expenditures have to be made to meet developmental needs and the progressive thought of the nation—schools, bridges, railways, buildings, factories, and commercial institutions—but in the building up of national parks, Nature has done so much that all that man needs to do is to preserve her creations and make them available for the widest and most democratic use, to carve new ways of access to the glory that has been given him and to minister to the convenience and pleasure of those who are wise enough to find rest and recreation among the wonders of creation.

*Animal Parks.*—Out of the impulse to preserve examples of original conditions have grown as a natural consequence the special animal parks which exist for the protection of nearly extinct native animals such as buffalo, elk, and antelope. All national parks wherever they are found are wild-life sanctuaries but the seven great scenic reservations in the Rockies need only adequate patrols to achieve their ends. There is no surrounding settlement to complicate the situation.

But the buffalo and antelope have their habitat on the prairie, and the prairie is now almost entirely settled, so that the home of these species has disappeared. To afford them protection it was necessary to create large fenced enclosures in which they could thrive and propagate under natural conditions without encroaching on the land of settlers. At Buffalo park, Wainwright, Alta., within an extensive fenced enclosure of 160 square miles, may be seen a large herd of buffalo living under conditions practically identical with those enjoyed by the species when the white man first invaded their feeding grounds. From the original stock of 700 obtained sixteen years ago there is now a herd of over 8,000, and surplus stock is being utilised for buffalo meat and robes, which have been placed on the market. Successful operations have also been carried out in cross-breeding the buffalo with domestic cattle with a view to producing a new type of animal which will be adapted to the severe winters of the far north.

A smaller park known as Elk Island park, containing buffalo and elk, lies within a couple of hours motor ride from Edmonton, on the Canadian National line.

In Southern Alberta and Saskatchewan there are also three reserves for the protection of antelope, the most important of which is at Nemiskam, Alberta.

*Bird Life.*—Recently, too, steps have been taken to preserve bird life, the reduction of whose numbers had been the cause of serious economic loss. Point Pelee park, in southern Ontario, was set aside because it is a natural resting place for hundreds of species on the long

migrations from north to south and return. It is hoped it will afford protection to many kinds of both insectivorous and game birds. Other reserves protecting the breeding grounds, especially of wild fowl, practically all of which breed in Canada, are also being set aside.

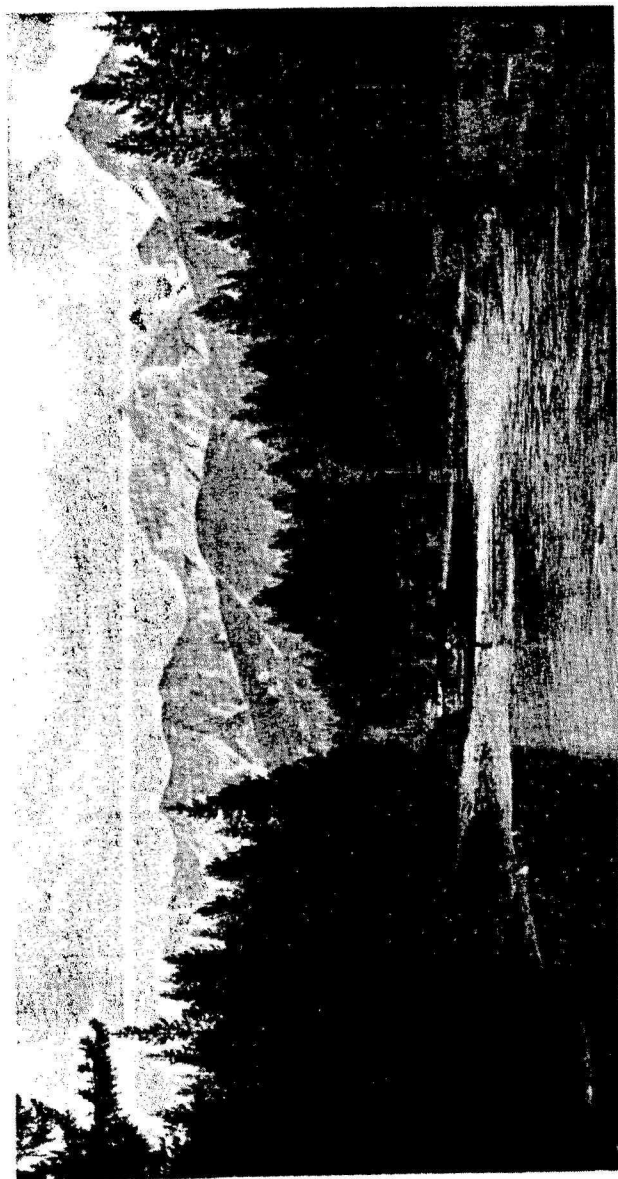
*Historic and Prehistoric Sites.*—It is but a step from the preservation of primitive nature to the preservation of sites connected with national history. Both serve an educational purpose and help to develop love of country. Within the past few years the Canadian National Parks Branch has been making a survey of all sites where events of national importance have taken place. Some of these, like old Fort Anne, Annapolis Royal, N.S., have been set aside as national parks. In other cases where less land is available the sites are being taken over and suitably marked and preserved. A survey of prehistoric remains and of some of the interesting culture of aboriginal occupation, such as the totem-pole art of the West Coast Indians, is also being made and steps taken for their preservation where possible.

*Location and Number.*—There are at present fourteen national reservations administered as national parks. Seven of these are in the Rocky and Selkirk mountains, four of them along the main line of the Canadian Pacific Railway: Banff, Yoho, Glacier, and Revelstoke parks. Jasper park is in the northern Rockies reached by the Canadian National Railway, Kootenay park lies along the new motor highway across the Rockies from Banff to the Columbia valley and Waterton Lakes park in southern Alberta adjoins the United States boundary. These seven reservations present practically every type of scenery found in the Rocky and Selkirk ranges.

The Canadian cordilleras, as is well known, comprise three great parallel belts each of which includes several mountain systems, and which together make up a mountain area that covers, roughly speaking, about 250,000 square miles. The Rockies system is the reatest both in area and in the height of its peaks. It extends from the eastern foothills west to what is known as the Rocky Mountain rench, the great intramontane trough that marks the division between the older mountains to the west and their more youthful descendants, the Selkirks. The Selkirks lie within the loop formed by the great end of the Columbia river which, rising in the Kootenay lakes, flows north not far from the Athabaska pass and then, making a wide detour, flows south to the international boundary.

Each of these great reservations has a distinct individuality of its own, for while there is a general resemblance throughout all parts of the Canadian cordilleras, each range and section has its special characteristics and charms of scenery that differentiate it from any other. In the Rocky Mountain range the peaks are for the most part of grey





KOOTENAY RIVER NEAR MACLEOD MEADOWS, KOOTENAY NATIONAL PARK

FIG. 9.

limestones with bands of purplish shales, and their summits have been worn in many cases into sharp spires, pinnacles, and castellated effects. The Selkirks show the marks of their much greater age, and though probably once the higher range, they are now from 1,000 to 2,000 feet lower than their more youthful neighbours. In the Rocky Mountain range too there is a much lighter precipitation, and Chinook winds remove much snow from the eastern slope that would otherwise go to form glaciers, so that their grey, sharp-pointed peaks often rise gaunt and bare several thousand feet above timber line. On the loftier peaks, however, beautiful glaciers and permanent snowcaps are to be found, while in the Lake Louise region and elsewhere along the divide every charm of the true alpine world may be found. Characteristic of the Rockies, too, is the countless number of beautiful lakes with an infinite variety of colouring and setting that holds the spectator almost breathless. The forests of the Rockies while always beautifully green, are lighter in colour and less dense in undergrowth than those farther west.

In the Selkirks precipitation is extremely heavy, the average being 56.68 inches of which more than 75 per cent. falls as snow. This great mass melts but little from year to year and forms a thick cap reaching down often to timber line. Glaciers are found in great abundance. The Selkirks, too, are pre-eminent in the wonderful luxuriance of their dark green forests, rich undergrowth, and the variety and beauty of their wild flowers.

In the east there are two reservations for public recreation under federal control: Point Pelee park in southern Ontario and another among the Thousand Islands of the St. Lawrence river. The provinces of Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia have, also, important and beautiful reservations set aside as provincial parks.

All these are conserving for the future outstanding regions of natural beauty and places of national interest and ensuring that Canadians will have access to them for all time. They constitute inalienable national possessions of which a country may be justly and humbly proud as it would be of great national works of art. Their value to the nation grows every year clearer and more important. Not only do they add to the economic wealth of the country but they are serving as well to meet the aesthetic, educational, and recreative needs of the people and to enrich the common life. In unsuspected ways, too, they are deepening the national consciousness and the Canadian's love for his land, for it is very true that "it is the love of country that lights and keeps glowing the holy fire of patriotism and this love is excited primarily by the beauty of the country."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>For bibliography see appendix.