ALBERTA'S FIRST PROVINCIAL PARK



Provincial Archives of Alberta, PA3470.1

Aspen Beach Provincial Park, 1966.

"We stand in Alberta today with the greatest heritage of natural beauty in the world" boasted Alberta Premier John Brownlee in 1927. Brownlee had just visited Great Britain and was deeply moved by the beauty of the English countryside. He returned to Alberta determined to promote the province's own natural beauty and set aside particular areas for public leisure and outdoor recreation. Brownlee appointed a special committee in 1929 to explore the issue and recommend specific locations with potential for park development. This work laid the foundation for the establishment of provincial parks in Alberta.



Courtesy of Glenbow Archives, Archives and Special Collections, University of Calgary, PA-3695-20

Aspen Beach Club, Gull Lake, Alberta, ca. 1940–47.

By the time Brownlee was promoting his vision, Alberta was already a world-class destination for tourists and outdoor recreationists. The federal government, which controlled Alberta's land and resources until 1930, took the lead in park development and established five national parks in Alberta between 1885 and 1922. The provincial government cleared the way to establish its own parks in 1930 when Premier Brownlee negotiated the transfer of control over land and resources to the Government of Alberta. That same year a Provincial Parks Board was established to oversee development and, in 1932, the provincial government established Alberta's first eight provincial parks.

The first such park open to the public was Aspen Beach on the shores of Gull Lake. The site had long been popular among local residents for swimming and boating and was viewed as an ideal location for the province's first park. Due to the onset of the Great Depression the original park was modest – just seventeen acres with a pair of bathhouses and a small kitchen. The popularity of the park, coupled with the return of economic prosperity after World War Two, resulted in the expansion of the park to 232 acres by 1966, by which time the park was visited by over 500,000 visitors a year.



Alberta Parks

Waterslide at Aspen Beach Provincial Park, 1932.



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Boating at Aspen Beach, Alberta, ca. 1920.



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Boating on Gull Lake, Alberta, ca. 1912–1918.

Alberta Government