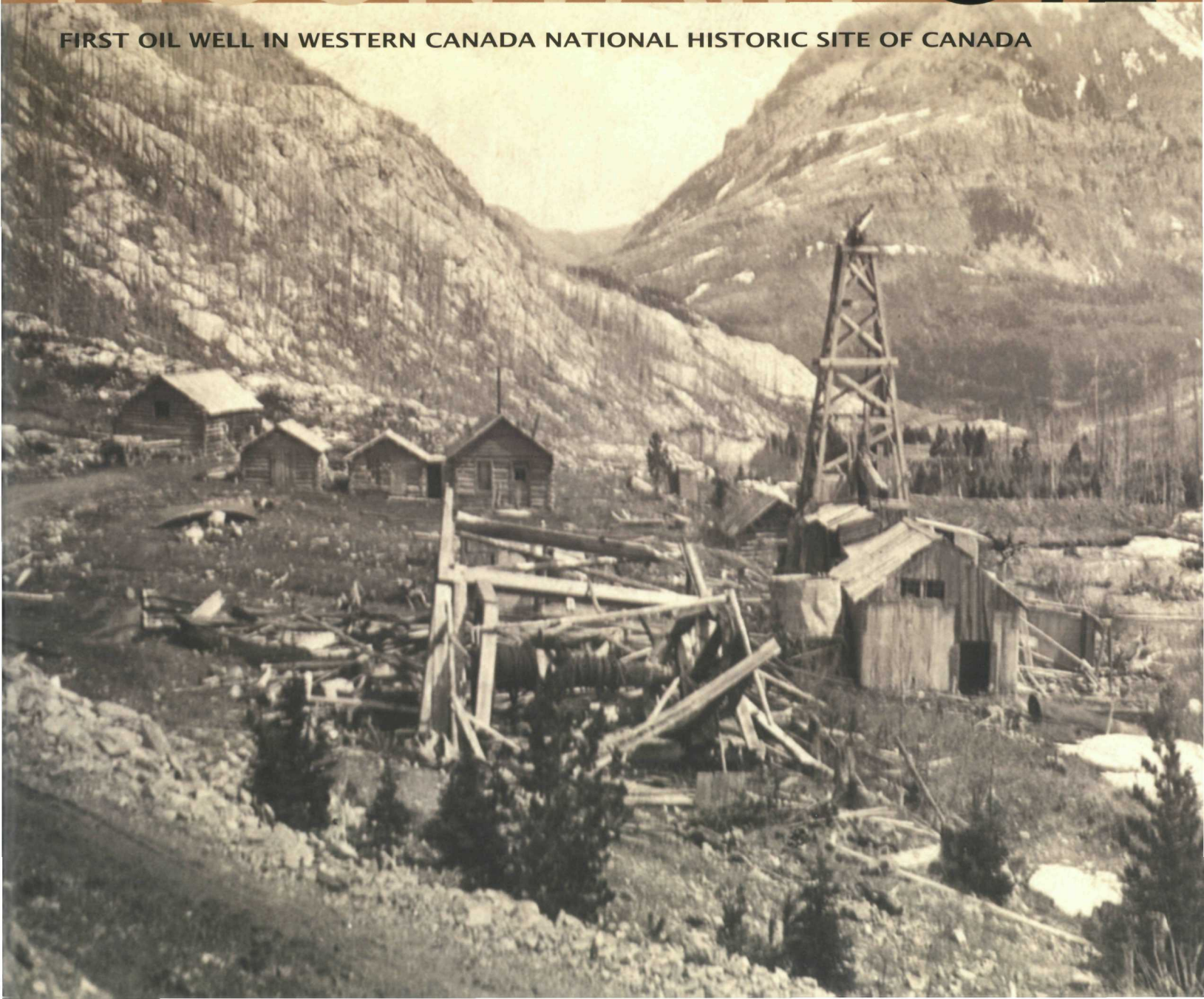


TALES OF

MOUNTAIN OIL

FIRST OIL WELL IN WESTERN CANADA NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE OF CANADA





*The information in this pamphlet
is from the book*

Oil City: Black Gold in Waterton Park
by Johan F. Dormaar and Robert A. Watt

available at the Waterton Natural History Association's Heritage Centre.

DISCOVERY

"One time, on their way to Chief Mountain, my grandparents stopped near this site to have lunch. My grandmother went to get water. She located a spring but she didn't draw any water out because it had a peculiar color to it. It looked blackish to her. She got a dipper full and examined it carefully; the contents were filthy, oily and thicker than water. It seemed that the black liquid running into the spring was coming from another source. She located the source of the black liquid and took a sample home to show her husband." *Hansen Bearspaw, Stoney Elder*

EARLY ATTEMPTS

1889 to 1893

In 1889, Allan Patrick staked and filed a mineral claim near Oil Creek (now known as Cameron Creek). In the following years, more than 150 mineral claims were filed throughout the region. There were a few attempts to sink oil wells but by 1893, all had failed.

Waterton's natural oil seeps were well known by Aboriginal peoples who used it as lubricant or medicine. Exactly how, when and who among the settlers first learned of the oil is the source of much debate, myth and story.

Waterton seems like an unlikely place for an oil boom - but it happened! Enjoy some tales of that time as you use the map in the middle of this booklet to visit some historic locations.

MOUNTAIN OIL

BUSINESS BUILDS

1897 to 1907

William Aldridge was the first person to commercially use oil from the seepages, selling the oil to local people as a lubricant and medicine.

In 1897, the Rocky Mountain Development Company was formed and eventually struck a strong flow of oil. This was the first well to produce saleable amounts of oil. Several other companies were enticed by their success. It is estimated there were about 25 wells in the area. Although some hit oil, none were economically successful.

TODAY

Most evidence of Waterton's oil boom is gone, but the places and traces that remain - from well casings, to foundations and wagon trails - depict the struggles, hard work and big dreams of getting oil from the mountains.

THE FIRST HOLES

One of the earliest attempts to bore an oil well in Alberta took place on the shore of Middle Waterton Lake. Snowstorms delayed the shipping of machinery and the investors ran short of cash. When operations finally began, a boiler fire spread and destroyed the drill rig.

A second company brought in a pole rig from Ontario. Their first well hit water and when they tried again, Waterton's legendary winds blew down the rig. Alberta's first oil operations were defeated by snow, fire and wind.

As you visit the shore of Middle Waterton Lake, imagine the excitement of early settlers rushing to stake oil claims in this majestic valley.

HOPEFUL CLAIMS

BOOM GOES BUST

Allan Patrick made the first petroleum claim on August 26, 1889. The Government Office in Fort Macleod had no appropriate forms so they altered a quartz mine form. Fuelled by enthusiastic newspaper reports, local communities eagerly embraced the promise of oil. Over the following months, so many claims were filed that office staff were overwhelmed, and many claims were incomplete or lost.

Although a few claims were made near the oil seeps on Oil Creek, most were staked in the Waterton Lakes valley. Charles Miles, a Dominion Land Surveyor, hit on the reason when he described the Oil Creek seeps as "somewhat difficult to access" despite the eager claims of the press to the contrary.

Most claimants had no experience drilling for oil; they hoped larger companies would buy them out at substantial profit. By 1893, the few real attempts to bore wells had ended in failure and most oil claims were abandoned.

"The whole country for many miles around ... was marked off with stakes of the oil claims." R.C. Selwyn, Director of the Geological Survey of Canada



FAMILY FIND

A few years after the initial frenzy of oil claims died out, William Aldridge and his family moved near Middle Waterton Lake and made a living by fishing and doing odd jobs. Aldridge heard of the oil seeps from other settlers and searched for them with his son Oliver. On a stop for lunch, Oliver found pools of black water and called for his father. By one account...

"Bill came down, put his fingers into the black water, smelled it, tasted it and said 'My Gosh, boy this is the ile we're lookin' for. Sure enough, it's ile.'" *from Bates and Hickman, 1974*

OILY PROFIT

William Aldridge was the first person to commercially use the oil seepages. He soaked up the oil with gunnysacks and skimmed it from sluice boxes. As he shovelled rocky soil into the sluice box, Aldridge said it "looked for all the world as if someone had poured black molasses over the gravel." (p.29) *Vancouver Western Oil and Coal Company*

The family produced about 10-15 gallons of oil per day, transporting it out of the mountains in a pack train, with each horse carrying 10 gallons of oil. They sold it locally as a lubricant and medicine for \$1/gallon.

Search the rolling prairie near the bend on the Red Rock Parkway for the remnants of old trails.

SURE ENOUGH, IT'S 'ILE'.

THE ALDRIDGE ROUTE

The Aldridges used a route along a traditional Aboriginal hunters' trail across the prairie at the base of Bellevue Ridge, along Blakiston Creek and over to the oil seepages via Crandell Lake. Ruts of this journey are still visible on the prairie. As you look for them, don't be fooled by a modern horse trail.



The William Aldridge family made a living for nearly 7 years selling oil from the seeps. Oliver Aldridge is in the back row, third from left.

BIG MOVE

The Rocky Mountain Development Company had lofty plans for a well near their mineral claim on Oil Creek, but first they had to haul their equipment there.

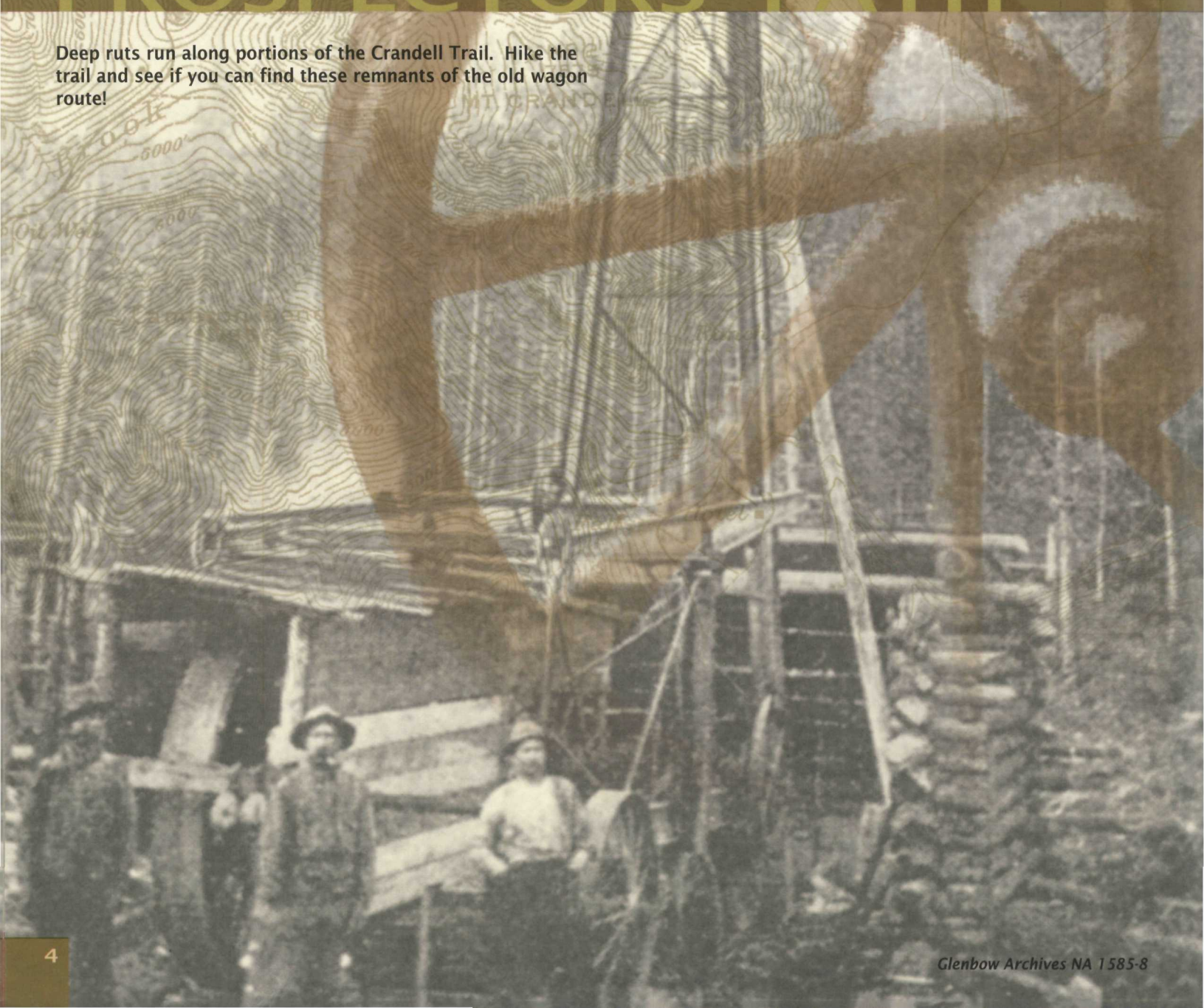
In late 1901, the company moved equipment into the mountains, creating a rough wagon trail where Aldridge had travelled. Imagine their persistence; the estimated shipping weight of a cable rig was 55,000 pounds!

Back then, the journey from Fort Macleod to the oil seeps took nine days. Today, the journey is less than two hours. Teams of horses moved cargo through difficult terrain with loads that could easily tip or slide out of control. On the trail near Crandell Lake, the grades were so steep that the heavy loads were raised and lowered with blocks and tackle. The crews faced deep mud and heat in summer and freezing conditions in winter.

Find and follow the oilmen's route to the oil seeps by driving up the Red Rock Parkway and hiking the Crandell Trail.

PROSPECTORS' PATH

Deep ruts run along portions of the Crandell Trail. Hike the trail and see if you can find these remnants of the old wagon route!



THE COMPANY

In 1897, John Lineham established a mineral claim beside Oil Creek and formed the Rocky Mountain Development Company with A.P. Patrick and G.K. Leeson. Its head office was in Pincher Creek. The company prospectus of 1904 was obviously promotional, endorsing the founders and the quality and quantity of Waterton's oil.

Would you join a rancher, surveyor and bank manager to find fortune?

PIONEER VENTURE

JOHN LINEHAM PRESIDENT

"John Lineham has by his perseverance, energy and excellent business ability, amassed a fortune, that places him in the front ranks of the wealthy men of Alberta."

John Lineham, a self-made wealthy businessman, became interested in the oil seeps when using crude oil to treat mange on livestock. A man of many hats, he homesteaded, ran an oxcart freight service, established lumber mills, sat three terms in legislature, operated cattle ranches and made his fortune breeding freight horses. He was the primary financial backer of the Rocky Mountain Development Company.

Glenbow Archives
NA 1230-19

GEORGE K. LEESON VICE PRESIDENT

"...there is no man in the Canadian Northwest who has more friends."

A friend and business partner of Lineham, Leeson ran a carriage service between Edmonton and Calgary. With Lineham, he founded the prominent "Leeson & Lineham" Block at 209-8th St. in Calgary.

Glenbow Archives
NA 1585-10

H.E. HYDE SECRETARY TREASURER

"He has been identified with the growth of the west..."

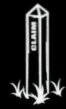
The company's head office was in Pincher Creek where Harry Hyde, secretary-treasurer of the company, was a prominent community member. There, he helped found the first store, worked as postmaster, founded a lumber business and managed the local bank.

Glenbow Archives M 941-6

ALLAN POYNTZ PATRICK DIRECTOR

Called A.P. by his friends, Patrick moved west working as a Dominion Surveyor. After learning of the Waterton oil seeps, he staked the first oil claim in the region and encouraged investors. During the oil boom he often returned to his surveyor origins - fixing the location of the Discovery Well and registering ambitious plans for a prosperous town. A.P. loved the outdoors and was still surveying at age 94.

Glenbow Archives NA 88-1



HOPEFUL CLAIMS

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SCRAMBLE & SABOTAGE

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IT'S 'ILE'

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1400 FEET DOWN

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DREAM TOWN

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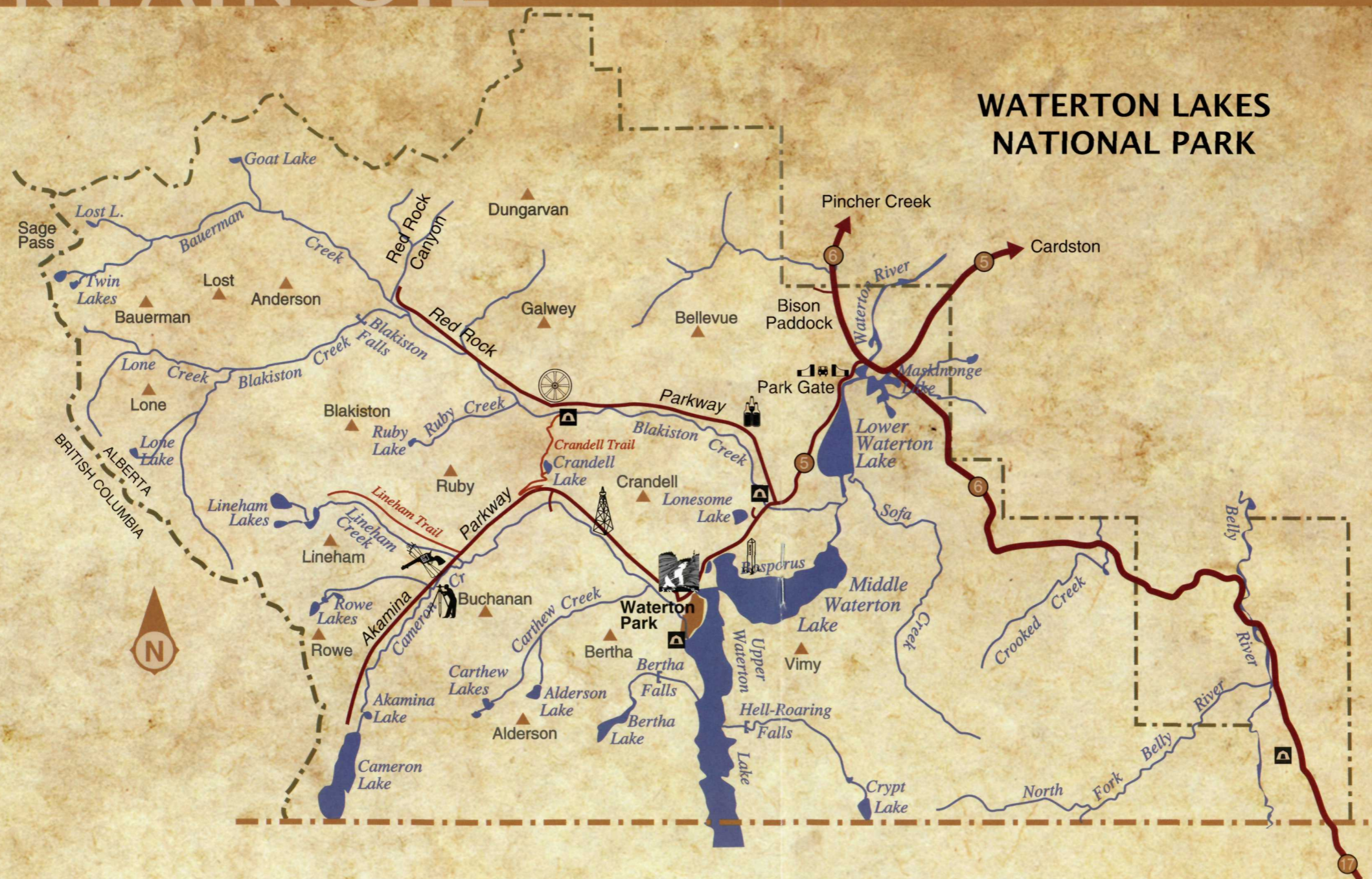


OIL ON EVERGREEN AVENUE

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Waterton seems like an unlikely place for an oil boom - but it happened! Enjoy some tales of that time as you use the map to visit some historic locations.

MOUNTAIN OIL



REPETITIVE WORK!

Workers struggled to bore through hard limestone using a "Canadian pole" rig, made entirely of wood and powered by a 35 horsepower steam boiler. Pole rigs repeatedly raised and dropped a suspended drill bit, using force to break the rock. A string of hard wood poles was joined together extending the drill bit as it bore deeper in the hole. Two thousand feet was about the limit of any well hole at the time.

Workers spent considerable time pulling out the wedge-shaped drill bit for sharpening. While it was out of the hole, workers removed chunks of broken rock, called drill cuttings, with a 'bailer'.

DANGEROUS FIRE AND ROASTED RABBIT

Steam boilers used on the rigs could cause dangerous fires. At Oil Creek, when an angry employee punched a hole in a boiler, a fire spread rapidly in the dry coniferous forest. Although shifting winds eventually put the fire out, workers protecting the oil camp fought it with shovels and water soaked gunnysacks. At one point, the fire crews thought that worker Klemmen Pederson and another man were trapped and burned. Fortunately, the two men escaped the fire, then survived in the wilderness by roasting a rabbit on a shovel.

Travel to where it all started - the Lineham Discovery Well at the First Oil Well In Western Canada National Historic Site. Below your feet, there is a hole in the rock that is 427 metres (1400 feet) deep!

1400 FEET DOWN

JOBS, JOBS, JOBS

One of the most important jobs for the rig was that of the woodcutter. Cutting, hauling and burning logs in the steam boiler provided the power to turn pulleys and belts, which lifted and dropped the drill bit. Huge quantities of wood were needed. One woodcutter, W.M. Terrill, did double duty hauling freight. Other workers looked after the drilling.

...AND THE RESULT!

The work progressed slowly due to equipment problems, inexperience and accidents. Finally, on September 21st, 1902 they struck a strong flow of oil at 311 metres (1,020 feet). The initial output was said to be 300 barrels a day. Oil Creek lived up to its name as, with no way to cap the well, much of the initial oil flowed downstream.

This success was short-lived as the well casing failed and gravel fell into the hole. While attempting to dislodge the tools, workers tied down the safety valve on the boiler to increase the steam pressure. The boiler burst, shutting down the operation for the season.

In 1904, the crew cleaned out the well and installed a pump to feed a small refinery. About 8,000 barrels of oil may have been extracted before the well was abandoned when drill tools jammed in the well again.

But the story isn't over yet! In 1914, a new attempt was made with a diamond drill bit - but the tools got stuck again. The Rocky Mountain Development Company and others made further attempts at the well and in the nearby area until 1939, but none proved viable.

Discovery Well and drilling rig.

SCRAMBLE

The Discovery Well prompted interest from other companies that scrambled to cash in on the oil strike. There was no love lost between the new companies, and even less between the men who worked for them. Police patrolled the oil camps each day to break up brawls and disagreements.

John Drader, a driller from Petrolia, Ontario, had moved to Waterton to manage drilling for the Rocky Mountain Development Company. Lineham and Drader had a falling out over new oil seeps found on Lineham Creek. Legend says Drader found these new seeps while chasing a wounded bear. He staked a claim and formed a new company, the Pincher Creek Oil and Development Company.

SABOTAGE

In response, Lineham tried to prevent Drader from moving his drill rig across a corner of the Lineham lease by blocking the road with cut trees. Drader withdrew and waited until he heard that Lineham was away. By some accounts, Drader backed Lineham's crew at gunpoint into the corner of a bunkhouse while his crew moved the equipment through the roadblock.

The drama and conflict continued at Lineham Trail as new companies moved into the mountains.

SCRAMBLE & SABOTAGE

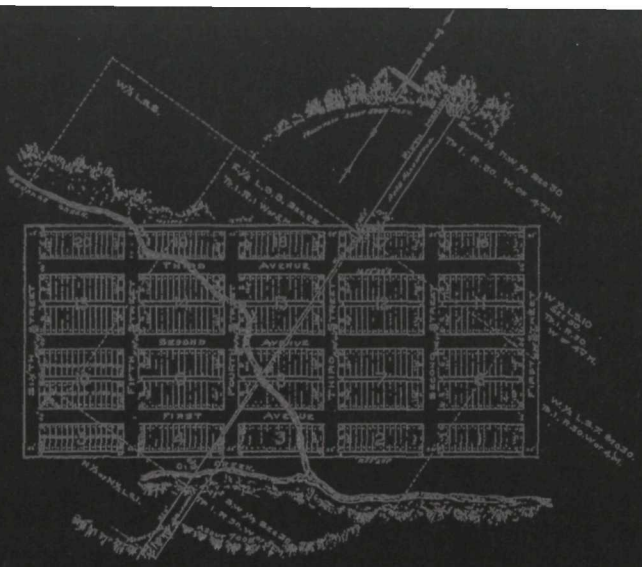
DESPERATE MEASURES

Drader eventually ran short of money and he decided to try "shooting" one of his wells. Exploding a charge at the base of a well bore can create a space for oil to pool, making it easier to pump out. Two unemployed coalminers from the Crowsnest Pass lowered dynamite on a long fuse down the hole. Halfway down, the dynamite exploded and large pieces of well casing were launched into the air. Permanently blocked, the well became yet another failure.

An operational derrick in the Lineham Creek valley ca. 1902

OIL CAMP

All of the oil activity created a large camp in the mountains, often called Oil City, with a regular stage service from nearby Pincher Creek. A post office opened in June 1905, with 41 people receiving mail there.



Can you imagine standing here surrounded by a bustling town? Follow the path to see the scarce evidence of what was meant to be the thriving town of Oil City - a foundation laid for a ten-room hotel that was never completed.

OIL CITY DREAM TOWN

OIL TOWN

As the oil boom attracted more wells and workers, Patrick, who was a Dominion Land Surveyor before getting into the oil business, decided a proper community was needed. He surveyed a town he called Oil City. Patrick registered the survey plan in 1908. This ambitious plan showed a main street and 450 fifty-foot lots organised into 16 blocks.

Streets were cleared of trees and a few cabins built, but the oil boom soon failed. The post office shut down the same year, buildings decayed, and Patrick's town slowly dwindled to nothing but the remains of a hotel foundation.

CHILD OF THE MOUNTAINS

The 1906 Census reports only five women living in Oil City, including Agatha Drader. Agatha came west from Ontario with her brother and sister looking for land near Pincher Creek. She married John Drader, then gave birth to their first child, Ernst Drader, in late 1905. A Cree woman, called Nichemous (Chee-pay-qua-ka-soo or Blue Flash-of-Lightning), was the midwife that saw Ernst into the world. She gave him the Cree name 'Child of the Mountains'. Ernst was the only child ever born in Oil City.

A NEW TOWN

During the height of the oil boom, the Western Oil and Coal Company of Vancouver drilled near Cameron Falls, striking a flow of one barrel a day in 1905. The company was responsible for the first buildings in the community – including a cookhouse, bunkhouse, blacksmith shop, office, stable, and engine room. In 1907 the well caved in, reportedly with tools stuck in it.

The same company also drilled where the Bayshore Inn and Alpine Stables are now located, and beside Blakiston Creek near Crandell Campground. All wells failed.

The site of the Western Oil and Coal Company's main well looks very different today!

Oil is also part of the Waterton Park community's history. Can you find the location of the old oil wells?

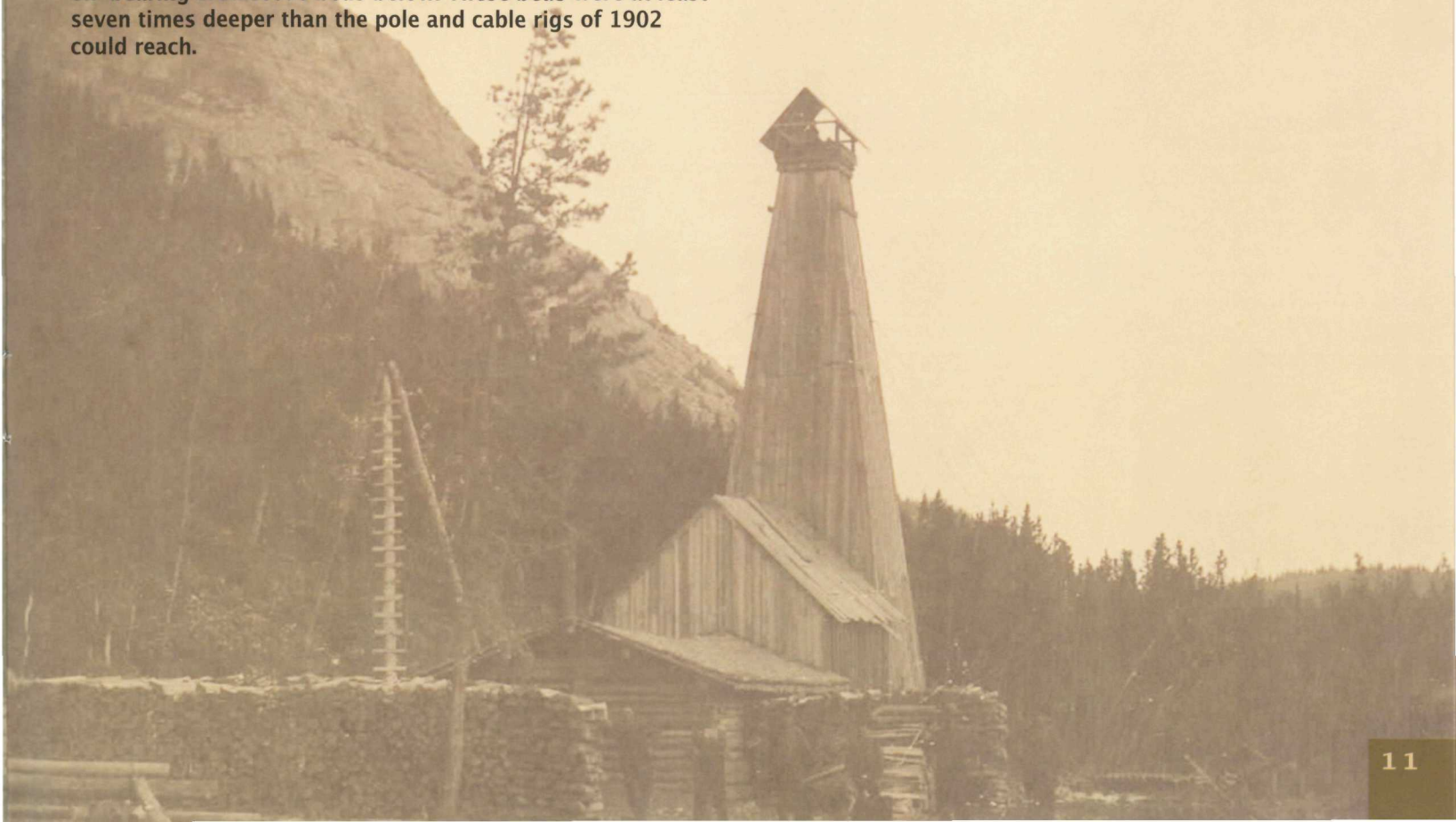
OIL ON EVERGREEN AVE.

A GEOLOGIC FLUKE!

Cameron Falls cascades over dolomite rocks. Only the simplest life forms lived on earth when these rocks were formed over 1,500 million years ago. The saved core samples confirmed that these ancient sedimentary beds overlie much younger cretaceous formations. The oil found here is a geological fluke. Small amounts of oil seeped into fault cracks in the older rock from the much younger oil-bearing cretaceous beds below. These beds were at least seven times deeper than the pole and cable rigs of 1902 could reach.

A WORLD FIRST

At the well near Cameron Falls, drillers collected 250 samples of drill cuttings at regular depths. This was the first time core samples were saved and they remain in the Geological Survey of Canada collection. It is now common practice to use this method of systematic sampling.



A PLACE TO COMMEMORATE

Frank Goble, a long time Waterton resident, brought the Discovery Well to the attention of the federal government. Goble grew up listening to old timers tell tales of the oil boom and visited many of the old buildings and well sites with Oliver Aldridge.

In 1960, Oliver Aldridge presented John Diefenbaker, Prime Minister of Canada, with a vial of oil from the original well when he visited the park.



Photo Frank Goble

If you feel a person, place, or event is worthy of national designation, you are invited to submit a nomination to the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada.

NATIONAL HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

BUT WHERE IS IT?

There was just one problem! During the 1930's, derricks were torn down and many well casings pulled out. World War II scrap metal drives removed discarded equipment and boilers, further erasing traces of oil activity. The exact location of the Discovery Well was forgotten!

Through research and interviews with local old-timers, a well-casing was finally identified as the 1902 Original Discovery Well No. 1 of the Rocky Mountain Development Company.

FIRST OIL WELL IN WESTERN CANADA NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

On October 10, 1968 the Honourable Jean Chrétien (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development) unveiled tablets commemorating The First Oil Well in Western Canada National Historic Site. Erratic mountain weather threatened to ruin the dedication ceremony, just as it once hampered the efforts of early oil companies, so the ceremony was moved to the Community Hall.

Since oil was first struck, the Akamina Parkway replaced the difficult wagon trail past Crandell Lake; names of creeks and mountains changed and trees grow on the streets of Oil City. Meanwhile, the Discovery Well remains (with tools still stuck in the well casing), representing the tremendous struggle for Waterton's mountain oil.



National Historic Sites commemorate over 1,500 important places, persons and events in Canadian history. Some are managed by Parks Canada, and other dedicated agencies and groups care for the rest. All are celebrated and enjoyed by Canadians and our visitors.

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| 1 Bar U Ranch | 7 Blackfoot Crossing |
| 2 Coleman | 8 Brooks Aqueduct |
| 3 Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump | 9 Writing-on-Stone "Aisinai'pi" Provincial Park |
| 4 Fort Macleod | 10 Medicine Hat Clay Industries and Medalta Potteries |
| 5 Fort Whoop-Up | 11 Cardston Alberta Temple |
| 6 Village of Stirling | |

Visit other nearby national historic sites.

SEEK OUT MORE TALES

