21 *Creating a Culture Commensurate with Place*

What we have created by way of the Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks World Heritage Site is unique in the world, and invites us to think in different terms about how we might live in association with this remarkable landscape in the future. By re-affirming local values derived from our strong historic connection to place, we can make our history work for us in the service of a bright future. This, I believe, can be accomplished through the re-telling of our history in the expanded context of our greatest cultural achievement: the creation of our National and Provincial Parks and their collective designation as a World Heritage Site. This re-telling should begin with what we have done well and what we can do well in the future. One thing we have done well relates to our growing understanding of the role fire plays in the succession of mountain ecosystems. Because this leads us back to a greater understanding of why protected areas exist, this is a story Parks Canada doesn't mind sharing.

TORCHING SMOKEY THE BEAR

As fire ecologists learned more about the natural history of Rocky Mountain valleys, it became clear that for thousands of years Native

peoples had been using fire to manipulate forest composition toward higher production of favoured wildlife species. Citing where we were all standing as an example, Parks Canada fire ecologist Dr. Cliff White pointed to the presence of mature poplars surrounding the Muleshoe parking area on the Bow Valley Parkway west of Banff townsite. Given the natural and anthropogenic regime of regular low-intensity fires, White argued, it is likely that aspens began over time to be found in close proximity to established Native campsites, which would invariably be close to water.

The gradual acceptance of prehistoric human influence on natural ecosystems, White explained, altered the very foundation of national park management, at least in the Rocky Mountains. Concepts of enduring ecological integrity had to encompass the role humans played in shaping the ecology of mountain regions long before the arrival of the first Europeans, the creation of the National Parks concept, and so-called modern approaches to land and ecosystem management. In other words, the Native peoples of the mountain West were a natural force that dramatically influenced the make-up and function of the ecosystems from which they were later excluded. We cannot manage the ecosystems that exist today without taking this into account. Our influence is merely an extension of theirs – a different extension perhaps but an extension nonetheless. And now the difference is diminishing between the way people managed mountain forests prior to European settlement and the way we manage them today. Our approaches became the same the moment we began emulating their management practices by purposefully setting fire to the forests.

The significance of this is not just symbolic. The implications go far beyond the mere acknowledgement that early peoples understood and responded creatively to ecosystem dynamics, which they intuited from observation and experience. Recognizing that First Nations were part of nature, and influenced ecosystem dynamics enough to shape the character of what exists, is a positive step forward. It suggests that we now realize the distanced, isolated role we have played in managing the national parks and similar protected areas in the past has been misguided and destined to fail. But the controlled burning of forests to generate favourable biodiversity goals can only be seen as a start. There is a huge backlog of similar management mistakes that we have made, which we have to go back and re-examine in a similar light. We have just started to repair the damage that we caused to the ecosystems we have taken into our charge, through the mismanagement of fire.

IAN PENGELLY
Parks Canada's Ian Pengelly is an expert in fire ecology. Over the past twenty years, he and his colleagues in the Banff National Park Warden Service have pioneered strategies for emulating the natural ecosystem effects of fire while at the same time minimizing the risk to wildlife and property in the mountain national parks.
Photograph by R.W. Sandford.

In order to fully appreciate the extent to which Parks Canada has committed to restoring the ecosystem function of fire in the Canadian Rockies Mountain Parks World Heritage Site, I was invited to fly over the area of Banff National Parks in which fire specialists had been most active in reproducing natural fire regimes through prescribed burns.

We left the Banff Warden office and flew up the Cascade River Valley to the Red Deer, then west to the Pipestone Valley north of Lake Louise. As each successive valley came into view, Parks Canada fire ecologist Ian Pengelly described its fire history and tied it to management decisions that had been made in the past. Pengelly pointed out the small patches of forest that had been set ablaze in prescribed burns that attempt to duplicate the historic regime and frequent, small, relatively low-temperature fires to which the mountain forest ecosystems had adapted over thousands of years.

Pengelly made it clear that despite the cost, these efforts will continue to be necessary if we want to even begin to reproduce the effect of wildlife and small-scale Native burns on the landscape of the mountain West. Important work is being done here that will help everyone in the West better understand and control fire and its effects. Pengelly pointed out that this knowledge will help us slow the diminishment and loss of ecosystem vitality and help us delay some of the effects climate change has already begun to cause. But it won't keep the pine bark beetle out and it won't stop the flow of invasive species into the World Heritage Site. We are too timid and still too inexperienced to do what cold winters once did naturally in the forests of the mountain West.

Flying from Lake Louise down the Bow Valley back to Banff, Pengelly didn't need to say a word. It was perfectly obvious, looking at the unexpected extent of forest that hasn't been burned in more than a century, that we haven't done enough to restore fire's former role in this ecosystem. We haven't even begun to burn what we need to burn. I think of Banff's highly conservative business community and I wonder what would scare them most; the size of the area of forest in the upper Bow Valley that should be set ablaze for reasons of maintaining natural forest community plant succession, or the extent of the vulnerability of Banff townsite to a catastrophic wildfire fuelled by deadfall that has built up in a forest that hasn't been allowed to burn in a hundred years. From the air it was easy to see how little actually protects the town of Banff from

THE PIED PIPER OF FIRE
Prescribed burns only take place when conditions for controlling resulting blazes are ideal. The object is to create a low-intensity, low-temperature fire that will reduce the natural fuel load and open up forests to vegetative succession that will support wildlife. To start a fire, forest ecologists employ drip torches that ignite a petroleum fuel mixture, which will set the understory ablaze in a confined area.
Photograph by R.W. Sandford.

an up-valley fire or one that might leap into the valley from any one of a half dozen side valleys and adjacent passes. Skilled firefighters might, if there was enough warning, be able to turn a big fire to the rims of the wide valley at Moose Meadows near Castle Junction. But, then again, with a strong wind from the west they might not. What was needed was a firebreak in the area of Castle Junction.

After the helicopter shut down at the Warden Office in Banff, Pengelly made a final observation on the unexpected risks associated with preventing fire from playing its natural role in shaping natural ecosystem dynamics. It has to do with the wind. It was his experience, gained from a couple decades of starting and controlling prescribed burns, that there was usually very little wind directly down the main valley from the direction of Lake Louise. When it was windy in Banff townsite, he said, the winds usually came down from adjacent Healy Creek. A big fire from that direction, he mused, might be turned at Vermilion Lakes so that it skirted the town on two sides. But it would be tricky. The valley below Healy Creek is a natural venturi that would concentrate and intensify wind speeds. A hot fire pushed down-valley by the right winds could easily burn the town of Banff to the ground.

There was just enough wind blowing from the west to clearly understand Ian's point. A higher-energy atmosphere will be one of the consequences of climate warming in this region. We should expect higher winds and more frequent and intense weather events. With these changing conditions, the chances of a "perfect storm" in the Bow Valley will be much increased. Pengelly was upbeat, however. Parks Canada ecologists now understood the importance of fire to natural

DRIP-TORCH
If the conditions are ideal the resulting fire will be easy to control. Such fires have become necessary because we have controlled fire in the mountain West for so long and over such vast areas that fuel build-up in the form of dead trees and branches now makes for fires that are hard to control and that can cause great damage.
Photograph by R.W. Sandford.

function. Fire could now be controlled to the benefit of the town and the park.

All those years of listening to Smokey the Bear had deeply affected me. "Always prevent forest fires," was a mantra I have never been able to get out of my mind. So I was very surprised at how satisfying it felt to set a forest on fire. The next step in my education about fire in the Mountain Parks was a course offered by Parks Canada fire and vegetation specialists. The course went into detail about why fires were important to natural plant community succession in mountain areas. We were also taught about fireproof clothes and drip torches, soil moisture and wind direction. More importantly, we learned about firebreaks. It is important to note that when I lit the fire I was under the close supervision of experts.

Not everyone has the occasion to purposely start a forest fire. This one, however, had been planned for months. The area in which the fire was scheduled to be set is a unique part of Banff National Park. Known as the Fairholme Environmentally Sensitive Area, it encompasses the rich montane lowlands of the Bow River Valley at the eastern edge of the park. Here we find some of the best winter habitat for elk and deer on the eastern slopes, and one of the last remaining places in the region to support relatively stable predator populations. The purpose of this fire was the further improvement of wildlife habitat, so that the area will continue to support a viable wolf pack, a sustainable local cougar population, and a few more black bears.

Ian Pengelly was in charge of the fire. He had waited a long time for conditions for the fire to be perfect. As snow had fallen the previous week, the soil was perfectly saturated. The temperature was right and the winds light.

Upon instruction from Pengelly, Province of Alberta Fire Specialist Terry Studd and I descended to the base of a small ridge and began to set fire to clusters of south-facing junipers. The fire quickly rose up the slope, just as Pengelly had predicted. I took over the drip torch from Terry as we advanced along the base of the ridge. The model we were using was the Western Forester Seal-Tite Back Fire Torch. When sealed, it looks like a

MAKING SURE WHAT NEEDS TO BE BURNED CATCHES FIRE
We can set small, frequent, low-temperature fires with careful prescribed burns. This emulates a natural fire regime and keeps fuel loads to a minimum. Conversely, suppressing fires and allowing fuel to build up can produce 1,100˚C fires that burn forests and destroy even microbes in the soil, such that it takes three hundred years for to recovery, with lasting impacts on wildlife, ecological stability, erosion and stream flow.
Photograph by R.W. Sandford.

large chrome coffee carafe. A large metal cover screws into the top. When this is removed one finds a metal wand that can be screwed back onto the outside of the tank, to create a device that can literally change the world.

By opening the right valves and lighting the end of the wand, one can create liquid fire by simply pouring the fuel in the same way you pour water from a watering can. I watched Studd as he advanced along the base of the ridge and made his way up the steep slope to meet a fire line created by Ian Pengelly and Tom Davidson. He looked like a Pied Piper from hell. As he moved nonchalantly up the hill and through the forest, flames popped out of the ground and followed him. A great roaring followed the fire into the forest above.

As the smoke cleared, the afternoon winds stopped blowing from the west. Cool, denser air began pouring slowly down the mountainsides into the valley. Night would soon put the fire to sleep. Pengelly explained that Parks Canada had to be very careful to keep its fire program operative within constraints acceptable to the local residents upon which it relied for support. He was very conscious that the smoke from prescribed burns in the park could create discomfort among people with respiratory problems who lived downwind. For this reason Pengelly and his colleagues kept the area of each burn to less than 200 hectares and carefully monitored conditions. A firebreak had also been created between the park and the neighbouring communities of Harvey Heights and Canmore. Pengelly hoped that the people who lived downwind in the Bow Valley would appreciate that the Fairholme fires would ultimately contribute to the natural biodiversity of the park and the region, making it a safer, more interesting and ultimately a more worthwhile place to live in the future.

RE-WILDING THE WEST

Our improved understanding of fire and our growing ability to manage it to the benefit of both ecosystems and people in the Mountain

NIGHT FIRES BURNING
While prescribed burns will help moderate the wildfire threat, they will not eliminate it. Wildfire frequency and intensity as well as the duration of the fire season are expected to increase in all climate change scenarios as a warmer, more energetic atmosphere generates more intense storms, longer droughts and more lightning in the mountain West. We are going to have to get used to smoky skies.
Photograph by R.W. Sandford.

RECOVERY AFTER FIRE
Observers are often astounded by how quickly mountain vegetation responds after a fire. As long as the fire is not too hot, grass shoots often begin to grow out of the blackened soil hours after the fire has passed. Wildflowers, and in particular fireweed, appear almost immediately.
Photograph by R.W. Sandford.

Parks has opened the door to other opportunities to restore ecosystems that have been adversely impacted by human actions in the past. One way to reverse the trend of diminishment and loss of ecological integrity and diversity that began in the Pleistocene, and we have carried on in our time, is to consider re-introduction of lost species. The restoration of previous ecological conditions, however, is fraught with complications. Only a very committed society can even contemplate turning back the ecological clock, for once a species is gone, a whole new ecology forms around its absence.

In association with Parks Canada's International Year of Mountains fire orientation program, I was also invited by Parks Canada to contribute observations on the viability of re-introducing the bison to the upper reaches of the Red Deer River in Banff National Park. This species

had been present in the area of the Mountain Parks up to and slightly after European contact and had had a huge influence on the ecology of the mountain forests until it was hunted nearly out of existence in the nineteenth century. The bison was the largest terrestrial mammal to have survived the Pleistocene extinctions in North America. The idea was that re-introduction of this species would reverse the trend of diminishment and loss of species and ecological integrity within the World Heritage Site. But as I soon learned, the introduction or re-introduction of even a single species through the process of re-wilding can have profound ecological consequences.

Parks Canada invited a number of people to see where the proposed bison re-introduction might take place. We gathered at the Warden Office in Banff early on an overcast June morning, with the aim of flying into the Red Deer Valley. The group included local naturalist and ecosystem expert Peter Duck, respected outfitter Ron Warner and me. Our host, at least for the flight from Banff to Scotch Camp Warden Cabin, was Chief Park Warden Ian Syme. Accompanying him was Ian Pengelly, the Parks Canada's fire specialist who had earlier allowed me to try my hand at starting a prescribed burn in the Fairholme Range.

Pengelly had confided that the idea of re-introducing bison into its historic range was the brainchild of a number of senior Park Wardens like himself who wanted to do something really bold before they retired. They had chosen the upper Red Deer watershed because it was known historic bison habitat. There were two other important advantages to the area. In this area the national park abutted on its boundary with the Ya-Ha-Tinda Ranch, a 565-hectare Parks Canada holding in some of the best grassland habitat in the front ranges of the Rockies. Just as importantly, it was a long way from the Bow Valley where conflicts between human use and wildlife protection always seemed to make national headlines. In this remote place it might be possible to perform the ultimate experiment in reversing biodiversity diminishment and loss while contributing to the restoration of the park's original ecological integrity. The object, Pengelly said with pride, was to re-introduce the alpha herbivore in the North American West. It wasn't going to be easy, however, as the bison is one of the most difficult and dangerous of all species to manage and confine.

To understand how wonderfully remote the upper Red Deer River Valley really is, it is valuable to see the park from the air. Pilot Ken Gray flew us from Banff up the Cascade River Valley, where we dropped supplies at Stoney Creek Warden Cabin before following the Panther River

BISON
Historically, bison were part of the mountain ecosystem on the east side of the Great Divide. Efforts to restore the species as part of a "Pleistocene re-wilding" effort have met with little success. Bison are hard to contain and control. Their reintroduction would be expensive and complicated, especially given the increasingly islandized nature of the mountain parks and threats to existing species such as the mountain caribou, which will take considerable resources to address. *Photograph by R.W. Sandford.*

to the park's eastern boundary and out into the Province of Alberta. We then flew over the Ya-Ha-Tinda, then back into Banff National Park, following the Red Deer River to Scotch Camp. The reasons for holding our discussion at this remote Warden Service outpost soon become apparent. We were joined at Scotch Camp by park ecologist Tom Hurd, ecosystem specialist Cliff White, and University of Calgary bison restoration specialist Cormack Gates. Hurd, White and Gates were very excited about the grass on which Ken Gray had so smoothly landed the helicopter.

The big meadow at Scotch Camp had been purposely set alight in April, less than two months earlier. White explained to our amazement that green shoots had started to push themselves through the burned sod barely two hours after the fire scorched the mountain prairie. In barely two months, the fescue had completely restored itself and the meadow, creating almost unbelievably rich habitat for ungulates like deer and elk. Conditions so lush, White and Pengelly pointed out, could surely support bison.

Their point was clear. The stunning grassland ecosystem recovery rate in this valley is evidence of how valuable fire would have been historically as a range improvement tool. By burning carefully and regularly at low temperatures, Aboriginal peoples ensured that bison could continue to be supported even this far into the mountains. If it was done in the past, it could be done again.

These Park Wardens wanted to try but they knew they would never be given an opportunity to undertake such an expensive and controversial project without a great deal of public support. Peter Duck, Ron Warner and I were invited to offer our observations on the idea behind the restoration and to be candid about whether or not the kind of public support necessary to make it happen might be forthcoming. No one was shy about identifying the obstacles. The first challenge was the nature of the bison as a species. They are so big and powerful, they are almost impossible to contain.

Jasper National Park contains some of the best natural bison habitat in the Mountain Parks. In 1973, a small herd of some twenty-eight animals was airlifted into a remote northern region of the park. It wasn't long, however, before they migrated out of the park and into the surrounding foothills. In order to prevent havoc on private lands, twenty-two of the animals were recaptured. The others lingered in the area but did not survive. It may be that they needed more habitat to survive than they could find solely within the protection of the park.

The idea was to bring in pregnant bison cows, have them calve in a purpose-built paddock and then gradually introduce them into the valley so that they would imprint on the upper Red Deer as home range. Bison bulls that grew up in the valley would eventually be able to roam within a core area that would include the Panther and Cascade Valleys to the south, the Pipestone River and Baker Creek drainages to the west, and the Siffleur and upper Clearwater regions to the north and west. Should bison wander outside of these core areas and containment zones, they would be culled by First Nation ecosystem specialists in the employ of Parks Canada. In this way, First Nations participation in the culling would be formalized in a manner that was both practical and symbolic. It was proposed that the first run of management experimentation be thirty years.

The political challenges associated with the re-introduction of the bison are not insignificant. Though there are presently some 220,000 plains bison on commercial buffalo ranches in Canada, Canadian ecological specialists recently proposed this bison be listed as endangered in the wild. Commercial producers went ballistic due to the threat such a listing would pose in international markets.

Cormack Gates pointed out that area-specific species restorations were occurring with other troubled prairie mammals such as the black-tailed prairie dog and the black-footed ferret. He also cited the fact that media mogul Ted Turner was trying to restore a complete Great Plains

ecosystem on his huge Montana ranch. This suggested to Gates that there was a "sweet spot" between economic, ecological and cultural interests that might permit restoration of Great Plains habitat and species. The challenge was to find that spot and do everything one could to enlarge it. Gates also cited the Charles M. Russell initiative, which aimed to restore prairie habitat in the American West, and another initiative in which the World Wildlife Fund helped add 25,000 acres to a restoration project on the Montana-Saskatchewan border. Gates pointed out that bison ranchers were also working on solutions such as the creation of common ranges as large as 600,000 acres. Whether all these initiatives will actually work, however, remains to be seen.

Cliff White wanted to talk about ecological considerations. "Is what we have here now, right?" he asked. "Or is it simply a product of what we have done, perhaps incorrectly, over the last century?" Bison, he pointed out, move differently on the landscape than other ungulates or even cattle. Bison do not congregate in the riparian areas like cattle do. They exert different grazing pressures. Bison wallow and tend to trample small pines and spruce trees, which encourages new patterns of grass and forb growth. They also tend to establish their own trails. Cliff's point was that the landscape you end up with over time is very different with bison than what results when the major ungulates are deer, elk and moose. Part of the significance of this restoration proposal was that it offered more options with respect to the era to which we want to return, in terms of replicating ecological integrity.

White was asking an important question. Which ecological integrity do we want to reproduce? The one with deer, elk and moose, or the one that existed before we established the current wildlife assemblage, which included and in fact was dominated by the bison? Ian Pengelly also weighed in on this argument. In his opinion it is crucial to determine clearly the point to which you want to return in the ecological history of the World Heritage Site as a function of Parks Canada's management objectives. Pengelly pointed out that the protected area's current ecosystem dynamics included a strong link between elk, caribou, predators and fire. He noted that there were – at last count – less than half a dozen mountain caribou in Banff National Park and only two hundred or so remaining in Jasper. He wondered if caribou were disappearing because humans were reintroducing fire and allowing wolf populations to re-establish themselves instead of eliminating them as vermin. He wondered if caribou would have even been present in these mountains had humans not decimated wolf numbers historically.

INDIAN PAINTBRUSH
Indian Paintbrush (*Castilleja coccinea*) presents a range of flower colours, from pink through bright red to nearly black. It may be the wildflower that is most emblematic of the Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks World Heritage Site. *Photograph by R.W. Sandford.*

He also wondered if the ecological combination of bison, predators and fire wasn't a more representative and stable one. He wondered if that composition might better fit our idea of the West we really want. If it did, he said, we should start managing toward it.

THE WEST WE WANT

Celebrations can be important, especially if they make us examine the roots of our success and the direction that success might be taking us. The International Year of Mountains offered Canadians at all levels of experience an opportunity to reaffirm their connection to place, and to expand their knowledge of Canada's mountain heritage. By analyzing how locals came to have a "sense of place," and by examining what people search for when they travel to see our mountains, Canadians began to see just how remarkable our protected mountain places really are in a larger global context.

In re-examining what makes what we have so meaningful to ourselves and others, we learned that the people who live in mountain communities in western Canada have a lot more in common than we

ever imagined. Most of those who live in Canada's mountain places today were not born where they now live. They came from elsewhere and experienced transformation in the mountains. They fell in love with the local landscape and culture and stayed to become "locals by choice."

We discovered that residents in what were locally considered to be very different and often rival mountain communities often felt very similar about what was important to them concerning where and how they lived in the mountain West. This, in combination with a number of other circumstances, led to the birth of the Heritage Tourism Strategy in the Mountain Parks. Though this idea has lost some of its initial momentum it still possesses great promise as a vehicle for helping to further develop and sustain a culture that is unique to place in the Rockies.

In a simple world, Parks Canada, or a select group of community-minded residents, might be asked to identify those tourism activities that were most appropriate to the wilderness image and long-term health of the park. Activities deemed inappropriate would somehow magically cease to exist and the image of the park as pristine wilderness would be immediately restored. Unfortunately, the real world is far too complicated to accommodate such simple solutions. Even if you could agree on what was appropriate in the context of changing environmental realities, issues of rights stemming from long years of residency and heavy investment in existing infrastructure cannot be ignored. No one in business in Banff was going to leave the park voluntarily just because their operation is held by some to be inappropriate to their version of park values.

The first objective of the Heritage Tourism Strategy is to make sure that all visitors to the Mountain Parks are aware they are in a park and World Heritage Site and to ensure they know what that means in terms of responsibilities, a unique aesthetic, and the recreational opportunities available to them here.

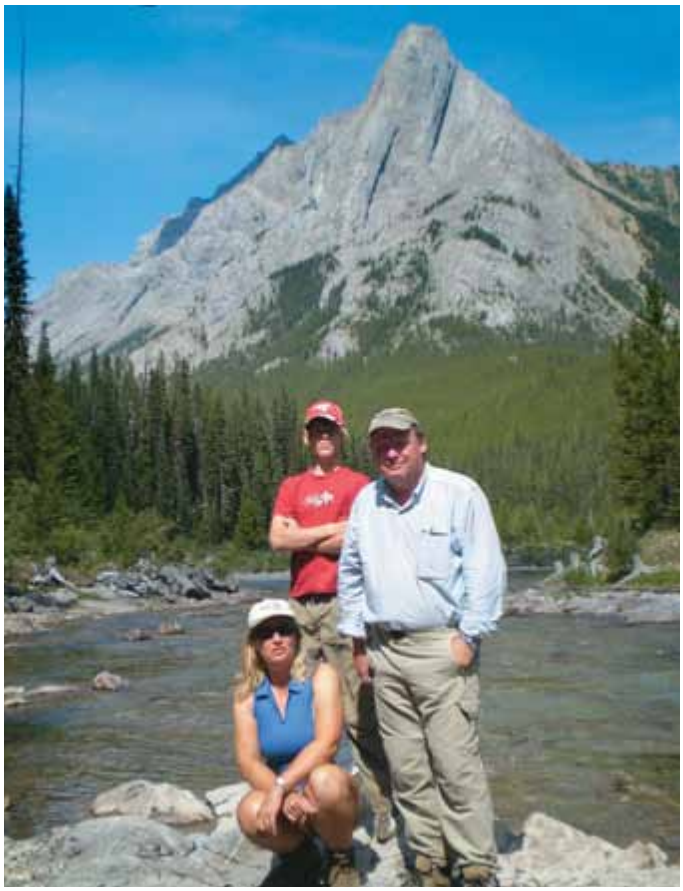
While this strategy may appear self-evident, the challenge of making people aware of the special circumstances that make Mountain Parks unique is more complicated than it might at first appear. The problem of grounding visitors in the values that are at the heart of our national park heritage begins with how we advertise our parks as attractions. In an examination of the brochures available to Banff visitors, for example, it was noted that less than one-quarter of these indicated that their attraction was in a national park or World Heritage Site and that this unique designation required any form of special consideration on

the part of the visitor. Without specific direction, visitors cannot be expected to act differently in a national park, provincial park or World Heritage Site than they would in any other tourism situation. To ensure our long-term success as a tourism destination, we have to preserve the unique nature of the park. We can succeed at this if we do everything we can to ensure that all visitors understand they are in a special place and a World Heritage Site, and why this is different and special.

The second objective of the Heritage Tourism Strategy is to encourage and develop opportunities, products and services consistent with heritage values. The point this objective makes is that we cannot continue to attract visitors to Mountain Parks to participate in activities that have little or nothing to do with the heritage of the park without expecting that heritage to be compromised. The more distractions there are from the true heritage of the park, the more visitors will come for these distractions. People coming for the distractions will replace those coming for the heritage. Instead of enjoying the World Heritage Site for the heritage for which it was preserved, visitors will come in increasing numbers to enjoy experiences unrelated to the true purpose of the reserve. As this continues to happen, tension over appropriate use will grow and the tourism sector in our parks will increasingly come under criticism as being in opposition to the fundamental purpose of protected areas.

With growing regional populations and a city growing up on the eastern boundary of the Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks World Heritage Site, Banff, for example, will face increasing difficulty in sustaining its international reputation as a wilderness park. The net future impact may ultimately be a decline in the image of Banff as an international destination, which could result in a very much altered tourism climate. In order to help preserve the wilderness character of the park and, at the same time, sustain its vital tourism reputation, the tourism community in Banff may wish to reassess what it offers. It has become clear that one way to assure a bright tourism future is to develop new products and services that mirror the heritage values locals hold dear to them, as a Mountain Park and World Heritage Site community.

New realizations about the complex nature of the parks' ecosystems are also prompting changes in the way we think about the areas that compose this World Heritage Site. The third objective of the Heritage Tourism Strategy addresses ecological concerns by encouraging environmental stewardship initiatives upon which sustainable heritage tourism depends.



AT MOUNT SHARK
Bob Sandford and some of his family at Shark Mountain. The Kananaskis is as worthy of World Heritage Site designation as the adjacent national parks.
Photograph by M. P. Rogeau.

The Heritage Tourism Strategy recognizes the enormous importance of evolving environmental sensitivity, especially within our national and provincial park and World Heritage Site context. The strategy makes it clear that heritage tourism cannot stand on its own without appropriate environmental practices that ensure the integrity of the natural systems upon which this form of tourism depends for its authenticity and sustainability.

In the past two decades, a great deal of progress has been made in the implementation of recycling programs and in the development of greater efficiencies in waste, water and energy management. Some tourism businesses have become leaders in the development of these systems and in the sharing of these advancements within their industries. But environmental considerations in the Mountain Parks cannot stop at recycling and waste management. As better and more complete science allows more accurate monitoring of the health of park ecosystems, it will become increasingly important for the tourism community and national and provincial park administrations to work effectively together to address common environmental problems. The historically adversarial relationship between these agencies and the tourism sector must be replaced with a greater mutual acceptance of the fact that healthy ecosystems are just as important to the tourism industry as they are to the park.

The strategy also recognizes that ecosystems involve complex relationships and that it will not always be possible to make clear-cut decisions relating to ecosystem management based on available information. For this reason, it is particularly important that everyone who lives and works in the World Heritage Site have a solid, current and consistent understanding of the heritage values and environmental

HELEN CREEK
A trail that begins across from the Crowfoot Glacier, on the Icefields Parkway, switchbacks upward toward vast alpine meadows that surround Helen Lake. Because of their similarity in appearance, the peak and valley are named for the Dolomite Mountains in northeast Italy. Grizzly bears are often seen in the area of Helen Lake's outlet creek. *Photograph by R.W. Sandford.*

considerations that drive management plans for this area.

The fourth objective of the Heritage Tourism Strategy is to strengthen employee orientation, training and accreditation programming as it relates to sharing heritage understanding with visitors. The people who live and work in this World Heritage Site establish, to a very great extent, the attitudes and habits of visitors who rely on them for example and direction, with respect to how they can maximize their national park experience. The Heritage Tourism Strategy seeks to harness local experience and appreciation of place as a basis for focusing visitor appreciation on the unique nature, history and culture of our World Heritage destination. This strategy demands that locals come to a common understanding and acceptance of what our heritage is and how we want it presented to visitors.

In the West, and in Alberta in particular, where individualism is highly cherished, coming to a common appreciation of our heritage may be difficult, perhaps even impossible. The Heritage Tourism Strategy does not presume, however, to want to make everyone think the same way about our mountain heritage. It does, however, propose that we all may want to start with the same information as a basis for reassessing what is important about our heritage and that the information be, as much as is possible, accurate and relevant.

The Heritage Tourism concept still makes a great deal of sense, but to be successful it may need to be revived at the regional level represented by the World Heritage Site. Its revitalization must not be made to rely solely on the good will and enlightened self-interest of the tourism industry. A strategy of such wide reach will only be made to work if it is

adopted as a regional development strategy and embraced as a tool for land-use planning in and around the World Heritage Site. Adopted in this way, however, the strategy embodies the kinds of values that help us decide on a regional basis how we will deal with global change and the impacts associated with global warming. An integrated approach to how we want to manage the World Heritage Site crystal around which we have developed our current circumstances will also help us determine what kind of mountain West we want to have in the future.

WHAT IS OUR HERITAGE?

HISTORICALLY IT HAS ALWAYS been understanding and appreciation of nature that has been at the heart of true Rocky Mountain localness. This tradition has been encouraged by a local culture that is interested in wild landscape and the fulfilling experiences you can have in it. In the Rockies, landscape has always been seen as a powerful transformational force in human life. For generations, visitors and locals in the Rockies have observed that in realizing the country they could realize themselves. The history that has always been most important to us as locals is the history of our developing relationship to that nature. True localness has been traditionally tied to weather, land and landscape, and the ways people meet their patterns and demands. For these reasons, our heritage can be defined as a tradition of people coming to live and work here who develop an interest in understanding and celebrating the unique qualities of local nature, history and culture. It is in this way we become locals by choice.

There is little doubt that over time we have gradually been moving away from our historic local grounding in place. There are a number of obvious reasons for this. Though increasingly strong communities compose its heart, the population remains frantically transient. Many of the people who live and work here know the history and geography of where they grew up but not of the place they currently live. And even those who have made the choice to stay are not immune to the acceleration of lifestyle that seems an inescapable part of contemporary culture. Busy people have less and less time to ground themselves in the nature that surrounds them.

Like communities everywhere, we also suffer the effects of the global homogenization of culture based on media and standardized business and communications processes. Even in Canada's western mountain national parks, politics and economics are gradually beginning to

impact people as much as or more than they do the landscape. In the midst of this, place is changing, too. Even those who have only lived in the Rockies a short while observe that their surroundings are changing. Our understanding of the nature of natural places is also being radically reformed by new knowledge of the dynamics of ecosystems and new awareness about what is required to sustain their integrity. It is hard to keep up with all that is happening.

But we have done one thing right that makes this region the envy the world. We have not spent all of our natural capital. The fact that we have saved important functioning elements of our natural and cultural history allows us latitude others do not possess in choosing the future we want. What we have saved keeps the door open to the most important of all cultural options: the opportunity to create a new and inspired vision of what kind of West we would like to create for ourselves and for our children.

Only now are we beginning to understand the importance of what we have preserved in terms of the watershed of the West. Only now are we beginning to imagine what this bold act says and could say about our identity and our true prosperity. Re-casting our history against the backdrop of such an extraordinary inter-generational public policy achievement allows our culture room to move in a time when natural systems everywhere are under great stress and are changing rapidly.

By caring about our mountains we have learned how to create a culture commensurate with place. But the frontier era is over and the West awaits its next historic age. We should not be satisfied to simply get what we get. It is up to us to create the West we want.