THE EAST SLOPE

Flowing Toward the Atlantic
Beyond being the birthplace of Canada’s national park system, Banff will always deservedly be famous for the grandeur of its many unique natural features. There is perhaps no place more beautiful on this planet than Moraine Lake. While we have allowed a huge hotel to belly up to the shore of Lake Louise, there are still times of the day when the lake and surrounding peaks radiate the glory that is at the heart of its original fame. Bow Lake is stunning. Peyto Lake is amazing almost beyond imagination. There are places in the backcountry that still hum to the rhythm of an earlier time when humans didn’t threaten to overwhelm the world. Banff still has its timeless beauty but at the same time it has its problems. Because this was our first national park, it is here more than anywhere else in the Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks World Heritage Site that what we have built most threatens what we have saved. In many ways that is why it is so interesting to visit, and such an extraordinary place to live and challenging place to work.

The creation of the Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks World Heritage Site allows us to examine Banff in a larger, more interesting context. Within the context of this World Heritage Site’s role in protecting a regional mountain culture associated with a regional ecosystem
dynamic, Banff is still important but it does not occupy the privileged place it once reserved for itself as the first and last word in mountain tourism in the Canadian West.

While Banff National Park is historically important to the still-developing notion of national parks, and remains crucially important in terms of how it manages the myriad problems that stardom at an early age has presented in later life, its star no longer outshines the larger accomplishment that is the Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks World Heritage Site. If this book seeks to do anything it is to suggest that the areas surrounding Banff are deserving of equal attention and visitor interest. In many ways this was to be expected. Appreciation of their grandeur and historical significance of the surrounding protected areas

THE TOWN OF BANFF
Banff was the first tourism town to exist in the Canadian Rockies. As no one in Canada had experience running a national park, it is not surprising that decisions were made with respect to development that later park managers came to greatly regret. Though criticized widely for its commercialism, Banff has the potential to be reborn as the aesthetic centre of the Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks World Heritage Site.
Photograph by R.W. Sandford.
is finally catching up to the reputation Banff spent millions of dollars to cultivate. While the other parks in the World Heritage Site may not have the visitor amenities of Banff, they don’t have its headaches either and in the larger scheme of the mountain West they are perhaps more representative of the importance of what we saved as opposed to what we built, in terms of both our material and aesthetic culture.

The world now has the experience to see that Banff was, in many important ways, a founding experiment from which the other national and provincial regions have learned much about what it takes to even contemplate managing a landscape for all time. That said, you can’t say you have really been to this World Heritage Site if you have only been to Banff. But this is hardly the end of the story. Banff could be the centre again if it ceases to so desperately and jealously pretend to its former position in the Western Canadian tourism universe and begins to see itself, instead, as the centre of a larger biophysical and cultural region that is of far greater interest to visitors, and of far more importance to the world than the sum of its parks.

Banff is well positioned to be the centre of understanding of the larger World Heritage Site ideal. It is the first national park in the system. It is a place where nationally significant history and grand landscapes have converged to create an icon of Canadian identity. It is also where leading-edge management ideas are tested in difficult and demanding circumstances that mirror less what a national park should be than what the real world outside national parks is actually like. It is a place where history truly matters.

**EARLY FIRST NATIONS PRESENCE**

The contemporary transient nature of the town of Banff suggests an aura of impermanence that is inconsistent with the history of the valley. Due to the disproportionate number of young people who live there, Banff has a reputation for being a party town. Undesirable consequences have followed in the wake of this developing image. Close
proximity to a prosperous city of a million people, ready availability of
drugs, and a comparatively high crime rate in combination with a high
incidence of sexually transmitted disease have made Banff townsite a
tourism destination that is not only at odds with itself but also some-
times at odds with place and with its own history.

In Banff townsite there is a sense that history just happened. Yes-
terday. The day before. On the weekend. The hysteria of fast living
seldom permits our gaze to stray from the mirror. It could be argued
that resorts such as Banff, where people come and go in seasonal tides
associated with the number of tourists there are in the area, should
not be expected to have a history much beyond that created by a few
“pioneers” who saw the tourism potential of the area and exploited it.
The history of the Bow Valley is not like that, however. This is a place
with nationally significant history and heritage. History here extends
gracefully backwards into a less frenzied time and into a different way
of thinking about mountains.

Archaeologists have found seven distinct layers of human occupation
at the Vermilion Lakes site dating from 10,400 years ago. Archaeologi-
cal inquiry aside, we know little of these first people. After ten thousand
years their campfire rocks have almost ceased to speak. When they
do, however, they tell us that for the greatest span of human time in
these mountains, people had a different way of being than ours. Their
attention was not rushed from one interest and excitement to another
as ours is today. Their lives were governed by obvious motives that
related directly to where and how they lived. Over the ten millennia
that people have lived in the Bow Valley, the climate of the area changed
dramatically. The Native peoples who lived here had a culture and a way
of life that allowed them to respond to quick changes in the environ-
ment and maintain themselves. One wonders if we will be able to do the
same.

Though it was thought for a time that prehistoric peoples never lived
in the mountains until they possessed the horse, local First Nations
have long argued otherwise. People were camping on the shores of the
Vermilion Lakes six thousand years before the pyramids in Egypt were
built. How many perfect lake reflections would have been witnessed
over more than two million days? How many times would the sky have
turned red at sunset? How many times would lightning have spirally
scarred the pines?

In 3000 B.C. the Sumerians discovered the healing qualities of
mineral water. By that time summer residents of the Bow Valley may
STEEL OF EMPIRE: THE RAILWAY YEARS

Canada did not become a country on its own. It did so to prevent its lecherous southern cousin from seeking the innocent hand of Miss Canada. So real was the fear of American annexation of the West Coast of North America that the British kept a fleet of warships at Victoria to protect Vancouver Island from imminent invasion. In 1871, a nervous four-year old Canada offered British Columbia a transcontinental railway if it would join its fledgling confederation. No one knew how much such a railway would cost or where the money would come from. But the Americans had one and that was enough. To consolidate a continental nation you needed to lay tracks from sea to sea.

You can tell a great deal about a nation by the way it celebrates its railways. The year is 1869. The place is Promontory Point, Utah where the last spike of America’s first transcontinental line is about to be driven. Americans already understood that history was drama. A telegraph wire already have been using local hot springs for five thousand years. Because they left no written record we know little of these people. This does not mean they were unimportant. It only means that what they knew has returned to the circling winds.

Despite their long history and presence in the Bow Valley, there isn’t a large First Nations presence in contemporary Banff. You see artifacts of their material culture at museums and shops but you don’t often see the people who created these objects. The only time a Native people’s presence is felt at all in Banff is in the summer when a few gather at the old Luxton Museum for the annual Indian Days celebration. Though there are a few notable exceptions, most locals don’t know much about First Nations presence in the Rockies. What they do know, however, has replaced that presence. It would be reasonable to suggest that there is no adult who lives in Banff who hasn’t been introduced to the history of the Canadian Pacific Railway. There is good reason for this, for it was the railway that built the town.

MOUNT LOUIS

Though it is within sight of the Town of Banff and the Trans-Canada Highway, few visitors get close enough to Mount Louis to fully comprehend the mountain’s stupendous character. Though not as high as the mountains clustered around the Great Divide at Lake Louise, Mount Louis is considered one of the classic mountaineering challenges of the entire Rocky Mountain chain.

Photograph by R.W. Sandford.
was attached to the last spike and another to the sledgehammer that was to drive it in. When the Golden Spike was tapped into place, telegraph lines broadcast news of the completion of the line to the entire world.

When you examine the photographs of the event, the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway didn’t generate a lot of smiles. For some, the driving of the last spike on the Canadian Pacific Railway at Craigelachie, British Columbia, Canada, November 7th, 1885, was the end. For others, like railway executive William Cornelius Van Horne, it was just the beginning, the beginning of a nation and the beginning of unlimited possibility in the West. What troubled these men most, however, was the realization that they had built the line in the wrong place.

In order to keep the line far enough south to prevent the Americans from building spur lines into Canadian territory, the CPR had been forced to build its transcontinental line over two impossible passes, Kicking Horse Pass near Lake Louise and Rogers Pass in the Selkirks. Neither of these passes would have been used if Sir Sandford Fleming had had his way. In his mind there was only one reasonable pass through the Rockies and that was Yellowhead Pass. But Fleming didn’t get his way – and the story of why he didn’t is the story of Canada.

**CASTLE MOUNTAIN**

James Hector named Castle Mountain in the summer of 1860. He was also the first to identify the horizontal strata that compose this huge massif as bedded sea floor sediments laid down over millions of years in an ancient inland ocean. In so doing, Dr. Hector brought “deep time” to the Rocky Mountains.

Photograph by R.W. Sandford.
As the country set out to translate a vision into operational fact, the surveying work of three generations of Western explorers became nationally important. As routes through the mountains of the West were the least understood links in the railway, mountain passes drawn by David Thompson and James Hector were pored over with nationalist zeal. Armed with copies of these maps, a route-finding expedition led by railway engineer Sandford Fleming came in 1872. What was required was a pass route of low enough incline to get trains over, yet close enough to the American border to assert strong territorial claim. By 1878, options for routes through the Rockies had been reduced to just four passes: the Kicking Horse, the Kootenay, the Vermilion and the Howse. As it was closest to the United States border, the railway syndicate chose Kicking Horse Pass as the final route through the Rockies. Because it didn’t yet know of a route through the Selkirk Mountains to the west, the Canadian Pacific Railway had to wait until 1882, and the discovery of Rogers Pass, to have its choice vindicated.

Once initiated, railway construction advanced with great speed across Canada. By late summer 1883, tracks had advanced up the Bow Valley from Calgary to a railway camp at Padmore on the Kananaskis flats. As the tracks advanced west, a divisional maintenance and refueling point for the railway was established at Canmore. The relentless advance of the tracks soon brought the railway into the vicinity of Cascade Mountain. It was here that the series of hot springs observed by James Hector was noticed by railway workers, who drew in the sulphurous stink of the therapeutic pools and made a direct link between money and water. It was their claims to these springs that would eventually lead to the creation of Canada’s first national park at Banff. In a very real sense, the history of our national parks system is a water story.

**IN AND OUT OF HOT WATER**

In the fall of 1883, the main line of the Canadian Pacific Railway had been laid to within a few kilometres of Kicking Horse Pass on the Great Divide. The work was abandoned for the season as winter came on. Some of the workers decided to stay in the valley to prospect and trap for furs. Among them were Frank McCabe, a twenty-six-year-old section foreman, and two friends who worked under him on the railway, William McCardell, also twenty-six, and his younger brother Thomas. While camped below the waterfall on Cascade Mountain, they decided they would like to cross the river to explore Sulphur Mountain,
or, as it was unofficially known at that time, Terrace Mountain. As the river was low at that time of the year, they built a crude raft and poled to the other side of the Bow. While moving up a particularly boggy slope on the mountain, they were surprised to find that the water that created the bog was actually warm. At the base of a cliff they found a large basin of steaming water, partially blocked with fallen timber. From the basin there emerged the strong smell of sulphur.

Far to the east another historic moment was passing: the naming of Banff. One interpretation of this event has William Van Horne rising at a meeting of the directors of the Canadian Pacific Railway to name the locale adjacent to the Bow River near the site of Siding 29 Banff, after Banffshire in Scotland, the ancestral home of railway directors George Stephen and Donald Smith. Parks Canada historian Bill Yeo calls this an old wives’ tale. He has been arguing for years that Banff Station was named in September of 1883 by the CPR Land Commissioner. Yeo claims that the commissioner used dozens of Scottish names and sprinkled them liberally over stations all the way from Winnipeg to Vancouver. The name Banff, Yeo claims, just happened to be sprinkled, well, on Banff. McCabe and the McCardell brothers built a rough shack at the springs that they allowed other railway workers to use. Though they later argued otherwise, it doesn’t appear that it immediately occurred to them to lay legal claim to the hot springs until after other railway workers had built similar shacks at various places along the base of Sulphur Mountain. Later investigation also cast doubt on William McCardell’s initial claim that, at the time of their discovery, he and McCabe had cut a statement of ownership on the springs into a nearby tree stump. Details of the discovery of the springs changed as they were told. McCabe later swore that it was January of 1884 before they were able to approach a Calgary surveyor by the name of A.W. McVittie for directions as to how to make an application to the government of the day for recognition of their claim. From McVittie they learned that a legal survey was required to make such a claim and that a survey in that remote part of the country would probably cost a whopping one thousand dollars, which the railway workers could ill afford.

More than a year passed before anything more happened with respect to the claim. On March 20, 1885, the Minister of the Interior received a letter from McCabe, William McCardell, Archie McNeil and C.W.N. Sansom applying for the legal title to the hot springs located 3.2 kilometres southwest of the Banff train station, which, at that time, was located at the base of Cascade Mountain. A few days later another
claimant, Theodore Seebring, applied for the rights to a second spring, now known as the Upper Hot Spring, located a few kilometres south and east of the McCabe claim.

Until these two claims were made, the government had no idea that hot springs even existed in this area of the Rockies. Their potential value, however, was not wasted on the government and it acted quickly to determine the nature of this potential tourism opportunity.

The assistant secretary to the Minister of the Interior instructed a Dominion Land Agent named J.M. Gordon to go to the site and to present a report to his Ottawa superiors, which he did in July 1885. Gordon established the existence of the two springs and observed in his report the improvements made at each of the sites by the claimants. It was at this time that yet another claim, made by one David Keefe, found its way to William Pearce of the Calgary Land Office. Keefe claimed he had discovered the hot springs at the present Cave and Basin on October 16, 1884, and that he had blazed a route to it that still remained. Two weeks later Pearce received another letter from Keefe claiming that McCabe and Seebring were trying to bring his claim into dispute. Pearce advised Ottawa to take no action on the claims until Keefe could authenticate his claim. But other claimants kept coming out of the woodwork. Willard Burrel Younge wrote the government to claim that he had discovered the springs and built a shanty there in the winter of 1875. His claim was supported by affidavits from such historical luminaries as the Rev. John McDougall and Andrew Sibbald of Morley.

As these claims piled up in government offices in Calgary, officials in Ottawa were designing a solution of their own to the hot springs problem. A former Conservative member of parliament visited the springs and recommended to the Prime Minister that this valuable asset be controlled and administered after an American model that saw the federal government recognize the national significance of such resources. By July of 1885, Deputy Minister of the Interior Alexander Burgess was actively seeking information on the process the Americans
used to set aside Arkansas Hot Springs, a national reserve similar in nature to the one Canadians potentially had in Banff.

Meanwhile, back in Banff, while William McCardell was away earning money by cutting railway ties, Frank McCabe was busy cutting ties of his own. Anxious to escape the valley and an unhappy marriage, McCabe unwittingly sold his and McCardell’s share in the springs to a politician of questionable reputation named D.B. Woodward who attempted to redeem the claim without even paying for it. The deal erupted into a political scandal that led, through a number of unlikely turns, to a clear realization that the government did not want the valuable springs to fall into the hands of men like the first claimants. The matter was settled by an inquiry held in Banff by William Pearce, which started off by recognizing no claims on the springs but ultimately recommended compensation for improvements. On November 28, 1885, just a few weeks after the driving of the last spike, an Order in Council was passed in Ottawa reserving just over twenty-six square kilometres on the north slopes of Sulphur Mountain as Canada’s first national park reserve. The “discovery” of hot springs in Banff was of immediate interest to the Canadian Pacific Railway, which was very interested in offsetting the high costs of building the line through the rugged mountains of the West. The railway planned a series of luxury hotels at strategic locations to break the long journey to the Pacific and make it possible to haul fewer dining cars up the steep passes that crested the tallest of the western ranges. Mount Stephen House was built at Field, and Glacier House grew elegantly out of the cedars and hemlocks at the summit of Rogers Pass. The grandest of the railway hotels, however, was planned for Banff.

Construction of the first Banff Springs Hotel was to begin in the spring of 1886. While plans were being completed for the grand hotel, Van Home arranged for the analysis of the spring waters’ chemistry. The medicinal qualities of these waters were highly praised and the reputation of their curative powers spread quickly and widely. Even without facilities, sufferers of every imaginable debility were coming to soak in the waters. After Dominion Land Surveyor P.R.A. Belanger completed a survey of the new reserve, two government leases were let for use of the springs. Upper Hot Springs leases were offered at the bargain price of fifteen dollars per tub per year.

One of the first to capitalize on the curative qualities of the water was Dr. Robert Brett, a surgeon with the CPR who would later become Lieutenant Governor of Alberta. Brett immediately recognized the
In the fall of 1886, Brett built the Grand View Villa at the Upper Hot Springs. It was a three-story luxury hotel with accommodation for fifty guests and forty patients. The astute Brett also experimented with an early form of souvenir sales. He created the Sanitarium Bottling Works and put “Banff Lithia Water,” on sale all over the resort. It was a hot item with tourists who required material evidence of their visit to Banff to show their friends. Brett later built a hotel on the present site of the Banff National Park administration building.

When the Banff Springs Hotel opened in the summer of 1888, it changed the complexion of the Bow Valley. While the latter was still very much a wilderness, there was suddenly civilization in the centre of it. Railway advertising proved very effective. Soon visitors from all over the world were coming to Banff to wander its mountain trails and bathe in the curative waters of the springs. Visitors and locals alike often have difficulty reconciling the railway’s crucial role in the creation and development of Canada’s first national parks with the later difficulties that these circumstances created in the management and protection of wilderness. From a century down the line, it seems as if the conflict between preservation and use has been sewn into the very fabric of our national parks system. The contradiction of creating national parks around major railway lines is inherently obvious today. The fact of the matter is that without the political and financial acumen of the Canadian Pacific Railway, Canada would have had to wait a long time to create its national parks system and, by the time it might have been
ready to create it, many of the country’s nationally significant landscape areas might have already been developed.

Van Home’s brilliant railway hotel scheme sought to create enclaves at all the most beautiful places between the prairies and the Pacific coast. That many of these hotels were situated in nationally significant reserves would only contribute to their attractiveness. The existence of these reserves, moreover, would allow the railway hotels some measure of control over the competition and over the pesky squatters who seemed to gather wherever the railway put down permanent roots. Nor can the economic contribution of the railway and its hotels be discounted. At a time when the country was struggling to stay fiscally afloat, railway tourism generated considerable income. Railway hotels in Banff and Jasper remain as economically important today as they were a century ago. The big thing that has changed in the Rockies over the last century is not the significance of the railway hotels, but the size and impact of the towns that have grown up around them.

THE CREATION OF A NATIONAL SPA

When Canada’s first national park reserve was created around the hot springs on Sulphur Mountain in 1885, a park system of the kind we have now was not even a consideration. The concept of protecting extant ecosystems was still many decades in the future. The 26-square-kilometre reserve at Banff was set aside for one thing, and one thing only: to protect the baths. Victorian society was obsessed with “taking the waters.” An entire cultural code had already grown up around the great spas of Europe, like Baden-Baden, Aix-les-Bains, Bath and Bad Gastein. There was much more to visiting a spa during the Victorian age than there is now. Visits to spas were carefully regimented. Custom ordained the right time of the year to visit a particular spa, propriety and social standing dictated the character of the people with whom you associated when you were there, and the spa doctor carefully prescribed the cure one should take. The cures ranged from lounging in the hot mineral water, drinking volumes of the water in bottled form, or subjecting oneself to hot mud poultices and near-scalding steam baths and plunges. It was widely felt that dedicated commitment to the pursuit of a “cure” would inevitably lead to better or even restored health. The federal government saw immediately that the hot springs at Banff could elevate Canada into the elite league of mineral bathing and used
The creation of a national park as a device for raising the profile of the curative waters.

An important feature of the upper-class spa experience was the opportunity to tour interesting nearby natural surroundings. Though sightseeing was not to interfere with the rigorous schedule of the “cure,” it was held that the restorative capacity of the waters was complemented through the uplifting sublimity of nature at its best. Wealthy guests, however, were not interested in roughing it. They expected a complete complement of elegant urban amenities, regardless of the spa’s remoteness. They also expected to be entertained and amused while they were there. Many desired hiking trails, observation platforms and even zoos filled with exotic animals typical of the region they were visiting. Sophisticated visitors also expected opera, theatre and chamber music with dinner, followed perhaps by dancing. The object of tourism during the Victorian Era was not much different than it is for many people today. To travel was to experience the familiar in an unfamiliar but spectacular setting.

The Canadian government set out to create a fashionable spa at Banff. Their first priority was to develop and then enforce strict controls on the nature of development in the new park. As the status of a given spa diminished in accordance with the ability of “commoners” to take the waters in what had previously been the solitary preserve of the high society, the government wanted to prevent cheap hotels and tasteless service establishments from being built in Banff. When the town of Banff was surveyed by George Stewart in 1886, all these considerations came into play.
The government devoted a great deal of time and energy to evolving an appropriate concept around which to focus commercial development at the springs. They chose to follow the model of Hot Springs, Arkansas, which John Hall, veteran hot springs inspector of the Canadian Department of the Interior, had visited in 1886. Local administrators at Hot Springs were very helpful in providing information concerning the operation of their springs. Upon his return, Hall recommended absolute government control, and management under medical supervision, for the hot springs in Banff. His recommendations, he claimed, were formulated in such a way as “to secure to the public the utmost benefit which can be derived from the waters without loss to the revenue.”

In 1887, Thomas White sent John Hall to Banff to report on the progress of development of the new hot springs facilities. Prior to his departure from Ottawa, Hall had heard word that the federal government was planning to pass an act that would create a national park around the springs. “Permit me to suggest,” he ventured, “that the act should contain very stringent provisions for the protection of fish and game and, if possible, under existing treaties, should prohibit Indians hunting in the park.”

In 1887, Rocky Mountains Park, as it was named, was officially expanded to 673 square kilometres. The park was “set apart as a public park and pleasure ground for the benefit, advantage and enjoyment...
of the people of Canada.” This legislation empowered the government to make regulations to preserve and manage all local flora, fauna and minerals, to control the management and utilization of the hot springs, and to control mining activities, trade and leaseholds within the park. Unfortunately, however, it was already too late to protect some elements of the natural environment that surrounded the springs. It is regrettable that locals of the time did not have a complete sense of what it took to preserve a national park as an “ark.” Some of the management strategies adopted at the time were to have serious implications as the park grew to embrace surrounding country.

EARLY PARK MANAGEMENT IDEALS

The comfort, convenience and amusement of park visitors were important considerations for early park managers like George Stewart. Not only was Stewart, as superintendent of the park, expected to put down “rowdyism and unseemly behaviour” among locals, he was expected to clear all dead trees in the area to lower the risk of fire, to continually upgrade roads in areas where prospective leaseholders wished to build homes, keep meteorological records in order to apprise visitors of the wonders of mountain climate and seek out new attractions to amuse visitors. Developing government policy regarding wildlife management similarly reflected the perceived needs of the tourist.

In 1886, the former Commissioner of Fisheries, one W.F. Whitcher, was asked by Minister of the Interior, Thomas White, to conduct an investigation into the park’s flora and fauna and to make recommendations concerning proper husbanding of these resources for the benefit of the tourist. Whitcher’s investigation revealed that serious wildlife deprivations had already occurred in the area surrounding the proposed park. Whitcher felt that a strong management policy was necessary to ensure preservation. His policy proposals, however, encouraged highly selective management. He believed that preservation policies should apply only to such herbivores as elk, deer, sheep, goats, squirrels and hares, as well as “countless innocent and gay plumaged birds,” that “form part and parcel of living ornaments interesting to visitors on every public reservation.” Whitcher was even prepared to extend the preservation ethic to black bears. But that was where he drew the line. Whitcher believed that predators should not be permitted to survive on public lands. He decried the “lupine, vulpine and feline vermin that prey upon furred and feathered game with savage
impartiality.” To Whitcher the title of “vermin” covered a lot of animals we now consider essential to ecological integrity in mountain wilderness. Among vermin, he included wolves, coyotes, foxes, lynxes, weasels, wild cats, porcupines, badgers, eagles, falcons, owls, loons, mergansers, kingfishers and cormorants, all of which he recommended be destroyed wherever possible by park staff. On the aquatic conservation side, Whitcher argued that it was imperative that devices such as dynamite explosions, nets, and “the improvidence of Indian fishing” be outlawed in national reserves.

Whitcher also recommended “improvements” on the natural beauty of Banff, such as the introduction of wild rice in the Vermilion Lakes. He also advocated the construction of dams on selected waters to permit fish restocking. He recommended rainbow trout as the species of preference for introduction of game fish. All of these things Whitcher recommended with the idea of improving the attractiveness of the hot springs reserve to visitors. We now know, however, that many of these proposals did not take into account the realities of natural systems. The elimination of predators in the park, combined with the introduction of exotic elk from Yellowstone in the 1920s, damaged natural environments in the Canadian Rockies far beyond the boundaries of the park.
Impacts of the decision to eliminate park predators still haunt the park today. Whitcher’s wild rice can still be found around the Vermilion Lakes and the introduction of game fish destroyed much of the natural aquatic environment. A century later we are confronted with the realization that the natural environments of many national park lakes can now only be restored through the wholesale destruction of introduced species and the reintroduction of natural species taken from lakes and streams outside the park boundaries.

**TOWARD A TOWN IN BANFF**

Once the attraction potential of the hot springs was realized, it fell upon the federal government to construct an infrastructure of roads, bridges and services that would make the reserve into a credible national park. The responsibility for developing a townsite in the park fell once again to George Stewart, who in 1886 had undertaken the first survey of the town that would become Banff.

One should never underestimate the power of those who design and build community infrastructure. It was around the first roads, bridges and zoning considerations that the town as we know it today developed. When Stewart came to Banff in February of 1886, what existed in terms of settlement was concentrated at Banff Station at the foot of Cascade Mountain. When Stewart first stopped at Banff Station, the town adjacent to it was called National Park, a name it would keep until 1888. Stewart’s immediate tasks were to survey a road from the Banff siding to the Cave and Basin, determine the exact boundaries of the new reserve, and to plot the locations of two townsites. The first of these towns was to be at Devil’s Lake or, as it is known now, Lake Minnewanka, which was expected to blossom into a major tourist attraction. The second of these towns, located on the banks of the Bow, was to be the service centre for the hot springs. Stewart completed these preliminary projects by the end of the winter of 1886.

The biggest problem was access to the lower hot springs at the cave and basin. The rough path that connected the train station with the river was difficult even for those in good health and impossible for invalids who were coming in increasing numbers to soak in the pools. Stewart had his men clear a good road to the river and then construct a timber float bridge across the Bow to the springs. This temporary structure was replaced by an iron truss bridge in 1887. It is this bridge that is featured in many of the early photographs of Banff Avenue and Cascade
Mountain. It was not long before carriages were carrying the ill from the train station right to the springs over a good road system that was soon expanded to include Bow Falls.

Stewart then turned his attention to the planning of the town. Stewart wanted to separate a downtown business community from an exclusive residential area he planned for the other side of the Bow on the lower slopes of Sulphur Mountain. The townsite as he envisioned it straddled a main street leading from the train station to the river. As it would lead from the town, which he initially named National Park, to the Banff Station and Post Office, Stewart called this street Banff Avenue. On either side of Banff Avenue, streets radiated outward in a grid pattern. As Stewart favoured high density in the commercial sections of the town, Banff Avenue lots were narrow with limited backyard space. In 1888, Stewart had also planned a new byway called Station Street in his design (what is now called Lynx Street) that connected a new train station with Bow Falls and the newly completed Banff Springs Hotel. The town was expanded and renamed Banff in 1888.

Stewart also turned his attention to creating better access to the Cave and Basin. The only improvement to cave access since its discovery was a fourteen-metre ladder thrust through the natural opening at the top of the basin. Though a group of Calgarians petitioned against it, Stewart proposed to tunnel through the cave wall from the abutting terrace, adding, in his terms, “much to the attractions and natural curiosity of the Cave, as well as affording a perfectly level and easy mode of access to its waters.” The cave access to the original spring, designed by George Stewart, remains today one of the most visited sites in Banff National Park.

HORSING AROUND IN THE ROCKIES

Railway advertising and word of mouth testimonials given friends by visitors to the Rockies gradually established an international reputation for stunning scenery and authentic local hospitality. Wealthy visitors from all over the world were riding the train across Canada and increasing numbers of them were stopping to enjoy the hot springs and take excursions into the fabled wilderness that crowded right up to the tracks at Banff.

The outfitting, horse packing and guiding industry that made early Banff so famous grew out of an earlier era of railway exploration and construction. The requirement for moving large numbers of workers
HORSE TRAVEL
Because of the distances and the number of river crossings required in the vast backcountry of the Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks World Heritage Site, horses are still a popular way to travel. As the equipment and the manner in which people travel on horseback have not been significantly altered over time, trail rides offer a way of experiencing the mountains in a manner that has not much changed in 250 years. Photograph by R.W. Sandford.

and huge masses of materials into position for railway construction attracted the widest possible range of horsemen, teamsters and mountain men to the Canadian West. Many of the most competent of these stayed on in the mountains to form their own small businesses in service of the tourism and freight industries that were created by the completion of the line. Some of these men contributed enormously to the reputation of early Banff through the Western hospitality they offered. Some conducted explorations on their own, and with tourists, into the unmapped regions of the Rockies that lay far beyond the tracks and the park boundary. Still others became famous because their attitudes about the mountains and about tourism shaped the future of a developing Banff in ways few could ever have suspected. Some of them are remembered simply because they were characters in their own right, whose combined stubbornness, wit and charm made them inseparable from an image Banff had of itself and wanted to portray to the world.

There are many reasons an aspiring Banff local may want to be knowledgeable about this early horse-packing community in the park. These people were simple, straightforward, tough, experienced and dedicated to mountain travel as a way of life. Though not usually formally educated, they were in almost universal possession of an uncommon degree of common sense. They were also famous for their humour and for the fun they shared with others. Though they were sometimes gruff in manner, and they loved the Rockies for their beauty and for the qualities of character the mountains brought out in those who travelled through them. These are not bad attributes even for a modern local to aspire to.

The earliest of the important horse guides in the Rockies was Tom Wilson, to whom the reader will be better introduced in the chapter on Yoho National Park. His discovery of Lake Louise and Emerald Lake made him an important historical icon. After the railway was completed, visitors interested in explorations beyond the tracks were
the early 1890s Peyto had begun working as an apprentice guide for Tom Wilson in Banff. It wasn’t long before Peyto impressed the dudes he took into the backcountry. Petyo’s renown as an excellent horseman was rivalled only by his reputation as a character. One of Peyto’s most famous Banff escapades involved capturing a live lynx and wandering casually into a Banff bar with it tied to his back. After noting the presence of a few miners with whom he was known to have had certain disagreements, he released the lynx and sat back to enjoy the havoc the cat unleashed upon the bar. The lynx later became a prime attraction at the Banff Zoo located then on the lower slopes of Cascade Mountain. While he was notorious for his local pranks, Peyto was also justifiably famous for his explorations, not the least of which involved a 1895 visit to the lake Walter Wilcox named in his honour the following year.

One of the unsung heroes of the early guiding community was Ralph Edwards. Born in Ramsgate, Kent in 1869, his wanderlust took him to Canada in 1888. Edwards took a mining job in Canmore before coming to work with Tom Wilson in 1894. From then on, Edwards dedicated himself to the trail life. Jimmy Simpson was another famous early horseman. He came from Lincolnshire, England in 1896 and built his famous lodge on the shores of Bow Lake in 1921. It was through men like these that many visiting explorers were able to put their names, and the names of their friends and loved ones, on the permanent map of the Rockies.6

It should also be noted that the great age of horse travel is not over in Banff. You can still hire outfitters and guides to take you into the backcountry. Some of the people who lead these trips are committed to horse travel as away of life. Through them you can relive a vital part of our mountain past. You can travel in a manner that has not changed in two
The democratization of automobile use changed visitor patterns in Banff National Park. While wealthy foreigners financed the age of train tourism in the Rockies, regional visitors powered the age of the car. Instead of the international trans-continental train clientele that Banff was used to, the car brought motorists from Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta who did not have the means to stay at expensive railway hotels in towns like Banff. Moreover, this new class of visitor was as interested in driving as it was in stopping to see the sights. A new concept of travel was born and with it a need for a new kind of place to stay. Enter the bungalow camp, inexpensive roadside accommodation that became the precursor of the “motor hotel” or “motel.” These camps, fashioned after an American model, were usually composed of from ten to twenty-four small cabins, a store, a service station and a lunch counter, designed to serve the needs of families travelling by car. Rates usually ranged from one to four dollars per night, depending on where the camp was located and on market demand. Seeing patterns of visitation change, the Canadian Pacific Railway built bungalow camps at Lake Windermere, Radium Hot Springs, Vermilion Crossing and Castle Mountain. By 1936, other private bungalow camps had been established at Tunnel Mountain near Banff, Johnston Canyon, Storm Mountain, Lake Louise and Moraine Lake. For motorists who wished to sleep in tents, the government constructed the first campgrounds.
The growing North American fascination with the automobile soon changed visitor demands. As bungalow camps spread all over the Rockies, visitation increased and the length of visitor stays dropped. While the average stay in the Banff Rockies might have been as long as two weeks in the 1890s, automobile travellers often only stayed overnight. While visitors were obviously seeing a lot more geography during their visits to the mountains, they were doing it more superficially, from inside their cars. Protracted journeys into the wilderness began to decline. The wilderness began to shrink back from roads that soon reached into even the remotest of valleys.

The Depression caused an extended period of involuntary restraint for the federal government during which it had to find innovative ways to further its mandate and finance its operations. By putting thousands of relief workers on large public works projects, the government was able to help the country through its desperate times. Some of the largest of the nation’s relief projects involved road construction in Canada’s mountain national parks. Much of the infrastructure of Banff National Park as we see it today was created during the Great Depression. The list of relief projects and Public Works Construction Act projects for 1931 alone numbered sixteen different major initiatives. The Banff–Calgary road was improved, a new building was constructed at the Upper Hot Springs and the Cave and Basin, extensive new trail systems were developed in the park, enthusiasm for skiing resulted in the completion of the Norquay Road, and an airstrip was built outside of Banff townsite. The Banff–Jasper Highway was built from 1933 to 1939, and officially opened in 1940. By 1936, a new park administration building and gardens had been constructed on the site of the old Bretton Hall, which had burned down in 1933. Between 1939 and 1940, when the depression came to an end, visitation to the park tripled due to better economic times as well as better roads and facilities in the park.

When World War II came to an end, Banff could, at last, take advantage of these investments. The expansion and improvement of the park’s...
road system and a growing post-war prosperity led to unprecedented annual visitation. Encouraged by aggressive and highly targeted government publicity focused on the value of outdoor recreation, visitors came from all over Western Canada and the United States to enjoy the wonders of Banff. For a decade the park held the recreational needs of visitors above the interests of landscape preservation. Though this focus would change gradually through the 1960s in response to a growing environmental lobby, the next five decades would still see spectacular development in Banff. In 1945, the population of Banff was about 2,000 with tourist accommodation for 5,600. If one wanted to add Tunnel Mountain Campground to the formula, Banff townsite could accommodate about 7,500 people at any given time during the summer season.

Five decades later, the town’s resident population had grown to the level of its former total visitor capacity. To put it another way, the number of people you would have found in Banff on a crowded weekend in 1945 were now living in the town permanently. Other changes had taken place, too. In 1994, the total visitation to Banff National Park was a whopping 4.6 million per year. But only two-thirds of these people were using the park. A total of 1.4 million of these visitors didn’t even stop in Banff or anywhere else in the park. In 1994, that still left 3.2 million to visit the town and park every year. At that time 76 percent were Canadian, 58 percent were from Alberta, and 17 percent were American, while the remaining 7 percent came from overseas. In that year there were 650 licensed businesses in Banff Park. Visitors spent roughly $750 million a year staying in Banff’s 3,600 hotel rooms, 125 restaurants, 220 retail outlets and three ski areas. In high season during the summer, there were often 25,000 people in Banff, qualifying it as a small city by provincial standards.

While visitation to Banff and to the Canadian Rockies continued to grow through the final years of the twentieth century, the numbers of visitors declined dramatically throughout the first decade of the new millennium as terrorism threats, high fuel prices and economic uncertainty eroded tourism globally. Despite these problems, Banff remains a very popular tourist destination for one very good reason: the town is a centre for the enjoyment of some of the most interesting and aesthetically rewarding experiences that people can have in mountains anywhere in the world. Banff also remains interesting and important due to the sustained and largely successful effort that continues to be made to perpetuate the park’s natural ecosystem functions in the midst of a rapidly changing West.
KEEPING UP WITH CHANGE

Keeping Banff National Park in some sort of wild condition and in good ecological health is no easy task. It requires a great deal of knowledge, dedication and no small amount of good technical and scientific skill. It also requires political will and the committed cooperation of locals. Unfortunately, park management is no longer just a matter of leaving Banff as it is and allowing nature to take care of itself. So much has happened in Canada’s first national park that it is now impossible to allow some natural ecological processes to unfold on their own.

Anyone living and working in Banff will soon become aware of a number of apparent contradictions in the way the park has been developed and operates. On one hand, the contemporary mandate of the national parks of Canada argues that the preservation of wilderness is the central reason for the existence of parks like Banff. On the other hand, we find a city inside the park, wholesale development at Lake Louise, and a railway and a national highway right through the heart of the park’s most ecologically productive valley. Even Parks Canada itself has declared “visitor experience” its highest priority. One might rightly ask, “How can all this be?”

The fact of the matter is that Banff National Park did not come to be what it is today overnight. The Banff we see and experience today has its roots in the past. As a culture we have not always held natural landscape to be as valuable as we do today. We have not always had the scientific understanding we now have of the ecological elements that make up the living framework of a wilderness. Different views of why parks exist and how they should be managed and used divide us still today. We are also living with the consequences of well-meaning but ultimately serious mistakes made in park management in the past. Lest one be unduly surprised and alarmed by this, it is important to understand just how much we have learned from Banff. It was our first national park. It was created at a time when no other national parks existed as models upon which we could base appropriate management and care. We had to learn by doing. We now have in this country one of the finest national parks systems anywhere in the world. Much of that is due to hard lessons we learned in Banff. Many of these lessons have to do with boundaries and how boundaries affect jurisdiction that ultimately affects ecosystem function.
As the twentieth century dawned, a conservation ethic gradually began to inform the consciousness of a growing Canadian professional class. As this occurred, increasing political pressure was applied to the challenge of defining and evolving the national park ideal in Canada. It took years for this issue to finally erupt into government action. This is not to say that nothing had been done since 1887 to forward the national park concept as it relates to Banff. Yoho and Glacier parks were created in 1886, and in 1892 a reserve around Lake Louise was established. But the issue of wildlife conservation had yet to be resolved. In 1902, the federal government responded to concerns about the disappearance of “big game” in the Northwest Territories by extending the boundaries of Rocky Mountains National Park, as Banff was known then, to 11,396 square kilometres, nearly twice its current size. The expanded park area now included the reserve at Lake Louise and the watersheds of the Bow, Red Deer, Kananaskis and Spray rivers. In other words, the park then extended from the current boundary of Banff National Park past the town of Canmore right to the Kananaskis River.
In 1908, the administration of national parks was placed under the Superintendent of Forestry and a forest and game protection service was created. Howard Sibbald was appointed chief game guardian of Rocky Mountains Park in 1909. It was Sibbald who recommended to Park Superintendent Howard Douglas that portions of the foothills region in which timber-cutting berths and grazing permits had already been granted should be excised from the park. He also argued that existing park boundaries were impossible to locate because they fell on ground that had not been surveyed. As the cost of a survey was at that time prohibitive, and outfitters were already lobbying for hunting rights in the newly expanded park, the government decided to give up much of the front range area in exchange for a land swap that would include areas north of the existing park in the North Saskatchewan River Basin.

In 1911, the Rocky Mountains Park Act was replaced by the Dominion Forest Reserves and Parks Act. This act reduced Rocky Mountains Park to 4,662 square kilometres, just over a third of its former size. Soon after the Parks Act came into being, responsibility for national parks passed from the Forestry Branch of the Department of the Interior to the newly created Dominion Parks Branch headed by the formidable J.B. Harkin.

In 1917, the watersheds of the Panther and Red Deer rivers were restored to the park, increasing its area to 7,125 square kilometres. The park was once again expanded in 1929 to include 2,528 square kilometres of mountainous terrain south of Sunwapta Pass that had formerly been part of Jasper. With the addition of 267 square kilometres around
Mount Moloch in the same year, the park was now just less than 10,000 square kilometres. Boundary changes didn’t come to an end until the passage of the National Parks Act of 1930. This important act, still the principal legislative device for preserving national parks in this country, set a new standard for the quality and nature of the landscapes Canada wanted to protect. Upon passage of the act, lands not conforming to the new criteria were withdrawn from newly named Banff National Park. These included the Kananaskis Valley, which had been badly scarred by fire; a portion of the Spray Lakes watershed which had been identified as having hydro-electric potential; most of the Ghost River watershed; much of the Red Deer River watershed, and a large area in the angle of the Cline and Siffleur rivers which had been included in the transfer from Jasper in 1929.

A major adjustment was also made in the size of the park in 1933 to accommodate a park gate on the Calgary-Banff Highway, and again in 1949 when fifty-four square kilometres were removed from the vicinity of the Goat Range above Canmore to accommodate hydroelectric development. Not taking into account the area of the now autonomous Town of Banff, the fifty-kilometre-long and half-kilometre-wide right-of-way of the Trans-Canada Highway and the main line of the Canadian Pacific Railway, plus the areas carved out for development at Lake Louise, the size of this park is about 6,641 square kilometres, or about 2,565 square miles. As any local will tell you, however, there is no reason, other than political will, for these boundaries not to change again.

In retrospect we now realize that it was unwise from an ecological perspective to separate Banff National Park from the prairies to the east. That is where the wildlife was concentrated in the past. What we have protected in mountains is just a fragment on the edge of the former range of most of the animals we try to protect. The wildlife connections between the plains and the mountains, however, have been severed. We have to be satisfied with the pieces we have saved.

There is also the issue of water. While the Rocky Mountains contribute generously to the water supply of the prairie lowlands, the Great
Plains are essentially semi-arid. At present all the rivers in the dry south of Alberta from the Montana to the Red Deer are fully allocated. The Bow River – the main river in the southern part of the park – is, by Western Canadian standards at least, a heavily utilized watercourse. The Bow is 657 kilometres long. From its headwaters at Bow Lake to where it joins the Oldman to form the South Saskatchewan River, it falls some 1,260 metres. The Bow drains some 25,000 square kilometres or about 4 percent of Alberta’s total land area. It provides 3 percent of the water that flows on the surface of the province, but in so doing provides water to 33 percent of the province’s population. Though it may not appear so, especially to managers from water-scarce countries, the Bow is arguably the most heavily developed watercourse in the province.

There are fifteen major dams or weirs on the Bow and its tributaries. Some 45 percent of Alberta’s irrigated land is in this basin. There is a great deal happening here and the public policy challenges are significant. How do you balance already entrenched demands for use – population growth, expanding oil industry needs, new realizations relating to the crucial importance of environmental services provided by aquatic ecosystems, emerging concerns about reduced flows and increased climate change impacts – against a frontier sense of optimism and abundance? How do you prevent current water use entrenchments from limiting social and economic development in the future? How is protection of the East Slope of the Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks World Heritage Site going to contribute to solutions to a growing water availability crisis on the southern prairies in Canada?

To create the West we want we have to stop seeing the Rocky Mountain parks as a mere collection of fragments pieced together under different and sometimes conflicting jurisdictions and dominated in the popular imagination by Banff. It is time to think about what it means to have saved the larger whole. This great reserve really is greater than the sum of its parks. Properly protected and managed, and perhaps expanded to include already existing precious buffer zones, the Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks World Heritage Site could become a crystal around which we build a better and more sustainable West. After all, anything is possible in a geography of hope like a World Heritage Site, and Banff is just one park in that grandly expanded site.