



# Lake O'Hara Trails Club Newsletter

2022  
Issue

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## Paul Zizka: capturing O'Hara's magic

Paul Zizka's most vivid memory of Lake O'Hara involves green snow, and the urge to wake up every guest at Lake O'Hara Lodge.

Zizka is an award-winning adventure and landscape photographer based in Banff, Alberta. The publisher of seven photo books, his work has taken him to all seven continents, and to every Canadian province and territory. But he confesses Lake O'Hara remains one of his favourite photographic destinations.

"Every time I travel to O'Hara, it keeps reinventing itself. There are so many varieties of light and weather, that you are guaranteed a new experience, every time you go," he says.

In particular, Paul recalls a visit in May 2015. "I had worked all day, and decided to get out on my skis on the lake after dark. It was a moonless night and there were stars everywhere. I was just about to turn around, when I noticed a glow over Wiwaxy. Over the next two to three



hours, the aurora was so strong that the snow developed a green cast. I captured images that night that I treasure to this day. I was like a little kid, and I was very tempted to run down the hallways at the lodge to get everyone up to see the show."

"Anytime you see the northern lights is special, but watching them at O'Hara takes the whole experience up a notch," he adds.

Zizka credits his career as a photographer to his love for the Rockies. "My wife and I moved to Banff 13 years ago. We wanted to live in the mountains and to be outside as much as possible – work was a secondary consideration." Up until that point, Paul had done little photography, but he began to document his new home "as a way to show my family in Quebec what life was like here."

*One of Paul Zizka's signature self-portraits, overlooking Lake Oesa and Lake O'Hara from Glacier Peak. Photo: Paul Zizka*

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## Steps and waterbars: 2021 Trail Report

Hikers were keen to get back to Lake O'Hara in 2021 after a year of restrictions due to the Covid pandemic. The Lake O'Hara Bus resumed operations at 50% capacity on July 1, moving to full capacity on August 1. A large winter snowpack remained on trails until well into July, so trail crews spent significant time shoveling to keep early season users on route. Early season trampling off trail can lead to significant damage of adjacent fragile vegetation.

Trail crew staffing was also somewhat challenging, as crew member Julia Verveda left the job in late July to pursue other professional opportunities. Parks filled the operational void with other members of the Lake Louise/Yoho/Kootenay (LLYK) trail crew until Lauren Goforth was hired, a strong and capable worker who learned the ropes in no time. Led by Lake O'Hara trails foreman Steve Bertello, the crew tackled projects from lakeshore to the high alpine.

### Maintain and Protect

General trail maintenance included removing snow-downed tree and avalanche debris, defining trail routes in the snow (June), clearing rockfall from the alpine routes, re-installing trail signs at Oesa/Abbot Pass and Oesa/Yukness junctions, trimming overhanging branches, re-painting faded alpine route markers, repairing damaged trail tread, repairing/replacing stone steps, and fixing/clearing drains and waterbars. Two major wind events over the summer required extensive tree cutting/removal.

Notable accomplishments included the following:

- 1) **Lakeshore Trail:** Repaired damage to waterbars and steps in avalanche gully sections.
- 2) **Lake Oesa Trail:** Total rebuild of approximately 70 meter upper section that was braided and eroded, including installing 28 new steps and removing awkward rocks.

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# Paul Zizka: capturing O'Hara's magic (continued)

After working as a guide for several years, Paul decided to commit to photography, and gradually built up a client base, including landing contract work for Parks Canada and Banff Lake Louise Tourism. His photographs have been featured in publications such as *National Geographic*, *Alpinist*, *The Guardian*, *Canadian Geographic*, and *PhotoLife*. He is perhaps best known for his alpine self-portraits – solo figures silhouetted on a rocky summit or against a limitless mountain lake.

Paul recalls one such portrait taken at Abbot Pass. “Meg and I had booked a trip to Abbot Pass Hut in late summer, and it turned out we were the only ones there. We hiked up from Lake O'Hara in summer temperatures, and climbed Mt. Victoria. We were back at the hut having a cup of tea after a long day, when I looked out to see a massive storm barreling in from the west. I abandoned my cup, and rushed outside to set-up a self-portrait with that storm coming in, and it was incredible. Within minutes we went from one season to the next, and we hiked out the next day through a winter wonderland.”

Paul's advice for others hoping to capture Lake O'Hara's beauty on film is not to try to do too much. “There are so many incredible destinations within the area that I think people tend to rush from one to the other. When you go there, take your time. You could devote an entire day to the Lake O'Hara shoreline, or to just one area such as Oesa.”

Asked to name his favourite locations, he hesitates. “There are so many.... Opabin Plateau or Grandview in the morning



Paul Zizka facing “a massive storm barreling in from the west” during a trip to Abbot Pass.  
Photo: Paul Zizka

light. Early fall days with snow and larch on the Divide. Even in the Rockies where standards for scenery are so high, Lake O'Hara is exceptional.”

Paul Zizka's latest book, *Spirits in the Sky: Northern Lights Photography*, will be published by Rocky Mountain Books in spring 2022. Some of Paul's best images of Lake O'Hara are featured on the LOTC website, [lotc.ca](http://lotc.ca).

Debra Hornsby

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## The littlest chipmunk

Is it a chipmunk or a ground squirrel? If you've watched a striped creature scurry between the rocks at Lake O'Hara, you may have asked yourself this question. If its tail is held upright over its back and if it appears more interested in seeds than your sandwich, the answer is most likely the least chipmunk.



Least chipmunks are so active, they can be challenging to photograph.  
Photo: Amar Athwal

The least chipmunk is often mistaken for its chunkier cousin, the lunch-loving golden-mantled ground squirrel. Both are striped, but the stripes on a least chipmunk extend over its head to the tip of its nose. In contrast, the head and shoulders (mantle) of the ground squirrel are a uniform buffy yellow – hence its name. Least chipmunks are much smaller and slimmer, averaging 43 grams/22 cm to the golden-mantle's 230 grams/30 cm.

The least chipmunk is also livelier – most often glimpsed briefly out of the corner of your eye as it dashes between woodpiles. It is strictly diurnal, spending nights resting in abandoned woodpecker holes or hollow logs. Its diet mainly consists of seeds. Least chipmunks are especially fond of the seeds of summer berries – carefully chewing around the pulp and discarding it to feast on the nutrient-rich seeds within.

Least chipmunks begin building a winter burrow in late summer, excavating a chamber about a meter underground, often beneath a stored seed cache. They hibernate fitfully, waking occasionally to eat. Breeding begins as the days lengthen in April. The young are born a month later and spend the summer months learning the ropes from Mom, before gaining their independence. Least chipmunks can occasionally be seen carrying their young by the loose skin on the necks, similar to how a cat carries kittens.

Debra Hornsby



# 2021 Trail Report (continued)

- 3) **Victoria Lake:** Rebuilt a confusing uphill section of trail near Victoria Lake. Installed 10 new steps.
- 4) **Huber Ledges:** Installed 13 rock steps and waterbars on steep erosion-prone section. Installed “speedbumps” which entailed adding rock steps at 10 – 15 foot intervals on the long steep section. These speedbumps offer a short but welcome “rest stop” for tired descending legs.
- 5) **All Souls:** Rebuilt two sections of trail on the east side with the addition of rock steps. Redefined confusing sections on west side by adding rock “handrails” and “uglifying” non-trail sections.
- 6) **Yukness:** Rehabbed an eroded section and installed four new steps.

2021 is the fourth year of the 2018 - 2022 trail plan. LOTC will soon develop a strategy to tackle the preparation of the 2023 - 2027 Five-Year Trail Plan. LOTC provides \$20,000 annually to cover the

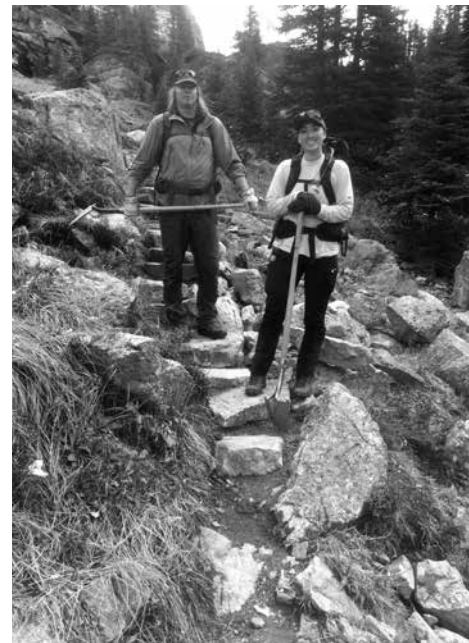


Trail crew members Steve Bertello and Lauren Goforth repair damage from avalanches on Lakeshore Trail. Photo: Sue Webb

cost of one trail crew member for the entire working season from mid-June to early October. Despite a crew shortage for approximately two weeks, sixty-two person-days were recorded in 2021.

A hearty thank you to all LOTC donors for their contributions to our trail maintenance budget!

Sue Webb



Steve and Lauren's new steps on this often wet trail near Victoria Lake will help to minimize impact from hikers stepping off trail.

Photo: Sue Webb



*Rockies Repeat* artists at the opening of their Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies exhibit in January 2022. The project, which was supported by LOTC, documents the impact of climate change on Lake O'Hara and other iconic Rockies landscapes. LOTC hopes to present a screening of the *Rockies Repeat* film at a future Le Relais Speakers' Series event. Photo: D.L. Cameron.

## Support the trails you love. Become a LOTC member.

Be part of O'Hara by becoming a member of the Lake O'Hara Trails Club (\$35 for a lifetime membership) and/or making a donation (fully tax-deductible). Your support will help us to preserve and enhance the Lake O'Hara area through trail maintenance and public education.

For more information on how to join or donate, go to [www.lotc.ca](http://www.lotc.ca). You can also forward your name, address, phone number, and membership fee and/or donation to:

### Lake O'Hara Trails Club

Box 98, Lake Louise, Alberta, Canada, T0L 1E0

## 2022 Annual General Meeting

Bill Warren Training Centre  
Canmore, Alberta

5:00 p.m.  
Monday, June 20, 2022

### All Members Welcome!

Please check [lotc.ca](http://lotc.ca) and/or [facebook.com/lakeoharatrailsclub](https://facebook.com/lakeoharatrailsclub) one week prior to the meeting for updates due to possible Covid gathering restrictions.

Prefer to attend via Zoom?

Email: [info@lotc.ca](mailto:info@lotc.ca) for meeting link

Prefer to vote by proxy?

Download proxy form at [lotc.ca/agm](http://lotc.ca/agm)

# Alpine groundwater: a hidden resource

On a visit to Lake O'Hara in September 2003, University of Calgary geoscience professor Dr. Masaki Hayashi asked himself a seemingly simple question. Why was there more water flowing out of Lake O'Hara than into it? Finding the answer to that question prompted 17 years of hydrological research – work which yielded ground-breaking insights into the nature of alpine watersheds.

Hayashi explains that he was at O'Hara to examine the lodge's wastewater treatment system. Finding himself with some extra time on his hands at the end of the day, he went for a walk, and along the way he measured the water flowing into the lake from Mary, Opabin, and Oesa Creeks; and the outflow at Cataract Creek.

"You would expect the volumes to be roughly equal," he says. "But instead, there was a lot more water flowing out than coming in. Clearly there had to be another source of water feeding the lake."

Since 2004, Hayashi and a team of University of Calgary researchers have studied the water cycle in the Lake O'Hara watershed. Their research reveals that, depending on the season, 30% to 70% of the water entering Lake O'Hara comes from groundwater.

Data is collected from weather and streamflow monitoring stations throughout the O'Hara area. Geophysical imaging – in which the response of the ground to physical signals such as electric current and electromagnetic waves – is also used, and that data has generated an image of the underground environment in areas such as the Opabin Plateau.

"Up until we began this research, alpine areas were considered 'Teflon basins,'" Hayashi explains. "The assumption was that water flowed through the alpine – it did not stay."

Water enters the Lake O'Hara watershed through rain, snow, and glacial melt. The data Hayashi and his team collected reveals that in areas such as Opabin Plateau a reservoir of water is held beneath talus slopes and within the glacial moraine, including a large volume stored as buried ice.

"Our research indicates that groundwater stays in the O'Hara watershed for years, even decades. We have this 'savings account' which slowly releases water," Hayashi points out.

Over the past two years, researchers have begun on a new initiative to better understand the role permafrost plays in groundwater



Water researcher Dr. Masaki Hayashi adjusts the instruments at the Opabin Plateau weather station. Photo courtesy Masaki Hayashi

retention. Approximately 100 iButtons – small computerized temperature gauges approximately the size of a loonie – have been buried throughout the Opabin Plateau.

"We are looking to determine what is happening to the permafrost at Opabin, and to use this as a model to predict where permafrost would occur in alpine environments anywhere in the world," Hayashi notes.

"Lake O'Hara is important because it is one of the few places in the world where we have so much knowledge from years of data collection," he adds. "Before we began this work, little was known about groundwater reserves in alpine environments."

Hayashi outlines three primary findings from the past 17 years of research: Alpine sediments provide natural reservoirs that retain meltwater and summer rains. Rivers such as the Bow and the Kicking Horse are sourced by alpine aquifers. Alpine groundwater provides a buffer against climate change in the Canadian Rockies.

Asked how much longer his team will gather data at O'Hara, Hayashi laughs. "Research will continue for as long as I can walk, and I hope to walk for quite a while."

*Debra Hornsby*



*Preservation Through Appreciation*

## Save a Trail. Send us your Email.

In an effort to reduce our environmental impact, and devote as much funding as possible to trail work, we're asking LOTC members to opt for an e-version of this newsletter. If you are a LOTC member, and if you would like to switch from a paper to an email newsletter, please send your name, current mailing address, and email to [info@lotc.ca](mailto:info@lotc.ca) with the subject line "E-newsletter".