



# Crown of the Continent: The Living Heritage

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC



BISON SHIP WITH THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN FRONT  
STEVIE WATSON

Atop a snow-dusted peak in October, a friend and I hear an elk baw. Scanning meadows below with binoculars, I spot instead a silver-tipped grizzly bear, flexing its massive shoulder mound to excavate glacier lilies. "This is his place," my friend says. "He owns this country." Indeed, while we have eliminated grizzlies in so many places, a robust population freely roams the Crown of the Continent, from mountaintops and plunging valleys to fescue prairies and cedar rain forests.

Think of these magnificent bears as wary sentinel of change. For millennia they watched over people who honored their power. The Ktunaxa called to the bear spirit for guidance and protection, while Blackfoot traditions tell of the Medicine Grizzly who rescues and nourishes a young boy. Explorers David Thompson, Meriwether Lewis, and William Clark learned the ancient wisdom of mutual respect the hard way. After several violent confrontations, provoked by nonlethal musket fire, en route to these mountains, Lewis determined to live and let live: "I find that the curiosity of our party is pretty well satisfied with respect to this animal."

From their silent perches, grizzlies witnessed the first trains cross Crownst and Marias Passes, followed by settlers to populate the Rocky Mountain Trench, and Flathead and Elk Valleys. By the turn of the 20th century, the bear's outlook dimmed as wildlife was slaughtered across the continent. Here, however, grizzlies persevered into a new era of wildlife restoration, wilderness designation, and cross-border stewardship. Today, they are a source of fierce local pride and the namesake of many businesses and festivals.

As the great silvertip disappears into the forest that bright October afternoon, I am the observer, humble and grateful that such a place may yet be found.

— Steve Thompson, writer, Whitefish, MT

## GEOLOGIC GRANDEUR

For millions of years, ancient seabeds were twisted, folded, and lifted by the tectonic crush of Pacific and North American plates. Successive ice ages then plowed through relatively soft limestone layers to carve river valleys, leaving behind dark forests and deep pockets of fresh water that endure today as glaciated lakes. The prairie meets the mountains at dramatic escarpments along the Rocky Mountain Front where ranchers and conservationists have joined to protect vast expanses for restored populations of wildlife. Weather systems converge over these mountains—Pacific, arctic and continental—magnifying the variety of many geologic niches for a great

variety of plants and animals.

**Crownst Pass D-3**  
Prepare for bracing winds at adjoining lakes where churning Pacific and Arctic air masses funnel through a mountain gap along the Continental Divide, causing abrupt transitions in tree species, wildflowers, and birdlife. Water from Crownst Lake flows east to Hudson Bay. Adjacent Summit Lake empties westward toward the Pacific Ocean.

**Coal Mine Tours C-2 and D-3**  
Chill in the Bellevue Underground Mine where the tunnel's breeze stays a constant 7°C (45°F). Or visit enormous open-pit coal mines, still active in Sparwood, B.C.

**Frank Slide D-3**  
For an intimate view of the mountain



THE CONNELL WALL, MT  
A 200-metre (656-foot) cliff face collapsed, burying 90 sleeping residents, driving the unpaved track through the rubble, running west from the main Hillcrest access road. See the full panorama of the 1903 disaster from the Frank Slide Interpretive Center.

**Transboundary Flathead E-3**  
Unbounded by dams, dikes, or diversions, this meandering floodplain ecosystem is known as the North Fork Flathead in Montana and simply as the Flathead in British Columbia. Grizzly bears, wolves, and wolverines radiate from this wild, remote valley. Venture on these rough roads with spare tires and a patient attitude.

**The Nature Conservancy of Canada's Waterton Park Front E-4**  
Prairie and mountain ecosystems clasp like fingers where ranches border the national park. A visitor centre and nature trail at Waterton Springs Campground describe how cowboys and environmentalists conserve grasslands for livestock and wildlife.

**Triple Divide Peak F-5**  
Get an early start for a long day-hike to this three-faceted jeweled spire, dividing Rocky Mountain waters among the Saskatchewan River's amble to Hudson Bay, the Missouri-Mississippi's slide to the Gulf of Mexico, and the Columbia's plunge to the Pacific Ocean.

**Two Medicine Dinosaur Center H-7**  
See hatching bones from a fossil nest and join in active dinosaur digs along Montana's Rocky Mountain Front.

**Glacial Lake Missoula I-3**  
During the last ice age, 13,000 to 15,000 years ago, an ice dam in a narrow canyon in northern Idaho periodically gave way, releasing raging torrents from a 2,000-foot-deep (610 meters) lake in western Montana. The legacy of these floods, which are recalled in Salish-Pend

d'Oreille Coyote stories, can be seen in huge ripple marks in Camas Prairie.

**Mission Mountains Wilderness Areas I-4**  
Rugged hikers scale ragged peaks jutting 7,000 feet (2,134 meters) above valley floors in adjoining wilderness areas managed by the U.S. Forest Service and Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. Portions of the tribal wildernesses are closed to humans when grizzlies congregate to feed on alpine insects.

**Scapegoat Wilderness I-6**  
The massive limestone cliffs of Scapegoat Mountain anchor the Chinese Wall, a geologic reef in the Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex. The Scapegoat was added to the "Bob" through citizen advocacy in 1972.

## LOCATION AND VISITOR INFORMATION

**REGIONAL AIRPORTS**  
Calgary International Airport  
YYC  
Calgary, Alberta  
yyc.com

Glacier Park International Airport  
FCA/GPI  
Kalispell, Montana  
ifflyglacier.com

Lethbridge Airport YOL  
Lethbridge, Alberta  
lethbridgeairport.ca

Missoula International Airport  
MSO  
Missoula, Montana  
missoula.com

Canadian Rockies  
Intercontinental Airport YXC  
Cranbrook, British Columbia  
flycanadianrockies.com

Great Falls International Airport  
GTF  
Great Falls, Montana  
flygtf.com

**TRAIN**  
Amtrak Empire Builder  
(stations in Whitefish, East Glacier Park, and West Glacier)  
amtrak.com/empire-builder-train



## TOURISM RESOURCES

Travel Alberta  
travelalberta.com

Kootenay Rockies Tourism  
kootenayrockies.com

Alberta Southwest Regional Alliance  
albertasouthwest.com

Montana Office of Tourism  
visitmt.com

Glacier Country Travel Information  
glaciercountry.com

Central Montana Travel Information  
centralmontana.com

Southwest Montana Travel Information  
southwestmt.com

Kalispell Convention & Visitors  
discoverkalispell.com

Whitefish Convention and Visitors Bureau  
explorewhitefish.com

Destination Missoula Convention & Visitors Bureau  
destinationmissoula.org

Visit crownofthecontinent.natgetourism.com  
to learn more about the Crown of the Continent and this spectacular landscape.



**Cranbrook History Centre D-1**  
Hints of dining car luxuries and parlour car cigar smoke haunt the vintage trains waiting forever at the Cranbrook History Centre. Stay in nearby CPR house, once the grand home of the railway's regional superintendent, and now a bed and breakfast.

**Fort Steele Heritage Town D-1**  
Rescued pioneer-era structures, summer street theatre, and grazing Clydesdales recall Fort Steele Heritage Town's origins as an outpost of the North West Mounted Police who came to tame itinerant gold seekers from America's wild west.

**Hillcrest Cemetery D-3**  
The 189 coal miners who died in Hillcrest Mine's 1914 explosion are buried in mass graves, grouped according to the religious cultures of the mostly young and immigrant men.

**Heritage Acres Farm Museum D-4**  
As you tour the log house, general store, photographic red barn, and other structures of this late 19th-century early 20th-century homestead, you'll see a vast collection of restored pioneer artifacts. For special events, volunteers demonstrate early farming methods and fire up vintage machinery such as the steam-powered sawmill.

**Kootenai Brown Pioneer Village D-4**  
This haven for rescued 19th-century structures is a good starting point for you to wander along Alberta's Cowboy Trail through the Rocky Mountain foothills, where film crews are sometimes as common as cattle drives.

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