



Research article

Defining *wilderness*: the evolution of Banff National Park

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Abstract

Internationally, Canada is a country known for its iconic, expansive landscapes. Images of the Rocky Mountains and destinations such as Lake Louise and Banff are instantly recognisable, drawing visitors from around the world each year. *Wilderness* is a term that has become irrevocably linked to Canadian national identity and Canadian culture. Nowhere is the significance of wilderness within Canadian culture and history more visible than in the country's vast network of provincial and national parks. This article explores the history of Canada's oldest national park, Banff, and the creation and evolution of its boundaries. It explores how park boundaries act as spatial tools to project legal frameworks and cultural values, creating landscapes and an experience of place rather than simply preserving existing conditions or ecologies. The history of Banff National Park is also used to explore the broader implications that idealised or romanticised notions of wild spaces have had in shaping Canadian cultural values, which in turn have shaped attitudes towards landscapes and the defining of landscapes into industrialised zones and zones of conservation. Fundamentally an architectural study of site, this article

explores the evolution of the national park boundaries of Banff through their interactions with industrial interests, cultural landmarks and historical narratives, dissecting their capacities to control intensely layered and contested areas. Through a study of the park boundary and the forces that have shaped it over time, the dynamics of power, exclusion, exploitation and commercialisation inherent to the definition of landscapes and boundaries are investigated.

Keywords wilderness; national parks; boundaries; conservation; borders; Canada; tourism

Introduction

Wilderness is a term that holds undeniable significance within Canadian culture and has become a celebrated aspect of the country's national identity. On the global stage, Canada is closely associated with its boreal forests, open prairies and iconic mountain ranges. Nowhere is the significance of wilderness within Canadian culture and history more visible than within Canada's vast network of provincial and national parks. As spaces defined by physical and legal boundaries, national parks are attempts to preserve wilderness, make it accessible and manifest an experience of *the wild* through a careful curation of space. Through selective exclusions, industries and narratives, such parks are attempts to bind wilderness within boundaries and maintain an associated and often idealised image of Canadian landscapes. In this sense, nature as presented within a national park is as much created as it is conserved. This article examines how federal park boundaries act as legal and spatial tools to regulate and control territory, rather than solely to preserve landscapes or ecologies. It examines how the notion of wilderness has developed over time within Canadian culture and the central role that it has played in the creation of a national identity. Through this examination, the dynamics of power, exclusion and commercialisation inherent to the definition of landscapes and boundaries are investigated.

Fundamentally a study of site, this article examines the evolution of a national park boundary to explore the broader implications of wilderness within Canadian culture. As constructs, national parks are attempts to preserve defined territories through the enforcement of spatial and legal boundaries. Understanding the boundary of a national park can help to understand not only the evolution of the park itself but also the economic and political forces that have guided its development over time. This article argues that the complex layering of histories and interests that have shaped the boundary can be understood through a singular – though perhaps ambiguous – prevailing pursuit: to create, control and commercialise an experience of wilderness. To this end, this article explores the topic of wilderness within Canadian culture through a specific study of one site: Banff National Park. This layered and contested space is investigated through its interactions with industrial interests, cultural landmarks and historical narratives.

Wilderness and the sublime

The original creation of the Banff Hot Springs Reserve in 1885 was part of an ongoing, broader shift in attitudes towards wild spaces across North America.¹ Wilderness, which had once been generally regarded as the central antagonist of the North American colonial mission of settlement, began to take on a new meaning within North American culture. New emerging philosophies such as Transcendentalism, which lauded the spiritual value of individual experiences and intuitive knowledge of the world, posed a direct challenge to the bewildering depictions of nature stemming from traditional Judeo-Christian doctrine in which the wild was seen primarily as a place of spiritual confusion.² These philosophies argued instead that wilderness was a space of spiritual awakening where human intuition and observation might reconnect with fundamental truths.³ By the eighteenth century, the awe-inspiring power contained in the rugged landscapes across the continent was expressed through the notion of the *sublime* – a term that encapsulated the power and often divine or supernatural connotations held within these dramatic natural landscapes.⁴ Some of the most significant contributors to this emerging brand of American Romanticism were naturalists and writers such as John Muir and Henry David Thoreau – the

latter perhaps making the most prominent contribution with his publication of *Walden* in 1854.⁵ Within this work, Thoreau extols the virtues of independence, self-reliance and spirituality that he believed the natural world could inspire. As explained by the American environmental historian William Cronon in 'The trouble with wilderness' (1996),

that Thoreau in 1862 could declare wilderness to be the preservation of the world suggests the sea change that was going on. Wilderness had once been the antithesis of all that was orderly and good – it had been the darkness, one might say, on the far side of the garden wall – and yet now it was frequently likened to Eden itself.⁶

This shifting philosophy and cultural celebration of wilderness was accompanied by the creation of new environmental organisations that sought to celebrate and protect these spaces, such as the founding of the Alpine Club of Canada in 1906.⁷ Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a new North American emphasis on self-reliance, capitalistic independence and cultural individualism became ingrained in the identities of the continent's emerging nations.⁸ Individual experiences of the natural world began to have new-found profundity and spiritual significance. As *wild* space ceased to be an existential threat to settlement, it began instead to offer an escape from the confines of established religious and social hierarchies.⁹ The completion of the transcontinental railway in Canada in 1885 linked the western provinces of British Columbia and Alberta to Ontario, and a new travel network granted settlers and tourists access to westward migration.¹⁰ The celebration of independent experience within nature, however, was coupled with a growing concern that expansion across the continent might threaten these *natural* experiences that made North America such a unique and great landscape. As Cronon writes,

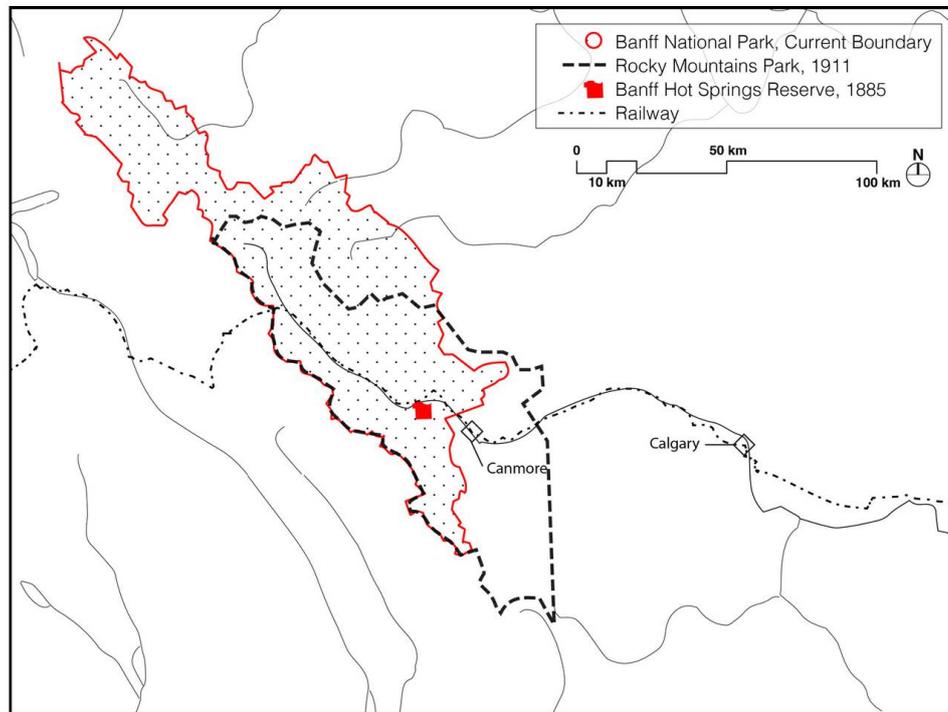
It is no accident that the movement to set aside national parks and wilderness areas began to gain real momentum at precisely the time that laments about the passing frontier reached their peak. To protect wilderness was in a very real sense to protect the nation's most sacred myth of origin.¹¹

Among the core elements of the frontier myth was the powerful sense that *wilderness* was the last remaining embodiment of the individualism that had made North America a landscape of such limitless possibility.¹² It was not simply that these beautiful landscapes began to take on a spiritual significance or the development of a melancholic sentiment that they represented a disappearing way of life, but a combination of the two that would forever cement the significance of these landscapes within North American culture. Federally owned and operated national parks presented a unique opportunity to maintain and preserve not only physical spaces but also the mythos and cultural narratives that surrounded them.

Banff Hot Springs Reserve

The formation of Banff National Park was closely linked to the history of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) and the construction of the transcontinental railway. The CPR was founded in 1881 under the primary mandate of physically linking the provinces in the Dominion of Canada together through the creation of a rail link.¹³ To connect the western province of British Columbia to the eastern provinces of Ontario and Quebec, a key condition of British Columbia's joining the Canadian Confederation in 1871, the railway required a safe passage through the Rocky Mountains.¹⁴ In 1883, as it found a passageway through the mountains along the Bow River valley, three CPR workers came upon geothermal hot springs, later named the Cave and Basin Hot Springs, at the base of what is now called Sulphur Mountain.¹⁵ Immediately convinced of the site's potential as a tourist attraction, William Van Horne, the then vice president of the CPR and primary supervisor of the construction of the transcontinental railway, appealed to governors of the Dominion of Canada to declare the site a reserve.¹⁶ The government responded quickly, and in 1885 a 26 km² parcel of land around the springs was declared the Banff Hot Springs Reserve, creating the first iteration of Banff National Park (Figure 1).¹⁷

Figure 1. Banff National Park, Rocky Mountains Park and Banff Hot Springs Reserve (Source: data taken from Government of Canada, Open Maps GIS Data)



This area of protected land would be enlarged to 673 km² in 1887 to include Devil's Lake, known today as Lake Minnewanka, and renamed the Rocky Mountains Park.¹⁸ In 1902, it was expanded eastwards to the edge of the Stoney Nakoda First Nations Reserve.¹⁹ The repeated expansion of the park was encouraged by Van Horne, laying claim to more territory and gaining control over the potential economic benefits held within the site. Conserving wilderness was simply a by-product of claiming land for its unique and valuable attractions, such as the geothermal resources at the Cave and Basin Hot Springs. The same arguments that had been used to create Yellowstone National Park in the US in 1872 – similarly seeking to give control of the space to government and railway agencies – were used in the proposal for the Rocky Mountains Park.²⁰ As described by Roderick Nash in *Wilderness and the American Mind*, the formation of the park at Yellowstone was far more concerned with claiming the resources of the site than with its preservation:

Yellowstone's initial advocates were not concerned with wilderness; they acted to prevent private acquisition and exploitation of geysers, hot springs, waterfalls, and similar curiosities. In New York the decisive argument concerned the necessity of forested land for an adequate water supply. In both places wilderness was preserved unintentionally. Only later did a few persons begin to realize that one of the most significant results of the establishment of the first national and state parks had been the preservation of wilderness.²¹

Similarly, in Banff the park was created to claim ownership of the hot springs after their discovery, inadvertently creating a zone of preservation.²² The CPR was an essential lobbyist in the creation and development of Banff National Park.²³ The company had invested heavily in the establishment of the transcontinental railway that, for the time being, was the only easy means of accessing the area. With this infrastructure in place, and a network of accommodation and hospitality venues established, the CPR stood to benefit significantly from sustained restriction to site access.²⁴ As described by the historian Leslie Bella,

[Canadian National Parks] were built ... to centralize control of that landscape in the hands of the railroads. That control was used to reduce competition in the parks, and to restrict

access to the mountains. Businesses that might be patronized by the working class were not sufficiently aesthetic. Access to the mountains was provided instead to upper- and middle-income tourists willing to pay substantial sums for a sanitized view of the mountains.²⁵

From its very beginnings, the park was tied to the infrastructure and economics of the railway and tourism industries that the CPR sought to establish. The need for the CPR and the Canadian government to celebrate the site and market it to potential tourists meant that park space became more than mere landscape, it became a commodity within a business operation. Central to the effort of selling the site's natural beauty to tourists, was the selling of narratives tied to spirituality, mysticism and adventure that Canadian society began to attach to *wild* spaces. It was the emergence of a new industry of selling *wilderness*.

The Canadian Pacific Railway

With the establishment of the Banff Hot Springs Reserve in 1885 – and the completion of the transcontinental railway along with its affiliated chateaus, hotels and major attractions – all the necessary systems and networks had been put in place to make the scenery and experience of the land accessible to tourists.²⁶ The wealthy, city-dwelling tourist now had direct access to the same awe-inspiring, spiritual experience of wilderness that had been defined by North American poets and conservationists. With this network established, and a need for the CPR and Canadian government to capitalise on investments put into its creation and maintenance, an industry of 'selling scenery' emerged.²⁷ William Van Horne summarised this new tourism industry and business model by saying, 'if we can't export the scenery, we'll import the tourist'.²⁸ This model, however, meant marketing Banff National Park (Rocky Mountains Park) before the visitor set eyes on the landscape itself. Advertising, marketing, branding and public image became a cornerstone of the CPR's business model. Extensive advertising campaigns also aimed to entice settlers westwards from the more populated provinces of Ontario and Quebec, as well as settlers from Europe and the US.²⁹ Because the CPR received large government land grants as a condition of completing the transcontinental line,³⁰ it became the largest owner of real estate in the Canadian North-West. For the company, westward immigration and settlement provided a means to significantly increase its revenues as it sold off its land to settlers.³¹ The CPR invested heavily in the depiction and representation of the Rocky Mountains, as well as the luxurious chateaus at Banff Springs and Lake Louise, creating posters, postcards, photographs and paintings that would be distributed across the world to promote Canada's iconic wilderness.

To promote itself – and Canada – to the world, Canadian Pacific [Railway] produced more than 2,500 stunning lithographic and silkscreen posters. They were displayed in offices and independent travel agencies worldwide, from the 1880s until the 1970s. The posters represented what Canadian Pacific and Canada had to offer: a world of deco-style streamlined locomotives, luxury resorts in the wilderness surroundings, glimpses of distant romance and adventure, ocean liners sailing to faraway locations, magnificent hotels, and the dawning of the jet age. These posters enticed millions to visit and even settle in Canada.³²

Despite the focus on a pristine and untouched landscape in these advertising campaigns, the very presence of the CPR immediately began to impact on the landscape. Even though the accommodations had yet to reach the scale and luxury that they have today, the landscape began to show the toll of the increased traffic and industry that had developed in the area. In one case, forest fires became an issue for the park due to constant sparks from the locomotives' steam engines, leaving several areas along the rail line blackened.³³ In the late 1880s, CPR marketing campaigns required touch-ups to their postcards and photographs, covering the blackened forests and smoke-filled valleys with clear skies and foliage.³⁴ Even in its earliest stages, Banff National Park regularly struggled to reconcile its image of pure, Canadian wilderness with the economic and industrial frameworks at the heart of its existence.

Narratives and nation-building

At its economic peak in the first half of the twentieth century, the CPR was a travel network with international influence, distributing a glamorous image of the Canadian wild across the globe.³⁵ Some of Canada's most famous artists would contribute to the creation of this image, and members of the Group of Seven – a collective of Canadian landscape painters including Lawren Harris, A. Y. Jackson and Frank Johnston – made several trips to the Rocky Mountains Park, renamed Banff National Park in 1930, throughout the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, looking to the landscape for a new vision of Canadian national identity and an artistic, spiritual rejuvenation.³⁶ As stated by Harris at the time,

We live on the fringe of the great North across the whole continent, and its spiritual flow and its clarity, its replenishing power passes through us ... Our art is founded on a long and growing love and understanding of the North in an ever clearer experience of oneness with the informing spirit of the whole land and a strange brooding sense of Mother Nature fostering a new race and a new age.³⁷

Wilderness and landscapes such as those found in Banff National Park played a large role in the emergence of a clear Canadian cultural movement, one which drew on the grandeur of natural landscapes to inform a national and cultural identity. As a result, national parks became icons of cultural pride. The countless representations of the landscapes featured in CPR posters created an iconised image of the Canadian wild. As explained by Eva Mackey,

The northern discourse of the Group of Seven, at a later stage of national self-consciousness and differentiation, symbolically differentiates Canada from both the U.S. and Britain by mobilizing a symbolism of unpeopled and rugged wilderness. It is a northernness that is not American, and a harsh wildness that is not European.³⁸

Depictions of the lake and mountain vistas within the Banff National Park boundary contributed to a uniquely Canadian mysticism surrounding the landscape. Consequently, a tradition of cultural nation-building became linked to an obsession with the Canadian *wild*.³⁹

Interpreting boundaries

While wilderness may be an abstract or ambiguous term, the pursuit of commodifying an experience of *the wild* throughout Canadian history has had tangible consequences, informing the development of the boundaries of Banff National Park and shaping national park policy and economics. Understanding the boundary of Banff National Park as a method of investigation is uniquely suited to exploring these consequences, and can trace how the site has been defined by human, industrial, political and national interests. Shifts in the boundary, which may seem insignificant to visitors today, show how closely connected the park is to stakeholders within a broader economic and political landscape. The boundary offers insights into how space, at the scale of the park, might be manipulated, constructed, crafted, legislated and restricted. As stated by James Corner,

Mapping is neither secondary nor representational but doubly operative: digging, finding and exposing on the one hand, and relating, connecting and structuring on the other. Through visual disclosure, mapping both sets up and puts into effect complex sets of relationship that remain to be more fully actualised. Thus, mapping is not subsequent to but prior to landscape and urban formations.⁴⁰

Corner states that maps, through the adjacencies that are expressed or selectively ignored in them, have the power to reveal political biases, economic interests, class structures and the aspects of landscape critical to human dwelling and industry.⁴¹ In the case of Banff National Park, this bias was directly asserted by its earliest founders and advocates – a focused effort to construct *wild* space for the benefit of the visitor and, more specifically, the wealthy tourist whom the CPR sought to attract. Far from mute or objective depictions of a reality, mapping and drawing boundaries can be highly political – an act of creating a reality as much as documenting one. As explained by Denis Cosgrove,

The measure of mapping is not restricted to the mathematical; it may equally be spiritual, political, or moral. By the same token, the mapping's record is not confined to the archival; it includes the remembered, the imagined, the contemplated. The world figured through mapping may thus be material or immaterial, actual or desired, whole or part, in various ways experienced, remembered or projected.⁴²

In the case of Banff National Park, the act of mapping is more than demarcating an area of conserved land; it is, rather, the means to manifest an idealised notion of Canadian wilderness into physical reality using a legal and spatial framework.

Conservation and park policy

The value that the scenery and landscape of Banff National Park held for tourism-based industries would come into direct conflict with competing industries seeking to access the site's valuable resources. The territory of the park held potential economic value for forestry and mining operations, as well as for hydro-electric development.⁴³ Although it was unclear whether tourism and industrial development could co-exist, advocates of tourism-based activities in the park believed visible industrial developments would undermine the image of an untouched wilderness that they sought to market to visitors.⁴⁴ Additionally, ambiguity remained around the definition of *conservationism* itself. For some, conservation meant making best use of a site's natural resources at a sustainable rate of extraction to promote economic growth, while for others it meant the complete absence of industry.⁴⁵ Two of the most notable voices in this debate were William Pearce, a civil engineer who argued for economic efficiency through hydro-electric developments, and Arthur Wheeler, a surveyor and outdoorsman who strongly opposed any such developments in national parks across Canada.⁴⁶ These two opposing approaches to conservation came to a head with the proposal of hydro-electric developments within the Rocky Mountains Park in the early twentieth century.⁴⁷ This new technology, as well as the demand for cheap electricity throughout the early part of the century, placed new pressure on the park. Its glacially fed watershed now held value along two different metrics, one scenic and one industrial. The different capacities to generate profit from the space caused much debate across different branches of the Canadian government and would force a redefinition of national park policy and its compatibility with hydro-electric development and, more broadly, industrial development within national parks.⁴⁸

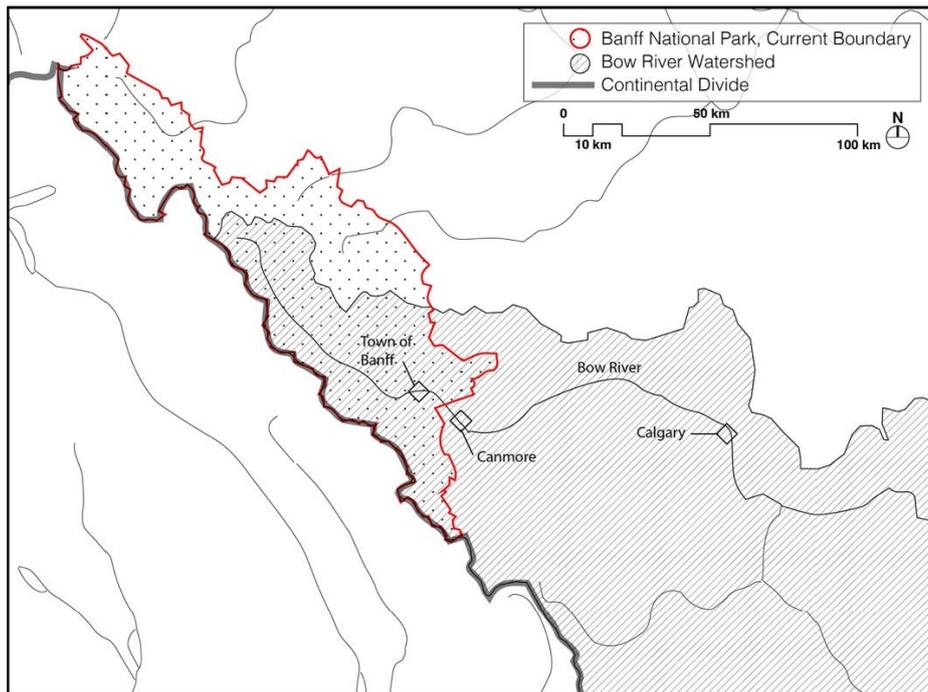
The need for Banff National Park to embody the wilderness that artistic and advertised depictions promised meant continued pressure to control the development of the site, restricting or concealing aspects of human occupation that might conflict with this idealised vision of the park. Forms of resource extraction and industry – such as mining, hydro-development and forestry – all had the potential to undermine the pristine landscape and scenery at the heart of an equally viable tourism industry. For a brief time at the beginning of the twentieth century, the hydro-electric industry and the industry of selling scenery would attempt a delicate co-existence within park boundaries. This would later manifest in a rigid dichotomy existing along the boundary, creating firm divisions between a wilderness experience on the 'inside' and industrial projects on the 'outside'. Policies implemented during the park's early history would come to define the site and the national parks system, culminating in the passing of the National Parks Act in 1930.⁴⁹

Hydro-industrial development and wilderness

As the population across southern Alberta grew during the early twentieth century, so did the demand for electricity.⁵⁰ The need for energy to supply the growing urban demand of the city of Calgary would place direct pressure on the Rocky Mountains Park. Central to this conflict was the Calgary Power Company and its ambitions to modify the Bow River watershed (see Figure 2) to meet the electrical demands of the surrounding area.⁵¹ The Calgary Power Company's focus on hydro-electric development would set a course for direct conflict between engineers seeking to maximise electrical outputs and conservationists wanting to limit the industrial presence within the national park. This conflict became a pivotal moment for Canadian parks policy, one that pitted industrial growth and a rapidly growing civic need for electricity against arguments for conservationism and the economic potential of tourist-driven industries.

A fundamental challenge to the Calgary Power Company's plan to invest in hydro-electric development was the fact that the flow rate of the glacially fed Bow River watershed was extremely inconsistent throughout the year due to freeze-thaw cycles, making it an unpredictable power source.⁵² The solution proposed by the company was the construction of reservoirs upstream to regulate the water supply.⁵³ These reservoirs, however, would need to be located within the territory of the park.

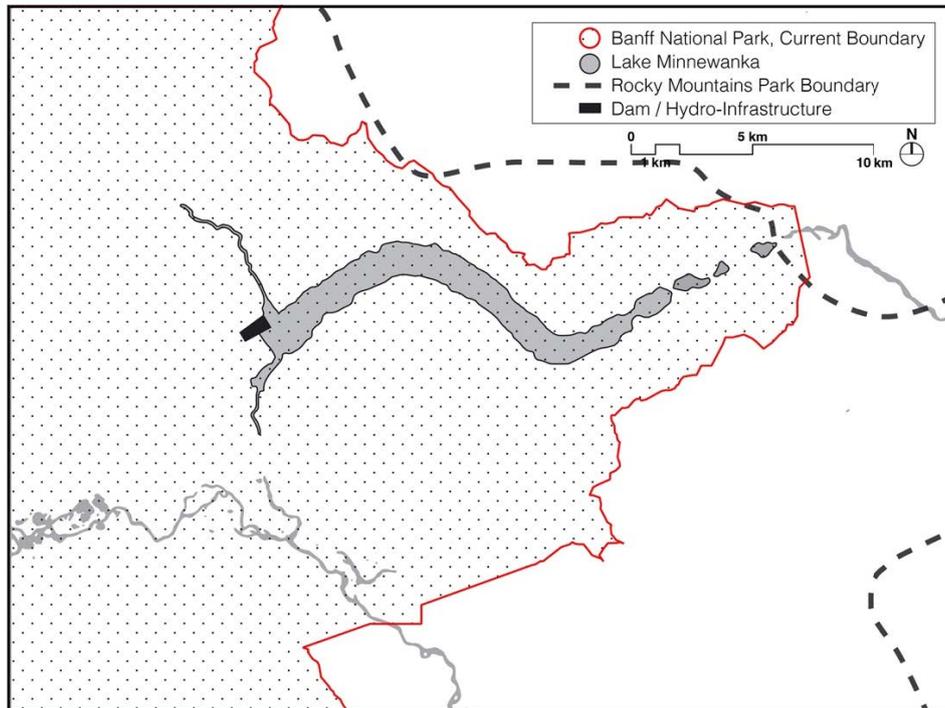
Figure 2. Bow River watershed in relation to Banff National Park (Source: data taken from Government of Canada, Open Maps GIS Data)



In 1912, the Calgary Power Company received permission to construct a dam at the outlet of Lake Minnewanka (see Figure 3), creating the first hydro-reservoir within the Rocky Mountains Park.⁵⁴ At the time of its proposal, local park officials took no issue with the development at Lake Minnewanka.⁵⁵ Officials had no reason to see hydro-electric developments within the Rocky Mountains Park as being counter to the park's mandate so long as developments did not detract from the scenery or interfere with visitor experience. Additionally, the parks branch was interested in the potential of hydro-power, hoping to supply electricity demands within the park and access an additional revenue source beyond the emerging tourism industries.⁵⁶ The development was eventually approved and concerns over its potential impacts were dismissed primarily on aesthetic biases and rationales, with one member of the Parks Department stating:⁵⁷

The reason is that the mountain lakes in the Rockies which are famous for their beauty, such as Lake Louise, are glacial cirques, while Minnewanka is only a flooded river valley. By clearing these flats and raising the water levels as proposed, they will be submerged, and the general appearance of the lake very materially improved.⁵⁸

Figure 3. Lake Minnewanka reservoir and hydro infrastructure in relation to the current park boundary and Rocky Mountains Park boundary (Source: data taken from Government of Canada, Open Maps GIS Data)



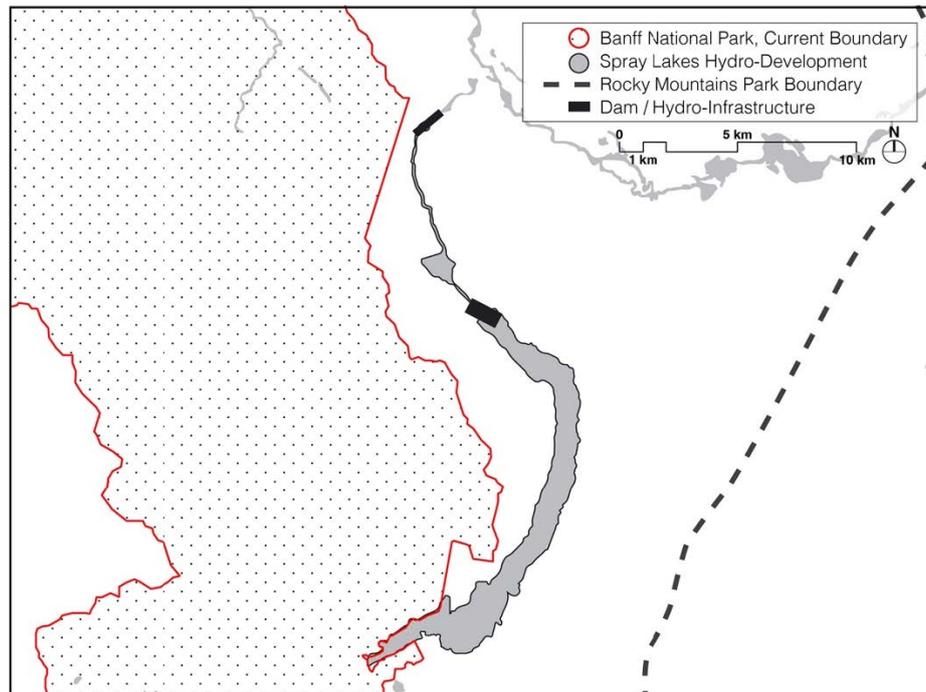
Despite the construction of the reservoir at Lake Minnewanka, the Calgary Power Company struggled to supply electrical demands each winter as the flow rates of the watershed decreased, and the company continually sought to increase its water storage capacity within the Rocky Mountains Park.⁵⁹ However, since the construction of the dam at Lake Minnewanka, the policy surrounding the use of resources within park boundaries had begun to shift. When the Calgary Power Company proposed the development of a second site in the Spray Valley, the parks branch was firmly opposed. The raising and lowering of the water table at Lake Minnewanka had begun to alter the landscape, leaving an unattractive shoreline and an inconsistent visitor experience.⁶⁰ Groups such as the Alpine Club of Canada argued against the development of further hydro infrastructure within the Rocky Mountains.⁶¹ As explained by the historian PearlAnn Reichwein,

Through the 1920s, the Calgary Power Company made repeated applications to Ottawa to develop watersheds in the Alberta Rockies to feed an eager regional market for electricity. National Parks in the Rockies were not immune to economic and technological demands from Alberta farms and cities. Controversy over building dams in Canada's national parks sparked a debate comparable to the well-known turn-of-the-century American 'battle of the Hetch Hetchy.'⁶²

Although a significant moment in the formation of national park policy, the new standards set for hydro-industrial development did little to prevent the establishment of the Spray Lakes project. Instead, the proposed development at the Spray Valley site went ahead and the park boundary was simply redrawn to exclude the new reservoir and its facilities (Figure 4).⁶³ As outlined by Bella,

More than 1,300 square miles of timbered land was taken out of the parks, and contributed to Alberta's resource base. So also was the Spray Valley, with its hydro-potential. Boundaries were redrawn to exclude them all.⁶⁴

Figure 4. Spray Lakes reservoir and infrastructure in relation to current park boundary and Rocky Mountains Park boundary (Source: data taken from Government of Canada, Open Maps GIS Data)



The incompatibility of hydro-industrial development lay not with the landscape or environment as modern understandings of conservation might contend, but with the image of the park and the experience inside its boundaries. The boundary was used not to protect or conserve the landscape, but to protect the definition of wilderness that the national park had come to represent. The park boundary had shifted to accommodate new policy, specifically the reaction to an absence of hydro-electric industry, moving the line to protect a definition of *wilderness* rather than a site or landscape. These events played a significant role in the parks branch establishing a doctrine of inviolability for national parks, conceding territory to maintain the premise of pure, untouched wilderness within its borders. As explained by the historians Christopher Armstrong and H. V. Nelles,

The argument that hydroelectric development should not take place within national parks, a point of view that seemed to gain wide public acceptance, when forced through the sausage machine of federal politics in the late 1920s, led to the remarkable conclusion that such places should not be within national parks in the first place. After lengthy negotiations between the Province of Alberta and the federal government, it was finally agreed that these lands should be removed from what had become Banff National Park because of their potential commercial value as a hydroelectric storage reservoir.⁶⁵

The National Parks Act reflected a renewed commitment to creating wilderness within the park that was absolute, absent of visible industrialisation, even though the agreement meant a significant amount of territory would be removed from the regulation of the park.⁶⁶ This incompatibility between hydro-industrial development and wilderness became a firm component of national park policy; however, as with the Spray Lakes reservoir, the potential to redraw the borders of this cohesive zone still offered a certain capacity to adapt the territory as the Canadian government saw fit. Industrial sites that had sufficient economic viability would be removed from the park. While the parks branch had failed to stop the development of the Spray Lakes site (see Figure 5), the notion that hydro-electric development should be barred within all park boundaries had gained traction. The profits that could be extracted from industries tied to 'selling scenery' became the political lifeline of Banff National Park and national

parks across Canada. This philosophy towards conservation deployed by the parks branch and its first commissioner, J. B. Harkin, would forever tie national parks to the economics of tourism industries. As discussed by Bella,

They had used one economic argument to counter another, insisted that beautiful scenery was in itself a source of profit – a source of tourist dollars. This argument dominated decisions about Canada’s national parks through the thirties and forties, and prevails even today. Wheeler and Harkin saved the national parks from one kind of exploitation, but by ensuring their exploitation from another. In 1930 the new National Parks Act entrenched a system and philosophy of parks for profit.⁶⁷

The continued need for an economic argument to justify setting aside national parks meant a constant affiliation of these spaces with tourism industries and infrastructure, such as the chateaus of the CPR. To justify setting aside valuable resources from industrial development required an economic industry of its own, one that depended on selling an experience of wilderness. The park boundary became the means to enforce this strict dichotomy, with extractive and hydro-electric industries now located directly outside of the boundary, and tourist-based industries located within.

Figure 5. Canal at Spray Lakes reservoir, 2021 (Source: Felix Mayer)



Conclusion

Across Canada, and particularly within the province of Alberta, industrialised sites and commercialised experiences of nature create site-specific tensions that are often in close proximity to one another. Celebrating wilderness while simultaneously consuming it has often been a calculated ritual in Canada, weighing cultural and aesthetic desires against economic metrics to inform development. Today, Banff National Park remains a celebrated icon of Canadian wilderness, with sites like Lake Louise hosting millions of visitors each year. The notion that the space within Banff National Park is perfectly conserved or untouched can undermine the fact that the park itself is a human construct – a border and a definition that has been projected onto a landscape. As with any border, the line it traces has been influenced by the hands that have drawn it, by economic and political forces, and by the many complex contexts that it navigates. A better understanding of the boundaries of Banff National Park and its complex history can reveal the intentions of their authors and the ambitions that they sought to fulfil. The history of Banff National Park and its boundaries tells a story of attempts to curate and market an experience of wilderness. This article explores only a fragment of this complex history and the consequences of this overarching pursuit. This boundary is a line across the landscape that tells us what we value – what we wish to conserve, to celebrate, to ignore and to erase – and the legacies we wish to leave behind.

Notes

- ¹ Cronon, 'The trouble with wilderness', 7–10.
- ² Cronon, 'The trouble with wilderness', 8.
- ³ Cronon, 'The trouble with wilderness', 10–13.
- ⁴ Cronon, 'The trouble with wilderness', 10.
- ⁵ Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 89.
- ⁶ Cronon, 'The trouble with wilderness', 9.
- ⁷ Reichwein, "'Hands off our national parks'", 129.
- ⁸ Cronon, 'The trouble with wilderness', 13.
- ⁹ Cronon, 'The trouble with wilderness', 14.
- ¹⁰ CPR Connecting Canada, 'Building the railway'.
- ¹¹ Cronon, 'The trouble with wilderness', 13.
- ¹² Cronon, 'The trouble with wilderness', 13.
- ¹³ CPR Connecting Canada, 'Building the railway'.
- ¹⁴ CPR Connecting Canada, 'Building the railway'.
- ¹⁵ Armstrong and Nelles, *Wilderness and Waterpower*, 12.
- ¹⁶ Binnema and Niemi, "'Let the line be drawn now'", 725.
- ¹⁷ Binnema and Niemi, "'Let the line be drawn now'", 725.
- ¹⁸ Binnema and Niemi, "'Let the line be drawn now'", 725.
- ¹⁹ Binnema and Niemi, "'Let the line be drawn now'", 729.
- ²⁰ Binnema and Niemi, "'Let the line be drawn now'", 728.
- ²¹ Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 108.
- ²² Binnema and Niemi, "'Let the line be drawn now'", 728.
- ²³ Binnema and Niemi, "'Let the line be drawn now'", 728.
- ²⁴ Binnema and Niemi, "'Let the line be drawn now'", 728.
- ²⁵ Bella, *Parks for Profit*, 24.
- ²⁶ Binnema and Niemi, "'Let the line be drawn now'", 728.
- ²⁷ Armstrong and Nelles, *Wilderness and Waterpower*, 96.
- ²⁸ CPR Connecting Canada, 'Building the railway'.
- ²⁹ Choko and Jones, *Posters of the Canadian Pacific*, 29.
- ³⁰ Choko and Jones, *Posters of the Canadian Pacific*, 29.
- ³¹ Choko and Jones, *Posters of the Canadian Pacific*, 29.
- ³² Choko and Jones, *Posters of the Canadian Pacific*, 13.
- ³³ Bella, *Parks for Profit*, 16.
- ³⁴ Bella, *Parks for Profit*, 16.
- ³⁵ Choko and Jones, *Posters of the Canadian Pacific*, i.
- ³⁶ Mastin, *The Group of Seven in Western Canada*, 22.
- ³⁷ Mastin, *The Group of Seven in Western Canada*, 26.
- ³⁸ Mackey, "'Death by landscape'", 127.
- ³⁹ Mackey, "'Death by landscape'", 127–8.
- ⁴⁰ Corner, 'The agency of mapping', 225.
- ⁴¹ Corner, 'The agency of mapping', 230.
- ⁴² Cosgrove, *Mappings*, 2.
- ⁴³ Bella, *Parks for Profit*, 56, 67.
- ⁴⁴ Armstrong and Nelles, *Wilderness and Waterpower*, 66–7.
- ⁴⁵ Bella, *Parks for Profit*, 50–1.
- ⁴⁶ Bella, *Parks for Profit*, 49–55.
- ⁴⁷ Armstrong and Nelles, *Wilderness and Waterpower*, 64.
- ⁴⁸ Armstrong and Nelles, *Wilderness and Waterpower*, 114–15.
- ⁴⁹ Armstrong and Nelles, *Wilderness and Waterpower*, 115.
- ⁵⁰ Armstrong and Nelles, *Wilderness and Waterpower*, 51.
- ⁵¹ Armstrong and Nelles, *Wilderness and Waterpower*, 51.
- ⁵² Armstrong and Nelles, *Wilderness and Waterpower*, viii.

- ⁵³ Armstrong and Nelles, *Wilderness and Waterpower*, 52.
⁵⁴ Armstrong and Nelles, *Wilderness and Waterpower*, 57.
⁵⁵ Armstrong and Nelles, *Wilderness and Waterpower*, 56.
⁵⁶ Armstrong and Nelles, *Wilderness and Waterpower*, 57.
⁵⁷ Armstrong and Nelles, *Wilderness and Waterpower*, 57.
⁵⁸ Armstrong and Nelles, *Wilderness and Waterpower*, 63.
⁵⁹ Armstrong and Nelles, *Wilderness and Waterpower*, 61.
⁶⁰ Armstrong and Nelles, *Wilderness and Waterpower*, 70.
⁶¹ Armstrong and Nelles, *Wilderness and Waterpower*, 87–8.
⁶² Reichwein, "Hands off our national parks", 129.
⁶³ Armstrong and Nelles, *Wilderness and Waterpower*, 115–17.
⁶⁴ Bella, *Parks for Profit*, 57.
⁶⁵ Armstrong and Nelles, *Wilderness and Waterpower*, 115.
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⁶⁷ Bella, *Parks for Profit*, 58.

Declarations and conflicts of interest

Research ethics statement

Not applicable to this article.

Consent for publication statement

Not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of interest statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest with this work. All efforts to sufficiently anonymise the authors during peer review of this article have been made. The authors declare no further conflicts with this article.

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