

Reflections on Lake O'Hara Trails

by Peg Jones and Carlie Thompson

It was from the Alpine Meadow that we first saw mountain tops coming out of the mist and we were so astonished - so high, so steep and so close to us! Our friend Lawrence Grassi came around and put names to each one of them: Odaray, Hungabee, Lefroy, Yukness.

Feeling the same wonder as the original wayfarers who had been in the area before us, we were drawn to trails that took us towards higher places on the mountains Grassi had named for us. Negotiating the trail to Grandview, we experienced the thrill of the physical feeling of scrambling upward, the earth dropping away below us, until we got above tree line. Oh, the view from Grandview! Looking out and around us we could see Mt. Biddle with the indescribable blue Lake McArthur at its base, Odaray Peak and its magnificent glacier, Cathedral Mountain and the whole Cataract Valley down to Wapta.

The trail to Oesa was a more steady and gentle climb along the way. Traversing the switchbacks we climbed the first of three headwalls to a new level. A succession of headwall climbs led us past three small lakes strung along the pathway until we found Oesa which lies in its bowl at the foot of Lefroy. Leaving Oesa we returned to Oesa's Falls taking the Yukness Ledges Trail around the

mountain to Opabin Plateau and descended to Lake O'Hara.

And so it is each year at O'Hara walking the trails; we find that being there once more gives us the thrill of new adventures and new discoveries.

Peg Jones and Carlie Thompson had their first visit to the Lake O'Hara area in 1958. They have been returning faithfully ever since to enjoy the trails and grandeur of the area. This summer marks their 27th year visiting Lake O'Hara. Peg is a member of the Lake O'Hara Trails Club Board of Directors.

What's Happening in '97?

The headline for '97 is that new signs are coming! Hopefully by June, hikers in the area will see the first batch of new signs in place. The remainder should be placed by the end of September. The Trails Club has donated the funds to pay for the signs. Many thanks to Terry Winkler of Yoho National Park who has been instrumental in getting this project off the ground. Thank you as well to warden Allan Knowles for his work in establishing an inventory of signs in the Lake O'Hara area.

The other exciting thing you can expect to see with a visit to Le Relais this summer is new T-shirts for sale! Art work for the new T-shirt is being done by local Banff artist Ruth Secunda.

For those of you planning a day visit or camping trip to Lake O'Hara this

summer, please note that the booking policy has changed. You can now make reservations 3 months in advance. Reservations can be made by phoning Yoho National Park at the new area code: (250) 343- 6433.

Correction

The article attributed to Allan Knowles appearing in the O'Hara '96 Newsletter was not as he wrote it. The article was revised by the editors and as a result a number of factual errors were introduced. We sincerely regret this incident and apologize to Allan.

We Need Your Help!

Your donation to the Lake O'Hara Trails Club will help further the preservation of Lake O'Hara and its trail system. The Trails Club is a registered non-profit organization and will issue a receipt for income tax purposes. You may donate directly at Le Relais, or mail your donation to:

The Lake O'Hara Trails Club
Box 98
Lake Louise, AB
TOL 1E0

Would You Like to Join Us?

Life membership in the Lake O'Hara Trails Club is available at Le Relais for a mere \$25. For this you will receive this newsletter annually and help support club activities in the Lake O'Hara area.

Produced by the
Lake O'Hara Trails Club.

Contributors: Cam McTavish,
John Harrop, Peg Jones, Carlie
Thompson, Mike Potter

Editor: Alison Millar



Preservation
through
Appreciation



O'Hara '97

Published by the Lake O'Hara Trails Club, Box 98, Lake Louise, Alberta TOL 1E0

It Moved Silently Through the Night!

By Cam McTavish

"Stealth, grace and power" are words we must use to describe the big cat that moved through the Lake O'Hara region last year. We first observed it south of McArthur Pass on July 18, 1996, as it fed upon a billy goat carcass near the base of Park Mountain. Six of 13 cameras we had established to automatically photograph wildlife in association with the Lake O'Hara Socio-ecological Research Study, captured the image of this cougar over the following 2.5 months. We obtained 14 exposures from cameras located between McArthur Pass and Narao Lakes. It was fascinating to note that every photograph and sequence of tracks and scat that we collected, indicated that it was travelling only during the night! (See photograph) We discovered that it crossed McArthur Pass at least 5 times during this period and used the main McArthur Creek and Odaray Highline hiking trails on several occasions. Hikers near the Elizabeth Parker Hut may have observed the cougar as it crossed the trail heading for Hidden Lake.

In North America, we call them "Cougar", "Mountain Lion", "Puma" and "Panther" but we're still talking about one species: *Puma concolor*. Similar to wolves and other large

carnivores, cougars have suffered great population declines at least twice this century but presently may be making a comeback. The activity we documented in 1996 constitutes the vast majority of information we have about cougar movement in Yoho National Park (YNP). An intelligent, secretive, camouflaged, nocturnal mammal with a very low population density (there may be fewer than 3 cougar in YNP), is exceptionally difficult to study.



Photograph by Cam McTavish

Research on radio-collared cougar in Alberta and British Columbia, indicate that big males may weigh in excess of 72 kg (160 lbs) while adult females are usually much smaller at 45 kg (100 lbs). In North America, the cougar is the largest wild cat north of Mexico. All wild felids, including Bobcat and Lynx, are mainly meat eaters and possess adaptations that include highly specialized teeth, massive muscles in

forequarters and jaws, and large sharp claws. In the early summer of 1996, a remote monitoring camera near McArthur Pass captured photographs of Lynx (again at night) but no evidence of Bobcat has been found within the Park.

Cougar will kill ungulates such as elk, white-tailed and mule deer, sheep, goat and occasionally even moose! Like all large carnivores, they most often select prey easiest to kill such as the old,

young and the weak. They hunt by stalking prey, followed by a short chase, but do not jump out of trees in ambush as Walt Disney would lead us to believe. Often their kills are either covered with surrounding litter from the forest floor, or if light enough, they're lifted to a cache in tree branches. Hiding the kill helps eliminate scavenging competition from wolves and bears and temporarily stops the smartest bird in the bush (Ravens) from finding it.

The lifetime home range is approximately similar to that of the pack of wolves that lives partially within this park (>1000 km²). It is very doubtful that this cougar will remain in the O'Hara region during the winter. Studies indicate that when snow depths approach 50 cm,

continued on page 2

ANNUAL MEETING

The 1997 Annual Meeting of the Lake O'Hara Trails Club will be held at Le Relais at 8:30 p.m. on Thursday, July 24.

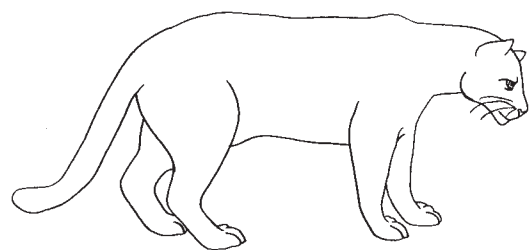
It Moved Silently...

continued from page 1

ungulate prey will usually migrate to areas with less snow and easier travel. The cougar will likely follow this migration south of YNP and possibly out to the Columbia Valley where common winter chinooks considerably reduce snow accumulations. Unfortunately, this may be a problem for the big cat as a legal season to chase, tree, and hunt cougar with dogs still exists both in Alberta and British Columbia. The most common cause of death is from sport hunting. Several types of disease, adult males killing other cougars, and a cougar that died from a broken back in an injury she suffered while attacking a mule deer are some of the natural mortality causes documented.

It was a true delight and comfort to understand that this park continues to exist in a natural enough state to support this incredible cat. When the O'Hara trails have been softened by a gentle evening rain, keep your eyes peeled and perhaps you'll also be fortunate enough to see the track of this fascinating wild hunter!

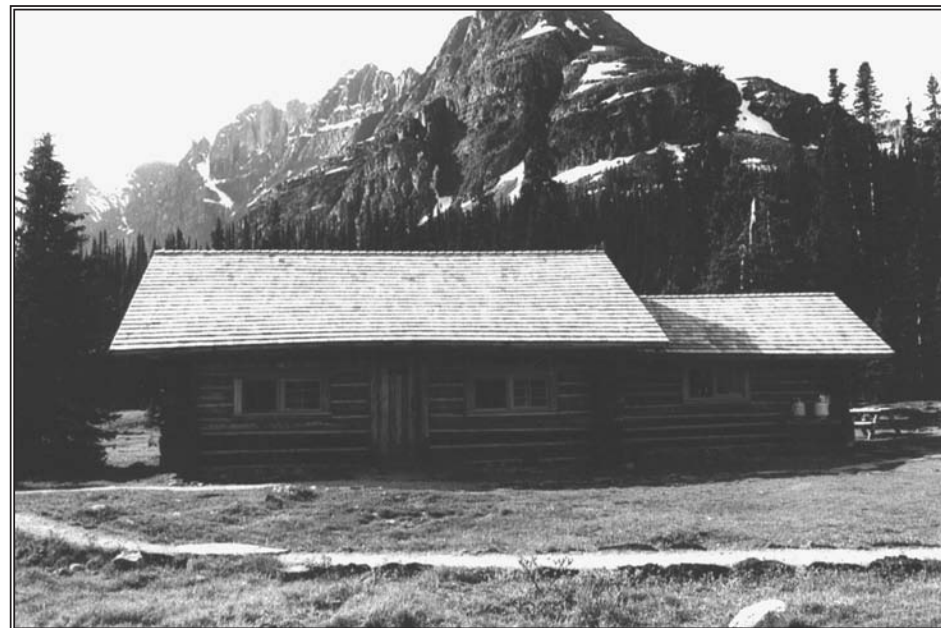
Cam McTavish was the Project Biologist for the Lake O'Hara Socio-ecological Research Study and is currently involved as a biologist for the Yoho and Kootenay National Park Wolf Ecology Project.



Renovation and Restoration to the Elizabeth Parker Hut

By John Harrop

In 1996 The Alpine Club of Canada celebrated its 90th year of serving Canada's mountaineering community. One of its founding members was Elizabeth Parker, after whom the huts in the Lake O'Hara meadow are



Photograph courtesy of ACC

named. In recognition of this significant year, the ACC Huts Committee undertook an extensive renovation/restoration of these huts which had shown signs of deterioration over the past 80 years.

After two years of planning, historical research and fundraising, the work party arrived in June 1996 only to find the meadow still covered in over a metre of snow. Always optimistic and resourceful, the volunteers used the piles of snow under the eaves as scaffolding and the blanket of snow on the ground as a means of protecting the fragile meadow underneath.

Efforts were focused in three main areas:

1. Repair, repointing and cleaning of the chimney which had suffered badly over years of freeze/thaw cycles.

2. Rehabilitation of the deteriorated, drafty and often inoperable windows. This involved removal and replacement of the window frames and restoration of the original window sashes.

3. Rebuilding of the roof, a process

that involved first stripping the hut down to its original log rafters. Once these were cleaned and inspected for rot, a new thermally efficient yet historically representative roof was placed on top, leaving the original rafters visible from the inside. Finally new shingles were laid, bringing back the appearance of the original roof that had been hidden by metal cladding for the past 20 years.

This project was accomplished in three weeks thanks to the efforts of some 35 volunteers and two staff members. The result, clearly visible from a stroll through the meadows, is a testament to the proud history of the ACC and the O'Hara valley.

John Harrop is the VP Facilities for the Alpine Club of Canada.

By Mike Potter

Western anemones grow in abundance in the Lake O'Hara area. These intriguing wildflowers present their large blossoms in early spring, shortly after winter's snows have melted. The veined white petal-like sepals (five or more in number) surround a bright yellow centre.

This species, a member of the buttercup family, prefers damp



*Western Anemone in seed
Photograph by Bruce Millar*

The Western Anemone

subalpine and alpine meadows and clearings. The stems of this plant are heavily haired; the dark green leaves—which follow the flowers—are very finely divided.

Even after their blossoms have faded, western anemones provide an eye-catching spectacle, for thick clumps of feathery seed heads adorn their habitat. Standing on tall stems, these curly clusters are especially attractive when back lit. Their appearance has given rise to the nicknames "towhead babies", "moptops", and colloquially "hippies on a stick". (So a large group of western anemones in seed could be thought of as the Woodstock of wildflowers!)

Autumn winds disperse the parachute-like plumed seeds to new sites, where they may flourish and enhance the visual delights of environments such as found around Lake O'Hara.



*Western Anemone in flower
Photograph by Hans Hortenhuber*

Mike Potter is the author of Central Rockies Wildflowers, Luminous Compositions, 1996. Other titles in the "Pack-it" Pocket Guide series that are of relevance to the Lake O'Hara area include: Central Rockies Mammals, John Marriott, 1997 and Central Rockies Placenames, Mike Potter, 1997.

'96 Questionnaire Results

With last year's mail out of the '96 newsletter, we included a short questionnaire which we asked members to fill out and return to us. Of the approximate 450 newsletters which were mailed, we received 89 responses. Many thanks to those of you who took the time to answer our questions, offer feedback and suggest ways to improve our club.

We have outlined below the general responses to the 3 questions:

Why did you join the Lake O'Hara Trails Club?

The overwhelming response to this question was to show appreciation for the work in place and to help continue the preservation of the trail system and area.

Do you think the Trails Club should change to a yearly membership?

The responses were varied with good arguments supporting both sides of the question. For administrative reasons (specifically, avoiding excess paperwork) we have chosen to stay with the life membership. We hope that members will continue to make a yearly contribution with the donation slip that accompanies the annual newsletter.

Are you interested in becoming more involved in the Trails Club?

The Lake O'Hara Trails Club is a unique club for many reasons. Its membership is spread out across North America (and some even overseas!) making it difficult for people to become involved on a daily, weekly or even monthly basis! Distance is the main factor cited on our response sheet for the reason people are unable to become involved. Most people felt they wished to be involved by donating funds to aid ongoing projects.

To those of you who expressed interest in helping out by writing articles for the newsletter... consider this an open invitation to submit articles for O'Hara '98! Send your ideas or letter of intent to Box 98, Lake Louise, AB T0L 1E0. Deadline for articles is December 1, 1997. Hope to hear from you!