

Glacier National Park of Canada

Climate

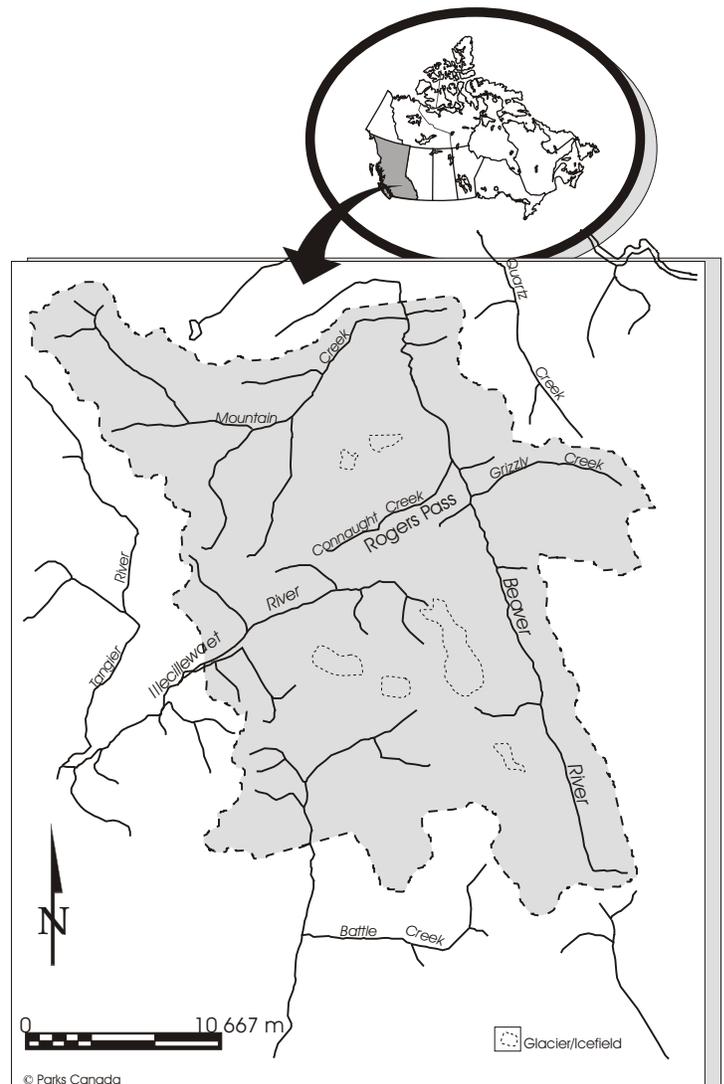
Moist Pacific air releases a large amount of precipitation over the Columbias. Up to 23 m of snow has been recorded. Heavy snowfalls, combined with steep terrain, render the park an active avalanche zone. January sees the greatest amounts of snow (150-200 mm) while July is both the warmest and driest month. There is only a loose seasonality associated with the precipitation, making it quite possible to experience rain in the winter and snow in the summer. Maximum average temperatures for January and July are -9°C and 20°C respectively.

Geology

The Columbias are massive steep-walled mountains with deep, narrow valleys. Water and ice continue to carve the ancient metamorphic rocks. The park contains an extensive network of caves, still being worn and enlarged by underground waterways. A number of fault lines run through the park as well. The avalanches that occur in these mountains can be both awe-inspiring and frightening. Military weaponry is sometimes used to stabilize avalanche slopes.

Location

Glacier National Park is located in southeastern British Columbia. Along with Yoho National Park, it is Canada's second national park, and was established in 1886. The park protects 1 350 km² of mountains, glaciers, alpine lakes, and deep valleys. Glacier National Park protects a representative sample of the Columbia Mountains Natural Region. Rogers Pass is located in the park. Discovered in 1881, it provided a long-sought route through the Selkirk Mountain barrier. Today, it is a national historic site. Glacier National Park is located in the Montane Cordillera Ecozone.

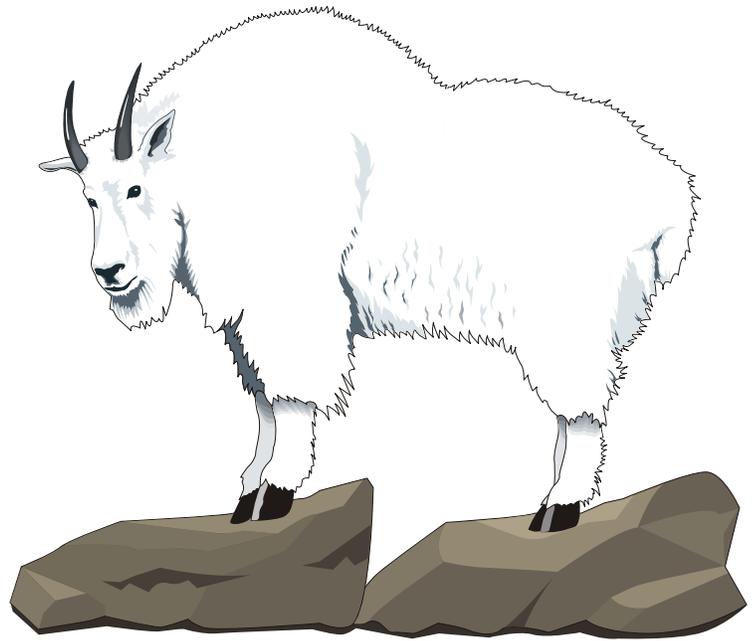


Vegetation

Three distinct vegetation zones occur in the park. From the valley bottom up to about 1 300 m, an interior rain forest of western red cedar and western hemlock towers over a dense undergrowth of devil's club, alder, and bracken fern. Above 1 300 m, the two main tree species are subalpine firs and Engelmann spruce. Near 1 900 m, the forest thins, and eventually disappears altogether, to be replaced by alpine meadows of grasses and saxifrage. At the summits, even these hardy species do not survive.

Wildlife

Glacier National Park is famous for its bears, including both black bears and grizzlies. Other mammal species include mountain caribou, mountain goats, mule deer, hoary marmots, picas, and the Columbia ground squirrel. A rich and diverse bird population graces the park. Species include Steller's jays, ravens, four types of chickadees and a number of neotropical migrants like red-eyed vireos. Unlike the park's mammals, however, few bird species are year-round residents of the park. The area's bird life includes some 235 species, but only about 30 remain in the park throughout the year. The mountain environment is not particularly favourable for reptiles and amphibians, with only three species of reptiles and four amphibians known to exist in the area. Some species include the northern alligator lizard, two types of garter snakes, the western toad, and two frog species. Park waters contain trout, sculpin, and whitefish.



Activities

The park offers 140 km of hiking trails, three campgrounds, picnic sites, and an interpretive program. Visitors can enjoy cycling, scenic drives, fishing, winter camping, ski-touring and snowshoeing. Wildlife viewing is also popular, but visitors are asked not to feed or approach any of the park's wildlife. Mountain climbing is excellent. Climbers, skiers, mountaineers and backpackers may register out at the Parks Canada office in Revelstoke; but must then also register their return. Registration is voluntary but recommended for hazardous activities.

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