



Burgess Shale Area Planning Strategy

Background: Yoho & Kootenay National Parks

A Need for Change

The revised management plans for Yoho and Kootenay national parks will reflect renewed emphasis on integrated management of the Burgess Shale sites.

Background

- The Burgess Shale contains remarkably preserved marine animals from the middle Cambrian period, 505 million years ago. One of the most significant fossil discoveries in the world, it was recognized by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site in 1981, making the protection and presentation of the sites and fossil collections an international obligation.
- People can only visit the two main Burgess Shale fossil sites in Yoho National Park as part of a guided hike led by the Burgess Shale Geoscience Foundation.
- In honour of the centennial of the discovery of the Burgess Shale by Charles D. Walcott in 1909, Parks Canada will launch a new Burgess Shale initiative.

Existing Management Plan Direction

To strengthen the protection and presentation of the Burgess Shale component of the Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks World Heritage Site.

The plan provides specific direction to support appropriate research, update the inventory of fossil collections, increase interpretation of Burgess Shale fossils, and control access to the sites.

Both the Yoho and Kootenay management plans designate all Burgess Shale sites as Zone I – Special Preservation Areas.

Considerations

- A new *Burgess Shale Management Framework* will provide strategic direction for protection, visitor experience, education and research.
- To make the Burgess Shale accessible to more people, Parks Canada will offer guided hikes to the Walcott Quarry and Mount Stephen fossil beds. These hikes will offer broad-based interpretation of the mountain environment, cultural heritage and the Burgess Shale, complementing the more specific earth science hikes offered by the Geoscience Foundation.
- The agreement between Parks Canada and the Burgess Shale Geoscience Foundation to offer guided hikes has expired. A new agreement is under development.
- The Yoho visitor centre will renew and expand the Burgess Shale exhibits to provide more stimulating educational opportunities to a large number of visitors.
- All Burgess Shale sites in the two parks will continue to be managed as Zone I – Special Preservation Areas. Strong measures are required to protect key sites from fossil theft and vandalism.

- Parks Canada will encourage appropriate scientific research to improve understanding of Burgess Shale type fossil locations in Yoho and Kootenay as well as of the sites' fauna, geological context, and the palaeoecology of the middle Cambrian period.

Future Directions

Parks Canada welcomes public comments on the following proposed direction for the revised management plan.

Provide a summary of the strategic direction in the *Burgess Shale Management Framework*, including a timetable for implementation.

Submit Burgess Shale research proposals for peer-review as part of the Parks Canada Research and Collection Permit System.

Offer interpretive hikes, led by Parks Canada staff, to the Walcott Quarry and Mount Stephen fossil beds.

Negotiate a new agreement for third-party guided hikes to the Burgess Shale.

Reduce the maximum group size for guided hikes to the Walcott and Mount Stephen fossil sites.

Permit excavation on Fossil Ridge and Mount Stephen as part of legitimate scientific research only if questions cannot be answered using existing fossil collections and peer reviews support the research.