

Manufacturing National Park Nature

Photography, Ecology, and
the Wilderness Industry of Jasper

J. KERI CRONIN

FOREWORD BY GRAEME WYNN



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FOREWORD

“that fatal breath of ‘improvement’”

Graeme Wynn

When the Canadian Pacific Railway began carrying passengers through the western mountains in 1886, the “awful grandeur” of the rugged terrain west of Calgary became the focus of much admiring attention, not least by agents of the railroad, anxious to recoup enormous construction costs by capitalizing on the scenery through which the rails ran. Given impetus by the country’s first prime minister, who was persuaded, after an early trip along the transcontinental line, that although “there may be monotony of mountains as there may be prairies ... in our mountain scenery there is no monotony,” a concerted publicity campaign “sold” the region to the world.¹

The Canadian Rockies were a titanic sculpture. Here “serrated peaks, and vast pyramids of rock with curiously contorted and folded strata” were “followed by gigantic castellated masses down whose sides cascades fall thousands of feet.” Glimpses of “glaciers and other strange and rare sights” were available from the luxury of the railway’s Pullman cars.² Fine fishing and magnificent shooting could be had a short distance from one or another of the stops along the CPR line. Glacier House offered accommodation at the foot of the Illecillewaet Glacier, in the shadow of a peak considered the equivalent of “a dozen Matterhorns,” and by century’s end Swiss guides were employed there to lead climbers into the mountains, sometimes described in promotional literature as constituting “fifty Switzerlands in one.”³ At Banff, which Prime Minister Macdonald believed beyond compare in its combination of “so many attractions” and its possession of “all of the qualifications necessary to make it a great place of

resort,” tourists were invited to enjoy hot pools with curative properties, beautiful scenery, a national park, and, after 1887, luxurious accommodation at the Banff Springs Hotel, soon recognized in the *Baedeker Guide to Canada* as one of the five best hotels in the country.⁴

By contemporary measures, the promotion of the region was a considerable success. Some three thousand people visited Rocky Mountain (later Banff) National Park in 1887. By 1891, over seven thousand did so. By 1888, a thousand visitors had stayed at Glacier House; a decade later the tally exceeded twelve thousand. Early in the twentieth century, over 4 million passengers (many of whom were tourists) rode the rails through the Rockies. In 1903, approximately as many guests (five thousand) were turned away from the Banff Springs Hotel as were accommodated there.⁵ But as the tide of tourists sojourning in Banff, at Lake Louise (where a small log chalet was built in 1890), at Glacier House, and at Mount Stephen increased, as tents and little chalets gave way to large hotels, and as trails were pushed to new points of interest at stops along the CPR line, some of those who had come, in the early years, “to value at its true worth the great un-lonely silence of the wilderness and to revel in the emancipation from frills, furbelows and small follies,” felt their Eden despoiled. With “jealous eyes” they watched “the silence slipping back, the tin cans and empty fruit jars strew [their] sacred soil, [and] the mark of the axe grow more obtrusive.”⁶

Among them (indeed, the person who put these sentiments to paper) was Mary T.S. Schäffer. The daughter of an affluent family from Pennsylvania, she had met her husband, Charles, a medical practitioner from Philadelphia, at Glacier House in 1889 while holidaying there with members of the Vaux family from the same city (who had first visited the area two years before). For a decade after 1891, the Schäffers returned to Rogers Pass each summer to pursue Charles’s interest in the botany of the region. When Charles died, in 1903, Mary continued his work with Stewardson Brown, curator of the herbarium of the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences, and contributed her own watercolours and photographs of plants to the volume published as *Alpine Flora of the Canadian Rocky Mountains* in 1907.⁷ Enduring the deaths of both her parents in the same year as her husband died, Schäffer found herself increasingly “lost and lonesome,” amid the early-twentieth-century influx of visitors to the southern Rockies. Nostalgic for earlier summers, when “99 percent” of those who came to the area “flitted across the country as bees across a flower garden, and were gone,” she listened to the tales of hunters and

trappers, who told of “valleys of great beauty, of high unknown peaks of little-known rivers, of un-named lakes ... a fairyland” to the north and northwest, and resolved to venture into this territory.⁸

Thus it was that barely a century ago, two remarkable women spent a couple of summers travelling on horseback along “old Indian trails” in the Rocky Mountains of Canada. Accompanied by guides and outfitters, they rode northward from the Canadian Pacific Railway line at Lake Louise into the upper reaches of the North Saskatchewan and Athabasca river valleys. Soon they entered remote and rugged country little known to Europeans. Fur traders and early explorers had traversed these fastnesses. A Roman Catholic missionary party passed this way in the 1840s, as did the artist Paul Kane, and surveyors seeking a suitable route for the CPR had followed thirty years later. But even in 1913, Canadian government officials would express frustration at the conflicting information about and scant knowledge of the territory immediately east of that into which the intrepid women travelled.⁹ Both Quakers, both Americans, Mary Schäffer and her companion Mollie Adams (who taught geology at Columbia College in New York) high-mindedly proclaimed their intent “to turn the unthumbed pages of an unread book” and to “learn daily those secrets which dear Mother Nature is so willing to tell those who seek.”¹⁰ More prosaically, but no less importantly, they were in search of Chaba Imne, an almost “mythical lake” at the centre of rich game country, known by hearsay to some local guides and visited historically by members of the indigenous Stoney Band.

After reaching and exploring Chabe Imne (Beaver Lake) in July 1908, Schäffer was ready to declare it “paradise.”¹¹ Miles and miles of lake were bordered by “exquisite bays and inlets” closed in here by “a magnificent double-headed pile of rock,” there by a “fine snow-capped mountain down whose side swept a splendid glacier” and yet elsewhere by a “fine waterfall” bursting from a fissure hundreds of feet above the lake and turning into a veil of spray “waving back and forth in the wind, long before it touched the rocks below.” Veritable gardens of “vetches crimson, yellow and pink ... spread away in every direction,” the crashing sound of avalanches interrupted the stillness and “the distant yapping of coyotes” broke the night. “How pure and undefiled it was,” this “heaven of the hills.”¹²

Yet change was coming, and Schäffer knew it. In September 1907, after her first summer on the trail, the Canadian government established Jasper Forest Park under the authority of the Dominion Lands Act. Encompassing an enormous area east of the Continental Divide, including all the

southern headwaters of the Athabasca River, and extending north to 53°35'N, this initiative anticipated the construction of a second trans-continental railroad through the Rockies at Yellowhead Pass.¹³ As the rails approached, the entire eastern slope of the mountains from the international boundary to a point north of the 54th parallel was reserved to protect the water supply and produce timber for settlers on the prairies. But when the Dominion Forests Reserves and Parks Act was introduced in 1911, it distinguished between forest reserves “withdrawn from occupation” and forest parks that could be “occupied for the purposes of pleasure.” By a subsequent order-in-council, Jasper Park was redefined as a strip of land twenty miles (thirty-two kilometres) wide along the route of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway, which brought passengers to Jasper in 1912, crossed the Yellowhead Pass to reach Tete Jaune Cache in 1913, and arrived on the Pacific coast in 1914. This left many of the area’s most strikingly beautiful sites, including Chabe Imne (which Schäffer had renamed Maligne Lake), beyond the boundaries of the park.

When she was asked to survey the lake for the Geological Survey of Canada in 1911, Schäffer was convinced that “nothing could hold back the tide of ‘improvement’” that would follow the python-like advance of the railroad into the hills, and she regretted that “inch by inch, our pet playgrounds are being swallowed up.” For all that, she rode the railway from Edmonton to its early 1911 terminus in Hinton, before proceeding by horse and pack train up the Maligne River “where pythons could not penetrate and ‘progress’ was unknown.” Driven onward by her commission, and her memories of the beautiful lake, she acknowledged “an ever increasing desire to see it once more before it too fell under that fatal breath of ‘improvement’.”¹⁴

Although the publicity that followed Schäffer’s survey, and her efforts to convince federal officials that both the magnificent scenery and the wildlife breeding grounds of Maligne Lake warranted protection, helped secure the inclusion of this area in an expanded Jasper Park in 1914, improvement’s hot breath was not so easily deflected. Yes, hunting was prohibited within Parks, as it was not within Forest Reserves. And yes, the narrow corridor that was Jasper Park after 1911 was inimical to effective wildlife protection. But the Dominion’s parks had been conceived, since their beginning, as “pleasure grounds, for the benefit, advantage and enjoyment of the people of Canada.”¹⁵ Wilderness protection and tourism development were conjoined enterprises. As the first head of the National Parks Branch of the Department of the Interior had it, “nothing attracts

tourists like national parks.”¹⁶ Whatever else they stood for, Canada’s mountain parks were intended to be tourist destinations.

In Jasper, this meant, first, the construction of an imposing building opposite the railway station to serve as the headquarters of park administration, and then the development of scenic roads to local attractions, including Pyramid Lake and Mount Edith Cavell (named, in a moment of imperial patriotism, in honour of the English nurse executed by German soldiers in Belgium in 1915).¹⁷ Outfitters began to guide wealthy tourists into the mountains and to the shores of several lakes. Soon there were tea houses and a campsite with permanent tents and a log kitchen and dining hall in the park. Early in the 1920s, the “tent city” was superseded by Jasper Park Lodge, a \$2.5 million investment where visitors could “rough it” in “rustic log cabins in a spectacular mountain setting” while enjoying the “service and facilities associated with luxury resort hotels.”¹⁸ After 1925, guests could play golf on the new, carefully designed eighteen-hole course at the lodge, construction of which had entailed blasting away rock outcrops and bringing in forty freight-car loads of topsoil. By 1935, “about one hundred miles of excellent motor highways” ran into the park in various directions from Jasper Park Lodge. There were three-day excursions by automobile, motorboat, and horseback to a chalet on Maligne Lake. There were opportunities for boating, fishing, hiking, and riding in the backcountry and cross-country skiers also began to use the growing network of trails in the park.

Government spending on public works during the Depression years produced an all-weather highway from Edmonton to Jasper (which also opened access to the Miette Hot Springs at the eastern entrance to the park) and the spectacular Banff-Jasper highway (now known as the Icefields Parkway). In 1941, a New York magazine described Jasper Park Lodge as the “gathering place of Summer sportsmen, society and vacationists ... a top-notch caravanserie that combines the luxuries of a tycoon’s Adirondack camp with the informality of a first class Dude Ranch.”¹⁹ But improved accessibility also encouraged the rise of automobile tourism, the development of autocamps, and the promotion of new activities such as “boat racing, surf board riding, water skiing, and a rodeo” within the park.²⁰ By 1950, the Jasper town site boasted a new recreational facility with “an outdoor swimming pool, dressing rooms, tennis courts, bowling green and sports field.”²¹

Given the extent of the park – in excess of ten thousand square kilometers in 1930, after a series of boundary adjustments – these developments

were hardly fatal to the “great garden of the mountains” in which Mary Schäffer had sought solitude, peace, and comfort only a few decades earlier. The breath of improvement, the transforming wedge of progress that she identified and lamented in 1911, moved inexorably, permeating dozens, scores, then hundreds of “secret places,” and ensuring that they “would be secret no longer,” but it also moved slowly, especially at first. There were ten thousand visitors to Jasper National Park in 1920. It took almost twenty years for this number to double, and it remained above twenty thousand for a mere three years, before falling through the remaining war years to approximately twelve thousand. Then the onslaught quickened: almost seventy-two thousand in 1947, eighty-five thousand in 1950, over one hundred thousand in 1952, and almost one hundred and fifty-four thousand in 1955. Still, these numbers were modest compared with Rocky Mountain/Banff National Park, which had more than one hundred thousand visitors in 1924, counted over seven hundred thousand in 1955, and fell below one hundred fifty thousand only four times after 1927, in the depth of the Depression of the 1930s. In comparison with its southern neighbour, Jasper was a “sleeping giant” until the mid-1950s. Then its popularity increased dramatically. Between 1957 and 1962, the Jasper visitor count averaged almost three hundred and fifty thousand each year. By 1966, it approached six hundred thousand (Banff topped 2 million in that year).²² Schäffer, who died in Banff in 1939, may have discerned a pattern in the loss of mountain wilderness, but with the acuity of hindsight it is clear that the trajectory of loss unfolded quite differently across the vast and varied space of the Canadian Rockies, and that it begs interpretation from a number of perspectives, all of which reveal the tensions inherent in human-nature interactions in the modern world.

By PearlAnn Reichwein and Lisa McDermott’s account, Mary Schäffer’s embrace of the western wilderness drew from the nineteenth century Romantic movement, which “sought the sublime and picturesque in wild landscapes,” and from those nineteenth-century New Englanders “who found joy and divinity through transcendental communion with creation.”²³ For Schäffer, the wilderness was a fount of peace, health, and happiness, but in her experience it was also a fragile place, one whose redemptive qualities were continuously under threat from the clamour and clutter of “modern materialist society.” Anxious about the impending despoliation of the wild mountains and of the wildlife habitat around beautiful Maligne Lake, she sought to protect these places while urging those who shared her attitudes toward the wild to visit them while they remained unspoiled. Extending the boundaries of the park would help

maintain wildlife. But saving habitat meant fencing it in, managing it. Protecting wild spaces this way inevitably meant that they were less wild. By the same token, mapping Maligne Lake helped secure its inclusion in a reconfigured park but also gave it a place in the minds – the mental maps – of untold numbers who had never seen it. Writing evocatively of the lake and its surroundings gave power to Schäffer's pen as she implored readers of *Old Indian Trails*, a book that she described as “the key to one of the fairest of all God's many gardens,” to “Go!” in search of this back-country Eden.²⁴ But words of encouragement carried ironic seeds of desecration. The more persuasive Schäffer's message, the more compelling her call to the wild, the more often would “great un-lonely silences” be broken, the more often would secret places be exposed. According to Reichwein and McDermott, the challenge of “safeguarding wilderness from overdevelopment” required of Schäffer “a pragmatic compromise between wild nature and gross capitalist exploitation.”²⁵

A similar balancing act was required of Canada's national parks' personnel by the complex, shifting mandates under which they operated. Canada's “first national park,” at Banff, began as a spa and health reserve and was envisaged two years later, in the Rocky Mountain Parks Act of 1887, as a “public park and pleasure ground,” within which there would be a commitment to the “preservation and protection of game and fish, and of wild birds generally.”²⁶ Regulations soon prohibited “the shooting, wounding, capturing or killing of any wild animal or bird” in the park, yet wolves and other “noxious” animals and birds, including coyotes, lynx, skunks, weasels, eagles, and cormorants were exempt from protection.²⁷ At the turn of the twentieth century, a bounty was offered for wolf kills in the park and a few years later, Persian sheep, coyotes, cougars, a timber wolf, a badger, and two golden eagles were caged and displayed alongside a herd of elk in the Banff animal paddock. Just as roads, bridges, and buildings were necessary to “make of the reserve a creditable national park,” so the elimination and confinement of local fauna “improved” the park for human visitors.²⁸ Meanwhile, poachers, aware that there were too few rangers to police the backcountry effectively, preyed on protected species within the park with relative impunity. By 1900, the park was devoid of wapiti (*Cervus canadensis*); once wolves had been eliminated from the Bow Valley, in 1914, several hundred elk were brought to Banff from Yellowstone Park in the United States. National park “nature” was bent, from the first, to human design.

Those who have written about Canadian parks have offered widely different interpretations of their origins and purpose. Four decades ago

and more, historian R. Craig Brown argued that Canada's first national parks were established to be "useful" rather than in reflection of lofty preservationist goals. In this view, the early Canadian Parks movement was simply an extension of the Macdonald Government's economic policies, which rested in large part on the use of natural resources to further national development. Parks were set aside to allow business and government to make the fullest possible use of their resources. This interpretation quickly gained traction and was reinforced by Leslie Bella's *Parks for Profit*, published in 1987, which argued forcefully that Canada's parks were foci of economic development rather than places removed from capitalist exploitation. Indeed, the creation of the Parks Branch in the Dominion Forest Reserves and Parks Act of 1911 gave some credence, as parks historian C.J. Taylor has suggested, to the view that parks were "fundamentally resource reserves, allowing for the controlled exploitation of a range of resources such as minerals, timber and water as well as scenery."²⁹

For all that, preservation, broadly defined, is widely understood to have become a more important guiding principle in parks management after the appointment of J.B. Harkin as the first commissioner of parks in 1911. Hailed as an ardent conservationist by the author of an institutional history of the park service, Harkin was also celebrated in Janet Foster's book *Working for Wildlife*, published in 1978. This influential study made the bureaucrat a hero by proclaiming his visionary role (fifty years ahead of the Americans and a century in advance of his fellow countryfolk) in articulating a coherent "philosophy of wildlands preservation."³⁰ A more judicious assessment reveals the commissioner as a more enigmatic figure through his quarter century at the head of the expanding parks branch. Although he claimed that Canada's national parks were places "in which the beauty of the landscape is protected from profanation, the natural wild animals, plants and forests preserved, and the peace and solitude of primeval nature retained," he consistently embraced the secular or "commercial" (as he once had it) alongside the sacred or "humanitarian" purpose of parks.³¹ In the latter vein, he often insisted that a return to nature, as demarcated by the boundaries of Canada's parks, offered a magic cure for nervous exhaustion and other afflictions of modern (urban) life. In the former, he famously calculated the yield from Canada's wheat fields at little more than a third of that from its scenery (\$4.91 per acre compared with \$13.88).³² Both revenue and rejuvenation were important, and National Parks yielded dividends – in gold and in human well-being – for the country.

Perhaps the best assessment of all of this has been provided by environmental historian Alan MacEachern, who has interrogated the underlying assumptions and political utility of Brown's and Bella's arguments, and analyzed Harkin's career to conclude that "there has never been just one doctrine directing the national park system."³³ Even the National Parks Act of 1930, which separated the administration of parks and forest reserves and prohibited mining and restricted logging in parks, failed to banish the ongoing tension between use and preservation by dedicating the parks to the "benefit, enjoyment and education" of the people of Canada and requiring that they be "maintained and made use of so as to leave them unimpaired for future generations."

Only with the rise of the environmental movement in the 1960s were parks staff enjoined to recognize the preservation of significant natural features as their "most fundamental and important obligation," and it was not until the late 1970s and 1980s that parks policy made use secondary to the maintenance of ecological integrity in the parks. Yet the dilemma continued. The environmental enthusiasm of the 1960s pulled people back to nature. Coupled with rising affluence and increased leisure time, improvements to roads, and ever-increasing automobile ownership, this led to a rapid and sustained rise in park visits. Annual visitor counts at Jasper have increased by approximately 3 percent per year since 1970 and are now near the 2 million mark. In recent years, both the Jasper Environmental Association, a local conservation group that has been monitoring Parks Canada's efforts to manage the ecological health of Jasper National Park since 1989, and the Northern Alberta Branch of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society have expressed concerns about park management plans that continue to encourage tourism, envisage alterations to wilderness zone boundaries, and allow expansion of commercial activities in ecologically sensitive areas, while remaining vague about what measures might be taken to protect the ecological integrity of the park.³⁴

Far from pristine Edens, Canada's mountain parks have been (and remain) contested, negotiated, real, imagined, manipulated, managed, and malleable places. From Mary Schäffer's day to our own, they have been endowed with many meanings and called upon to serve many purposes. Then as now, these meanings and purposes reflected not only what was there (the biogeophysical landscape of the cordillera – nature) but also the ideas that shaped the ways in which people viewed, imagined, and described what they saw. In much the same way as the desert canyon once known as the *Chasm of the Colorado* became a Grand national monument and a

symbol of something unique about the United States of America, so too Rocky Mountain splendour – the “Nature” that defined the essence of Canada’s mountain parks – was created rather than revealed.³⁵ Understanding these places requires more than knowledge of their ecology, more than an appreciation of their political and administrative history, more than awareness of the details of the regulations under which they operate, more than familiarity with the names and personalities of those charged with administering them. To grasp their broader meaning requires a sense of why people came to these places, what they thought they would find there, and how they responded to what they encountered.

These are questions at the very centre of Keri Cronin’s *Manufacturing National Park Nature*. Focusing on photographic representations of Jasper National Park, this revealing and richly illustrated study lays bare the gap between what is pictured and what is concealed in tourist images of the park and offers an intriguing commentary on the ways in which visual depictions have shaped both “imaginative” and “actual” landscapes in this region. Working the fertile borderland between cultural production and environmental values, it reveals how government agencies, tourism operators, environmental activists, and tourists themselves have drawn from and given substance to the idea that National Parks encompass pristine Nature.

Considering somewhat similar, albeit generally slightly earlier, developments south of the 49th parallel, historian Mark Barringer has explicitly linked the development of America’s western parks to America’s frontier mythology. In this account, Yellowstone and other mountain parks were celebrated as the last remnants of a continent once new, “natural and almost magically alive” that inspired generations of Americans to “awe and reverence.” They preserved “those things lost to progress elsewhere” and became “repositories of ... [a] national mythology” and symbols of American identity. Here, visitors looking out at “mountains, waterfalls, canyons, glaciers, and geysers,” watching bison and elk grazing in meadows, and marvelling at bears alongside the road saw what they expected to see: the nation’s past. But they had other expectations too. They wanted comfortable accommodation from which to venture into the wilderness; they wanted roads to carry them to especially scenic or remarkable spots; they hoped to see bison, deer, and elk “on demand”; and they wanted “dance halls, swimming pools and bear-feeding shows to reflect the belief that nature’s bounty had created the most affluent society on earth, able to afford such whimsical pursuits.” And so, says Barringer, America’s national parks were designed “to fit popular beliefs about what they should

be,” and “both the physical Yellowstone and its image in the collective imagination underwent tremendous change.”³⁶

Although Cronin’s and Barringer’s books reveal some broad parallels in the ways in which mountain parks north and south of the border were shaped by visitors’ expectations, it is important to recognize the differences between Canadian and American stories here. Different historical and geographical circumstances gave rise to different national mythologies. Early European explorers of the northeastern foreland of the American continent were more often cognizant of its peril than its promise. Thus the northern reaches of the continent were characterized as “the land God gave to Cain” while southerly latitudes entered English literature more propitiously as places “so full of grapes [and with signs of] such plenty” that those who first encountered them after crossing the Atlantic “did thinke in the world were not the like abundance.” To put none too fine a point on it, while those who settled Canadian space grappled with what Voltaire described dismissively as “quelques arpents de neige” [a few acres of snow], Americans were awed by what Scott Fitzgerald imagined, in *The Great Gatsby*, as the “fresh green breast of the new world.”³⁷ Similarly, those who occupied the scattered archipelago of habitable islands across the continent’s northern limits of agricultural settlement rarely found American historian Frederick Jackson Turner’s notion of a continuously unfolding frontier of agrarian opportunity a convincing account of their experience. Barringer may be right to tie perceptions of America’s mountain parks to American mythologies (and no doubt American influences have spilled across the border to influence Canadian ideas in these matters as in so many others) but, as Cronin recognizes, more prosaic and immediate considerations bring us closer to understanding the forces at play in shaping Canada’s Rocky Mountain parks.³⁸

Following those who see photography playing a major role in the naturalization of cultural constructions, Cronin argues that the photographic representations so common in illustrated guidebooks to Jasper National Park, on souvenir postcards of the area, and in “how-to” manuals about nature photography, have encouraged people to see the landscape of the Canadian Rockies in particular ways. Because these images almost invariably portray the “flora, fauna, geological features, and landscapes of the park” (144) in ways that minimize the human effects upon them, and because photography is widely regarded as an “objective” practice – how many times have we heard that “the camera never lies”? – these representations have helped to embed conceptions of the Rocky Mountain region as “wilderness” or “unspoiled Nature” in the popular mind. They have

shaped ideas of “what nature is and how humans ought to think and feel about it,” and they have mirrored the values of consumer culture in doing so.³⁹ They have worked, in other words, to persuade people that a carefully manufactured cultural product is “natural.”

There are many smaller ironies catalogued in these pages. Among them: the claim of one recent guidebook that 8 million visitors enjoy the “untrammelled” Canadian Rockies each year; the assumption that railcars or automobiles can deliver visitors to places beyond civilization, unaffected by technology; the sense that wilderness can be experienced while hiking carefully maintained trails; the erasure of the past (including that of indigenous peoples) through the belief that wild places are necessarily devoid of human presence; the conception of nature as static; and so on. Noting each of these small absurdities serves, in its own way, to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions and to sharpen reflection about the ways in which the members of modern western societies think about and interact with the natural world. More than this, however, *Manufacturing National Park Nature* speaks to enduring societal convictions about nature and non-human animals. For all the environmental, social, technological, and political changes of the last century, visual representations of Jasper National Park have remained surprisingly constant through the years.

By focusing the tourist gaze (and the attention of those who consume this landscape from afar) upon supposedly “unspoiled” or “untouched” scenes while excluding from the frame of everyday perception the disrupting effects of the python of commercial development, representations of the park have encouraged people to imagine this space much as Mary Schäffer did a hundred years or so ago (and for equally complicated reasons) as a “fairyland,” a stunningly beautiful, pure, and undefiled natural h(e)aven. By focusing upon the manner in which these images are produced, Cronin reminds readers that the scenic views and landscape representations that shape our perceptions of the world, within and beyond park boundaries, are less transparent portrayals of reality than they are reflections of both societal understandings of the environment and dominant pictorial conventions. Because we see what we have been conditioned to think we are looking at, Cronin (and others) would argue, we are all too easily persuaded of the pristine quality of beautiful places even as these places are suffused with and changed by “that fatal breath of ‘improvement.’” Realizing as much is the first step to unsettling such cultural representations and thinking anew about both dominant understandings of place and the imbalance of power between human and non-human inhabitants of the earth.

I

Grounding National Park Nature

Jasper National Park is one of Canada's best-known tourist destinations. Nestled in the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains and referred to as "the gentle giant of the mountain national parks," this UNESCO world heritage site has captured the imaginations of thousands of visitors each year.¹ Canada's national parks are world famous and are seen as icons of Canadian national identity by visitors and residents alike. For over a century, they have been imaged and imagined as quintessentially Canadian, and this designation seems to ring especially true in the parks located in the Rocky Mountains. Like the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Rocky Mountains are a significant and established part of Canadian iconography. The visual culture of Jasper National Park reinforces these sentiments – from collector coins to postcards, from postage stamps to tourist photographs, specific views of this landscape have been consumed and replicated since the park's official establishment in 1907.

Of particular interest for the following discussion are the ways in which the play among visual culture, regional specificity, and national symbolism has influenced environmental perceptions and realities, both in Jasper National Park and in the broader context of the Canadian nation. In this book, I explore how visual imagery shapes conceptions of nature in a variety of complex ways. Photography, in particular, has been a significant means of creating cultural expectations of place, and I am interested in exploring the ways in which the camera has shaped certain ideologies about this landscape.

Of course, photography is not the only visual medium that has been used to represent the area now known as Jasper National Park. Examples of sketches, paintings, poetry, and prose inspired by this mountain landscape abound, many dating from well before the designation of Jasper as a federally sanctioned forest reserve in 1907. As historian Karen Jones has pointed out, Reverend George Grant, who accompanied an 1872 survey party to the region, “advertised nature’s canvas in Jasper as an inspiring panorama for budding artists.”² Sportsmen and explorers who visited the region in the nineteenth century employed dominant pictorial modes of the day in published accounts of their travels in the Canadian Rockies.³ The celebrated explorations of Lord Milton and Dr. Cheadle in British North America took them through what we now know as Jasper National Park, and their published accounts of this journey include landscapes that emphasize “the picturesque, despite the desolation of the British North American West.”⁴ Canonical Canadian artists such as Paul Kane, Lawren Harris, and A.Y. Jackson also produced images of the Jasper landscape.⁵ Kane arrived at Jasper House in 1846, and many of the sketches he made during this trip appeared in his well-known publication *Wanderings of an Artist* and served as reference material for his watercolour paintings.⁶ Even though paintings of the northern Ontario landscape are usually identified with the Group of Seven, paintings of Jasper by the artists found their way into the rhetoric of the tourism industry, as evidenced by the inclusion of sketches by Harris, Jackson, and Franklin Carmichael in a 1927 promotional brochure produced by Canadian National Railways.⁷

Many well-known writers have embraced the romantic mythology of the Canadian Rockies over the past several decades. In 1914, Arthur Conan Doyle visited Jasper, a trip that inspired the famed creator of Sherlock Holmes to write a poem entitled “Jasper National Park on the Athabaska Trail,” in which he declared that

The mighty voice of Canada will ever call to me,
 I shall hear the roar of rivers where the rapids foam and tear,
 I shall smell the virgin upland with its balsam-laden air,
 And shall dream that I am riding down the winding woody vale,
 With the packer and the packhorse on the Athabaska Trail.⁸

Canadian writers have also been drawn to the imagery and mythology of the Rocky Mountains. For instance, the personal scrapbooks of Lucy Maud Montgomery, author of the *Anne of Green Gables* series, include postcard imagery of one of Jasper’s most recognizable geographical features,

Mount Edith Cavell.⁹ A more recent example is Thomas Wharton's award-winning 1995 novel *Icefields*, a fictional account of a glacier expedition in the Jasper region.¹⁰ That such a diverse group of high-profile producers of cultural capital have shared a sense of fascination with Jasper speaks volumes about the position this specific geographical location holds in dominant cultural constructions of Canada.

This book focuses on Jasper National Park for three main reasons. First, Jasper National Park is one of Canada's best-known vacation destinations, and the image culture of this Rocky Mountain vacation destination has helped to define, in the minds of many, what nature looks like in a Canadian context. Second, the park's centenary celebrations in 2007 provoked reflections on this particular landscape in the context of twenty-first century environmental concerns. And third, in recent years there has been much debate and public awareness surrounding the ecological health of the Canadian national park system. The Canadian Rockies are a significant location for biodiversity – a recent count indicated that there were “277 species of birds, 1,300 species of plants, 20,000 species of insects and spiders, 15 species of amphibians and reptiles and 69 species of mammals” in this region – and, at a time when concerns about ecological sustainability are becoming increasingly urgent, it is important to re-examine our connections and cultural ideals about these types of spaces.¹¹ As one of the famed Rocky Mountain parks, Jasper National Park has been at the centre of many of these discussions and serves as a good case study for the current inquiry. In addition, I hope that this book will add to the growing body of critical analysis on Jasper National Park, a landscape that has been, until recently, relatively neglected in comparison with neighbouring Banff National Park.¹²

PHOTOGRAPHY, TOURISM, AND NATIONAL PARK NATURE

Jasper National Park has had a long and complex photographic history and has been the subject of countless photographs since it was first set aside as a federal forest reserve in the early twentieth century. Although photography has been used in numerous ways in the park – among them in wildlife management, scientific studies, geological mapping, law enforcement, and as an aid to exploration and natural resource extraction – photographic images of Jasper have been, and continue to be, predominantly related to the tourism industry. Photography has been an active component of the commodification of the Canadian wilderness, what

Patricia Jasen has described as “the process by which meaning [has been] encoded, saleable imagery ... identified, and tourist sights ... made to speak to consumers on an imaginative level, through the language of signs.”¹³ Photographic imagery has thus had a significant impact on how the supposedly natural region of the Canadian Rocky Mountains has been understood, a process that has been the result of sophisticated and carefully rehearsed representational techniques. It is this *understanding* of place – what I refer to as “National Park Nature” – and how this understanding has been mediated and manifested through photographic imagery that comprise the focus of the following chapters.¹⁴

National Park Nature is a way of seeing that shifts according to the landscape under consideration. It is not a static or easily identifiable entity but a system of visual organization predicated on dominant cultural values regarding nature, non-human animals, and “the environment.”¹⁵ National Park Nature is mediated by technologies of vision, such as photography, and differs from other modes of engaging with the landscape due to its relationship with contemporary notions of environmentalism.

In Jasper, National Park Nature has been shaped predominantly by the cultural constructs of “wilderness,” “recreation,” and “wildlife,” key components of both the visual identity of the region and the promotion of Jasper as a popular vacation destination. Throughout the park’s history, photographic imagery has played a key role in creating and sustaining these specific conceptions of what it means to engage with nature in the Jasper region. Photographic representations of National Park Nature have reinforced assumptions about what constitutes acceptable activity and behaviour in this culturally defined space, while at the same time often masking local environmental and cultural tensions. Photographic images of National Park Nature provide the illusion of imparting objective and unmediated visual information when in actuality they are thoroughly shaped by the dynamics of consumer culture, of which tourism is a significant part.

National Park Nature in Jasper has been characterized by a complex dynamic between a desire for “pristine” and “unspoiled” wilderness and the development of amenities such as recreation facilities and luxury accommodations. The gap between what is pictured and what is concealed in tourist photography relating to Jasper National Park is of central concern in the following discussion. The “erasure of locality” from dominant discourses surrounding National Park Nature has led to specific forms of environmental knowledge in this context, including the notion that Nature is a static entity that needs to be preserved from human use and abuse.¹⁶

As ecologist Daniel Botkin has argued, “We have tended to view nature as a Kodachrome still-life, much like a tourist-guide illustration ... but nature is a moving picture show.”¹⁷ Botkin’s analogy is significant here since it underscores the sense of interconnectedness between tourist imagery and dominant ideologies of Nature.

National Park Nature informs the representational politics of Jasper National Park and figures prominently in illustrated tourist brochures and photographic postcards. As the examples I draw on in this book demonstrate, National Park Nature is often pictured in ways that serve to reinforce the mythological construction of a Nature/Culture divide that many scholars argue is at the root of the current ecological crisis in North America.¹⁸ In a variety of ways, photography has been used as a means to perpetuate this myth, in particular because of the persistent assumptions about the capacity of the camera to record “the truth.” On the basis of studies in British Columbia, geographer Bruce Braun has pointed out that most photographs made in the context of Nature (or “adventure”) tourism mask the process of image production. The photographer and, by extension, the technological trappings that placed him or her in that specific locale and facilitated the production of the image are excluded from the frame, thus allowing the landscape in the picture to be conceived of as unmediated by human presence or, simply, as a record of Nature. Further, as Braun argues, pictorial conventions reinforce the notion that Nature and Culture are two distinct realms: “By situating the viewing subject behind the (absent) camera, looking out into the wilds, the image firmly situates the viewer *in* modern society and asks him or her to ponder the yawning gap between culture and nature, city and country, modernity and its premodern antecedents.”¹⁹ Much of the tourist photography that defined Jasper National Park during the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century has had the effect of constructing borders around the park, setting it in opposition to other, more urbanized, parts of Canada.

Although I focus on camera-based imagery in this study because it has dominated the history of visual culture in Jasper National Park, my analysis relates to the broader history of European and North American landscape art in a number of ways. The visual legacy of the European aesthetic traditions of the “sublime” and the “picturesque” is found in the images of the Canadian Rockies, though they are modified to suit early-twentieth-century sensibilities. In previous historical eras, paintings of mountains by well-known landscape artists such as Salvator Rosa conformed to a visual rendering of the sublime intended to raise in the viewer an emotional response just shy of fear. Dark crags, shadowy caves,

and impossible jagged peaks formed the cornerstones of these types of images. In the twentieth century, representations of mountains were still intended to evoke a sense of awe, but this was a tamer, safer sense of awe, more congruent with contemporary efforts to promote tourism in the region. Likewise, elements of the picturesque – literally meaning “like a picture” – found in Jasper National Park imagery are compositionally different from the rolling hills and quaint farmlands of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British landscape art. Yet the notion that Jasper National Park is a space that is at once aesthetically pleasing to look at and “tamed” by human society remains a significant part of this body of imagery.

The many connections between visual representations of a landscape and the social, political, and environmental issues shaping it are of particular significance. Scholars such as John Barrell have described how landscape imagery can be understood as a site of power relations among various social classes.²⁰ In his classic text, *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting, 1730-1840*, Barrell offers an analysis of well-known paintings by canonical British landscape painters such as John Constable, George Morland, and Thomas Gainsborough to demonstrate the ways in which these images corresponded to the needs of the dominant social classes of the time. What happens when we place a similar analytical framework over the visual culture of a landscape such as Jasper National Park? What kinds of power relationships – both between different groups of human actors and between different species – are created, challenged, and sustained when we think about representations of this mountainous landscape? If, as British cultural historian Malcolm Andrews has asserted, “landscape is a political text,” then it is no longer sufficient to consider representations of beloved “natural” spaces such as Jasper National Park as existing outside political, social, and environmental tensions.²¹

Yet a sense of leaving behind such tensions has characterized cultural understandings of spaces such as Jasper National Park. Today we continue to look wistfully at tranquil scenes from the Canadian Rockies, daydreaming about a relaxing vacation away from the demands, pressures, and stresses of “real” life at home. In many ways, we are no different from the generations of tourists who have sought out this landscape in previous decades. National Park Nature has historically been informed by the notion that so-called wilderness destinations, like Jasper, are an escape from the effects of modernity. Yet, as historian T.J. Jackson Lears reminds us, “anti-modernism was not simply escapism; it was ambivalent, often coexisting with enthusiasm for material progress.”²² The seemingly dichotomous

positions of “escape to nature” and “enthusiasm for material progress” are intimately related.

The history of Jasper National Park teems with examples of this relationship; as tourists, we have arrived by automobile to a destination purportedly untouched by industry, technology, and innovation, we have hiked on carefully maintained trails in search of the timeless, spiritual qualities we have come to associate with Nature. These ways of enjoying landscapes such as Jasper National Park are not, in and of themselves, negative. In fact, the pleasure, enjoyment, and sense of wonder we experience in these spaces can result in many positive benefits, among them a deeper sense of appreciation of the species we share the planet with. What is essential, however, is the recognition that these spaces are part of – and not separate from – the industrial and technological forces driving life in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This is not, of course, a new revelation. Scholars such as William Cronon have been arguing this point eloquently for years.²³ For all that, however, dominant representations of landscapes such as Jasper National Park continue to reinforce notions of the pristine, the unspoiled, and the untouched. Even as tourist publications boast about the number of visitors to the Rocky Mountains each year, they continue to emphasize these ideals: “more than eight million people visit the Canadian Rockies every year,” the 2008 issue of *Our Alberta* claims, before assuring potential visitors that this region is “untrammelled.”²⁴

Representations of recreation and wildlife in Jasper National Park also play upon the notion that Nature and Culture are separate and distinct entities. It is within these thematic and pictorial frameworks, perhaps, that this dynamic becomes especially pronounced. Whereas scenes of wilderness landscapes mark the distinction between Nature and Culture through the erasure of human presence, the ideologies informing scenes of recreation and wildlife perpetuate the notion that Jasper National Park is a space where the two realms can intersect and harmoniously coexist, yet remain distinct and different from one another, each being defined by what it is not and, thus, revealing their mutually constitutive aspects.

Building on arguments made by Braun, this volume takes the position that the type of Nature tourism that has historically defined spaces such as Jasper National Park “reorders nature through a *visual* logic, not an *ecological* one.”²⁵ In other words, dominant ideologies of National Park Nature have more to do with the ways in which this landscape has been pictured than with environmental actualities, which themselves are subject to cultural interpretations and political influences. In her book *On the Beaten Track: Tourism, Art, and Place*, art historian Lucy Lippard has

discussed how park spaces need to be understood as examples of visual culture. “The most famous National Parks,” she writes, “have come to resemble television shows or photography books – controlled or static sequences of scenery and sights.”²⁶ As a key aspect of this transformation, the representation of National Park Nature through photography sets up a dichotomous relationship between what is seen and experienced while on holiday and the broader ecological picture of the region. In this way, the environmental actualities of a place can become masked through dominant forms of visual representation.

National Park Nature, then, is a specific way of seeing that has been replicated in large part through photography and, by extension, the intertextual relations that arise when photographs are circulated in the context of tourism. National Park Nature is dependent on both the medium of photography and the tourism industry, and, not coincidentally, all three of these entities can be traced to the same historical phenomenon, the intensification of modernity during the nineteenth century.

TOURIST PHOTOGRAPHY AS VISUAL ECOLOGY

Jasper’s position as a national park, and thus a “protected” landscape, came about as a result of dominant cultural ideas regarding Nature and modernity reproduced largely through photographic imagery. In this way, photography has been used to draw boundaries between areas to be “conserved” and the rest of North America.

Of particular interest here are the ways in which national parks became equated with the idea of the environment over the course of the twentieth century as “green” values became increasingly part of mainstream society in North America. One result of this process is that National Park Nature has become a dominant mode of understanding and engaging with nature, even though this is, by definition, a very select perspective. Contemporary understandings of national parks as a means to achieve a sense of ecological balance for the country as a whole are a relatively recent development; the nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century origins of Canada’s national parks had more to do with the promotion of tourism and revenue generation than the preservation of the environment on an intrinsic level.²⁷ In recent years, however, the establishment of new national parks in Canada is usually celebrated as a victory for the environmental movement. This dominant way of understanding the role of national parks has had the result of obscuring some significant environmental concerns. As David

Suzuki has pointed out, “It’s a common misconception that environmental salvation can be had by simply putting dotted lines around tiny areas on a map where humans aren’t allowed to run amok.”²⁸ This sentiment is echoed by Parks Canada biologist Kevin Van Tighem, who takes the position that “if Canadians fail to sustain Canada, no amount of protection will sustain our parks.”²⁹ Marc Bekoff, renowned scholar of evolutionary biology and one of the world’s leading experts on the emotions of non-human animals, goes so far as to argue that “whenever humans seek to ‘manage’ nature, creating parks and artificial boundaries, it is always only for the benefit of humans.”³⁰ What these activists stress is that while parks such as Jasper may indeed have a certain level of ecological value, their inherent sense of segregation creates a difficult situation in terms of twenty-first-century environmental concerns. This sense of geographical segregation has resulted, in large part, from the ways in which these types of spaces have been imaged and imagined over the past several decades.

National parks are cultural artifacts, and within their borders National Park Nature is manufactured in both a physical and a psychological sense. As with any other cultural artifact, there are social and symbolic arguments to be made in terms of value and preservation in places such as Jasper National Park. Conceptual problems begin to arise, however, when it is assumed that these culturally created spaces can be sealed off and “saved” in a manner beneficial to broader planetary systems. But as environmental concerns increasingly become part of everyday parlance, the identification of these socially designated spaces as “the environment” (in general) becomes, paradoxically, further solidified.

From politicians and policy makers looking to benefit from a rising environmental awareness among their electorate to concerned citizens trying to reconnect with Nature and “save the planet,” Canadian national parks are increasingly being promoted as a means to restore Earth to a state of ecological harmony, while at the same time playing upon long-standing ideologies regarding the position of Nature in discourses of Canadian national identity. To this end, Stéphane Castonguay has argued that, even though most contemporary environmental issues have global implications, it is important to look at the role of nation building and the role of the nation-state in environmental ideologies since, for the most part, federal powers have “created and managed institutions for the exploitation, conservation, and preservation of natural resources.”³¹

Even as landscapes such as Jasper National Park are celebrated as unspoiled and untouched, the cumulative environmental effects of building highways, hotels, and recreational amenities in this region continue to add

up. These kinds of developments have been known to interrupt migration patterns and result in habitat fragmentation, and the long-term effects of such disruptions are still being discovered. We do know, however, that the movement patterns of large carnivores (e.g., grizzly bears and wolves) have shifted due to increased human presence and activity in certain regions of Jasper National Park.³² As these carnivores moved farther away from areas dominated by human activity and infrastructure, their prey (notably elk and deer) began to thrive in these areas. Without predators to keep these populations in check, a number of problems began to arise. Concerns over biological diversity, the spread of disease, and the impact that an ever-growing population of ungulates can have on vegetation became the focus of both scientific research and parks management. Further, instances of human-elk confrontations began to reach an unprecedented level, and concerns about property damage and human safety could no longer be ignored. During the 1990s, for example, there were several hundred reported instances of humans being chased or injured by elk in Jasper National Park.³³ The strategies for dealing with large numbers of elk populations have ranged from relocating animals deemed to be problematic to the establishment of an abattoir, a controversial development that allowed “population management” to be undertaken out of the view of tourists until the facility was shut down in 1970.³⁴

The management of garbage and of human waste generated by the throngs of visitors constitutes another serious concern for those overseeing the day-to-day operations of Jasper National Park. Such concerns led to the establishment of the “solar pooper” – a \$200,000 restroom facility built on the shore of Maligne Lake.³⁵ This “total biological system” runs on solar power, and the sewage and waste water from the facility are broken down using anaerobic bacteria, a process that results in “swimming-pool clean” water.³⁶ The treated water is then used to water the trees in the vicinity. Given that “sewage effluent” has presented prior ecological problems in this landscape, the solar pooper is a significant development in terms of tourist infrastructure in the park.³⁷

One of the central questions underlying these kinds of development and management decisions is the ability to maintain “ecological integrity.” This phrase is vague and has been interpreted in many different ways by different stakeholders, but the definition of this concept that guides the management strategies of Jasper National Park is that a landscape is considered to have ecological integrity “if all the plants and animals that should be in the park still thrive there, and people use the park and its

surroundings in ways that respect the needs of those plants and animals and allow fires, floods, weather and other natural processes to create natural habitat.”³⁸ As the examples discussed above indicate, achieving ecological integrity in space marketed as a tourist destination is an extremely complex undertaking.

Environmental activists often lament the fact that many Canadians are simply not aware of the many environmental threats facing their national parks. As Rick Searle writes, “Tragically, the ecological deterioration of the National Parks is going largely unnoticed by most Canadians. To many eyes, everything appears fine.” Searle argues that, in spite of appearances, “Canada’s National Parks are dying,” largely due to a widespread “domestication of the wild” in these spaces. This has created, Searle insists, “Phantom Parks” – “places that still look beautiful, but where the essential quality of wildness is largely absent.”³⁹ Searle is correct in his conclusion that wildness is missing from Canada’s national parks; however, the assumption that this quality can somehow be reobtained is a misleading one that has come about largely through the ways in which these spaces have been depicted. The paradoxical situation is that people generally are not aware of environmental problems in national parks because what they see corresponds with what they have been conditioned to think Nature should look like. Nature looks this way, however, because this is how dominant cultural forces have decided it should look. Further, as I discuss throughout this book, very little about these spaces can be said to be free from human intervention.

This is not to discount the passionate pleas made by committed environmentalists such as Searle; indeed, this landscape is being changed at a rapid rate in ways that many would agree are not socially or environmentally responsible. However, this dynamic cannot be structured in a humans versus nature framework because it would oversimplify the situation to a point at which sustainable solutions cannot be found. As Searle and others have argued, Canada’s national parks are indeed at an ecological crossroads. Solutions such as teaching people to “genuinely love the wild,” however, run the risk of replicating the situation that brought us to this point in the first place. Parks are as domesticated and as human manipulated as the rest of the Canadian landscape; they only *appear* to be wild to a public that has been conditioned to equate National Park Nature with unmediated nature. Searle argues that a change in “heart and mind” regarding Canada’s national parks is required; what I am arguing in this book is that this shift of perception needs to begin with a shift in representation.⁴⁰

NATURE AND NATION

The history of Canada's national parks is characterized by the association between scenery and state, a connection that has, in essence, legitimized the designation and development of park space under the guise of nation building. Cultural constructions of Canadian identity have hinged on wilderness ideals, including those perpetuated by Group of Seven imagery and Margaret Atwood novels. In recent years, this dynamic has been further complicated by the mainstreaming of environmental values; there is little doubt that the rhetoric of environmental stewardship has made inroads in the consciousness – if not always in the actions – of Canadians from coast to coast, as evidenced by social shifts such as the implementation of curbside recycling programs and the introduction of environmentally friendly products in grocery stores. In this context, the long-standing link between Nature and nation in Canada has necessarily been recontextualized.

As debates over the Kyoto Accord, “mad cow disease,” and clear-cut logging began to reach the nightly news in recent years, many Canadian public figures and policy makers attempted to appear sensitive to environmental issues. This sense of environmental stewardship has also been played out on a global stage, in no small part through the promotion of the Canadian national park system. It was no accident, for instance, that former prime minister Jean Chrétien's announcement that his government was committed to funding and developing ten new Canadian national parks took place during the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa.⁴¹ In his announcement, Chrétien stated that “Canada is blessed with exceptional natural treasures ... We owe it to Canadians, and to the world, to be wise stewards of these lands and waters.”⁴² Following this announcement, however, leaders of the environmental movement in Canada were cautiously optimistic about what this plan meant for the national park system as a whole. For instance, Jim Fulton of the David Suzuki Society applauded the funding announcement but drew attention to the needs of the currently existing parks: “I tip my hat to him, but an awful lot of it is ‘buns.’ An awful lot of us who know the national park system – and particularly the national park system that still needs to be done – are asking, ‘Where's the beef?’”⁴³ This point was made previously by other advocates for the national park system who pointed to a lack of funds to maintain existing sites managed by Parks Canada.⁴⁴

This idea of national parks as spaces of ecological purity and sources of national environmental pride relates to the nostalgic search for an

authentic, unspoiled land that has been a defining characteristic of tourism in this region. Photography has played an important part both in this search, which is often enacted in photographs that tourists take on their vacations, and in the perpetuation of the myth that the object of this search – an Edenic, unspoiled landscape – exists, as is suggested by photographs that appear in brochures and advertisements for these destinations. Within this framework, representational strategies have set Jasper National Park up as “a landscape of mourning,” to use Braun’s terminology. As Braun points out, “Paradoxically, it is in the continuous *failure* to locate the not yet destroyed that we sustain our sense of ourselves as modern, for it provides the very evidence of modernity’s destructive force (look, it’s already happened here!) and leads to additional rounds of nostalgic yearnings.”⁴⁵ The location of spaces such as Jasper in this cycle of “nostalgic yearning” has resulted in specific ways of seeing and engaging with nature.

Many environmental educators and activists have argued that the federal designation of landscapes as national parks is environmentally beneficial for several reasons, not the least of which is that industrial development is stopped or at least restricted.⁴⁶ Canadian national parks do give people an opportunity to interact with and learn about nature through direct experience, something that many see as essential for establishing a sense of environmental stewardship. Further, many scientists claim that parks act as “natural laboratories,” allowing the concentrated study of ecosystems, species interaction, geology, and anthropology.⁴⁷ These are significant points, and there is indeed environmental value in the establishment and maintenance of a park system. However, as Suzuki and Taylor note, this is “only the start of conservation.”⁴⁸

Canadian national parks face many of the same stresses as other regions of the Canadian landscape, stresses that are masked through the rhetoric of pristine wilderness so dominant in National Park Nature. Environmental concerns such as pollution, habitat fragmentation, and competition among native and introduced species of plants and animals affect the parks as much as they do areas outside park boundaries, and, as such, representations of these landscapes as uninfluenced by human activity, wild, and environmentally pristine are at best well-intentioned visual myths. For instance, aquatic ecosystems in Jasper National Park have been significantly altered by human activity during the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century, and research conducted by Parks Canada has determined that a significant proportion of fish species – four of eighteen – in this landscape are non-native.⁴⁹ The biodiversity of plant species has also been affected by human presence in the landscape. As a result of fire

suppression policies throughout the twentieth century, there has been a change in the plants that dominate this landscape. As the recent Jasper National Park management plan acknowledges, montane grasslands in this region have shrunk considerably, and there is a “decline in biodiversity, specifically in aspen, open conifer, riparian willow, and young pine stands.”⁵⁰

Moreover, as sociologist John Urry has argued, preserving a particular area for its “special environmental quality” often has the effect of drawing large crowds to the region, a process that creates a new set of environmental concerns. As Urry writes, “To designate somewhere as a national park is to generate a kind of magnet, sucking in potential visitors who otherwise might visit many different places.”⁵¹ The concentration of millions of visitors each year to Canada’s national parks virtually ensures that the pristine and untouched qualities for which they are so often celebrated will not be found.

In the following discussion, I explore how diverse groups such as government agencies, tourism operators, and environmental activists have drawn on and promoted this mythology of pristine National Park Nature through visual means over the course of Jasper’s history. The repetition of these images and ideologies has constructed the sense of authenticity that shapes tourist encounters and expectations in Jasper National Park. Visual technologies have set up specific ideas of what Nature means in a Canadian context; as Timothy Luke argues, the “green gaze” of landscape photography “becomes the normalizing framework for imagining what Nature really is.”⁵² This has often masked the results of human activity within the park and does not address fundamental questions regarding consumption and human activity outside national park borders. Moreover, this point of view does not easily accommodate introspective questions regarding the status quo values that have created the cultural demand for these spaces.

One of the key arguments informing my discussion is the assertion that visual imagery has played a key role in sustaining power relationships between *homo sapiens* and the species with which they share the planet. My research has investigated some of the cultural and corporate powers that have shaped this dynamic and how photography has been a recurring feature in this process. An important assumption underlying the following discussion is that so-called wilderness spaces are never free from human intervention. This discussion, then, builds upon arguments made by writers such as William Cronon and Simon Schama, who have argued that notions of Nature and wilderness are deeply dependent on human values.⁵³

This does not mean, however, that they exist *only* in human values, perceptions, and discourses. As Cronon writes, “Yosemite is a real place in nature – but its venerated status as a sacred landscape and national symbol is very much a human invention.”⁵⁴ In this example, and in all other examples of spaces designated as wilderness, the cultural and the natural merge and are necessarily intertwined. All human conceptions of and interactions with what has come to be known simply as Nature are a negotiation between these tensions and as such are continually being contested. It is this dynamic that is the focus of the following discussion. The central question of this book is: How has the visual history of Jasper National Park shaped both the imaginative and the actual landscapes of that region?

AN ECOCRITICAL APPROACH TO VISUAL CULTURE

There are several ways to approach the intersection of cultural production and environmental values. From my position as a historian of visual culture, I am interested in investigating the complex relations between imagery and ecology. How, for instance, does the way in which a specific landscape is pictured influence human interactions with and attitudes toward that place?

Much has been written about environmental, or “earthwork,” artists such as Robert Smithson, Walter de Maria, Michael Heizer, and Andy Goldsworthy.⁵⁵ However, an ecocritical approach to the study of visual culture is not limited to a certain genre, time period, or select group of artists. It has a much broader scope and questions the role of a diverse range of images and cultural practices in shaping how societies interact with and impact the physical environment. In other words, those concerned with taking an ecocritical approach to the study of visual culture need to focus on how imagery has complicated, constructed, and sustained relationships between humans and their environments in a variety of contexts, geographical locales, and historical periods.⁵⁶ In addition, the environmental impacts of systems of image production and distribution must be taken into account. The consumption of images is linked to the consumption of landscapes and natural resources in a number of complex ways, and these relationships and connections will inform the direction of ecocritical studies of visual culture in the coming years.

An ecocritical approach to visual culture is an interdisciplinary undertaking. My research is informed by a number of different scholarly traditions, but two academic fields shape the following discussion: visual culture and environmental studies. Put simply, visual culture studies are

concerned with imagery, and environmental studies focus on the physical environment of Earth and how human societies interact with it. These two elements come together in the following discussion to form a new object of inquiry. The chapters that follow investigate the production of environmental knowledge by considering how images shape understandings of and interactions with nature. Here, as W.J.T. Mitchell has argued, “the point is to let the terms interrogate each other, to negotiate the boundaries between them”⁵⁷ to understand how the production of environmental knowledge through visual means is dependent on both dominant understandings of the environment and dominant pictorial conventions.

PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The role of photography in shaping dominant ecological ideologies and environmental knowledge is a central focus in this book, for, as Joan Schwartz and James Ryan have noted, “from daguerreotypes to digital images, from picture postcards to magazine illustrations, photographic images have been an integral part of our engagement with the physical and human world.”⁵⁸ From the earliest days of photography, the camera was used to make landscape images, and this process remains deeply ingrained in representational practices.

Australian scholar Tim Bonyhady has charted something of photography’s always ambiguous relationship with the conservation movement. In his view, many well-known nineteenth-century landscape photographers actively altered elements of the physical environment in order to obtain a photographic image that corresponded to what scenic views were expected to look like.⁵⁹ Well-known photographers such as Carleton Watkins and Eadweard Muybridge routinely chopped down trees, rearranged tree stumps, boulders, and other such “scenic elements,” and “replanted” vegetation in foreground areas that were found to be lacking elements of visual interest.⁶⁰ In this respect, photographic images further perpetuated cultural notions of how Nature was supposed to appear. The ideals of National Park Nature that linger into the twenty-first century owe much to these processes.

In his recent publication *Natural Visions: The Power of Images in American Environmental Reform*, Finis Dunaway argues that the environmental movement gained momentum in the United States not only because of changes in legislation but also because of the role of visual

culture. As Dunaway argues, “The history of environmental reforms is more than the passage of a series of laws; it is also the story of images representing and defining the natural world, of the camera shaping politics and public attitudes.”⁶¹ Photography, in particular, has played an instrumental role in how North Americans think about and interact with the physical environment.

Since the nineteenth century, photographs of culturally specific landscapes, wilderness areas, and exotic-looking flora and fauna have been found in innumerable contexts in our day-to-day lives. Although the use of this type of imagery has a long history, it is only in recent years that a handful of scholars, among them Bonyhady and Dunaway, have begun to analyze the cultural history of Nature photography from an ecocritical perspective. An impressive body of critical scholarship has convincingly unravelled the myth of photography’s objectivity with regard to the complex ways in which the medium has been used to reinforce hierarchies of gender, class, and race; however, ecocritical analysis of photographic imagery remains a developing category of scholarly inquiry.⁶²

It is my contention that photographic imagery, in particular, is directly related to the conditions of the physical environment, precisely because of its ever-persistent ability to convince people that it records the truth. As Bonyhady has demonstrated, however, these images often obscure the conditions of their production. Photographic images play a significant role in the perpetuation of dominant values when it comes to ideas about Nature and the environment. This aspect of photography, coupled with the “naturalization” of cultural constructions such as National Park Nature, have resulted in the double layer of masking that is my focus here.

PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT

The 1960s and 1970s saw the emergence of environmentalism as a widespread social movement. During these decades, environmental issues were brought forcefully to public attention through the publication of influential books, such as Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* and Paul Ehrlich’s *The Population Bomb*, as well as through events such as the “energy crisis” of 1973 and the first Earth Day, held on 22 April 1970. The relationship between photography and the environmental movement has revolved around use of the camera as a form of eyewitness. From photographs exposing perceived environmental atrocities and injustices to use of the camera in attempts to illustrate the intrinsic value of Nature and, thus, its need for

protection and preservation, photography has been a dominant weapon in the arsenal of environmental activists for the past several decades. Campaigns such as the now famous Preserve and Protect calendar, which featured women from British Columbia's Salt Spring Island posing nude in the landscape they sought to protect from logging, have become increasingly sophisticated in their use of photography as a means to gain support for environmental causes.⁶³

Perhaps one of the most famous photographs associated with the environmental movement is the so-called whole Earth image – a photograph taken of Earth from space in 1972 during the Apollo 17 mission. As Denis Cosgrove notes, this photograph – officially titled AS17-148-22727 by NASA – is “a favored icon for environmental and human-rights campaigners and those challenging Western humanism’s long-held assumption of superiority in a hierarchy of life.”⁶⁴ Although this image continues to be celebrated by environmental groups as demonstrating both the fragility of nature and the interconnectedness of all life systems on Earth, some cultural analysts have argued that this photograph has also perpetuated unsustainable environmental messages. Yaakov Jerome Garb argues, for instance, that it has encouraged a sense of psychological distance in landscape imagery that has perpetuated the notion that humans are separate from Nature instead of an integral part of the global ecosystem.⁶⁵

During the 1970s, activist groups began to recognize how public opinion could be shaped through exposure to photographic and filmic imagery.⁶⁶ Photography quickly became an integral part of “visual lobbying” by environmental groups.⁶⁷ Greenpeace, for instance, used the camera to create “mindbombs” – shocking film and still footage of environmental exploitation – in the hopes of angering people into action and bolstering support for their various environmental campaigns.⁶⁸

This type of approach has also been adopted by individual photographers who have attempted to use their photography as a means of making visible the ways in which human activity alters the global landscape. W. Eugene Smith’s 1972 photographs exposing the environmental damage and human suffering resulting from widespread industrial-related mercury poisoning in Minamata, Japan, are a well-known example of this practice. More recently, photographers such as David T. Hanson, Peter Goin, and Edward Burtynsky have attempted to reframe understandings of the relationships between human society and the physical world through their photographic practices. These photographers use their cameras in ways that ask viewers to consider the impacts that human activities have had

on the physical environment and, in doing so, disrupt a particular way of seeing that has become deeply entrenched in dominant ideologies of Nature.

A more familiar form of Nature photography follows in the tradition of Ansel Adams's work with the Sierra Club in the United States and uses photography to present views of Nature as Edenic and unspoiled. As Deborah Bright notes, the work of Edward Weston, Eliot Porter, and Adams in the early decades of the twentieth century typified a landscape aesthetic "premised on an identification between a mythical Eden and the American landscape."⁶⁹ These photographers – and, by extension, the conservation movements of which they were a part – were confident that such photographs would be effective in persuading anyone who saw them "of the inherent worthiness of wilderness preservation."⁷⁰ Not surprisingly, North American national parks were photographed with this goal in mind. In both 1946 and 1948, for instance, Adams photographed the American national parks in the hope that the resulting images would "restore a lost experience of nature that had become corrupted by the postwar burgeoning of family tourism."⁷¹ Although the majority of his photographs focus on American monuments and landscapes, examples of photographs taken in Canada exist; in 1928, several years prior to embarking on his American national parks project, Adams photographed the mountains of Jasper National Park.

At times, as in the case of Adams, the work of these photographers is elevated to the status of fine art and is found hanging on the walls of art galleries or reproduced within the pages of art history textbooks. However, this type of image is reproduced and circulated in a wide variety of forums, thus shaping and framing the ways in which dominant understandings of nature are manufactured in a number of different contexts. Photographs by Adams, in particular, currently occupy a place within the realms of both fine art and popular culture, having been frequently reproduced on greeting cards, decorative posters, and wall calendars.

As Cosgrove notes, "The making, circulation, and consumption of pictorial images cannot be divorced from an embodied engagement with the world."⁷² In other words, images of nature are always already bound up in political, social, cultural, and environmental processes. The job of the ecocritically minded historian of visual culture is to continue to unravel the ways in which these dynamics shape and inform one another. In the case of photography, this becomes a particularly urgent task because of the ways in which camera-based images continue to be pressed into service as pictorial evidence of "what really happened" or as a way to demonstrate

what something “really looked like” even though the very act of using imagery in this way necessarily selects certain points of view over others.⁷³

TOURIST PHOTOGRAPHY IN JASPER NATIONAL PARK

As is the case with the environmental movement, photographic images used in tourism frame nature and non-human animals in culturally specific ways. Photographic representations of Jasper National Park can be understood as indicators of deeply entrenched, dominant cultural values regarding Nature and the commodification of so-called wilderness spaces. Specifically, tourist photography in the Canadian Rocky Mountains has helped create and sustain the belief that destinations such as Banff and Jasper National Parks are pristine wilderness areas where one can enjoy a fun-filled vacation complete with luxury accommodations and a wide array of recreational pursuits set against a backdrop of spectacular scenery and adorable animals. This set of ideals informs the production of a manufactured wilderness experience that is rarely questioned.

In the years since Jasper Forest Park was first established, there have been many social, political, cultural, and environmental changes in North America, but for the most part the representations of this landscape have changed very little. Amid far-reaching phenomena such as the world wars, the Great Depression, and the rise of 1960s counter-culture, the landscape of Jasper National Park continued to be depicted as a safe and tranquil place, one that represented the antithesis of social and political change and in which Nature existed as a timeless entity. Within the park itself, changes in management, boundaries, and government policies have done little to unsettle the ideals of National Park Nature that continue to define this landscape for so many. Even as roads, ski lifts, and hotels were constructed, these dominant ideals remained firmly entrenched. Research conducted by botanists, biologists, and geologists continues to add to our knowledge of nature and non-human animals, and this research, in turn, often shapes changes in national park legislation. Yet in the midst of all these changes, there is a sense of continuity in how this landscape is imagined. For instance, in 1981 the National Historic Parks Wildlife and Domestic Animals Regulations became part of the legislation governing Canadian national parks. With the introduction of these regulations, it became illegal to “touch or feed wildlife in a Park or entice wildlife to approach by holding out food-stuffs or bait of any kind.”⁷⁴ Thus, a once popular activity became outlawed, and the feeding of wildlife in Jasper

National Park today is both illegal and a social taboo. However, while the specific behaviour has been modified, the cultural ideals that drove that behaviour remain intact. In other words, the practice of feeding wildlife in the park was not driven from a sense that the animals were particularly hungry. Rather, this behaviour stemmed from the desire to experience a direct connection with the megafauna that have become so symbolic of National Park Nature. This desire did not vanish with the introduction of the 1981 National Historic Parks Wildlife and Domestic Animals Regulations. As anyone who has visited the Rocky Mountain national parks in recent years knows, a bear or elk along the side of the road virtually ensures a line-up of parked cars full of tourists hoping to get a closer look, a snapshot, or video footage of the encounter. Paul Kopas's recent study of national parks policies in Canada underscores the shifts that have taken place with respect to management and legislation of these spaces, for "the meanings of parks are not static but varied and complex."⁷⁵ Yet the patterns of representation that have come to visually define landscapes such as Jasper National Park have remained relatively constant throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century, and these sets of images, in turn, continue to inform expectations of and experiences for visitors to this region.

Tourist photography has been a key feature in the formation of what we now know as Jasper National Park and draws on accepted images and dominant ideas of Nature in an attempt to frame the tourist experience in a way that is both culturally specific and financially lucrative for those with a stake in the tourism industry of the region. Photographically illustrated publications have become one of the most common means of "manufacturing nature." Potential visitors have been enticed by images of mountains, lakes, rivers, and forests and are encouraged to visit "Canada's Playground," "See Alberta First," and take "A Real Vacation" in the heart of the Canadian Rockies (see Figure 1).⁷⁶ In 1944, for instance, the *Traveler's Digest* used photography to illustrate "Pleasurable Places in the Wide Open Spaces," while other publications promised "A Vacationtime Superb" in which travellers could see firsthand the geographical features and wildlife pictured in the brochure (see Figures 2 and 3).⁷⁷ The covers of these three brochures prominently feature a photograph of a car winding its way through the mountain landscape and, as such, point to just how crucial cultural inventions and technologies are to dominant understandings of Nature. In each example, however, there are only one or two cars on the road, a not-so-subtle suggestion that this is still a landscape predominantly unchanged by these very inventions and technologies.

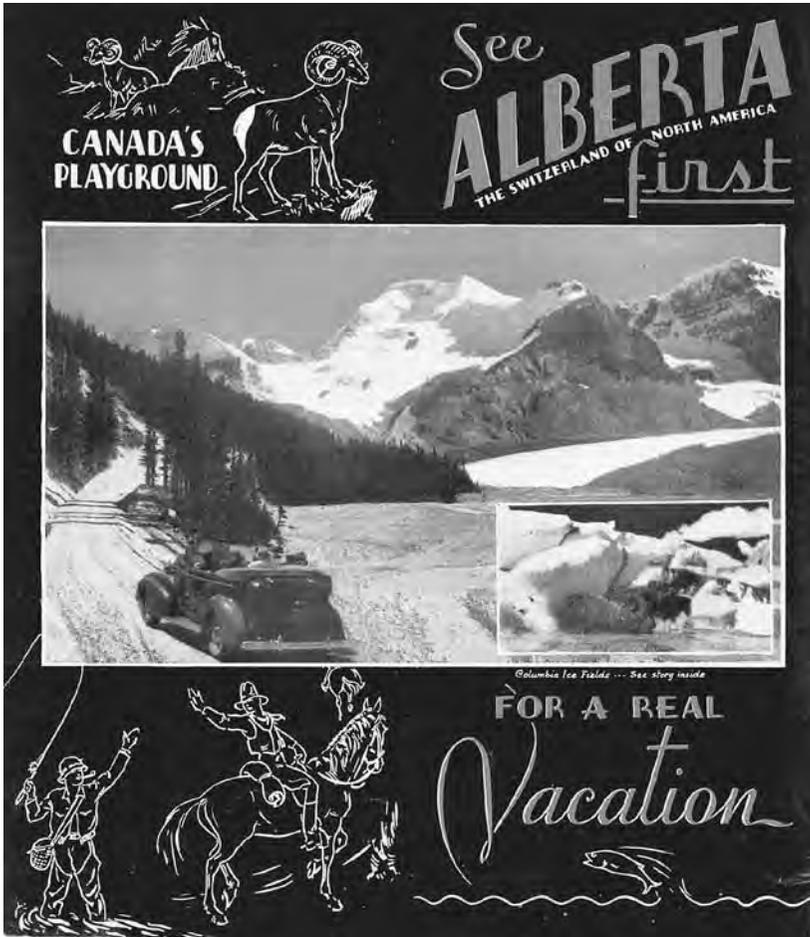


FIGURE 1 Cover of a 1938 tourist brochure enticing visitors to vacation in Alberta. *Alberta Provincial Tourist and Publicity Bureau, See Alberta First, 1938. Jasper-Yellowhead Museum and Archives, Accn#994.45.1.1, Doris Kensit Fonds.*

As Jasper's tourist infrastructure became increasingly developed, these publications often juxtaposed images of wilderness scenes with photographs of modern conveniences such as luxury accommodations and facilities for automobiles available in the park. Through the use of these types of framing devices, this particular section of the Canadian Rocky Mountains was transformed into a cultural landscape, even though that transformation was entirely dependent on the process of transformation itself being



FIGURE 2 Cover of a 1944 tourist brochure. *The Traveller's Digest, Pleasurable Places in the Wide Open Spaces, 1944.* *Jasper-Yellowhead Museum and Archives, Accn#84.161.72, Jasper-Yellowhead Museum and Archives Book.*



FIGURE 3 Cover of an early tourist brochure for Jasper National Park. Jasper in June: A Vacationtime Superb in the Canadian Rockies, n.d. *Jasper-Yellowhead Museum and Archives*, Accn#2005.44.13a, *Jasper National Park Travel Brochure and Memorabilia Collection*.

masked. To put it another way, for the wilderness industry of Jasper National Park to succeed, it required the illusion that these were not cultural landscapes but natural spaces unspoiled by human intervention. Tourist photography of Jasper National Park has continually offered up scenes of seemingly pristine mountain landscapes that at once encouraged travel to Canada's mountain parks and served to spark campaigns focused on the preservation of these landscapes from further human encroachment. Developments such as the Jasper Park Lodge and the Marmot Basin ski resort, and the establishment of fish hatcheries in the park, were unproblematically factored into this equation because these amenities and facilities were understood as complements to the wilderness experience and therefore essential parts of National Park Nature. Photography has been an integral part of this process and, as such, has played a key role in this transformation of "land into landscape."⁷⁸ As Steven Hoelscher has noted, in the context of tourist spaces, "nature's scenic transformation was succinctly accomplished by photography – a superb vehicle of cultural mythology."⁷⁹

From the early days of Jasper National Park, photographic images have been used in advertisements, postcards, and other assorted promotional materials. In this way, commercially produced images of wilderness destinations such as Jasper can be considered part of what historian Tina Loo has termed "commodity environmentalism" or "knowledge about the natural world circulated by mass-marketed products."⁸⁰ Tourists, too, have been encouraged to record their experiences in the park photographically. As a 1948 publication entitled *Photographing the Canadian Rockies* points out, "Most tourists are photographers, and vice versa, but all who are confronted with the magnificence and splendour of the Canadian Rockies will wish to take back with them vivid memories of the scenic grandeur they have beheld."⁸¹ As tourist photographs are placed in albums, framed, and shared with friends, the process of commodification continues.

Photography has become so deeply entrenched in the tourist experience that it has been described as "one of the most usual things to do while on vacation."⁸² John Urry argues that photography "gives shape to the very processes of travel so that one's journey consists of being taken from one 'good view' to capture on film to another good view. It has also helped to construct a twentieth-century sense of what is appropriately aesthetic and what is not worth 'sightseeing'; excluding as much as it includes."⁸³ The "good views" that Urry refers to are shaped, in large part, by scenes presented to visitors and potential visitors in publications and souvenir items produced by the tourism industry. Tourism in Jasper National Park, like

many similar destinations in North America, is dependent on the production and sale of specific types of imagery, a significant component of what may be conceived of as a “wilderness industry.” Although the idea of such an industry runs counter to values traditionally associated with these types of spaces, I characterize Jasper National Park in this way because, like other industries, a specific product – in this case the wilderness experience – is assembled, marketed, and sold. As is the case in other industries, the use of visual material plays an important role in this process.

The success of the wilderness industry depends on the level of perceived authenticity that a tourist experiences when visiting locales such as Jasper. As Christopher Steiner has argued, in the context of tourism this sense of authenticity is created through repetition: “Tourists are not looking for the new but for the obvious and the familiar.”⁸⁴ Certain types of images have come to be associated with the socially defined spaces of national parks in North America and have been repeated in various media over the past several decades. For instance, in her discussion on the representation of Canada in *National Geographic* magazine, Sylvie Beaudreau points out that the Rocky Mountains, “it seems, [are] Canada at its eternal best, and the images found in the 1960s were repeated almost exactly in the 1990s[,] suggesting their enduring appeal to a worldwide audience.”⁸⁵ This “iconographic redundancy” plays a key role in defining what constitutes an authentic experience for the thousands of people who visit the region each year.⁸⁶

Repetition of specific iconography and notions of authenticity in tourist discourse have ensured that Jasper National Park continues to be conceptualized as a pristine wilderness playground. Signifiers of regional specificity become subsumed in a national mythology through representational strategies that have changed very little over the past century. The continued appropriation of the regional landscape in these contexts has served to construct and sustain the notion that this is a land devoid of environmental tensions. Explorations of negotiations between various groups of human actors, as well as inter-species relationships, in a consideration of this landscape on a local level, however, reveal a much different story. That these tensions are minimized and most often completely disregarded in dominant representations of Jasper speaks volumes about the highly constructed and select view of the region that characterizes National Park Nature.

Representations of an untouched wilderness, for example, disregard human presence in this region prior to 1907, the year Jasper Forest Park was established. Research into how Aboriginal cultures used this land is

ongoing, but the evidence collected so far suggests that the area we now know as Jasper National Park was not traditionally a location in which large permanent settlements were established, especially when compared with the archaeological evidence found in other nearby regions.⁸⁷ However, in 1909 those Aboriginal families who did settle on the lands that would eventually be part of the park found themselves suddenly characterized as squatters and were subsequently evicted from their homes.⁸⁸ These evictions paved the way for a mythology of untouched wilderness that could be conveniently marketed and sold. Although themes of Aboriginality are occasionally evoked in the promotion and marketing of Jasper National Park (see, for instance, Figures 8 and 12), this has not been done to the same extent as in neighbouring Banff National Park, where events such as Indian Days remain an important part of the tourist experience. This erasure of Aboriginal presence and history from the dominant narrative of Jasper National Park was acknowledged by Parks Canada in its 2008 *Jasper National Park of Canada: State of the Park Report*. The document acknowledged that “Aboriginal perspectives are not well represented in the current management plan and decision-making processes; opportunities to learn about and experience Aboriginal culture are not well represented in the suite of park visitor experiences.”⁸⁹ In response to this situation, the Council of Elders of the Descendants of Jasper (formed in 2004) and an Aboriginal Forum (formed in 2006) were established to look at ways to ensure more Aboriginal involvement in the park and better recognition of the Métis history in this region.⁹⁰ In the 2010 management plan for Jasper National Park, Parks Canada stated that “it is committed to building strong and mutually beneficial working relationships with Aboriginal people” and that “the perspectives, cultural ties, and stories of Aboriginal people are an important part of the park’s historic fabric and its future.”⁹¹

The Rocky Mountains have become symbols of Canadian culture, history, and wilderness ideals, and there exists a rich and complex photographic history from which to draw when undertaking an analysis such as this. Collectively, this photographic history has fostered the notion that Nature – in particular Nature found within the borders of national parks – is primarily scenic. This view sees destinations such as Jasper National Park as unspoiled, virgin, and pristine, even in light of recent studies indicating that the ecological integrity of Canada’s national parks is “under threat.”⁹² In fact, concerns about the ecological integrity of the Rocky Mountain national parks have reached the point where UNESCO, the UN branch monitoring World Heritage Sites, has expressed concern about

ongoing development near parks such as Jasper.⁹³ One of the central goals of this project, then, is to explore the gulf that exists between how this landscape has been pictured and some of the environmental factors that tend to be excluded from the frame.

MANUFACTURING NATIONAL PARK NATURE

Jasper National Park provides an ideal vantage point from which to examine the issues raised here, though the decision to focus a discussion of the ecological implications of visual imagery on such a site may seem illogical initially. After all, in comparison to urban centres, the environmental problems facing national parks appear minimal. However, it is precisely there that an investigation into the ways in which imagery and ecology are intertwined must begin. Wilderness areas such as Jasper National Park are most often defined by what they are perceived not to be, namely, urban, crowded, polluted, and industrial. The “imaginative geographies” of these seemingly separate realms, however, are necessarily intertwined and, as such, shape and inform one another.⁹⁴ It is no accident that Jasper National Park was established precisely at the moment Canada was undergoing a transition toward a predominantly urban nation.⁹⁵ As Richard Tresidder argues, “sacred landscapes” such as Jasper National Park provide an “apparatus to escape from the very society that has created it.”⁹⁶ It is necessary, therefore, to unravel the deeply entrenched cultural and economic processes that have created a cultural desire for places such as Jasper National Park in order to arrive at a more complete understanding of how human society acts on and interacts with nature. This process of manufacturing a wilderness experience, as this book demonstrates, is intimately linked with the photographic history of the region.

As will become immediately evident, this book does not attempt to present a linear narrative of the photographic history of Jasper National Park. Rather, it is a thematic exploration of how National Park Nature is created and sustained through camera-based imagery of this landscape. Throughout the following discussion, I explore connections between images and ideologies and consider some of the ways in which the physical and photographic environments have shaped and informed one another throughout the history of Jasper National Park. One of the central arguments of this book is that visual imagery plays a significant role in how we think about and interact with our physical environments; a second yet

equally important concern addresses some of the environmental consequences of tourist photographic practices. A number of questions have guided my research. In what ways do photographs serve to promote certain values and conceptions of Nature at the expense of others? How does this affect tourism, and in turn how does the promotion of tourism through photographic means affect the ecological health of destinations such as Jasper National Park? How does photography shape visitor perceptions of and interactions with such wilderness destinations? In what ways do these images contribute to cultural constructions of Nature in a broader context, and what are the ecological implications of these practices? How are shifts in dominant forms of environmental knowledge registered in tourist photography of Jasper National Park?

The following chapters draw on established methodological frameworks and theoretical positions used in other disciplines in an attempt to stimulate dialogue about how imagery and ecology are necessarily interconnected. Visual material under consideration in this analysis ranges from photographically illustrated tourist brochures and postcards to government documents and promotional films produced by institutions such as Parks Canada and the Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau. Photographs accompanying newspaper and magazine articles, as well as corporate links between the photographic industry and business entities operating within park borders, are also considered in this project. This link between imagery, ecology, and industry is fundamental to my study, and the following discussion explores these connections as they have been mediated through visual representations of National Park Nature in the context of Jasper National Park.

The construction of National Park Nature in Jasper has been achieved through the use of photographic imagery to promote this space as a vacation destination where one can escape to the wilderness and enjoy an abundance of leisure activities set against a scenic backdrop of forests, mountains, lakes, streams, and of course the non-human animals who live there. These three often competing and overlapping themes – wilderness, recreation, and wildlife – form the central structure of National Park Nature, and the following discussion considers each in a separate chapter. In these chapters, I discuss how these ideals have been played out through familiar forms such as picture postcards, illustrated brochures, and tourist guidebooks – standard fare for any vacation in the Canadian Rockies. Rather than simply providing information about what to do, where to stay, and what to eat, these popular tourist items also shape how visitors

think about and experience nature. National Park Nature is constructed, in part, on the glossy pages of these souvenir items; nature is mediated according to hegemonic values.

In Chapter 2, I focus on images that have promoted the idea of wilderness in Jasper National Park. Wilderness, in this context, refers to a landscape that is aesthetically pleasing and has minimal (if any) overt visual reference to human-designed technologies or structures. Images from Jasper National Park that fit into this category tend to focus on geological features (mountains, bodies of water, towers of ice) and/or scenic vistas. In many of these images, human figures are absent. When humans are present in these wilderness scenes, they are either solitary or in very small groups symbolic of an intimate family unit. The primary exception to these representational patterns relates to the depiction of Aboriginal cultures. Although the visual representation of Aboriginal cultures in tourist imagery of Jasper National Park is nowhere near as dominant as in neighbouring Banff National Park, examples do exist. In these examples, Aboriginal cultures tend to be represented in a generalized and simplified manner, often a single figure or cultural object symbolizing European and Euro-Canadian mythologies about the lives and histories of First Nations peoples (see, e.g., Figures 8 and 12).

In Chapter 3, I focus on images of recreation and leisure in Jasper National Park. The visual culture of this region contains many examples of images showing visitors enjoying activities such as golfing, skiing, canoeing, and fishing. These images are characterized by an overarching sense of harmony as the recreational activities depicted do not disrupt the aesthetic pleasures of the wilderness landscape. Whether it is a round of golf set against the backdrop of snow-peaked mountains, canoes gliding effortlessly along the glassy waters of Lac Beauvert, or the professional landscaping around the swimming pool at Jasper Park Lodge, these images collectively imply that recreational pursuits need not disrupt enjoyment of the wilderness and, in fact, are an important part of experiencing Nature in the park.

Chapter 4 explores some of the dominant ways in which non-human animals have been represented in the context of Jasper National Park. Not surprisingly, the majority of these images have been produced for and consumed by tourists in the park. Representations of bears – perhaps the classic example of megafauna in the Canadian Rockies – dominate the visual culture of this region. In many of these examples, the viewer is confronted with a deliberate and at times jarring juxtaposition of non-human animals with human-built technologies. This chapter explores this

representational pattern and discusses how the context in which these images are viewed can shift them from simple souvenir items to visual agents of activism and education. For example, a snapshot depicting a tourist eagerly extending his or her hand to feed non-human animals encountered in the park can easily shift from being a personal visual reminder of a trip to the Rockies to being part of a widespread campaign to stop the illegal practice of feeding wildlife in Canadian national parks (see, e.g., Figure 35). Such examples underscore the fluidity of visual culture and demonstrate the potential of images to disrupt ideals of National Park Nature.

To further underscore the idea of National Park Nature as a way of seeing, Chapter 5 compares this perspective with both “fake nature” and the “museological gaze.” The museum has long been regarded as a temple of knowledge, and natural history museums in particular have been a means since the nineteenth century for people to learn about nature. These are spaces revered for their intellectual rigour and educational value. The phenomenon of fake nature theme parks, in contrast, is often derided as cheap entertainment that further separates humans from their natural surroundings. By situating national parks in a discussion bracketed by these two extreme ways of viewing Nature, I aim to unsettle assumptions about all three.

As I was researching this topic, the debate over a proposed mine near Jasper National Park loomed large. The proposal of a natural resource extraction site so near a supposedly protected area has raised concerns over the environmental impact of this industrial endeavour. Concern over what constitutes proper use of the region has often positioned humans against nature in a most simplistic yet deeply troubling way. Indeed, the ideals of National Park Nature are threatened by these types of industrial development, but what has been excluded from these discussions thus far are considerations of the cultural systems and values that shaped this understanding of the landscape in the first place. The social values and human activities that have resulted in the construction of National Park Nature in this location are not addressed; this particular way of relating to this landscape is taken as a given. The adversarial frames used to describe the Cheviot mine debate replicate assumptions that Nature and culture are necessarily separate spheres.⁹⁷ As Neil Evernden has argued, when environmental issues are presented in this way, it is unlikely that appropriate solutions can be reached.⁹⁸ Part of the process of negotiation over land use will need to consider questions such as: Where did this specific way of understanding this region come from, and why has it remained so dominant?

Who benefits from maintaining National Park Nature as *the* dominant mode of understanding this landscape?

My motivation for undertaking this study was not to present a discussion of the pros and cons of development in or near Jasper National Park. Rather, I am interested in taking a step back and trying to piece together how this dominant cultural understanding of Jasper has been created, specifically through the medium of photography. How has the photographic history of this region served to naturalize complex power dynamics? Like many Canadians, I enjoy and value Jasper National Park. Contrary to popular assumptions, critical analysis of such landscapes should not be equated with systemic condemnation of their simple existence. In discussing Jasper in these terms, I am not seeking to find fault or lay blame. Instead, I am hoping to contribute to developing dialogues surrounding the cultural values that have created this space, the ways in which visual images have participated in this process, and how both, in turn, are situated in relation to twenty-first-century notions of environmental protection. To have meaningful dialogues regarding the future of the park and indeed of ecosystems across Canada, it is crucial to begin to understand how these spaces have been shaped and informed through visual culture.

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