



# O'Hara 2013

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## Conrad Kain and Lake O'Hara

There were many significant painters who turned to Lake O'Hara as their fount of inspiration. There is also the tale of the stellar trail-building efforts of George Link and Lawrence Grassi, so insightfully told by Jon Whyte in *Tommy and Lawrence: The Ways of the Trails of Lake O'Hara*. But, before the coming of the creative artists and the building of the trails, there was Conrad Kain and the 1909 Alpine Club of Canada's mountaineering camp at Lake O'Hara.

There is little doubt that Conrad Kain (1883-1934) was the finest and fittest mountaineer in the first generation of mountaineering in Canada. The Swiss Guides hired by the CPR are often given their rightful nod and due, but none of the Swiss Guides did the challenging peaks or took their clients on the questionable climbs that Kain did. Kain, a native of Nasswald, Austria, was brought to Canada in 1909 by the Alpine Club of Canada (Arthur Wheeler, the club's first president, hired Kain).

There remains some lingering dispute about whether Kain was the first to climb Mount Robson in 1913, but in 2013 (100 years after Kain reached the snow-packed summit of Robson), many is the ascent planned to commemorate his historic standing on the roof of the highest peak in the Rockies. Kain tends to hold the imagination of many, and the myth and lore of Kain is fated to continue. The 2009 republication of Kain's edited autobiography *Where the Clouds Can Go* (original foreword by J. Monroe Thorington, updated foreword by Hans Gmoser, and new foreword by Pat Morrow) signalled once again, the abiding significance and relevance of Kain. He was the outstanding pioneer of Canadian mountaineering, who rose, like Mount Robson, above the lesser peaks of the Swiss Guides.

What, though, is this climber's relationship with the Lake O'Hara area? Conrad Kain was hired to be one of the main guides for the Alpine Club's annual mountaineering camp at Lake O'Hara in 1909 – the club's first camp at O'Hara. Lillian Gest, in her somewhat dated yet suggestive missive, *History of Lake O'Hara*, had this to say: "This club (Alpine Club of Canada) held 13 camps at or near Lake O'Hara. The first camp was in 1909 in the alpine meadow with 190 persons. ...The veteran, world-famed mountaineer, Edward Whymper attended the 1909 camp. He brought greetings from a number of the most famous English mountain climbers of the day" (p.34.).

Kain wrote a lengthy letter to his Austrian friend Amelie Malek after the 1909 camp at O'Hara, describing, in varied detail, the many events that occurred at the camp and his participation in them. Kain mentions in the letter how he

arrived at O'Hara on July 23rd after a two-hour train ride from Banff, followed by a day-long horseback ride to the camp. Most of the following week was spent setting up camp which began August 1st. Kain was a guide most days, and Mount Huber (11,049 ft) was the peak of choice for most at the camp. Kain mentions leading a few at the camp to the summit of Huber and down on a rather nasty snow-thick day when others had turned back. The group Kain led returned safely to camp, but Kain wondered how Wheeler would greet the tardy but safe climbers. Wheeler was amply delighted by Kain's leadership, but Kain makes it abundantly clear in his letter that the Swiss guides (rented from the CPR for the 1909 camp) were none too pleased with all the attention he was getting from Wheeler and many others at the camp. Needless to say, the Swiss and Austrian guides had many a tension point.

There is a lovely section in the letter in which Kain describes, in poignant and evocative detail, the sheer delight and pleasure he had in being in the O'Hara area. He mentions how it so reminded him of the Swiss or Tyrol mountains. He comments on how he took a gun into his tent when bedding down for the night, and the charm of Oesa, the "Ice Lake". Porcupines even occasionally made a visit to his tent! But there can be no doubt - the serenity and grand beauty of O'Hara charmed Kain.

Kain went on to become one of the Rockies' best-known guides in Canada's "golden age of mountaineering", but it is interesting to note that his Canadian guiding career began in the meadows and on the peaks of Lake O'Hara.

Ron Dart



Members of the 1909 Alpine Club of Canada Mountaineering Camp. Conrad Kain at far left. Photo courtesy Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, v263-na71-49.

# Tribute to Michael Laub



Lake O'Hara has lost its greatest champion and ambassador. Michael Laub died December 28, 2012 in Banff, after a hard-fought battle with cancer. He was 69.

Michael was raised in Calgary, taught economics at the University of Manitoba and, in autumn of 1974, made the biggest decision of his life. He left Winnipeg with

his wife Marsha to embark on a 37-year journey as owner-operator of Lake O'Hara Lodge. Along the way Michael and Marsha raised two beautiful and talented daughters, Marika and Aviva. Marika loved O'Hara, excelled in school and was an accomplished cross-country ski racer when we lost her at the age of 17 in a tragic car accident. Aviva grew up in Banff with summers spent at Lake O'Hara and went on to become a nurse in Victoria, BC where she currently lives and practices.

Lake O'Hara was at a crossroads in 1975 when the Laub family bought in and began a new era of management at the lodge. Parks Canada had made it clear that there was to be no expansion in the size of the lodge operation, camping was restricted to the designated campground, and there was to be a quota on the number of people entering the area by bus. There was even talk of phasing out backcountry operations like Lake O'Hara Lodge. It was a delicate time that called for careful navigation of these transitions.

Michael promptly established that the vision for Yoho National Park held by Parks Canada was also the vision for Lake O'Hara Lodge - to celebrate and protect the heritage of a stunning and magical backcountry setting. That heritage included a bold landscape, a rich ecology and a relatively short human history beginning with First Nations, horse access, the railroad and then very modest development. The transition that began in 1975 saw the trail system enhanced and maintained through collaboration with Parks Canada and the Lake O'Hara Trails Club. A reservation system for the bus was introduced. Le Relais (a rustic backcountry visitor centre) was established and the lodge season was extended to fall and winter. Michael was instrumental in all these advances, quietly guiding negotiations, proposing solutions and responding to concerns. He played a leading role in everything Lake O'Hara has become over the years.

Family was Michael's most important priority. His care, guidance and leadership extended to the entire Lake O'Hara Family - a family that included friends, staff, lodge guests and visitors to the area. Michael was always willing to listen to a challenging question, consider a difficult issue or help solve a thorny problem. There were many who went to him for advice and came away with a new perspective, an idea or a direction they had not considered. This was Michael's genius. He taught us the value of hard work, determination, patience, contemplation and respect.

We will miss Michael dearly, but our sadness in losing him is comforted by the legacy and challenge he has left for future generations - to protect and celebrate this very special place.

Tim Wake

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## Build a Legacy at Lake O'Hara

When Lawrence Grassi began building the stone steps on the Lake Oesa trail and Tommy Link and A. Carson Simpson blazed a trail to the Cathedral Plateau, they were creating legacies for generations to come.

You can be a proud part of that tradition of building legacy by including the Lake O'Hara Trails Club in your estate planning. A legacy in your will ensures that the Club is able to continue with our work of preserving and enhancing the Lake O'Hara area while your estate may benefit from a charitable gift receipt. Contact us at [message@lotc.ca](mailto:message@lotc.ca) for more information.

NEW!!! Make a gift to Lake O'Hara online! Use the "Donate Now" button on our website at [www.lotc.ca](http://www.lotc.ca) and you can make a gift securely online through a group called "CanadaHelps". You will receive a charitable gift receipt from CanadaHelps, and the Trails Club will receive your gift minus a 3.9% processing fee. (You may want to consider increasing your gift to account for this fee.) This system will keep the Club's administration costs down, and will make it easier for you to support your Trails Club.

We are tremendously grateful for all of our supporters and donors, and hope that the next time you visit Lake O'Hara, you might take a moment to remember the contributions of so many who trod these trails before us.

# In the Footsteps of Lawrence Grassi: Maintaining and Improving O'Hara Trails

## 2012 Season Report

With up to two metres of snow still covering O'Hara trails in late May 2012, the trail crew was forced to delay last summer's trail work until well into July. Repairing damage to the access road became a priority for the early season, as a big rain event and the large amount of run-off last spring caused considerable damage to many sections of the road. The crew was finally able to make their first pass around the Lakeshore Trail on July 10th – one of the latest starts in recent memory.

We were once again fortunate to be able to count on experienced hands John Morrison and Matt Cadden to deliver the final year of the Trails Club's three-year trail work agreement with Parks Canada. Despite the late start, and with minimal guidance or supervision, Matt and John were able to exceed their allotted trail days at Lake O'Hara. Almost all of their work last season centred on routine maintenance and repairs such as cutting and pruning trees, fixing drainage issues, re-setting rocks for better footing, replacing the bridge at Morning Glory Lake (which had floated away), adding or improving rock steps and bringing in firewood for Le Relais. Carrying out routine maintenance on virtually every O'Hara area trail meant the crew was not able to get to some of the larger trail improvement projects on the books.

## 2013 and Beyond

We are very pleased to announce that your Trails Club memberships, donations, purchases at Le Relais, and other fundraising efforts have allowed the Club to sign a new five-year agreement with Parks Canada to support trail work at O'Hara. The Club will continue to contribute \$15,000 (or a minimum of 40 person-days of trail work) to support the trail crew's activities for each of the next five years. We are also grateful to be able to fund trail design and construction guru Don Gardner so he can be on hand regularly to share his considerable knowledge and experience.

Trail work initiatives for the upcoming years will be based on a new five-year program. The main goals are to continue to reduce erosion and improve trail durability by

securing rock work, improving trail alignments and treads, and facilitating drainage. Many of the initiatives are fairly small in scope, but should result in major improvements. In 2013, the focus will be on addressing outstanding issues on the Lake O'Hara circuit, Lake Oesa trail, Huber and Yukness Ledges alpine routes, Opabin Plateau, East and West Opabin, and Big Larches trails.

The Club will also be pursuing a couple of larger-scale trail re-alignments – on the All Souls and Wiwaxy alpine routes – to address major erosion issues. Because of their scope, these re-alignments are contingent on review and approval by Parks Canada following more detailed design and specifications. The same conditions will apply to another Trails Club initiative – investigating the potential for reopening the old Seven Veils Falls trail between the O'Hara lakeshore and the Lake Oesa trail. Moving forward with this project will again be contingent on a rigorous review and approval by Parks Canada.

As always, on-going trail improvements at Lake O'Hara trail may mean some short-term individual trail closures during the hiking season. Your understanding and cooperation are much appreciated as we continue to work with Parks Canada to maintain the legacy of Lawrence Grassi and other great O'Hara trail builders.

Judy Otton



*Parks Canada trail crew workers Matt Cadden (l) and John Morrison (r) use a "come-along" to move a large rock into place on the Opabin Plateau.*

# LOTc 2013 Art Fundraiser

A big “thank you” to those who purchased tickets for our 2012 Art Fundraiser, and a special thanks to J.R. Webb for having donated “Fall at Lake McArthur”. Betty Castle of Keizer, Oregon was the lucky winner of this lovely watercolour. We’re thrilled to present a stunning 22” x 29” framed oil entitled “Above Opabin Plateau” by local artist Liz Wiltzen for the 2013 fundraiser. This is the second time Liz has donated an original painting for the raffle, for which we are truly grateful. Learn more about Liz and see her work on her web site: [www.mountainartist.com](http://www.mountainartist.com). Stop at Le Relais to find out more about the fundraiser.

## Elizabeth Wiltzen

Elizabeth’s hiking, climbing and skiing expeditions were her initial inspiration to begin a career in art. Over time, her experiences have made her intimately aware of the magic and beauty present in the natural world, and in painting she has found an instrument to convey her reverence for it. For 15 years, Elizabeth worked in watercolour, but in 2003 she became intrigued with oil painting in her pursuit of new and inspiring ways to share her perceptions, and in this medium she found a channel that more clearly enables her to express her personal artistic vision. She has exhibited in numerous solo, group and juried exhibitions,



has garnered international recognition and awards, and is in demand as a workshop instructor. Elizabeth is a member of the Oil Painters of America, and a signature member of the Society of Canadian Artists, the Canadian Society of Painters in Watercolour, and the Federation of Canadian Artists.

## 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](http://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*

## 2013 Annual General Meeting

Warden Cabin at Lake O’Hara 4:30 p.m.  
Monday, July 23, 2013

*All Members Welcome!*