



Canada has been called the blessed child of a bountiful nature. Its mineral riches, immense forests and enviable energy supplies are celebrated. What has been taken for granted at times is perhaps the most precious resource of all – Canada's natural beauty.

Now attitudes are changing. Canadians are becoming increasingly aware of the attractiveness and variety of their vast country, largest in the world after the Soviet Union. And they are determined to preserve their heritage.

They take pride in possessing the world's largest system of national parks, covering 32 million acres of which 38 per cent are in the lovely northlands. One set up last year on Baffin Island is the world's only national park above the Arctic Circle. It covers 8,290 square miles, with rugged mountains dominating a massive ice cap and a coastline fretted by fjords.

With its vast living space, 6,000 miles of coastline and the largest body of fresh water possessed by any country, Canada has always been admirably suited for a program of protecting and preserving the environment. Yet the national parks system began only in 1885, when the Canadian

National Resources

World's largest parks system preserves Canada's natural beauty

The Prince of Wales Hotel on a hilltop in Waterton Lakes National Park, Alberta.

government took over 10 square miles around the mineral hot springs at Banff, in the western province of Alberta, and dedicated the land to the people of Canada.

Now the total has grown to 29, and the government is setting its sights confidently on increasing the count to 60 by the year 2000. So swiftly has interest mounted that 11 new parks have been created since 1968, compared with only four in the preceding 30 years. Visitors to the parks trebled in a decade – from five million in 1962 to 15 million a decade later.

The basis for administration is the National Parks Act of 1930. It sets out the general aim as being a dedication of the parks to the people of Canada for their benefit, education and enjoyment, to be maintained and used in a way that would leave them unimpaired for future generations.

For the first time, every one of Canada's 10 provinces, the Yukon and the two northern territories are now represented in the parks system.