



# O'Hara 2010

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## Interview with Tim Auger

Tim Auger was Park Warden at Lake O'Hara from 1969 to 1975. Now retired from Parks Canada, Tim devotes his time to guiding summer and winter in the mountain parks. LOTC caught up to him this past winter in Canmore Alberta.

### **Tim, what was your introduction to Lake O'Hara?**

In 1967 I was lucky enough to land a summer job working on the trail crew in Yoho Park. The basic aim for me was a job somewhere in the mountains, as opposed to silt sampling in Bridge River country north of Kamloops. The job was fine and the days off allowed for climbing and exploration. I had heard about Lake O'Hara, and that if you had to choose one mountain to climb in that area, Mt. Hungabee was the one. So I headed up there to scout. I met Sid Marty, the resident warden that year, and set a date for climbing Hungabee together.

### **How was that first O'Hara climb?**

Fine. In mid-September Sid and I did Hungabee. The next day we headed up Grassi Ridge on Wiwaxy. About a third of the way up we ran into a climbing accident. A climber had suffered a badly injured foot from a rock dislodged by another climber. I had a bit of mountain rescue training so Sid and I were able to pack the victim to the road.

### **What brought you back to O'Hara after that first summer?**

It was spring of 1969. I had finished university and was drifting, as far as career ambitions go, so I sent a letter off to inquire if I might make it onto the trail crew again. As an afterthought, I added something to the effect that if the Park needed anybody for the warden job at Lake O'Hara, would they consider myself? I included a couple of lines about being a climber, the mountain rescue training and that I thought I could relate pretty well with the Park visitors.

I got the trail crew job again, and headed back to Yoho Park. A couple of weeks later, the Chief Park Warden sauntered up to me as we were ending our shift and said, "So, Tim. You still interested in that job up at Lake O'Hara?" I think I nearly fainted. It was one of those special turning points in one's life.

### **How did you get started?**

The next morning, the Chief Warden drove me up to O'Hara and while I was putting my things away he sat at the kitchen table whittling a piece of kindling into a fuzz stick, an old-timer's way of starting a fire, and tried to explain to me what I should be doing. It didn't take long, but at the end he told me, "Over at the Lodge there's a fellow who knows just about everything there is to know about this place. You should get to know him. He'll be able to tell you what to do." He was of course talking about Dr. George K.K. Link.

### **And did you meet Dr. Link?**

The very next day. The Chief was right of course. By the time I met Dr. Link he had a corner room held for him at the Lodge every year. He was a dedicated sunbather and some sheets over the railing of his "private" balcony met his needs. I am sure he was pretty well baked all over.

He was a professor of Botany in the US. He had a broad range of interests and whatever it was, if it was worth knowing, it was worth being passionate about. He was retired but kept up his academic interests through a collaborative project to translate the Greek text of

the philosopher Theophrastus into English for the first time. This ancient work is considered to be the oldest existing text concerning botany. Dr. Link's collaborator handled the translation of the Greek and Dr. Link provided the expertise from the botanical perspective. The work on this project had gone on for years. I don't know if it was ever completed before he passed away.

Dr Link knew just about every inch of the ornate system of trails (ways, as he called them) and more: like about the crystal caves, history, plants, geology, etc. etc. I needed him.

### **And was Dr. Link receptive to you?**

Oh yes and, as it turned out, he could use me too. My climbing had a particular utility for him. Supplying me with an altimeter and showing me the specific fossil layer that he called the "marker layer" between the lower and middle Cambrian formations, I could bring him the exact locations of the "marker" in many places that he was not able to visit. This gave him specific information on the geological faults and relative shifting of the mountains around the area.

I went on many walks with Dr. Link. He had developed a problem with his feet that required him to wear orthotic shoes so he was slowing down. Traveling slowly together allowed him to make it over even the more strenuous high line routes that, as his feet got worse, he hadn't been able to visit and it allowed me to learn the concept of guide's pace. We got to know each other pretty well. Of course he was from a different generation and I felt privileged to share the knowledge and experience (and time) with such a fascinating person.

Eventually our relationship reached the point of familiarity that Dr. Link felt comfortable to enquire how I thought Parks might feel about marking some of the higher trails (ways) with paint. I knew something about the history of paint and trails at O'Hara by this time but I also thought that a modest amount of marking was actually a good idea considering the risks of getting off-route on some of the higher ways. I might have run the idea past someone "downtown". Dr. Link had obviously been thinking about this for a while. He had already chosen the colours we ought to use: red and orange, because according to him some people are colour blind to red but orange will show up. I presume the same rationale explains the use of blue and yellow today. Some of the red/orange markers still visible today date back to the 70s and our trips with a couple of paint cans.

### **Is O'Hara still a special place for you?**

I became a seasonal Park Warden in Yoho Park, residing at Lake O'Hara for six years. I met my wife, Sherry, in front of the Warden's cabin at O'Hara in 1972. I was only lured away from O'Hara/Yoho by the offer of a permanent job in the warden service in the public safety programme in Banff. Over the years we have returned to Lake O'Hara to climb or hike and always to soak up the unbelievable beauty of this remarkable place. So yes, O'Hara is special.

I am not alone. Lake O'Hara is considered a magical place for so many. The magnificent concentration of the Rocky Mountains' finest scenery inspires such passion in people that they want to be considered friends of this particular place on the planet as well as its history. So yes, O'Hara is incredibly special.

# Intelligent Life — Lake O'Hara Style

Not only does the Lake O'Hara Valley have big mountains turquoise lakes, neon orange and yellow lichen, lime green or golden larches, it has some very smart plants.

Life is a challenge when you live above 2200m in the alpine life zone. It's cold and windy. The growing season is short. Deep snow covers the ground from October through June. Temperatures range from extremely cold in winter to extremely hot in summer. There aren't many insects to pollinate and kick-start the next generation. Soil is thin and nutrient-poor. Solar radiation is strong. What is a plant to do to survive in such conditions?

Alpine plants grow low to the ground to take advantage of radiant heat from the earth. They tuck into rocky crevices for protection from the wind and to take advantage of accumulated pockets of soil. Their leaves and stems are often woolly, hairy or waxy to conserve moisture and retain warmth. Brilliant colours and subtle scents attract the few pollinators that may be around and able to manoeuvre in cooler weather. Many alpine species are fast-growing perennials that set protected blossom buds late in the growing season, ready to pop open as soon as the snow melts and the ground warms. O'Hara is rife with microclimates created by snow patches, trickling meltwater, or sun-heated rock. They harbor a variety of plants that couldn't survive under different conditions only a few meters distant.

Let's identify a few of these amazing plants and suggest places to look for them as you hike the O'Hara valley this summer.

- Smooth alpine gentian (*Gentiana glauca*) bears its dark blue-green, bottle shaped flowers at the top of a 3 – 10 cm stem that rises from a low-growing rosette of shiny leaves. It prefers a stony, damp habitat and can be found on the rocky knolls west of Opabin Lake.
- Mist Maiden (*Romanzoffia sitchensis*) loves the moist world of crevices with trickling springs or meltwater. Tiny five-petal flowers are white with dark yellow to orange funnelled centres. The rare Mist Maiden is most easily identified by its basal leaves: five to nine well-defined rounded lobes per leaf. Look

for the Mist Maiden in sheltered, drippy rock walls north of Opabin Prospect and along West Opabin.

- Alpine fleabane (*Erigeron purpuratus*), also called Baby Bluebeard, has hairy rosette basal leaves and stem, and a single white to pink many-petalled flower about 1 cm in diameter with hairy dark blue-purple involucral bracts – hence the nickname! It's very exciting to find and examine Baby Bluebeard – almost like finding pirate treasure.
- Spotted saxifrage (*Saxifraga bronchialis*) reveals a cornucopia of red, purple, yellow and orange dots inside its multiple creamy white blooms. Thin red-brown stems grow up to 20 cm in height. Prickly needle-shaped leaves form a cushion at the base of the plant. One of the most remarkable members of the Saxifrage family, it is also known as Prickly saxifrage or Common saxifrage. Spotted saxifrage loves scree slopes and rock crevices, especially near Opabin Lake.
- Moss campion (*Silene acaulis*) hugs the ground in a tight cushion of bright green mats, liberally speckled with dark pink to soft purple five-lobed flowers. The densely packed leaves look very similar to conifer needles. Look for moss campion in the moist but well-drained rocky areas on Opabin plateau, the lower section of Yukness Ledges and Lake McArthur.
- Purple saxifrage (*Saxifraga oppositifolia*) sports showy azure star-shaped blossoms atop closely packed scale-like leaves. It is one of the first alpine plants to flower once the snow melts, one bloom per stem. Purple saxifrage is often found alongside moss campion.

These six alpine plants are a small selection of the variety you will encounter as you tour Lake O'Hara's landscape. Look up, look down, take notes and photos, and marvel at the intelligent life around you.

*Kathryn Cameron, Parks Canada. You'll find these and other flower-spotting tips with colour photos on the Newsletter page at [www.lotc.ca](http://www.lotc.ca).*

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## Ode to the Road

Oh Road. You old dusty road.  
You neglected, abused and wash-boarded little road.  
You soft-shouldered, tight-cornered, narrow and harrowing road.  
You're a one-lane playing two-ways kind of road.  
Your culverts are clogged and your ditches are flooded, but oh, how I still love you, Road.  
Oh Road. You 11 kilometre road.  
You 450 vertical-metre-gaining road.  
You bus-hugging, truck-carrying, car-stopping wilderness road.  
You're so popular you need your own reservation system.  
You could be the road to my heart but instead you're the road to the cart I use to move all the luggage I just brought up on the bus.  
Oh Road. You cute little road.  
You curvy, unpaved and playful fire road.  
Well you turn down the cruisin' and you turn up the bruisin'.  
You make the trails 'round here seem so much smoother.  
You've got mountains around your corners,  
And creeks just off your shoulders,  
And the beautiful Lake O'Hara where your head might be.  
I drive you almost every night,  
So I guess that makes us pretty tight,  
So for you this was an ode to the Road.

*Penned by Ben Ferrel, Lake O'Hara Lodge Bus driver 2009*



# Groundwater: The natural water reservoir in the alpine

Have you ever wondered about the source of water in alpine lakes and streams? University of Calgary researchers have been studying the water cycle in the Lake O'Hara watershed. Preliminary results published in 2007 concluded that, depending on the season, 30-70% of water entering Lake O'Hara is groundwater. New data indicate that most of the water in Lake O'Hara, as well as other area lakes and creeks, has spent some time in sediments and rocks as groundwater.

Studying groundwater in the alpine presents a special challenge because wells cannot be drilled as is done at lower-elevations. Two techniques have been used to overcome this challenge. First; researchers study how surface waters (lakes, streams, snowpack, glaciers) interact with groundwater. For example, changes in lake level and chemical composition are studied and compared to changes in groundwater springs. Second; geophysical imaging is used. The response of the ground to physical signals such as electric current, electromagnetic waves, and vibration of ground surface is measured and the data are processed to generate an image of the underground environment.

These methods show that about 2-3% of water input to Opabin Creek, one of the three creeks flowing into Lake O'Hara, is glacier melt. The remainder of water input is summer rain and snowmelt, in roughly equal volumes. These inputs are temporarily stored under talus slopes and within glacial moraines. Talus slopes appear to hold water for a few days to a week, as the springs emerging from the talus slopes respond very quickly to rain events and snowmelt. In contrast, the moraine appears to have a much greater water-holding capacity, which allows the springs emerging from the moraine to flow through winter months. The moraine between Opabin Lake and Opabin Glacier has a large volume of water stored as buried ice which may generate melt water during summer months though it has not been determined how much. The presence of buried ice indicates that the disappearance of glaciers on the sur-

face does not always mean the complete loss of water source. One important discovery of our study is that the flow and storage of groundwater is strongly influenced by the topography of the bedrock surface under the sediments as rain and melt waters percolate through boulders and flow along the bedrock topography before surfacing as lakes or springs.

The timing and amount of peak flow in alpine streams are strongly dependent on snowmelt. Future changes in snow accumulation and the timing of melt in the Rockies will cause a noticeable change in the peak flow of rivers downstream. Groundwater reservoirs in the mountains will likely sustain river flows for a long time after the melt period and rivers will continue to flow and support aquatic life as long as the mountains receive snow and rain. Nevertheless it is still very important to acknowledge the uncertainty in future river flow and conserve the precious water resources as well as we can. We thank Parks Canada and Lake O'Hara Lodge for their support and encouragement, and numerous students, technicians, and volunteers for conducting fieldwork.

*Masaki Hayashi and Jaime Hood, Department of Geoscience, University of Calgary*



## Yoho National Park Management Plan Review

Throughout 2009 and early 2010, Parks Canada conducted the second 5-year review of the Yoho National Park Management Plan. For the first time, this review was conducted in conjunction with reviews of the other national parks in the Rockies and the Columbia Mountains: Kootenay, Jasper, Banff, Waterton Lakes, Mount Revelstoke, and Glacier. These reviews, mandated by the *Canada National Parks Act*, provide an opportunity for Parks Canada to work with Canadians, partners, stakeholders, and other park users to consider park management issues, and plan a course of action for the future. The updated management plan replaces the 2000 version, and provides a road map for how Parks Canada will deliver its integrated mandate of protection, experience, and education in Yoho National Park for the next 10-15 years.

The State of the Park Report for Yoho, prepared in 2008, set the stage for the review and helped to point the way toward areas or issues which require further management attention. Key findings of the report included:

- The population stability of some wide-ranging wildlife, such as grizzly bears, is of concern.
- Wildlife mortality along the Trans Canada Highway and the Canadian Pacific Railway remains a concern.
- Connectivity of aquatic ecosystems has been affected in some areas due to aging or poorly designed infrastructure that hinders movement and passage of some aquatic species.
- Cultural resource inventories require updating, and a cultural resource management plan needs to be completed.
- Visitor satisfaction is high, although there is a need to re-invest in aging frontcountry infrastructure.

- Satisfaction with educational programs is high, but participation rates are relatively low.
- Research is required to better understand how park experiences and education can help to influence attitudes and connect Canadians to the park.

A close look at the 2000 plan confirmed that the strategic direction for ecological integrity remained sound, and that it was leading to improvements in park ecosystems, and would continue to respond to the ecological issues identified in the State of the Park Report. The depth of management attention to visitor experience and education, however, was found to be inadequate for responding to the weaknesses identified in the State of the Park Report. Consequently, Parks Canada decided to rewrite the management plan to bring more focus to the education and visitor experience opportunities in the park, while bringing forward the strong protection elements of the previous plan. This also allowed the park to bring the plan in line with Parks Canada's most recent direction on strategic planning documents, as outlined in the Parks Canada Guide to Management Planning (2008).

The management plan review benefited from the involvement of many interested stakeholders, park visitors, park employees, and individuals who took the time to get involved and voice their thoughts and ideas related to Yoho National Park. The public participation program included planning workshops, community open houses, staff discussion sessions, in-park visitor surveys, and on-line surveys using the *ParksListens* panel. An online discussion forum was also available where individuals could share their perspectives on particular topics during the preparation of the draft plan. In November the draft management plan was released for public review, and was posted on the park website along with a

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## Yoho National Park Management Plan Review cont'd

summary newsletter. All input received during this multi-faceted public participation program was taken into consideration during the preparation of the final management plan.

The updated Yoho National Park Management Plan has a different look and format than the previous plan. It contains seven key strategies that outline the overall management direction for the entire park. It also contains seven area concepts that translate this direction into objectives and actions for specific geographic areas of the park. Each of the area concepts begins with a Future Best that articulates a vision for the specific area, which Parks Canada, in collaboration with others, will strive to achieve. The Future Best for Lake O'Hara is:

*Spectacular scenery, accessible solitude and incredible hiking combine to make Lake O'Hara one of the best-loved backcountry destinations in the Canadian Rockies. A well maintained network of trails leads visitors seeking day and multi-day adventure to turquoise lakes dwarfed by famed peaks.*

*New and returning visitors find unparalleled opportunities to hike, climb, ski, snowshoe, paint, draw or simply relax. Stands of fragrant subalpine fir and Engelmann spruce, and high alpine meadows dotted with wildflowers, provide inspiration to all who visit during the short summer season. In fall the golden glow of the larches is a feature attraction, while in winter the area offers some of the best, earliest and latest alpine ski touring anywhere.*

*The Lake O'Hara area continues to be strictly controlled. Visitors access the area on foot, ski or snowshoe, or travel via shuttle bus, outfitted with new interpretive media and staffed by informed drivers. Bicycles and private motor vehicle access are not permitted. These important conservation measures help preserve Lake O'Hara's renowned landscape, peace and tranquility.*

*Visitors to this little bit of paradise find a landscape little changed from the time when the Canadian Pacific Railway built the Wiwaxy Cabin and the Elizabeth Parker Hut to accommodate its first alpine tourists. Abbott Pass Refuge Cabin National Historic Site, significant for its con-*

*nection to Canada's alpine history, sits high above the lake. Now operated by the Alpine Club of Canada, these historic structures provide rustic accommodations and welcome a new generation of hikers, climbers and skiers.*

*For campers there is a small Parks Canada-run campground, and for those seeking more luxurious accommodation, the elegant, timeless Lake O'Hara Lodge. No matter the accommodation, all offer authentic immersion in true mountain wilderness.*

*For those who want to give something in return for these memorable experiences, opportunities to help protect this fragile alpine environment are available through the efforts of the Lake O'Hara Trails Club and Parks Canada.*

Those familiar with the Lake O'Hara area may notice that this future condition sounds a lot like the Lake O'Hara experience of today. Indeed, the management plan recognises the high value that visitors place on the Lake O'Hara experience, and the need to continue to carefully manage this special place so that it remains unimpaired for future generations. Although there is some potential for improvement, the general management approach to the Lake O'Hara area will remain the same. Private motor vehicle access will continue to be prohibited, and the shuttle bus and reservation system will continue to provide an alternate means of access. The management plan zoning for the Lake O'Hara area remains unchanged from the 2000 plan. The majority of the landscape is classified as Zone II Wilderness. The access road and small areas surrounding the Lake O'Hara Lodge, Le Relais day shelter, Parks Canada patrol cabin, campground and Elizabeth Parker Hut are designated as Zone III Natural Environment areas.

Once the plan is approved by the Honourable Jim Prentice, Minister of the Environment, it will be available on the Yoho National Park website. Please visit us at: [parksCanada.gc.ca/yoho](http://parksCanada.gc.ca/yoho).

Todd Keith, Land Use Specialist, Parks Canada

## LOTC 2010 Art Fund Raiser

Our 2009 fund-raiser was a raffle of an original painting by Banff Artist Liz Wiltzen. The winner was Barb Klie of Jasper. Our raffle was, once again, a great success and our thanks go to Liz Wiltzen for the donation of her painting and to all who bought tickets.

This year we are pleased to have an original 8 x 10 framed oil painting donated by the artist Mitchell Fenton. Mitchell's painting, *Lake McArthur (Mount Biddle)*, was painted en plein air at Lake McArthur in 2009. For details of the fund-raiser, check at Le Relais or Lake O'Hara lodge this summer season. Learn more about Mitchell and see more of his work at his web site: [www.mitchellfenton.com](http://www.mitchellfenton.com). Also check our web site [lotc.ca](http://lotc.ca) for the results of previous year fund-raisers and to see Mitchell's artist statement and the painting in colour.



*Preservation Through Appreciation*

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



## 2010 Annual General Meeting

Le Relais at 8:30 PM  
Tuesday, July 27, 2010  
All Members Welcome!