Wells Gray and North Thompson-Robson Valley Global Geopark proposal

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On the map of British Columbia, Wells Gray Provincial Park is a large green spot 340 km northeast of Vancouver. At 540,000 ha, this magnificent wilderness preserve is as large as one in every five nations on earth. The boundaries of the park circumscribe nearly the entire drainage of the Clearwater River and encompass a region of tremendous geological diversity. East and north, Wells Gray bristles with unnamed peaks and ice fields, interrupted by long fjord-like lakes. South and west the landscape is more subdued, with rolling, flower-strewn highlands, scattered summits, and the broad, flat-bottomed Clearwater Valley itself. Periodic volcanic outpourings over the past three million years have transformed this landscape into a wilderness showcase of volcanic features: lava flows, cinder cones and numerous remarkable volcanoes that erupted under glacial ice or even into glacial lakes. With 18 named volcanoes, many of them shaped by ice contact, and 25 km^3 of erupted lavas, Wells Gray is a landscape of international geological significance. Superimposed over this volcanic activity are numerous meltwater-carved canyons and waterfalls for which Wells Gray – the “waterfall park” – is justly famed. The Murtle River (the world’s largest river captured within the boundary of a park) is punctuated by six major waterfalls including iconic Helmcken Falls, experienced annually by thousands of national and international visitors. The geology captured in Wells Gray, now celebrating its 75^{th} anniversary, is augmented by a rich diversity of plants and animals. As one of the world’s most accessible assemblage of ice-contact features, this fascinating landscape clearly merits recognition in the global GeoPark arena as the ‘flagship’ attraction within a designated ‘regional destination corridor’ that stretches almost 300 km from Mount Robson (a UNESCO World Heritage Site), southwards – a corridor renowned for experiences associated with its unique geomorphology, biodiversity, cultural heritage, and wilderness values.

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