



# WILD LANDS ADVOCATE

THE ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION JOURNAL



*Ridge Hike, Willmore Wilderness Park* PHOTO: © R. V. RASMUSSEN

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## COVER PHOTO

Ray Rasmussen captured this image of two companions enjoying the trackless ridge between the Wildhay and Rock Creek watersheds in Willmore Wilderness Park. Like most features in Willmore, the peak in the background is unnamed and is on the north side of Eagle's Nest Pass.

## FEATURED ART

This issue of the Advocate features public art. Throughout the Journal you will see some of the ninety-three murals, painted over the last seven years as part of AWA's annual Climb for Wilderness, that adorn the stairwell of the Calgary Tower. Public art aspires to make art, not artists, visible. The murals in the Tower are special; they record our need to pay respect to nature and, ironically, record that respect in a dramatic symbol of our detachment from nature – the Tower. "Public art," says the Newport News Public Art Foundation, "can make strangers talk, children ask questions, and calm a hurried life." May the Tower's murals accomplish those ends and deepen our community's appreciation of the natural world.

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## ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION

*"Defending Wild Alberta through  
Awareness and Action"*

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PHOTO: N. DOUGLAS

## LOOKING FOR VALUE IN WILDERNESS RECREATION

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It is that time of the year again, that time when I rummage through the basement looking for the essentials of summer – backpack, boots, walking stick, fly rod, tent, and, alas, raingear. This year I added something to my ritual – I also have been looking inside this aging body and mind for answers to a simple question: “Why do I value wilderness recreation?”

To assist me in my search I essentially asked for help and ideas from the contributors to this issue of the Advocate. Why does Nigel Douglas go back, year after year, into Alberta’s “official” Wilderness Areas? Why has Ray Rasmussen pilgrimaged to Willmore Wilderness Park for the past twenty years? What makes Darin Zandee want to pick up and use a paddle – whether on a weekend outing or on a two month, 3,600 kilometre trip as he did in 2008 as a member of the David Thompson Brigade? Why does Mishka Lysack care about trying to encourage more people to become committed wilderness activists? Why do outfitters love to work in a nature that may be as harsh or punishing as it is beautiful?

When we think about valuing wilderness recreation we might want to think about its economic value. Frankly, I do not believe we do a good enough job of impressing politicians with just how much money wilderness recreation activities generate and inject into their communities and constituencies. American statistics and studies demonstrate the considerable monetary value wilderness recreationists generate. For example, overnight stays in wilderness areas managed by the United States National Park Service exploded from 15,244 in 1975 to 738,434 in 1994. John Loomis estimated, in a study published in 2000, that the annual economic value of wilderness recreation was \$574 million. That sounds to me like a pretty nice piece of change.

I could not find strictly comparable numbers for Alberta. But, government has told us that more than 8 million people annually visit Alberta’s protected areas and that those visits generate an eye-popping \$2.7 billion in economic activity.

But, as impressive as these numbers may be, to dwell on them is too mercenary for me to think about as I am trying to locate my missing stove. Instead, I want to hear more about the physical, psychological, or spiritual benefits of wilderness recreation; I want to hear more about the strengthened bonds among family, friends, or even casual acquaintances that participating in wilderness recreation activities may produce. What follows in this issue does not disappoint and is just what this doctor ordered.

The experiences and values you will encounter in the following pages reinforce some of the points Roger Kaye, a wilderness specialist with an intimate knowledge of Alaska’s Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR), makes in his look at the symbolic importance of ANWR to Americans. People treasure America’s last great wilderness, in part, for reasons such as:

- it “provides a connection to... cultural heritage.”
- it is “a place of mystery and unknown, a place for exploration and discovery.”
- it “provides psychological benefits associated with solitude.”
- it “provides a connection to the natural world and our species’ evolutionary past.”
- it “is a place to approach and experience humility.”
- it “is a place of intrinsic value.”
- it “is a bequest to the future.”
- it “is a sacred place.”

So, read on. Join us in learning about and celebrating the amazing recreational opportunities Alberta’s wilderness offers. May the summer of 2009 not disappoint in your efforts to discover or reaffirm why you value wilderness recreation.

- Ian Urquhart, Editor



## A BEAUTIFUL BUT FRAGILE INHERITANCE: ALBERTA'S WILDERNESS AREAS

By Nigel Douglas, AWA Conservation Specialist

There is something special about a mountain pass. We pick our way up a long, steep trail, heads down as our packs grow heavier and heavier, until finally we reach the crest of a ridge and a whole new world opens up in front of us. Looking back the way we came, the panoramic views are ample reward for aching muscles; looking forward offers the tantalizing prospect of new vistas and unexplored valleys. Standing at the top of Cataract Pass, peering expectantly into the White Goat Wilderness Area, is like looking back into an earlier, simpler age.

The White Goat, lying immediately to the east of the junction of Banff and Jasper National Parks, is one of the province's three Wilderness Areas, along with the Siffleur and Ghost River. The least heralded of Alberta's protected areas designations, yet probably the most comprehensively protected of all, they cover 1,010 km<sup>2</sup> of some of Alberta's most breath-taking and pristine wilderness.

Alberta's protected areas come in a confusing mish-mash of different designations, from National Parks to Ecological Reserves to Provincial Recreation Areas. (Willmore Wilderness Park has its own level of protection, indeed its own legislation, and is not discussed here). Including federally protected areas, there are at least 10 different designations in Alberta. Some of these areas are more protected than others: many people are surprised by the levels of industrial activity and motorized access taking place in the our nominally *protected* areas.

Alberta's three Wilderness Areas are among the most strictly protected areas in Canada; no developments of any kind are permitted. Travel in Wilderness Areas is by foot only; hunting and fishing are not allowed. It is difficult to imagine Wilderness Areas being created in Alberta today given our obsession with exploiting natural resources.



*Picking a way up the trail to Cataract Pass, gateway to the White Goat Wilderness.*

PHOTO: N. DOUGLAS

In a way, these three Wilderness Areas, which date back to the 1960s, hark back to more open-minded, less cynical times. Brochures from the 1970s tell us these areas were designated to "protect their unique beauty and natural character, and to safeguard them from infringement, development or occupation by man, except as a visitor." It is difficult to read them now without feeling nostalgic: "Our wilderness," claims a 1970s Siffleur Wilderness Area brochure, "is a beautiful but fragile inheritance."

### **Siffleur Wilderness Area**

Northeast of Banff National Park the 412 km<sup>2</sup> Siffleur Wilderness Area was established in 1961. It is a land of majestic mountain peaks, picturesque valleys, hanging glaciers, mountain lakes and alpine meadows, home to mountain goats and bighorn sheep and other wilderness denizens such as grizzlies and wolverines. The South Jasper caribou herd, identified in 2005 as *in decline*, uses the area at certain times of year.

Like the other Wilderness Areas, the Siffleur is visited mostly by experienced backcountry travelers. Indeed it seems

likely that travel was only ever for the hardy in these wild lands. In a 1903 book, *Climbs and Exploration in the Canadian Rockies*, Stutfield and Collie describe hard going in the Siffleur: "The logs, piled in wild confusion, one on another formed a tangle that made our progress very slow." Standing dead trees added to the hazard: "Fallen trees, intercepted in their descent, rested on the branches of some neighbouring giant of the wood; and with every passing breeze there arose a great creaking and groaning among them, like the wailing of lost souls in some arboreal Hades."

Today, government brochures for the Siffleur likewise emphasize that travel in these areas should not be taken lightly: "Anyone using a wilderness area should be well prepared. Users must be well-informed, self-sufficient and experienced in order to accommodate the varied risks and challenges which await them."

### **Ghost River Wilderness**

The 153 km<sup>2</sup> Ghost River Wilderness Area, just east of Banff National Park, was established in 1967. Waters from here nourish the Bow River to the benefit

of one million Calgarians. The Ghost River consists of rugged mountain terrain and glacier-carved valleys and is home to many of the same wildlife species found in the Siffleur. In an Alberta increasingly fractured by industrial access, these areas are undisturbed havens for species sensitive to human activity.

The name *Ghost* was first recorded by Dr. Hector of the Palliser expedition and originates from a Stoney legend in which ghosts were seen along the river picking up skulls of warriors killed in battle. The ethereal sense of the area is reflected in beautifully evocative names such as Spectral Creek and Apparition Mountain.

Again, government brochures for the Ghost River Wilderness indicate that travel is tough but rewarding, and can “afford the visitor the opportunity for isolation, challenge and solitude in a natural undisturbed setting.”

### White Goat Wilderness

Largest of the three Wilderness Areas, at 445 km<sup>2</sup>, is the White Goat Wilderness Area. A breath-taking landscape of rugged 10,000 foot peaks and hanging glaciers, the White Goat is part of the headwaters of the North Saskatchewan River, one source of Edmonton’s drinking water.

AWA’s involvement in the White Goat Wilderness Area goes back to 1971. Then AWA organized a *litter blitz* in the White Goat, calling for help from “individuals with two feet, a strong back and a weak mind who are willing to spend several days during the summer filling gunnysacks with garbage.” Volunteers spent a weekend collecting literally a ton of garbage.

The White Goat has had a more chequered history its two sisters. When it was created in 1961, 1,259 km<sup>2</sup> was protected. Some influential voices objected to its restrictions. Some wanted to hunt and fish; industry wanted access. These “special interests” won. The 1973 Wilderness Areas Amendment Act removed 814 km<sup>2</sup> – or 65% – of the White Goat from the Wilderness Area.

If these newly “unprotected” lands (government preferred to label them “unallocated”) had been assigned a lower level of protected area status which just allowed hunting and fishing then the natural values of the area might have been preserved. AWA’s 1975 book, *Wildlands for recreation - Nine areas on*



MAP: S. NICHOLS

*Alberta’s East Slope*, stressed that the removed area “must be given protection for its wildland recreation values... Hopefully the deletion of most of this valuable wildland area from protective legislation will only be temporary.” Today this land remains unprotected; today later AWA continues to push for it to be protected. It is integral to the Bighorn Wildland.

### The Future

What does the future hold for Alberta’s Wilderness Areas? If implementing the province’s 2009 Plan for Parks tampers with the level of protection enjoyed by Wilderness Areas such government action will be strongly resisted. In 1999, when the draft Natural Heritage Act proposed reclassifying Wilderness Areas as Wildland Parks, considerable public

opposition forced the government to make a U-turn. Gary Mar, then Minister for the Environment, recognized the strength of public sentiment. “Albertans have been clear,” he said at the time. “They want Alberta’s three Wilderness Areas to remain among the most protected in Canada. Keeping these areas in their own separate classification will continue this strong protection.”

Stepping down from Cataract Pass into the White Goat Wilderness, we feel immensely grateful to those who went before us, and had the foresight to safeguard these areas. While we are welcome as visitors, what we do in these special places must take a back seat to the preservation of the wild landscape. It is indeed a “beautiful but fragile inheritance.” 🍄



## CANOEING ALBERTA: A NATURAL CHOICE

By Darin Zandee

The river was fast, cold, and full on. The waves piled high on the rock wall of the sharp corner. Our canoe bucked like a rodeo bronco. Jennifer, in the bow of our canoe, was taking full hits of the icy water as we crashed through the chest high wave train. My 13 year old son, Justin, held tight to his 10 year old sister, Stephanie, in the centre of our canoe. They hollered over the roar of the waves against the cliff. My senses were focused on the conditions of the waves, the rock wall, the current, the canoe angle, lean, and speed that we entered the corner at. Subconsciously, my body, my canoe, and my paddle moved as one in experienced harmony with the forces of wind and water.

My mind raced to process two linear scenarios simultaneously. The first was how do I negotiate the corner to keep from swamping our canoe; the second was, if we were swamped, I had to remember the actions we practiced to keep my family safe. We dropped into the corner and, even with a spray deck on, the canoe took on water. The waves rushed over the deck into the open hatch where the kids knelt ready to eject on the upstream side of the canoe if we flipped. Half way through the wave train we had taken on so much water the canoe became unstable and difficult to control. I had to make a choice – push through the wave train to the calmer section below but risk being swamped by the waves, or, escape into the eddy with a difficult manoeuvre and an unstable canoe.

I chose the latter. I called to Jennifer, “eddy out”! She executed a solid cross bow draw and I applied the correct lean and pry. The canoe spun into the eddy. We almost rolled over when the water sloshed to the side of the canoe but I was ready with a counter lean. The canoe came to rest against the cobble shore. While I exhaled the kids exclaimed, “aw Dad, but we wanted more big waves”!

This was not an accident or uncontrolled event that we had found



*Canada Day 2008 as a member of the David Thompson Brigade on a 3,600 km trip from Rocky Mountain House to Thunder Bay. PHOTO: J. CHANDLER*

ourselves in. This was a calculated and experienced decision we made on a regular basis when we paddled Alberta’s foothills rivers in the spring at the annual peak flow. This particular event happened June 22, 2003 on the clear and cold Waterton River in southwest Alberta. My family and I camped on the river and ran the 23-km route twice that weekend because it was so much fun and the conditions were favourable. The river flow, according to the Alberta Environment website, was at 70m<sup>3</sup>/s which was the highest flow the river reached that year. The weather was sunny and 15 degrees but the strong westerly winds from the mountains of Waterton National Park chilled us. These are the physical details and conditions from my trip log book; the experiences and memories are stored in our hearts and minds.

Paddling in Alberta for the last 18 years has provided my family and me with the opportunity to experience some of Alberta’s most special places and fostered a deep sense of connection to the diverse natural areas available in this province. Although we have explored many of the waterways in Alberta there are so many more wonders yet to see, more than can be experienced in one lifetime.

As president of the Borealis Canoe Club in Fort McMurray I get many requests about how and where to paddle in Alberta. Although I have my personal favourites I encourage people to decide and discover for themselves. I reinforce that, like all outdoor pursuits, paddling has unique challenges and hazards and there are a few simple steps to follow to ensure your outdoor experience is safe, environmentally responsible, affordable,

and enjoyable. These steps include:

- be prepared and have a good plan,
- ensure skills and knowledge are sufficient for the adventure,
- have the appropriate equipment and resources for the conditions you will likely encounter.

Luckily for Albertans there are many good resources available throughout the province to enable paddlers to cover these fundamentals. A good start is to visit Paddle Alberta, the central voice for paddling in Alberta. The organization's website is [www.paddlealberta.org](http://www.paddlealberta.org). There, you will find route information, courses, paddling club listings, and resource information. The next stop should be your local paddling club; almost every major town and city in Alberta has one. This is a great way to gain local knowledge and to meet other paddlers. Local paddling clubs offer courses, seminars, and organized trips. Other convenient information sources are club websites like ours at [www.borealiscanoe.ca](http://www.borealiscanoe.ca). These sites provide local travel advisories, local destination routes, internet forums, and opportunities to communicate with other paddlers in your area. Finally, most major centres in Alberta have paddling or outdoor retail stores where you can find books and maps specifically for paddling. These stores have knowledgeable staff who can help you choose the right gear for your preferred adventure.

The reasons we go out on the water and paddle are as varied as the types of water Alberta offers. Although I have been in canoes since I was two years old I did not consider myself a paddler until my family and I made the conscious decision to choose paddling as our primary family recreation. The importance of family inspired our choice.

When the kids were pre-teens our family was involved, individually, in three or four activities each (such as dance, curling, ball, skating, soccer, ringette, volunteering). The coordination required so that we could be in four different places doing our activities simultaneously was, at the very least, challenging and hectic.

Eating supper together at home became infrequent; rushing here and there was the norm. Driving, picking up, dropping off, being late, waiting, and following an itinerary consumed all the time between our activities.



*In March the Kananaskis River provides challenging, and potentially bone-chilling, white water canoeing opportunities.* PHOTO: K. KROEKER

This lifestyle ended when one evening I picked up the 150-page spiral bound notebook off the kitchen table. It contained our daily notes and instructions to each other and I realized it was full. I read back through the hastily written notes and instructions and decided enough was enough. It was time to get back to the basics, reconnect with each other and with nature.

We decided a canoe would help us in our new direction. We figured canoeing was the right activity for us because paddling is environmentally friendly, affordable, deeply rooted in Canadian history and would enable us to move at a more natural speed.

Some benefits of paddling are unlimited exploration, adventure, exercise, fresh air and sun light. We knew we can paddle our entire lives

and that paddling is sustainable. Canoes and gear last a very long time with little maintenance required. Paddlers leave almost no trace and move quietly with nature instead of crashing through it. We can put everything we need in our two canoes to happily exist in the wilderness. Whether it is just for a weekend, or for many weeks, all the essentials fit in the middle of our canoes.

Most importantly perhaps, paddling helped us grow as a family. It improved our communication and cooperation. It strengthened trust and patience. It fostered individual accountabilities, self-reliance, and confidence. My daughter Stephanie refers to us as river gypsies. We go with the flow and can carry our lives on our backs to anywhere in Canada via our lake and river network.

The paddling destinations in Alberta

are so abundant that choosing just the right route can be tricky. One way to make it easier is to group the routes by their characteristics – such as region, difficulty, and whether the route is on rivers or lakes. For some people, researching a route is an enjoyable part of the actual journey.

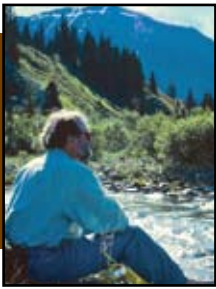
Since we decided to spend more time paddling in Alberta as a family we have had many memorable journeys. One route we found truly magical was the Milk River. We started at the town of Milk River and paddled into a hidden world found in the grasslands of southern Alberta. We glided beneath 80-million-year old Cretaceous sandstone cliffs. The bizarre, creature-like, shapes of the hoodoos gave us the eerie feeling

of being watched until we discovered it was just the intense stare of a prairie falcon perched high on the canyon wall. My children, seated in the centre of the canoe, marvelled at the cliff swallows peering out of mud nests stuck to the overhung cliffs. On several occasions we drifted by deer who seemed unconcerned with our presence. I treasured the moment when we sat as a family on a large column of rock and watched the sunset to the sound of the high, melodic voice of a horned lark. That night we stood together in the meadow beside the river. It was so dark that the stars seemed just above our heads. We reached up and traced the constellations with our fingers. We felt like we were the only humans standing on another planet viewing the

entire galaxy. The next day, when we reached the surreal landscape of Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park, we thought we had paddled back in time.

In the future when my family recalls the wonderful adventures we had in Alberta's wild lands we will appreciate all that the wilderness and a canoe enabled us to share. Today I hope that, in the future, the wilderness and a canoe will be there for my children to share with my grandchildren, like my parents shared with me, and as I rediscovered with my children. 🐾

*Darin Zandee lives in Fort McMurray and is the co-founder and current President of the Borealis Canoe Club.*



## WILLMORE WILDERNESS PARK: THE START OF A TWENTY-YEAR FRIENDSHIP

*By Ray Rasmussen*

I always have been a backpacker. With that preference came a disdain for the havoc horses make on trails and campsites. However, twenty years ago, a friend invited me to join a horse-assisted hiking trip in a relatively unknown wilderness park. The word “unknown” sold me – I was in.

The first day we meet outfitter Rocky Notnes at the Rock Lake trailhead. Once a member of Norway's Nordic Ski Team, Rocky is not only a horse person; he has walked and climbed most of Willmore's ridges and peaks. His horses are being packed with each hiker's 40 pounds of personal gear plus the food and camp equipment needed for a 14-day trip. When I heft my pack it weighs a mere 20 pounds, not the usual 50, and 30 pounds of disdain slip away.

The horses also are loaded with a large wall tent that will provide a welcome escape from the heavy rains or the occasional summer blizzard that one can expect in the Northern Rockies. And there's a wood-burning stove for cooking and drying out. When a saw and axes go on I think of the many cold nights when I craved a warming fire, a comfort I could



*Hiker on the crest of Persimmon Ridge. Chown and Resthaven peaks and icefields in the background left. PHOTO: © R. V. RASMUSSEN*

not have because I was in a national park. But, I digress. My story is not about the merits of horse-assisted hiking – it's about exploring an unknown (to me) wilderness park.

The first few miles on the trail flip me

Willmore Wilderness Park is a 4,600 square kilometre (1840 sq. mi.) wilderness area directly north of the world famous Jasper National Park. But it is far less known and visited than Jasper National Park.





*Hikers on the unnamed ridge running parallel to the Wildhay River. For more of Ray's photos and information about Willmore see his website <http://raysweb.net>*

PHOTO: © R. V. RASMUSSEN

back into disdain mode. We follow the heavily forested, relatively flat Wildhay River Valley on an abandoned dirt road built 50 years earlier to fight a forest fire. True, it's closed to motor vehicles and has partly reclaimed itself, but "Why," I ask myself as I trudge along, "have I elected to spend any time at all on a dirt road that looks as if it's been beaten to death by horse traffic?" I have since come to realize that the road in is the price paid, and a fair one at that, for the rest of the trip.

We come to the first stream crossing after three kilometres. There are no bridges in Willmore and today it's a knee-deep wade. The crossing is cold, but bridgeless wilderness is a plus for me. More good news comes over the next few kilometres as the Wildhay Valley broadens out and the Berland Range to the east and the Persimmon Range to the west begin to poke up above pine, spruce and aspen benches. It's now that I relax into the steady rhythm of walking that breaks down the urban armour I have built up since my last visit to the mountains.

We reach the Eagle's Nest Pass region eighteen kilometres later and find our camp. None of the six well established campsites in the region is visible or easy to find. As we pitch our tents this first night I notice that no other camps or people are visible—a rare treat for someone used to routes like Jasper's

Skyline trail. Rocky tells us, during dinner at the campfire, that our next camp will be on Persimmon Creek, sixteen kilometres up the Wildhay Valley. If we want to avoid the horse trail, we can pick our own route. I pull out my topos and see that by climbing the unnamed ridge that runs north of and parallel to the Wildhay River (we now call it the Wildhay Ridge), we can walk in the alpine for almost the entire distance to Persimmon Creek. That's fourteen kilometres of walking in the sky without trails!

Some of our hiking group has extensive backcountry experience; others are making their first trip and are unsettled by the prospect of climbing to the top of the ridge. However, we set a pace that's enjoyable for everyone and

Willmore is home to some of Alberta's iconic species – the grizzly, the wolf and the caribou – and it serves to protect roughly 20% of the total population of mountain goats and bighorn sheep in Alberta. Other mammals commonly found here include elk, deer, cougars, coyotes, wolverines, lynx and black bears. Marmots, rock pika, and ptarmigan can be found in the higher alpine areas. The sub-alpine environment contains white spruce, lodgepole pine, balsam fir and aspen poplar.

Designated a park in 1959 by the provincial government, Willmore has seen little tourism and recreational development, leaving the area pristine for backcountry enthusiasts to explore. It was named in memory of Norman Willmore who, as Minister of Lands and Forests, promoted the creation of the park for the recreational enjoyment of Albertans.

we easily ascend through an old growth pine forest to the top of the ridge—about a 400-metre climb. Were we in the big mountain country of Jasper or Banff a climb from valley bottom to ridge or peak would be very difficult – at least 1,500 metres with stick-like trees and deadfall creating endless obstacles. But here the trees are large and well spaced and the valleys aren't deep. Willmore is what I call 'human scale.'

I lose all concern on this second day about having made a serious error in coming on the trip. Once up on top, we walk through fields of wildflowers and along the rocky buttresses of a serpentine, but safe, ridge-top. We share the ridge with caribou and bighorn sheep and enjoy a 360-degree panorama of mountains, basins, lakes and valleys. In my mind, Willmore has become "Walking-in-the-sky Country".

In late afternoon, we pick a route off the ridge and at the bottom stop for a brief dip to rinse off the day's sweat. Reaching camp, we put up our tents and settle in for a prepared dinner by campfire. The sunset on Persimmon Creek is stunning – summer days are long in the Northern Rockies and a sunset can linger for 3 hours.

We stay at this campsite for the next two days. Our options are day hiking, doing photography or whatever tickles one's fancy. After consulting our maps, several of us hike into the headwaters of Persimmon Creek; sometimes we follow light horse and game trails; sometimes we pick our own route. The Persimmon headwater basin, with three branches, is typical of the extensive and multi-branched basins found in the Willmore. We follow the right branch up a slate rock streambed past a series of waterfalls and enter an alpine meadow that looks as if it has never seen humans. The creek meanders through fields of mountain avens and is edged with cottongrass. I cup my hand for a drink of crystal

Conservation groups and outfitters have fought several battles to prevent Willmore from being commercially developed. They have included the successful AWA/AFGA petition campaign of the 1970s against a ski-hill proposal, the battle to keep Willmore under the terms of its own legislation instead of folding it into the Parks Act in the 1990s, and more recently, the campaign to have Willmore named a World Heritage site.

clear water that has just come out of the mountain – something I would never do in the heavily used Banff and Jasper watersheds.

Several of us opt for a more strenuous excursion the next day. We follow a trail into the South Berland headwaters basin, find a route to the ridge between it and the Persimmon Basin, and walk the spiny ridge between the two. Over the millennia, sheep and goats have made this easy by slowly beating a path into the scree-covered ridges with their hooves. From the spine of Persimmon Ridge we can see the headwaters of the West Sulphur River, the peaks of Western Willmore and Northern Jasper. Poking above them, we see the top of Mt. Robson and, the Chown and Resthaven peaks and, ice fields. On the ridge, we come across a group of fifteen bighorn rams that typically travel in all male groups until the mating season. There is a hunting season in Willmore and unlike their roadside cousins found along the Jasper and Banff highways, these rams cautiously move off on a rocky spur and disappear. We continue along the ridge until we find one of the best scree slopes I have ever run, descending to the bottom of Persimmon's centre basin. We follow the creek reaching camp just before dusk, refreshed by a dip in a deep pool along the way.

On Day 5, we plan to move our camp to the Jack-knife Pass region. After consulting with Rocky, we pick another route to the top of the Persimmon Range and make our way north along the crest until it descends into the Jack-knife Pass region. The ridge is spiny and challenging in places, but never dangerous. Perhaps because Willmore is more human scale, I find the views more pleasing than those on Jasper's famous Skyline trail. Unlike the Skyline trail, I



*Sharpe Visions by Sherri Sharpe, 2009.* PHOTO: D. VONESCH

am fairly certain that few people have set foot on our eight kilometre ridge trek along the crest. After reaching the pass we follow a trail through extensive alpine meadows, pass through an old burn filled with twisted, silver trees and reach our camp at the junction of Snow Creek and the North Fork of the Berland River.

Here we take two more layover days, hiking into a chain of small lakes on one day and into an unnamed and untracked basin on the other. In the basin, there's an ancient rock fall of irregular stone strewn across the meadows and I name it "the Druid's Rock Garden." On one day, we see two wolves chasing a group of mountain goats into some rock bands, only to turn back, heads hanging down. On the other, we encounter a group of sixty bighorn ewes and lambs.

And so it goes. Our trip winds through places whose names and beauty captivate us. We move up the West Sulphur River into the Hardscrabble Pass area and make camp more than fifty miles from our starting point. We return cross-country into the Marie Lake

Recreational possibilities in the park include camping, hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking, cross-country skiing and hunting. There are 750 km of trails. Fishing for bull trout is strictly catch and release. Canoeing and whitewater rafting can be done on the Smoky River. All motorized vehicle use is prohibited.

basin, from there cross a bench into the South Sulphur watershed, and then move across a divide into the upper Rock Creek Valley. We take a layover day to climb and walk the crest of the 12 km long Starlight Range. Finally, we cross from the Rock Creek Valley through Eagle's Nest Pass and reach our first camp in the Wildhay Valley.

Fourteen days after starting we return along the dirt road that I objected to so strenuously on the first day. Our feet have toughened up, we have gotten leaner, and even the most inexperienced person in our group now has an enthusiasm for ridge hikes and a reluctance to return home.

My thoughts about Willmore at the end of that first trip were overwhelmingly positive. It's a gentle, human scale wilderness. Its wide valleys are surrounded by mountain ridges less high, forests less dense, and contains streams more easily crossed than what you find in the Rocky Mountain parks: Waterton, Jasper, and Banff. It's possible to explore off-trail for days with no signs pointing the way. Seldom does one encounter other hikers or horseback riders. Those experiences have brought me back to the Willmore every summer since that first trip.

Having now hiked in Willmore for 20 summers, I can give some advice to people who wish to visit the park as backpackers. While it's tempting to do a big circuit to see as much of the park as possible, I have found it far more

enjoyable to make base camps and do day hikes. Hike into the Seep Creek watershed (about 10 kilometres from the trailhead), for example, and from there you can do three or four interesting cross-country excursions to nearby alpine ridges. Make it to Eagle's Nest Pass and five or six scenic hikes await you. It's possible to hike off-trail to the top of most Willmore ridges and even to the tops of many peaks in complete safety with several hours of moderate effort. But if you're backpacking through the park, you won't have an easy time hefting a 60-pound pack to the tops of those ridges and for the most part you'll be stuck walking the horse trails along the valley bottoms. The ridges tend to be trackless

alpine grasslands that can be walked for miles. The numerous deep basins make for enjoyable daylong excursions into places where you will have the sense that you are the first human to set foot in them.

Be prepared to spend your evening time in primitive, established camps located near water. Most will have a fire pit and a biffy consisting of a board between two trees with a simple pit below. Some camps suffer from the impact of horses, tree hackings and litter—although today's more responsible Willmore outfitters have for the most part taken control of this problem. Even if the camp you select is not pristine, you will spend most of each day hiking and you

will find that the physical condition of the camps is not very important.

As John Muir wrote: "Going to the mountains is going home." Willmore Wilderness Park is a special kind of mountain home that should be experienced by every lover of wilderness. I hope you are able to enjoy Willmore, or if not Willmore, then some other big wilderness, as I have. 🐾

*Ray Rasmussen lives in Edmonton. He has been a long time member of AWA and is a past Director. Retired from the University of Alberta, his time is filled with hiking, photography, haiku poetry, walking the dog and changing the cat's litter box.*



## TO WORK IN NATURE: AN OUTFITTER'S LIFE

By Ian Urquhart

Let me start with a confession. The closest I have come to being on horseback in the past twenty years was by watching the 1991 movie *City Slickers* (can you get any further away than that?). In that film, when Jack Palance's character Curly, a grizzled cowboy weaned on the wilds of New Mexico, snarled "City folk!" at his clients I cringed; I knew he was venting at me.

Outside of the movies, Curly's characterization of me – and I would wager of at least some who read the *Advocate* – is important to consider for several reasons. Curly's snarl suggests, first of all, that urban dwellers like me do not or cannot appreciate people whose office is in the outdoors as opposed to a downtown tower of concrete and glass.

And, as environmentalists, another inference we might take from Curly's comment is that many in our community regard work in nature to be, by definition, destructive. This is the position adopted by the American historian Richard White in a powerful, provocative essay *Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?: Work and Nature*. Most modern environmentalists, White argues, "equate productive work in nature with destruction."



*Outfitter Dewy Matthews overlooking the Continental Divide in Kananaskis Country.*

PHOTO: J. MATTHEWS

What follows challenges White and perhaps how some or many readers think about work in nature. Since this issue of the *Advocate* is concerned largely about celebrating wilderness recreation some space is used here to discuss those who help "greenhorns" like me experience the wonders of Alberta's wilderness. To make my challenge I rely on the strong backs of Alberta's outfitters and their

horses – those men and women and their animals who take us into this province's backcountry – although many other representatives of "adventure tourism" could have been chosen.

"City folk" should appreciate the long, distinguished role outfitters have played in Alberta's environmental history. Outfitters from southwestern Alberta played a crucial role in AWA's



*Mist Ridge is a great ridge walk or ride in Kananaskis Country. The Misty Range looms in the background.* PHOTO: J. MATTHEWS

formation in 1965. Alberta's outfitters in the northern Rockies, joined by Jasper guides and Métis families, were the catalyst behind the establishment of that wilderness jewel Ray Rasmussen celebrates in this issue – Willmore Wilderness Park. Outfitters more than a generation ago, like AWA members now, were very troubled about oil and gas exploration and exploitation in the Rockies and Foothills. "So we pressured Norman Willmore (MLA) to do something about the oil and gas exploration," said outfitter Tom Vinson Sr., "and he did. He declared the area a wilderness park where trapping, hunting, and fishing would be permitted. That was all – no motor vehicles. That's what we wanted, of course."

In writing this piece I was fortunate to be able to interview two people who have been in the outfitting business for more than a generation. Tom Vinson Jr., from Horseback Adventures in Brule, is a second-generation outfitter who has been in business since 1979 and ventures into places such as Jasper National Park and Willmore Wilderness Park. Dewy Matthews, of Black Diamond's Anchor D Guiding and Outfitting, first dreamed about what a life with horses could be like when he was seven or eight and he has been fortunate enough to live most of his adult life doing just that.

Outfitting is nothing if not demanding work. If you aspire to be, in Dewy's

words, a "nine to fiver" the outfitting business "is not your cup of tea." When you run more than one hundred horses, as Dewy does, much of your winter is spent preparing, working, and shoeing horses for the upcoming seasons. For Tom too, many hours are spent training his horses so he can deliver safe, enjoyable backcountry experiences for his clients. The quality of that training really "makes you or breaks you" when you are out on the trail.

The hours good outfitters spend working with their horses is probably more important now than it was for Tom's father when he took people to the backcountry of Jasper in the 1950s. Then, Tom Sr. could presume people had a familiarity with and a knowledge of horses that is much more rare among the largely urban clientele who come through an outfitter's gates today. Now, as Tom told me, "it's in most cases the horse looking after the person."

Is the demanding nature of the outfitter's vocation enough to make it a rewarding one? What aspects of their work in nature make outfitters like Tom Vinson and Dewy Matthews want to get out of bed in the morning and jump into the saddle of a good horse? Elsewhere in this issue of the Advocate Mishka Lysack introduces readers (at least this one) to "biophilia," a term coined to describe our natural "urge to affiliate with other forms of life." This urge, manifested

as a simple, uncomplicated love or appreciation of horses, provides some of the good outfitter's motivation. Tom noted that most of his clientele is further and further removed from animals, nature too; some are apprehensive and hesitant about the prospect of riding such large animals on backcountry trails. Seeing people either reconnect or connect for the first time with horses and the natural wonders those horses will introduce them to is a gratifying part of Tom's business – to see people gain confidence around horses and feel like they have really accomplished something in the mountains is very rewarding.

Later in this issue Margaret Main reviews Richard Louv's award-winning book *Last Child in the Woods*. Louv is very troubled by the development of "nature-deficit disorder" in many of today's children – modern society denies them the opportunity to develop a crucial relationship with the natural world. The apprehensiveness towards horses mentioned by Tom underlines that this disorder is not limited to children; adults too suffer from it.

But the experiences children and young adults gain with horses and nature is central to Tom Vinson's view of why his work in nature is very worthy. Parents invariably are concerned that their children are going to be bored on his multi-day pack trips, that "they are not going to have anything to do because they can't bring their electronic toys." Tom's compelling description of how most children adjust to what I would call "life without Playstation" on his trips needs to be quoted in its entirety:

*I see it happen over and over and over again but you know you watch those kids, when they get out, they have way more fun with a crooked stick playing in the fire or throwing a rock in the crick or playing with a rope...I mean they can occupy themselves with things that are totally natural and they – the kids – don't have any trouble at all adjusting and it's good to see because, you know, they do an absolute, total, flip-flop and within hours they are out in the meadow petting their horse....*

Although I have yet to be face-to-face with either of my interviewees I can tell you that, courtesy of the internet, Dewy Matthews looks every inch the iconic Alberta cowboy. His weathered face, etched by sun and wind, testifies well to



*At the Kearl Homestead by the "Kearl Klan" 2003. PHOTO: D. VONESCH*

the more than twenty-four years he has spent working in nature. In conversation, his passion for the mountains is as obvious as his thick, graying moustache. For him the mountains are a tonic, an elixir. "They put you in your place, these mountains," he says. "You can have the biggest problem in your life and if you get out in those mountains it will help shrink that problem. They really do."

Sharing the mountains with his clients is doubly rewarding for him as you can hear from the following passage:

*Even though I have been in them for 30 years, rattling around in them, packing horses and then running in them... to take people that are as keen as you were when you were young and you get to see the mountains through their eyes and the amazement...it just makes it all fresh again. It's pretty special to be able to take somebody into these mountains and show them what we've got and see them just fall in love with it. It just brings it back to you why you wanted to do it so much.*

Personally, how the light at different times of the day transforms mountain scenery is one of the experiences I treasure most when I am in the high country. But, nothing I think I have ever seen though can rival the portrait Dewy painted of being on a mountaintop on a cold November night: "I've been on top of a mountain at about 8,000 feet in November, in the black dark and watched those mountains turn...from...they go purple, and then they go rose and it's

like an anvil or a horseshoe on an anvil heating up and cooling off and it's just magic."

Both outfitters were hard-pressed to select one experience as being the most memorable one for them and/or their clients. For one of Tom Vinson's guests, a wholesaler from Switzerland, memorable meant not seeing anyone for fifteen days as they rode from Grande Cache to McBride, often with little or no trail, a trip that was tough on his horses and tough on people.

"One time we popped up on the Divide," Dewy said excitedly. "There was a sow grizzly and her babies and they

were on a place where we were going to go down but there was no way we could cut down into that canyon because there was a solid wall of snow and they were all playin' toboggan. We were sitting there watching this sow grizzly and her kids, her two cubs...it was just such a cool thing watching them slide down that...big, solid bit of snow that wasn't going to be leaving until at least July. And, you know what, how many people get to see that? And I had people from different parts of the world and we sat and watched and it was soooooooo cool."

None of the foregoing should be taken to mean that outfitters do not see storm clouds on their horizon that may threaten their ability to work in nature. Their place in the Land-use Framework, back country access, the province's reluctance to grant tenure and transferability to their licences, and the qualifications of new operators are among the issues outfitters such as those in the Alberta Outfitters' Association hope government will address soon.

Those storm clouds are a subject for another time though. For now, I am happy to stop and just appreciate why an outfitter like Dewy Matthews sees himself as blessed, as a very lucky man indeed. I will leave the last words to him: "To get up on a good morning and get on a horse and head up a ridge and get hit by three different thermals that change your temperature and then you start seeing the light hit the Rockies – what could be better?"



*Caribou and swift fox by Thea McCaffey and Hanna Cawsey 2008. PHOTO: D. VONESCH*



## DEFENDING AND PROTECTING WHAT WE LOVE: BIOPHILIA AND CREATING ENVIRONMENTAL CITIZENSHIP

By Mishka Lysack

*We know enough of our own history by now to be aware that people exploit what they have merely concluded to be of value, but they defend what they love (Wendell Berry, *Life is a Miracle*).*

We are entering a time of both serious environmental peril and great opportunity in Alberta. Concerns about species protection, water, land use, global warming, and pollution have been growing. And yet, the numbers of individuals who are actively engaged in protecting nature and wilderness continue to be small, despite the fact that polls show repeatedly that Albertans are concerned about the environment and want to protect it. How do we encourage people to expand and deepen their concerns for the environment, and translate this concern into ongoing committed action? How do we move from passive consumers and bystanders to *active environmental citizens* engaged with protecting nature?

One of the more promising ways of encouraging environmental citizenship lies in cultivating the growth of *biophilia*, what the Harvard biologist E. O. Wilson calls the innate “urge to affiliate with other forms of life.” From our earliest age, we as human beings are powerfully attracted to life and its processes, moving “toward it like moths to a porch light.” Think of a child who is irresistibly drawn to an animal, and the child’s delight and joy in encountering the animal. Think of the children’s stories and movies as well as world stories and myths that are filled with animal characters or plants or natural landscapes. Think of our deep attraction to gardening, nature walks, hunting, and fishing. All of these are signs of our biophilia, our love of life.

For Wilson, the foundation of a deep conservation ethic lies not in the lure of economic gain in nature, or the promise of personal health, or our enthusiasm or nostalgia for the outdoors, but in the powerful biophilic attraction and impulse to affiliate ourselves with other forms of life. Like roots of a forest, these impulses and longings grow and spread throughout



*Travel in Wilderness Areas such as the White Goat offers an “opportunity for isolation, challenge and solitude in a natural undisturbed setting.” PHOTO: N. DOUGLAS*

our life and relationships, nourishing our understanding and affection for nature and its protection. As Wilson suggests, it is out of this deep and abiding connection that we feel for the diverse forms of life around us that we derive our yearning to protect living beings, whether it be an animal or plant species or a feature of the natural world, such as Alberta’s boreal forest.

This impulse to connect with other forms of life lies at the heart of who we are as human beings, linking us to a spirituality. This biophilic connection with life enables us to recover our sense of vocation to be the guardians of life on the Earth, a calling that runs deep in the wisdom and spiritual traditions stretching like a rainbow through human history.

How do we discover, or re-discover, this sense of our connection and affiliation with life? In my work

of public education with individuals coming to terms with the impact of global warming and its relationship with other environmental concerns, I have developed an educational pathway that can assist people to re-connect with their desire to protect the environment. It involves engaging with questions that lead people into their own inner awareness of their connection with living beings and the biosphere.

### **Our Connection to Life**

*1) What part of the natural environment – animal or plant, or part of the natural world – do you want to protect the most from global warming or from a deteriorating environment?*

This question draws us into the heart of our biophilia, and highlights the specific part of the natural world that we will defend because of our affection for

it. As we travel into ourselves to answer this question, we bypass the political splits of right or left, and recover our affection for the planet. This affection becomes the foundation for our sense of protectiveness and environmental justice for threatened species, and galvanizes our commitment to advocate on their behalf.

2) *Why did this part of the natural world become so important to you? How have you come to cherish this part of nature so deeply? Share with us some stories about the ways in which this part of the natural realm entered your heart.*

Answering these questions gives a history through time to our biophilic attachment, as we develop a personal narrative that has a past, present, and future, a sequence of experiences that coalesce into a tapestry of meaning and value that unfolds through time according to a plot. As our sense of history emerges, we discover that this affection for nature has a reality that spreads through our lives like vines of endearment. That which we love so deeply and cherish as part of ourselves is deeply embedded in our history.

### **Our Environmental Sense of Loss**

3) *What difference would it make to you to know that this part of nature was lost or became extinct through human activity?*

This part of the educational journey takes us directly into our emotional pain and abiding sense of grief as we lose more of the natural realm through climate change, environmental degradation, or species extinction. It uncovers not only our sense of guilt and shame, even self-loathing, about our past behaviour, but brings us face-to-face with our anger and moral outrage about what is being lost in the present, and our fear and anticipatory grief about what the future holds. In struggling with this question, we experience the emotional bond we need if we are to persevere in our protection of life on Earth. As we reflect on how ecological destruction is due to human activity, our sense of responsibility for caring for the ecological communities of flora and fauna and the web of life around us is aroused.

4) *What would the impact be on the human community on Earth if one-third to one-half of us were to lose this part of nature through human activity?*

This question moves us out of ourselves as individuals and places us in the community of life. We now make our bonds of attachment a universal concern shared by the entire human community. As we encounter the sheer breadth of our impact on the planet and the emotional distress we are beginning to experience, we find that our sense of loss is both a

*personal* as well as a *shared* grief. In touching this emotional distress, we also encounter science that projects that we may be facing an extinction rate of as high as one-third to one-half of species due to habitat loss driven by global warming, pollution, and urban sprawl by 2050, a date well within the lifetime of our children and grandchildren.

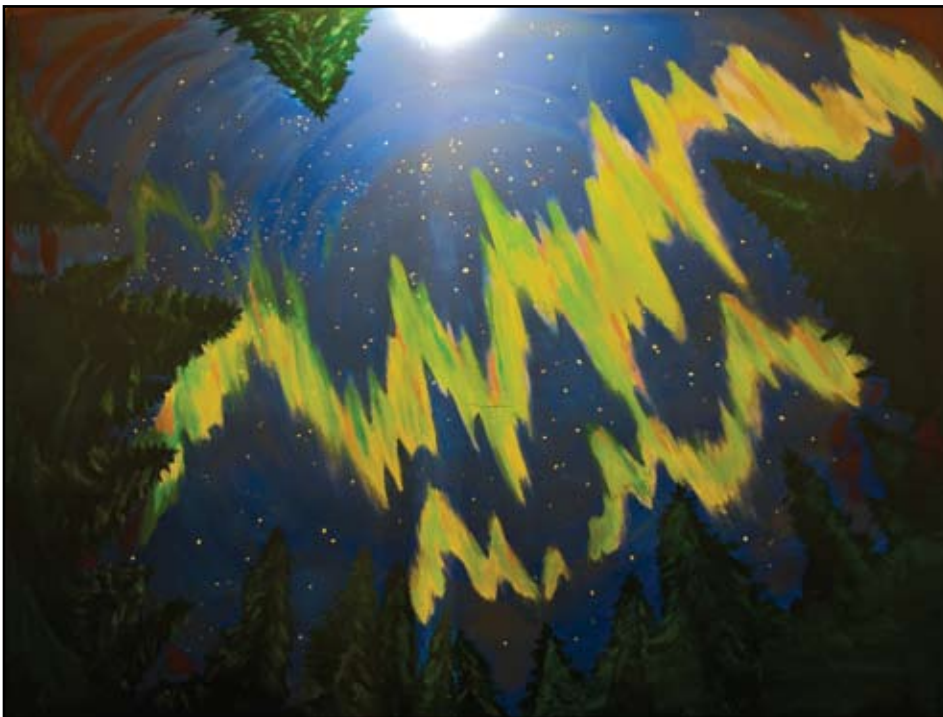
### **Weaving our Sense of Biophilic Attachment into our Important Relationships**

5) *Who would be the least surprised that you feel this way about this part of nature? What stories would they tell us about you that would help us understand why they would not be surprised? What did they see you doing when you were younger that told them how important nature was to you? What did this tell them about your priorities, or what kind of person you are?*

Answering these questions supports us in making linkages between our biophilia and our significant relationships that have made us who and what we are. Our identity as persons is not an object or possession but it is a gift from a community of people and ecological place. As we identify who would be least surprised about our attachment to nature, such as a grandmother, we recover what the anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff calls an “outsider-witness,” one who grounds and authenticates our sense of who we are as individuals and gives a deeper reality and *history* to our attraction to nature.

6) *What values do you and this person share regarding the importance of protecting and conserving nature? What commitments to the priority of defending the environment do you and this person have in common? When this person looks at you, how would they see their commitments to protecting nature reflected in you and your life choices? When you consider this person, in what ways could you see how you cherish nature as a “will” or legacy or spiritual inheritance from this person to you?*

Answering these questions strengthens the renewed sense of commitment that surfaces in us as we re-discover the values and commitments that we share with those who have shaped us as persons. In making these links, we also deeply sink our roots in our vocation



*Aurora Borealis* by A.O.K. Team, 2007. PHOTO: D. VONESCH



*Stupendous by Team Green, Alberta High School of Fine Arts, 2006. PHOTO: D. VONESCH*

of protecting the environment into a network of like-minded individuals. We are all familiar with the practice of passing on physical objects to others as part of our will. But, what about seeing the intensity of our commitment to nature as a spiritual or ethical “will” that is passed on to each of us as a person? Such an image enhances our sense of the responsibility we need to cultivate if we are to be worthy of receiving such a set of values as our inheritance from our forbears.

### **Commitment to Action and Engaged Environmental Citizenship**

7) *What would you be prepared to do in order to protect this species or part in the natural world?*

Our journey into our sense of biophilic attachment to nature is not simply an experience to enjoy, but the starting point and foundation for committed engagement in the arena of ecological advocacy. Resigning ourselves to being passive bystanders, or ecological “free-loaders” (benefiting from the efforts of others protecting and conserving the environment, but taking little or no decisive personal action) is simply not an option. We need to become active in many forms of public education and political advocacy if we are to be true to the intensity of the love and affection we feel for the natural world. And the actions need to be relevant to the species or part of nature we wish to protect. Recycling milk cartons, as good an activity as that

is, is not as directly related to saving the ecological community in the Canadian Arctic as is writing the Minister of the Environment and the Prime Minister (or Premier).

8) *Who could you join with in order to accomplish these goals? What community of environmental action could you belong to that would amplify and multiply your efforts?*

Environmental writer and public educator, Bill McKibben, describes how groups act as echo chambers for our efforts in protecting the environment. He also suggests that the mere addition of actions by individuals does not create a critical mass for change, especially given the serious time limitations that we face regarding global warming and the serious deterioration of ecological communities around the globe. McKibben suggests that if individuals such as Martin Luther King Jr. and those struggling for racial equality had continued to desegregate one lunch counter at a time, merely adding up their actions over time, then Obama would not be President of the United States. Rather than addition, McKibben proposes multiplication of our actions for the environment, where the public drama of just and ethical actions of protecting nature through advocacy and education spreads virally through the public consciousness and acts as “salt” or “leaven” to preserve and transform society-in-nature. We can only accomplish this action of multiplying

personal commitment and public impact through choosing a community of environmental action.

9) *What difference will it make for the Earth as we move in this direction? When we look back on this period of history, in what ways will our actions be part of the turning point of the planet? What difference will it make for us as persons as we take action together in this way?*

It is helpful if we can envision or picture the impact of our actions of protecting the planet’s ecological communities. It is easy to be recruited into thinking that our actions do not count for much and that it makes little or no difference if we take action to defend and protect life communities and species. Given this inertia, being empowered to engage in sustained and committed action relies on our continued cultivation of a growing awareness of how our actions contribute to the global groundswell of activity that Paul Hawken describes in his book, *Blessed Unrest*. We also need to “do hope,” to offer the best of who we are to the chorus of voices and action that promise a great sea-change of possibility out of our loving care and abiding affection for the life that encompasses and embraces us on all sides. “We cannot win this battle to save species and environments without forging an emotional bond between ourselves and nature as well – for we will not fight to save what we do not love.” (Stephen Gould)

### **Important Note: Alberta Town Halls on Global Warming and Environmental Decline**

This educational process will be part of the series of Alberta Town Halls on global warming and environmental decline that will be held in locations throughout Alberta over the next year. If you are interested in participating in the Town Hall nearest you, or wish to help organize a Town Hall, please contact the Project Coordinator, Greg Powell, at [gregp@pembina.org](mailto:gregp@pembina.org). 🐾

*Mishka Lysack is an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Calgary. In February 2008 he organized the university’s first teach-in on global warming and climate change.*



# CLIMB & RUN FOR Wilderness



Climb and Run for Wilderness is AWA's annual celebration of Earth Day. Each year we use Earth Day to focus on the good things happening in Alberta and the people who care about our planet and the legacy we will leave for our children and grandchildren. Started as a display at the base of the Calgary Tower 18 years ago, this event has grown into arguably Alberta's premier Earth Day event. AWA would like to thank all of our members, supporters and sponsors who make this event a success and ensure we continue defending Wild Alberta.

- Christyann Olson, Executive Director

## The 7<sup>th</sup> Run for Wilderness



PHOTO: D. OLSON



PHOTO: R. HENDERSON

A blast from the horn kick-started the day and signaled the start of the Run for Wilderness. Eighty racers dashed around our urban adventure race course before sprinting up 802 stairs to the top of the Calgary Tower. This year Vincent Pialoux was the fastest, finishing the race in 8 minutes, 55 seconds. Lesley Farrar was the fastest female; she completed the course in 10 minutes, 34 seconds. Nessie Hollicky (above right) had the distinction of being the oldest racer this year – 77 years young. She completed the course in an amazing 17 minutes, 58 seconds.

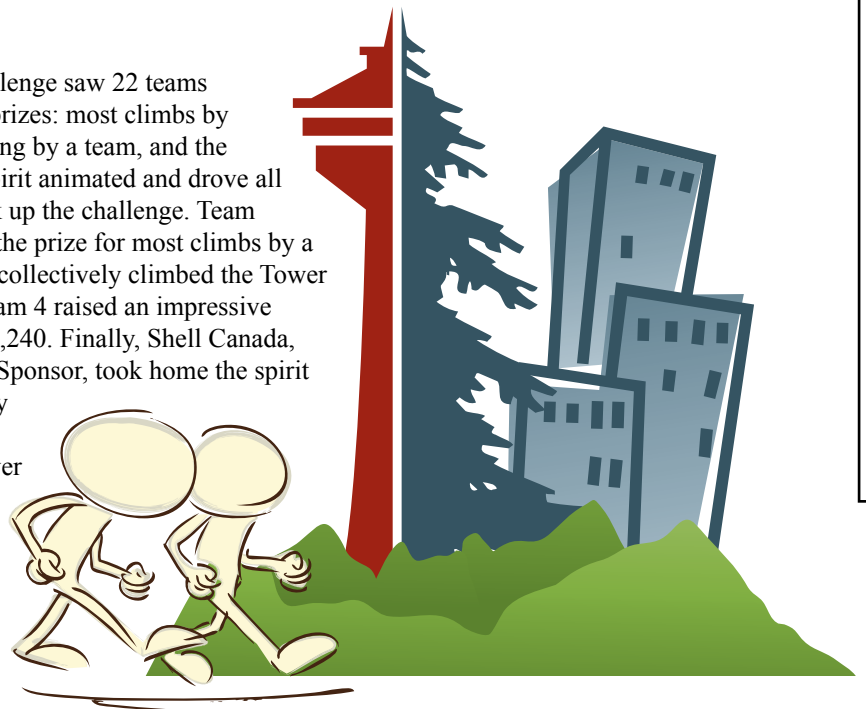
## Team Challenge



Shell Canada's Al Dunlop

PHOTO: R. HENDERSON

This year's team challenge saw 22 teams competing for three prizes: most climbs by a team, best fundraising by a team, and the spirit award. Great spirit animated and drove all of the teams that took up the challenge. Team QuIC – Orange won the prize for most climbs by a team; their members collectively climbed the Tower 83 times! EnCana Team 4 raised an impressive and very welcome \$2,240. Finally, Shell Canada, the event's Platinum Sponsor, took home the spirit award for the fun they had and shared from climbing the stairs over and over!



# CLIMB AND RUN FOR WILDERNESS 2009



PHOTO: D. OLSON

PHOTO: R. HENDERSON

## Climb for Wilderness

Deputy Mayor John Mar and David Swann, MLA for Calgary Mountain View and leader of the Alberta Liberal Party, were on hand to open the stairs for the public climb. More than 1,200 climbers and participants filled the stairwells throughout the day. Richard Guy (above left) was this year's oldest climber; at 92 he managed to climb the stairs seven times. Louise, Richard's 90 year old wife, was the oldest woman to climb the Tower. Four year old Morganna Ulmer was our youngest climber this year.

## Volunteers

One hundred and fifty-seven volunteers made this year's event a safe and enjoyable success. Countless hours are involved in planning and executing the Climb and Run for Wilderness. This year saw the introduction of another new award - the first annual



PHOTO: D. OLSON

## Wild Alberta Expo

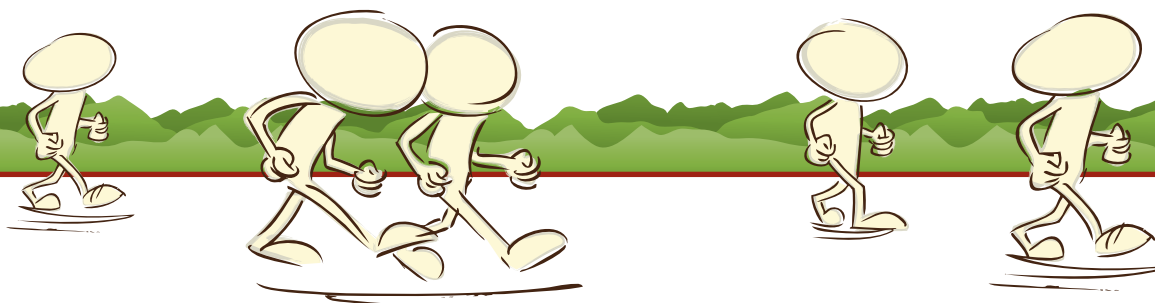
This year AWA introduced a new award, the Barbara Sherrington Memorial Award, for the best display. More than 30 organizations were in the running for the award this year. The Department of National Defence, Suffield (right, bottom, receiving their award from Barbara's husband Peter), captured this year's prize. The interactive and educational dimensions of the Suffield display were very impressive. Children and adults alike learned from and enjoyed the display all day long. The Expo was a huge success this year complemented as it was by face painters and a non-stop program of entertainers and musicians. The Prairie Fiddlers and Raging Grannies were on hand, singing to the jubilant crowd while wildlife mascots entertained children and families.

PHOTO: D. OLSON



PHOTO: R. HENDERSON

Will Farrington Memorial Award presented to the outstanding volunteer. Ed Hergott, a dedicated AWA volunteer, was the recipient for his tireless effort and attention to detail in monitoring and managing a safe environment for racers and climbers alike. Special awards recognized Ellen Querengesser, this year's volunteer coordinator. Ellen, a new volunteer with AWA, did an outstanding job; Chris Saunders, AWA Board member and back for his 4th year, was also recognized for his significant contribution to the success of the event.



# CLIMB AND RUN FOR WILDERNESS 2009

PHOTO: C. OLSON



## Ward Neale Memorial Award

Last year Ward Neale, a well known Calgarian and Canadian, passed away suddenly and left all who knew and cared for him deeply saddened. Ward was a tremendous character in the Climb and Run for Wilderness; each year he engaged folks of all ages to participate in some way. His friendship and untiring devotion to the natural world led us to initiate the first annual award in his name. Ward was a significant fundraiser for the event and the Ward Neale Memorial Award recognizes outstanding fundraising spirit and success. This year, the award was presented to Bill Overend. Bill and his sons Alex and Sam (left) have been climbing for three years now and this year they brought along their mom, Patti, and a cousin to join in the fun. Bill and his family raised all their funds through the online sponsor-a-climber service associated with the climb. Together they raised an amazing \$4,750. In addition to the Earth Day trophy, the Overends received a gift package that included a stay at beautiful Aurum Lodge, an ecotourism Alberta Lodge in the heart of the Bighorn and one of “Ward’s places”.

## Phyllis Hart Award

Everyone was thrilled to see Phyllis (right) arrive at this year’s event. She is a hero, an icon, for the Climb for Wilderness. At 93 years she was still climbing the Tower and made it to the top without a problem. Meeting folks all along the way, Phyllis inspired all of us to better health and a greater appreciation of our wilderness and wildlife. At 94 her physician did not allow her to climb, but she participated anyway, raising funds and attending the event. Phyllis is 95 this year. When Phyllis spoke at the awards ceremony, she recounted how much this event meant to her and expressed her humble gratitude that AWA established an award in her name. The Phyllis Hart

PHOTO: D. OLSON



PHOTO: N. DOUGLAS



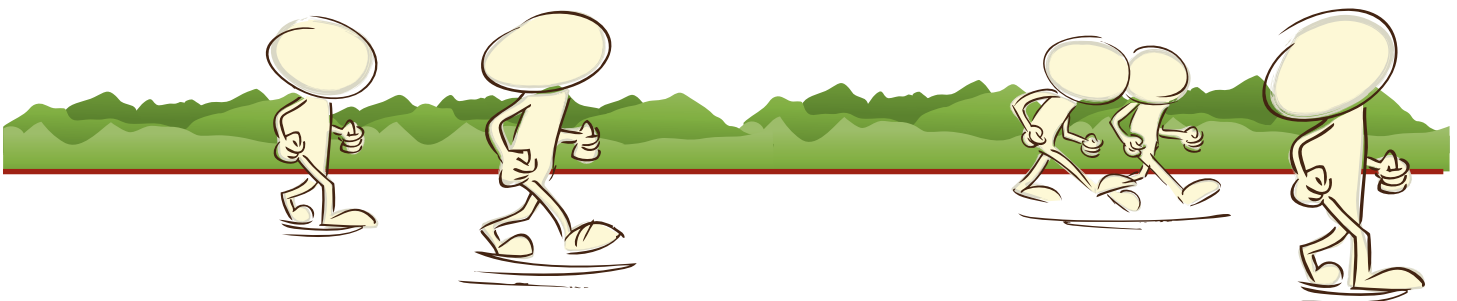
Award is given to the senior female (over 75 years) who completes the most climbs. Mary Luciuk and Diane McCallum (above right) were joint winners this year; the pair tied with 8 climbs each. They brought a special quality to the award, as they were climbing and raising funds for the first time and emblazoned “Climbing for Ward” on their t-shirts. The pair had supported Ward Neale’s climbs through the years and this year they took up Ward’s challenge and climbed the Tower for themselves.



PHOTO: R. HENDERSON

## Families

A number of families participate in the event each year. This year we took time to recognize the Knowlton-Cockett Family (left). The foursome - Polly, Robin, Audrey Lane and Rowan - have participated in the Climb for Wilderness for 12 years! Audrey Lane and Rowan have taken home awards year after year for their tremendous athletic ability and tenacity in climbing the stairs over and over to the top of the Tower – 525 feet above street level! Thank you one and all for making this year’s Climb and Run for Wilderness a tremendous success!



## Alberta's woodland caribou: one herd down, seventeen to go

Alberta's endangered woodland caribou population took one more blow in April, with the likely extirpation of one of the province's eighteen remaining caribou herds. The North Banff caribou herd, identified in the 2005 *Alberta Woodland Caribou Recovery Plan* as at *immediate risk of extirpation*, stood at just five individuals. But an April avalanche killed four of those five animals. The fate of the other individual is unknown; Parks Canada has continued to search for its tracks but without success.

Even if this individual survived the avalanche, maintaining a viable breeding population is impossible. The herd is isolated from the nearest adjacent herd in Jasper National Park, and it would likely require a major translocation effort by Parks Canada to create any chances of long-term persistence.

Alberta's woodland caribou continue to follow the classic pattern of a species being driven to extirpation or local extinction. Populations become fragmented into smaller and more isolated herds that become increasingly vulnerable to events such as the avalanche that killed the Banff animals.

Of Alberta's eighteen identified caribou herds, just three were listed as *stable* in 2005. Six were *in decline* and six were *unknown*. Three (including the Banff herd) were listed as *at immediate risk of extirpation*. Some biologists now argue that the Little Smoky herd, another herd *at immediate risk of extirpation*, is unlikely to survive for long because of persisting industrial encroachment into their habitat. AWA continues to disagree with this point of view; we stress that all Alberta's caribou herds are eminently recoverable if government would just find the modicum of political will needed to protect their habitat from these industrial incursions.

- Nigel Douglas

## The Alberta Land-use Framework

While Land-use Framework legislation is moving forward, another Regional Advisory Council has been announced with minimal representation from the

environmental community.

The long-awaited Bill 36, the Alberta Land Stewardship Act (ALSA) quickly passed first reading in April, second reading in May, and was passed for the third, and final, time at the beginning of June. Public information sessions took place around the province throughout May to explain the legislation to Albertans. The emphasis there was firmly on explanation, not consultation.

This law outlines the broad, sweeping powers required to pull existing legislation into line to make it comply with LUF principles. But two major concerns expressed by many are first, the tremendous amount of discretion given to the cabinet and second, the severe limitations on opportunities for public input, comment or appeal. AWA and a number of environmental groups expressed this view during a May meeting with the Hon. Ted Morton, Minister of Sustainable Resource Development.

The Land Stewardship Act also does little to address the issues of interim measures and existing dispositions. Companies with development projects in the pipeline are receiving a clear message that it would be to their benefit to push ahead with their plans as quickly as possible while the older, weaker, planning guidelines are in place. This is despite the fact the LUF acknowledges that the current land management system "risks being overwhelmed by the scope and pace of activity."

Once again, environmental representatives have been ignored - this time with respect to the membership on the South Saskatchewan Regional Advisory Council (RAC). The government invited the Alberta Environmental Network to submit three nominees to fill this role; all of the Network's nominees were rejected.

In the north, the RAC for the Lower Athabasca region has been making slow progress - it was still awaiting its terms of reference at the time this update was written. Nevertheless, public *awareness and information* sessions have been scheduled throughout the region.

While the Land-use Framework

process has made some progress, shortcomings need to be addressed if it truly will reduce Alberta's focus on "economic development and growth," a shift requested by a large majority of Albertans in the 2007 LUF survey.

- Nigel Douglas

## Sandhill Cranes

It recently came to AWA's attention that the Alberta government may propose to introduce a hunting season for sandhill cranes in Alberta. Although AWA has no objection to hunting when it is demonstrably sustainable, we doubt this would be the case with sandhill cranes.

The Alberta government's report, *General Status of Alberta Wild Species 2005*, recognizes the sandhill crane as a *species sensitive to human disturbance*. The report suggests that the species is (*vulnerable to wetland loss*) in its boreal forest habitat and so, if nothing is currently being done to address this continuing wetland loss, the precautionary principle would suggest that introducing a hunt now would be inappropriate.

AWA also believes the hunt would pose an unacceptable risk to the critically endangered whooping crane. The Alberta government's 2001 report, *Status of the whooping crane in Alberta*, states "accidental shooting due to misidentification and poaching are still of concern." Although the government's proposals for hunting sandhill cranes downplay the risk of whooping cranes being shot, the risk of even one misidentified whooping crane being



*It is not always easy in the field to distinguish the sandhill crane (shown here) from the highly endangered whooping crane. PHOTO: C. OLSON*



*Mountain Meadows by Melissa Sacco, Alannah Whitaker of Blessed Damien School 2003. PHOTO: D. VONESCH*

shot is quite simply too high for such an endangered species. Only 344 individuals are believed to make up the world's entire whooping crane population.

AWA believes that initiating a provincial sandhill crane hunt would be inappropriate at the current time.

- Nigel Douglas

### May Workshop Charts Course for Headwaters Management

On May 1, fifty decision makers and advisors gathered in Cochrane to discuss issues and priorities around managing Alberta's headwaters – the heights of land in the mountains and foothills from which most of our drinking water originates. Participants represented a diversity of sectors and interests found in the headwaters regions of the Oldman, Bow and Red Deer River watersheds. Alberta Wilderness Association played a leading role in organizing this workshop, part of the legacy of actions arising from the successful Headwaters science workshop AWA organized in November 2008.

Evan Berger, MLA from Livingstone-Macleod, presented an update of the Land-use Framework planning process. This included an overview of the now passed Alberta Land Stewardship Act. Five panelists, representing rural and urban municipalities, forestry, ranching and provincial parks, discussed positive aspects as well as gaps in how Alberta currently manages its headwaters. Breakout groups discussed management issues and identified several top priorities to carry forward to the larger group. After

a discussion period the group voted to put the following management priorities at the top of the list: develop a tool box of policies for headwaters management; integrate watershed issues into the Land-use Framework's regional planning process; and develop a headwaters management planning process. The specific management tools assigned the highest priority were valuation of ecosystem goods and services, education and monitoring.

A multi-sector Coordinating Committee was formed to develop the most effective ways to move these priorities forward. The Committee will take into account current initiatives, including Watershed Planning and Advisory Council actions and upcoming Land-use Framework regional planning in the South Saskatchewan region. The Committee's organizing meeting will be held sometime in June.

- Carolyn Campbell

### Wind Power and Public Lands

The Alberta government has recently come under increasing pressure to facilitate installation of wind energy facilities on public lands in southern Alberta. AWA believes this would be an inappropriate use of public lands, lands managed by the government on behalf of all Albertans.

Although alternative energy sources such as wind power are preferable to using non-renewable resources such as oil and coal, it is vital that renewables are not developed at the expense of important landscape features. Only 43

percent of Alberta's Grassland Natural Region remains as native prairie and less than one percent of the Grassland Natural Region is protected. Consequently, the value of the remaining native grassland on Crown land in this region is very significant.

AWA hopes that the South Saskatchewan regional planning process of the Land-use Framework (LUF) will eventually discuss and help resolve land-use conflicts such as this. So, it is important that no major policy decisions are made before this process has run its course. The LUF emphasizes the importance of minimizing the human footprint on the landscape: "Land is a limited, non-renewable resource and so should not be wasted. Land-use decisions should strive to reduce the human footprint on Alberta's landscape."

While wind energy is likely to play an important role in Alberta's energy future, it is crucial that the province learns the lessons from the past. Like any activity, wind development should be allowed only where the costs – environmental and social – do not outweigh the economic benefits. To lose some of our few remaining public grasslands and the numerous endangered species they support would be too high a price to pay.

- Nigel Douglas

### Petro-Canada Sullivan hearing

The Energy Resource Conservation Board (ERCB) hearing process into Petro-Canada's application to drill 11 sour gas wells in Kananaskis Country continues to limp forward at a painfully slow pace. Although the hearing itself ended on January 30, it was temporarily postponed after it was revealed that Petro-Canada and ERCB employees had entered into a personal, non-business relationship.

Following an external enquiry, ERCB determined that the hearing had not been compromised, but this did not satisfy the many opponents of the development. The decision to continue with the hearing was appealed by lawyers for the Big Loop Group and on May 7 lawyers for Royal Adderson and AD Ranches submitted a motion to have the entire hearing suspended until the appeal had been heard.

At the same time, lawyers for the Stoney Nakoda Nations filed a Notice of Question of Constitutional

Law with the Attorney General of Canada. They question whether ERCB has the jurisdiction needed to decide on the “adequacy of consultation, accommodation and compensation” with the First Nations.

It seems unlikely that the Sullivan application will come to a resolution any time soon. The numerous legal avenues will all take their time to run their courses. Even when a final ERCB decision is reached, a lengthy appeal is likely. In the meantime, the wildlife and the ranching operations in southern Kananaskis Country and life on the Eden Valley reserve have been given a temporary reprieve. But, whether this is just a stay of execution remains to be seen.

- Nigel Douglas

### Bighorn Wildland

The Bighorn Wildland, more than anywhere else in Alberta, sums up the contradictory nature of Alberta’s wild spaces. A hauntingly beautiful landscape

of timeless, rugged mountains and remote, pristine waters, it is sometimes hard to appreciate its frailty. While this 4,000 km<sup>2</sup> wilderness gem offers unbounded opportunities for peaceful, self-propelled recreation AWA believes that the very fragility of the landscape is what should determine the levels of activity allowed to take place there.

The final report on AWA’s Bighorn Wildland monitoring project was completed in March 2009. The report, *Is the Access Management Plan Working? Monitoring Recreational Use in the Bighorn Backcountry*, covers five years of recreational access monitoring in the Bighorn between 2003 and 2008. It details increased illegal motorized use of trails and makes a strong case for the removal of motorized trails from the Prime Protection Zone. The report also discusses the findings of a user survey that strongly favours greater protection of the area. AWA has met with the Hon. Ted Morton, Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, and Bruce Cartwright,

Area Manager SRD, Rocky Mountain House to present the findings of the report and discuss protection of Bighorn Wildland. Many critical factors favour greater protection of the area known as the Bighorn Wildland, including watershed security, non-motorized recreation value, and perhaps most of all, wildlife habitat, particularly critical grizzly bear habitat. AWA is optimistic that the current FLUZ designations can be upgraded and that legislated protection and designation of the area that includes critical grizzly bear habitat will be achieved. AWA will launch the final report in June with a series of presentations throughout the province to share the findings of the report. Then we will enlist help from others to let the government know they support effective protection of the Bighorn Wildland. We also will help those concerned with the impact of recreation activities on natural areas to learn about our methodology and results.

- Christyann Olson

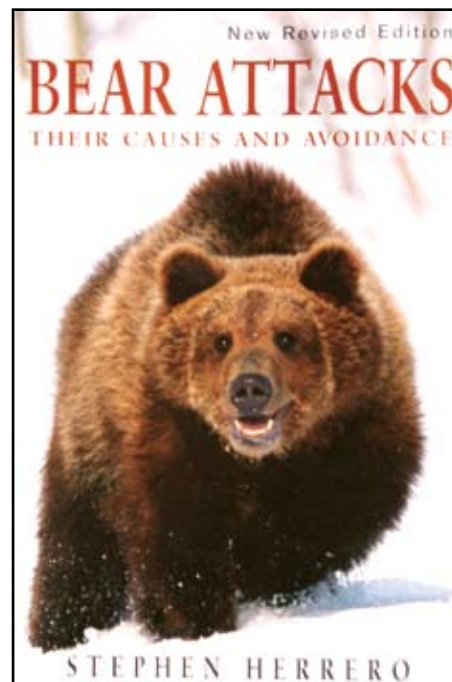
## READER’S CORNER

**Stephen Herrero, *Bear Attacks: Their Causes and Avoidance*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2003).**

*Reviewed by Ian Urquhart*

This year’s Victoria Day long weekend was a memorable one for people who enjoy Alberta’s outdoors. For many their most vivid memories of the weekend may be of the bitter cold and snow that greeted the unofficial start of the camping season. Sadly, more than two-dozen campers east of Swan Hills likely always will remember the long weekend for a much more exceptional event – the mauling of a teenage boy by a black bear.

Such tragic encounters – what causes them, what may be done to avoid them, and what may be done to minimize the risks of injury and death to people and bears – are the centrepiece of Stephen Herrero’s *Bear Attacks: Their Causes and Avoidance*. The first edition of this classic study of bear behaviour and ecology was published in 1985; five years later it was recognized as “the most important scientific work on bears in (the) past 25



years.” A slightly revised second edition arrived in bookstores in 2003. In either edition Herrero, Professor Emeritus of Environmental Science at the University of Calgary, offers timeless advice and analysis to anyone who hikes, camps, or

works in bear country.

The fundamental premise of Herrero’s book is that improving our knowledge of bear behaviour and ecology may reduce the odds of unwanted encounters with grizzly and black bears. On the one hand, he seeks to reduce our fears of bears; on the other hand, he wants to insure that the fears we have are grounded firmly in reality.

To those ends Herrero gathered and analyzed 414 detailed records of human/bear encounters starting in 1872 (the year Yellowstone National Park was created) and ending in 1980. Just over two-thirds of those encounters were with grizzlies, the species he devotes most of his attention to in the first half of the book. His first five chapters examine, sometimes in stark detail, the circumstances related to incidents resulting in injuries or death. He discusses sudden encounters with grizzlies, provoked attacks (such as by photographers), and how risks of injuries increase significantly if grizzlies lose their wariness of people and associate people and campgrounds with food.

Attacks that do not fit obviously within these three categories are discussed next and the sixth chapter examines aggressive acts by grizzlies that did not result in injury. After discussing black bear encounters in Chapters 7 and 8 Herrero concludes the first half of the book with a chapter discussing what we can do to avoid encounters with bears.

Collectively, these chapters offer an invaluable guide to what the responsible hiker or camper should do in bear country. While the details of the documented attacks may be gruesome Herrero is the consummate realist when it comes to putting the risks of bear encounters into perspective. The risks of encounters are small; visitors to national parks are much more likely to be injured in accidental falls or motor vehicle accidents than by a grizzly encounter. And, if we follow the advice of this self-described “scientific handicapper,” those risks should be even smaller.

Herrero’s most important piece of advice to avoid bear encounters is simple – use your brain. Plan your trip: know the species of bears that live where you intend to visit; learn about where bears are likely to be at different times of the year, what foods they are likely to seek and how to interpret the signs they leave (several chapters in the last half of the book offer this essential ecological information); ask wardens or park officials if there have been any garbage problems where you plan to be; think about what you will do if you or someone in your party is injured.

When it comes to traveling in the backcountry *Bear Attacks* offers many helpful suggestions about what you can do to minimize the chance of a sudden encounter with a grizzly. If you are in open country scan ahead for any signs of bears (this includes looking for birds that may be scavenging a carcass); if you see a bear from a distance and it is unaware of you move quietly but quickly downwind of the bear using whatever cover is available to you; be aware of which way the wind is blowing; since climbing a tree offers some protection from grizzlies be aware of what trees may be available to climb; when camping be vigilant when it comes to storing your food and garbage.

Let’s say, even after taking these and other precautions, you have a sudden encounter with a grizzly. What should

you do? Given the unpredictability of bears, Herrero cannot identify a failsafe option to follow. If he faced a charging grizzly he would not run from the bear or shout at it. He would either stand his ground or slowly back away from the bear, talking to it while never making eye contact.

His preferred course of action highlights, I suspect, the importance of the knowledge and understanding gained from his field experiences. Had he relied solely on what people reported they did during non-injurious sudden encounters he would have recommended either shouting at the bear (the action reported the most – 42 times – in 179 grizzly

incidents that did not result in injuries) or running away (the second most popular action – mentioned 39 times). If none of these actions leads the bear to abort its attack Herrero recommends the ultimate act of passive resistance – playing dead. Lie face down, lock your hands behind your neck to protect you neck, and leave your pack on to help protect your body.

Whether playing dead is an appropriate response to an attack depends fundamentally on the nature of the attack. If, instead of a sudden encounter, a grizzly enters your camp in the evening and rips a tent open you should assume this is a predatory attack: yell, flee, and/or fight back. To play dead, in Herrero’s

### Quiz on Bear Behaviour and Ecology:

1. Sudden encounters with black bears almost never lead to injury. True or False?
2. What is the highest a grizzly bear is known to have climbed up a tree during an attack?  
(A) 15 feet (B) 24 feet (C) 33 feet (D) 40 feet
3. What is the minimum distance Herrero recommends should be maintained between a photographer and a grizzly bear?  
(A) 500 yards (B) 333 yards (C) 150 yards (D) 55 yards
4. When camping, how far downwind from your tent should you set up your cooking area?  
(A) 10 yards (B) 25 yards (C) 50 yards (D) 100 yards
5. How far downwind of camp should trees for storing food be?  
(A) 10 yards (B) 25 yards (C) 50 yards (D) 100 yards
6. What should you do if you come across a backcountry campsite where you find leftover food, garbage, and bear sign?  
(A) Clean up the campsite, store the food/garbage in resealable plastic bags, and set up camp  
(B) Keep going and find a place to camp where you do not see food, garbage, or bear sign.
7. Bears prefer to eat large, mature plants because of their high cellulose content. True or False?
8. Which of the following plants are important grizzly bear foods?  
(A) Horsetail (*Equisetum spp.*) (B) Hedysarum (*Hedysarum spp.*)  
(C) Buffaloberry (*Shepherdia canadensis*)
9. Berries are an important food source bears rely on to fatten up before moving into their winter dens. Grizzly research from the Yukon estimated that grizzlies eat a tremendous amount of buffaloberries during in the fall. How many buffaloberries did this research indicate grizzlies could eat daily?  
(A) 10,000 (B) 50,000 (C) 100,000 (D) 200,000
10. The tracks of grizzly and black bears may be differentiated according to claw length and toe characteristics. The claws of a grizzly are longer than those of a black bear and a grizzly’s toes are more separated and arc more than a black bear’s.  
True or False?
11. Are you more likely to be killed in an attack by a:  
(A) Bear (B) Dog (C) Snake (D) Bee?

(Answers follow Margaret Main’s book review, page 25)

words, “would be akin to offering yourself to the bear.”

If you already have the first edition of *Bear Attacks* you may not want to run out and buy the second edition since, as Herrero notes, he does not analyze bear encounters that have taken place since the early 1980s since the fundamental nature of bear behaviour and ecology has not changed in the past generation. But, for me, the second edition offers a crucial addition – a discussion on the value of bear spray as a deterrent. Herrero and Andrew Higgins systematically studied sixty-six incidents between 1984 and 1994 where pepper spray was used to try to deter aggressive or curious bears. In fifteen of the sixteen cases where pepper spray was used against an aggressive grizzly bear the spray appeared to work; the bear stopped the potentially dangerous behaviour it was displaying just before being sprayed.

Last year, Herrero co-authored a study in the *Journal of Wildlife Management* confirming the effectiveness of pepper spray as a bear deterrent. Pepper spray



*Bison Panel by the Troglodytes 2005. PHOTO: D. VONESCH*

stopped aggressive Alaskan brown bears in 92 percent of 50 incidents recorded between 1985 and 2006. A remarkable 98 percent of people carrying sprays were not injured in close encounters with brown, black, and polar bears; none of the injured required hospitalization. Bear spray clearly is an important personal safety option for anyone planning to

venture into the backcountry.

Reading a copy of *Bear Attacks* is sound advice for novice and expert alike. If you want to put the risks of entering bear country into perspective and learn about how you can minimize those risks further take the time to consult this classic before your next trip outdoors. 🐾

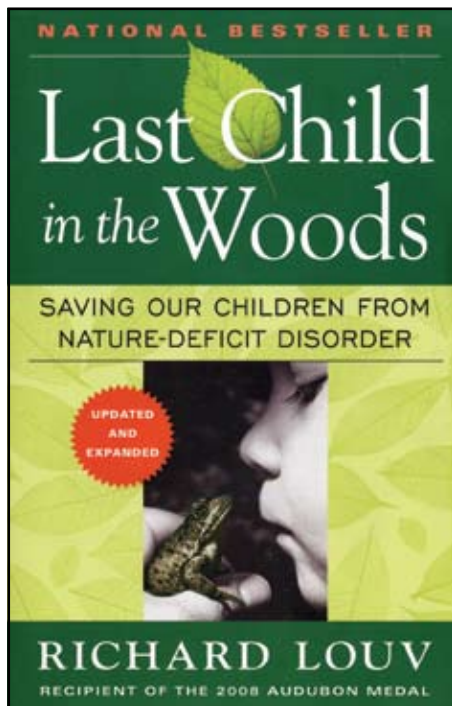
## READER'S CORNER

**Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*, (Algonquin Books, 2008).**

*Reviewed by Margaret Main*

The major premise of Richard Louv's book is that the generation of children growing up today is the first to be organized and protected to such an extent that they are deprived of the opportunity to develop an essential relationship with the natural world.

First published in 2005 *Last Child in the Woods* kick-started a growing movement among concerned adults, parents and educators which has now spread through much of the United States, parts of Canada, Australia, and several countries in Europe. People are becoming committed activists to getting nature back in the lives of today's youth. They have succeeded in raising awareness of this issue and influencing changes to the educational systems and programs



offered in national and local parks. The current expanded edition includes references to the studies of highly

regarded psychiatrists, sociologists, educators and environmentalists and a list of further reading. Importantly, it also offers practical activities anyone can use to increase children's exposure and involvement in the natural world.

Louv quotes a growing body of evidence positively linking spontaneous physical exercise and experiences in nature to higher levels of mental acuity and better concentration. These activities also help to combat childhood obesity and may be useful therapies for Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (A.D.H.D) – issues of growing concern in the last few decades.

Serious consequences follow from the fact that, in a security-conscious society, our children are no longer free to roam outside. The essential spirit of children is impoverished when they are not given the opportunity to ponder the wonders of hedgerows, skies, or even empty, weedy city lots. This situation saps their abilities to make independent decisions and build healthy relationships with their peers.



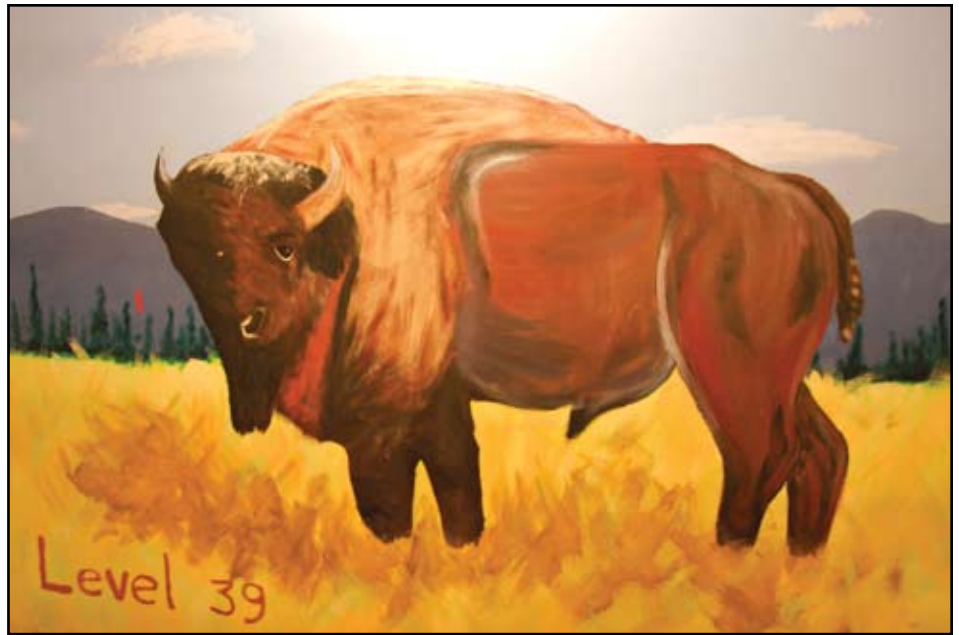
Furthermore, first hand experiences in the natural world are necessary for physical and emotional health.

Our children's world has been taken over by television, computers and a growing assortment of electronic devices. While the virtual realities available can wonderfully represent a huge range of experience of distant places, the viewers only experience them passively. Our focus on a technological approach to every facet of life leads to a loss of direct experience of the world and an atrophy of the senses. In order to develop all aspects of their intelligence, children need to use all five senses and interact individually with the world around them.

Many factors are responsible for the changes estranging children from nature. Modern suburban development and the disappearance of natural spaces, a lack of time in busy families, and the well meaning desire of parents to protect their children, from both real, and in many cases overblown, dangers all share responsibility. There is a cost to these changes. Growing up in an indoor sedentary environment is a ticket to mental and physical health problems later in life. Nature has been confined to national parks and free unstructured outdoor recreation has been replaced by organized sports. Our children have been "containerized" from baby seats to automobiles. We have taken away the free movement to explore needed to help build their cognitive abilities and resist stress and depression.

The book also notes that not only children suffer from a lack of exposure to the natural world; everyone can benefit from outdoor experiences. Many of us are already aware of the restorative value of a natural environment. New studies support this awareness. They show that there is even a difference in productivity among workers with a view of trees and shrubs outside their windows, as opposed to those in window-less work areas. People who spend time in the natural environment are also less angry, less violent.

The growing 'No Child Left Inside' movement is raising awareness, particularly among educators of young children. It has been noted that in schools where children play in fenced black-top areas, they become bored and fights arise. Consequently, more and more schools are converting their play spaces to natural



*Bison by the Wales family 2004. PHOTO: D. VONESCH*

areas. This change seems to reduce the stress and anger levels in children; it also improves motor coordination and the ability to concentrate.

Some may find the book weighed down by an over-abundance of references to and quotations from so many learned sources; but, they are important because of the support they offer to the validity of Louv's position. Richard Louv writes in an accessible style and I would

recommend this book to all parents and to educators at all levels. The evidence from current independent research is overwhelming. Unless modern society makes a concerted move to reverse the trend towards shutting our children away from the natural environment we will limit severely their ability to develop to their full potential; we will handicap their abilities to contribute creatively to our ailing society. 🍷

### Answers to Quiz on Bear Ecology/Behaviour

All answers, except to question 11, taken from *Bear Attacks*.

1. This is true according to Herrero's data. His records up until 1980 revealed only four occasions when sudden encounters with a female black bear with cubs led to injuries. This highlights an important behavioural difference between female black bears and female grizzly bears.
2. (C) 33 feet.
3. (B) 333 yards. Fifty-five yards is a crucial distance in Herrero's research. Most sudden encounters resulting in injury took place when a person was unaware of a grizzly bear until it was less than 55 yards away – a distance Herrero presumes to be already too close.
4. (D) 100 yards
5. (D) 100 yards
6. (B) The first campsite shows all the defining features of one that may be frequented by a habituated, food-conditioned grizzly. Such a bear is more likely to initiate a predatory attack.
7. False. Bears lack a caecum, the large digestive organ found in many herbivores, that contains the bacteria needed to break down and digest cellulose. Consequently, bears generally browse on plants during their early growth stages.
8. All.
9. (D) 200,000
10. Neither. A grizzly's claws are longer but its toes are closer together and arc less. A black bear's claws are shorter and its toes are more separated and arc more.
11. A bee. A bear is the least likely of all four.

## RECALL OF THE WILD

*This is the third of a new Wild Lands Advocate series featuring interviews with Albertans who had the opportunity of living and working in Alberta's backcountry when it was still largely wilderness. Writers will interview those who have known and loved wild Alberta for many decades, bringing you singular perspectives and stories from their colourful lives.*

### Gordon Mathews: A Life Well-Spent in God's Country

By Norma Ruecker

"I thought this must be God's country" says 98 year old Gordon Mathews while reminiscing about his first wilderness experience. It was 1938 when Gordon decided to escape the "dirty thirties" in central Saskatchewan. A hunter and trapper all his life, he thought Alaska would be the place for him, so he started to bum his way west. With only \$2 in his pocket, and in need of work, Gordon was happy to accept an offer from a Banff outfitter to help move horses from a lease north of the Panther River. This was Gordon's first taste of the Alberta wilderness. He never moved on to Alaska and spent the next 37 years as an outfitter, a wrangler and forest ranger in the wilds of Alberta.

Gordon worked for a number of years as an outfitter in the Banff and then the Lake Louise areas. There he guided fishermen in summer and hunters in the fall. He also did the horse work, including training and shoeing. While shoeing a horse brought in from the wild, the frightened horse became aggressive, reared, and struck Gordon with his hooves. The incident left Gordon with a broken back and in a body cast for three months. That put an end to his hard days as an outfitter. Gordon's best memories were of packing "real" fisherman from Lake Louise into the Baker Lakes. He did not miss "babysitting" tourists or guiding in late fall when grazing was poor and he would lie awake at night wondering where his horses would be in the morning.

While working on the Bar C Ranch in the Ghost River area, Gordon was offered a job as a "lookout man" by the forest ranger. It was obvious to the ranger that Gordon still needed some time to heal, so Gordon spent the next six months in the lookout atop Blackrock Mountain. There were two tasks for a lookout man:



*Dealing with magnificent predators such as this 200 pound cougar was a dangerous and difficult duty of forest rangers. Gordon was forced to kill this cougar because of its appetite for his yearling horses.*

to watch for fire and to ensure that the telephone line was in service from the top of the mountain down to the tree line. The job of lookout man was a lonely existence; his only friend that summer was a mountain goat.

The next spring Gordon hired on as a ranger in the Alberta Forest Service. The qualifications for this position were to have a saddle horse and a packhorse of your own. Gordon was stationed in the Ghost River area for 10 years and during this time he married his wife Ida. They lived in a cabin near Water Valley in the summers and at the Ranger station in the winters. Daily diaries and monthly reports were due no later than the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of the month and had to be mailed from the nearest post office - located 25 miles away in Morley. Gordon recalls those cold and bitter -30 winter trips to the post office with the wagon road blown shut with snow and a feed of oats tied to his saddle, "No use packing lunch," he grins, "it would be frozen." Once he posted his reports he would treat himself to a

chocolate bar and go out to the barn to eat it while his horse ate the oats. Then, it was back into the saddle for the return trip back to the Ranger station. About those fifty mile roundtrips at -30 Gordon now laughs: "It's much different today, my neighbour has a heated 4 wheel drive truck."

Although fire was always the priority for a forest ranger, Gordon's description of the job shows that it involved much more than that. It included being fire warden, game warden, forest ranger, forest officer, cattle wrangler, weatherman, and person responsible for dealing with aggressive predators in the area.

Gordon enjoyed the ranger life because he loves horses and working outdoors. He says the best thing was that he pretty much got to be his own boss, a timeless idea that no doubt appeals to many of us today.

But even great jobs have their drawbacks. What Gordon did not like about his ranger days was the "officer" part. Too many times he had to testify in court and those occasions were, by far, the least favourite part of his life as a ranger. Work in the Ghost and Elbow also included responsibilities for cattle. Here the job included counting the cattle in and out of the forest reserve, making sure they were salted, and moving them on a regular basis so they would not overgraze an area.

Gordon spent two years in the Elbow and then was moved to Kananaskis. The lakes were what drew people to Kananaskis and Gordon encountered many more tourists there; although many of the tourists were interesting people from all over the world he certainly missed working with the ranchers.

Fishing and hunting licenses were sold from the Ranger station and the weather report needed to be sent everyday at noon. Gordon's wife Ida did most of the office work as Gordon took care of the many other duties including packing supplies into one of the two fire

towers. He adds with a chuckle, “they got two rangers for the price of one.”

In the 1960s “progress” began to barge through the door of his wilderness. The Kananaskis Ranger station received power and Gordon was provided with his first Forest Service truck. Getting a truck was one thing, being able to drive it was something else. He could only drive it down to the station when the weather was good since the roads were not maintained at that time. He typically left the truck at his nearest neighbour, Dominion Forestry, and he relied on his horse to travel back and forth to the truck. Essentially, he used it just for the run to the post office at Seebe or for the monthly trip to Calgary as, even when weather was good, Gordon preferred to do most of his ranger work on horseback. In those days forest rangers lived and worked “24/7” at the station; they only were allowed one day per month to go to town for supplies and to deliver reports to the Calgary office.

Gordon and Ida remained at the Kananaskis Ranger Station for 15 years until Gordon retired in 1975 with more than 25 years of service. In the thirty-nine years since retiring he has never been back to Kananaskis; he does not want to see how his wilderness has changed. People tell him, he says, that the roads are paved. Gordon showed me a photograph taken by Ida. It is a wonderful image of two bull elk standing

head to head with their antlers locked and Gordon reminisces about the day the picture was taken in the “best” meadow in Kananaskis. He gently hangs the picture back on the wall and remorsefully says, “I understand there is a golf course there now.”

He speaks about his days in the Ghost where he worked the area between the Big Red and the Little Red rivers on horseback; now much of that type of work is done with ATVs and helicopters. What hurts Gordon the most is reading in local papers about the off road vehicle damage inflicted on the Waiparous area. He finds it hard to believe that some of today’s Albertans would do that and that police are required on weekends to keep these abusers of the landscape out. Discussing such travesty brings tears to his eyes.

The creation of a tag system to control hunting is something that Gordon is proud of. “There is not a single person in Alberta who has to hunt for his supper; therefore, no wildlife population should be pushed to extinction.” Gordon explained to me how much damage could be done to the population of a local elk herd over a five-year period if just seven cow elk were removed from that area at one time. For Gordon, we would not have today’s tag system and the more plentiful wildlife populations it has contributed to if he and other forest rangers did not

document the numbers and kinds of animals that hunters were hauling out of the wilderness. In the old days, Gordon believes meat hunters did more damage to animal populations than sportsmen and trophy hunters but acknowledges that this may not be the case today.

To Gordon the growing human population is the greatest single threat to the wilderness. He understands that people with steady jobs in the city deserve to be able to recreate on the weekend but is concerned that more and more people do that in wilderness areas. In the old days he feels there was a different class of people, with a different set of attitudes, who visited the wilderness. He believes they had more respect and that people used to come to the wilderness because they truly loved it. “Now,” he says, “people just come because they can.” He worries we have become a spoiled and entitled society that believes it has a right to everything. For him, the results of this are troubling and incomprehensible. Fortunately for Gordon, he has not returned to Kananaskis to witness the increased development, fished out lakes, and animal populations that seem to be in irreversible declines.

In light of this view, what should our governments do? Gordon’s answer is that the province should be looking after and protecting wilderness areas as a service to its citizens. “When they are gone,” he offers, “there is no looking back.” The single most important reason for protecting wilderness should simply be its unspoiled beauty, the same beauty that first led Gordon to believe he had found God’s Country in Alberta’s mountains and foothills. 🍷



*Meadow by Jacqueline Treloar 2004. PHOTO: D. VONESCH*

Dear Editor,

It is highly unlikely that the ever increasing problem posed by the toxic waters in the “tailing ponds” will be promptly and satisfactorily resolved until Albertans realize the size of these toxic water bodies. According to the Pembina Institute they presently occupy 130 sq. km. This is hardly a “pond;” they are really tailings lakes.

Perhaps the size of these toxic lakes can be better grasped if we compare them with the surface areas of some better-known Alberta lakes:

- Beaver Lake (33.1 sq. km), Pigeon Lake (96.7)
- Waterton Lakes (11.6), Maligne Lake (19.71), Sylvan Lake (42.8), Lac Ste. Anne (54.5) and Bow Lake (3.21).

Put differently, the surface area of Alberta’s tailings lakes equals Beaver and Pigeon Lakes combined; they are as large as the last five lakes put together.

The Provincial Government must also come clean on the full extent and leakage from the toxic lakes into the Athabasca River and groundwater supplies.

How can a problem be solved unless we stop denying how serious it is?

Also, the amount of surface reclamation is a bad joke. To date the government has apparently only certified 0.2 % of the land scarred by open pit mining as reclaimed. Meanwhile Pembina reports that this mining has consumed 47,832 hectares of the boreal forest. It appears doubtful that our boreal wetlands will ever be reclaimed.

The March 2009 issue of “National Geographic” exposed to the world the woefully inadequate, selective, and incomplete information provided by the Stelmach Government and the petroleum industry.

It is high time that the Stelmach Government comes clean! Transparency and accountability indeed.

*Tom Maccagno,  
Lac La Biche*

Dear Editor,

Thank you for the informative and needed words in the Wild Lands Advocate of December 2008. Again you remind us Albertans that we need to translate words of policy into action on the ground. Is it “Yes We Can” or “No We Cannot”?

In December 1867 my relative Herman left his pregnant wife and four children in Germany to find work, any work, in America. His journey across the Atlantic was hellish. His two letters about that trip and his arrival in America describe a voyage where his survival was his primary concern. I do not know if his beloved family ever followed him or whether he was able to repay the debts he incurred in Germany and regain his honour.

Today, key economic institutions in our society are in very deep trouble. Now no amount of dollars, euros, or pounds seems too much for troubled or collapsed banks and companies to ask for. And, in spending billions to bail them out our society shows who it favours by conveniently relegating the health of our air, water and soil to minor roles.

But, fellow Albertans, have no fear! We are creating the Land-use Framework for the entire province. Will we understand the complicated concepts involved and that good land management requires restrictions? Will we agree to limit some of our accustomed pleasures for our collective long-term good? Most Albertans do not come from my ancestor Herman’s world of basic survival. For many of us life has been pretty easy and filled with opportunities, not threats. Some of us are able to travel for pleasure, and luxuriously, to all points of the globe. We enjoy our technological toys and change the global climate as we use many of them.

In Alberta, our government often likes to “resolve” issues through countless stakeholder meetings which are considered failures if consensus is not reached. Unfortunately, consensus does not mean that corrective actions, when they are uncomfortable for companies and the provincial government, will be taken. We need leaders who are

informed and willing to act in the long term common good of all life on our land. If, and when, we are blessed with such leaders, will Albertans follow and accept limitations? Can we accept change required for the long-term collective good?

Can we?

*Klaus Jericho  
Lethbridge*

### **What’s controversial about preserving landscape integrity?**

Dear Editor,

We say it’s there, even when it’s gone. We laud its integrity as we line up to deface it. We market its beauty as we watch its daily degradation. And even as it approaches ruin—ravaged, rutted and scarred—we sing its praises and incongruously refer to it as “wilderness.”

Earlier this year, while addressing the value of landscape integrity during a Crowsnest Pass Chamber of Commerce luncheon, I reported that maintaining landscape integrity, when accomplished on a foundation of stunning, drop-dead-gorgeous scenery, generates society’s greatest economic reward.

Focusing on this vision, I provided examples to illustrate how one county—the richest per-capita in North America—has united its business community in a way that defines success through its ability to retain aesthetic and ecological integrity. There, even the transportation and real estate sectors recognize the importance of insuring viable populations of all native species, preserving natural scenic vistas, and insuring the safe, unimpeded movement of wildlife.

Here, in southwestern Alberta, we lack a similar – singular – winning vision. Instead, we try to be all things to all people. We even endeavour to believe that a land ethic founded without real rules and regulations can give everyone what they want while maintaining land and resource values.

During the same Chamber luncheon I reported that it would require more than 200 million dollars just to *begin* restoring abused landscapes within the greater Crowsnest Pass (including the

headwaters of the Castle, Crowsnest and Oldman rivers).

I hope that society, instead of entrenching abuse and accepting hundreds of millions of dollars in loss as nothing more than collateral damage, will rise to actively embrace a land ethic that preserves landscape integrity and, with it, cutting edge economic viability. It's the only way we are going to save our multi-billion-dollar landscape. It's the only way we are going to live off – and maximize – the wealth of our gift of natural capital.

Within the past few weeks, media reports have focused on Alberta's

Land-use Framework. One group's effort to bring landscape integrity to the headwaters of the Castle River also received coverage.

It disturbed me to read articles that identified these proposals as alarming or controversial. What's controversial about preserving landscape integrity? Is it alarming that the province actually intends to reverse the land-abuse tide by introducing a Land-use Framework? Is society more comfortable to simply watch and witness further landscape destruction?

Our current rules are decades behind today's needs. We cannot simply wring our hands and live in the past. Instead, we need to prepare for the future before it consumes us.

To our credit, we have established a catch-and-release ethic to protect our heritage fisheries. It's time to embark on a catch-and-release landscape ethic that delivers this same brand of protection and carries it into the headwaters of a cherished land.

*David McIntyre  
Crowsnest Pass*

## BACKCOUNTRY RECIPES

So, if the theme of this issue has led you to dig out the backpack and waterproof your boots here are two recipes you might want to incorporate into your summer's adventures.

The first, by Jen Douglas, helps to make sure AWA's Nigel is up to his responsibilities like introducing people to the White Goat Wilderness in our summer hikes program – be sure to ask him to make it! ;-)

The Cranberry-Orange Bread recipe is taken from the *Simply Simpatico* cookbook published by the Junior League of Albuquerque. It made the current WLA editor's canoe trip in Lakeland in 2008 even that much more delicious.

### Potato Pancakes (serves 2)

1 cup potato flakes  
¼ cup couscous  
¾ cup flour  
½ teaspoon chili powder  
½ teaspoon black pepper  
½ teaspoon salt  
Grated cheese (optional)

Mix dry ingredients in ziplock bag at home. In camp, add water gradually and knead bag until you have the desired consistency. Fry in hot oil or butter and serve with salsa, sour cream, ketchup (all these can be carried in small plastic pots, rather than entire bottles!)

### Cranberry-Orange Bread

2 cups sifted flour  
2 tbsp melted butter  
½ tsp salt  
½ cup orange juice  
1½ tsp baking powder  
2 tbsp hot water  
½ tsp baking soda  
½ cup chopped nuts  
1 cup granulated sugar  
1 cup coarsely cut cranberries  
1 egg (please beat it slightly)  
1 tbsp grated orange rind

First, indulge! Overload the recipe with nuts, cranberries, and orange rind.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Sift dry ingredients together; add egg, melted butter, orange juice, and water. Mix only until dry ingredients are moistened. Fold in nuts, cranberries, and orange rind. Pour into a greased 9"x 5" inch loaf pan. Let stand 20 minutes, then bake for 50 minutes, or until bread tests done. When cool, wrap in waxed paper. The bread improves in flavour and slices more easily if allowed to stand for 24 hours before cutting. Makes 1 loaf.

If you have a favourite backcountry recipe or food you would like to share with AWA members please send it to us.



*Cooking in the White Goat Wilderness Area* PHOTO: J. DOUGLAS

## AWA SUMMER HIKES

AWA's hikes program is a great way to explore the lesser-known wilderness gems of Alberta, discover our province's diverse wildlife, and learn about AWA's work to protect these magnificent landscapes.

For more information about all our summer hikes see the 2009 hikes brochure or visit our website: [www.AlbertaWilderness.ca](http://www.AlbertaWilderness.ca).

**Pre-registration is required for all trips**

Online: [www.AlbertaWilderness.ca](http://www.AlbertaWilderness.ca)  
 Phone: (403) 283-2025  
 Toll-free: 1-866-313-0713



*Marbled godwit* PHOTO: C. OLSON

## DAY HIKES

\$20 – AWA members  
 \$25 – non-members

Saturday June 13, 2009

### Whaleback Hike

*With Bob Blaxley*

Thursday June 25, 2009

### Porcupine Hills Hike

*With Vivian Pharis*

Wednesday July 8, 2009

### Dry Island Buffalo Jump Hike

*With Tjarda and Rob Barratt*

Climb to the top of the park's namesake – the “dry island,” rising 200 metres above the water, look out to the cliff-top of an ancient buffalo jump, and keep an eye out for the bones of the Albertosaurus.

Difficulty:

Saturday July 11, 2009

### Ya Ha Tinda Hike

*With William Davies*

Ya Ha Tinda (“mountain prairie” in the Stoney language) is one of the last unspoiled areas of natural grass and shrubland in Alberta — a true montane environment. The Ya Ha is considered a very important elk migration route and bighorn sheep wintering range, and, as a result, is very important to wolves.

Difficulty:

Saturday July 18, 2009

### Jura Creek Hike

*With Heinz Unger*

Jura Creek, just east of Canmore, is in the beautiful South Ghost Region. This hike picks it way up the creek and into the canyon. A popular site for geologists, the region is famous for its fossils.

Difficulty:

Saturday August 1, 2009

### Sage Creek Hike

*With Lorne Fitch*

Sage Creek area of south-eastern Alberta has an impressive scale and feel of big, wide prairie. As we climb in and out of some of the creeks and coulees the sense of flat, featureless grassland will be dispelled.

Difficulty:

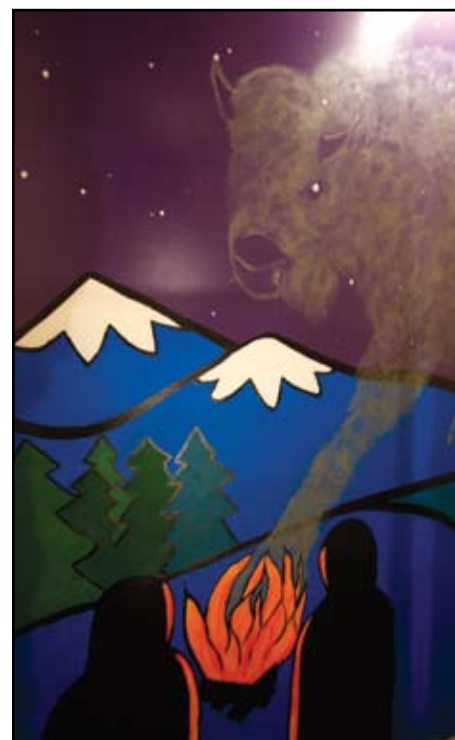
Wednesday August 5, 2009

### Plateau Mountain Hike

*With Vivian Pharis*

The broad wind-swept summit supports a remarkable variety of plants and geological gems, with stunning vistas across the mountains and foothills.

Difficulty:



*Fire by 3 Crazy Painters (Eric Baer, Jayda Karsten, Zainar Rehmani)* PHOTO: D. VONESCH

Saturday September 26

### Zephyr Creek Hike

*With Paul Sutherland*

This beautiful valley, draining into the Highwood River offers something beyond dancing creeks, peaceful woodlands and stunning mountain views. Pictographs, some over 300 years old, can still be seen today.

Difficulty:



*Northern flicker* PHOTO: J. DOUGLAS

## SUMMER SOLSTICE STROLL AT THE DEVONIAN GARDENS

Friday June 19, 2009  
Devonian Botanical Gardens (30 minutes SW of Edmonton)  
6:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

Join us for a summer evening stroll through these beautiful and diverse botanic gardens. Along the way you will learn about the significance and mystery surrounding the Solstice and celebrate Alberta's Wild Spaces. As you stroll into the pavilion, we will have prizes and entertainment including Owl expert Ray Cromie, who might even have an owl with him! This is a wonderful event for the whole family; bring a picnic to enjoy and spend the evening with us.

Date: Friday June 19, 2009  
Time: 6:00 – 9:00 p.m.  
Cost: Family - \$35:00; Adults - \$15:00;  
Children/ Seniors - \$10:00  
Tickets: Toll-free 1-866-313-0713  
Register on-line at <http://shop.albertawilderness.ca>

*The scenic Devonian Botanic Garden is located in Parkland County, 5 kms north of Devon on Highway 60, within 30 minutes of downtown Edmonton.*

For directions to the Devonian Botanic Gardens visit [www.devonian.ualberta.ca/maps.html](http://www.devonian.ualberta.ca/maps.html)

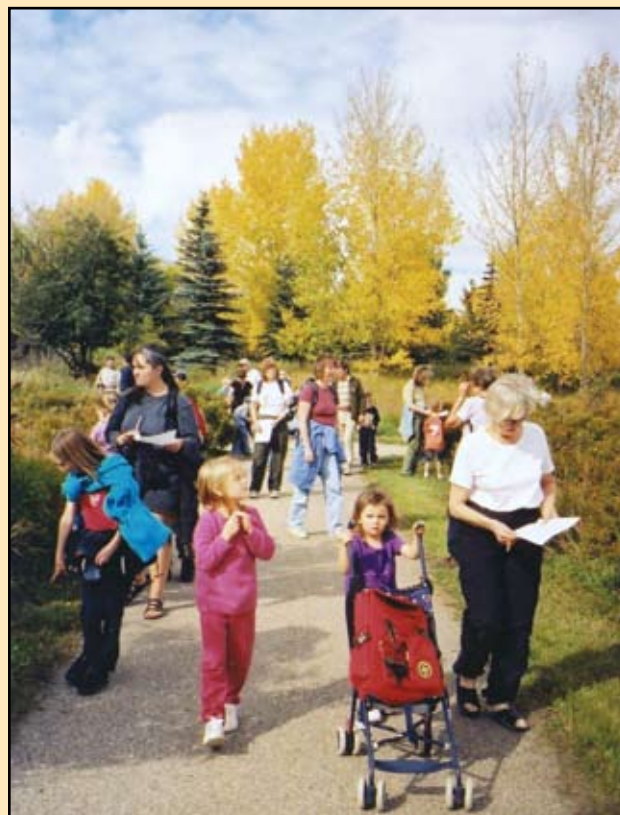


PHOTO: L. SMANDYCH

## ALBERTA WILDERNESS ASSOCIATION PRESENTS

Daniel and Rachel Eisenberg received the 2009 AWA Wild Alberta Award at the Calgary Youth Science Fair. Studying lake activity and how lakeside development affected pH of the lake water, they won the award amongst the 1,090 entries in the fair. The Eisenbergs won a gold medal at the fair and we encourage them to continue their interest in wildlife and studying the interdependence between wild lands, biodiversity, and human health. AWA President Heinz Unger presented the award.



PHOTO: AWA FILES



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