



## **Strathcona Wilderness Institute – 2021 Annual Report Park Use Permit, Authorization 103312 / 102645**

### **General remarks**

With waves of the COVID-19 Pandemic continuing for a second summer, Strathcona Provincial Park saw a repeat of the huge increase in numbers of visitors, with parking areas full and overflowing. Our records reflected the limitations of travel to the Island until mid July, when more visitors from the Mainland arrived, followed by a clear increase from other Provinces in August. The SWI Board decided however to keep in place the necessary distancing protocols developed last summer, which meant a modification of our usual operations and much less direct public engagement than in pre-Covid times. We made both the SPWC at Paradise Meadows and the Buttle Hut at Buttle Lake off-limits to the public, with students and volunteers meeting visitors outside in the open, and any necessary purchase transactions made through a screened window. Both visitor centres were equipped with sanitizer, as well masks and gloves. Projected events such as an Accessibility Day and a special celebration of our 25th anniversary were postponed yet again.

We received funding to employ 5 students through the federal Canada Summer Jobs program, so we assigned one to staff the SPWC, two as Research Assistants to document flora and fauna on major trails in the Park, and two who were to act partly as Research Assistants in the Buttle Area and partly staff the Buttle Hut. These two quit after 5 weeks. We had only 6 volunteers staffing the Centre at Paradise Meadows this year and 6 at the Buttle Hut. As last year, a couple of our long-term volunteers were unable to contrib help this year over concerns with COVID -19, but disappointingly we were not able to attract as many Volunteers to staff the Centre, so that for most of September and October we could be open only at weekends.

We did not schedule any interpretive walks or hikes, since appropriate distancing even for small groups on the trails in such contexts would not be possible. We addressed our educational mandate in part by distributing free Interpretive self-guiding maps of the Paradise Meadows area. We distributed about 200 of BC Parks Educational Booklets for Children and Youth. Through our brochure and our website, we invited hikers to send us or post on iNaturalist their wildlife observations. And we had our 2 Research Assistants again documenting floral and



faunal data on 8 Major Trails in the Park (4 repeating last year's surveys, 4 in "new" areas, including Della Falls, Bedwell/Cream Lakes and Donner Lake, as well as in White Ridge Provincial Park). These observations were uploaded into the *SWI Data Collection Project* on iNaturalist (<https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/swi-data-collection>) and thus made available to the public. At present SWI's Species Count is around 1650; the two students this year doubled the number of species submitted by our two students last summer. The students also presented online Webinars open to the Public on specific topics that emerged from their work for us. These Webinars, along with others related to research projects relevant to the Park, are made available to the public through our Website under the Events tab.

### **Strathcona Park Wilderness Centre : Paradise Meadows Trail Head**

The Centre was open from June 24<sup>h</sup> until October 11<sup>th</sup> in 2021, for a **total of 80 days**: 7 days in June, 30 days in July, 27 days in August, 11 days in September, 5 days in October.

The Centre was ably staffed by CSJ student Mateo Jaeckel, and by 6 Volunteers plus our Outreach and Volunteer Coordinator Laura Isaacs.

**5898** visitors were recorded at the Centre, with a daily average of 74 (compared to last year's 3608 with an average of 45 over 81 days.). Again a high percentage (89 %) were visitors from the Island plus the rest of BC (as opposed to 63% in 2019, though down from the 2020 tally of 95%), reflecting the travel restrictions still in place.

#### **Visitor Provenance Summary for the SPWC in 2021. (2020 %s in brackets)**

74%	from Vancouver Island	(83%	from Vancouver Island)
15 %	from mainland BC	(12%	from mainland BC )
9 %	from other parts of Canada	(4.5%	from other parts of Canada)
2 %	foreign visitors	(0.5%	foreign visitors)

**Scheduled Interpretive Walks and Hikes – none were scheduled.**

**School Groups - no programs were offered.** (in the Fall there were several school day and overnight field trips into the Park, but we were not involved.)  
we were not involved)



**Workshops - Subalpine Mycology Workshop, Sept 18<sup>th</sup>**, with follow-up hike on October 3<sup>rd</sup>.

With some reservations, we hosted our 3<sup>rd</sup> Subalpine Mycology Workshop on September 18<sup>th</sup> at the SPWC, conducted by returning mycology experts Shannon Berch, Juliet Pendray, Andy MacKinnon, Thom O'Dell and James Holkko. We restricted the number of participants to a maximum of 15, with appropriate prerequisites for registration (double-vaccination, masks for indoors activities etc.) and filled the spaces within a week of advertising. In spite of the poor weather, and the very limited range of fungal species in the subalpine (following the hot dry summer), the event was hailed a great success, with much positive feedback. The presenters appreciated the smaller number of participants (we had 35-40 in 2018 and 2019) as more manageable for the ID sessions and forays. The associated hike to Divers Lake scheduled for the day following the Workshop was in fact held two weeks later in better weather and with more species of fungi for observation.

### **Wheelchair & TrailRider Use**

At least 5 visitors made use of the Wheelchairs for the Paradise Meadows & Centennial Boardwalks. The TrailRider was taken out on 3 occasions for day-trips, and on one day to rescue a hiker suffering from heat-exhaustion.

### **Special Events at the Strathcona Park Wilderness Centre**

We would have liked to build upon our success in 2019 by holding a 2nd (to be annual) Accessibility Day in the Park, highlighting the TrailRider and Accessible trails and so were very disappointed to have to cancel again because of COVID.

### **The Buttle Hut beside Park HQ at Buttle Lake**

Our Information Hut at Park HQ at Buttle Lake was staffed between July 3<sup>rd</sup> and Sept 6<sup>th</sup> for a **total of 25** days. We were unsuccessful in attracting a student specifically to work weekdays at the hut, but 6 of our regular dozen Buttle Weekend Volunteers were able to return this year. Over the 25 days a total of **830** visitors were recorded for an average of 33 per day (down from 39 last year). This year saw a return to increased #s of Visitors to the Buttle area from off the



island by contrast with Paradise Meadows where 74% were from Vancouver Island. Almost half of the 4.5% foreign visitors were European; in pre-Covid years we would see over 25% European travellers at Buttle.

**Visitor Provenance Summary for the Buttle in 2021 (2020 %s in brackets)**

54 %	from Vancouver Island	( 69% from Vancouver Island)
29 %	from mainland BC	( 23% from mainland BC)
12.5 %	from other parts of Canada	( 5% from other parts of Canada)
4.5 %	foreign visitors	( 3% foreign visitors)

New to Buttle this year was SWI support of the reintroduction of the Jerry's Nature Quest / Jerry's Rangers Program as an initiative by 43K employee/SWI Board Director Claire Gordon. Three events were planned, two were run (with one cancelled due to the heat wave in August) and were very well received.