

Climber's Paradise: Making Canada's Mountain Parks, 1906–1974

By Pearlann Reichwein. 2014. University of Alberta Press, Ring House 2, Edmonton, AB, Canada, T6G 2E1. 402 pages, 28.22 CAD, Cloth.

For those who love the mountains, the Canadian Rockies give a sense of place and wilderness which go on forever and words like majestic, spiritual, grandeur, and limitless are used to describe the feelings which most of us experience on our visits to their challenging slopes. Regrettably they do not go on forever and we always have to come back down the mountain after our

brief sojourn into unreachability. For over a century, Canadians and international visitors have been making careful investigations into the reachable parts of the Rockies, spending their summers climbing and winters telling the tales and planning the next year's activities.

This book by historian Pearlann Reichwein is a series of vignettes into the lives and explorations of the Alpine

Club of Canada members from its conception in the flat prairie city of Winnipeg in 1905. The club consisted of many adventurers, professors, clergy and other professionals who wished to climb, explore and conquer the peaks of Canada's Rocky Mountains. The first part of the book deals with the organization of the club, comparing different clubs in existence at the time, English, American and world-recognized organizations which were exploring the Canadian Rockies and taking the recognition of first-time scaling of peaks to their own credit or to the credit of clubs outside Canada. So in a kind of patriotic, competitive ideal and in recognition of how a local club could serve the interests of Canadian mountaineers, outfitters, and adventurers, the Alpine Club of Canada was formed.

At the beginning, the club's interests were solely in climbing peaks previously unrecorded as climbed. Each summer a new camp was established and the surrounding peaks were located and attempted. Later club activities were expanded to conservation of areas for mountaineers and wildlife. As the country opened up with railroads and automobile passable roads from the earlier trails, the members were the first ones to find that their chosen playgrounds were also chosen by other commercial and industrial interests with purely economic gain in mind when marketing the appreciation of the montane wilderness.

Of course, the access to the interior of the Rockies which began the explorations of the club was the right-of-way of the Canadian Pacific Railway, which allowed subsequent development of the Banff area, the Crownest Pass areas and the building of hotels and resorts which housed the travelling adventurers and provided access to the jump-off points without travelling for hundreds of kilometers through untracked wilderness. The areas chosen for the yearly camps were very much dependent upon close railway access of supply which could be off-loaded at assembly points for outfitters

and their pack animals to complete the final link to the camp.

The hydro-electric power and irrigation potential of the eastern Rockies, specifically in the Waterton Lakes and the Bow River, by development groups were of major concern in the club and much political activity began in the club's discussion, occupying their club publication and annual meetings. The book chronicles the course of the disputed water reserves with the subsequent creation of the Canadian National Parks Association which arose as a response to industrial intervention and preservation disputes. As the well-placed adventurers used their experience and political will, the fruits became a system of national parks with access to many wilderness areas.

The book also chronicles the public discussions of the access into the mountains which the club first designed and maintained. Building of shelter cabins, advocacy for conservation of water, timber and freedom from pollutants began with advocates in the club but ironically became critiques of the club's own practices of setting up the yearly camp and leaving junk on the mountain after the season finished. The clubhouse and climbing shelters also fell victim to other conservation strategies as the parks system evolved. Other events of the club's history are mentioned, like mountain training of soldiers in WWII, where the only experienced group of mountaineers to be recruited as teachers were ACC members, and the club's Centennial Project of scaling 10 peaks named after the 10 provinces, which were significant milestones of the club. Finally, the book discusses the eventual passing of the club's legacy, the mountain parks, to Parks Canada, which had less and less communication with club members and grew to an organization which we now revere as the promoters of conservation and wilderness protection in the same Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks.

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