

# Dinosaur Provincial Park:

## Taking No Comfort

By Allison McPhail



Alberta's parks have been a part of my life as long as I can remember. Even as a small child, my father would take me out with him to enjoy the beauty and fresh air of our wonderful outdoor sites. This fostered an early love for being in nature that has only grown with time. I went from "tenting" with my father and siblings as a kid, to hiking, camping, and canoeing in my grade school Outdoor Education programs. After five years out of the province for university, I was ecstatic to celebrate my homecoming with an overnight trip to the Kananaskis backcountry.

There are many reasons to love Alberta's glorious variety of parks, both the recreational ones and those restricted for conservation. But one that will forever hold a special place in my heart is the always-popular Dinosaur Provincial Park.

I have a multitude of happy memories from Dinosaur. I first camped there at a young age, but returned again and again. The trails and tours became familiar, something to look forward to every time a new trip was planned. The mosquitos maybe got a little too familiar in the evenings, yet a few bug bites that quickly faded were a small price to pay for the joy of a weekend spent traipsing through the Badlands and learning from friendly Parks staff. This, too, was a park I returned to after completing my studies out-of-province.

Dinosaur really is a special place. The trees and terrain are gorgeous. The excitement of "discovering" fossils during a guided tour will make any child giggle with glee. There is a wealth of educational material available for the eggheads like me and, on weekends, it

is a delightful setting for live musicals. Then there is the sheer, simple pleasure of just picking a trail and wandering down it!

That said, one of my fondest memories of the park took place right in the middle of the campground. Past visitors will be familiar with a small creek running through the area, a safe and refreshing place to cool one's feet on a hot day. Or, if you've brought a swimsuit, why not sit right in the water? That's what my sisters and I thought, anyway!

Oh, yes. The three of us loved to play in that little creek. We'd splash and jump around as only children really can, before we enter the



*The grasslands are home to the plains spadefoot toad. PHOTO: © C. WALLIS*

more inhibited world. And I remember quite distinctly the day we set to making mud pies.

We were novice mud bakers at the start of the day. We piled mud up and tried to shape it. But we soon found that, much like working with real dough, the consistency was crucial. So, we spent a good deal of time experimenting with different mixes. A small sandbar proved to be a key source for this.

Upon mastering the necessary mud making consistency, we got down to the serious business of pie shaping. The creek bank was

soon covered in neatly-formed lumps. Other children, seeing our great delight as novice mud pie makers, were eager to join in. It began quite the industry!

Of course, I have numerous other precious memories of my different trips to this gem of a park. In adulthood, a good friend of mine was employed at Dinosaur. It was exciting to take the bus tour with her and watch her guide us with her own unique flair. In the evening, we sat around a campfire with her and her other friends, making s'mores and laughing.

Truly, Dinosaur Provincial Park is a special place. I believe it is an experience everyone deserves to have. As I have now dealt with a physical disability for several years, I have developed a new appreciation for the comfort camping sites run there. Anything that makes the park more accessible seems to me a worthwhile investment. I had hoped to make use of the facilities myself, once I developed sufficient tolerance to car rides to drive that far. It is therefore deeply troubling and saddening that Minister Nixon has announced plans to close the comfort camping section (as part of the 20 partial/full closures announced in Alberta's 2020 budget). Unlike some of the other sites discussed in this issue of the *Advocate*, this camping option didn't receive a reprieve from the Minister in June. We shouldn't take any comfort from these actions.

*Allison McPhail is an aerospace engineer, artisan jeweller, and professional writer. The worsening climate crisis terrifies her, and she is dedicated to combatting it through activism. ♡*