

Waterton Lakes National Park

Cover: Mount Custer

Cameron Falls

Where the mountains meet the prairies

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 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 future generations."

Waterton Lakes National Park is an outstanding mountainous area rising abruptly from the prairies in the southwest corner of Alberta. Set apart as a national park in 1895, it covers an area of 203 square miles along the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains immediately north of the Canadian-United States boundary. Glacier National Park, Montana, joins it to the south and the two parks together form Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park.

The park environment

Each national park has its own character, its unique story as a living outdoor museum. The theme of Waterton Lakes is "where the mountains meet the prairie".

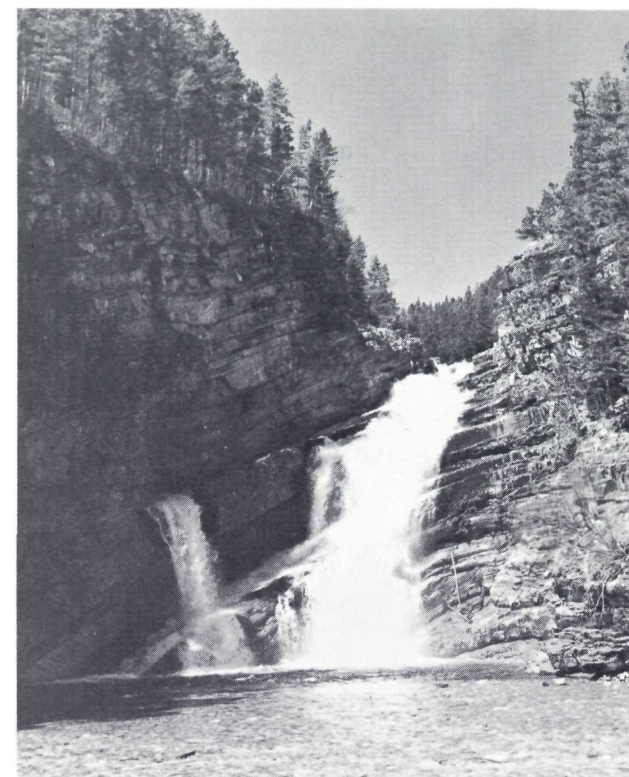
The mountains

The mountains in the park have been carved out of a series of layered sedimentary rocks over a mile thick and include some of the oldest known rocks in the Canadian Rockies. Some structures found in these rocks are believed to be fossilized algae. The old sedimentary rocks were uplifted and displaced horizontally in relatively late geological time. These now lie adjacent to much younger rocks in the north-eastern section of the park, which have yielded fossil shells. The sharp peaks, narrow ridges and interlocked U-shaped valleys are the result of water erosion and alpine glaciation. The highest peak is Mount Blakiston (9,600 feet).

A great overthrust fault which affected mountains on the eastern slope of the Continental Divide is also found in the park. The pressure along this fault during mountain formation was so great that some of the oldest rocks in the park overrode younger rocks and thus form a few 'upside down' mountains, such as Vimy Ridge, Crandell Mountain and other mountains that extend south into Glacier National Park, Montana.

The distinctive purple, red, green and grey colouring of the various geological formations throughout the park has been caused by chemical change in the minute mineral particles making up the formations. This chemical change was brought about by variations in climate, as the particles comprising the sedimentary formations were being deposited.

Waterton is noteworthy for its sculptured geology, formed by glaciation and well illustrated in the prominent



cirques (steep-walled basins), tarns (rock-basin lakes), U-shaped valleys, hanging valleys and waterfalls.

Upper Waterton, seven miles long, one-half mile wide and over 450 feet deep in places, spans the international boundary and occupies part of a valley that has been considerably deepened and widened by valley glaciers. A hanging valley formed by this deepening has resulted in Cameron Falls in the townsite area.

Jagged indentations formed in the rock by frost and snow water are much in evidence on the side of Vimy Peak. The light green, bare streaks down Bertha Peak above the townsite and elsewhere are evidence of snow-slides which have swept the forest from their pathway, leaving only low shrubs and grasses.

The townsite of Waterton Park is built on a delta deposited by Cameron Creek. It is believed that most of the sediments were deposited while remnant glaciers of the Ice Age were still present in the park. The grinding of the previously existing Waterton Glacier against Bertha Mountain produced the sharp cliff over which Cameron Falls now drops.

The prairie

The prairie region of the park occurs in the northeast part of the park, adjacent to the Rocky Mountains. The flora and fauna here are quite different from that of the sur-



rounding prairie and many mountain species are found. This corner of Alberta probably bears the most luxuriant plant life of the entire province.

The vegetation

Waterton Lakes National Park is different from the other Canadian parks because two major regions, the prairie and the Rocky Mountains, distinct in every way and vastly different from one another, meet and lie immediately adjacent to one another within the confines of the park. The Cordilleran or mountain flora stands in great contrast to the prairie flora. This is further emphasized by the sudden and drastic change in topography. There is only a narrow belt of what can be termed transitional vegetation between the two regions.

The flowers present an ever-changing carpet of colour for most of the summer season. Among the better-known prairie flowers are the wild rose, large-flowered gaillardia, wild geranium, pasque flower, double wind flower and balsamroot.

False hellebores, yellow columbines, avalanche lilies, Jacob's ladders and bear grass are found in the mountains, while the aster, Indian paint brush and mariposa lily are present in both the mountain and prairie regions.

Some of the more common shrubs found in the prairie part of the park are shrubby cinquefoil, bear berry, silver

berry, dogwood, juniper, saskatoon and chokecherry, while the buffalo berry occurs most commonly in the mountainous coniferous forest part of the park.

Timberline is at approximately 7,000 feet although it may vary as much as 500 feet up or down depending on local conditions. Most of the trees in the park are ever-green. At the lower altitudes Douglas fir, lodgepole pine, limber pine, and white spruce are common. At the higher altitudes Englemann's spruce, white-bark pine, and alpine fir occur throughout the park. In the lower regions of the park and adjacent to the prairie areas are the deciduous or broad-leaved trees, the most common of which are the trembling aspen, paper birch, cottonwood, willow, Douglas maple and sitka alder.

The animals

Like the plants, the animals have adapted themselves to the demands and opportunities of the environment and are found principally in those habitats most suitable to their survival, whether it be summer or winter.

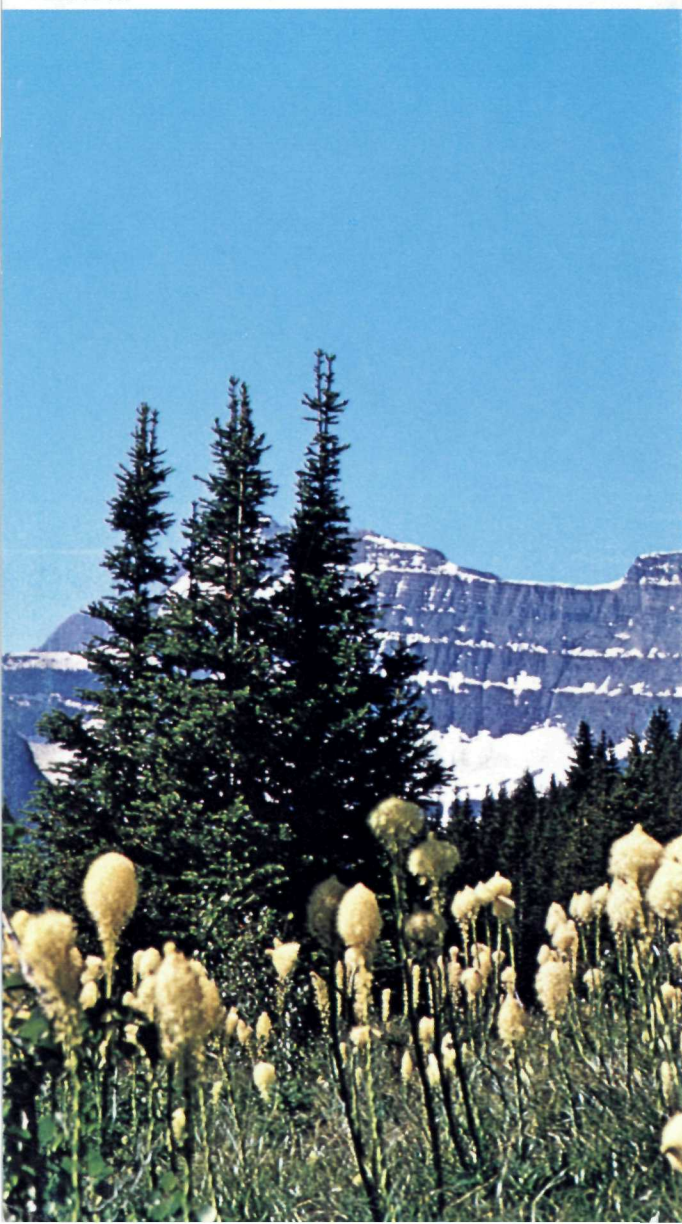
Because of their nocturnal activities and secretive habits, most animals, especially the smaller kinds, are seldom seen by park visitors, but some diurnal (daylight) species allow themselves to be studied at close quarters.

Hikers on the higher trails near timberline and the alpine meadows quite often have the opportunity to watch a band of bighorn sheep grazing or resting on a sunny slope. Rocky Mountain goat with their near-white coats may also be seen, silhouetted against the dark rock walls that make up their favourite haunts. Ptarmigan, marmot, pika and ground squirrels take advantage of the profuse vegetation in the open alpine meadows while overhead a golden eagle or Clark's nutcracker may be watching for its food.

Many of the larger mammals prefer the shade and protection offered by the forests at middle elevations. Among them are the bears, both grizzly and black, which may sometimes be seen grazing on the lush green vegetation of the avalanche slopes. Moose are also found in this setting. Mule deer, elk and bighorn sheep prefer the semi-open forest and its meadows. This forest type occurs mostly on southerly, exposed slopes which are not able to support a dense forest cover, owing to the lack of moisture. These semi-open areas are often dotted with rock outcrops, which are ideal escape terrain for the deer, elk and sheep when danger threatens in the form of a predator such as a cougar or coyote. Tree squirrels, ground squirrels and their natural enemies the marten, weasel and hawk play their part in this interesting community, as do many forest-adapted song birds.

An interesting animal community abounds in the lowest of the park's life zones, the aspen parkland belt and the grassland habitat. Although this region is dried out and whipped by severe storms from autumn to spring, life for

Alberta



the animals is not as harsh here as at higher elevations. White-tailed deer and their predators the cougar and coyote can be found here. Skunk, badger and mink find this habitat suitable to their needs. Several species of ground squirrel make their home here, while hawks patrol the sky and songbirds add their notes to the aspen forest. The value of this community is fully realized when winter conditions make survival almost impossible for animal species of the higher life zones, which are not adapted to hibernation. Hundreds of elk and mule deer, for example, descend into this lower region of the park every winter to feed on grasses and shrubs that have been freed of their snowload by violent winds.

Finally, the chain of large lakes which gives the park its name and the many smaller lakes in the park offer visitors the opportunity to observe lakes in their various stages of succession from a very deep, water-filled glacial trough to cold, high alpine cirque lakes and shallow-water reed patches. Beaver, muskrat and mink are the most-often-observed lakeshore animals. They are supplemented by marsh-birds, waders and shore birds, which are generally found in small numbers and seldom nest in the park. During the migrational periods of spring and autumn, the lower and shallower lakes experience a major transformation. Literally thousands of ducks and geese rest up here before continuing their migration, while swans, herons and gulls are also present.

Fish, native and stocked, delight angler and diving bird alike. Pike spawn in the shallow, warm waters of some lakes, while whitefish are found in the Waterton Lakes and the Waterton River. Several species of trout are found in the lakes, as well as in the fast-running cold creeks.

A brief park history

Waterton Park derives its name from the lakes in the main valley. These lakes were named after Charles Waterton, famed 18th century English naturalist, by Lieutenant Thomas Blakiston, of the Palliser Expedition, who discovered the lakes in 1858. Blakiston Mountain and Blakiston Creek perpetuate the name of this officer.

The expedition marked the turning point in the history of this region, which hitherto had been practically unknown territory and a stronghold of the hostile Blackfoot Indian Federation. In 1886 traces of oil were found in Lineham Creek and Alberta's first producing oil well was drilled there in 1902. A national historic monument now marks the well site.

The gradual settlement of the region ultimately led to the filing of a petition to make this area a national park. Most active in the promotion of this objective was John George "Kootenai" Brown, who was later to become the first park warden and subsequently acting park superintendent. Kootenai Brown lies buried between his two wives in a specially marked grave.



The idea to link Waterton Lakes National Park with Glacier National Park in Montana originated at the first goodwill meeting of the Rotary Clubs of Alberta and Montana in 1931. By their efforts laws were passed the following year on both sides of the border to link the two parks into the first International Peace Park in the world.

How to get there

Most visitors travel to Waterton Lakes National Park by car. Alberta Highways 5 and 6 lead into the park from the north and east and Montana route 17 enters from the south. Buses run twice daily from Calgary and Lethbridge during the summer months only. Visitors travelling by train should make bus connections at Lethbridge or Fort Macleod. No aircraft may land in the park.

How to enjoy the park

Season – The park is open all year, although commercial tourist services are available only during the summer months. Summer is the busiest time. Swimming, boating, golfing, hiking, climbing and camping are popular.

Boating – Rowboats and canoes are permitted on most of the park's larger lakes. Motor boats are restricted to the Lower, Middle and Upper Waterton Lakes, and must conform with federal navigation regulations and carry proper safety equipment.

Fishing – Fishing in the park is by permit, available at a nominal charge at the park information centre, administration building or from any park warden. Fishing regulations are available at the same places.

Hiking – This is one of the best ways to explore the park. There are over 110 miles of park trails covering all the main valleys. Many trails to remote areas have primitive campgrounds for overnight bivouac. All areas are readily accessible for day walking or riding. A publication giving information on distances, altitudes and other details is available free at the park information centre. Directional signs have been placed at the beginning of every trail and at every trail junction. A topographical map showing all park features and trails may be purchased at the information centre.

All climbers and anyone travelling off park trails must register with a park warden before and after such travel (no charge).

Snowmobiles – Self-registration is necessary at the beginning of the trails designated for snowmobile use. All other motorized land vehicles are restricted to public roads.

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

and animals, and all plants, trees, rocks and fossils are to be left undisturbed. Even the wild-flowers are not to be picked; they must be left for others to enjoy. Feeding, touching or molesting wild animals is not permitted.

Dogs and cats may accompany visitors into the park. For protection of park animals, however, dogs must be kept on leash. No permit or vaccination certificate is needed. Because dogs have been known to cause bears to attack, hikers should refrain from taking their canine friends into the back-country.

Where to stay

Camping brings you into the closest contact with the park's natural environment. Modern facilities are provided at two campgrounds: Upper Waterton Lake and Crandell Mountain. Daily fees at campsites vary and depend on whether the site is unserviced or is equipped with electrical, water and sewage connections. Camping space is allocated on a first-come, first-served basis. Campgrounds open about May 15 and close about September 15, depending on weather conditions. The maximum allowable stay in a campground is two weeks.

It is not permissible to camp except in established campgrounds. Persons on overnight trail trips must bivouac in primitive campsites en route and must have previously registered with a park warden and obtained a camp-fire permit.

Other facilities

A variety of other facilities for park visitors are available. The park operates a heated, outdoor swimming pool during the summer months, and an 18-hole golf course. Private business provides bus and boat tours, travel by horse, and boat rentals.

Waterton Park townsite contains all the customary services of a modern community with hotels, motels and dining facilities situated throughout the business area. Details on motel and hotel accommodation are available at the park information centre and reservation for accommodation can be made through booking services in Waterton Park townsite. Practically all businesses are operated on a summer seasonal basis only.

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.

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, landforms, plants and animals are interrelated, and it will make your visit more rewarding.

During the day there are conducted field trips and auto-caravans; in the evening, in the campgrounds, talks, slide and film programs are given.

Self-interpreting nature trails, roadside exhibits, signs and viewpoints also explain the park's natural features. At some of these places free interpretive pamphlets are available.

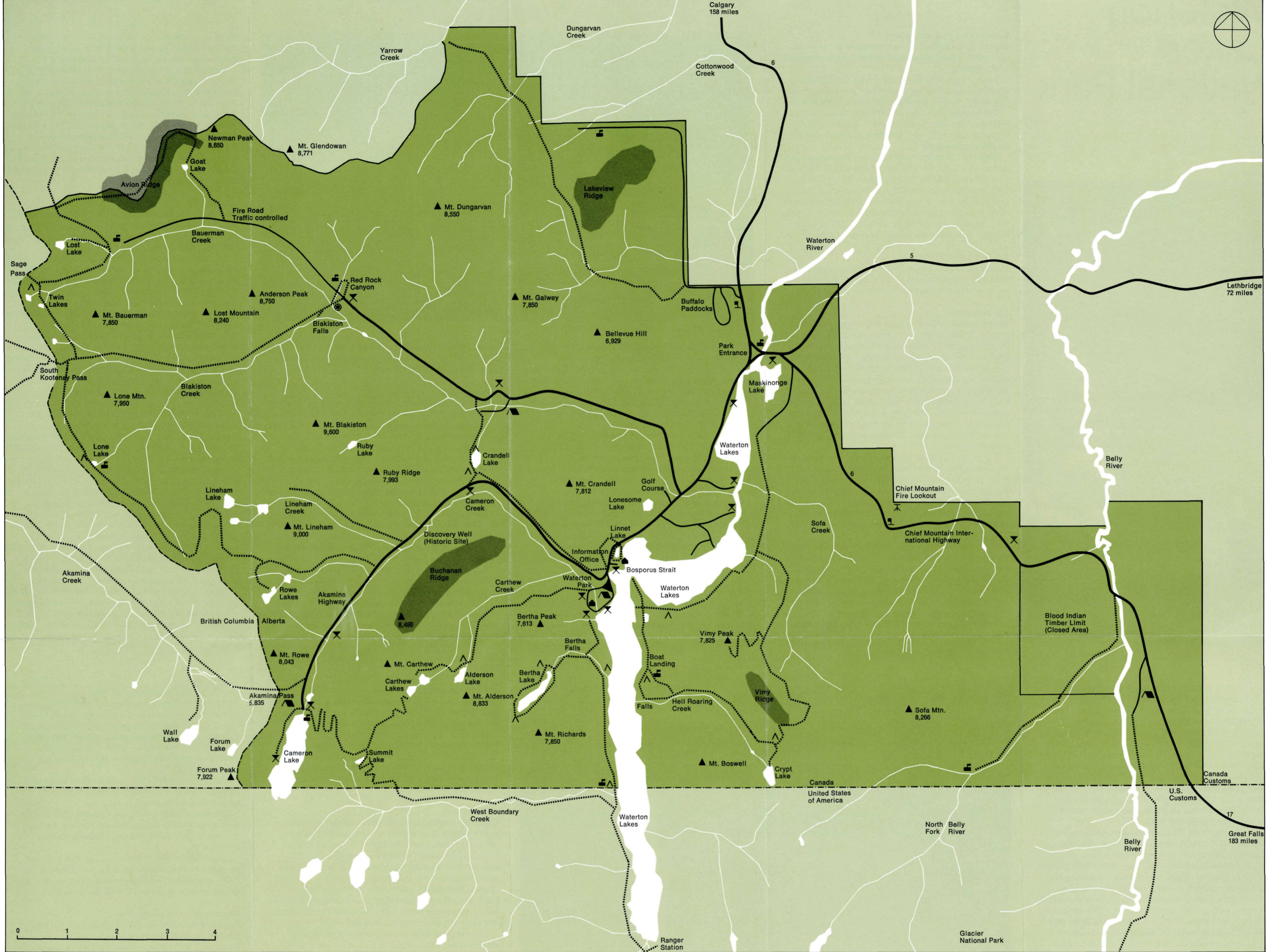
A naturalist will meet and address groups if arrangements are made in advance. Information about the entire interpretive program is available from park staff, the information centre and from bulletin boards.

Where to get more information

Detailed information may be obtained from the park information centre at the entrance to the townsite. Uniformed staff will answer questions, provide maps and accommodation lists, 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, Waterton Lakes National Park, Waterton Park, Alberta. For information about other national parks, write to the Director, National and Historic Parks Branch, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 400 Laurier Avenue West, Ottawa 4, Ontario.



Waterton Lakes National Park

- Highway
- Secondary Road
- Walking or Hiking Trail
- Lake, River, Creek
- ▲ Mountain
- Warden's Cabin
- X Picnic Area
- ▲ Accommodation
- ▲ Campground
- ▲ Overnight Camp
- ⊕ Nature Trail
- On-site exhibit

