

## CONSERVATION AND RECREATION

# The Vanishing Parklands and Public Conscience

By RODERICK HAIG-BROWN



Photo by Doug Gilroy

## Cypress Hills Provincial Park with its unspoiled stands of white spruce

Reprinted, by kind permission of the author, from *Saturday Night*, May 14, 1955, as the third in the *Blue Jay's* series of conservation inserts. At this time of year, people are coming back from holidaying in the parks of Saskatchewan and other provinces, and the memory of the pleasant summer meeting weekend at the Cypress Hills Provincial Park is still fresh in our minds. It is a time to take stock and to assess what these parks mean to us. In Saskatchewan we are fortunate in having an active provincial parks development programme. Yet Mr. Haig-Brown's injunction to us to be prepared to fight for preservation of our parks is timely. Whether they are national or provincial parks, or simply the recreational and park areas of cities, or parks—as Mr. Haig-Brown reminds us—are safe only when citizens man a picket line.

The people of North America spend a sixth of their national income on recreation. This may seem an admirable choice, a reprehensible choice, or downright silly; but it is a free choice, growing out of the type of civilization we have. It is a social fact, and a hard economic fact. It is also a fact with a future; there is every possible indication that recreational spending, of both time and money, will continue to increase and play a larger and larger part in the economic life of the country. But it is a fact that Canadian government, federal or provincial, has done very little to recognize or prepare for.

Recreational use of land is not necessarily very demanding; forest land, for instance, will produce a

hundred annual crops of game and fish and other recreational values while it is producing one crop of timber. Agricultural land can yield much, not only to the hunter and picnicker, but to anyone with a keen love of the world about him, whether he is a full-fledged naturalist or simply a man who likes to drive his car slowly along the country roads.

In these instances recreation is a subsidiary but important use of the land. It must not interfere with timber crops or agricultural crops, but it is clearly to the benefit of the country as a whole to encourage their use within these limits. On provincial or national forest lands the total yield of the recreational resources—fish, wildlife, lakes, scenery, and

—through the period of regrowth may even exceed the value of the ultimate timber crop. . .

There are other areas where recreation is properly the paramount even the exclusive land use. These are the areas that we call parks, national, provincial or municipal, and which we generally consider the guaranteed recreational areas not only for ourselves, but for future Canadians.

This is a good time to take a long, hard look at the parks of Canada and their guaranteed future. Rapidly increasing population, increasing wealth and leisure, together with the tiring monotony of many types of factory work and enormous advances in transportation, have multiplied the value and importance of public parks and lands since the war. Parks that were remote are suddenly close at hand; parks that were used by a few score of visitors ten years ago are now used by tens and even hundreds of thousands; parks which once seemed a comfortable reserve against the distant day when the population would need them, are already barely adequate to meet the demands upon them.

This would be bad enough if we still had all the parks. But exactly as

population builds and parks become more necessary, so economic and industrial pressures increase and there is demand that parks be thrown open to exploitation. The struggle to protect parks never ends—it goes on, year in year out, all over the United States as the land-grabbers think up new techniques. In Canada, the public conscience has scarcely begun to stir itself—yet the encroachments of industry upon parks have already gone far and fast.

Most Canadians are inclined to feel pretty smug about the National Parks . . . they are good parks and perhaps fairly well protected, though Banff already has a hydro-electric development with the usual hideous dam and penstock and surge tower. But the National Parks are not even nearly enough to serve Canada . . . It is clear that the future of recreational land is only partly here. The rest of it, if it exists at all, must be in the provincial parks . . . Yet even these, and even if they were securely worked into the national system, would not be enough to take care of future needs, nor would they ensure Canadians of honest, unspoiled samples of all that their land once was.

And the provincial parks are not secure . . . Provincial parks can only



*Photo by F. W. Lahrman*

**Party returning from S.N.H.S. field trip at Madge Lake, June 1956**



Sask. Govt. Photo by Les Robinson

**Spruce and aspen along the beach at Madge Lake where the flora and fauna of two zones overlap.**

be as secure as the will and conscience of the provincial legislatures. And the will and conscience of the legislatures can only be as sound as the information and foresight of the individual legislators. At the present time provincial legislators are rarely well informed, because Canadians have not yet defined the philosophical base of their recreational assets, and because trained and qualified parks officials are seldom free to speak out plainly when industry threatens park land. And foresight is a difficult matter in times when developments move as swiftly as they do today.

A system of provincial parks probably should not be a rigid affair. It should aim first of all to set aside areas representative of the various features of the province. It should make sure that the protected areas are distributed so that major and minor parks are easily accessible to residents in any part of the province. It should guard jealously those parks already within the reach of major centres of population. But it need

not rigidly exclude the possibility of any other type of use from all park lands. In some instances there can be the give and take of multiple use provided always that the recreational use is paramount.

The danger here is in the principle. Once concede that parkland can be safely used for more than one purpose and everyone with a convenient industry will jump in and grab what he can. The protection must be in defining and stating the purpose of each and every park area, and in testing any proposed encroachment in terms of its effect on the park purpose. The question then is who could be trusted to do the testing and deciding? The only people qualified to do it at all are the park administrators. Almost, inevitably some of their decisions would be too narrow, and in any case there must always be some appeal from pure administrative decision; so the matter would eventually return to the legislature again, but at least the legislature would be informed by the stated purpose of the park and by

unrestricted advice of the administrators. The position would be longer and better than it is today. But there is, ultimately, no real protection for parks except in the length of public feeling. So long as public turns and bows three times the direction of the nearest stock change at every mention of "progress" or "industrial development", provincial legislatures can be depended upon to make bad decisions

about parks, and even the federal government will bear watching. There will be hope of a comprehensive and secure parks system in Canada the first time a labor union votes to down tools because a project threatens a park, or the first time an aroused citizenry mans a picket line in defence of a park. Sooner or later both these things will happen. But in the meantime the parks are disappearing.



Sask. Govt. Photo by Ralph Vawter

Sloughs and swamps in farming areas provide a rich harvest for the hunter. Here "recreation is the subsidiary but important use of the land."

## Ernest Thompson Seton

By E. H. M. KNOWLES, Regina

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The author of this sketch knew Ernest Thompson Seton very well. In fact, Seton's homestead was not far from Mr. Knowles' first home in Saskatchewan.

Ernest Thompson Seton, author, artist and naturalist, was born in South Shields in the North of England near the Scottish border in the year 1860, and came to Canada at an early age with his large family. They settled in the vicinity of Toronto and from an early age it was apparent that young Seton had an aptitude for sketching, was very observant and was very fond of nature.

He was not a robust child but gained strength in the "outdoors" and with it a self reliance which came with experience. Early in life, on the advice from a friend he commenced keeping a diary from which many notes were readily available for his books.

One would say that he was restless

and that his eyes were always in focus for distant things. His manner and voice were gentle and quiet. He was extremely courteous, wiry, well set up and tall. His movements were rapid yet deliberate, and in walking he set his foot straight in the manner of a bushman.

Seton spent much of his time in and around Carberry, Manitoba from whence he made his excursions into what became Saskatchewan. He came into this area for the purpose of filing on a homestead. Names such as Fort Ellice, the Assiniboine River, the Shell River, the Bog, Little Boggy and Big Boggy, Pelly and the Duck Mountains occur often in his notes. He located his homestead, built a shanty and filed on the land. The shanty was well known as Seton's Shanty for many years afterwards.

During this time he was busy writing and his stories began to ap-