



LAND BETWEEN THE MOUNTAINS

Sandwiched between the Coast Mountains to the west and the Columbia and Rocky Mountains to the east, the Interior Dry Plateau is one of Canada's most diverse natural regions. Choose your clothes carefully for a hike here - within a few miles you can walk from parched "desert-like" conditions on valley bottoms, through moist sub-alpine forests to alpine tundra on mountain tops.



Chilcotin River Valley

THE LAND:

This natural region is characterized by flat or rolling plains, the result of immense lava outpourings 60 million years ago. The plains are dissected by deep narrow valleys, gorges and long, narrow lakes. Hell's Gate, famous with rafters on the Fraser River, is the best known of the river gorges typical of this region.

Lying in the rainshadow of the Coast and Cascade ranges, the region basks under almost guaranteed summer sun. In the parched bottomlands, the temperature can



Prickly Pear Cactus

rise to an oven-like 35 degrees Celsius or more. Due to the dry conditions, many species of wildlife occur, in Canada, only in the southern portion of the region where dryness combine with high temperatures produces desert-like conditions.

VEGETATION:

This is one of the most ecologically diverse regions in Canada, and a significant portion of the region's biota is found nowhere else in the country.

In the deepest valleys where the rainshadow effect is strongest is a mosaic of open ponderosa pine forests, sagebrush and bunchgrass. This is cowboy country, an almost-desert unique in Canada, where cactus, sagebrush, bitterroot, bitterbush and other species thrive. Above the open rangelands, forests of Douglas fir darken the higher plateau country. At still higher elevations, on moister slopes, is a narrow band where Engelmann spruce and alpine fir are the climax species. As a result of past fires, lodgepole pine is now the most common species in this zone. Finally, at the highest



Rob Gardner

This dry grassland between Osoyoos and Greenwood, B.C., gives way to coniferous trees in the moister sites. Note the long needles of the pine in the foreground, and the shorter needles of spruce behind. The haze from forest fires has become a regular summer situation.

Aboriginal Peoples

Parks and Natural Areas

South Okanagan - Similkameen
national park proposal

Further Information

[British Columbia Wine Association](#)
[Tourism Prince George](#)

Main Communities

Kelowna
Penticton
Kamloops
Williams Lake
Prince George

Land Uses

Logging
Ranching
Orchards
Vineyards
Tourism
Mining



British Columbia Wine Association

The mild winters and hot, sunny summers have made the Okanagan Valley an ideal locale for orchards. Over the last ten years, many farmers have changed to growing grapes instead. A little farther north, the moister conditions make Salmon Arm and Shuswap Lake (below) less suitable for agriculture, but houseboat vacations have soared in popularity.



RobGardner

Natural Region 3

elevations, patches of alpine tundra cover the mountain slopes.

Not only is there a significant altitudinal gradient within the region, but also a major latitudinal gradient; desert vegetation at the Canada-United States border gives way to boreal spruce forest at the northern end of the region in central B.C.

WILDLIFE:

The Interior Dry Plateau is home to a host of creatures that slither, scuttle, hop, run, glide and hover in the driest, deepest desert-like valleys: the pygmy horned lizard, western blue-tailed skink, tailed frog, Great Basin Spadefoot Toad, alligator lizard, rubber boa, yellowed-bellied racer, canyon wren, white-throated swift, white-headed woodpecker, black-chinned hummingbird (Canada's smallest bird), and California bighorn sheep. Scorpions and rattlesnakes are also encountered. And, of course, Lake Okanagan is the haunt of the mythological Ogopogo, Canada's most famous lake monster. These species, uncommon in Canada outside of Natural Region 3, share the region with more familiar creatures such as grizzly bears, mountain goats, wolverines, mountain caribou, badgers, white-tailed jackrabbits and cougars.

The almost-deserts of the driest valley bottoms - and their associated species- are among the rarest and most threatened habitats in Canada. Cattle ranching, sheep grazing and cultivation have already destroyed much of this arid habitat and reduced the populations of species already limited in number.

STATUS OF NATIONAL PARKS:

No national parks have been established in this region. The extent of development including land uses that are incompatible

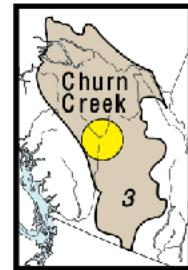


Cougar

with national parks - urban growth, logging, sports hunting, ranching - is making this one of the most challenging unrepresented regions within which to establish a national park.

Parks Canada worked from 1991 - 1995 within the land use planning process of British Columbia in the Cariboo-Chilcotin region, seeking to promote the

creation of a new national park in the Churn Creek area. A proposal covering an area of about 2,000 square kilometres was put forward for consideration. The national park proposal lacked widespread local support and so was not supported by the province, but two portions of the proposed national park area are to be protected through provincial programs. Further discussions with the provincial government are required before deciding on the next step towards representing this natural region in the national park system.



The following table summarizes the status of system planning for each step toward establishing a new national park in this natural region.

Steps in the Park Establishment Process	Status
Representative Natural Areas Identified:	done
Potential Park Area Selected:	done
Park Feasibility Assessed:	partially
Park Agreement Signed:	0
Scheduled under the National Parks Act :	0



Three major rivers - the Fraser (above, near Lytton), Thompson and Chilcotin - have cut deep canyons through the volcanic rock. Scattered trees, often Ponderosa Pine, and bunch grasses inhabit the north-facing slopes, while sage brush lives on the warmer, south-facing slopes.





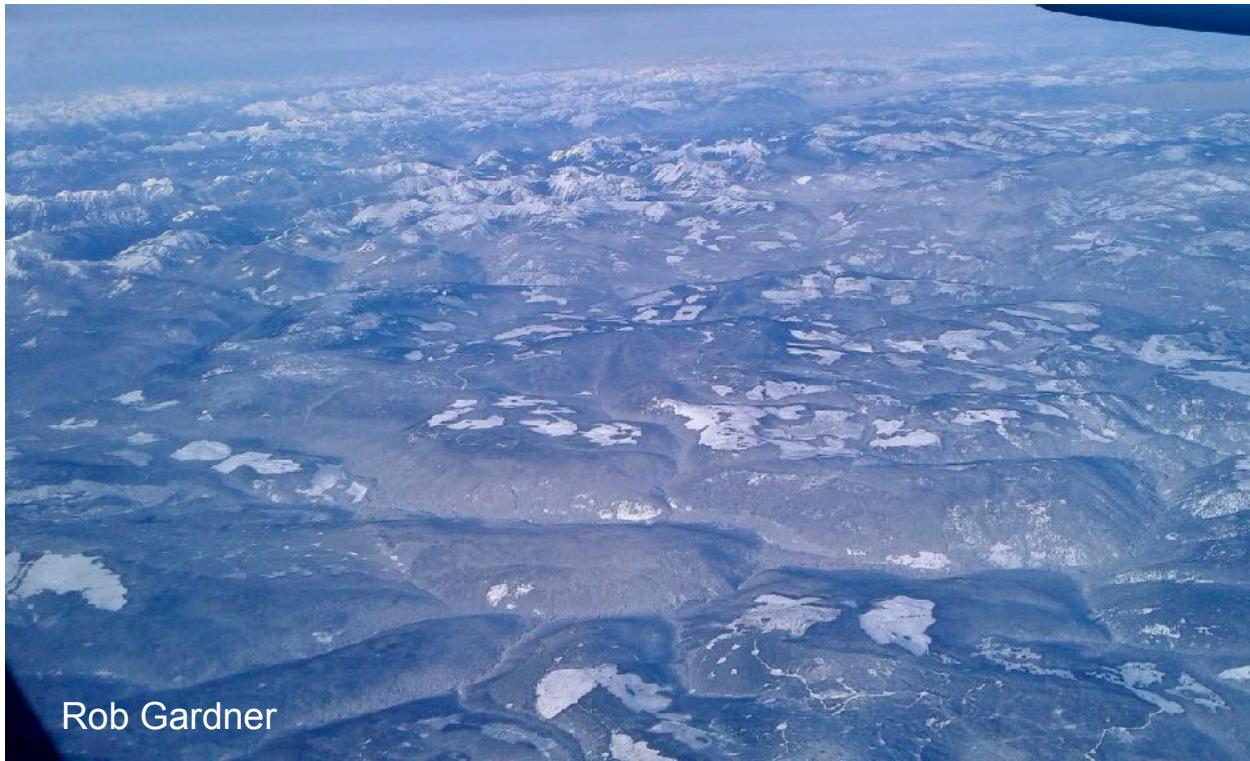
Ed Dick

In the Okanagan Valley, located in the southern part of the region, the mild winters and sunny summers allow the fertile, flat valley floors to be developed as orchards, and more recently, vineyards.

The generally hot summers and numerous parks make this region popular for family holidays.



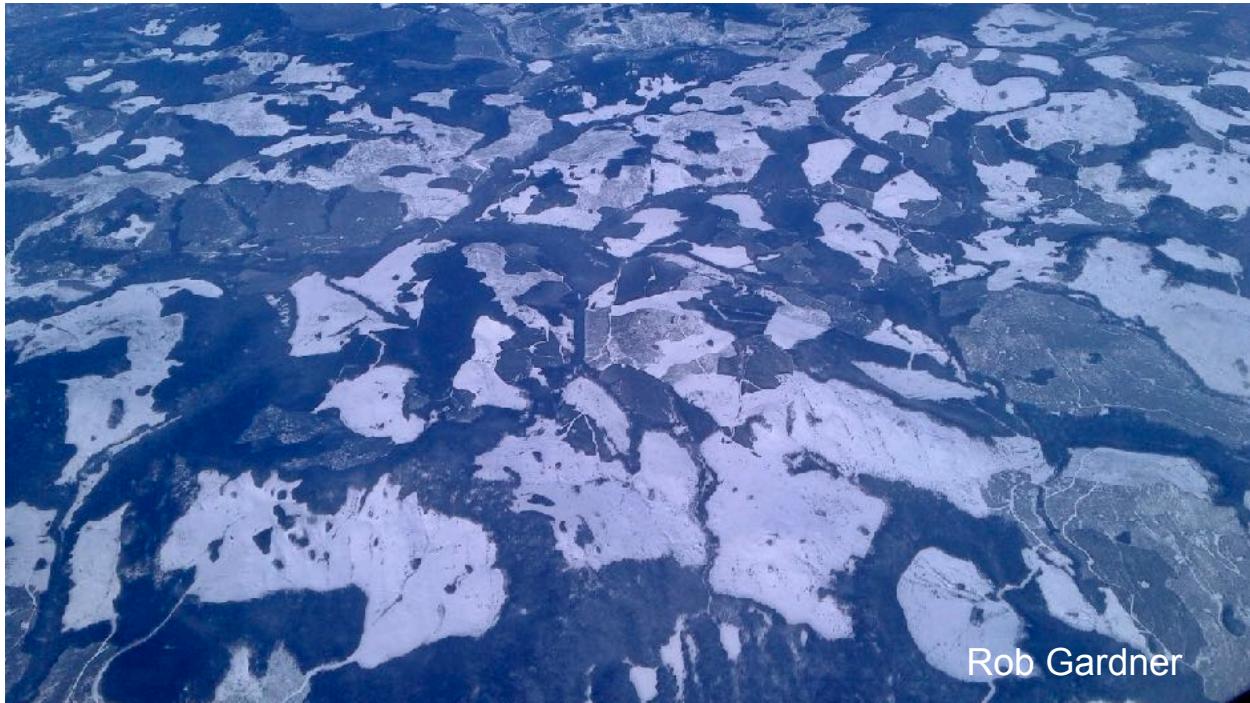
Prince George Tourism



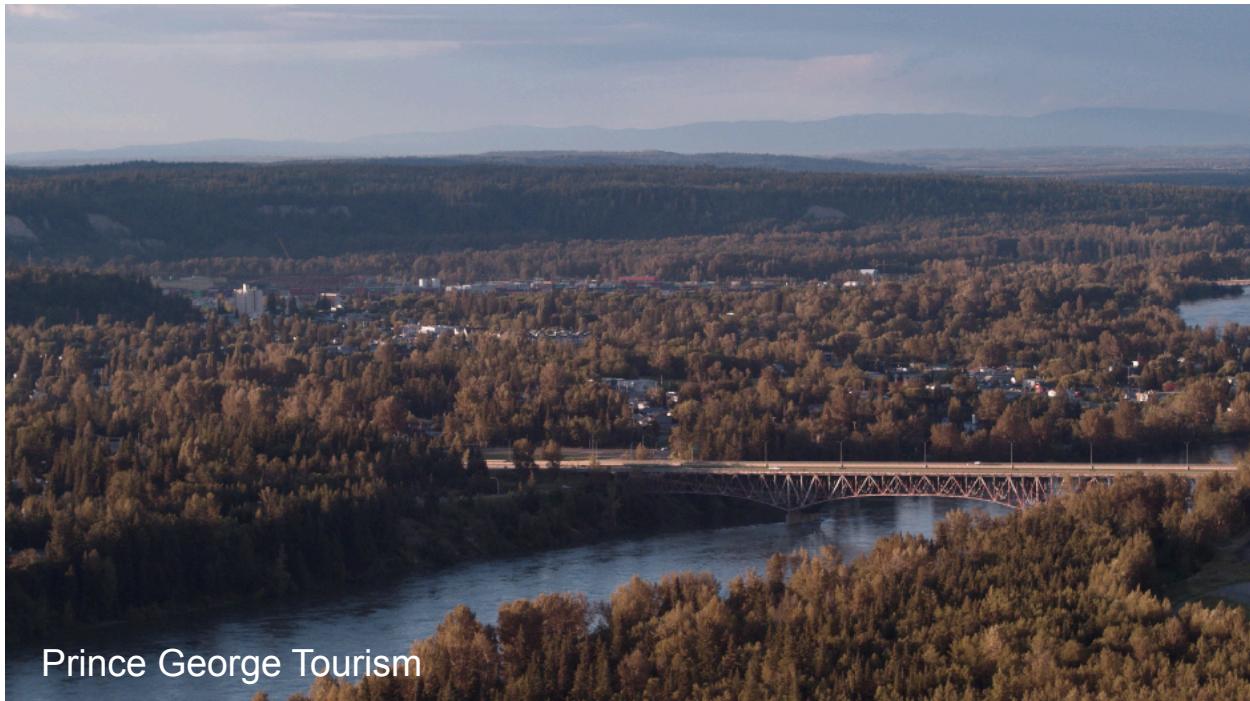
Rob Gardner

Looking north-west from near Princeton, BC, shows the relatively gentle topography. The more rugged Coast Mountains can be seen in the distance.

Gentle slopes allow much easier access to the forest, leading to extensive logging. The most recently logged sites appear as snowy patches, while older clearcuts are darker with some trees regrowing. The darkest areas have not been logged. Photo taken about 100 km northwest of Penticton, BC.



Rob Gardner



Prince George Tourism

Prince George (above) lies at the northern boundary of the dry interior region. Moderate topography and fairly open forest encourage outdoor reaction of many kinds.



Prince George Tourism

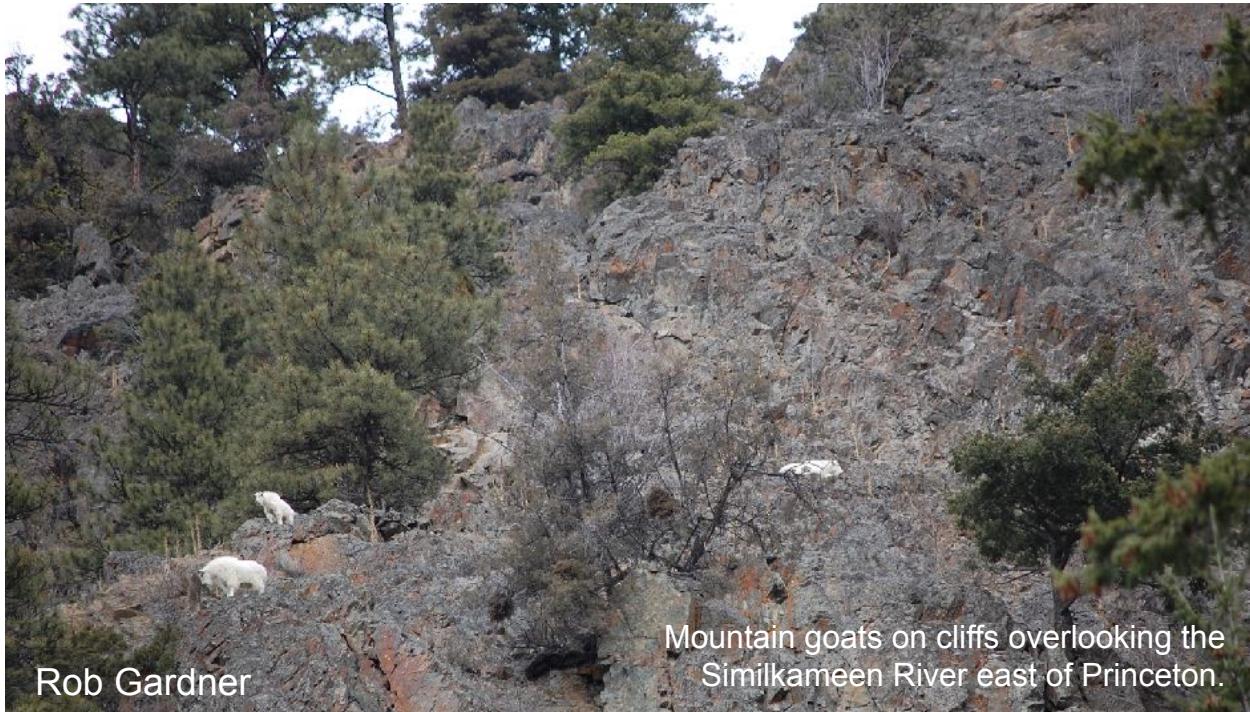


Michelle Spornitz

B. C. teachers: Learn more about the mining process and get great instructional tips at [MineralsEq](http://MineralsEq.com).

The Highland Valley Copper Mine lies about 75 km southwest of Kamloops. In production for more than 60 years, this mine now produces 130,000 tons of copper and 550 tons of molybdenum annually. The main pit is over three km across, and the entire operation including tailings pond covers 50 sq km. At 800 m deep, the pit could easily hold Toronto's CN Tower (540 m tall).

While this seems like a large disturbance, we should remember that the entire province of British Columbia has only 17 active mines, with this being the largest.



Rob Gardner

Mountain goats on cliffs overlooking the Similkameen River east of Princeton.

The Kettle Valley Railway, from Nelson west past Kelowna to Princeton, once part of the Canadian Pacific Railway, carried supplies for gold miners and early farmers. Now, only a short section remains to carry tourists on a special train, while most of the route hosts cyclists as part of the Trans Canada Trail. Spectacular trestle bridges and long tunnels make this a route like no other.



Ed Dick