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THE NATIONAL PARKS OF CANADA

Canada has embarked on the largest development programme in the history of its National Parks. A mounting population, new trends in leisure, the facilities to reach almost anywhere in the country on wheels or by air, have brought about an increase in National Parks use that would have seemed impossible to predict ten years ago. Over this period attendance has risen more than 240 per cent. In 1958, more than four million people visited the eighteen National Parks in Canada, and indications are that this record figure may be exceeded in 1959.

All this is a far cry from the year 1887 when the first National Park was established as Rocky Mountains Park in Alberta. As remote from this modest 260-square mile area are the 29,288 square miles that comprise the system today and which, if combined, would almost cover two Provinces - New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island.

But size alone, in a country as large as Canada is no proof of distinction. What makes the Parks notable is their fascinating variety of terrain, strongly regional, distinct in topography, deeply a part of the life and colour of the Canadian landscape.

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 Parks System is now firmly established, preservation and wise use depend ultimately on public understanding and appreciation of the national park idea and park purposes. The obligation to provide for proper use and yet at the same time to preserve nature and natural features inviolate is a continuing one. Since the parks belong to the people by right of citizenship, the administration has a duty to make them accessible by road and trail, and to provide accommodation and other facilities necessary for the enjoyment of the natural scene. But the more the parks are used the more difficult it becomes to prevent 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 for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations. Hence a modern national park system is a complex, many-sided enterprise, a study in land use and preservation, and a challenge to administration.

Against a timeless background of mountain peaks, lakes, forests and sea coast, the National Parks are engaged on the practical level in large-scale outdoor housekeeping. There are, for example, 787 miles of motor roads to be maintained, including