



O'Hara 2017

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Viewpoints and Volunteers: 2016 Trails Report

2016 may well go down in the record books as one of the most productive years for the Trails Club and O'Hara's trails. The stars aligned for us to be able to accomplish several significant initiatives. We were very fortunate to have a stellar full-time Parks Canada crew on site for the summer – seasoned foreman Steve Bertollo returned for a second year, ably assisted by new recruit Tanya Solvsten. Your donations allowed us to fund an extension to Tanya's work term.

Along with the usual trail clearing, necessary repairs, and maintenance, these were the major achievements in 2016:

Seven Veils Falls Trail: In the nick of time

before winter set in, the Trails Club received final approval from Parks Canada to proceed with a new viewpoint at Seven Veils Falls. In October, contractor Eric Oxner and his crew from Oxner Stonescapes worked in adverse conditions using local materials to construct a series of sturdy rock walls, small viewing platforms, and a bench at the falls overlook. Lake O'Hara Lodge and the Alpine Club of Canada deserve a heartfelt thank you for their support of Eric and his crew during construction.

Over the summer, the O'Hara trail crew also reconstructed the long-neglected access trail to the falls. The refurbished trail and new viewpoint would make original



Contractor Eric Oxner directs a helicopter delivery of gravel at Seven Veils Falls. Photo: Sue Webb.

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O'Hara's Swimming Songbird

Anyone who has dipped their toes or more into one of O'Hara's many beautiful lakes quickly realizes how cold the waters are. Yet there is one creature who makes a living doing just that. It is the American Dipper

(*Cinclus mexicanus*), also known by some as the water ouzel.

The dipper is a plump, short-tailed, gray songbird about 20 cm in length. The "dipper" name refers to their peculiar habit of bobbing up and down much like athletes doing a series of squats to strengthen their thighs and core muscles. Why dippers dip is one of those mysteries of nature.

Aquatic insects such as caddisflies, mayflies and stoneflies, especially their larvae, are the

principle food items for dippers. Thus, they make their living along the edges of clear, cold streams and lakes. This is where their unique physiology allows them to do the remarkable feat of diving under the water surface to capture these delectable morsels.

They have short, strongly muscled wings that enable dippers to "fly under water" and strong toes and claws to grip on to the rocky substrate as they hunt their food. Special flaps prevent water from entering their nostrils. A higher level of haemoglobin and a lower metabolic rate enables them to stay submerged for up to 30 seconds. They have a dense layer of down feathers under



The American Dipper braves icy streams in search of food. Photo: Amar Athal

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Viewpoints and Volunteers: 2016 Trails Report (cont'd)



Eric and crew hauling gear from the Seven Veils trail on October 12. Not sure how they managed the wheelbarrow in the snow... Photo: Sue Webb.

trail builder Lawrence Grassi proud, and will provide an enjoyable new side trip from the O'Hara Lakeshore Trail that fits with the standard and aesthetic of other O'Hara trails. Eric and the trail crew will spend a few more days completing their work in early 2017, after which the new Seven Veils Falls trail and viewpoint will be open for O'Hara visitors to enjoy!

Lakeshore Trail Sandbag Project: With the trail crew's capable assistance, we were able to successfully resurrect a once-popular volunteer project. Many visitors responded to the call to fill and carry sandbags to a designated "drop zone" on the Lakeshore Trail. Bags were emptied onto a

tarp and subsequently spread where needed by the trail crew. All those helping hands resulted in improvements to a surprising long stretch of the Lakeshore Trail, helping to address tripping hazards and drainage issues. Many thanks to those who participated, and we look forward to continuing with this project in 2017.

Waterbar Installation: The installation of new waterbars on the Schaffer Lake Trail was completed, wrapping up a major waterbar replacement initiative.

Wiwaxy Trail Improvements: Trail crew began addressing some of the erosion issues on this trail with new rock work and minor trail re-alignments. Improvements will continue to be phased in over the next few years, so the trail can remain open during construction.

2017 is the final year of the current five-year cooperative agreement between Parks Canada and the Trails Club. We will concentrate on completing trail work projects set out in the agreement and trail plan, focusing on the McArthur Lake area, Opabin Plateau, upper Big Larches trail and the Wiwaxy alpine route. Planning, coordinating and managing volunteer initiatives will be another priority. It is also time to start planning for the next five years. If you have a comment on a trail improvement you'd like to see, let us know through the LOTC website. And don't forget, we count on Trails Club memberships and donations to keep making all this happen!

Judy Otton

O'Hara's Swimming Songbird (continued)

a well-oiled outer layer. The oil is supplied by an extra-large preening gland. Most interesting is their ability to change the curvature of their eye lenses to better see underwater.

To attract a mate they have a surprisingly long melodious song which can be quite varied. Another form of communication is thought to occur through the blinking of their white eyelids — a little flirtation perhaps. Dippers build their round, mossy nests near the splash zone of streams and are even known to tuck them behind waterfalls and under low bridges.



The melodious song of the American Dipper can be heard along streams throughout Lake O'Hara. Photo: Klaus Exner

After a romantic interlude the female will lay four to five eggs which hatch in 16 days. The young are fed by both parents and are ready to leave the nest after about 18 days. I once saw three fledgling dippers enthusiastically

bobbing up and down on a branch overhanging the water at the back of Lake O'Hara as one of their parents surfaced nearby with some food for them.

On your next visit to Lake O'Hara, watch for these intriguing birds. One good place to look for dippers is where the streams from the Opabin Plateau or Mary Lake enter Lake O'Hara. They are also frequently seen along the many streams that flow through the Lake O'Hara area.

John McFaul operates Alpenglow Nature Hikes and is a frequent presenter at the Lake O'Hara Speaker Series.

Volunteer Trail Work Day

A chilly and snowy day on October 6, 2016 did little to dampen the enthusiasm of ten hearty volunteers who were keen to man wheelbarrows, shovels, and rakes on the lakeshore trail. A pilot project cooperatively sponsored by the LOTC and Parks Canada, the day was designed to accomplish a considerable amount of trail work in a short time, as well as to engage and involve volunteers.

Several days in advance, Parks Canada trucked two loads of gravel trail-mix (purchased by LOTC) up the road to a staging area near the campground, where our Parks trail crew Steve and Tanya transferred the material into large “fly bags”. A helicopter arranged by Parks Canada then flew the bags to

strategic locations along the lakeshore trail. Our volunteers, several of whom are retired Parks employees (Parks Heritage Conservation Society), were bussed up the road courtesy of Lake O’Hara Lodge. Keeping warm by loading and running wheelbarrows, and spreading and raking the trail-mix, the volunteer team covered approximately 200 metres of trail in a thick layer of gravel, helping to reduce trip hazards from tree roots and rocks. A hearty bag lunch and a T-shirt for each volunteer, supplied by LOTC, were welcome perks for their hard work. All the volunteers enjoyed themselves despite the weather, and are eager to return for a repeat performance; we hope to arrange



Glen Wong, Penney Gaul, and Martin Armitage (l-r) spread gravel to improve footing along the Lakeshore Trail. Photo: Tina Lambert.

another trail work day for 2017.

Big thanks go to LOTC’s Judy Otton and Parks Canada’s Glen Kubian (Lake Louise/Yoho/Kootenay Wilderness Management Specialist) for arranging the volunteers and organizing materials, to Lake O’Hara Lodge for transportation, to Dan Verrall (LOTC) for helping on-site, and to the Parks Heritage Conservation Society and the rest of our team of keen volunteers!

If you would like to be on the list of potential volunteers for trail work, please email message@lotc.ca with your name and contact information (phone, email) and any relevant work or volunteer experience.

Sue Webb



Volunteers Ruby and Bill Fisher and the O’Hara trails crew hard at work on the Lakeshore Trail.

O’Hara Online

Alpine larches. Artists of Lake O’Hara. Harlequin ducks. Lake Oesa. Adeline Link. Wolverines.

What do all these things have in common? They have all been the subject of articles in the Lake O’Hara Trails Club newsletter in the last four decades.

If you are a Lake O’Hara fan, the LOTC online library of

newsletters at lotc.ca is a treasure trove of information. Thanks to the hard work of LOTC board member Klaus Exner, there is now an index of newsletter articles stretching back to 1978. By browsing the index, and then clicking on the appropriate year, you can hone your knowledge of the natural and human history of Hara. Lake O’Hara Trivia Night anyone?

The Italian Job – Lake O’Hara Style

In Spring 2016, mountain interpreter guides and Lake O’Hara enthusiasts Joel Hagen and Nadine Fletcher travelled to Italy and visited Falmenta, the ancestral home of Lawrence Grassi, perhaps Lake O’Hara’s most famous trail builder. Joel captured their visit in the following blog post.

If you are a Lake O’Hara fan, you’ve probably admired Lawrence Grassi’s trails. His handiwork is the original “Italian Job,” long before Michael Caine and the boys pulled off their movie heist.

Lawrence came to Canada in 1912 as a young man, and quietly climbed his way into our Rocky Mountain history books in the 20s, 30s, and 40s. He was a skilled mountaineer and guide, but in his spare time he built trails, including good chunks of O’Hara’s trail system in the late 1950s. His stone staircases and stepping stones are still in good shape 60 years later, and our trip to Falmenta slowly revealed why.

Falmenta is perched on a steep hillside about an hour’s drive from Lake Maggiore, and when we arrived



Nadine admires one of the thousands of hand built stone walls near Falmenta. Photo: Joel Hagan

unannounced, we really didn’t have much of a plan. In the town’s small piazza, we asked around a bit, and were soon introduced to Amanda Grassi, Lawrence’s great niece! She took us on a tour to see the house that Lawrence grew up in, and pretty soon we picked up a small entourage of locals. In the local cafe, we learned more about the town, and about their lives, and once we said our goodbyes, we headed into the hills to see what we could see.

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Lawrence Grassi, trail builder extraordinaire, surveys his handiwork on the Lake Oesa Trail. Photo: courtesy Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies.



Nadine Fletcher with Amanda Grassi, Lawrence Grassi’s great niece and her brother-in-law Emilio, in front of Lawrence’s family home in Falmenta, Italy. Photo: Joel Hagan



Amanda, Lawrence Grassi’s great niece, with a photo of her grandmother, Lawrence’s sister. Photo: Joel Hagan



Lawrence Grassi climbing at Castle Mountain. Photo: courtesy Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies.

Increase in Day Visitors a Concern

It is the hope of those who have enjoyed Lake O'Hara that it will remain a semi-wilderness area for the pleasure of those who enjoy nature and wish to spend their vacation walking and climbing in a congenial atmosphere. May it never become a spot for day-trippers and for souvenir stands!

Lillian Gest, 1963, in *History of Lake O'Hara*

Lillian Gest served on the Board of the Lake O'Hara Trails Club for many years. Even half a century ago, it was clear to Lillian and her Trails Club colleagues that unlimited access to this special area would be detrimental. This conviction was shared by National Parks managers when in 1974 they first implemented a day-use quota for the Lake O'Hara bus service of 40 visitors per day.

This original quota was reduced to 36 people per day in the late 1970s, based on convenience for bus scheduling and reservations. In 1982, this quota was not regularly filled, and about 1,900 day users visited O'Hara. Since then, the quota has crept slowly upward in response to increasing demand and presently sits at 42.

Walking in to Lake O'Hara has always been an option with no restrictions. At the time of the last visitor survey in 1990, walk-in numbers were so low they were not a consideration. Since then, the number of walk-ins on the road has blossomed, to the point where the estimated number for 2016 was over 2,400 people. This is more than the total number of day users in the early 1980's, and for last year represents close to 20 per cent of the quota visitation. The number of walk-ins on good weather days rivals the number allowed under the bus quota.

This increase in walk-ins is of concern to the Trails Club. Many are unprepared for the backcountry experience at O'Hara. The new "greeter" at the bottom of the road has

succeeded in re-directing many of these potential visitors, but others are so driven to see Lake O'Hara that they are willing to undertake the 11 km walk to get there.

Last summer the Trails Club undertook a visitor survey. In addition to asking questions, it provided the opportunity for written comments and suggestions. Some comments suggest a degradation of the visitor experience. For example;

"We found that the overall experience was very different than other years. We have been coming in to Lake O'Hara for over 20 years and this year seemed to be very busy. Too many people on the trail."

"We met about 100 people on the trails on Saturday, many poorly prepared for the weather conditions (no rain coats). We picked up litter left behind. We used to be proud to tell others that Parks Canada protected this beautiful but fragile place by limiting numbers. We hope we will be able to again."

"I am concerned with people who are just coming up to the lake for the day and not good knowledgeable hikers."

"I feel that increase in walk-in traffic is having an effect on the trail around Lake O'Hara itself – quota numbers should be enforced."

The Lake O'Hara Trails Club is presently analyzing the survey data and will be reporting results to Parks Canada. In the meantime, LOTC has reiterated its support for maintaining a meaningful quota and made recommendations to the Park Superintendent to address the increase in walk-in numbers.

The values and objectives of the Lake O'Hara Trails Club remain unchanged from the days of Lillian Gest.

Klaus Exner

The Italian Job – Lake O'Hara Style (continued)

It wasn't long before we started to understand where Lawrence got his inspiration. The hillsides around Falmenta are all terraced with dry stone walls, and the old and abandoned farmhouses are dry stone as well. The forest is reclaiming what were once terraced farm plots and pastures, but the ghosts of a centuries-old stoneworking culture

is everywhere on display. Lawrence must have been steeped in this tradition from the cradle, and we're lucky he wanted to showcase his heritage in the Rockies.

Plans call for Canadian Rockies hikers to be the benefactors again this summer, when Amanda's brother-in-law Emilio (married to Lawrence's other great niece) intends to travel to

Canmore, bringing a new generation of stone-building here. Emilio hopes to teach locals dry stone techniques, and restore the trail to Canmore's Grassi Lakes.

It will be "The Italian Job," take two. *Joel Hagen and Nadine Fletcher operate Great Divide Nature Interpretation and are frequent presenters at the Lake O'Hara Speaker Series.*

Rock graffiti

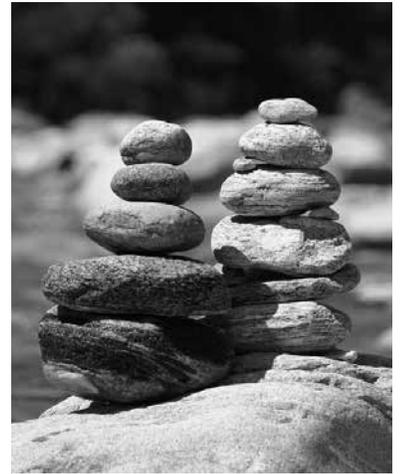
It's a fad that's all about saying, "Look at me, I was here!" Unfortunately, this fad — the building of rock cairns, rock piles, or inukshuks along trails — has taken hold at Lake O'Hara.

What's the problem? There are a few:

- Rock piles are unnatural visual clutter. Some popular trails elsewhere are now crowded with hundreds of these ego-boosters.
- In areas where small directional cairns have been built by our trail crew, built-for-fun rock piles create confusion.
- Sometimes, recreational rock-pile builders actually dismantle our trail directional cairns to get materials for their "rock graffiti".

Please do not build rock piles along the Lake O'Hara trails. If your kids want to pile a few rocks for amusement during a lunch stop, please ask them to dismantle their pile and return the rocks to their original locations before you leave.

Let's keep O'Hara uncluttered and beautiful. Mother Nature's rock formations are plenty good enough!



While it is tempting to build cairns, their proliferation along popular trails amounts to rock graffiti.

Make a Difference. Leave a Legacy

Be part of O'Hara by becoming a member of the Lake O'Hara Trails Club (\$25 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, or to donate, go to www.lotc.ca.

Click on the Donate Now button, or go to the Donations and Membership page to download the membership form. 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

Final Bylaw Tweaking Coming to AGM 2017

At last summer's Annual General Meeting, members approved an updated version of the Club's bylaws, the first update since 1980.

When we sent the new bylaws to Alberta Corporate Registry, they asked for a few more changes:

- specifically stating the duties of the board members and executive.

- describing the method of appointing executive members and removing them if necessary
- noting the requirement for auditing the books annually

We'll need to vote on these small changes at the AGM, before resubmitting the bylaws for registration.

You can view the proposed draft bylaws at www.lotc.ca. If you have any questions about what you see, please contact Club President Leslie Taylor at lataylor@telusplanet.net.

If the update passes at the AGM, the new bylaws must then be registered with Alberta Corporate Registry, and will come into effect around the end of 2017.



Preservation Through Appreciation

2017 Annual General Meeting

4:30 p.m., Thursday, July 27, 2017

Warden Cabin at Lake O'Hara

All Members Welcome!