

## Central Lancashire Online Knowledge (CLoK)

Title	Book Review: Pearlaann Reichwein, Climber's Paradise: Making Canada's Mountain Parks, 1906 -1974, Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2014. 402 pages. ISBN 9780888646743. Paperback £37.50.
Type	Article
URL	<a href="https://clock.uclan.ac.uk/12412/">https://clock.uclan.ac.uk/12412/</a>
DOI	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2015.1072380">https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2015.1072380</a>
Date	2015
Citation	Westaway, Jonathan (2015) Book Review: Pearlaann Reichwein, Climber's Paradise: Making Canada's Mountain Parks, 1906 -1974, Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2014. 402 pages. ISBN 9780888646743. Paperback £37.50. The International Journal of the History of Sport, 32 (11-12). pp. 1515-1517. ISSN 0952-3367
Creators	Westaway, Jonathan

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2015.1072380>

For information about Research at UCLan please go to <http://www.uclan.ac.uk/research/>

All outputs in CLoK are protected by Intellectual Property Rights law, including Copyright law. Copyright, IPR and Moral Rights for the works on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. Terms and conditions for use of this material are defined in the <http://clock.uclan.ac.uk/policies/>

**Pearlann Reichwein, *Climber's Paradise: Making Canada's Mountain Parks, 1906 -1974*, Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2014. 402 pages. ISBN 9780888646743. Paperback £37.50.**

Settler mythscapes are both imaginative and hugely practical affairs. In this history of the Alpine Club of Canada (ACC), Reichwein outlines the role of the ACC in contributing to the idea of national parks in Canada via a dialectic of 'landscape as idea and landscape as material' (7), a complex of entanglements between people and mountains that made and re-made the meanings of these mountain parks and helped form, and was formed by, Canadian nation building.

Founded in 1906, nearly forty years after the inception of the federal Dominion of Canada, the ACC represented an urgent sense that settler self-determination should be extended to leisure practices in mountain landscapes. The founding of the American Alpine Club in 1903 and the efforts by American and British Alpinists to claim first ascents of Canada's highest peaks stimulated middle-class Anglo-Canadian nationalism. The land surveyor Arthur O. Wheeler found an ally for his efforts to form a national mountaineering club in the Winnipeg journalist Elizabeth Parker, who wrote about the Rockies as a national asset and sanctuary. Parker's Romantic journalism and travel writing linked Canada's mountains with Canada's future via a discourse that drew on notions of therapeutic landscapes, spiritual renewal and frontier vigour. 'In time' Parker said, 'we ought to become a nation of mountaineers, loving our mountains with a patriot's passion' (24).

Patriotism did not exclude the fantasy of mimetic transfer within the wider British imperium, the ACC emulating at its inception the broad cultural objectives of the Alpine Club, many of its members and officers having been born in other parts of the British Empire. The nationalism of the ACC did not, however, envisage a mass participation organization like some of the European Alpine clubs and it remained a 'small English-speaking organization dominated by members who were urban, well-educated, leisured, and drawn largely from professionals and business people of British ancestry in the middle to upper classes' (34). Racial isomorphism saw Jewish applicants systematically rejected; Asian mountaineers found it hard to gain membership. Despite this conservative Anglo-Canadian world view, Reichwein provides ample evidence of a 'frontier effect' on women's agency and empowerment within the ACC. Unlike most mountaineering clubs in the world at the time, the ACC was open to women members from its inception and women played critical organizational roles, particularly at the level of local club sections. Women represented over 30% of the membership in 1907 and 'from 1922 into the post-Second World War era, the number of women members comprised 41 per cent of the club membership' (43).

Chapter Three, *Mountaineering Camp in the Tented Town*, provides a richly elaborated and illustrated exploration of the striking and innovative ways in which the ACC sought to perform a type of outdoor domesticity and so constitute a nation by replicating a family. The annual ACC summer camps brought 100-200 middle-class participants from all over Canada to remote encampments for two weeks in Yoho, Banff, Glacier and Jasper National Parks for instruction in mountaineering, providing ways into mountaineering via tiers of membership and guided apprenticeship. Middle-class stewardship inculcated the correct approaches and attitudes to mountain and wilderness landscapes, reinforced by the compelling sociability of tented living and the rituals of the Tea Tent, the Dining Fly, campfire conviviality and song. Maintaining this fantasy wilderness experience required extensive logistics from outfitters, administrative effort and high levels of subvention from

provincial governments and federal agencies. The ACC received \$1,000 annual grant from the Dominion Parks Branch of the Department of the Interior between 1906 and 1931, becoming a 'prominently placed, client-user group during the formative period of national park development' (116). The Canadian Pacific Railroad provided Swiss Alpine guides and Chinese cooks to the ACC summer camps, competing with the Canadian National Railway in the 1920s for ACC business. Reichwein details how the ACC positioned itself at the intersection of railway tourism, provincial boosterism and nationalist imperative, the club shaping a narrative that saw its role as a privileged exploratory *avant garde* for subsequent tourist development. Settler imperialism is defined by a desire for racially exclusive polities and through the ACC camps the 'national parks became peopled by Anglo-Canadians and were constructed as white, middle-class, touristic spaces' (118). Reichwein doesn't let us forget that the concept of wilderness in settler societies involve forms of emparkment, involving the removal and forgetting of the claims of indigenous population. Aboriginal peoples were conspicuously absent in these compensatory domains, their absence enabling forms of racial playacting evidenced by an extraordinary picture of ACC members dressed as "Indians" around a campfire at Sherbrook Lake in 1911 (103).

As national parks came under pressure from hydropower schemes and tourist development, the ACC formed part of a conservationist lobby, campaigning for parkland inviolability, its membership overlapping with the Canadian National Parks Association founded in 1923. Land-use politics saw the ACC come into conflict with provincial governments and agricultural lobbies. The Depression reduced club membership and the ACC lost its federal grant in 1931. Some land was alienated from the parks, enabling the passing of the 1930 National Parks Act which established the principle of inviolability, dedicating the parks to the people of Canada and establishing the principle of land held in trust for future generations. In the post-War era the ACC narrowed its focus; though there were still conservation battles, the ACC increasingly saw its role as defining appropriate forms of mountain recreation. The pioneering ethic and the summer-camp tradition continued, perpetuating what many climbers felt was a hopelessly out of touch approach to mountaineering, fixed on the idea of first ascents of remote mountain peaks. The 1967 Yukon Alpine Centennial Expedition (YACE) 'promoted mountaineering as symbolic commemoration' (233) a form of summit nationalism that aimed to make multiple first-ascents in the remote St. Elias Mountains: 'twelve peaks would be named after the respective Canadian provinces and territories, and two first ascents on the Yukon-Alaska border would confer the names "Good Neighbour Peak" and "Centennial Peak"' (235), mixing neighbourliness, territoriality and memorialization on a grand scale. This remarkable and beautifully illustrated book demonstrates how a modern conservationist and environmental ethic is always enmeshed in troubling and contested historical and spatial specificities. Reichwein demonstrates how both national parks and national mountaineering clubs shared a rhetorical space and how mountain landscapes become invested with meaning, becoming ritual sites for performing symbolic forms of nationhood.

Jonathan Westaway, 2015

University of Central Lancashire

[jwestaway@uclan.ac.uk](mailto:jwestaway@uclan.ac.uk)