



West 2019

Rivers and Mountains of
British Columbia and Alberta





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West 2019

Rivers and Mountains of British Columbia and Alberta

Introduction

I began to take pictures with a 35mm camera in high school, but when I first saw the Rocky Mountains in my early 20s I stopped taking pictures right then and there. I realized there was just no way to capture the overwhelming grandeur of what nature had wrought. I wasn't interested in even trying, and it was many years before circumstances prompted me to get another camera and take up photography again.

Recently I've realized that I've travelled extensively in Europe and have gotten lots of photos of stunning landscapes there but haven't concentrated as much on the wonders in my own country. Time to get over my Rockies block.

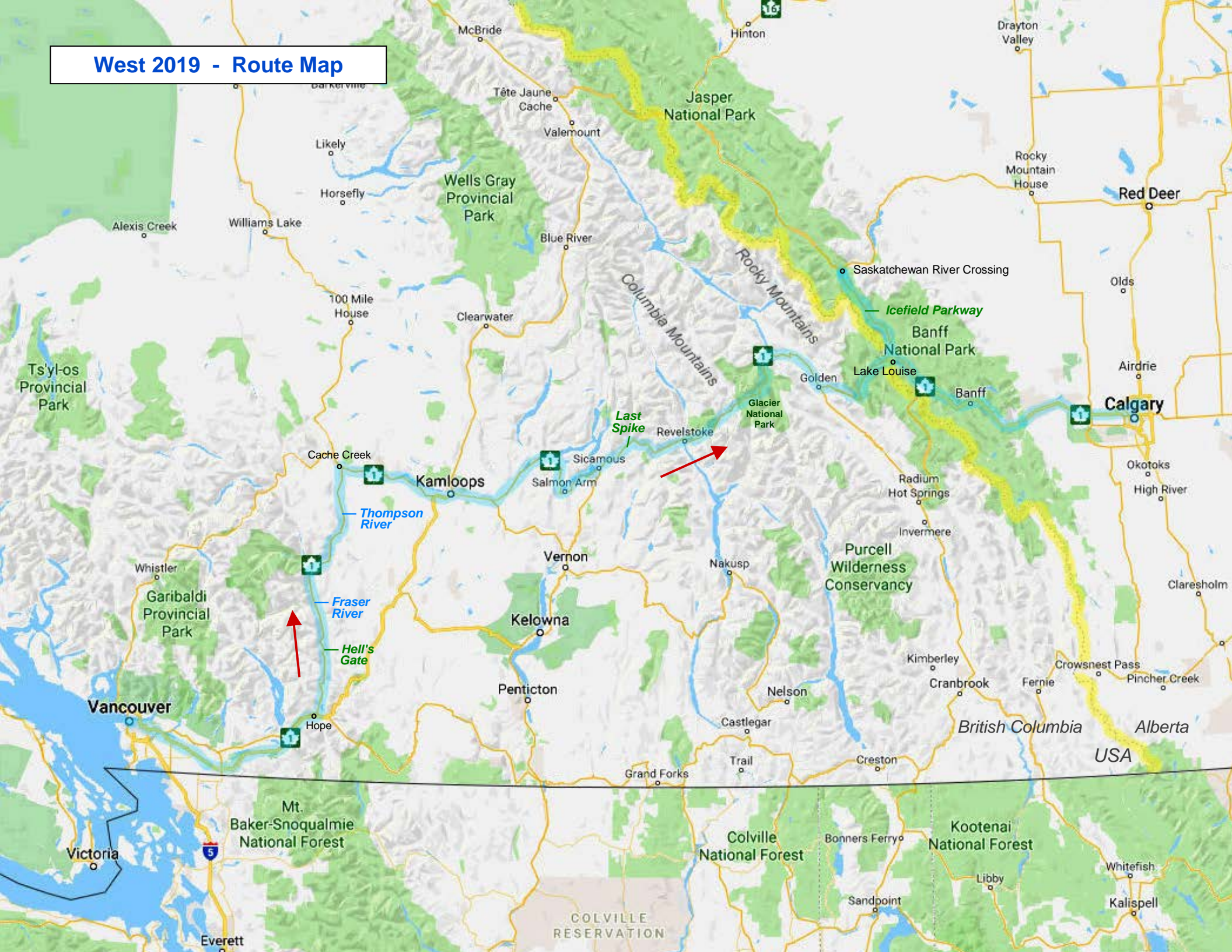
In 2016 I explored Vancouver, parts of British Columbia's lower mainland, and Vancouver Island with Chris Paton, a very good friend who lives in Vancouver. Photos from that tour are presented on the *British Columbia* page of this website.

Chris joined me again for this trip which focuses on the canyons and territory of the Fraser and Thompson Rivers east of Vancouver, and then on the majestic mountains of eastern BC and western Alberta. Chris contributed some of the photos of this adventure used here.

Two different passenger rail services run along much of our route, but we chose to drive to have the flexibility to stop and explore the features of interest to us. I hope you enjoy our choices.

– Bruce McKay

West 2019 - Route Map





Vancouver

Our trip originates in scenic Vancouver.
This isn't the primary focus, but it's impossible to ignore.



Vancouver

**Downtown beach, 1000 acre / 400 hectare downtown park,
rivers, mountains. Where to start?**



Vancouver

We do easy sightseeing from the flying saucer shaped Vancouver Lookout.



Vancouver

Commercial district.



Vancouver

The sails of Canada Place still look fresh 33 years after their launch for Vancouver's Expo 86.



Vancouver

Water transportation is important here.
And rail too ...



Vancouver

British Columbia joined Canada on the basis of the promise to build a railway joining the Pacific province to Central Canada.



**Horseshoe
Bay**

A brief side trip to the north shore ...



**Horseshoe
Bay**

... to see the small ferries come and go.



Horseshoe
Bay

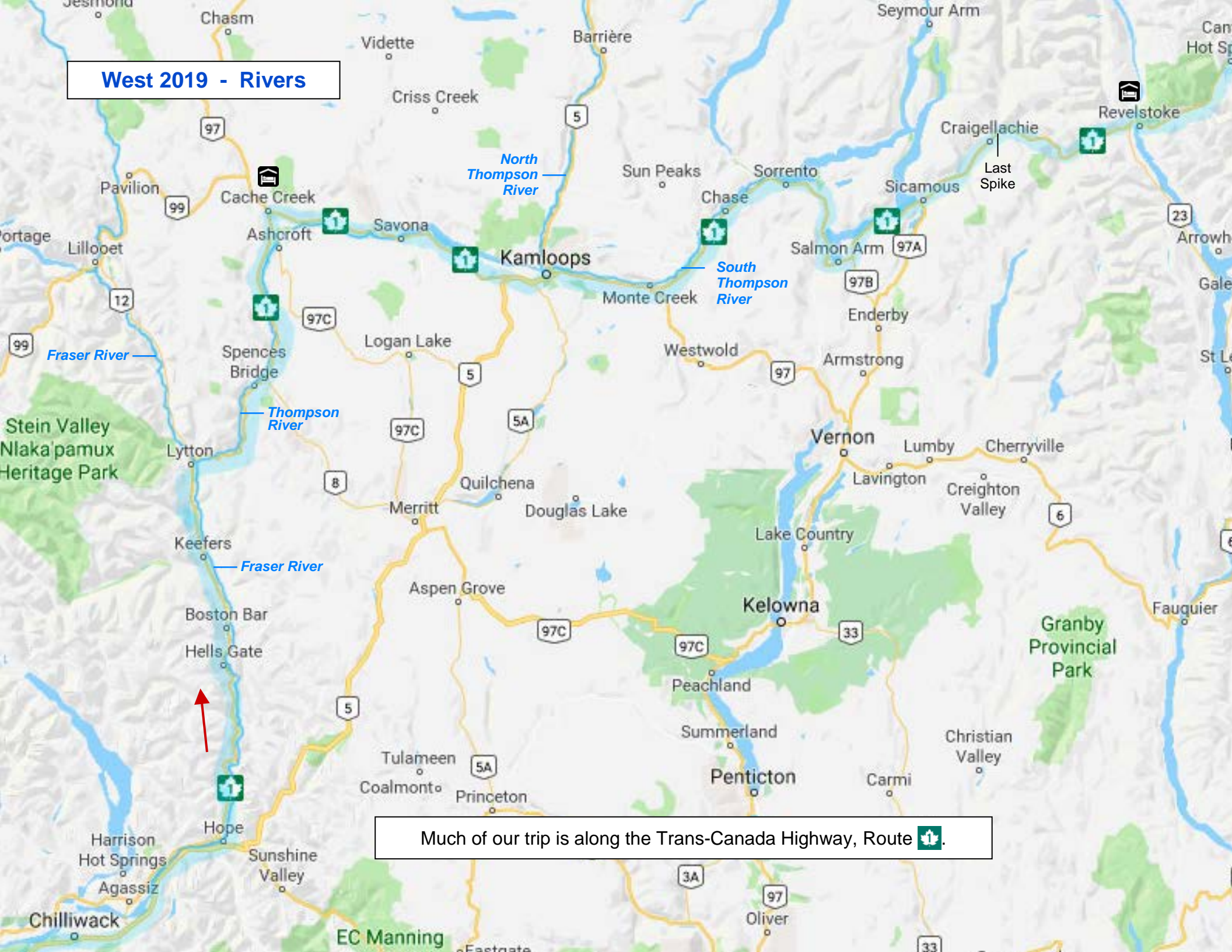
And the big ones too.
But we'll be off by land tomorrow morning.



Heading Out

As we head east toward Hope the urban buildup gets replaced by more natural surroundings.

West 2019 - Rivers



Much of our trip is along the Trans-Canada Highway, Route .



Fraser
Canyon

As we head north from Hope we find echoes of the
railroad building era in small places like Yale.



**Fraser
Canyon**

**Our first glimpse of the mighty Fraser River,
British Columbia's longest river at 854 miles / 1375 km.**



Hell's Gate

The Hell's Gate Airtram north of Boston Bar promises good views where the walls of the Fraser Canyon narrow dramatically.



Hell's Gate

The Airtram makes a 500 foot / 152 m descent ...



Hell's Gate ... to a base on the other side of the canyon.



Hell's Gate

On the way we get a good view of the river coming peacefully from the north.



Hell's Gate

But at the Gate the entire volume of the river is forced through a gap only 115 feet / 35 m wide.



Hell's Gate

The flow rate here is 3.9 million gallons per second /
15000 cubic metres per second.



Hell's Gate

Fish ladders are provided to make it possible for salmon to travel upstream to spawn.



Hell's Gate

Snowsheds protect the rail lines running through the canyon from avalanches.



Hell's Gate

The first rail line through the canyon formed part of the first trans-Canada railroad, completed in 1885.



Hell's Gate

Today's freight trains are often 1.2 miles / 2 km long.



**Fraser
Canyon**

Rail lines now run along both sides of the Fraser Canyon.



**Thompson
River**

**The Thompson River, the Fraser's major tributary, joins it at Lyton.
Rail lines follow along the Thompson too.**



**Thompson
River**

Resource trains carry petroleum ...



Thompson
River

... and minerals.



**Kamloops
Lake**

**The North and South Thompson Rivers
join just east of Kamloops Lake.**



South
Thompson

We couldn't resist checking out this Swiss Army
knife of convenience stores east of Kamloops.



**South
Thompson**

**Intermodal freights, with their variety of colourful
containers, are the most fun to watch.**



**South
Thompson**

There won't be much more farming as we head further east.



Sicamous

Sicamous, at the east end of Shuswap Lake, is a pretty resort town with a population of 3,200.



Sicamous

The lake is a playground for all sorts of water craft.



Sicamous

But houseboats rule here.



Sicamous

Sicamous styles itself as "the Houseboat Capital of Canada."



The Last Spike

The driving of the Last Spike north of Craigellachie in 1885 signified the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) linking British Columbia to Central Canada.



**The Last
Spike**

The CPR railway became the major player in the settlement and early economic development of Western Canada.



**Revelstoke
Dam**

British Columbia's mighty river systems provide lots of opportunities for generating hydro-electric power. The province gets 95% of its power from hydro.



**Revelstoke
Dam**

**Revelstoke Lake extends 81 miles / 130 km upstream,
accommodating recreational watersports ...**



Revelstoke
Dam

... and Martha Creek Provincial Park.



Lumbering

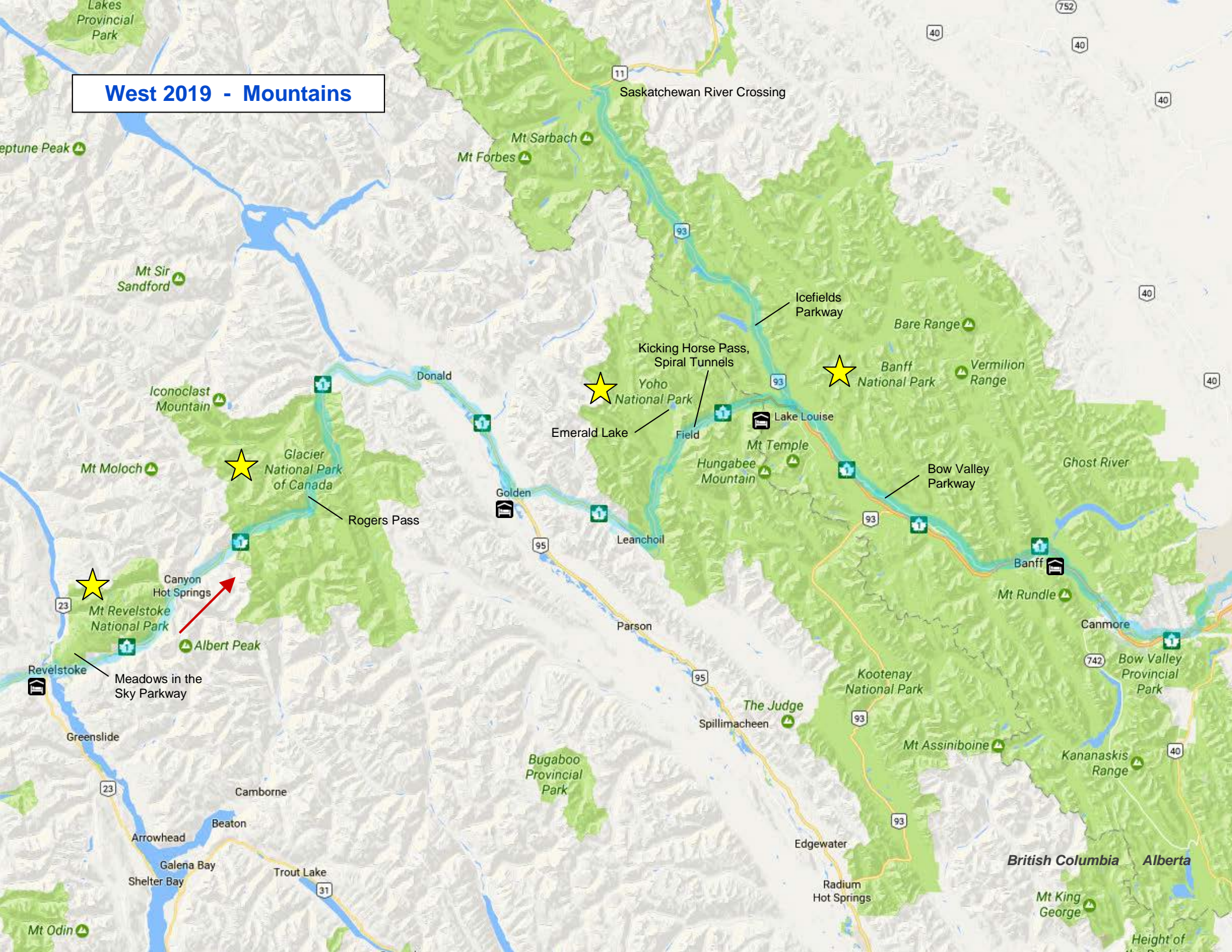
**Forest industries are important parts
of the British Columbia economy.**



Lumbering

Forest industries employ over 150,000 in BC.

West 2019 - Mountains





Mount Revelstoke National Park



**Meadows
Parkway**

The Meadows In The Sky Parkway snakes its way up the southwest side of Mount Revelstoke, offering views like this of Revelstoke and the surrounding mountains.



**Meadows
Parkway**

**The 16 mile / 26 km Parkway rises from an elevation of
1,540 feet / 470 metres to 6,020 feet / 1835 metres at its top.**



**Meadows
Parkway**

**Power lines from the Revelstoke Dam cut through
the forest on the other side of the Columbia River.**



**Meadows
Parkway**

**The two-lane traffic bridge centre bottom above provides
a clue about the elevation of this roadside viewpoint.**



**Meadows
Parkway**

**But we won't get to the top today. It's mid-June but too much
snow remains on and around the road past this point.**



Boardwalks

The Giant Cedars Boardwalk down in the valley weaves its way through a native forest of massive western red cedars.



Boardwalks

Some of these giants of the forest are over 500 years old.



Boardwalks

The Skunk Cabbage Boardwalk Trail leads over a swamp inhabited by animals, birds, and a wild cabbage that produces a pungent odor if a leaf is broken or torn.



Boardwalks

**The swamp is also home to muskrats and beavers.
And Parks Canada wants you to feel at home here too.**



Glacier National Park



Rogers Pass

Rogers Pass, at an elevation of 4,360 feet / 1330 m, was the most difficult to navigate in the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway in the 1880s.



Rogers Pass

The Trans-Canada Highway was officially opened here in 1962. Rogers Pass is a narrow valley surrounded by a number of mountains.



Rogers Pass

Avalanches have always been a problem here. The Discovery Centre for visitors is built in the shape of the snow sheds that have been used here since the 1880s.



Rogers Pass

The worst avalanche killed 62 railroad workers in 1910. 105 mm howitzers are used to knock down the avalanches under controlled circumstances.



Rogers Pass

One of the series of snow sheds protecting the Trans-Canada Highway.



**Kicking Horse
Bridge**

As the Kicking Horse River flows into the town of Golden it's greeted by the town's pride and joy, ...



Kicking Horse Bridge ... a beautiful and graceful covered timber frame bridge.



**Kicking Horse
Bridge**

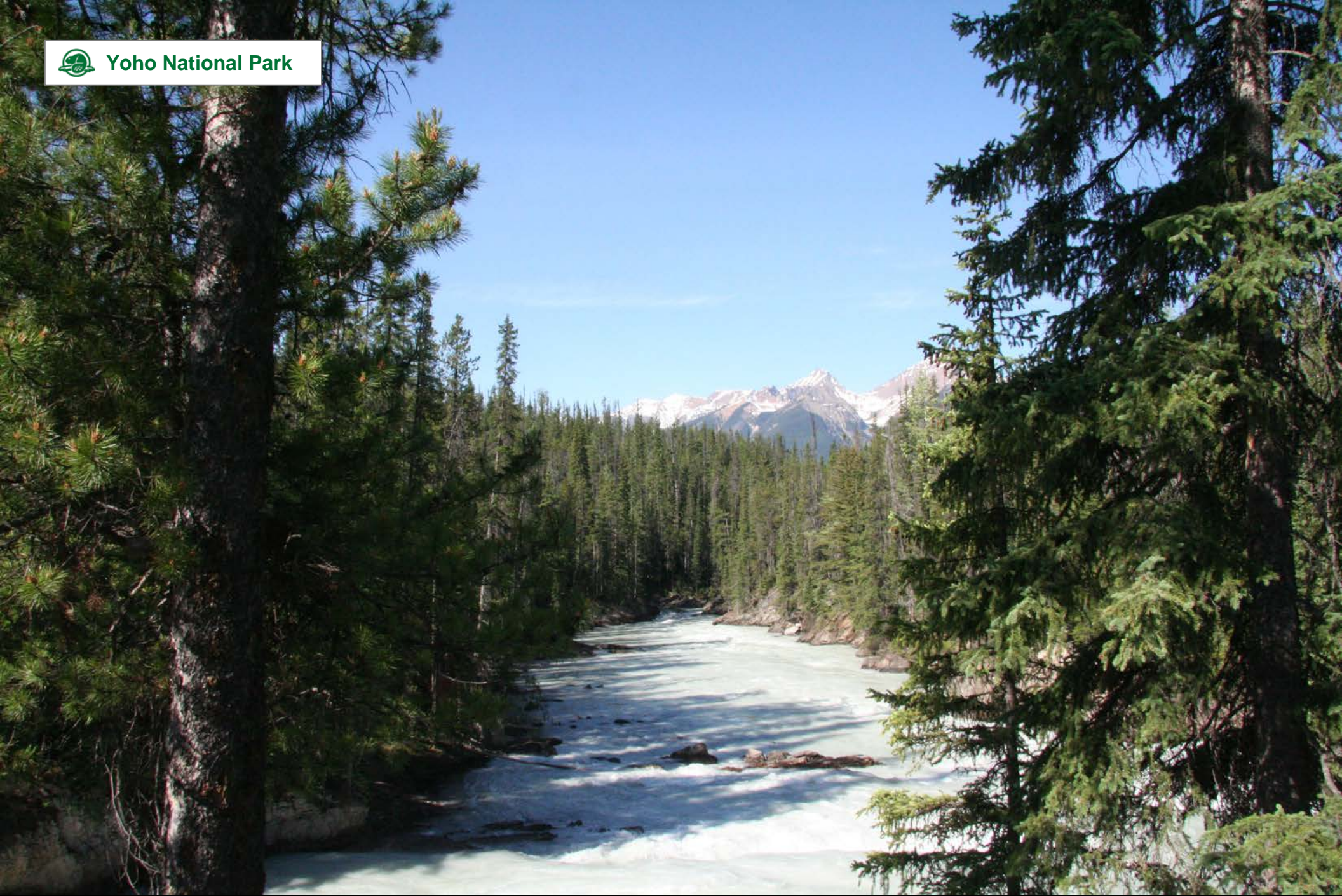
Over 100 members of the Timber Framers Guild came from the US, Europe, and all over Canada to help raise the bridge in 2001.



Kicking Horse Bridge Golden regards the bridge as a symbol of cooperation.



Yoho National Park



**Natural
Bridge**

Further upstream, just west of Field, the Kicking Horse River is actively cutting down its bed.



**Natural
Bridge**

**Rushing water carrying minerals and debris has
eroded softer rock below a harder upper band ...**



**Natural
Bridge**

... to create a natural bridge where once there was a waterfall.



**Emerald
Lake**

Emerald Lake is a popular destination for hiking, paddling, cross country skiing, or snowshoeing.



**Emerald
Lake**

Or just sightseeing.



**Yoho Visitor
Centre**

The Yoho National Park Visitor Centre at Field reflects the shape of the mountains which surround it.

Parks Canada's role

How fortunate the Burgess Shale fossils are found in National Parks!

The Burgess Shale is an exquisite treasure in the heart of the Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks World Heritage Site. As steward of the Burgess Shale, Parks Canada protects the Burgess Shale and its fossils for the understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of present and future generations.

Due to their rarity and sensitivity, the fossil sites must be closed to casual, unsupervised visits. Fortunately, the Burgess Shale can be well protected and still be experienced in person: guided hikes are available.

For those unable to take in a hike, the Trilobite Beds on Mt. Stephen can be viewed from just outside the door. A wonderful view of Fossil Ridge, home of the Walcott Quarry, can be had at Emerald Lake.

Ask for details on hikes and other opportunities at the information counter.





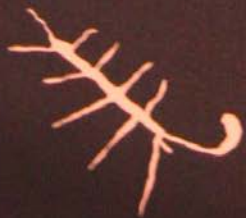
**Yoho Visitor
Centre**

The Burgess fossils represent a complete ecosystem that existed for only a very short time. Mount Burgess is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Window on the CAMBRIAN WORLD

This slab of silty shale was flown down by helicopter from the Trilobite Beds on Mt. Stephen. Weighing about 200 kg (450 lb), the rock is over 500 million years old. It is the ultimate time capsule.

*Can you find fossils
that have been carried
through time in this rock?*



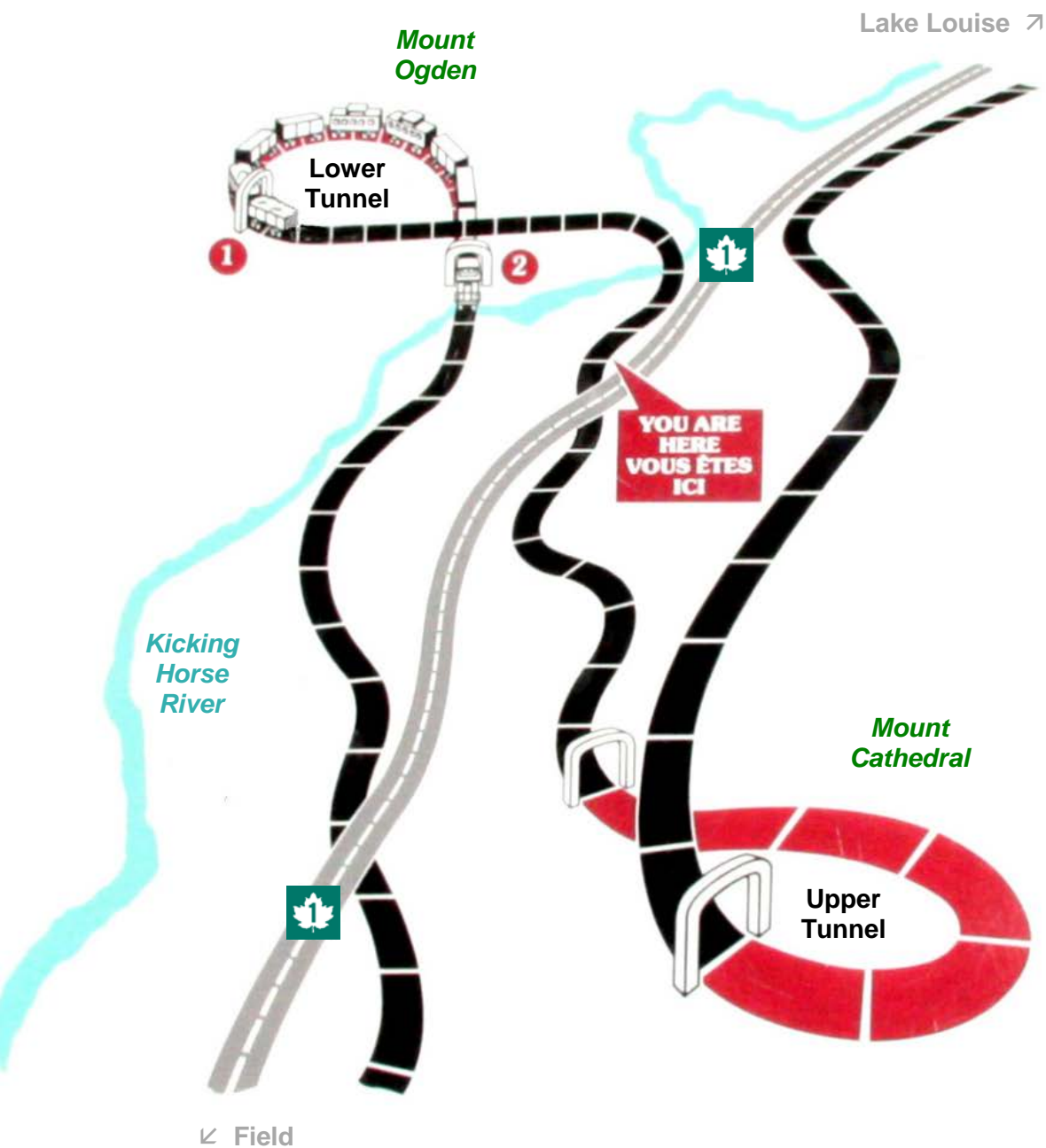
**Yoho Visitor
Centre**

**Visitors can feel the imbedded fossils
in this 500 million year old slab of rock.**



Spiral Tunnels

The opening in the side of Mount Ogden just east of Field seems innocent enough. But circular tunnels inside two mountains here work miracles for struggling trains.



Spiral Tunnels

The original CPR rail route through Kicking Horse Pass was aggressively steep, difficult and expensive to operate, and tragically dangerous.

The solution for a more gradual grade was modeled after a system used in Switzerland.

Two circular tunnels in facing mountains effectively double the length of the climb or the descent, and reduce the gradient from 4.5 % to 2.2 %.

The tunnels were completed in 1909, and the original route was completely abandoned in 1924.

Today we will see a train descend through the Lower Tunnel, entering at ❶ and emerging 50 feet / 15 metres lower at ❷.



Spiral Tunnels

Our freight train enters the upper entrance to the Lower Spiral Tunnel.



**Spiral
Tunnels**

It's a long train, and it keeps on coming.



**Spiral
Tunnels**

Eventually it emerges from the lower entrance ...



**Spiral
Tunnels**

**... and in fact we see it still entering at the top while it is emerging below.
!!!**



Banff National Park



**Icefields
Parkway**

The Icefields Parkway, winding along the continental divide from Lake Louise to Jasper, is rated as one of the top drives in the world.



**Icefields
Parkway**

**Parks Canada's system of wildlife overpasses has
reduced wildlife collisions in the park by 80 %.**



**Icefields
Parkway**

**Herbert Lake is a roadside lake within a forest of lodgepole pine.
Sites are measured in km from the south. (Herbert is at km 3.)**



**Icefields
Parkway**

**The highest peak in the area is Mount
Temple, at 11,626 feet / 3454 metres.**



**Icefields
Parkway**

**Hector Lake is Banff Park's largest and deepest.
(km 16)**



**Icefields
Parkway**

Bow Lake is one of the more scenic and accessible lakes for fishing. It was created by retreating glaciers. The turquoise blue water is the source of the Bow River. (km 37)



**Icefields
Parkway**

Bow Lake



**Icefields
Parkway**

**Bow Summit (6,790 feet / 2070 m) is the highest point on the Icefields Parkway.
(km 40)**



**Icefields
Parkway**

**At Bow Summit a spur road leads from the
Parkway to the Peyto Lake Viewpoint.**



**Icefields
Parkway**

Peyto Lake is considered the bluest lake in the Rockies. It gets its colour from the large amounts of glacier rock flour that flow into it.



**Icefields
Parkway**

**The colour of Peyto Lake varies depending
on the season and even on the time of day.**



**Icefields
Parkway**

Lower Waterfall Lake. The beautiful turquoise colour is created from glacial silt coming from the Peyto Glacier. (km 56)



**Icefields
Parkway**

Lower Waterfall Lake. We continue up to Saskatchewan River Crossing, a third of the way to Jasper, and then double back.



Lake Louise

The emerald hues and glacial backdrop of Lake Louise have wowed visitors since the 1890s.



Lake Louise This is probably the most photographed lake in Canada.



Lake Louise

The lake offers photo ops, a lakeshore stroll, canoeing, and horseback riding.



Moraine Lake Moraine Lake, 9 miles / 14 km south of Lake Louise, is surrounded by mountains, waterfalls, and rock piles.



Moraine Lake

Moraine Lake's waters are a vivid shade of turquoise that changes through the summer as the glaciers melt.



**Bow Valley
Parkway**

Morant's Curve is a site made famous by CPR photographer Nicholas Morant, where the railway line follows a photogenic curve in the Bow River.



**Bow Valley
Parkway**

**After a wait we get to see a train, though not
going in Morant's preferred direction.**



**Bow Valley
Parkway**

At least it's a colourful container train, our favourite type.



**Bow Valley
Parkway**

We were inclined to think this was the trip's last train ...



**Bow Valley
Parkway**

... but of course there was another further down the valley, just to underline the key role of the railroads in this part of the world.



Lake
Minnewanka

Just north of the town of Banff we go for a
one-hour boat cruise on Lake Minnewanka.



Lake
Minnewanka

This gives us a chance to see see things from lake level.



**Lake
Minnewanka**

For more than 100 centuries people hunted and camped along the original shores of the lake. The Stoney people called it "Minn-waki" or "Lake of the Spirits".



Banff

The original Banff Springs Hotel, opened in 1888 as one of the CPR's earliest grand railway hotels, was designed to generate passenger traffic to the Canadian West.



Banff

The building has been replaced and updated, but the hotel's key role in western Canada's tourist industry remains unchanged.



Banff

The resort town of Banff is one of Canada's most popular tourist destinations, known for its mountainous surroundings and hot springs and for skiing, hiking, and biking.



Banff

The town is entirely within Banff National Park, which had its origins in a national reserve created in 1885, the beginning of Canada's National Park system.



Banff

**Banff Avenue, with Cascade Mountain in the background.
Our adventure ends here, in fine style.**



Return

We fly home from Calgary with fond memories of all those rivers and mountains, and lakes ... and trains.

< End >

West 2019