

Emerald Lake Landslide

Fabulous National Parks

Part 3

Story and Photos by Dale Dunlop

This article is a continuation of one that appeared in our January/February and March/April 2018 issues.

In Part II of this trip I described my visits to Mount Revelstoke and Glacier National Parks with my sons and grandson. While the parks were great, the weather was not. In Part III, we visit Yoho National Park where the weather and scenery improved dramatically.

We started the day at the Illecillewaet Campground in Glacier National Park and headed east on the Trans-Canada Highway with Kicking Horse Campground in Yoho as our destination. After passing through the mountain town of Golden, we navigated what is really a treacherous stretch of the Trans-Canada Highway (which is currently being upgraded, thank goodness) and entered through Yoho's western entrance.

According to the Parks Canada website, Yoho is a Cree expression of awe and wonder. The centrepiece of the park is the Kicking Horse River, a designated Canadian Heritage River and its various tributaries, most notably the Yoho, that have created a number of valleys amidst 28 peaks that top out at over 3,000 metres. Not surprisingly, whitewater rafting and mountain climbing are both big draws at Yoho.

The only permanent settlement inside Yoho is the tiny town of Field which has only 200 residents and yet is one of the most popular towns in the Canadian Rockies. Originally built as a base for railway workers, it evolved into a railway town providing good union jobs that allowed the CPR workers to build sturdy homes able to withstand the onslaught of winter in the Rockies. Today the trains no longer need to

take on water or fuel at Field and simply pass by, the abandoned water tower a testament to bygone days. Now, the railway workers have been replaced by artisans and adventure-seekers drawn to the natural beauty of the location on the Kicking Horse River. It seemed that every second house in Field was a B&B and virtually every one had a “no vacancy” sign.

After visiting the very modern visitor centre, we parked the RV and drove into the town in Dale’s car to have a look around and get some lunch. There were several choices, but Truffle Pigs seemed to be the busiest, with the most interesting menu, and we opted to wait the 20 minutes it took to get one of the few tables in the bistro.

The wait was well worth it, both for the funky interior where pigs do fly, and for the excellent food and drink. There were a number of craft beers available including a delicious (according to Dale and Alex - I was driving the RV) ginger beer. I usually stay away from veggie burgers, mostly on principle, but the beet burger was a Truffle Pigs original recipe and it was outstanding.

Our hunger sated, we hit the road again for the short drive to Kicking Horse Campground which is the only one of four in Yoho that is suitable for RVs. Even so, the sites are unserviced so we relied upon battery and propane power for our needs. There is a very well maintained shower and flush toilet facility at Kicking Horse.

With the RV in place we set out for the number one attraction of Yoho – Takakkaw Falls.

Takakkaw Falls is at the end of a 13.7 km paved road that is only suitable for cars and motorcycles. There is a switchback at about the halfway point that is impossible for RVs or trailers to navigate, although we were told that occasionally some nut would get around it by backing an RV up this stretch. If you don’t have a car, there are a couple of attractions worth seeing on the Yoho Valley Road before the hairpin turn.

The first is a viewpoint from where you can watch the progress of trains as they navigate the world-famous spiral tunnels of Kicking Horse Pass. This is the main CPR line in BC with upward of two dozen trains a day, some of them hundreds of cars long, so there is a very good chance you will get to see this amazing feat of engineering in action whereby a single train can be seen going in opposite directions as it enters one tunnel and leaves another.

Just up the road from the spiral tunnels observation point there is a short, steep path that leads down to the confluence of the Yoho and Kicking Horse Rivers.



View of Takakkaw Falls from the Red Chairs

Given the two days of heavy rains, it’s not surprising that both rivers are a roar and putting on a display that dwarfs the one we saw the previous day in Glacier National Park. Dale and Alex jump from rock to rock like mountain goats to get out in the middle of it. I restrain AJ from following suit.

After navigating the hairpin turn, we make it to the parking lot for Takakkaw Falls and follow the crowds along the banks of the Kicking Horse River to a sturdily constructed foot bridge that crosses the river and then we see the falls. This is no lie – almost simultaneously Dale, Alex and I, all stand stunned and blurt out the word “Yoho”. I have never seen a more magnificent waterfall, ever.

What makes Takakkaw so spectacular is not just its height. At 380 metres, it’s the second-highest in Canada. It literally jets upwards after hitting some type of barrier about a quarter of the way down. This is something I’ve never seen in a waterfall and it is a mesmerizing sight. After that, the water drops

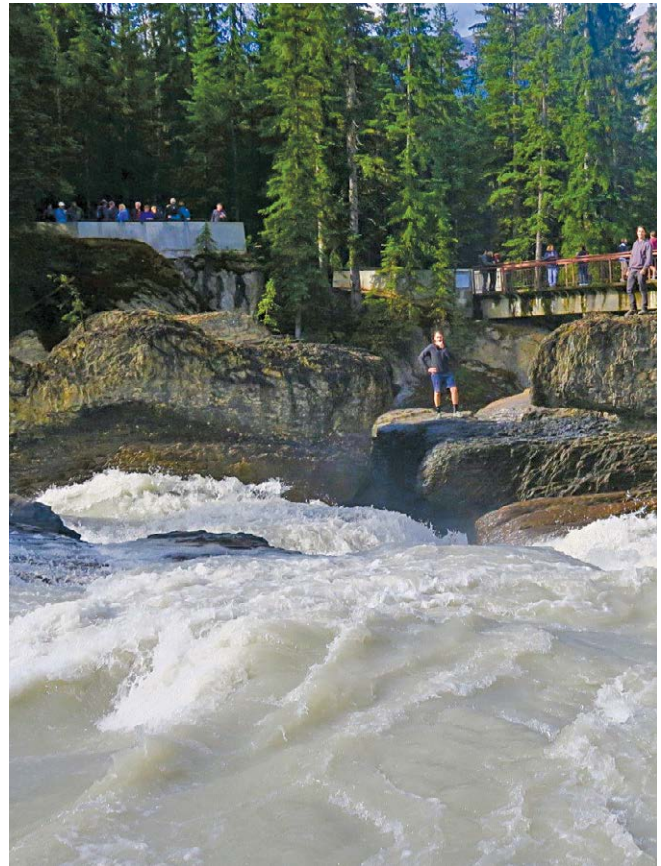
a sheer 254 metres straight down.

You can get as close to the bottom of the falls as you dare. Naturally, Dale, Alex and AJ take off and leave me behind. This is OK by me because the falls whip up their own winds which, along with the mist, drops the temperature dramatically the closer you get to the base.

We spent a lot of time at Takakkaw Falls. After waiting 66 years to see it, I was not in a rush to leave. It was getting dark as we descended the Yoho Valley Road and back to the RV at Kicking Horse Campground. It was another night of home cooking accompanied by BC wines and craft beer. Life was good.

The next morning, I saw something I hadn't seen since arriving in Kelowna four days earlier: the sun! My goodness the mountains are beautiful when you can actually see them. We had the whole day to continue exploring Yoho National Park and we set out early for the other major side road in the park that leads to Emerald Lake.

Our first stop was at the Natural Bridge over the Kicking Horse River. There is so much dissolved material in the river that it looks more like milk than water. The Natural Bridge is just that – a bridge that has been carved out of the stone by the erosional force of



Dale and Bruce at the Natural Bridge

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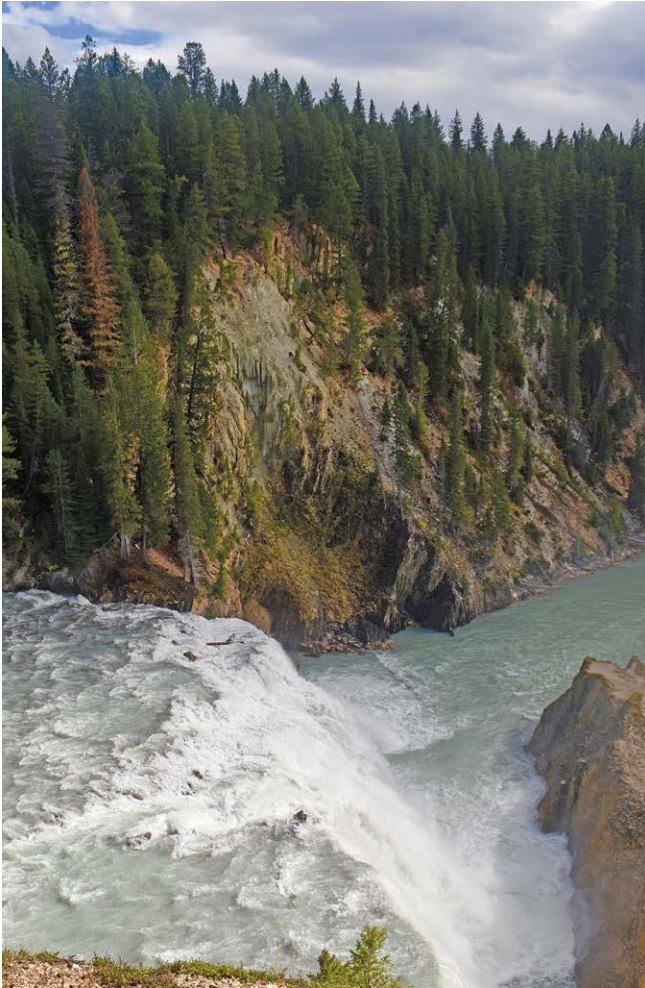
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View from above Wapta Falls

the water that is forced to go through an opening only a few feet wide. Despite looking inherently dangerous or maybe because of it, Dale and Alex are immediately drawn to get as close a look as possible.

The Canadian Rockies are justly famous for having some of the most beautiful lakes in the world, Lake Louise long being the number one attraction. Unfortunately, Lake Louise is being loved to death. When we passed by later on our way to Kootenay National Park, not only was the main parking lot full, but so was the overflow parking lot which is miles away from the lake. And this was during the shoulder season.

Fortunately, Lake Louise is not the only opportunity to observe, walk around, canoe, kayak or fish on one of our fabled emerald green lakes flanked by mountains on all sides. At Emerald Lake, you can do all those things, and while you certainly won't be the only ones doing it, the crowds are minuscule compared to Lake Louise. The walk around Emerald Lake is an easy, mostly flat 4.6-km trail that is simply one of the nicest in Canada, or the world for that matter. The green colour of the water is a result of the ground rock flour

in suspension which reflects sunlight. This is why Emerald Lake looks fantastic on a sunny day.

Emerald Lake is also close to the scene of one of the most important fossil finds in all paleontology – the Burgess Shale. Mount Burgess rises behind Emerald Lake and Parks Canada does provide guided tours, although the hike is quite demanding.

At the head of the trail around Emerald Lake you can rent canoes and kayaks, have a meal or stay at one of the legendary Canadian mountain resorts, Emerald Lake Lodge. It is the very definition of a romantic mountain lodge.

Alas, that is the end of my time with the boys in Yoho. Dale has to return to Nelson and Alex, AJ and I are off to Kootenay National Park. However, I did return to Yoho three days later with my wife Alison as my hiking companion.

It was raining so hard when we first entered Yoho National Park that we originally passed on the hike to Wapta Falls, which was on my must-see list. Three days later, the RV was parked at Redstreak Campground on the outskirts of Radium Hot Springs. Alison had arrived from Calgary in the interim, while Alex and AJ headed back to Edmonton. Despite being more than 175 km away, I still wanted to visit Wapta Falls so we drove the very pleasant Highway 95 up to the Trans-Canada and back into Yoho.

The trailhead is down a dirt road to a parking lot that will hold about 20 cars. It was fairly busy on the day we visited, but not to the point that it detracted from the enjoyment of both the walk and the falls. The hike is fairly level with a few ups and downs once you reach the first overlook where you can see the falls. The distance varies depending on how close to the falls you want to get. It's just over a mile to the first overlook and from there you can make your way down to a number of other viewpoints and almost to the base if you want.

Wapta Falls is the antithesis of Takakkaw, which I would describe as having a feminine side; you often see the term bridal veil applied to the slender wispy waterfalls that plunge hundreds of feet. On the other hand, Wapta Falls are definitely brawny. While the elevation of the falls is 30 metres, the width is an impressive 152 metres. The volume of water passing over Wapta Falls is immense and you can hear it long before you see it. From below, on sunny days, there is an ever-present rainbow which draws people closer and closer.

That concludes this story on one of Canada's greatest national parks. See it for yourself and be prepared to "Yoho". 🍁