

# Kootenay National Park

Cover: Timberline at Sinclair Pass

"Paint Pots" or ochre beds

Floe Lake

## 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 landforms in this immense country, and Canada's national parks have been created to preserve important examples for you and for 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."

Kootenay National Park preserves a spectacular 543-square-mile area on the western slope of the Rocky Mountains, with two river valleys of different character, high glaciers and deep canyons, and icy alpine lakes as well as hot springs.

The park is situated in southeastern British Columbia, 91 miles north of Cranbrook, and borders on both Banff and Yoho National Parks.

## The park environment

Each national park has its own character, its unique story as a living outdoor museum. The Kootenay story is the influence of climate, mountains and valleys on the variety of vegetation and wildlife found in the park.

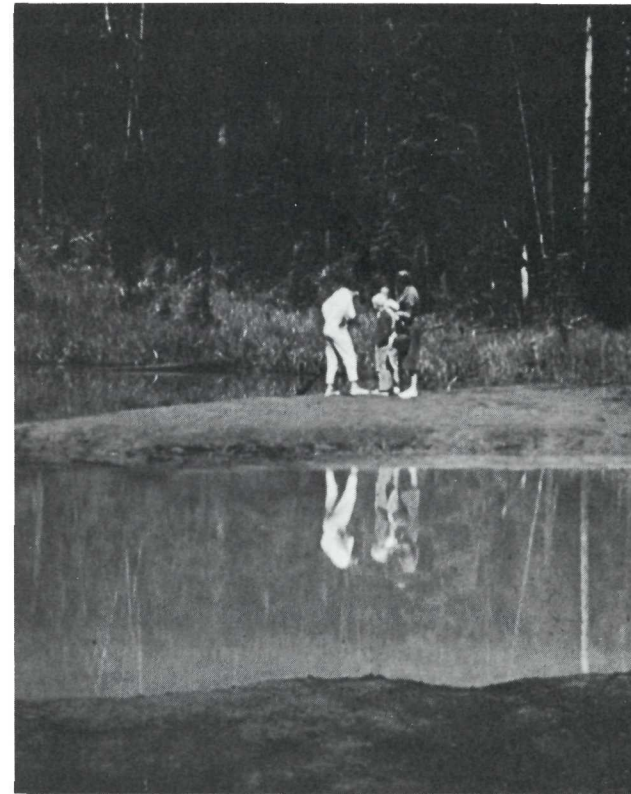
## The land: canyons and hot springs

Kootenay stretches for approximately 65 miles parallel with the northwest-southeast direction of the Rocky Mountains and surrounds a section of the Banff-Windermere Highway between Vermilion Pass and the Columbia Valley. The highway follows two main river valleys, the Vermilion in the north and the Kootenay in the south, crosses the Vermilion, Mitchell and Brisco Ranges and two passes, Vermilion (5,416 feet) and Sinclair (4,875 feet). The southwestern section of the park extends westward from the Kootenay River and follows Sinclair Creek down the eastern slope of the Columbia River Valley.

The mountain ranges along the park's northeastern boundary consist of nearly flat-lying rocks and their peaks look like layer cakes or ancient castles. The remainder of Kootenay's mountains, however, are cut into rock masses that have been severely folded or faulted to produce peaks in a wide variety of shapes.

The descent from Vermilion Pass is gradual, with splendid views of hanging glaciers. Marble Canyon is one of the famous landmarks here. Part way up, an arch of natural rock bridges the narrow chasm, and the canyon culminates in a spectacular 70-foot waterfall at the upper end. The canyon was formed by the waters of Tokumm Creek eroding the rock at a break in the earth's crust.

The Ochre Beds or "paint pots" are also in this area. Springs bring a peculiar colouration of iron oxide to the surface, staining everything with a rusty red hue.



Mountains on either side of the Vermilion Valley are sufficiently high to support numerous snowfields and glaciers. In summer these feed swift-flowing mountain streams that rush down steep valleys to join the principal rivers. There are also several beautiful lakes among the lofty peaks.

The rugged eastern escarpment of the Vermilion Range is known as the Rock Wall, accessible by several trails from the main highway.

The Radium Hot Springs, at the foot of Redstreak Mountain, are the result of surface waters seeping deep along the Redwall fault to very hot rock masses. The resulting steam rises through cracks and fissures, condenses and returns to the surface as hot water.

## The plants: alpine and subalpine

The U-shaped valleys of the Kootenay and the Vermilion are well forested and provide a variety of habitat. The climate of the park's southern portion within the Columbia and Kootenay valleys is characterized by hot, dry summers, moderate winters, and low annual precipitation. In contrast, the Vermilion Valley, in the northern portion of the park, experiences moderate summer temperatures and rainfall, and more severe winters.

This marked difference in climate, combined with differences in elevation, has resulted in distinct environ-



ments or life zones. The park visitor moves through three life zones while travelling north along highway 93 from Radium Hot Springs. At the southern end of the highway along Sinclair Creek is the dry Douglas fir zone, and the trees here include Douglas fir, western larch, western red cedar, Douglas maple, lodgepole pine, trembling aspen and Rocky Mountain juniper.

In the Kootenay Valley elements of both the Douglas fir and subalpine spruce-fir zones have combined to create a transitional zone. Disturbances such as forest fires, wind storms and insect infestations in this transitional zone have resulted in a mixed environment.

Mount Wardle at 9,218 feet is the southernmost extension of the Vermilion mountain range which acts as a boundary between the two life zones. It too contains elements of both, which results in a diversity of flora and fauna.

The Vermilion Valley is a subalpine spruce-fir zone. Engelmann's spruce is dominant at lower levels and alpine fir at higher elevations. Other trees within this zone include the lodgepole, whitebark and limber pine, western red cedar, Douglas maple, alpine larch and various species of willow.

From the highway, visitors can see, on the mountains above them, the alpine zone, an area above the timberline or in excess of 6,500 - 7,000 feet in elevation, consisting

of high windswept meadows and exposed plateaus or barrens. The climate is extreme and variable and few trees survive here. Dominant shrubs and flowers include red mountain heath, white mountain heather, dwarf willows, bog laurel, black crowberry, yellow mountain avens and cut-leaved fleabane.

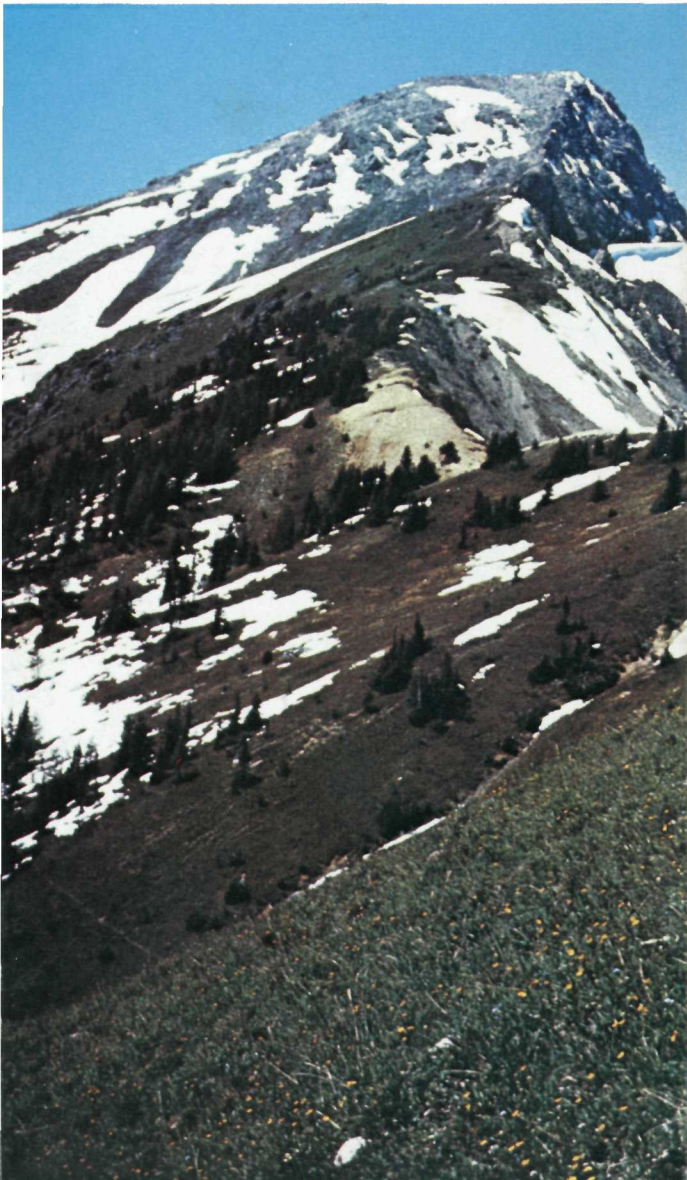
Small lakes and ponds are found in the Kootenay Valley. Most occur as a result of glaciation: pools, marshes and small lakes have become established in glacial kettles. Wildflowers are found in abundance throughout these zones, in alpine meadows and on mountain slopes. Even their names promise visual delights - mariposa lily, purple clematis, dwarf Canadian primrose, western anemone, white globe-flower, balsamroot, avalanche or snow lily, alpine saxifrage, butterwort and Venus'-slipper orchid.

## The animals: each seeks its own habitat

Animals frequent those areas which best supply their food and shelter needs. Like plantlife, they depend on suitable environment for their survival. Some of the larger mammals and the birds are migratory in their habits, and the places where they are found depend on the season.

The elk or wapiti and mule deer migrate up the river valleys in the spring, behind the melting snows, until they reach timberline, where they spend the summer. They retreat from these areas in the fall and pass the winter in

British Columbia



the valley bottoms and on lower mountain slopes.

Bighorn sheep summer in the high alpine zone and move to open grassy slopes at lower elevations before winter arrives. Throughout the summer they frequently move down from their alpine range to soil licks near the Radium Hot Springs pools.

Mountain goats are found in all the higher mountain regions of the park, and Mount Wardle is one of the best places to see them from the highway. White-tailed deer, moose, mountain lion, grizzly and black bear also inhabit the park.

Smaller mammals, which are seldom seen, include the wolverine, marten, mink, beaver, lynx, snowshoe hare, hoary marmot, Columbian ground squirrel, pika, red squirrel, chipmunk, meadow vole, white-footed mouse and dusky shrew.

Birdlife is not plentiful either in species or numbers in Kootenay. In the Douglas fir forest western tanager, pine siskin and Audubon warbler are abundant, while Cassin's finch, white-crowned sparrow and blue grouse are less common but characteristic. In the Engelmann's spruce forest characteristic species include the northern three-toed woodpecker, olive-sided flycatcher, Canada jay, Hudsonian chickadee, red-breasted nuthatch, olive-backed thrush and evening grosbeak.

#### A brief park history

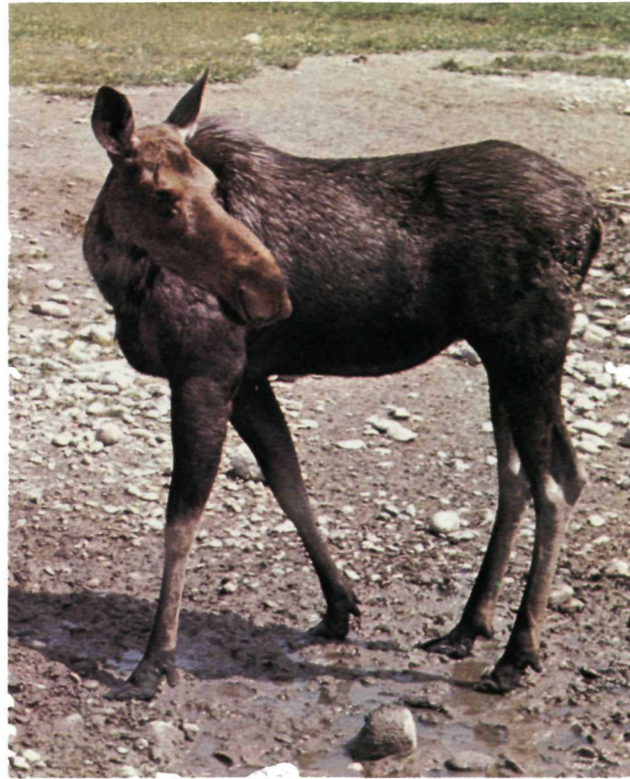
"Kootenay" is an anglicized version of the Indian word "K'tunaxa" meaning "strangers" or "people from beyond the hills." Prairie Indians are believed to have been the first to use this term in reference to the local Indians.

Pictographs near the Radium Hot Springs suggest that these springs were a favourite gathering place of Indian bands, from both the mountains and the prairies.

During the 1840's, Sir George Simpson and James Sinclair were the first Europeans to pass through the area now occupied by the park. Both were employees of the Hudson's Bay Company, interested in investigating routes through the mountains to the Columbia River and later in bringing settlers to the area.

About 1881 John McKay homesteaded a large tract of land along the Columbia River, which included the Radium Hot Springs. The first wagon road to the hot springs from the Golden-Windermere Road was completed in 1911. That same year John Harmsworth undertook development of the springs and vicinity as a public bathing area. He built two log buildings and a pool.

In 1916 the Province of British Columbia transferred to the Dominion government a strip of land on either side of a proposed road from Banff to Windermere. In return for this land, which was to be used for a park, the Dominion government agreed to build the road which became known as the Banff-Windermere Highway. Kootenay National Park was established in 1922.



#### How to get there

Motorists from Lake Louise or Banff use the Trans-Canada Highway, turning off at Eisenhower Junction onto Highway 93 and driving about six miles through Banff National Park into Kootenay.

Visitors using Highway 95 from Golden, B.C. (67 miles north of the park entrance) or from Cranbrook, B.C. (91 miles south) should turn off the highway at Radium Hot Springs at the intersection of Highways 93 and 95.

There is a daily bus service to Radium Hot Springs from Cranbrook and Golden.

There is a daylight landing strip for light aircraft just outside the park boundary at Radium Hot Springs. The nearest commercial airport is at Cranbrook, B.C.

#### How to enjoy the park

*Season* – The park is open all year but most tourist services are available only from May through September. Summer is the busiest time; however, visitors to the park at other seasons are increasing every year. Nature study, photography and swimming are popular the year round in Kootenay. Fishing, mountain climbing and camping are favourite summer activities, and trail skiing and snowshoeing are increasing in popularity during the winter months.

*Boating* – Rowboats, canoes, floats and rafts may not be used on the park lakes. Permission from the park super-

intendent is required to use an unpowered boat, canoe, raft or float on the Kootenay River.

*Fishing* – The Vermilion, Simpson, and Kootenay Rivers, their tributaries, and several lakes provide excellent angling for various species of fish, including Dolly Varden, eastern brook, cutthroat and rainbow trout. A regular stocking program using modern methods of fish management is carried out to maintain fish in several lakes. Up-to-date information on fishing regulations, licences, seasons and bag limits is available from the park information centre, park wardens and at the campgrounds.

*Hiking* – This is one of the best ways to explore a national park. The park's many miles of trails are marked on a topographical map, available from the administration office or information centres. Many trails start from the highway and lead to lakes, glaciers, and high alpine country above timberline. Most of the trails are readily accessible for day hikes, others are suited to overnight trips.

*Mountain climbing* – For the protection of mountain climbers, all travel off the park trails must be registered with a park warden before and after the climb. Inexperienced climbers should obtain the services of a guide and full information about necessary equipment.

*Snowmobiles* – As these machines can be harmful to plants and animals, their use in the park is banned.

*Swimming* – The Aquacourt at Radium Hot Springs is open the year round and provides two outdoor pools, dressing accommodation and showers. The waters, which have a temperature of approximately 113 degrees F. at their source, issue from shattered rocks at the base of Redstreak Mountain.

There are also plunge pools, steam rooms and a massage concession in the Aquacourt. These and a coffee shop are open from mid-May through September.

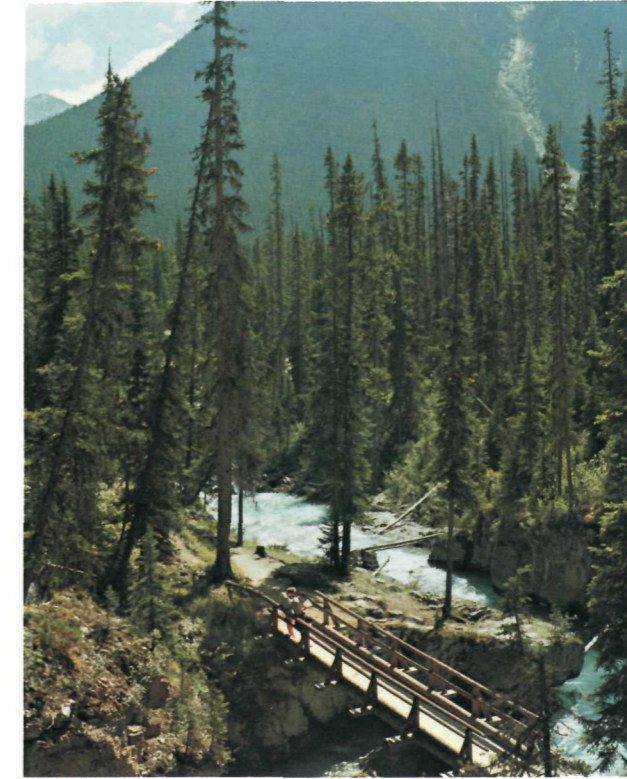
#### Some don'ts

National parks are selected areas set apart as nature sanctuaries and special care is taken to maintain them in their natural state. For this reason, all wildlife, plants, trees, rocks and fossils are to be left undisturbed. Even the wildflowers are not to be picked; they must be left for others to enjoy. Feeding, touching or molesting wild animals is not permitted.

#### Fires

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 trail travel.

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.



#### Where to stay

Camping brings visitors into the closest contact with their natural environment. Facilities are provided at Redstreak, McLeod Meadows and Marble Canyon campgrounds for tenting, trailers and other forms of motor camping. Daily fees at campsites vary and depend on whether the site is unserviced, has electricity or is equipped with electrical, water and sewage connections. Camping space is allocated on a first-come, first-served basis and therefore reservations cannot be accepted. Campgrounds open about May 15 and close about September 30, depending on weather conditions. The maximum allowable stay in a campground is two weeks.

Visitors on overnight trail trips may camp outside established campgrounds, provided they register with a park warden before and after each trip.

Private campgrounds are also available, situated west of the park along Highway 95.

Additional accommodation is offered at Radium Hot Springs and Vermilion Crossing, where visitors will also find restaurants, stores, laundries and other services.

#### How to get the most out of your visit

To help you understand and appreciate Kootenay's complex natural environment, you are urged to take advantage of the free interpretive program, conducted by the park naturalist and his trained staff. It will provide you with an insight into how climate, water, land forms, plants and animals are interrelated, and it will make your stay more rewarding.

During the day there are conducted field trips; in the evening informative talks, illustrated with slides or films, are given in the campground theatres.

Self-guiding trails, exhibits, interpretive signs and viewpoints also explain the park's natural features.

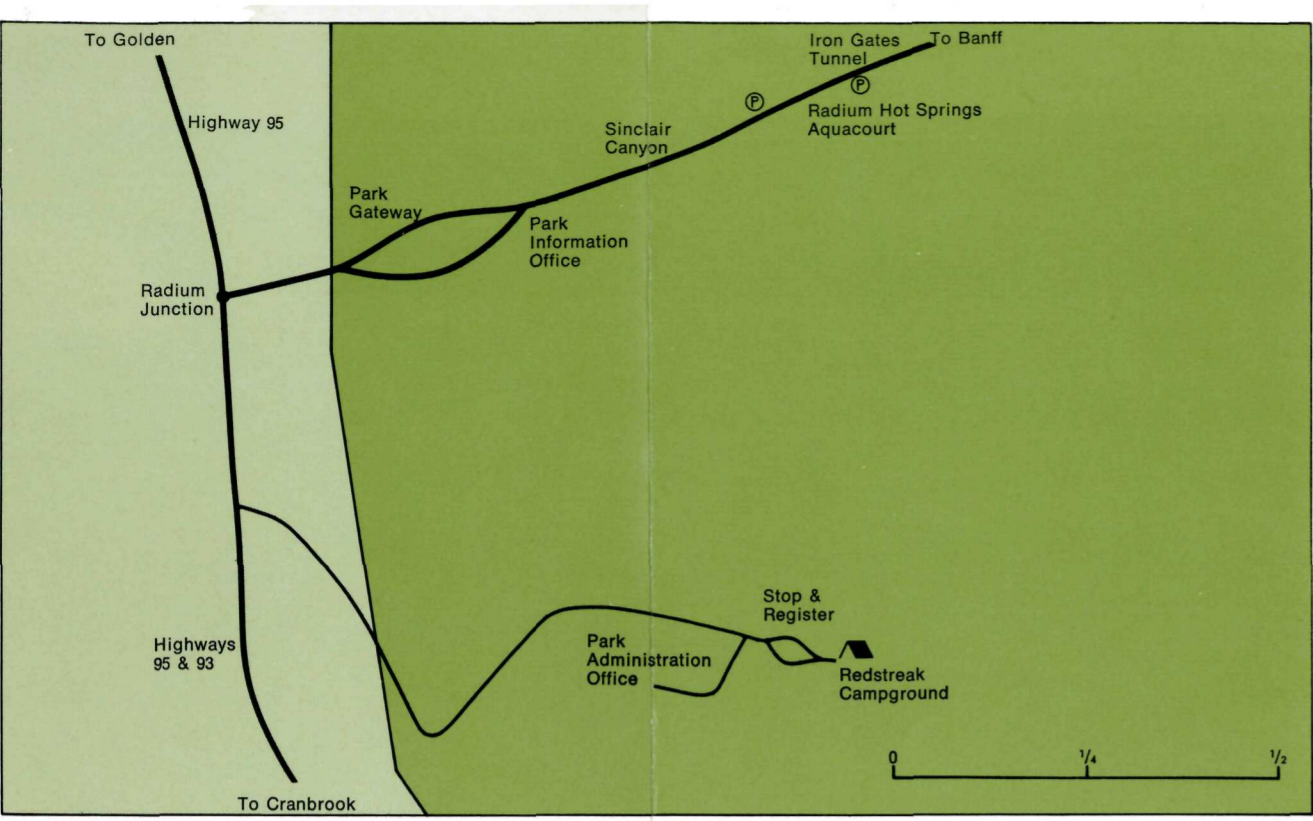
Information on the interpretive program is available from bulletin boards, information centres, and the park staff. Special groups, including school, scout and guide organizations, may take advantage of these programs throughout the year.

#### Where to get information

Information can be obtained from the park gate at Radium Hot Springs. During the summer season detailed information is also available from the park information centre just inside the park gate and from the exhibit centre at Marble Canyon at the north end of the park. Uniformed staff will answer questions, provide maps, outline travel routes and refer visitors to the various areas and facilities in the park. Special events are posted on bulletin boards.

Park wardens and park naturalists, though not primarily responsible for general information, will help visitors whenever possible.

Additional information about the park is available from the Superintendent, Kootenay National Park, Radium Hot Springs, British Columbia. For information about other national parks, write to the Director, National and Historic Parks Branch, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Ottawa 4, Ontario.



# Kootenay National Park

- Highway
- Secondary Road
- Walking or Hiking Trail
- Railroad
- Lake, River, Creek
- Glacier
- Mountain
- Warden's Cabin
- Picnic Area
- Accommodation
- Campground
- Viewpoint
- Nature Trail
- Fire Lookout
- Parking

