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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 increasing leisure, they are visiting parks, both national and provincial, and outdoor recreation areas more frequently and in greater numbers.

The number of visitors to the 19 national parks increases each year. Since 1958, attendance has almost tripled. About 12 million visitors a year now pour into the national parks. It is no longer surprising that the concentration of national parks in the mountains of Alberta and British Columbia, 2,600 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 29,275 square miles of today's system, which, if combined, would almost cover the provinces of New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island.

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 future 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