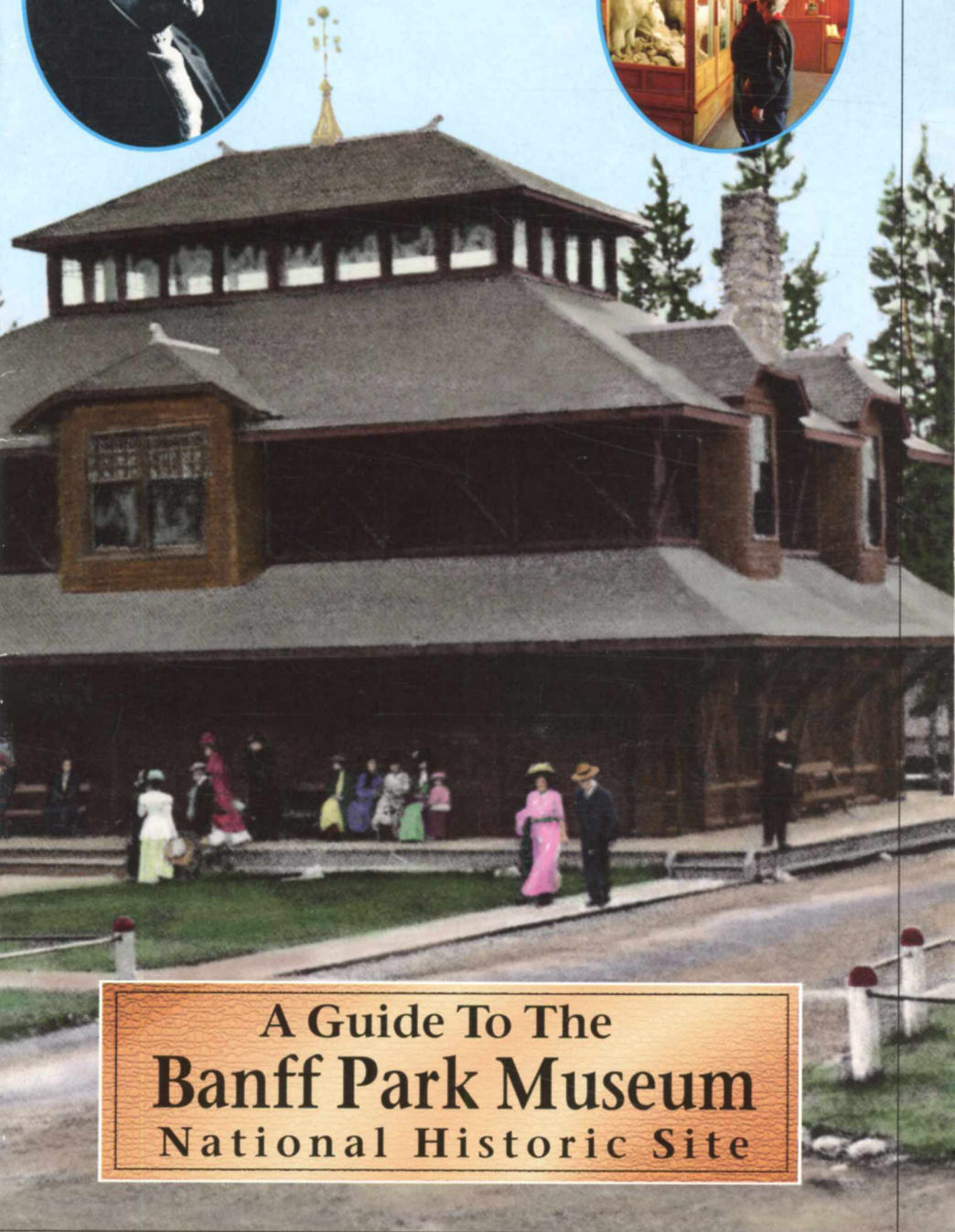




A Guide To The
Banff Park Museum
National Historic Site



Canadian Heritage
Parks Canada

Patrimoine canadien
Parcs Canada

Canada



The Banff Park Museum never ceases to amaze ...

Just watch. One step inside, and hands gesture wildly at the treasures within. Children come face to face with a buffalo several times their size. Wolves, grizzlies and eagles watch over your shoulder while a tiny hummingbird amazes you with its delicate wings.

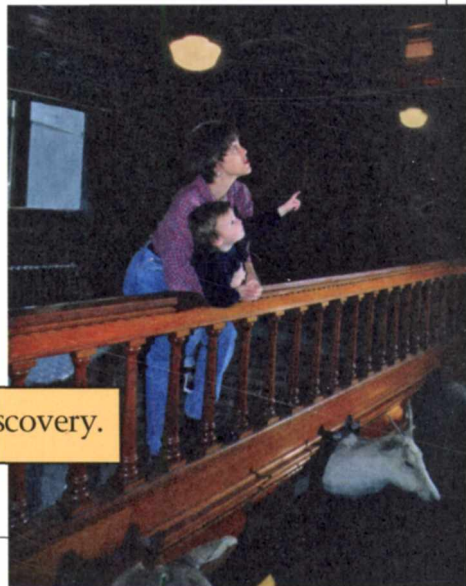


And there's the truly unexpected: an **albino woodpecker** ... a muskox, obviously far from home ... trilobites and musket balls, rattlesnake rattles and pemmican pounders.

Our museum has been a source of wonder and scientific learning for nearly a century. Today you are part of that history.

Welcome — to a place of science and discovery.

\$3.00



If you build it they will come . . .

Whyte NA80-42

And come they did! Lured by the hot springs, early visitors to Banff were often wealthy, educated, and exploding with curiosity. By 1887, the ramshackle town already had six hotels, nine stores, two churches and a post office to meet their needs.

In 1895, the government added another attraction Banff's first natural history museum. Crowded and far from the centre of town, it was replaced in 1903 with the museum that stands today.

Banff's first museum,
1895 - 1903



Whyte PA139-350



—PLAN OF PROPOSED—

—MUSEUM READING ROOM AND OFFICE—

—for Banff National Park—

—Scale 1/2 inch = 1 ft—

"A thing of beauty
and a joy forever"

Crag and Canyon,
Banff, 1903

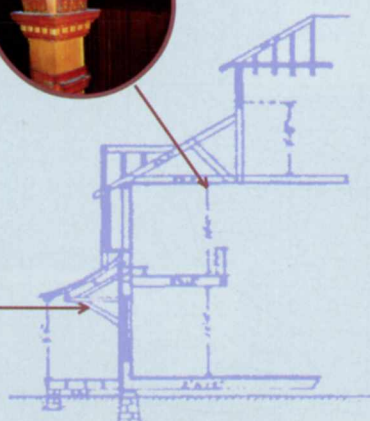
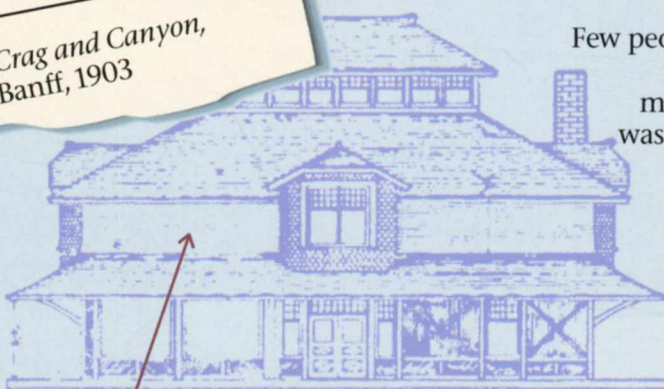
No, this isn't the Banff train station ...

But it's easy to see why people think so.

Few people are surprised to learn that the museum's designer was a former railway bridge engineer named John Stocks. Look closely you'll notice the overhanging verandas, carved brackets, and cross-log details found in early railway stations.

Large windows and a glass-sided roof pagoda brought light to the museum before electricity came to Banff.

Douglas fir panelling added to the elegant interior details.



—Part Section—

Did you know?

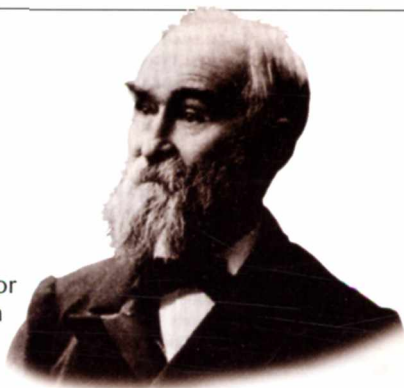
The Banff Park Museum cost 10 thousand dollars to build in 1903!

A helping hand



William Spreadborough

Professor
Macoun



The Geological Survey of Canada supplied the museum with its first collection: eight Canadian mammals, 259 Canadian birds, 57 specimens of wood, 814 plants, 201 minerals and a turtle.

Professor John Macoun and his assistant William Spreadborough collected several original specimens. Macoun had already influenced Canadian history by recommending to Prime Minister Macdonald that the southern prairies were suitable for agricultural settlement.

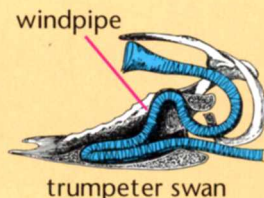
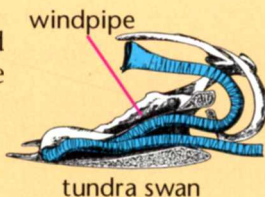
The evolution of science

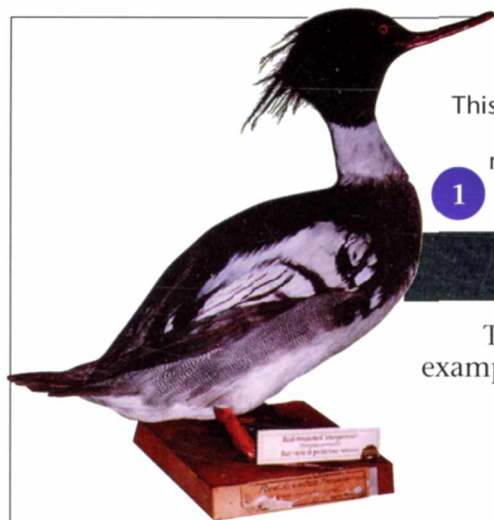
Turn of the century science was exploding! The New World now revealed its plants and animals to scientists and amateur enthusiasts for the first time.

Without modern guide books, coloured photographs or lightweight binoculars, exploring this new world was difficult. A visitor's only chance to see these strange animals was likely in the museum.

Scientists also faced challenges - identification often required measuring and dissecting specimens. These methods seem cruel, but have helped shape our understanding of natural science. The collectors' detailed records show us how the environment has changed, charting a path for its future protection.

According to *Birds of Canada* (1926), tundra and trumpeter swans could be positively distinguished only by the shape of their windpipes!





This **red-breasted merganser**, collected in 1860, is the museum's oldest specimen.

1

Look around ...

The museum's first floor holds many examples of the rich animal and plant life found in Banff National Park!

This radical 1914 exhibit placed the **mountain goat** and **bighorn sheep** in their natural habitat. It also told visitors that the goat lives at higher elevations than the sheep.

Can you find other exhibits that place animals in their natural surroundings?

Dr. Harlan Smith, an archaeologist with the National Museum, designed these early exhibits. He also wrote the museum's first guide, the *Handbook of the Rocky Mountains Park Museum*.



2

Are sheep and goats the same colour?

No — the sheep are darker, but natural light streaming through the windows has faded them. Many older specimens have faded too — which others can you find?

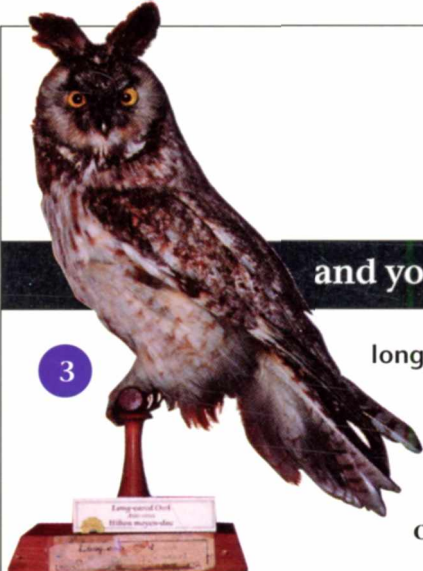


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The 1914 museum guide described the **black-billed magpie** this way:

"He is very pert in all his actions, both in trees and on the ground, and is always ready for mischief... they are also very noisy and forever scolding and chattering among themselves."

and you'll see wild diversity ...



3

long-eared owl

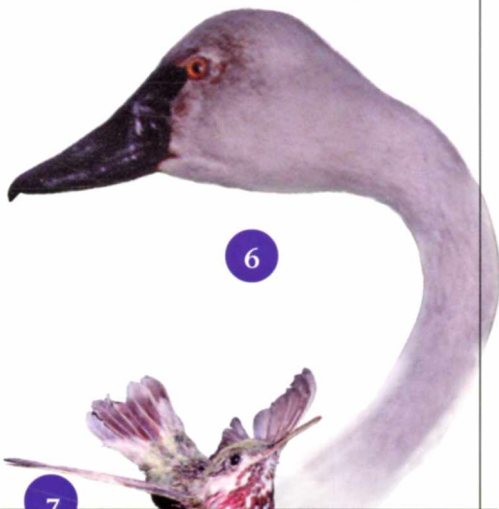
Harlan Smith's 1914 handbook noted the existence of **long-eared** owls in the park, though no one else had seen them. Sixty years later, the park officially identified its first wild long-eared owl.

It's not the first time we've overlooked something in nature. In 1992, naturalist Peter Sherrington discovered a major migration route for **golden eagles** that passes over Banff. Up to 8 thousand golden eagles migrate in spring and fall, but the phenomenon had gone largely unnoticed until then.



4

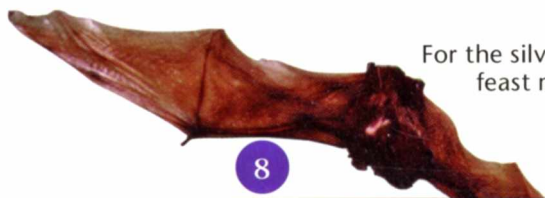
golden eagle



6

7

Look up, and you'll find the **tundra swan**, North America's third largest bird. But nearby, you'll find the tiny **calliope hummingbird**. At 7 cm., it is the continent's smallest bird.



For the silver-haired bat, an all-evening feast might mean eating an insect every seven seconds!

Every face tells a story ...

... especially the animal faces surrounding you. Looking around can give you clues to how we viewed animals at the turn of the century.

No, you're not going colour-blind. The **grey wolf** appears in shades ranging from black (like this specimen) to almost pure white.



Predators were once considered a menace, and mounted to look fearsome. Even the museum's 1914 guide called predators like the wolf "cunning and merciless," while **white-tailed deer** were "happy and care free."



Columbian
ground squirrel

10

All creatures...

...great and small

Harlan Smith's new exhibits also revealed the relationships between animals. While 60 million **plains bison** once ruled the west, they didn't do it alone. Burrowing animals like the Richardson's ground squirrel, badgers, or this **Columbian ground squirrel** broke the ground beneath the massive herds' weight, preventing the prairie from being trampled.



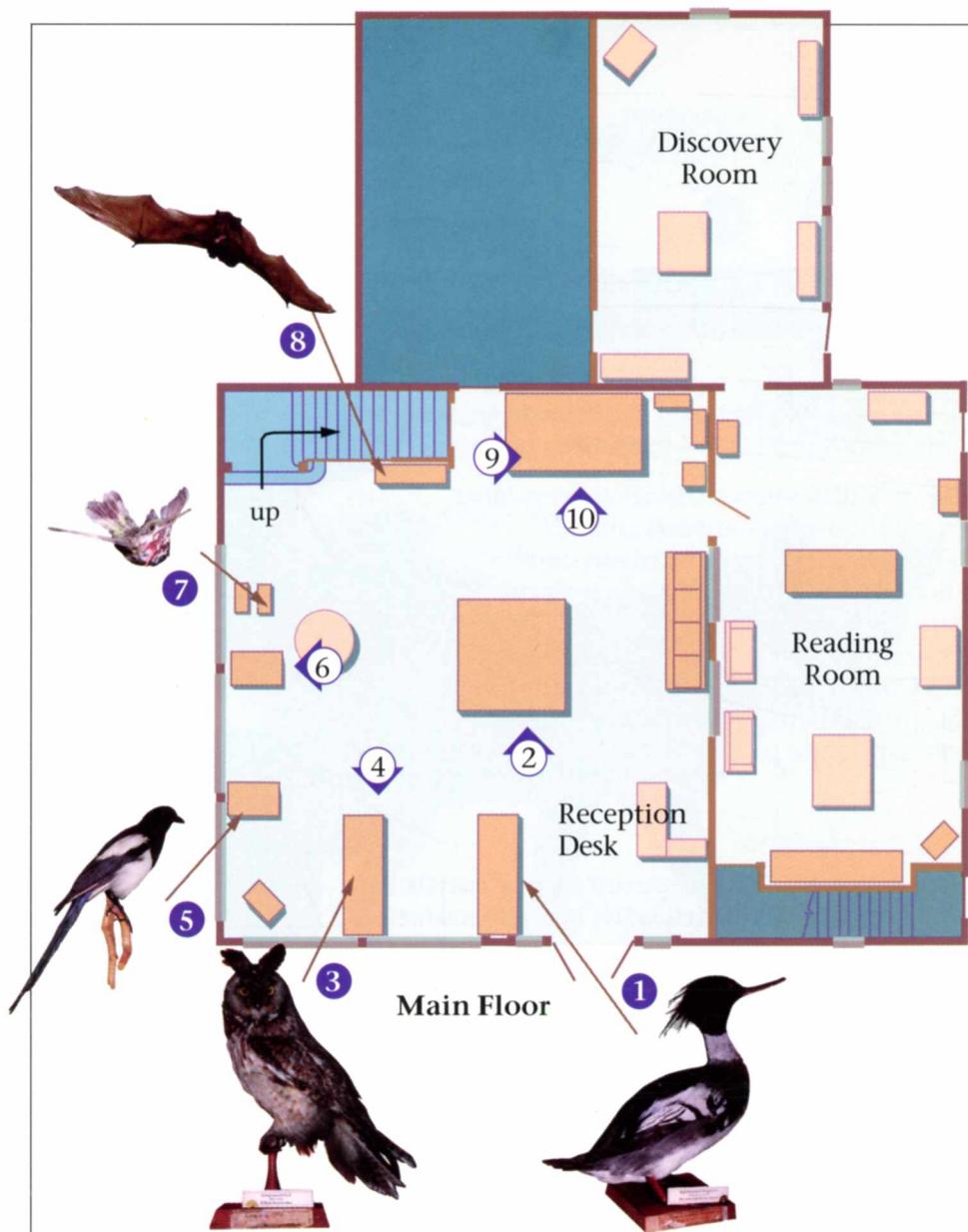
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The museum's story continues upstairs, with more fascinating discoveries like this ...



He's no vegetarian, but up to 90% of the massive **grizzly bear's** seasonal diet can come from roots, berries, seeds, flowers, and other plant material.

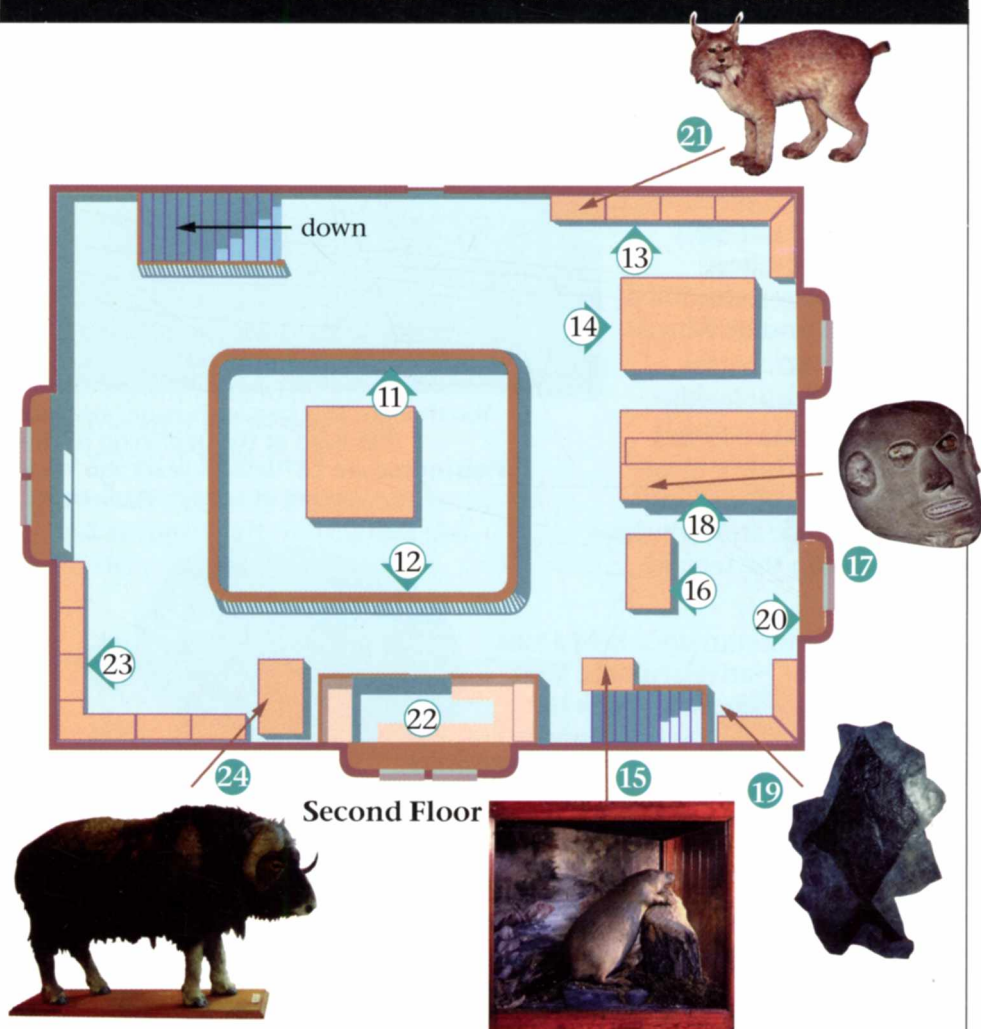
14



It's hard to believe this magnificent building was nearly demolished.

By the late 1950s, the museum was considered a firetrap, and the Parks Service ordered its destruction. Objections from a prominent citizen helped reverse the death order.

The Banff Park Museum ... a national historic site



In 1985, the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada recognized the significance of the Banff Park Museum, and it became a **national historic site**. This designation recognizes the museum's early contribution to natural history education in Canada and the building's unique architecture. It is one of Western Canada's first natural history museums, and the best surviving example of a rustic, Swiss-influenced design popular in early park buildings.

A bit of this ...

The museum's policy was to only collect "specimens of natural history which pertained to the park," but early visitors might have thought they'd stumbled into P.T. Barnum's American Museum!

15



You thought this **beaver** is huge? Beavers that lived at the beginning of the Pleistocene era 1.87 million years ago were as big as today's black bears.

Many of these curious items have since found their way to other museums, but you'll still find many strange and wonderful items on the second floor!

The Banff Museum once held a vast collection of Native artifacts. Most of these objects now reside in the Glenbow and Luxton museums, but a few remain here.



16

nesting abalone shells

Dreams inspired the sculptures of **Wolf Collar**, a Blackfoot shaman who carved this stone face sometime after 1900.



17

... a bit of that

Who is "**GS**"? The Hudson's Bay Company's "Little Emperor", **George Simpson**, once governed over three-quarters of Canada's landmass. Did he or his men carve this inscription when they passed through the area in 1841?

18



Hell no, I won't go ...

When one of Banff's early game wardens and outfitters hauled this huge Devonian **fish fossil** into the museum, he caused a lot of excitement. Seeing this rare specimen, Dr. Harlan Smith demanded warden Bill Peyto take him to where it was found.

"We will like hell," Peyto shot back, and abruptly left. To this day, the mystery remains unsolved.



19

Wild Bill strikes again

Bill Peyto caused even more excitement when he hauled a live lynx, tied up on his back, into a local bar. Whether or not he released the zoo-bound wildcat inside the establishment is unclear, but either way, Peyto had discovered a sure-fire way to empty the place.

This 233 pound **ironstone concretion** came into the museum on the back of who else? Bill Peyto! Created when sediments cement themselves to an organic core — perhaps a leaf, a tooth or a fossil — a concretion forms like a giant pearl.



20

Bill Peyto and the infamous lynx.





Norman Bethune
Sanson, 1862-1949

Norman Sanson arrived in Banff after fighting the 1885 Riel Resistance with the Queen's Own Rifles. He became the museum's second curator in 1896, holding the position for 32 years.

Sanson wanted to make the park museum "the best of its kind in Canada," a "University of the Hills." In many ways, it was. Sanson personally collected thousands of specimens, covering 20 thousand miles on foot and horseback. He traded specimens and ideas with scientists world-wide, and attracted cutting-edge experts to the museum.

Wanted - One Museum Curator

In 1895, Professor John Macoun suggested the museum hire a curator with these qualifications:

- a man of wide intelligence
- energetic (not a hotel lounge)
- ought to be able to skin a bird or a mammal
- will talk natural history, mineralogy, geology or anything else to the visitor
- a political bloke should be the last man for that place

Noticing the disappearance of the **yellow lady's slipper**, Sanson transplanted several bulbs into remote areas to protect them from what he called "the marauding tourists."



These **exotic butterflies** arrived through Norman Sanson's global trading network.



Professor Mulvaney's Revenge

Norman Sanson had difficulty saying "no" to museum donations, though he once removed a platypus for being "too foreign." National Parks Mammalogist, Dr. C.D.H. Clarke, was not amused when he wrote in 1940:

23

"... the most obvious feature about the whole collection is the lack of any plan or purpose in its assembly...except to assemble ... I presume if Professor Mulvaney had presented his prize pickled tapeworm it would have been given a place of honour."

Gone up Sulphur

At age 70, Norman Sanson marked his 1,000th ascent of Sulphur Mountain. Working also as the area meteorologist since 1896, he had climbed the mountain every two weeks to collect weather data.

As a fitting tribute, the Geographic Board of Canada named the highest point of Sulphur Mountain "Sanson Peak."



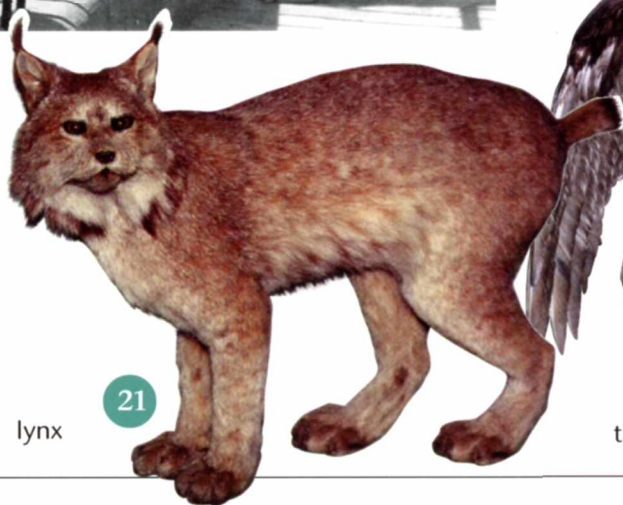
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One of our best-travelled specimens, this female **muskox** was collected near Alaska and mounted in Rochester, New York.

The Banff Park Zoo

Just behind the museum, live "specimens" inhabited the Banff Park Zoo. Some animals that died here found their way into the museum's collection.

From 1904 to 1937, the zoo boasted local and exotic animals - including a pair of rhesus monkeys, exotic pheasants, peacocks, and polar bears! At its peak, the zoo housed 58 animals in cement and iron cages then considered modern. But as funds dwindled and conservation attitudes changed, the zoo's popularity faded. When the zoo closed, its occupants were either released into the wild or sent to other zoos.



lynx

21

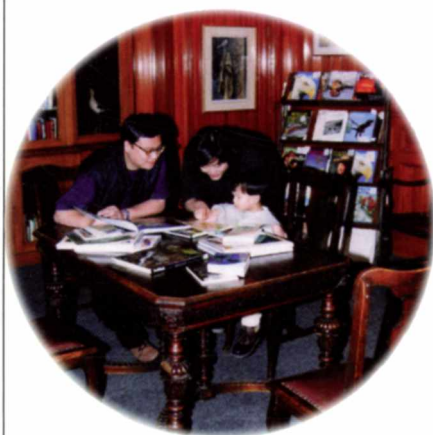


turkey vulture

2

More to explore downstairs!

In the **Discovery Room**, children can explore Banff's natural history through hands-on activity. We have games, puzzles, picture books, animal pelts and videos to make learning fun!

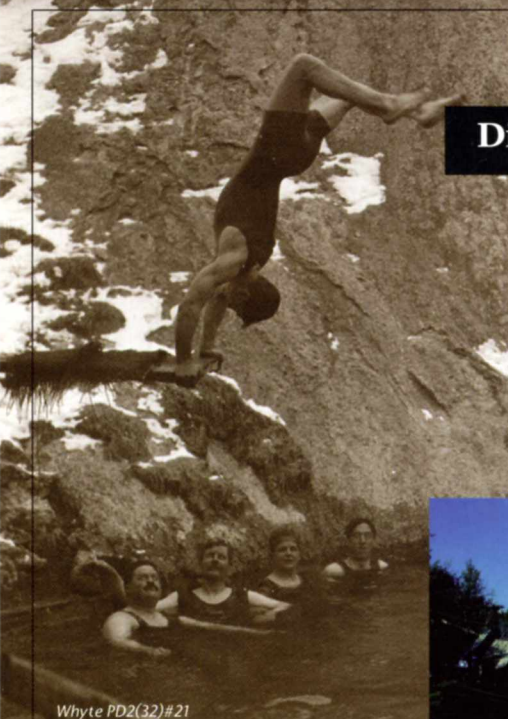


The elegant **Reading Room** is a place to relax, write a postcard, or peruse leading natural history magazines. We also provide up-to-date reports on park programs that study threatened species such as harlequin ducks, bull trout, grizzly bears and wolves.

Touring the Banff Park Museum today, you've discovered a grand building restored to her original splendour. She stands as a "museum of a museum," a looking glass into science at the turn of the century.

The museum also holds lessons for the future. With each visit, the collection reveals more of its stories to scientists, to historians, to visitors, and even to the people who work here! By preserving her as a national historic site, we ensure the Banff Park Museum's continuing contributions to Canadian science, education, history and architecture.





Dive into Banff's past . . .

You just might uncover ***10 thousand years*** of human history! Today, we have seven national historic sites, 35 federal heritage buildings, plus many other places that unravel Banff's colourful past.

Here are a few highlights:

Cave and Basin National Historic Site

These warm, bubbling mineral springs inspired the establishment of Canada's first national park. Interpretive exhibits, self-guiding trails, and the original cave are just a few attractions.

Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies

Explore the lives of Banff's early artists and mountain pioneers. The museum offers fascinating historical displays, art exhibitions, and the Archives of the Canadian Rockies.

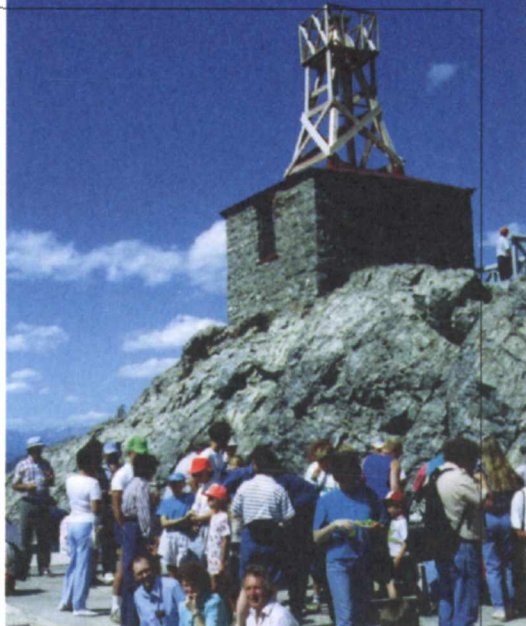
Luxton Museum of the Plains Indians

Celebrate the richness and diversity of the area's First Nations. Visit a traditional tepee or marvel at ornamented clothing of the Rocky Mountains and Northern Plains Indians.



Sulphur Mountain Observatory

One of Banff's best views! From the top of Sulphur Mountain's Gondola Lift, follow the one kilometre boardwalk to the 1903 Observatory. Norman Sanson often made this climb — from the base of Sulphur — in less than two hours! The path also leads to the **Sulphur Mountain Cosmic Ray Station National Historic Site**.



Bankhead

This booming coal mining centre once had 900 residents. Explore the ruins of the abandoned town and its mining operations along interpretive trails.

Banff Historical Walking Tour

Commemorative plaques steer you along the trail of Banff's historic buildings. You'll find the tour booklet at the town office, park museum, information centre, or many other locations throughout Banff.

For more information about these attractions, ask the museum attendant or visit the Banff Information Centre.



Thank you to the Friends of Banff National Park for assistance in funding this guidebook.

Research and writing: Steve Gin

Design and illustration: Howard Coneybeare

Contemporary photos: Brian Merry, Parks Canada, and Banff Lifts Ltd.

Historic photos: Whyte Museum, Archives and Library of the Canadian Rockies



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