

Dickens' Dichotomy

In the first half of 2020, I have thought much about the dichotomy Dickens presented in the opening of *A Tale of Two Cities*, his classic novel set during the French Revolution. Is our future likely to be one of light or darkness? Of the best of times or the worst of times?

Often, too often perhaps, darkness gets the better of me. The worst of times? The age of foolishness? The epoch of incredulity? The season of darkness? The winter of despair? It is easy to associate those phrases from Dickens with the fates of people such as George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, and Chantel Moore. It's easy to see them live too in some of the elderly care facilities where many of Canada's COVID-19 deaths have occurred. Unemployment levels reminiscent of the Great Depression, household debt levels near all-time highs, sharp contractions in investment and shrinking economies – it's standing room only in my mind on the dark side of Dickens' ledger. And then there's a certain political leader who wonders out loud if injecting disinfectant into patients or hitting them with powerful light might be promising COVID-19 treatments. Sounds interesting.

I hope you will see this issue of *Wild Lands Advocate* as restorative, as a volume helping to sustain light, hope, and wisdom. Its content challenges the foolishness and despair the provincial government served us with through its decision to strip protected and public status from nearly 200 sites in Alberta. AWA invited you over the past months to send us your stories about what public, protected spaces mean to you. Some of those stories have appeared on our website; others are told here. In story after story you have affirmed the importance of provincial parks and protected areas to the quality of our lives. They underline the value of our parks system to building and sustaining a better Alberta.

Henry Wismayer wrote in *The Guardian* that: "It is no exaggera-

tion to say that humans are almost universally terrible at admitting when they are wrong." Your reflections hopefully will make it easier for the Minister of Environment and Parks to admit exactly that, to rectify the "penny wise, pound foolish" nature of his decision to "optimize" our parks system.

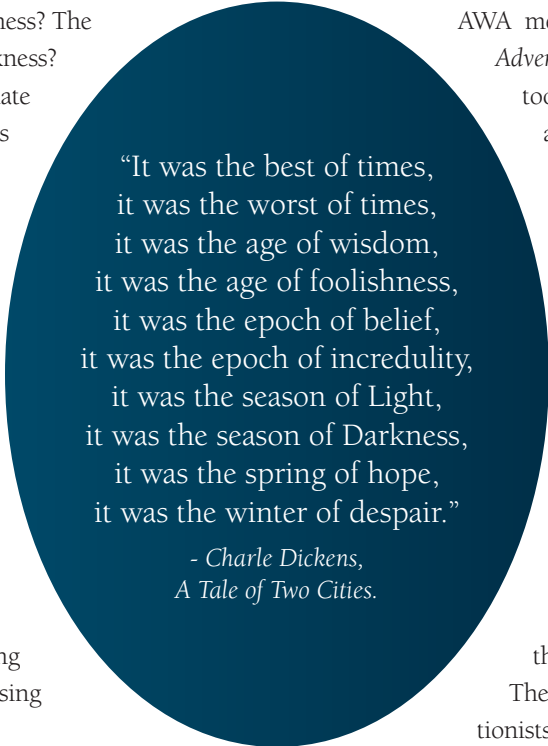
This WLA also highlights several of the adventures AWA members have offered through AWA's new *Adventures 4 Wilderness* program. Those stories too are ones promoting the light, wisdom, and hope our organization strives to see in Alberta's future. They illustrate well the health of the AWA community, of our community's dedication to share valued nature-oriented experiences with like-minded individuals.

Some recent commentaries try to slur the actions and ambitions of conservationists as "ideological," where this label is understood to mean opposed to the public or common good. I hope that, before people consider using that term in that way, they will spend a few minutes reading Ed Hergott's account of the "Getting Dave to the Summit" adventure.

There you read about the efforts of conservationists/adventurists to help their legally-blind friend experience getting to the top of a ridge in Kananaskis country. It's a story of people coming together to help someone they care for enjoy an experience in the outdoors that he can no longer accomplish on his own. If that's what "ideological" means, I hope Alberta's future is a very ideological one.

Whether you turn to June's stories about parks or to its stories about *Adventures 4 Wilderness* you will encounter the values and actions that strengthen community and the public good. Let's be optimistic that our current political leaders will realize the wisdom of embracing those ideas and revise their policies accordingly.

- Ian Urquhart



"It was the best of times,
it was the worst of times,
it was the age of wisdom,
it was the age of foolishness,
it was the epoch of belief,
it was the epoch of incredulity,
it was the season of Light,
it was the season of Darkness,
it was the spring of hope,
it was the winter of despair."

- Charles Dickens,
A Tale of Two Cities.