INTRODUCTION

The four Rocky Mountain national parks of Banff, Jasper, Kootenay and Yoho share boundaries, scenery, geology, plant and animal life, human history, exceptional interest and of such universal value that protecting them is a concern of all mankind.

The four Rocky Mountain parks were chosen for this honor because they include all four geological zones of the Rocky Mountains in an outstanding setting of exceptional beauty. These characteristics, exemplified by the Burgess Shale fossils, the Columbia Icefield and the Maligne Valley, give the parks world value.

HISTORY

The human history of the four mountains likely began about 11,000 to 12,000 years ago. For most of this period, Indians roamed the Rockies in search of food and clothing. In certain places in the parks, Indians collected ochre or iron oxide for decorative use. There is also some evidence of native use near the park hot springs. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Rockies were explored and settled by fur traders and merchants. In areas now in Kootenay National Park, there is some evidence of native use near the park hot springs. Some mineral and forest exploitation was allowed in the parks until about the 1930s and until the 1960s in Yoho. Since then, the parks have been virtually free of resource extraction and industry.

GEOLOGY

Geological formations in the four mountain national parks are composed largely of shale, sandstone, limestone and slate spanning time periods from the Precambrian to the Cretaceous. Forces have resulted in faulting, folding and up-tilting of these rock layers to produce mountain ranges which form the continental spine.

The Canadian Rocky Mountains consist of the Western Ranges, the Main Ranges, the Front Ranges and the Foothills, all of which are represented in the four parks. Glaciers carved these ranges and the climate has worn them to create a variety of landforms.

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The sedimentary Rocky Mountains contain an extensive fossil record dating from the Precambrian period. Of special interest in the area is the Burgess Shale, located adjacent to the Icefields Parkway which links Banff and Jasper national parks. The Athabasca Glacier, located adjacent to the Icefields Parkway, which links Banff and Jasper, provides unequalled opportunities for visitors to view ongoing glacial processes.

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Although the last major glacial advance ended about 10,000 years ago, active glaciers and icefields still exist throughout the region, particularly in the Main Ranges. The most significant glaciers in the area is the Columbia Icefield. The Columbia Icefield is the largest in the Rocky Mountains and the largest in North America's subarctic interior.

Counting 225 km (135 square miles) the Columbia Icefield contains the Continental Divide and the boundary between Jasper and Banff national parks. The Athabasca Glacier, located adjacent to the Icefields Parkway, which links Banff and Jasper, provides unequalled opportunities for visitors to view ongoing glacial processes.

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A special note about wildlife

All four parks are home to an interesting and varied wildlife population. Fifty-six species of animals are found in the parks, and it is not uncommon for visitors to see deer off the beaten path. Deer, elk and moose are common in these parks.

All wild animals are unpredictable and approaching them is strongly discouraged. Feeding wild animals is illegal and can be dangerous for both animal and man. Animals attracted to populated areas by feeding endangers their health and is dangerous. It is illegal to feed, entice or molest any animal in a national park. For information about bears, please obtain a copy of You Are In Bear Country from information centres.

PLANT LIFE

These different life zones can be seen easily by visitors: the montane zone in the lowest valleys; the subalpine zone at higher elevations; and the alpine zone above timberline, high on the shoulders of the mountains and bordering on the bare rock and permanent snow of the peaks. In Yoho, there are also locules of interior rainforest.

The montane region is distinguished by grassy meadows and forests of Douglas fir, white spruce, trembling aspen and lodgepole pine. Forests of conifer dominate the lower subalpine zone above timberline, with Engelmann spruce, subalpine fir and lodgepole pine.

The alpine subzone has a greater snowfall and a shorter growing season and is characterized by nature forests with subalpine fir, krummholz (stunted) and Engelmann spruce. In summer, subalpine meadows are carpeted with wildflowers.

The alpine region cannot support trees. The plant life has had to adapt to the harsh region with its short growing seasons, extreme daily temperature fluctuations, high winds and intense ultra-violet radiation. This zone can be viewed without a long climb at the Whistlers in Jasper and at Sunshine, near Banff, where tramways take visitors to this region. Alpine meadows such as these above Lake O'Hallan are also typical of the high country.

WILDLIFE

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More than 280 species of birds have been identified including golden and bald eagles.

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BANFF NATIONAL PARK
Banff, perhaps Canada's premier tourist magnet, attracts more than three million visitors a year from every corner of the globe. With its magnificent mountain scenery, diverse wildlife, and ancient forests, it is no wonder that Banff is one of the world's premier national parks. The town of Banff is located in southeastern British Columbia on the western slopes of the Rocky Mountains adjoining Banff and Yoho national parks.

Lake Louise, with glacier-tipped Mount Victoria and the limestone towers of Marble Canyon, the ochre-tinted paint pots once used by the First Nations for the color of mineral springs is one of the park's most popular stopping places. There are many trails for walking and horse-back riding in this area as well as canoeing on the lake and skiing in the winter.

The park contains at least 25 peaks which tower 3,000 meters (10,000 feet) or more. Access of lakes are part of the natural landscape and their turquoise hue begs to be captured on film. The lakes are home to many species of waterfowl. The park is a haven for wildlife enthusiasts. The rich diversity of plant and animal life that dot the wide Athabasca Valley. Day trails, overnight hikes and backcountry camping are other ways to see the park.

JASPER NATIONAL PARK
The largest of Canada's Rocky Mountian national parks, Jasper, spans 10,880 km² (4,200 square miles) of broad valleys and rugged mountains along the eastern slopes of the Rockies. Many of the park's striking features are accessible by road — the Athabasca Glacier, Sunwapta and Athabasca Falls, Miette Hot Springs, glacier-clad Mount Edith Cavell and the limestone gorge of Maligne Lake. Visitors can ride a tramway to the top of the Whistlers to see the view above the treeline and the spectacle of surrounding mountain peaks and many of the lakes that dot the wide Athabasca Valley. Day trails, overnight hiking trips, horseback rides and a boat trip down Maligne Lake are other ways to see the park.

Jasper joins Banff National Park to the south via the Icefields Parkway. This parkway is virtually unparalleled for its grandeur. A large number of lakes, high peaks, meadows and clear streams are dotted with waterfalls. The Athabasca and Saskatchewan rivers are joined to form the Athabasca River which runs to the northwest. The Child and Muncho lakes are other bodies of water in the park. The park is a haven for wildlife enthusiasts. The rich diversity of plant and animal life that dot the wide Athabasca Valley. Day trails, overnight hikes and backcountry camping are other ways to see the park.

What to Do
A wide variety of activities are available in Banff and Jasper National Parks. Information on commercial accommodation is available from Travel Alberta, 15th Floor, Capitol Square, 10025 Jasper Ave., 1-877-659-7787 or 780-427-5000 or on the internet at www.travelalberta.com. Yoho National Park

Yoho — Non-motorized boats are allowed on all park lakes and rivers. Power boats may not be used only on Lake Minnewanka. Jasper — Rowboats and canoes are allowed on all of the ponds and lakes in the park except Cabin Lake. Power boats may be used only on Pyramid and Medicine lakes. Boats with electric motors without on-board generators are allowed on any lake where boats are permitted.

Yoho — Boating is allowed on many of the park's lakes and rivers. Power boats may be used only on Lake Minnewanka.

Boating

Boating permits are required by anglers in Canada's national parks. Permits are available at park information centres, the Parkettes at Banff and Jasper National Parks, and at the Lake Louise visitors centre. Yoho National Park and at the Radium Hot Springs Aquacourt. Soaking in outdoor hot pools fed by natural mineral springs is available at the Upper Hot Springs in Banff, Maligne Lake in Jasper, the Miette Hotsprings in Jasper (summer) and the Radium Hot Springs Aquacourt in Kootenay. The springs that sparkled the first hot springs is one of the park's most popular stopping places. There are many trails for walking and horse-back riding in this area as well as canoeing on the lake and skiing in the winter.

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