

Author: Trevor Goward
Lichenologist
Clearwater, British Columbia

Abstract

A call for the protection of the upper reaches of the Trophy Mountains as an extension of Wells Gray Provincial Park is made. To this end a proposal is briefly outlined and several arguments advanced.

Statement

By virtue of its size, geography and natural features, Wells Gray Provincial Park promises to assume a keynote importance in the British Columbia Parks system. However, certain factors exist which may combine to jeopardize the park's future status. These can be discussed under two headings: inaccessibility and logging.

Inaccessibility

British Columbia's wilderness parks, notwithstanding their tremendous appeal to visitors from other parts of the world, have not yet won full acceptance from British Columbians. A phrase often heard is that too much of British Columbia's land resource is "locked up" in parks. In the context of Wells Gray Park, at least, this objection may be partly justified: to date, almost no concessions to access have been made even in those portions of the park which have been set aside expressly for this purpose. Few trails, for instance, lead to alpine areas. Even visual access is restricted, so that to most people Wells Gray remains more an abstraction than a park.

Logging

There is a growing concern that the forests of southern British Columbia are being cut over at a more rapid rate than they are being regenerated. Although the long-term impact of this crisis upon wilderness parks as a whole remains uncertain, a number of adverse effects are already being felt. One of Wells Gray's prime resources - its wilderness setting - is for example being eroded by the growing visual impact of logging activities. A few key areas still remain unlogged; however, as another consequence of the forest industry's growing appetite, the chances of securing these for the preservation of wilderness values must decrease over time. The logging of forests adjacent to Wells Gray is also threatening the park's caribou herds, which rely upon these forests during part of each year. The Ministry of Environment has already made known its intention to place a high priority on the maintenance of Wells Gray's caribou, and it is hoped that the Ministry of Lands, Parks and Housing may soon adopt a similar position.

The present report recommends a southward extension of Wells Gray Park to include approximately 6500 hectares of the Trophy Mountains. It is argued that this, the Trophy Mountain extension, would benefit the people of British Columbia by providing them with a potential for greater involvement in the values which Wells Gray protects. At the same time it would help to safeguard the high elevation forests upon which its caribou depend, as well as to maintain its wilderness character. Other benefits are also outlined.

Introduction

At 540,000 hectares (1,334,340 acres), Wells Gray is the third largest park in the British Columbia Parks system. Unlike the province's other large wilderness parks, it is situated within a day's drive of several urban centres, including Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Prince George and Kamloops. Recently Wells Gray has begun to win international recognition both for its wilderness values and for its volcanic and other landscape features. In the future, therefore, the park promises to play an increasingly important role in British Columbia's growing tourist industry.

When Wells Gray was established in November 1939, its western, northern and eastern boundaries were drawn to circumscribe the watersheds of the Clearwater and Murtle Rivers - a fact that should theoretically ensure the maintenance of its wilderness values indefinitely. The southern and south-eastern boundaries, by contrast, are more arbitrary in their establishment, when Mr. E.C. Manning, then Chief Forester, stressed that these boundaries were only tentative and that, as Lyone and Edwards (1953) report, "adjacent areas should be examined for possible inclusion in the park".

In 1952, R. Ritcey recommended a southward extension of Wells Gray to encompass the Battle Mountain area (Ritcey, 1952). The following year, Lyons and Edwards (1953) submitted a special report in which they argued that the inclusion of Battle Mountain in the park would benefit its grizzly and caribou populations. On June 10, 1955, Wells Gray was accordingly enlarged by some 55,000 hectares (135,905 acres).

During the 1950's and 1960's, a public interest in Wells Gray centred largely around its wildlife populations. Fishing, trapping and hunting accounted for a disproportionately large percentage of total park use in those years. More recently, a trend toward less consumptive forms of outdoor recreation, particularly in parks, has resulted in a greater emphasis on other park features, including physiography, geology and vegetation. Given this modern emphasis, and given also an increasing encroachment by British Columbia's forest industry, we can no longer assume that Wells Gray's boundaries necessarily reflect the needs of either the park user or, in the long-term, the park itself.

Proposal

Two separate extensions, both of modest proportions, seem indicated: a Trophy Mountain extension to the south; and a Clearwater River extension to the south and southwest. The present paper deals exclusively with the former proposal, namely to adjust the boundaries of Wells Gray Park southwards to include those parts of the Trophy Mountains which lie above 1800 m. In practice, such an extension would enlarge the park by some 6500 hectares (16,061 acres) (see Goward, 1981b: Figure III).

The nine peaks of the Trophy Mountains (2577 m) rise within the Shuswap Highlands (Holland, 1964), an elevated plateau of gentle topography intersected by deep, steep-sided river valleys. A popular account of the Trophies will be found in Neave's Exploring Wells Gray Park (1981), while details of their geology, climate, vegetation, flora, fauna and special features appear in Goward (1981b).

Justifications

The Trophy Mountains extension can be justified in terms of its various benefits to Wells Gray Park, to British Columbia Parks, and to the residents of British Columbia. These benefits are expressed in the following eleven points:

1) The Trophies accentuate Wells Gray's wilderness setting. The Trophy Mountains dominate the southern skyline from most developed areas in Wells Gray. At present, those flanks which are visible from the park are unlogged. If Wells Gray's wilderness atmosphere is to be maintained, they must remain so at all costs.

2) The Trophies, if included in Wells Gray, would give the park greater visual accessibility. From the crest of the Trophies, virtually all of lower Wells Gray is brought into focus in a vista which stretches to the northern skyline. Such a prospectus is at present unavailable within the park.

3) The Trophies provide ready access to the subalpine and alpine. Currently the subalpine meadows of the Trophy Mountains can be reached in under an hour from the nearest logging road; a comparable trip to the Fight Lake Meadows of Wells Gray requires approximately five hours. Already the Trophy meadows are more popular than all the subalpine areas of Wells Gray taken together. If the Trophies were incorporated into Wells Gray, the park would benefit from a resulting greater public awareness of the wilderness values it preserves.

4) The Trophies contain various landscape features which in Wells Gray are either rare, out-of-reach, or lacking altogether. Particularly striking, for example, is the Plateau of Lakes (Neave, 1981) - an assemblage of more than a dozen alpine lakes and tarns. The only

glacier in the southern Wells Gray area also occurs here and, not surprisingly, the Trophies provide an unusually complete record of local glacial history.

5) The Trophies to some extent complement Wells Gray's major interpretive theme: the hotspot story. Simply states, volcanic activity in this part of British Columbia is thought to be associated with an underlying region of thermal upwelling which, as a phenomenon, occurs nowhere else in Canada. Glacial activity has modified many of Wells Gray's volcanoes; however, only on the west flanks of the Trophies does one find traces of a cinder cone which has been essentially erased by erosional processes.

6) The Trophies are climatically more conducive to summer use than alpine areas within Wells Gray. As one progresses northward and northeastward in the park, precipitation increases dramatically (Goward, 1981a). To the summer recreationist, the Trophies therefore offer both a longer snow-free period and a greater incidence of sunshine than areas further north. Thus, assuming that ready access may eventually be provided to the peaks of the Cariboo Mountains, it must be emphasized that the drier Trophy Mountains would still be available to hikers on substantially more days every summer.

7) The Trophy meadows are much less conducive to biting insects than are comparable subalpine areas within Wells Gray. Owing to the wetness, for example, of the Fight Lake meadows of Battle Mountain, intolerable swarms of mosquitoes hatch here during July and early August. At this season, therefore, the only accessible meadows to which most visitors to Wells Gray can in good conscience be directed are the meadows of the Trophy Mountains.

8) The Trophy meadows give rise to an early floral display which effectively complements that of the later blooming meadows of Wells Gray. Goward (1981b) has estimated that less than 80 percent of the flora of the Trophy meadows is duplicated in adjacent park meadows. An especially striking point of difference is the glacier lily, *Erythronium grandiflorum* which, essentially lacking in the park, covers the Trophy meadows during early July with a spectacular carpet of clear yellow blossoms. Given that the subalpine meadows of Wells Gray do not reach their peak of floral display until nearly a month later, the annexation of the Trophies would considerably increase public interest in the park focusing attention on the subalpine over a longer period.

9) The Trophies, if included in Wells Gray, would help to ensure the survival of one of its hallmark wildlife species, the mountain caribou. It is well known that habitat destruction, due mainly to logging, is currently endangering the caribou populations of southern British Columbia. As about 70 percent of the total herds in the Thompson-Nicola region centre on the Wells Gray area (Swanell, 1980), the park is considered to be critical to the survival of these animals here. Unfortunately, only 10-15 percent of Wells Gray constitutes good caribou habitat

(Ritcey, 1981). Part of the Wells Gray herd therefore annually migrates out of the park, particularly southward to the vicinity of the Trophies. According to the best information available, "protection of park habitat alone will not ensure maintenance of the existing caribou numbers in the park" (op. cit.). The Ministry of Environment has recently placed special emphasis on the protection of wintering areas adjacent to the park against forestry interests. In view of the fact that the Ministry of Forests is at present allowing high elevation logging here, it is hoped that the Ministry of Lands, Parks and Housing will soon show a similar concern for the protection of Wells Gray's caribou.

10) The annexation of the Trophies to Wells Gray would considerably increase the representation of the highland landform within the British Columbia Parks system. It is pertinent to point out that where comparable meadow areas already appear inside Provincial park boundaries, as in Manning Park, they have become a showcase attraction. At present the Highland's most salient feature, the subalpine meadow, is scantily represented in British Columbia's parks.

11) Finally, the Trophies represent a stunning example of one of the most distinctive features of the mountains of the Pacific Northwest: the subalpine flower meadow. Contrary to popular belief, treeline in most parts of the world is characterized not by flower meadows but by dwarf shrubs or grass heaths (Hamet-Ahti, 1965). Even in British Columbia, the flower meadow phenomenon is largely restricted to areas south of about 55' N. As it seems likely that flower meadows will continue to figure prominently in the attractiveness of British Columbia to potential visitors, it is clearly in the best interests of British Columbians to ensure that at least the more spectacular of them are secure against the detrimental impact of mining, grazing and overuse by all-terrain vehicles. In the context of the Trophies, logging activities have already opened the meadows to snow machines; it is only a matter of time before motorbikes find their way there also. Therefore, if the meadows are to be preserved at all, they must be set aside very soon.

Conclusion

It must be emphasized that the Trophy Mountain extension, if realized, would significantly enhance Wells Gray Park. For not only are the Trophies accessible to a degree that no alpine area further north is accessible. Not only do their uncut slopes accentuate Wells Gray's wilderness setting. Not only do their peaks offer a needed prospectus of the park. Not only do their meadows complement the wetter and later-blooming meadows of Battle Mountain. Not only do they constitute a northern outpost of a subalpine type found nowhere in Wells Gray. Not only do they and their associated forests provide critical winter habitat for Wells Gray's mountain caribou. In addition to all these arguments for their inclusion in Wells Gray, the Trophy Mountains are of themselves a full expression of the two major features which set the mountains

of western North America apart from nearly all others: flower meadows and untouched wilderness. Their inclusion in the park would benefit the people of British Columbia offering a new potential for public involvement in Wells Gray. At a time when the future of wilderness values in Provincial parks is at best uncertain, the resulting stronger proprietary attitude toward this park would be welcome.

1989 will be Wells Gray Park's jubilee year. Perhaps those concerned for its future as a wilderness park could consider 1989 as a target date for this realignment of its boundaries to best ensure that future.

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