



# O'Hara 2008

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## My Lake O'Hara by Chic Scott

We all know that Lake O'Hara and the surrounding mountains are rich in history. We have heard the story of Sam Allen and Yule Carryer discovering Abbot Pass in August 1894, and we know that Phillip Abbot lost his life on Mount Lefroy two years later. The stories of Dr. George (Tommy) Link and Lawrence Grassi's efforts to create the wonderful trail system are also well known. But there are many other exciting tales of mountain adventure at Lake O'Hara that are rarely told.

When I step out of the bus and gaze up at the summits, I see many unknown stories of trailblazers, lingering around the peaks. Few people know that Lake O'Hara was the scene of Conrad Kain's first climbs in Canada. In July 1909, shortly after arriving in Banff, Kain was sent by A.O. Wheeler, President of The Alpine Club of Canada, to Lake O'Hara to help set up the club's summer camp. On his first day off, anxious to stretch his muscles and see the Canadian Rockies up close, he climbed with A.O.'s son, E.O. Wheeler and American Val Fynn to the top of Mount Odaray. The next Sunday he made a solo ascent of Mount Victoria. Kain was no doubt impressed by what he saw and spent the rest of his life climbing and guiding in Canada. He went on to be our most outstanding mountain guide and led first ascents of Mount Robson, Mount Louis and Bugaboo Spire.

And when I look up at the beautiful quartzite ridge of Wiwaxy Peak I see Hans Gmoser, Leo Grillmair and Milt Hicks in October 1952, struggling with frozen fingers to make the first ascent. They were forced back by the snow and cold but two other Canadian Rockies legends, Brian Greenwood and Don Vockeroth, along with Phyllis Johnston, were successful ten years later. The rock is so good and the climb so spectacular that Vockeroth returned the following day and soloed the route.

Many of us admire the prominent northeast buttress of Mount Odaray that rises steeply from Linda Lake. But few know that it was first climbed in 1955 by Yorkshireman, Don Morrison, and Calgarian, Jim Tarrant. Morrison led the entire route without using any pitons or modern protection devices. Today the route is called the Tarrant Buttress

but it was, in fact, his partner Morrison who led the way.

And when I look up at the wind whipping off the skyline crest of Ringrose and Glacier Peaks I see two teenaged Calgary boys, Don Gardner and Charlie Locke. In mid August

feat has still never been repeated. Some day you might run into Don here on the trails at Lake O'Hara for he is often hired to do work for the Trails Club.

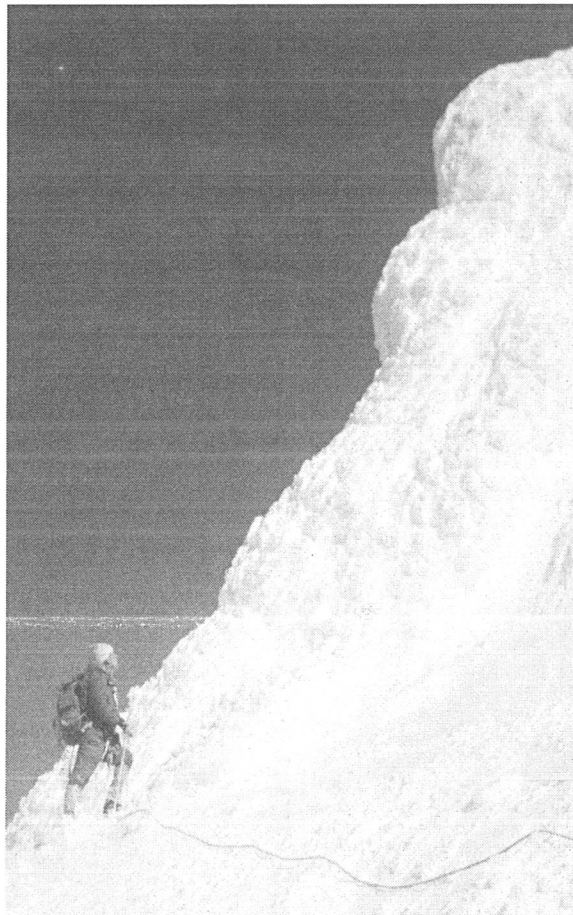
And when I look up at Mount Hungabee I have some special memories of my own. On December 23, 1966, with Brian Greenwood and Charlie Locke, I made the first winter ascent of this noble peak. Breaking trail through knee-deep snow we skied up the road and made our way to the Elizabeth Parker Hut (there were few backcountry skiers in those days). The next morning, under heavy packs, we struggled steeply up the trail to Opabin Meadows (using cross-country skis and wax) and across the glacier to Opabin Pass. Then we climbed the ridge above to the first band of cliffs that block the way and here we settled in for the night. It was a long, cold bivouac and I remember noticing for the first time in my short life that the stars move in the sky.

The next morning in -30 degree C we traversed right then climbed a long snow and ice filled gully to the summit tower. Here Brian sawed off blocks of frost with his ice axe to allow him to climb on the rock below. Our rest on the summit was short but magical - crystal clear, bitterly cold but with an incredible view from horizon to horizon. The sun sets early at this time of the year and it was dark when we got back to Opabin Pass. Putting on our skis again, we carved slow turns down the glacier through silky smooth powder snow, by the light of the full moon.

There are many more stories of mountain adventure at Lake O'Hara. Like the time high on Mount Hungabee that Brian Greenwood received a direct lightning strike on the ice axe attached to his pack. It blew the soles off his boots and burned holes in his sweater but he survived and, with the assistance of his companion Dick Lofthouse, made his way safely back to the valley. And there are stories of

American climbing legend, Fred Beckey, on Mount Lefroy in the winter of 1965, and Pat Morrow and Chris Perry on Mount Huber in the winter of 1972. But we will save these for a cozy evening, sitting around the fire with a glass of brandy, while the snow falls silently outside our window.

*Chic Scott, climber, skier, guide, writer and alpine historian. Visit [www.chicscott.com](http://www.chicscott.com) to learn more.*



Brian Greenwood below the frosted summit tower of Mount Hungabee, December 23, 1966. Photo: Chic Scott.

1965, the pair, only 19 years old at the time, made the impressive traverse from Mount Fay near Moraine Lake, across all the Ten Peaks, over Mount Hungabee then across the narrow crests of Ringrose and Glacier Peaks to Mount Lefroy. Descending to Abbot Pass they continued along the ridge of Mount Victoria to Mount Collier and Popes Peak. They climbed 23 summits over 10,000 feet (3050 m.) in 6 1/2 days. This outstanding

# Dr. George K. K. (Tommy) Link – In Memory

Dr. George K.K. Link died in May 1979 almost 20 years before my first visit to O'Hara, but he left me a legacy. In fact every visitor to O'Hara is touched by his passion for this bit of earth.

In the 10 years since I have been coming to O'Hara I have tried to know him by studying pictures taken of him, studying pictures taken by him, reading about him and reading his cramped, hand-written notes over many hours spent in the Whyte Museum archives. This latter is no small feat. When both sides of a page were filled from margin to margin, the paper was often turned sideways and the margins filled. Sometimes the filled page was turned upside-down and writing filled between the lines. The man emerges.

With his wife Adeline, Dr. Link made his first visit to O'Hara in September 1928. The Links had been accustomed to vacationing in Glacier Park, Montana but that year fires in the Pacific Northwest drove clouds of smoke inland obscuring their favourite haunts and sending them to O'Hara instead. They could not have known then that for Dr Link this would be the first of 49 annual consecutive visits.

In those early years, there were few trails at O'Hara: a trail from Wapta through the Alpine Meadow, over McArthur Pass and down to the Ottertail, a branch to the newly-erected lodge and another to Lake McArthur; a trail along the south shore of O'Hara and ultimately to Oesa; a trail up the west side of Opabin Creek to the meadows; a trail to the Crystal Cave.

In the early 1930s Sid Graves built trails up the east side of Opabin Creek to the meadows and from Shaffer Lake to Odaray Prospect and the Links watched as he worked. Shortly after, Dr Link began trail building himself with assistance from Carson Simpson, a Philadelphia lawyer. Their first work together took them from Odaray Prospect into Duchesnay Basin. But it was during the war years, when the Links and a handful of others were the only occupants at the Lodge, that Dr Link made perhaps his most notable contribution to the O'Hara trail system. A small crew completed a trail around Lake O'Hara.

Originally christened Wiwaxy Route, Adeline made the first human circuit of the lake on a September morning in 1943. Dr. Link's notes record that a moose may have been the first non-human circumnavigator the previous night. Back in Chicago a few weeks later, Adeline died of a stroke. Though devastated Dr. Link returned in 1944 to complete the work. In 1945 the trail was renamed Adeline Link Circuit Trail and remains so today.

With Carson Simpson, Dr. Link went on to build many other ways as he preferred to call them and by 1951 the pair had completed 45 km. of trail! Streamers, blazes and paint (red, yellow and orange triangles, squares and in some cases multi-coloured, nested shapes) were used to designate the ways and routes.

In 1952 Parks Service took over the maintenance of O'Hara. Dr. Link did not gladly relinquish this role and a glimpse of a conflict can be found in a letter written by him in 1973.

*"In 1955 or 1954 I was about to set out at O'Hara for Lake Oesa, with red paint and a brush to mark a cutoff way (route) I had located between Lake Oesa and the Yukness Ledges and Terrace walking route. Warden Gardner and the official CPR photographer and his wife, also the warden's wife, appeared and enquired as to where I was going. We all proceeded to Lake Oesa. There we rested a bit and then I invited them to have a look at the new way. As we got underway I got my paint bucket and brush and was halted by the warden's raised hand and statement that he had received orders from higher up, presumably, I think, Ottawa, that no more red paint was to be*

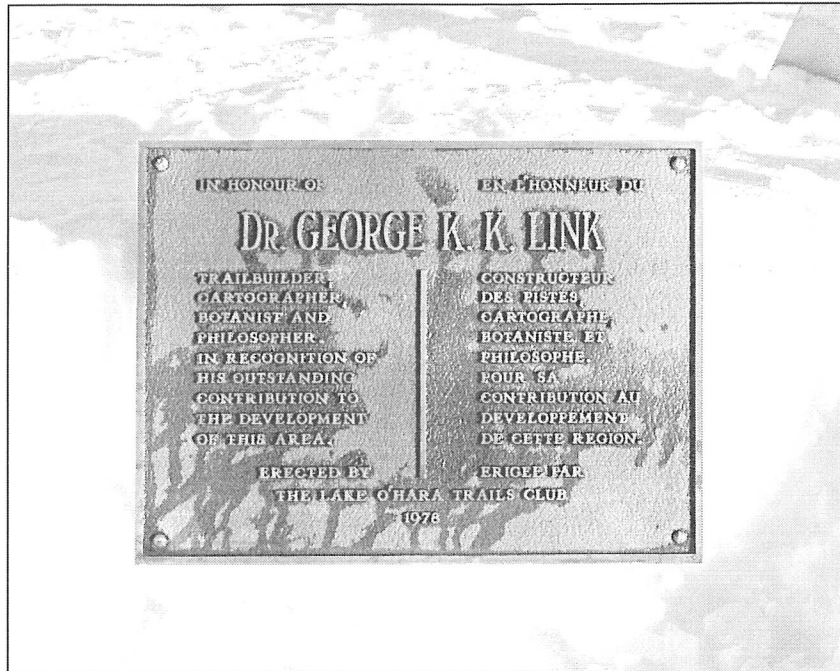
*used in the park and that all paint heretofore be removed from blazes and rocks. I said, "Okay," and buried paint bucket and brush on the shore of Lake Oesa. Since then I have not made any way, I have marked none, but I have persuaded the local warden or his associates to do some work in relocating, improving and repairing ways, above their line of duty."*

With trail work in the hands of Parks Service, Dr. Link set his efforts to the documentation of O'Hara's rocks and structures and to completion of a map of her ways, geologic features, peak names and meadows which he had named after his favourite O'Hara companions. It was an almost unending task. He was never quite satisfied, making repeated

revisions to both text and map. The map was finally printed in the late 1960's at the persistent urgings of his Trails Club companions. The text has never been published.

After 49 consecutive summers at Lake O'Hara since that first visit in 1928, 1978 was the first year in which Tommy was unable to return. That year Lake O'Hara Trails Club placed and dedicated a monument on Odaray Prospect to recognize his contribution. He never saw it in person. We can see it only during a winter visit and each February I try to get out there to thank Tommy for his great gifts to O'Hara.

Dr. Link was a mystic and he may have been enchanted by the magic of 2008: the 120th anniversary of his birth, the 80th anniversary of his first visit and the 30th anniversary of the



Warm February sun melts the snow off the Link Monument on Odaray Prospect. Photo: Stan Mum

dedication of his Odaray monument.

When you walk his ways and happen upon his blazes this year, watch for him.

Patty Cucman, LOTC

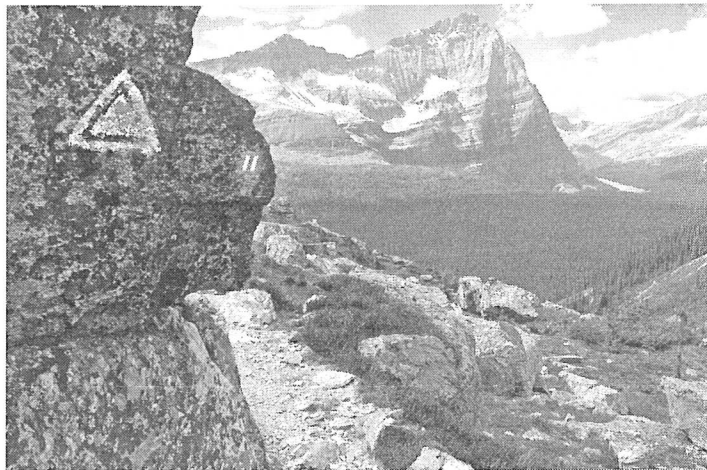
## The Ways of Lake O'Hara are Fading

In the early days of O'Hara, when George K. K. Link and Carson Simpson were creating the trails that made the beauty and grandeur of Lake O'Hara accessible to all visitors, the trails were marked very differently than they are today. Dr. Link called them "Ways", rather than trails.

Originally, the "Ways" of Lake O'Hara were marked by red blazes. A blaze on a tree trunk, created by a woodsman taking a chunk of bark off with his axe to expose the bare wood beneath the bark, would then be painted with red paint. Red blazes are still visible in many areas, especially on the central Opabin Plateau trails, where old blazes show faint traces of red paint around the edges. Some blazes have healed, with just a thin red paint scar remaining. O'Hara winter visitors may be lucky enough to find original red blazes on trails on Odaray Prospect, an area which has been closed during summer months because it straddles wildlife migration routes. Very few of these original red blazes are left because in the 1950s, Parks Canada attempted to eradicate them. The conflict is enshrined in a mostly fictitious book (inspired by the goings-on at O'Hara), entitled "The Yellow Paint War", by William C. Taylor. The book is out of print but there are two copies in the Trails Club Library in the Lodge. Lodge guests won't have too much trouble finding one; it is an entertaining, though not very challenging read.



As the number of trails grew, Dr. Link and Carson Simpson marked each one with its own symbol. Each trail was marked by a coloured metal plaque on trees and by symbols painted on rocks. Thus, the visiting hiker could follow a trail of choice by following that trail's unique symbol. Where trails merged or crossed, they could be marked with more than one symbol and, in places, these multiple symbols remain. The symbols utilized colour and geometry: squares, circles and triangles in various colours. For example, the Adeline Link



This location at the east end of the Yukness Ledges shows old trail markings (a red triangle within an orange triangle) alongside the new. Photo: Stan Munn

Memorial Trail around the lake was marked with blue circles, while the Oesa - Opabin and cliff circuit was marked with yellow squares. The symbol for the Wiwaxy Gap - Lake Oesa circuit was a red triangle; yellow triangles were used on some trails on the Odaray Plateau and MacArthur Pass Circuit. There are other symbols; we do not have keys to them all.

In your hikes around O'Hara, you may have seen some of these old trail symbols. Many you have not seen because they've been eradicated by vegetation growth, weathering, erosion or removal as they have been replaced with today's more uniform system of two bright yellow vertical bars on a square blue background. Our modern trail markings are effective and easy to see, but they don't have the character of the original scheme. "I've been hiking all day and I've never left trail 11," said one tourist.

Watch for the old markings. They indicate that you are following in the very footsteps of Dr. Link and Carson Simpson.

Stan Munn, LOTC

## O'Hara's Aquatic Residents

*"Picture the colours of morning darting from pyramid to pyramid, then slowly creeping down into the valleys, as sunlight puts a crown upon the summits, while still wrapt in the purple gloom sleep the circling glaciers, the winding stream, and the emerald water of Lake Oesa."* S.E.S. Allen.

With their radiant colors and spectacular settings, the alpine lakes around Lake O'Hara offer scenes of immeasurable beauty. For the aquatic organisms that live in them, however, these lakes are harsh environments. Low nutrient inputs keep the lakes unproductive, and low water temperatures slow individual growth rates. Another factor that makes alpine lakes such austere environments is ultraviolet radiation (UVR). Although most of the solar UVR is absorbed by the ozone layer, a significant amount still reaches the earth's surface and poses a threat to living organisms. UVR levels increase with elevation (one study estimated that solar irradiance of UV-B increased 20% per 1000 m. elevation). Because alpine lakes are so clear, UVR penetrates deep into the water column. For the past few years, Janet Fischer and Mark Olson of Franklin & Marshall College in Pennsylvania, Craig Williamson of Miami University in Ohio, and Rolf Vinebrooke of the University of Alberta, have been studying the implications of UVR exposure for the invertebrates that live in these lakes.

The aquatic organisms in alpine lakes are highly adapted to UVR exposure. For example, the crustaceans in the water column (called zooplankton) have high concentrations of UVR-absorbing photoprotective compounds in their tissues. In many of the O'Hara Lakes, you may have seen bright red copepods (about 2 mm. long as adults) that get their coloration from carotenoid pigments. Lake Hungabee also has *Daphnia middendorffiana*, which look like small black peppercorns due to high concentrations of melanin. The zooplankton species in lower elevation lakes have lower pigment concentrations, making their bodies translucent or even transparent. Consequently, they are less able to survive the UVR exposure levels typical of alpine lakes.

The unique zooplankton communities of alpine lakes were threatened in the past by widespread fish stocking. Even now, Lakes Opabin and Oesa are among the only deep fishless alpine lakes in North America. Fish are voracious zooplanktivores, and can even eliminate species from some lakes. Fortunately, fish stocking in the Parks stopped in 1988, and Parks Canada has begun to restore lakes to their former fishless state.

These days, alpine zooplankton face a new threat due to changing UVR levels. Contrary to the increases in UVR exposure experienced by organisms in polar regions over the past 30 years, alpine systems are more likely to see reductions in UVR exposure caused by climate change. In a warming climate, the treeline is expected to move upwards and many alpine lakes may become sub-alpine lakes. With more trees in the watershed, these lakes will receive greater inputs of dissolved organic carbon (the tea-colored substance that stains some lakes brown) that will in turn decrease light penetration and reduce UVR levels. Another expected consequence of climate change is an increase in the frequency and severity of forest fires, which would add more UVR absorbing aerosols to the atmosphere. The amelioration of UVR stress could potentially allow lower-elevation zooplankton to invade high elevation lakes. Once in a lake, the lower-elevation species would possibly outcompete alpine species for food due to their higher feeding efficiencies. If that happens, we will lose a rare community of species that had been bound together by their abilities to tolerate UVR exposure.



Sunlight striking Lake Oesa. Photo: Craig Williamson

Janet Fischer and Mark Olson are Associate Professors in Franklin and Marshall College's Department of Biology in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Craig Williamson is the Ohio Eminent Scholar of Ecosystem Ecology in the Department of Zoology at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. Rolf Vinebrooke is an Associate Professor in the Department of Biological Sciences at University of Alberta in Edmonton. <http://www.muohio.edu/uwllakes/summary.html>

# News from Parks Canada

The Parks Canada Lake O'Hara staff extends a warm welcome to all Lake O'Hara users. We have been busy over the past year upgrading some of the facilities to make your stay more pleasant and to reduce the human impact on the environment. New benches have been placed around Le Relais to minimize trampling and make the wait for the bus more comfortable. Solar lighting has been installed in the washrooms and we refurbished the public washroom in the parking lot. In the campground we have installed a new water system, new storage lockers and re-graveled the

common use area. Improvements for this year include a new kiosk and benches at the parking lot staging area and additional benches at the campground and le Relais day use area. Cardinal Coach Lines Ltd. continues to provide the public transportation services and will be using bio fuel as their contribution to environmental sustainability. We look forward to your visit and as always, appreciate your feedback. Enjoy your stay at Lake O'Hara.

*Beth Weaver, O'Hara Supervisor,  
Parks Canada*

## LOTC Board of Directors Report

Le Relais has been operated since its construction under an informal verbal understanding between Parks Canada and Lake O'Hara Trails Club. In response to Parks Canada's desire to put third party operations inside the parks under better defined business relationships, the Board is pleased to announce that Lake O'Hara Trails Club will continue to operate visitor services at Le Relais under a Service Contract that is mutually beneficial to area visitors, Parks Canada and Lake O'Hara Trails Club.

All of the recommendations from Business Practices Review have been completed and enacted: complete a visioning exercise (resulted in creation of our mission and vision statements); put in place a formal budget process; define and implement internal financial controls; define the role of the board and its members; undertake long term planning; place greater control over donation receipts (accomplished by appointing a membership and donations officer).

Over the previous three years of the current plan \$45,000 have been given to Parks Canada to sponsor a trail crew and all O'Hara visitors have benefited from the almost 200 trail crew man-days that have been dedicated to O'Hara's trails. An additional \$15,000 will be provided for a trail crew in 2008. LOTC continues to fund the Speaker Series and the printing of the trail maps available at Le Relais. None of this would be possible without the generous support of you, our members and other O'Hara visitors. Our thanks for your continued encouragement, donations and raffle ticket purchases.

LOTC is in the midst of a new four-year planning process, which will define how your donations will be spent for the 2009 – 2012 time frame. In addition to sponsorship of trail work and the Speaker Series, LOTC is evaluating new initiatives and activities consistent with our vision and mission. The new plan will be finalized in the fall of 2008 for implementation starting in 2009.

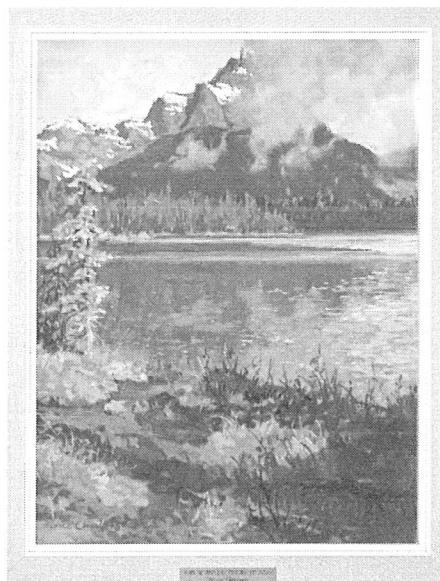
## LOTC Art Raffle

### 2007 Raffle Results

In 2007, we were pleased to offer for raffle an original Robert Genn painting, "Grey Day on Lake O'Hara". With Mr. Genn's generous gift, we were able to raise \$3020, which will be used to fund our activities at O'Hara. Our lucky winner was Janet Fischer of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, currently residing in Canmore, Alberta. Our thanks to Mr. Genn and to all those who bought tickets.

### 2008 Art Raffle

This year LOTC is the recipient of an original, framed 12" x 15" pastel by Horace Champagne entitled "Morning Mists on Cathedral Mountain". This lovely original was donated to LOTC for fund-raising by LOTC members who wish to remain anonymous. Our sincerest thanks go to our generous donors. Details of the fund-raising activity will be available at Le Relais at the start of the 2008 season.



## Order by Mail

### Membership

You can make a difference. Be a part of O'Hara by becoming a member and/or making a donation.

Membership is \$25 and entitles you to receive the annual newsletter in your mailbox each year. Each new member will receive an LOTC logo reflective sticker.

### Donations

Every dollar you donate to LOTC is directed towards our mission to inspire and facilitate the stewardship of the trail system and the appreciation of the cultural and natural history of Lake O'Hara. This year we will do this by funding a Parks Canada trail crew and an evening speaker series.

It costs \$375 for one trail worker to be at O'Hara for a ten-hour day. This year your donation will fund a Parks Canada crew to work on removing obstacles and trail widening at Mary and Linda Lakes and Big Larches, erosion and water issues at Linda Lake and short cutting remediation on Lower McArthur.

One evening presentation costs \$125 and we will fund 30 presentations this season. Every donation, regardless of size, helps us make a difference.

You will receive a tax receipt for the full value of your membership fee and/or donation.

Forward your full name, address and phone number with all memberships and/or donations to:

Lake O'Hara Trails Club  
Box 98, Lake Louise, AB T0L 1E0



*Preservation through  
Appreciation*

### 2008 Annual General Meeting

Le Relais at 8:30 PM  
Tuesday, August 5, 2008  
*All Members Welcome!*