



# REFERENCE PAPERS

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## THE NATIONAL PARKS OF CANADA

Canada's national parks, established to preserve select natural areas of the country in a near-original state, are in the midst of a boom in outdoors recreation whose demands challenge traditional ideas about parks.

The combination of outdoor recreation and travel is a bargain holiday for most Canadians, particularly when they can camp or park their trailers in publicly-owned parks. With good roads and efficient transportation, more money to spend, and an increasing amount of leisure time, they are visiting parks, both national and provincial, and outdoor recreation areas more frequently and in greater numbers.

The number of visitors to the 17 national parks that are easily accessible increases each year and there is no indication that a peak will ever be reached. Since 1958, attendance has almost doubled and, in 1963 alone, 32 per cent more people came to the national parks than during the previous year. About 7,000,000 visitors a year now pour into the national parks, most during the months of June, July and August. It is no longer surprising that the concentration of national parks in the mountains of Alberta and British Columbia, 2600 miles from the heavy urban concentrations of population, should be absorbing more than a third of all the visitors.

All this is a far cry from the year 1887, when the first national park, Rocky Mountains Park in Alberta, was established. Similarly the modest area of 260 square miles that was the original park has grown into the 29,288 square miles of today's system, which, if combined, would almost cover the provinces of New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island.

How to preserve the original character and purpose of the parks while providing for the enjoyment of millions of users is the central problem of national parks management in Canada today.

### Administration

While the national park system is now firmly established, preservation and wise use depend ultimately on public understanding and appreciation of the idea and purposes of the parks. The obligation to provide for proper use, at the same time preserving nature and natural features inviolate, is a continuing one. Since the parks belong to the people, the administration has a duty to make them accessible by road and trail, and to provide accommodation and other facilities necessary for their enjoyment. But the more the parks are used, the more difficult it becomes to prevent their impairment. Without careful planning and regulation of the kind and quantity of visitor facilities and activities, the parks could lose the qualities that justified setting them apart as a national heritage. Hence, a modern national park system is a complex, many-sided enterprise, a study in land-use and preservation and a challenge to administration.