



Strathcona Wilderness Institute – 2023 Annual Report Park Use Permit, Authorization 103312

General remarks

An earlier spring melt than in 2022 meant that we were able to open the SPWC in the later part of June this year, the last two weekends already busy with visitors. Heat was less of an issue this summer, but smoke from wildfires in the Buttle area in August did drift over the Plateau, and we saw fewer visitors participate in our scheduled events in August.

We received funding for 5 students through the federal Canada Summer Jobs program, but found only three suitable candidates; one we employed as a Staffer at the SPWC, one as Summer Programs Coordinator/ Research Assistant and one Naturalist Interpreter/Research Assistant, continuing the work of previous years documenting flora and fauna on the Trails, as well as helping with our summer programs. We had a cohort of 11 volunteers (including 2 Directors) to assist in the staffing of the SPWC at Paradise Meadows and 8 at the Buttle Hut, while a further 4 who helped with special events up at the SPWC. 15 individuals (as well as 4 directors) acted as leaders or presenters in our summer activities.

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 June 24th and October 9th in 2023, for a **total of 78 days**: 4 days in June, 29 days in July, 28 days in August, 13 days in September, 4 days in October.

The Centre was ably staffed by student Jesse Klahm 4 day a week in July and August, with the rest of the days covered by 7 veteran Volunteers (including 2 Directors) and 4 new Volunteers, and on occasion by Mateo Jaeckel, our CSJ Programme Coordinator.

4579 visitors were recorded at the Centre, with a daily average of 59 (compared to last year's visitor count of 3791 with a daily average of 77 over 49 days).



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 and the rest of BC, a slight increase in visitors from other parts of Canada, but a marked increase again of foreign visitors, coming closer to pre-Covid figures (28.5% in 2019).

Visitor Provenance Summary for the SPWC in 2023. (2022 %s in brackets)

57.5% from Vancouver Island	(63% from Vancouver Island)
11.5 % from mainland BC	(12% from mainland BC)
10 % from other parts of Canada	(8.5 % from other parts of Canada)
21% foreign visitors	(16.5 % foreign visitors)

Wheelchair & TrailRider Use at Paradise Meadows

At least 5 sets of visitors made use of the Wheelchairs for the Paradise Meadows & Centennial Boardwalks including two 90-year-old ladies from Mexico. The TrailRider was taken out on 1 occasion for a day trip. 3 other bookings were made but cancelled.

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 25th and September 3rd for **a total of 32 days**. We were unsuccessful in attracting a student specifically to work weekdays at the hut, but we had 7 of our regular Buttle Volunteers, as well as artist James McBeath who covered over half of the 32 days. A **total of 769** visitors were recorded for the 32 days, making an average of 24 per day (down from an average of 30 per day over 50 days last year). This year again there was a greater percentage of visitors to the Buttle area from off the Island, by contrast with Paradise Meadows (39% of VI visitors at Buttle, 57.5% at PM). Over one third of the visitors were again of foreign origin, with 19% of the total from Europe (closer to pre-Covid years).

Visitor Provenance Summary for the Buttle in 2023 (2022 %s in brackets)

39 % from Vancouver Island	(34 % from Vancouver Island)
15 % from mainland BC	(18.5% from mainland BC)
10.5% from other parts of Canada	(11% from other parts of Canada)
35.5 % foreign visitors	(36.5% foreign visitors)



Educational Activities and Public Outreach

Scheduled Interpretive Walks, Hikes and Workshops

It was gratifying to return to a full summer programme of interpretive walks and hikes after the tentative start in 2022, and to now include Workshops as well. We scheduled 6 Interpretive Walks in Paradise Meadows in July and August, 9 Hikes from early July to the end of September, on the Plateau and in the Buttle area. We hosted a special Presentation made by members of **Save Our Forest Team** (Comox Valley) on July 2 and one by **Birds Canada** on July 15. 8 workshops were planned for our **“Discovering our Biodiversity” Series**, but one was postponed, one cancelled. For the most part we continued to limit registration in response to lingering concerns over Covid, and so the average number of participants for Interpretive Walks, Hikes and Workshops was 7, but we did not restrict numbers for special presentations and the Chris Carter Memorial Hike and Tea, with attendance ranging between 30 and 40. Our student Mateo Jaeckel, as Program Coordinator, was in charge of the schedules and handling of registration and waivers. Leaders included 7 Guest Presenters, 7 Volunteers, plus 4 Directors and 2 students, Mateo Jaeckel and Inza Maki.

Brochures

As part of our educational mandate, we continued to distribute our Wilderness Code pamphlet setting out the general principals of *Leave No Trace*, with specific reference 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. We have available at the SPWC the BC Parks Educational Booklets for Children and Youth, and we encourage families to participate in the Jerry’s Ranger Kids’ program.

SWI Data Collection Project on INaturalist 2023

This year we again assigned 2 of our CSJ-funded students (Inza and Mateo) to assist in the on-going documentation of floral and faunal diversity on major trails in the Park, although on single-day rather than the multi-day hikes of previous years - new trails included Mt Myra and Mt Allan Brooks and trails such as King’s Peak not covered since 2020. 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 (contributing 575 and 590 species), as well as input from Research Director L. Maingon, the SWI’s Species Count now stands at



2548 (as of November 12th), and still heads the “leaderboard” by some 700 species in the BC Parks overall Project on iNaturalist. And by way of a conclusion to their work with us we ask the students to present online Webinars open to the Public on specific topics that emerged from their work. 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

Within the “**Discovering our Biodiversity**” series, SWI organized its 5th Annual Mycology Workshop on September 16th in the Ruth Masters Nature Hall at the SPWC, followed by a hike into Divers Lake on the 17th. We had 4 of the best mycologists from Vancouver Island as presenters and leaders for the Fungus ID Sessions and Forays into the Park (Andy MacKinnon, Kem Luther, Tom O’Dell and Erin Feldman). We were graced with glorious sunshine up on the Plateau, cloud appearing only in the later afternoon. The drought conditions over the past three summers have resulted in a dearth of fungal species to see in the park in September, but our participants did bring a fair range of samples for the ID sessions. And the on hike to Divers Lake on the Sunday we were not disappointed, although we could not expect the profusion of fungi from the very first workshop in 2018. The feedback from our participants was overwhelmingly positive.

Other workshops through the summer included an Introduction to Plant Identification and an Introduction to the Lichens of Strathcona Park, both led by Loys Maingon, with morning sessions of presentations in the Ruth Masters Nature Hall, followed by afternoon practica out on the trails. Diverging from the scientific focus of the above, we also scheduled the “Magic of Watercolour” with artist James McBeath and “Inspired by Wilderness” led by poet Claire Gordon, in which the leaders demonstrated how other media can elicit ways of understanding the natural world of Strathcona Provincial Park.



Special Events at the Strathcona Park Wilderness Centre

June 24th : **SWI Volunteer Appreciation Tea.** To coincide with the opening of the SPWC we invited volunteers past and future for cake and refreshments at the Wilderness Centre, making it an occasion both to acknowledge the hard work of our volunteers in the 2022 Season, as well as to encourage new volunteers to learn more about what SWI does through engaging with our “veteran” volunteers and members of the Board. The group of 30 enjoyed cake and refreshments in the sunshine in front of the Ruth Masters Nature Hall.

September 30th:: **Chris Carter Memorial Hike and Tea** . It was the perfect day for a fall hike – bright sunshine illuminating the glorious fall colours, with a crisp slightly frosty start to the day and Albert Edward gleaming in a light frosting of early snow. We had 20 participants on the day-hike to Croteau Lake and above led by Chris’ long-time hiking companion Tim Penney, with the assistance of Janet Beggs. We organized a short walk in the Meadows in the afternoon for Mary and friends to enjoy the brilliance of the shrubs around the Ponds, and then at 3.30 pm about 35 friends of Chris together with family members gathered outside the Ruth Masters Nature Hall for tea and cookies, as the sun continued to shine. As everyone noted, it was a truly memorable day on which to think about Chris and his enduring presence in Strathcona Provincial Park. This will become an annual event.