



Fabulous National Parks

Part 1

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2017 marked Canada's 150th birthday and Parks Canada celebrated by providing free entry to every national park and historic site. The offer was an overwhelming success as Canadians flocked in unprecedented numbers to our national parks, including Banff and Jasper. The towns of Banff, Jasper and Lake Louise were so packed that finding a spot to stay, including at one of the many campgrounds in the parks, was nigh impossible without a reservation made months in advance. Frankly, this type of scenario was not what I wanted in an RV vacation and I decided to come up with an alternative.

For the past seven years, I have been going on a week-long RV trip somewhere in Canada with my youngest son, Dale, and writing about it. In previous years we always rented, but this year I proudly joined the RV owners club with a 29' Jamboree Class C RV which Dale found in Nelson, B.C. where he lives. The plan was to meet up in Kelowna and then do a loop of the Kootenay area of B.C., taking in four lesser known national parks and three interesting mountain towns along the way. To avoid the summer crowds, we scheduled the trip for the first week after Labour Day when park traffic drops off dramatically, but the weather is still usually good.

A few days before I was scheduled to fly to Kelowna, Dale called and said his boss had reneged and would not give him the time off, although he could join me on the weekend. In a bit of a panic I called my oldest son Alex, in Edmonton, to see if he could pinch hit. The timing was good and he agreed to meet me in Kelowna and as a bonus he would bring along A.J., my oldest grandson. It would now be a three-generation trip. Sometimes things work out unexpectedly well.

In Kelowna we bought supplies, rented a car and drove through the mountains. We crossed Arrow Lake by ferry and arrived at the small town of Nakusp, where Dale had delivered the RV to the municipal campground. This year will be remembered as the year of the forest fires and unfortunately, from the Okanagan Valley all the way to the Rockies, there was a smoky haze that blocked out the sun and the view of the mountains. It cleared up after some rain, so for the second part of our trip, we got the majestic mountain views I flew 3,000 miles to see.

Our trip began in earnest the next morning as we drove north to the ferry crossing at Galena Bay, heading to Revelstoke.

Revelstoke is a major railway centre that has morphed into one of the favourite gathering spots for mountain adventurers, whether they are hikers, climbers, heli-skiers or just people like me who love the mountain atmosphere. It has all the charm of Banff or Jasper with far fewer tourists and is the gateway to **Mount Revelstoke National Park**, our first stop on the national parks tour. After stopping at an outdoor gear supply store to buy bear spray and A.J.'s first pocket knife, we stopped for a picture beside the town's famous grizzly bear.

The entrance to Mount Revelstoke National Park is off the Trans-Canada Highway just a few miles outside town. As national parks go, it is not large, at 260 km² or 100 miles² and there are no front country campsites so our visit here was relatively short. I had done my research and knew exactly what we wanted to see starting with the steep climb up to the Nels Nelson ski jump.

Ski jump you might ask - what's that got to do with a national park? Everything, as the birth of this sport in North America took place right here on the side of Mount Revelstoke.

World record jumps were made at this place and crowds as large as the entire town today came from great distances to watch the jumping competitions. In terms of Canadian sporting history, this remote

place is as important as any in the country.

While nobody has jumped off Mount Revelstoke in more than 40 years and the ramps down to the departure point are long gone, Parks Canada has preserved the actual jumping sites along with interpretive panels that explain how Nels Nelson and others came to make this the hub of North American ski jumping. There are two ways to get to highest point of the exhibits - the easy way and the hard way. Naturally, we took the hard way. From the parking lot at the bottom of the former ski hill there are several trails that head up Mount Revelstoke. The middle one is the Nels' Knickers trail and while it's only 400 m long, it is a brutal steep ascent with many switchbacks. Trust me, after coming from sea level, this is a lung breaker, but it's also a good way to get acclimatized.

As we reached the first of the jump sites which was used by young jumpers, I shook my head that anybody would have the nerve to hurl themselves down a ramp and up into the air, especially on the handmade skis of the day. As we climbed higher, there was a view of the highest jump from below and Nels was still there in spirit and sculpture. And so was Alex.

This is one of those pieces of art that works perfectly in capturing the essence of this place.





Town of Revelstoke



When I mentioned an easy way up, there is a turnoff from the Meadows in the Sky Parkway that lets you park close to the top.

Mount Revelstoke National Park is unique among the Canadian mountain parks in that it has a very well-maintained road that goes almost to the summit of Mount Revelstoke. You don't have to hike up a mountainside to get fabulous views and that makes it a very popular destination for RVers and elderly travellers. The Meadows in the Sky Parkway is 26 km long and climbs almost 1,400 m with 16 switchbacks. While suitable for most RVs, trailers are not permitted and can be left at the Nels Nelson parking lot.

The entire highway is lined by tall western red cedar and hemlocks so there is not a lot of mountain

scenery except at the designated viewpoints. Given the hazy conditions, they were not of much use on the day we drove it but on a clear day, they would be amazing. As far as wildlife goes, there are signs warning to be on the lookout for marmots, a type of mountain woodchuck. We did see one standing at attention by the side of the road, but he vanished the moment I took the camera out.

For the driving public, the road ends a kilometre short of the actual summit, but persons who don't want to walk can take a Parks Canada shuttle to the top. We elected to walk and were rewarded with a pleasant stroll through open woods to the bare summit.

A final short climb to the very summit of Mount Revelstoke where there is an abandoned fire lookout station and a sign to let you know that you summited at least one of hundreds of peaks in British Columbia.

Overall, our visit to Mount Revelstoke National Park was more than satisfactory, but because of the haze from the wildfires, it really was a teaser to come back and see this beautiful place when you can, well, see it. Mount Revelstoke National Park gets 600,000 visitors a year. Compare that to Banff at almost four million. Reason enough for another visit. 🍁

To be continued in the March/April 2018 issue.