

# 5

## Rocky Mountains

Represented by: Jasper, Banff, Yoho, Kootenay, and Waterton Lakes National Parks



### ROCKY MOUNTAIN HIGH! ... SEABEDS IN THE SKY

Glistening snow-capped peaks and thundering waterfalls, bugling elk and whistling marmots, lakes of startling turquoise and ice-blue glaciers - this natural region is postcard country. Within this region is some of the most famous and familiar mountain scenery in the world.



Mount Rundle, Banff National Park

### THE LAND:

This region encompasses a series of parallel ranges including the Rocky Mountains and the foothills. These are orderly mountains, with wide sweeping valleys separating the ranges and open pine forests cloaking their shoulders. The sedimentary rocks making up the mountains of this region, sculpted by glaciers and rushing water, have resulted in distinctive, angular peaks. Many peaks exceed 3000 metres with Mt. Robson, at 3954 metres, being the highest.

### VEGETATION:

Dramatic climate changes caused by elevation, rainshadow effects and latitude create



Waterton Lakes National Parks

a complex, diverse pattern of vegetation ranging from grasslands and alpine meadows to towering forests of evergreens. But the most dominant vegetation is the sub-alpine forest. This is a high forest, spreading down valleys below alpine meadows like a black tide. It can be an open, sunlit easy-to-walk-through forest typified by lodgepole pine or a dark, dense and damp forest of sharp-pointed Engelmann spruce and alpine fir. Alpine larch provide brilliant yellow patches of colour each autumn. Montane grasslands cover large areas along the valley bottomlands.

### WILDLIFE:

This region is famous for its easily observed wildlife. In long-established parks such as Banff and Jasper, the wildlife has learned to tolerate and, in some cases, to exploit people, making these parks the premier place in North America for mammal-watching. A drive along the highways traversing the national parks almost guarantees sightings of moose, elk, mule deer, Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, mountain goats, black bear or coyote. The region is also known for its game fish. Many species of trout, including non-native species such as brook and brown trout, thrive in the region's cold



Mount Rundle, towering over the Bow River, welcomes visitors on the Trans Canada Highway to Banff National Park.

Mountain valleys provide moist habitats for lush vegetation. The relatively mild temperatures make this ideal wintering habitat for elk, Big Horn Sheep and other mammals.



## Natural Region 5



Big Horn Sheep

water rivers and streams alongside native rainbow, cutthroat and Dolly Varden.

### STATUS OF NATIONAL PARKS:

Canada's national parks system has its beginnings in this region over 100 years ago with the creation of a 26-square-kilometre national reserve around hot sulphur springs discovered near Banff. Since then, this reserve has grown to an area of 6,641 square kilometres and become known as Banff National Park. Yoho (1,313 km<sup>2</sup>) and Waterton Lakes (505 km<sup>2</sup>) were established by the federal government in 1886 and 1895 respectively; Jasper (10,878 km<sup>2</sup>) in 1907; and Kootenay (1,406 km<sup>2</sup>) in 1920. Today, the five national parks protect more than 12 percent of the region's area, providing representation of the geology, vegetation and wildlife of the Rocky Mountains.

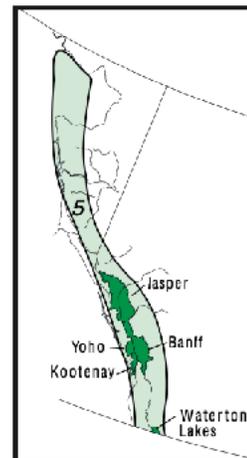
Waterton Lakes National Park is linked with Montana's Glacier National Park as Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park, and in 1995 these two areas were declared a World Heritage Site based upon the exceptionally rich plant and mammal diversity and outstanding glacial and alpine scenery. Waterton Lakes National Park also forms the core area of the Waterton Biosphere Reserve, one of six biosphere reserves in Canada.

The contiguous block of Banff, Jasper, Kootenay and Yoho national parks, augmented by several provincial parks and



Mountain Goats

wilderness areas on its periphery, is among the largest protected areas in the mountains of North America. These four national parks, along with the provincial parks of Mount Robson, Mount Assiniboine and Humber were declared a World Heritage Site because of their exceptional geological features and unspoiled beauty.



The sedimentary strata of the mountains — ancient seabeds compressed into rock and thrust into the sky — bear witness to events from a billion years ago to the age of mammals, the most complete sequence of sedimentary rocks found in Canada. The Burgess Shale Formation in Yoho National Park contains a remarkably preserved record of sea life from over 500 million years ago.

Astride the continental divide, the Columbia Icefield feeds rivers leading to three oceans - the Pacific, the Atlantic and the Arctic. The largest known cave system in Canada - Castleguard Cave - extends below the Columbia Icefield. No one yet knows just how far. One of the world's largest known underground rivers drains Medicine Lake, promising still larger cave systems waiting to be discovered. Some of the most famous hot springs in Canada are found here, including the Banff Hot Springs, which was the initial reason for establishing the first national park in Canada.



The Rocky Mountains of Waterton Lakes National Park viewed from the village of Mountainview, AB. These two natural regions have almost no transition between them; the mountains have been pushed up and over the flat, soft, bedrock of the prairies that forms the foreground of this picture.

**Major Land Uses**

- Tourism
- Watershed protection
- Hydro-electric power
- Coal mining

**Main Communities**

- Banff
- Jasper
- Dawson Creek
- Ft. St. John

**Aboriginal Peoples**

- Carrier, Stoney, Kutenai

**Further Information**

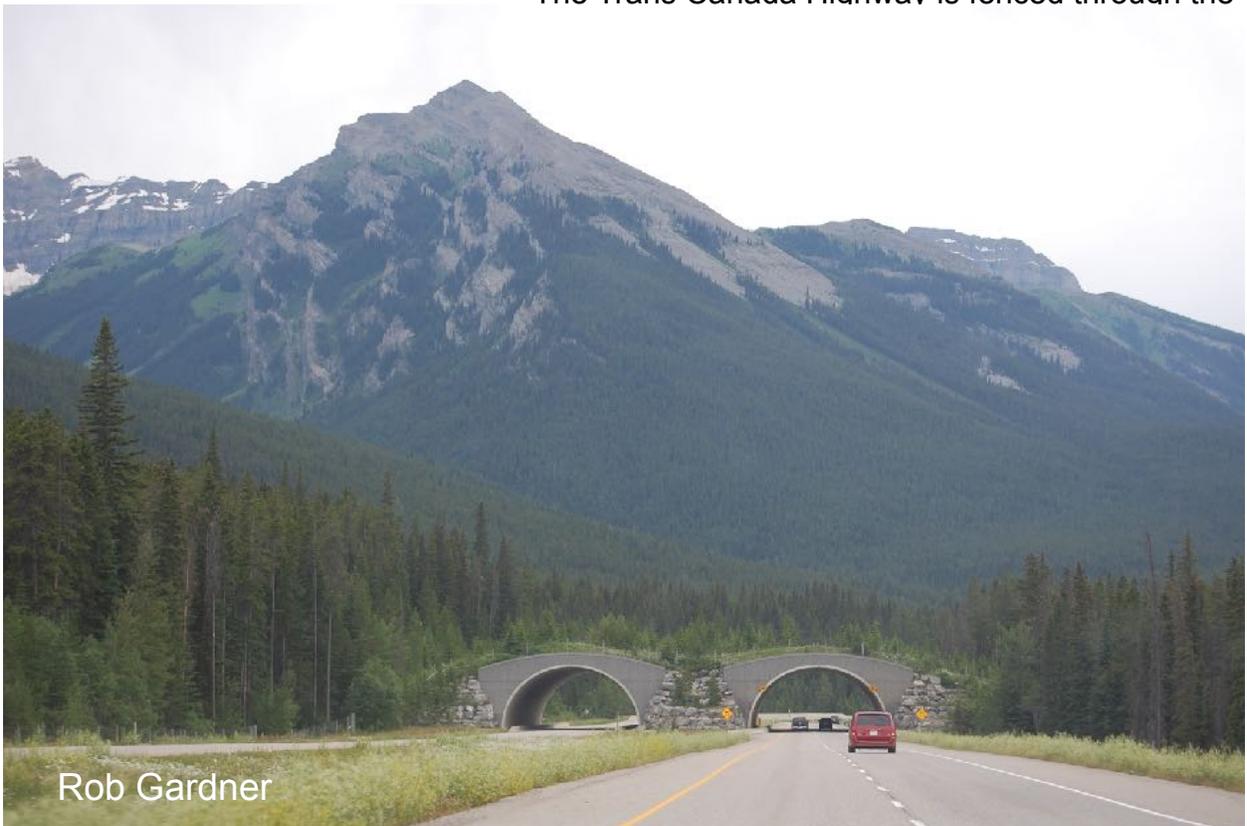
**Parks and Natural Areas**

- Banff National Park
- Jasper National Park
- Kootenay National Park
- Yoho National Park
- Waterton Lakes National Park
- Wilmore Wilderness Area
- Kananaskis Country

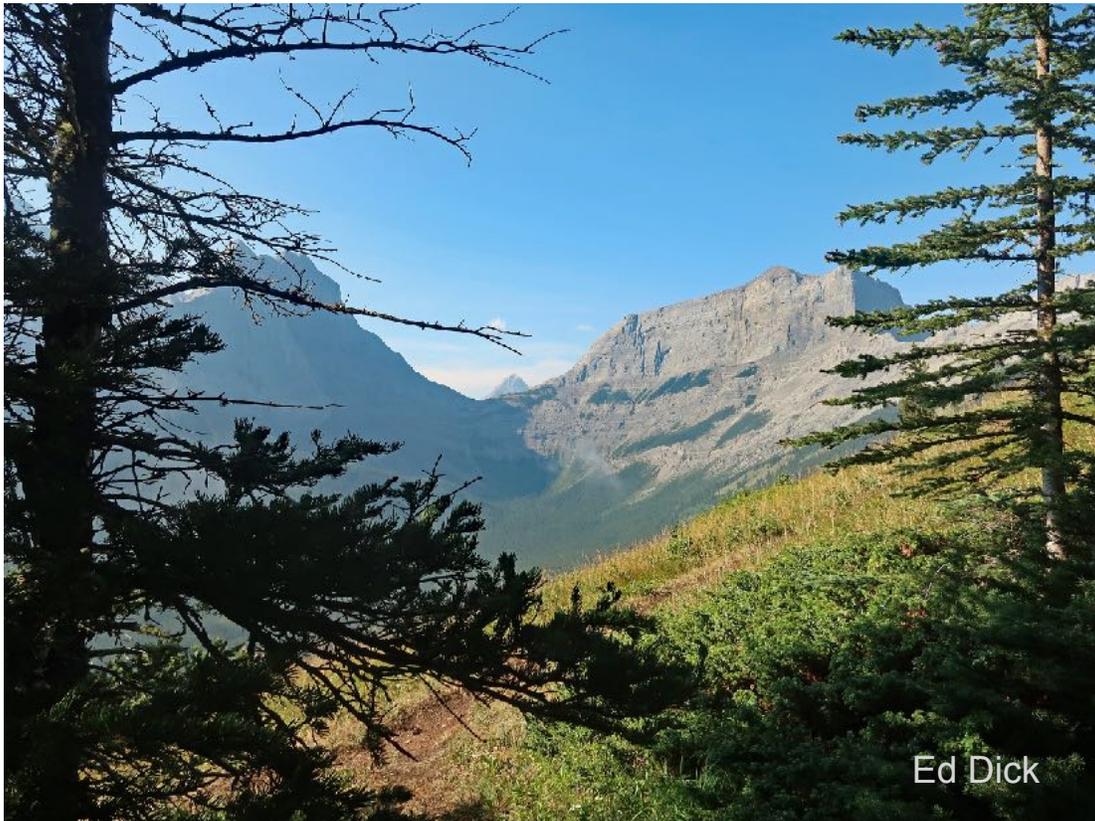


Rob Gardner

The Trans Canada Highway is fenced through the



Rob Gardner



Meltwater from glaciers carries fine glacier flour which gives many alpine lakes, including Lake Louise on the right, a distinctive turquoise colour. Lake Agnes, on the left, is filled with melting snow, so it remains a clear blue.





The Rocky Mountains extend north to the Liard River. The Alaska Highway follows the notch carved by this river. As these views illustrate, these peaks are almost as impressive as those of the more accessible national parks to the south.

