



Strathcona Wilderness Institute – 2019 Annual Visitor Report Park Use Permit, Authorization 103312 / 102645

Strathcona Park Wilderness Centre : Paradise Meadows Trail Head

The Centre was open from June 15th until October 13th in 2019, for a **total of 101 days**:

7 days in June, 31 days in July, 30 days in August, 25 days in September, 8 days in October.

The Centre was staffed by two students (Rupert Love and Alissia Hoorn), employed through the Canada Summer Jobs programme from June 29th to August 31st, and by a cohort of twelve Volunteers. Anna Heiter was contracted to oversee the coordination of the volunteers and help with the management of the Centre.

5552 visitors were recorded at the Centre, with a daily average 55, which was about half of the number recorded in previous years. We did not count School groups on their Field Trips, which tended to inflate numbers in September in past years. We believe that the overall decrease was directly related to our decision not to act as a Concession selling snacks and pop in an effort to eliminate plastics from the Centre and garbage from the Trailhead, and rather to prioritize our educational mandate. The busiest day was September 2nd with 279 visitors recorded. In addition there were about 165 participants in the organized events in the Forbidden Plateau area (Hikes & Nature Walks etc - see details below.)

Visitor Provenance Summary for the SPWC in 2019

Canada: 71.5 of total visitors (75% last year)

US: -- 5.5 % of total visitors (5.5 % last year)

Europe: -- 17 % of total visitors (15% last year –misreported as 17)

Other overseas countries: 6 % of total visitors (4.5% misreported as 6%)

Organized Summer Events

We scheduled a total of 26 guided Hikes and interpretive Nature Walks in the Park, on weekends from June to September; 22 took place on a variety of the Forbidden Plateau trails, including the shorter Paradise Meadows loops and longer routes e.g. to Mt Allen Brooks, Mt Becher, Cruikshank Canyon Lookout and Divers Lake, with a total of 165 participants. Our Summer Programme was coordinated by a third student employed under the CSJ programme,



Dan Tucker. Seven volunteers led these Hikes and Nature walks, as well as three of the SWI Directors (R. Mindell, L. & A. Maingon) and Dan Tucker the Programme Coordinator.

School Groups

Again at least 12 Schools staged Field Days in the Park, with only two contacting us, but in the end not following up on our offer of guided tours.

Wheelchair & TrailRider Use

Approximately 15 visitors made use of the Wheelchairs for the Paradise Meadows Boardwalks. The TrailRider was taken out on 3 occasions for day-trips, It was also used on two occasions to transport injured hikers to the trailhead.

Special Events at the Strathcona Park Wilderness Centre

ACCESSIBILITY DAY – Sunday August 4th

SWI organized this special event to show-case Accessibility in Strathcona Park and highlight the **TrailRider**. With the help of a cohort of 16 strong-armed volunteers, four trips were made up to Battleship Lake and back, with the BC Parks TrailRider and the one from the Campbell River. Andy Smith of BC Parks was on hand to talk about the history of the Accessible Trails in the Park, and to instruct the new volunteer Sherpas. Holding the event on the long weekend gave exposure to the general public, although we might have had more participants with Trailriders from other groups such as Power-to-Be in Victoria had we picked another weekend. Nonetheless, it was gratifying that so many volunteered to help (20 in total) and let their names be included in a list of potential “on call” Sherpas for TrailRider bookings in future years.

WORKSHOPS (September 14th & September 28th)

SWI put on two day-long workshops in September following up on the success of last year’s first Mycology Workshop. Both workshops were held in the lower meeting room of the SPWC, now called the Ruth Masters Nature Hall, with indoor presentations and ID sessions, as well as outdoor forays into Paradise Meadows and beyond. For each workshop a day-hike was organized on the following Sunday to the Divers Lake area.



The first workshop on Mycology (Sept 14th), led by 5 prominent BC Mycologists including Andy McKinnon and Dr. Shannon Berch, had reached its limit of 30 registrants before the end of August and proved to be even more successful than last year's, in part because there was such a profusion of mushrooms this Fall. The second workshop, on Bryology (Sept 28th), attracted 20 participants, including two from out of province. That workshop was led by Dr Jamie Fenneman (who had been SWI's first summer student in 1999) and Dr Randal Mindell (SWI director). Feedback from participants was highly positive. For the Bryology Workshop, Dan Tucker our summer student and Randal Mindell, prepared a booklet on "Common Subalpine Bryophytes of Strathcona Provincial Park", illustrating, with key identification features, 30 of the list of 225 mosses and liverworts compiled this summer, the first such list for the Park.

The Buttle Hut beside Park HQ at Buttle Lake

Our Information Hut at Park HQ at Buttle Lake was staffed from June 29 to Sept 2nd for **a total of 62** days, during the week by Johaan Do, our 4th student employed through funding from the Canada Summer Jobs programme, with the weekends from Canada Day to Labour Day covered by 10 volunteers. Over the 62 days a total of **1926** visitors were recorded, a 2% increase over last year. And significantly, the percentage of European visitors was up from 19% to 28% of the total number. We consistently see a much larger percentage of European visitors at Buttle than up at Paradise Meadows.

Organized events at Buttle

Four interpretive walks/hikes were organized this year, with a total of a 35 participants. Two separate hikes to upper Myra, plus one on the Elk River Trail, covered various aspects of flora, fauna and geology, and we repeated the Faunal Track and Sign Walk on the Elk River. The guides included two volunteers, plus Directors R. Mindell and L Maingon and our Programme Coordinator, Dan Tucker.



TrailRider: SWI oversees the Strathcona Park TrailRider Wheelchair Programme, in conjunction with Kyle Smith of BC Parks, which enables individuals with mobility restrictions to visit areas of the Park otherwise inaccessible to them. The TrailRider was taken out on 3 occasions in 2018 for trips to Battleship, Helen MacKenzie and Croteau Lakes; it was also used twice in rescue operations.

SWI's mandate is to promote public appreciation & awareness of Strathcona Park through the summer months at the Wilderness Centre at Paradise Meadows. The successful operation of the SPWC & our programs (interpretive walks, hikes, courses & workshops) depends on both publicity through various media, and organization of summer students and volunteers who staff the Centre. For this we employ an Outreach & Volunteer Coordinator. For 2020 we are preparing "program kits" for SD 71 classes & need more educational displays. Our summer plans include further workshop offerings and to make the Accessibility Day an annual event. So the GIA will help in the reimbursement of travel expenses for volunteers, not only those staffing the Centre, but also those who have signed up to act as TrailRider Sherpas. Such support enables us to encourage more potential volunteers in the Comox Valley to become involved in SWI.