



# O'Hara 2015

• Published by the Lake O'Hara Trails Club, Box 98, Lake Louise, AB. TOL 1E0 • www.lotc.ca •

## The Story of the Lakeshore Cabins

What visitor to Lake O'Hara has not been awed by the beauty of the lakeshore cabins? They seem perfectly suited to their environment, dotted aesthetically around the point of land that juts into the turquoise waters of the lake, and ringed by soaring peaks. But what is their story? What historical and cultural forces were at work to explain their appearance in such a remote setting? Who built them?

In the post-World War I era, the Canadian Pacific Railway's tourism monopoly in the mountain parks was threatened by the growth of motor vehicle tourism. A cavalcade of the Calgary Automobile Club arrived in Banff in July 1911. By 1920, the highway extended to Lake Louise, and Field was reached by 1926. In an effort to appeal to the new motor tourist, the CPR created a low-cost, auto-accessible alternative to their large destination hotels by building a network of "Railway Bungalow Camps". Basil Gardom, the CPR's construction superintendent for western hotels, was charged with implementing this concept.

In contrast to the CPR's "monolithic resort formula" influenced by European styling, the bungalow camps were designed to portray a rustic "wilderness frontier" style, using log and stone construction. The monolithic was replaced by the intimate; lavishness was replaced by simplicity. Another important feature of this new rustic simplicity was the concept of a "decentralized camp", in which modest sleeping cabins were organized around a central building that functioned as a social and dining centre. Such a design would be reminiscent of a tent encampment, with the central structure representing the campfire.

The CPR had been staging tent camps in the meadow where the Elizabeth Parker Hut currently resides since the early 1900s. The tent camp offered an enticement, drawing tourists from the main CPR resorts of Chateau Lake Louise and Mount Stephen House in Field. Even then, Lake O'Hara was a favoured hiking and climbing destination, an opportunity to experience the wilderness up close. Thus it was no surprise that, although not accessible by automobile, the first of the CPR's bungalow camps appeared at Lake O'Hara.



*Bungalow camp in the meadow, ca. 1925. (Photo by Byron Harmon)  
Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, V263/NA-6188*



*Cabins were moved to the lakeshore in 1926. (Photo by Susan Webb)*

In 1920, in order to upgrade the tent camp to the new Railway Bungalow standards, Basil Gardom hired Banff outfitter James Boyce to replace the tents with log cabins. In addition, a lodge was constructed: this building now stands as the Alpine Club's Elizabeth Parker Hut. Jim Boyce was known for his ability to build log structures, having been born in the Ontario bush and learning the art of axe-handling from both his grandfather and father. Perhaps his log construction work offered a seasonal counterpoint to

# The Story of the Lakeshore Cabins (continued)

his primary work as an outfitter and guide. Jim had come west ten years earlier, at the age of 19, initially joining his father to build trails in Banff National Park. Jim soon found his first job, cooking for Jimmy Simpson. Ten years later, Boyce started his own outfitting business and had many regular summer clients including Carl Rungius, the famous wildlife artist; Caroline Hinman and her parties; and George and Adeline Link.

But how did the cabins in the meadow get to where they are now? After the main lodge at Lake O'Hara was constructed in 1925, the eleven cabins were, amazingly, skidded down a specially constructed road along Schaffer Creek, to the lakeshore. This work was undertaken by Calgary house mover, Charles Riddock, during the winter of 1926/27, assisted by Russell Wiswell and Jim Boyce. Jim used a team of strong horses and a capstan, a rotating machine with vertical axle, to winch the cabins over the hill. Taking advantage of the hard snow surface in March made this herculean task somewhat easier.

The cabins feature peeled logs, 6" to 10" in diameter, a gable roof, and a deep overhang above the entrance. In contrast to the cabins in some of the other bungalow camps (Storm Mountain, for example), there were no fireplaces installed.

Jim went on to build many log structures in the Lake Louise-Yoho area. He built the first Lake Louise Trading Post (now Deer Lodge), and, while managing Skoki Lodge, Boyce added a second floor to the Lodge, and new cabins in 1935/36. He also built Halfway Hut, situated near Ptarmigan Lake on the way to Skoki, and the beautiful Post Hotel, originally known as the Lake Louise Ski Lodge.

After the Lake O'Hara cabins were built, large bungalow camps were opened in 1922 at Wapta Lake and in the Yoho Valley. When the Banff-Windermere Highway was completed in 1923, the CPR opened a group of auto-accessible bungalow camps at Storm Mountain, Vermilion, and Radium Hot Springs.

Now approaching their centenary, the Lake O'Hara cabins stand as a testament to the skills of their builder, James Boyce, and to the vision of Basil Gardom. They represent the CPR's approach to offering more modest tourist accommodations to a growing number of middle-class motoring tourists. (In 1928, you could book a week for \$35!) Look closely in the cabins and you might even see Basil Gardom's name stamped on a piece of timber.

*Brenda Drake*

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## What's in a Name?

Many peaks and lakes in the Lake O'Hara area have evocative, beautiful names. Who hasn't wondered, as they wandered along the trail, about the meaning of "Oesa" or "Yukness"? Luckily, we have a couple of early explorers to thank for retaining original names from their native Stoney guides, or applying appropriate Stoney descriptors for the feature. Samuel Allen, late-19th century Rockies explorer and alpinist, mapped the Lake Louise area with Walter Wilcox in 1893-95. German geographer Jean Habel also mapped parts of the Rockies in 1896, lending his voice to the nomenclature. Here are some of the interesting Stoney names and their meanings, recorded by Allen, Habel, and others:

**Hungabee** (mount and glacier), meaning "chieftain", named for its impressive height compared to its neighbours. The size difference is most noticeable from the Odaray side of the valley; even better from the summit of Mt. Stephen.

**Odaray** (mountain and pass), meaning "very brushy" or "windfall". They obviously didn't have our great trails back in those days.

**Oesa** (lake), means "ice". Ringed by high peaks blocking the sun for much of the winter, Lake Oesa is one of the first

lakes to freeze in the fall. Bring your skates!

**Opabin** (creek, mountain and pass), meaning "rocky", originally applied to the creek.

**Wiwaxy** (peaks) means "windy". If you've ever hiked to Wiwaxy Gap on a breezy day, this will make perfect sense.

**Yukness** (mountain), meaning "sharpened", an apt description of this knife-ridged summit.

*Susan Webb*



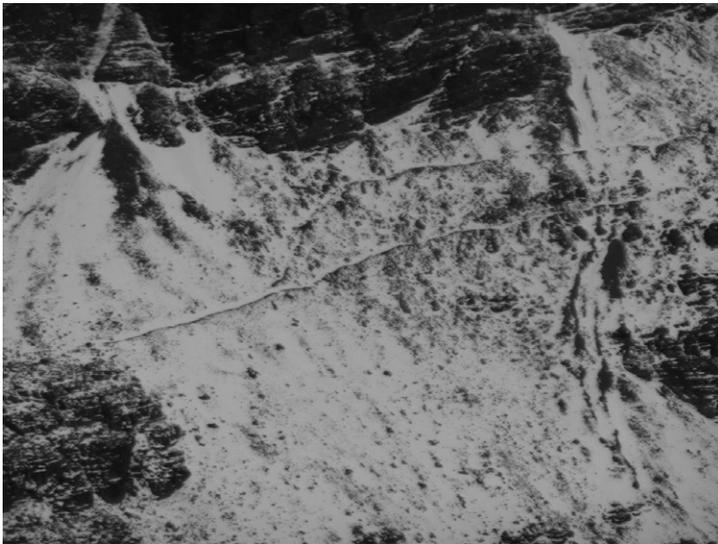
*Lake Oesa, Mt. Ringrose (centre) and Mt. Hungabee (right) (Photo by Susan Webb)*

# 2014 Trail Work Report

## 2014 In Review

Last year was something of a transition year for trail work at Lake O'Hara. With the departure of the longstanding O'Hara trail crew, a series of rotating crews stepped up to the plate and put in a considerable effort toward new projects and regular trail maintenance. This arrangement allowed for more Parks Canada trail crew workers to enhance their knowledge and appreciation for the special nature of O'Hara trails. Once again, your donations funded about 40 person-days of work in the area, while Parks Canada matched this amount and more, resulting in over 80 person-days spent in the area in 2014.

By far the biggest accomplishment of the season was the successful re-alignment of a 400 metre section of the All Souls alpine route below Mt Schaffer. The new alignment follows a more natural, gently rising traverse and will avoid the late-lying snow patches, steep grade and erosion issues that plagued the former route. The trail crew did an excellent job of fine-tuning the new route, digging out a solid trail tread and reclaiming the former route. Most importantly, the new alignment appears to have been readily adopted by O'Hara visitors. Try it out for yourself this summer!



*A blanket of snow in early autumn highlights the new (lower) All Souls traverse below the now decommissioned (upper) alignment.*

Most of the crews' remaining time was spent on general trail maintenance throughout the area including removing fallen trees, clearing drainage ditches, repairing wooden bridges and improving trail treads. Crews also put a considerable amount of effort into widening rock steps on the West Opabin trail and improving the Yukness Ledges alpine route. Parks Canada's geomatics specialists spent a day at O'Hara using GIS technology to map all the formal and random trails on the Opabin Plateau, as a base for trail planning in 2015.

## What's Up for 2015?

Some important staffing changes are being put in place this year to support the O'Hara trail program. For the first time in many years, Parks Canada will be hiring an on-going trail crew foreman for O'Hara, to supervise trail work and keep an eye on needs for trail improvements. The Trails Club will continue to fund a full-time trail crew position to work alongside the foreman, and Trails Club funds will also be used to extend the work season for both positions later into the fall.

Long-time visitors may remember the original route to Lake Oesa, which climbed up from the Lake O'Hara circuit trail alongside spectacular Seven Veils Falls. In the mid to late 1950s, trail building pioneer Lawrence Grassi made a herculean effort to improve what was then an informal climber's access route to Lake Oesa and the Abbots Pass alpine hut by building a series of solid rock steps and stepping stones. Much of that trail legacy is still in evidence today on the way to Lake Oesa. However, parts of the lower trail beside Seven Veils Falls proved to be too wet and susceptible to erosion, and in the 1970s this route was replaced by the switchbacks we follow today. This summer, at the request of the Trails Club, Parks Canada will be assessing the potential to re-open a short section of the original lower trail between the O'Hara lakeshore and a scenic viewpoint beside Seven Veils Falls. If approved, this would offer a scenic side-trip for visitors circumnavigating Lake O'Hara on the lakeshore trail and display more of Grassi's superb trail handiwork.

The Trails Club will also be working with Parks Canada to have a detailed look at the myriad of trails, both formal and random, that has developed over the years on the Opabin Plateau. The current formally maintained trail system will likely remain unchanged, but some redundant random trails may be closed off and rehabilitated as a result of this initiative.

Most of the remaining trail work this season will consist of drainage improvements, brush and tree clearing, removal of tripping hazards, re-setting loose rock work, and replacing rotting timber water bars. Keep an eye out for a Parks Canada volunteer crew conducting an inventory of trail signs and crossing structures (bridges) throughout the backcountry this summer.

As always, the Trails Club welcomes your comments and suggestions for O'Hara trails. Follow the links on the Lake O'Hara Trails Club website ([lotc.ca](http://lotc.ca)) to the Contacts section for email and regular mail addresses. Happy hiking!

*Judy Otton*

# LOTC 2015 Art Raffle

We are thrilled to present a beautiful work of art by acclaimed artist and master pastelist, Horace Champagne, for this year's art raffle.

Mr. Champagne's pastels express his passion for the Canadian wilderness. Mr. Champagne was educated at Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Montreal, at the Ottawa School of Art, and in the U.S.A. with Charles Movalli and Daniel Green. He finds inspiration right outside his studio on Ile d'Orléans, Québec, surrounded by ancient birch, fields and farms; in Newfoundland with its quaint and colourful fishing villages; and in his annual excursions to the wilds of the Canadian Rockies.

Raffle tickets are \$10 and can be purchased at the lodge or Le Relais.

Learn more about Horace Champagne and his art on his website: [www.horacechampagne.com](http://www.horacechampagne.com)



## More Art Donations

Last year, artist Mitch Fenton donated three wonderful postcard images that were sold in Le Relais. We turned the "Lake O'Hara" postcard into a popular T-shirt; this year we're printing another design, so be sure to pick up a new T-shirt, and watch your money turn into good trail work!

A big thank you to Alberta photographer Wayne Johnson for donating a stunning panorama photograph of Lake O'Hara from the Odaray plateau, printed on aluminum. The LOTC is selling this beautiful art-piece photo as a fundraiser; check it out in Le Relais.



## Check out our website

Go to [www.lotc.ca](http://www.lotc.ca) to find the latest trail work updates, maps, past newsletters, etc.

## You can make a difference.

Be a part of O'Hara by becoming a member of the 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. Donations are fully tax deductible.

Download a membership/donation form online 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*

## 2015 Annual General Meeting

Warden Cabin at Lake O'Hara 4:30 p.m.  
Tuesday, August 4, 2015

*All Members Welcome!*