



Dating from 1888, the picturesque bandstand is the oldest structure in Victoria's Beacon Hill Park. It was carefully repaired and restored to its original colours in 2010 for use as a new information kiosk.



Canada's Historic Parks and Green Spaces

Photo: Nick Kenrick

Le pittoresque kiosque à musique datant de 1888 est la plus ancienne structure du parc Beacon Hill de Victoria. En 2010, il a été soigneusement réparé et restauré dans ses couleurs d'origine, et il sert maintenant de kiosque d'information.

Parks of all sizes offer Canadians grand vistas to ponder, clear lakes to swim in, pathways to meander, manicured gardens to admire and impressive structures to shelter in.

BY JAMES CARELESS

Canada has protected some of its most magnificent natural scenery through a system of parks that rivals any in the world. From grand national parks to more modest neighbourhood squares, generations of Canadians have been seeking green spaces, flowers and shade trees to enjoy recreational and cultural activities.

BEACON HILL PARK

No visit to Victoria, B.C. is complete without a stop at historic Beacon Hill Park, where two beacons once stood on the hill, guiding sailing ships into Victoria Harbour. Located on the southwest side of the city with its southern edge rolling into Juan de Fuca strait, the park was originally native farming land. It is said that the beauty of the Songhee camas meadows attracted James Douglas, governor of Vancouver Island, to build the Hudson's Bay Fort in the area in 1843. Some 183 acres were set aside as a park reserve shortly afterwards. Finally, in 1882 it was granted to the City of Victoria in trust for the enjoyment of the general public.

Popular 19th-century attractions included cricket and horse racing. Bylaws prohibiting cattle grazing,



Hillsborough Square circa 1860 shows a more park-like setting after years of use as a pasture.

Le square Hillsborough, vers 1860, prend l'allure d'un parc après avoir servi de pâturage pendant des années.



Queen's Square is at the city's centre, where Province House stands.

Le square Queen's est au centre de la ville, où se trouve l'Assemblée législative de la province.



The City's revitalization of Rochford Square in 2000 included the planting of an elaborate Victorian garden.

En 2000, lorsque la ville a revitalisé le square Rochford, elle y a aménagé un beau jardin victorien.

protecting not just its built features but its cultural and natural landscapes too. The designation meant a heritage impact study was produced before restoration of the original 1888 bandstand—the oldest structure in the park—began. This once-picturesque feature was repaired, restored and repainted to its original colours in July of 2010 for use as a new public information kiosk.

CHARLOTTETOWN'S PUBLIC SQUARES

When Charlottetown was surveyed by General Thomas Wright in 1771, five squares of land were reserved for public use within a 500-plot layout. Today, four of those green spaces—Connaught Square, Hillsborough

Square, Kings Square and Rochford Square—still anchor the corners of the original Charlottetown plan, with the fifth, Queen's Square, at the centre where Province House stands.

To a large extent their evolution reflects the social history of the city. Connaught Square, originally known as Pownal Square, was the site of the local jail for much of the 19th century. It suffered from an unsavoury association with criminals and public executions (the last public hanging took place in 1869). After a new jail was built elsewhere in the city in 1911, the square was rejuvenated for public use; all remnants of the old building were removed and it was renamed in honour of the visiting Duke of Connaught, who was Queen Victoria's son and Canada's Governor General.

For the first 100 years, Hillsborough, Rochford and Kings squares seem to have been used by livestock as much as by people. As far back as 1825 Hillsborough was fenced in for use as a pasture. Later, recognizing that the land was set aside for public use, band concerts were held there—until discontinued due to local brawls

discharging firearms and beating carpets on the grass were introduced, and a beautification plan put in place. A landscape architect was hired, and \$25,000 and over 2,000 trees and shrubs were committed to transforming the area into a carefully landscaped English-style "pleasure garden" complete with carriageways, a lake with a rustic arched stone bridge and a decorated bandstand.

Over the years, attractions such as a children's petting zoo, duck ponds stocked with fish, a miniature golf green and lavish ornamental gardens have been added to the park site. However, the great glory of Beacon Hill Park remains its largely landscaped natural setting, including its substantial population of Garry Oak trees. "Only 5 percent of the original Garry Oak ecosystem still remains," says Roy Fletcher, chair of the Friends of Beacon Hill Park. "By far the largest stand of this rare tree, which mainly grows once the primary forest has been logged out, is here in Beacon Hill Park."

For nearly 130 years, citizens of Victoria have zealously guarded the park from commercial encroachment. In 2009 it was designated a municipal heritage site,



The beautiful wooded setting of London's Springbank Park offers 30 kilometres of pathways, picnic areas and relaxing formal gardens.

Le magnifique cadre boisé du parc Springbank de London offre 30 kilomètres de sentiers, des aires de pique-nique et de reposants jardins classiques.

and displays of drunkenness. By the 1860s, a general improvement plan for the city saw investment in its squares. Efforts were made to clean up Hillsborough and Rochford; ornamental trees were planted and children were encouraged to use them as parks.

Keeping the area clear of livestock proved a daunting challenge. Although 110 trees were planted in Rochford Square as part of the city's first Arbour Day celebrations in 1884, *The Charlottetown Herald* reported horses, pigs and cows were wandering the square "at their own sweet will," no doubt munching and trampling new growth along the way.

Kings Square seems to have suffered much of the same early trials, made worse by the area's industrial and commercial activities. However, as the neighbourhood evolved, becoming more residential by the 1900s, the park's upkeep improved along with its potential as a place for recreation and relaxation.

The second half of the 20th century saw a more sustained commitment to these unique historic urban spaces with the addition of more trees, new pathways

and benches, ornamental gardens and playground equipment. Today, the squares continue to appeal to the people of Charlottetown as places of quiet urban refuge.

LONDON'S SPRINGBANK PARK

On the southern shore of the Thames River in London, Ontario lies Springbank, the city's largest and most beautiful park. The property was acquired by the City in 1877 because the natural springs in the area made it the best site for a new waterworks. "This part of the Thames is where spring water flows into the river," explains local heritage planner Don Menard. "That's why retaining ponds and a pumphouse were built. A dam was constructed across the Thames to provide power for the pumps, to send the spring water up to the reservoir on Chestnut Hill." The pumphouse, erected in 1881, is still in the park, as are the massive underground holding tanks.

The construction of the dam also deepened the Thames, allowing steamers to carry passengers from downtown London to the park. Tragically, on a return trip from Springbank's May 24 celebrations in 1881, the steamer *Victoria* capsized, drowning nearly 200 people.

The area was ever popular with Londoners, who visited by bicycle and horse and carriage, taking advantage of its natural beauty for picnics and outings. Finally, in 1894 the City dedicated it as a park, adopting the name Springbank. Two years later the London Street Railway improved access with a special tram service to the park, which lasted into the 1930s.

Springbank Park has seen many attractions come and go, including tennis and lawn bowling, a shooting gallery, a dance hall and an early zoo. "There was an amusement park set up in 1913," says Menard. "The miniature train, which still runs today, first came here in the 1920s."

A major addition to the park was the opening in 1958 of Storybook Gardens, a children's fairyland complete with rides, games and wandering nursery rhyme characters that remains hugely popular.

Today the 140-hectare urban parkland, in its beautiful wooded setting, provides a 30-kilometre system of pathways, picnic areas, shelter pavilions and formal gardens. It continues to be a vibrant focal point for this historic Ontario city.

GATINEAU PARK

Located across the Ottawa River from the Parliament Buildings, Gatineau Park stretches northwest from the Eardley escarpment into Quebec's rugged Gatineau Hills. Approaching its 75th birthday in 2013, Gatineau Park's 363 square kilometres are renowned for their natural beauty and recreational activities. This is Canadian Shield country—home to dense forests, abundant wildlife and numerous clear lakes. Set amongst this natural beauty are hundreds of kilometres of trails for hiking and mountain biking, public beaches and campgrounds. In the winter, the trails are groomed for cross-country skiers and snowshoers, while alpine skiers and snowboarders hit the slopes of Camp Fortune. Also located inside the park is historic Kingsmere, the donated estate of former Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King, who was a major proponent of this natural reserve.

"There was public interest in making this land into a park as early as 1915, both from local planners and outdoor lovers who wanted to preserve this landscape from exploitation," says Marie Boulet, the National Capital Commission's director for Gatineau Park and the Greenbelt. "However, it wasn't until loggers intensified



Photo: NCC - CCN



Photo: Rob Ellis

Above: A 2-hour hike to Meech Creek in Gatineau Park reveals the “Ruins”—a dam, generating station and acid condensation tower—which formed the super-phosphate fertilizer plant (the first of its kind in the world) owned and operated by Thomas “Carbide” Wilson in the early 20th century.

Left: Gatineau Park’s extensive trail system is a popular destination for local weekend skiers as well as those in training for competitive races.

Ci-dessus : Une excursion de deux heures jusqu’au ruisseau Meech, dans le parc de la Gatineau, permet de découvrir « les ruines » – un barrage, une centrale électrique et une tour de condensation d’acides – de l’usine d’engrais superphosphate (la première en son genre au monde). Le propriétaire, Thomas « Carbide » Wilson, l’a exploitée au début du 20^e siècle.

À gauche : Le vaste réseau de sentiers du parc de la Gatineau est une destination appréciée des skieurs de fin de semaine aussi bien que des athlètes s’entraînant pour des compétitions.



Photo: Janice Smith, Parks Canada

Waterton Lakes National Park's most famous landmark is the Prince of Wales Hotel—a grand alpine chalet built in 1927 by the Great Northern Railway and today a national historic site.

La structure la mieux connue du parc national des Lacs-Waterton est l'hôtel Prince of Wales, un grandiose chalet alpin que le Great Northern Railway a construit en 1927 et qui est aujourd'hui un lieu historique national.

their cuttings in the 1930s that the Federal Woodlands Preservation League was formed. It successfully lobbied for the creation of Gatineau Park in 1938.”

Since that time, succeeding agencies have worked hard to preserve the park's natural beauty and to develop its attractions to draw in more visitors. Located just a 15-minute drive from Canada's capital, it is a very popular destination—whether for athletes in training or families enjoying recreation and fitness opportunities.

WATERTON LAKES NATIONAL PARK

In the Canadian imagination, the Rocky Mountains signify outstanding natural beauty on a grand scale stirring a sense of adventure, romance and national pride. For many, the rugged, windswept terrain of Waterton Lakes National Park with its diverse physical, biological and cultural resources captures the best of the Rockies.

Canada's fourth national park, its name derives from the Waterton chain of lakes named in honour of Charles Waterton, a 19th-century British naturalist. In 1910 James Hill, president of the Great Northern Railway in the U.S., designed numerous hotels, chalets, boats and trails to attract tourists to Waterton Lakes National Park and its Montana counterpart, Glacier National Park. The Canadian link in this chain is the 1927-vintage all-wood Prince of Wales Hotel, a grand alpine chalet with soaring roofs, gables and balconies, which still sits in magnificent isolation as Waterton's most recognized landmark.

“It's a beautiful old building which hearkens to the chateau/chalet style of railway hotels in Banff and Lake Louise,” says Janice Smith, communications officer with the park. “It's part of the western legacy that makes this park so special.”

Waterton Lakes is undeniably special. Its unique setting—where the humid Pacific weather meets the Rocky Mountains and Prairie grasslands—inspired



Photo: Greg Sapp

Nestled in a bay of Upper Waterton Lake and cradled by the Rocky Mountains lies Waterton Village (seen here from the Prince of Wales Hotel), a renowned base from which to explore the outstanding natural beauty of Waterton Lakes National Park.

Le village de Waterton (vu ici depuis l'hôtel Prince of Wales) est niché dans une baie du lac Upper Waterton, à l'ombre des montagnes Rocheuses. Il est réputé comme base pour l'exploration du magnifique cadre naturel du parc national des Lacs-Waterton.

the Dominion government of 1895 to set aside a 140-square-kilometre area as a forest preserve. The boundaries have fluctuated over the years, with the park now covering 505 square kilometres.

James Hill's dream of creating "the playground of the northwest" was formalized in 1932 when both parks were joined to form the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park. Other characters who loom large in the history of these parks are Waterton's first park official, John "Kootenay" Brown, and Henry "Death on the Trail" Reynolds, an American ranger. Neither man wanted to see the upper Waterton valley divided by the border between the two countries, as the waters and wildlife run freely across it. Reynolds himself once commented, "The geology recognizes no boundaries, and as the lake lay ... no man-made boundary could cleave the waters apart."

Their dream was surpassed in 1995 when the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Within its boundaries are two national historic sites: the First Oil Well in western Canada and the Prince of Wales Hotel. "Waterton Lakes really encapsulates key features of the Canadian west," Janice Smith concludes. "It is a must-see for any Canadian wanting to touch their historic roots."

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