



Western Canada Wilderness Committee



Woodland Caribou Karvonen Films

CARIBOU MOUNTAINS WILDERNESS ALBERTA'S INCREDIBLE ECO-TOURIST DESTINATION

"... a handful of faithfuls are fighting giants. However, the tide can be turned and victory ours as has been done before."

• Bernard de Vries



RARE ROADLESS WILDERNESS SHOULD BE MAINTAINED AS AN INTERNATIONAL TREASURE

By Gray Jones

Executive Director, WCWC Alberta Branch

As wilderness areas around the world become industrialized and criss-crossed with roads or turned into crop land, roadless wilderness areas are becoming rarer and rarer. The Caribou Mountains is one of these special places. A place which screams for protection.

The Caribou Mountains if left relatively intact, could be a literal Noah's ark or final refuge for the woodland caribou in Alberta.

Faith Popcorn, internationally recognized trend analyst has stated that jurisdictions that have high quality wilderness experiences will be highly sought after and will have tremendous eco-tourism potential. She predicts that wilderness pursuits will be one of the two major activities involving people from industrialized countries in the next decade.

The Caribou Mountains is an elevated plateau, 100 air kilometres from High Level, Alberta. It rises 1500 feet above the surrounding terrain. It was not glaciated in the last ice age and therefore has remnant communities of lichens, vascular plants and mosses not found in the adjacent country. Currently, 73 species of lichen have been recorded, along with 230 vascular plants and 61 species of mosses. The lichen count is one of the highest in the world.

The tapestry of multi-coloured ground and tree lichens provide one of the richest habitats for up to thirty per

cent of Alberta's remaining woodland caribou. Some caribou experts argue that with fragmentation of caribou habitats by logging and oil and gas developments around the province of Alberta, that the Caribou Mountains if left relatively intact, could be a literal Noah's ark or final refuge for the woodland caribou in Alberta. The Caribou Mountains may be the last opportunity in Alberta to manage the woodland caribou as a priority.



Margaret Lake

Karvonen Films

The Caribou Mountains is a place where arctic and boreal ecologies collide. Underlying permafrost throughout much of the area makes it a unique and fragile ecosystem, very susceptible to damage from industrial development. Scars in the permafrost twenty years old remain and become increasingly eroded.

Extremely rare landforms are found in the Horseshoe Lake area. These landforms include floating plant communities - fens and palsas. Horseshoe Lake is also home to one of the rarest plants in Alberta: the northern ground-cone. Along the Ponton River large peat and sulphur slumps can be found.



Caribou Mountains Aerial Karvonen Films

Over 80 species of birds are found in the Caribou Mountains, including exotic wood warblers and it is one of the two known nesting sites of the red-throated loon. Dr. Jim Butler describes it as being a literal 'loon factory'. The presence of The Little Red River Cree Band's, world-class Margaret Lake Lodge, the spectacular scenery and the high bird population make it an ideal ecotourist destination for bird watchers, which are the fastest growing segment of the tourism market.

Last summer, I witnessed the spring break-up of Margaret Lake, saw woodland caribou from the air and tracked the flight of wood warblers through the bush. The highlight for me was watching a young eagle, sitting on a nest defend itself from a diving osprey. It lay on its back and raked the air with its huge comic book-like orange talons. It successfully defended itself.

WCWC calls for formal protection of the Caribou Mountains as a National Tribal Park

The Western Canada Wilderness Committee calls for formal protection of the Caribou Mountains. We promote the concept of a National Tribal Park for the Caribou Mountains, honouring the Little Red River Cree Band as being the traditional stewards of the land. This Tribal National Park would cover the entire plateau and we promote two core areas as being perfect candidates for U.N. Biosphere Reserve status: the Margaret Lake / Ponton River area and the Horseshoe Lake area.

It is time to take the Caribou Mountains from the edge of oil and gas development into a state of protection for the lichens, woodland caribou and rare landforms, so that future generations may enjoy them.



Woodland Caribou:

Karvonen Films

THE CARIBOU MOUNTAINS: A NATURAL HERITAGE IN CRISIS

By Bernard de Vries • Botanist/Lichenologist

As a botanist and lichenologist I had the privilege to travel throughout the Caribou Mountains on several occasions, and each time I was shocked by the sight of the immense labyrinth of seismic exploration lines spreading like a spider web over the southern part of this landscape, and evidence of clearcuts on slopes.

This encroachment of industrialization upon this unique landscape is still in it's infantile stage, but growing steadily.

The integrity of this ecosystem is threatened by commercial exploration and logging. How long can this continue as a viable ecological reserve, before it is completely thrashed by industrialization?



The Western Canada Wilderness Committee calls for formal protection of the Caribou Mountains as a National Tribal Park encompassing the entire plateau.

So many of our natural areas are under siege and in need of protection that we have categorized them into priorities. Regretfully, the Caribou Mountains is not seen as a high priority by many.

We know the effects of industrialized encroachment upon a pristine ecosystem, but fail to get to the root of the cause which is creating the effects in the first place.

This unique Boreal Sub Arctic region is located in the central northern portion of Alberta approximately between 58 38" and 59 40" N latitude and 114 00" and 116 55" W longitude of the 5th Meridian. Contrary to the name inherent, the Caribou Mountains are not mountains at all, but rather an elevated saucer shaped plateau that rises 600 to 700m above the surrounding low-

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resources in a sustainable manner" arises. This philosophy has not been adhered to, and industrial encroachment continues unabated, with emphasis on short term gain rather than on a long term sustainable basis.

The complexity of life functions maintaining a healthy environment is a delicate chain of relationships, so that even the slightest disruption tends to disrupt all, often with disastrous consequences.

Time has not healed the scars of earlier explorations and other commercial activities upon this landscape, and they will remain as mute testimony of man's disregard for a living ecosystem.

This wilderness of boreal subarctic and northern boreal forests as well as lakes and muskegs, fosters a unique community of flora and fauna and among them many rare species e.g. the Northern Groundcomb and Lodgepole Pine.

It is this very fabric of life that is seriously threatened by seismic explorations and logging, which tend to cut up the land and shred its fragile landscape.

Too many changes in a short time is not readily adjusted to by the land and its wildlife, nor by the people whose ancestral land this is. Thus concerns over the fate of those wildlife species which depend on the Caribou

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Exploring the Forest

Andy Miller

Continuation of the current trend of industrialization will ultimately reach the very core of this wilderness, thereby undermining the maintenance of ecological integrity. This can be seen as a serious threat to the ecological longevity of this area, with a foreseeable collapse of the non-migratory woodland caribou herd and its supportive lichen habitat. Nonetheless the clamour for more economic development, regardless of the long-term cost, is again heard from central Alberta.

Their relationship with the Caribou Mountains is founded upon the principles of respect, reciprocity and sharing of the land they consider as the source of life and traditional spiritual beliefs



Woodland Caribou:

Karvonen Films



Moose

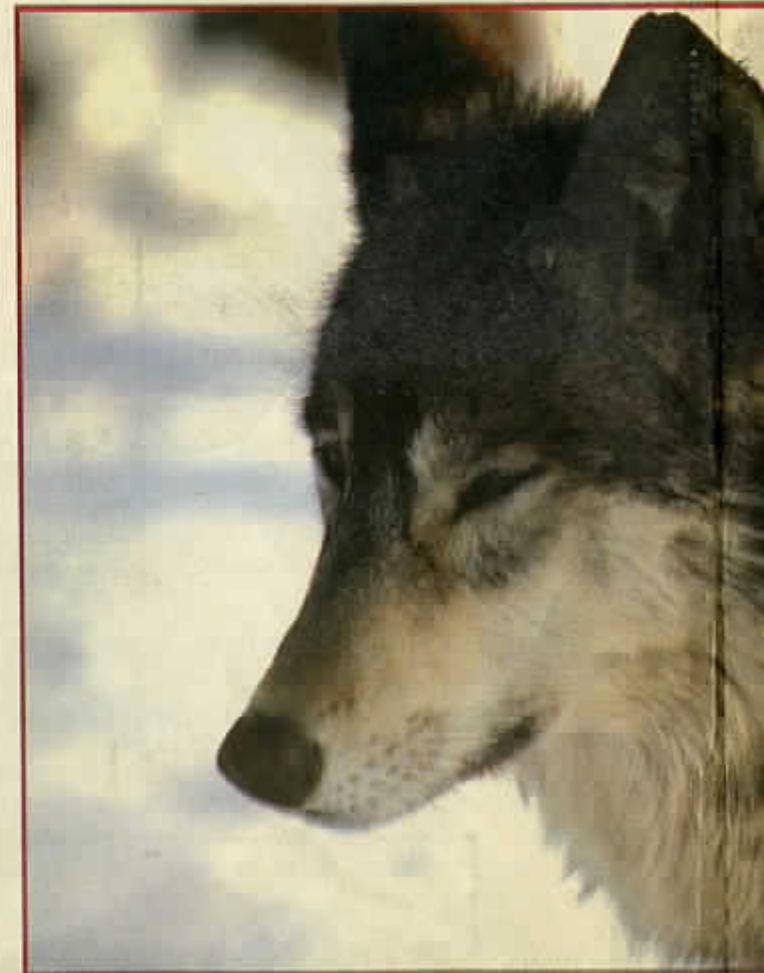
Karvonen Films

life, nor by the people whose ancestral land this is. Thus concerns over the fate of those wild-life species which depend on the Caribou Mountain ecosystem has surfaced, especially the existent woodland caribou and lichen pastures, which are the most important and vulnerable. Their disappearance would signal an ecosystem in crisis and the beginning of extirpation of other sensitive inhabitants of the area (Northern Groundcomb, Lichen species).

Preliminary lichenological studies showed that lichen forests and pastures are significant components of the flora, and to date 73 species have been identified in addition to 61 moss species and 230 vascular plants, based on data from selected areas. The Caribou Mountains have also the most northern stand of Lodgepole Pine.



Eagle



Timber Wolf

'S ARC

IONAL TRIBAL PARK

EN OF OUR CHILDREN



LEGEND
 1. Proposed UN Biosphere Reserve - Margaret Lake / Ponton River
 2. Proposed UN Biosphere Reserve - Horseshoe Lakes
 Tribal Park Boundary

Within the Caribou Mountains plateau WCWC calls for two UN Biosphere Reserves:

1. Area around Margaret Lake & the Ponton River
2. Area encompassing Horseshoe Lakes

Many lichens are sensitive to atmospheric pollution, and indicators of environmental health or deterioration, because of their unique uptake of nutrients and therefore valuable to the ecosystem.

Terrestrial as well as arboreal lichens are important caribou winter nutrients, although caribou do utilize other plants to obtain mineral and vitamins.

The terrestrial ecosystem of woodland caribou and lichens is not inviolate. Indeed the threats facing it are all too apparent, and serious disruption of their native habitat, causes disappearance of both. Think about the highly touted economic growth and disregard for long-term effects upon the environment. A landscape dotted by

well-heads, a labyrinth of seismic lines and access roads, atmospheric pollution's which creates lichen deserts, clearcuts of lichen producing forest, causing loss of Caribou and depaperized lichen habitat. Surely this is not what we want to happen.

The need to study the broader view e.g. looking for the root causes of the environmental crisis and not just the symptoms has already begun, and a research

program has been launched by the Little Red River Cree Council as a concerted effort to save what is still wilderness.

corridors, and immediate means must be found to identify and protect them.

The multinationals who invest high amounts of money in their ventures do not favour the world "CONSERVATION", which to them means restrictions to development. They prefer "CARTE BLANCHE", and their own research, which is often a "Smoke Screen".

Alberta's legislation allowing commercialism of natural areas tends to brush aside concerns and needs for environmental impact studies, including the Caribou Mountains and receive lip service if nothing else.

The beauty of the magnificent Woodland Caribou, the luxurious carpets of caribou lichens, the majestic old growth forest and unique boreal subarctic landscape with its extensive string flark fens and palsas symbolizing a common heritage, exemplifies the urgent need for protection of that which still remains free of this pristine wilderness.

This can be done by bringing the issue of the Caribou Mountains all across Canada and beyond. Let it be known to all its peoples that a total ecosystem is on the verge of slowly being violated by industrial encroachment.



Grizzly Bear

WCWC File Photo

be forgotten. Recommendation for protection under plan Special Places 2000 and governmental evaluation of two sites for Natural Areas candidates in the Caribou Mountains, has come to naught. Let's act now before it is too late.

They are creatures of isolated undisturbed wilderness (which is becoming increasingly rare) adaptive to subtle changes to their habitat, but respond poorly to intensive encroachment





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River Cree Council as a concerted effort to save what is still wilderness.

To find some possible answers, we must focus first on the caribou, their habitat and lichens. These are the key indicators of environmental health in the Caribou Mountains.

Thirty percent of Alberta's remaining Woodland Caribou inhabit this region. They are creatures of isolated undisturbed wilderness (which is becoming increasingly rare) adaptive to subtle changes to their habitat, but respond poorly to intensive encroachment upon lichen and vegetation pasture and especially calving grounds. Such areas are inviolable sanctuaries, off limits to all industrial activities and transportation



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Only you the reader can decide what is to be done and what the best conservation measures would be. You can influence politicians to change their static views. You can support the various organizations concerned with saving our fast disappearing last natural areas.

^{know} We now about he horrors of Banff, threats to the Temagami and the Algonquin forests, oil explorations in the Arctic, and the list goes on. Natural areas are in crisis. Conservation of natural areas in the form of new reserves and national parks are urgently needed. It is applaudable that such areas have been recently established. However, the simple lack of good information on this relatively pristine area has left the Caribou Mountains out of the mainstream. But they should not

Loon
This publication is a precursor to the release of a documentary on the Caribou Mountains, entitled "Island in the Sky" to be released in 1997 to television networks across Canada.

This documentary shows what words can not, the awesome wilderness with its treasures, some still hidden, of lichens, mosses and vascular plants. Its wildlife, from the majestic caribou to the lofty eagle. Silent forests where the wolf lives free. The sparkling lakes with the cry of the loon. The very solitude of the string flark fens and muskegs. A sensitive unique landscape, where men should but tread lightly. This is what the Caribou Mountains stand for.

Help us to save it.



Mushrooms



Reiner Loewen British Soldiers



Sulphur Cup Reiner Loewen

THE MAGIC OF THE ECO-TOURISM ADVENTURE

By Jana Lee Marsh

As an avid eco-tourist I can honestly say that Margaret Lake is one of the most beautiful places on earth. When we stepped into the plane I never imagined it would transport me to such a wonderland - never before discovered - yet in my home province.

We spent the day hiking from Margaret Lake to Eva Lake most of the time face down in the mosses and lichens discovering an incredibly diverse eco-system in every square inch. What an incredible day in the wilderness! From our sighting of a woodland caribou swimming across the lake as we flew in, to the Ospreys

we saw diving for fish at supper, we were completely mesmerized by the place. The wonderfully hospitable gentleman who runs the lodge brought us moose meat stew and told us stories of the land around the evening campfire. When our day was over and we were flying back over the lake towards the south I looked over at my friend and we shared a warm smile and knew that some day we would return.

We spent most of our time face down in the mosses and lichens discovering an incredibly diverse eco-system in every square inch



Campfire Musicians

WCWC File Photo



Welcome to Margaret Lake

Karvonen Films



Gray Jones filming Eagle

Karvonen Films



Grizzly Bear

WCWC File Photo

Credits & Thanks

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in the production of this publication



Yellow Warbler

Edgar T. Jones



Eco-Tourist Dollars Save Wilderness!



ECO-TOURIST DOLLARS SAVE WILDERNESS!



WCWC File Photo

WCWC OFFERS ECO-TOURS TO THE CARIBOU MOUNTAINS

In co-operation with American Express Travel Vacation Services, Western Canada Wilderness Committee is offering eco-tourism packages to the Caribou Mountains. The first tours are scheduled for June and September of 1997. These 10 day exclusive tours will include hiking, boating, birding, wildlife viewing and interpretive programs complete with guides.

Show your support for preservation of this roadless wilderness jewel and spend your eco-tourist dollars in the Caribou Mountains!

If you would like more information on the eco-tourism opportunities we have planned in 1997 please fill in your name and address on the form below and mail it to the WCWC offices in Edmonton, Alberta. Or if you would prefer, please call Claire Ashton of WCWC at (403) 433-1285.



Rainer Lorenz

Andy Miller Calling in the Chute



Andy Miller

Fishing



Espie T. Jones Capturing

Blackburnian Warbler



Forest Interpretive Tour

YES!! I WILL SUPPORT YOUR EFFORTS TO SAVE THE CARIBOU MOUNTAINS!

- Make me an individual member of the Western Canada Wilderness Committee for \$30 a year.
- Send me more information on Eco-Tourism opportunities in the Caribou Mountains
- Here is my tax deductible donation of:
 \$30 \$50 \$100 \$200 other

Name: _____

Address: _____

City / Town: _____ Post Code: _____

Mastercard or VISA # _____
 exp. date: _____

Make cheques, VISA or Mastercard (include expiry date) payable to WCWC and send them to

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