

Growing down a wall

*One 'barrier' yet divides
Waterton-Glacier International
Peace Park.*

by Reta Gilbert

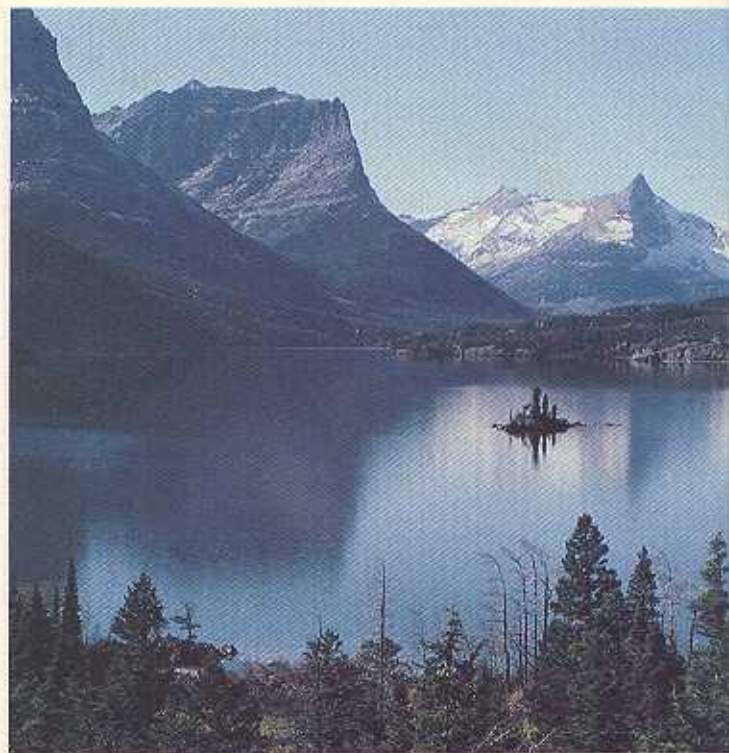
Sixty-three years ago, as a result of what was essentially a Rotary club project, the governments of Canada and the United States established Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park. No barbed wire, police patrols, dogs, or high walls separate the Canadian and U.S. sections of the 528-square-kilometre (204-square-mile) park. Only a six-metre (20-foot-) wide clear-cut of trees running up and down the hills indicates the exact boundary.

Has the time come to break down this visual barrier?

David Mihalic, superintendent of Glacier National Park (Montana, U.S.A.) and a member of the Rotary Club of Kalispell; Mervin Syroteuk, superintendent of Waterton Lakes National Park (Alberta, Canada) and a member of the Rotary Club of Cardston; and the Rotary clubs in Montana and Alberta think so.

Waterton-Glacier is a monument to the vision and hard work of Rotary leaders from both sides of the border. On 4 July 1931, representatives from the Rotary clubs of Kalispell, Great Falls, and Missoula in Montana, and Lethbridge and Cardston in Alberta met at Waterton Park, Alberta. They devised a plan to designate the two national parks as one "International Peace Park," among the first of its kind in the world.

On 18 June 1932, more than 2,000 people attended a dedication ceremony sponsored by Rotary International at Glacier Park Hotel in East Glacier, Montana. U.S. President Herbert Hoover sent greetings: "I am gratified by the hope and faith that it will forever be an appropriate symbol of permanent peace and friend-



Mountains dwarf Wild Goose Island on St. Mary's Lake in Glacier National Park, the U.S. side of the park.

ship." Prime Minister Richard Bennett of Canada wrote: "The relations between Canada and the United States [have] so long been characterized not only by that peace which is the foundation of our two democracies but by mutual respect and friendship."

Today the tradition continues. The Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park Association includes all members of Rotary districts 5360 (Canada) and 5390 (U.S.). Yearly meetings alternate between Waterton and East Glacier.

Why an International Peace Park in the middle of the Rockies?

"It's a small gesture for peace and goodwill," says association President Glen Coulter, a member of the Rotary Club of Lethbridge East (Alberta). "It makes people think about their neighbors, that we are essentially a global people."

"It's like a living monument, a place to celebrate peace," says David Mihalic.

"Why not?" asks Rita Fitzsimmons, president of the Rotary Club of Kalispell. "The Rotary ideal is service to humankind in all its conditions." Achieving peace may be the highest level of that service, she adds.

Rotary clubs on both sides of the border have spent much time making the concept of the park a reality, yet they face an artificial symbol of division—the "Border Swath." Former Glacier Superintendent H. Gilbert Lusk said it best: "Maintenance of this artificial scar between the two parks is incongruous with the concept of an International Peace Park and hinders the goal of preserving a naturally functioning



The Border Swath separating the Canadian and U.S. sections of the park.



ecosystem." Cutting a few metres around some of the ports of entry may be necessary, but there is no need for 27 kilometres (19 miles) of border clearing, he argues.

There is a very practical reason to let the Border Swath grow up—to save money. In 1987, the last year the swath was cut, the Boundary Commission accepted Glacier National Park's bid of U.S. \$168,000 to hand-clear some 63 kilometres (39.4 miles), including the common border separating the two parks. Considering inflation, that would amount to a quarter of a million dollars today.

The solution is simple. Amend paragraph five, Article IV of the Treaty of 1925 defining the International Boundary between Canada and the United States. This act requires an open vista along the boundary line. Instead, the superintendents propose that this line continue to be marked simply with monuments that are accessible by a meandering trail.

The world community recognizes the significance of the International Peace Park. In December 1995, it was named a World Heritage Site. Both Glacier National Park and Waterton Lakes National Park are designated as Biosphere Reserves by UNESCO.

The Border Swath is a symbol of division, not unity, say Canadian and U.S. Rotarians. Park wildlife pay no attention to it—an elk herd that winters in Waterton summers near the Glacier leg of the Belly River—nor should people. Each year, Rotarians meet for a Hands

Across the Border ceremony. In 1995, they gathered on a hill in Waterton—Canadian representatives on the north side of a 30-metre- (100-foot-) long white ribbon, those from the U.S. on the south. Each group reached across the ribbon to hold hands with their neighbors while everyone pledged:

"In the name of God, we will not take up arms against each other. We will work for peace, maintain liberty, strive for freedom, and demand equal opportunities for all mankind. May the long-existing peace between our two nations stimulate other peoples to follow this example."

During the ceremony, two wardens and two rangers stood at attention with their respective national flags whipping about in the wind.

At this place where we celebrate peace, is there any need to chop down trees? In a world torn by dissension, we have a chance to strengthen a symbol of unity, goodwill, and peace. Let's do it. ☺

- *Free-lance writer Reta Gilbert lives in Spokane, Washington, U.S.A., and previously worked in the U.S. part of the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park.*



Mervin Syroteuk (left), superintendent of Waterton Lakes National Park, chats with David Mihalic, superintendent of Glacier National Park, at a monument marking the boundary between the two countries.