



Summer Camps

Canyon Church Camp

Canyon Church Camp, formally established in 1944 in the Blakiston Valley, is today the oldest surviving youth camp in Waterton. A predecessor canvas camp for boys was located at the same place in 1940 by two United Church Ministers from New Dayton, Alberta.



The quintessential group photo was a necessity for each camping session and served as a lasting memory maker. (Photo: Galt Museum and Archives)

The two camp requirements—water and wood—were adequate at this location and in the summer of 1940, about 35 boys from three southern Alberta towns, members of a local group called the Trail Blazers, spent 10 memorable days in the wilds. They returned each summer.¹

Despite the Second World War and its associated rationings, the camp organizers thought it appropriate to make an application for a permanent facility at this site under the auspices Lethbridge Presbytery of the United Church of Canada which had far greater influence than the Trail Blazers. Two acres of land were assigned to the church for camp purposes based on Superintendent H. A. DeVeber's recommendation. In the summer of 1944, using mostly volunteer labor, a dining hall-kitchen building, one sleeping cabin and an outhouse were built.² The camp sessions, held separately for both boys and girls, began July 17, the first of three 10-day sessions utilizing borrowed tents and other equipment. Fees were \$1 a day plus \$3 for transportation to and from the park.

An editorial in the 1945 *Lethbridge Herald* drew attention to the benefits of youth camps by noting that those facilities in Waterton provided recreation “that cannot be overrated in its value to boys and girls. The more facilities of this nature for present day youth, the better the citizenship of the future.... Park authorities in setting aside sites for these camps are carrying out what is really intended of our parks—a playground for the people. In these camps the playgrounds are supervised and parents know that their children are being well looked after and that their summer outing is being helpfully directed. Few better investments can be made for youth than to provide them with camps of this nature.”³



Kate Parry was the much loved, hard working head cook who served the camp for decades and fed hundreds of children. (Photo: Galt Museum and Archives)

youth camp. The camp cook was a cherished regular among the camp counsellors. Kate Parry of Taber, the mother of five who was widowed in 1940, spent 20 summers cooking for the campers, watching those who returned each year grow up.⁵ In honor of her long service, the main lodge was named for Parry in 1963.⁶

The longevity of Canyon Church camp may well have been founded in the operators' willingness to try new formats: In 1951 a family camp was scheduled in late August to give children too young to enroll alone an opportunity to experience camp life. This session was repeated for several summers. During the 1970s two other kinds of varied and successful sessions were held: a week-long camp for senior citizens and then a camp for the mentally ill patients from Claresholm and Raymond. This latter group participated in a carnival, painting, games, dancing, song writing and hikes.⁷

After the first season, a building fund campaign for the camp was launched and raised \$3,200. The facilities grew gradually as money and access to materials in wartime permitted. After the war, the camp boasted nine sleeping cabins, a modern shower-toilet house, ablution shelter and insulated house for food storage.⁴

Religious services were always a part of the camp activities and were offered in a primitive outdoor chapel with hand hewn benches. In recent years this outdoor altar has been booked for both weddings and baptisms.

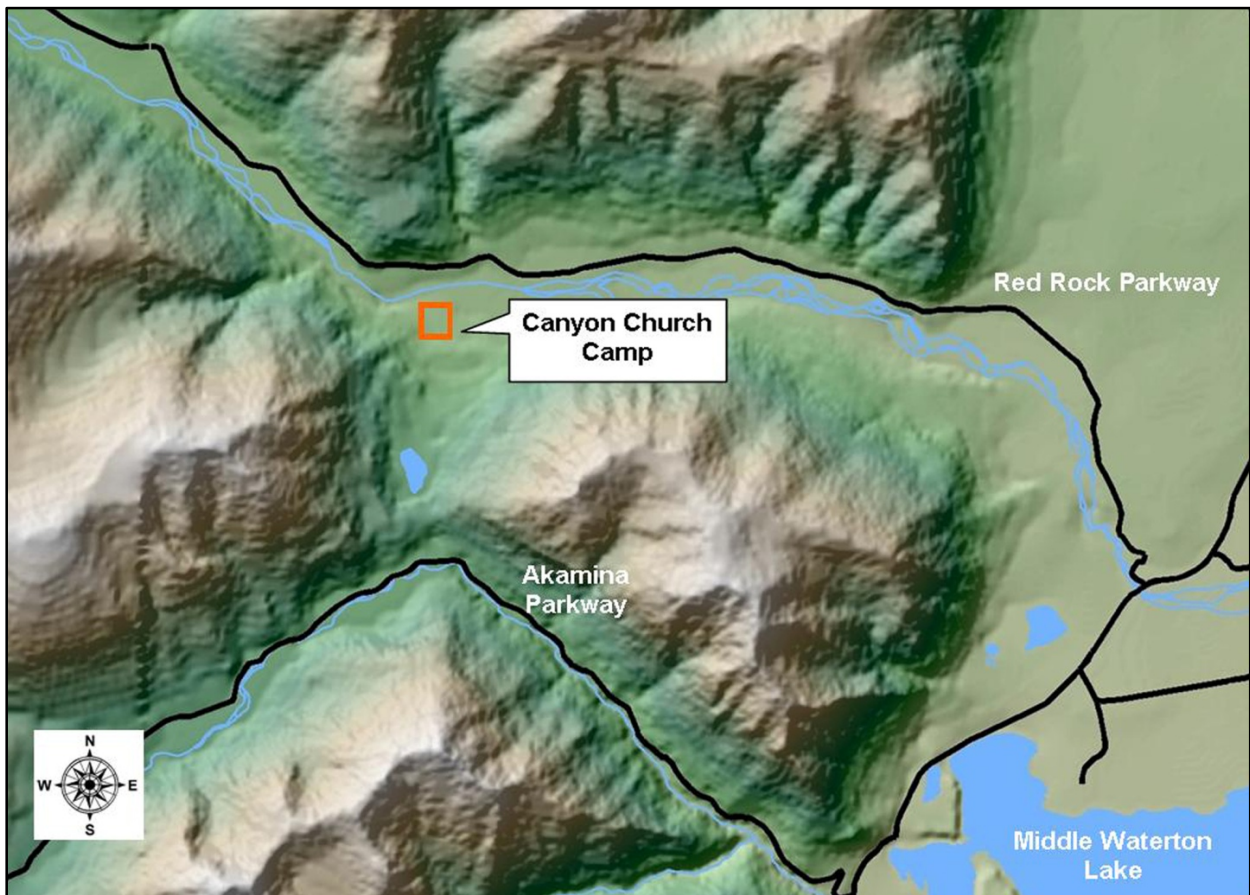
The camp activities were many: swimming in Crandell Lake, 1.6 kilometres away by trail, sports, day hikes, camp crafts, evening campfires, singing as well as participating in kitchen and dining room duties which included assistance in meal preparation, table setting and clearing as well as kitchen clean up.

If an army runs on its stomach, so too does a



Preparing for a day hike was always looked upon with much anticipation. (Photo: Galt Museum and Archives)

The church's original lease did not expire until March, 1975 by which time the government's policy toward existing camps had been amended and Canyon Church Camp avoided the fate of other camps. In 1983 management of the camp was offered to the Lethbridge YMCA for a five year term when the United Church found the administration of the camp too onerous. Under this arrangement both the church and the YMCA had their own camping sessions. Management of the camp returned⁸ to United Church organizers who nurtured "Christian faith through fun and fellowship in God's outdoors."⁹ Family camps and a woman's retreat continue to be offered at this 96-person camp which is accredited by the United Church Camping Association. Rental of the facilities is available in the shoulder seasons.¹⁰



¹ Chris Morrison, *Waterton Chronicles: People and Their National Park*, (Lethbridge: Goathaunt Publishing, 2008), 126.

² Chris Morrison, *Waterton Chronicles*, 126.

³ Editorial, *Lethbridge Herald*, July 24, 1945, 4. WLNP Archives, Box 252, Item 20.

⁴ Chris Morrison, *Waterton Chronicles*, 126-127.

⁵ Obituary for Kate Parry, *Lethbridge Herald*, December 28, 1985.

⁶ "Four Park Youth Camps End Successful Year," *Lethbridge Herald*, Sept. 10, 1963, 5. WLNP Archives, Box 252, Item 20.

⁷ Chris Morrison, *Waterton Chronicles*, 128.

⁸ The date this occurred is not known by present day camp administration.

⁹ Chris Morrison, *Waterton Chronicles*, 129.

¹⁰ Canyon Church Camp website: <http://www.canyonchurchcamp.com/rentals.html>