



O'Hara 2020

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Watcher in the trees: American marten

Unless you are lucky, you have probably never seen an American Marten (*martes americana*) in the wild. But if you have hiked the trails of Lake O'Hara, a marten has likely seen you!

Martens are members of the mustelid or weasel family, with the elongated body, prominent ears, pointy face, and luxuriant fur that are the hallmarks of all weasels. They are most active at night, and often rest in the crook of a tree trunk during the day, surveying their territory between naps. Perhaps you have paused on one of Lake O'Hara's forested trails, and glanced up to see what looks like a cross between a mink and a house-cat watching you.

A great photo op — but be warned, martens are fierce predators.

Martens — often referred to as pine martens — are common in the Lake O'Hara area, and are active year-round. Their thick

glossy fur — reddish brown on their body and black-tipped on their legs and bushy tail — insulates them from the winter cold. Males can be as long 60 centimetres (with that bushy tail included) and weigh one-and-a-half kilograms. Females are approximately 15 per cent smaller.



During daylight hours, martens often survey their territory, and passing hikers, from the crook of a tree. Photo: Amar Athwal.

American martens move with great ease in trees. They mark trails from branch to branch with their strong scent glands. But they do most of their hunting on the forest floor. Their dietary staples are mice, voles, frogs, berries, small birds, rabbits, and insects, but a hungry marten will eat just about anything it can catch. Martens will pursue squirrels though the treetops, poach

eggs from bird nests, and forage in woodpiles and cabins. In the winter, a marten's furry paws allow it to scamper over the snow, diving into drifts in search of voles and mice.

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2019 Trail Report: Smoothing the Way

Stewardship of the trails in the Lake O'Hara area is at the core of the LOTC mandate. 2019 was the second year of the 2018-2022 Trails Plan. The plan doesn't call for any major new trail projects, but instead concentrates on addressing issues such as trail widening, trail proliferation, erosion, unstable rock work, and structural failures.

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. Sixty-five person-days were recorded in 2019.

Trail Work Completed

General trail maintenance included removing snow-downed trees and avalanche debris, trail defining 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. Railings on the bridge over Seven Veils Falls creek were repaired.

Notable accomplishments included the following:

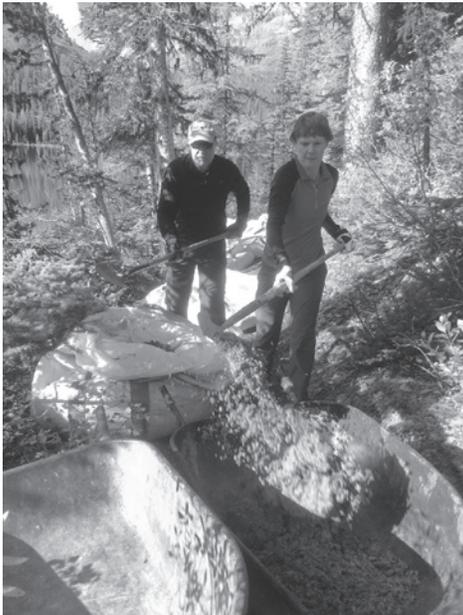
- 1) A cliffy section on the Huber Ledges alpine route where hikers often strayed off the trail was rebuilt to better clarify and define the route.
- 2) Low retaining walls were built on rooty sections of the Lakeshore Trail in anticipation of the fall Volunteer Workbee, which would fill in the sections with trail mix.
- 3) A section of poorly defined trail below Victoria Lake on the Oesa

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2019 Trail Report (continued)

Trail was rebuilt by adding rock steps and rock handrails.

- 4) Eroded/rutted sections of the Linda Lake Trail were filled in with 3500 lbs of new trail mix.
- 5) A badly eroded section of trail on the Opabin plateau was rebuilt with added fill, new rock steps, and a rock “handrail” to keep hikers from straying.
- 6) On All Souls Prospect, seven new steps were built and trail definition improved on the steeper section of



Volunteers Penny Gaul and Alvin Perkins enjoy the sunshine while shoveling on the Lakeshore Trail. Photo: Sue Webb.

the west approach, and a section of the 2014 re-route on the east approach was rebuilt, including a new stairway of five large rock steps.

- 7) A Volunteer Workbee in September filled in rooty sections of the Lakeshore Trail with approximately 10 tonnes of trail mix.

Trail Mix Delivery

The 25 tonnes of top quality trail mix that LOTC purchased last year from Lafarge Calgary was delivered to the open area at kilometre five on the Lake O’Hara road. Trail crew then either shoveled the trail mix directly into a truck or arranged for a heli-sling to move the trail mix to required locations. Thanks to board member Dan Verrall for overseeing this project!

Volunteer Workbee

The weather gods were good to us on September 19 with full sunshine. Ten keen volunteers and trail crew made short work of 10 tonnes of trail mix, shoveling it from flight bags into wheelbarrows, and spreading it on prepared sections of the Lakeshore Trail. Big thanks to Alison from Lake O’Hara Lodge who provided bus transportation and invited everyone for afternoon tea. Thanks also to



Alvin Perkins and Eric Kuhn spread trail mix on the Lakeshore Trail during the September Volunteer Workbee. Photo: Sue Webb.

Parks (Jeff Hearnden, Backcountry Maintenance Coordinator, and trail crew supervisor Steve Bertollo) for arranging the trail mix to be heli-dropped, and for managing the legalities of volunteer involvement. We felt we accomplished a lot, improved the trail surface, and had a great time – and even managed a hike amongst golden larches and sunshine in the afternoon.

Sue Webb

Yoho National Park Plan Review

Between February and April 2019, Parks Canada asked for input on what key considerations and opportunities should be addressed in drafting management plans for the mountain national parks, including Yoho National Park. Each park has now produced What We Heard summaries. A summary of comments can be found online at www.letstalkmountainparks.ca and at <https://www.pc.gc.ca/en/pn-np/mtn/plan>.

Parks Canada will use the feedback it received to draft new park management plans. A further public review of the draft plans is anticipated to begin in summer 2020. Have your say about the future of the Lake O’Hara area. Check the lotc.ca website as well as the Lake O’Hara Trails Club Facebook page. Information on how to provide input will be posted there as it becomes available.

Reservation System Changes

In November 2019, Parks Canada announced that all day use reservations for the Lake O’Hara shuttle bus will be booked through a random draw reservation system. Visitors will have a one-month period each year to submit an application online. Also new in 2020, all overnight camping reservations at Lake O’Hara will be offered through the Parks Canada Reservation Service. For full information on day use and overnight reservations, see the Yoho National Park website.

Abbot Pass Hut

A lofty refuge steeped in history

Since 1922, Abbot Pass Hut has stood sentinel between Lake Oesa and Lake Louise. At an elevation of 2,926 metres, it is the second highest permanent habitable structure in Canada.

Abbot Pass Hut has a rich history, closely tied to that of Lake O'Hara. It was above the pass during an attempt to climb Mt. Lefroy that Philip Stanley Abbot fell to his death in 1896, marking North America's first mountaineering fatality and giving the pass, and later the hut, its name. The next year, Swiss guide Peter Sarbach led a successful summit of Mt. Lefroy and Mt. Victoria. Realizing that hiking and climbing could drive tourism in the region, the Canadian Pacific Railway hired Swiss guides to work at their hotels, including at Chateau Lake Louise. By the beginning of the 1920s, ascents of Lefroy and Victoria had become popular guided outings, with parties often returning via Lake O'Hara.

The CPR Cabin, as the hut was originally known, was constructed to provide easier access to the peaks and shelter in emergency situations. It was built during the summer of 1922 by Swiss guides using stones from the pass and supplies hauled from Lake Louise, and officially opened in 1923. During 1924-25, CPR also built Lake O'Hara Lodge, in part to service adventurous guests making the circuit from



Abbot Pass Hut sits astride the BC-Alberta border at 2900 metres. The hut has been closed since August 2018, due to erosion caused by climate change. Photo: David Preissl, courtesy ACC.



In 1922, Swiss guides packed supplies in from Lake Louise to construct Abbot Pass Hut. Photo: Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, Joe Warner fonds

Lake Louise to Lake O'Hara and back.

As CPR removed itself from the guiding business, the condition of the hut deteriorated and ownership changed hands, until in 1985 Parks turned operation over to the Alpine Club of Canada (ACC), who restored the hut to its former glory. Abbot Pass Hut was designated a National Historic Site in 1997.

Today, the hut still stands in its original form with a kitchen area and common room, and dormitory-style sleeping arrangements on the top floor. Sadly, soil erosion as a result of climate change has undermined the foundation, and Abbot Pass Hut has been closed since August 2018. Parks Canada is working to stabilize the hut by installing rock anchors and nets to secure the surface of the slope and prevent further erosion. As this newsletter went to print, there was no estimated completion date for this work. Both Parks Canada and the ACC are committed to reopening the hut, once the structure is secure.

Travel to Abbot Pass is not for the faint of heart, involving 450 vertical metres of difficult scrambling/hiking on scree slopes, and is recommended for advanced hikers only. Appropriate knowledge, equipment and safety precautions are required. Helmets are mandatory.

Debra Hornsby

Hellos and Advice

LOTG Greeter Position

Since 2016, the Lake O'Hara Trails Club has been providing funding to Parks Canada each summer for a "Greeter" position. The greeter assists visitors and gathers visitor observations at the bottom of the road in the morning, and roves the Lake O'Hara trails in the afternoon. The greeter provides information on the ecological values of the area and how

to protect them during a visit; on the reasons for the quota system and why some bus seats remain empty; and on what visitors can expect to find at the lake in terms of facilities such as water and washrooms. The greeter also provides accurate information to visitors without bus reservations who wish to walk up to the lake, including the difficulties of the 11 kilometre hike up the road, the lack of guarantee that

a bus ride down will be possible, and the availability of alternative hikes in Yoho National Park. This position has proven invaluable in providing educational and orientation services to visitors, as well as in managing expectations with respect to the Lake O'Hara area. The Lake O'Hara Trails Club is pleased to confirm our ongoing support for the work of the "Greeter" at Lake O'Hara.

Watcher in the trees: American marten (continued)

Summer weather brings thoughts of love. Martens are polygamous, and are often vocal — grunting and caterwauling — when pursuing a mate. Before mating, a pair will sometimes wrestle and play together. Females do not become pregnant immediately. Fertilized eggs spend about 200 days in a kind of suspended animation before they are implanted in the uterus of the mother. Come spring, females construct dens in tree trunks, snags, or squirrel middens, lining them with dried plant material. The two or three blind and naked kits are born in late March to early April. Kits are entirely dependent on their mothers, and are not weaned for six weeks, shortly after their eyes open. They grow to adult size in three to four months, and do not generally breed until their second year.

Martens seem genuinely curious about human activity. Brian Keating tells the story of waking after an overnight sojourn in a quinzee (snow igloo) during a winter trip not far from Lake O'Hara. There were marten tracks in the snow around and over the quinzee, and the marten had clearly climbed to the top of the snow dome and peered down into the ventilation hole to look at the sleeping campers.

Overnight guests at Elizabeth Parker Hut would do well to heed Ben Gadd's memorable tale of a tussle between a marten and a roast chicken at a Rockies hut (reprinted with permission from *Handbook of the Canadian Rockies*):

"Here was the marten trying to make off with half a chicken we had left out on the table the night before. Quickly

it dragged the bird off the table, across the floor and under the woodbox, where I could hear it crunching away, growling. This annoyed me; there went the chicken sandwiches. So I poked it with a broom handle — and out it came snarling. Yikes!

"A couple of other people had got up to enjoy the growing fiasco, and I yelled at one of them to open the front door, intending to lob the marten out with a flick of the broom. But the marten was way ahead of me. It quickly dashed back to the woodbox, grabbed the chicken, and was out the door before I could deliver a swat."

Score that Marten 1, Hikers 0!

Debra Hornsby

Meet Your Trail Crew



Steve Bertollo has been the Seasonal Foreman for the Lake O'Hara trails crew for the past six years. LOTC thanks Steve and his co-workers for all their hard work. You can help keep our trails in great shape by sticking to the trail, using the rock steps provided, and avoiding muddy or snow-covered trails. Photo: Sue Webb.



Preservation Through Appreciation

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 (\$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 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

2020 Annual General Meeting

Bill Warren Training Centre
Canmore, Alberta

5:00 p.m.

Tuesday, June 16, 2020

All Members Welcome!