



WIDER HORIZONS

{ A PUBLICATION OF LETHBRIDGE COLLEGE }

NEVER ENOUGH NATURE

CELEBRATING BLACKFOOT TERRITORY'S
HOODOOS, COULEES, PRAIRIES AND PEAKS
THROUGH STORIES AND SCENERY 12

CLASS OF '22 GRADS ARE READY 38
A PASSION FOR LEADERSHIP 42
HONOURING EXCELLENCE 53

SPRING 2022



WIDER HORIZONS

{ VOL. 15 | ISSUE 3 | SPRING 2022 }

Wider Horizons is Lethbridge College's community magazine, celebrating the successes and stories of students, employees, alumni, partners and friends. The magazine aims to educate, engage and delight its readers through compelling stories and images about Lethbridge College people, places and experiences.

In addition to free distribution to our regional community, *Wider Horizons* is also mailed to all alumni and available on campus. Alumni looking to connect with the college or update their contact information can email alumni@lethbridgecollege.ca or go to lethbridgecollege.ca/alumni.

Readers who would like to receive an e-version of the magazine, comment on a story, change their address or remove their name from our mailing list should email the editor at WHMagazine@lethbridgecollege.ca.

Wider Horizons
3000 College Drive South
Lethbridge, AB T1K 1L6

Publisher: Dr. Paula Burns

Editor: Lisa Kozleski

Guest editor: Dave McMurray

Blackfoot storyteller: Mike Bruised Head

Art director/designer: Dana Woodward

Cover photo: Aaron Keeling

Photographers: Jamin Heller, Aaron Keeling, Dave McMurray, Rob Olson, staff contributors

Illustrator: Eric Dyck

Writers: Jamin Heller, Tina Karst, Aaron Keeling, Paul Kingsmith, Tom Russell, Dawn Sugimoto

Proofreaders: Diane Fjordbotten, Brenna Lowrie, Jennifer Yanish

Distribution: Amy Taylor

College staff contributors: Kristy Clark, Leeanne Conrad, Tanner Fletcher, James Harrison, Greg Kruyssen, Lawrence Krysak, Kristina Madarasz, Ron Ostepchuk, Shawn Salberg, Stephanie Savage

Located on the traditional lands of the Blackfoot Confederacy, Lethbridge College is committed to honouring the land from a place of knowing. We honour the Siksikaitsitapi as both the traditional and current Land Keepers of this area, and we welcome all First Nations, Métis, Inuit and non-Indigenous peoples who call Blackfoot territory their home.



I can't write about what the mountains mean to me without writing about what they mean to my dad, who grew up living in a small apartment above the sausage factory in Chicago where his parents worked. My dad's family took just one true vacation during his childhood – a road trip in 1962 from their southside Polish neighbourhood to the Rocky Mountains of Colorado. From the moment the family car started making its way up to the 14,110 feet (4,302 metres) summit of the Pike's Peak Highway, my dad dreamed of coming back to stay.

It took almost 20 years, but he and my mom did just that, opening up a business 15 kilometres up the road from the turnoff to the same highway my dad travelled as a teen. That's where I grew up, and every day as my dad drove my brother, me and our cool neighbour, Debbie, into school, he would stop before turning onto the highway, look up at majestic purple mountains that inspired Katharine Lee Bates to write *America the Beautiful*, and say with great conviction: "Good morning, Pike's Peak!" I would always roll my eyes and whisper: "Come on, Dad. Cool Debbie is in the car!" And he would always reply: "I just never want to take this mountain for granted."

I totally took that mountain – and so many others – for granted when I was growing up. They were nothing more than my playground, the place where my brother and I with our friends would explore, race, climb, discover and dream. As I got older, I would tag along with my brother and his Boy Scout troop on their adventures, hiking the highest of Colorado's mountains, the ones called Fourteeners – reflecting their 14,000-foot-plus elevation.

It wasn't until I left those mountains that I truly understood how magical they were, how lucky I was to grow up in their shadow, and why my dad said good morning to them every day. Wherever else I've lived and travelled, I've made a point to appreciate whatever beauty the land offers. But in my heart, it's mountains that feel most like home to me. Once the pandemic started, my own family turned to the mountains more than ever for adventure and recreation, picking and planning new hikes each month, coming to love and appreciate Alberta in general – and Blackfoot territory in particular – in new and memorable ways.

This special issue of *Wider Horizons* is dedicated to celebrating every aspect of the southern Alberta landscape, from the hoodoos, coulees and prairies to the rivers, lakes and peaks. My colleague Dave McMurray has generously served as a guest editor of this issue, and I hope you savour his story about the meaning of mountains as much as I did (see p. 16). Dave and I and the entire team are grateful for the time and teachings of *Ninna Piiksii* (Mike Bruised Head/Chief Bird), a Blackfoot knowledge keeper and PhD candidate who shared the Blackfoot stories of these sacred spaces with us, so we could share them with you.

We hope the stories and photos in this issue remind you of the abundance and awe of some of the places that you might have taken for granted over the years. It would mean so much if they inspired you to do what my dad made sure to do each day – slow down, savour the view, and wish the mountains a very good morning.

Thanks for reading!

Lisa Kozleski
Editor



SEEN ON CAMPUS

Prospective students from the Piikani Nation and other southern Alberta Indigenous communities came to campus in March to experience Lethbridge College's Wind Turbine Technician program. Students climbed the training platform, explored the inner workings of a nacelle and learned more about this green energy career – and were treated to lunch in the Garden Court Restaurant – in an event sponsored by Enel Green Power.

Photo by Rob Olson

2 President in action
4 News and notes

48 From our kitchens
50 Where are they now?

50 Makers, doers and thinkers
60 The last word

A passion for leadership

Dr. Paula Burns reflects on her nine years as president.



Distinguished alumni

Celebrating four recipients of this year's Honouring Excellence awards.



The last word

Check out the action inside the Val Matteotti Gymnasium, the site of championship runs and the world's best fans.



NEVER ENOUGH NATURE

CELEBRATING BLACKFOOT TERRITORY'S
HOODOOS, COULEES, PRAIRIES AND PEAKS
THROUGH STORIES AND SCIENCE

HENRY DAVID THOREAU CALLED IT THE TONIC OF THE WILDERNESS

...AND EXPLORING THE HEIGHTS AND DELIGHTS
OF THE OUTDOORS HAS SEEMED TO BE JUST
THAT FOR MANY IN THE LETHBRIDGE COLLEGE
COMMUNITY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

As pandemic-time passed and colleagues, students and alumni continued to share stories of finding joy in nature, the *Wider Horizons* team started brainstorming. What if we created a special issue dedicated to the beauty and bounty of Blackfoot territory? What if we shared the stunning photos that were filling up our cell phones, and offered insider's tips and insights of where to go, what to see and, sometimes most importantly, where to eat? What if we could get students and other employees across campus involved in some of the storytelling and photography? Most importantly, what if we invited a Blackfoot scholar and knowledge keeper to share the Blackfoot stories of this land with us – and with our readers?

It took almost a year to accomplish all those “what ifs,” but we did it. And the result is this 26-page special section focused on six remarkable areas in southern Alberta: *Ninaiistáko* (Chief Mountain); the Castle Wilderness area; Writing-on-Stone; Waterton; the Crowsnest Pass area; and Lethbridge's own coulees.

If you, like Thoreau, discover you need the tonic of the wilderness and believe that “we can never have enough nature,” we hope this special issue proves to be a useful guide for you this summer – and for seasons to come.

Be sure to check out additional content – including so many magnificent photos – online at widerhorizons.ca.

Blackfoot storyteller: *Ninna Piiksii* (Mike Bruised Head/Chief Bird)

Ninna Piiksii is a fluent Blackfoot speaker and a spiritual leader for sacred societies. He is completing his PhD in Cultural, Social and Political Thought at the University of Lethbridge where his research focuses on restoring the Blackfoot names of the mountains, valleys, trails and waterways in *Paahtómahksikimi* and across traditional Blackfoot territory.

Special guest editor and writer: Dave McMurray, manager of Applied Research Operations. Dave runs the hiking and scrambling blog, peaksandstreams.com.

Photography: Aaron Keeling, Dave McMurray and Lethbridge College employees

Story: Lisa Kozleski | **Design:** Dana Woodward

WH

MUCH MORE TO SEE

The beauty and wonder of Blackfoot territory cannot be fully captured in 26 pages of a magazine, or even 26 volumes of a book. The views change with the time of day, the seasons and the years, as well as with the company you keep when you head out into nature. The *Wider Horizons* team encourages you to visit and re-visit these places and others in our region, being open to learn new lessons each time.

In addition to visiting these memorable places yourself, we also invite you to take in more sights in these three ways:

- Check out the slideshow created by Lethbridge College employees throughout the summer and fall of 2021 and winter and spring of 2022. Just go to learn.lc/never-enough-nature to savour some of the most marvelous spots in our region.
- Visit the Galt Museum in Lethbridge before Sunday, June 19, to experience a new exhibit, *Nitsitapiisksakoo: Nitsitapii Landscapes*. Or contact the Galt to request the travelling exhibit be shared in your community. This exhibit has been co-curated by *Ninna Piiksii* (Mike Bruised Head), *Itsinohtss piyaki* (Rebecca Many Grey Horses), and Bobbie Fox, and it includes videos of *Ninna Piiksii* sharing many of these same stories in Blackfoot that he has shared in this special issue of *Wider Horizons*. More details can be found at learn.lc/galtlandscapes.
- And last but certainly not least, *Ninna Piiksii* (Mike Bruised Head) says one of the best ways to learn about this land is to visit a Blackfoot elder or grandparent and ask to hear more stories. You won't be disappointed.

NINAIISTÁKO CHIEF MOUNTAIN

Located in Glacier Country, Montana, on the eastern border of Glacier National Park and the Blackfeet Indian Reservation – and seen on a clear day from many places throughout Blackfoot territory (including Lethbridge College).

Elevation: 2,769 m



A STORY OF NINAIISTÁKO

CHIEF MOUNTAIN

WH By *Ninna Piiksii* (Mike Bruised Head/Chief Bird), pictured above on Sage Pass on the Continental Divide.

I will tell this story as the elders told it to me. It's their stories I am reciting. The stories are not my own.

I will start with *Ninaiistáko*, Chief Mountain. At the beginning of time, before being called *Ninaiistáko*, a story goes that *Ksiistsi-komm* (the Thunder spirit) came into a human form, and he had a falling out with the people because he captured the wife of a man without his permission. Thunder began to harm the people and was very hard on them. The man wanted his wife back, so the man and the people called on *Omahkai'stoo* (the Big Raven) for help. They asked the Raven to help them settle this, for the man to get his wife back and for Thunder to quit tormenting the people.

And so Raven said, I'll help you. And the battle went on for a long time. Thunder tried to hit Raven with his lightning, but Raven used his wings to cool the air so Thunder couldn't use his lightning. And the battle continued. And finally, cold weather and winter came. And the lightning could not strike the people because of the cold. And finally they made an agreement, and Raven told Thunder to give the woman back and to stop tormenting the people.

Thunder agreed, and said OK, I will give the people what they want. And with that, Thunder and Raven agreed to exchange their mountain homes. Thunder would now call *Ninaiistáko* (Chief Mountain) his home, and Raven would

call *Omahkai'stoo*, the mountain we called Crowsnest Mountain, his home. Today, *Ksiistsi-komm* represents the spring, the warm season, and *Omahkai'stoo* represents the winter season.

Thunder was to give the people a *ninámsskaan* – a bundle with a pipe – as a peace agreement. And Thunder agreed and told Raven that he would protect, and he would watch over them and guide them. And so they agreed.

Thunder said: I will give this pipe to the people, and that way we will maintain peace forever. And the people, when they hear thunder, they will have to open this bundle, they will have to smoke it. I will give them songs too. The songs can only be sung with the ceremony. And they can transfer the pipes in the bundle to other people. And as long as they do these ceremonies, I will watch over them. I will watch over them as long as the sun shines.

And thus Chief Mountain – *Ninaiistáko* – is the home of thunder. Chief Mountain is powerful. It has withstood all kinds of wars. It has withstood colonization. It has withstood European thought.

And today many people during summer go to fast and pray there. They always make sure to offer tobacco, berries, meat, cloth and hide. And the Blackfoot and Blackfeet people, we honour that mountain, Chief Mountain – *Ninaiistáko*. The vision quest experience is still active with the Blackfoot people.

KEEP IN
MIND

When heading out, remember that many of these sites are considered sacred by the Blackfoot people and are still used today for ceremonies and spiritual practices. If you come across cairns of stones or gifts left from a ceremony or prayer, you should leave the area untouched (although it is considered proper protocol to leave an offering of tobacco at these sites.)



RECREATION AS RE-CREATION

REFLECTING ON THE MEANING OF MOUNTAINS AND THE BENEFITS OF BEING OUTDOORS

WH Story and photo by Dave McMurray, guest editor

We are beyond privileged to live in southern Alberta – a fact I am reminded of every time I hike in the coulees, stand in the clear waters of an east slope stream, or venture onto a mountain. This land that we share together shapes where we live, how we live and who we are. It is a gift and a responsibility.

When *Wider Horizons* editor Lisa Kozleski graciously invited me to share what our southern Alberta landscape means on a personal level, I readily agreed, though I'm not sure I was prepared for the meandering paths of thought that I would find myself on. Every trip I make into the backcountry – or the front country – provides me with new layers of meaning, and sorting these into something coherent has been challenging. Indeed, as everyone has their own personal connections to the land, my reflections are limited and that's why I'm glad to be only one voice in this issue. The photos and stories shared by members of our community are collectively powerful and serve to invite all of us into not only going outside and onto the land but reflecting on why we do.

Recent scholarship has identified the psychological and physical benefits of spending time in the world-out-of-doors, including the effects it has on brain function and emotional well-being.

For me, this rings true as outdoor recreation has always meant re-creation; that is, it returns me to a place of wholeness.

Being outside is where I can experience risk and wonder woven together in ways that are otherwise unavailable. I will never forget when my kids were little, taking them to the trout stream of my youth and inviting them to turn over rocks to see


what was underneath. The excitement they showed when a stonefly nymph scurried away, or a caddis larva retreated into its casing was magical. Before it was simply a rock, but now they saw it as home to a myriad of life. That in one small part is what being outside as an adult allows me to recapture. Every time I see morning sunlight illuminate a band of red argillite or witness the intricate colours of a brook trout in the fall, I am brought back into wonder – and for me, that gives life.

Beyond this, I love the coupled sense of adventure and exploration. When I see a mountain, my mind immediately looks for natural routes to the top. If there is a known track, that's great because my experience will be different than anyone else who has used it before. Different day, different season, different weather, and so on. If there isn't a documented route, the process of planning and actualizing it, adapting and changing course on the fly, and eventually making the top (and sometimes not), is incredibly fulfilling.

For me, time on the land is relational. First and foremost, it means time with my own family, where my wife, Melanie, an elementary school vice principal, constantly looks for interesting natural artifacts that she can incorporate into a curriculum of outdoor play for children. As we walk together, her keen observations remind me that learning from nature needs to be done within nature and through the context of community. Fostering authentic attachment to the natural world is important for society on so many levels, let alone addressing climate change in a serious manner.

Watching my adult kids take their love for the outdoors and translate this into their own contexts is truly special. I have been blessed to stand on many summits and wade many waters with my kids, and I remember each trip in vivid detail. It started with walks in the coulees when they were young and progressed from there. Indeed, there is something powerful about sharing an outdoor adventure with your children no matter their age – or yours. It's not just the quantity of the time together, but the

“FOR ME, THIS RINGS TRUE AS OUTDOOR RECREATION HAS ALWAYS MEANT RE-CREATION; THAT IS, IT RETURNS ME TO A PLACE OF WHOLENESS.”



“EVERY TIME I SEE MORNING
SUNLIGHT ILLUMINATE A BAND
OF RED ARGILLITE OR WITNESS
THE INTRICATE COLOURS OF A
BROOK TROUT IN THE FALL,
I AM BROUGHT BACK INTO
WONDER – AND FOR ME,
THAT GIVES LIFE.”

constant shifting of focus and intensity of presence. Sometimes it is problem solving together to get past an obstacle or pick a fly pattern, sometimes it's contagious laughter because dad fell, sometimes it's stopping to admire a delicate alpine buttercup, and sometimes it's comfortable silence – though that's a hard one for our family! Healthy risk is important, and witnessing the grit that outdoor activities have built into my kids is something that I know will serve them well.

The relational benefits of outdoor adventure extend beyond my immediate family. Hiking and scrambling have allowed me to develop deep friendships with truly amazing people. Spending hours and sometimes days on an adventure allows you to get to know a person beyond the superficial. It also allows a common story to develop – usually around something funny – and sharing a story is foundational to both family and friendship. In an age when many men lack quality friendships, I am incredibly grateful to my nephew Jeff, and friends Andrew, Brad, Lance, Mark, Raff, Sonny, and Zosia for what they've taught me through deep conversations and laughter – lots and lots of laughter.

Finally, while all of this is true, there is also risk in romanticizing nature into something it is not. I am acutely aware that the natural world is full of lessons on the hardship and unfairness of life. It is also a place where even the most prepared individual or group may find themselves in trouble. As the saying goes, “the mountain doesn't care,” and this reality translates into everyday life. One thing that I've learned in the backcountry is to be flexible because you never know what the mountain – or life – will throw at you, despite all of the planning you may have done. Reflecting on the fragility and harshness of nature translates into appreciation for life, however long or short that may be.

As you look through the photos and read the stories in the following pages, I again invite you to reflect on your own experiences and stories from the land we share. Each time that we enter the natural world as watchful and engaged participants, we get a glimpse of the knowledge and power that surrounds us. If we're open, these experiences can transform our everyday lives.



A STORY OF > TATSIKI-MIISTÁKI

THE MIDDLE MOUNTAINS/CASTLE WILDERNESS AREA

WH By *Ninna Piiksii* (Mike Bruised Head/Chief Bird) | photos by Dave McMurray

The elders from Piikani and Kainai tell the story of the Middle Mountains, which come between the Livingstone Range Mountains and *Paahtómahksikimi* (Waterton). I heard one story of the Middle Mountains. I was given the names of some of the mountains in the area, but I was quite young.

Within those mountains you don't really feel the wind. The elders described the area as a prime camping area – no matter the season. There are still tipi and ceremonial rings out there. And the elders described it as being abundant of *saaám* (medicine) and for hunting *ponoká* (elk) and *áwákaasii* (deer). The area is abundant with fish, all the wild animals you can imagine, from *kiááyo* (bear) to *makóyi* (wolf) and *aapí'si* (coyote), the *sikihtsisoo* (moose) and *áápomahkihkinaa* (mountain sheep). And the streams are abundant of *ksísskstaki* (beaver) and *áímmóniisi* (otter), all those that we used for spiritual ceremonies and for survival as food. With all the fresh water it is also abundant with *píftaa* (eagle) and *áyinnimaa* (hawk). It's a magnificent area, one of the most peaceful areas on Earth. This area is still abundant with those animals. The only thing that is missing is *iiní*, the free-roaming buffalo. One of these days soon I hope the buffalo will be able to roam free again.

The Middle Mountains are where, originally in their passing, the *Siksikaitsitapi* (Blackfoot people) went to get their tipi poles.

They went to chop, to get the lodge poles that were abundant in that area, and still are today. Piikani and Kainai people still go up there to get their tipi lodgepoles. Back then they didn't haul tipi poles across the prairies. Everybody was respectful and they leaned them against the trees. There are even stories of tipi pole sharing, leaving poles behind for the next group.

These stories from the old people say for more than 10,000 years, we roamed and travelled this land. We possibly had over 100 bands and each band or clan travelled differently. That's why our traditional territory spans from Big River (the North Saskatchewan River) to the other side of *Ómahksspatsiko* (the Great Sand Hills), to *Otahkoítahtaa* (the Yellowstone River) and *Miitsíistakistsi* (the Rocky Mountains) beyond the Continental Divide.

But times have changed. We have been made to be foreigners in our own homeland, in these mountains. We have been made visitors, and other nations are now settled there, and they're not the visitors. We are, even though we were here first. That is why we need to keep the Blackfoot stories, the old stories, going.

As Blackfoot people, we still pray to those mountains, to the water. We always will pray to our homelands and our territory. There's no other Blackfoot territory in the world. This is our territory.

ABOUT TATSIKI-MIISTÁKIISTSI (CASTLE WILDERNESS)

Much of this area is now part of the 105,000-hectare Castle Provincial Park and Castle Wildland Provincial Park. The parks are home to grizzly and black bears, wolverines, wolves, big horn sheep, cougars, moose and elk as well as an array of bird species. The floral and faunal biodiversity of this landscape is recognized as being the most diverse in Alberta, if not Canada, because of abundance and variety of habitat, and also a unique location where so many species are at the very edge of their range.

ISTS



DID YOU KNOW?

Between 1858 and 1915 there were officially two Castle Mountains in the southern Alberta area. Thomas Blakiston bestowed the name to the iconic massif in what is now the Castle, without knowing that two days prior, James Hector had given the same name to a mountain in Banff National Park. To avoid confusion, the southernmost mountain was officially changed in 1915 to Windsor Ridge with the northern peak called Castle Peak, and the slightly lower southern peak, Windsor Mountain. Comprised of Paleozoic limestone, Windsor Ridge is a geologic anomaly and a relative youngster compared to the older mountains that surround it.

Sources: Naming Canada: Stories About Canadian Place Names by Alan Rayburn and Peaks of the Canadian Rockies.

TOP 4

CASTLE AREA

Great place to eat:

Check out the Twin Butte General Store (Hwy 6, 14 minutes north of Waterton Park) for some of the best Mexican food north of the border.

Hike with breathtaking views:

Table Mountain (8.6 km each way and worth the effort!)

Got kids?

Check out the “Learn to Fish” program at Beaver Mines Lake.

Looking for more hikes and scrambles?

Here are three others that Dave McMurray highly recommends: the hike to Grizzly Lake and Ruby Lake, and for the adventurous, getting there via the ridge walk and scramble on Lys Ridge; the scramble from Pincher Ridge to Victoria Ridge (or vice versa) where you’ll be rewarded with loads of beautiful red, green and yellow rock; and the Middlepass Lakes, including a scramble to the top of Rainy Ridge.



SPIITAWAKASI (LOWELL YELLOWHORN/TALL DEER) SHARES:

WHAT THE CASTLE WILDERNESS MEANS TO ME

The area known as the Castle Wilderness area is a very wonderful place to interact with. I recently bought a fishing boat and have been going to fish the last few summers in the area. Beauvais Lake is a very wonderful area to do this. The lake is small enough to paddle around and not get overstrained.

This area has also been used quite extensively by the Blackfoot tribes as well it has been a traditional area of harvest. One area known as the Crow Eagle Reserve has seen a lot of cultural activity. It has been known to host special resources that the Blackfoot people utilize in their ceremonies. The area also holds a lot of lodgepole pine - the tree utilized for tipi poles. A lot of the Blackfoot people come here to harvest these trees for that purpose.

One summer I was doing some wildland firefighting and fought a blaze known as the Lost Creek Fire. I spent a whole summer in the area battling the fire. I had the opportunity to interact with the area quite extensively with hiking. It is such a beautiful area to engage with. I also have been skiing at Castle Mountain, this is one of the most wonderful ski locations in Alberta from my perspective due to the nature of the location. It is easily accessible, and the crowds are not as large as other ski resorts making it very convenient.

Story and photo by *Spiitawakasi* (Lowell Yellowhorn/Tall Deer)



INTO THE WILD

There is a place. A place with beautiful valleys, where you can get away and enjoy the bounty that nature provides. Recreational opportunities are abundant in this place, which is tucked away in the Rocky Mountains not far from Lethbridge. This place is the Castle Provincial Park and Castle Wildland Provincial Park.

Most people who visit this place are not aware of its unique environment. Plants in this area are common with parts of the interior of British Columbia. The forests in the valleys are abundant with Engelmann spruce, Lodgepole pine, Douglas fir and sub-alpine growths. Many botanical treasures can also be found. If you are looking for huckleberry, mariposa lily and bear grass, this is your place. The eastern valleys in the area host diverse grasslands and native plants, and many rare plants are found here.

If botany is not your thing, then maybe wandering to one of over 30 lakes in the area is more your speed, some of which are easily accessible for daytrips. Beaver Mines, Table Mountain and Castle River are hotspots for camping, hiking, flyfishing and family day trips. In the winter months, Castle Mountain Resort is popular amongst the snow seekers, and many a photographer can be found waiting for the right moment to capture the peaks above.

This is a beautiful place. Maybe it can be your beautiful place.

Story by Aaron Keeling, a student in Lethbridge College's Ecosystem Management degree who will graduate in the spring of 2023.

Sweeping panoramas and picturesque valleys are the hallmarks of the Castle area. In this photo, General Studies instructor Brad Wolcott enjoys a ridge walk on Hollebeke Mountain near South Kootenay Pass.
Photo by Dave McMurray

A STORY OF > AÍSÍNAI'PI WRITING-ON-STONE

WH By *Ninna Piiksii* (Mike Bruised Head/Chief Bird) | photos by Jamin Heller and Sarah Yavitu

As far back as there have been Blackfoot people walking through this area, they have gone to *Aísínai'pi* (Writing-on-Stone). The stories from the old people tell us that there was never a battle there. The Blackfoot have, since time immemorial, looked at *Aísínai'pi* as a sacred site and a safe place for passage. Even the enemy tribes and visiting tribes, they did not battle there. And they did not tamper with those drawings.

The old people say it is a spiritual place, a place of significant human and spiritual import. The valley that includes *Aísínai'pi*, and the whole of *Kínáksisahtai* (Milk River), has probably the most abundant pictographs and petroglyphs in Blackfoot territory and possibly all of North America. Those drawings at *Aísínai'pi* were to be there forever and ever, and they are not to be tampered with. These are places where you make an offering when you visit, of tobacco or berries or a bit of meat.

All of the writing may look simplistic to the viewer. But just one circle is probably 1,000 words. And what's behind that circle, a perfect circle that was drawn with sharp bones or sharp rock? Every petroglyph had to have some very deep significance to be drawn there. And the people who drew these petroglyphs probably had some very deep and profound reason to create that drawing. The early people put their markings on the rocks, and each of them has a story. Each of the drawings

has a story. And so people say 500 years ago they made these drawings. It could be true. And other people say well, why not 5,000 years ago? That also can be true.

It is interesting to ask non-Blackfoot people, before we tell part of the story from a Blackfoot lens, "What did you get out of visiting *Aísínai'pi*? What do you think it means?"

The old people say some of those drawings were not there the day before, and they go back there in the morning, and there would be a new drawing. And the old people would say, the spirits before us made some of those markings.

Many people visit *Aísínai'pi* year after year, and it's an honour that some people have of hearing song, voices and prayers. Others may go over there and never experience anything. And so it's not for them at that time. It all depends on their respect for land, respect for the metaphysical world. And if somebody is not in tune with that, they will not experience that. They will not hear the sounds or voices or singing.

For the *Siksikaitsitapi* (Blackfoot people), we feel it every time we go there. We're so in tune with our ancestors and our lands. Like *Ninaiistáko* (Chief Mountain), we feel something every time we go to *Aísínai'pi*. And so we pray, or we put tobacco, out of respect for the Ancient Ones that we come not to harm them, not to disturb them, not to destroy, but we ask for knowledge through the dream world of what those stories mean.

ABOUT AÍSÍNAI'PI (WRITING-ON-STONE)

The sedimentary rocks exposed in the Milk River valley were formed 85 million years ago at the edge of a great inland sea. Meltwater began eroding the soft sandstone after the last ice age and formed the coulees and hoodoos.



DID YOU KNOW?

A great way to experience Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park and the surrounding landscape is through a day or multi-day canoe or kayak trip. If you don't have your own mode of paddling, you can rent canoes and kayaks in the town of Milk River. Options exist for everything from overnight to week-long trips, depending on where you start. There are also convenient campgrounds along the way, such as popular Poverty Rock. Flow rates drop throughout the summer, with June and July having the highest flow. If you haven't paddled the Milk River before, join a local club or community where you will find plenty of advice and knowledge.

TOP 4

WRITING-ON-STONE

Great place to eat:

Hickory Street BBQ in Stirling (206 4th Avenue) is a delicious place to stop on your way going to or coming back from a day at Writing-on-Stone.

Hike with breathtaking views:

The Hoodoo Trail (5.6 km each way) is one of the coolest hikes around. Bring lots of water and watch for snakes... and make sure you add this to your list this summer!

Got kids?

Even preschoolers can navigate this trail, especially if you happen to come with friends and leave a car on one end so you can ferry the younger hikers back.

Looking for dinosaurs, but don't have time to go to Drumheller?

Stop by Devil's Coulee Dinosaur and Heritage Museum in Warner – home of Canada's first dinosaur nesting site.

DIANE FJORDBOTTEN SHARES:

WHAT MILK RIVER MEANS TO ME

What do the mountains mean to me? I'd like instead to talk about some remarkable southern Alberta landscapes that aren't mountains but are still important to me. First is Devil's Coulee near Warner, where 10 fossilized dinosaur eggs were discovered in 1997. The Devil's Coulee Dinosaur Heritage Museum has both dinosaur fossil displays and artifacts from settlers, but my absolute favourite activity there is the Devil's Coulee site tour. I love walking around the coulees, hunting for fossils in the dry bentonite clay – and finding some! So. Much. Fun.

Second is Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park, which holds a special place in my heart. Hiking and climbing around the hoodoos with their haunting, wind-sculpted shapes are family-favourite activities. The petroglyphs and pictographs on the sandstone cliffs of the Milk River valley tell personal histories of the Blackfoot people, from ancient times through colonization. I was fortunate to have an Indigenous park interpreter on one of my many site tours, and her stories were powerful and meaningful beyond the beauty of the location. She told us that the Blackfoot people believe that the spirits of their ancestors are found in all of nature, and just as she was speaking an enormous, majestic buck appeared at the edge of the cliff. I would swear he listened to her stories while he watched our group for several minutes. This experience was profound and spiritual, and for me it underlined the importance of story and learning from place.

Story and photo by Diane Fjordbotten, coordinator of the Learning Café





GARDENS OF STONE

Have you ever seen a hoodoo? What about a tent rock? How about a fairy chimney? These are just a few of the names of the unusual landforms found at Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park. These sedimentary rocks along the park's valley edge make for an amazing and enlightening stroll upon this UNESCO World Heritage Site. This is a special place – not just for the tourists, but more importantly for the Blackfoot people. The park contains some of the best archeological engravings and drawings on the sandstone walls in the valley.

These sandstone walls and formations developed from what once was the edge of a giant and ancient inland sea. This incredible habitat provides not only unique animal species, but also amazing flowers and cactus. The self-guided trail along these sandstone formations twists and turns along the edge of the Milk River, at one point dropping down to the valley floor to provide views of the sandstone rock walls rising above. Every turn you take provides an opportunity to stop and appreciate something incredible, even if for just a moment.

My advice? Take your camera and take your time. Staying on the trail is important in this area. The sandstone is fragile and easily eroded by excited and eager footsteps. Don't let that discourage you as there are plenty of views, and maybe, just maybe, some appreciative and interesting little finds if you pay attention to the details along the way.

Story and photo by Aaron Keeling

A STORY OF > PAAHTÓMAHKSIMI WATERTON

WH By *Ninna Piiksii* (Mike Bruised Head/Chief Bird) | photos by Dave McMurray and Aaron Keeling

There are several stories about *Paahtómahksikimi* (Waterton). It is a descriptive name, about a lake created by water flowing from ice forming in the middle of the mountains and flowing into prairie. There are not too many lakes like that, from the mountains to the prairie. The *Siksikaitsitapi* (Blackfoot people) are categorized as prairie people, but we are more than that. We are also mountain people. We lived in the mountains. We travelled all over *Paahtómahksikimi*. The elders say we have been at *Paahtómahksikimi* since time immemorial. They talked about the present townsite of Waterton being under ice. Recent findings of tipi rings discovered after the Kenow Fire of 2017 affirm what our elders have said – that we have been here for a very long time.

Everything has a beginning. Everything had to start. Those mountains were given to us, we believe, by our *Náápi* and Creator stories. For hunting, fishing, camping, ceremonies, fasting, vision quests, harvesting plants, animals – it is all there within *Paahtómahksikimi*. There are vision quest sites all throughout the park, and those visions in the mountains guided certain people to which medicinal plants to use. From there, the gifts they were given in terms of healing and doctoring, they passed it on to the people. These were our own natural pharmaceuticals. We knew about those a long time ago.

We not only appreciate the aesthetic beauty of the mountains, but we look to the mountains for what they were truly worth. And that was to get these spiritual energies, this knowledge. That is why they're so sacred to us. Those mountains and the visions that were attained there and given to those special people, 10 or 12 or 50,000 years ago, that is why we're still here.

The medicine people were able to heal us with plants from all the different mountains in *Paahtómahksikimi*. There are plants there that we cannot harvest on the prairies. There is

one valley there where it is the only place to find one particular root. There is no other place like it in Blackfoot territory. Our relationship with the mountains goes far beyond just climbing them. We offer the mountains tobacco, berries, even animal meats, leaving it for these mountain spirits.

Some people cannot comprehend the word spirits or the metaphysical connections in the mountains. It's beyond their thinking. And yet, we as *Siksikaitsitapi*, we knew about this a long time ago. And we still pay respect to those spirits. People who have passed on, we pray in turn to them and call on them for guidance. And so it is with culture and ceremony. A lot of our ceremonies were carried out in *Paahtómahksikimi* before we were forcibly removed, before we became foreigners to our own mountains, before we became visitors. One such ceremony was the Beaver Bundle Ceremony, which was started thousands of years ago after a spiritual experience where the beaver changed into a man and gave the people the beaver pipe and bundle. The last Beaver Bundle Opening ceremony in *Paahtómahksikimi* was in 1926.

In 1858, Thomas Blakiston claimed the mountain there now named after him, and he named the whole area after his friend Sir Charles Waterton – a man who never set foot on that land. That broke wide open the colonial thought of naming mountains after European people. To this day, as *Siksikaitsitapi*, we don't know the names of many of the mountains or passes or lakes in *Paahtómahksikimi*. The elders tell of stories that each mountain had its own spiritual name and even a spiritual song. The stories and songs have been absent since colonial settlement.

It is important for Blackfoot names to make a comeback. The park should be bilingual, and it should include Blackfoot names and signs. The mountains have their own songs.

ABOUT PAAHTÓMAHKSIKIMI (WATERTON)

Waterton was Canada's fourth national park and, at 505 square kilometres, is the smallest in the Canadian Rockies. More than half of Alberta's plant species are found in Waterton.

KIMI



DID YOU KNOW?

Two favourite destinations for hikers, Bertha Lake and Bertha Peak, are named after Bertha Ekelund, whose father was one of Waterton's first park rangers. During the summers of 1913 and 1914, M.P. Bridgland, who was responsible for naming many mountains in Alberta, took a romantic interest in Bertha when he was stationed in Waterton, eventually naming the peak after her. A similarly smitten young warden, changed the name of Spirit Lake to Bertha Lake as part of his courtship attempt. Bertha, who took pride in being the first non-Indigenous woman to explore many of the area's mountains and valleys, may have also run a local gambling ring before becoming a fugitive counterfeiter. She was apprehended by the RCMP as she tried to escape to B.C. using the backcountry routes she once loved to explore. Recent Blackfoot interpretations suggest the Blackfoot name for Bertha Peak is *Akiihtaikiistakoo* (Woman Spirit Mountain).

Source: Being Bertha: How a Wayward Woman Became a Local Legend by Fran Genereux.

KERRY EDWARDS SHARES:

WHAT WATERTON MEANS TO ME

Southern Alberta is blessed with so many incredible places. Just imagine, Alberta has six World Heritage Sites designated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization – and five just happen to be here in southern Alberta. Our province has over one-quarter of the 20 World Heritage Sites in Canada, and that really speaks to the diversity of the landscape and the rich Indigenous culture.

Having been involved with parks and protected areas (PPA) most of my career, camping has always been a big component in my life. Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park is one of my favourite places, and wanting to get closer to the area, my wife and I explored the idea of finding a permanent campsite we could call our home away from home. In 2016, we found a spot on the Waterton River, which is just over 30 minutes from the Waterton Lakes National Park gate and also accessible to many other great locations in the Pincher/Crowsnest area.

Waterton has always been a special place for me since first going to the location as a Lethbridge Community College student in the early 1980s. Once discovered, it soon was a destination for many weekends and later in life summer vacations. The landscape of southern Alberta is so dynamic you can move from mountains to grasslands to badlands easily within the same day. I have spent over 40 years within PPA Management, either learning about parks, managing parks, or teaching about park management here at the college and I can't think of a better place to live and recreate than southern Alberta.

Story by Kerry Edwards (Renewable Resource Management 1983) | photo by Aaron Keeling



TOP 4 WATERTON

Great place to eat:

There are so many wonderful places to eat in Waterton village, but our editor's family tradition starts with a fully loaded hotdog at Wieners of Waterton followed by a scoop (or two) of ice cream.

Hike with breathtaking views:

Bear's Hump (in the village) is short, steep and worth every step. If you have friends visiting who have never seen the Rocky Mountains, this 2.8 km trail, which was rebuilt and rehabilitated after the 2017 Kenow Wildfire, should be on your list.

Got kids?

Let them scramble, splash and study stones in Red Rock Canyon, a 0.7 km loop on the way to Cameron Lake.

Love a thrill?

National Geographic rated the Crypt Lake hike as one of the "World's 20 Most Thrilling Hikes" – and our team can confirm that claim! Starting with a boat ride from the village townsite, this is a memorable and mind-blowing adventure.

THE SECRET LIFE OF PLANTS

Tucked away in the southwest corner of Alberta is a place everyone needs to visit at least once in their life. Waterton Lakes National Park is one of Canada's most beautiful places and represents a significant biodiversity with its four ecoregions: alpine, subalpine, montane and foothills parkland. With these four ecoregions are an unusually high number of more than 1,000 rare plant species. The park is graced with numerous flowers such as the fairy slipper and, of course, everyone's favorite, bear grass!

What most people do not know is that Waterton is also home to 175 plant and flower species that are considered provincially rare, and 20 of these can only be found in the Waterton area. Eight of these are moonwort (or grapefern), and the park has its very own: the Waterton Moonwort (*Botrychium x watertonense*) is the rarest plant found in the area. Unfortunately, it is not always visible because it spends most of its life underground, only producing one emergent leaf anywhere from three to eight years apart. When it does decide to peek into our world, it does so in such seclusion that most visitors to the park never see it.

So as Lethbridge College Environmental Science instructor Henry Komadowski would always ask during his lectures: "What is the most important thing you should carry if you are out in the forest?" Your camera, of course!

Story and photo by Aaron Keeling



A STORY OF > OMAHKAI'STOO CROWSNEST MOUNTAIN

WH By *Ninna Piiksii* (Mike Bruised Head/Chief Bird) | photos by Shanda Webber and Andrew Nugara

This is a story of *Omahkai'stoo* (Crowsnest Mountain/Big Raven Mountain). You have already heard about how Raven's home place was originally *Ninaistáko* (Chief Mountain), and how when Raven and Thunder got all of that settled, they agreed that Thunder would now occupy *Ninaistáko*, and Raven would go to live at *Omahkai'stoo*. (See story on p. 15).

As the old people say, *Omahkai'stoo* continually reminds Thunder to treat people well. And *Omahkai'stoo* looks out for the people in what we now call the Crowsnest Pass, as that pass has always been used by the *Siksikaitsitapi* (Blackfoot people) to reach the interior of British Columbia and even the coast. *Omahkai'stoo* is a marker, a guide, and that's why it stands alone. That way, Raven can see far and wide. And Raven protects and guides the people through their journey through the mountains.

Omahkai'stoo wasn't only used by the Blackfoot people. It is also used by the animals, and it was a guide for the larger four-legged beings and all the other smaller, four-legged animals too. They, also, use *Omahkai'stoo* as a marker to know which direction they should go. And the birds that migrate use it, as a guide to know where to go when they move on. And those birds that stay year-round, they look at the Raven – now we call it the crow – they look at that as their home. The crow never leaves. There are a lot of crows all over. They

don't migrate. They feel safe in that area, and through all the mountains where they live.

Many *Siksikaitsitapi* would go to this area to fast, just as much as they do at *Ninaistáko*. They have fasted there from time immemorial. The *Siksikaitsitapi* also used to camp a lot around *Omahkai'stoo*, back in what they would call the dog days. There are still a lot of tipi rings and sacred rock mounds there. The buffalo went way up there as there was a lot of good water, and you can still find today buffalo skulls and bones.

But the people have been pushed back. The land now is not part of our Blackfoot and Piikani reserves, and we've lost that history of it. We've been pushed away. The colonial impact has taken this knowledge of the mountains away, and some of the mountain culture and mountain language – the names of all the beings and animals and plants and trees. Now we live in the prairie. We don't know the names of all of those trees.

The same is true of a lot of ceremonies from way back in the day. There is so much history that we've been disconnected from. But I think we can reconnect. It all comes back to the spiritual aspect of reconnecting with land.

Omahkai'stoo is a guiding protective mountain. That's why it stands all by itself. It almost stands away from the mountain range. I've heard our elders call it All Alone Mountain, and it has the respect of the human, spiritual and animal world.

ABOUT OMAHKAI'STOO (CROWSNEST MOUNTAIN)

Elevation: 2,785 m The Crowsnest Pass is the richest archaeological zone in the Canadian Rockies.

The oldest relics are stone tools found on a rock ridge outside Frank, Alta., from more than 10,000 years ago, at the end of the last glacial period.



DID YOU KNOW?

Andy Good Peak is named for one of the area's more colourful settlers. A former Montreal detective, Andy married his American sweetheart, Kate, and the two set off on their honeymoon to find gold in the Klondike. They ended up in the Pass where they opened the Summit, a hotel that straddled the B.C.-Alberta border. Depending on which provincial liquor laws were the most liberal at any given time, they would move the bar from one end of the building to the other. A unique attraction at the hotel was a zoo that featured a tamed bear named Jim, a cougar named Leo, a monkey and an alligator. The Summit was renowned across North America for its fine food and dining. Unfortunately, despite her entrepreneurial skill in building the Summit, Kate was omitted from the mountain's name.

Sources: "The Top 'O' The World" Lethbridge Herald, April 14, 1923; John Kinnear, "Tracing the Flow of the Crow"; Canadian Mountain Place Names: The Rockies and Columbia Mountains by Glen W. Boles, Roger W. Laurilla, and William Lowell Putnam; 50 Roadside Panoramas in the Canadian Rockies by Dave Birrell.

TOP 4

CROWSNEST PASS

Great place to eat:

You can't go wrong with a cinnamon bun from the Cinnamon Bear Café in Coleman (8342 20th Avenue).



Hike with a breathtaking view:

Take a trip to the wreckage of a 1946 RCAF airplane crash that sits below Mt. Coulthard and Mt. Parrish. Located about 7.5 km from the North Lost Creek trailhead, the site also serves as a quick stopover before a scramble to the summit of Mt. Coulthard.

Got kids?

Take an hour or two to explore the stories and sights at the Frank Slide Interpretive Centre (and make sure you don't miss the easy 1.5 km hike on the interpretive trail).

Want to go back in time?

Visit the old Lille Townsite to check out coke ovens, fire hydrants, and building foundations that date to the turn of the 20th century – and get a better understanding of the coal mining history of the Crowsnest Pass.

AMBER BAGU SHARES:

WHAT THE MOUNTAINS MEAN TO ME

To me, the mountains mean heritage, home, comfort, beauty, peace and adventure. I grew up on an acreage west of Coleman (Willow Drive), with the river literally in my backyard and the mountains at the front. My grandparents moved to Willow Drive in the 1930s and had nine children. Three of those children then spread out to other acreages in Willow Drive, including my mother.

My childhood memories include walking to my grandparents' house and seeing wildlife along the way (funniest was the badger I thought was my grandmother's dog and was trying to chase into the yard; he didn't like that!); swimming in the river with the family in the summer and Dad coming straight from work to join us; walking in the mountains with my brother and the dogs; rescuing said brother when he got his 4x4 stuck somewhere in the back of beyond; and harvesting the produce of the mountains—fish, raspberries, strawberries, elderberries (for wine, of course), huckleberries, saskatoons, black currants, mushrooms, plants for herbal remedies, and the list goes on.

Of course, I cannot forget the beautiful sunrises and sunsets I saw almost daily. I slept with my window open almost all the time and would awaken with the birds. I really miss hearing the ravens gurgling in the morning. I do not miss, though, the deer flies in the summer and the icy roads in the winter. I still enjoy the mountains on day trips in the summer. Lovely mountains.

Story by Amber Bagu | photo by Shanda Webber





WHERE EAGLES DARE

There are two eagle species in Alberta, the bald and the golden. People can occasionally see bald eagles in the Lethbridge area, but did you know that the Crowsnest Pass area is one of the best areas to observe a biannual golden eagle migration?

In the spring, large numbers of golden eagles can be seen flying through the area in narrow streams in the sky. They fly north to Alaska and Yukon from as far south as northern Mexico. The migration begins in late February, and the peak period lasts until the end of April. In fall, the route reverses, and the eagles can be seen from mid-September to November.

Ridgetops become nightly roosts until the first light of dawn, and the eagles' daily movement in the sky ends as soon as it becomes dark. A good bird spotter can sometimes find the eagles resting on the peaks for the evening.

For those who enjoy birding or bird photography, the journey to a small handful of designated observation sites in the area would make for an amazing outing, even for novices. Although the weather may not always cooperate and the skies may be clouded over, there is always a chance that your trip will be worthwhile.

Story by Aaron Keeling | photo by Kerri Martin

FOUR STORIES OF > KAAWAHKÓÍTSI LETHBRIDGE'S COULEES

WH By *Ninna Piiksii* (Mike Bruised Head/Chief Bird) | photos by Shanda Webber and Andrew Nugara

I am going to share some stories about the *kaawahkóistsi* (coulees) around *sikóóhkotoki* (Lethbridge), that were told to me by my grandparents and elders from Kainai. If you look at the landscape of the traditional Blackfoot territory, you will quickly understand that coulees are always close to waterways. So the first story about coulees is about the movement of the Blackfoot people. Imagine going on a journey, being part of a clan or a band – 100, 500 or 2,000 people – travelling on foot with your belongings. There are children and elders. Each clan or band had a group of scouts, young men who could run, swim, go into warfare. These scouts would navigate and guide the people, running ahead and checking out the whole area.

In the summer, you would navigate across the rivers by walking on foot. And coulees would help you cross. Not every coulee was walking friendly. Scouts would have to find the best place to cross the river where it was shallow and safe for elders. Thousands of years ago, scouts knew the coulees and they knew the rivers. And the coulees and rivers all had a name.

After the walking days, horses made travelling a little bit quicker. But they still had to manoeuvre the rivers. And more coulees could be used to navigate going down and back up from the river. Now there are tracks and if you really observe, you can see the ruts of the travois on the tops of some coulees.

The second story of *kaawahkóistsi* is that they were almost like alleyways for hunters. Hunters knew where the animals

went down to drink water and where they came up. Hunters would manoeuvre in the coulees so the wind wouldn't carry their scent, so the animals will not smell the humans. The coulees – as alleyways – would help the hunter harvest the game.

The third story of *kaawahkóistsi* is that you could find berries there, many natural berry patches. People knew where to go to pick berries, and there were names for these berry spots. And those names are gone. I would encourage the reader to find out some of the names we know – for the coulees and for places in all of southern Alberta. People today – like the Blackfoot people since time immemorial – can use the coulees as a place to rest away from the wind.

The fourth story about *kaawahkóistsi* is that they are a place to find medicine. Not all medicines that we harvest grow in the coulees, but many do. The same medicines that we harvest for human consumption, the animals also ate, and so imagine how healthy they are for us to eat.

We give thanks for the *kaawahkóistsi*. I hope people will go to the coulees and think about where the Blackfoot people may have crossed and look for the alleyways the hunters may have used, and find the berries in summertime, and think about where the medicines might grow. The coulees are a living part of nature. These stories bring out the living contributions of the coulees. The coulees are alive. They will always be there. They are our friends.

ABOUT KAAWAHKÓÍTSI (LETHBRIDGE'S COULEES)

Coulees are the steep-sided, v-shaped valleys found along the river throughout Lethbridge. They – and the coulees throughout southern Alberta – were formed when the last glaciers retreated from the area, and they have been eroded by water and wind over time. Coulees are a sanctuary for wildlife and home to hundreds of native plant species. The word coulee comes from the Canadian French *coulée*, from the French work *couler*, which means “to flow.”



DID YOU KNOW?

If you can't make it to mountains, you can enjoy your own "urban mountains" in the coulees. It is possible to plan hikes that allow you to match the elevation gains of small to medium-sized mountains while taking in a variety of interesting scenery. You may even discover some fossils along the way! You can also enjoy some technical climbing, as Lethbridge College instructor Brad Wolcott demonstrates in his parody (but also serious) guidebook, *Selected Alpine Climbs in the Coulees of Lethbridge*. In it, he details 26 of the 94 technical climbs he has completed, including the special tools and techniques that he uses.



BRAD WOLCOTT SHARES:

WHAT THE COULEES MEAN TO ME

I love the coulees because they have led to many pointless adventures. With a little imagination (along with a heavy dose of stupidity), one can find all sorts of things to do in them. White water canoeing down a stream. Building obstacle courses with fallen logs. Spelunking in a tunnel. Alpine climbing up a ridge of dirt. You can do all of these things by yourself. Nevertheless, stupid and pointless activities are always more fun with others. As such, I love to venture into the coulees with my family and friends. Furthermore, the fun will continue after you return home. You can regale your “non-coulee friends” with epic stories of adventure. Likewise, you can remind your “coulee friends” of all the fun that you had together. My friends and I still talk about our escapades. Mark falling into Six Mile Creek and having to attend a meeting afterwards. Lance canoeing through thicket after thicket of thorny buffalo berries. Jeff tentatively squirming over a sheet of ice, only to fall through halfway across. Dave wondering if a belay anchor placed into dirt is actually a good idea. Great times!

Story and photo by Brad Wolcott

TOP 4

THE COULEES

Great place to eat:

Lethbridge College’s Garden Court Restaurant has one of the city’s best views of the coulees. Enjoy student cooking and the beauty of our region by booking a table at facebook.com/LCGardenCourt or calling 403 320 3230.

Hike with a breathtaking view:

Be sure to check out the newly opened *lissksiniip* (Coming to Know and Learn) Coulee Walk, which was unveiled in September as part of Truth and Reconciliation Week and starts just behind the college.

Got kids?

They can learn about plants, animals, soil and air at Lethbridge College’s Environmental Explorer Junior camps in July – including those in the coulees behind campus. Check out this and other great camps for young learners at lethbridgecollege.ca/summercamps.

Want to learn more?

Stop by the Helen Schuler Nature Centre, which opened in 1982 and offers a wide range of interactive experiences that connect people to their local natural heritage. It’s open year-round and always worth a visit.



The prairie crocus is actually not a crocus; it is an anemone (*Anemone patens*) and found in the buttercup family. This furry perennial flowers in the spring and is known as a pasqueflower, getting its name from Passover.

SPLENDOUR IN THE GRASS

The coulees are a special place for me. They tell me that I am home. They tell me that I need to slow down and focus on what is important. They tell me to listen.

If anyone reading this has spent time in the coulees in Lethbridge, I praise you. If not, we should talk. I will even guide you in the right direction.

Most of us take for granted that we have an amazing ecological area right in the city. It is a place teeming with biodiversity and distinct species. The coulees represent our river valley, wetlands, cottonwood forests, and municipally designated parkland. It is a place that demands attention, whether you just want to stop and enjoy the view, go for a stroll, or discover it in more detail.

This is where things change a bit. Although it is a beautiful space, it is delicate. It needs to be cared for, just as if it was our own. Amongst the tufted grasses in the coulee is a small native grass named red three-awn. Its floret is purplish red at maturity and can be found amongst cheatgrass and blue grama, other grasses in the area. It is also a species of concern and considered endangered in various areas.

The coulees are an everchanging community of biotic function, and they deserve respect from those who use it. And yes, there is natural erosion present along the hills, and at times it may not look like anything is alive because the weather is so hot and dry. Maybe this is all part of the plan. If we take good care of it, it will take good care of us.

Story and photo by Aaron Keeling

NEVER ENOUGH NATURE

The *Wider Horizons* team reminds all people who head out into Blackfoot territory to respect the land we share and leave only footprints. We also encourage you to share stories of your journeys with your family and friends when you get back home – and we would love to see photos of the places that matter to you, too.

Email photos of your favourite places to WHMagazine@lethbridgecollege.ca or post them on social media (and tag @lethcollege), and we'll add them to our slideshow!

WH