

## THE NATIONAL PARKS OF CANADA<sup>1</sup>

Canada has an area of 3,628,882 sq. miles. The population is 20.7 million of which two-thirds live within 100 miles of the U. S. border, and most of its large population centers lie within a 200 - mile belt along that boundary.

The outstanding physical feature of Canada is the Shield, a rugged area of Pre-Cambrian Rock surrounding Hudson Bay and covering most of eastern and central Canada - almost half the country. To the east of Shield lie the Appalachian - Acadian Highlands and the St. Lawrence and Ontario Lowlands and to the west the Great Plains and the Rocky Mountain Cordillera.

The climate ranges from arctic to mild, but generally in the cool temperature zone, with long cold winters.

Politically, it is an independent country within the British Commonwealth with its capital in Ottawa. The 10 provinces forming the country are: the Atlantic Provinces of Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and New Brunswick; Quebec; Ontario, the prairie provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta; and British Columbia. Yukon and Northwest territories are to the north.

Canada's first national park or prototype for a national park was created in 1885, only fourteen years after the establishment of Yellowstone National Park. An area of ten square miles around the hot mineral springs at Banff Station, Alberta, was the core of the first Canadian National Park, established by order in Council of November 25, 1885.

Two years later, the Banff Hot Springs Reserve, enlarged to an area of 260 square miles, officially became Canada's first national park. The establishing of Rocky Mountains National Park of Canada (which was later subdivided into several national parks) specially cited the word "national park" in its preamble and reserved the area as "a public park and pleasure ground" for the benefit, advantage and enjoyment of the people of Canada. The Rocky Mountains Park Act also spelled out the protective aspect, stating that no leases, licences or permits that could "impair the usefulness of the park for the purposes of public enjoyment and recreation" would be issued.

In 1886, an area in the Selkirk Mountains of British Columbia was established as Glacier National Park, and 507 square miles on the west slope of the Rockies as Yoho National Park. Waterton Lakes and Jasper, established as national parks in 1895 and 1907 respectively, brought the number of parks to five by 1911 when the next legislative step was taken.

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Adapted from a report by K. C. Iu 1970.

Prior to 1911, there was no distinctive national parks administration in Canada. The Superintendent of Forestry, the senior official of the Forestry Branch of the Canadian Department of the Interior since 1908, had looked after national park matters. However, the Dominion Forest Reserves and Parks Act of that year, detached parks administration from the Forestry Branch and made a Commissioner of Dominion Parks the responsible official. This Act also authorized the establishment of areas within forest reserves as Dominion Parks, "maintained and made use of as public parks and pleasure grounds for the benefit, advantage and enjoyment of the people of Canada".

By 1930, the National Parks System had expanded to seventeen areas, fourteen of which had been formed from forest reserves and other tracts administered by the federal government in western Canada. Of the other three parks, all in Ontario in eastern Canada, one was acquired by purchase and two by transfer from other federal government departments. Of the total area of 29,359 square miles, the three parks in eastern Canada contributed only eleven square miles.

In that year an act was passed formally recognizing the national parks as a distinct administrative entity and setting out the provisions under which they were to be managed. The National Parks Act of 1930, as amended, is the legislation under which the parks are administered today.

From 1930 onward, the pace of development was slow. After new national parks were established in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island in 1936 and 1937, eleven years elapsed before the next park, Fundy National Park, was established in New Brunswick. Nine years later in 1957, Terra Nova National Park in Newfoundland came into being. In 1965 the Province of Nova Scotia turned over to Canada the land for Kejimikujik National Park. Physical development of this new park is now well under way, although the park has not yet been formally established by Act of Parliament (1970).

It should be noted that the basic legislation, the National Parks Act, also provided for the establishment of National Historic Parks by order in council. There are now 19 National Historic Parks, 15 major National Historic Sites operated and administered by the Branch and 8 major National Historic Sites leased to local bodies for operation. In addition, 613 areas of national historic significance are marked. Although the actual area encompassed by these historic parks is small, approximately forty-eight square miles, they receive very intensive use, far out of proportion to their size. The Branch has been engaged in the gradual restoration of many historic sites, buildings and landmarks such as the Halifax Citadel.

It is clear that until recent years there was no clear definition of the concept of a "National Park" or a "National Historic Park". The term "benefit, education and enjoyment of the people of Canada" was, therefore, interpreted according to the economic needs of the times and a large degree of public misunderstanding as to the real and unique purposes of national parks. In the minds of a great many Canadians, the "public park, and pleasure ground" mentioned in 1887, was interpreted as meaning a scenic resort, recreation area and tourist attraction.

This is not really too surprising. The mountain parks comprising by far the largest and most important units in the system, came into being when railways were the basic transportation. The construction of the railways and the building of the new nation meant severe financial and political problems. It was therefore natural for the government and the railways to seek the development of an international tourist trade. This was the era of resort hotels at Banff, Lake Louise, Field, Glacier and Jasper, catering to guests of prestige and financial standing.

Keenly aware, like the railroads, of the tourist potential of the national parks, the Dominion Parks Administration plunged into an energetic travel promotion program which offered the parks as the main Canadian tourist attraction. During this early period, the "playground" view of national parks was sedulously fostered and numerous concessions and compromises were made. Types of commercial development and visitor use not consistent with the principles of national parks were allowed. The effort to meet two sets of objectives, those of tourism and national parks, laid the basis for many of the present problems.

Two results of this exuberant period were the establishment of permanent townsites within some of the national parks and a general misunderstanding by the Canadian public of the purpose national parks were really intended to serve in national life. Both problems remain today.

Prince Albert National Park in Saskatchewan and Riding Mountain in Manitoba were established just prior to the depression of the 'thirties. In view of their location and the conditions of the times, the tendency was to develop them to serve the recreation needs of a region rather than the nation, and their use has continued to be predominantly regional. Many people in the area used these areas as summer resorts and in the depression years no doubt it seemed justifiable to give these people special consideration in order to encourage use at a time when visitation was low and it appeared there was ample space for summer residences of various types and tenure.

Looking back upon the development of the National Parks System, it is apparent that it has been shaped by the constitutional factor, by the economics of the times, and by practice and precedent. The constitutional factor is largely responsible for the drastic imbalance in the system. Disregarding the 17,300 square miles in Wood Buffalo National Park, ninety-four per cent of the remainder is in the western provinces, which have about twenty-six per cent of Canada's population. In heavily populated eastern Canada there is less than one-tenth of an acre of national parks, by number and extent, is explained by the constitutional situation in western Canada to 1930.

By the British North American Act, legislative powers are distributed between the federal and the provincial governments. The provincial governments have exclusive jurisdiction over natural resources, including lands, that lie within provincial boundaries, while the federal government has exclusive jurisdiction over natural resources that lie outside provincial boundaries, in such areas as the Northwest Territories and the Yukon Territory.

However, in western Canada the federal government retained jurisdiction over the natural resources of the Railway Belt in British Columbia, and in the provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba until 1930, with the Department of Interior being the administering department. Thus the federal government was free to establish national parks in western Canada until May 31, 1930. In fact, the only free land in Canada available for national park purposes was in these four western provinces.

In eastern Canada national parks could be created only by the rather involved process of gaining provincial government approval and active co-operation. After the Transfer of Resources Agreements of 1930, this situation became the same for all provinces and an area within a province could only become a national park if the provincial government transferred the title and resource rights to the federal government free of all encumbrances. Only in the federally-administered northern territories, where federal jurisdiction is maintained over all resources except game, could the federal government act independently in creating national parks. As the National Park System developed then, it was an unbalanced system without any geographical relation to the heavily populated regions. As population, disposable income, leisure and the ability to travel increased, attendance rose dramatically and undue strains and demands were placed on national parks. For many years there was little expansion of the System. Its slow growth did not keep pace with the development of the nation and the demands for outdoor recreation space. There was a tendency to look toward national parks to meet most of the demand for outdoor recreation space, without full recognition of their unique role as national heritage areas.

#### Progress and Problems in the Development of National Park System

The Canadian National Park System has evolved through the sporadic efforts of a visionary few, through accidents of geography and by political expediency. The result is a system acquired and developed in reverse to the settlement pattern. Not only is there an imbalance with regard to the country's population, but there is also a lack of representation of many important natural features. Only four of the eight major regions in Canada are represented and many major geographical and ecological features of national significance remain absent from the system.

Very serious is the fact that the Canadian National Park System is practically a static system, having had almost insignificant growth in area for nearly forty years during a time when there have been dynamic change in every other national endeavour. The result is a static system, in the face of massively increasing interest in and demand for all forms of outdoor recreation space, in increasing density of use which now reaches serious proportions in smaller national parks and in local areas of the larger parks.

Major effort has been made toward study and identification of those areas which should belong in the system. Eighteen such studies have been carried out in the last seven years, but only one has resulted in the establishment of a new national park. This reason for this lack of success is primarily due to jurisdictional problems, in most cases the provincial governments are unwilling to release the land. One approach to overcome

this problem is the core-plus reserve principle which works as follows: through a joint survey by federal and provincial resource people, a large area meeting national park requirements is defined. The primary features of this area are then pin-pointed and internal boundary drawn which encompasses the minimum area required, exclusive of buffer lands to define a viable national park justifying federal expenditure on its preservation and development. The surrounding land ultimately required to round out this core and guarantee the preservation of the key natural features is set aside in a special provincial reserve which mineral exploration and possibly other commercial utilization of resources is permitted. After a specified period of time, this surrounding reserve, or a major part of it, depending on the effect of the resource utilization, is added to the national park core.

As an alternative to expansion of the system over which the Federal government has little control, the National and Historic Parks branch has sought to achieve a more appropriate use of the existing park through better planning through zoning, through phasing out the unnecessary facilities, by moving toward a more realistic fee structure and by attempting to planning and development of intensive use and urban type facilities outside the national park boundaries.

Canada is among the few countries in the world who started the establishment of national parks in the later part of nineteenth century. However, its national park system was evolved mainly through accidents of geography and by political expediency. Consequently there is an imbalance with regard to population distribution and also a lack of representation of many unique geological and ecological features in the country. The political complications have resulted in almost static growth in the last forty years. In the face of increasing demand for outdoor recreation, efforts are being made to expand the system by co-operation and compromising with provincial governments and by increasing the capacity of existing resources through better management.

#### References

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