

SPACE AND PLACE

Douglas A. Brown
University of Lethbridge

Waterton National Park and the Sporting Culture of South Western Alberta Between 1910 and 1940: **An Intersection and Interdependency of National and Regional Discourses**

This paper studies the relationship between shared playground/park space and the development of sport, leisure and recreation culture in neighboring urban centers. Specifically, it examines the relationship between Waterton National Park and the communities of Cardston, Pincher Creek and Lethbridge. Theoretically, this research engages post-structuralist arguments concerning the discursive function of time and space in the construction of cultural practices and social identities, particularly the work of socio-cultural theorists and historians Anthony Giddens, Pierre Boudieu, Roland Barthes, and Henning Eichberg.

Waterton National Park was formed in 1910. It was the first National Park in Canada to be established as a result of public pressure to preserve forested mountain lands. In contrast, the origins of other National Parks in Canada (specifically Banff and Jasper) are inextricably linked to the commercial motivations of railway companies seeking to expand and monopolize new tourist markets. Today, a huge disparity exists between the highly commercial sport and recreation industries that have emerged in Banff and Jasper and the seemingly modest sport and recreation industry in Waterton. In spite of this, Waterton is referred to as the jewel of the Canadian Rockies and is a well-known Mecca for backcountry hikers, cross-country skiers and sail boarders. How does a national park interface with local and regional sporting cultures?

Banff and Jasper are intricately woven into the sporting and recreation cultures of the dominant adjacent urban centers of Calgary and Edmonton, respectively. Calgaryans, for example, have been flocking to Banff National Park to ski, hike and golf for most of this century. The 100 kilometers that separate Banff from Calgary's city limit is now a mere extension of the city's sport and recreation space. Reciprocally, Calgaryans have influenced the development of facilities and the pattern of sporting life in Banff. Has a similar relationship existed between Waterton National Park and the urban centers of Cardston, Pincher Creek and Lethbridge? Has this national park had a similar impact on the sporting cultures of these smaller Alberta towns?

Primary sources for this research include the records of local sporting clubs, local newspapers, park newsletters, reports of the Federal Department of the Interior, and the *Alpine Journal of Canada*. The period under scrutiny is 1910 to 1940. The paper argues that Waterton National Park, indeed, was part of the sporting and physical recreation cultures of these small urban centers; the mountain playgrounds functioned discursively in the lives of southwestern Albertans. Movement to and from the park signified the division between work and play, and also reinforced the complex regional and national identities of these Canadians. Life in and around the park helped perpetuate conceptions of cultural modernism. At the same time, sporting opportunities within the park were vastly different from those of Banff and Jasper and reflected the very different origins of this national park.

This research examines sporting and outdoor recreation culture in a sector of Canadian society that has rarely been addressed by sport historians. Additionally, the theoretical framework expands our understanding of sport as an inherently unstable, and yet, highly potent discursive structure that has an impact on the ability of individuals and groups to construct social and cultural realities of their own.