With some of the most spectacular scenery in North America, Tweedsmuir Park is a magnet for outdoors people. The park offers superb angling, hiking, horseback trips, camping and canoeing. Located in west-central British Columbia, this huge (981,000-hectare) park is roughly triangular in shape. The southern portion of the park, described here, is managed separately due to the park’s extreme size.

The park’s terrain varies from the high elevation pine forests of the Chilcotin Plateau on the east side, to the vividly-coloured hilltops of the Rainbow Range volcanoes, to the glaciated peaks and deep valleys of the Coast Range on the west. Hunlen Falls is a major attraction, plunging 260 metres and disappearing in a cloud of spray before entering the Atnarko River.
**Wildlife**

South Tweedsmuir is a refuge for a wide variety of large mammals: grizzly and black bears, mountain goats, caribou and wolves. The park’s extensive alpine meadows provide summer range for moose and mule deer, and its low-elevation valleys support these animals during winter. The variety of bird-life reflects the large variety of ecosystems found in the park.

**History**

The Nuxalk and Carrier First Nations have used the park and surrounding areas for thousands of years. Routes known as grease trails enabled the interior peoples to trade furs and obsidian for marine products such as eulachon grease. The Nuxalk people of the Bella Coola valley still depend on the abundance of salmon in the rivers for their livelihood. They catch and process fish from the same rivers in much the same way as their ancestors.

Alexander Mackenzie travelled through the area of the park on his epic journey to the Pacific Ocean in 1793. Mackenzie was the first white man to reach the western seas over land. Mackenzie and his party trekked from the Fraser River over an old grease trail to the Bella Coola River. There they enjoyed the hospitality of the Nuxalk inhabitants, who then guided Mackenzie and his men down the river into Dean Channel. A dispute between the Nuxalk and the coastal Heiltsuk people prevented them from reaching the open sea, but Mackenzie was satisfied that his mission was complete.

Tweedsmuir Park was established in 1938, and was named for the 15th Governor General of Canada, John Buchan, Baron Tweedsmuir of Elsfield (also known for writing thrillers). He travelled in the park in 1937, stating: “I have now travelled over most of Canada and have seen many wonderful things, but I have seen nothing more beautiful and more wonderful than the great park which British Columbia has done me the honour to call by my name.”

**How to Get to the Park**

Hwy 20 connects Williams Lake with Bella Coola, a distance of 479 kilometres, all paved except for a 60 kilometre section west of Anahim Lake. Approximately 360 kilometres west of Williams Lake the highway enters the park at Heckman Pass; 1,524 metres elevation. Next it descends “the Hill”, a well graded but narrow, switch-backed section of road with up to 18% grades. From the bottom of the Hill, Hwy 20 is paved to Bella Coola, about 40 minutes’ drive.

Pacific Coastal Airlines provides scheduled flights from the Vancouver area to Bella Coola and Anahim Lake. Sharp Wings Ltd. provides a charter service from Williams Lake. There are also floatplane charters available at Bella Coola and Nimpo Lake.

BC Ferries offers scheduled vehicle/passenger service between Port Hardy (on Vancouver Island) and Bella Coola during the summer months.

Supplies and accommodations are available at Bella Coola, Hagensborg, Nimpo Lake and Anahim Lake. There are a hospital in Bella Coola and a clinic at Anahim Lake.

**Facilities**

There are two vehicle-access campgrounds:

- Atarko, at the bottom of the Hill (28 sites including two double units) and Fisheries Pool near Stuie (14 sites). Most trailers and RVs can be accommodated. A sani-station is located near the Atarko Campground.

- Picnic areas are along Hwy 20 (east to west) at Rainbow Range Trailhead, start of the Tote Road, Atarko Campground, Big Rock, Fisheries Pool, and Mackenzie Heritage/Grease Trailhead.

Three car-top boat launches are available: Belarko, Fisheries Pool and Steep Roof (see map). At high water it is possible to launch trailered boats.

Backcountry camping facilities are basic. The sites marked on the map feature a pit toilet and most have bear-proof food caches. Use these sites rather than camping at random. One small backcountry cabin is open to the public, but do bring your tent, as cabin has no sleeping platforms.

**Fishing**

Angling is one of the most popular activities in the park. Fish for trout or coho and chinook salmon in the Bella Coola and Atarko rivers. The lakes of the area can be fished for Dolly Varden, cutthroat trout, rainbow trout or whitefish. The Dean River is renowned for fly-fishing. You must possess a valid BC angling license. Consult the fishing regulations – some special restrictions apply.

**Canoeing**

The Turner Lake Chain consists of seven high-altitude lakes connected by short portages. Views of snow-capped peaks, white sand beaches and excellent fishing for cutthroat trout make this two-to-four-day canoe trip very rewarding. Canoes may be rented at Turner Lake, or you can airlift in your own. There is a camping fee on the chain. For more details, send for the Hunlen Falls/Turner Lake brochure or check the park’s website.

**Multi-day Trails**

Many long trails through spectacular country reward backpackers. Detailed descriptions of the trails are given in the Hunlen Falls/Turner Lake and Rainbow Range brochures. Some trails are suitable for horses. For a list of permitted outfitters, contact the BC Parks Cariboo office.

The backcountry of Tweedsmuir Park is an isolated wilderness with infrequent patrols by park staff. You should be experienced in wilderness travel, fit and well equipped. Snow is possible any month of the year. If you plan to visit the backcountry, inform a responsible person of your plans, giving your destination and estimated return time. Distances given are one-way.

- **Rainbow**: Length 7 kilometres; 2–3 hours; 300 metres elevation gain.
- **Octopus Lake**: 14 kilometres; 5–6 hours; almost flat. Easy.
- **Crystal Lake**: 20 kilometres; 8–9 hours; 1,000 metres elevation gain. Moderate.
- **Mackenzie Heritage/Grease**: 300 kilometres of hiking from near Quesnel to this trailhead; 25–30 days; 1,800 metres elevation gain. Follows Mackenzie’s route. Many visitors hike only the scenic 80 kilometres section through the Rainbow Range (5–7 days). Difficult.
- **Hunlen Falls**: 16.4 kilometres; 6–9 hours; 800 metres elevation gain. The trail starts at the end of an old tote road suitable for 4-wheel drive vehicles only. Be especially alert for grizzly bears on this trail. Difficult.
- **Ptarmigan Lake**: 12 kilometres; 5 hours; 600 metres elevation gain. Trail starts near Hunlen Falls. Moderate.

**Day Hikes**

- **Kettle Pond**: 1 kilometre. An easy one-hour loop trail from opposite the Big Rock/Kettle Pond picnic area to a kettle pond (formed when a large remnant of ice from the last ice age melted).
- **Valley Loop/Burnt Bridge**: 5 kilometres. This trail starts from the Mackenzie Heritage/Grease Trailhead and leads along Burnt Bridge Creek to a small suspension bridge, looping back down to the parking area. This trail has a viewpoint overlooking the Bella Coola Valley, about 20 minutes from the start and can be completed in 1–2 hours.

**Winter Recreation**

A large area is zoned for snowmobiles at Heckman Pass (separate brochure shows the boundaries). Snowmobiling is not permitted elsewhere in the park. There are also cross-country ski trails and a small downhill ski facility nearby.