



Time for Nature



Close Encounters

Researching bear/human interactions in Kluane National Park and Reserve of Canada

Kluane National Park and Reserve of Canada is an important refuge for grizzly bears. While the grizzly has disappeared from many parts of North America, in this wild, remote region of the Yukon, they are not presently at risk. Parks Canada wants to make sure the grizzlies continue to thrive. But people love Kluane, too, and “close encounters” with a grizzly are not recommended! That’s why Parks Canada is studying how bears and humans interact in the park. The new information is guiding park managers, who want to ensure both bears and people can enjoy Kluane’s natural treasures.



Kluane National Park and Reserve is an important refuge for grizzly bears.
© Parks Canada.

Getting an expert's opinion

The A'äy Chù'/Slims Valley - Sheep Mountain area of Kluane is one of the park’s most popular hiking and camping areas. Here, humans and bears often come together. That’s why Sandra MacDougall, an ecology instructor at Red Deer College, chose the area to study bear/human interactions in 1997. When she researched bear/human encounters and identified situations where bears could become aggressive, Ms. MacDougall found she could pinpoint risky locations. She also highlighted habitats that are important to the bears, and that visitors should not disturb. This led to closure of parts of the valley to overnight camping for backcountry hikers.

Unwanted dinner guests

Research like this helps Parks Canada’s managers find ways to avoid risky situations. For example, earlier studies found bears had learned that hikers carry food, and that backpacks were handy sources of meals. Now, hikers must carry their food in bear-resistant containers. This has reduced incidences of food rewards for bears encountering people on hiking trails.



The A'äy Chù'/Slims Valley - Sheep Mountain area is a very popular area for hiking and camping. © Parks Canada, M. Beddell.

A hands-on school project

Now Ms. MacDougall and her students are taking another look at the situation in the A'äy Chù'/Slims Valley - Sheep Mountain area. They are analyzing new bear data and evaluating the



results of the overnight camping closure in relation to bear/human encounters. In the process, the students are learning about bear biology and behaviour as well as park management. "The students have completely bought into this," said Ms. MacDougall.

"It's the most useful thing I've done in two years," reported one student.

A Valuable Partnership

For Parks Canada, partnerships like that with Red Deer College are providing valuable new information to help park managers balance park use and species protection. "It's a practical hands-on project for the students," says Park Warden Tom Elliot. "It's win, win, win all the way around!"

For more information visit www.pc.gc.ca/kluane



Research helps Parks Canada find ways to avoid risky situations. © Kluane National Park and Reserve of Canada.