

Glacier National Park Remains An Unspoiled Wilderness

By Patricia Arrigoni

GLACIER NATIONAL PARK, Montana – Glacier Park, so named for the gigantic Ice Age glaciers that carved its alpine meadows and lakes, is little changed from the days when it was established by an act of Congress in 1910.

Its million acres consist of unspoiled wilderness including about 60 masses of ice, 250 glacier-fed lakes, hundreds of swift running streams, roaring waterfalls and majestic, snow-capped mountains.

There are 1,000 miles of hiking and horse trails, stands of quaking aspen, cedar and fir trees, 57 known species of mammals and more than 200 species of bird life.

The park runs north into Canada where it becomes Waterton Lakes National Park, 204 square miles of scenic beauty similar to the land found in Montana. In 1932 the two parks were joined by the governments of the United States and Canada and named the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park. Each July, citizens of both countries meet at the border for a “Hands Across the Border Ceremony” to renew their pledges of friendship.

My husband and I arrived by Amtrak at East Glacier in the second week of June for a four-day tour of the park.

Glacier Park Lodge (altitude 4,821 feet), where we spent our first night, was a scenic wonder all by itself. It was built by the Great Northern Railway and opened to guests in 1913. The buildings sit among flowers and manicured lawns with a nearby golf course.

One enters the gigantic lobby and is immediately overwhelmed by 40-foot Douglas fir trees, complete with original bark, which support the surrounding balconies and roof three stories above. Sixty trees, some more than 800 years old and 36 to 42 inches in diameter, were brought by train from Oregon and Washington to the astonishment of the Blackfoot Indians. They promptly named the mammoth new building the “Oom-Coo-La-Mush-Taw” or Big Tree Lodge.

We checked into room 312 on the third floor and found a large comfortable room with two double beds, a desk with a mirror, two chairs, baggage racks and

lamps. There was a tiny closet and a small white bathroom with a shower. The ceiling was a mass of exposed pipes added when indoor plumbing was installed.

We dropped off our bags and hurried down to dinner served in a gigantic dining room. The food was excellent as was the after dinner entertainment provided by college students who were studying music and drama.

The next day we took a bus to our second stop, the Many Glacier Hotel some 54 miles to the north. We passed through Cut Back Valley at an elevation of 5,000 feet and arrived at the Many Glacier Hotel where a boat ride was scheduled for Swiftcurrent and Josephine Lakes.

The hotel resembled the Glacier Park Lodge, but was bigger, with 200 rooms. It had a Swiss décor and young college men dressed in lederhosen stood in the massive lobby. Our transportation on the third day was a picturesque 1937 red touring car manufactured by the White Company of Cleveland, Ohio.

Our route was the famous “Going to the Sun Road” over Logan Pass and the continental divide to Lake McDonald Lodge. This narrow mountain road with the lovely Indian name took ten years to build more than 50 years ago and cost three lives.

The Going to the Sun Road was to be the spectacular scenic ride of our tour, but we could see little because of heavy fog and snow. We made a brief stop at St. Mary Lake Visitors’ Center and viewed an excellent 12-minute slide show about the park.

The Lake McDonald Lodge was an old hunting lodge filled with mounted heads of animals from the area such as mule deer, elk, mountain goats, Bighorn sheep and moose. Built in 1913, it has operated under various ownerships and has been modernized and renovated.

We rented a motor boat and explored the lovely Alpine Lake. The water was crystal clear and as smooth as glass with aqua colors along the shore and a deep purple in the middle.

Glacier National Park offers horseback riding, fishing, boat excursions, campgrounds and accommodations for back-country hikers.