



## **Strathcona Wilderness Institute – 2022 Annual Report Park Use Permit, Authorization 103312 / 102645**

### **General remarks**

With the travel restrictions of the past two years lifted, Strathcona Provincial Park saw a return to a broad range of visitors from around the globe in addition to locals and Canadians on vacation. The prolonged cool spring and the impact of the winter storms, especially in the Buttle area of the Park, resulted in a “slow” beginning to our usual summer activities. Snow lingered on the Plateau till later July, with trails still snow-bound above 1200m, preventing the opening of the campsites at Kwai and Circlet. Both the trails and the campsites around Buttle required clearing of extensive windfall, so again fewer visitors arrived until August. The SWI Board decided allow visitors into the SPWC this year but still emphasised appropriate distancing and had a screen installed for the protection of staffers at the desk. At the Buttle Hut it remained more practical to have staffers meet visitors outside in the open. We were pleased to resume our summer programme of Interpretive Walks and Hike, although with limited numbers (and requiring that participants be vaccinated for COVID).

We received funding for 5 students through the federal Canada Summer Jobs program, but employed only three students, two as Research Assistants to document flora and fauna on major trails in the Park, and one to coordinate the summer programmes. We could not find students to staff either the SPWC or the Buttle Hut, with the result that we had to rely totally on Volunteers to give visitors information. And we were also unable to attract the same number of volunteers as we had in pre-Covid years, with only 7 volunteer staffers the Centre at Paradise Meadows this year and 7 at the Buttle Hut. For the SPWC this translated into it being open for only half of the 100+ days we considered normal pre-Covid (see below).

### **General Visitor Information and Education**

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

The SPWC is the focal point for Visitor Information and Education on the Forbidden Plateau side of the Park. It was open between July 1<sup>st</sup> and October 9<sup>th</sup> in 2022, for a **total of 49 days**: 20 days in July, 14 days in August, 10 days in September, 5 days in October.



The Centre was ably staffed by 3 veteran and 3 new Volunteers, by one Director and on occasion by Mateo Jaeckel, our CSJ Programme Coordinator and we had a new Volunteer Coordinator, Jaron Piercy, in charge of the scheduling.

**3791** visitors were recorded at the Centre, with a daily average of 77 (compared to last year's 5894 with a daily average of 74 over 80 day).

The distribution of provenance is returning to what was observed in pre-Covid times. The greatest number of visitors still come from Vancouver Island, but we observed an overall drop in percentages of people from the Island (now back to what was observed in 2019), the rest of BC and other parts of Canada, but a marked increase of foreign visitors, coming closer to pre-Covid figures (foreign visitors = 28.5% in 2019).

#### **Visitor Provenance Summary for the SPWC in 2022. (2021 %s in brackets)**

63 % from Vancouver Island	(74% from Vancouver Island)
12 % from mainland BC	(15% from mainland BC)
8.5 % from other parts of Canada	( 9 % from other parts of Canada)
16.5% foreign visitors	( 2 % foreign visitors)

#### **Wheelchair & TrailRider Use at Paradise Meadows**

At least 5 visitors made use of the Wheelchairs for the Paradise Meadows & Centennial Boardwalks. The TrailRider was taken out on 3 occasions for individual day-trips (see more under Special Events below).

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

In the Buttle area of the Park, the Buttle Hut is the locus of Visitor Information and Education. It was open between June 25<sup>th</sup> and October 9<sup>th</sup> for **a total of 50** days. We were unsuccessful in attracting a student specifically to work weekdays at the hut, but we had 4 of our regular Buttle Volunteers and 3 new ones. One veteran Volunteer (Judy van Boven) deserves special mention having covered more than half of days open. Over the 50 days a **total of 1480** visitors were recorded for an average of 30 per day (down from 33 last year). This year saw a return to a greater percentage of Visitors to the Buttle area from off the island, by contrast with Paradise Meadows (34% of VI visitors at Buttle, 63% at PM). Over one third of the visitors were of foreign



origin, with 23% of the total coming from Europe, especially Germany (approaching the 28% recorder in 2019).

#### **Visitor Provenance Summary for the Buttle in 2022 (2021 %s in brackets)**

34 % from Vancouver Island	(54 % from Vancouver Island)
18.5 % from mainland BC	(29 % from mainland BC)
11 % from other parts of Canada	(12.5% from other parts of Canada)
36.5 % foreign visitors	( 4.5% foreign visitors)

### **Educational Activities and Public Outreach**

#### **Scheduled Interpretive Walks and Hikes**

It was gratifying to restart our summer programme of interpretive walks and hikes after the imposed 2-year hiatus. We scheduled 15 Interpretive Walks and Hikes from mid-July to mid-September (postponing 2 in early July because of the lingering snowpack on the Plateau trails and the fallen trees on the trails in the Buttle area). We deliberately restricted registration in response to continuing concerns over Covid, and so the average number of participants on the Interpretive Walks was 6, while on the Hikes 3. Our student Mateo Jaeckel, as Programme Coordinator, was in charge of the schedules and handling of registration and waivers. 6 Volunteers, plus 3 Directors and our student Mateo acted as leaders.

#### **Brochures**

As part of our educational mandate, we continued to distribute free Interpretive Self-guiding Maps of the Paradise Meadows area, as well as the BC Parks Educational Booklets for Children and Youth. This year we produced a "Wilderness Code" pamphlet for free distribution, setting out the general principals of Leave No Trace, specifically tailored to Strathcona Provincial Park. Through our general SWI brochure and our website, we invited hikers to send us or post on iNaturalist their wildlife observations.



### **SWI Data Collection Project on iNaturalist**

This year we again employed 2 CSJ-funded Research Assistants (namely Jack Bindernagel and Steven Hayward) to document floral and faunal data on major trails in the Park. Because of the late spring and persistence of the snow pack in the Alpine, this year our students focussed on lower elevation areas of the Park, thus extending the range covered in the two previous years. New areas included the Bedwell River Trail (from Buttle down to Bedwell Sound), Wolf River, Isardi Creek and Divers / Rossiters Lakes. The students' observations were again uploaded into the *SWI Data Collection Project* on iNaturalist (<https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/swi-data-collection>) and thus made available to the public. From the work of the students this summer (each contributing between 575 and 590 species) as well as input from Research Director L. Maingon, the SWI's Species Count now stands at 2122, and still heads the "leaderboard" by some 400 species in the BC Parks overall Project on iNaturalist. The two students also acted as hike leaders for the 2-day Botany BC event hosted by SWI. And by way of a conclusion to their work with us the students 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.

### **School Groups - no programs were requested or offered.**

(During the summer and in the fall there were both day field trips and overnight camping trips by a number of institutions, but SWI was not involved.)

### **Workshops**

#### **Subalpine Mycology Workshop, Sept 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup>**

We held our 4<sup>th</sup> Subalpine Mycology Workshop on September 17<sup>th</sup> at the SPWC, conducted by returning Mycology experts Shannon Berch, Juliet Pendray, Andy MacKinnon, Thom O'Dell and James Holkko, as well as Kem Luther. This year the weather cooperated on the day, with no rain!. We again 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 withing a week of advertising. As last year, there was a limited range of fungal species in the subalpine following the hot dry August and early September, but we again received very



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. On the associated hike to Divers Lake scheduled for the day following the Workshop a fair cross-section of species were observed, since slopes beneath Mt Allan Brooks tend to retain more moisture than the Paradise Meadows area. In retrospect our timing was fortuitous since the continuing lack of rain through the rest of September and into October reduced the number of species of fungi observable.

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

#### **TrailRider Days (July 24, August 20 and September 25)**

We planned 3 events for this season, one in July, one in August and one in September, to highlight Accessibility in the Park, extending invitations to groups on the Island and beyond such as Power to Be in Victoria or BCMOS in Vancouver. While we did have pre-registered individuals and groups for each of these days, there were cancellations and no-shows for the first two, so that on each occasion only one TrailRider trip was made up to Battleship Lake. For the 3<sup>rd</sup> event in September, when a group of 8 cancelled, we decided to cancel the event day outright. Our planned Sherpa Training workshop had to be postponed, then cancelled because of the lingering snow. We did however have 6 Volunteer Sherpas come out, as well as one Director and our Volunteer Coordinator, for the events held in July and August.

#### **BOTANYBC 2022, July 22 and 23**

SWI hosted Botany BC for its annual gathering of professional and amateur botanists and plant enthusiasts from British Columbia and areas beyond. The 2-day event featured 4 guided hikes each day onto Forbidden Plateau (including Divers Lake, Mt Elma, MacKenzie Lake and Meadows, as well the west summit ridge of Mt Washington), led by local botanists/naturalists and our 2 CSJ students. With SPWC as its base, the group of some 40 participants gathered after the forays for refreshments and presentations, one on the SWI Data Collection Project on iNaturalist by Director L. Maingon and the second on fossil mosses by former Director Randal Mindell.



We were delighted to be able to partner with the executives of BotanyBC to organize at fairly short notice this much appreciated event, their first in-person event since 2019.