



Lake O'Hara Trails Club Newsletter

2024
Issue

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The story behind O'Hara's trail markers

by Joel Hagen

Have you ever wondered who painted the trail markers on the Alpine Circuit route at Lake O'Hara? There are red and orange squares side by side, as well as blue squares with two vertical yellow stripes. Sometimes you see all of them on the same rock.

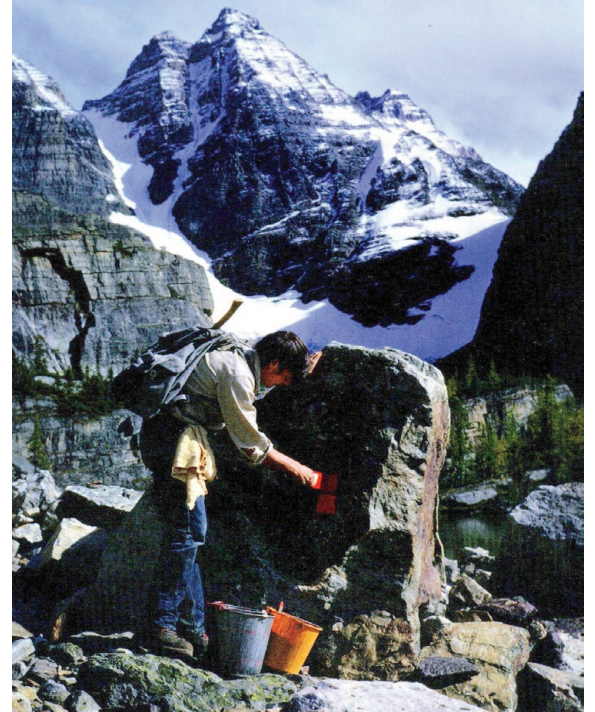
Who painted them? How were the colours chosen? It turns out it's a multi-generational story, with a handful of cast members who ought to be celebrated for their efforts to keep us hikers in the right place on the mountainside.

First up in our cast are trail builders George "Tommy" Link and Carson Simpson. Through the 1940s, they worked to create most of the Alpine Circuit we enjoy today, putting up the routes to Wiwaxy Gap and All

Soul's Prospect, as well as the Huber and Yukness Ledges. Since there was little to indicate where the trails were, Tommy decided to mark the route with red and orange squares of paint. He had researched the colours, and believed that they would be easy to see for people who are colour-blind.

In 1969, the legendary Tim Auger started working as the district warden at O'Hara, and became a protégé of Tommy, who was by this time in his 80s. Tommy took Tim out to all the trails he had built, and since the paint squares were fading, Tim repainted the red and orange in the early 1970s.

Fast forward to the 1980s, when my friend Edwin Knox, now retired from the Waterton Lakes National Park Warden Service, got his first



Park Warden Tim Auger painting route markers in the early 1970s.

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2023 Trail Report: an Early Spring and a Surprise Rockfall

Mother Nature both helped and hindered the Lake O'Hara trails crew in 2023 with an early spring and a major fall rockfall. 2023 also marked the first year of a new Five-Year Trail Plan (2023 - 2027), developed by Parks Canada staff and Lake O'Hara Trails Club Board members. The plan includes a list of projects to be completed, as well as a "Best Practices" section outlining the "how-to's" of various maintenance issues.

Steve Bertollo returned as Trail Crew Foreman in 2023, as did crew member Megan Burns. Steve and Megan were able to get right down to business in late May, as the winter snow disappeared earlier in 2023 than anyone could remember.

General trail maintenance included removing snow-downed tree and avalanche debris, 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 and steps,

and clearing and repairing drains and waterbars.

Notable accomplishments included the following:

1. Linda Lake Trail: Installed two new log bridges to replace rotten ones.
2. West Opabin: Installed steps in two different sections and repaired braiding.
3. Morning Glory Trail at Elizabeth Parker Hut: Installed a new bridge over the creek from which hut guests retrieve water.
4. McArthur Lake: LOTC Board members met on-site with Steve, Megan, and Parks asset manager Kurt Devlin to develop a long-term plan to attempt to reduce trail braiding along the McArthur lakeshore. Some unofficial trails were blocked while we attempt to encourage use of "main" trails with signage. This is a challenging area, as hikers spread all along the lakeshore for the perfect spot for lunch or cliff diving.

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2023 Trail Report (continued)

- Schaffer/Mary Lake junction near ACC hut: improved the trail here by increasing the grade, adding trail mix, and correcting drainage to prevent annual flood damage.

Rockslide on Lakeshore Trail

After two days of severe rains in early September, a large rockslide occurred at the south end of the Lakeshore Trail. Luckily, the slide, comprised of refrigerator-sized boulders, occurred in the evening so no hikers were on the trail. Additional trail crew from Lake Louise came to help move some of the

boulders. Complete repair will have to wait until 2024. The Lakeshore Trail at that location will remain closed; access to the Lake Oesa trail intersection is open, and hikers can reach Seven Veils Falls and the falls viewpoint from the west side of the lake.

Other 2023 trail work included: rock steps installed on Huber Ledges and All Souls (west side), steps and rock water bars added to Huber Ledge Trail below Abbot Pass junction, gully #1 on Lakeshore Trail cleared of avalanche debris, new steps added, and continued

attempts to limit unofficial trails and braiding on Opabin Plateau by covering with brush, dead trees, etc.

LOTC provides \$20,000 annually to cover the cost of one trail crew member for the entire working season from mid-June to early October. 66 person-days of work were recorded in 2023. Foreman Steve Bertollo and crew member Megan Burns continue to do an outstanding job in keeping our trails in tip-top shape.

Thank you as always to our donors for their contributions to our annual trail budget!



Morning Glory Trail at Elizabeth Parker Hut: Installed a new bridge over the creek from which hut guests retrieve water. Photo: Sue Webb.



In September 2023, a large rockslide consisting of refrigerator-sized boulders swept over the south end of the Lakeshore Trail. Repair work will continue into 2024.



Crews continue to try to discourage the use of informal trails at McArthur Lake.

2023 by the numbers

Lake O'Hara was officially full in 2023, with the Lake O'Hara campground, Lake O'Hara Lodge, ACC Elizabeth Parker Hut, and the day use bus all at 100% capacity. Nevertheless, visitor feedback, as reported to Parks Canada staff, was that those who made it into O'Hara were happy with the quiet and wilderness experience they found there.

The Lake O'Hara campground was fully booked from June through October, with 15% no shows or early departures, most resold the day off. The June to October day use shuttle was similarly 100% booked. No shows for the bus stood at just 5%, again sold the day off.

Approximately 3600 people hiked into O'Hara over the summer. Hike-in numbers remain below pre-pandemic levels. Parks staff

noted that preparedness to hike in was at 75%, higher than in the past. Parks staff also reported an increase in runners choosing to run up the road, complete the Alpine Circuit, and run out.

Improvements to the campground in 2023 by Parks staff included the removal of 50 hazardous trees, the replacement of 10 tent pads, and the installation and painting of eight new picnic tables.

In order to better answer natural and human history questions posed by visitors, members of the Parks Canada Visitor Services Team received a half-day of training from Joel Hagen of Great Divide Nature Interpretation. This training was funded by LOTC. LOTC also continues to fund an extra greeter position on the Lake O'Hara Parks Canada crew.

Behind O'Hara's trail markers (continued)

trail crew job... at Lake O'Hara! He started in 1984, and spent three summers up at O'Hara. Edwin overlapped the era when the trail markers were changed. I interviewed Edwin last year and got the whole story. In 1986, it was decided that the orange and red squares needed an upgrade: they looked too similar to the brightly coloured lichens on the rocks, and they actually weren't ideal for those who are colour-blind.

That summer, Edwin was on a crew that included Rob Hemming and Diny Harrison (who later became the first woman in Canada to become a full mountain guide). Diny had studied fine art in university, and from her knowledge of the colour wheel, she knew that two colours from opposite sides of the wheel would

give the highest contrast and be the most visible – even to those with colourblindness – so she chose blue and yellow. In the first week of August that summer, Edwin, Diny and Rob went on a mission to paint the new squares on the alpine route. They had little stencils, small paintbrushes, and a couple of cans of paint.

When you next hike the Alpine Circuit, make sure you tip your hats to Tommy, Tim, Diny, Rob, Edwin, and all the other great O'Hara trail crew members who have followed in their footsteps. Without them, we'd almost certainly get lost up in the high country!

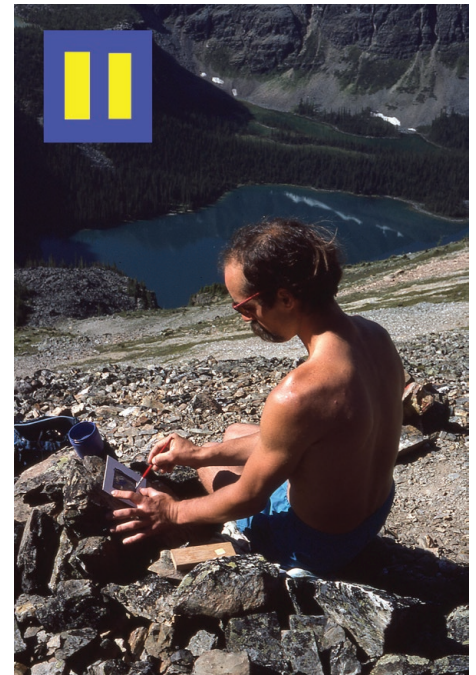
Joel Hagen is a master interpreter who regularly guides at Lake O'Hara. www.greatdivide.ca



Lake O'Hara trail builders Carson Simpson and "Tommy" Link created the first trail markers.



Rob Hemming and Diny Harrison painting alpine markers in 1986. Note the Parks Canada "uniforms": blue or pink shorts, and bare chests or bikini tops! Photo by Edwin Knox



Rob Hemming painting alpine markers in 1986. Photo by Edwin Knox.

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. 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

2024 Annual General Meeting

Bill Warren Training Centre
Board Room
Canmore Nordic Centre,
1995 Olympic Way

5:00 p.m.
Monday, June 24, 2024

All Members Welcome!

Prefer to attend via Zoom? Email:
info@lotc.ca for meeting link.
Prefer to vote by proxy? Download
proxy form at lotc.ca/agma

A summer of mushrooms

by Debra Hornsby

Summer 2023 was remarkable in many ways. An early spring meant Lake O'Hara trails were free of snow by late May. Warm sunny days combined with regular rain showers produced an abundance of summer flowers, followed by berries which ripened much earlier than normal. And as anyone who hiked the O'Hara trails last year surely noticed, 2023 also produced a bumper crop of mushrooms.

One mushroom that stood out in both size and shape was *Sarcodon imbricatus*, more commonly known as the scaly tooth or scaly hedgehog mushroom.

Scaly hedgehogs are big mushrooms. Some individuals growing along O'Hara's forested trails last summer were as large as dinner plates. These mushrooms feature a dark cap covered in brown overlapping scales. Instead of gills or pores, the scaly hedgehog has teeth on its underside. These teeth extend downward from the cap and are pale brown, becoming darker with age. When young, the developing teeth resemble pores, but they become more defined as they mature.

Scaly hedgehog is a widespread species, making its home across North America and Europe. It appears most commonly in the Rocky Mountains, where it grows with subalpine fir and Engelmann spruce. Scaly hedgehogs grow from the ground, never from trees or wood. The fruiting bodies appear alone or in scattered groupings. Often, they form small overlapping clusters.

The scaly hedgehog's name *imbricatus*, derives from Latin, signifying "tiled" or "with overlapping tiles". This term refers to the mushroom's distinct cap, which resembles overlapping tiles or shingles. These scales darken as the mushroom ages and turn upwards. The middle of the cap is indented, creating a central depression which often collects water and debris.

Scaly hedgehogs are valued across many different cultures and for many reasons. In Norway, *Sarcodon imbricatus* and related species are harvested for their blue-green pigments, which can be used to dye wool. In Bulgaria, they are collected, dried, and

ground to create aromatic mushroom flour. In Korea, a tea is made from dried mushrooms. In Japan, the fried younger specimens are a sought-after delicacy.

Why there was such an abundance of mushrooms at Lake O'Hara, and throughout the mountain parks last summer, is a bit of a mystery. Whatever the reason, it meant many of us headed home from our hikes to consult a mushroom guidebook.



Look Mom – giant mushrooms! Photo: 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 newsletter@lotc.ca with the subject line "E-newsletter".