

SPATSIZI PLATEAU WILDERNESS PARK

by Parks and Outdoor Recreation Division

ECOLOGICAL RESERVES COLLECTION
GOVERNMENT OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
VICTORIA, B.C.
88V 1X4

Spatsizi Plateau Wilderness is one of British Columbia's largest and most significant parks at 675,024 hectares in area. It encompasses three major vegetation zones which are the habitats of varied and large faunal populations. It thus contains interesting mix of plants, animals, birds and fish from northern and southern Canada.

The park spreads across two broad physiographic regions, the Spatsizi Plateau and Skeena Mountains. The plateau is a rolling upland which extends in a broad curve from Mount Brock in the northwest to Tuaton Lake in the southeast. The valleys which separate the individual tablelands are broad and U-shaped. Elevations range from 1600 m to 2000 m.

The rugged mountains in the southwest are the Eaglenest Range, part of the Skeena Mountain system. Alpine glaciation has produced cirques, tarns, and hanging valleys on their northern and eastern sides. A few scattered and small glaciers remain. The highest peak is Mt. Will at 2,500 m.

The park has a cool continental climate with moderate precipitation (60 cm annually at Cold Fish Lake). In general, western edge of the park receives more precipitation throughout the year. The area around Hyland Post has a drier regime and lower snow pack than Cold Fish Lake. Winters are long and cold with January temperatures averaging -20°C . In spring, the period of daylight is long and precipitation low. April and May are the driest months, but snow may fall in any month. Cold Fish Lake is usually free of ice by mid-June. Summers are cool and cloudy although temperatures infrequently rise above 20°C .

The three vegetative zones which dominate the park are treeless barrens (Alpine tundra zone), a shrubby Spruce-Willow-Birch Zone and the Boreal White and Black Spruce forest. The boreal forest is found throughout the park at lower elevations. At higher elevations persistent frosts affect the continuance of these evergreen trees. In their place, scrub willow and dwarf birch dominate. In valleys which are subject to cold air drainage from adjacent mountains, these shrubs will occupy the valley floor as well.

Localized stands of Lodgepole pine and Trembling aspen also occur on favourably dry sites. Wet lands or boggy areas are often found adjacent to streams or places with poor drainage. Grassy meadows are also found on steep or exposed slopes.

Lands within the park have an excellent capability for supporting wild ungulates. The large rainshadow area of the plateau itself forms one of the most significant ranges for Woodland caribou in the province. This particular caribou subspecies is the largest of any in Canada.

Moose are the next most common ungulate in the park. The Spatsizi River valley with its many flooded areas and oxbow ponds, provides a habitat for winter vegetation for summer forage as well as willow flats for winter

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Persons wishing to view Stone sheep and Mountain goat may hike into the Gladys Lake Ecological Reserve. This reserve was created as a place where these animals could be studied in undisturbed habitat. Val Geist's book "Mountain Sheep and Man" provides an excellent introduction to the animals of this area.

Other animals which are abundant are Black and Grizzly bear, Wolf, Wolverine, Beaver, Hoary marmot, and Arctic ground squirrel. The latter are at the southern extremity of their range.

One hundred and forty species of birds have been recorded within the park. Of note to the naturalist are the recorded nestings of Gyrfalcon, Smith's Longspur, and American Golden Plover. Long-tailed Jaegers, Wheatears, and Snow Buntings have also been seen.

Apart from a few explorers, hunters and prospectors, the Spatsizi region was rarely visited by white men until 1926. At that time, the Hyland brothers established a post on the Spatsizi River to trade with native trappers, abandoning it only a few years later. In 1948 Tommy Walker established permanent camps at Hyland Post and Cold Fish Lake and hired local Caribou Hide Indians as guides for his hunting operation. Walker retired in 1968.

Walker was the original proponent for having the region given special protection. His book "Spatsizi" describes his feeling for the land and adventures from two decades spent roaming the wilderness there. It was largely due to his persistent efforts that Spatsizi Plateau Wilderness Park and Gladys Lake Ecological Reserve were created on November 27, 1975.

Additional Reading

Geist, Valerius, 1975. Mountain Sheep and Man in the Northern Wilds, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, N.Y.

Walker, T.A., 1976. Spatsizi, Nunaga Publishing Co. Ltd., Surrey, B.C.

RECREATION

The scenery and easy terrain make the park an excellent place for quality backpacking, riding, canoeing, rafting, hunting, fishing, and nature study opportunities.

Trails are more aptly called routes as they have evolved from game trails and routes for horses. As they often use stream banks where passage is easiest, many water crossings are necessary for the hiker. Game trails may be picked up where they lead in the preferred direction of travel, but they are notorious for being non-continuous or brushy. However, the majority of horse trails are blazed, are usually cleared, and have low gradients.

Two river trips are possible. One extends down the Stikine River from Laslui Lake to its confluence with the Spatsizi River. Challenging and strenuous canoeing is offered by this route; it has two portages and some class II and III sections. The other trip is down the Spatsizi River from

the abandoned B.C. Railway grade. All vessels must pull out at Highway 37 as the Grand Canyon of the Stikine is impassable.

FACILITIES

There are limited facilities in the park:

1. Rustic cabins and a cookhouse are available to the public at Cold Fish Lake. These facilities are open year-round on a first-come first-serve basis. No person may occupy them for more than seven consecutive days, nor more than 14 days total in any one year.
2. Primitive camping is permitted throughout the park. Many old guide-outfitter camps are located in favourable locations.
3. Game fish are abundant but not large in size. Species found here are Rainbow trout, Lake trout, Dolly Varden char, Mountain whitefish, Longnose sucker, Burbot and Arctic grayling.
4. Trails may be followed into most areas of interest, but are not regularly maintained.
5. The nearest gas, food, and lodging is available at Eddontenajon Lake, Tatogga Lake, and Iskut, on Highway 37.

ACCESS

The park is located approximately 300 kilometres north of Smithers and approximately 60 kilometres east of Highway 37 at Eddontenajon Lake. The majority of visitors arrive by aircraft. All major lakes are accessible to floatplanes. There are emergency landing strips at Hyland Post and Cold Fish Lake within the park. Three others are located along the B.C. Railway grade near the western park boundary.

Persons wishing to ride or hike into the park can reach the Klappan River by the Ealue Lake road which extends 22 kilometres east from Eddontenajon Lake. There is no bridge at the river crossing.

The northern and eastern portions of the park are also accessible by jetboat on the Stikine River as far upstream as Metsantan Creek.

A SPECIAL MESSAGE TO PARK VISITORS

Hunters are reminded that Gladys Lake Ecological Reserve is closed to the discharge of firearms. Firearms are not permitted in the park outside of legal hunting seasons. Please consult current B.C. Hunting Regulations for further information.

Motor vehicles, including snowmobile, ATV's and motorcycles are prohibited in the park and ecological reserve.

Gladys Lake Ecological Reserve has a number of special restrictions applying to it. It is illegal to land aircraft on Gladys Lake. Persons entering the reserve should make themselves aware of the ecological reserve regulations.

Throughout the park, persons are requested to use no-trace camping techniques. Burn all food scraps and refuse. If possible, pack out more garbage than your own. Leave no campfire rings. Bury only human waste, as animals will dig up refuse. The next comer should be unable to detect any sign of previous use.

Take standard precautions against bears in camp and on the trail. The use of bells to warn these animals of your presence is recommended.

For information regarding guided use of the park contact Mr. Ray Collingwood, Box 235, Smithers, B.C. VOJ 2N0.

SPATSIZI PARK

Crossing major streams on foot
can be dangerous in Spatsizi Park.



Hiking

Spatsizi Park is an excellent area for hiking and backpacking, providing many scenic attractions and opportunities to view wildlife. The ground at lower elevations is generally firm and sufficiently free of vegetation to permit easy traverse. Many alpine areas feature extensive plateaus which provide excellent terrain for hiking. Dwarf birch - willow communities, common in the park, are rather difficult to hike through in some locations. Fir clumps, ("shin tangle"), are a problem for hiking in some areas such as south of Bucking-

horse Lake. There are boggy areas along some watercourses and many streams are difficult to cross at high water. Snow is a hindrance to hiking early in the season, with hiking conditions not being favourable until early July.

Trails

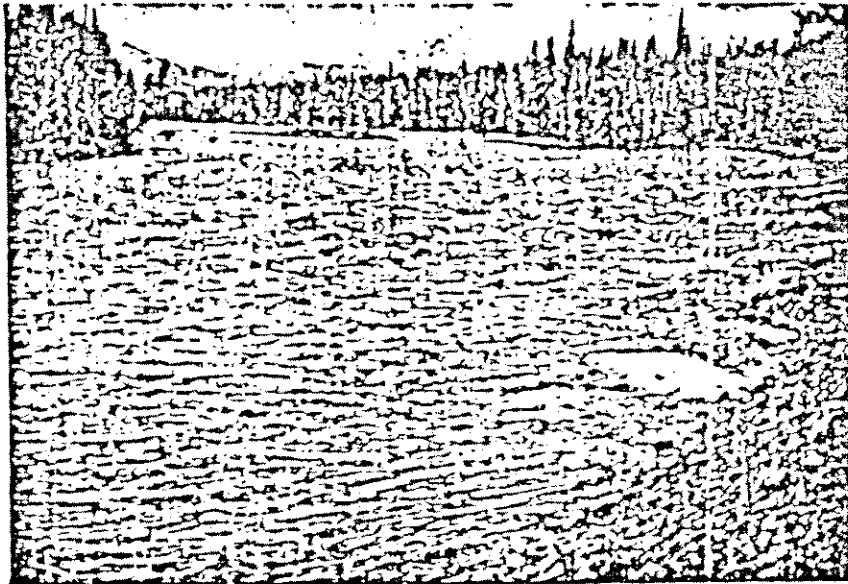
The many trails throughout the park were originally created for horse-use by guide-outfitters (see Map 4). These trails facilitate hiking considerably, although some are rather boggy at times and tend to cross streams rather too frequently for the hiker. The following is a brief discussion of trails:

1. Stikine River to Klappan River. We hiked the portion of this trail from the Stikine to approximately four miles northwest of Bug Lake. The trail is generally in good condition and easily followed for that portion. Major crossings at Kliweguh, Bear, and Black Fox Creeks could provide some difficulty at high water. A portion of the trail about a mile down Mink Creek is quite boggy and the trail could be lost there. The last five miles of the trail along Cullivan Creek crosses the creek a number of times and should not be attempted except at low water. The trail has been well-used by horses and presumably is easy to follow from Cullivan Creek to the Klappan River. Apparently, there is quite a bit of bog west of Cullivan.
2. Cold Fish Lake to Cache Creek. We traversed the length of this trail and would recommend only that portion along Black Fox Creek since the trail crosses Kliweguh Creek seven times. Hikers wishing to go west from the top of Black Fox Creek would do better to go via the Spatsizi Plateau. The Black Fox trail is generally very good except that the upper portion is very wet in spring and is badly "chewed up" by horses in the fall. The old Indian trail shown on the topographic maps from the Spatsizi River up Kliweguh Creek and on to Cullivan Creek seems to be indistinct and is not recommended.
3. Cache Creek to Marion Creek. This is an excellent trail, providing a magnificent journey (in favourable weather) through alpine tundra down into Marion Creek. Rutting caribou are frequently observed from this trail in September.
4. Cold Fish Lake to McDonald Camp. This trail begins at the Black Fox Creek crossing and is very good to Danahua Pass where

one must cross two small streams. The hike through Danahue Pass and beyond provides a very scenic view of Nation Peak and the Eaglenest Range. Crossing Eaglenest Creek at Ice Box Canyon is difficult in that the creek is divided and muddy. The remainder of the trail is very soft in places. McDonald camp consists of tent frames and a tree cache.

5. Trails south of McDonald Camp. We didn't hike any of these trails which are, presumably, well-defined but may be soft and wet. The trail from Waterfall Creek to Joan Lake is probably not well-defined in the high country.
6. Ice Box Canyon to Cullivan Creek - Trout Lake - Cartmel Lake. We only hiked the trail from Ice Box Canyon through to the main valley of Cullivan Creek. This trail is excellent to the top of Ice Box Canyon where it is indistinct; however, the direction to take is unmistakable. Going down Cullivan Creek it is best to stay on the west side as far as the campsite, although the trail crosses the creek several times. Below the campsite, the trail again crosses the creek several times. The hiker would probably do best to stick to the trail here; however, the creek crossings would be rather difficult at high water. There is apparently more than one route on the trail to Trout Lake from Cullivan Creek which might be confusing but nonetheless, it is probably a rewarding hike. The trail through Joe Mutz Pass is reportedly better than the one through Caribou Pass.
7. South Arm - Gladys Lake. There is a good trail from the south arm of Cold Fish Lake along the east side of the stream connecting Gladys Lake to Cold Fish Lake. The trail apparently crosses Cold Fish, just at the beginning of the narrows at the exit. This crossing is not advised for persons on foot - a boat or raft is advised.
8. Trails south and west of Gladys Lake. We did not hike these trails. The trail to Joan Lake may be rather indistinct.
9. Scotty Creek - Dawson River. This trail, which we did not hike, is apparently very old and is probably indistinct. Access to it is from the Spatsizi River and would also be difficult.
10. Hyland Post - Griffith Creek. This trail begins on the south side of the Spatsizi River opposite Hyland Post. It continues on to the Griffith Creek camp, crossing

the Dawson at least twice en route. The trail was used by horses in 1976 and should be quite distinct although probably soft in places.



Spatsizi River at Hyland Post.

11. Garden Creek - Klahowya Lake. We did not hike this trail which has probably not been used since the late sixties when T. Walker was the guide-outfitter. The route should be easy to discern. Slough-grass Pass and the Ross Valley are reportedly good areas to see grizzly.
12. Kluayetz Creek - Klahowya Lake. We did not hike the Kluayetz - Buckinghorse section which is probably indistinct, but might still be very useful. The trail along Buckinghorse Lake is easy to follow but soft and wet in many places. The trail down Buckinghorse Creek is good; however, the trail to Klahowya Lake is apparently difficult to follow in sections and there is Klahowya Creek to cross. (Hazelwood, 1976)
13. Klahowya Lake - Tuaton Lake. This is an excellent and very rewarding trail. Caribou and grizzly are common. Crossing the Stikine at Tuaton should be no problem providing the water is not too high. There is a tent frame cabin covered with plastic at Tuaton which was still together in the summer of 1976. The trail apparently proceeds to Laslui Lake, but we didn't hike that portion. There is a good trail along Hotlesklwa Creek from Laslui Lake to Hotlesklwa Lake.
14. Hyland Post - Blueberry Mountain. This trail begins on the south side of the river, opposite Hyland Post. The trail

is good - at least as far as the Ross crossing. The cabin located there is very old and presumably uninhabitable. The trail on to Blueberry Mountain is likely good; however, the old trail across the plateau and down to the Stikine is probably quite indistinct by this time.

Camps

The main guiding camps are at Cold Fish Lake and Hyland Post. The camp at Cold Fish Lake is owned by H. Paish of Burnaby, and consists of a cook cabin, barn, cache, sauna, office cabin, six living-quarter cabins, horse corrals and an air strip.

There are eleven buildings at Hyland Post, including a barn, tack shed, the "Morgan Cabin", and a miscellaneous cabin, all of which were presumably built by the Hylands who first established the post. There is an all-weather airstrip as well. Hyland Post currently belongs to L. Perry of Smithers and is currently on lease to H. Paish.

The trail camps were erected for purposes of hunting and, typically, contain poles for cabin tents, a wooden cache in a tree, and, sometimes, horse corrals.

The cabins at the southeast end of Cold Fish Lake and at Gladys Lake are in good condition and suitable for occupancy. The Cold Fish cabin (called Rainbow cabin) has been occupied by pack rats which have left a somewhat unpleasant odour. The "cabin" at Tuaton Lake is constructed of boards to about three feet from the ground; the rest is covered by plastic. A similar cabin was situated on the southeast shore of Hotleskiwa Lake. The old cabin near the mouth of Kliweguh Creek, called "Scotty's cabin", is very rundown and not really suitable for occupancy. The cabins at Ella and Duti Lakes are apparently in good condition with certain provisions and are used during the fall. The Ella Lake cabin is believed to belong to Bill Love and the Duti Lake cabin is owned and used by Love Brothers and Lee, guide-outfitters in Tatlatui Park. Apparently, there are also some old cabins on the Stikine River above the Spatsizi River.

Boating, Canoeing and Rafting

The principal difficulty for these activities is transportation of vehicles to the area since it must be done by air. Boats are currently kept by Paish Ventures at Cold Fish Lake, Hyland Post and Buckinghorse Lake.

There was also a boat at Hotleskiwa Lake in the summer of 1976. Power driven river boats can be taken up the Stikine to near Chapea Creek or beyond at high water, and also up the Spatsizi beyond Mink Creek.

Rafting the Stikine and lower Spatsizi is becoming popular. B. C. Forestry Service employees rafted the Stikine from Laslui Lake and have written a report on the trip (McLellan, ed. 1973). In 1975 and 76 a private group, Canadian River Expeditions, flew into Hyland Post by DC-3 and rafted down the Spatsizi to the Stikine and then on down the Stikine.

Some canoeing has been done on the Stikine. Parks Canada made the trip down from Tuaton Lake in late June, 1973 (report in G. Hazelwood files). They note three portages that must be made: the first one on the right bank for 1.2 km, beginning 1.6 km below Laslui Lake; the second for .53 km on the left bank, beginning 3.2 km below Chapea Creek and another of .8 km on the left bank around Goat Canyon at Beggarly Creek. Canoeing the Stikine is apparently gaining some popularity, as a group was encountered at Laslui Lake who were beginning a trip down the river. The Spatsizi might be a very enjoyable river to canoe as well; however, access to the upper reaches is a problem but will improve with future train access.

Hunting

The Spatsizi is very popular with hunters and their success rate on guided hunts is high (Table 2,18). Hunters have been guided in what is now Spatsizi Park since 1948 when T. Walker began operations. Prior to that, wandering groups of Indians and a few white trappers were the principal harvesters of game, although there were probably a few guided hunts in the area originating from Telegraph Creek and Fort St. James.

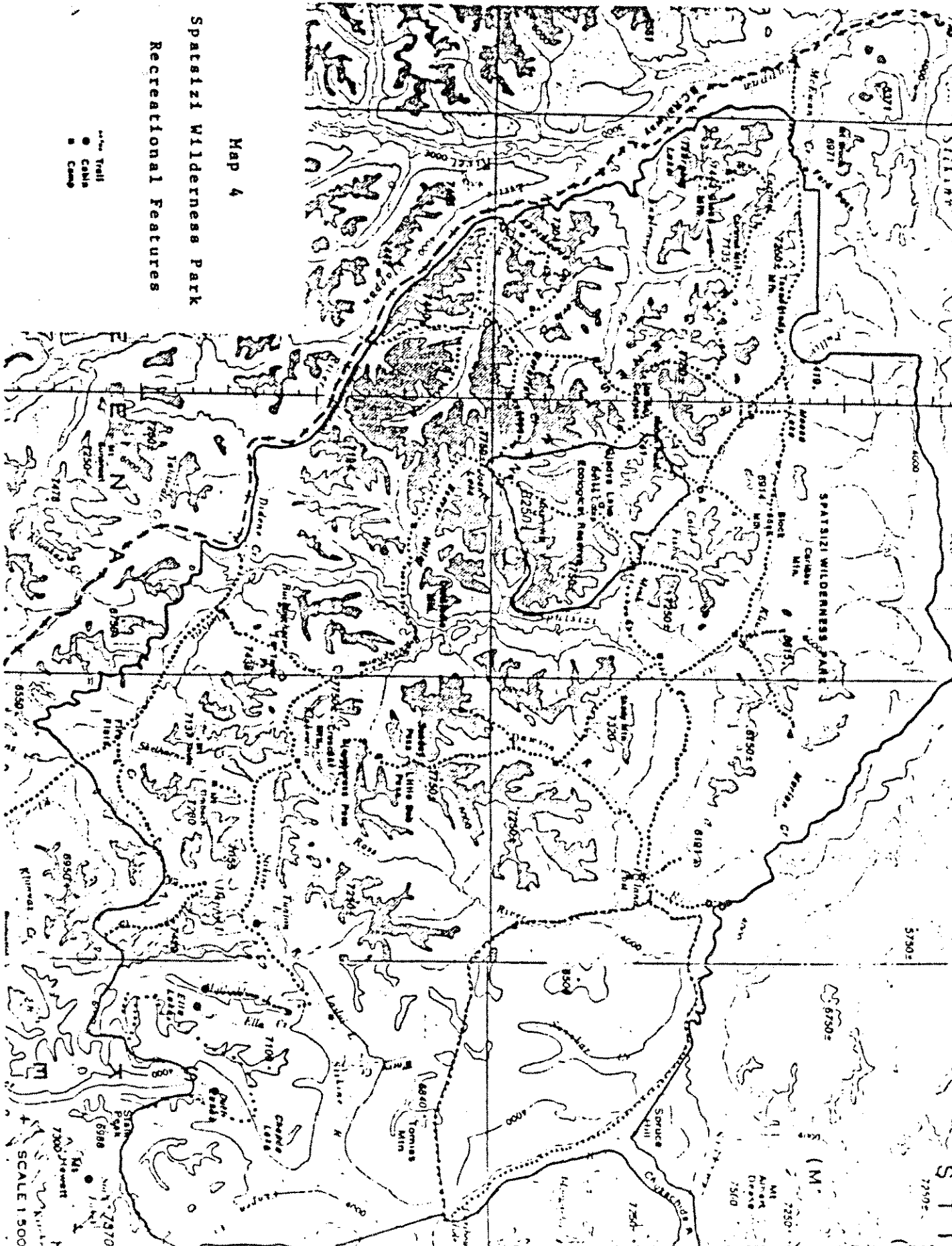
Species hunted are Stone sheep, caribou, mountain goat, moose, wolf, black bear, and grizzly bear (season temporarily closed in 1976).

Non-resident hunters must use the services of Paish Ventures with the exception that some non-residents are guided by Love Brothers and Lee in the Duti Lakes area. Resident hunters tend to hunt primarily from lakes accessible to float planes. Favoured locations are Cartmel, Tuaton, Laslui, Buckinghorse, Hotleskiwa, and Cold Fish Lakes. With road access along the B.C.R., adjacent areas may now be reached

STIKINE RANGES
(CASSIAR MOUNTAINS)

SPATSIZI WILDERNESS PARK

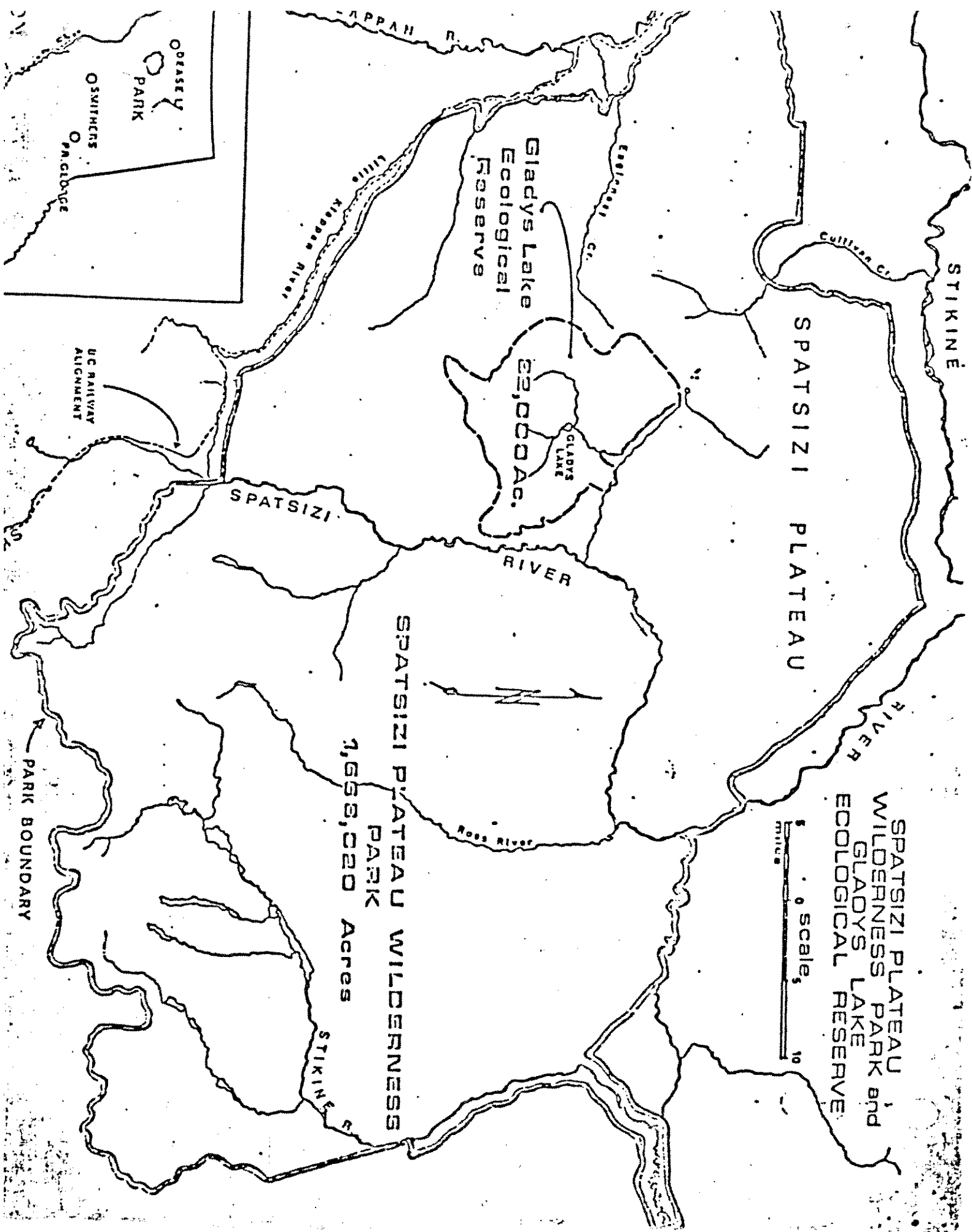
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Map 4
Spatsizi Wilderness Park
Recreational Features

- Trail
- Camp

SCALE 1:5000



SPATSIZI PLATEAU
WILDERNESS PARK and
GLADYS LAKE
ECOLOGICAL RESERVE



Gladys Lake
Ecological
Reserve

22,000 AC.
GLADYS
LAKE

SPATSIZI

RIVER

SPATSIZI PLATEAU WILDERNESS
PARK
1,658,020 Acres

STIKINE

Cullivan Cr.

East Fork Cr.

Little Klappan River

Klappan R.

ODEASE U.
PARK

OSMITHERS

PACLIDGE

U.C. RAILWAY
ALIGNMENT

PARK BOUNDARY

STIKINE

Ross River