



# THE MOUNTAINS, THE ROCKS THE OIL & GAS

## WE'VE BEEN PUSHED AROUND

The theory of 'plate tectonics' explains that the crust of the Earth is made up of a series of solid, moving rock plates. Over millions of years of geologic time, our North American plate has drifted from south of the equator and rotated into its present position, and has split away from the continents of Europe and Africa. (See maps below)

At times, North America has been flooded and it has received great thicknesses of sedimentary deposits. It has seen both extreme climate changes and periods of dramatic mountain building; all resulting in a great variety of very different rock types being formed (see diagrams on back side).

## DO YOU KNOW THAT GEOLOGIC TIME COVERS BILLIONS OF YEARS AND IT IS DIFFICULT TO GRASP ITS ENORMITY?

However, earth scientists have been able to age-date each event that occurred during the history of the Earth and have been able to place these events in the sequence in which they occurred. (see the Stratigraphic Column)

### Pliocene - Pleistocene time geography

(5.5 to 0.1 million years ago) Time of the ice ages when Canada was completely ice covered. The last expansion of the polar ice sheets took place about 18,000 years ago. Humans evolved during this time.



### Late Cretaceous geography

(65 million years ago) The Rocky Mountains were formed in several pulses between 170 to 40 million years ago (see back panel). North America drifted north and pulled away from Europe and Africa. Location of Chicxulub meteor impact site, caused global climate change and killed the dinosaurs and many other forms of life at the Cretaceous / Tertiary (KT) boundary - 66 million years ago. Sandstone and shales deposited in Western Canada.



### Middle Jurassic geography

(175 million years ago) The first signs of continental breakup and the Atlantic Ocean started as a narrow opening separating Africa from Eastern North America.



### Early Permian geography

(265 million years ago) Continents collide and Appalachian mountains formed. 99% of all life perished in a mass extinction at the end of Permian time.



### Early Carboniferous geography

(325 million years ago) Extensive coal swamps formed near the equator. First insects evolved 320 million years ago. Thick limestones deposited in Western Canada.



### Middle Devonian geography

(385 million years ago) Coral reefs grew in shallow warm seas. The first fish appeared 436 million years ago and vertebrates 495 million years ago. Land plants began to colonize the barren continents.



### Early Cambrian geography

(540 million years ago) Animals with hard shells, such as trilobites, appeared in great numbers for the first time.



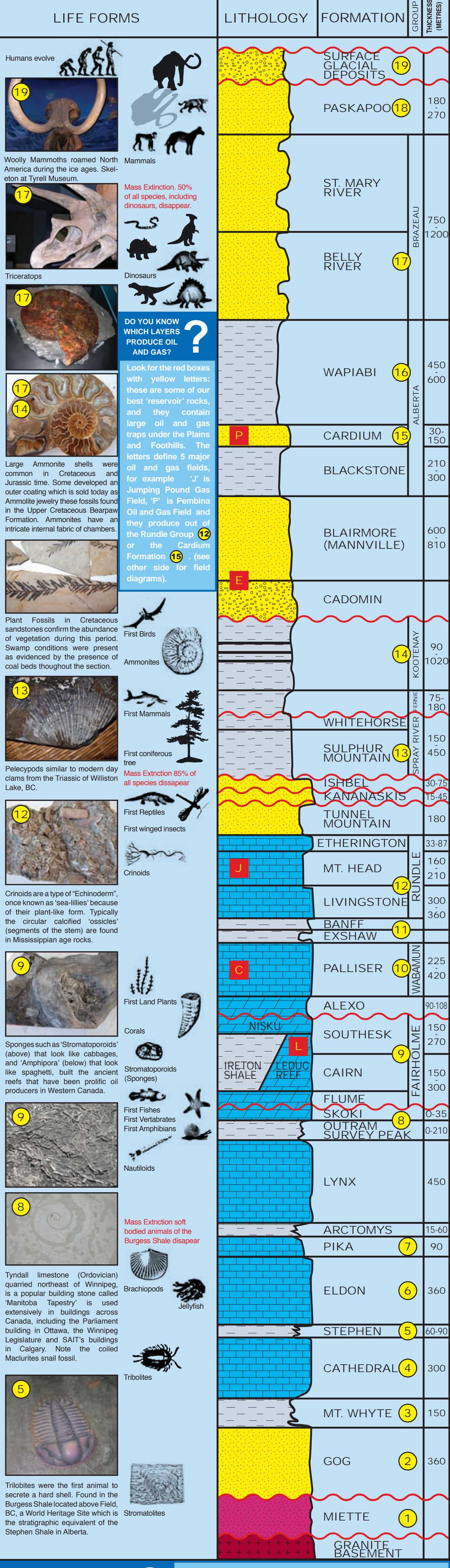
Maps above reproduced from Hitchon, B. "Alberta Beneath Our Feet," geosci@telusplanet.net

## FOSSIL HUNTING

There has been life on Earth for billions of years. Animals and plants live and die and their remains are often buried and preserved as fossils. Thousands of species have been identified by paleontologists, and their study tells a fascinating story of the evolution of life over time, as well as age-dating the rocks and providing clues to the environment in which these creatures lived for example, on land or at the shoreline in warm or in shallow water, etc. Plants are compressed and are now preserved as coals, and buried marine animal organic matter has generated our oil and gas.

## WHAT IS A STRATIGRAPHIC COLUMN?

Over millions of years of geologic time, great thicknesses of soft sediments were deposited and subsequently buried, and eventually compacted into the stratified layers of rock that we see in the mountains and in our wells today. Each layer is unique and they are shown in the stratigraphic column below, which shows in condensed form, the age, rock type (lithology), names and thickness of each unit. The oldest rocks are at the bottom and the youngest are on top; this is the way we find them under the undeformed Plains area. However in the mountains these layers are complexly folded and faulted and often the stratigraphic succession is rearranged by mountain building. The study of these layers is called 'stratigraphy'. The important rock units are given numbers 1 - 19.



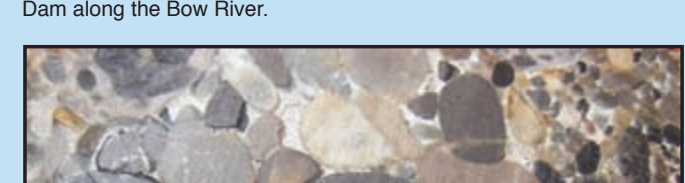
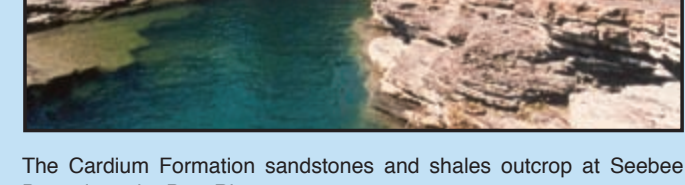
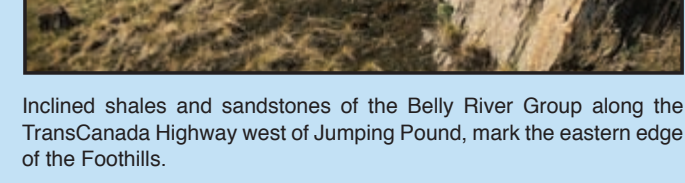
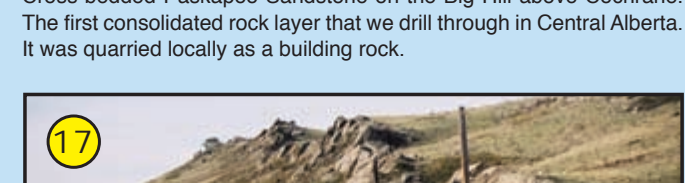
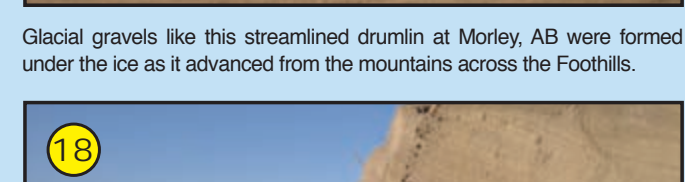
DO YOU KNOW HOW OLD THE EARTH IS? The Earth is believed to have been formed 4.6 billion years ago. Rocks dated between 570 million years and 4.6 billion years are called PreCambrian.

## EVERY ROCK TELLS A STORY

To a geologist, the rocks we see in outcrop and the samples we get from oil and gas wells tell us a fascinating story. Like detectives, we figure out their mineral composition, their age, how they were formed, and any changes that may have occurred.

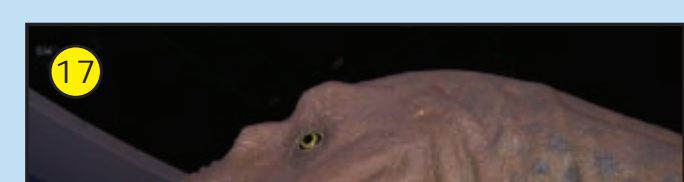
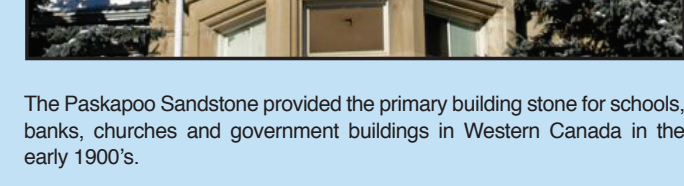
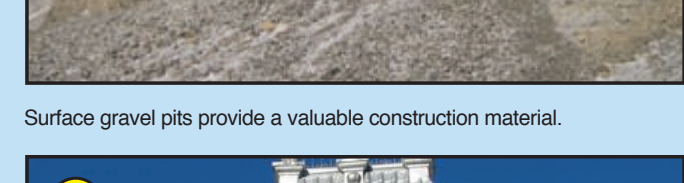
Some rocks are igneous, i.e. granites, basalts and some are sedimentary (sandstones, limestones, shales) and are the most interesting in the search for oil and gas. Some are metamorphic, or rocks that have been changed by heat and pressure, such as slates and marbles.

We look for fossils, valuable minerals, organic material, porosity (holes in the rock that could contain oil and gas), and we map their aerial distribution and their structural attitude (folds and faults).



## WHAT USE ARE THEY?

The rocks and mountains of Western Canada are an incredibly valuable resource. They have many uses including construction materials such as gravels, cement and decorative stone and they provide industrial products like oil, gas, sulphur, lime and gypsum. Their recreational and educational opportunities abound, with our national parks, skiing, hiking, rock climbing, hot springs and museums, supporting a valuable tourist industry.



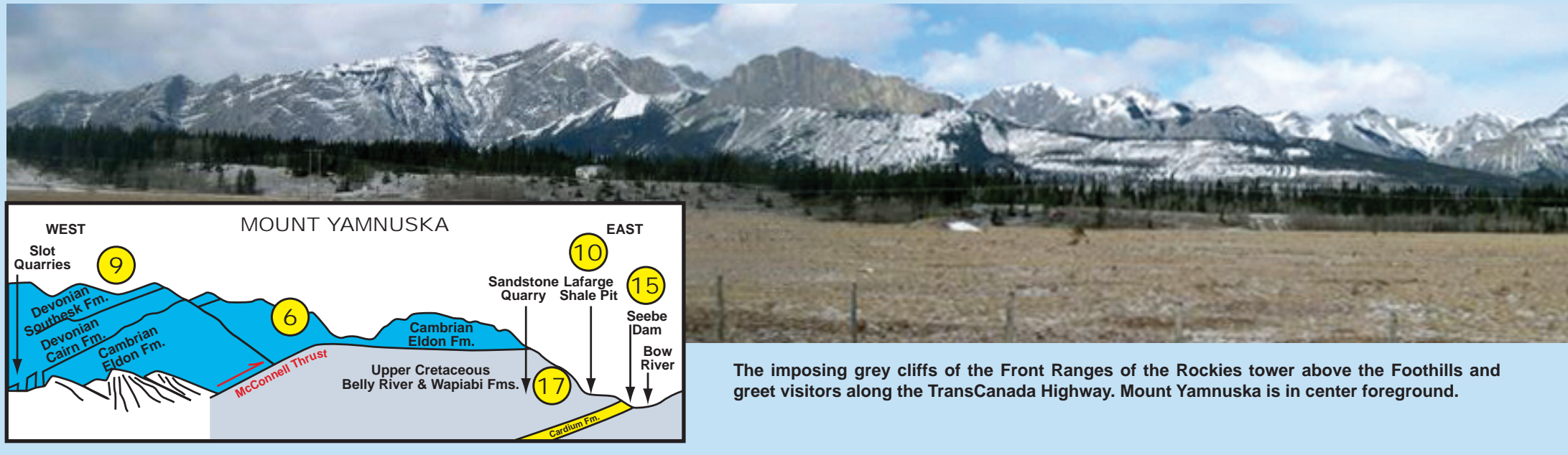
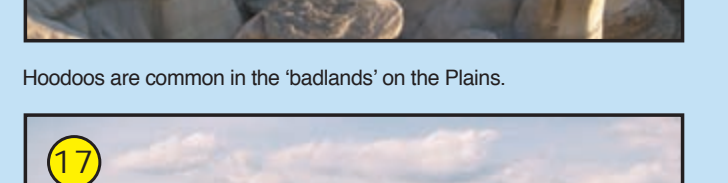
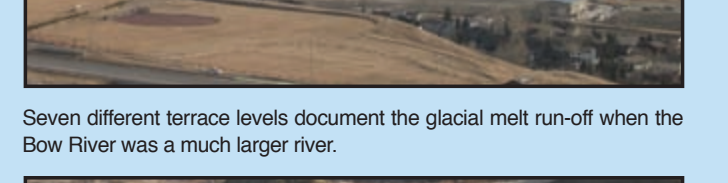
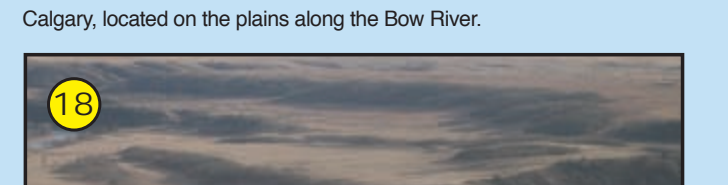
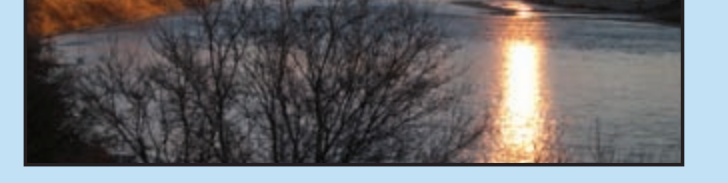
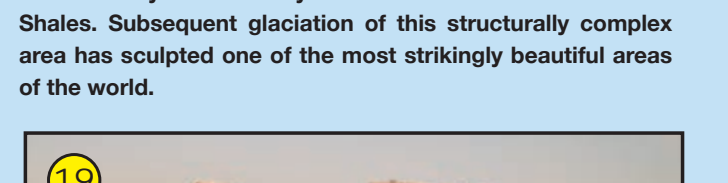
## THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE

Three very distinct geographic areas make up our changing landscape, namely the Interior Plains, the Foothills and the Rocky Mountains.

The Interior Plains comprise a flat, gently rolling grassland topography, and the surface slowly gains elevation towards the mountains. The Plains are underlain by layers of undeformed rocks that are essentially flat-lying, and the deeper layers are slightly inclined to the west, and are made up of a westward thickening wedge of sediments.

The Foothills are characterized by tree-covered rolling hills and valleys, and the underlying rocks are primarily Cretaceous in age. They are complexly thrust-faulted with the more resistant sandstone layers being the ridge-formers at the surface.

West of the Foothills, the majestic wall of the Rocky Mountains is a spectacular feature, with jagged glaciated peaks and valleys. The mountains are underlain by westwardly-inclined thrust faults with the resistant carbonate rocks of Cambrian to Permian age forming high linear ridges. The valleys are underlain by more easily eroded Triassic to Cretaceous Shales. Subsequent glaciation of this structurally complex area has sculpted one of the most strikingly beautiful areas of the world.



**LEGEND:**

<b>FOSSIL FUELS</b>	<b>CLASTIC ROCKS</b>	<b>CARBONATE ROCKS</b>	<b>OTHER ROCKS</b>	<b>SYMBOLS</b>
Oil	Conglomerate	Limestone	Salts	Unconformity
Gas	Sandstone	Dolomite	Metasedimentary Clastics	Thrust Fault
Water	Shale & Siltstone	Reef	PreCambrian Crystalline Basement, Granite	Formation Boundary
Coal				

1 - 19 Important rock units in the sedimentary basin. Also shown on photos and diagrams to designate their stratigraphic position

P Important oil and gas producing horizons and fields (e.g. Pembina Oil Field)

