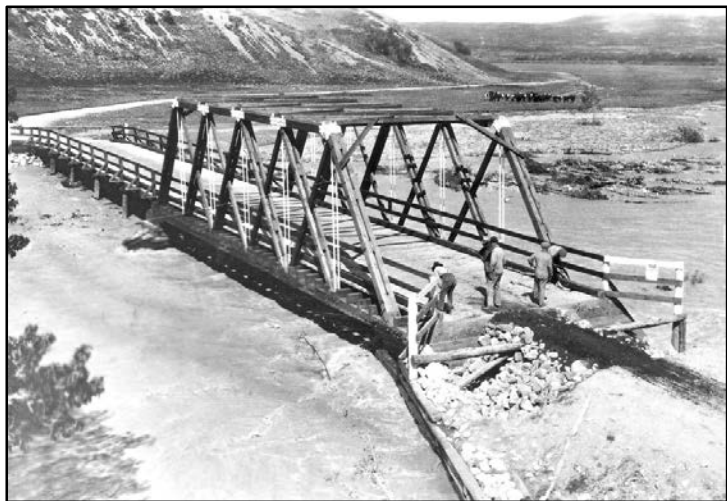




Grazing

Legislation to allow the grazing of cattle and horses in national parks by permit was introduced in the fall of 1914, just after Waterton's boundaries had been expanded from 35 square kilometres to 1,096 square kilometres and Canada entered the First World War. Some years before, Howard Douglas, Commissioner of Dominion Parks, had opposed the granting of grazing leases in parks because he felt the grasslands would be destroyed at the expense of the park's wildlife. But the legislation allowed for annual permits, as opposed to leases, regulated fees, location and the size of herds allowed, bringing order to what might have been an otherwise chaotic use of grasslands.¹

It was up to the park superintendent to determine the areas where grazing would be allowed and park wardens enforced animal numbers and range within those areas. Ranchers who lived closest to Waterton were given preference in use of park land for this purpose. It took very little time before the administration of the permit rules went awry and Robert Cooper, new park superintendent, was accused of favoring certain applicants, allowing overgrazing, permitting diseased cattle to graze in the park, unverified head counts, and irregularities as to payments, among other questions.² Accusations of favoritism and mismanagement had already reached the House of Commons in Ottawa where W. A. Buchanan, Lethbridge Member of Parliament, was questioned on the subject.³



A herd of cattle graze in comparative safety on the north side of the flooding Blakiston Creek. Cattle were not allowed on the south side of the creek.

(Photo: Chris Morrison)

It took until July, 1918, for the regulations to be properly enforced with the appointment of park warden Robert Charles McDonald as grazing inspector.⁴ His duties and instructions as to how carry them out were detailed in writing. The applications for the grazing permits were equally detailed and asked for specific information as well as spelling out the rules.⁵

Even while the First World War was being fought overseas, and with southern Alberta suffering from a very dry summer, it was considered desirable to graze as many cattle as possible in the park in aid of supplying meat for the Allies. By July, 1918 permits for some 3,000 head of cattle had been issued.⁶

Meanwhile the deteriorating relationship between Cooper and his chief park warden George Allison had come to the attention of park authorities. Each man made accusations of wrong doing toward the other, much of it related to grazing.⁷ Statements were taken and in the end, the two men were given six months to mend their ways in the execution of their duties as well as reconcile their differences or they would be dismissed. In 1919 that's exactly what happened.⁸ War veteran George Ace Bevan, of Calgary, was appointed superintendent.

From that point on, careful records were kept of those who took out grazing permits to ensure all rules were closely followed with preference being given to those ranchers who lived within five miles of the park boundaries. In 1936, more than 2,200 animals grazed under permit but in other years numbers were usually less but still respectable.⁹ The grazing fees collected were a good revenue generator for the park, nearly always in the top three or four after lease rents, motor vehicle entry fees and occasionally golf fees.¹⁰

During the Second World War the demand for and price of beef increased and according to H. A DeVeber, acting park superintendent, "Ranchers increased their herd in order to cash in on the lucrative business of raising and selling beef cattle. In many cases the herds were increased beyond the limit of the home range and two years [of] less-than-normal precipitation had a damaging effect on the range."¹¹ The upshot was an increased demand for park grazing permits which were denied to avoid over grazing. Only ranchers whose home range was within 25 to 30 miles of the park were considered and permits were for summer only grazing, a period that ended Oct. 31.

Consideration for the elk and deer in the park was being made. In 1946 DeVeber wrote to a hopeful permit applicant: "The park is primarily a sanctuary for wildlife and a good supply [of grazing area] must be maintained sufficient for the needs of the present game population."¹² That year the grazing area included the Badlands, an area north of Pass Creek, Crooked Creek and the Maskinonge. Since no fences could be erected,¹³ permit holders were required to hire range riders to keep the domestic animals to their assigned areas and off the roads.

Following the end of the Second World War, the end of grazing was at hand. In early 1947 a battle over grazing was waged in a public



Cattle grazing on the Blakiston Fan in the area of the Hay Barn Road. Ever wandering cattle were tended by a range rider to ensure they stayed where they belonged. (Photo: Foster Collection, WLNP Archives)

forum printed in *The Lethbridge Herald*. On one side was Waterton businessman Ernie Haug who had lived in the park for many years. On the other side were several neighboring ranchers who had permits to graze.

Haug contended the cattle and horses were endangering motorists, that Waterton was the only national park in Canada “that is utilized as a cow pasture,” the cattle were an eyesore, their manure was a nuisance, and allowing the grass to grow untouched by summer cattle would allow the elk to use it in winter and keep them from devastating haystacks put up by ranchers outside the park. An editorial printed in *The Lethbridge Herald* agreed with Haug.¹⁴

J. J. West, a Mountain View rancher, certainly did not agree with Haug and expressed his opinion that most ranchers in his area could use more land if it were available.¹⁵ But the war of words really got under way when S. Walter Jenkins, a long time Twin Butte rancher, jumped in: “...to discontinue grazing won’t stop elk and deer from bothering ranchers in severe winters and it might put them in a rather awkward position. For if the park won’t graze the rancher’s cattle in the summer, it will be definitely up to them to keep their game within the park boundaries in the winter,” he wrote.¹⁶

Jenkins noted that grazing helped reduce the risk of prairie and forest fires, ranchers were helping relieve the world-wide beef shortage, and that a good many park visitors found the presence of the cattle grazing on hillsides “a thing of beauty rather than an eyesore.”¹⁷

Within nine months of the barrage of letters, Ottawa announced grazing of domestic animals in Waterton would cease with the end of the 1947 season citing the desire for highway safety and “the need to preserve the grass in the park for winter grazing for increased herds of deer, elk and other park game animals.”¹⁸



¹Ian A. L. Getty, *The History of Waterton Lakes National Park 1800-1937*, unpublished research paper, March, 1971; revised February 1972, WLNP Archives Box 115, Item 12, 100.

² Letter from Maxwell Graham, chief of animal division, Dominion Parks Branch, Ottawa, to J. B. Harkin, Commissioner of Dominion Parks, Ottawa, June 11, 1918. WLNP Archives, Box 211, Item 2.

³ "W. A. Buchanan Discusses Many Matters of Interest to Constituents," *Lethbridge Herald*, Feb. 22, 1916, 4. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 21.

⁴ Unsigned letter to R. C. McDonald, park warden, Waterton Park, July 5, 1918. WLNP Archives, Box 211, Item 2.

⁵ Application for Grazing Permit, Department of the Interior, Dominion parks Branch. WLNP Archives Box 211, Item 2.

⁶ Unsigned letter to J. B. Harkin, Commissioner of Dominion Parks, Ottawa, July 15, 1918. WLNP Archives, Box 211, Item 2.

⁷ Several charges of dereliction of duty were brought against each man. Ian A. L. Getty, *The History of Waterton Lakes 1800-1937*, (unpublished, 1971, revised 1972), 71. WLNP Archives Box 115, Item 12.

⁸ Frederick Maunder, Superintendent of Revelstoke National Park, was appointed acting superintendent at Waterton until Bevan arrived.

⁹ The superintendents' reports show that individual administrators generally accounted for grazing figures by reporting dollar figures instead of herd or permit counts with only a few exceptions.

¹⁰ Waterton Lakes National Park Revenue, Period 1 April to 31 December, 1929 to 1943, WLNP Archives, Box 207, Item 7.

¹¹ Letter to Controller, National Parks Bureau Controller, Ottawa, from H. A. DeVeber, acting park superintendent, Waterton, June 13, 1945. WLNP Archives, Box 210, Item 1.

¹² Letter to L. S. Turcotte, barrister, Lethbridge from H. A. DeVeber, acting park superintendent, Waterton, March 20, 1946. WLNP Archives Box 210, Item 1.

¹³ Fences were expensive and counter to wildlife.

¹⁴ "Cattle in Waterton Park," *Lethbridge Herald*, Jan. 21, 1947, 4. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 21.

¹⁵ "People's Forum: Again, the Elk," *Lethbridge Herald*, Feb. 3, 1947, 4. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 21.

¹⁶ "People's Forum: Cattle in Waterton Park," *Lethbridge Herald*, Feb. 8, 1947, 4. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 21.

¹⁷ People's Forum: Cattle in Waterton Park."

¹⁸ "No More Summer Grazing of Cattle in Waterton Park Effective 1948 Season," *Lethbridge Herald*, Sept. 17, 1947, 7. WLNP Archives, Box 130, Item 21.