



The Kootenay River's shallow edges make it a favourite spot for fly-fishing.

## British Columbia's Kootenay National Park turns 100



The highway that runs through the park dramatically squeezes through the massive rock walls of Sinclair Canyon.

### TALES FROM THE ROAD



ARLENE & ROBIN KARPAN

**K**ootenay National Park celebrates its 100th anniversary this year. In 1920, the federal government agreed to build a road linking Banff and the Columbia Valley in return for British Columbia donating land on either side of it to be preserved in a national park.

When the Banff-Windermere Highway opened three years later, it became the first driving route across the Canadian Rockies. It is still regarded as among the top scenic drives in Canada.

A big reason to visit this park is that it is a lot less busy than its next-door neighbour, Banff, but has equally impressive scenery. The

southern end has the most dramatic park entrances anywhere, as the highway squeezes through the massive rock walls of Sinclair Canyon, passes the brilliant Redwall Fault cliffs, then winds up to the Kootenay Valley Viewpoint.

The south end is home to Radium Hot Springs, B.C., a name that refers to both the bathing pools just inside the entrance and the village just outside the park. The waters were long thought to have curative powers, though today it's more about relaxing in a hot pool in a breathtaking setting, tucked into the cliffs of the canyon. The clear and odourless mineral water has no strong sulphur smell like some hot springs in the Rockies.

The Banff-Windermere Highway provides access to almost everything in the park, from hiking trailheads to picnic sites, campgrounds, and scenic viewpoints galore.

It's about 105 kilometres from Radium Hot Springs to where the road meets the Trans-Canada Highway at Castle Junction, shortly after crossing into Banff National Park. The picturesque drive follows

river valleys most of the way, the Kootenay River in the south and the Vermilion River farther north, both with water so brilliantly turquoise that it looks unreal.

A handy guide to driving through the park is the Kootenay Guided Tour app, which people can download from the park website. The GPS-triggered app not only alerts you and provides details to points of interest along the way, but also includes behind-the-scenes stories by Parks Canada staff.

Besides the scenic drive and soaking in hot springs, the park's other claim to fame is the awesome hiking, including several major backcountry treks with various levels of difficulty.

In summer, you can also take a guided hike to the Stanley Glacier area to see the famous Burgess Shale with fossils over 500 million years old.

If you prefer to take things a bit easier, day hikes rated as "easy" lead to some stunning countryside. Marble Canyon tops the list, a lime-

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The water in the Vermilion River is so brilliantly turquoise that it looks unreal.



The Paint Pots consist of pools with an unusual orange ochre once used for paint pigment in the days before the park.

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stone and dolomite gorge that has been eroded into wild shapes, making it a great spot for photography. The nearby Paint Pots consist of pools with an unusual orange ochre once used for paint pigment in the days before the park. Come here after a rain and you'll almost certainly end your walk with shoes a different colour than when you began.

A pleasant forested trail beside the Vermilion River runs between the Paint Pots and Marble Canyon.

Other short hikes we enjoyed include the Cobb Lake Trail that descends a mountainside along a series of switchbacks to Swede Creek, then to tiny picture-perfect Cobb Lake. The Dog Lake Trail also goes to a small lake, though the highlight comes near the beginning where you cross two foot bridges over the dazzling blue water of the Kootenay River, its shallow edges favourite spots for fly-fishing.

The easiest short walk with non-stop views is the Valleyview Trail, accessed along the road that runs from the village to Redstreak Campground. From the trailhead, the mostly level walk follows the hilltops on the valley rim overlooking the village, with sweeping views over the broad Columbia Valley. A bonus is that bighorn sheep tend to frequent the campground area.

See the park website at [pc.gc.ca/kootenay](http://pc.gc.ca/kootenay) for more details and special events planned for the 100th anniversary.

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One advantage of staying at the park's Redstreak Campground is that bighorn sheep tend to frequent the area.

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