

Jasper park hikers asked to collect bear poop — for science

BY MARTY KLINKENBERG, EDMONTON JOURNAL JUNE 5, 2015



A female grizzly bear is shown in a handout photo. Hikers in Jasper National Park now have the option of gathering bear droppings so they can be used in a DNA study of the park's grizzly bears.

Photograph by: Steve Michel, The Canadian Press, file

EDMONTON - From offering such adventures as collecting bear poop to paddle-in camping and paragliding, Jasper National Park is reaching out to attract new visitors this summer.

Officials at the massive wilderness area in western Alberta have added a host of activities that range from the pristine — canoeing or kayaking to a small, lakefront campground — to the interesting, if curious: Parks Canada is looking for hikers who wish to contribute to a research project by gathering bear droppings on trails.

“It is totally fascinating,” says Gloria Keyes-Brady, who works in Jasper’s visitor experience branch.

Hikers will receive special training in collecting and handling bear scat so it can be employed in a DNA study on the park’s population of grizzly bears.

“Naturally, the safety of those people, and the integrity of the samples, are our biggest priorities,” Keyes-Brady says.

This week, the park opened the Hidden Cove family campground with four sites tucked away along the shoreline of Maligne Lake.

The backcountry sites can only be reached via a sheltered four-kilometre paddling trip that is appropriate for beginners and experts alike. The campground has a communal shelter with a picnic table and wood stove, with reservations required at (780) 852-6177.

Other new activities include:

- Ten canvas-walled tents have been added this summer giving the park 21 bookable oTENTik units. The tents provide sleeping space for four adults and two children and are equipped with fold-out single beds and queen and bunk beds with mattresses. Due to their popularity, spots must be reserved by calling 1-877-737-3783 or by visiting Parks Canada’s Reservation Services.
- After several years of public consultation, paragliding and hang gliding are being allowed within the park for the first time as part of a two-year-pilot project. Only members of the Hang Gliding and Paragliding Association of Canada are allowed, all flights must be logged, and pilots are warned to stay away from ecologically sensitive areas.
- Traction kiting, which involves being pulled by a kite over snow, ice, water or land, is being allowed over water and land for the first time, as well. The most recommended spot is Jasper Lake, which is nearly 10 kilometres long. Closed or restricted areas must be avoided.

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