

## Waterton Days

The first concerted effort by business people, beyond newspaper advertising, to stimulate Waterton tourism was Waterton Days, a two-day, event-filled weekend started in June, 1954. Organized and sponsored by the Waterton Chamber of Commerce, Waterton Days highlighted the park as an inviting place for people to enjoy the outdoors, and to kick off each summer in an unusual way.

The first Waterton Days weekend attracted some 13,000 visitors, more than enough to encourage the Chamber to continue the event. It became an annual promotion through 1958. Waterton Days began just as calls from many quarters were being made to greatly improve park facilities and roads leading to it.<sup>1</sup>



*Waterton Old-timers dressed in clothes of days gone by, piled in to this jalopy and took place in the Waterton Days parade. (Photo: Chris Morrison)*

A key to each year's lineup of events was a big parade which drew participants who competed for prize money and spectators who enjoyed the variety with bands, mounted riders, First Nations members in full regalia and floats from neighboring communities.<sup>2</sup> There were fishing and boating competitions with prizes, a giant barbecue held in the townsite campground, this at a time when barbecues were not commonplace, outdoor movies, First Nations' dancing and drumming

and in the Waterton Dance Pavilion on Saturday night,<sup>3</sup> a windup dance. "Practically everything is free," *The Lethbridge Herald* noted in an editorial which highly praised the concept.<sup>4</sup> "It is an excellent idea and we hope it's the success it deserves to be," the newspaper declared.

Each year that followed, the Chamber of Commerce ensured potential visitors that Waterton Days events would be "bigger and better."<sup>5</sup> Well-known local man, Andy Russell, park horse concessioner, was the chairman of the parade committee, one of various committees responsible for events. In preparation for the second event in 1955, the Chamber of Commerce began discussing ideas in January.<sup>6</sup> Regional interest in the event had grown rapidly. "I know one man who has been plastering silver on his saddle all winter; he's is determined to win that prize money (for the best parade entry)," Russell

said.<sup>7</sup> To promote additional interest, Russell offered to visit other chambers of commerce and boards of trade in the region to show them a short colored movie of the 1954 parade he had made.

Businessmen George Baker of Park Transport, Kirk Bell of the Kilmorey Lodge, Frank Goble of Frank's Restaurant and Ernie Haug, owner-operator of an auto bungalow, worked together to arrange for First Nations entertainment on the commons.<sup>8</sup> Boat races on Emerald Bay were the responsibility of tour boat operator Slim Udal, and a number of other volunteers got involved in putting on the barbecue in the campgrounds, a golf tournament, a dance in the Waterton Pavilion, and a week-long fishing derby that ended at the close of Waterton Days.



*A parade float, complete with fish, was created to promote the International Peace Park.*

*(Photo: WLNPA Archives)*

Each year Waterton Days events were modified or added to attract visitors. During the fourth event, held in 1957, a strong western theme prevailed especially in the colorful parade entries which were led by marching Royal Canadian Mounted Police in their dress uniforms. Even Tony Pierce, park superintendent, donned western wear and rode a horse in the parade.<sup>9</sup> Prize money for various categories in the parade totalled a whopping \$1,500.<sup>10</sup>



*Billy Lammers and his pack mule from Twin Butte were perennial parade participants.*

*(Photo: John Russell)*

That year a musical ride of the “much acclaimed Marr Light Horse Club of Twin Butte had top billing on the afternoon program,” *The Lethbridge Herald* reported.<sup>11</sup> The 16 riders performed a number of drills for those gathered. There were chuck wagon races with miniature horses, a magician, Scottish dancers and other performers. In addition there was the annual golf tournament and boat races. A near record crowd of 10,614 people came to the park to be entertained for the 1957 event.<sup>12</sup>

*A Lethbridge Herald editorial*

had high praise for the 1957 effort: “We’ve said it before but South (sic) Alberta with its vast cattle ranges, its broad acres of waving grain, its irrigated farmlands, its plentiful coal resources, its tremendous petroleum reserves and its developing industries is a favored region. Waterton Lakes National Park is the frosting on our cake,” the editorial noted. “The Waterton Days program, with all its color and special events, exerts a pull which those who have already made friends with the park cannot resist. And we know that there will be many new Waterton boosters by the time this weekend is over.”<sup>13</sup>

Waterton Days would be put on for one more summer but under different leadership. Andy Russell, who had been instrumental in so much of the program and who had personally recruited the First Nations participants and assisted in supplying them with parade horses, sold his park horse concession and was no longer involved in Waterton business.<sup>14</sup> No parade was held that final season.

Just days before the 1958 festivities, Waterton lost another important participant in a horrific accident. Boatman Slim Udal died while testing his new racing boat June 17, on Upper Waterton Lake. He had been in charge of a key event: the boating exhibition and races for Waterton Days.<sup>15</sup> Ironically, a boating regatta theme had been chosen for the final year.<sup>16</sup>

It is not definitively known why Waterton Days was discontinued.

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<sup>1</sup> “Major, Long Range Improvement Program for Waterton Park Urged,” *Lethbridge Herald*, Oct. 4, 1950. H.P.B. (Hugh Buchanan), “A Personal Opinion: Waterton is being Neglected,” *Lethbridge Herald*, July 20, 1950. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 14.

<sup>2</sup> “Thousands View Colorful Waterton Parade,” *Lethbridge Herald*, June 24, 1957, 9. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 14.

<sup>3</sup> The pavilion was located on Waterton Avenue and today the same building exists in a renovated state as the Bayshore Inn Convention Centre and Thirsty Bear saloon.

<sup>4</sup> “Waterton Days,” *Lethbridge Herald*, June 24, 1954. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 14.

<sup>5</sup> “Plans Being Made for Waterton National Park Gala June 25,” *Lethbridge Herald*, Jan. 12, 1955, 22. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 14.

<sup>6</sup> “Plans Being Made,” *Lethbridge Herald*.

<sup>7</sup> “Plans Being Made,” *Lethbridge Herald*.

<sup>8</sup> A wide open grassy area that is now the site of the Waterton Lakes Lodge.

<sup>9</sup> “Thousands View,” *Lethbridge Herald*.

<sup>10</sup> Parade prizes were given for these categories among others: best band, best decorated car, best decorated bike, best dressed cowboy and cowgirl, best dressed Indians (sic), best floats.

<sup>11</sup> “Waterton Days to Open with Parade Saturday,” *Lethbridge Herald*, June 20, 1957, 5. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 14.

<sup>12</sup> “Near-record Crowd at Waterton Event,” *Lethbridge Herald*, June 24, 1957, 9. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 14.

<sup>13</sup> “Wonderful Waterton,” *Lethbridge Herald*, June 22, 1957, 4. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 14.

<sup>14</sup> Email to Chris Morrison John Russell, Oct. 25, 2015. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 14.

<sup>15</sup> “Freakish Accident is Fatal—Waterton Man,” *Lethbridge Herald*, June 18, 1958, front page. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 14.

<sup>16</sup> “Two-Day Regatta Planned: Emphasis on Boating During Waterton Days,” *Lethbridge Herald*, Feb. 15, 1958. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 14.