

## **Sibbald Flat Trail**

You are part of a camping tradition at Sibbald Lake that spans at least 11,000 years — and several cultures. See how these stories unfold by walking this 1 km (.6 mile) trail, accompanied by a brochure — and your thoughts.

### **Ancient Footsteps**

**(Stop 1)** *11,000 years ago ... a prehistoric hunter carefully chips a stone spearpoint — destined to kill a camel. Heat waves shimmer from the grasslands.*

*200 years ago ... an Assiniboine man readies his bow for the approach of the cow bison. Aspen leaves block his view.*

*100 years ago ... a rancher curses the weather as he rounds up stray cattle. Rain lashes the pine forest.*

*50 years ago ... a Stoney Indian weaves freshly-cut willows into the walls of a sweat lodge. The setting sun still warms the open meadow.*

Why did you come to the Sibbald Recreation Area? It is likely that your decision was influenced by what the area has to offer: scenic views, a lake for fishing, forested trails for walking, or a quiet campsite.

In August, 1983 a team of archaeologists uncovered an array of artifacts at a site two kilometres south of where you now stand. Bone chips, stone flakes and arrowheads tell a story about the people who have stayed here. Your overnight visit is one in a long succession of temporary camps in the foothills.

Now, think about *your* camping spot. If you were \_ to leave your belongings there for 50, 100 or even 200 years ... what might a future archaeologist say about your lifestyle?

### **11,000 Years Ago. Hunting Camels**

**(Stop 2)** Grasping his stone-tipped spear, the hunter crouches behind the trees and surveys the field below. Heat shimmers from the grassland. There is no breeze to carry his scent to the feeding herd. Quietly, the hunter adjusts the skins on his shoulders — they are the camouflage he needs to get close to the camels.

He nods to the other hunters, and they all stalk downwind, circling the herd. With a loud cry, the hunter waves his arms and stamps the ground. A dozen spears hiss through the air as the frightened animals turn to run. Limping, a female camel falls back from the others and the hunters rush forward. A final spear brings the camel down.

**(Stop 3)** After a feast of fresh meat, the man and woman settle beside the fire. The woman pulls the camel skin toward her, a bone flesher in her hand. Silently, she scrapes the fat from the hide.

The hunter lays a carefully chosen flake of quartzite on his lap, using a worn piece of hide to protect his legs. He takes an antler point and presses hard against the edge of the flake. A small chip breaks off. As more pieces fall, the spearpoint takes shape with a distinctive fluted base.

The woman stirs the dying fire with a stick. The hunter leans back, satisfied with his new tool. There will be more meat in the days ahead.

*11,000 years ago, prehistoric hunters lived on the borders of the glacial icesheets which still covered much of the land to the north and west of here.*

*The people followed migrating herds of camels, woolly mammoth and bison to the flats. It was a good place to camp; sheltered from cold north winds, with a ready supply of firewood.*

## **200 years ago an Assiniboine camp**

**(Stop 4)** The young girl bent down with her willow basket, searching for wild onions. Her black braids swung with the rhythm of digging and pulling. Suddenly, she stopped. She cocked her head and squinted through the trees to the field below.

She was an Assiniboine, one of the "People Who Cook With Hot Stones". She travelled with a small nomadic band that followed game along the foothills and mountains.

The running figure of a man caught her attention. Her face brightened. The hunting party must have killed a bison from the herd they found beside the creek.

This was good. With a source of fresh meat, her people would stay longer in the sheltered valley, safe from warring Blackfoot parties. There would be feasting and dancing.

The girl straightened up, her willow basket almost full. Then she spied a ripe strawberry, and laughed aloud in the aspen grove.

**(Stop 5)** Resonant drumbeats echoed through the aspens to where the young girl stood. She had left the circle of dancing, for her mind was crowded with the news the scouts had brought.

There was talk of a great sickness among the Plains people — a white man's sickness that left many families dead. The men were excited about raiding the Blackfoot camp tomorrow. They would bring honour to the band by taking many horses. Then, the whole band would move again, farther into the safety of the mountains. There was talk of change.

The girl fingered the blue trade beads at her throat, and ran her hand along the porcupine quillwork on her doeskin tunic. The pattern was one Old Grandmother had taught her.

*Native populations camped here for hundreds of years. However, the arrival of the white man, smallpox epidemics and the elimination of the bison threatened traditional ways of life.*

*Today, Stoney Indians occupy part of their original territory along the Bow River near Morley. The Stoney Nation is active in encouraging native economic development and preserving cultural identity.*

## **100 years ago...the first round-up**

**(Stop 6)** "Ranching? You bet it was something to be a rancher in the early days.

Not a bit like today, I'll tell you.

Of course the buffalo had been gone years before most of the cattle were brought up from Montana, and the cattle we had were roaming free. We'd follow them as far as they'd graze up the valley, through unsettled land. No towns, no farms, no fences.

Lots of folks figured we were crazy to bring cattle into the hills, but we did it. There was a fine piece of grazing land near the front ranges of the Rockies, which was on an old Indian trail. There was lots of water, and the grass grew like you never see it now.

You know, as bad as those winters got, our cattle made it — what with the wind blowing down and keeping the flats clear of snow. Come spring, we were all ready for the round-up. Yes sir, the round-up was what we ranched for in the early days..."

*The name Sibbald Flat comes from its ranching tradition. The Sibbalds were one of the first families to settle in this area, in 1875.*

*Because the nearest post for supplies was Fort Benton, Montana, the Sibbald boys joined the annual caravans which brought back food, materials, and Longhorn steers.*

*Frank, the youngest son, took some of the cattle to these open grasslands and became the area's first rancher.*

*Grazing leases came into effect in 1910, with the Bow Crow Forest Reserve. Later, with public input, the government created a resource management policy for the Eastern Slopes. This policy states that the land is to be zoned for levels of protection and a variety of activities.*

*That is why you may see cattle grazing alongside camping and picnic areas, or pass logging trucks on the road. For the same reasons, hundreds of kilometres of both hiking and equestrian trails have been developed throughout Kananaskis Country.*

**(Stop 7)** "...Each man had a good slicker, as he had to be out in all kinds of weather. And in foothill country, that means just about anything: cold, wet rain, late snowfalls or those mean spring winds. We would camp out on the trail and I well remember rolling my blanket up in my slicker and sleeping like that. We were up at daybreak for a big meal of beef, potatoes, bread and jam. We'd swallow lots of strong black coffee. We worked the range all day, bringing the cattle back near the wagon. The herd had to be watched day and night, because the animals were wild and hard to hold. I can still hear the shouts of the riders and the bawling of the calves.

Oh, ranching has changed since those days. Now fences keep the cattle in and we share the land with a lot more people. And now it's my boys who are running cattle on those flats. Still, when I get on a horse and ride out into those hills, it all comes back."

## 50 years ago a celebration

**(Stop 8)** The old man's fingers curled around a damp willow branch, weaving the pliable wand with ease. His hands moved quickly and smoothly, for they had fashioned sweat lodges for many summers. As the old man worked, he scanned the field. It was a familiar flurry of activity.

Families were noisily greeting one another, setting up their tipis, preparing food, talking; men were gathering in ceremonial dress and the fragrance of freshly cut poplar filled the air. The people were assembled for the most sacred, most joyful religious celebration of the year.

For a moment, the old man's eyes misted, and he no longer saw the sun-drenched meadow. Instead he heard the voice of his grandfather, and the slow, rhythmic beat of a skin drum.

"In a long ago time, there was a girl who was lovely beyond belief ..."

**(Stop 9)** "... And Scarface, who loved the maiden, made the long journey to the home of the Sun. The Sun said, 'My power brings life to all things, it brings light and beauty to the world. Your praying should show honour and respect: Build me a lodge, round as the Sun, with arched sticks ...' So the Sun taught Scarface the rites of the Sun Dance, which he took back to his people. To this day, each year as the Moon of the Ripening Berries shines, the Dance is performed as was taught and the story of Scarface and the maiden comes alive.

The old man blinked, a lingering ray of sunlight bringing him back to the present. He sat back and surveyed the newly built sweat lodge and nodded to himself.

Today the ceremony began once more.

*The Sun Dance has been performed in these foothills for longer than memory recalls.*

*The lodge across from you was part of the ceremony which took place here in June, 1984. It is left for time and weather to dismantle.*

*Please respect the Indians' religious symbol, leave the site undisturbed and allow the changing seasons to do their work.*

## **Today**

**(Stop 10)** The story doesn't end here. Today, cattle replace camels on the rangeland, and tipis have given way to trailers. History continues, and you are part of it. Today's chapter has many different characters:

- As the rider points her horse toward the distant hills, she settles comfortably in her saddle.
- A man examines the leaves of a low-growing shrub, while his son searches through the pages of a field guide.
- A couple sits by the lakeshore, fishing rods forgotten as the setting sun warms the western sky.
- Campers fill the seats at the amphitheatre: an interpretive program on the Sibbald history begins. The camping tradition continues at Sibbald

## **But what about tomorrow?**

*The number of people visiting here over the next ten years will likely surpass the total number who have come before. The land will support large numbers of recreationists as well as wildlife and cattle. Also, renewable resources such as timber will be harvested in selected areas.*

*The land has to be shared by many, and the guidelines of Kananaskis Country help in this sharing. Through careful planning and management, the camping tradition can remain a part of the foothills story.*

## **What part will you play?**