

Wilderness and National Parks in Canada:  
Evolving Perceptions & Management

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper examines the evolution of perceptions and management of wilderness and national parks in Canada from the time of European settlement to the present. First, it examines the wilderness perceptions of European explorers and settlers. Second, it describes the rising concern in the nineteenth century about the destruction and shortage of resources, and the initiation of conservation measures. Third, it provides a summary of national park history from 1885 to 2000. Fourth, the perceptions of wilderness recreationists in the 1960s, as revealed by Sigurd Olson (1966), are described. Finally, consideration is given to the recent re-evaluation of the meaning and importance of wilderness.

## **INTRODUCTION**

This paper is about wilderness and national parks in Canada. It is intended to provide a basis for comparison with other studies that have been, or might be undertaken of wilderness and national parks in Britain or other countries. Examples of international comparisons of wilderness and national park development and management have been provided by Nelson *et. al.* (1978), Henderson (1992) and Shultis (1998) amongst others. Part of the paper was presented at a conference at the University of Leeds in March 2001 on “Wilderness Britain? Society, Policy and the Environment,” and part of it at a seminar at the University of Reading in March 2001.

The evolution of perceptions and management of wilderness and national parks in Canada from the time of European exploration to the present are herein considered. The perceptions of European explorers and settlers, who reacted with ambivalence to this threatening land of riches, and differently from the aboriginal population are examined. Second, in the nineteenth century the growing appreciation of wilderness and concern about its destruction that prompted conservation measures, notably the establishment of national parks, are discussed. Third, a brief summary of the history of these parks from 1885, when the first national park was created, to the year 2000 is given. Fourth, given the growing importance of wilderness recreation in the 1960s, the perceptions of wilderness recreationists, as revealed at this time in the writing of Sigurd Olson, are described. Fifth, consideration is given to the recent re-evaluation of the meaning and importance of wilderness as a concept. Source material includes a wide range of publications, but draws in particular on selections from Canadian literature to reveal historical and recent perceptions of wilderness.

## **EARLY RESPONSES TO WILDERNESS**

The Native peoples of Canada generally considered themselves to be at one with the land, and many continue to affirm this belief. This is illustrated by Basil Johnston (1983, 90) who wrote the following about the Path of Life that Native people must follow: “We

must honour Kitche Manitou and thank him for life – for the winds, the sun, the waters, and the land we live on. We must honour our elder brothers – the wolf and the bear, the eagle and the robin, the snake and the turtle, the butterfly and the snail, the whitefish and the trout. We must honour the rose and the corn. On them we depend for food and clothing. Treat them well so that when you want them they will allow you to take them”.

Sean Kane (1994, 37) emphasised the close relationship of people to the land in the past by posing a question and answering it. “Where is the north when you’re lost in the forest at night and the sky is overcast? Our ancestors would have known. The smell of the north side of trees is different. That is because in the northern hemisphere certain mosses grow on the north side of trees, on the damp side, away from the light. You could smell your way north”.

The European explorers of Canada seeking a route to the Indies, natural resources, opportunities for settlement and agriculture, in the context of trade and colonialism, reveal in their accounts diverse reactions to the landscape. On the one hand it was considered as challenging, even deadly, to be conquered and exploited, with natives to be civilized. Labrador was considered by the explorer, Jacques Cartier, as being so inhospitable that he called it “The land that God gave Cain.”

In 1792-3, Alexander Mackenzie made his second exploration of Canada, and this time became the first man to cross the continent by land. In his journal published in 1801 he noted that what his voyages “offered to the eye, is not of a nature to be effectually transferred to the page” (Mackenzie, quoted in Sheppe, 1962, 49). However, he did his best to describe what he saw, “without exaggeration or display.” He spoke of the “wide-spreading forests”, and “dreary wastes”, of having traversed “deserts”. He noted that “I had to encounter perils by land and perils by water,” and had “to watch the savage who was our guide, or to guard against those of his tribe who might mediate our destruction. The toil of our navigation was incessant, and often times extreme, and in our progress over land we had no protection from the severity of the elements and possessed no accommodations or conveniences but such as could be contained in the burden on our

shoulders, which aggravated the toils of our march, and added to the wearisomeness of our way”.

On the other hand, this new land was seen as a place of riches, and worth claiming for trade and Empire. In 1497, John Cabot explored the east coast of what is now Canada. Contemporary accounts of the land he reached described it as “excellent and the climate temperate, suggesting that brasil and silk grow there. The sea is full of fish” (Quoted in Dawson, 1905, 22). In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the fur and timber trades flourished and confirmed the impression that Canada was rich in natural resources (Innis, 1930; Lower, 1973).

This perception of richness is also evoked by the twentieth century novelist, Morley Callaghan (1983, 93), when writing about the Algoma Hills of Ontario and a character who had “read about the gold mines of the country that had been wildcatted, and the vast iron ore deposits; and without ever having seen it, he could talk glibly about the blue lake teeming with whitefish and lake trout, and of the abundance of pickerel at the river mouths”.

Sigurd Olson (1966, 7) has implied that the perceptions of the voyageurs involved in the fur trade in the wilderness varied from place to place. This is evident in his comments on their likely reaction to the Rainy River area of Ontario. “After traversing the Quetico-Superior country, a series of rugged picturesque lakes connected by rapids, falls, and many portages, they finally left the island-dotted expanses of Lac la Pluie and drifted down a broad and quiet river flowing serenely through an almost pastoral region of meadows and gentle terrain toward the broad waters of Lake of the Woods. It was such a contrast to what they had known, reminded them so much of the tranquil rivers of Europe, that they always thought of it as ‘Le Beau Pays’”.

A recent tourism advertisement in the Daily Mail (February 10, 2001) stated “Canada. For the early settlers it was big, beautiful and wild.” Undoubtedly, early settlers perceived it as big and wild, but not always as beautiful, and not always as the basis for a

positive experience. Jane Urquhart, in her novel, “Away” (1993, 124), provides a reminder of the ambivalent perceptions of the Canadian landscape likely held by immigrants in the nineteenth century. In Ireland, the family is advised “You must go away...emigrate to Canada. There will be land there waiting for you – acres and acres – more than you can imagine”. While a free land grant awaited them in Hastings County, the wilderness of southern Ontario proved to be mentally and physically challenging. Urquhart also stated that “When the wagon deposited them under the outstretched arms of massive fir trees and disappeared into the further realms of the forest they were filled with dread, knowing themselves to be in a region where nothing at all was constructed and everything was engaged in haphazard growth. While the forest shrieked, whistled and moaned, his father tied branches together, constructing a shelter” (*ibid.*, 139-140). “In a few years’ time, Liam would know corduroy roads and rail fences and stumping machines, horses and cutters and banks of snow taller than a man, and the webbed shoes like teardrops that one must wear to cross fields in winter. He would know the smell of wood in newly constructed buildings and the view through the glass to graveyards only half filled with alert white stones. He would come to be familiar with cumbersome tools invented to cut through the flesh of trees or to tear earth and rock” (*ibid.*, 139).

Louis Hemon (1921, 3), in his classic novel, “Maria Chapdelaine”, emphasised the challenges for settlers in rural Quebec posed by the weather and the forest. “The snow lay deep upon road and fields, for the April sun was powerless to send warmth through the gray clouds, and the heavy spring rains were yet to come. This chill and universal white, the humbleness of the wooden church and the wooden houses scattered along the road, the gloomy forest edging so close that it seemed to threaten, these all spoke of the harsh existence in a stern land”.

## **APPRECIATION AND CONCERN**

Gradually, however, the wilderness was tamed, agriculture prospered and cities grew. The growing appreciation of nature was reflected in the arts. For example, Archibald

Lampman, who was born in Ontario in 1861 to a Loyalist family, wrote numerous poems showing an appreciation of nature. He stated “there is one kind of work I can do – nature work,” and believed that nature had “an emotional existence of its own.” Duncan Campbell Scott (1925), in an introduction to a book of Lampman’s poems, entitled “Lyrics of Earth”, noted that Lampman was “an impressionist” who made “marvelous interpretations of nature”. Another popular Canadian writer, wrote in 1904, that “it is a religious feeling, this special love of the natural world, and entirely modern” (Carman, 1904, 36).

Artists too, in the nineteenth century, began depicting the scenic appeal of nature in Canada, albeit in the style of European landscape painting. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Canadian Pacific Railway paid artists to produce paintings of the scenery along the railway across the country that could be exhibited and used in advertising to attract tourists (Hart, 1983). Subsequently, the most famous group of Canadian artists, the Group of Seven, through their impressionistic paintings of the Canadian Shield and other wild landscapes of Canada, such as the Rocky Mountains and Arctic, encouraged Canadians to appreciate these landscapes. The association of wilderness with art and national identity remains strong today (Marsh, 2001).

The rising concern in the nineteenth century about the destruction and shortage of resources, from trees to wildlife, led to the initiation, for survival and economic reasons, of conservation measures. First, laws were passed to protect forests and wildlife, for example by restricting hunting to certain seasons and by imposing catch limits. According to Hodgins *et.al.* (1998, 80, 81), “Conservation came of age in Canada with the meeting of the second Congress of the American Forestry Association in Montreal in 1882. The Congress attracted a variety of eminent Canadians – including scientists, politicians, interested laymen and lumbermen. All were in agreement with the general resolution of the Congress, which declared that forest fires, wasteful cutting practices, poor woodland utilization, and improper land clearing were depleting the forests of North America. Led by representatives of the lumber industry, conferees called for more

extensive cooperation between government and timber operators to maintain parts of the public domain as perpetual forest lands”.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century a more holistic approach to conservation was initiated with the designation of protected areas, such as national parks and provincial parks. In the early years of the twentieth century the Dominion government also established a Commission of Conservation that focused on threats to the Canadian environment and means to counteract them.

## **THE EVOLUTION OF THE NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM**

The first national park in the world was established at Yellowstone in the western USA in 1872 (Nash, 1982). The Dominion government of Canada soon followed suit by establishing Banff national park in the Rocky Mountains in 1885. It was intended to safeguard the scenery around hot springs located near the newly opened Canadian Pacific Railway so that tourism could be developed (Bella, 1987; Hart, 1983). Soon thereafter several more parks (Glacier, Yoho) were established in the mountains on the route of the railway for similar reasons (Wall and Marsh, 1982). Since then numerous other national parks have been established across the country for a variety of reasons (See Table 1).

**Table 1: Dates of Establishment of National Parks in Canada**

Banff, Alberta	1885
Yoho, British Columbia	1886
Glacier, British Columbia	1886
Waterton Lakes, Alberta	1895
St. Lawrence Islands, Ontario	1904
Elk Island, Alberta	1905
Jasper, Alberta	1906
Revelstoke, British Columbia	1914

Point Pelee, Ontario	1918
Kootenay, British Columbia	1920
Wood Buffalo, N.W.T.	1922
Prince Albert, Saskatchewan	1928
Riding Mountain, Manitoba	1929
Georgian Bay Islands, Ontario	1929
Cape Breton Highlands, Nova Scotia	1937
Prince Edward Island, P.E.I.	1938
Fundy, New Brunswick	1948
Terra Nova, Newfoundland	1958
Kejimikujik, Nova Scotia	1968
Kouchibouguac, New Brunswick	1969
Pacific Rim, British Columbia	1970
Forillon, Quebec	1970
La Mauricie, Quebec	1970
Gros Morne, Newfoundland	1970
Pukaskwa, Ontario	1971
Kluane, Yukon	1972
Nahanni, N.W.T.	1972
Auyuittuq, Nunavut	1972
Grasslands, Saskatchewan	1975
Ivvavik, Yukon	1984
Mingan Archipelago, Quebec	1984
Quttinirpaaq, Nunavut	1986
Bruce Peninsula, Ontario	1987
Aulavik, N.W.T.	1992
Vuntut, Yukon	1993
Gwaii Haanas, British Columbia	1996
Tuktut Nogait, N.W.T.	1996
Wapusk, Manitoba	1996
Sirmilik, Nunavut	1999

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In 1911, The Dominion Forest Reserves and Parks Act served to stimulate and coordinate various conservation initiatives. A Dominion parks Service was established in the capital of Ottawa with James Harkin as its first commissioner. They strived to establish and manage national parks to protect scenery, conserve wildlife and provide for recreation and tourism. Accordingly, at the beginning of the twentieth century more national parks were established to protect forests and endangered wildlife (Foster, 1971). These included: Waterton Lakes, Elk Island, Wood Buffalo and Point Pelee National Park in Ontario was created in 1918 because “its scenic value, the southern nature of its birds and plant life, its importance as a main route for migratory birds means its affords exceptional opportunities for a national reservation” (Commission of Conservation, 1918). However, then and now, it has also been appreciated because of its excellent beaches and recreational opportunities.

In 1930, a new National Parks Act was passed that reflected the accumulated thinking of James Harkin about parks. It stated that “the national parks of Canada are hereby dedicated to the people of Canada for their benefit, education and enjoyment subject to this act and the regulations, and the national parks shall be maintained and made use of so as to leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations” (Canada, 1930). To enable more Canadians to enjoy national parks, Harkin set out to establish at least one national park in each province. Thus, such parks as Prince Albert in Saskatchewan (1928), Riding Mountain in Manitoba (1929), Cape Breton in Nova Scotia (1937) and Prince Edward Island Park in that province in 1938 came into being.

After the Second World War, in recognition of the need to encourage economic development in the poorer parts of Canada, especially the Atlantic Provinces, and of the power of parks to attract money-spending tourists, new parks were established to encourage economic development in that region. These included: Fundy in 1948, Terra Nova in 1958, Kejimikujik in 1968 and Kouchibouguac in 1969 (MacEachern, 2001).

Arguably, the establishment of the first national parks in Quebec, namely Forillon and La Mauricie in 1970, long delayed for political reasons, reflected a similar interest in providing economic and employment benefits in relatively poor areas, while also fulfilling Harkin's objective of having national parks in each province. However, it is also noteworthy that La Mauricie National Park was also in the electoral riding of the minister responsible for national parks!

In the 1970s, in response to the environmental movement, and in recognition of the need to have a strategy to guide future park creation and management, a plan was prepared to indicate the total system of national parks envisaged (Indian and Northern Affairs and Northern Development, 1971). The aim of national parks, according to a policy statement in 1979, was "to protect for all time representative natural areas of Canadian significance in a system of national parks and to encourage public understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of this natural heritage so as to leave it unimpaired for future generations" (Environment Canada, 1979, 38). The system plan divided the country into 39 biophysical regions. The above policy requires that there be at least one national park in each biophysical region to represent it. For the historical reasons noted above, some of the 39 biophysical regions already have several parks, whereas other regions still require parks to represent them. In particular, many new national parks have been established in the north to represent its biophysical regions (Marsh, 2000; Atkinson, 2001).

This system now includes, and in the future will include, some national parks that will be perceived by most people as wilderness and others, especially smaller ones in the south, that will be seen as attractive but hardly wilderness. For each national park a management plan is prepared. This includes a zoning plan, with one zone being termed the wilderness zone. This is generally the part of the park that has been least modified by humans, is environmentally sensitive and less used for recreation. It is usually managed to preserve its wilderness character and to afford opportunities for what many people would call wilderness experiences.

Of course, new parks, especially provincial ones, have also been deemed necessary in many parts of the country since the 1950s because of substantial increases in outdoor recreation, especially activities such as hiking, canoeing, and camping (Killan, 1993; Marsh, 1985). Furthermore, the potential of scenic and accessible parks to attract tourists thus providing economic benefits and employment remains an incentive to create and finance more parks.

### **THE WILDERNESS PERCEPTIONS OF SIGURD OLSON**

The very popular writings of Sigurd Olson, such as *The Singing Wilderness* (1956) and *Runes of the North* (1966), about canoeing in the wilder areas of Canada, evoke the values many people, who sought recreation in the wilderness in the 1960s, ascribed to it. He noted that in the “solitude, silence and freedom” of wilderness, “I see more clearly those values and influences that over the long centuries have molded us as a race. One senses anew his relationship to the earth and all life. The inner world has to do with the wilderness from which we came, timelessness, cosmic rhythms, and the deep feelings men have for an unchanged environment” (1966, 3-4).

Sigurd Olson (1996, 20) recalled that on one of his canoe trips in Ontario “it was sunset when we crossed the last portage around the rapids of the Knife River and stood at last on the shores of the lake itself. A golden glow lay over the water and over our minds as well, and as I looked down that dusky waterway for the first time, saw its rocky islands floating in the distance against the haze of high terrain to the east, I was aware of a fusion with the country, an overwhelming sense of completion in which all my hopes and experiences crystallized into one shining vision. The loons were calling, I can hear them yet, echoes rolling back from the shores and from unknown lakes across the ridges until the dusk seemed alive with their music. This untamed sound, the distances, the feeling of mystery and adventure filled me with joy and elation. Here to my young mind was the threshold of the wild...” (1966, 22).

At a campsite, Olson observed the cleanliness of the wilderness. “The water was clear, the rocks and trees freshly scrubbed and immaculate. The land seemed clean, new, unused. Across from our camp to the north, and on the Canadian side of the border, was a stand of pine; beyond that, as far as we knew, were thousands of miles of wild country to roam and explore, an unbroken expanse clear to the arctic. To the south of us, on the American side, much of it had been logged for almost a hundred miles to the shores of Lake Superior; but to us, on this voyage of discovery, it still seemed unravished and unspoiled. As I sat there I felt the country’s bigness, its space and unexplored distances” “No other soul did we see during all this time, for the country, then, had not been discovered by fishermen or canoeists. We came to believe we were the only ones in the entire Quetico-Superior and became imbued with the feeling that this wilderness belonged to us alone, it was a distinct shock one day to see a tent pitched on a beach across the lake. The tent belonged to some lumberjacks who were examining the timber potential of the area” (25). After meeting them, Olson noted “these practical men told us they were cruising timber and that all the magnificent pine around the lake was destined for the mills. To them, the trees were already cut and in the rafts, the rapids sluiced and the lakes dammed for the spring drives to Fort Francis and the mills. They were so matter-of-fact about what they were doing, there seemed no question that the logging was right” (1966, 26).

From the above writings, it is possible to deduce that some of the important attributes of wilderness and the experiences it afforded at this time were as follows:

- Solitude
- Timelessness
- Mystery
- New
- Vastness
- Contrast
- Silence
- Fusion with country
- Adventure
- Unused
- Space
- Freedom
- Untamed
- Clean
- Thousands of miles
- Unexplored

Whether the Canadian environment can include wilderness with these attributes in the future is questionable, as the wilderness, and the perception and management of it, are all changing.

## **CURRENT RESPONSES TO WILDERNESS**

There has been a growing awareness that most wilderness areas in Canada have been used by aboriginal peoples, all have been modified by people, often through management intended to preserve wilderness (Nelson, 1976; Bordo *et.al.* 1998). Nelson (1998, 291) noted that “the wilderness idea – in the sense of a pristine environment largely undisturbed by human actions – has been challenged in recent decades by research that shows that many national parks and protected area landscapes or ecosystems, were considerably changed by historic hunting and other activities of native peoples as well as by agriculture and other activities of early European settlers. Yet many people still feel strongly about wilderness as a way of thinking about, enjoying, planning and deciding upon parks and protected areas”. The same pertains to the moorlands of Britain, many of which are included in national parks, and the appreciative attitudes of the British towards them.

I have gone so far as to suggest that there is no longer wilderness, but all landscapes have become heritage (Marsh, 1996). The fact that the term “heritage” is now applied to both natural and historical features, and Parks Canada, the agency responsible for national parks, is now in the Department of Canadian Heritage, rather than the Department of the Environment, appears to support this suggestion. Moreover, there is an increasing trend, particularly in Canada, to use the term “cultural landscapes” (Buggey, 1998). A corollary of this involves landscapes, formerly regarded as wilderness, being considered as “cultural landscapes.” With an increasing tendency to manage wilderness, this trend seems particularly appropriate. Of course, post-modern contentions that landscape is a human construction or text likewise lend support to this conception of wilderness areas as cultural landscapes.

Concern about wilderness is also being replaced by concern for ecological integrity (Woodley *et.al.* 1993; Porter *et.al.* 2002). It has been discovered that most areas perceived as wilderness, or parks, or zones of parks, defined as wilderness have not only been modified by people, but have lost some of their ecological integrity. It would appear, for example, that most of the national parks of Canada have lost species over the last hundred years. If national parks are intended, as is now the case, to maintain ecological integrity, then they must be established and managed with this, rather than wilderness in mind.

Despite this re-evaluation of the meaning and value of wilderness, many people have a fundamental or vested interest in maintaining the notion of wilderness. Perhaps, like Thoreau in the nineteenth century, society in the twenty-first century is still wedded to the belief that “in wilderness is the preservation of the world” (Thoreau, quoted in Porter, 1962) or at least the preservation of our own individual sanity. The historian, John Wadland (1998, 1), contends that “described landscapes constitute the essential benchmarks of an evolving human affinity with terrain, occupied or unoccupied” (Wadland 1998, 1). Thus, the loss of wilderness is feared.

Landscape is often considered central to a sense of national identity, and this is believed to be especially true of Canada (Marsh, 2001). The national anthem identifies “the true North” with being “strong and free.” The national flag features a maple leaf, a common tree in much of Canada, and many Canadian bank notes and coins feature landscape scenes and wildlife. A book produced by the National Film Board of Canada to mark the one hundredth anniversary of the Confederation of Canada was titled “Canada – a year of the land” (Monk, 1967, 1). It points out that the physical characteristics of the landscape in Spring are “far older than man (*sic*)” and contends that they “define his place here, set his limits and verify his title to the land”. Margaret Atwood (1972) has argued that survival in the face of the challenges posed by the wilderness and weather is the dominant theme in Canadian literature, which presumably reflects Canadian identity.

Consequently, loss of wilderness and the challenge it presents has been perceived as a threat to that identity.

However, it can be argued today, when over 80% of the population live in cities, and only a small minority venture regularly into the wilderness, that Canadian identity is as much, if not more, related to its urban environment than to the wilderness. The late Prime Minister, Pierre Elliot Trudeau, was said by many to embody the spirit of Canada. He was often depicted enjoying the outdoors, especially canoeing in the wilderness. On his death in October 2000, it was proposed that Mount Logan in Kluane National Park, Yukon, the highest peak in Canada named after a Director of the Geological Survey, be renamed "Pierre Elliot Trudeau Mountain". However, this provoked a public protest and did not come to pass. It must be recognized that Trudeau lived in Montreal and was as much an urbane and cosmopolitan man as he was a wilderness man.

In a similar vein, Cecilia Paine (2000, 4), a landscape architect, suggests that "the rugged granite base of Parliament Hill sitting next to the shores of the Ottawa River, covered with remnant boreal forest tells us in no uncertain terms who we are as Canadians: a nation forged from a vast, rugged natural environment." However, she also contends that "the built landscapes of the Ottawa-Hull region also reflect who we are as Canadians: sensitive to our past and our achievements, yet practical and accommodating to those around us".

Dionne Brand (1996, 14, 15), a Canadian writer of West Indian origin, points out that "there is something distinctly Canadian about trying to focus on an identity or a place which would describe where we live and who we are". She also observes that the association of landscape with identity may be problematic for the immigrant "settler who cannot ever know the ground as birthplace and inherits instead a restlessness, an unsettling feeling which always needs a heavy hand to confirm..." . She goes on to note that the writings of another West Indian immigrant, Austin Clarke, have been "mapping this landscape called Canada or more specifically Toronto...". She thanks him for his "insistence that the landscapes layer all our possibilities, admit of all our origins, see our

lives as changing and dynamic and claim nothing that we cannot or need not hold” (16). Similarly, Rinaldo Walcott (1996, 16) refers to Clarke as “our most lyrical blues geographer” who offers “a gaze from another position which is instructive for the nation” and “insists that Canada becomes a place where arrival is possible”. Whether that arrival must be via the wilderness is an interesting question.

The tourism industry aspires to maintain the image of Canada’s wilderness, yet is careful to assure potential visitors of comfort and safety. Thus, the advertisement of Canada, by the Thomas Cook company in the Daily Mail (February 10, 2001), depicts a bear clutching a tree, and refers to the “majestic mountains” in “beautiful Banff”, “the bears and elks in the national park near Banff”, “the perfect place to get close to nature”, and the “untamed Laurentians” of Quebec. However, the holiday guarantees “the highest standard of service and comfort.” Another advertisement for Cook’s Tours of Canada urges tourists to “watch out for bears and elk in the wilderness along the Athabasca River to the Columbia Icefields, where you can ride the snowcoach on the glacier.” Despite this, the accompanying photograph is one of mountains and a glacier devoid of people and facilities.

## **CONCLUSION**

Historically wilderness has been an important but confused idea in Canada, and a landscape that people have reacted to with ambivalence, sometimes fearing and destroying it, sometimes appreciating and protecting it.

Destruction began with hunting and fishing, then logging, mining and agriculture, the development of cities, roads and reservoirs, and more recently tourism. The main means of protecting wilderness has been the establishment of national and provincial parks.

The wilderness still evokes ambivalent attitudes. This is exemplified in several recent newspaper articles. One was on Kokanee Provincial Park, British Columbia, where

Michel Trudeau, the youngest son of former Prime Minister Trudeau, died in an avalanche while cross-country skiing. The article was entitled: “A mystic beauty, an unforgiving land” (Hume, 2003). Another article by Roy MacGregor, entitled “The Great Lone Land” and published on Canada Day, celebrated the size of Canada and its wilderness character but noted that not everyone appreciates these characteristics (MacGregor, 2003). It quoted, as an example, a British travel writer, Stephen Brook, who said in the late 1980s “There are those who find the wilderness exhilarating. I am not one of them. The expanses and vistas of Canada frustrate those who, like myself, often prefer the detail to the grand design. Canada’s mystique is its spaciousness, its northern emptiness. To me it is oppressive” (Brook, in MacGregor, 2003, A7). Even parks reflect a continuing ambivalence about wilderness. They are designated to protect areas but environmentally degraded by recreation facilities and activities. Risk activities in parks and wilderness balance appreciation and threat.

Today, I would argue that, as a result of the belated and somewhat reluctant recognition that all landscapes, even protected wilderness areas, have been modified by people, wilderness is an outdated concept. It is being replaced by ideas of heritage, cultural landscapes, and ecological integrity. However, wilderness is a concept that many people will cling to or modify to suit their expectations. This may be accounted for in various ways. Many people remain ignorant of the impacts generations of people have had on so-called wilderness landscapes, impacts that are often subtle or masked by subsequent regeneration. Some people wish to believe that there are still some places that are pristine, perhaps as God created them. There also remains a belief that wilderness has been crucial to Canadian identity, so there is concern that the elimination of wilderness will undermine this sense of identity.

National Parks will continue to be the prime means in Canada, and many other countries, of protecting areas perceived by some as wilderness, by others as valued cultural landscapes, heritage or for their ecological integrity.

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