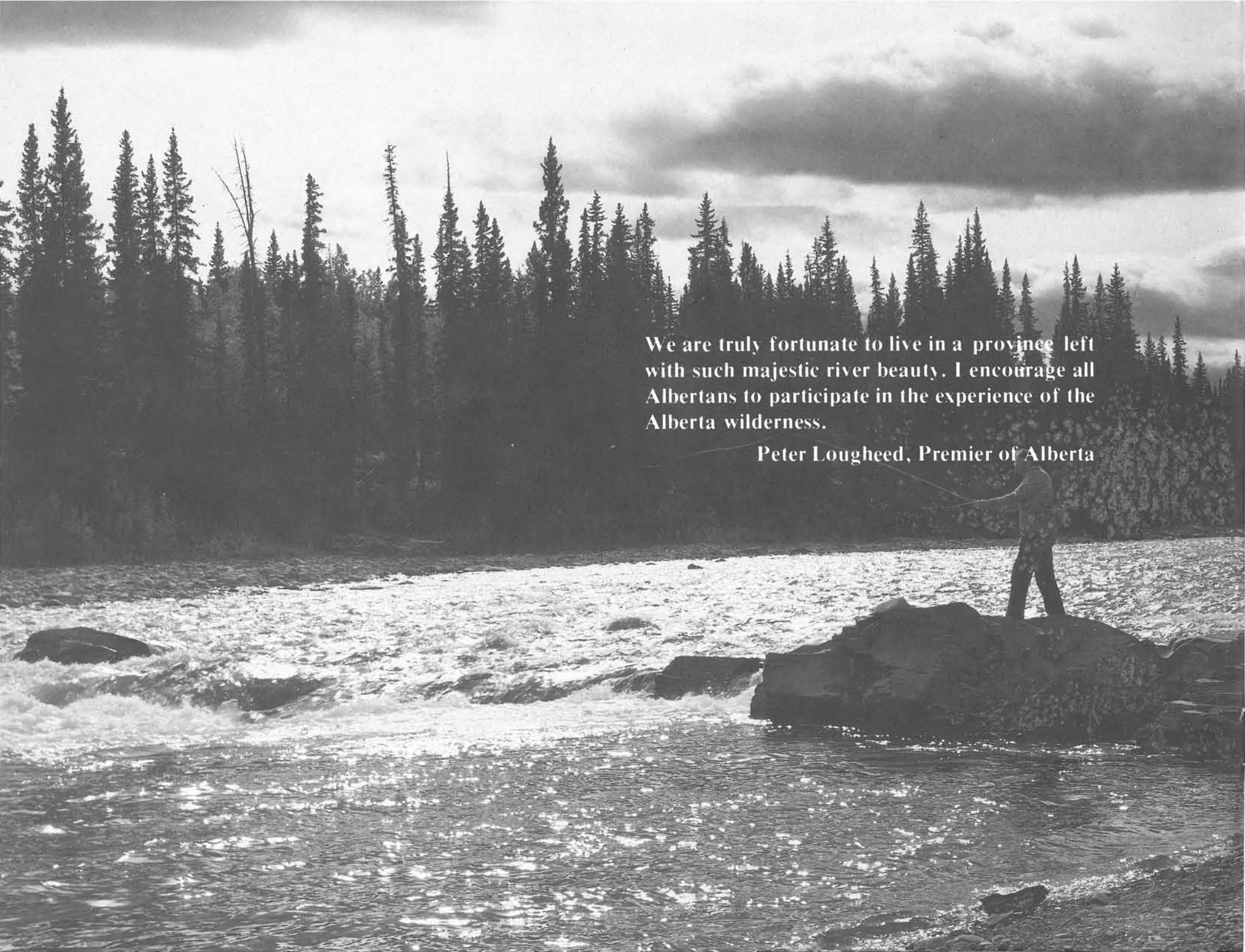




Rivers on Borrowed Time

Eight great Alberta waterways, and what we must do to save them

A black and white photograph of a person fishing in a river. The person is standing on a large rock in the foreground, casting a fishing line into the water. The river is flowing rapidly, creating white rapids. In the background, there is a dense forest of tall evergreen trees under a cloudy sky.

We are truly fortunate to live in a province left
with such majestic river beauty. I encourage all
Albertans to participate in the experience of the
Alberta wilderness.

Peter Lougheed, Premier of Alberta

Rivers on Borrowed Time

Eight great Alberta waterways, and what we must do to save them

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River study team

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A bright spring day in Alberta promises summer. You smile, remembering the small boy at the river, picturing how the waders and fly rod dwarfed him. You said a small prayer as his fly landed awkwardly above that steadily rising trout in the eddy. The fly disappeared in a swirl, the rod came up sharply and immediately bowed. Jumping into the daylight, the bright rainbow snatched an astonished gasp from the boy. Awkward but competent, he met the river's challenge and seemed to grow taller as you watched.



You survey the river carefully, for you're planning an overnight canoe trip with your family. After the canoeing course last year, the family has enough skill to safely enter the chutes above the second rock garden. You begin to make a mental checklist of equipment for the trip—six paddles, five life-jackets, splash covers, a new helmet for your youngest daughter...a flight of Canada geese catches your eye and interrupts your thoughts. The geese are new migrants; they seem not to notice you. Quickly you reach for your camera. What a great photograph they will make, framed by the aspen parkland bordering the river!

The challenge

Alberta's rivers are vital and complex, a precious flowing heritage. As trustees of the river resource, our challenge is to manage rivers wisely, leaving to future generations a resource enriched by our stewardship. Today, none of Alberta's rivers outside the national parks are guaranteed protection or wise stewardship.

Rivers on Borrowed Time challenges Albertans to support an option for action. Stressing the need for natural and recreational river legislation, this booklet has two objectives:

- to demonstrate the value of Alberta's rivers,
- and to present a plan of action to preserve and enrich them.

The challenge is immediate because our rivers are in jeopardy, a limited resource under acute pressure. More and more of them are being dammed. Piecemeal development of riverscapes is being forced by a rapidly growing population with more leisure time and higher incomes. Adding to these pressures, industries and communities continue to pollute streams unnecessarily.

Decisions must be made soon, before our remaining free-flowing rivers are permanently changed. As trustees, Albertans cannot afford to squander opportunities for preservation and enrichment, opportunities lost through neglect and poor planning.

The reasons

Albertans are beginning to discover the exciting challenges that rivers provide. The key to this discovery is in the diversity and quality of recreational opportunities found within river environments. Diversity and quality is created by flowing water. Recreational opportunities might consist of simply watching the river move or touching a moment of history in the stones of a tipi ring. It might be the thrill of racing through a rapid or seeing a mink hunting the river shore. Recreation means different things to each of us, but high-quality recreation is linked to the mix of opportunities available.

The best measure of the value of a recreational experience is our ability to become totally involved with it, forgetting for a time the pressures that we live with each day. Places where we can seek this *recreation* of ourselves are more highly prized as they become less available.

*...the future of our river resources
is not certain...*



Immature Great Horned Owl.

Cliff Wallis

Alberta is growing at a pace unparalleled in our history. Rapid advances in Alberta's dynamic energy industry and new developments in forestry and agriculture make this an exciting place to be. Future development forecasts for the province stagger the imagination. New tar-sands and heavy-oil projects, petrochemical industries, expanding oil and gas exploration and development, more processing plants for coal, thousands of new service-sector enterprises, expanded irrigation, gigantic hydropower developments, new pulp mills and dramatic increases in population growth are all expected within this decade.

Not all of our growth is economic; Albertans are also growing socially. We are developing new attitudes and values about the places we live. Our environment has become important to us.

The places where we spend our leisure time are special parts of this environment. Each year more Albertans enjoy parks and recreation areas, wildlands, lakes and rivers. Our challenge is to maintain the integrity of these places while developing our other resources wisely.

The present explosion in river recreation, ignited in the past decade, is changing the way Albertans view their river resources. Today, many of us see river environments as places to experience a wide diversity of exciting opportunities. But, tragically, the future of our river resources is not certain.

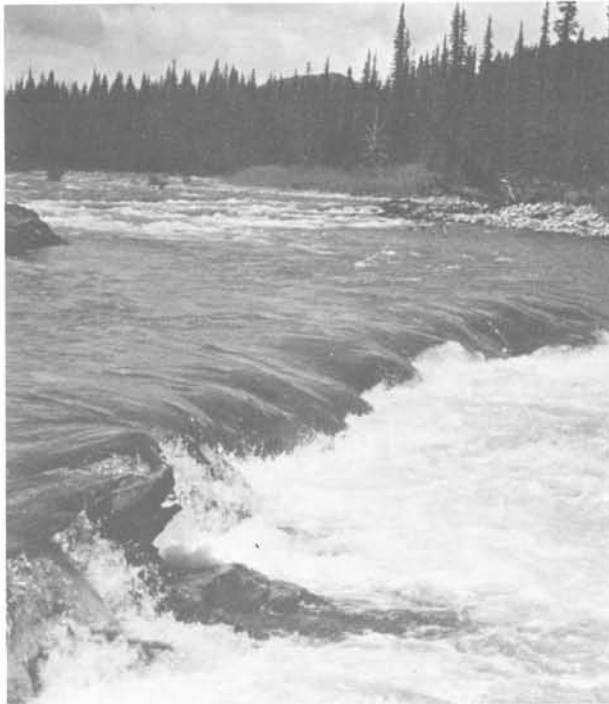
Rivers are important for municipal water supply, industrial use, irrigation and hydropower generation. These and other uses compete directly and often unnecessarily with recreational use. Today, river recreation is mainly considered in water management planning as part of proposals to dam rivers for other uses. This trend is expected to continue until management planners respond to the increasing demand for high-quality river recreation. River recreation must have a higher priority in management planning than it does today.

The cost of devaluing our river resource is high. If we commit our remaining free-flowing rivers to uses which compromise their inherent biological, scenic and recreational value without balancing change with protection, we waste a unique opportunity and damage an irreplaceable resource.

A word about multiple use

All Albertans benefit from river resources. Rivers give us drinking water, light for our homes, water for agriculture and recreation. Recognizing the many uses of our rivers, the provincial government manages Alberta's rivers on a multiple-use basis. Multiple-use management encourages extensive use of all river resources. Under present policy, recreation receives a very low priority, a priority which does not reflect the rapidly growing interest in recreation. The multiple-use policy does not permit any river or even a segment of that river to be preserved or managed mainly for recreation. The policy is applied uniformly to all rivers with no special recognition of unique natural or recreational attributes.

Water resource engineers argue, "Why preserve a river for one use, when several uses may be possible at the same time?" This argument fails to consider that a balance is needed between use of some rivers for economic gain and preservation of other rivers for enjoyment. We can begin to achieve this balance by identifying rivers with significant recreational opportunities, projecting future demands for river recreation and obtaining public comment on the value of these resources. The choices are not black and white, and should not be posed as economic need versus quality of life. Good management should serve both objectives. To arrive at a balanced choice we must determine the value of the resource we are attempting to manage.



Ledge on the upper Red Deer River.

Ron Hooper

The study

In 1979, the Alberta Wilderness Association formed a team to study the need for legislation to protect and conserve our finest waterways as recreational or natural rivers. Ron Hooper, who coordinated the study, has many years of paddling experience on western Canadian rivers as a planner for Parks Canada. Hans Buhrmann, a University of Lethbridge professor and author of *Chinook Country Rivers*, with his paddling companion Brian Forestall, spent hundreds of hours traveling the rivers we discuss in this booklet. Cliff Wallis is a professional biologist with considerable experience in developing natural resource inventories of river landscapes.

This study team looked at 32 rivers in southern Alberta. These rivers are near many of Alberta's major growth centres and all receive growing recreational use. Of course, many other Alberta rivers have great potential as future recreational or natural rivers and should be studied.

In this booklet, the study team presents its findings. Eight rivers stand out among the rest, exceptional in their natural character or recreational value. Some are familiar to Albertans—the Bow, the North Saskatchewan, the Red Deer—while others may come as a surprise. Following a discussion of the ways in which Albertans use (and abuse) their rivers, each of the eight candidate waterways is described and the merits of each are presented in the form of handy tables.

Enjoying rivers

Rivers have tremendous recreational potential. Consider these: fishing, river running, nature watching, camping, hunting and visiting heritage sites.

Fishing

One in every four Albertans will cast a line into our streams, rivers and lakes this year. A wide variety of angling is available in the province, from the cold-water trout streams of the eastern slopes to the northern forest lakes with their ravenous pike populations.

One Alberta river is recognized as a world-class trout stream. The Bow River, downstream from Calgary, has a reputation for consistently producing huge rainbow and brown trout. Leigh Perkins, president of the famous Orvis Tackle Company, describes a day on the Bow River as "...the finest day of fly fishing we've ever had in our lives...that's quite a statement when our business is fly fishing, our major interest is fly fishing and we have had the opportunity to pursue the sport all over the world for the past 35 years."

In southern Alberta, fishing is mainly done on streams and rivers. Much of the angling pressure is concentrated in the cold-water streams of the foothills and mountains. With few exceptions, these streams are not very productive waters for trout and mountain whitefish. Cold temperatures, steep stream gradients, ice cover through much of the year and limited nutrient sources combine to restrict the growth of fish populations. A pan-sized trout in these streams can be from three to four years old. But a chance to fish in pristine clear streams surrounded by magnificent mountain and foothills scenery thrills many anglers.

Stream gradients decrease through the foothills, and slight increases in water temperature and nutrient sources provide excellent cold-water fish habitat. The more productive sections of the Crowsnest, Oldman and Highwood rivers are known to many anglers as some of our finer wild trout water. Tributaries to the Red Deer River downstream from Sundre are also known to provide some of the better brown trout fishing in the province.

Compared with opportunities to angle for cold-water sport fish, warm-water fishing for pike, walleye and lake whitefish is widely available in lakes and reservoirs. In parts of southern Alberta some warm-water fish, such as goldeye, sauger and sturgeon, are important river game fish.

The modern, easily operated spinning reel is encouraging many Albertans to begin sport fishing each year. A complete spinning outfit can be purchased for less than the cost of a good restaurant meal. Even at this modest cost, Alberta anglers spent over \$57,000,000 on their sport in 1980.

Using fur and feathers—fly fishing—is gaining unprecedented popularity in Alberta and elsewhere in North America. The number of fly fisherman on Alberta streams has increased dramatically in the past decade. This increased popularity comes from



Fishing along the Oldman.

T.D. Lindsay

understanding that most of an angler's time is spent fishing, not catching fish; angling with a fly simply adds to the fun of fishing. Fly-fishing and fly-tying courses are offered by many sportsman's groups and schools to promote this life-long recreational activity.

High-quality sport fishing in Alberta is enhanced by increased public interest in fishing. Anglers are recognizing the need for more intensive management of provincial sport-fish resources. Good water quali-

ty, preservation of habitat, more information on the recreational value of fishing, priority consideration of fisheries in water-management planning, and public access to fisheries are concerns of both the resource managers and the anglers.

River-running

Many Albertans experience a river's power and face its challenges in canoes, kayaks, boats, and rafts. River-running with these craft is one of western Canada's faster-growing sports—the number of canoes alone increased by six times on provincial waterways between 1967 and 1976. Today, Albertans own more than 60,000 pleasure craft.

The canoe is Alberta's most popular river craft. Depending on length and construction, a canoe can be suited to a family outing or to a challenging whitewater run. Canoes vary. Short canoes, preferred for solo paddling, are light and maneuverable. Longer canoes hold more gear, are faster, and maintain their direction easily. Weight is important, especially on trips where portages are expected.

Kayaks, decked canoes, and rafts are also becoming more popular on Alberta's whitewater rivers. Use of these craft often requires specialized training and practice. These whitewater boats can be used by skilled paddlers in rapids not negotiable in open canoes.

Albertans are discovering the pleasures of river-running in ever-increasing numbers. Each summer weekend, hundreds of canoes and other pleasure craft can be seen on easily paddled streams such as the Bow River near Calgary. An estimated 14,000 pleasure boats used the Bow River near the city in 1977, the only year in which this information was collected. Adult education programs and recreation groups offer a variety of canoeing courses for the novice or advanced paddler.

Today, canoe use of our rivers far exceeds the development of recreation facilities. Camping and picnic sites, river access points, comfort stations, safety signs and marked points of interest are limited or absent on even our most heavily used rivers. These facilities are particularly desirable on rivers designated for recreation use. Development must be planned with care, because natural rivers with wild characteristics can be spoiled by conspicuous facilities.

Nature-watching

Swept downstream by currents, leaves will lodge in stream gravels, forming a blanket of life. Stonefly nymphs graze on this leaf harvest, their bodies flattened and streamlined to cling to the undersides of stones. Elk crossing the river disturb the gravel, dislodging the nymphs. Darting from beneath beaver lodges and overhangs, bright cutthroat trout capture dislodged nymphs. In turn the trout become meals for hungry kingfishers. The cycle of change, growth and life in the river continues.

Rivers, with their associated shorelines and uplands, are among the most biologically productive natural communities in nature. Rivers are excellent places to watch, experience and learn about nature.

Unlike lakes and ponds, rivers are open systems closely linked to the surrounding land. Food for river systems comes from the land, as leaves or other organic material. River currents vary greatly in different parts of the same stream, forming a multitude of habitats for living things. Abundant oxygen supplies are available because of a river's constant motion, shallow depth and exposed surface area.

Rivers in Alberta's mountains and foothills contain two broad habitat types—rapids and pools. Living in the rapids are torrential animals with adaptations permitting them to live in swift currents. Caddis-fly nymphs construct nets facing upstream to capture food drifting in the current. Other caddis nymphs attach tiny rocks to their cases for ballast. Mayflies and stoneflies have their bodies flattened and streamlined to live under stones. These nymphs will become clouds of insects moving upstream to lay eggs, which return with the current to their places of origin. Burrowing into stream banks or clinging to vegetation, other nymphs, such as the burrowing mayfly nymph, dragonfly and damselfly nymphs, live in the pools between the rapids.

Pools and rapids are used to measure the quality of cold-water sport fish habitat. Habitat quality is determined by examining the ratio of pools to rapids or riffles and rating their suitability for fish.

River valleys and uplands provide changes in topography, soils, temperature, and water movement that create habitats for trees, shrubs, grasses and wildflowers. Extensive cultivation above the river breaks, particularly in Alberta's prairie region, has left river valleys as ribbons of nature in a sea of wheat.

Rivers form natural wildlife refuges in much of the settled area of the province. Responding to the

diversity and abundance of habitats, wildlife are often found in river valleys. Large animals, such as deer, elk and moose, find shelter and food by rivers, particularly in winter. Geese, ducks and shorebirds nest and feed near the river edge. Herons, birds of prey, and songbirds use the mature trees of the river valley as nest sites. Coyotes search the diverse river habitats for mice, voles and the occasional hare.

Rivers are living museums of nature where we have the opportunity to view native plants, fish and wildlife in natural settings. Watching wild things and



Running the Bow.

understanding their relationship to their surroundings sparks the imagination of many Albertans. All of us can understand the delight in a child's upturned face watching a flock of migrating geese passing overhead.

For most Albertans, observing natural things is something we do while engaged in other activities. Driving to work on a winter morning, we watch flocks of waxwings feeding on red mountain ash-

berries. Driving in the country, we observe clouds of gulls following a farm tractor. Entranced, we may watch a deer bounding across a field of wildflowers. These moments enrich our lives.

Some Albertans actively seek opportunities to view nature through the lens of a camera or a pair of binoculars. These people keep careful records of the wildlife they see. Such records often provide the only information available on the status of many birds and mammals in the province. Guidebooks are widely used to provide additional information on the wildlife seen.

Camping

Many of Alberta's rivers offer journeys into wilderness settings. To reach these areas, river tours of two or more days are increasingly popular. Lightweight clothes, tents, pack frames and freeze-dried foods play an important role in these new camping experiences. We usually think of this lightweight equipment as suited to backpacking in the mountains or wilderness areas, but light gear is also necessary for overnight or longer tours of Alberta's more challenging rivers. A heavily loaded canoe is not responsive in whitewater and it's difficult to portage; wise planning and proper selection of equipment are essential.

Few of us can resist the lure of camping near water. It is difficult to think of a campground in Alberta that is not near a stream, river or lake. Today, remote campsites along provincial rivers are established by the recreation user. The quality and maintenance of these primitive campsites depend on the people who use them. This situation is generally acceptable, or even desirable, where river recreation pressure is light. But as recreation pressure increases, these primitive campsites become damaged and inadequate. Human waste disposal is a particularly difficult problem in heavy-use areas. Numerous, unnecessary fire pits and indiscriminate cutting of trees for firewood and shelter also detract from the quality of a campsite.

Simple, inexpensive management procedures can overcome these problems. Human waste is confined to a single, marked location where possible. Construction of permanent fire pits and tent pads decreases damage to heavily used sites. Encouraging campers to use portable stoves and to pack out litter is also important.

Hunting

Late autumn is a special time for many Albertans. In air sparkling with frost, colours are brighter and images sharper. Woodlands are covered with blankets of yellow and red leaves as forest soils prepare to receive a summer's bounty. Ice borders small streams and ponds. Wildlife are reaching the peak of physical condition anticipating winter snows or annual migrations.

Hunting is a pursuit of tradition. Each year brings new experiences built on past understanding. Friendships are renewed, equipment is checked and rechecked, trips are carefully planned and last season's tales are retold. These traditions are as much a part of hunting as seeking game in the field.

River valleys and adjacent uplands provide important habitats for many game birds and animals. In the past, these areas were less influenced by resource development and agriculture than the surrounding land. Large game animals, including deer, elk and moose need river valleys as parts of their range, particularly in winter. Wildlife management in Alberta centres on these wintering areas to ensure that wildlife populations are protected and maintained. If these critical habitats cannot be preserved, wildlife populations will be greatly reduced or lost.

In Alberta, hunting seasons generally begin after other types of recreation have ended for the year. The length of a season depends on the game available, the type of hunting, and other uses of the area. Hunting regulations are designed to protect a base population of game animals for future years.

Wildlife scientists and sportsmen recognize that hunting regulations are only one aspect of management. To ensure that wildlife populations are maintained, the places where they live must be protected. Each year Alberta sportsmen contribute funds to the *Bucks for Wildlife Program* through their license fees. This program, sponsored by sportsmen across the province, was developed to enhance and protect wildlife habitat. Much of this habitat is along rivers.

*...friendships are renewed;
equipment is checked
and rechecked...*



Mule deer in velvet.

Cliff Wallis

Heritage sites

Alberta's rivers have a rich paleontological and cultural heritage. Alberta's Dinosaur Provincial Park has received world recognition for the hundreds of important fossils collected from this site in the Red Deer River valley. Dinosaur fossils in museums across Canada come from the Red Deer River badlands.

Prehistoric peoples needed river valleys for shelter, hunting, toolmaking and religious ceremonies. The people of our past left their mark on our river valleys. Tipi rings, cairns and medicine wheels are abundant yet often overlooked by the untrained eye as scattered stones on a river terrace. Petroglyphs and pictographs are more noticeable and some of these have been included in the provincial park system, notably at Writing On Stone Park in southeastern Alberta.

Yet prior to 1973, the archeological resources of Alberta received little or no protection. Cultural sites were destroyed by agriculture, industrial development, vandalism or natural decay. Few of these sites were catalogued and are now lost to our understanding of Alberta's past. In 1973 the Alberta Government passed the *Alberta Heritage Act*, now called the *Alberta Heritage Resources Act*, which was a progressive step in furthering the interpretation of the prehistory of our province.

Rivers were major transportation routes followed by explorers, fur traders and adventurers in the early history of Alberta. Trading posts set up along northern rivers received furs that brought high prices in European markets. Posts along the North and South Saskatchewan rivers were often used to provide provisions needed to maintain this northern fur trade. Several place names in Alberta have their origins in the fur trade—Fort Saskatchewan, Rocky Mountain House, Fort Chipewyan.

Many of these paleontological, archaeological, and historic sites lend themselves to development as interpretive centres. These sites should be identified and developed, so that the integrity of the resource can be adequately protected, and Albertans can learn about the fascinating history of their river landscapes.

...ribbons of nature in a sea of wheat...

River management for recreational use

Sound river-recreation management requires coordination between governments, their agencies and the public they serve. Coordinated management increases the quality of river use by including the expertise of various resource agencies and the public in planning.

In Alberta today, there is a need to begin this planning to avoid damaging our river-recreation resources. Identifying these river resources and understanding their value is a necessary first step.

Rivers provide a diversity of recreational opportunities requiring different management approaches. A natural river with wilderness character should be managed differently than a heavily used recrea-

tional river near a major urban centre. The number of facilities, their location and their visibility along a natural river can be designed in such a way as to maintain the river's natural character. Signs describing a natural river's whitewater sections and campsites should be limited to major access points. A recreational river could have more obvious facilities along its shores.

These facilities are urgently needed on many Alberta rivers to enhance recreational use, and to protect natural, heritage and wildlife resources for our future enjoyment.

The choice is ours. We must plan today to preserve our river heritage.



Petroglyph along Milk River.

Classifying Alberta's rivers

Every river is unique. All of Alberta's rivers have a mix of exceptional recreational, scenic, natural, scientific, historical or cultural features. A detailed technical assessment of the unique value of each river requires coordinated action between all levels of government, their agencies and the public. It's not an easy task.

The Alberta Wilderness Association river study was done to identify some outstanding river resources, to initiate debate and to generate support for the preservation of segments of our finest waterways. We have developed a general classification system based on the natural attributes of rivers and the diversity of recreational opportunities available. Rivers were separated into two broad categories: natural rivers and recreational rivers. Each category has distinct features, as the chart below shows.

Natural Rivers

Natural values are predominant. The river environment is essentially unchanged by impoundments and diversion works.

Access by road is limited. A few inconspicuous roads are permitted.

Shorelands within river valleys are largely in their natural state.

Water quality is naturally determined or exceeds provincial minimum criteria.

Public ownership of shorelands predominant.

River characteristics include one or more exceptional natural features, historic or archaeological sites.

Recreational Rivers

Recreation is primary. Recreational activities prevail, including canoeing, fishing, hunting and scenic viewing.

Road access is readily available, or can be developed with minimal environmental damage.

Shorelands may be developed.

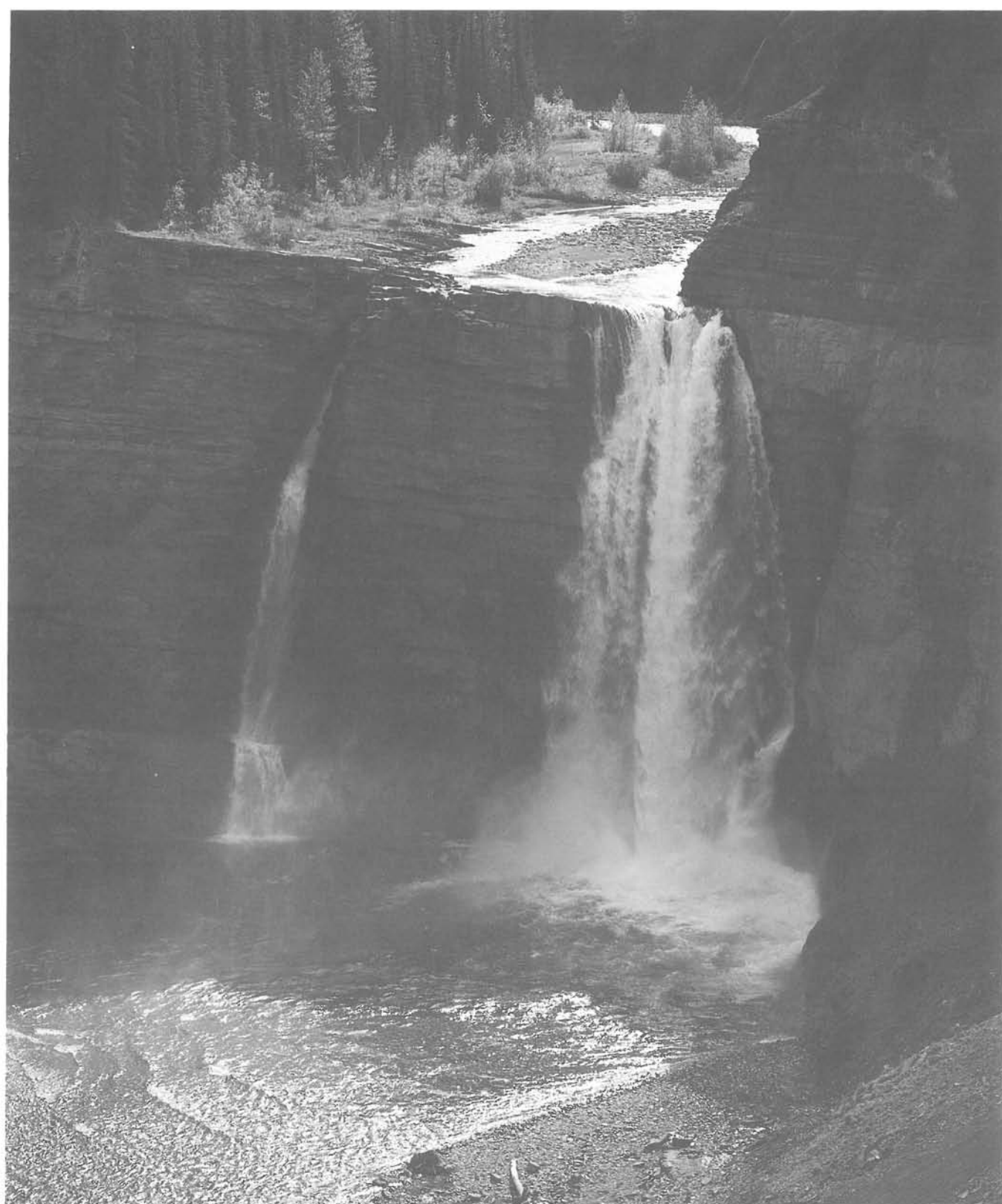
Water quality can be restored to, or already exceeds provincial minimum criteria.

Public or private ownership of shorelands is accepted.

River or adjacent valley land offers one or more exceptional recreational opportunities.

The general categories were subdivided to include more detailed descriptions of twelve natural and recreational attributes, as shown below.

*South Ram River Falls.
T.D. Lindsay*



Natural attributes

Wildland

Wildland associated with a river and its valley form the basis of this category. Roads, cultivated fields, powerlines or houses visible from the river affect ratings.

Representative landscape

River valleys containing vegetation, wildlife and geological features representative of one or more of Alberta's natural regions are key in this category.

Wildlife

Rivers where there is an opportunity to view large wildlife (deer, elk, moose, coyote) and common birds of the region are highly rated. Rivers sheltering rare or endangered wildlife are also rated highly.

Fish

Wild, self-sustaining populations of native fish, well-distributed throughout the river segment, are important in this category. A superior rating is awarded where fish populations are either unique to the region, of scientific importance, or include several native species.

Scenic views

River cliffs, mountain passes, bluffs or picturesque scenes are recognized in this category.

Historic, paleontological or archaeological sites

The presence of heritage sites that could be viewed by the public without damaging their integrity are noted in this category. Sites with considerable scientific or cultural value produce a high rating.

Recreational attributes

Rivers with challenging and diversified whitewater opportunities receive a high rating. Rivers that provide a minimum of eight weeks of whitewater-craft use are included.

The possibility of using a wide variety of water craft with minimal experience is considered advantageous in this category. Rivers that provide a minimum of 16 weeks of pleasure craft use were considered.

The presence of island camp sites, or the potential for development of primitive shore sites, is considered valuable in dispersing recreational users. Potential sites for development of campsites with parking and cooking facilities near major access points are also considered desirable and included in this category.

River valleys with opportunities or potential for family outings, hiking, wildlife observation and other recreation not requiring access by water craft receive high ratings.

The availability of abundant game fish populations, good fishing access, or the potential to develop these are rated highly.

This category reflects the importance of a river valley in providing opportunities for hunting. High ratings were given where river valleys provided autumn or winter habitats for two or more species of large game animals, resting areas for waterfowl or extensive cover for upland game birds.

Whitewater-craft use

Pleasure-craft use

Camping

River-corridor recreation

Fishing

Hunting

Eight rivers urgently require protection and recreational management. Here they are.

Natural rivers

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| <i>Milk River</i> | Secondary Road 880 to United States border. |
| <i>Lower Red Deer River</i> | Douglas Creek confluence to Saskatchewan boundary. |
| <i>Ram River</i> | Ram River forks to North Saskatchewan River confluence. |

Recreational rivers

| | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| <i>Oldman River</i> | Headwaters to North Fork Bridge. |
| <i>Bow River</i> | Bearspaw Dam to Blackfoot Indian Reserve. |
| <i>Upper Red Deer River</i> | Banff Park boundary to Sundre. |
| <i>South Ram River</i> | Headwaters to North Ram confluence. |
| <i>North Ram River</i> | Headwaters to South Ram confluence. |
| <i>North Saskatchewan River</i> | Forestry Trunk Road to Rocky Mountain House. |

In the pages that follow, explore these rivers with us.

Using these attributes, the natural and recreational features of rivers were rated by canoe float trips and/or by hiking along shorelines and river bluffs. Other observations came from recreational users and technical reports. In this way the study team was able to determine a rating of *poor, fair, average, excellent, or outstanding* in each category for each river.

Thirty-two rivers were selected for preliminary consideration. Between 1979 and 1982, the research team traveled over 5000 km in exploring these 32 rivers and their shorelands. For more information on the preliminary study, turn to the appendix.

The Milk River: a river of history

The Milk River valley is unique. Today, few of the vast prairie grasslands that excited the imagination of early settlers exist in Canada. But one such large area of native prairie remains, bordering the Milk River valley in southeastern Alberta. This living museum exhibits an awesome combination of cultural and physical features.

Milk River Canyon has been identified by Parks Canada as a *Landscape of Canadian Significance*. Only four of these landscapes are found in Alberta. The Alberta Ecological Survey has proposed two ecological reserves in the region; the Alberta Wilderness Association has suggested that the area be designated for wildland recreation, and in 1976 the Alberta government completed an excellent resource evaluation of the Milk River. Yet, the area's wealth of natural features, many of which are found nowhere else in Canada, presently receive no formal recognition by the province.

The Milk River valley, from the Secondary Road 880 crossing east to the United States border, includes extensive badlands, rolling grassland vistas, canyons, unusual and rare wildlife and plants, dinosaur fossils, Indian writings, campsites and cairns. The beauty of the river is inseparable from the beauty of the natural features that border its shores. This section of the Milk River merits designation as a *natural river* and must be preserved.

Scenic views

The Milk River valley and its prairie uplands provide the visitor with a panorama of scenes. Framed by the Sweetgrass Hills of Montana and the terraces, rock outcroppings and eroded stream channels of the Milk River valley is a vast, rolling grassland. Here our imaginations can easily picture the herds of bison that grazed this range a little over 100 years ago.

The wide-open space of the Milk River valley narrows to form a striking canyon. Massive sandstone walls, badlands with extraordinary rock formations, narrow ravines with great vertical drops, hoodoos, and balancing rocks are all found in or near the canyon. Considered more spectacular, diverse and rugged than the Red Deer River badlands, Milk River Canyon is one of Canada's unique landscapes.

Wildland and wildlife

The integrity and wise stewardship of ranchers grazing cattle on public lands bordering the Milk River are largely responsible for maintaining the area's wild character. Particularly noteworthy are the management practices of Lost River Ranches. The late George G. Ross and John C. Ross developed an understanding of the grazing capacity of the range, and maintained the ecological resource undamaged. Most lands managed within the Pinhorn Grazing Reserve and by Brower Ranching also exhibit this wise stewardship.



Milk River badlands.

Cliff Wallis

Today, much of the public land controlled by Lost River Ranches has been turned over to other interests. Whether future cattle grazing and other resource use of this area will remain in harmony with the area's wild character is an open question.

Over 400 varieties of plants, 31 different mammals, 157 species of birds, 12 kinds of reptiles and amphibians, 15 species of fish and an amazing variety of invertebrates occur in the Milk River Valley. Many of these are not found elsewhere in Alberta, and others are unique in Canada.

The yucca plant can be found in Canada only along the Milk River. Other plants, such as tumble grass, red three-awn and flowering quill wort are rare in Canada. Within Alberta, rabbitbrush, nodding umbrella plants, silver saltbush and others occur only in the Milk River region.

Western painted turtles reproduce nowhere else in Alberta. Short-horned lizards and the plains hog-nosed snake (two rare reptiles), are also found in the Milk River valley.

Nesting birds of prey are common. Mule deer and whitetailed deer, pronghorn antelope and the occasional bobcat are some of the large animals found in the valley.

River-corridor recreation

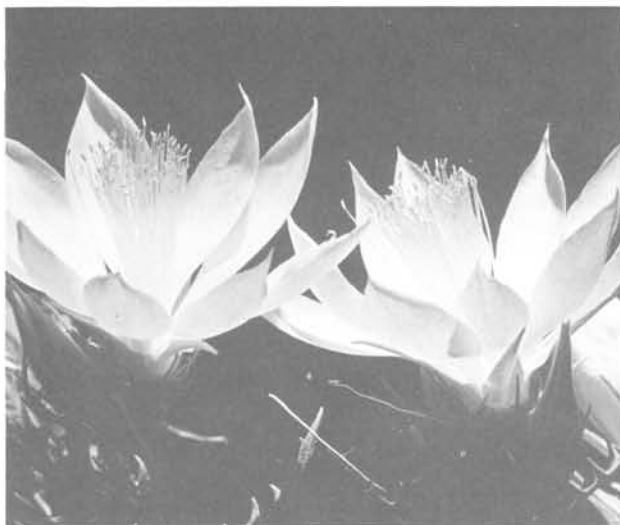
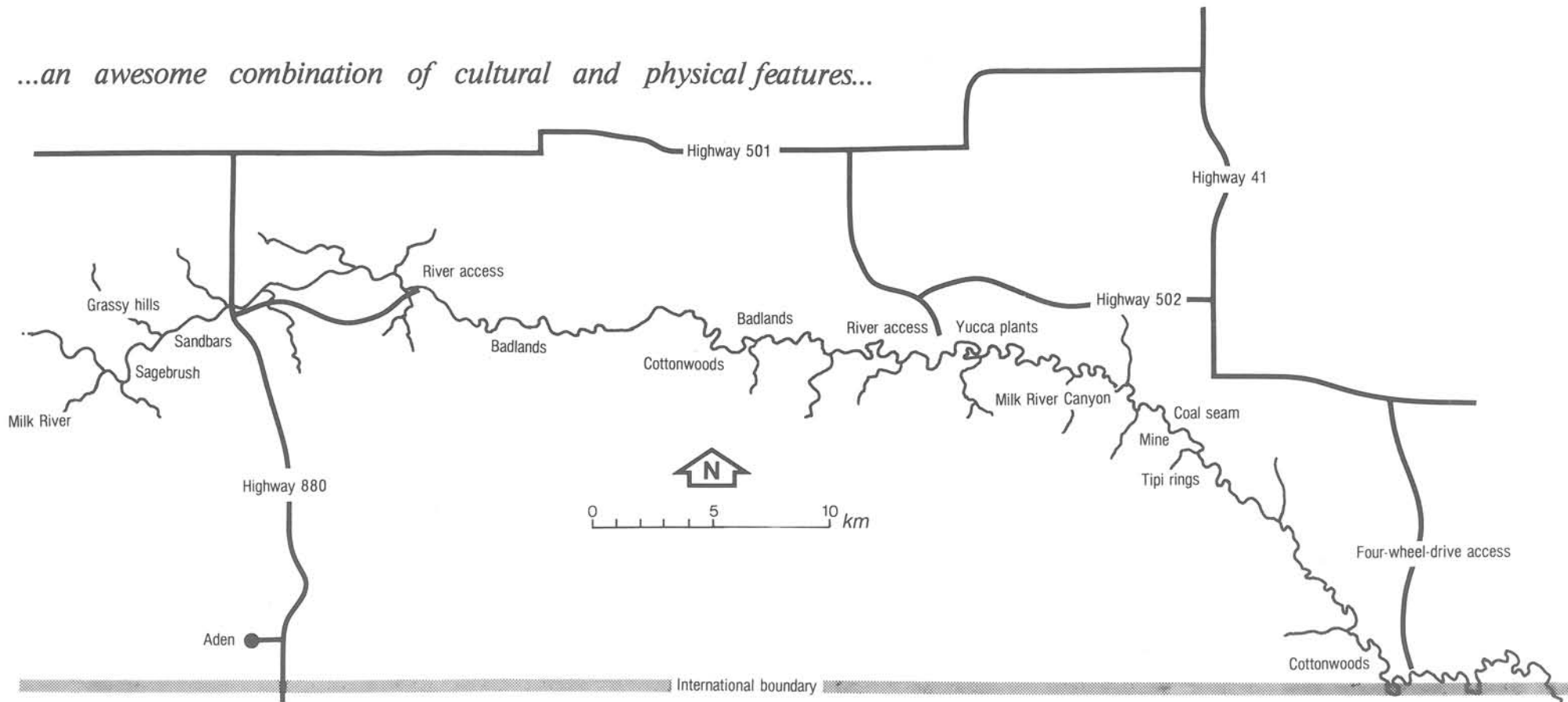
The Milk River valley is suitable only for light to moderate recreational use. Rare geological features, fossils, Indian writings and campsites along the river are fragile and irreplaceable. Several wildlife species and plants found in the valley are also sensitive to disturbance.

Recreational and other resource use of the region is presently uncontrolled. All-terrain vehicles and other recreational machines are not confined to established trails. Expansion of stock-watering facilities and fences, and petroleum exploration activities are also adversely affecting portions of the Milk River valley. These activities should be occurring only within a management plan developed to preserve the region's natural beauty, unique ecological features and heritage resources.

Access

Vehicle access to the Milk River east of the Secondary Road 880 crossing is limited to prairie trails or a few roads to ranch buildings. Many of these trails and roads are in very poor condition; topographic maps are recommended. Canoe travel on this reach of the Milk River is possible during late April, May and June depending on runoff conditions. In some years canoes can be seen on the river in July. The river is suitable for beginners, but caution is advised in trip planning: the remote nature of the river valley requires wilderness camping skills. Access to the Milk River downstream from the Secondary Road 880 crossing must be carefully preplanned. Canoeists travelling into the United States are advised to notify U.S. authorities.

...an awesome combination of cultural and physical features...



Evening stars in bloom.

Cliff Wallis



Yucca plants.

Rating the Milk River

Natural Values

| | |
|--------------------------|-------------|
| Wildland | Outstanding |
| Representative landscape | Outstanding |
| Wildlife | Outstanding |
| Fish | Excellent |
| Scenic views | Outstanding |
| Heritage resources | Outstanding |

Recreational Values

| | |
|---------------------------|-----------|
| Whitewater-craft use | Poor |
| Pleasure-craft use | Fair |
| Camping | Excellent |
| River-corridor recreation | Excellent |
| Fishing | Poor |
| Hunting | Excellent |

The Upper Oldman River: Chinook-country whitewater

Cascading over ledges and plunging through rocky chutes, the Oldman River divides the Livingstone Mountains as it enters the foothills ranchlands of southern Alberta. From its origin in a small alpine lake on Mount Lyall, the river races down a steep valley and through a deep gap (called The Gap) in the Livingstone Range. Skirting the Porcupine Hills, the river flows at a more leisurely pace toward the prairie.

From its source to the North Fork Bridge, the upper Oldman River has been designated as a candidate *recreational river*. The upper river is known for its majestic river and mountain scenes, for superb whitewater experiences and for some of the finer stream angling in Alberta.

River-running

The upper Oldman is expert-class whitewater. River rapids above the Callum Creek confluence can be dangerous for inexperienced canoeists. The river's whitewater sections challenge the river runner, promising excitement and demanding skill—Rock Wall Rapids, Crazy Ledge, Submarine Rapids, Iron Gates, The Gorge, Cave Rapids, and Rosie's Roll. Quiet river sections are found downstream from Callum Creek to the North Fork Bridge.

Planning for a river trip on the upper Oldman River should include reading Buhrmann and Young's river guide, *Canoeing Chinook Country Rivers*.

Whitewater craft can be found on the river from ice break-up in late April or early May to the end of July. River flows vary from year to year, reducing or lengthening the river-running season. In some years it is possible to canoe the river into November. In most years the river is available to the whitewater enthusiast for at least 12 weeks, from early May to until the end of July.

Scenic viewing

The upper Oldman River offers some of the more spectacular scenery in Alberta. The vertical rock walls of the Livingstone Mountains stand facing the spruce-and pine-covered ridges of the Porcupine Hills. Rolling foothills, grasslands, forested mountain valleys and the Oldman River's sparkling waters make this area a photographer's delight. Autumn is especially dramatic, as aspen leaves turn valley sides to brilliant yellow against the deep-blue fall skies.



Hans Buhrmann

Fishing

Downstream from Racehorse Creek, the upper Oldman River is rated as an excellent rainbow trout stream, second only to the Bow River near Calgary. Cutthroat trout are found in the mountain tributaries of the river. These native trout are considered an important provincial resource; elsewhere, logging and mining practices and cattle-damaged stream banks have left few healthy populations of cutthroat trout in Alberta. Mountain whitefish are also abundant in the upper Oldman River.

On a summer weekend, anglers on the river come from as far as Edmonton, Calgary and Medicine Hat. Good fishing access is provided by the Forestry Trunk Road, which parallels much of the river within the Bow-Crow Forest Reserve. Anglers crossing private land in the foothills are requested to seek permission from landowners.

Wildlife

Bighorn sheep are found among the high alpine meadows and peaks above the river. Elk, mule deer and moose are frequently found along the upper Oldman River, particularly in winter. Whitetailed and mule deer can be seen where the river flows through the foothills. Beaver, mink and muskrat seek food along the river's shorelines. An abundance of mountain and foothills songbirds can be observed along the river.

River-corridor recreation

The upper Oldman River, from its headwaters tributaries to the Bow-Crow Forest Reserve boundary, provides a multitude of recreational opportunities. Camping, fishing, hunting, picnicking, hiking, photography, canoeing, nature observation, sightseeing, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing are only a few of the recreational opportunities available.

Access

The upper Oldman River is easily accessible from the Forestry Trunk Road north of Coleman, which parallels the whitewater section of the river, from The Gap upstream. From Racehorse Creek downstream, Secondary Road 517 follows the river to the Highway 22 crossing north of Lundbreck. The North Fork Bridge downstream of the Highway 22 crossing is another access point.

Rating the Upper Oldman River

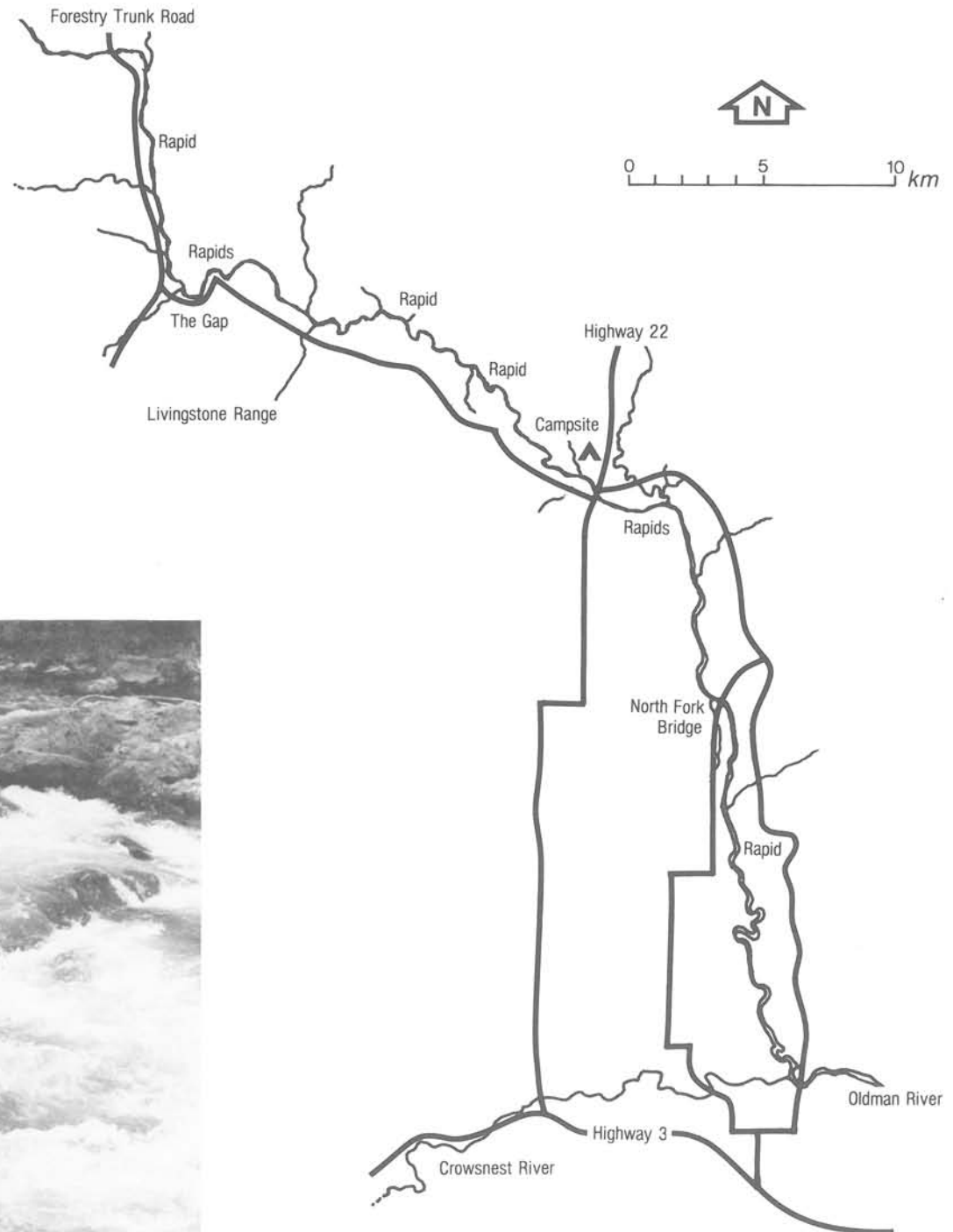
Natural Values

| | |
|--------------------------|-------------|
| Wildland | Excellent |
| Representative landscape | Excellent |
| Wildlife | Excellent |
| Fish | Outstanding |
| Scenic views | Outstanding |
| Heritage resources | Average |

Recreational Values

| | |
|---------------------------|-------------|
| Whitewater-craft use | Outstanding |
| Pleasure-boat use | Poor |
| Camping | Average |
| River-corridor recreation | Excellent |
| Fishing | Excellent |
| Hunting | Excellent |

Hans Buhrmann



The Bow River: on borrowed time

Few cities in the world can boast an internationally renowned trout stream within a few minutes of every household. Few cities in the world can offer their citizens a relaxing summer evening paddling sparkling, emerald-green currents. Few cities in the world host huge flocks of migrating geese; deer, eagles in winter, and beaver within their city limits. Calgary is such a city.

The Bow River offers Calgarians solitude, excitement and quiet pleasure. On a summer weekend hundreds of brightly coloured canoes wind their way through the city and beyond. Following a day at the office, anglers cast flies over hugh rainbow and brown trout in the gathering darkness of a summer evening, while others jog and cycle over pathways along the river's shores, or picnic in river parks.

Evergreens and aspen forests west of Calgary follow the Bow River valley east into prairie farmland. Sandstone outcroppings, rushing yet gentle currents, prairie bluffs and stately groves of cottonwoods and evergreens greet the canoeist around river bends. Wildlife is more abundant here. River islands ring with the sound of nesting geese; deer feed on the river's edge, and red-tailed hawks soar over the uplands. Each year more Albertans explore this magnificent resource.

The Bow River from Bearspaw Dam to the Blackfoot Indian Reserve should be established as a *recreational river* for the future enjoyment of all Albertans. This section of river represents some 20 percent of the river's length beyond Banff National Park.

Fishing

"In 50 years of trout angling, I can't recall many places that consistently produce big rainbows and browns on tiny dry flies the way this Alberta water does." When A.J. McClane, internationally known angler-writer with *Sports Afield* magazine, made these comments he captured the reason anglers consider the Bow River a world-class trout stream. Most fishing occurs between the Bearspaw Dam and the Bow River Irrigation District weir at Carseland. Some 200,000 anglers were recorded using the river and its tributaries in 1977. Four out of five of these anglers were from Calgary with June, July and August being the most popular months for fishing. Rainbow trout, mountain whitefish, and brown trout were the game fish caught most often.

To maintain good numbers of trophy-size fish and to protect spawning trout, daily catch limits are low on the Bow River and the fishing seasons are restricted. Highwood River tributaries are the major spawning streams for Bow River rainbows. Moving through the Highwood and its tributaries, spawning rainbow trout migrate to the very base of the Rocky Mountains. The quality of the Bow River fishery can be maintained only if the Highwood River and its tributaries are free of dams, diversions and pollution.



The Bow River below Calgary.

T.D. Lindsay

The Bow River fishery downstream from Calgary periodically suffers from major fish kills as a result of pollution. *The Bow is on borrowed time*. Recognizing this, the Alberta government and the city of Calgary are improving sewage treatment facilities. Research is also being directed toward reducing nutrients in the city's effluent that cause unnecessary weed growth in the river. These are encouraging first steps in protecting and managing a unique recreational resource.

River-corridor recreation

Wildlife viewing, fishing, boating, photography, cross-country skiing, bow hunting and picnicking are common recreational activities in the Bow River valley. During the past few years, many of these activities in the Bow River valley have been limited by a lack of public access to the river. Sportsman's organizations and other recreational groups have urged the Alberta government for more than 15 years to establish controlled public access to the river. Although a number of publicly owned access sites exist, progress has been slow in developing these as *recreational* access sites. The lack of developed access is preventing thousands of Albertans from enjoying the river each year. Uncontrolled recreational use and increasing vandalism have forced landowners to close most public access, but sensible management practices, such as providing day-use sites, toilets, adequate policing, and fencing, would minimize the impact of recreational use and improve relations with landowners.

Recreational uses of the Bow River that conflict with the enjoyment of the resource by others need to be restricted. High-speed jet boats can be hazardous to canoeists and fishermen wading the river. The speed and sound of jet boats often disturb wildlife, particularly nesting waterfowl and flocks of migrants in late summer and fall. Large rivers, such as the North and South Saskatchewan, or rivers with light recreational use, are more suited to these craft. Damage to rangeland by all-terrain vehicles is one reason many private lands are closed to the public today. Uncontrolled use of these machines is a detriment to the aesthetic enjoyment of the Bow River valley.

Access

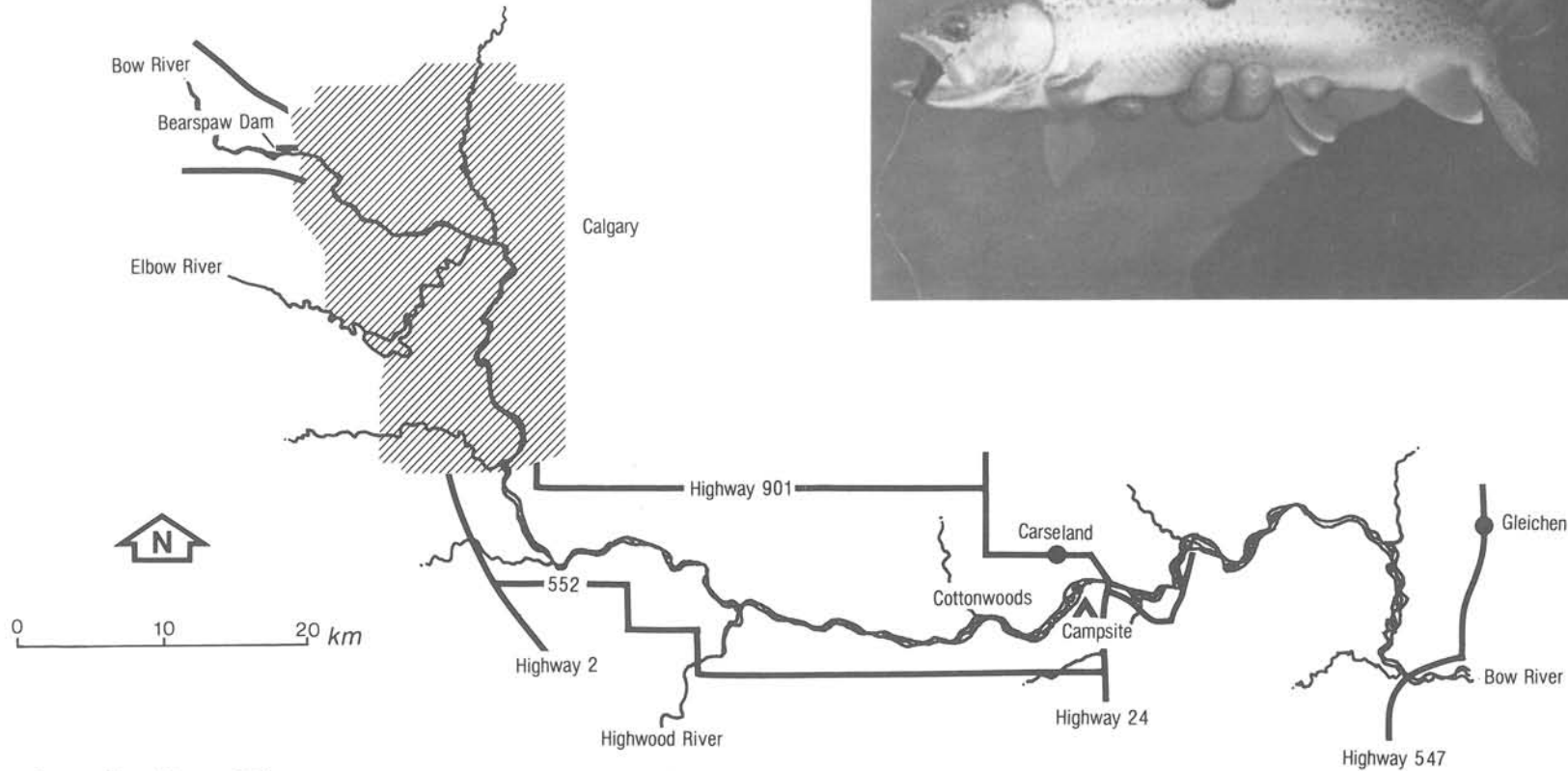
The Bow River valley is accessible at various points within the city of Calgary. Bridge crossings, the Bearspaw Dam, Bowness Park and Fish Creek Park are particularly popular. Between Highway 22X and the weir at Carseland, access is poor, but a public road south of Carseland provides some access for pleasure boaters and anglers. On the south side of the weir, above the safety boom, it is possible with some difficulty to take a light boat from the river. A provincial campsite is located at the Highway 23 crossing below the weir.

Simply the finest dry fly-fishing for big trout in the world.

A.J. McClane, Editor,
Sports Afield magazine



Dave Hotchkiss



Rating the Bow River

Natural Values

| | |
|--------------------------|-----------|
| Wildland | Fair |
| Representative landscape | Average |
| Wildlife | Excellent |
| Fish | Average |
| Scenic views | Excellent |
| Heritage resources | Average |

Recreational Values

| | |
|---------------------------|-------------|
| Whitewater-craft use | Fair |
| Pleasure-craft use | Outstanding |
| Camping | Average |
| River-corridor recreation | Excellent |
| Fishing | Outstanding |
| Hunting | Excellent |

...solitude and quiet pleasure...

The upper Red Deer River: endless variety

The upper Red Deer River offers an excellent challenge to Alberta's whitewater enthusiasts. From Banff National Park the river flows 92 km to the town of Sundre. This river section boasts a national-class whitewater slalom course. Here paddlers from across Canada compete for national honours in whitewater rapids that defy description.

Although the upper Red Deer River is accessible by road for much of its length, many of the rugged and wild characteristics of the river valley remain.

Seldom is a river or natural feature unique because of but one or two items of its makeup; rather, it has individuality as a result of the complex nature it exhibits. The upper Red Deer, from the Forestry Trunk Road bridge to a point 30 km downstream, has such a complex nature. The spruce forests along the sloping valley sides, the cobble beds and banks, the elevated and richly vegetated floodplains (offering excellent camping areas), the fishing, the opportunities to view moose and elk as well as waterfowl, together with sparkling cold water, frequent rapids, sounds, sights, smells, all contribute to a unique environment, a unique resource and a unique experience.

The upper Red Deer River is an excellent *recreational river* candidate.

River-running

The upper Red Deer River can be run by the experienced canoe or kayak paddler throughout the ice-free period in most years. From the Forestry Trunk Road crossing to the forest reserve boundary, the Red Deer River is renowned for its fine whitewater and easy accessibility. Concentrated in a short reach of this river section are a diversity of rapids, chutes and ledges of breathtaking power. Under the international rating system for whitewater, there are 21 rapids and ledges in this river section.

It draws you to itself while cautioning you away. It mystifies. It is more than a view and greater than a sound. You have an experience. And for some there is a dimension of doing and achievement to it. This comes from the uncertainty, mystery and challenge to training and skill for someone to successfully paddle a canoe or kayak through it and to know that some do.

S.R. White, Red Deer Regional
Planning Commission

River-corridor recreation

The grasslands of the Ya-Ha Tinda area along the upper Red Deer River are the home of a large elk herd. These animals are an important provincial resource. The elk fascinate families watching them in spring and summer and thrill sportsmen during the chill days of autumn. Meadows and woodlands near the river provide habitat for moose and deer. A few wild horses can also be found here.

The roar of the river's rapids and the sense of their power impresses even those unfamiliar with nature's force. A short hike from the road takes the visitor to these rapids. Campsites, both developed and primitive, are available in the river valley within the public lands of the forest reserve. Fishing is popular along the upper Red Deer River and its tributary streams.

Upper Red Deer whitewater.



Fishing

The upper Red Deer River between Banff Park and Sundre is a cold-water mountain whitefish and trout stream. The river and its tributaries support dolly varden, brown trout, brook trout and mountain whitefish. Whitefish are the most abundant sport fish in the river. Tributary streams often contain healthy trout populations. Unlike some other game fish, dolly varden are easily taken by anglers. The future of this native fish can be jeopardized by over-fishing and anglers are encouraged to return dolly varden to the stream when possible. Through the wise stewardship of anglers and resource managers, the upper Red Deer River and its tributaries will continue to provide Albertans with fishing opportunities.

...more than a view and greater than a sound...

Access

An important whitewater section of the upper Red Deer River between the Panther River and Burnt Timber Creek tributaries is accessible from the Forestry Trunk Road crossing. To reach this crossing, turn south off Highway 27 14 km west of Sundre; from there an all-weather road parallels the river to the Forestry Trunk Road crossing.

Rating the Upper Red Deer River

Natural Values

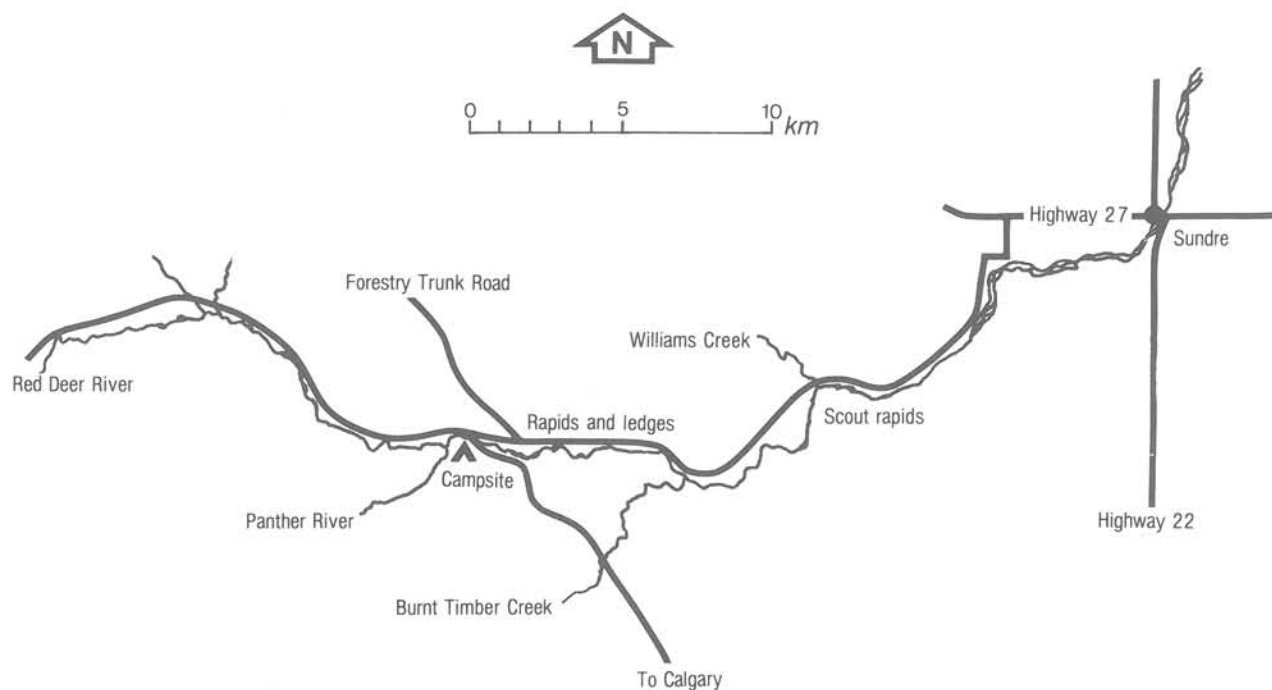
| | |
|--------------------------|-----------|
| Wildland | Average |
| Representative landscape | Average |
| Wildlife | Excellent |
| Fish | Average |
| Scenic views | Excellent |
| Heritage resources | — |

Recreational Values

| | |
|---------------------------|-------------|
| Whitewater-craft use | Outstanding |
| Pleasure-craft use | Fair |
| Camping | Average |
| River-corridor recreation | Outstanding |
| Fishing | Excellent |
| Hunting | Outstanding |

Running the upper Red Deer.

Ron Hooper



The lower Red Deer River: touching 70 million years of Alberta history

Known for its broad expanse of natural open space and badlands topography, the lower Red Deer River offers visitors unique scenic and wildland experiences. Each year many Albertans visit world-famous Dinosaur Provincial Park, where fossils are found dating to Cretaceous times 65-70 million years ago. This area's rugged landscape, with numerous coulees and stream courses entering the valley, complements the spectacular hoodoos, buttes, knife-edge divides and mesas of the badlands.

Beyond Dinosaur Park, few Albertans are aware of the provincially and regionally significant features found along the lower Red Deer River valley. Outwash terraces, sand dunes, pronghorn antelope wintering area, cottonwood and Manitoba maple woodlands, coulee springs, and vast sagebrush flats make the river valley and its uplands an ideal natural-river candidate. The lower Red Deer River, with its uplands of special significance between the Douglas Creek confluence and the Saskatchewan border, is proposed as a *natural river*.

The Alberta government completed a resource evaluation of the lower Red Deer River in 1977. From the city of Red Deer to Empress on the Saskatchewan border, a corridor 450 km long and 45 km wide centering on the Red Deer River was examined for its natural features and recreational potential. The study concluded that preservation of special features and conservation of natural landscape values was imperative if the lower Red Deer valley was to remain a unique recreational resource.

Wildland

Wildlands identified in the provincial study and within the proposed natural river area are numerous. The Finnegan - Steveville terraces, west of Dinosaur Park, are excellent examples of well-developed river terraces with sand dunes, extensive woodlands and native prairie uplands. On the eastern edge of the terrace area is Duchess springs, unusual for its peach-leaved willows, and unique aspen and balsam poplar woodlands. Pileated woodpeckers have been sighted in the mature woodlands associated with Duchess springs. This large woodpecker is extremely rare beyond areas of extensive forest. Critical antelope winter range borders the Red Deer River in this area. The Cessford esker is a special geological feature along the northeastern corner of the Finnegan - Steveville terraces.

East of Dinosaur Park along the Red Deer River are extensive river terraces with active sand dunes, sandstone outcroppings, and numerous springs. Alkali Creek is a feature with regional significance within the Buffalo - Dune Point terraces. This is the best representative of a relatively undisturbed tributary stream environment entering the lower Red Deer River. Thorny buffaloberry, willow, water birch and streamside vegetation attract an amazing variety of birds. Archaeological sites in the Alkali Creek area include cairns once used to watch bison herds on the terraces.



Ball cactus in bloom.

Cliff Wallis

The Red Deer River north of Bindloss creates a variety of unusual features not often found along the river. These include springs with extensive Manitoba maple and willow woodlands, outwash terraces and sand dunes. These sand dunes provide habitat for the most northerly population of kangaroo rats on the continent.

The largest river terraces in Alberta border the Red Deer River north of Bindloss. These terraces are classic examples of terrace development on a meandering river; the river course features sandbars, meander scars, point bars and islands. The eastern terrace has what may be Alberta's largest plains-cottonwood forest.

The upland grasslands south and west of Bindloss contain a variety of sand-dune and mixed-grass vegetation, like that found in the Middle Sand Hills within the Suffield Military Reserve.

Today, these special features and natural landscapes receive little protection or management. A balanced approach is needed to maintain these areas for agricultural use and recreation, while preserving their unique features.

River Corridor Recreation

Summer recreation in the lower Red Deer River area is mainly associated with Dinosaur Provincial Park. Camping sites are available at the park, but they are often crowded. A small campsite is also available at the Highway 36 crossing. Primitive campsites are abundant, although care must be exercised to avoid adverse impact on natural features, native vegetation and wildlife.

Some 350 species of mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians and 530 species of plants have been identified in the Red Deer River valley. This wild resource is a naturalist's and photographer's paradise. The solitude of the river valley enhances opportunities to view wildlife. From a canoe the solitude is even more pronounced. River currents are slow and the canoeist may need to skirt the occasional sand bar in summer.

Terraces, coulees, sage flats and woodlands along the lower Red Deer River are popular locations for big-game hunting. Mule deer and whitetailed deer seasons open in November. The remote nature of much of the river valley provides a unique hunting experience.

Access

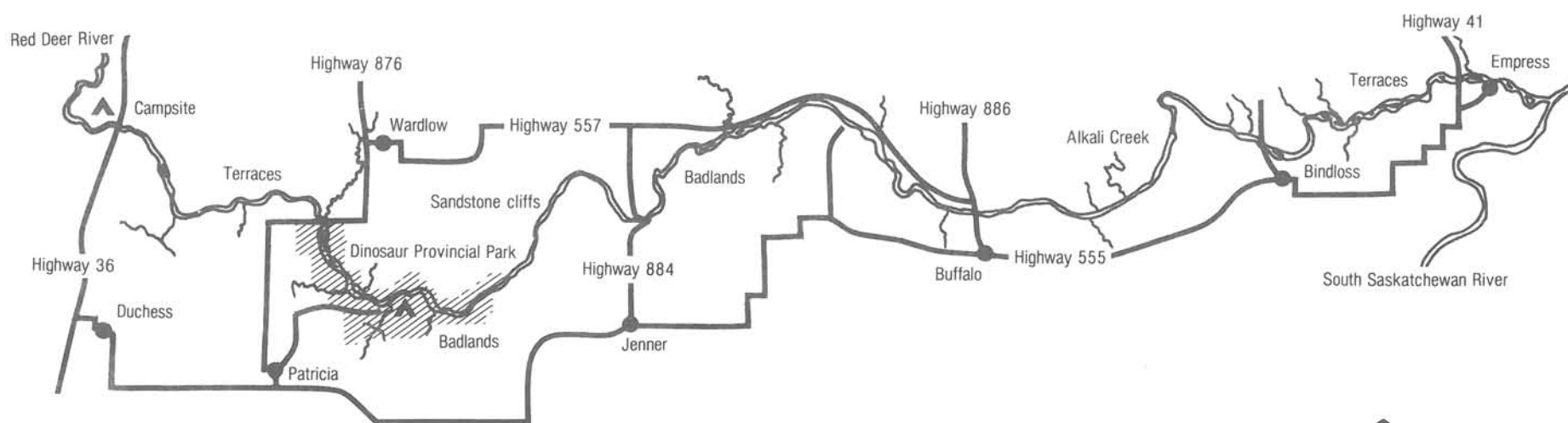
Dinosaur Park may be reached by traveling north from the TransCanada Highway near Brooks or east from Highway 36 to Patricia. The route from Patricia to the park is well marked. Other access to the lower Red Deer River is provided at the Highway 36 and 41 bridges and river crossing near Buffalo, Empress and on Secondary Road 876. Several of these bridge crossings can serve as access points for day trips by canoe. Numerous trails also exist throughout the river valley. Visitors are advised to stay on established trails to avoid damaging rangeland.



Badlands along the lower Red Deer.

Cliff Wallis

...spectacular hoodoos, buttes, knife-edge divides...



0 10 20 km

Rating the lower Red Deer River

Natural Values

| | |
|--------------------------|-------------|
| Wildland | Outstanding |
| Representative landscape | Outstanding |
| Wildlife | Excellent |
| Fish | Fair |
| Scenic views | Outstanding |
| Heritage resources | Outstanding |

Recreation Values

| | |
|---------------------------|-----------|
| Whitewater-craft use | Poor |
| Pleasure-craft use | Fair |
| Camping | Average |
| River corridor recreation | Excellent |
| Fishing | Poor |
| Hunting | Excellent |

The Ram River: roaring rapids, canyon walls, danger and excitement

In its 58-km length, the Ram River boasts a magnificent canyon and several waterfalls. The impressive rock walls of this narrow canyon display rock strata of various hues, sulphur springs, many rapids and deep pools. This deeply entrenched river cascades through gorges less than ten metres wide.

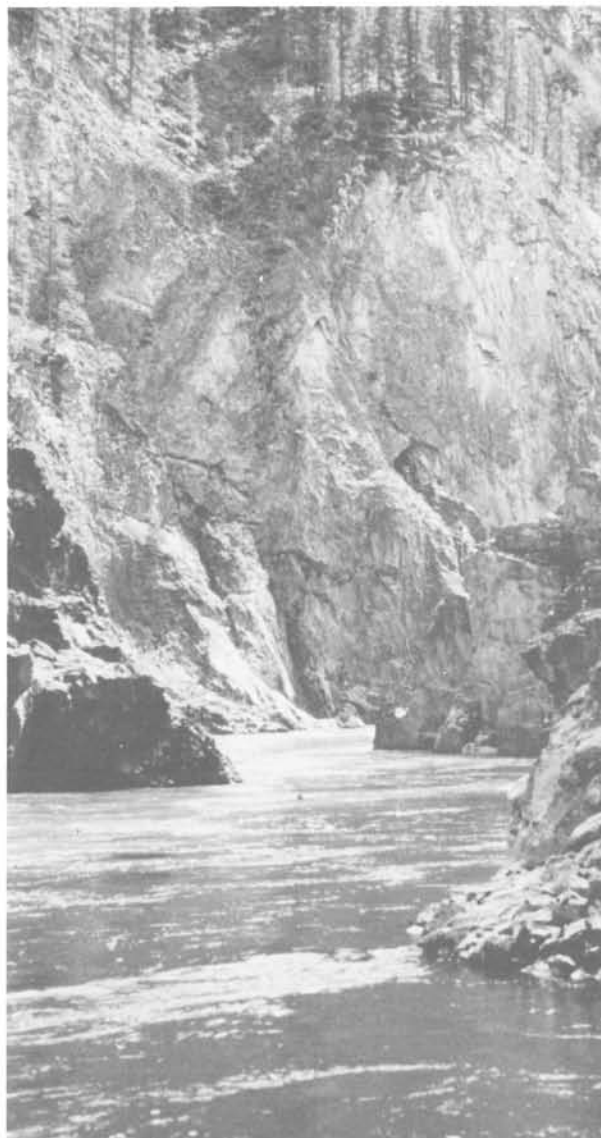
The Alberta Wilderness Association study team recommends that the Ram River be designated a *natural river* to preserve it as a scenic resource.

Scenic Values

Visitors to the Ram River area can view the river's canyon and waterfalls by hiking along the canyon rim. The more adventurous can canoe the river, but two difficult portages are necessary to avoid waterfalls and impassable ledges in the upper part of the canyon. The river remains confined by high rock walls for much of its length, with boulder-studded chutes, rock gardens, and low ledges adding to the visual excitement.

River-corridor recreation

Cutthroat, rainbow trout and mountain whitefish are important game fish in the Ram River. Fishermen gain access to the lower reaches of the river relatively easily; those wishing to fish the deep pools of the canyon will be rewarded by good fishing after a steep, sometimes treacherous climb.



Canyon along the Ram River.

Hans Buhrmann

The whitewater season begins in early May and usually lasts until the end of August, with maximum river flows expected near the end of June or in early July. Portages are not clearly marked and trails are very steep. Advance scouting is mandatory in the canyon reach. The entire river can be canoed in two days, but the Ram is so demanding and beautiful that a longer, more leisurely trip is recommended.

Hunting for deer, elk and moose in November is popular on the public lands bordering the river. Bow hunting seasons and bird hunting seasons begin earlier.

Access

Vehicle access to the Ram River is available near its confluence with the North Saskatchewan River. From Rocky Mountain House travel west on Secondary Road 752, turning north 4 km west of the village of Strachan; this road takes you to the Ram River bridge. A few loose-surface, dry-weather roads in the area will also take you within hiking distance of the river.

Whitewater craft can be paddled down the North Ram tributary to reach the Ram River. Shortly after entering the Ram, the white-water enthusiast will encounter impassable ledges, cascades and a nine-metre-high waterfall in the David Thompson Canyon. Portaging is a necessity!



Bighorn Ram

Parks Canada

...boulder-studded chutes and rock gardens...

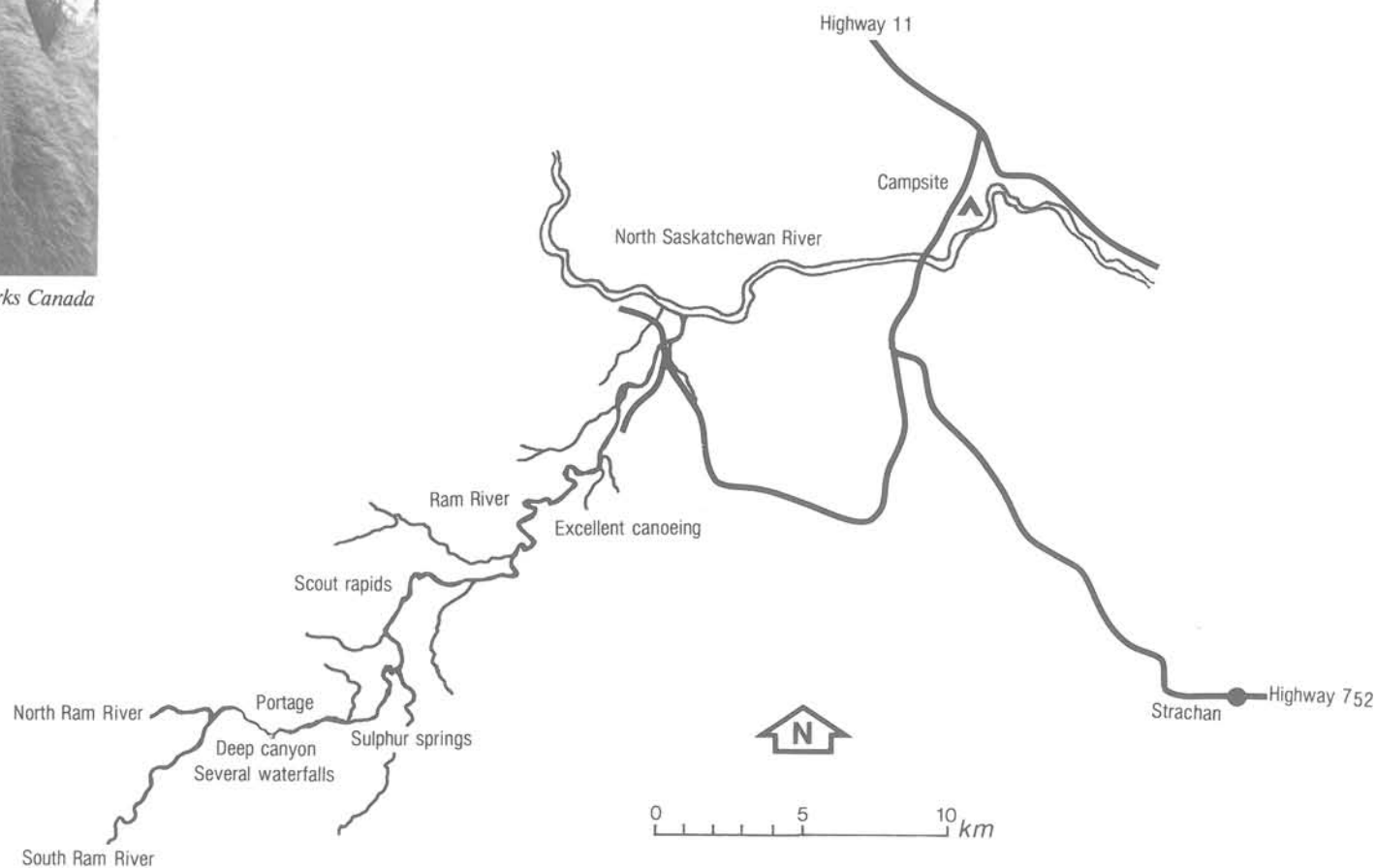
Rating the Ram River

Natural Values

| | |
|--------------------------|-------------|
| Wildland | Excellent |
| Representative landscape | Excellent |
| Wildlife | Excellent |
| Fish | Average |
| Scenic views | Outstanding |
| Heritage resources | — |

Recreational Values

| | |
|---------------------------|-----------|
| Whitewater-craft use | Excellent |
| Pleasure-craft use | — |
| Camping | Average |
| River-corridor recreation | Excellent |
| Fishing | Excellent |
| Hunting | Excellent |



The North and South Ram rivers: foothills streams of unique beauty

The Ram Range east of Banff National Park is the origin of the streams that form the North and South Ram rivers. These rivers, forming the Ram River where they join, flow through spruce and pine-covered foothills with aspen groves on the more open, south-facing hillsides. They offer beauty to the photographer, hiker and wildlife enthusiast. Fishing, hunting and whitewater challenges also attract Albertans to these rivers. The North and South Ram Rivers are proposed as *recreational rivers*.

River-running

The North Ram is a small, shallow river that will challenge the intermediate canoeist. Some 35 km of the North Ram above its confluence with the South Ram is accessible to the canoeist in June and July. River difficulty ratings only occasionally exceed Level II, with rock gardens and chutes predominating. Primitive campsites are abundant along the north shore.

The South Ram River has a very steep gradient, with several falls and impassable rapids. Unlike much of the North Ram, this river is frequently confined by rock walls. The South Ram requires further study to assess its use by whitewater craft, but the river's abundant rapids appear to offer considerable potential.

River-corridor recreation

The North and South Ram rivers offer scenic beauty, wildlife viewing, good fishing for trout and mountain whitefish, and opportunities to hunt for elk, deer, moose and bear. A critical wintering area for bighorn sheep is found along the South Ram.



North Ram River.

Hans Buhrmann



South Ram River.

Hans Buhrmann

Ruffed and spruce grouse are also found in the forests bordering the rivers. A developed campsite and scenic viewpoint are found on the South Ram River at the Forestry Trunk Road crossing. Primitive campsites are numerous.

The proximity of the North and South Ram rivers to Alberta's major population centres provides an ideal opportunity to develop day-use sites for family outings and additional developed campsites. Trail networks would also enhance this area's value to Albertans.

Access

The North and South Ram rivers are accessible from Secondary Road 940, known to most Albertans as the Forestry Trunk Road. This all-weather road can be reached from Highway 11 west of Rocky Mountain House. Traveling south on the Forestry Trunk road, you will cross the North Ram River 28 km from Nordegg. Camp and picnic sites are available at this crossing. An all-weather road runs east from the crossing and parallels the North Ram River to the Nice Creek confluence.

Continuing south on the Forestry Trunk Road from the North Ram River crossing, you will pass through rolling, spruce and pine-covered foothills before arriving at the scenic lookout and campsite at the spectacular South Ram River Falls.

An alternative route is available from Highway 1A west of Cochrane, near Calgary. By following the Forestry Trunk Road north to the South Ram, you will be treated to a scenic view of the eastern slopes of the Rockies.

Rating the North Ram River

Natural Values

| | |
|--------------------------|-----------|
| Wildland | Average |
| Representative landscape | Excellent |
| Wildlife | Excellent |
| Fish | Excellent |
| Scenic views | Excellent |
| Heritage resources | — |

Recreational Values

| | |
|---------------------------|-----------|
| Whitewater-craft use | Average |
| Pleasure-craft use | — |
| Camping | Excellent |
| River-corridor recreation | Excellent |
| Fishing | Excellent |
| Hunting | Excellent |

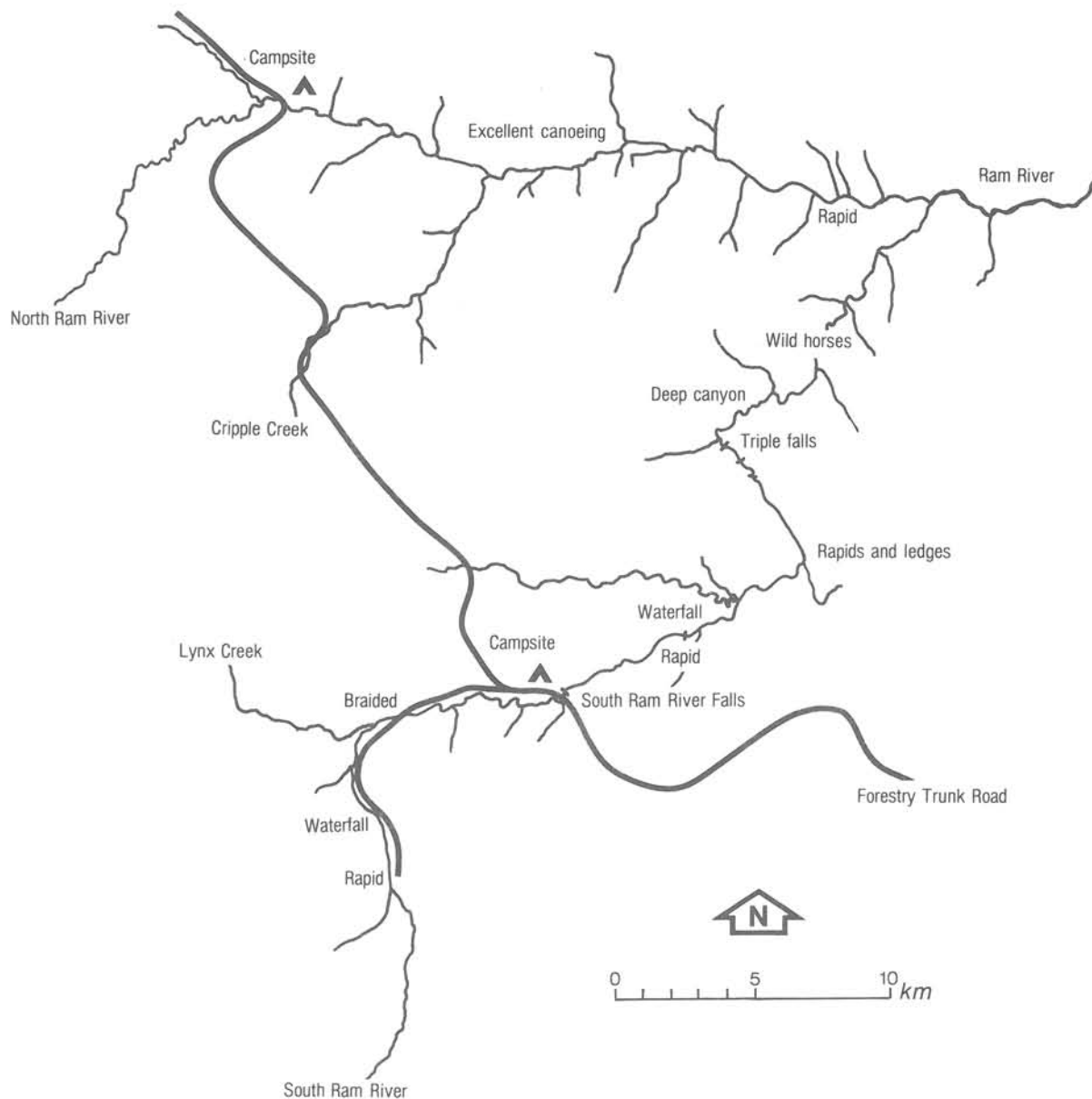
Rating the South Ram River

Natural Values

| | |
|--------------------------|-----------|
| Wildland | Excellent |
| Representative landscape | Excellent |
| Wildlife | Excellent |
| Fish | Excellent |
| Scenic views | Excellent |
| Heritage resources | — |

Recreational Values

| | |
|---------------------------|-----------|
| Whitewater-craft use | — |
| Pleasure-craft use | — |
| Camping | Excellent |
| River-corridor recreation | Excellent |
| Fishing | Average |
| Hunting | Excellent |



The North Saskatchewan River: paddles have plied this water for two centuries

A canoe trip on the North Saskatchewan River can revitalize, challenge and evoke dreams. The river offers a diversity of exciting recreational opportunities. Long sections of uninhabited shoreline lure those in search of solitude. Traveling through an area rich in Alberta's history, paddlers slice through currents followed by the fur traders 150 years ago. David Thompson opened a fur-trading post on the North Saskatchewan River in the early part of the 19th century. This post established Rocky Mountain House as one of the major trading posts between Hudson Bay and the Rocky Mountains.

Glacier fed, with its headwaters emerging from the Columbia Icefield in Banff National Park, the river downstream of the Bighorn Dam to Rocky Mountain House is a *recreational river* candidate.

River-running

Canoeing is the main recreational appeal of this section of the North Saskatchewan River. The river provides an ideal four-day canoe trip for intermediate paddlers. Below the Bighorn Dam, river flows are spread over a wide, braided channel that narrows toward the confluence of the Ram River. From the Ram River downstream, the North Saskatchewan becomes more swift and powerful. In the 30 km reach above Rocky Mountain House, there are numerous rapids, some with standing waves over two metres high. These rapids are excellent training runs for the canoeist wishing to advance his or her whitewater skills. Depending on river flow conditions, rapids rarely exceed Level II difficulty.



North Saskatchewan River.

Hans Buhrmann

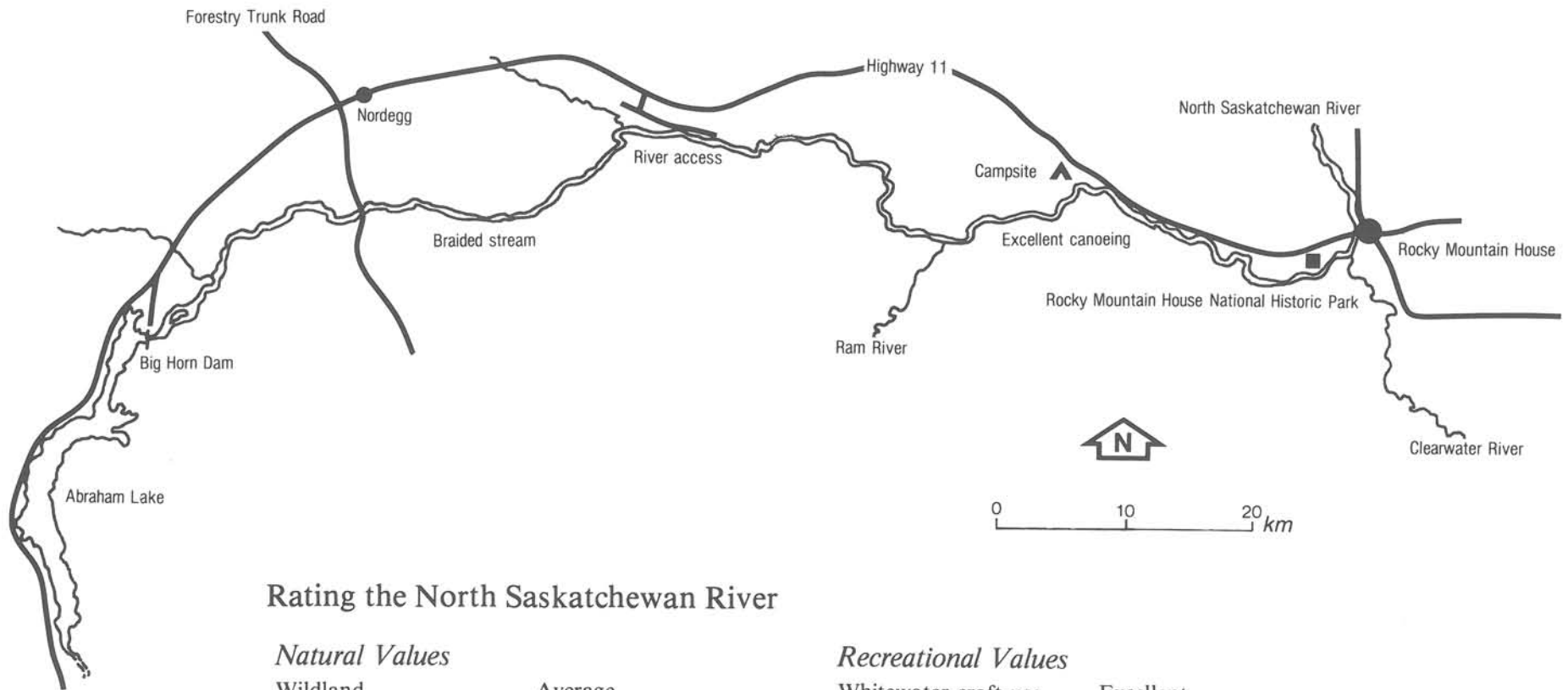
River-corridor recreation

The 134-km reach of the North Saskatchewan River between the Bighorn Dam and Rocky Mountain House flows through low foothills covered with spruce, pine and aspen, and divides the rugged Brazeau Range. Primitive campsites downstream from Nordegg are abundant, though road access to them is infrequent within the forest reserve. Developed campsites are available near Nordegg. Hunting is a major recreational use of this area. Moose, deer, bear and elk are found in the forests bordering the river. Other recreational uses of the uplands bordering the river include scenery enjoyment, photography, wildlife viewing, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and snowmobiling.

Access

Although Highway 11 west of Rocky Mountain House parallels the North Saskatchewan River (sometimes within a kilometre of it), all-weather road access is limited. The forestry Trunk Road crosses the river 20 km south of Highway 11, providing a suitable launch site for whitewater craft. An alternative launch site is the all-weather road 4 km west of the village of Strachan, on Secondary road 752, where it crosses the Ram River. This crossing is just above the Ram River confluence with the North Saskatchewan. Access to the river near Rocky Mountain House is possible, with a short portage, from an all-weather road that follows the Canadian National Railway 33 km west of the town to Highway 11.

...slice through currents followed by the fur traders...



Rating the North Saskatchewan River

Natural Values

| | |
|--------------------------|-------------|
| Wildland | Average |
| Representative landscape | Average |
| Wildlife | Average |
| Fish | Fair |
| Scenic views | Excellent |
| Heritage resources | Outstanding |

Recreational Values

| | |
|---------------------------|-----------|
| Whitewater-craft use | Excellent |
| Pleasure-craft use | Average |
| Camping | Average |
| River-corridor recreation | Excellent |
| Fishing | Fair |
| Hunting | Excellent |

Opportunities for action

Time is precious. We have all used the phrase, recognizing its truth. By contributing 20 minutes of your time, you can make an important contribution to securing the future of our rivers. The challenges of river management described in this booklet are immediate; the erosion of our river resources has already begun. Act today; it takes only 20 minutes to make an impact.

Individually, each of us has an important persuasive tool - the letter. Legislation does not just happen; it is usually developed in response to public demands for action. A letter to an elected representative is an effective way to generate action. If politicians are to support legislation protecting rivers for recreational use, you must make them aware of your interest and commitment to good river management.

Alberta legislators receive surprisingly little correspondence. A letter from a voter back home does three things—

First, your letter alerts the representative to an important issue.

Second, letters require action. It is a politician's job to keep in touch with his constituents. To answer your letter, the legislator has to take time to think about the issue.



Third, a letter can enlighten, educate and perhaps generate support for your position. Your action could recruit a powerful ally.

Letters to the editor of your local newspaper are also useful. A letter on the editorial page alerts others to our concerns and informs your community on the issue. Letter pages of newspapers are widely read by the public and by local government officials.

You've taken 20 minutes to write your letter. You've made an impact. Any extra time to spare? Think about your community. Who are the decision-makers, the educators, the leaders of public opinion? Talk to them about rivers. Talk to them about challenges and problems, and recruit their support.

Let us know what develops in your community. We'll help out with literature, a speaker for your group, advice on approaches ... write to us at the address in the front of this booklet.

We in the Alberta Wilderness Association join with many recreation and conservation groups in asking you to make a commitment, to do your part as an Albertan to preserve and to enrich our river heritage.

Our rivers are on borrowed time.

The need for legislation to preserve river resources is also supported by:

Alberta Fish and Game Association
Federation of Alberta Naturalists
National and Provincial Parks Association of Canada
Alberta Canoe Association
Alberta Water Management Coalition
Canadian Nature Federation

Appendix

Rivers investigated in the Alberta Wilderness Association study

Missouri River Basin

Milk River

North Fork (Del Bonita to South Fork confluence).
South Fork (Secondary Road 501 to North Fork confluence).
North and South Fork confluence to Secondary Road 880 crossing.
Secondary Road 880 crossing to United States border.

South Saskatchewan River Basin

Belly River

Mt. View-Hillspring bridge to Secondary Road 505.
Secondary Road 505 to Highway 2.
Highway 2 to Oldman River confluence.

Waterton River

Waterton Park Gate to Waterton Reservoir.
Waterton Dam to Secondary Road 811.
Secondary Road 811 to Belly River confluence.

Castle River

Ranger Station (Secondary road 774) to Oldman River confluence.

Crowsnest River

Blairmore Bridge to Oldman River confluence.

Oldman River

Forestry Trunk Road crossing to Callum Creek.
Callum Creek to Brocket.
Brocket to Monarch.
Monarch to Lethbridge.
Lethbridge to Bow River confluence.

South Saskatchewan River

Grand Forks to Bird Sanctuary (km 141).
Bird Sanctuary to Bindloss Ferry (km 240).
Bindloss Ferry to Saskatchewan boundary.

Highwood River

Cat Creek to Secondary road 541 campsite.
Longview bridge to Bow River confluence.

Sheep River

Bluerock Creek to Secondary Road 546.
Turner Valley to Highwood River confluence.

Elbow River

Elbow Falls to Canyon Creek.
Canyon Creek to Bragg Creek.
Bragg Creek to Bow River confluence.

Bow River

Banff Park border to Bearspaw Dam.
Bearspaw Dam to Bow River Irrigation District Weir.
Bow River Irrigation District Weir to Bassano Dam.
Bassano Dam to Grand Forks.

Kananaskis River

Lower Kananaskis Lake to Bow River confluence.

Little Red Deer River

Secondary Road 579 to Highway 27.
Highway 27 to Red Deer River confluence.

Burnt Timber River

Forestry Trunk Road to Red Deer River confluence.

Panther River

Sheep Creek confluence to Red Deer River confluence.

Red Deer River

Banff Park boundary to Forestry Trunk Road.
Forestry Trunk Road to Sundre.
Sundre to the City of Red Deer.
City of Red Deer to Drumheller.
Drumheller to Douglas Creek confluence.
Douglas Creek confluence to Saskatchewan boundary.

James River

Secondary Road 584 to Red Deer River confluence.

North Saskatchewan River Basin

Clearwater River

Banff Park boundary to Forestry Trunk Road.
Forestry Trunk Road to Rocky Mountain House.

North Ram River

Kiska Creek to South Ram River confluence.

South Ram River

Onion Creek to North Ram River confluence.

Ram River

North and South Ram River confluence to North Saskatchewan River.

North Saskatchewan River

Highway 93 to Abraham Reservoir.
Abraham Reservoir to Forestry Trunk Road.
Forestry Trunk Road to Rocky Mountain House.
Rocky Mountain House to Drayton Valley.
Drayton Valley to Edmonton.
Edmonton to Saskatchewan boundary.

Baptiste River

Brazeau Dam Road to North Saskatchewan River confluence.

Nordegg River

Brazeau Dam Road to Brazeau River confluence.

Blackstone River

Shankland Creek to Forestry Trunk Road.
Forestry Trunk Road to Brazeau River confluence.

Brazeau River

Banff Park boundary to Forestry Trunk Road.
Forestry Trunk Road to Brazeau Dam.

Cardinal River

Miskiki Creek to Brazeau River confluence.

Elk River

Airfield Road bridge to Brazeau Reservoir.

Sand River

Wolf and Sand River confluence to Beaver River confluence.

Beaver River

Secondary Road 866 to Highway 28.

