



Photos by CAROL PATTERSON/freelance

Making it easy

BY CAROL PATTERSON
SPECIAL TO THE ADVOCATE

A large office supply company pioneered the idea of an easy button — one push and all your challenges fade away. What if you could make your trip to Canada's national parks easier? Banff National Park staff has been trying to simplify your outdoor adventures.

Last year, Parks Canada launched equipped campsites — a tent with sleeping pads is set up and waiting, removing the need to buy camping gear or stressing over how to assemble tent poles. At Two Jack Lakeside campground in 2013, Parks Canada constructed oTENTiks — sturdy tent/cabin hybrids to keep the rain out and your bones off the ground.

Both initiatives have been popular — the oTENTiks are fully booked most of the summer — and now the Red Chairs program is coming to Banff National Park. The idea for the chairs came from Gros Morne National Park, where pairs of red Adirondack-style chairs were installed hoping visitors would sit and ponder great views. The chairs were so popular, "there were lineups to sit in some the chairs," recalled Greg Danchuk, visitor experience manager at Banff National Park.

Now visitors can relax in the red chairs at several locations in Banff National Park, such as the Hoodoos Interpretive Trail or at the Valleyview

picnic area. "We placed them in places that are very easy to get to," said Danchuk. There are nine pairs of chairs in the park, with the possibility of adding more.

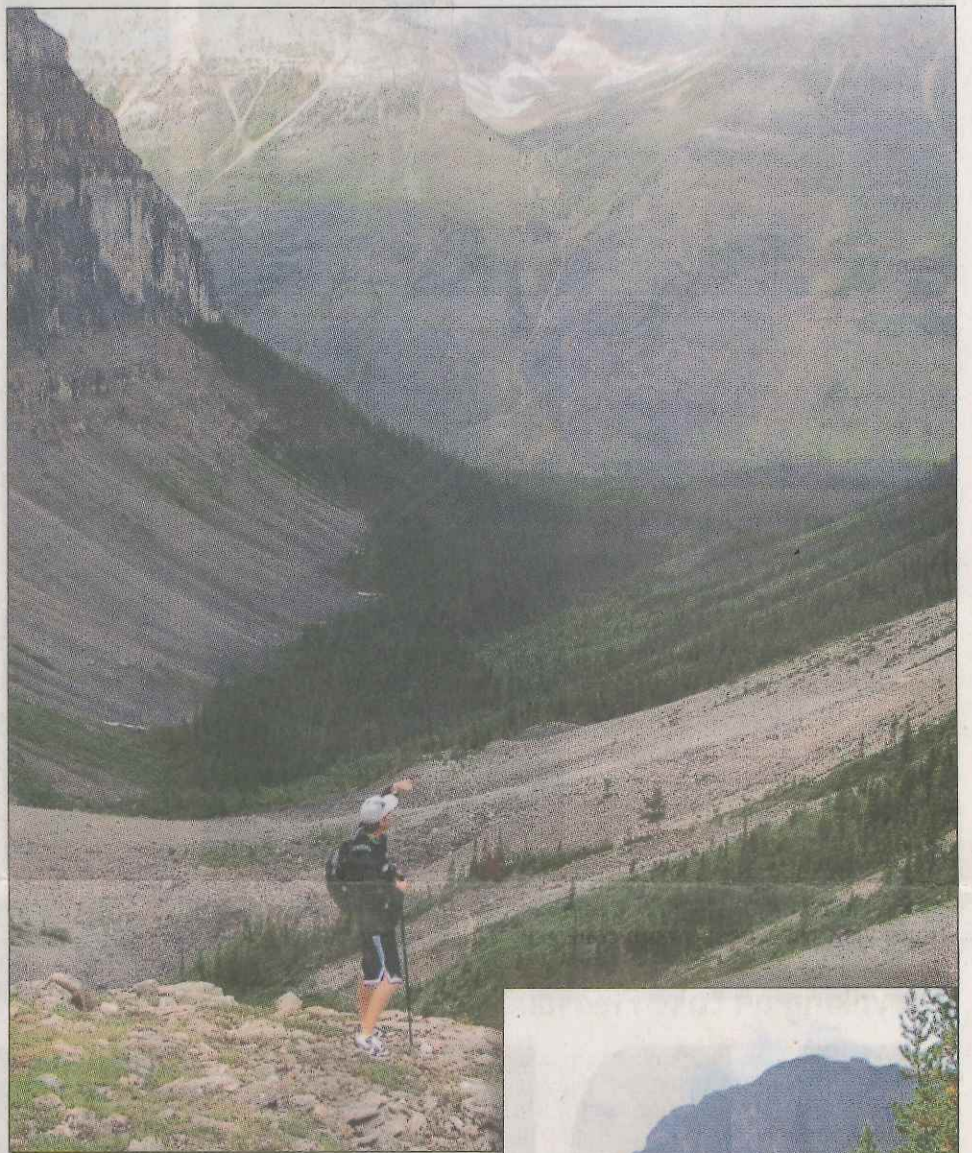
Although some people raised concerns initially that the chairs would encourage environmental overuse, Danchuk stresses, "They are not placed in the backcountry or hard-to-find areas. We would also never place them on rehabilitated ground. We will monitor them to see if there are any negative impacts but so far there has been no significant problems."

The chairs I visited were placed near picnic tables but were much more comfortable for sitting. Parks Canada hopes the chairs will encourage people to pause for a few minutes and take in the natural beauty. "Parks Canada does a lot of work to make sure nature is there and this is a way to contemplate that nature," said Danchuk.

Wanting to see the chairs for myself, I headed to the Cave and Basin. Finding the chairs near the First World War internment program exhibit, I settled in for some contemplation and to snap a few photos. It wasn't long before someone stopped to ask if I wanted my picture taken in the chair, the maple-red colour against the landscape being a visual draw for photographers.

From 2006 to 2011, attendance at national parks dropped. Concerned about the decrease, Parks Canada saw attracting new Canadians as a way to rebuild visitation. But with more Cana-

TOP: Red chairs near the Hoodoos Interpretive trail.
BELOW: Parks Canada is looking to combat visitation declines.



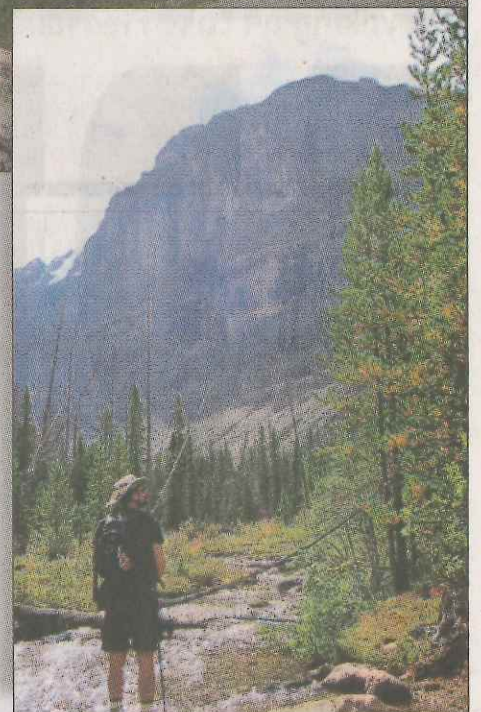
dians living in cities, outdoor skills can be rusty or non-existent.

Making it easier for people to experience the outdoors is a strategy being tried by park planners across North America and it seems to be attracting new customers to Banff National Park.

"We project a seven per cent increase in Banff park visitation for the year ending March 31, 2015 and we think some of that increase is from initiatives like oTENTiks, Equipped Campsites and the Red Chairs that make it easier to enjoy nature."

Now, if Parks Canada could find a way to make navigating crowded summer highways smoother, travel really would be easy! In the meantime, I'm going to find another chair.

Carol Patterson inspires everyday explorers within organizations. When she isn't travelling for work, Carol is travelling for fun. More of her adventures can be found at www.carolpatterson.ca.



Visitors using equipped campsites can enjoy outdoor adventure without worry about setting up a tent.



Banff National Park provides opportunities to appreciate nature. Making it easier for people to experience the outdoors seems to be attracting new customers to Banff National Park.

TRAVEL WITH FRONTIER
"because we care"



403-347-4990 | 1-888-LET-S-BUS (538-7287)
www.frontierbuslines.com

Visit our website or call for details
SUPERIOR SERVICE AT AN AFFORDABLE PRICE

PAY FOR 5 CASINO DAY TRIPS
- 6TH DAY TRIP IS FREE

MULTI-DAY TOURS
BEAUTIFUL BC & THE INSIDE PASSAGE

SINGLE DAY TOURS
GLACIER SKYWALK EXPERIENCE
Thursday May 21