

CREATING A “NATURAL ASSET”:

British Columbia’s First Park, Strathcona, 1905-16

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AT THE BEGINNING OF the twentieth century, British Columbia’s economy was integrated into what American environmental historian William Robbins refers to as a modern Western “culture of capitalism” that placed “ultimate significance on the material world and on the manipulation and transformation of that world for the purpose of making a profit.”¹ Like the American west, British Columbia was widely regarded as a “great natural resource reservoir” and a potentially profitable arena for the investment of outside capital.² By 1910, this “resource reservoir” included the scenery in newly created national parks. Responding to a lobby by naturalists and tourism promoters who defined unspoiled scenic areas as commodities, the BC government funded an “exploratory survey trip” to the Buttle Lake-Crown Mountain region of central Vancouver Island to assess its suitability for British Columbia’s first provincial park.³ Upon his return, the expedition leader proclaimed his support for the establishment of a park, arguing: “Switzerland gets millions sterling yearly from the thousands of tourists who go to see the Alps. We have right at our doors a natural asset as great as the Alps are to Switzerland.”⁴

¹ William G. Robbins, “Cultural Construction of Place: Approaches to Environmental History,” paper presented at “Environmental Cultures: Historical Perspectives,” conference held at University of Victoria, Victoria, British Columbia, 1996, 63.

² William Robbins, *Colony and Empire: The Capitalist Transformation of the American West* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1994), 62. See also Martin Robin, *The Rush for Spoils: The Company Province, 1871-1933* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972); Cole Harris, *The Resettlement of British Columbia: Essays on Colonialism and Geographical Change* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997). For environmental change associated with resource-based capitalism in the United States, see also William Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York and London: Norton, 1991).

³ Harry McClure Johnson, “Journal of the BC Exploratory Survey Trip into the Buttle’s Lake Region,” 172, British Columbia Archives (hereafter BCA), MS-0249, vol. 1, fol. 35, Johnson, 3 August 1910.

⁴ “Immense Asset to the Province,” *Victoria Colonist*, 14 August 1910. See also Paula Eng, “Parks for the People? Strathcona Park, 1905-1933” (MA thesis, University of Victoria, 1996).

The preservation, commodification, and consumption of scenery proved intrinsic to the earliest development of a tourist industry in British Columbia as many wealthy and middle-class British Columbians embraced the culture of consumerism associated with industrial capitalism.⁵ By the late nineteenth century, Victoria's tourism promoters, boosters, and business groups – including the Canadian Pacific Railway, the Victoria Board of Trade, the Tourist Association of Victoria, and the Vancouver Island Development League – marketed natural resources, scenery, modes of transport, and accommodations to attract settlers, investors, and tourists to Vancouver Island.⁶ In 1901, the Victoria Board of Trade and the city's tourist association approached the Canadian Pacific Railway about the possibility of building a new tourist hotel. This culminated in the construction of the Empress Hotel.⁷ Many travellers visited the province's wilderness areas to escape modern society, but also visited them “with a keen interest in locating and embracing industrial and agricultural opportunities.” Tourism associations “worked diligently to attract as many visitors as possible” and saw the creation of a provincial park on the central island as a key to the success of a new regional tourism industry.⁸

By the late nineteenth century, national and local park movements had emerged in Canada and the United States, coinciding with industrial expansion, railway development, and the creation of leisure time. Within a context of modernity, tourism promoters in British Columbia commodified scenery and used the language of economics to argue for the creation of a provincial park for tourism and recreation purposes and, in doing so, integrated this new park into the industrial capitalist model

⁵ Michael Dawson, *Selling British Columbia: Tourism and Consumer Culture, 1890–1970* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 10. Dawson suggests that tourism did not fully emerge as an industry in British Columbia until the 1920s or 1930s; however, my research suggests that tourism was important as early as 1910.

⁶ Dawson, *Selling British Columbia*, 26. See also Vancouver Island Development League, *Vancouver Island British Columbia, the Treasure Island: A History of Its Resources by District* (1910), available at <http://www.archive.org/details/vancouverislandb00vanc> (accessed 15 July 2011).

⁷ Dawson, *Selling British Columbia*, 27. For the CPR's early promotion of the Empress Hotel, see Terry Reksten, *The Empress Hotel: In the Grand Style* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1997).

⁸ Dawson, *Selling British Columbia*, 23. Dawson also suggests that most “tourists” to British Columbia between 1890 and 1930 were in fact local residents and journalists who wished to publicize the province, along with visitors from afar. Furthermore, he argues that, for this period, there is “no accurate way of measuring tourist demand or even the number of tourists visiting the province.” See Dawson, *Selling British Columbia*, 15. By 1915, the Vancouver Island Development League believed “the tourist business . . . had become an industry.” See “No Money to Spend on Strathcona Park,” *Victoria Daily Times*, 19 November 1915.

in an effort to create a tourism industry – although the outbreak of war thwarted these ambitions.⁹

Organized lobbying for the establishment of a provincial park in British Columbia began in 1905 when members of the Victoria-based Natural History Society of British Columbia (hereafter NHS), alarmed at the rate of logging on Vancouver Island, called on the provincial government to create a provincial park to preserve scenic parcels of land for future generations. Members of the Victoria Board of Trade soon joined them in urging the province to reserve land on central Vancouver Island for park purposes. In 1905 and 1908, the Kaslo Board of Trade and the North American Fish and Game Protective Association argued for a provincial park in the Kootenays.¹⁰ For the most part, these early park proponents did not envision the preservation of the landscape in its pristine form – after all, small-scale logging and mining were already widespread. They commodified scenery, arguing that the success of the burgeoning tourism industry depended upon making available unspoiled scenery, and they suggested ways in which the landscapes of proposed parks could be “improved” to attract the kinds of people who had the time and money for pleasure travel and sightseeing.

A major obstacle to the establishment of provincial parks was the fact that the province had granted rights to large amounts of Crown land to companies for mining and timber extraction. Such developments led, in 1907, to the provincial game warden’s suggestion that the government set aside land for a game reserve because it would soon be difficult to find “suitable spots.”¹¹ Concerned that the amount of timber tied up in

⁹ For the national park movements in Canada and the United States, see: Alan MacEachern, *Natural Selections: National Parks in Atlantic Canada, 1935-1970* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001); Leslie Bella, *Parks for Profit* (Montreal: Harvest House, 1987); Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 3rd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982); Chris Magoc, *Yellowstone: The Creation and Selling of an American Landscape, 1870-1903* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico: 1999); and Mark David Spence, *Dispossessing the Wilderness: Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999). For local parks, see: Jean Barman, *Stanley Park’s Secret: The Forgotten Families of Whoi Whoi, Kanaka Ranch and Brockton Point* (Madeira Park: Harbour Publishing, 2005); Robert A.J. McDonald, “‘Holy Retreat’ or ‘Practical Breathing Spot’? Class Perceptions of Vancouver’s Stanley Park, 1910-1913,” *Canadian Historical Review* 65, 2 (1984): 127-53; Sean Kheraj, “Restoring Nature: Ecology, Memory and the Storm History of Vancouver’s Stanley Park,” *Canadian Historical Review* 88, 4 (2007): 577-612; Janis Ringuette, “Beacon Hill Park History, 1842-2009,” (2004), available at <http://www.beaconhillparkhistory.org/> (accessed 15 July 2011).

¹⁰ F.J. Fulton, Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works, to the Premier, 27 February 1908, B.C.A., GR-0441, vol. 3; and British Columbia, Legislative Assembly, *Sessional Papers*, 1908, “Game Warden’s Report” attached to the Report of the Provincial Game and Forest Warden.

¹¹ British Columbia, Legislative Assembly, *Sessional Papers*, 1907, “Game Warden’s Report,” F11. The Game Warden, Bryan Williams, was a passionate sportsman. See A. Bryan Williams,

timber licences and leases issued by the province exceeded the potential market and compromised the public interest in preserving public land, the government withdrew “all unalienated timber lands from all forms of alienation.”¹² Indeed, finding land for park purposes proved challenging after the provincial government passed its March 1908 Act to Provide for the Maintenance of Provincial Parks, enabling it to reserve land for park purposes. The act did not reserve specific parcels of land. Instead, it gave the government the authority to define the boundaries, and to appoint trustees, of these “pleasure grounds” in order to make changes to park environments that would be “suitable for the enjoyment and recreation of the public,” including leasing, granting, or conveying the land; erecting fences, walls, and buildings; planting shrubs; and building roads and sidewalks. Significantly, the act neither prohibited nor permitted park land to be used for industrial purposes.¹³

Inspired by the passing of the 1908 act, members of the NHS and the Victoria Board of Trade intensified their lobbying for the establishment of a provincial park on Vancouver Island.¹⁴ The members of these organizations included prominent middle-class men with political connections, some of whom belonged to two or more of these organizations. For example, Arthur W. McCurdy (an inventor and scientist) and Chartres Pemberton (a lawyer and botanist) belonged to both the NHS and the Victoria Board of Trade. It is also probable that the prominent Victoria lawyer Arthur Crease belonged to both.¹⁵ These groups imagined a provincial park as an area for the protection of forests and fauna that simultaneously provided an appealing destination for

Game Trails of British Columbia: Big Game and Other Sport in the Wilds of British Columbia (London: John Murray, 1925).

¹² Robert E. Cail, *Land, Man, and the Law* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1974), 104. For statistics relating to timber leases and licences, see Cail, *Land*, 103-4 and 274; and British Columbia, *Journals of the Legislative Assembly*, 1907, 67, which states that 770,362 acres were leased with another 2,560,000 acres under licence. The total timber land (excluding Dominion land in the province) deemed “productive” in 1913 was 12,308,578 hectares (30,414,080 acres). For the history of British Columbia’s forest industry, see Gordon Hak, *Turning Trees into Dollars: The British Columbia Coastal Lumber Industry, 1858-1913* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000); Stephen Gray, “Forest Policy and Administration in British Columbia, 1912-1928” (MA thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1977).

¹³ British Columbia, “An Act to Provide for the Maintenance of Provincial Parks,” assent received 7 March 1908, *Revised Statutes of British Columbia 1911*, vol. 3.

¹⁴ On the botanical activities of the NHS, see David Brownstein, “Sunday Walks and Seedtraps: The Many Natural Histories of British Columbia Forest Conservation, 1890-1925” (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 2006), esp. chap. 4.

¹⁵ NHS minutes 1908 and 1909, BCA, MS-0284, see minutes for 4 January, 12 February, 3 March, 14 June, 20 September, and 13 December 1909. Women were scarce in the NHS: only two, Miss Tuck and Miss Laughter, joined or were considered for membership. See minutes for 29 March and 14 June 1909, BCA, vertical files, reel 110, files 282 and 309, and reel 34, file 2696.

tourists and new business opportunities for guides, hoteliers, railways, and other private, profit-oriented businesses. They assumed that most people who would visit parks in relatively remote regions would come from class backgrounds similar to their own, and they did not preclude landscape alterations that would appeal to their aesthetic sensibilities and recreational proclivities – from the construction of park facilities to the planting of non-native species and the eradication of some animals in favour of others.¹⁶

In April 1910, members of the Victoria NHS sent a resolution to the Vancouver Island Development League expressing concern about the rapid exhaustion of the "pristine beauty" of "our noble forest probably unequalled in magnificence and extent" due to overcutting and "waste and destruction" caused by "the insatiable lumberman." The NHS asked the Development League, whose secretary was Ernest McGaffey, a travel writer and poet, for its assistance in lobbying "the powers that be" to reacquire alienated land rights and to form a "forest reserve and game sanctuary" at Cameron Lake on central Vancouver Island.¹⁷ The area offered panoramic views, a "magnificent primeval forest," and, significantly, relatively easy public access "by wagon road and soon by rail." According to NHS members, it would make "an ideal forest and plant reserve, a game sanctuary and tourist resort."¹⁸ Thereafter, members of the NHS, the Development League, the Victoria Board of Trade, and the Alberni Board of Trade joined forces to lobby the provincial government to set aside and protect land for a park at Cameron Lake.¹⁹

Creating a park at Cameron Lake was no easy matter, however. According to the surveyor-general, E.B. McKay, the "Victoria Lumber and Trading Company [Victoria Lumber and Manufacturing Company]" owned or leased much of the land. As these parcels contained "some of the finest Fir timber in British Columbia," McKay and Chief Commissioner of Lands Price Ellison estimated it would be too costly to acquire the company's rights, and certainly none of the park proponents appear to

¹⁶ "Strathcona Park and Tourist Traffic," *Daily Colonist*, 13 January 1915.

¹⁷ NHS minutes 4 January and 19 February 1909, BCA, MS-0284. For McGaffey, see Dawson, *Selling British Columbia*, 17.

¹⁸ NHS minutes, 4 January and 19 February 1909, BCA, MS-0284. The NHS minutes here refer to the E & N's branch line between Parksville and Port Alberni. Under construction in 1910, the railway through the Vancouver Island Mountains opened in 1912.

¹⁹ NHS minutes, 18 April and 20 April 1910, BCA, MS-0284; "National Park on the Island," *Daily Colonist*, 21 April 1910. I could not find a copy of the petition in any of the minutes, *Sessional Papers*, or Premier's Papers, so I am unable to determine whether its contents differed from that of the resolution. See also McKay to Ellison, 11 May 1910, and enclosed letter from Alberni Board of Trade, BCA, GR-0441, vol. 37.

have considered the idea that the government should expropriate these properties and land tenure rights.²⁰

The provincial government then looked further north on Vancouver Island and recommended a large wilderness area near Buttle Lake, southwest of Campbell River, for park purposes. On 31 May 1910, it passed an order-in-council reserving “the unalienated and unoccupied land in the vicinity of Buttle’s [sic] Lake, with a view of later on setting it apart as a Provincial Park.”²¹ The provincial government gave little, if any, consideration to indigenous use of the land, nor did it consider geographic features, wildlife migration patterns, or other environmental factors when determining the possible boundaries of the proposed park.²² The Esquimalt and Nanaimo Railway (hereafter E & N) railway belt formed the eastern boundary of the reserved land, and, as a result, the northern end of Buttle Lake remained outside the reserved area, in the railway belt, where the surrounding land was open to resource extraction and other industrial development (see Figures 1 and 8). W.J. Sutton, a member of the NHS and a geologist for the E & N Railway, wrote to Premier Richard McBride suggesting the province purchase the northern end of Buttle Lake from the E & N as the area had “very little commercial value [to the E & N] being rugged and mountainous.”²³

Aside from the inconvenient presence of twenty-four timber leases around Buttle Lake and elsewhere in the proposed park (see Figure 2), the choice seemed perfect. The 1 June 1910 edition of the *Victoria Daily Colonist* proclaimed: “[Buttle Lake] more than successfully rivals the Lake of the Clouds [in Rocky Mountain National Park], Emerald Lake

²⁰ McKay to Ellison, 11 May 1910, and Ellison to McBride, 31 May 1910, BCA, GR-0441, vol. 37, file 3, no. 168/10. In the 31 May letter, Ellison states: “while it would be very nice to have this preserved for scenic purposes, it seems altogether likely that it would take a very large figure to purchase it back again.” For the Victoria Lumber and Manufacturing Company, see Donald MacKay, *Empire of Wood: The MacMillan Bloedel Story* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1983); and Ken Drushka, *H.R.: A Biography of H.R. MacMillan* (Madeira Park: Harbour Publishing, 1995). To the best of our knowledge, two parks were eventually created out of the Victoria Lumber & Manufacturing Company’s land (Block 35) at Cameron Lake: Little Qualicum Falls Provincial Park (established 1940), and MacMillan Provincial Park (established 1944), better known as Cathedral Grove. For the origins of MacMillan Park, see MacKay, *Empire of Wood*, 149; and Drushka, *H.R.*, 255-56.

²¹ Ellison to McBride, 31 May 1910, BCA, GR-0441, vol. 37, file 3, no. 168/10; and McBride to James Motion, Alberni Board of Trade, 1 June 1910, BCA, GR-0441, vol. 37, file 3, no. 168/10; BCA, map s.616.9 bj6795, 1910, showing “Government Reserve for National Park. 348 Square Miles Should E & N Contribute 1/4th or 84 Square Miles,” 6 June 1910.

²² William H. Wilson, “Reginald H. Thomson and Planning for Strathcona Park, 1912-15,” *Planning Perspectives* 17 (2002): 378. For indigenous use of the reserved area, see Eng, “Parks for the People,” 31-33.

²³ Sutton to McBride, 3 June 1910, BCA, GR-0441, vol. 39; NHS minutes, 20 September and 18 October 1909, BCA, MS-0284.

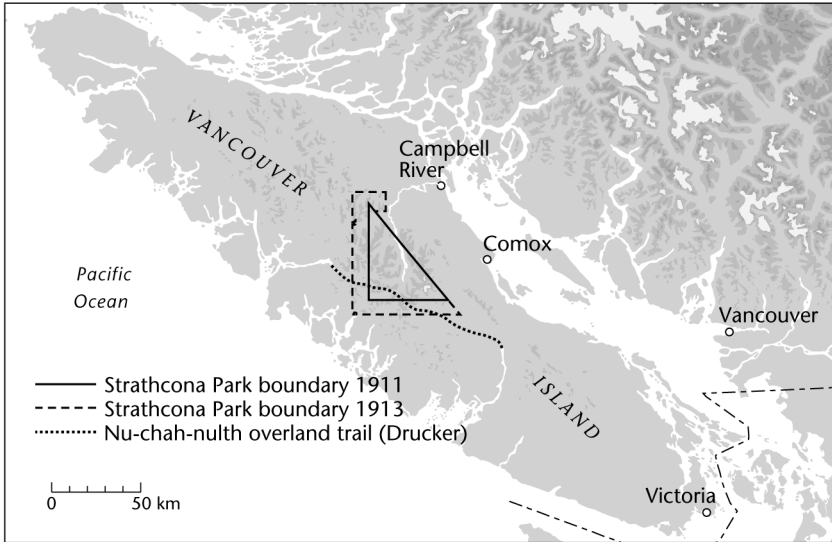


Figure 1. Strathcona Park, Vancouver Island, British Columbia. Sources: BCA "Government Reserve for National Park," 5 June 1910, Map bj6791; Strathcona Park Act 1913, Statutes of British Columbia, 1913; P. Drucker, *The Northern and Central Nootkan Tribes* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1951) facing p. 1. Map by Eric Leinberger.

[in Yoho National Park] and Lake Louise [in Banff National Park]." And it predicted that the area would soon "constitute a magnificent national park for the people of British Columbia, quickly and easily accessible from the chief centres of population upon the completion . . . of already projected transportation facilities." The lake was "distinguished for the magnificence and variety of its scenic delights, mountains – perpetually snow crowned – rising from its dense blue waters to a height of from seven to eight thousand feet [2133 to 2440 metres], while charming waterfalls, majestic glaciers and fairy-like islands afford alluring contrasts."²⁴ The following day a *Daily Colonist* reporter claimed: "the preservation of such a magnificent scenic area will enhance the value of the island as a tourist resort, besides conserving a considerable tract of fine timber."²⁵

Almost immediately following the government's announcement, park proponents realized that "the government's intentions in connection with the reserve were not very clear."²⁶ While all parties agreed the park

²⁴ "Designed to be Provincial Park," *Daily Colonist*, 1 June 1910.

²⁵ "Provincial Park Decision Lauded," *Daily Colonist*, 2 June 1910.

²⁶ "Endorses Idea of Provincial Park," *Daily Colonist*, 10 June 1910.

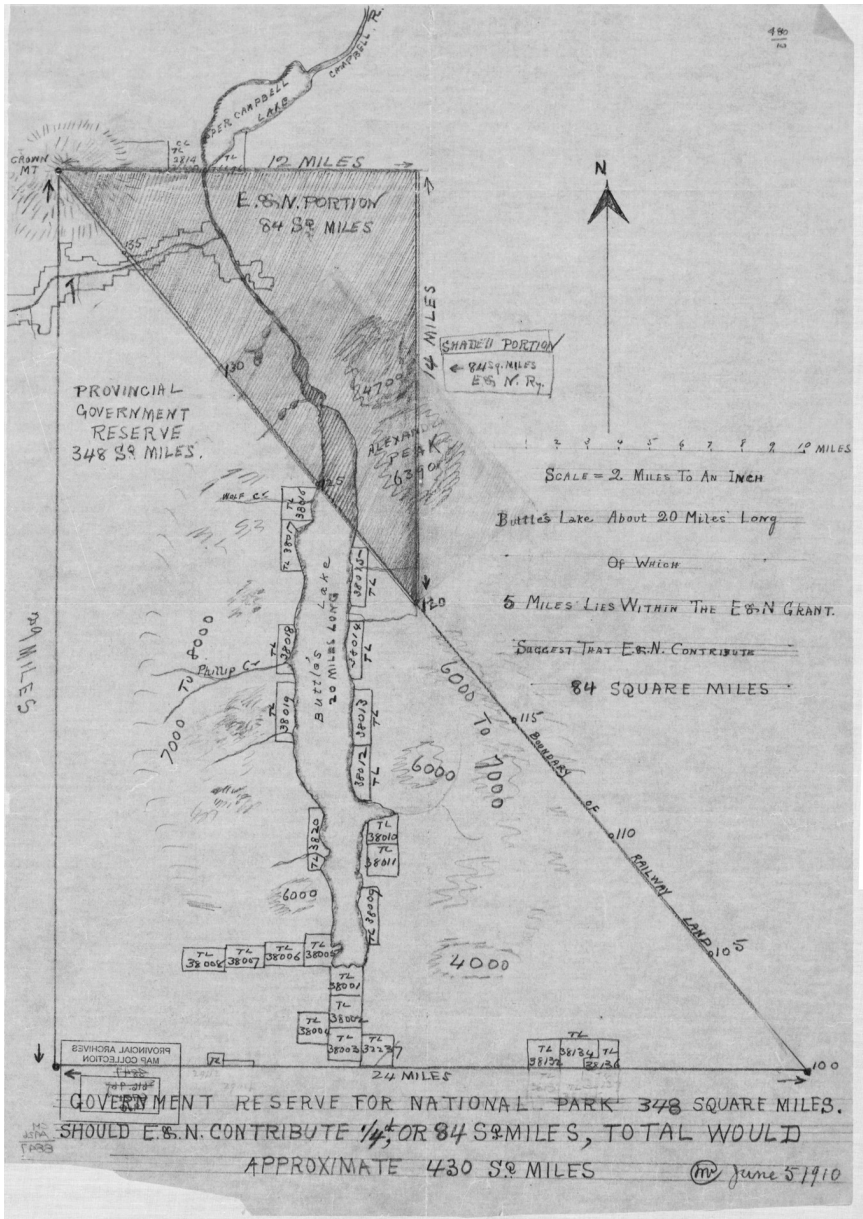


Figure 2. "Government Reserve for National Park, 348 square miles should E & N contribute 1/4th or 84 square miles, to total would approximate 430 square miles. Buttles [sic] Lake about 20 miles long of which 5 miles lies within the E & N grant; suggest that E & N contribute 84 square miles." Map shows timber licences held within Strathcona Park. Reprinted by permission of Royal BC Museum, B.C.A. Call number: CM-A926, AAAA6071.

should be open for public recreation, members of the Victoria Board of Trade and the Development League were unclear whether the park would be a "game sanctuary, where only vermin and wild beasts [predators native to the area] would be destroyed" or whether hunting and fishing would be prohibited within the reserve.²⁷ In addition, relatively little was known either about the area or about how the government should proceed to administer and/or exploit such a park.²⁸ This lack of knowledge provided the rationale for the government-sponsored expedition, led by British Columbia's newly appointed chief commissioner of lands Price Ellison, into the newly reserved park land. Between 5 July and 13 August 1910, a party of twenty-three people, including Ellison's twenty-year-old daughter Myra, explored the rugged backcountry to assess its suitability as a park and to suggest ways that it could be "improved" for use by outdoor enthusiasts and sightseeing tourists. The *Nanaimo Free Press* reported that Ellison's party was to examine the area in order "to comprehend in its grandeur what the park should be when generous nature ha[d] been supplemented by intellectually directed human aid in the conversion of the natural park of which Buttle Lake [was] the central feature into one of the world's very greatest rest and recreation centres." The reporter expected the area to be transformed into an "incomparable pleasure ground."²⁹

Members of the Ellison expedition travelled by steamer from Victoria to Vancouver, Lund, and Campbell River, and then by wagon from Campbell River to McIvor Lake. From there, the party hiked, climbed, and canoed its way to Buttle Lake and Great Central Lake. Thirty-eight days later, the party returned to Victoria via the new road between Alberni and Nanaimo, and the E & N Railway from Nanaimo to Victoria.³⁰ It was not only the beautiful scenery that captured the imaginations of the expedition members but also the advances in transportation. Indeed, Ellison's nephew described the new Alberni road as "splendid" and the timber around Cameron Lake as "wonderful."³¹

²⁷ Ibid. See also NHS minutes, 13 June 1910, BCA, MS-0284; and Victoria Board of Trade to McBride, 23 June 1910, BCA, GR-0441, vol. 37.

²⁸ For the early exploration of the Strathcona Park region, see John Hayman, ed., *Robert Brown and the Vancouver Island Exploring Expedition* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1989); and Lindsay Elms, *Beyond Nootka: A Historical Perspective of Vancouver Island Mountains* (Courtenay: Misthorn Press, 1996).

²⁹ "Expedition to Buttles Lake," *Nanaimo Free Press*, 4 July 1910; for Price Ellison, see Kenneth V. Ellison, *Price Ellison: A Short History of an Okanagan Pioneer Family* (Oyama: privately published, 1988).

³⁰ Johnson, "Journal."

³¹ Dawson, *Selling British Columbia*, 15; and Johnson, "Journal," 211-12.

This was no ordinary exploration party. Most of its members were educated, upper middle-class, and politically connected immigrants or their descendents from England and Scotland. Myra Ellison attended McGill University; Ellison's nephew by marriage, Harry McClure Johnson of Peoria, Illinois, was a one-time student of law who kept a journal of the trip; and William W. Bolton, a former Anglican priest and Cambridge graduate was, by 1910, employed as the headmaster and warden at the University School for Boys in Victoria. Bolton had visited Buttle Lake in 1896 and had written about it in glowing terms.³² Several participants worked for the provincial government, including Walter Fletcher Loveland, a former military sergeant-major born in Kent, England, who served as a provincial land surveyor, and Charles Haslam, the chief log-scaler for the province. Lionel Hudson of London had attended a small college in England before training as a forester in Norway. Clearly, Hudson's family held some wealth as his brother attended Cambridge. Finally, Hugh Nathan Bacon had prospected and trapped in British Columbia and held interests in iron-ore on a mountain at Upper Campbell Lake.³³ Elite, educated men also formed the majority of those who packed supplies or performed other labour-related tasks. They included James Dickson Twaddle, Gerald Bolton (son of William), Frank Ward (the official photographer), and James Howard. Indigenous people acted as guides and packers. In his journal, Johnson identified "Dave" and "Bob" as "pure-blooded Duncan [Indians]" but did not mention their surnames, and he described "Dan Gaboriau [sic]" as an "Indian canoe man, half-breed [from] Duncan."³⁴

The journey to and through the proposed park area was an arduous one, and the travellers admired the area's beautiful scenery while persevering in the face of numerous hardships. Their comments suggest that, like later tourists described by Michael Dawson, they admired landscapes while wishing to "conquer the very topography that produced these feelings."³⁵ Harry Johnson's journal of the Ellison expedition did not present a romantic view of the party's travels, as it described encounters with mosquitoes, sandflies, snakes, blowdowns, steep trails,

³² W.W. Bolton, *Vancouver Daily Province*, 22 August 1896, reprinted in "Vancouver Island by Land and Water," *Link* 14, 2 (1991): 31-33.

³³ Johnson, "Journal," 22-26.

³⁴ Johnson, "Journal," 27-29. This is Dan Gabourie from Duncan in the Cowichan Valley, a descendant of Joseph Gabourie, a French-Canadian labourer with the Hudson's Bay Company who had married a Cowichan woman. See Bruce McIntyre Watson, *Lives Lived West of the Divide: A Biographical Dictionary of Fur Traders Working West of the Rockies, 1793-1858* (Kelowna, BC: UBC Okanagan, 2010), 1:394.

³⁵ Dawson, *Selling British Columbia*, 21.



Figure 3. Members of Party around a Camp Fire at Lower End of Buttle Lake. Price Ellison is second from the right. *Source:* MS-0249, Ellison Family Correspondence. Reprinted by permission of Royal BC Museum, BCA.



Figure 4. An Elk River Exploration Party. Myra Ellison is facing the camera. *Source:* MS-0249, Ellison Family Correspondence. Reprinted by permission of Royal BC Museum, BCA.

and tree roots as well as spectacular scenery. Nonetheless, occasional journal entries suggest feelings of nationalism, ethnic elitism, and pride in conquering nature. In a similar vein, celebrating the conquest of nature and the presence of Myra Ellison, William Bolton described the party's successful ascent and descent of Crown Mountain in a poem:

Yon Mountain-Crown of fair Vancouver's Isle,
 Whose domes no foot hath trod,
 Whose outlook is o'er ocean wide
 O'er vales and hills and racing tide.
 Men strive to master thee.

Through forest, stream and rock faced heights,
 They plod their steady way.
 Their aim to plant the Union Jack
 Despite the climb and weighty pack
 Upon thy noble crown.

They win! What matters now the weariness
 The blowdowns and the falls.
 The honor theirs which none can take
 Their witness left which none can shake.
 Save snow and maddened storm.

A maid amongst them, light of feet,
 With nerves as strong as steel,
 How could MEN halt, or hearts give in!
 Her gallant deed all praise doth win,
 True daughter of our RACE.³⁶

The language used by politicians, tourism promoters, alpinists, and other middle- to upper-class men in describing Strathcona Park reveals that their valuation of scenery reflected their ideas of what a park should be as well as their motives for protecting land near Buttle Lake. These British Columbians appreciated nature for its scenic value, for its contribution to the intangible value of nationalism, and, most important, as a scenic resource to compete with other resources.³⁷ After Ellison returned to

³⁶ William Bolton, "On the Ascent of Crown Mountain, July 29, 1910," in Johnson, "Journal," 161-62; Dawson, *Selling British Columbia*, 21.

³⁷ "Designed to be Provincial Park," *Daily Colonist*, 1 June 1910; and Sutton to McBride, 3 June 1910, BCA, GR-44r, vol. 39.



Figure 5. Buttle Lake Near the Middle. *Source:* MS-0249, Ellison Family Correspondence. Reprinted by permission of Royal BC Museum, B.C.A.

Victoria, he raved about the “magnificent” scenery, including mountain peaks, glaciers, and waterfalls.³⁸ The *Nanaimo Free Press* predicted the park, when developed for public pleasure, would be “the pride not only of British Columbia but of all Canada.”³⁹ Park proponents described the new park reserve as an “asset” or “natural asset” that would enhance tourism. Arthur Wheeler of the Alpine Club of Canada later said that Ellison’s report to the Legislature “opened our eyes wide to its [the park’s] tremendous value as a scenic resource.”⁴⁰ Even Premier McBride, when he cut back funding for the park in 1915, told the *Victoria Daily Times* that he had been fully cognizant of “the value of tourist traffic” when the government had entered “the park scheme.”⁴¹

³⁸ “Immense Asset to the Province,” *Daily Colonist*, 14 August 1910.

³⁹ “Expedition to Buttles [sic] Lake,” *Nanaimo Free Press*, 4 July 1910.

⁴⁰ Arthur O. Wheeler, “The Alpine Club of Canada in Strathcona Park,” *Canadian Alpine Journal* 5 (1913): 91. For Wheeler’s career see R.W. Sandford, *Among the Great Hills - Three Generations of Wheelers and their Contribution to the Mapping of Mountains* (Canmore, AB: The Alpine Club of Canada, 2006).

⁴¹ “Provincial Park Decision Lauded,” *Daily Colonist*, 2 June 1910; “No Money to Spend on Strathcona Park,” *Victoria Daily Times*, 19 November 1915.

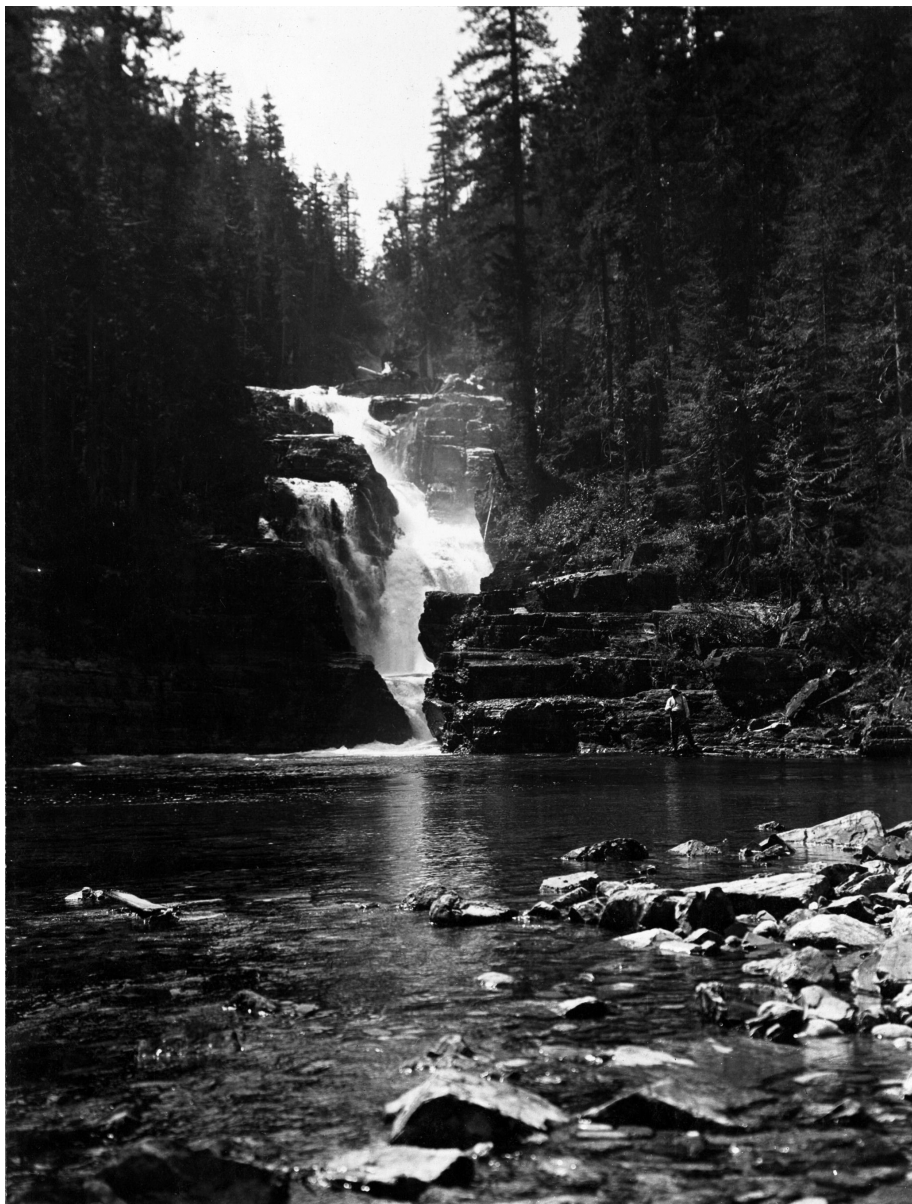


Figure 6. Myra Falls. *Source:* MS-0249, Ellison Family Correspondence. Reprinted by permission of Royal BC Museum, B.C.A.



Figure 7. The Top of Crown Mountain. *Source:* MS-0249, Ellison Family Correspondence. Reprinted by permission of Royal BC Museum, BCA.

In addition to expounding on the new park's scenic beauty, Ellison emphasized the economic benefits of park creation and urged the government to advertise "this vast natural playground ... to all the world" and to make it easily accessible by constructing a road from Campbell River for the many outdoor enthusiasts, including alpinists from the United States, Great Britain, and Italy who had expressed interest in visiting the park.⁴² Others shared Ellison's belief in the need for promotion and road construction. The editor of the *Victoria Daily Times* enthusiastically endorsed the government's decision to preserve the park, which he believed was "destined to become extremely popular as a holiday resort." Like Ellison, he pointed out that it would be necessary to construct a road to the park in order for visitors to be able to see its glaciers and "other picturesque features."⁴³ The following day, the *Victoria Daily Times* reported: "a measure has come before the House which men of all shades of opinion can support, that for the establishment of a

⁴² "Buttles [sic] Lake Park Reserve," *Daily Colonist*, 27 January 1911.

⁴³ "Road to Strathcona Park," *Victoria Daily Times*, editorial, 26 January 1911; "All Approve of New Playground," *Victoria Daily Times*, 27 January 1911.

provincial park at Buttles [sic] Lake to be known as Strathcona park.⁴⁴ In the months following Ellison's return, Premier McBride appointed him the minister of finance and agriculture and appointed William Ross the new chief commissioner of lands and works. It was Ross who, in January 1911, introduced to the provincial Legislature the bill creating Strathcona Park.

Almost immediately it became clear that forestry companies and timber speculators with holdings inside the boundaries of the new park expected compensation, and plenty of it, for their loss of access to timber within the park. On several occasions in 1911, holders of the timber leases at Buttle Lake, including the Paterson Timber Company and Henry Hemlow (who owned several claims in partnership with the company), wrote to the government, apparently at Ross's request, seeking compensation in the form of cash or the right to select an equal amount of stumpage from unalienated Crown timber lands. The company and Hemlow based their compensation proposals on a one dollar per one thousand board feet stumpage rate, even though the provincial stumpage rate was only seventy-five cents per one thousand board feet, ensuring they would acquire more timber, not an equivalent amount, in the exchange.⁴⁵ On 21 February, the Paterson Company, perhaps prompted by a rumour of potential provincial restrictions on timber extraction at Buttle Lake, requested a total timber exchange equivalent to 426,000,000 board feet (approximately 1 million cubic metres) of timber. If the government refused, the company wanted Ross to let it cut on the existing leases within the park. In April, Hemlow suggested swapping twenty timber claims within the park for twenty-five claims selected by himself and Paterson Timber.⁴⁶ After failing to reach agreement with the province, Paterson Timber sold its timber rights to the Vancouver Timber and Trading Company represented by Alvo von Alvensleben, a personal friend of Premier McBride. In December 1911, von Alvensleben acknowledged that the province did not want logging to take place at Buttle Lake. Therefore he, too, sought compensation, reminding the

⁴⁴ The bill was introduced on 23 January 1911. See "Defines Limits of Province's Park," *Daily Colonist*, 24 January 1911.

⁴⁵ Paterson Timber Co. Ltd. to Ross, 24 January 1911, BCA, GR-1991, Recreation and Conservation, Closed Park History Files. Ross spoke with a representative of the company on 23 January and requested the company make a proposal to the government. See Paterson Timber to Ross, 24 January and 4 February 1911, BCA, GR-1991, Recreation and Conservation, Closed Park History Files; Gray, "Forest Policy," 19.

⁴⁶ For the purposes of discussing stumpage and timber values, I retain the Imperial system of measure because the government used this method for timber calculations. Paterson Timber to Ross, 21 February 1911, BCA, GR-1991; and Hemlow to Ross, 4 April 1911, BCA, GR-1991.

premier that the company expected to be reimbursed for money spent on "locating the old licenses in Buttle's [sic] Lake," on taxes and licence fees, and on locating the new timber to replace their holdings in the new park.⁴⁷

While the timber companies attempted to strike a deal with the province, the provincial government passed the Strathcona Park Act on 1 March 1911 (see Figure 8).⁴⁸ The park was named after Donald Smith, Lord Strathcona, an executive director of the Canadian Pacific Railway, the Canadian high commissioner in London, and one of the wealthiest and most powerful Canadians of the time.⁴⁹ The act bore a strong resemblance to the Canadian government's 1887 Rocky Mountain Park Act (Banff) in that it created "a public park and pleasure-ground for the benefit, advantage, and enjoyment of the people of British Columbia." The Strathcona Park Act allowed for the construction of park buildings (to serve the needs of tourists and for other purposes) and the "care, preservation, and management of the park," including the protection of fish, game, and birds. Section 6 of the act permitted holders of timber leases and mining claims to maintain, but not necessarily to exercise, their rights. The implications were enormous. This provision allowed government to infringe on the property rights of timber lease and licence holders, and it also provided future governments the opportunity to change the primary use of the park, or parts of it, from recreational to industrial.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ von Alvensleben to McBride, 22 December 1911, BCA, GR-1991, file 443/11. An article in the *Vancouver Daily Province* dated 20 August 1914 identifies von Alvensleben as a "representative of a big German syndicate which owns coal mines, timberlands and real estate in British Columbia." For documentation of the personal relationship between McBride and von Alvensleben, see McBride to von Alvensleben, 15 September 1914, BCA, GR-0441, vol. 60, file 1, no. 687/14; and von Alvensleben to McBride, 4 September and 21 October 1914, BCA, GR-0441, vol. 60, file 1, no. 687/14. For von Alvensleben's career as financier and stock promoter, see David Cruise and Allison Griffiths, *Fleeing the Lamb: Inside the Vancouver Stock Exchange* (Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1987), 17-30.

⁴⁸ British Columbia, "An Act Respecting Strathcona Park," 1 March 1911, *Statutes of British Columbia* 1911, 331-32.

⁴⁹ Donald Smith – later Lord Strathcona – had become William Ross's guardian when Ross was orphaned at age nine. See Peter Gillis and Thomas Roach, *Lost Initiatives: Canada's Forest Industries, Forest Policy and Forest Conservation* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986), 142-43. See also Donna McDonald, *Lord Strathcona: A Biography of Donald Alexander Smith* (Toronto: Dundurn, 1996). On Smith's corporate connections, see John A. Eagle, *The Canadian Pacific Railway and the Development of Western Canada, 1896-1914* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989), 8-9.

⁵⁰ "An Act Respecting Strathcona Park," *Statutes of British Columbia* 1911, 331-32. The Rocky Mountain Park Act (Banff) created "a public park and pleasure ground for the benefit, advantage and enjoyment of the people of Canada." See also Kevin McNamee, "From Wild Places to Endangered Spaces: A History of Canada's National Parks," in *Parks and Protected Areas in*

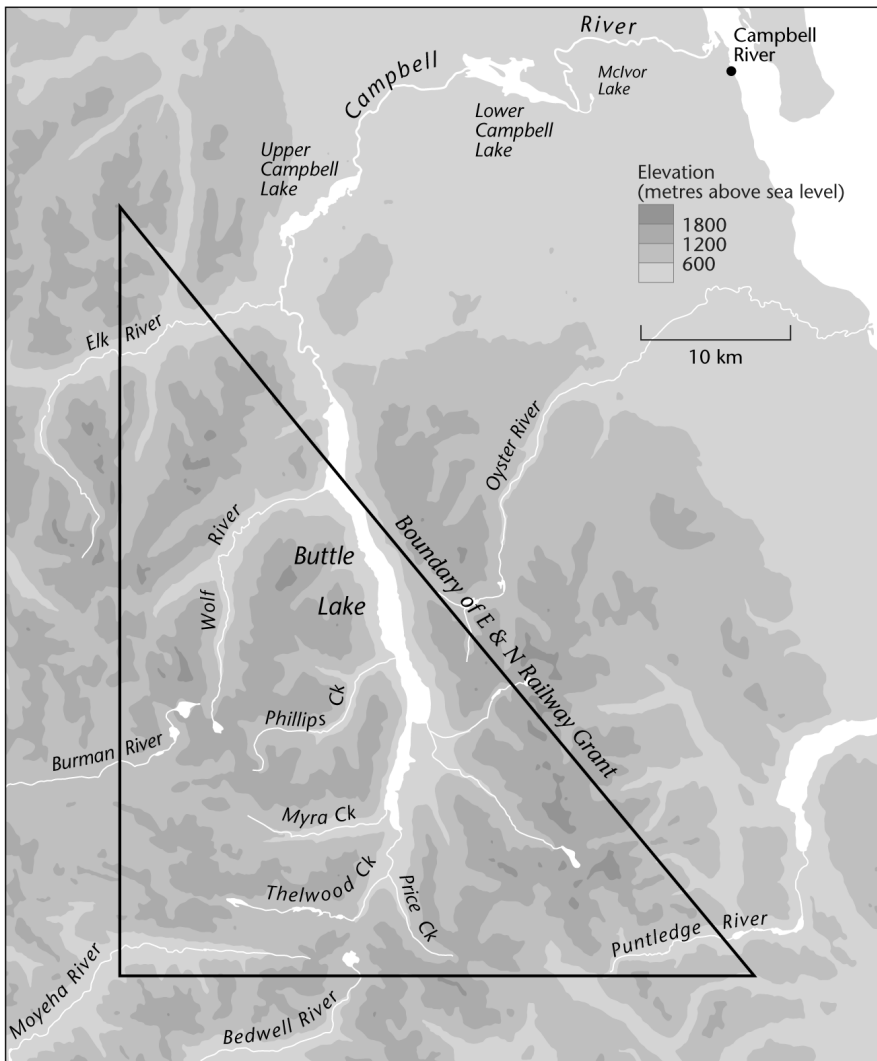


Figure 8. Strathcona Park 1911. Source: BCA Microfilm CM A926, “Government Reserve for National Park,” 1910. Map by Eric Leinberger.

The earliest visitors to the new park embraced efforts to transform or “improve” the landscape, and to eradicate certain animal species, to enhance public enjoyment. As parks reflect society’s views at particular times and places, their definition, use, and function change over time.⁵¹

Canada: Planning and Management, eds. Philip Dearden and Rick Rollins (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1993), 20; and “Rocky Mountain Park Act, 1887,” *Statutes of Canada 1887*.

⁵¹ MacEachern, *Natural Selections*, 4.

In 1910, park users accepted ideas of "improvement" that were common among agricultural settlers who, motivated by profit, came to the Pacific in the nineteenth century.⁵² Similarly, when members of the Alpine Club of Canada hiked into the park in 1913, one member, Frederick Longstaff, an architectural draughtsman educated at Eton and Cambridge, commented on the enormity of the cedar and fir trees and observed bears, grouse, and other wildlife.⁵³ However, he clearly did not want all wildlife to remain in the park and remarked that depleted elk herds should be preserved by exterminating cougars in the area. Longstaff also suggested the park be improved through the construction of an experimental farm, a garden area, a chalet, and trails for "quick access" to mountain peaks. Further, Longstaff was prepared to allow timber extraction in the park provided that any logging operations were carefully supervised and that the logged areas were reforested with suitable "deciduous varieties."⁵⁴

Arthur Wheeler, member of the NHS and president of the Alpine Club of Canada, shared Longstaff's ideas of park transformation.⁵⁵ He pictured Strathcona as one day containing the summer homes "of wanderers from the cities of Vancouver Island and elsewhere."⁵⁶ He favoured improving public access by clearing the cedar flat, an area a few kilometres northeast of the park boundaries, to facilitate travel. His field notes also reveal that, by 1913, motor launches were used on the park's lakes and that numerous good foot and pony trails had been blazed in the park, and several passages cut through blowdown. Wheeler also proposed developing the cedar flat outside the park as a holding ground from which elk, deer, and even buffalo could be introduced into the park. Wheeler seemed unaware of the extent to which these transformations would alter the areas he perceived as "gloriously wild."⁵⁷ Instead, he simply noted: "Strathcona is a splendid possession, and a wise and safe reserve for the great future that lies ahead of Vancouver Island."⁵⁸ For

⁵² Richard White, "The Altered Landscape," in *Regionalism and the Pacific Northwest*, ed. William Robbins, Robert J. Frank, and Richard E. Ross (Corvallis, OR: Oregon State University Press, 1983), 114-15.

⁵³ Index to Longstaff Papers, BCA, MS-0677.

⁵⁴ Longstaff Papers, BCA, MS-0677, vol. 400, file 239, "Strathcona Park," 1-6. At the time the provincial government created the new park, the province had in place a bounty on cougars. See Richard Mackie, "Cougars, Colonists, and the Rural Settlement of Vancouver Island," in *Beyond the City Limits: Rural History in British Columbia*, ed. Ruth W. Sandwell (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999), 123.

⁵⁵ NHS minutes, 6 and 20 March 1911, BCA, MS-0284; Arthur Wheeler, "The Alpine Club of Canada in Strathcona Park," *Canadian Alpine Journal* 5 (1913): 82-83.

⁵⁶ Wheeler, "Alpine Club in Strathcona," 82-85 and 91.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 95.

all that, some early park visitors expressed concern about the extent of park transformation. Alpine Club member W.W. Foster, for example, called for Strathcona's "preservation to posterity as a heritage unspoiled by too great an interference with the original gift of Nature."⁵⁹

After the park's creation, Reginald Thomson, an American engineer hired as the first superintendent of Strathcona Park, sought to develop it along lines that were being adopted in many rural parks in North America.⁶⁰ He supervised surveying and road building to improve access in the park and initiated the planting of non-native plant species around its entrance.⁶¹ Thomson's idea of a park, like Longstaff's, included the transformation of nature to make it easily accessible, with family camps, summer homes, and children's playgrounds so close to "mountains that [they] may be touched." While access to Strathcona was difficult, Thomson suggested: "every effort is being made to subdue the wilds so as to render several portions accessible and usable by 1915." Thomson also believed it was important that animals and birds in the park should become "less shy, so they [would] not flee from the presence of man." In 1913, the province spent over \$100,000 on "topographic surveys, contouring and trail making, including provision for immediate access at the north end," and extended the north and west boundaries of Strathcona to incorporate "features of exceptional interest or of special scenic charm, and also to control the natural and impressive entry portals."⁶² However, the north end of Buttle Lake remained outside the park's new boundaries. That same year, Thomson attended the annual meeting of US railroad passenger agents held in Yellowstone Park to market Strathcona.⁶³ Prospecting and mineral exploration continued inside the park, although the amount and exact nature of such work is unclear. However, it was significant enough that, by 1916, the *Daily Colonist* speculated that parts of Strathcona could be "released for private utilization" once the development program was completed.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ W.W. Foster, "Strathcona Park," *Canadian Alpine Journal* 5 (1913): 99.

⁶⁰ Wilson, "Reginald H. Thomson," 373.

⁶¹ R.H. Thomson, "The Great Playground on Vancouver Island: Strathcona Park," *British Columbia Magazine*, vol. 9, July 1913, 363-70. For a discussion of the planting of non-native species, see D.E. Isenor, E.G. Stephens, and D.E. Watson, *Edge of Discovery: A History of the Campbell River District* (Campbell River: Ptarmigan Press, 1989), 256.

⁶² "Baseless Criticism of Strathcona Park," *Daily Colonist*, 14 December 1914; McGaffey, Secretary of the Vancouver Island Development League, to McBride, 25 January 1912, BCA, GR-0441, vol. 44, letter 125; British Columbia Board of Trade Minutes, 5 September 1912, Victoria City Archives (VCA), 32B3-8, vol. 3, 330; "Nature's Beauty to be Conserved," *Daily Colonist*, 5 February 1913; "An Act to Amend the Strathcona Park Act," *Statutes of British Columbia* 1913, 335.

⁶³ Wilson, "Reginald H. Thomson," 380.

⁶⁴ "Strathcona Park and Tourist Traffic," *Daily Colonist*, 13 January 1915; Foster, "Strathcona Park," 98.

The development of Strathcona proceeded until 1913, when an economic depression and railway debts stalled British Columbia's economy. Vancouver Island's tourism promoters competed for government support and financial resources. Even timber companies were disappointed. Perhaps as a result of the depression and perhaps foreseeing a way to recoup some of his investments, von Alvensleben again wrote to William Ross requesting compensation for timber leases along Buttle Lake. Clearly an opportunist, he offered to sell 477 million feet (1.125 million cubic metres) of merchantable timber to the government for \$1.50 per thousand feet of timber, even though the government stumpage rate was only one dollar. As leverage, he suggested that unless the government was willing to purchase the timber, it should not interfere with his company's plans to cut it. He assured the government that logging would not scar the area around Buttle Lake as it would take place over fifteen or twenty years, and the company would cut only 30 million feet per year, giving the government ample time to assess any adverse effects of logging. He neglected to say that by then it would be too late to reverse those effects. There is no evidence of the government's response. However, logging did not take place during those years, and the government did not purchase the timber leases.⁶⁵

With the outbreak of the First World War, provincial revenues declined substantially while railway debt remained. Consequently, the province reduced the funds available for park development and the construction of roads. The tightened budget also negatively affected the possibility of purchasing the timber leases in Strathcona Park.⁶⁶ In 1914-15 the government allocation for exploration and development costs related to Strathcona Park was \$96,937.48. Over the next few years the government slashed its allocation until it stood at a mere \$751.25 in 1917-18 (See Table 1).

By December 1914, the province had stopped most work in the park and had laid off the men employed to build roads and cut trails. Debates over government spending ensued, with critics suggesting that the government had spent far too much money on the park. However, that same year, W.W. Foster, now a Conservative MLA and still a member

⁶⁵ Jean Barman, *The West beyond the West: A History of British Columbia*, rev. ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 200; von Alvensleben, on behalf of Vancouver Timber and Trading Co. Ltd., to Ross, 8 July 1913, BCA, GR-1991; and G.H. Dawson, Surveyor-General, to the Minister of Lands, 10 February 1914 (and documents received in draughting office on 27 August 1913), BCA, GR-1991; Gray, "Forest Policy," 24.

⁶⁶ "Strathcona Park and Tourist Traffic," *Daily Colonist*, 13 January 1915. The report says that McBride intimated "that the prevalence of abnormal conditions, due to the war, might necessitate a revision of the government's programme in this matter."

TABLE 1
Exploration and development costs for Strathcona Park

YEARS	DEVELOPMENT COSTS (\$)
1911-12	10,003.64
1912-13	103,389.93
1913-14	130,828.78
1914-15	96,937.48
1915-16	7,881.60
1916-17	8,881.60
1917-18	751.25

Source: BCA, GR-1991, Closed Park History Files, Public Works Department – Exploration and Development Costs for Strathcona Park.

of the Alpine Club, addressed the NHS on the development of the travel industry in British Columbia. He argued that improved transportation facilities and advertising would guarantee an “immense income” from the previously overlooked “value of the scenic attraction of [British Columbia’s] mountains, valleys and rivers.”⁶⁷ There were few touring motorists on Vancouver Island in 1915, but tourism promoters saw the potential market and the “wider distribution of ... vacation dollars,” and they began to plan for motorists.⁶⁸ Still, the economic depression had a negative impact on the finances of many organizations that promoted travel to Strathcona Park, including the NHS, which had been reduced to a precarious financial situation by members who failed to pay their dues and a former treasurer who embezzled funds.⁶⁹ The Victoria Board of Trade was too preoccupied with the province’s economic problems and the war’s adverse effects on business, especially in terms of declining lumber exports, to pay much attention to parks.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ William Ross, “National Parks,” *Canadian Alpine Journal* (1914): 167. Ross quoted W.W. Foster’s address to the NHS.

⁶⁸ The Malahat Drive, British Columbia’s first scenic highway, opened to motorists in June 1911. Its construction had been advocated by numerous Vancouver Island motoring clubs, boards of trade, and tourism promoters. See Kenneth Lines, “A Bit of Old England: The Selling of Tourist Victoria,” (MA thesis, University of Victoria, 1972), 46; G.W. Taylor, *The Automobile Saga of British Columbia, 1864-1914* (Victoria: Morriss, 1987), chap. 7; and John A. MacFarlane, “MacFarlane’s Folly,” *Victoria Colonist: Islander Magazine*, 19 March 1995, 1-2.

⁶⁹ NHS minutes, 10 September 1915 and 20 March 1916, BCA, MS-0284.

⁷⁰ Victoria Board of Trade minutes, October-December 1914, VCA, 31F7-9.

Despite the government cutbacks, Reginald Thomson used an economic argument for increasing public access to Strathcona Park. He praised the park's "scenic beauty," declaring it a great "asset in respect to scenic attraction," while assuring the public that it would be easily accessible to tourists by the summer of 1915.⁷¹ Later, the Vancouver Island Development League sought Premier McBride's assurance that the road to the park would be opened by the summer of 1916 so the league might advertise the park in railway brochures and other publicity materials. However, despite the league's plea that "the tourist business ... had become an industry," McBride responded that "no promise would be given that any money would be provided in the estimates for public work of this character ... because of the strained financial conditions existing." By the summer of 1916, the road reached only from Campbell River to Forbes Landing on Lower Campbell Lake, well outside Strathcona's eastern boundary. A trail stretched from Forbes Landing, the site of the closest hotel, to Buttle Lake, where there were a few cabins for public use, but British Columbia's first provincial park remained isolated from casual travellers, the exclusive preserve of those with enough time and money to engage in extended visits.⁷²

By the time of its defeat in 1916, the Conservative government had created two provincial parks, Strathcona and Mount Robson, for the use of "the people." The province's inability to fund Strathcona's maintenance and development during the First World War reflected tourism's lower economic priority in a province dependent on natural resource extraction for a large part of its revenue. Yet the creation of British Columbia's first park was a significant event. By using economic language to rationalize its creation, Strathcona's advocates not only gave the province a beautiful park but also succeeded in integrating scenery into the industrial capitalist model, transforming the park into a consumable commodity for the upper and middle classes who could afford to travel for pleasure. Such commodification of scenery led to the creation of a new tourism industry that eventually became an important contributor to the province's economy.

⁷¹ "Strathcona Park and Tourist Traffic," *Daily Colonist*, 13 January 1915.

⁷² "No Money to Spend on Strathcona Park," *Victoria Daily Times*, 19 November 1915; Lines, "A Bit of Old England," 48; "Strathcona Park Open for Tourists," *Daily Colonist*, 6 June 1916.