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 tributary valleys of the Kootenay and Vermilion Rivers. The Cranbrook and Larch Valley have easy trails to reach and see it.

Plantlife
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.

Geological
This Park borders a 65-mile section of the Banff-Windermere Highway between the Columbia Valley and Yoho and Assiniboine 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 rocks, especially through the Sinclair Pass, are a perplexing series of problems to geologists. Exposed rock formations range from Colourless rock to the railway and sold it as a base for paint.

Radium Hot Springs are the result of surface waters keeping 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.

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.

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.

Evergreen forests fill the Simpson River Valley and clothe its slopes to treeline.

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, bighorn 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 some animals which you 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.
How You Can Learn More About the Park

To help you know the Park better and obtain greater enjoyment from your visit, the National Parks provide an Interpretation Service. This includes conducted tours and nature talks illustrated with colour slides and films to explain the purpose and the natural phenomena of the Park. The evening programs are presented at different locations according to a seasonal schedule.

Well-marked nature trails are maintained for convenient access to unspoiled natural areas as indicated on the accompanying map. Various species of trees, shrubs, and wildflowers on the trails are identified with labels. Detailed information on the park's natural resources is available at the Park Information Office and Red Streak Campground.

How to See the Interesting Features

While the Banff-Windermere Highway provides a convenient method of seeing the Park, a fuller appreciation of its natural features will be obtained from its many trails. A number of trails with various walking times are shown on the map and are indicated on the accompanying map. For a more intimate contact with this mountainous area, the Park trails offer many new and wonderful experiences. Traveling on foot or on horseback to the alpine meadows and remote lakes reveals scenery as a living museum of nature. A walk along a quiet stream or up the slopes to timberline will reveal different facets of natural history. A trip into the high country will reward the visitor with an unquelled view of the tops of the mountains. Massive peaks, ridges, and glistening in the clear mountain air provide a panorama of geological features not soon forgotten.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Park Administration

A resident Superintendent is in charge at the Park Office near Radium Junction. Park Warden posts stationed in the three districts of the Park are responsible for the protection of all natural features and for the safety and guidance of visitors. A detachment of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police assists in the maintenance of law and order.

Season

The Aquacourt and the Banff-Windermere Highways are open all year but the main visitor season is between early June and late September.

Camping

A number of unserviced campgrounds convenient to the Banff-Windermere Highway with kitchen shelters, firewood, water and sanitary facilities are provided free. These may be located on the accompanying map. A large serviced campground and trailer area has been newly developed on a bench of Red Streak Mountain near Radium Hot Springs; a nominal fee is charged.

Accommodation

Commercial accommodation is available at Radium Hot Springs and other locations in the park as well as at Radium Junction, just outside the park. The National Parks Service does not arrange accommodation or reservations but lists of commercial accommodation and rates are available at the Information Bureaux.

Preservation

National and Parks are selected areas set apart as nature sanctuaries and special care is taken to maintain them in their natural state. For this reason all birds, animals, wildlife, trees, rocks and fossils are to remain undisturbed. Even the wildflowers are not to be picked; they are to be left for others to enjoy. Feeding, touching or molesting wild animals is not permitted. This is in the interests of the animal, as well as the human who could receive serious injury.

Please help protect your own Park for future enjoyment. It is part of your national inheritance.

Prevent Fire

Campsites may be kindled only in fireplaces provided for this purpose and must be completely extinguished before campers leave the site. Visitors observing an unattended fire should attempt to extinguish it, if possible and promptly report it to the nearest Park employee. Fire in a National Park can cause damage that cannot be repaired in a hundred years.

How can you tell a Mountain Goat from a Mountain Sheep?

The Mountain Goat is present throughout the Park. Both are excellent swimmers. Mountain Sheep are found occasionally in the lower elevations in the transitional forest of lodgepole pine and blue spruce. Mountain Sheep are able to jump high and fly long distances. Mountain Goats prefer steep, rocky terrain. Mountain Sheep will eat grasses and sedges on the slopes of Mount Wardle, while bighorn sheep will look for fir and pine on the slopes of Mount Rundle.

Bassoon's Goldmeyer, one of the ducks seen in the Park.

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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 Kootenai 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.