

Adventures for Wilderness – Summer 2022 Roundup

By Lindsey Wallis



Beavers and bears and bones, oh my! The second half of this year's Adventure for Wilderness season was full of discovery. From ways to stay safe in bear country, to how beavers can help fight climate change, to discovering dinosaur bones and exploring new (to us) parts of Wild Alberta, our volunteer co-ordinators did not disappoint.

The Adventures for Wilderness program has been running for three years now and embraces two core principals of AWA's motto "Defending Wild Alberta through Awareness and Action". We are so grateful to our volunteer co-ordinators for stepping up and taking action to organize, lead and fundraise for an Adventure. This program would not be a success without the hours they put in and their willingness to share their knowledge from a wide variety of backgrounds – from geology, to biology, to art, and public policy.

They say you won't protect what you don't love. This year's adventures have taken us to new parts of the province and even areas within our city that we didn't know about or fully appreciate. In addition to raising awareness about these places, our generous volunteers have armed participants with the knowledge they need to be stronger advocates for the wild places they already love or have just discovered.

This year's Great Grey Owl recipient, Tako Koning, shared his knowledge of geology and fossils with folks on adventures ranging from city explorations to tours near Cochrane and around Southern Alberta. In addition to describing geological processes that took place millions of years ago to create these formations, participants also learned about current issues taking place in these areas and how they can take action. AWA Conservation

Specialist Ruiping Luo joined Tako in late August for a trip to Frank Lake, where she shared information about a proposed solar farm near this internationally recognized Important Bird Area.

Another valued volunteer coordinator, Heinz Unger, led several adventures in the Ghost. An often-overlooked area, rife with OHV misuse and irresponsible logging, Heinz shared a few hidden gems and shared his extensive knowledge of the area's history and landmarks. The Sand Hills, Horse Lake, Black Rock Mountain, and Meadow Creek are all incredibly beautiful and also contain intact, productive ecosystems amidst a landscape scarred by poor management.

On the hottest day of the year (record-breaking), Heinz, Tako and a few hardy souls headed to White Rock Coulee. The group discovered dinosaur bones and enjoyed the impressive geology amongst the hoodoos and water-worn coulees. The banks of the South Saskatchewan River provided tall cottonwoods for a respite from the heat, and a chance to cool off in the river itself.

One of our most successful fundraising adventures was Jim Campbell and Bob Patterson's annual "Don't Let the Old Man In." This year, fittingly, it took place on the Oldman River and raised almost \$7,000. AWA Conservation Specialist Phillip Meintzer joined them. They revelled in the beauty and wildlife along this somewhat rarely travelled stretch of river, but a large agriculture and irrigation footprint led the trio to ask, "How do we reconcile all the competing demands on this vibrant but vulnerable eco-system?"

September brought the fall Equinox and a

chance to connect with nature through art. Led by artist Barbara Amos, participants used natural materials to create ephemeral works of art in the forest. Earlier that month bear biologist Sarah Elmeligi took folks on a bear-themed adventure in Banff. The group learned amazing things about bruins (did you know they can turn amino acids into muscle during hibernation to prevent muscle atrophy?), as well as ways to safely recreate in bear country.

In mid-September an adventure to Ricardo Ranch brought out scores of citizens to learn more about the importance of the area and stand against urban sprawl. You can read more about this adventure on page 30 of this issue.

Our final adventure for the season was a collaboration with the Elbow River Watershed Partnership. Despite being postponed a week due to heavy snowfall it was well-attended. Kathryn Hull and Ann Sullivan led two different tours around the West Bragg Creek area. Kathryn shared some great insights into the lives of beavers and why they are so integral to our ability to adapt to climate change.

As we wind down the 2022 Adventure season, all of us at AWA would like to say an enormous THANK YOU! To our volunteer coordinators who are so generous with their time and knowledge, our sponsors, especially long-time supporter Gord's Running Store, and also to all those who joined or donated to adventures this year. Do you have an idea for an adventure? Share a wild place special to you or push your limits and fundraise for a great cause! Reach out to us at a4w@abwild.ca.

Happy adventuring!



Participants on Chris Saunders' adventure to Tryst Lake were treated to a visit by a resident hoary marmot and a profusion of wildflowers including forget-me-not, valerian, fleabane and many chalice flowers. Photo © C. Saunders