

Understand Banff, Jasper & Glacier

THE PARKS TODAY234

Discover how the national parks are facing up to the challenges of conservation and climate change, and how First Nations people are addressing their future.

HISTORY236

The story of how the parks came to be involves pioneering explorers, intrepid mountaineers, enterprising railroad magnates and enduring Native American tribal nations.

GEOLOGY.....243

The views are never less than spectacular, but you'll have a better appreciation of the scenery if you understand how it was formed and how it's changing.

WILDLIFE.....246

From native berries that fill the bellies of bears to charismatic megafauna, the Rocky Mountains are home to all sorts of wonderful wildlife.

CONSERVATION.....254

Protecting the precious natural environment of the national parks is perhaps more vital now than ever, so it's important to understand the issues and what you can do to help.

The Parks Today

Fire and ice and natural cycles of destruction and regeneration have shaped the ecosystems and landscapes of these parks for millennia. However, the quickening pace of climate change, especially warming, means that today's visitors, whose impact must be managed, will likely be the last to experience the parks as generations before have done. Meanwhile, Native American people on both sides of the international border continue to actively assert their relationship to the lands and the traditions that have sustained them.

Best on Film

Brokeback Mountain (2005) An unorthodox cowboy tale partly filmed in Kananaskis Country.

The Shining (1980) The opening scene tracks a car plying its way along the Going-to-the-Sun Rd in Glacier National Park.

River of No Return (1954) The peroxide beauty of Marilyn Monroe is pitted against the natural beauty of Banff and Jasper.

Days of Heaven (1978) Terrence Malick's magnum opus utilized Waterton and Banff for its stunning cinematography.

Inception (2010) Fortress Mountain in Kananaskis Country served as the setting for this film's ski-chase scene.

Best in Print

The Melting World (Christopher White; 2013) What the warming climate is doing to Glacier's glaciers.

People Before the Park (Sally Thompson, Kootenai Cultural Committee & Pikunni Traditional Association; 2015) Tribal histories of Glacier before it was a park.

Old Indian Trails of the Canadian Rockies (Mary Schäffer; 1911) Early-20th-century account of Schäffer's wilderness adventures.

Night of the Grizzlies (Jack Olsen; 1969) The story of two deadly bear attacks on the same night.

First Nations

Formalized in a treaty (the first since the 1880s), there's now an ongoing First Nations effort to reintroduce buffalo into the northern tier of Glacier National Park, as well as neighboring tribal areas in Alberta, Canada. The endeavor is spearheaded by the InterTribal Buffalo Council, whose president, Ervin Carlson, is a member of the Blackfoot tribe. The long-term goal is the restoration of the buffalo's ceremonial and cultural standing, not fully realized since the late 19th century. In order to accomplish this, the traditional roaming patterns of the buffalo, which include crossing the international border (sans passports), need to be restored. Not surprisingly, northern Rockies ranchers are not on board. In the meantime, the Blackfeet also see potential in tourism: plans call for the building of an interpretive center on US 2 dedicated to the history of the buffalo, as well as overnight buffalo drives where tourists can sleep in teepees along the way.

In another significant milestone, Energy Keepers – a corporation formed by the Salish and Kootenai confederation – took over ownership of the Kerr Dam on the Flathead River near Polson, MT, in September 2015, renaming it the Salish Kootenai Dam. Opposition to the dam was strong among tribal leaders when it was originally proposed in 1930 – understandably so, as it was built on an important religious site without consultation. Now, however, it will be the first Native American-owned hydroelectric facility in the US and, equally important, it will be a return to the historical management of the river and lake as natural resources by local tribespeople.

The Heat is On

South of the 49th parallel, Glacier National Park juggles issues of both the hot (forest fires) and cold (melting glaciers) variety. Ongoing studies by the US Geological Survey on Glacier's 'rivers of ice' have revealed that many of