



The Origin and Meaning
of the
National Parks of Canada



J. B. HARKIN

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*Extracts from the papers of the late Jas. B. Harkin,
first Commissioner of the National Parks of Canada.*

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Foreword

THE late Jas. B. Harkin, first Commissioner of the National Parks of Canada, was an eminent member of that long list of distinguished public servants who have added so much to Canada's prestige abroad and prosperity at home. His work carried him into many fields of conservation, in each of which he had to break new ground. When he took office, alarmed wild life conservationists were predicting that America would soon be a "gameless continent." Of the countless thousands of wild buffalo, antelope, and elk, which had once roamed the prairies, only a few hundreds were left, while the Bighorn sheep and Rocky Mountain goat, two of the most interesting species in the mountains, had been driven farther and farther back. One of Mr. Harkin's first tasks was the setting up of an effective fire and game protective service, and the response of the wild animals in the National Parks and in the fenced sanctuaries which he established on the Prairies, became one of the most thrilling chapters in the history of wild life conservation on this continent. When the International Treaty was signed providing for the protection of migratory birds, Mr. Harkin was directed to frame the regulations and set up the necessary organization for the carrying out of the Act. With a view to obtaining full information on wild life matters throughout the Dominion and the initiation of concerted action, Mr. Harkin called a nation-wide conference of game officers and experts. At this conference many problems relating to wild life conservation across Canada were threshed out, and the exchange of opinions proved so useful, the conference became an annual event.

Mr. Harkin took a keen interest in all matters connected with the development of the Far North and was one of the first to experiment with its tar sand for road surfacing. He urged the protection of Arctic animals—the musk-ox, caribou, and fur-bearing seal—as a means of livelihood for the natives. He pointed out the rich mineral possibilities of the northern islands and took an active part in the organization of the expedition under Capt. Bernier for the establishment of more Arctic posts.

He urged upon the Government the patriotic duty of the marking and restoration of Canada's historic sites and when this duty was assigned to him, he set up that unique body—the Historic Sites and Monuments Board—which, serving without remuneration, has, throughout the years rendered such valuable service to Canada.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The publisher, and lovers of national and provincial parks are deeply indebted to Miss MABEL B. WILLIAMS, an authority on Canadian National Parks, for the compilation of "The Origin and Meaning of the National Parks of Canada" from the original notes of the late Jas. B. Harkin, first Commissioner of Canada's National Parks. She is also an author of note, having written a series of books on the parks, the most recent of which are: The Heart of the Rockies, The Banff-Jasper Highway and Jasper National Park.

Miss Williams willingly volunteered to compile this volume and in doing so derived much pleasure and satisfaction because of her profound admiration and deep appreciation for and of Mr. Harkin's contribution to the weal of Canada.

Thankful acknowledgment is accorded Mr. J. S. Wood, librarian, Saskatoon Public Library, for his helpfulness in editing the manuscript.

But Mr. Harkin's lasting monument must always be that magnificent system of reservations, now stretching from coast to coast, the National Parks of Canada. When he took office Canada had but one legally constituted park, the one at Banff, but before he retired he saw his dream realized of a great national park within almost every province. Within a few years he had made the name "National Park" a household word and had convinced everyone of their value. It is not too much to say that he set the model of what a national park should be. Soon, emissaries from countries abroad were coming to Canada to study his methods and ask his advice.

In order to make the parks accessible he had to become a road builder. In 1914 he opened the first road ever built across the Rockies—the Banff Windermere Highway. An engineering feat of perhaps even greater difficulty was the construction of the road from the Great Divide down the west slope of the Rockies to Field and through the formidable Kickinghorse gorge. A few years later saw the completion of the long talked of road from Banff to Jasper—the "Road to the Icefields" which attracts thousands of motorists each year.

Mr. Harkin has often been called "the Father of National Parks" but he might have been called too, "The Father of Tourist Travel" for he was the first to impress its economic value upon the government. His publicity methods were highly successful and the stream of visitors which came to the national parks, with the resulting millions of dollars left in the country, soon made further argument unnecessary.

He was deeply, almost religiously convinced of the value of beauty and throughout his twenty-five years of service he fought unceasingly to preserve the parks from spoilation and to preserve their dignity and peace. At first his critics called him a visionary but they came to admire him as a far-sighted Canadian who had added much to the prosperity of his country.

It had been Mr. Harkin's intention to write a book giving the history of the National Parks in Canada and expressing some of his ideas as to their meaning and value. Unfortunately circumstances prevented him from completing the task. This small pamphlet, made up from his notes, is being published as a slight memorial tribute to a fine Canadian, who, seeking neither reward nor recognition for himself, not only added in large measure to its wealth, but, made Canada a fairer and happier place in which to live.

H. R. LARSON

National Parks of Canada

IT was in June, 1911, that Hon. Frank Oliver, then Minister of the Interior, called me into his office and told me that he was considering the creation of a new Branch of his department. The number of visitors, he said, who are coming to see our Canadian Rockies is increasing each year and the government feels that we should be doing more to protect this magnificent region. As you know we have one legally constituted area at Banff set aside by Act of Parliament as a "National Park," and four others set aside by Order-in-Council as "Scenic Reserves." The Government has decided to bring down a Bill creating them all "Dominion Parks" and establishing a separate Branch headed by an executive who will have full power to administer and protect them. "How," he said, "would you like to take on the job?"

Overcome by surprise I could only say that I doubted my ability since I knew nothing about the parks or what would be expected of me.

"All the better," he said, in his laconic way, "You won't be hampered by preconceived ideas and you can find out."

The prospect intrigued and stirred my imagination and, albeit with many misgivings as to my ability, I told him I would undertake the post.

So far as I know, Canada was the first country thus to acknowledge its responsibility with regard to the con-

servation of its places of outstanding beauty or other interest by creating a special government office to protect, administer, and develop them.

Having got together a small staff and procured office accommodation, one of my first duties, I felt, must be to find out what national parks were, why they had been established, and the inspiration behind them. The word "park" seemed a very small name for so great a thing. Credit for the use of the term and honour for the vision behind it, I found, must go to Judge Cornelius Hedges, of Montana, a member of the first authorized party to explore the Yellowstone region, in 1871. After thirty-five day's journey through this remarkable region, they came to their last camp on the Firehold River. As they sat about the fire, talking of the marvels they had seen, they began to speculate as to its possible future. Some wished to acquire part of it for themselves, others had rosy dreams of fortunes that might be made through commercial exploitation. But Judge Hedges—all honour to his name—said quietly: "Gentlemen, this place is too big and too beautiful to belong to any private individual. It should be set aside by the government for the use and enjoyment of the people for all time as a National Park.

Hedges' noble and public-spirited idea was received with general enthusiasm and when the party returned to civilization they organized that continent-wide campaign which resulted finally in the setting aside of Yellowstone by Act of Congress the following year.

It is an inspiring story, one which I have never forgotten. It breathes, it seems to me, the true spirit of

democracy. Here was a new "Declaration of Rights"—the right of the people to a share in the use and enjoyment of the noblest regions in their own land, another expression of the great principle of Conservation—the duty of a nation to guard its treasures of art, natural beauty, or natural wonders for the generations to come.

My first problem on taking office was the economic one. How was I to get the money for developments that were immediately necessary? To restore the disappearing wild life, an efficient game protective service with a code resembling that of our Mounted Police should be built up. The existing fire protection system depended chiefly upon the outmoded man-and-bucket brigade, ineffective and out-of-date. Eight thousand square miles of the sublimest scenery in Canada had been placed under my protection and I lay awake at nights thinking of the damage one bad fire might do. Hundreds of miles of new trails and forest telephone lines, were needed at once. And there must be more and better roads. In 1911, Canada was still in the horse-and-buggy era and the tally-ho coaches swept from Banff to Lake Louise over the only good gravelled road in the park. But a new era was undeniably coming. Already enthusiastic motorists on the prairies were urging that the old "tote-road" from Calgary to Banff should be made suitable for cars. Motor roads within the parks could not be long denied.

All this would cost money—a great deal of money. How could the hard-headed members of the House of Commons be persuaded to increase parks' appropriations? It is an axiom that no society will pay for something it does not value. Many of them knew as little about

the parks as I, myself, had known a few months before. Others regarded them as "frills," all right as long as they did not cost much. What arguments could be put forward that would make them loosen the purse-strings?

While I was pondering this problem my attention was called to an article in an old "*Review of Reviews*," stating that a considerable part of the wealth of France, Italy, and Switzerland was derived from foreign tourists. I had my staff write to these countries and to California, Florida, and Maine. The replies received giving their estimates of the revenues derived from this source were astonishing. When questioned, the C.P.R. informed us that they estimated the amount of money attracted to Canada annually by the fame of the Rockies as about \$50,000,000. This was a sum sufficient to pay the interest upon our (then) national debt, and added to estimated amounts spent in other parts of Canada, to give tourists travel fourth place among our natural resources.

We published these figures in our next Annual Report, pointing out that tourist traffic was one of the most satisfactory sources of revenue a nation could have because although the tourist left large sums of money in the country, he took away with him nothing that left the country poorer, and we sent a copy of this report to every member of the House of Commons and the Senate. When our appropriations came up in the House and their increase was questioned, the Hon. Arthur Meighen rose and defended them, quoting our figures. No man in the House was more respected than Mr. Meighen for the keenness of his intellect. The appropriation vote passed without further objection, and the economic value of the parks

was thence forth established. In my Annual Report for 1916, I advocated the creation of a Government Bureau of Tourist Travel, a policy which was later adopted.

But while we were forced in the beginning to stress the economic value of national parks we realized that there were other values far more important which would be recognized in time. As an eminent Englishman has pointed out: "The quantity of natural beauty in the world is limited. In many older countries it has fallen into hands of private persons and the people generally have no access to it."

The day will come when the population of Canada will be ten times as great as it is now but the National Parks ensure that every Canadian, by right of citizenship, will still have free access to vast areas possessing some of the finest scenery in Canada, in which the beauty of the landscape is protected from profanation, the natural wild animals plants and forests preserved, and the peace and solitude of primeval nature retained.

One important feature of our Western parks, both in the mountains and on the Prairies, is that they are portions of the original North America. Apart from the few townsites and small areas set apart for the accommodation of visitors there is no settlement and a mile or two back from the trunk highways the country remains just as it was when the first white man saw it.

But man is a restless animal. He is constantly changing the face of nature, cutting and burning the forests, ploughing up the wild flowers, killing off the wild animals

and birds, damming and polluting rivers, draining and diverting lakes, always creating change and upsetting the old balance of nature. Even the face of Canada has seen many changes in the last fifty years. What will it be like a hundred years from now?

Many children today have never seen a wild animal unless in a circus, museum or zoo, and these can give him at best but a poor and partial idea of what a wild creature is like in its natural surroundings. To see a deer leading its fawn down to drink at some quiet lake, to watch a beaver building its dam, or black bear cubs chasing each other up and down a tall pine tree, a wild goat leading the flock across a knife-edge crag to their airy pastures near the snow line can give him a thrilling sense of kinship with nature, and teach him more of her wondrous ways than all the classes in biology ever can.

I look forward to a time when our national parks will be the recognized schools for the study of natural history and geology. The pity of it is that they can be within reach of such a comparative few. I should like to see a "Nature Park" established within reach of every city in Canada which would be a wild life sanctuary and a place where children could get to know all sorts of living things at first hand.

It has been well said man does not need to tame the wild animals, he only needs to tame himself. One of my happiest experiences has been to see how wild animals have responded to the protection afforded them in the national parks. It was touching to observe how soon they discovered that within these areas they were

safe. Within two years after the establishment of sanctuary conditions, moose, elk, deer, and smaller animals came in from districts quite a long way from the park boundaries, while the mountain sheep and goat which had been hunted to the verge of extinction, began to be seen in ever increasing numbers. In a very few years bands of as many as fifty Bighorn sheep might be seen, feeding unconcerned, within a few miles of Banff with no apparent fear of man.

Canada has now a fine series of national and provincial parks of which we may well be proud, but we need more parks—county parks, township parks, roadside parks, places where people can camp and fish and enjoy Nature. There are many bits of wasteland along our great highways which could be set aside and—I think this is becoming less difficult—people educated to respect them and keep them clean as if they were their own property, as in fact they would be.

As Canada expands northward we shall need more northern parks, too, particularly sanctuaries for wild fowl and other migratory birds which breed there. Our country has the great responsibility of protecting these migratory species since they breed only in Canada. As civilization moves north swamps and lakes are being drained, breeding places destroyed, and armies of hunters with aeroplanes, motor cars, and modern guns are penetrating the once far-away inaccessible places.

Two great sources of wealth in our developing north are oils and minerals. The development of both tends to create ugliness. We should set aside large areas here

so that people could refresh their eyes and spirits with the fresh green of trees and the clarity of unpolluted lakes and streams.

"Use without abuse"—how can it be attained? That is the problem which must confront everyone who is responsible for the protection and development of our national parks. The parks belong to the people by right of citizenship, in the same way as our National Galleries and National Museums do. It is the duty of those in charge to make them freely accessible by road and trail, and to permit, under regulation, the private provision of accommodation, refreshments, and other needs. But the more the parks are used the more difficult it is to prevent abuse. There are increased demands for more and more roads, cheaper forms of amusement, commercial exploitation, and the danger is that if these demands are acceded to, the parks may lose the very thing that distinguished them from the outside world.

I have always believed that the building of motor roads should be restricted as much as possible. Through trunk roads, of course, there must be, and they should be made as good and safe as possible. But road building in the mountains is extremely expensive and—what is more important—it is only from the trails that one can get into real intimacy with the peaks. Roads have to conform to the topographical nature of the country, whereas trails can go anywhere, across the loftiest passes, up to the snowfields, and into the most isolated regions.

Besides, why should we make access to the primeval solitudes and sublime heights too easy? Let our moun-

tain parks, at least, continue to offer a challenge to hardihood and courage. In these silent wildernesses there are "holy places." Those who penetrate them on foot or horseback enjoy an experience which those who whizz through them in cars can never know.

"The fairest thing that we can experience," once said Einstein, "is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion that constitutes the truly religious attitude." Wonder, reverence, the feeling that one is nearer the mystery of things—that is what one feels in places of such sublime beauty.

We talk of "priceless works of art" and build great fire-proof galleries to protect them. But are these marvellous works of nature less priceless? Do they not hold equal potentialities of enjoyment and refinement for the human race? Nature has created these landscapes in accordance with some divine law of harmony of her own. Will we ever be able to educate the man in the street to realize that it is as much a desecration to mar this harmony as to draw a razor across the "Mona Lisa."

Man can maim, disfigure, and weaken Nature, but once he has destroyed original conditions, he can never replace them. Each citizen of Canada is the owner of one share of stock in the National Parks. Our part is to see that the value of their holdings is kept up. I feel that everything our engineers construct in the Parks should be dominated by the spirit of beauty. People sometimes accuse me of being a mystic about the influences of the mountains. Perhaps I am. I devoutly believe that there are emanations from them, intangible

but very real, which elevate the mind and purify the spirit. The late Professor Coleman, the eminent geologist, who spent many summers climbing and exploring in the Rockies, summed it up thus: "There is a cleanness and virginity, an exquisite loneliness, about many of the Rocky Mountain peaks and valleys that has a peculiar charm. There is a feeling of having caught Nature unawares at her work of creation. Here is dignity, purity, measureless peace. Here one can think high thoughts."

We can never get at Beauty. In all the hundreds of books that have sought to explain it in the last two thousand years, no completely satisfying definition has been found. We are all aware of the emotion it arouses—"sensations sweet, felt in the blood and felt along the heart," but we do not know why. Is there not some mysterious law here that we have not yet begun to fathom? Do our bodies hold the undiscovered secrets of life? It is part of my creed that beauty is not only living but life giving. One of the most intelligent men I have known used to talk of "the dynamic of beauty." May it not be that there are energies which our science has not yet studied which are as necessary to man's complete well-being as sunshine and food. Man is as yet only a partially developed creature. He has potentialities—every man is dimly conscious of this in himself—which, if developed, could make life nobler, happier, more truly human.

The battle for the establishment of National Parks is long since over but the battle to keep them inviolate is never won. Claims for the violation of their sanctity are always being put forward under the plausible plea

of national or local needs. The cry is: "We must utilize our national resources." But even materially speaking, is not outstanding beauty one of the rarest and greatest possessions a land can possess? It should be looked upon as a national asset and given an important place in every programme of conservation. And quite aside from the millions of money these rare places bring into a country, have they not an even greater value—the power to give pure and ennobling pleasure, and may this value seem far more important to future generations than it does today?

A society was recently formed in Washington, D.C. with whose aims I am deeply in sympathy. One of the articles in its creed reads: "We believe that wilderness is a valuable natural resource that belongs to the people and that its preservation—for educational, scientific, and recreational use—is part of a balanced conservation program essential in the survival of our civilized culture." Canada still has vast untouched areas out of which more wilderness parks could be carved. Future generations may wonder at our blindness if we neglect to set them aside before civilization invades them. What is needed in Canada today is an informed public opinion which will voice an indignant protest against any vulgarization of the beauty of our National Parks or any invasion of their sanctity. Negative or passive good-will that does nothing is of little use. We need "fierce loyalties" to back action. The National Parks of Canada are a source of untold pleasure and pride to our people. Every principle of enlightened patriotism should inspire us to keep them inviolate.

If I were to sum up the reasons why we should have National Parks I would say:

“National Parks are maintained for all the people—for the ill, that they may be restored, for the well that they may be fortified and inspired by the sunshine, the fresh air, the beauty, and all the other healing, ennobling, and inspiring agencies of Nature. They exist in order that every citizen of Canada may satisfy his craving for Nature and Nature’s beauty; that he may absorb the poise and restfulness of the forests; that he may steep his soul in the brilliance of the wild flowers and the sublimity of the mountain peaks; that he may develop in himself the buoyancy, the joy, and the activity he sees in the wild animals; that he may stock his mind with the raw material of intelligent optimism, great thoughts, noble ideals; that he may be made better, happier, and healthier.”

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