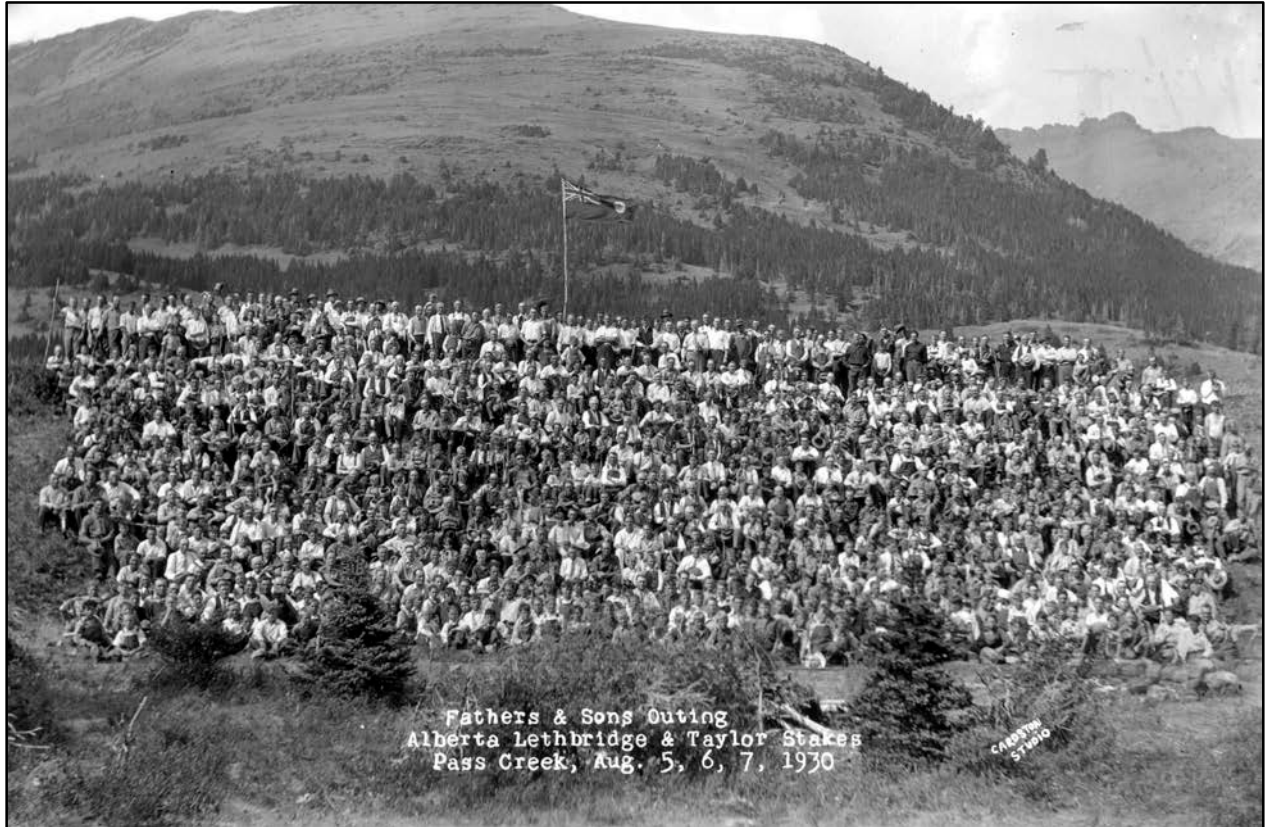




Summer Camps

Fathers-Sons Camp



The Father-Son Camp began in 1929 and by the following year the event drew an outstanding number of participants to a location in the Blakiston Valley. (Photo: Raymond Historical Society)

An annual Fathers-Sons camp for Boy Scouts associated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints proved to be one of the most popular camping events in Waterton. In one year attendance grew 15 fold from its first event in 1929 to its second the following year.¹ Lasting just three days once a summer, but never held on a Sunday, the outings provided an opportunity for fathers and sons to get away from their regular surroundings. They camped in tents in the Blakiston Valley where nature and its wonders provided a perfect place to develop a bond of fellowship and comradeship during the all-male event.² The camp was located on the south bank of Blakiston Creek, between Coppermine and Lost Horse creeks.

The Young Men's Mutual Improvement Association (YMMIA) of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints organized the Mutual Improvement Association Scouts in late 1911 to provide church-appropriate leisure and sports activities for its young men. When this separate group became a recognized part of the Boy Scouts organization a few years



later, it gave LDS boys the opportunity to participate in church sanctioned Boy Scout troops of their own.³

The first of these faith-based events drew 114 fathers and sons from three stakes⁴ of The Church of Christ of Latter-day Saints: Lethbridge, Taylor (Raymond) and Alberta (Cardston). The following year, as word spread, more than 1,500 fathers and sons from the same stakes gathered at a site about 16 kilometres up the Blakiston Valley, along Pass Creek.⁵ This was an astonishing number to camp at one location.



*The camp was run with the precision of a military organization with rules and regulations for nearly everything.
(Photo: Woslyng Collection, WLNP Archives)*

The 1930 outing was described as being “the greatest gathering of its kind in the history of the world.”⁶ Some 300 cars arrived at the camp site carrying the fathers, sons and necessary gear, food and equipment. The camp was highly organized. Nothing was left to chance, from the sun up to sun down. Everything, from who should go and when to go, to how deep the latrines and garbage pits should be, to what to do and the schedule for doing it, was laid out in writing in a church

document issued in 1926.⁷ The planning and organization had been done for the campers right down to which songs should be sung around the campfires.

Selection of the camp’s location, which became known as Camp Kootenai,⁸ was credited to Gerald Brown of the Alberta Stake, C. R. Wing of the Taylor Stake and C. F. Steele of the Lethbridge Stake. Just as had been “suggested” in the camp instructions, a rustic entrance was erected over which the camp name was spelled out in tree branches. Substantial preparations were assigned to eight separate committees which handled everything from camp layouts and assignments to first aid and sanitary facilities.⁹

The encampment was made up of smaller camps each of which was provided with a garbage and grease pit for three days’ use and then was filled in at the end of the event leaving only trampled grass to indicate the area’s use. Every attendee, novice or adult, learned how to care for a campfire, the proper way to pitch a tent and the need for orderly camp conduct. Camp life was a combination of the best of Scouting and the best of adherence to church organization. Sons and fathers participated in hiking, cooking, sports, singing and other activities.

Ceremony was observed from the sound of the reveille bugle and the flag raising in the morning to the lowering of the flag at dusk. Boys were “shown the way by men themselves who do the right thing in the right way,” the *Raymond Recorder* told its readers.¹⁰



The flag raising ceremony was the official beginning of each day and attended by all.

(Photo: Woslyng Collection, WLNP Archives)

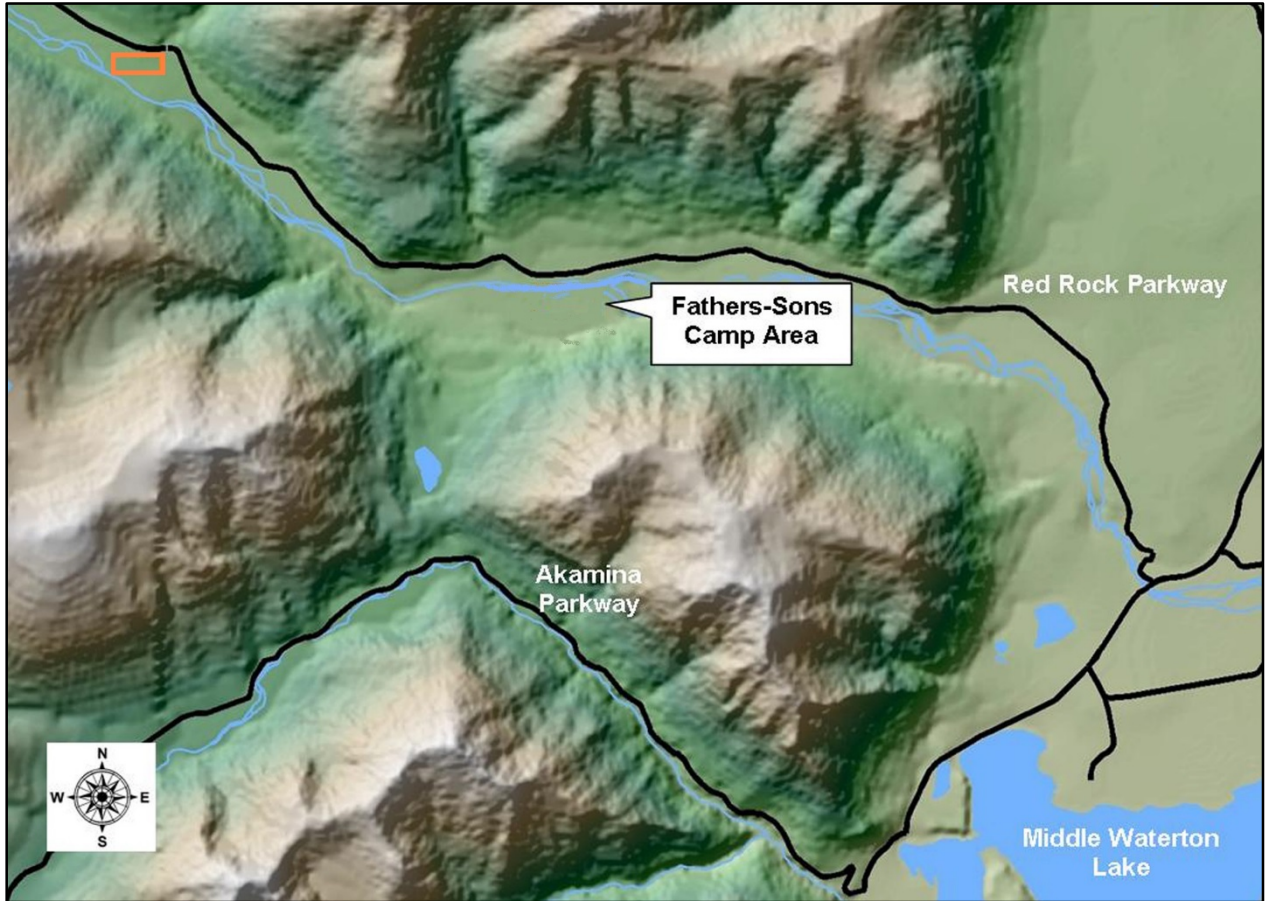
The following year, 1931, the Fathers-Sons participation was reduced to 170 campers, but by then the outing had been labeled by the newspaper as “a tradition”.¹¹ That year the campers hiked, and learned about geology and flora. Sports including baseball, horse shoe pitching and swimming were pastimes. Dinner was to be ready at each campsite by 6 p.m. followed by campfire

entertainment. The 1931 outing proved to be sadly memorable: Three uninvited visitors, a Black Bear sow and her two cubs, entered the camp attracted by the food odors. When she returned the next evening, “for her lack of camp ethics, she was shot by the warden...much to the regret of the camp. For one of the things for which the fathers and sons stand is the preservation of wild life in its natural beauty.” Warden Bo Holroyd, of the Pass Creek warden station killed the animal.¹²

In outings to come, the programs were similar with talks given by special guests which included Herbert Knight, the park superintendent, who spoke on what the park means to the people and why it should be carefully preserved.¹³ The final night of the outings, prizes were presented to campers for various distinctions:¹⁴ the oldest, the youngest, the father with the most sons present, the camper from farthest away, the church ward with the greatest number attending¹⁵ and the best kept camp.

Camp Kootenai was where memories were made. But some of those memories were not good ones. At the 1939 camp, George Shinbashi, the 11-year-old son of a Welling, Alberta farmer suffered fatal injuries while climbing Mount Blakiston with a party of other campers. A rock dislodged above the lad and struck his head. He died in hospital later that same day.¹⁶

Despite the regular practice of camping in the park by the Fathers-Sons and other Boy Scouts groups, they held no right to any individual site and had no fixed location.¹⁷ The LDS campouts continued after the Second World War and into the 1950s¹⁸ but it is not known when they stopped camping as a group in the park.



¹ “Fathers and Sons Have Wonderful Outing,” *Raymond Recorder*, Aug. 15, 1930, front page.

² “Fathers and Sons Have Wonderful Outing,” *Raymond Recorder*, Aug. 15, 1930, front page.

³ _____ *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992), 1275-1277.

⁴ A stake is an administrative unit composed of multiple congregations in the LDS movement.

⁵ “Fathers and Sons Have Wonderful Outing,” *Raymond Recorder*, Aug. 15, 1930, front page. It is not clear where in the Blakiston Valley the camp was set up.

⁶ “Fathers and Sons Have Wonderful Outing,” *Raymond Recorder*, Aug. 15, 1930, front page.

⁷ “Fathers and Sons Outings, 1926”, issued by the General Board of YMMIA, Salt Lake City. Available at: <http://www.keepapitchinin.org/2011/06/22/fathers-and-sons-outings-1926/>

⁸ The name Camp Kootenai was later applied to the event rather than the location of the event since the Boy Scouts had no official claim to any site in Waterton according to Herbert Knight, park superintendent. (see footnote 17)

⁹ “Fathers and Sons Outings, 1926”, issued by the General Board of YMMIA, Salt Lake City.

¹⁰ “Fathers and Sons Have Wonderful Outing,” *Raymond Recorder*, Aug. 15, 1930, front page.

¹¹ “Fathers and Sons Have Wonderful Outing,” *Raymond Recorder*, Aug. 15, 1930, front page.

¹² “Fathers and Sons Outing Great Success,” *Raymond Recorder* Aug. 14, 1931, front page.

Bo Holroyd Fonds, Whyte Museum, Banff, M495, File 11.

¹³ “800 Fathers and Sons have Wonderful Outing,” *Cardston News*, July 21, 1936, front page.

¹⁴ “800 Fathers and Sons have Wonderful Outing,” *Cardston News*, July 21, 1936, front page.

¹⁵ In the LDS movement a ward is the equivalent of a large congregation.

¹⁶ “Welling Lad Fatally Hurt in Rock Fall at Waterton Lakes Park,” *Lethbridge Herald*, July 28, 1939, front page.

¹⁷ Library and Archives, RG 84, A-2-a, vol. 2202, file W36, pt. 2. Letter to C. W. Fletcher, District Commissioner, Boy Scouts Association, Lethbridge, from Herbert Knight, Waterton Superintendent, June 11, 1937.

¹⁸ “Father-Son Waterton Camp Attracts 200 from LDS Stakes,” *Lethbridge Herald*, Aug. 4, 1953, 10.