KOOTENAY NATIONAL PARK
BRITISH COLUMBIA

Location
Kootenay National Park is situated on the western slopes of the Rockies in southeastern British Columbia, 107 miles north of the City of Cranbrook. It includes the remarkable scenic valleys of the Kootenay and Vermilion Rivers. The Park is a region 543 square miles in area notable for snowcapped peaks and glaciers whose meltwaters pour down rock faces and canyons into broad valleys with forested slopes.

Kootenay National Park is one of Canada's 18 National Parks which form a chain of nature sanctuaries extending from Mount Revelstoke in British Columbia to Terra Nova in Newfoundland. These Parks have been established for the preservation of selected areas in their natural state for the benefit, education and enjoyment of present and future generations of Canadians.

This vast area of nearly 29,350 square miles is administered by the Department of Northern Affairs and National Resources.

NATURAL FEATURES

Geological
This Park borders a 65-mile section of the Banff-Windermere Highway between the Columbia Valley and Vermilion Pass on the Continental Divide. The highway crosses Brisco, Mitchell, and Vermilion Ranges and two passes, Sinclair (4,875 feet) and Vermilion Pass on the Continental Divide. The rugged eastern escarpment of Vermilion Range is known as the "Rock Wall". The Banff-Windermere Highway and many miles of trails provide convenient access to these areas of unspoiled nature.

Vegetation
The vegetation of the Park is luxuriant and varied. One of the famous landmarks of Kootenay Park is Marble Canyon, approximately 53 miles north of Radium Hot Springs. The canyon was formed by the waters of Tokumm Creek eroding the rock at a shattered break in the earth's crust. One of the major breaks or faults here is the Stephen-Denis fault.

The Ochre Beds, or "paint pots", are also in this area. Springs bring this peculiar colouration of iron oxide to the surface, staining everything they cover with the rusty-red hue. Miners once hauled this coloured rock to the railway and sold it as a base for paint.

Radium Hot Springs are the result of surface waters seeping deep along the Redwall fault to very hot rock masses. The steam rises through cracks and fissures, condenses into water, and returns to the surface as hot water.

The Park is particularly noted for its icefields, towering glaciers, and the magnificent rock basin lakes along the lofty peaks of the continental divide. The rugged eastern escarpment of Vermilion Range is known as the "Rock Wall". The Banff-Windermere Highway and many miles of trails provide convenient access to these areas of unspoiled nature.

Evergreen forests clothe the mountains and valleys. The vegetation of the Park is luxuriant and varied. The terrain of mountains, glaciers, alpine meadows, slopes, river valleys and lakes supplies many habitats, each with its distinctive association of plants and animals.

The effect of altitude on plant growth is easily seen. The lower transitional forests of lodgepole pine, blue Douglas fir, western red cedar, trembling aspen, black cottonwood and a few Engelmann spruce soon give way, as one travels upward, to the sub-alpine forest of Engelmann spruce and alpine fir, in which lodgepole pine and blue Douglas fir are very minor elements.

For thousands of years this stream has been eroding the walls of Marble Canyon.

Wildlife
The Park supports a large variety of animal life but unless you have learned how to observe the smaller animals, such as the cinnereous shrew, jumping mouse, white-footed mouse, and meadow vole, you will see only the large ones. An incomplete list includes wapiti or American elk, black bear, grizzly bear, moose, white-tailed deer, mountain lion, mule deer, big horn sheep, mountain goat, coyote, wolverine, lynx, beaver, red squirrel, golden-mantled ground squirrel, hoary marmot, and pika.

All National Parks are wildlife sanctuaries in which neither hunting or trapping is permitted. Under these conditions, one may observe, especially along the highways, often appear quite tame. This attitude in wild animals is quite deceptive however, and bears especially are not to be trusted. Under no circumstances should a bear or other animal be fed or approached closely.

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There are many other kinds of trees in these forests. Some of these are water birch, western white birch, rocky mountain juniper and western white spruce.

At timberline the forests end and the true alpine flowers, in all their variety and colour, become the dominating attraction.

Many shrubs are as attractive as the trees or other vegetation—at times dominating the landscape with their colours. A few are servicerose or saskatoon berry, ground juniper, buffalo berry, Labrador tea, mountain alder, rusty mentinia, white mountain rhododendron, and oval-leaved blueberry. Many kinds of willows are present and some like the Barratt's willow have very large, attractive catkins.

The wildflower display of the Park is a sight to behold. If one had to study and pick out each kind separately the variety would be bewildering. You will find them, each in its particular place or habitat—whether it be in the lowest river valley or on the edges of a high glacier. No matter where a particular flower or plant lives, you can usually travel easy trails to reach and see it.

Only a few of the wildflowers will be mentioned. They are all gems when found singly or in masses blanketing a mountain slope or alpine meadow. Even their names promise visual pleasure—mariposa lily, purple clematis, dwarf Canadian primrose, western anemone, white globe-flower, avalanche or snow lily, yellow mountain-avens, alpine saxifrage, butterwort and Venus'-slipper orchid.

Evergreen forests fill the Simpson River Valley and clothe the slopes of Hawk Ridge up to timberline.

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A young mule deer picks its way down a slope.

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How to Reach the Park

The Park is well served by all modern means of transportation rail, air, bus, or car, as indicated by the map. The nearest airport is at Windermere, a few miles from the western Park entrance.

A Brief History of the Park

The name "Kootenay" is of Indian derivation. It has several spellings but the accepted Canadian form is as used in relation to this Park. The word itself is an Anglicized version of the Kootenay Indian word "K'tunaxa" meaning "strangers" or "people from beyond the hills" and the prairie Indians are supposed to have been the first to use this name.

The area now forming Kootenay National Park was well known for generations to Indians of the western part of the United States and Canada. All knew of the Hot Springs—a favourite gathering place of tribes and bands from the prairies and British Columbia. Sir George Simpson and James Sinclair of the Hudson's Bay Company during the 1840's were the first Europeans to travel in this region. Landmarks commemorating their journey can be found throughout the Park. Father de Smet, one of the earliest missionaries in the west, made his first journey into the Kootenay and Columbia Valleys in 1845. Diaries record that these early travellers visited the Hot Springs.

In 1881 the area was included in the homestead of John McKay and was privately owned until the establishment of Kootenay National Park in 1920.

A road connecting Banff with the Columbia Valley was constructed between 1911 and 1923. Later revisions and reconstruction of this roadway have brought the Banff-Windermere Highway to its present high standards.

In 1927 the original building at Radium Hot Springs was replaced by a two-storied log-faced structure which was more spacious. It burned in 1948 and was replaced by the present masonry structure in May 1951.

Kootenay Park was administered first from Banff, later, by a Superintendent at Yoho Park. In 1949, a resident Superintendent was appointed on a permanent basis and a Park Office established at Radium Hot Springs. Each year the Park is seen by over 400,000 visitors.

Additional information concerning the Park may be obtained from:
The Superintendent,
Kootenay National Park,
Radium Hot Springs, B.C.,
or
National Parks Branch,
Department of Northern Affairs
and National Resources,
Ottawa, Canada.

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