

# “Siding 29” or The Role of the Canadian Pacific Railway in the Development of Canadian Rocky Mountain Sport

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The history of Euro-Canadian sport in the Canadian Rocky Mountains begins with the intertwining relationships of the Canadian government, a railroad, a mineral hot spring, and the wily entrepreneurship of William C. Van Home. British Columbia declined to enter the Dominion of Canada until a transcontinental railroad appeared to be a certainty. The Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) undertook this venture in 1881, but soon encountered difficulties, especially in engineering a passage through the Canadian Rocky Mountains. The CPR hired Van Home to untangle these problems and, finally, on November 7, 1885, the transcontinental railroad became a reality.

When the CPR reached siding 29, later named Banff Van Home, entranced by the beauty of the area, suggested setting aside a tract of land for a national park. The discovery by white men of a mineral hot spring in the vicinity raised questions of the ownership and administration of the springs. In 1885 the Canadian Privy Council created Canada’s first national park which included Siding 29 and the springs.

By 1930 seven national parks had been established. It is generally agreed that the first parks owed their existence and development to the CPR. Van Home built hostelrys and used sport to promote tourism in the parks. Glacier House, a mountain chalet which opened in 1887, attracted many sport climbers and hikers as well as the general tourist. In 1899 the CPR began to hire Swiss guides to lead climbs and hikes. CPR officials organized and assisted associations such as the Alpine Club of Canada.

Van Home built the luxurious Banff Springs Hotel to attract international, wealthy tourists. He invited artists, editors, politicians, and churchmen to visit the hotel, counting on them to spread the news of the beauty of the Canadian Rockies. In addition to hiking, climbing, and packtrips, Banff Springs’ guests enjoyed swimming, tennis, and, after 1911, golf.

Following World War I CPR officials built bungalow camps to attract visitors who might not be able to afford the Banff Springs Hotel. In 1921 Lake O’Hara Camp consisted of two cabins and five tents. By 1926-27 there was a small chalet on a point above Lake O’Hara surrounded by eleven bungalows. Guests could enjoy hiking, climbing, trail riding, and fishing. The CPR officials assisted in organizing association such as the Trail Riders of Canada and the Skyline Hikers.

In 1930 the government passed the National Parks Act resulting in major policy shifts and ending an era. Many aspects of the early history of sport in the Canadian Rocky Mountains need further study. The CPR no longer chugs through the mountains, but the railway’s role in the development of Rocky Mountain sport remains.