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The Calgary Stampede



Written by Katherine Follett

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Table of Contents

Welcome to Calgary	4
Friday: The Parade.....	6
Saturday: Farm Life & Animals	8
Sunday: A Walk Through Indian Village.....	12
Monday: The Midway	14
Second Saturday: The Grandstand Show	16
Second Sunday: Rodeo and Chuck Wagon Races.....	18
Until Next Year	23
Glossary	24



Welcome To Calgary

Calgary, Alberta, sits where the vast Canadian grasslands bump into the bottom of the Rocky Mountains. Today, it's a city of over one million people. But looking at the expanse of rolling farmland that surrounds it, you can easily see Calgary's roots. This is a town that grew from cattle, horses, ranches, and chuck wagons. This is a cowboy town.

Every summer, Calgary puts on a huge **rodeo** and show to celebrate its rich Western history. For ten days, the Calgary **Stampede** fills the city. There are parades, pancake breakfasts, horse shows, traditional American Indian dances, carnival rides, and barbecues. The star of the Calgary Stampede is and always has been the rodeo. The Stampede rodeo is one of the top contests of its kind in the world.



A Native American Hoop Dance performance at the Calgary Stampede in Alberta, Canada

Friday: The Parade

The Stampede starts off bright and early on a sunny Friday morning. At 9:00 a.m., the streets of downtown Calgary are lined four and five deep with people. It seems as though every single person here wears a cowboy hat. There's a real sense of excitement among the packed crowd. People stretch to see over or around their neighbor.

Finally, there's a blast of horns! And a bang of drums! Here comes the very loud Stampede Show Band. As the band marches down the street, people shout out their best cowboy "Yee-haw!"



The Opening Day Parade of the 1930 Calgary Stampede

The parade on Opening Day has changed little since the first one in 1912. Cowboys still wear their brightest shirts. Their horses

are brushed to shine in the morning sun. Groups from Alberta's American Indian nations parade in beautiful beaded costumes. Enormous **draft horses** appear, pulling brightly painted show wagons. Stampede week has begun!

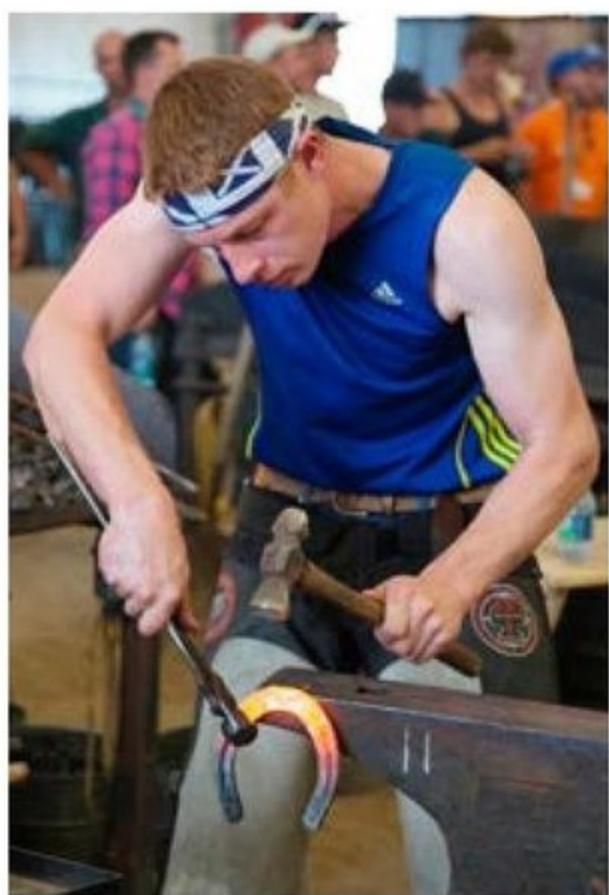
It takes a full two hours for the entire parade to pass by. Most of the crowd will follow the music toward Stampede Park. That's where most Stampede events are held. If it looks as if every person in town is going, that's because they are. In some way, everyone in Calgary helps to celebrate Stampede Week.

Almost every store window in town is decorated for Stampede. Colorful banners line the streets, announcing the day's events. There are so many things to look at, and you'll see every type of Stampede souvenir you can think of. Calgary always has places to buy cowboy hats, boots, and fancy silver belt buckles. But around Stampede time, souvenir stands line the streets. They sell straw cowboy hats, string ties, bandanas, baby moccasins, and toy chuck wagons. And food! Everywhere you walk, the smell of sizzling steak drifts out of restaurant doors and home barbecues. This city spirit is a big part of what makes the Calgary Stampede special.



Saturday: Farm Life & Animals

Calgary first became a town because the land around it is perfect for farming and ranching.



Blacksmith shaping a horseshoe.

Ranching is still big in the southern part of the **province** of Alberta. Ranchers and farmers come to show their best animals and compete in traditional blacksmith and sheep shearing contests. Huge show barns house hundreds of animals. Every animal is washed and brushed to look its best. The beef cattle

look like huge bricks of muscle.

But who can resist petting the soft nose of a sweet dairy cow? Wooly sheep, clucking chickens, scampering piglets, and skilled herding dogs all compete for your attention.



The animal that Calgary loves best is the horse—any breed, any color, and any size. Every visitor at the Stampede loves the miniature horse show. These charming little animals are barely waist high, but they have all the grace and spirit of full-size horses. The packed crowd roars for the miniature chuck wagon races. Fast and furious, it's a smaller-sized preview of the Stampede's most exciting event.

At the other end of the size scale is Draft Horse Town. These horses are enormous—some weighing over 2,000 pounds. Draft horses were the tractors of old Alberta. They hauled heavy loads on farms and in factories. The Heavy Horse Pull event shows off their strength, beauty, and grace. Teams of straining draft horses drag enormous sleds loaded with massive blocks. Champion teams may pull over 10,000 pounds!



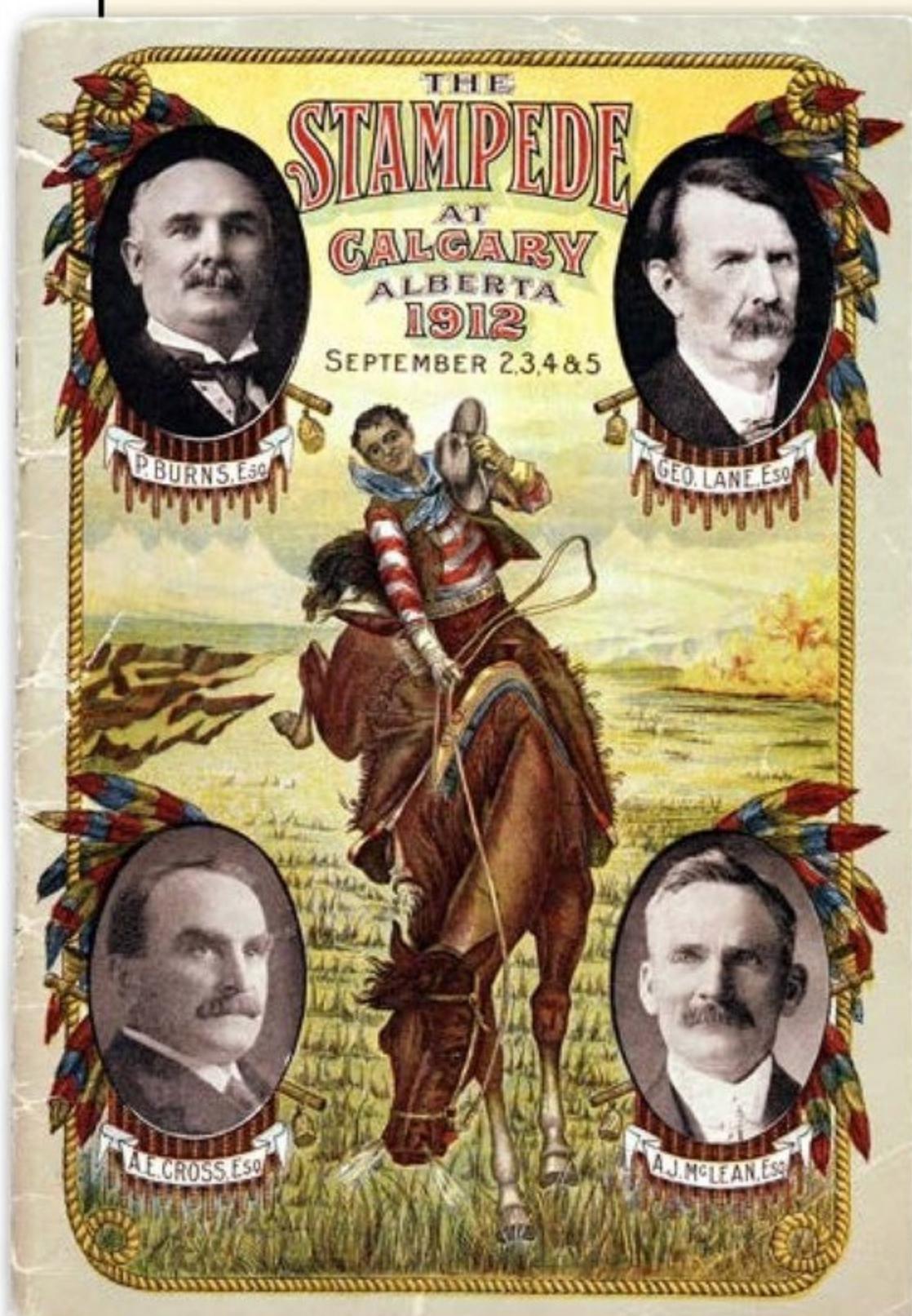
The History of the Calgary Stampede

In 1886, the farmers and ranchers of the area held a local fair called the Calgary **Exhibition**, to show off their crops, animals, and crafts. It was a success, so other Exhibitions were held on and off for the next several years.

Calgary's popular fairs caught the attention of an American cowboy and entertainer named

Guy Weadick. He thought Calgary would be the perfect place to hold a huge rodeo and Western fair.

The first Calgary Stampede, held in 1912, included many of the events you see in Calgary today—a parade, a rodeo, riding **demonstrations**, and ranching and animal displays.



The first Stampede was a huge hit and was the talk of the town for years afterward. Weadick organized another Stampede in 1919.

- 1886:** The first Calgary Exhibition, an agricultural fair, is held in October.
- 1888:** The Calgary Agricultural Society buys the land that will become Stampede Park.
- 1912:** Guy Weadick and his partners hold the first Calgary Stampede.
- 1919:** The second Calgary Stampede includes World War I military exhibits.
- 1923:** The Calgary Stampede and The Calgary Exhibition combine.
- 2012:** The city celebrates the 100th anniversary of the Calgary Stampede.

In 1923, the Stampede joined with the Calgary Exhibition and the bigger, combined new show became a yearly event. It continues to grow almost every year. In the 1960s, so many events were scheduled that the Stampede expanded from a week to ten full days. Today, the Stampede attracts over one million visitors each year, and many of the buildings in Stampede Park have become Calgary landmarks.





Sunday: A Walk Through Indian Village

The American Indian nations of southern Alberta are well represented at Stampede. They have participated since its very first year. The Siksika (SIK-sik-a), the Piikani (pee-KAN-ee), and the Kainai (KY-ny); the Tsuu T'ina (tsoo-TI-na), and the Nakoda (na-KO-da) all take part. Indian Village contains more than two-dozen **tipis** (TEE-pees), each covered in beautiful signs and symbols.

Members of the represented tribes live in Indian Village during the Stampede. Visitors are welcome in these beautiful tipi homes. It's a unique way to experience First Nation traditions, foods, and culture firsthand.

Beauty and decoration aren't only seen on a tipi. A flash of beads and long buckskin fringe turns us toward the Native Dance competition. The dancers' amazing costumes are highly detailed. Quills, fringe, and feathers follow a dancer's every move. Ankles and wrists are wrapped in bands of tiny bells and beads that rattle and ring in time with a drum's beat.

The tribes of southern Alberta are Great Plains Indians. For thousands of years, they followed the great herds of buffalo. Each group would set up a tipi camp where the hunting was best. When the herd moved on, so did they. This tipi-building tradition continues in today's tipi-raising contest. Now, teams race each other to set up and take down a sturdy tipi. One winning team at the Stampede raised a tipi in under five minutes!



Interior of a tipi in Indian Village at the Calgary Stampede

Monday: The Midway

The twenty-first-century Stampede isn't only about remembering tradition and history. Just follow the sounds of thrilled screams and laughter to find the bright lights of the **midway**! The Stampede's entertainment midway is one of the largest in North America. It's filled with people day and night. There's always a long line for the Sling Shot, a ride that flings people over 200 feet in the air! Fun-fair rides spin, twist, flip, swing, and toss people around in every direction. As day turns into evening, the lights get even brighter. The sky above the midway glows like Canada's famous northern lights.





And just smell the food! The two major food groups on the midway seem to be “fried” and “on a stick.” You can get fried pickles, fried jellybeans, and fried strawberry shortcake. There’s cheese on a stick, waffles on a stick, and pizza on a stick. You can also sample a hot beef sundae. This sundae piles layers of meat and mashed potatoes to look like ice cream!

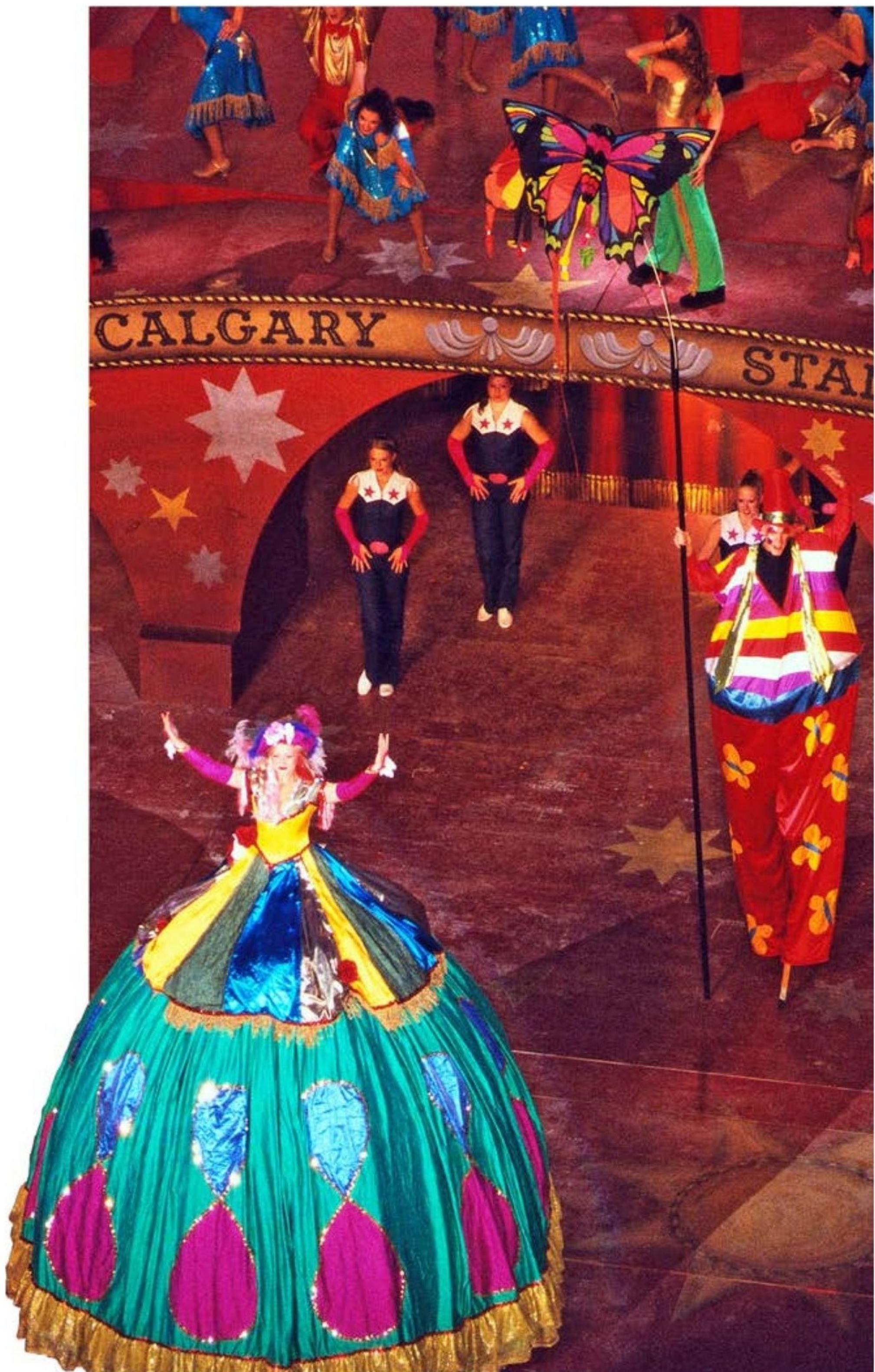
Many Stampede events, such as the midway and the barn tours, run for the full ten days. Visitors have plenty of opportunities to see everything. Even if you don’t make it to Stampede Park each day, there are loads of special events in town as well. Stampede concerts feature the biggest names in rock and country music. You’ll also find a juggler, mime, or magician on almost every street corner!



Second Saturday: The Grandstand Show

It wouldn't be a trip to the Calgary Stampede without tickets to the **Grandstand** Show. You won't see any empty seats at this huge evening performance. It's like a rock concert, Broadway play, and circus all in one. This amazing show is put on by the Young Canadians, students at a performing arts school for kids as young as 11. They get yearlong professional training. The big highlight of their year is the Stampede Grandstand Show.

This is no dance-class recital. It's big. The Grandstand stage is enormous, full of lights, smoke, and giant screens. It even has floating platforms suspended high over the crowd on wires. Every spot on the stage is filled with performers in elaborate costumes. These kids can sing, dance, and perform amazing acrobatic tricks. This one-night show is not to be missed!





Second Sunday: Rodeo and Chuck Wagon Races

This is it—the biggest and most famous event of the Calgary Stampede. It's the Championship Rodeo.

The rodeo has gone on all week and there have been lots of winners. But tonight is all about the best, the strongest, and the luckiest. The Grandstand is packed with eager rodeo fans and people who are just here for the **spectacle**. Cowboy hats sit atop almost every head. In fact, Western wear is required for anyone stepping onto the center ring. No dudes allowed. Every seat is filled, and the restless crowd keeps looking toward the gates. Then *clang!* A metal gate springs open. There's a shout, a horse snorts loudly, and the first bareback **bronc** rider leaps into the ring!

Most rodeo events match a rider against an animal that might weigh ten times as much as he or she does. In bareback bronc riding, the rider tries to stay atop a bucking horse for eight seconds. There's no saddle. He hangs onto a strap buckled around the horse's middle, with just one hand. The horse leaps, jumps and twists, trying to shake off the rider. The rider must stay on for the full eight seconds to qualify. The final winner takes home a \$100,000 check!

The saddle bronc event is similar, but the cowboy sits on a saddle. He tries to control the bucking horse using reins and stirrups. Next up is bull riding, which also follows the same basic rules. Of course, the cowboy isn't on a horse—he's on a huge bucking bull.



Steer Wrestling event

The bulls at the Stampede rodeo seem extra huge and powerful. But these big bulls leap and twist like giant rubber bands. The bull rider needs to hang on for the full eight seconds and then jump from the bull's back. But sometimes the bull wants to chase the rider down. Call the clowns! Before the rider can get hurt, the rodeo clowns run in. These skilled bull handlers rush into the ring and distract the animal. They herd the bull away and the lucky rider makes his escape.



Steer wrestling is just what it sounds like: a rider on horseback chases after a running steer. He throws himself on the animal and pulls it to the ground by its horns. Barrel racing is a timed horse-control event that's only for women.

Highly trained horses loop around several barrels in tight turns. This event tests a rider's balance, speed, and skill.

Finally, the broncs, bulls, and tired riders have earned their cheers and prizes. But the Stampede crowd has waited for one last event. It's time for the wild and always-exciting chuck wagon race.



On the vast grassy plains, the chuck wagon served as the cowboy's kitchen as well as the doctor's office and supply station.

The crowd strains to see the wagon teams pull into place at the end of the track. Teams of four horses, each pulling a canvas-covered chuck wagon, line up. Then teams of cowboys called *outriders* line up their horses behind the wagons. The outriders then stand behind a wagon's tailgate. The crowd takes a deep breath.

What's a chuck wagon?

Chuck is an old cowboy word for "food." Cowboys spent a lot of time out on the **range**, herding cattle to market. The chuck wagon was a horse-drawn mobile kitchen. It held the team's food, extra supplies, and a heavy iron stove to cook on.

Chuck wagon races first became a sport at the 1923 Calgary Stampede. They were another invention of Guy Weadick.



Chuck Wagon Race event

There's the starting horn! The outriders leap into action. They fling poles and a rubber "stove" into the back of each wagon. The wagon teams blast away at a gallop. The outriders leap onto their horses and race after the wagons. The bouncing, rattling, clanging wagons do a dangerous figure-8 around barrels. Then they race around the track at full speed! Pounding horse hooves and rattling wagons shake the grandstand seats.

As they race to the finish line, the crowd is on its feet, with everyone cheering on their favorite team. The first team of horses blasts across the finish line, outriders racing right behind. The first place team wins \$100,000 in what's often called the roughest event in rodeo.



Until Next Year

It's been an exhausting but eye-opening ten days at the Calgary Stampede. If you visit for even one day, you'll be amazed at the huge size of this event. Each year, the stampede involves thousands of workers, volunteers, and participants. It's a lot of hard work to put on a show of this size. But there's no question that all these people will be back again next year to help out. The Calgary Stampede is the pride of Calgary. It's a unique and memorable way for a city to celebrate. The Stampede celebrates its history, brings its people together, and shows the world what the Canadian West is all about.

Glossary

bronc (n.)	a wild or untamed horse (p. 18)
demonstration (n.)	a presentation that shows how something works (p. 10)
draft horse (n.)	a large, muscled horse bred for pulling heavy loads (p. 6)
exhibition (n.)	a public show of artwork or other things of interest (p. 10)
grandstand (n.)	the main seating area at a stadium or racetrack (p. 16)
midway (n.)	an area of a carnival or fair where rides, food, and games are found (p. 14)
province (n.)	any one of the largest areas that some countries are divided into (p. 8)
range (n.)	a large open area where animals roam and graze for food (p. 21)
rodeo (n.)	an exhibition or competition in which people display skills related to handling cattle and horses (p. 4)
stampede (n.)	a sudden rush of cattle or other herd animals that panic and run at top speed as a group (p. 4)
spectacle (n.)	an unusual or impressive object or event seen in public (p. 18)
tipis (n.)	tentlike homes used by Native Americans of the Great Plains (p. 12)

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Author's Note: A note on usage—the terms “Indian” and “American Indian” are used throughout the Stampede by both Native communities and European-Canadians, so that term is used here to describe Native American/First Nations peoples.

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