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. The watersheds of some of the great rivers of this immense country, and national parks have been created to preserve important examples for you and for generations to come.

The mountains
The mountains in the park have been carved out of a series of layered sedimentary rocks over a mile thick and include some of the oldest known rocks in the Canadian Rockies. Some structures found in these rocks are believed to be fossilized shells. The old sedimentary rocks were uplifted and displaced horizontally in relatively late geological time. These now lie adjacent to much younger rocks in the north-eastern section of the park, which have yielded fossil shells. The sharp peaks, narrow ridges and jagged indentations formed in the rock by frost and snow water are much in evidence on the side of Vimy Peak. The light green, bare streaks down Bertha Peak were produced by Cameron Creek. It is believed that most of the sediments were deposited while remnant glaciers of the Ice Age were still present in the park. The grinding of the sediments was so great that some of the oldest rocks in the Canadian United-States border. Glacier National Park, Montana, joins it to the south and the two parks together form Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park.

The environment
Each national park has its own character, its unique story has a living outdoor museum. The theme of Waterton Lakes is “where the mountains meet the prairie”.

The vegetation
Waterton Lakes National Park is different from the other Canadian parks because it has two major regions, the prairie and the Rocky Mountains, distinct in every way and vastly different from one another. The vegetation in the park is also very different from that of other parks. The prairie region of the park has a semi-open forest and its meadows. This forest type occurs along the park’s life zones, the aspen parkland belt and the mountainous coniferous forest part of the park.

The animals
Like the plants, the animals have adapted themselves to the demands and opportunities of the environment and are found principally in those habitats most suitable to their survival, whether it be summer or winter. Because of their nocturnal activities and secretive habits, most animals, especially the smaller kinds, are seldom seen by park visitors, but some diurnal (daylight) species allow themselves to be studied at close quarters.

Berry, dogwood, juniper, Saskatoon and chokecherry, while the buffalo berry occurs most commonly in the mountainous coniferous forest part of the park.

Timberline is at approximately 7,000 feet although it may vary as much as 900 feet depending on local conditions. Most of the trees in the park are evergreen. At the lower altitudes Douglas fir, lodgepole pine, limber pine, and white spruce are common. At the higher altitudes Engelmann’s spruce, white-bark pine, and alpine fir occur throughout the park. In the lower regions of the park and adjacent to the prairie areas the deciduous or broad-leaved trees, the most common of which are the trembling aspen, paper birch, cattowood, willow, Douglass maple and Sitka alder.

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Hikers on the higher trails near timberline and the alpine meadows often have the opportunity to watch a band of bighorn sheep grazing or resting on a sunny slope. Rocky Mountain goat with their nearly-white coats may also be seen, silhouetted against the dark rock walls that make up their favourite haunts. Ibex, marmot, pika and ground squirrels take advantage of the profuse vegetation in the open alpine meadows while overhead a golden eagle or Clark’s nutcracker may be watching for its food.

Many of the larger mammals prefer the shade and protection offered by the timber at lower elevations. Among them are the bears, both grizzly and black, which may sometimes be seen grazing on the lush green vegetation of the aspen and birch groves. The caribou, however, is anything but shy in this setting. Mule deer, elk and bighorn sheep prefer the semi-open forest and in the park the bighorn type occurs mostly on southerly, exposed slopes which are not able to support a dense forest cover, owing to the lack of moisture. These forests offer a wide variety of food in the form of grasses, sedges, willows, rock outcrops, which are ideal escape terrain for the deer, elk and sheep when danger threatens in the form of a predator such as a cougar or coyote. Tree squirrels, ground squirrels and their natural enemies the marten, weasel and hawk play their part in this interesting community as do many forest-adapted song birds.

An interesting animal community with its boundaries in the lowest of the park’s life zones, the aspen parkland belt and the grassland habitat. Although this region is dried out and whipped by severe storms from autumn to spring, life for
The animals is not as harsh here as at higher elevations. White-tailed deer and their predators the coyote and cougar can be found here. Skunk, badger and mink find this habitat suitable to their needs. Several species of ground squirrel make their homes here, while birds that patrol the sky and songbirds add their notes to the aspen forest.

The value of this community is fully realized when winter conditions make survival almost impossible for animal species of the higher life zones, which are not adapted to the cold, high alpine cirque lakes and shallow-water reed patches. Beaver, muskrat and mink are the most-often observed lacelike animals. They are supplemented by marsh-hawks, waders and shorebirds, which are generally found in small numbers and seldom nest in the park. During the migrational periods of spring and summer, the lower and shallower lakes experience a major transformation. Literally thousands of ducks and geese rest up here before continuing their migration, while swans, their snowload by violent winds. The sky and songbirds add their notes to the aspen forest.

The idea to link Waterton Lakes National Park with Glacier National Park in Montana originated at the first goodwill meeting of the Rotary Clubs of Alberta and Montana in 1931. By their efforts laws were passed the following year on both sides of the border to link the two places to form a International Peace Park in the world.

To get there

Most visitors travel to Waterton Lakes National Park by car. Alberta Highways 5 and 6 lead into the park from the north and east and Montanya route 17 enters from the south. During the summer season buses run daily from Calgary via Highway 2 and weekly from Lethbridge via Highway 2. Visitors travelling by train should make bus connections at Lethbridge or Fort Macleod. No aircraft land in the park.

How to enjoy the park

Scenic – the park is open all year, although commercial tourist services are available only during the summer months. Summer is the best time for hiking, swimming, boating, golfing, biking, climbing and camping are popular. Scenic – the park is open all year, although commercial tourist services are available only during the summer months. Summer is the best time for hiking, swimming, boating, golfing, biking, climbing and camping are popular.

How to get the most out of your visit

To help you understand and appreciate the park’s complex environment, you are urged to take advantage of the free interpretive program, conducted by a park naturalist and his staff. It will provide you with an insight into how climate, landforms, plants and animals are interrelated, and it will make your visit more rewarding.

Other facilities

A variety of other facilities for park visitors are available. The park operates a heated, outdoor swimming pool during the summer months, and an 18-hole golf course.

Additional information

Waterton Lakes National Park, Waterton Park townsite contains all the customary services of a modern community with hotels, motels and dining facilities. Details on motel and hotel accommodation are available at the park information centre and reservation for accommodation can be made through the R.B.I. Waterton Park Townsite. Practically all business are operated on a summer seasonal basis.

Fire

Campfires may be set only in fireplaces provided for this purpose, or in outdoor portable stoves. Barbecues may be used only in campgrounds or picnic areas, and all coals must be dumped into existing park fireplaces. Fire permits must be obtained from a park warden for open fires during the summer months. Anyone finding an unattended fire should try to extinguish it, or if it is beyond his control, report it at once to the nearest park employee.

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This is but a reference map, designed to give you a general idea of what you will find in this park. It is not a road, hiking or boating map. To find your way accurately, you should obtain a topographical map, available at the park information centre in summer and at the administration building in winter.