

NATIONAL PARKS OF CANADA

bird of a series of ten radio talks on the natural resources of Canada, given by the Honourable T. A. Crerar, Minister of Mines and Technical Surveys, over the national network of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, at 10.30 E.S.T., Wednesday evening, February 17, 1937.

Last week I spoke about the forest wealth of Canada. To-night I wish to discuss another of our important resources—our National Park system, the administration of which is one of the functions of the Department of Mines and Resources.

The establishment of National Parks is one of the more interesting developments of the present century. Originally set aside to preserve the scenery, the natural and historical objects, and the wild life of the country so as to leave them unimpaired for the use of future generations, they have proved to be one of the major attractions for the tourist trade, an industry which last year reached a value of more than \$250,000,000.

The popularity of our national parks, not only with Canadians, but with visitors from abroad, is reflected in the figures for tourist travel to these areas during the nine months ending December 31, 1936, when more than 896,000 visitors entered the National Parks of Canada. This is an all-time record, and represents an increase of more than fifteen per cent over the total for the preceding twelve months.

The swift onrush of settlement, and the advance of industry have brought about, in many countries, needless destruction of natural beauty and wild life, and widespread alienation of public lands. When the necessity for conservation became apparent, Canada still possessed large tracts where primitive and unspoiled conditions prevailed, and wisely set apart large and representative areas for the benefit, education, and enjoyment of the people.

In these areas are preserved the scenery, the flora, and fauna, typical of that part of Canada in which the park is situated. From the snow-capped peaks of the Rockies to the surf-washed cliffs of Cape Breton Island, these great natural playgrounds offer to the visitor exceptional opportunities for the renewal of health and vigour in the stimulating atmosphere of the great outdoors.

The establishment of Canada's original national park grew out of an incident in the building of our first transcontinental railway. When the railroad was being pushed westward from the prairies, construction engineers discovered hot sulphur springs on the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains. The curative properties of these waters gave rise to many offers for the purchase or lease of the site; and in order to preserve the springs for all time for the people of Canada, the Dominion Government, in 1885, set aside a surrounding area of ten square miles. So impressed were early travellers with the scenery in the locality that the Government was urged to substantially enlarge this reservation as a public domain, and in 1887 an Act of Parliament was passed, establishing what is now the Banff National Park.

Since that time the system of National Parks has been built up by the addition of other areas, until it now consists of twenty separate park units, having a total area of more than 12,500 square miles, which is almost equal to the combined areas of the states of Massachusetts and Connecticut.

Within the parks, the Government is responsible for protection. This includes protection from the menace of wild life, preserving the natural beauty of the landscape, and standing points of interest by the construction of roads and making provision for the convenience and comfort of visitors. The establishment of the first national park the Government has in approximately \$30,000,000, including administrative costs, in developing and maintaining our national scenic and recreational areas. Canada is now receiving cash dividends on this investment through the expenditures made by the ever-increasing stream of tourists who annually visit these holiday lands, as well as dividends in health and enjoyment to her own people.

The great mountain playgrounds include Banff, Jasper, and Waterton Lakes Parks in Alberta, and Kootenay, Yoho, Glacier, and Mount Revelstoke Parks in British Columbia. Here amid a sea of mountains are scenes of magnificent alpine grandeur. Majestic peaks, many of them snow-capped, with glacier-covered slopes, rise to tremendous heights. In between lie beautiful valleys, clothed with the diverse greens of forests, and set with sparkling lakes, beautiful in colour. On the upper slopes are the alplands—wildflower gardens with a profusion of colour. Madly tumbling torrents rush from the icy summits, and waterfalls drop for a thousand feet down the sides of canyon and gorge.

Within the area of the mountain parks is the great Columbia ice-field, the accumulation of snows and ice for untold centuries, the area of which has been estimated at about 110 square miles. Lifted high on the shoulders of a score of mighty peaks, it forms the geographical centre of the water system of one-quarter of the continent, and feeds the glaciers that move slowly down to the valleys below. It has been well called the "Mother of Rivers," for from this sea of ice issue streams which take their way finally to three oceans, the Pacific, the Arctic, and the Atlantic through Hudson Bay.

The prairie provinces of Saskatchewan and Manitoba also have their share of National Parks. North of the great grain belt in Saskatchewan lies Prince Albert Park. Here scores of lakes, ranging from tiny rock basins to bodies of water fifty miles long, are woven into continuous waterways by innumerable small rivers. With its background of romance and adventure dating from the days of the fur trade, Prince Albert Park has a particular appeal to the camper, fisherman, and canoeist. Along the water highways that lie like a network over the northern part of the park, the trader, trapper, and voyageur travelled to and from the Mackenzie Valley, and Hudson Bay.

Riding Mountain Park in Manitoba is located north of the most thickly populated area of the Canadian prairies, and attracts many visitors from this section, and from the Mississippi Valley in the United States, which is served by the famous Jefferson highway that stretches from the Gulf of Mexico to the Canadian border. Its picturesque scenery and typical wild life, together with its happy location on a well-forested tableland containing several delightful lakes, 1,500 feet above the surrounding plain, provide an attractive change to the dwellers of the level prairie lands.

The recreational parks in the east offer to the people in that part of Canada, and to residents of nearby cities and towns across the International Boundary, opportunities for relaxation comparatively close at hand. Consequently these parks are extremely popular, and the number of visitors runs to hundreds of thousands each season. In Ontario there are three National Parks, namely, Point Pelee Park, extending into Lake Erie;

as Park, consisting of a group of islands in the famed region; and St. Lawrence Islands Park in the Thousand , comprising a number of islands and a mainland reservation. Dominion Government, with the co-operation of the two provinces, recently been able to establish parks in Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. The Cape Breton Highlands Park in Nova Scotia includes an area of 458 square miles in the northern part of Cape Breton Island. Its many attractions include the rugged, but picturesque coastline, with its mountain background. The Prince Edward Island site is a strip approximately twenty miles in length along the north shore of the Island; and through its establishment as a Park area some of the finest salt-water bathing beaches in Eastern Canada will be preserved as a national playground.

It was early realized that one of the first essentials to the full enjoyment of the parks development is the construction of roads and trails leading to outstanding points of beauty and interest. Since the inception of the National Parks Service, more than 700 miles of motor highways and secondary roads have been constructed. At the administrative centres of the larger parks picturesque towns have grown up, in which the buildings erected harmonize with the beauty of the surrounding landscape.

The demand for good roads is one of the developments of modern motor travel. Realizing the importance of providing dustless all-weather routes into the national parks, the Government of Canada is co-operating with the Provinces of British Columbia and Alberta in the improvement of approach roads to the parks in these provinces. The aim is to provide in British Columbia a dust-free standard road from Kingsgate at the International Boundary to the western gateway of our National Parks Mountain highway system at Radium Hot Springs; and in Alberta a similar road from the International Boundary at Waterton Lakes Park to connect with the Calgary-Banff highway on the east. When these roads are completed visiting tourists from the United States, who are accustomed to travel on dustless roads will have opened up to them some of the finest scenic attractions on the North American continent.

The many natural advantages of the parks have been fully utilized to provide facilities for outdoor recreation. Boating, bathing, mountain-climbing, hiking, and trail-riding in the summer, and ski-ing in the winter are forms of sport, the enjoyment of which requires but little more than Nature's handicraft. Fine golf courses and tennis courts have been constructed in six of the western parks, all of which provide opportunities for the enjoyment of these popular forms of recreation. Bathing pools and supervised swimming beaches, community buildings, park museums, and playgrounds also add to the pleasure of visitors. Excellent hotel and bungalow camp accommodation in many of the parks has been augmented by well-equipped motor campgrounds situated in the park townsites and along the Park highways.

The Banff and Mount Revelstoke parks are now regarded as notable winter sports centres, and each season thousands of enthusiasts are drawn to these areas. The winter carnival held annually in Banff attracts skiers, curlers, skaters, and other participants in winter sport from Canada and United States.

One of the great attractions of the parks is the variety and extent of their wild life. All National Parks are maintained as sanctuaries for wild animal and bird life, where no trap may be set and no gun fired. The protection afforded the creatures of the wild has resulted in large increases

in their numbers, and many areas formerly depleted re-populated with species native to the region.

The absence of pursuit or violence of any kind has freed from fear of man, and in many parks they have become qu Deer, elk, and bear approach to within a few yards of human habit and on the mountain highways Bighorn sheep allow visitors within cam range. The parks are thus becoming reserves for big game, and the overflow which spreads beyond the park borders is restocking the surrounding districts.

In order to preserve for the future such species as the buffalo and the antelope, whose habitat is the open prairie, the Dominion Government established four wild animal parks in Alberta. Buffalo Park near Wainwright and Elk Island Park near Lamont contain more than 7,000 buffalo, which were developed from a small herd of about 700 head, purchased in 1907 when the species was on the verge of extinction. The Nemiskam and Wawaskesy Parks contain fine herds of pronghorned antelope, a species which only two decades past had almost disappeared.

Another phase of National Parks activity of increasing importance is the preservation and restoration of our historic sites. By the selection of sites commemorative of events of outstanding importance in the history of the Dominion, not only are they preserved for the education of future generations, but by constantly reminding us of the glories and the sacrifices of the past, they contribute to national pride and love of country. Canada has been fortunate in saving these memorials before it was too late. In the work of selecting sites worthy of marking, the Department of Mines and Resources has the advice of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada—a group of eminent citizens who are recognized as authorities on the history of the different sections of the Dominion which they represent.

More than a thousand sites have been considered by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board, and of these well over 300 have been recommended to the Department for marking and preservation. From the Atlantic to the Pacific stirring events in the history of our country are being recalled by tablets and monuments erected by the Department; and at Fort Anne in Nova Scotia, and Fort Beausejour in New Brunswick, small national parks have been created to mark forever the events with which those old names are associated in Canadian history.

In this hurrying age, when the stress of life is sometimes almost unbearable, and when much in which we have placed our faith seems uncertain, we do well to turn from time to time to the beauty and the majesty of Nature, unspoiled by the hand of man. I am sure you will agree with me that, quite apart from their commercial importance, they have an intangible value as a restorer of mind and spirit. Long centuries ago the Psalmist in his perplexity turned his eyes to the hills:

“Where silence hushes discontent,
And petty fears are lost in space”

By following his example we too may perhaps rediscover the poise and the vision, and the sense of ultimate values which alone can make our nation great.

In the National Parks the people of Canada have a spiritual as well as a material resource which, if wisely preserved, will be forever a foundation upon which to build and maintain our national character.

Next Tuesday night at this hour I shall talk about the Indians of Canada and some of their problems.