



Fossils in Burgess Shale

Alpine Bliss

Escape to the mountains of British Columbia

BY JENNY WISNIEWSKI

The lofty mountains and jewel-toned lakes of western Canada are breathtaking. While the dreamlike views enchant, crowds and traffic often pack Alberta's busy national parks in the summer months.

Not far away, British Columbia offers the same jaw-dropping scenery with fewer visitors, less development and a quieter, more laid-back vibe. Within a relatively confined area, you will find four national parks with charming mountain towns sprinkled along the byways. While cruising along Highway 1, also known as the Trans-Canada Highway, drink in the towering, snow-tipped mountains, glacier-fed rivers and potential wildlife sightings like black and grizzly bears, elk or bighorn sheep. And then be prepared to be dazzled by the main attractions. >

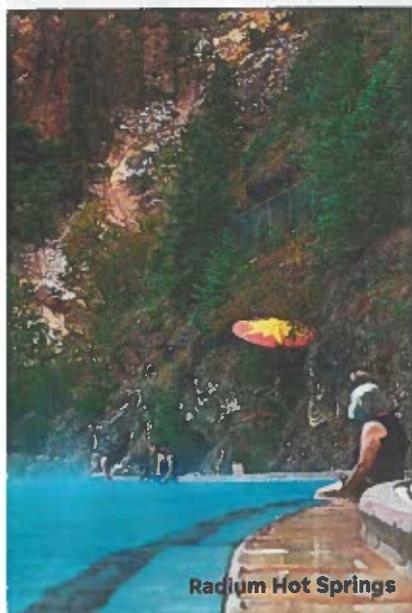
YOHO NATIONAL PARK

Just east of Golden, Yoho National Park features several unique attractions. The Burgess Shale, a UNESCO World Heritage Site accessible through guided hikes, tops the list. Visitors marvel over 508-million-year-old fossils in their natural environment, which was once a sea.

The park also boasts Emerald Lake, truly a gem with its luscious mint sparkle. The lake is a great destination for canoeing, hiking or picnicking. For more seclusion, head to Lake O'Hara, accessible via a shuttle lottery that helps keep the stunning spot pristine and quiet.

Another of Yoho's calling cards is its waterfalls. Take a forested hike to Wapta Falls or a short meander to Takakkaw Falls, one of the highest in Canada.

For a break, stop in Field, a mountain hamlet of fewer than 200 residents located within the park.



Radium Hot Springs

KOOTENAY NATIONAL PARK

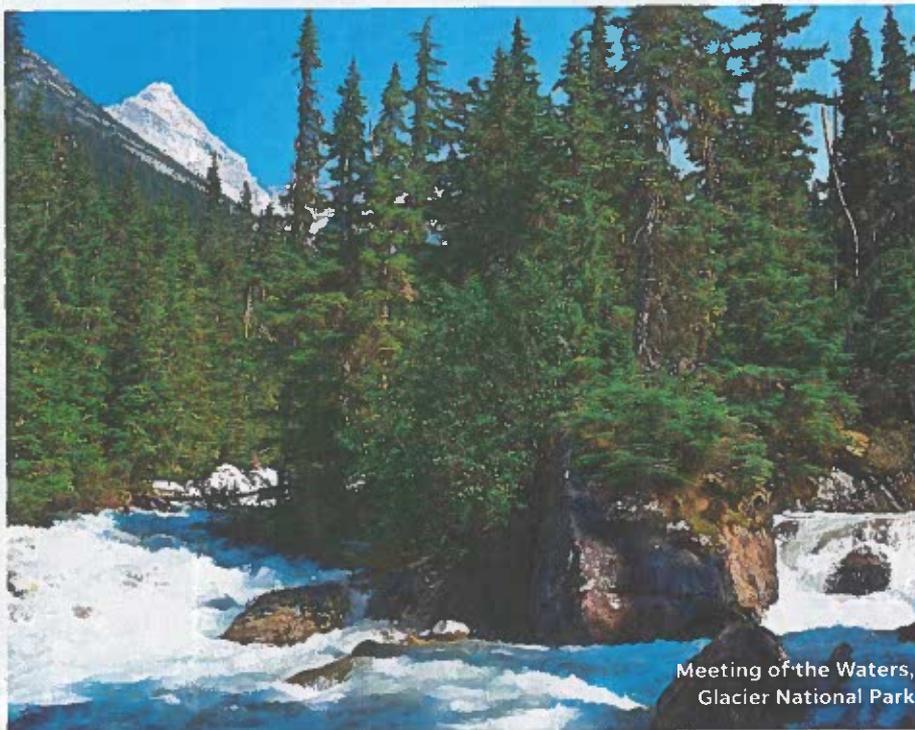
This park (pronounced Koo-te-nee) shares a number of beautiful hikes and part of the Burgess Shale with Yoho. Highway 93 slices vertically through the center of the park: Download the Kootenay driving app for a guided audio tour that offers history, stories and tips. Notable stops include the Continental Divide Day-Use Area, where you can straddle the Pacific and Atlantic watersheds, two provinces and two national parks.

Whatever draws you to Kootenay, don't miss a stop at Radium Hot Springs. Soak in a naturally heated pool while enjoying the beauty of the adjacent Sinclair Canyon rock cliffs and the soothing chant of Sinclair Creek. For a deeper peek into Sinclair Canyon and a chance to spot bighorn sheep grazing, try the nearby Juniper Loop hike.

MOUNT REVELSTOKE NATIONAL PARK

The only inland temperate rainforest in the world sits at the base of Mount Revelstoke National Park. After applying a liberal amount of mosquito repellent, take a hike through its dense, cool trails and walk among giant cedars, some over 500 years old, on the Soren Sorenson Trail, Inspiration Woods Loop or the Giant Cedars boardwalk.

Next, take a ride to the summit on the Meadows in the Sky Parkway. As late



Meeting of the Waters, Glacier National Park

as mid-July, you may find a layer of snow coating the parking lot at the top, and glacier lilies, the first to bloom, blanketing the ground. While often mistaken as the Rockies, these mountains actually form the Columbia Mountain Range. Various mountaintop trails offer hiking for diverse ages and abilities.

GLACIER NATIONAL PARK

Not to be confused with the U.S. national park of the same name, British Columbia's Glacier National Park also offers fascinating history and majestic natural features.

Established about the same time that the Canadian Pacific Railway completed its transcontinental line, you'll learn how the railway forged its way through the steep terrain and valleys of Rogers Pass. Additionally, explore the introduction of mountaineering in the late 1800s by Swiss guides, and discover the park's role as the birthplace of glaciology and the site of the earliest glacier research in North America.

If up for a challenge, hike the Great Glacier Trail for spectacular views of the Illecillewaet Glacier (meaning big water and pronounced ill-a-silhouette). For



Giant cedars at Mount Revelstoke National Park

those interested in a lighter walk, try the Meeting of the Waters Trail, which is exactly as it sounds and a peaceful spot for a rest or lunch. ■