

Riding Mountain National Park

Manitoba



Cover: Baldy 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 land forms in this immense country and national parks have been created to preserve important examples for you and 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."

Riding Mountain National Park, about 60 miles north of Brandon, Manitoba, is situated on a rolling plateau that forms part of the Manitoba Escarpment. It preserves 1,150 square miles of diverse landscape that includes both evergreen and hardwood forests, prairies, rolling hills, valleys, lakes and streams.

The park was named for its principal feature, Riding Mountain, the third highest elevation in Manitoba.

The Park Environment

Each national park has its own character, its unique story as a living, outdoor museum. Riding Mountain National Park is the story of a highland plateau, situated in the centre of North America. The park is a crossroads, where habitats characteristic of eastern, western, and northern Canada meet and mingle in a diverse pattern of forest and grassland, hills and valleys, lakes and streams. It shelters a remarkable variety of plant and animal life.

The Land: An Ancient Landscape

The story of Riding Mountain began approximately 135 million years ago, when giant reptiles roamed the earth, and what is now southwestern Manitoba was covered by a shallow, tropical sea. Clay and sand were carried into this sea by rivers and laid down in successive layers. Gradually this material solidified into shale, the rock that makes up the foundation of Riding Mountain.

Tremendous pressures from within the earth's crust eventually pushed up the whole interior of this continent, forcing the sea to retreat, and leaving the beds of shale exposed to erosion.

Great rivers flowed across the ancient landscape, cutting an immense valley as much as 2,000 feet deep. The western side of that valley today remains as the Manitoba Escarpment, the area's most dramatic legacy from its geological past. The escarpment can be observed by visitors as they approach Riding Mountain from the east and north. Rising abruptly more than 1,500 feet above the lowland plain, it extends in a twisted, broken line for almost 1,000 miles across North Dakota, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan. Rivers have divided the escarpment into a series of highlands, of which Riding Mountain is the third highest, rising to an altitude of 2,480 feet above sea level.

Wild roses



About 800,000 years ago, the Great Ice Age began another chapter in the story of Riding Mountain. The huge, shifting ice-sheets that covered most of North America greatly changed the appearance of the area, grinding huge masses of shale from the highlands, and filling the ancient valleys. Deposits of clay, sand, gravel, and boulders formed new hills and valleys. Granite boulders were carried great distances from the Precambrian Shield situated to the northeast, and were left scattered across the landscape.

As the ice slowly retreated, meltwaters flooded the lowlands, creating an immense lake, now referred to as Lake Agassiz. Then, about 6,000 years ago, this lake drained into Hudson Bay, leaving behind the large lakes of the lowland plain.

On the highland, water collected in valleys to form marshes, muskegs, and lakes. The park's spring-fed lakes are among its greatest charms. Clear Lake, the largest, covers 9½ square miles and is 110 feet deep in places. Although streams draining the park lakes are small, they have etched broad channels over the ages, as seen in the Birdtail Valley.

The Plants: A Diverse Community

Situated on the southern edge of the transcontinental northern coniferous forest zone, Riding Mountain National Park is being invaded from the southwest by grasslands

Conducted trail ride



and from the southeast by hardwood forests. An amazing variety of plants thrives in these three different life zones.

The highest areas of the park, especially those over 2,000 feet, are covered with an evergreen forest of white and black spruce, jack pine, balsam fir, and tamarack. Stands of trembling aspen and white birch also grow in these regions. Although poor soil and cold temperatures limit the plant life in these high areas, some of the park's most exquisite wildflowers can be found here, hidden away in bogs and evergreen glades. They include the round-leaved orchid, bishop's-cap, gaywings, one-flowered wintergreen, and bearberry.

Along the base of the escarpment, the park's lowest and warmest regions support a deciduous forest of hardwoods, shrubs, vines, and ferns. Here Manitoba and mountain maple, green ash, Canada plum, white elm, bur oak, chokecherry, nannyberry, and downy arrow-wood flourish in dense stands, while such wildflowers as nodding trillium, wild columbine, yellow wood violet, and wild morning-glory brighten the forest floor. There is also poison ivy.

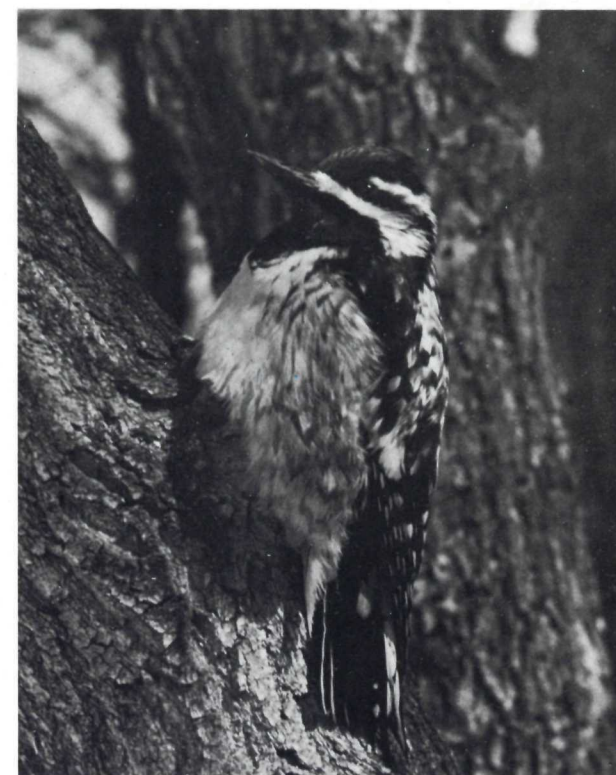
Because of lighter rainfall, sandy soil and fire damage, extensive areas in the western section of the park are covered with meadows and open grasslands. In this windswept environment, grasses mix with a constantly changing pageant of wildflowers, which reaches the height of its beauty in late July and early August. Included in this floral display are the cut-leaved anemone, three-flowered aven, shrubby cinquefoil, showy locoweed, sweet vetch, crowfoot violet, blue hyssop, wild bergamot, Indian paintbrush, meadow blazing-star, black-eyed and brown-eyed susan, and stiff goldenrod.

The Animals: Predators And Prey

Because of its varied elevations and plantlife, Riding Mountain National Park is endowed with a diverse animal population. Of the 60 species of mammals known to have inhabited the park area within "modern" historical times, seven species were exterminated from the area before it was established as a national park.

The wapiti and moose are the largest and most abun-

Yellow-bellied sapsucker



dant members of the deer family, and since the park was established both have increased in numbers. The moose can usually be seen in the vicinity of lakes and beaver ponds, and the wapiti in the open forest. The white-tailed deer, which inhabits the edges of the park, has almost completely replaced the mule deer.

From historical accounts and skeletal remains, it is known that bison once roamed Riding Mountain. Almost immediately after the park was established, four adult bulls and 16 young cows were shipped here. Kept at less than 40 animals to prevent over-grazing of their enclosed range, the herd brings the park's animal population a little closer to its original state.

Predators, or flesh-eating animals, help the park's wildlife retain its natural balance. The grey or timber wolf and the Canada lynx are shy creatures, difficult to observe at any time of year. The black bear (actually ranging in colour from pure black through all shades of brown to cinnamon and blond) and coyote are more frequently seen.

The beaver, the park's largest rodent, was almost exterminated in the area before the park was established, but has made a dramatic comeback and can be observed in almost every pond, lake and stream. It plays an important role: ponds formed by beaver dams may eventually become marshes and meadows, thus providing food and new habitats for many other forms of wildlife.

Park birdlife is diverse and more than 230 species have been recorded to date. Migratory shorebirds, geese, and swans, following the Mississippi Flyway, cross the park twice each year. Many other migratory species remain to nest, adding to the beauty and mood of the lakes, forests, and prairies. They include the common loon, Swainson's thrush, Blackburnian warbler, western meadowlark, and white-throated sparrow. Only a limited number of hardy species, such as the pileated woodpecker, gray jay, raven, and evening grosbeak, remain through the long winter.

Riding Mountain National Park is also known for the number and size of its fish. The main game fish here is the northern pike, and specimens weighing as much as 28½ pounds have been taken from Clear Lake. Lake whitefish is another native species, which flourishes in the deep, cold waters of Clear Lake. They are usually caught through the ice during March and April. The wall-eye is also abundant in Clear Lake and usually weighs in at about five pounds, although specimens as large as eight pounds have been taken through the ice. Lake trout ranging from five to 20 pounds are found in Clear Lake. Both rainbow and brook trout populate Lake Katherine and Deep Lake.

A Brief Park History

The forests, prairies, and lakes of the Riding Mountain area were hunted and fished by Indian tribes long before the first white man came to the area. The Cree ruled the highlands, while their friends, the Assiniboines, roamed the prairies in pursuit of bison. These peoples followed the retreat of the bison herds westward, and were eventually replaced by the Ojibway, who still live in the area.

Between 1731 and 1749, Pierre de la Vérendrye and his sons explored and traded on the plains around Riding Mountain, and a post was established on Lake Dauphin in 1741. The Hudson's Bay Company soon followed suit, and by 1800 the mountain was surrounded with posts as traders reaped a rich harvest in furs.

During the next 100 years, the population of fur-bearing animals was greatly reduced, and such species as the otter, marten, fisher, and wolverine disappeared from the area completely.

Because the easiest means of penetrating the rugged highland was by horse, the early travellers and traders ceased to use the original name of Fort Dauphin Hill, and adopted the name Riding Mountain.

After the Canadian Pacific Railway reached Brandon, Manitoba, in 1881, the fertile plain surrounding Riding Mountain received a great influx of settlers, who hunted and logged the highland.

The need to conserve the area's natural resources was recognized at the turn of the century, and the highland was withdrawn from settlement and made a forest reserve. In 1930, it became Riding Mountain National Park.



How To Get There

The Park is easily accessible by car and bus from centres to the north and south.

There are three main highway approaches to Riding Mountain National Park. Highway 10 connects Brandon (60 miles to the south) with Wasagaming, the park's administration centre, and continues north to Dauphin where the nearest commercial airport is situated. From the east, Highway 19 enters the park through the scenic escarpment region.

A park motor vehicle permit is required for all motorized vehicles. It can be purchased at park gateways.

How To Enjoy the Park

Season – The park and the townsite of Wasagaming are open all year, but most visitor facilities are only seasonal. Summer is the most popular season, but a ski area at Mount Agassiz, approximately 35 miles northeast of Wasagaming, is open from December to April.

Boating – Motor boats may be used on Clear Lake, Moon Lake, and Audy Lake, provided they conform to federal navigation regulations and carry proper safety equipment. Boats may be rented in the park.

Snowmobiles – These must stay on trails designated for their use. All other motorized land vehicles are restricted to regular roads.

Hiking – This is an ideal way to explore the park. There are miles of trails in Riding Mountain, leading to the park's main attractions, including evergreen and deciduous forests, meadows, and lakes. Many to remote areas are best suited to overnight trail trips. Other areas are readily accessible for day walking or riding, particularly the Lake Katherine and Clear Lake districts. A map of the more than 30 miles of trails in the Wasagaming townsite district may be obtained from information centres.

Fishing – Fishing in the park is by permit, available from the information centres or the park warden service. Fishing regulations are available where permits are sold.

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, including birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians, and 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 or touching wild animals is forbidden.

Please help protect your park for future enjoyment. It is part of your national inheritance.

Dogs and cats may accompany visitors into the park, but dogs must be kept on leash. No permit or vaccination certificate is needed.



Where to Stay

Camping brings you into close contact with the natural environment of the park. Camping facilities are provided at five campgrounds, the largest of which are at Wasagaming and Lake Katherine. Daily fees at campsites vary, and depend on whether the area is unserviced, or equipped with electrical, water, or sewage connections. Camping space is allocated on a first-come, first-served basis, and the maximum allowable stay is two weeks. Campgrounds open about May 15 and close about September 15, depending on weather conditions.

It is not permissible to camp outside established campgrounds, although visitors on overnight trail trips may bivouac en route, provided they register with a park warden before and after each trip.

A variety of commercial accommodation is available in the park, details of which can be obtained at park information centres. Accommodation reservations can be made through booking services in the townsite of Wasagaming.

Other Facilities

Nearly all the facilities of a modern town, including grocery stores, restaurants, garages, laundries and other services, are found within the park at Wasagaming.

In addition, the visitor will find a large variety of recreational facilities, including a golf course, tennis courts, bowling greens, boat tour and boat rental operations, riding stables, and a ski development.

Fires

Campfires may be lit only in fireplaces provided for this purpose, or in portable stoves. Barbecues may be used only in campgrounds or picnic areas, and all coals must be dumped in existing park fireplaces. A fire permit must be obtained from a park warden for any 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.

How To Get The Most Out Of Your Visit

To help you understand and appreciate the park's complex natural 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, land formations, plants, and animals are interrelated, and it will make your stay more rewarding.

During the day there are guided hikes, car caravans and illustrated indoor programs. In the evenings talks are held at the outdoor theatres and interpretive centre, using slides, films, and specimens. The interpretive centre houses exhibits outlining the park's human and natural history. It also contains an information desk and a lecture hall. Self-guiding trails, on-site exhibits, interpretive signs, and free literature also explain the park's natural features.

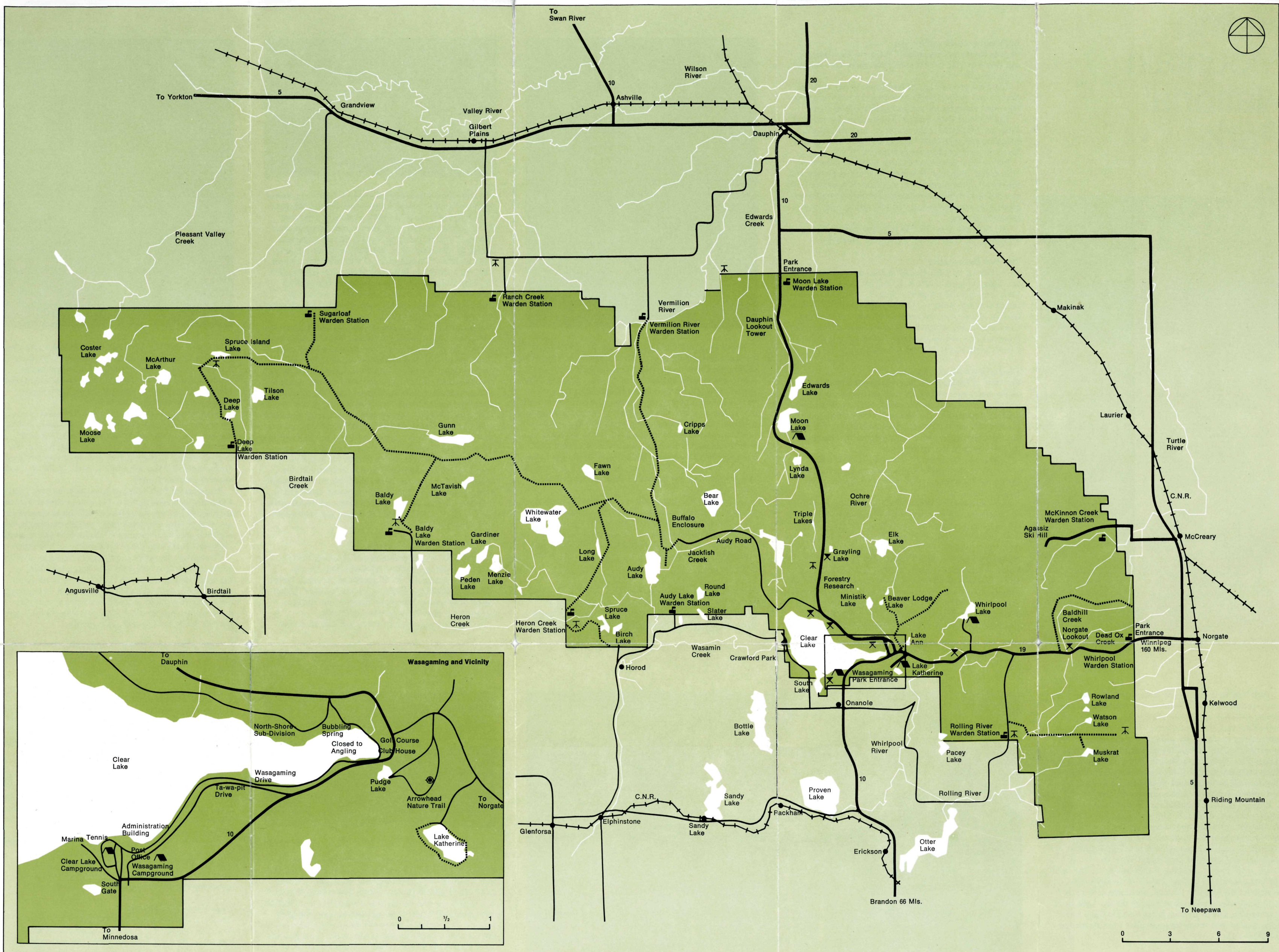
Information on the interpretive program is available from bulletin boards, the park information centres, the interpretive centre and park staff.

Where To Get Information

Detailed information can be obtained from the park information centres at Wasagaming townsite. Uniformed staff will answer questions, provide maps, outline travel routes, and refer visitors to various areas and facilities in the park. Special events are posted on bulletin boards.

Park wardens and naturalists, though not primarily responsible for general information, will help visitors whenever possible. They are particularly helpful in planning trips to isolated areas.

Additional information on Riding Mountain is available from the Superintendent, Riding Mountain National Park, Wasagaming, Manitoba. For information on other national parks, write the Director, National and Historic Parks Branch, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Ottawa.



Riding Mountain National Park

- Highway
- Secondary Road
- Walking or Hiking Trail
- - - - Railroad
- ▭ Lake, River, Creek
- Warden's Cabin
- X Picnic Area
- 🏠 Accommodation
- ▲ Campground
- Nature Trail
- 🗼 Fire Lookout

