

Hiking the Table

TO PROTECT THE CASTLE

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On Sunday morning, September 15, 2013, people gathered around the trail head eager to set off on a three hour climb up to the top of Table Mountain, located in the southwest corner of Alberta in the Castle wilderness. It could not have turned out to be a better day for a scenic hike. We wound around aspens and firs, followed a dry creek bed, and scrambled up the scree, all to savour Table Mountain's stunning views of the Rocky Mountains, Porcupine Hills, and Alberta's plains.

But this hike was about much more than the scenery. Other than blue skies, sunshine, and views what brought 50 of us together then was a common, overarching goal: Protect the Castle. The Castle Crown Wilderness Coalition (CCWC) and the Bert Riggall Environmental Foundation co-sponsored this event to build public awareness and send a clear message to the Alberta Government and to Spray Lakes Sawmills. Enormous banners, emblazoned with the words "Protect the Castle," were packed up the mountain in anticipation of a plane scheduled to fly overhead to take aerial shots of everyone proudly displaying our message. This was no easy task but everything was planned and executed perfectly.

The plane flew by several times so the photographer could get the best shots of all the hikers holding up the words that, to some of those there, have been their life's passion.

The hike symbolized the hard work and dedication of those conservationists who have been trying to protect the Castle wilderness for over 40 years. The Castle was designated as a Special Place in 1998 but was never legally designated as wilderness off-limits to clear-cut logging, mining, and other industrial processes that destroy important wildlife habitat. Specifically, there have been recent public protests over Spray Lakes Sawmills clear cutting in core habitat for grizzly bears, a species designated as threatened under Alberta's Wildlife Act. The message held up on the top of Table Mountain underlined and emphasized the public's concern over the state of the Castle. The Castle wilderness is an area of tremendous ecological and recreational value which surpasses any economic value of timber and fossil fuels.

The Castle wilderness region has been an area of special concern for Alberta Wilderness Association since the birth of the organization. More than two generations later the

struggle continues to defend it from industrial incursion. Christyann Olson, AWA's executive director and one of the hikers, said "the spirit of the people of Alberta was present in those who could climb; Albertans want the Castle protected and legally designated." Board director Vivian Pharis was also there along with Sean Nichols and myself. We were all thrilled to be a part of such a powerful event; it was a spectacular day to enjoy what's left of the majestic Castle wilderness.



Aerial shot of all the hikers proudly holding up the “Protect the Castle” banner. The excitement was evident with everyone cheering and waving at the plane.

PHOTO: © R. PISKO



In the distance AWA’s Christyann Olson takes in the magnificence laid out before her from the top of Table Mountain.

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