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Source: Mountain Research and Development, 22(2) : 186-187

Published By: International Mountain Society

URL: https://doi.org/10.1659/0276-4741(2002)022[0186:MCATBC]2.0.CO;2

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Mountain Culture at the Banff Centre

A Local Film Festival Generates a Global Legacy

THE BANFF CENTRE

The Banff Centre for Mountain Culture promotes understanding and appreciation of the world's mountain places by creating opportunities for people to share—and find inspiration in—mountain experiences, ideas, and visions.

Birth of the Division for Mountain Culture

In 1976, about 500 mountain enthusiasts gathered in Banff, Canada, to spend an afternoon watching mountain films. It was a gloomy November, too late for rock climbing and hiking, too early for ice climbing and ski touring. The crowd loved the films, and the Banff Mountain Film Festival was born.

After 20 years of ever-more-successful festivals, the Banff Centre created a special division for Mountain Culture, recognizing that what had begun with an annual film festival had become much more than entertainment.

In establishing Mountain Culture, key goals were identified to guide the direction and development of the Centre.

- To offer an international mountain cultural network and forum.
- To support leading-edge pursuit of mountain cultural studies.
- To host a variety of world-class mountain events and celebrations.
- To establish a mountain resource center and global outreach programming.
- To reinvest revenues into mountain program development and support.

Current activities

Today, the Banff Centre runs programs such as

- The Banff Mountain Film Festival and World Tour. An annual film festival including category prizes for Mountain Culture and for Mountain Environment. The best films from the festival tour to over 30 countries and are seen by hundreds of thousands of people.
- The Banff Mountain Book Festival and Speakers' Tour. Founded in 1994, the Book Festival celebrates the best writing about the mountain world through speakers, readings, seminars, book signings, a book fair, and the presentation of internationally recognized awards for mountain literature, mountain exposition, mountain image, and adventure travel.
- The Banff Mountain Photography Competition. Last year's competition attracted 2200 entries from 17 countries. Winning photos, including category prizes for Mountain Culture and for Mountain Environment, are exhibited in several North American and European countries.
- The Banff Mountain Archives. The world's largest collection of mountain videos and films.
- The Banff Mountain Grants. Annual grants to projects that interpret mountain issues to a broad public audience.
- Heritage Interpreters' Training. An annual course that prepares guides and interpreters for the certification exam of the Mountain Park Heritage Interpretation Association.

The Banff Centre and the International Year of Mountains 2002

Two Banff programs are of special note for the International Year of Mountains:

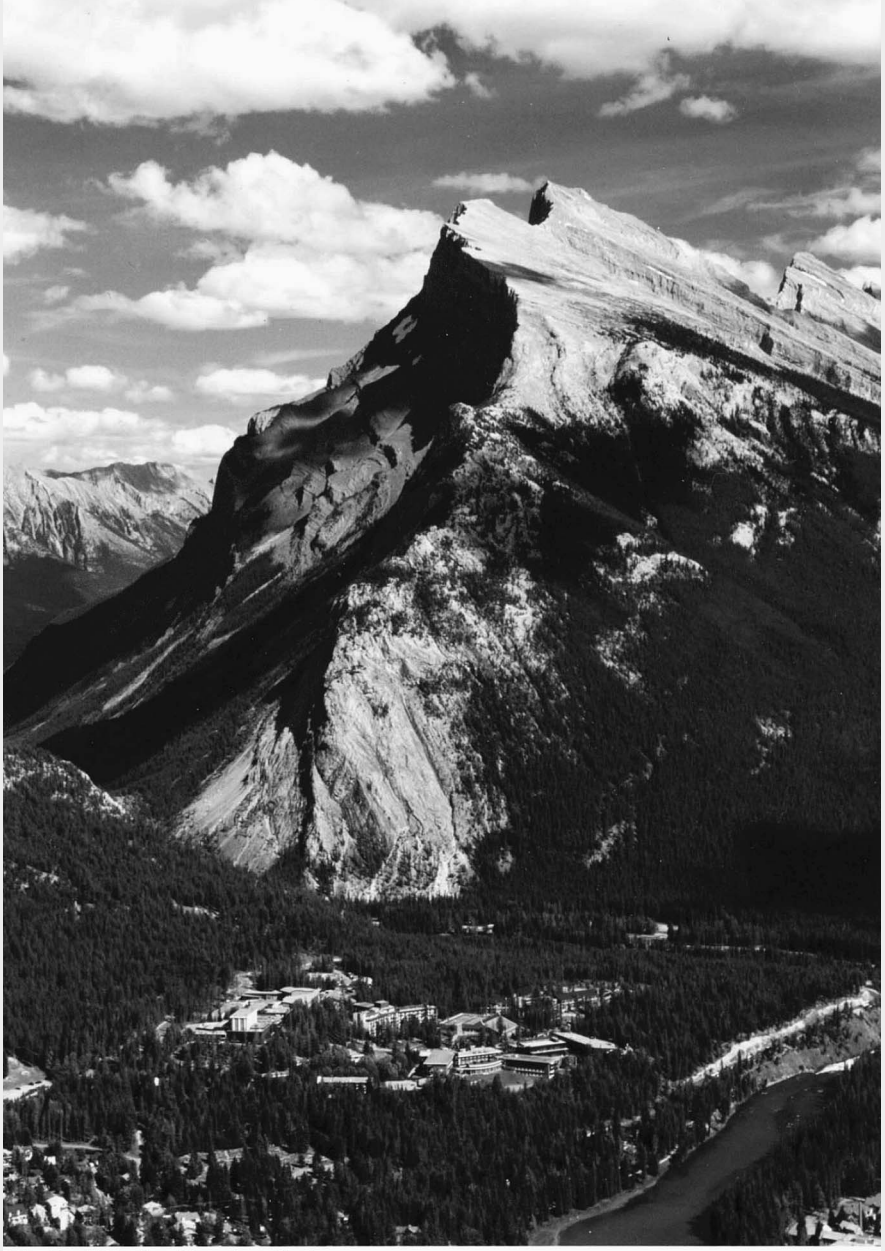
- *The Banff Mountain Summit 2002—Extreme Landscape: Challenge and Celebration,* 27–29 October 2002. Sponsored by Parks Canada and the National Geographic Society, the summit will explore how extreme landscape shapes people's lives and how people influence extreme landscape. It will include mountain authors, scientists, dancers, musicians, anthropologists, and filmmakers; men and women who have a passion for mountain places and who have translated that passion into creative endeavors, scientific research, and critical thinking. Speakers at the summit will include: award-winning author Gretel Ehrlich; mountaineer, author, and European parliamentarian Reinhold Messner; author and ethnobotanist Wade Davis; sacred mountains specialist Edwin Bernbaum; cultural photographer Chris Rainier; Canadian poet and singer Sid Marty; climber and founder of Patagonia Yvon Chouinard; adventurer Will Gadd; peace parks expert Jim Thorsell; and conservationist George Schaller. The Summit and the International Year will be commemorated by National Geographic Books, which will publish a book featuring 17 of the writers involved with the summit. Edited by Bernadette McDonald, director of Mountain Culture at The Banff Centre, *Extreme Landscapes: The Lure of Mountain Spaces* will be a lasting legacy of the event and the International Year of Mountains.

Banff Mountain Summits are presented every 2 years. Future topics under consideration include Mountains as Water Towers and Mountain Spirituality.

"Well of course the Banff Mountain Film Festival is one of the greatest if not THE greatest film festival on mountaineering matters in the world." (Sir Edmund Hillary, 1994)

"HUMMA [Mountain Communities conference 2001] was one of the best conferences I've ever been to …" (Ralf Buckley, Griffith University, Australia, 2000)

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The Banff Centre, Signature Shot
Photo: Scott Rowed

- *Banff Mountain Communities Conference 2002—Ecological and Earth Sciences in Mountain Areas*, 6–10 September 2002. Sponsored by the Canadian Wildlife Service, the University of Alberta, and the Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative. This conference will examine the state of the world's mountain areas in the International Year, focusing on present and future conditions of ecological and earth sciences information for mountain habitats and drawing examples from the breadth of the world's mountain regions. Confirmed speakers include Larry Hamilton, Bruno Messerli, David Schindler, Christian Koerner, and Kathy Tonnessen.

Banff Mountain Communities conferences take place annually. The 2003 conference will be on Sustainable Mountain Communities.

Commitment to multidisciplinarity in a unique environment

The greatest strengths of the Banff Centre are its multidisciplinary approach to mountains, its audience reach, and its inspirational mountain setting. The Centre is located in Banff National Park—part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

There are few places on earth where mountain scientists, artists, lobby groups, and land managers can meet on common ground, wrestle with mountain issues, and interact with a broad public audience. Mountain Culture at the Banff Centre provides an arena where mountain people from all over the world can share their passions, their ideas, their concerns, and their dreams for the future.

The Banff Centre—mountains and more

Located in Banff National Park, the Banff Centre is Canada's only learning center dedicated to the arts, leadership development, and mountain culture. Founded in 1933, the Centre began with a single course in drama. Its success generated additional arts programs and the Centre became known as the Banff School of Fine Arts in 1935. While arts programming continued to grow and flourish, conferences were introduced in 1953 and management programs in 1954. Mountain programming began in 1976.

From a mountainside campus, the Centre serves the needs of accomplished artists, business and community leaders, and members of the global mountain community through year-round programs designed to enrich professional practice beyond the realm of traditional education. The convergence of resources, multidisciplinary programming, and spectacular physical location affords an inspirational learning experience. Creative excellence is the Banff Centre's hallmark.

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