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23. BLACK BEAR

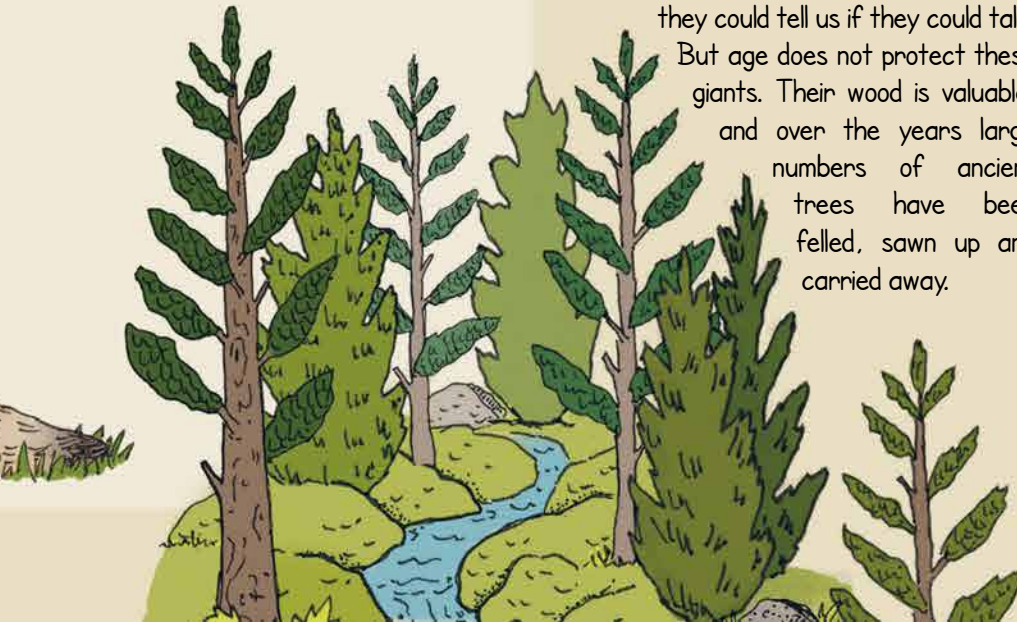
Like people, black bears (officially known as American black bears) come in all sizes. On average they're about the same height and weight as us. Also like us, they're omnivorous – they'll eat whatever takes their fancy. A black bear will happily chew grass and flowers, then munch on a few nuts and roots, and end the meal by fishing a salmon out of a nearby river.

Unlike grizzlies and polar bears, black bears are not under threat. But their eating habits often land them in trouble. Once they get a taste for human food, they prowl into town to rummage through the garbage. Returning home after a pleasant night out, a black bear is not exactly what you want to see on the front lawn. And if you leave food outside your tent when you're camping, a bear visit can be really scary!

★★
24. PYRAMID FALLS

It's not difficult to see how the Pyramid Falls got their name. Water from a melting glacier tumbles 91.4m (300ft) down the mountainside in two waterfalls. On the second, it fans out in a sparkling pyramid. At its base the waters come together again, rush under the railway, and empty into the North Thompson River.

The river is named after one of the world's greatest map makers. When Europeans arrived in Canada the land had not been mapped, so David Thompson (1770-1857) set about putting things to rights. Working with only a handful of helpers, and sometimes entirely alone, he mapped around 3.9 million km² (1.5 million sq miles) of some of the wildest country on Earth – 40% of all Canada!



★★
25. TÊTE JAUNE

Back in the early 1800s, the mischievous Pierre Bostonois was a well-known Canadian hunter and fur trader. Because of his long blonde hair everyone knew him as Tête Jaune, meaning 'Yellow Head'. He came to a sticky end (murdered!) but in 1825 a few log cabins were built at the place beside the Fraser River where he used to bury his valuables. The settlement took his name: Tête Jaune.

The town boomed when the railway was built nearby, and it grew into a bustling, wild community of 3,000 bar workers, hoteliers, engineers, miners and fortune hunters. Bustling, that is, until in 1913 when the Fraser River rose dramatically and washed away Tête Jaune's wooden houses, shops and businesses. Today only their stone chimneys and fireplaces remain.

★★
26. CEDAR-HEMLOCK RAINFOREST

From the vast Pacific Ocean, streams of warm, wet air move eastwards over Canada. This air rises up over the Coast Mountains, which we passed through in the region of Hell's Gate (5). It then meets the Columbia Mountains, where we are now. Forced high up again, the damp air produces snow. But at lower levels the moisture falls as rain. This feeds the awe-inspiring Cedar-Hemlock Rainforest, the only inland temperate (non-tropical) rainforest in the world.

We are in the Glacier National Park. Standing on a soft carpet of ferns and mosses, we stare upwards at mighty cedars, hemlocks and pine. Some are well over a thousand years old – what stories they could tell us if they could talk! But age does not protect these giants. Their wood is valuable, and over the years large numbers of ancient trees have been felled, sawn up and carried away.

★★
27. SNOWMOBILING IN VALEMOUNT

When it snows in this part of the world, it really snows! In Valemount, the resort in the Monashee Mountains, heavy snow falls between November and April. By the spring in the snowfields above the town, the snow lies deep (14m / 46ft), crisp and even: ideal for snowmobiling. Especially on what is known as a 'bluebird day' – a clear blue sky after a night of heavy snow.

With tracks at the back and skis at the front, a snowmobile is a sort of winter go-kart. The really powerful ones can reach 160kph (100mph), but we're happy to spin along at less than half that speed. We don't want our engine noise to disturb the skiers and the wildlife. Out here you're in the true wilderness, so a few words of warning: never snowmobile alone and always give someone your route... just in case you're not back by nightfall when the temperature can fall to -20°C / -4°F. Brrrr!



★★
28. MOUNT ROBSON

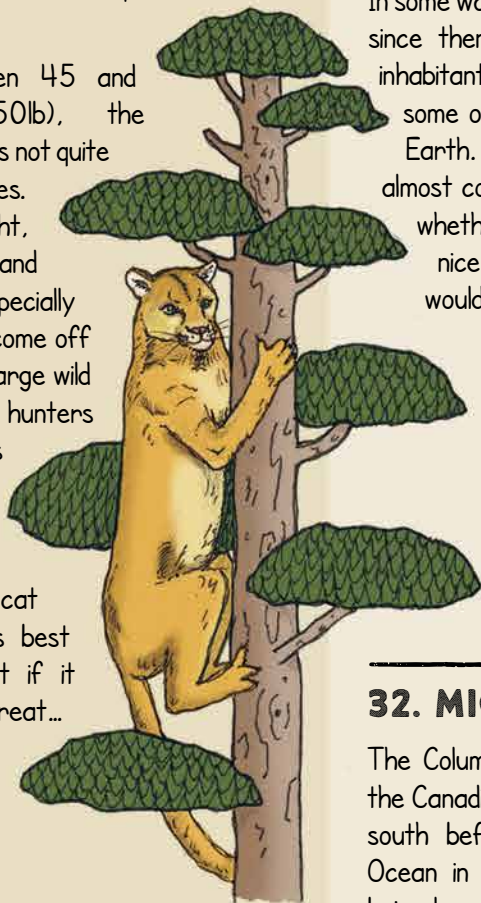
Originally known as the Mountain of the Spiral Road, Mount Robson is probably named after Colin Robertson, a tough-living fur trader who died in 1842. It now lies at the heart of the Mount Robson Provincial Park, recognised by UNESCO (the United Nations Scientific and Cultural Organisation) as a site of world-wide importance.

Glaciers glide down the mountain's northern side, where the steep Emperor Face challenges the most experienced mountaineers. The peak was not climbed until 1913!

★★
29. MOUNTAIN LION

The cougar is a crafty beast. It hunts alone, usually at night, and captures its prey by ambushing it. Deer are its favourite food, but if there aren't any around, it'll eat almost anything that moves, including insects and rats. It stalks along silently and, like a household cat, purns rather than roars.

Weighing between 45 and 68kg (100-150lb), the muscular cougar is not quite king of the Rockies. If it comes to a fight, packs of wolves and big bears, especially grizzlies, usually come off best. Like other large wild mammals, human hunters are the cougar's most dangerous foe. Attacks on people are rare as the big cat normally does its best to avoid us. But if it feels under threat... you have been warned!



★★
30. ATHABASCA FALLS

The River Athabasca only drops 23m (75ft) at the Athabasca Falls, but the sheer weight of water makes it a spectacular sight. You'd think the river would be fullest in the winter, after heavy snow and rainfall, but no. The Athabasca is fed by water from melting glaciers, so it is deepest in summer. On a hot July day, enough water to fill a domestic swimming pool crashes over the Falls every second.

Before the Falls, the Athabasca river flows along a bed of hard rock (quartzite). It then plunges down onto softer rock (limestone), carving out intricate patterns of potholes, shelves and ledges. The view is so remarkable that every few years some keen photographer gets too close to the edge – and disappears into the churning waters below!

★★
31. JASPER

Like most towns in the Rockies, Jasper was founded by hunters and traders. A century later, when the government set up the Jasper National Park, the settlement grew in importance and a railway line was built to link it to the rest of the country.

In some ways, things haven't changed much since then. Jasper is still tiny (4,000 inhabitants), remote, and surrounded by some of the most stunning scenery on Earth. It's a quiet place. By night it's almost completely free from all pollution, whether by noise, dirt or light. It'd be nice to spend a bit more time here, wouldn't it?

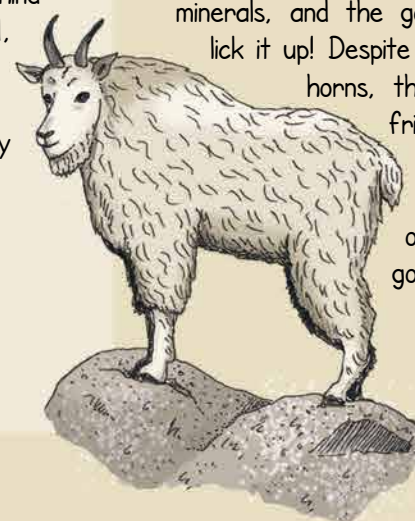


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32. MICA DAM

The Columbia River is awesome. Rising in the Canadian Rockies, it snakes north then south before emptying into the Pacific Ocean in the United States. As well as being long (2,000km / 1,243 miles), the Columbia is extremely powerful because of the weight of water it carries and the distance it falls. This makes it ideal for the generation of hydro-electricity.

In the 1960s, the US and Canada agreed to work together to harness the power of the Columbia. A key part of the scheme was constructing the earth-filled Mica Dam.

Four thousand workers living in a specially built village completed the project in six years. A vast new lake, known as Kinbasket, flooded the Big Bend Country behind the Dam. As the waters deepened, they drowned the dreams of the small mining communities that had stood there since the 19th century gold rush.



To build up their super-insulation coats, mountain goats need a mineral-rich diet. The rocks and soil at the viewpoint here and along the nearby roadside is rich with sodium, sulphur and other important minerals, and the goats come here to lick it up! Despite their wicked-looking horns, the goats are easily frightened. Please give them plenty of space to get on with their goat-y lives.



★★
33. COLUMBIA ICEFIELD

Most of us have read about glaciers or seen them on TV. But actually driving onto one is something else! We take a trip in our special vehicle to the Athabasca Glacier: a frozen river 6km (3.7 miles) long and 1km (1,093 yards) wide. When we arrive, we step out onto a finger of deep ice that has lain here for 10,000 years.

There was a time, as the Earth was coming out of the last Ice Age, when glaciers advanced down the mountainsides like gigantic bulldozers of ice. The Athabasca Glacier still slips down by about the width of your hand each day. However, due to melting caused by global warming, it is shrinking by about 5m (16ft) per year. In the last 125 years it has lost half its volume.

As we stand wondering at all this ice, it's astounding to think that when our grandchildren come here the enormous glacier may have completely disappeared.

★★
34. GOAT LICK VIEWPOINT

The trouble with mountain goats is that they're not actually goats. The name's a mistake. Their nearest relatives in the animal world are deer and cattle, so it would be more accurate to call them mountain antelopes. However, like true goats they have beards and long shaggy coats to protect them from the winter cold. These coats have an inner lining of short, thick hairs and an outer layer of long, hollow hairs. Double wrapped, they can survive temperatures of -50°F (-46°C).

To build up their super-insulation coats, mountain goats need a mineral-rich diet. The rocks and soil at the viewpoint here and along the nearby roadside is rich with sodium, sulphur and other important minerals, and the goats come here to lick it up! Despite their wicked-looking horns, the goats are easily frightened. Please give them plenty of space to get on with their goat-y lives.

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35. FAIRMONT CHATEAU

In 1882, Thomas Wilson, a worker on the Canadian Pacific Railway, became the first white man to see what his local guides knew as the 'Lake of Little Fishes'. Astounded by its loveliness, he called it Emerald Lake. It was later renamed Lake Louise in honour of one of Queen Victoria's daughters. Wilson's vision – the blue-green waters of the lake overlooked by snowy peaks and the glistening ice of the Victoria glacier – is now hailed as one of the finest mountain scenes in the whole world.

In 1890, a lakeside log cabin hotel was built for 'outdoor adventurers'. It soon filled with climbers, skiers and sightseers. Twenty years later the cabin was replaced by a larger, more comfortable building. Further rebuilding created the Fairmont Chateau, a luxury hotel where we are now lucky enough to rub shoulders with winter sports enthusiasts and international celebrities. But the real star of the place remains unchanged: the breathtaking beauty of the Rockies.

★★
36. THE ICEFIELDS PARKWAY

The Icefields Parkway runs for 232km (144 miles) through two of Canada's finest areas of protected wilderness, the Banff and Jasper National Parks. If the driver keeps his foot down (and if there's not too much snow), we could make the journey in about three hours. But to pass by a sight so majestic would be a crime.

The view from our coach windows is an amazing and ever-changing one: snowy mountains, shimmering glaciers, crashing waterfalls, clear lakes and broad, tree-lined valleys. You might catch sight of the occasional hiker, but you're more likely to spot one of the native inhabitants: big horn sheep, deer, black bears, and coyotes. And if you're lucky, you might catch a glimpse of a wolf or a grizzly.

Driver! Slow down, please!

★★
37. GLACIER SKYWALK

The scenery of the Jasper National Park is stunning. Until recently, the best way to see it all was to fly over in a helicopter. But clattering along in a polluting metal machine is not exactly environmentally friendly. So, in 2014, a new way to view the park was opened, a man-made walkway known as the Glacier Skywalk. This glass-bottomed viewing platform, 280m (918ft) above the ground, juts out 30m (100ft) from the side of the Sunwapta Valley.

Not everyone approves of the Skywalk. Environmentalists say the whole point of a national park is to preserve Canada's natural heritage. The enormous structure of glass and steel, they complain, is an eyesore and has no place in the wilderness. Others disagree. They argue that the whole point of a national park is to make the natural world accessible to everyone – which is what the Skywalk does. Whichever side you're on, if you do visit the Skywalk, don't step out onto the platform unless you've got a good head for heights.

★★
38. UPPER HOT SPRINGS BANFF

Water trickling through the rocks of Mount Rundle descends 3km (1.86 miles) below the Earth's surface. When it finds its way back to the surface at Sulphur Mountain, it is steaming hot (47°C/116°F) and has absorbed all kinds of minerals. The First Nations regarded the bubbling springs as sacred. European settlers had different ideas – they enjoyed bathing in the warm, mineral-rich waters. To protect the Springs, in 1885 they and the surrounding area became Canada's first national park.

The Banff Upper Hot Springs are 1,585m (5,200ft) above sea level. As getting changed for a dip in the cold mountain air is not much fun, in 1931 the government built the pool and bath house that we're using today. But pss! Want to know a secret? There isn't always enough water from the natural springs to fill the pool. When this happens, it's topped up with heated water from the town.

★★
39. ANIMAL OVERPASS

Problem: what do you do when the country's major road (the Trans-Canada Highway) cuts through one of the country's main wildlife reserves (the Banff National Park)?

Answer A: Erect tall, steel fences beside the road.

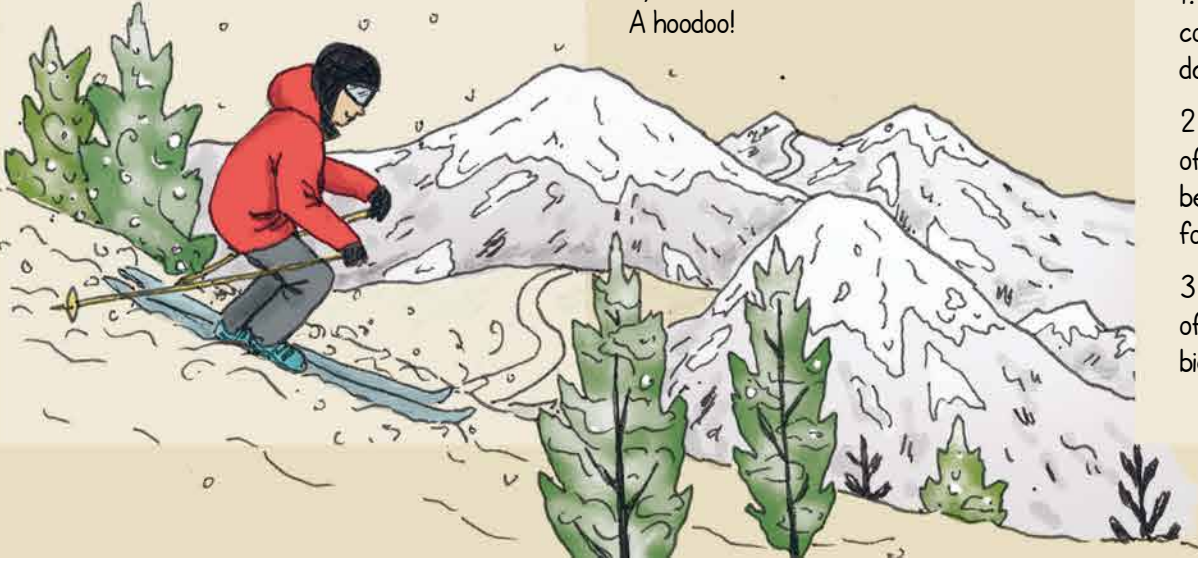
Answer B: Build six wildlife overpasses and 38 wildlife underpasses so that animals can cross the road in safety.

Thankfully, answer B was the winner here. Coyotes, black bears and cougars were quickest to learn how to use the crossings. Then the deer, elk, and moose caught on. It took rather longer for grizzlies and wolves to get the message, but they got there in the end. Thank goodness.

★★
40. WINTER SPORTS

Banff National Park is known as Canada's Protected Playground – and no one has more fun there than skiers and snowboarders. First, though, you've got to overcome a couple of snags. Banff takes some getting to – it's 140km (86 miles) from the nearest airport; plus you can't actually ski in Banff itself, but have to travel to one of the nearby resorts.

We've chosen to come to Lake Louise Village. It was worth the trek. Up we go on the Top of the World Express chairlift amid the most amazing scenery imaginable. Looking out across Bow Valley, there's a row of towering peaks in the distance. Now look down – Lake Louise boasts more than 130 ski and snowboard trails. Added bonus: the resorts open in November and close in May, giving one of the longest ski seasons anywhere in the world.



★★
41. BANFF

George Stephen, President of the Canadian Pacific Railway Company, was born in the Scottish seaside town of Banff. So when some of his workers found hot springs on the mountainside near where he was building his railway, he decided to build a station there and call it Banff too. Well, why not?

Having built the railway at great cost, Canadian Pacific needed people to use it. To tempt them, they built smart hotels at Banff and turned the place into an international tourist resort in the heart of 'Rocky Mountain Park' (now Banff National Park). Visitors flocked in – and they still do. Skiers, snowboarders, hikers, campers and spa-bathers pour in to make Banff one of the most popular destinations in all Canada.

★★
42. HOODOOS

We've put on stout walking boots and set off down the Hoodoos Trail to take a look at these odd pinnacles of stone. They're hoodoos, and look like pieces of modern sculpture. In fact, they're all natural – not man-made at all.

Three things go into the making of a hoodoo: 'badlands', hard rock and soft rock. Badlands is the name for a dry, well-drained base. Above it, long, long ago, lay a thick layer of soft rock. In places it was covered by areas of harder rock. Down came the rain, snow and wind. Gradually, very gradually, the soft rock was eroded away – except where it was protected by an umbrella of hard rock. The result? A hoodoo!

★★
43. WOLF

There are more grey wolves in Canada (about 55,000) than anywhere else in the world except Russia. The wolf is really a wild dog, which is why it looks like the domestic pet. But don't treat it like man's best friend! Wolf attacks on humans are much rarer than they used to be, but they do happen: as recently as 2010, a pack of four wolves attacked and killed a Canadian geologist who had ventured alone into the wilderness.

Wolves live in packs of up to a dozen, led by an alpha male. You can recognise him by his sticking-up ears. The other wolves crouch around him with their ears flat and their tails between their legs. He leads the pack when it chases or ambushes its prey. But not everyone joins the chase: after the birth of young, some stay behind in the lair to babysit the cubs.



★★
44. ELK

The Rocky Mountain elk is a whopping great deer. The males (bulls) weigh up to 315kg (700lb), stand 1.5m (5ft) tall at the shoulder and are 2.4m (8ft) long. Stick multi-pointed antlers 1.2m (4ft) wide on top, and you've got a pretty impressive beast! Lady elks (cows) think so too: the bigger a male's antlers, the more attractive she finds him.

Here are three more quirky elk facts:

1. Babies (calves) are born with a spotted coat, no scent, and don't move for several days. This protects them from predators.
2. An elk's top two canine teeth are made of ivory and are used in jewellery. Scientists believe these 'ivorines' were originally tusks for fighting.
3. Only male elks have antlers. They fall off each winter and are replaced by new, bigger ones in the spring.



★★
45. CALGARY

The city of Calgary, standing at the meeting of the Bow and Elbow Rivers, has grown from humble beginnings. In the 1870s, it was Fort Brisebois, a base for Canadian police trying to stop American whiskey smugglers. Though it now has over one million inhabitants, it still guards the frontier between the wild Rocky Mountains to the west and the broad sweep of the Canadian prairies to the east.

The overground railway helped Calgary grow – but nowhere near as much as what was found underground. Oil. When large reserves were discovered nearby in 1947, the city's population shot up from 100,000 to 325,000 in just 18 years. Skyscrapers appeared, new businesses opened up. What had once been a little old fort had grown into one of Canada's largest, busiest cities.

Wandering around amid the ceaseless noise and bustle of a great city, it's hard to believe that just a few hours ago we were deep in the tranquil wilderness of those wonderful Rocky Mountains.