

BOOK REVIEW - 1990

By Yorke Edwards, 663 Radcliffe Lane, Victoria, British Columbia V8S 5B8

TITLE: Nature Wells Gray

By Trevor Goward and Cathie Hickson. 1989. The Friends of Wells Gray Park, Box 1386, Kamloops. xv+ 190 pp., illus. \$9.95.

Wells Gray Provincial Park is mostly wilderness, a mountainous landscape unique in many ways. This is a book equally unique which does the park full justice with good reading, high quality illustrations, and a format demanding frequent browsing. In my experience it establishes new standards for layout and content introducing the geology, biology, and ecology of a large and wild area.

The most accessible half of the park, traversed by a road, holds abundant evidence of geologically recent vulcanism. With its cinder cones, lava flows, and other evidence of connections with Earth's molten depths, this area is, geologically speaking, among the most interesting landscapes in the province. Accounts of these features are based on the thorough explorations of co-author Cathie Hickson.

Highlights and revelations of the flora and fauna are equally well treated. The area is rich biologically, and with its several life zones ranging from a bit of steppe bunchgrass country to considerable areas of alpine-arctic heights, understandings can come only after much travel and alert observations. This is no quick regional guide among the many written following a few short hikes. Trevor Goward lives there, a naturalist in all seasons; Cathie Hickson studied the area for her doctoral thesis in geology. The authors' experience ranges throughout the region featured and their interest extend from mountains to hot springs, from thread-like lichen in highest mountain tops to moose in the valleys bottoms, and from why the month of June is the key to the park's rain forest to an account of the insects active on the deep snows of February.

The writing is lively and briefly detailed with an unerring gift of finding the right words for explaining appearances, selected relationships, ecological processes, and biological strategies. Page layouts are imaginative with most two-page spreads having on-going text mixed with one to five other features such as photographs, drawings, maps, tables, and boxed texts on especially noteworthy subjects. It sounds confusing, but somehow it works well. In 205 pages there are 141 photographs (all black and white), 59 small marginal drawings (most of plants and animals), 54 boxed texts (many of them quotations, or direct contributions from other authors), and four maps. A full chapter deals with winter. Helpful references of best field guides are in the text, and there is a long list of major references.

This book has two outstanding values. It is a superb introduction to a unique park. It is also, in my opinion, a standard of high quality worth following when introducing living landscapes to the public.