

Riley Park

Riley Park is a beautiful destination in northwest Calgary. In 1910, Ezra Riley (1866 – 1937), a rancher and politician and the father of Louise Riley, donated land to the city to be designated as a park for all residents to enjoy. The park has many different amenities including a cricket pitch and a wading pool making it a popular destination during the summer months. Along 10th Street NW you will find the Senator Patrick Burns Memorial Gardens. Constructed in the 1950s, the gardens honour Senator Patrick Burns (1856 - 1937), a rancher, businessman, politician and one of the Big Four who founded the Calgary Stampede.

History

In 1904, Ezra Riley sold land to The City of Calgary that was developed into what is now known as the Hillhurst-Sunnyside community. Over 7,800 trees and shrubs were planted in the area in 1912, and by 1914 hundreds more were added, including perennial beds. In the early 1900s parks were sometimes used to grow crops to help support Calgarians in need. The produce was distributed to the hospital, children's shelter, and other local charities.

Wildlife and Plant Life

Some of the common species seen at Riley Park include the American Crow, Red-breasted Nuthatch, White-tailed Prairie Hare, and the Merlin. Trees in Riley Park include both native and non-native species, such as the Tartarian honeysuckle, caragana, white spruce, Siberian larch, Ponderosa pine, and the Bristlecone pine. Flowers commonly planted in the annual beds include petunias, tulips, and marigolds, although these vary from year to year. This high degree of biodiversity allows the ecosystem to be more resilient to environmental change.

Did You Know?

Gladstone Road/4th Avenue from 14th Street to 10th Street was part of an Indigenous trail, which is why it is not oriented North-South or East-West like most roadways in Calgary's inner-city communities. Also, the sandstone in the flowerbeds of the Senator Patrick Burns Memorial Garden were taken from his former mansion (more than 20,000 pieces)!



Riley Park Study

Overview: These activities provide hands-on learning opportunities which will enhance your students' understanding of the importance of biodiversity and green spaces, as well as develop their skills in scientific observation. The activities promote civic responsibility and natural stewardship in an engaging way.

Activity 1: Benefits of Biodiversity

Riley Park supports a high level of biodiversity due to its variety of trees and shrubs, including native and non-native species. Biodiversity (the variety of life) allows ecosystems to adapt and recover more effectively from environmental changes (resiliency). Some of these environmental changes could include floods, diseases, and climate change. Many trees in the city were planted for a variety of reasons, including riverbank stabilization, air purification, and aesthetics. Compare the biodiversity in Riley Park to the biodiversity in your schoolyard or community park. Are the trees and shrubs similar? Discuss the adaptations these species may have that could help them survive environmental changes. What are some short term and long term changes that could happen to the park that may affect these species?

Activity 2: What a Colourful World

In the garden, look carefully at five different plants, and notice the differences in their colours. Discuss the roles of colours in nature: to attract pollinators (bees and other insects see colours differently than us), attract a mate (male ducks), as a warning sign (ladybugs), to copy another species (mimicry, such as the hover fly), and for camouflage (jackrabbits changing their coats). Split your group into two, and provide one group with small pieces of paper (or other material) in a variety of colours. Ask the first group to hide their papers throughout the green space, and ask the second group to go find them. Discuss which colours were easy or difficult to find, and why. Do you recognize any of these colours in animals you've seen in the area?

Activity 3: Storytelling

Louise Riley, daughter of Ezra, served as the Children's Librarian for the Calgary Public Library from 1930 until 1949, when she became assistant librarian. She played a major role in developing the children's section of the library and was widely known as a great storyteller. Two years after her passing in 1957 a new library branch opened in her name. Louise Riley published three adventure novels, one of which is:

***A SPELL AT SCOGGIN'S CROSSING:** "Peter, a young orphan, is bound across the Canadian Rockies to a foster home. Heartsick at being separated from his dog—his new family does not want animals—Peter appeals to Gus, a railway attendant, who is a master magician. From that moment on, Peter enters a mountain world peopled with talking animals, delightful children and an eccentric English nobleman. Here, each member of the group finds the solution to his particular problem."*

Two heads are better than one! In this story, the diversity of animals and people help Peter find solutions to his problem. Write a short story taking place in nature where a problem is solved by putting the ideas of multiple characters together.

Activity 4: Benefits of Parks and Green Spaces

After having explored Riley Park and Senator Patrick Burns Rock Garden, review all the features of the park and create three stations for students to rotate between. Station 1 can look at the rock garden, and write an interpretive sign about a feature of the garden. Station 2 can look at the large green space, and design a natural playground that can be build here. Station 3 can look at the large, mature trees in the park, and write a story about something you think this tree has "seen" or "heard" in its lifetime. Gather all three groups at the end to share and reflect on everyone's observations.



Visiting Riley Park?

What you need to know.

Park Etiquette — [Click here for bylaws related to parks and pathways](#)

- Stay on designated trails at all times, unless otherwise posted. This helps to protect the habitat of plants and animals that live in the park.
- Use quiet voices. Running and yelling will scare away wildlife and reduce the opportunities to view these species.
- Do not disturb or feed wildlife, including birds.
- Look but do not remove vegetation (including flowers and berries). These plants could be food, nesting material, or a rare native species.
- Do not litter. Place all garbage, recycling, and compost in appropriate bins or take them back to your school.

Nature Kit Information

Calgary Parks would like to encourage you to explore the amazing features of Riley Park. To enhance your experience, we have a free learning kit available for you to use which includes:

- A map of the park or region
- Biofacts (bone clone mammal/bird skulls, track and scat molds, egg replicas)
- Bird plushes with audio of bird call or song
- A tree cookie (cross section from a known tree species)
- Alberta natural history field guides and booklets relevant to the topic of the kit
- Printed resources to supplement the park study activities
- Various laminated photographs and information on local plant and animal species
- Nature BINGO activity page

Renting a Nature Kit

- Kit is available for a one-week duration FREE of charge.
- User is responsible for picking up and dropping off the kit at the designated location.
- If the kit is not returned, or materials are missing or damaged, the user will be charged a replacement fee.