

government that wanted its directive carried out. To prevent bloodshed and casualties, somebody had to blink. The Canadian government did blink, and we were given orders to stand down. The story we were told was that our government was given assurances that day by the German government that our Canadian prisoners of war would have shackles removed, and no further shackling would take place. To me this seemed like a comfortable and happy ending.”²

Fortunately for the prisoners, before the worst of winter hit they were moved to better quarters near Lethbridge, Alberta.



The Kananaskis River

Site of Ozada
POW Camp

The Trans-Canada crosses the Kananaskis River as it flows out to join the Bow. This is a heavily controlled piece of water, with three dams (Interlakes, Pocaterra, and Barrier) along its 75 kilometre course to manage the water supply to TransAlta power projects downstream. The steady year-round release of water from Barrier Dam means that the river below this offers great opportunities for paddlers. TransAlta posts a schedule for a consistent release of water from the dam so kayakers can get on the water at optimum times to play in the rapids.

Rafting on the Kananaskis has become a popular activity in the last decade, and several companies offer half-day trips here. The river is classified as II-III whitewater. That means it's on the gentle end of the scale as rafting goes, which makes it good for beginners and small children.

Although the rafting is seasonal, the relatively warm water being released from Barrier Lake means that this stretch of water is open for paddling 12 months of the year, and a section of the Kananaskis has become a real white-water canoeist's and kayaker's mecca. In 1984, the Alberta Whitewater Association started making modifications to the river. The consistent year-round water release means that the river never freezes up, so the riverbed is more stable than

First guard
tower at Ozada
prisoner-of-war
camp, April
1942, Glenbow
NA-4197-1



Rafting on the Kananaskis, Canadian Rockies Rafting

Kayaker working a wave in the freestyle section, riverboarder in background, E. Duggan



most rivers, which are subject to the freeze-thaw cycle. This makes the Kananaskis unusually suitable for improvements. Between the put-in at the “Widow Maker” rapid and the take-out at Canoe Meadows, a section of the river has been enhanced by man-made elements to create exciting runs of big waves, holes, and other features that paddlers love. A 30-gate, 300 metre slalom course was installed that has served as the premier training course in Alberta for more than 20 years. Four National Whitewater Championships and one North American Championship have been held here, and this site is the permanent host for the annual Provincial Slalom Championships. The annual paddling festival, Kanfest, is staged at Canoe Meadows each summer. This results in an estimated 50,000 individual day uses of the river annually.

The Alberta Whitewater Association has worked closely with the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Alberta Environment, and Alberta Parks regarding the development of the Kananaskis River. Because of the flushing from the dam, this is virtually a dead river – no vegetative or invertebrate life will survive in that warm water and daily dry-up, so it will also not be a good habitat for fish. This makes it an ideal candidate for recreational development.

A couple of new river sports are showing up on the Kananaskis. River surfers ride the standing waves in the river. Enthusiasts paddle out, catch a wave, and stand on their board, remaining in one spot as the river travels underneath them. For the other new sport, riverboarding, the participants wear fins for control (as well as protective gear!) and grip a super-heavy-duty flotation board to ride down the river. Edmond Duggan, a kayaking instructor, describes this sport as “armoured flutterboarding.” It is growing quickly in popularity, partly because it has a less challenging entry level – no learning to roll a boat or stand up on a surfboard...

The growth of river surfing has generated plans to create in the near future a drop structure that will be ideal for this sport. In the longer term, the section below Canoe Meadows downstream to the Trans-Canada will probably be developed for introductory paddlers, to allow them to develop skills that will take them on the more advanced water in the existing section.