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Geology of Strathcona Provincial Park

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Geology of Strathcona Provincial Park

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Visits to provincial parks in any province of Canada are an enriching experience for individuals or families. Having moved to Calgary only seven years ago, I am still exploring the numerous and beautiful parks in Alberta, British Columbia and Saskatchewan. Every park visited has had a wealth of information on the botany and zoology of the area but, at best, a fleeting mention of the geology. This is reflected in the fact that the average camper knows several species of birds, mammals, plants and invertebrates on sight but can't tell one rock from another. The British Columbia Geological Survey (BCGS) is trying to put this right for at least one provincial park in their jurisdiction, having published an elaborate brochure on Strathcona Provincial Park located on Vancouver Island. (I am sorry to say that I have not visited this park yet, but the brochure is an inspiration to do so at the earliest opportunity.)

The document is folded as a map and is almost a square metre in size when unfolded. This generous area provides lots of space for information but also makes it unwieldy to read in a car or tent. The brochure is beautifully produced in full colour with excellent graphics and high-quality reproduction of photographs. On one side there is a map of the park that includes all the information one expects to find on a park map (campgrounds, roads, tracks and trails) with the geology overlain in colour. The rock units are identified by colour and number. I had a bit of trouble finding the explanation for the numbers because they were not referred to in the main caption. Since this form of graphical representation may not be familiar to non-geologists, it would probably have been better to make reference to it in the main caption. The map also shows Westmin's Myra Falls Mine site and a host of historical mine workings scattered through the park.

The opposite side of the brochure contains information on the various kinds of rocks to be seen in the park and a series of panels that describes the geological history of the park in time sequence. There are also panels discussing plate tectonics, fossils, the Myra Falls Mine, black smokers, and structural geology. These are accompanied by excellent diagrams, all in full colour. Unfortunately, none of these panels corresponds to the folds in the brochure, so it really has to be completely unfolded to take full advantage of the information.

The language used in the text is reasonably simple but there are still some technical words that will be difficult for the layperson — even the keen camper-naturalist — to grasp. The description of the geological history is treated in several episodes that bear titles like "Age of the Sea Lily" for deposition of the Permian Buttle Lake Group, "Invasion of the Granite Magma" for the Jurassic, and "The Big Chill" for the Quaternary history. These titles entice the reader and should make the brochure fun to read.

The wealth of photographs of the beautiful scenery makes the brochure extremely attractive. The authors could have made these photographs more educational by overlaying geological contacts on some of them to clearly illustrate some of the geological descriptions in the text.

This publication is a most welcome development in the sphere of public education. It will be of great value to all visitors to the park, enhancing their enjoyment of the magnificent scenery. Local schools will also be able to benefit from this publication (I understand 1500 copies have already been distributed to schools). It is high time that earth science takes its rightful place beside biology in the education of park visitors. The fact that there is an active mine site in the region allows people to understand how the deposit developed and how development of a mine can be accommodated within a park setting.

The list of contributors to the project is long. The brochure is based on field research conducted by Athol Sutherland Brown and Nick Massey. The initial text was rewritten for the layperson by John Wilson. Cliff Pearson of Westmin's Myra Falls Mine contributed a detailed description of the mine area. Several individuals provided photographs, and staff from BC Parks reviewed the document. T.D. Mock and Associates are responsible for the handsome layout, and Brian Grant and Claudia Logan coordinated the whole project. Kudos go to all these people and to the BCGS for the initiative to produce the brochure. We need more of these to accompany information in all of the parks in "beautiful British Columbia" and across Canada. This is a magnificent start.

I hope that future documents such as this are published. It is clearly an expensive document to produce and I hope that funding will not be difficult because of the high standard set with this publication. If such difficulties arise, the BCGS should consider producing more modest maps, like those produced for BC parks everywhere, but incorporating geology. This might enable more rapid production of more brochures for more parks. Even better would be to incorporate geological information into every park brochure so that visitors become as familiar with earth science as with botany and zoology. It is possible to produce simple monochrome documents on specific topics of interest for individual parks as is done for biological features in several parks. However, the standard set by the Strathcona Park brochure is wonderful. In the future, I can hear an excited six-year-old describing her first encounter with beautiful feldspar crystals or elegant crinoid fossils with the same fervour as her first sighting of a majestic elk.