

MT. ASSINIBOINE PARK TRIP

AUGUST 19-22, 1974

by W. G. Hazelwood
Parks Biologist

Parks Branch
Dept. of Recreation & Conservation
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, B. C.

Mt. Assiniboine Trip

A familiarization and investigative trip was made to this Park on August 19, 1974 by myself and a two man Fisheries Inventory crew. Their objective was to sample the lakes fishery at the south and north ends of the Park, and mine was to examine some grizzly bear habitat on the Simpson River and to also examine the condition of guiding cabins in the same area. A Jet Ranger aircraft was rented from Bow Helicopters at Banff with Jim Davies acting as pilot for the trip. An overflight of the Simpson River area was conducted prior to landing at Sunburst Lake. On August 22 the trip was terminated with the helicopter meeting the group at the confluence of the North and South Simpson Rivers and returning to Banff.

A nursery band of Rocky Mountain Bighorn sheep containing 22 individuals was observed just south of Nestor Peak from the helicopter. A nursery herd of 16 elk were observed in Og Pass and another group of 8 elk contained a 5 point bull. The latter group were seen near the Lodge in the core area of the Park. One old billy mountain goat was also seen on the shoulder of Mt. Wedgewood during the flight.

Prior to leaving the core area of Mt. Assiniboine a hike was made to Cerulean Lake, Sunburst Lake and Lake Magog. At Magog a 1½ pound gravid female cutthroat trout, 39 centimetres in length, was caught in the evening. Extensive talks were held with Ken Jones the Park Ranger for the last seven years and with the Park Naturalist.

A cursory look at the horse damage in the alpine was also conducted. The abuse of the trail system with 3 foot deep trails in some places and 20 foot wide areas in others is sickening. A band of horses stampeding across the head of Magog Creek and a



Mt. Assiniboine and Magog Lake.



Elk on alpine summer range in Og Pass at 8000' elevation.

party of 4 horsemen galloping along a trail after a rainfall with clods of dirt flying over their heads is not conducive to reassuring oneself of the sanctity of wilderness parks. In short the horses MUST go!! A non-horse use area should be established from Og Lake to Wedgewood Lake to Rock Lake, where backpackers only can travel the trails and alpine areas. The slumping and erosion are also of concern and are directly caused by horse use. Canadian thistle and other common weeds are becoming more abundant and are introduced either in the horse food or in their droppings along the trails and lakeshores.

August 20

The ground party that hiked 18 miles down to the confluence of the North and South Simpson Rivers consisted of Jan Risse-Sawitski, Park Naturalist; Ken Sumanik, Habitat Protection Biologist and his family of 3; and Grant Hazelwood, Parks Biologist.

The trail to Og Lake is badly abused by horse use as is the meadows adjacent to the trail. Columbian ground squirrel colonies are extensive here and help to precipitate erosion of the topsoil and vegetative layer of mosses, lichens, sedges and grasses. The hollow tunnels allow the horses' weight to break through the topsoil stability and this in turn allows runoff water to gouge out and remove the soil thus loosened and exposed.

The horsetrail through the Valley of the Rocks is quite stable and resistant since the soil layer here is almost non-existent. Grizzly scats were observed in two spots on the trail, but horse droppings are the main litter on the trail.

Beyond, the Golden Valley shows much more horse impact on the trail as soil levels deepen down the valley as the Simpson River

is approached. Occasional grizzly sign was evident along the trail as well. At Police Meadows, where the river is first encountered is the main base of Albert Cooper's hunting operation within the Park. There are 3 cabins here and only two are serviceable. A main cabin sleeps 6 and has a good stove and table, while the other cabin has only 4 rough plank bunks as furniture.

High water in the spring has floated all the horse droppings and plastic debris down to the north end of the meadow. The grass species are mixed here with marsh grasses present as well as dry site grasses. The meadow appears quite capable of supporting horses for limited periods of time in late summer and early fall. Weeds such as Canadian thistle and dandelion are also present here at Police Meadows.

August 21

The old forest fire avoided Police Meadows when it burned in the Simpson Valley, but the trail down the river enters the burned off areas almost immediately. A steep hill takes the horse trail down to cross the Simpson River and within a mile a large tributary from Citadel Pass is also crossed on the East side. Both of these stream crossings should have bridge crossings for hikers established as the latter crossing in particular is dangerous to wading and the water temperature is frigid at 38° F.

Another mile down the trail a second ford of the Simpson River was encountered, and at this point we stayed on the east side and searched for the new trail currently being cut by Parks Branch personnel.

The burned area where the trail is to be located has a good many berry bushes that attract bears in late August to feed on the fruit. The entire area is semi-open vegetation with a lodgepole

pine and scattered spruce forest 40 feet in height. The grassy slopes and rocky escarpments along with the many alluvial fans make any wildlife here highly visible to the hiker. Bear scats are more common in this area where the berry crop is plentiful.

Near the confluence with the North Simpson River the spruce forest has withstood the fire in the valley bottom and many of the mature Douglas Fir on the higher slopes have survived as well. After the 6 mile hike from Police Meadows to Scoop Cabin a climb was made by myself up to the cliffs on the south-facing slopes of Quartz Hill. A small area here has served as a marginal winter range for moose, elk and deer that have likely been trapped by early snows and have been unable to migrate out to better winter ranges down the Simpson River. The Douglas fir, paper birch, vine maple, Saskatoon berry vegetation is indicative of a relatively dry snowfree site. Some of the immature balsam have been browsed very heavily while lower branches are untouched, indicating a snow depth in the valley bottom of 3-4 feet.

Two cow elk were sighted near the trail and both immature spruce and blue grouse were observed. No bears were seen on the open areas. Fishing was tried at the cabin but the stream runs fast and pools are few - no fish were seen in either of the Simpson Rivers.

Scoop cabin is much smaller with only one small bunk inside but an adjacent tent frame allows for setting up a tent quickly. Two hikers heading for the Simpson Pass put their small tent here for the night.

August 22

At 9:00 a.m. the helicopter arrived and a low level flight was conducted to examine the trail area and to take Jan Risse-Sawitski

back to the Lodge. The rest of our group was then picked up and lifted out to Banff by 10:00 a.m.

Grant Hazelwood

G. Hazelwood
Parks Biologist



Burn area semi-open with immature lodgepole pine and spruce forest.



Hikers on south end of uncompleted trail. Avalanche spill area.



Park Naturalist at Og Lake.



Og meadows - note foreground soil slumping initiated by horse use.



Horse trail to Og Lake. Note how hikers spread the trail wider.



View up the Simpson River valley to Valley of the Rocks in far distance.



Police Meadows and head of the Simpson River.



Mountain sheep winter range on Quartz Hill at right. Moose, elk, deer marginal winter range on lower slopes. The Monarch 9528' in back left.

G. Hazelwood

MEMORANDUM

TO Mr. G. Macnab
Chief, Planning Division
Parks Branch

PARKS BRANCH
DEPARTMENT OF RECREATION AND CONSERVATION

OFFICE OF G. Hazelwood
Parks Biologist

Attn: M. Hanry

3-2-32

September 6 1974

RE: Simpson River Trail

The hiking trail proposed along the east side of the Simpson River along the lower slopes of Quartz Hill and Citadel Peak appears to be an excellent trail location. The absence of horse use is also a welcome relief from other trails in Mt. Assiniboine Park. No out-of-the-ordinary hazard from grizzly bears is to be expected here beyond what any hiker would expect in any other part of the Park.

I would recommend the following steps be taken to promote a safer hiking experience when this route is completed.

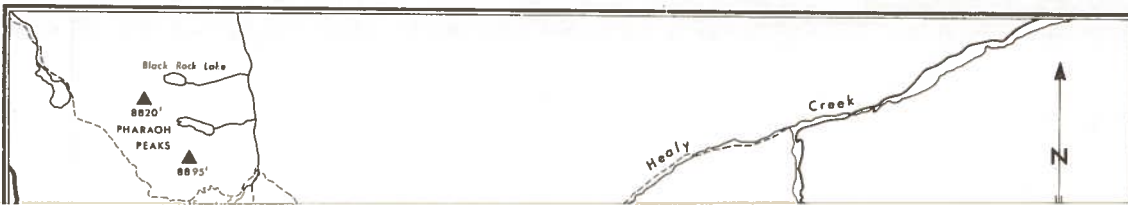
1. Eliminate all sharp corners and blind corners in the trail.
2. Clear a visibility right-of-way 8 feet wide eliminating branches and brush so man and bear can mutually avoid close confrontations.
3. Continue the trail through the open areas as much as possible.
4. Post a sign at either end of the trail indicating grizzly bear habitat in berry season and a no horses allowed on this trail message as well. Be a noisy hiker.
5. Build a footbridge over Citadel Creek and possibly a camping area near the bridge as water is scarce in the burn area and any overnighting between Scoop cabin and this creek should be firmly discouraged.
6. That the trail continue on up the east side of the valley to join the Citadel-Fatigue Passes route from Golden Valley.

If the foregoing recommendations are adhered to, I see no serious conflict arising out of the completion of this trail.

G. Trachuk,
Assistant Director,
i/c Park Operations.

G. Hazelwood
G. Hazelwood,
Parks Biologist.

cc M. Goddard
R. Lowrey
G. Trachuk



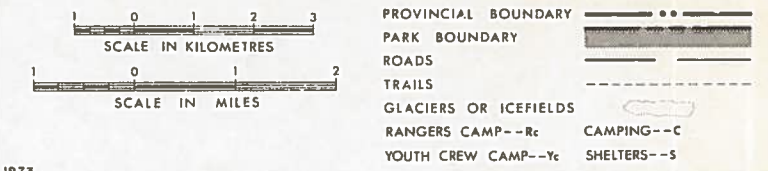
MT. ASSINIBOINE

PROVINCIAL PARK

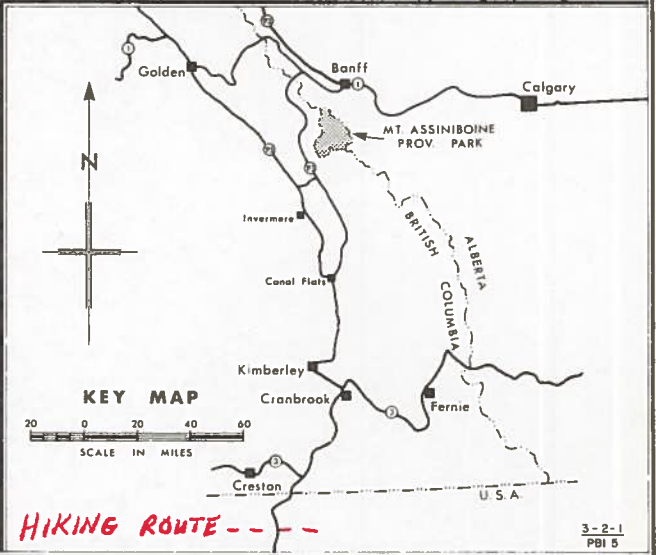
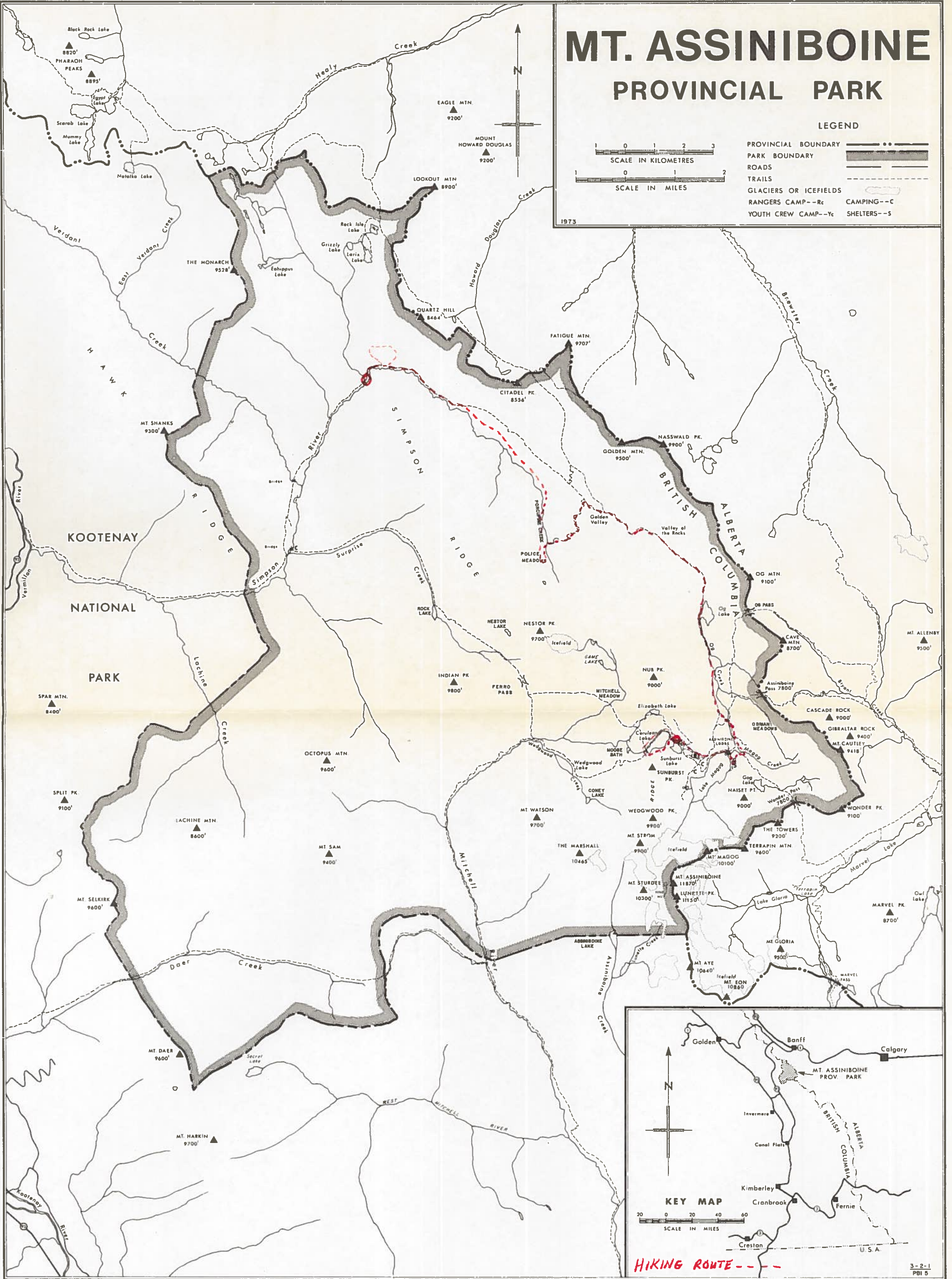


MT. ASSINIBOINE PROVINCIAL PARK

LEGEND



1973



HIKING ROUTE - - - -