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Rainforests and Peaks in BC's **GLACIER NATIONAL PARK**

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Illecillewaet River

Fabulous National Parks

Story and Photos By Dale Dunlop

Part 2

This article is a continuation of one that appeared in our January/February 2018 issue.

Our next stop was Glacier National Park, but isn't that in Montana? Yes and no. There is a Glacier National Park in Montana, but Canada used the name first. Our Glacier National Park was established in 1886, the second oldest in the system along with Yoho, while the U.S. upstart wasn't created until 1910. So, if there is any name infringement, it's not by Canada.

We arrive at Illecillewaet campground after our day

of exploring Mount Revelstoke National Park. It is the only campground in the park that can accommodate RVs and even then, it's a tight squeeze backing into the narrow space. Given the remote location only a few kilometres from the summit of Rogers Pass, it is not surprising that there are no serviced lots, but there is a modern and very clean washroom with flush toilets and showers. After a simple meal of pasta with pomodoro sauce accompanied by some nice red B.C. wine, we are ready for bed. The roaring of the Illecillewaet River only a few feet from our site acts like white noise and soon we're in dreamland.

It rains during the night. A. J. loves to cook and rustles up a hearty breakfast of bacon and eggs while I brew the coffee as we plan our day. The rain is still coming down and the forecast is for it to continue throughout the day. That rules out any of the tougher mountain hikes (not that I'm complaining), but there's still lots to do.

So, what to do in the rain? How about visit a rainforest? Hemlock Grove is the only inland hemlock rainforest in the world and after Canadian icon Rick Hansen visited Glacier National Park in 1987 as part of his Man in Motion tour, Parks Canada built a handicap accessible boardwalk to let all Canadians enjoy the splendor of these giant hemlocks and cedars.

There is a cathedral-like quiet in the rainforest with only the steady drip, drip, drip of raindrops falling off the leaves. Coming from a province where more than 95% of all original forest has been logged, it is truly awe-inspiring to stand among these trees and I can see the look of wonderment in A.J.'s eyes as he looks up at trees far larger than any he has ever seen.

This would be a great spot for the famous Parks Canada red chairs and sure enough, right around the next corner there is a pair. Rain or no rain, I never pass up a photo op with red chairs.

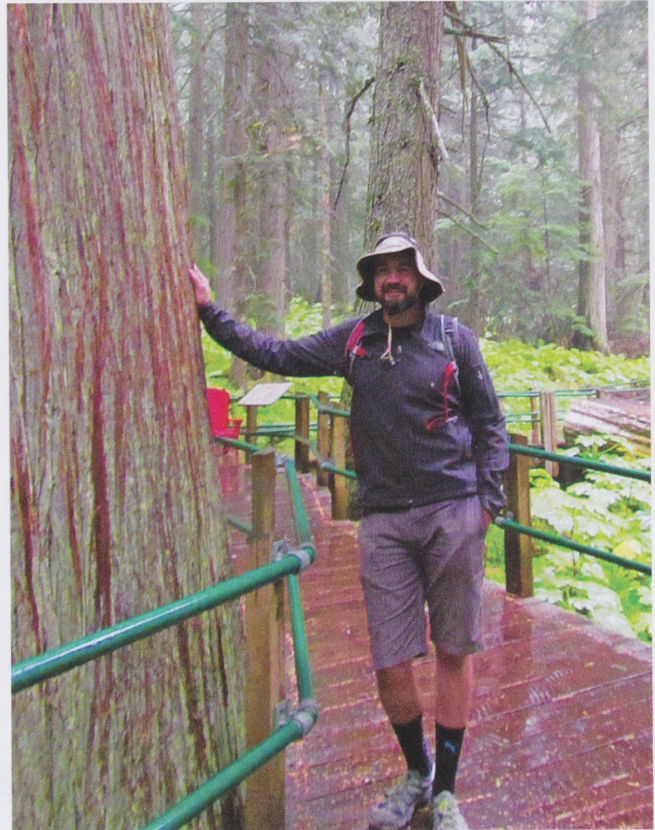
After finishing the short walk around Hemlock Grove, we return to Illecillewaet campground where there are a number of trails that are closely linked to a number of historic events that took place in Glacier National Park. By combining parts of the 1885 trail with the Meeting of the Waters trail, we can do an easy loop that will teach us some history and observe the power of nature when the rivers are filled with rainwater. Let's start in chronological order and see how each event almost inevitably led to the next.

Today, when a lot of us are more familiar with railways as places – that after being abandoned – make great trails, we just don't understand how important railways were to the development of young Canada. We first became a country in 1867, but with only four provinces – Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Manitoba came on board in 1870 and in 1871, the two colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia agreed to join on one big condition – build a railway connecting B.C. to the rest of Canada by 1881. That promise is described in an interpretive panel on the 1885 trail.

Getting through the Rockies was always going to be the toughest part of building the railway and the toughest nut to crack was in modern day Glacier National Park. It was not until the Canadian Pacific (CP) hired American surveyor, Major A.B. Rogers,

in 1881 that the pass that now bears his name was discovered and we were standing on the rail bed that he laid out at that time. It is now part of Rogers Pass National Historic Site which preserves a portion of the original route and includes an interpretive centre. Sir John A. kept his promise to B.C., albeit four years late, and in 1885, the last spike was driven at Craigellachie.

After the railway was built it brought a mass of settlers to the Prairies and the valleys of B.C., but for CP there was another more lucrative market



Hemlock Grove Trail



Original Rail Bridge over the Illecillewaet River



Ruins of Glacier House



Meeting of Waters Trail

than just poor immigrants – tourists, particularly rich Americans and Europeans. Canada can be justly proud of the iconic CP and CN hotels that were built specifically to attract tourists to this new country.

I had no idea that Glacier National Park was once home to a hotel complex that rivalled Banff Springs and Chateau Lake Louise, and in fact predated them. Started in 1886, Glacier House developed over the years into a multi-building destination resort that played an instrumental role in the creation of Glacier National Park and the Canadian park system. The first national park in the world was created at Yellowstone by the U.S. in 1872. Despite its relative isolation, the Northern Pacific Railway was able to bring tourists to the park and made a pretty penny doing so. Cornelius Van Horne, the principal owner of CP was alert to this and it was he who lobbied the government for Canada to follow suit and we did – first at Banff in 1885 and only a year later at Glacier and Yoho.

The creation of the national park and the building of Glacier House had a symbiotic effect, with tourists warming to the idea of visiting an area of such great natural beauty that it was set aside forever, and of course, happy to find luxury accommodations available right on the railway line. Although we certainly couldn't see them for the rain and the mist, the area around Illecillewaet Glacier (once called the Grand Glacier to sound more tourist-friendly and pronounceable) boasts a number of peaks that led to the area being dubbed "Fifty Switzerlands in One".

Switzerland was the home of mountain climbing, so having 50 of them couldn't help

but attract climbers from around the world and so Glacier National Park became the birthplace of North American mountain climbing.

So, a confederation promise leads to railway, railway leads to luxury hotel, luxury hotel and railway lead to creation of national parks, national parks bring fame and the birthplace of North American mountain climbing. It's a heck of a story and it all took place on the 1885 trail.

What of Glacier House today? Alas, it is long gone, the victim of an early rerouting of the railway bed to avoid avalanches. Without rail service to its doors, Glacier House closed in 1925 and was torn down a few years later. However, you can still walk among its skeletal remains. Somehow it seems appropriate that the weather be sorrowful. R.I.P. Glacier House.

From the ruins of Glacier House it is but a short walk to the where Asulkan Brook flows into the Illecillewaet River. The rain has turned both into raging torrents that are knocking huge boulders together like tumbling dice. We can hear the knocking coming from under the water and it's a bit eerie. There is a well-constructed bridge from which we can watch this aquatic gnashing of teeth.

At the other side, we are greeted with a familiar sight – the red chairs. We all agree how lucky we are to be in this wonderful spot and that despite the poor weather, there is more than enough reason to visit Glacier National Park, if even only on a fleeting visit. We all vow to return in better weather and try some of the more difficult hikes that first attracted visitors to Glacier House more than 125 years ago. 🍁