

Warden Journals

The Warden Service of Old 'gettin er done'

By Rod Wallace, Former Jasper National Park Warden

Many years of boundary patrol in the NE portion of Jasper National Park were some of the most memorable and enjoyable times of my Park Warden career. Having spent 10 years at Pocahontas (two different times), I knew the Miette Hot Springs and Fiddle Valley well, having patrolled the area both on foot, and by horseback on countless occasions, during the late 70s, 80s and early 90s. I did many trips in the upper end of the Fiddle Valley both inside and outside the park boundary. Numerous joint patrols involved Alberta Fish and Wildlife officers, coordinated with staff led by Bill Cruthers working in the Edison/Hinton area of Alberta. In those days Park Wardens were given complete freedom

backcountry saw fit. Miette Highway 16 east, Valley, and directly adjacent boundary, were of responsibility District of Jasper

During a decade east park the Fiddle river trips were made on foot to above the Fiddle area at Mystery

adjacent the park boundary. National Park boundaries are defined as "height of land" along the mountain ridges that define the park, in this case from the adjacent Alberta foothills. Hunters and trappers regularly approach the park boundary while guiding Bighorn trophy sheep hunters, with elk, deer, moose, and goat hunting permitted up to the park boundary. During the winter months, there are active trap lines used by trappers for wolf, cougar, beaver, coyote, pine marten, and squirrel. Access to the park boundary is an easy several hour trip to the Mystery lake area from nearby provincial foothills parking areas. Easy access to Mystery Lake, and Jasper National Park, can also be made from the ridges NE of Folding Mountain. Vehicle access to an old well site and an active trap line provides year round access to the park.



to manage the district as they Hot Springs, lower Moosehorn Provincial areas to northeast Park considered areas for the Pocahontas National Park.

plus of patrolling boundaries along valley, many day by horseback, and boundary ridges River, and to the Lake, directly

Jasper National Park was established in 1907 with several boundary changes

implemented up to, and including 1930. Surveyed, formally established, and properly marked park boundaries were sporadic and infrequent, especially along the relatively remote north boundary of Jasper. Key locations, primarily along major backcountry trail crossings were originally marked with high quality bronze oval shaped signage, reflecting the name of various mountain national Parks. This would include trail boundaries with adjacent provincial lands like Mt. Robison Provincial Park in British Columbia. A “height of land” definition of boundary meant many remote and smaller ‘cols’ or mountain ridge ‘passes’ remained unmarked, or crudely marked with visible rock cairns, or ‘stick’ mounds. Well-meaning district park wardens of yesteryear, from the 1930s to 1980s, had taken the time and effort to mark many of these remote boundary locations. A few square, then triangular, black and yellow metal NP boundary signs were placed at several of these high elevation locations, primarily where foot and horseback sheep hunters would frequent. A few decades’ later, black and yellow triangular, then square, followed by rectangular plastic signs appeared at various locations along the boundary. Today, dated sporadic collections of these boundary markers still exist around the four contiguous mountain parks. Confusion over the “height of land” boundaries has existed for almost 100 years. A good example of this confusion was near Mystery Lake on the edge of “height of land” in Jasper National Park. Despite several relatively high profile incidents at this particular boundary spot and ongoing confusion over the actual park boundary, nothing was ever done. As early as the 1960’s, and perhaps earlier, an incident at the Mystery Lake boundary area highlighted the problem. George Ostasiuk was outfitting two sheep hunters from New Mexico in the area. Park Warden Bill Walburger, and a park naturalist companion, tracked the hunters into a Jasper National Park basin below Folding Mountain. The hunters were caught with loaded firearms, well within “height of land” boundary markings in the lower basin. Weapons were seized, Alberta Fish and Wildlife advised, and charges laid. When in Hinton court, charges were withdrawn, and the weapons returned, at least in part due to confusion over sporadic and informally marked Park boundaries. Similar incidents had occurred in the past in this area with outfitter Jim Babella and sheep hunting clients.



While on boundary patrol in the 1990s, after a decade of patrolling the Mystery Lake area, I crossed the “height of land” Park boundary on horseback, yet another time. Firmly convinced the actual “height of land” was closer to the lake, I changed the

boundary marking sign location to what I was convinced was the actual “height of land”. Soon after, I found two horses hidden in the trees off the trail near the lake. I placed my Park Warden business card on the outfitter’s saddle horse, and returned to Pocahontas Warden Station to find a message from outfitter Randy Babella. I knew the Park would receive a call from Randy Babella for an explanation. The next day I was asked to report to the Park Superintendent as soon as possible. I felt my job could be on the line, especially if I was not correct in my interpretation of “height of land” at MysteryLake. After a ‘lively’ discussion in the Superintendent’s office, an immediate formal survey of the Mystery Lake area was ordered which was undertaken shortly after. Lucky for me I was right and the boundary at Mystery Lake was formally marked at last. An estimated three to four acres was added back into the park. Hunting and trapping still continues adjacent National Park lands. Formerly establishing and accurately clarifying the boundary markings at many other “height of land” sheep hunting boundary locations remains to be done. Such was the way things were sometimes done by local park district wardens who deeply cared and intimately knew their districts. Their dedication and determination led to ‘hands on’ management of park resources they were entrusted to protect and preserve for all Canadians.