FOR THE CREE, “YOHO!” was an expression of profoundest awe. Suggesting the sacred and the mysterious, Yoho was first applied by the Cree to those rare and powerful natural places that could induce a mindslowing sense of aesthetic arrest. Yoho is a word describing reverence tinged with fear inspired by the sublime. In its simplest contemporary translation, Yoho means wonder. The name Yoho was applied first to the river and then to the valley through which the river runs, and later applied to the national park as a whole.

Yoho became a national park in 1886. On the official maps of the Rocky Mountain National Parks, Yoho is a small, irregular diamond tucked between Banff National Park on the east and Kootenay National Park on the south.

As has been explained, Dr. James Hector of the Palliser Expedition certainly had his problems here. It was August of 1858. After a year of travelling across Canada, Hector was well accustomed to long days in the saddle in unfamiliar country, and was looking forward to the new discoveries he was going to make in what were locally called the Shining Mountains. As planned, the other members of the Palliser party had already set out on separate, independent expeditions looking for new
passes through the Rockies. John Palliser had headed south from Old Bow Fort toward what is now the Kananaskis area, and Thomas Blakiston was following the Livingstone Range south toward what is now Waterton. James Hector had set his sights on the Great Divide, which he eventually hoped to follow north, peeking between the mountains for evidence of anything resembling a pass, before heading east to Fort Edmonton where he would stay the winter.

After reaching and naming Castle Mountain, Hector climbed Vermilion Pass and descended to the Vermilion River Valley in what is now Kootenay National Park, directly adjacent to Yoho. After several days of exploration Hector concluded that a road could indeed be built down this pass. He then ascended the Kootenay River to its headwaters and passed over another divide into the drainage of the Beaverfoot, which he reached on August 27. This area is now part of the province of British Columbia, lying along its common border with both Kootenay and Yoho National Parks. Hector named the Brisco Range for Captain Arthur Brisco (a member of the 11th Hussars, who were immortalized in Tennyson’s “The Charge of the Light Brigade”). Hector named Mount Vaux for his friend William Sandys Wright Vaux, who for twenty-nine years was resident antiquarian at the British Museum, one of Hector’s favourite haunts. It was in this area that Hector came upon a significant waterfall, now known as Wapta Falls, above which his luck suddenly changed:

The expedition’s only doctor had received a life-threatening kick in the chest just at that point in the journey when starvation threatened the survival of the whole party. Although their situation was grim, Hector realized that a new pass over the Great Divide awaited him at the upper end of the valley through which this unmapped river flowed.

The Palliser expedition identified eight passes for the consideration of the Secretary of State in England. Given the undeveloped state of the Atlantic and Pacific colonies in Canada, the expedition did not recommend building a wagon road through the difficult and dangerous
terrain of the Canadian West. Instead, the final pages of the lengthy report recommended that the government consider an international undertaking with American railroads planning to use a “North Pacific route.”

But James Hector’s ultimate accomplishment transcends the recommendations of the Palliser report. Hector is important to Yoho and to the rest of the World Heritage Site because he brought different interests to the mountain West. He was not a fur-trader, a missionary, a prospector, or a soldier of fortune of any kind. He was the first of a new kind of traveller whose expectations were fashioned by aesthetics as well as by the pursuit of adventure. The perception of what was once considered a barren wasteland of western peaks was about to be changed. Hector replaced a landscape of terror and fear with summits of imagination. The published accounts of the expedition told of a new kind of West that nurtured freedom of the spirit and provided room in which that spirit could wander. Hector imposed a new geography on the Rockies—a geography not of limitations but of possibility. His accounts told of an entire landscape history waiting to be experienced and described. A whole new world of knowledge was waiting for those with the energy and curiosity to explore it.

The map Hector created of Yoho became a map of wonders. Although Hector did not see it at the time, in the world’s imagination Canada was about to become blue mountains, Mounties and moonlit ice – and the Canadian Pacific Railway would put Yoho, with all its wonders, right in the middle of it.

The Palliser report stimulated a lively debate about the future of the Canadian West. Much was made of real and imagined American threats to the political sovereignty of these sparsely populated lands. A nationalist movement began to grow in Canada. Confederation debates led to a reassessment of the relationship of the West to the political and economic aspirations of a developing national identity. Two years after the confederation of Canada’s upper and maritime provinces, the continent’s first national railway was completed in the United States. Although Canada had a tenth of the population of its southern neighbour, the Canadian government decided that if the United States could
build a national railway, it could too. The building of Canada’s first national railway was as much a political coup as it was a feat of remarkable engineering. The history of Yoho National Park is inextricably linked to this history.

At Confederation, settlement was concentrated in Upper Canada in Ontario and Quebec; the only other large concentration of people was along the Pacific coast, where most trade was with the western United States. To achieve greatness, Central Canada had to embrace the west coast by way of the almost limitless lands that formed the interior of the continent. Four years after Confederation, the Dominion of Canada made a rash promise to the Colony of British Columbia, offering a railway in exchange for political union. The area that is now Yoho played a huge role in this story and if you don’t get off the highway or away from the train tracks in this national park, it would be easy to think that what we built here is more important than what we saved. In Yoho, however, both matter to our history and our future.

SURVEYING THE WONDER

The builders of Canada’s national railway knew where they wanted to go, but they didn’t know what lay between them and their goal. In April 1871 an engineer named Sandford Fleming was hired to solve the problem of locating the railway over its nearly six-thousand-kilometre route across Canada. A number of very proficient surveyors were assigned to the Rockies. Since Kicking Horse Pass had already been noted and mapped by James Hector, surveying efforts by Walter Moberly and others were concentrated on other sections of the Great Divide. Their efforts were halted by a scandal in 1873 that led to the fall of the country’s Conservative government under John A. Macdonald. Once in power, the Liberals, under Alexander Mackenzie, put a temporary halt to the railway.

Surveying in Western Canada continued sporadically throughout the next five years. During that time, British Columbia became restless over the Dominion’s lack of progress toward the fulfillment of its promise and threatened to leave Confederation. By 1878, however, Macdonald’s Conservatives were back in power and the dream of a railway once again gathered steam. A new syndicate was established, arguments over where the Pacific terminus would be located were finally resolved, and as the railway began to snake westward from Montreal, contracts were let to begin laying the rails inland from the Pacific toward the
Great Divide. It did not seem to matter that a route across the prairies and through the Rockies had yet to be firmly chosen; the Great Railway had finally been started and the rest would take care of itself.

Uncertainty over which pass the railway should use in the Rockies was complicated by a number of factors. Although Yellowhead Pass was the preferred route of Sir Sandford Fleming, it was argued that a line that far north of the international border would require more trackage and would therefore be more expensive to build. A more southerly route would not only cost less but might also open up the Canadian prairies for agricultural development. When the decision was made to lay the track in the south, two obstacles remained. No known route existed through the Selkirks and an acceptable pass through the Rockies had yet to be identified. The responsibility of solving these two problems was given to an American engineer named Albert Bowman Rogers.

**THE BISHOP OF BLUE THUNDER**

Major A.B. Rogers was born in Orleans, Massachusetts, on May 28, 1829. A Yale graduate, Rogers quickly developed a reputation as both an outrageous character and one of the best railway and civil engineers on the continent. While working on the Erie Canal, the Chicago,
Milwaukee and St. Paul, and a number of other, lesser railway projects, Rogers mastered most of the obscenities in the English language. By the time he went to work for the Canadian Pacific in 1880, Rogers was already well-known by the nickname of “the Bishop.” He also possessed a respected reputation for almost superhuman physical endurance.

Many of Rogers’s explorations followed leads on potential routes left behind by earlier surveying parties. Following an eagle up a remote valley on the western edge of the Selkirk Mountains in 1865, Walter Moberly had discovered Eagle Pass. In the spring of 1881, Rogers advanced past Eagle Pass to the head of the valley and, by way of a fork that Moberly had not visited, discovered the glacial headwaters of the Illecillewaet River. There he was certain he had found the pass through the Selkirks that was the key to southern route of the railway. Now that Rogers Pass had been discovered, it would not take long to pick a logical route through the Rockies, the next and last mountain obstacle in British Columbia. But Rogers had only travelled to the west side of his pass and did not know what its descent would be like. Rogers charged himself with further investigation and rushed back to the Rockies to organize the tracing of the rail route east from the Great Plains to the Great Divide and over Kicking Horse Pass, which had scarcely been examined since James Hector last saw it in September of 1858. In so doing, the Bishop would come into contact with a man who could see past his gruff facade and to the sincerity and kindness that were at the centre of Rogers’s being. That man was Tom Wilson. This quiet cowboy would put the next grand human stamp on Yoho.

Tom Wilson began his career in the West as an officer in the service of the North-West Mounted Police at Fort Walsh in the Northwest Territory. Thinking a change of career would suit him, Wilson hired on at Fort Benton, Montana, to assist in surveying a route through the Rockies. In 1881 found himself employed as a packer by P.K. Hyndman, Chief Engineer for Major A.B. Rogers, Engineer-in-Charge of the Mountain Section of the Canadian Pacific Railway.

On July 5, 1881, Wilson departed Fort Calgary as part of a large movement of supplies, including eighty packhorses to freight supplies into the mountains. The party was to await Major Rogers on the Bow River at the entrance to the Rockies. Wilson did not have to wait long to meet the great engineer, and when he met him, he understood immediately what kind of work it was going to take to make this railway plan work. Tom Wilson did not leave behind extensive journals. What he wrote about A.B. Rogers, however, is pure Canadiana. His accounts also tell
us that travel in Yoho had not become any safer since James Hector had travelled there twenty-three years before:

On the 15th of July I had strolled a short distance west of the camp and was sitting smoking alongside the narrow Indian trail when suddenly a mottled roan cayuse, carrying a rider, appeared round a curve. Behind it came two packhorses then two other animals ridden by Shuswap Indians. The leader, whom I instantly sensed was Major Rogers, wore an old white helmet and a brown canvas suit. His condition, well, dirty doesn’t begin to describe it.

His voluminous sideburns waved like flags in a breeze; his piercing eyes seemed to look at and see through everything at once. I had heard that Major Rogers was famous for his tobacco chewing ability and may have doubted the stories I had heard. Such doubts, if I had any, were dispelled during the first few minutes I was with him. Every few minutes a stream of tobacco juice erupted from between his sideburns; I’ll bet there were not many trees alongside the trail that had escaped his deadly tobacco juice aim.

Someone once said of him, “Give him six plugs of chewing tobacco and five bacon rinds, and he will travel for two weeks.” The man who said that was no exaggerator. Despite his fifty-odd years he leapt from his horse in a manner that many a younger man could have envied.

When Wilson met the famous surveyor, Major Rogers was accompanied by his twenty-one-year-old nephew, A.L. Rogers, better known as “Al,” who had travelled from St. Paul to meet his uncle in Kamloops, B.C., where the Hudson’s Bay Company had a trading post. Rogers arranged for his nephew to begin exploration of Kicking Horse Pass from the west while he rounded to begin an assault from the east.

The party, with Wilson included, worked its way slowly up the Bow River Valley toward the Great Divide. In his gruff way Rogers was living up to his reputation. The men were already complaining. Only Tom Wilson sympathized with Rogers:

[Maj or Rogers] called for a volunteer to accompany him and act as his special attendant. Silence greeted his request; there were good reasons for it. Every man present had learned in three days to hate the Major with a real hatred. He had no mercy on horses or men; he had none on himself. The labourers hated him for the way he drove them and the packers, for the way he abused the horses; he never gave their needs a thought. When no one volunteered I thought I might as well take a chance and so took him up.

This invitation from Rogers was, in fact, an invitation to become part of history. There were a good dozen other men there who could have easily decided to participate in the discovery of many of the most
significant natural features the Rockies, but they simply hated Rogers too much to do so.

Wilson knew that James Hector had not travelled the entire length of the Kicking Horse. Hector had come upon the Kicking Horse River by way of the Beaverfoot, thereby missing the section of the river between Wapta Falls and the Columbia where it enters Kicking Horse Canyon, a long, deep, sunless gorge where even Native peoples declined to travel. During the summer of 1881, Wilson discovered why the two European parties that travelled through the valley of the Kicking Horse had both suffered from starvation and acute exhaustion. This was difficult country to explore. There were dues to be paid before the landscape would reveal its greater splendour – and Wilson did not mind paying them.

**Tom Wilson Finds Emerald Lake**

For Wilson, the summer of 1882 began in much the same way as the previous summer. He began ferrying loads of equipment and supplies from Padmore, now called Kananaskis, to Rogers’s main surveying camp at the summit of Kicking Horse Pass. While returning from his second trip for supplies, Wilson camped at the junction of the Pipestone River and the Bow. The next day, a small band of Stoneys camped at the same site. It was raining and soon everyone was gathered around a big fire. In the mist they heard the thunder of avalanches falling from above. One of the Stoneys in the party indicated to Wilson that the thunder was coming from “snow mountains above the lake of the little fishes.” The following morning, Wilson invited the man to take him to the lake. They had little trouble reaching it by horse. Wilson named the stunning sheet of water Emerald Lake, and it appeared as such on the first geological map made of the area, drawn by George Dawson. Before the map was published in 1886, the Geographical Society of Canada had changed the name to Lake Louise, in honour of Princess Louise Caroline Alberta, the fourth daughter of Queen Victoria. By the time the map was published, however, Wilson had already found another Emerald Lake, in Yoho.

The day after first visiting Lake Louise, Wilson ran into Major Rogers, who, as Wilson’s story goes, made a prophetic announcement about Wilson’s future in the mountains, an announcement that has been made for more than a century since to those who have been captured by the mountains: “‘Blue’, he roared, ‘I knew you’d be back. I knew you’d be back. You’ll never leave these mountains again as long as you live. They’ve got you now.’”4
It did not take long for Rogers to confide to Wilson his growing doubts about what route the railway should take through the Rockies. Rogers was now more certain than ever that Rogers Pass was the right route through the Selkirks, but he did not know whether Howse Pass or Kicking Horse Pass was the most economical route over the Great Divide. Rogers wanted more information about the Howse area and offered Wilson a fifty-dollar bonus if he would go to Howse Pass to get it. Since a lone, lightly equipped traveller could move with greater speed, Wilson agreed to go alone and on foot.

Although the going was harder than Rogers had predicted, Wilson encountered few problems on his journey up the Bow River and down the north side of Bow Pass to the Saskatchewan River and the mouth of the Howse. He got lost a few times on the ascent of the pass, but his problems did not really begin until he began his descent from the Great Divide into the valley of the Blaeberry River. The deadfall was nearly three metres deep and his progress slow and exhausting. Rogers had predicted that the journey would be brief, so Wilson only carried food for ten days; by the time he reached the Blaeberry he was starving. He soon became so weakened that he doubted he could make it to

Mount Stephen towers over the town of Field, the administrative centre of Yoho National Park. It was named for George Stephen who became the President of the Bank of Montreal in 1876. The mountain was first climbed by Surveyor J.J. McArthur in 1892. Photograph by R.W. Sandford.
the confluence of the Blaeberry and the Columbia, where Rogers had agreed to meet him. At the time when Wilson had begun contemplating leaving everything behind but his axe in an all-out attempt to make it out to the Columbia, he heard voices and stumbled through the heavy darkness toward them. As he followed the voices, the forest opened up to reveal a big campfire with two men silhouetted against the flames. Although Rogers barely showed it, he was fearfully worried about Wilson, and it was this that made them friends for the rest of their lives:

The Major looked at me for a moment – a queer look it was – then, “What kept you so long?” he snorted and turned on his heel. Not another word did he speak until I had eaten and, with the two men, fetched my equipment from the bush and put out the fire I had left. On the way to do that they told me how for hours the Major had paced up and down like a caged lion, his oft repeated cry being “If that boy don’t show up what in hell will I do? No one but a fool would send a lad on such a trip alone, and no one but a fool would try to make it alone."

The next day Wilson gave Rogers a full report on the difficulties of Howse Pass, which seemed to satisfy the Major that Kicking Horse Pass was the right route after all. Wilson returned to the main camp at the summit of Kicking Horse Pass and resumed his task of packing supplies into Yoho for the survey crews. On one of his many trips down the pass into the main valley of the Kicking Horse, something happened to Wilson that in retrospect almost seems like a reward for the punishing journey he made up Howse Pass. After discovering Lake Louise a few weeks before, Wilson found the real Emerald Lake – or at least his horses did:

On nearly each trip some of the horses would get sore backs or lacerated legs from sharp ledges or bad stumps, and the animals of poor stamina would show the effects of hard work. Expecting this to happen, we had about twice as many horses with us as were needed at one time. The extra ones, termed the hospital hunch, were turned out to graze in a slough at the foot of the big hill of the Kicking Horse Pass. Driving them down there was a safety measure for they had all come from the east, and some from only as far away as Morley; there was a chance that, if turned out east of the camp, they could wander home.

At the conclusion of one trip I decided to rest some of the horses I had been using and so I drove them to the pasture with the intention of bringing relief ones to the camp. At the very end of the “nose” of Mount Stephen my attention was arrested by some quartz that had newly fallen from the mountain. I dismounted and examined it; there was lots of it lying amongst more that had fallen a long time before and had become so weather-stained as not to attract the attention of a passer-by. I decided that Mount Stephen needed prospecting and planned to do that later on.
The horses, for which I had come, were not at the slough, so I followed the river to another feeding ground just below the site of the present town of Field. No animals were there. It was clear that they had been there and their tracks showed in which direction they had departed. I tracked them past the Natural Bridge where I noted that they had adopted the single file system, as though following a leader that knew where it was going. I became more convinced of this fact as the single file system continued without evidence of the horses having made any halts.

Through the bush, across small streams, then a little way up the mountain sides the tracks led me. After a time they returned to valley level alongside a creek that a few minutes later brought me to a beautiful sheet of water. I stood at the outlet of the mountain scenic gem known today as Emerald Lake.

The discovery of Emerald Lake is a telling example of the depth of knowledge of the country possessed by the Native peoples of the region. Native peoples knew the country intimately. Even their horses knew more about the country than the recently arrived Europeans. Wilson’s analysis of how his horses showed him the way to Emerald Lake also suggests that earlier Aboriginal and European travel patterns in this region of the Rockies are not captured within the atomized jurisdictions of individual parks. These patterns are far better understood within the context of the expanded designation of these parks as a World Heritage Site:

For a few moments I sat on my horse and enjoyed the rare, peacefulness of the scene, then, at the far end of the lake I noticed something move. It was an old white horse that belonged to my bunch and which we had bought from the Stoney’s. I rode to the end of the lake and found the wanderers fairly revelling in one of the finest mountain meadows.

How had they found it? Well, I later figured that out.

Some years earlier, Cline, the Hudson’s Bay factor at Jasper House, had arranged with the Kootenay and Shuswap Indians to meet him on the east side of the Great Divide to do their annual trading. This became necessary because of the enmity of the Black-foot confederacy; the latter had practically forced the British Columbia Indians to abandon trading at Jasper House by inflicting several defeats on them.
purchased from the Stonies carried Kootenay or Shuswap brands; they proved that the Stonies had obtained the horses from their original owners at some of the annual festive-trading meets. It was evident that the pasture where I found them was one of the B.C. Indians’ “hidden valleys” and the natural conclusion was that one, if not more of our horses had, when belonging to Shuswap or Kootenay, been left there for safety. While hunting food in the Kicking Horse sloughs, the horses had remembered the good feed in the “hidden valley” and with unerring instinct had led the rest of the bunch to there. That is the conclusion I arrived at and, right or wrong, it is certain that the incident resulted in the discovery of Emerald Lake.

After confessing that Indian horses knew the local geography better than visiting European explorers, Wilson stayed in the Kananaskis area that winter instead of heading south. In the spring of 1883, Wilson returned to the summit of Kicking Horse Pass. The railway was advancing rapidly past Maple Creek in Saskatchewan and was expected to
reach Calgary in the summer. By the end of the season, after further doubts about the superiority of Kicking Horse Pass over Howse Pass were finally resolved, the steel advanced as far as Silver City, below Castle Mountain. The next season the tracks would reach the Great Divide and cross Kicking Horse Pass into British Columbia.

Tom Wilson’s surveying work with the railway came to an end. He became a prospector and later joined the Steele Scouts and fought in the Riel Rebellion. At the conclusion of his military service, Wilson returned to Morley to visit friends. While he was there a train arrived and a conductor who knew him asked if he was coming along on the ride to Craigellachie to watch the driving of the last spike. After the ceremony, Wilson shook hands and bade Major Rogers a fond farewell.

“Tom,” the Major said, “One day we’ll take a holiday and ride ocean to ocean on this railroad.” But Wilson never saw Rogers again. While working with the Great Northern Railway in the Coeur d’Alene Mountains in Idaho in 1889, Rogers fell from a horse and in May of that year, died from his injuries. Just as Rogers had predicted, Tom Wilson went on to live in the mountains for the rest of his life. In time, he became the most famous outfitter and guide in the Rockies, the man to see if you wanted access to the wonder of the western wilderness.

**OVERCOMING OBSTACLES**

*Yoho’s later human history* is tied directly to the railway and the problem of the steep descent from Kicking Horse Pass into the valley below. By the fall of 1883, the tracks had been laid from the east as far as the approach to Kicking Horse Pass. From the west the tracks had been advanced as far as the western slopes of the Gold Range. Less than three hundred kilometres of railroad remained to be built between the two advancing lines of Canada’s national railway. That relatively short section would take two years to build. There were a number of serious obstacles. On the western side of the Selkirks there was Notch Hill, Eagle Pass, and finally the spine of the Selkirks at Rogers Pass. Along the Great Divide was the difficult passage down the west side of Kicking Horse Pass, as well as the gorge of Kicking Horse Canyon farther west.

Work on the railway was slow to begin in that wet spring of 1884. Deep snow lingered long into the spring, making work difficult and dangerous. By May 25, the tracks at last crested the divide, a cause for some celebration. The steep descent down the pass delayed further progress until July. After tote roads were built, the grading slowly
continued in advance of the laying of the track. Deciding that the originally surveyed route would take years to build, the contracting company proposed constructing a “temporary” line that would descend from the summit of the pass to the valley floor at twice the slope proposed by Rogers and Hurd. Critics of the plan argued that such a slope would make the Kicking Horse Pass section of the Canadian Pacific Railway the steepest main line in the western hemisphere.

Undaunted as ever, William Van Horne arrived on the scene to survey the problem. After much analysis, Van Horne argued that the cost of maintaining special locomotives for a short, steep push up the pass made for less expense and delay than a slow, more gradual climb up a lesser grade. Van Horne’s argument pivoted around the idea that the construction of a temporary line could permit the Canadian Pacific a number of years in which to observe weather patterns, stream flows, glacial activity, and the frequency of avalanches before a final decision about the route needed to be made. The fact of the matter was that the railway could afford to do little else. The “Big Hill” was part of the political cost of moving the main line 250 kilometres south from Yellowhead Pass to be closer to the American border. At this crucial stage in the railway’s construction, the cost of reducing the grade at the Great Divide was beyond the means of the railway because it was beyond the means of the nation.

The entire Big Hill project was labour-intensive. The line required continuous maintenance, as did the pusher trains and the standard locomotives that pulled the regular service trains. It was clear that a railway service centre was going to be necessary to keep the Big Hill open even in summer. A small yard and engine facility was laid out on the valley floor at the foot of Mount Stephen, and a stone roundhouse was constructed to service the locomotives. For a number of months this burgeoning community was simply called Third Siding. In December 1884, Donald Smith, the railway syndicate’s great financier, came to the end of the tracks. A few months earlier he had encouraged Cyrus West Field, a wealthy Chicago businessman and the promoter of the first Atlantic communications cable, to come and see the potential of the railway for himself. In an attempt to persuade Field to invest in the financially troubled railway, Smith, with a sweep of his hand, named the little railway community and the mountain across the valley from it in Field’s honour. Despite the honour, Field did not commit any money to the venture. The little town grew anyway.
In 1884, a 4.5 percent railway grade was a serious matter. Steam locomotives going up such hills had to be full of water to prevent their boilers from exploding, and even a passenger train of only a few cars would need pusher engines to help it up the Big Hill. Such a steep grade also pushed contemporary brake technology to its very limits. To prevent runaways on the Big Hill, three runaway tracks were built. The switches leading to the runaway lanes were always open. Every train had to come to a complete stop above of each switch before it would be turned to allow the train to continue downhill. As early Big Hill railroader Roxy Hamilton commented, there was a big difference of opinion as to how well this system worked. He argued that the first siding saved some trains because at that point on the descent the downhill speed was not great enough to make the siding impossible to take: “As for the other two, about all you did was to pile up a train in the siding instead of down the mountain.”

The Big Hill saved money and time, but at the expense of overall safety. There were some terrible wrecks. Early in 1884, a construction train steamed out of Hector, near the top of Kicking Horse Pass pulling flatcars loaded with heavy bridge timbers. One hundred and twenty men were on board. Suddenly the train began to pick up speed. With brake shoes screaming, the train began to thunder down the grade. Men started jumping for their lives. The train reached nearly 130 kilometres an hour before it telescoped into a mountainside, where the huge

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**GRAVE OF AN UNKNOWN RAILWAY WORKER**

Though no one knows the exact number, it is thought that a railway worker died for each mile of track laid through the mountains of the Canadian West. Many of these workers were Chinese. A quietly maintained grave marker at the summit of Kicking Horse Pass commemorates those who lost their lives supporting their families and dreaming of a better life in Canada.

*Photograph by R.W. Sandford.*
timbers splintered like match sticks. Hissing with escaping steam, the engine then plunged into the frothing waters of the Kicking Horse far below. Sixty men had to be treated in the railway’s hospital car.

It took only a wreck or two for the Big Hill to develop a Big Reputation. Heavier engines with bigger and more efficient air brakes were brought west to replace lighter locomotives with inadequate hand-brake systems. Double-braked cars were also brought out just for this section. Prime Minister John A. Macdonald came out West on the second train to have crossed the country. His daring wife, Agnes, rode on the cowcatcher through Kicking Horse Canyon to prove how safe the line was. It was a highly successful public relations stunt but it did nothing to ameliorate the hazard of the Big Hill.

While the railway continued to study the conditions of the route through Kicking Horse Pass, the line was kept open with remarkably few incidents for nearly fifteen years. When a ten-car coal train tore out of control and jumped the track, its engineer, Jack Ladner of Revelstoke, and a young fireman named Aimslee died in the wreck. For the railway this was the last straw. It was time to reconsider how the trains got up and down Kicking Horse Pass. Spiral tunnels near the pass were proposed. By this time the town of Field was a thriving railway service centre and hopping tourist resort.

THE DOMINION’S GREAT SURVEYORS

Even with the railway completed, much of the mountain West was still remote, save for the narrow strip of country flanking the rail line. Before the potential for the resources and tourism in the West could truly be appreciated, the region had to be mapped. Starting at the fringes of the railway belt, a small army of highly dedicated surveyors began to establish a picture of what the mountains were like north and south of the line. Although mountains and lakes have been named for some of these unsung heroes, most of their efforts have been forgotten today.

By the terms of Confederation, a corridor thirty-two kilometres on either side of the rail right-of-way was to be conveyed by British Columbia to the federal government as part of British Columbia’s payment for its share in the cost of the railway. In order to clearly define which of the mountains lay within the sixty-four-kilometre-wide belt adjoining the tracks, a comprehensive survey was demanded. This was to be a real survey, describing the timber, minerals, and agricultural features of
the landscape right to the tops of the mountains. The model was to be the system of rectangular townships that had already been adopted by earlier surveys of the prairies.

A very astute and highly motivated individual happened to be the Surveyor General of Dominion Lands at the time. Edouard Deville realized that three-month summer field seasons in the high mountains were too short to keep the survey ahead of development spurred by the railway. The ability to cover a large area in a short time became crucial to the success of his surveying project. Deville, who had been born and trained in France, knew that the emerging science of photography had already been applied to surveying as early as 1849. He predicted that this new technology could help to make better use of the short field season, while allowing follow-up work to be done between seasons in a warm, comfortable office. The process, developed by one of Deville’s mentors, had already been successfully used in Germany, Austria, Italy, Switzerland, and the United States.

There were two serious drawbacks to the new technology. First, the photographs had to be of the highest quality, taken under the clearest atmospheric conditions. This would be a problem in the West, since steam locomotives often spewed live coals from their smokestacks, causing heavy smoke and forest fires along the rail line. The second was that the photographs had to be taken from high positions, and in the Rockies this meant the summits of mountains. The mountains did not have to be the highest in any given area, or the most difficult to climb. But mountains had to be climbed. A first generation of homegrown mountaineers was instantly created by the demands of this new surveying technology.

One of the most active of the government surveyors in the Rockies and the Selkirk Mountains was James Joseph McArthur, who worked between 1886 and 1892. During this period, McArthur surveyed the rail line all the way from Canmore, on the eastern edge of the Rockies, to the summit of the Gold Range west of Revelstoke. On September 9, 1887, McArthur and his assistant climbed Mount Stephen from the town of Field, with little previous experience and under the encumbrance of heavy surveying equipment and cameras. This was no easy walk. Here is what McArthur wrote about the climb in the government blue book, in which he was instructed by the department to keep his surveying notes:

Foot by foot we made our way, cutting steps as we ascended, and in time reached the ledge of the rock and looked down the perilous slope. A slip on the glare surface meant death, and how we were going to get down again caused no little anxiety. Crawling
along dangerous ledges and up steep narrow gorges, we groped our way. At length we reached the top of what we had judged from below to be the highest point on the mountain. But another wall arose several hundred feet higher. We moved along to a slanting rift, up which we clambered, sometimes dependent for a hold on the first joints of our fingers. After a perilous climb of about a hundred feet we arrived at a debris-covered slope leading to the top of the ridge. It was like a much-broken wall, in some places not more than three feet wide. It required all our nerve to crawl about the eighth of a mile on the top of one of these half-balanced masses to the highest point on the mountain, 6,385 feet above the railway track.10

Using the railway as a centre for their operations, the surveyors set off to discover new valleys, passes, and mountains. Just like Hector and Rogers before them, they were often without provisions. Although they knew their bearings, they were often lost in totally alien valleys, many of which may not even have been visited by Native peoples. They were constantly encountering bears. The smoke of summer forest fires, often sparked by locomotives, fouled their work. Only very exceptional men could qualify for such travail. Surveyors of the calibre of J.J. McArthur did more climbing, and climbed at a very much higher standard than many later climbers who gained fame from their holiday experiences in the Rockies. It is most fitting that Lake McArthur in Yoho National Park was named for this great surveyor. The fact that so much of this landscape was saved makes it possible to experience Yoho on the same wild terms that made the Rockies so remarkable in the eyes of early surveyors. Though the mountains now are named and we know all their heights, it remains just as challenging and rewarding to explore them and to reach their summits.

THE BIRTH OF TOURISM IN YOHO

The national dream was completed in November 1885. Unfortunately, projected freight and domestic passenger traffic was not of sufficient volume to subsidize the winter upkeep of the line through the formidable mountains of the West. As the most expensive public project ever undertaken in this country, the newly completed railway had to find creative ways to pay for itself. William Cornelius Van Horne had already been thinking about the opportunities the stunning scenery of the West might present to foreign visitors. Thus, for the first time, North America’s spectacular landscapes were seen to have an economic value in their own right.
An astute executive, Van Horne believed that the burgeoning appreciation of mountains that was occurring in Europe could be used to fuel the engines of the railway’s great westbound trains. Almost overnight, the land of the West, with its stupendous peaks and roaring rivers, became a symbol of the bounty of this young country. Thus, the idea of tourism in Canada was born. The image of the aesthetic ideal was made concrete in extensive promotion in Europe and in the eastern United States. Canada became the natural wonder of the Western world. A changing environmental aesthetic had charged wild landscapes with a new spiritual energy, and wealthy travellers were prepared to pay handsomely for the opportunity to look upon unspoiled nature.

**THE GRAND HOTELS**

The first grand hotel was planned for Banff. With the hot springs as a natural attraction, a big hotel was planned on a site overlooking the Bow Valley near the springs. Smaller railway hotels were planned at convenient intervals along the line, and a chalet was built later at Lake Louise. Mount Stephen House in Field and Glacier House near the summit of Rogers Pass offered meal services for railway passengers, to save the railway pushing heavy dining cars over the passes.

Construction of Mount Stephen House began in the spring of 1886 on a site on the north side of the tracks, a hundred metres or so east of Field station. Designed by railway architect Thomas Sorby, with much advice from a very interested and involved William Van Horne, it was a small structure composed mostly of dining space, with a few rooms for overnight guests. Since service on the main line had already begun, dining cars were parked on a siding at Field to serve train passengers. Mount Stephen House opened in the autumn of 1886. Glacier House and Fraser Canyon House at North Bend did not open until the following spring.

Although Banff and Lake Louise had higher profiles, it did not take rail passengers long to appreciate the stunning scenery that surrounded Mount Stephen House. Field was close to the Natural Bridge on the Kicking Horse and Emerald Lake. Takakkaw Falls was the second highest waterfall in Canada. Easily reached by saddle horse from Field, it became one of the park’s earliest and most-visited attractions, and the railway built Yoho Valley Lodge near the falls.

Word gradually went out that Yoho was worth a stop on the transcontinental route. In 1901, Mount Stephen Park was expanded to 2,145.6
square kilometres (828.5 square miles) and its name was changed to Yoho National Park. In 1902, architect Francis Rattenbury designed a massive expansion to the hotel. Mount Stephen House became a luxurious and elegant entranceway to the glorious scenery of the Rockies. Emerald Lake Lodge also opened for business in 1902.

Located between Banff National Park with its famous hot springs and the dramatic scenery of Rogers Pass, Yoho was in the very centre of what the railway promoted as the Canadian Alps. The Canadian Pacific compressed all the ranges of mountains in the west into “Fifty Switzerlands in One; a mountain playground for the world.” Mount Stephen House would soon become one of the earliest centres of alpinism in Canada’s mountain West and would remain so for more than fifty years.

**SENSE OF PLACE IN A MOUNTAIN TOWN**

**Field** is the capital of Yoho National Park. It is a real place in that to live there one must make ritual and actual sacrifices to survive and to be worthy of the honour of living in one of the world’s most remarkable places. We arrived there to live in May. Most of the snow had disappeared in town but still lingered in deep drifts in the trees that rose like green surf up the nearly vertical walls of the surrounding mountains. The dark, just-thawed earth smelled of mud, grass and pine needles. The potholes in the dirt streets were filled with still brown water that reflected the bruised blue of the sky. It was silent save for the rising and falling thrum of the traffic on the Trans-Canada Highway across the river.

We had been warned about Field. Field distinguishes itself from other mountain towns by the fact that due to its location tight in the valley at the headwaters of the Kicking Horse River it can be a difficult place in which to live. In the other mountain park towns there is plenty to do if you do not like to hike, climb or ski. Life in Field, however, demands that one really does love the mountains. The landscape demands nothing less of you.

Living in Field is like living in the bottom of the Grand Canyon. It is two kilometres, more than a vertical mile, from the river that slides along the bottom of the valley to the summits of the peaks that loom over the town. We moved into an old saltbox next to the train tracks. Without the need of binoculars we could sit on the front porch and watch mountain goats as they picked their way along ledges on the cliffs of Mount Burgess. The mountains were a presence one could not escape. They exerted themselves on the imagination even in darkness.
mud- and rockslides constituted one hazard. The most serious hazard was other drivers. Most Fielders had either seen a fatal highway crash or had had a life-threatening experience of their own on the Trans-Canada. The highway and all its terrors were part of life in the mountains and part of living in Yoho. So it was that people came and went from this town, staying as long as it took to solidify a job with the government or the railway and leaving when the weather, the isolation, or the highway made living in Field unbearable. The people who stayed were invariably characters – dyed-in-the-wool mountain people.

When I moved to Field I did not have all the life skills needed to live successfully there. I was taught a great deal by my neighbours who, I discovered later, had viewed me as something of a rehabilitation project. Under their guidance I learned to clean a chimney, shovel a roof and even fell a tree if need be. Though at no point was I ever beyond accidentally throwing a log through the back window of my pickup truck, I gradually became accomplished enough to cut my own firewood. Although none of my neighbours ever liked to watch me split this wood, I was slowly accepted into the community of Field. Over the time it took to accomplish this, I gradually realized that many of my attitudes and much of the behaviour of locals had in some subtle way been shaped by the mountains around them. This, I discovered, had even begun to happen to me.

Given time, the mountains shape us. Native North Americans know that. All the old-time park wardens understood this fact. So did early horse guides and packers. In Field we were all subjects of the weather and the season. Even our moods were shaped by the kinds of clouds that obscured the narrow slit of sky above the town. Houses in Field were

**Winter in Yoho**

You have to love the mountains if you want to experience Yoho year-round. Because its valleys are so deep, places like Field can be gloomy in winter. Heavy snowfalls also create high avalanche hazards in most years. However, the light regime improves late in winter, creating the backcountry skiing conditions that are a growing part of the Yoho legend.

Photograph by R.W. Sandford.
less it cost to live, the more time you had to travel in the mountains inside and outside of the park. The more places you visited, the more the country could grow in you. The more the country grew in you, the fewer your material needs and the more simply you could live. It was a way of living that fed positively upon itself.

There were a good number of locals who had mastered this mountain way of life. They lived simply but very elegantly. They read widely in winter and walked or biked or climbed just as widely in summer. They had time for the country and the country had time for them. Unlike harried visitors who raised their frustrated fists to the wet skies, locals seldom got very excited about the weather. There were always just enough clear and perfect days to travel in, and if there weren’t, you just dressed for the rain. It was with this enlightenment that my inquiry after wonder, which is the foundation of this book, began.

Although it was easy to see who had mastered a simple way of life, it was more difficult to measure how many any of my neighbours had been affected by the wonder that is the basis of the park’s name and spirit. It is my experience that a deep, carefully nurtured appreciation of place is not something worn as a badge. It is not a degree you can get or a trophy you can win. Nor is it something you can directly ask about. For the people I met in Field who most certainly had a keenly developed relationship with the landscape, sense of place expressed itself more as an attitude than a habit. There was in Field, while we lived there, for example, a park warden named Glen Brook who had developed small so that they would be easier and cheaper to heat. Almost all of them had wood heaters to augment propane furnaces. Since fuel was very expensive, people put on more clothes when it got cold, rather than just turning up the heat. There was no such thing as fashion in Field. Everyone wore roughly the same kinds of wool shirts, winter jackets and boots, warm hats and gloves, often even in summer. The same practical attitude applied to transportation. Very few people in Field bought expensive, luxurious cars. A practical vehicle bought at a reasonable price was a sign of common sense. I remember being teased relentlessly for buying a two-year-old station wagon because, well, it was simply too new.

The object of these compromises was to allow you to create a self-reinforcing lifestyle. Living in Field could be relatively cheap if you adopted a simple way of life. The
a remarkable sense of place a good forty years before I met him. The wonder he possessed manifested itself quietly in a keen naturalist’s eye, an almost photographic knowledge of the park’s backcountry and a gentleness and unselfish charm that easily made him the town’s most respected local. His wife, Irene, had the same charm. Their wrangler friend Slim Haugen had it, too – a timeless, fluid grace instilled by a lifetime of exposure to the land.

Gordon Rutherford, another park warden who was born and raised in Field, had this same gentleness and profound sense of place. He, too, possessed an astounding memory of important things that had happened, it seemed, on every peak and in every valley in the park. In explaining the history of Yoho, Rutherford was simply retelling the events of his life as it had unfolded among these peaks. This was also true for Bev, his wife. Randall Robertson, who had spent most of his working life in Yoho, had the same easy grace. So did Sid Brook and his brother Alex. So did Men Camastral. So do Pierre Lemire and forty others who lived in that small town. Each of these people in their own way demonstrated that sense of place is a form of grace. It is a way of refining yourself by giving yourself up to the land in which you live.

I also learned in Yoho that a deep sense of place can only be acquired in increments. To truly see wonder in any place, one has to experience it through the seasons, through years of subtle learning that comes only from cumulative observation. One has to bathe in the country, in its spring creeks, in its summer lakes, in its autumn larches and in the howling winds of its bitter winters. The legend and legacy of a place like Yoho are derived only partly from the rock walls and the waterfalls. The ways of properly and fully experiencing the country are passed on from generation to generation by those who have known and cared about where they lived. If there is wonder in Yoho, it is in part because people put it there. As the poet Sid Marty once said, these mountains are special because those who have lived in them have made them so and because they would not have them any other way. Our lives are shaped and given value by our experience of place. “It is wonderful,” the Native peoples proclaimed. Yoho, the name for wonder.

**WONDER CONCENTRATED: LAKE O’HARA**

There are a handful of places in the Canadian West where time and rock and water come together in such profoundly pleasing and overwhelming ways that one cannot spend an hour in the presence of such
concentrated wonder without being overcome by awe and reverence for the world that preceded ours. Lake O’Hara is one such place.

Although the main peaks of the Great Divide were explored from the east by way of Lake Louise much earlier, one of Yoho’s special delights, Lake O’Hara, was not “discovered” by Europeans until James Joseph McArthur found his way to it via Cataract Creek in the summer of 1890. The lake was later named for retired Colonel Robert O’Hara, who was among the earliest visitors to the lake. During his surveying explorations, J.J. McArthur also crossed a nearby pass and climbed into the amphitheatre occupied by the lake that was eventually to bear his name.

When people say that they have been to Lake O’Hara they could mean a number of things. They could mean that they rode the bus from the parking lot at the junction of Highway 1A and the Trans-Canada near the Great Divide up the twelve kilometres of gravel and potholes following Cataract Brook to the lake to visit the lodge that sits on its shore. Here one may spend hours just taking in the view of the dazzling teal-green lake, which in mornings and evenings is often still enough to reflect Mounts Victoria and Lefroy, the giants on the boundary separating British Columbia from Alberta. Together these two towering peaks form the back wall of a great stone bowl, with Seven Veil Falls spilling over it to form the lake.

But what locals call “O’Hara” encompasses more than just the lake. Lake O’Hara is wonder concentrated. It is the gentle trail that circles the lake. It is also the steep switchbacks that lead up to grand views at Wiwaxy Gap. Wiwaxy Gap is the starting point for an even greater adventure, for here begins the mountaineering route up the Huber Ledges to the west shoulder of Mount Victoria. “Lake O’Hara” is also the elegant, moderately graded stone walkway past rumbling waterfalls and a series of tiny lakelets to Lake Oesa. Due to its high altitude, Lake Oesa used to be covered with ice well into the summer. “Lake O’Hara” also includes the high alpine route from Oesa over the impressive ledges on the shoulder of Mount Yukness to Opabin Lake and the Opabin Plateau. At the head of the Opabin Plateau is the alpine route to Opabin Pass, a glacier-shrouded shoulder from which mountaineers make their way down to the Eagle’s Aerie and up Wenkchemna Pass to Moraine Lake in Banff National Park.

“O’Hara” is much more than even the remarkable stillness of Opabin Lake set ablaze in the oblique light with the green fire of spring larches. Yet another trail leads, again by way of carefully laid flagstones, to the lip of the plateau. From a viewpoint on this lip, known as Opabin
Prospect, one can see that there are other lakes in the upper Cataract Brook valley other than Lake O’Hara. A whole other domain can be seen to the west. Odaray Plateau is a great swatch of larch that glows faint green in the spring, then burns yellow-gold where touched by the frost in the fall. In a small meadow in the midst of this larch forest is a small cabin that belongs to the Alpine Club of Canada. Constructed in 1919 and named for the feisty co-founder of the club, this famous log cabin is known as Elizabeth Parker Hut. It is from this hut that generations of Canadians and their guests have explored and been transformed by the glory of Lake O’Hara.

A trail wanders past Elizabeth Parker Hut and then forks south toward McArthur Pass and west toward the head of Odaray Plateau. The McArthur Pass trail is also considered part of the Lake O’Hara area. Past the hut, the trail winds through the wildflowers and huge larches and past a line of shallow pools, before climbing gently to the boulder-strewn pass. From the summit of the pass the trail forks again. One fork leads down McArthur Creek into some of Yoho’s wildest backcountry, an area often closed to visitors. The other fork leads upward through some interesting cliff bands to the lip of a cirque that cradles Lake O’Hara.
McArthur, easily one of the most beautiful places on all of the West Slope of the Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks World Heritage Site.

**THE CANADIAN YOSEMITE**

It only takes one visit to Lake O’Hara and the Yoho Valley to know that the natural history of Yoho National Park is fundamentally about water. Due to its spectacular waterfalls, roaring rivers and the concentrated abundance of ice-and-water shaped features, it is often referred to as our “Canadian Yosemite.”

Glaciers and icefields form Yoho’s northeast boundary, which it shares with Banff. In this area, amidst the Waputik Mountains, lie the Waputik and Wapta Icefields. *Waputik* is a Stoney word meaning mountain goat. It is out of this icefield that the Daly Glacier flows. The Daly Glacier and nearby Mount Daly were named in 1916 by the American climber Charles Fay for his friend Joseph Francis Daley, who had served as President of the American Geographical Society in New York. Melt from the Daly forms Takakkaw Falls, the second highest waterfall in Canada. *Takakkaw* is another Native expression of wonderment. It was how the Cree said, “Wow!”

Yoho National Park is roughly divided into three geographical regions. Forested valley floors at the lowest altitudes comprise a little less than half of the park’s 1,313 square kilometres, or 507 square miles. Large mountain regions composed mostly of bare, frost-shattered rock comprise another half. It is in this domain of high plateaus of accumulating icefield snows and living but rapidly shrinking glaciers that the water of the West accumulates as snow each winter. The presence of glacier ice, the altitude and relief of the peaks, the proximity of the continental divide and the number of watercourses draining the area imply regular precipitation in summer and heavy snow in winter. Yoho contains a total of ten completely pristine rivers which all feed into the Kicking Horse River. What we saved in Yoho was one of the most important watersheds in British Columbia.

**THE BURGESS SHALE AND YOHOL**

Cambrian, Ordovician, Silurian, Devonian, Mississippian, Pennsylvanian, Permian. Campbell’s Ordinary Soup Does Make Peter Pale. I am sitting in the famous Truffle Pigs Restaurant in Field, trying to use Stephen Jay Gould’s mnemonic device for remembering the geological
periods of the Paleozoic Epoch of the earth's history. It is 2002, the International Year of Mountains, and I have returned to the town of Field to take a course offered by the Yoho-Burgess Shale Foundation on the most famous fossils in the world. Over a quiet lunch, I am beginning to make sense of Gould’s geological soup. Campbell’s Ordinary Soup Does Make Peter Pale.

The Burgess Shale course is offered that year in the Yoho Brothers Trading Post. A number of national institutions are working to create a major centre around the UNESCO Nations World Heritage Site on the slopes between Mount Field and Mount Wapta, high above town. A freight train rumbling through town reminds me it was here that Charles Doolittle Walcott discovered these remarkably complete Cambrian-era fossils at roughly the same time as the Spiral Tunnels were completed on the Big Hill up Kicking Horse Pass in 1909.

The course was taught by Dr. Desmond Collins of the Royal Ontario Museum. Between 1972 and 1992, Dr. Collins spent ten field seasons in the Burgess Shale. As Dr. Collins was a world expert on these fossils and on life in the Cambrian seas, it was not surprising that people from all over Western Canada came to Field to hear him speak, and to join his field trips to the quarry he and his students were excavating in the Burgess Shale.

The lecture began with lots of coffee and a detailed introduction to the fossil discoveries made in Yoho National Park. Collins recounted that during the construction of Mount Stephen House in Field in 1886, one of the construction workers went prospecting on Mount Stephen and returned with what he called “stone bugs” trapped in the rock. He showed them to surveyor Otto Klotz, who later showed them to geologist R.G. McConnell of the Geological Survey of Canada and to State of Michigan geologist Karl Rominger, who published the first descriptions of these ancient life forms in a technical journal in 1887. Charles Walcott, who was an unschooled but avid collector of fossils, read Rominger’s article. In 1907, Walcott, who had advanced to the prestigious position of Secretary of the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C., came to Yoho to collect some of the stone-frozen creatures that had been discovered on the slopes of Mount Stephen just above Field. While he was in Field, Arthur Wheeler, the President of the Alpine Club of Canada, invited Walcott to write an article on his finds. In 1909, Walcott and his wife Helen came to the Rockies on a working holiday. While traversing the trail across Mount Wapta, they discovered a second great fossil bed now known as the Burgess Shale.
Collins identified Walcott’s major fossil discoveries and traced the interpretation of these discoveries through much upheaval of thought to the present. He then subtly placed before his audience a professional point of view about the significance of the fossils based on his own work. It soon became clear that his considered analysis of the importance of the Burgess Shale was at some variance with the interpretations of Stephen Jay Gould in his book *Wonderful Life: The Burgess Shale and the Nature of History*. Lively debate ensued on the subject. Collins then concluded his lecture with Gould’s major point about the importance of the Burgess fossils to our understanding of evolution. Gould was right, according to Collins, in that contingency or accident was a powerful evolutionary force.

The Burgess Shale tells us that evolution did not cascade toward the perfection of humans, but toward any channel it could. History may well be contingent upon itself rather than subject to any formal laws of nature. We are, as Gould explains, in awe of these “grubby little creatures of a seafloor 530 million years old.” We are in awe because they are the Old Ones and they are trying to tell us something.12 It was only an accident of contingency that humans evolved. The “stone bugs” of the Burgess Shale have dethroned us from the centre of meaning in the world. Like the Chicxulub Crater in the Yucatan created by the meteorite that likely destroyed the dinosaurs, these fossils teach us that evolution is not simply progress, but the constant adaptation to circumstance and change. As Gould went on to explain in the book he finished just before he died in 2002, the emergence of *Homo sapiens* as a small population in Africa some 200,000 years ago cannot be explained meaningfully without emphasizing the formative role of contingencies that, in principle, do not flow predictably from the laws of nature.13 Chance plays a huge role in nature, which suggests that human actions matter. This is a fact we need to bear constantly and positively in mind as we work to preserve and enhance the mutual relationship between and landscape and culture that makes living in, and visiting, the Rocky Mountains so worthwhile.