

# A Year Measured in Adventures



**By Lindsey Wallis**

What images come to mind when you think of Wild Alberta landscapes? Is it the majestic Rocky Mountains, with their jewel-hued lakes and imposing limestone peaks? The ochre

and terracotta shades of the badlands dotted with wildflowers and dinosaur bones? Towering clouds scudding across an endless prairie sky? Or perhaps it is a wild place closer to home. A neighbourhood pond that is home to muskrat and beaver? Or an urban forest filled with songbirds?

This year's Adventures for Wilderness program explored all these places, accompanied by experts who shared their knowledge in a wide array of fields, from geology to botany to bats and beyond. We were thrilled to share these experiences with almost 400 participants this year.

Our 2023 adventure season started early, with snowshoeing in Fish Creek, hiking along snowy Waiparous Creek, cross-country skiing, and skating. As winter began to release its grip on the sun-kissed south-facing slopes

of Nose Hill, an avid group of adventurers braved a chilly, windy day and went hunting for crocuses — one of our favourite signs of spring.

April brought a stair climbing challenge, which raised over \$1,000 for our Adventures for Wilderness program, and participation in the City Nature Challenge, where citizen scientists used their phones to capture birds, plants, and even an amphibian.

During the May Mum Days Challenge, mums challenged themselves to leave their kids and partners at home and find time for themselves in nature. Some truly #RadMums organized events including nature walks, a sunset hike, and a rock-climbing day.

Spring flowers exploded in June. We enjoyed undulating fields of pink geranium and purple lupin along



Adventures by the numbers in the 2023 season. **Graphic by L. Wallis**

the Milk River Ridge. Vibrant orange wood lilies and amethyst thistles glowed in the dappled sunlight of the stunted aspen forests in the Wainwright Dunes. And as the birds returned this spring, new bird-watchers visited Frank Lake to learn the basics of this popular pastime.

This summer and into the fall brought a wide variety of adventures, from exploring different corners of the Ghost Wilderness to discovering fossils found right here in the city. Adventurers biked up Plateau Mountain and traversed ridges in Kananaskis and the Whaleback.

Sometimes, the best way to understand the threats facing Alberta's wilderness is to experience these places first-hand. This year we explored threatened landscapes such as the Rosebud Valley, where we learned about the imminent threat posed by a proposed racetrack development, and Big Hill Springs Provincial Park, whose iconic springs are vulnerable to the effects of a gravel mine being constructed less than a kilometre from the park's border. Our Oldman Off-Trail, an adventure was supposed to be a lighthearted fall romp along the Oldman River, but also held some dark foreshadowing. From our viewpoint upstream, the reservoir appeared as a sea of silt, with a sickly stream trying to wend its way through a deep channel in the expanse of mud. An ominous portent of

things to come as climate change intensifies and we continue to mistreat our headwaters. AWA staff also adventured to McClelland Lake where they experienced its unique landscape on the water and in the air.

We are always so grateful for the knowledge of our volunteer coordinators. This year we welcomed some new faces, including beaver expert Kirby England who accompanied us on a paddle along the Sturgeon River, Susan Holroyd who opened our eyes to the bats in our own backyard, and Isaac Peetoom Heida who shared his knowledge of butterflies and botany on two different Kananaskis adventures.

We were also thrilled to partner with organizations who share common goals, including Save the Rosebud, Elbow River Watershed Partnership and Bighill Creek Preservation Society, each of whom gave us great insight into the conservation issues that are important to them.

Our participants are often experts in their own right. On our hike up to the Mockingbird Fire Lookout we had a past lookout attendant who brought along an old photo album from his time at the Mockingbird lookout, as well as great stories to share. And on the Milk River Ridge adventure, Bette Beswick brought her passion for bumblebees and beetles to share, along with her net.

And of course, we are so grateful for

our coordinators who have been with us since the inception of the Adventures for Wilderness Program. These include Tako Koning, Heinz Unger, Chris Saunders, Cliff Wallis, Nathan Schmidt and Jaimie Jack.

This year we had two solo fundraising adventures. These are special adventures where individuals set themselves a challenge and raise money for AWA in the form of sponsorships. Jim Campbell and Bob Patterson took part in their fourth annual "Don't Let the Old Man In" Adventure for Wilderness. They traversed the highest maintained trail in Canada, Centennial Ridge, and raised more than \$5,500 for wilderness conservation.

On the other end of the age...um... experience spectrum, seven-year-old Karina Eustace-Wallis challenged herself to climb eight peaks before she turned eight on Sept. 8, and raise \$8,000 for AWA. Not only did she succeed in reaching eight summits, she raised more than \$10,000 and was featured on CBC Radio's "The Eyeopener." (You can read more about her adventure in the Fall 2023 Advocate).

Thank you to everyone who came out on an adventure this year and to everyone who donated. This program is only possible thanks to generous donations, both of time by our volunteers and money by our supporters. If you wish to contribute to the Adventures for Wilderness program you can do so on our website or by calling our office.

Happy Adventuring! See you in 2024!

*Do you have an idea for an adventure? Set yourself a goal and raise money for conservation! Or share your area of expertise with others. Reach out to [a4w@abwild.ca](mailto:a4w@abwild.ca) for more information on creating your Adventure for Wilderness.*