



# O'Hara 2001

Published by the Lake O'Hara Trails Club, Box 98, Lake Louise, Alberta T0L 1E0

## Poetry & Painting: J.E.H. MacDonald's Lake O'Hara

Lisa Christensen

James Edward Hervey (J.E.H.) MacDonald  
(1873 - 1932)

As a founding member of the Group of Seven, J.E.H. MacDonald is well known as a key figure in the emergence of Canadian modernism in painting. His works depicting Algonquin Park, many areas of Toronto, and the landscape north of Lake Superior adorn gallery walls coast to coast. He is less well known for his depictions of the Lake O'Hara region, an oddity, as the scenery here was his greatest obsession.

Lake O'Hara was MacDonald's Mecca. Every year from 1924 until 1930 he undertook a six week sketching trip. On the train, as it pulled out of the station in Toronto, he would begin his journals, writing several times each day until his return to the city some six weeks later, painted out and exhausted, but full of the spirit of the Rockies. He found within the beauty of the mountains, a release from the pressure that his career as an artist brought him. Lake O'Hara was his solace, and the numerous small oil sketches, all created on the spot and in virtually every region of Lake O'Hara, testify to the beauty he found there. They are fresh, immediate, and personal, a delightful window into a little known part of this famous Canadian life. The journal entries are equally delightful, as one excerpt transcribed following shows:

*Mon. Aug. 31, 1925. Another grand John Muir Day. One when John would have ranged the heights with his soul in rapture. Bigger*



*Pack train to Lake O'Hara.*

*Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies V263 NA71 2049 Vaux Family.*

*clouds than yesterday, and now (evening) comes a little shower on the roof. Sketched at O'Hara this morning, effect, delicacy the idea, the clear but delicate light tones of the mountains in shadow, the lake colour absolutely unapproachable. "I don't believe nobody can do it." In afternoon, made sketch of Cathedral with stream in foreground, and after supper, a small sketch of orange clouds and grey peaks. Made sketch in early morning. (7 o'clock) of Lefroy with peculiar shadow lines from peak in sky.*

MacDonald's sketches capture the many moods of Lake O'Hara, showing her in all her unpredictable variety. A sun streaked sketch of Lake McArthur that was completed the same day as a cold grey rain storm study of the cliff face south of the Seven Veils Falls chart his adventures with the weather, and his journal notes, documenting not only each sketch, but the

events of each day, fill out the visual story. His adventures getting to the lodge by pack train became the foundation for a published book of poems, and his growing feelings of patriotism and love for the mountain scenery inspired a series of University lectures and public addresses. While at O'Hara, he encountered and worked with other artists, quietly observed wildlife from his sketching seat, watched climbing parties come and go, and enjoyed jokes with the kitchen staff and other lodge guests. He is an integral part of the history of Lake O'Hara as are the logs from which the lodge is built.

*I welcome your comments and suggestions as I complete research on this book, at [christel@cadvision.com](mailto:christel@cadvision.com).*

For two days in July of 2000, Don Gardner of Gardner Associates Ltd. carried out an assessment of the majority of the hiking trails in the Lake O'Hara area. A few trails such as Duchesnay Basin, Cathedral Basin and some minor connectors were not included in the work due to their remoteness, low use and / or known good condition. Don had done work on the Cathedral Basin trail in 1999 along with work on bridges heading out to Morning Glory Lakes from the campground. The final gravelling on this trail was completed early in the summer of 2000.

A report was generated by Gardner Associates that provided a brief assessment of each trail followed by a list of deficiencies and recommended repair work. The vast majority of the work proposed is of a preventative nature where corrections of relatively minor deficiencies will prevent the development of major problems. It is suggested that a single person can carry out this work over a period of 35 days perhaps spread over 2 or 3 years as suggested by the priority rating given to each task. This preventative maintenance work consists of tasks such as cleaning and / or adding drainage features (water bars), removing mid-trail obstacles such as rocks and roots, surfacing, repairing rock work, defining trail tread, blocking braided trails etc. This work is prioritized and estimates of the commitment are made in person day's labour and materials.

The judgement as to the priority of the proposed work is made in regards to environmental protection (washouts, trail widening, impact on water ways and other terrain impacts), safety and to a lesser degree visual quality and hiker enjoyment.



*Preservation through  
Appreciation*

For the 2001 season, we would like to have work done on the trails given the highest priority. Both the trails described below receive heavy use throughout the season and while the deficiencies may seem minor, they should receive immediate attention before they escalate into major problems.

## **1. Lake O'Hara Circuit:**

Scattered along the entire trail there is work needed where there is trail widening from hikers stepping around obstacles. Work is required to replace and stabilize rock steps and slabs at the two small creek crossings (in the gullies) on the north side of Lake O'Hara. Near the junction of the East Opabin Trail, due to the loss of trail surfacing the trail is being widened into the forest when this section of trail is flooded by high water or during extreme wave action.

## **2. Lake Oesa Trail:**

The repairs completed in 1996 on the switchbacks just above Lake O'Hara were reported stable other than a stonework support flaw on the first major slab stairway on the trail and in 3 other situations scattered along the remainder of the trail. The loss of the support of the bottom tier of any rockwork structure will quickly result in the loosening of the bottom rocks and eventual disintegration of the entire structure. This is a common process at O'Hara and requires attention throughout the Lake O'Hara trails. In addition, another priority on the Oesa trail is correcting the problem that occurs when water on the trail quickly erodes the trail tread and hikers then create a parallel braided trail. This is a major concern just above the "falls" and can be corrected by cleaning cross ditches and water bars and occasionally creating new ones.

We are pleased to have this report completed as we plan to use it as a framework when planning future trail work. Don Gardner does excellent work and is well respected by Parks Canada. If you are out on the trail this summer and happen to see Don at work, you should stop to say hello. A true mountain man with a historical connection to the O'Hara area, you can count yourself lucky if he shares a story with you as he has many an interesting tale to tell.

## **Wildlife Corridors**

Concentrated points of human activity can influence the behaviour, survival and reproduction of individual animals. Wary species, like carnivores may avoid the area, or be forced to alter their movement to travel at night. This effect is magnified in a narrow wildlife corridor where, over time, it can influence the composition and persistence of entire communities of wildlife.

If wildlife cannot move freely across the landscape, less habitat is available to them, and ultimately the patch of habitat they are in becomes isolated. This reduces the effectiveness of the corridor and its role in connecting healthy, viable wildlife populations and communities.

# Shared Stewardship on the Odaray Highline Trail

Jenny Klafki and Clare Day

Last summer an exciting and innovative approach was used to help protect an important wildlife corridor running through the Lake O'Hara area. The understanding and support of Lake O'Hara visitors and their willingness to voluntarily change the way they used the Odaray Highline trail was key to the success of this approach. To understand how this voluntary use program came into place, it is worth casting back to events that triggered an intensive five-year research project and an evolution in management.

Four serious bear-human encounters occurred on the Odaray Plateau over a nine year period (1984 - 1993). During this time, two other serious but non-injurious encounters occurred in the McArthur Valley. Seasonal area closures were effected in 1993 on Odaray Plateau and in McArthur Valley to help prevent further bear-human conflict. Both a hazard assessment and an earlier bear study raised concerns about the long-term health of the local grizzly bear population. The concentration of these events to such a localized geographic area seemed to indicate something was happening here that was not well understood.

With the participation of several stakeholders, including Lake O'Hara Lodge, a five-year socio-ecological research project was initiated. It identified key wildlife habitats and an important movement corridor. Management actions to revise closures at Odaray Plateau and McArthur Valley were recommended by the Lake O'Hara research steering committee and accepted by Parks Canada in 1998.

The Odaray Highline trail bisects the McArthur Valley ñ Cataract Brook wildlife corridor at its most narrow point. Human use at this pinch point in McArthur Pass has the potential to act as a filter or worse, a barrier to wary animals trying to move through the area. There is a need to reduce the level of human activity at this point to free up some elbowroom for wary animals. A regulatory approach using a permit system was set up in 1999. It was successful in that it helped maintain a low level of disturbance, but public feedback indicated it was too restrictive and cumbersome.

Rather than try to regulate people, a philosophy of education and empowerment was adopted for 2000. This approach, using communication, focused on many issues that require attention well

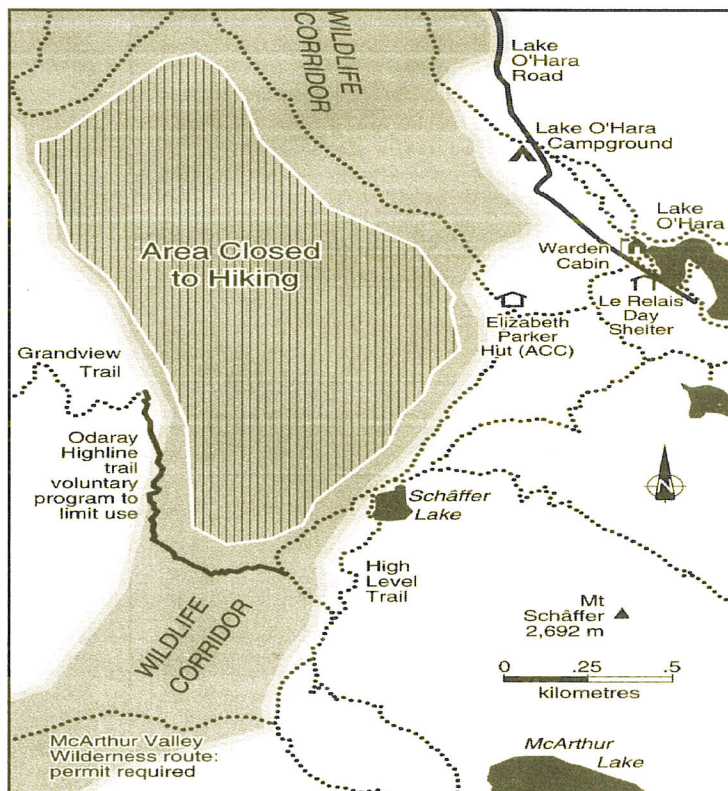
beyond Lake O'Hara. Concepts such as wildlife corridors, effective habitat, seasonally important habitats, and human disturbance were explained. Basically, attempts were made to empower users of the area so that they had the choice to change how they used the area to help protect the wildlife corridor. Besides ecological and public safety objectives, quality visitor opportunities was also an important objective.

Inherent in the success of the voluntary use program pilot is its ability to actively involve visitors in the area's protection. By providing tools and information needed to understand the importance of the wildlife corridor and the program's objectives, visitors were empowered to make ecologically responsible decisions. These decisions resulted in the following outcomes:

- A low number of disturbance events occurred in the corridor
- 89% of hiking activity on the Odaray Highline occurred between 09:30 and 16:30
- overall use of the trail was reduced by half
- group size increased slightly
- only 5 or 6 parties stopped within the corridor
- only 1 dog was observed with a hiking party
- 3 out of 10 visitors chose to hike elsewhere to support the program's objectives
- 94% of general area users were satisfied with opportunities in the area

Lake O'Hara stakeholders and visitors can be proud of their stewardship commitment. The success of the voluntary use program for the Odaray Highline trail reflected people examining their values and seeing themselves as part of the land with a role to play in its protection. If this approach can be facilitated throughout the mountain national parks, visitors will be perceived by themselves and others not simply as "users" of an area, but rather as caretakers.

*The evaluation summary is available for reading at Le Relais and the Lodge.*



Lake O'Hara: McArthur Pass and Odaray Plateau Area

# Fundraising and Finances

The Trails Club is fortunate to receive many donations from members and also non-members experiencing the wonder of the Lake O'Hara area and wanting to contribute to the trail system in some way. In 2000 those donations totaled \$6,327.05. Lake O'Hara Lodge donates all that wonderful carrot cake, chocolate chip cookies and delicious sandwiches sold in Le Relais. That donation factored to \$1730.00 in 2000. The Trails Club has also been very fortunate over the years to receive a donation from every adult bus fare paid by visitors coming to the Lake O'Hara area. In 2000, that donation amounted to \$4,374.00.

On the expense side, \$2800.00 was paid in total to speakers participating in the popular speaker series program that takes place in the evenings at Le Relais throughout the summer. Topics vary and seating space is usually at a premium. We donated \$3500.00 towards the Bear Habituation Program. This program is financially supported by The Lake O'Hara Trails Club, The Friends of Yoho and Parks Canada and has become a successful endeavour to educate the visiting public in Yoho National Park about our grizzly bear population helping to ensure the survival of this great mammal. In the summer of 2000, \$2900.00 was spent on trail projects. This involved the finishing of the bridge replacement on the Morning Glory trail and some outstanding signs needed to complete the replacement of trail signs in the O'Hara area.

The end result? After operating Le Relais, accepting donations and fulfilling our trail

work and educational objectives for the year 2000, the net income of the Club was \$1760.00. Your donations continue to be of great significance to the Club and we thank you all for what you have contributed to us over the years. Our work is small but significant in the area. For two seasons now we have seen minimal trail work done by Parks Canada Trails crews in the O'Hara area with the exception of the rehabilitation of the trails in the Odaray Plateau area. Parks Canada continue to find their resources being cut (reflected in staffing and funding available for projects) and are challenged to determine priority of trail work within our designated area which includes Yoho National Park, Kootenay National Park and the Lake Louise area of Banff National Park.

In the fall of 2000, the Lake O'Hara bus service was put out to tender by Parks Canada. A donation for trail work from the bus fare was not considered in the bidding process. As a concession, Parks Canada has kindly agreed to offer a donation for the 2001 season however we fear that this major donation source may be soon gone. If you have any suggestions for fundraising or wish to become involved, please let us know. We look forward to hearing from you all.

For 2001 you can consider sending a donation that will be put towards our speaker series program, the bear habituation project and the trail work prioritized by our trail assessment initiative. Happy trails to everyone!

***Annual Meeting***  
The 2001 Annual Meeting of  
the Lake O'Hara Trails Club  
will be held at Le Relais at 8:30 p.m.  
**Monday, July 30th.**

## *Would You Like to Join Us?*

Life membership in the Lake O'Hara Trails Club is available at Le Relais for a mere \$25. For this you will receive this newsletter annually and help support club activities in the Lake O'Hara area.

## *We Need Your Help!*

Your donation to the Lake O'Hara Trails Club will help further the preservation of Lake O'Hara and its trail system. The Trails Club is a registered non-profit organization and will issue a receipt for income tax purposes. You may donate directly at Le Relais, or mail your donation to:

**The Lake O'Hara Trails Club**  
**Box 98**  
**Lake Louise, Alberta**  
**T0L 1E0**

Produced by the  
Lake O'Hara Trails Club.

Contributors:  
Jenny Klafki  
Clare Day  
Don Gardner

Editor: Alison Millar



*Preservation through  
Appreciation*

