



Waterton Lakes National Park of Canada

Climate

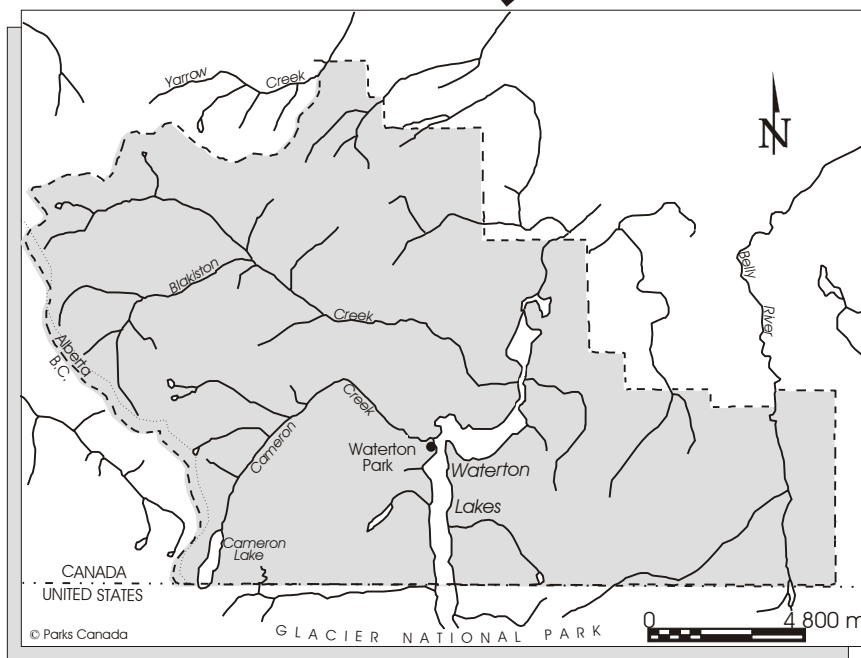
While Waterton receives cold, dry weather from the northeast, most of Waterton's weather comes from the Pacific coast. Those warm, moist winds make Waterton the wettest place in Alberta, with an average annual precipitation of 1 072 mm. Winds are an important part of Waterton's climate. With average winds of 32 km/h, Waterton is also one of the windiest places in Alberta. Winds gusting well over 100 km/h are common in the winter. Most of the very strong winds are chinooks. These warm winds are famous for creating large, sudden rises in winter temperatures. Waterton's unique climate is an important reason why so much variety is found within this small park.

Geology

The park's rugged, windswept mountains rise suddenly out of gentle prairie grasses. These mountains are made of some of the oldest sedimentary rock in the Canadian Rockies. These rocks formed in a sea that existed over 1 500 million years ago in what is now British Columbia. About 75 million years ago, a massive sheet of rocks were pushed up along a huge fault and pushed eastward about 100 km up and over young prairie rocks. Later, glaciers and water shaped this landscape, leaving features like cirques, eskers, and alluvial fans. The Upper Waterton Lake sits in a glacier-carved U-shaped valley and is the deepest lake in the Canadian Rockies.

Location

Waterton Lakes National Park is located in the southwest corner of Alberta on the Montana and British Columbia borders and covers 505 km². The park was established in 1895, making it Canada's fourth national park. It represents the southern Rocky Mountains, where some of the most ancient mountains in the Rockies abruptly meet the prairie. It is a landscape shaped by wind, fire and floods; with a rich variety of plants and wildlife. Together with its neighbour, Glacier National Park (USA), the park forms the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park World Heritage Site. Waterton Lakes is located in the Montane Cordillera Ecozone.

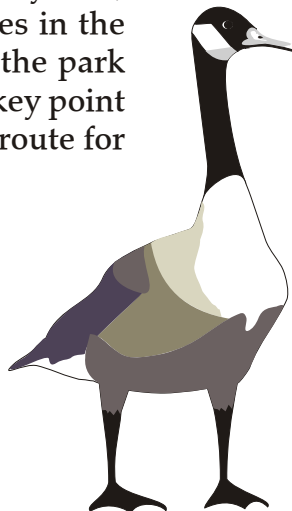


Vegetation

Waterton is a place where prairie and mountains meet. Its plant communities have unusual combinations of species. Prairie grasses grow with mountain plants. Glacier lilies, usually found in mountain meadows, are also found in low elevation aspen groves. The park has 45 different habitat types, including grasslands, shrub lands, wetlands, spruce-fir, pine and aspen forests, and alpine meadows. This means the park has an extraordinary number of plants for its size, with over 970 species. Many of these are rare or threatened. Fire has played an important role in shaping the landscape and its plants. Park Wardens are now carefully reintroducing fire to the park ecosystem.

Wildlife

The park's variety of vegetation provides home for over 60 mammals, over 250 birds, 24 fish, and 10 reptiles and amphibians. The grasslands are important winter range for ungulates such as elk, mule deer, and white-tailed deer. In autumn, the marsh and lake areas of the park are heavily used by migrating ducks, swans and geese. Large predators include wolf, coyote, cougar, grizzly and black bears. Waterton is part of the Crown of the Continent ecosystem, which is one of the narrowest places in the rocky mountain chain. This means the park and its surrounding region sit on a key point of an important north-south travel route for wildlife.



Activities

Waterton is small and easy to explore. Four scenic parkways cross through different landscapes. All lead to popular attractions. The Entrance Parkway features views of the Waterton Lakes chain and ends at the small community of Waterton Park. The Akamina Parkway takes you through a mountain valley to Cameron Lake, a great place for strolling, hiking and boating. The Red Rock Parkway is one of the best places for Waterton's most popular activity - wildlife viewing. The road ends at Red Rock Canyon, a great place for picnics, hiking, horseback riding, cycling and photography. Travellers on the Chief Mountain Highway can view the site of the 1998 Sofa Mountain Fire as they head south across the border to Glacier National Park in the USA. Waterton also has three campgrounds, a golf course, a variety of interpretive programs and exhibits, and an unforgettable boat tour down the beautiful Upper Waterton Lake.

For more information, contact:
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