Introducing a Park and an Idea

Canada covers half a continent, fronts on three oceans, and stretches from the extreme Arctic more than halfway to the equator. There is a great variety of land forms in this immense country and national parks have been created to preserve important examples for you and generations to come.

The National Parks Act of 1930 specifies that national parks are “dedicated to the people . . . for their benefit, education and enjoyment” and must remain “unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.”

Riding Mountain National Park, about 60 miles north of Brandon, Manitoba, is situated on a rolling plateau that forms part of the Manitoba Escarpment. It preserves 1,150 square miles of diverse landscape that includes both evergreen and hardwood forests, prairies, rolling hills, valleys, lakes and streams.

The park was named for its principal feature, Riding Mountain, the third highest elevation in Manitoba.

The Park Environment

Each national park has its own character, its unique story as a living, outdoor museum. Riding Mountain National Park is the story of a highland plateau, situated in the centre of North America. The park is a crossroads, where habitations characteristic of eastern, western, and northern Canada meet and mingle in a diverse pattern of forest and grassland, hills and valleys, lakes and streams. It shelters a remarkable variety of plant and animal life.

The Land: An Ancient Landscape

The story of Riding Mountain began approximately 135 million years ago, when giant reptiles roamed the earth, and what is now southwestern Manitoba was covered by a shallow, tropical sea. Clay and sand were carried into this sea in rivers flowing away from the Precambrian Shield. Gradually this material solidified into shale, the rock that makes up much of Riding Mountain.

As the ice slowly retreated, meltwaters flooded the lowlands, creating an immense lake, now referred to as Lake Agassiz. Then, about 6,000 years ago, this lake drained into Hudson Bay, leaving behind the large lakes of the lowland plain.

On the highland, water collected in valleys to form marshes, meadows, and lakes. The park’s spring-fed lakes are among its greatest charms. Clear Lake, the largest, covers 9½ square miles and is 1½ feet deep in places. Although streams draining the park lakes are small, they have etched broad channels over the ages, as seen in the Birdal Valley.

About 800,000 years ago, the Great Ice Age began another chapter in the story of Riding Mountain. The huge, shifting ice-shafts that covered most of North America greatly changed the appearance of the area. The enormous masses of shale from the highlands, and filling the ancient valleys. Deposits of clay, sand, gravel, and boulders formed new hills and valleys. Granite boulders were carried great distances from the Precambrian Shield situated to the northeast, and were left scattered across the landscape.

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The highest areas of the park, especially those over 2,000 feet, are covered with an evergreen forest of white and black spruce, jack pine, balsam fir, and tamarack. Stands of trembling aspen and white birch also grow in these regions. Although poor soil and cold temperatures limit the plant life in these high areas, some of the park’s most exquisite wildflowers can be found here, hidden away in bogs and evergreen glades. They include the round-leaved orchid, bishop’s-cap, gaywings, one-flowered wintergreen, and bearberry.

Along the base of the escarpment, the park’s lowest and warmest regions support a deciduous forest of hardwoods, shrows, vines, and ferns. Here Manitoba and mountain maple, green ash, Canada plum, white elm, bur oak, chokecherry, nannyburr, and downy arrowwood flourish in dense stands, while such wildflowers as nodding trillium, wild columbine, yellow wood violet, and wild morning-glory brighten the forest floor. There is also poison ivy. Because of lighter rainfall, sandy soil and fire damage, extensive areas in the western section of the park are covered with meadows and open grasslands. In this windswept environment, grasses mix with a constantly changing pageant of wildflowers, which reaches the height of its floral display in late July and early August. Included in this floral display are the cut-leaved anemone, three-flowered avens, thimble cincquefoil, showy locoweed, sweet vetch, crowfoot violet, blue hyssop, wild bergamot, Indian paintbrush, meadow blazing-star, black-eyed and brown-eyed susan, and stiff goldenrod.

The Animals: Predators And Prey

Because of its varied elevations and plantlife, Riding Mountain National Park is endowed with a diverse animal population. Of the 60 species of mammals known to have inhabited the park area within “modern” historical times, seven species were exterminated from the area before it was established as a national park.

The wapiti and moose are the largest and most abundant members of the deer family, and since the park was established both have increased in numbers. The moose can usually be seen in the vicinity of lakes and beaver ponds, and the wapiti in the open forest. The white-tailed deer, which inhabits the edges of the park, has almost completely replaced the mule deer.

From historical accounts and skeletal remains, it is known that bison once roamed Riding Mountain. Almost immediately after the park was established, four adult bulls and 16 young cows were shipped here. Kept at less than 40 animals to prevent over-grazing of their enclosed range, the herd brings the park’s animal population a little closer to its original state.

Predators, or flesh-eating animals, help the park’s wildlife retain its natural balance. The grey or timber wolf and the Canada lynx are shy creatures, difficult to observe at any time of year. The black bear (actually ranging in colour from pure black through all shades of brown to cinnamon and blond) and coyote are more frequently seen.

The beaver, the park’s largest rodent, was almost exterminated in the area before the park was established, but has made a dramatic comeback and can be observed in almost every pond, lake and stream. It plays an important role: ponds formed by beaver dams may eventually be converted into lakes.

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was withdrawn from settlement and made a forest reserve.

recognized at the turn of the century, and the highland
Manitoba, in 1881, the fertile plain surrounding Riding
and logged the highland.

the otter, marten, fisher, and wolverine disappeared from
ranging from five to 20 pounds are found in Clear Lake.

Lake trout and 28% have been taken through the ice. Lake trout
in at about five pounds, although specimens as large as
have been taken through the ice. Lake trout, ranging from five to 20 pounds are found in Clear Lake.

rain without any fish. They are usually

and evening grosbeak, remain through the long winter.
The white-throated sparrow, Blackburnian warbler, western meadowlark, and
thrush, and prairies. They include the common loon, Swainson's
nest, adding to the beauty and mood of the lakes,

and fossils are to be left undisturbed. Even the wild-
and prairies. They include the common loon, Swainson's

However, the easiest means of penetrating the rugged
was used by the early travellers and traders
to the north and south.

the more than 30 miles of trails in the Wasagaming town-

is part of your national inheritance.

Moose

Moose

Where to Stay

Camping brings you into close contact with the natural
environment of the park. Camping facilities are provided
at Riding Mountain National Park. A park motor vehicle permit is required for all motorized land vehicles.

Top: A moose heads up a steep rise in Riding Mountain Recreation Area. Bottom: A moose in Riding Mountain National Park.

Where to Get Information

Detailed information can be obtained from the park information centres at Wasagaming township. Informational staff will answer questions, provide maps, outline travel routes, and refer visitors to various areas and facilities.

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Information on the interpretive program is available from bulletin boards, the park information centres, the interpretive centre and park staff.

How To Get There

This is an ideal way to explore the park. There are miles of trails in Riding Mountain, leading to the park's main attractions, including evergreen and deciduous forests, meadows, and lakes. Many to remote areas are best suited to overnight trail trips. Other areas are readily accessible for day walking or riding, particularly the Lake Katherine and Clear Lake districts. A map is available at the park's main attractions.

Hiking

How To Enjoy the Park

Several facilities of a modern town, including grocery stores, restaurants, garages, laundry and other services, are found within the park at Wasagaming.

In addition, the visitor will find a large variety of recreational facilities, including a golf course, tennis courts, bowling greens, boat tour and boat rental operations, riding stables, and a ski development.

Fires

Campfires may be lit only in fireplaces provided for this purpose, or in portable stoves. Barbecues may be used only in campgrounds or picnic areas, and all coals must be extinguished before disposal. A fire permit must be obtained from a park warden for any open fires during trail travel.

Anyone finding an unattended fire should try to extinguish it, or if it is beyond his control, report it to the nearest park employee.

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Riding Mountain National Park. Highway 10 connects Brandon, Wasagaming, Manitoba. For information on other national parks, write the Director, National and Historic Parks Branch, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Ottawa.