



O'Hara 2014

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A New Welcome for Lake O'Hara

First impressions are important. We're excited to announce that the old bus shelter at the base of the Lake O'Hara Road has been replaced by a larger and more attractive structure that incorporates more space for information of interest to area users.

This project was initiated by Lake O'Hara Lodge, the Alpine Club of Canada and Lake O'Hara Trails Club. We made a joint proposal to Parks Canada in the fall of 2012, signed a partnering agreement with them the following winter and proceeded with planning and design over the spring and summer.

"The old shelter had been there for more than 30 years. When the time came, it didn't take much to knock it down," said Bruce Millar, who coordinated the design and permits for the project sponsors and oversaw installation. Michael St. Denis, Visitor Experience Manager for Kootenay, Yoho and Lake Louise Field Unit for Parks Canada is delighted to see this new addition to the O'Hara area. "We at Parks Canada are pleased to see such a high quality product. It is fitting for such a popular area and we know that users will appreciate it for many years to come."



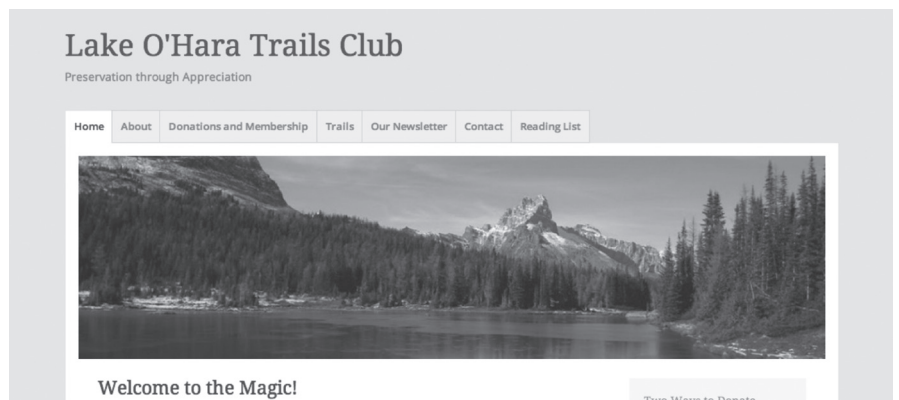
Display panels incorporated into the shelter will include interpretive information as well as bulletins on conditions and events that users will want to know before embarking on their backcountry adventure. On your next visit, do check out the new shelter and displays. And you can get out of the rain while waiting for the bus!

Check Out Our New Website

Our website is our best means of communicating and interacting with our broad and diverse membership. This year we have redesigned the site and included quick links to all kinds of interesting information and updates. We want to make it easy for you to join the club online, make a donation that will make a difference in our annual trail work capacity, and see the latest newsletter and trail work report.

We're also working on producing an online trail map with descriptions to help you plan your hikes before your visit.

You can see it all at lotc.ca. We'd love to hear your comments and suggestions: email us at message@lotc.ca.



2013 Trail Work Report

Despite a few early season setbacks, year one of the current five-year trail work program was a success, with close to 90 person-days spent in the area by Parks Canada crews. Lake O'Hara was not spared from the flooding that inundated southern Alberta in June 2013, and early season work was hampered by heavy rains and washouts on the access road to Lake O'Hara. Lake and creek levels were higher than normal, causing some trail flooding and erosion, particularly at the far end of Lake O'Hara. However, snow conditions were about average and cleared much faster than in 2012.

Most of the priority projects for this year were accomplished, despite the fact that long-time Parks Canada trail crew member John Morrison worked on his own following the retirement of crew partner Matt Cadden in June. Matt's replacement was not hired until late August, but John made significant progress working solo. Visitors were intrigued by the sight of John moving gravel across Lake O'Hara on his innovative barge set-up. John estimates he moved close to 20 tons of gravel to fill the flood-prone end of the Lake O'Hara circuit trail.

In August and September, the full Yoho National Park trail crew was assigned to Lake O'Hara for nine days, directing most of their efforts toward a major upgrade of the Big Larches trail. The boggy lower section of the trail was improved with gravel fill, while the haphazard steps on the steeper portion of the trail were replaced to provide more solid footing at a better grade. Parks Canada provided a helicopter to move materials in support of this work. This summer, work will continue on the upper part of the Big Larches trail. We anticipate that all these improvements will provide trail users with a high quality, scenic alternate route to and from Schaffer Lake.

Trail guru Don Gardner was hired under contract to the Trails Club to provide trail design and project oversight for the 2013 season. One of Don's main accomplishments was laying out a preliminary realignment of a section of the All Souls alpine route to address erosion concerns. This realignment underwent an initial review by Parks Canada in the fall, and if approved, construction will follow in 2014.

Other accomplishments for 2013 include:

- Annual clearing of blow-down and water structures.
- Post-flood repair of the washed-out gully between Wiwaxy and Oesa, and re-routing Opabin Creek back into its channel.
- Re-building and filling the steps above Le Relais (toward the ACC meadow), and improving drainage.
- Building up the low-lying area at the junction of Schaffer/ACC/Big Larches trails with fill to create drainage and protect surrounding vegetation.
- Better defining the Yukness-Oesa alpine route (including painting 12 new markers) and improving the by-pass route.
- Addressing drainage issues on the Lake Oesa trail, fixing steps, and covering exposed gabion with a concrete mix.
- Making the "big rock bridge" over Opabin Creek easier to cross.



Lakeshore trail flood damage repairs. Photo Judy Otton



New stone steps on the Big Larch Trail. Photo Judy Otton



John Morrison's innovative gravel barge. Photo John de Bruyn

Watch for crews out on the trails this coming summer, as they have a full complement of work ahead to complete anticipated (and the usual unforeseen!) trail projects at Lake O'Hara. Thanks to all of you who donated funds to the Lake O'Hara Trails Club – your dollars do make a difference!

Judy Otton

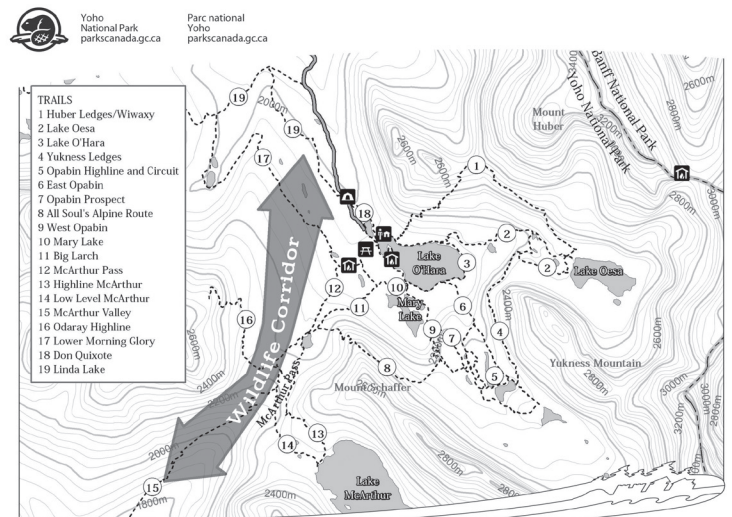
Trails for All of Us

The Lake O'Hara area is blessed with some 80 km of trails, including a one-of-a-kind alpine circuit and trails that lead to meadows, alpine lakes and breathtaking viewpoints. But not all of the beautiful routes and destinations developed by O'Hara's pioneering trail builders are accessible today.

The Odaray Plateau was a favourite destination for Tommy Link, one of the two energetic builders of the Lake O'Hara trail system. He first started to go there in the 1930s. With his leadership, trails to the Odaray Prospect from Shaffer Lake, McArthur Pass and Morning Glory Lakes were eventually constructed.

For more than half a century people enjoyed these trails, likely unaware that the Odaray Plateau was also enjoyed by, and in many ways more important to, several of the animal species that inhabit the area. We now know that the plateau is highly used by goats for forage, bedding, and to access mineral licks. That the plateau is an important travel corridor for bears and wolves is also well documented. Five years of research in the 1990s, partially funded by the Lake O'Hara Trails Club, established that these wildlife movements do occur and that this route is one of few critical links between the Columbia and Bow River valleys. Parks Canada funded a follow-up study in 2011 using motion-activated cameras and regular ground patrols which confirmed animal travel patterns.

Though the initial closure was done more than 20 years ago, long-time users of the area still hope that the Trails Club might try to influence some form of re-opening of the Odaray trails that are so fondly remembered. In 2012, as part of a broader review of possible trail re-routing and re-opening projects undertaken by the Club, its Board of Directors decided to support Parks Canada in maintaining the closure of



most of the Odaray access and the ongoing voluntary restrictions on the Odaray Highline trail (see Parks Canada web site for more information).

The mission and vision of the Lake O'Hara Trails Club is broad. It includes fostering an appreciation for the natural history of the area and inspiring stewardship of and commitment to natural and wild spaces. By foregoing our own access to a few critical areas we are allowing the use of important routes by animals whose long-term health is critical to the preservation of wilderness. We humans have it good at O'Hara – leaving a bit of space for wildlife to have their trails is the right thing for us to do.

Klaus Exner

Hiking Can Be for the Birds!

You don't need to be an expert birder to enjoy observing our feathered friends at Lake O'Hara. Just hiking with your eyes and ears open (and a pair of binoculars) is a good start. Birds in the O'Hara area are unique to the higher elevations of the sub-alpine and alpine ecosystems, with each species requiring its own particular combination of food and shelter to survive and reproduce. Let's start our bird hike on the trail to Wiwaxy Gap.

The trail starts at the warden cabin and crosses the bridge over Cataract Brook. If you stop on the bridge and look downstream, you may see an American Dipper bobbing in the water amongst the rocks. This small, starling-sized bird spends much of its time under water searching for insect larva. Amazingly well-adapted

to cold mountain streams, dippers manage to survive the entire winter wherever there is open water.

Look out to the lake as you continue on the lakeshore trail. There's a good chance you'll see diving ducks such as mergansers and goldeneye, gliding along, then suddenly disappearing, and bobbing back up like corks as they feed. Gray Jays are most likely keeping an eye on you here as they glide from tree to tree. Watch out that these clever birds don't steal your lunch!

The mature sub-alpine forests that cover the slopes above the lake are home to a number of forest birds. As you ascend towards Wiwaxy Gap, you may hear the persistent song of the tiny Pacific Wren flitting around in the dense forest. It prefers the darkest, thickest sub-alpine forests,



White-tailed Ptarmigan in winter plumage



Common Merganser
Photos by Amar Athwal.

Hiking continued...

sharing them with the secretive Hermit Thrush; listen for the melancholy flute-like song of the thrush in the evenings.

As you break out of the trees, you enter the favourite habitat of the Clark's Nutcracker. These loud, raucous birds fly from tree to tree high on the mountain slopes feeding on seeds extracted with great fanfare from the cones of the Whitebark Pine.

Above treeline, in the zone of weathered, twisted trees known as kruppelholz, the male White-crowned Sparrow can be seen perched on top of a stunted alpine fir singing its heart out. Other birds such as the American Pipit and Gray-crowned Rosy Finch are often seen in small flocks flying from rock to rock searching for insects in the tundra-like meadows.

Continuing on to Lake Oesa, keep your eyes peeled in the rocky terrain – the perfect habitat for the White-tailed Ptarmigan. This grouse-like bird blends in perfectly with its surroundings so may be difficult to spot, as its plumage changes colour with the seasons. If you're lucky, you might spot a Golden Eagle soaring high above, hunting for marmots and ground squirrels.

When hiking between Lake O'Hara and the Opabin Plateau, check the willows along the banks of the creek for the Wilson's Warbler, or look upwards into the spruce forest for kinglets and Yellow-rumped Warblers. Tiny Rufous Hummingbirds might also be feeding nearby on the nectar of alpine flowers or willow catkins.

Birds add a rich dimension to a hiking experience, and remind us how diverse these forest and alpine environments are. Once you become familiar with these common species, you'll likely see—and hear—them each time you go hiking.

If you're interested in reporting your bird sightings, visit www.ebird.org to enter your observations. This valuable data is compiled worldwide by the Cornell University Department of Ornithology and is used for research.

Happy birding!

Author Al McDonald began his mountain career on the Yoho Park trail crew in the 1970s and went on to be a warden in the Mountain Parks for 30 years. He's had a passion for birds all his life and enjoys observing the numerous species that fly by his patio near Pentiction.

Postcard Art Generously Donated

We're excited to announce a new item for sale at Le Relais this summer. Artist and Lake O'Hara fan Mitchell Fenton, who donated a painting in the past for our art fundraiser, came forward this year with three wonderful postcard designs, one of which will also be used on new t-shirts.

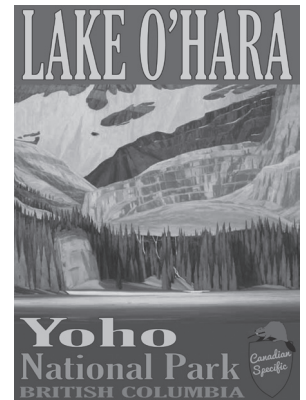
Mitch writes: "I've been to Lake O'Hara many times to hike and paint because it's so beautiful. When I first arrived, it felt very familiar because of all the famous artwork I had seen from the

area. Some Lake O'Hara artists also did commercial work that I admire very much. Recently I've had fun using some of my paintings to make postcards under my *Canadian Specific* label celebrating that 'Golden Age of Advertising'."

We're hoping the postcards and t-shirts will be popular with visitors. The proceeds will be put towards maintaining the trails that we all enjoy.

Please check out Mitch's website:

mitchellfenton.com



You can make a difference.

Be a part of O'Hara by becoming a member of Lake O'Hara Trails Club and/or making a donation.

Membership is \$25 and entitles you to receive the annual newsletter in your mailbox each year. Memberships fees and donations are fully tax-deductible.

Download a Membership/Donation form on line at www.lotc.ca or simply forward your full name, address and phone number with membership and/or donations to:

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



Preservation Through Appreciation

2014 Annual General Meeting

Warden Cabin at Lake O'Hara 4:30 p.m.

Monday, August 11, 2014

All Members Welcome!