



## Farming

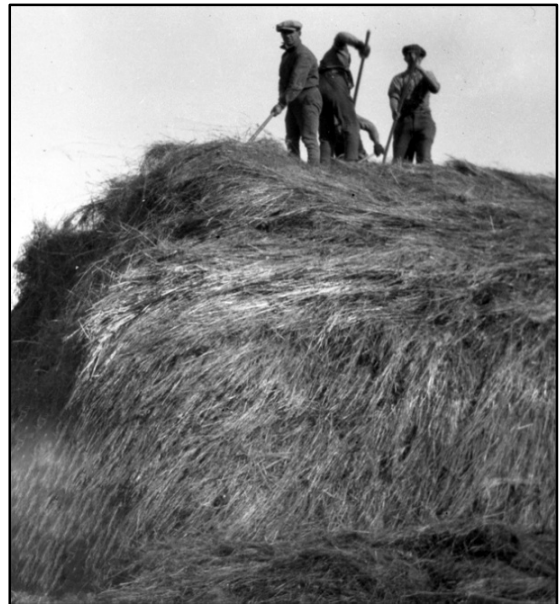
The practice of raising hay and oats in Waterton to feed government-owned work horses and saddle horses began in 1916 as a wartime measure to save money in the face of a reduction in appropriations.<sup>1</sup> After the First World War and for decades to follow, however, growing feed for park horses continued because of the expense of transporting feed to the park.<sup>2</sup>

The first farming effort involved breaking 20 acres of ground and fencing it off.<sup>3</sup> Although the location of this initial site is not clear, it is assumed that it was located immediately to the east of the Cedar Cabin<sup>4</sup> on Lower Waterton Lake, an area that would become known as “The Old Farm.”

The 1916 farming season was not a great success due to the delay in the seeding of oats and timothy<sup>5</sup> at the site and the presence of grazing stock which got inside the fenced area.<sup>6</sup> With the promise from Robert Cooper, park superintendent, that a larger area would be planted earlier in the 1917 season, it was noted that the raising of feed in the park “will mean a large saving to the department.”<sup>7</sup>

The next few years after the end of the First World War, the region suffered poor growing conditions resulting in a general scarcity of feed and Waterton scrambled to put up enough hay for three of its five warden stables.<sup>8</sup> The relatively poor wagon access to two outlying warden facilities, Yarrow Creek and Belly River, were problematic and required the purchase of baled, as opposed to loose, hay at an extra cost.<sup>9</sup> In addition, the regional oat crop in 1918 was nearly a total failure and F. E. Maunder, acting superintendent, was obliged to ask J. B. Harkin, Commission of Dominion Parks, for \$600 to cover cost of bringing in the feed from Wainwright and Jasper.<sup>10</sup> In 1919 the park again had no choice but to purchase feed for its horses.<sup>11</sup>

Determined to succeed, the park managers continued to improve the planted area. Thirteen acres of oats and 17 acres of rye were planted and plans were made to add substantially to both the park’s fenced and plowed land in 1920. Although rye was not used as a horse feed, it was used as a cover crop because it grew vigorously in May and June, held soil in place and combated weed growth.<sup>12</sup>



*Harvesting was both labor intensive and weather dependent. (Photo: Chris Morrison)*

The hay farm was located on the east side of Lower Waterton Lake, sometimes called the Y camp flats. According to Ken Goble, local resident, only oats were planted and these were cut and stooked for green feed. After the bundles had dried, they were put into storage where they could be used as required. The area on the south end of the Lower Lake north of Pass Creek was also fenced and used as a hay meadow.<sup>13</sup>



*The Hay Barn, once located on the Blakiston Fan at the end of its namesake road, provided storage for the harvest. (Photo: WLNP Archives)*

By the end of the 1920 season, a good hay crop of 50 tons was put up at the headquarters barn, 10 tons at the Cedar Cabin and five tons at the Pass Creek warden's barn. Oats, which were used as green feed, had good yields as well.<sup>14</sup> Finally the park's farming efforts were showing good results.<sup>15</sup> Two more growing areas on the Blakiston Fan (then called the Blakiston Flats) near the mouth of Pass Creek were being used by the spring of 1924 as well as "The Old Farm" location at the Cedar Cabin which became a secondary location. At that time the park's herd of horses numbered around 40 animals.<sup>16</sup>



*Contractors eventually took over the work of haying which freed wardens to attend to other duties. (WLNP Archives)*

While individual barns existed at warden stations as shelter for horses and hay storage, a new central barn for additional storage was built in early summer of 1927 on the park's haying flats.<sup>17</sup> The building gave rise to the name of the road that led to it: "Hay Barn Road," a moniker that continues to this day even though the barn itself was removed in 1970.<sup>18</sup>

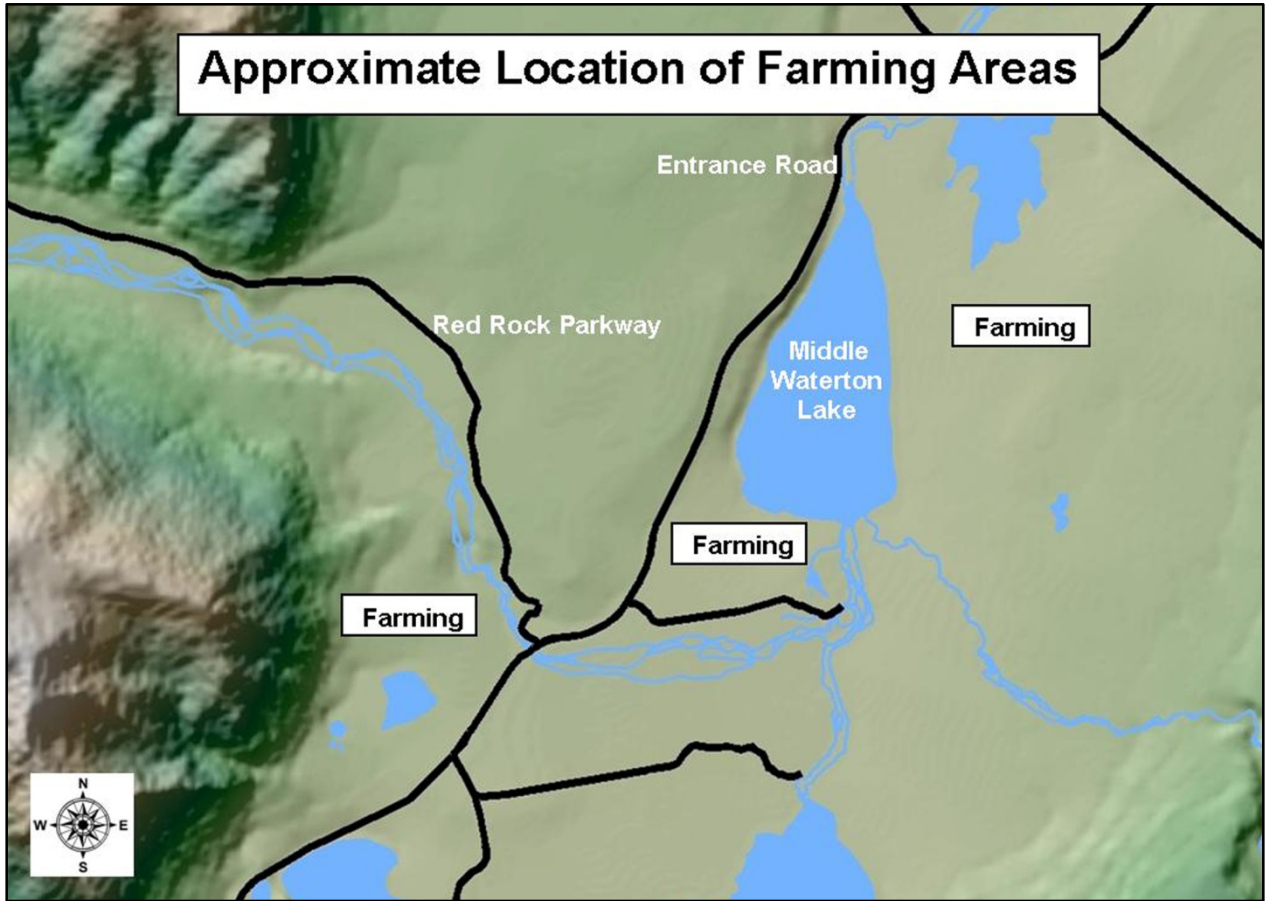
Not only were park wardens expected to be game and fire guardians, they were also required to plow and plant a 20-acre section behind their cabins for growing oats and hay, and they routinely worked at harvesting wherever crops grew.<sup>19</sup> By 1935, the last mention of growing oats was made in the superintendent's annual report but in reports to follow,<sup>20</sup> no reason was given for discontinuing oat farming. By 1937 no more land was plowed, a requirement for growing oats, while production of timothy and sometimes brome continued.<sup>21</sup> During the Second

World War, the golf course rough was cut for hay as well providing 20 tons in 1942,<sup>22</sup> seven tons in 1943,<sup>23</sup> and four tons in 1944.<sup>24</sup>

Like any farming operation, success was in direct proportion to the vagaries of the weather and some years were better than others. No specific evidence has been found of the exact year growing hay in the park was discontinued<sup>25</sup> but it seems obvious that as the number of horses kept for park purposes dwindled, so did the need to feed them by raising tons of hay.

Eventually the park contracted two farmers to harvest the hay on a share basis with one third going to the park for storage and two thirds going to the harvesters.<sup>26</sup> That arrangement was replaced in the late 1950s with the acquisition of a park baler and rake equipment which were operated by park employees.<sup>27</sup>

Today horses continue to be a part of park operations on a seasonal basis. They are kept in a corral at the Upper Compound and their food is supplied under contract by local suppliers.<sup>28</sup> Park employees are responsible for feeding the horses.



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<sup>1</sup> Annual Report of the Department of the Interior for Year ending March 31, 1917, *Sessional Papers, Vol. 11, First Session of Thirteenth Parliament, of the Dominion of Canada*, Session 1918; Part V Dominion Parks, (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1918), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Ian A. L. Getty, *The History of Waterton Lakes 1800-1937*, (unpublished, 1971, revised 1972), 71. WLNP Archives Box 115, Item 12.

<sup>3</sup> Annual Report of the Department of the Interior for Year ending March 31, 1917, 14.

<sup>4</sup> The Cedar Cabin was the home of the chief park warden until the early 1950s.

<sup>5</sup> Timothy is a hardy perennial grass widely grown for hay.

<sup>6</sup> Annual Report of the Department of the Interior for Year ending March 31, 1917, 14. The "grazing stock" was in the park under permit to area ranchers.

<sup>7</sup> Annual Report of the Department of the Interior for Year ending March 31, 1917, 52.

<sup>8</sup> These were Headquarters, the Chief Park Warden's stable on Lower Waterton Lake, and Pass Creek Warden's stable.

<sup>9</sup> Letter to J.B. Harkin, Commissioner of Dominion Parks, Ottawa, from F. E. Maunder, acting superintendent, Waterton Lakes, Aug. 20, 1918. WLNP Archives, Box 211, Item 3.

<sup>10</sup> Second letter to J.B. Harkin, Commissioner of Dominion Parks, Ottawa, from F. E. Maunder, acting superintendent, Waterton Lakes, Aug. 20, 1918. WLNP Archives, Box 211, Item 3.

<sup>11</sup> Superintendent's Report for 1919. WLNP Archives, Box 206, Item 1.

<sup>12</sup> David C. Jones, *We'll All Be Buried Down Here: The Prairie Dryland Disaster 1917-1926*, (Calgary: Alberta Records Publication Board, 1986), *liv*.

<sup>13</sup> E. Kenneth Goble, *Waterton Park History*, (unpublished manuscript, 1981), 35-36; WLNP Archives, Box 115, Item 8.

<sup>14</sup> "Oat hay or green feed is a common forage for horses in many parts of North America. Often oat hay is available because the oat crop did not mature to be harvested as grain. Drought, or frost conditions are often the reason that the cereal crop was made into hay...." according to Dr. Bob Coleman, "Feeding Horses When Feed is Short," (This information was presented at, and appears in the Proceedings of, the 2003 Alberta Horse Breeders and Owners Conference). Last reviewed/ revised on October 17, 2011. [http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/\\$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/hrs6287](http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/hrs6287).

<sup>15</sup> Superintendent's Report, 1920. WLNP Archives, Box 206, Item 2.

<sup>16</sup> "Farming Begins at Waterton Park," *Lethbridge Herald*, April 24, 1924, 5. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 22.

<sup>17</sup> "Beautiful Waterton," *Lethbridge Herald*, July 4, 1927, 5. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 22.

<sup>18</sup> Resource Conservation Report for 1970, 15. WLNP Archives, Box 114, Item 1. Use of the barn was discontinued some time before and it was removed as the final step in completing the beautification program in this area.

<sup>19</sup> Ian A. L. Getty, *The History of Waterton Lakes 1800-1937*, (unpublished, 1971, revised 1972), 70-71. WLNP Archives Box 115, Item 12.

<sup>20</sup> Some of the reports are missing from the Archives and may have been lost over the years.

<sup>21</sup> Superintendent's Report for 1938-39, WLNP Archives, Box 206, Item 8.

<sup>22</sup> Superintendent's Report for 1942, WLNP Archives, Box 206, Item 2.

<sup>23</sup> Superintendent's Report for 1943, WLNP Archives, Box 208, Item 3.

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<sup>24</sup> Superintendent's Report for 1944, WLNP Archives, Box 207, Item 4.

<sup>25</sup> The last reference to haying that could be found was in the Superintendent's Report of 1966. WLNP Archives, Digital Files.

<sup>26</sup> Superintendent's Report for 1955, WLNP Archives, Box 206, Item 15.

<sup>27</sup> Superintendent's Report for 1958, WLNP Archives, Box 208, Item 1.

<sup>28</sup> Email to Chris Morrison from Sara Jaward, Resource Conservation Officer, Sept 17, 2015. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 22.