KOOTENAY NATIONAL PARK
BRITISH COLUMBIA

Location

Kootenay National Park is situated on the western slopes of the Rocky Mountains 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 snow-capped 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 19 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 more than 29,000 square miles is administered by the National and Historic Parks Branch, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

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 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.

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. The waters of Tokumm Creek once hardened 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.

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.

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.

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 serviceberry or saskatoon berry, ground juniper, buffalo berry, Labrador tea, mountain elder, rust menziesia, 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.

Flowers are seen at timberline and higher—mazzi- posa lily, purple clematis, dwarf Canadian primrose, western anemone, white globe-flower, balsam-root, avalanche or snow lily, yellow mountain-avens, alpine saxifrage, butterwort and Venus’-slipper orchid.

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 inquisitive 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. 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.

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Some animals may be seen more easily from certain vantage points; consult the Park Wardens if you need advice on getting a good view of wildlife. Mountain goat frequently display their agility on the slopes of Mount Wardle, while bighorn sheep visit the vicinity of Radium Hot Springs throughout the year.

Birdlife
Like plants and other animals, birds frequent habitats of their choice and must be looked for in their local environments. Some of the common birds found at lower elevations in the transitional forest of lodgepole pine and blue Douglas fir are red-shafted flicker, yellow-bellied sapsucker, western wood pewee, mountain bluebird, tree-swallowing vireo, western tanager, red-eyed vireo, dusky flycatcher, Oregon junco, pine siskin, Audubon’s warbler, spruce grouse and Cassin’s finch. The sub-alpine forest of Engelmann spruce and alpine fir is home to such distinctive birds as boreal chickadee, Tennessee warbler, Lincoln sparrow, hermit thrush, varied thrush, ruby-crowned kinglet, Canada or gray jay, Bohemian waxwing and Canada jay. Some of the characteristic birds of the high alpine areas, above timberline, are white-tailed ptarmigan, narrow billed curlew, water pipit, grey-crowned rosy finch, and golden eagle.

Fish
On the accompanying map it can be seen that the Vermilion, Simpson, and Kootenay Rivers present the main drainage pattern in the Park. These rivers and their tributaries and several lakes provide excellent angling. Various species, including Dolly Varden, Eastern Brook, cutthroat, and rainbow trout, are found in the lakes and streams of the Park. Native fish are restricted to such lakes as Barrier and Shooting Star and to a few streams. Various non-native species, introduced from elsewhere, are well established in the lakes of the Park.

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 mountain filmstrips. A public address system is available at the Park Information Office, Park Wardens, and well-marked nature trails. The climbing and mountaineering programs of the National Parks Service are also available at the Park Office in Radium Junction.

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Camping
Within the Park there are five campgrounds adjacent to the highway and one additional, Redstreak Mountain near Radium Hot Springs. Redstreak, McLeod Meadows and Marble Canyon campgrounds are fully serviced and camping fees are charged. The other campgrounds, which have kitchen shelters, water, and firewood, are free. No camping is permitted except at designated campgrounds. Persons wishing to camp on trails must register with a park warden on leaving and on return. Picnic areas and wayside tables are located along the highway; most of these have firewood, water, and sanitary facilities.

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 regularly arrange accommodation or reservations but listings of commercial accommodation and rates are available at the Information Bureau.
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.

Additional information concerning the Park may be obtained from:

The Superintendent,
Kootenay National Park,
Radium Hot Springs, B.C.,
or
National and Historic Parks Branch,
Department of Indian Affairs
and Northern Development,
Ottawa, Canada.

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