



## **Strathcona Wilderness Institute – 2024 Annual Report Park Use Permit, Authorization 103312**

### **General remarks**

A lower winter snowpack and an earlier spring melt resulted in our being able to open the SPWC in the later part of June in 2024, the last two weekends already busy with visitors. Since the beginning of June, the Directors worked on repainting and reorganizing the interior of the SPWC, with the new arrangement in place for our opening. New Interpretive Panels were installed by August 1st, as well as the refurbished free-standing 3-D Map of the Forbidden Plateau area. The 3-D Wall Map of the entire Park was not ready before the end of our Season in mid-October.

We received funding for 5 students through the federal Canada Summer Jobs program and were able to fill five positions this summer. Two we employed as Staffers at the SPWC, one as Summer Programs Coordinator/ Research Assistant and two Naturalist Interpreter/Research Assistants, 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 12 volunteers to assist in the staffing of the SPWC at Paradise Meadows and 10 at the Buttle Hut, while a further 4 who helped with special events up at the SPWC. 13 individuals (plus 3 directors and 2 students) 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 24<sup>th</sup> and October 9<sup>th</sup> in 2023, for a **total of 86 days**: 5 days in June, 30 days in July, 29 days in August, 19 days in September, 3 days in October.

The Centre was ably staffed in July and August 6 days a week by two students (Jesse Anderson, in his second year with SWI, and Sable Gilmore), while the rest of the days over the season were covered by 10 veteran Volunteers and 2 new Volunteers.



**4885** visitors were recorded at the Centre, with a daily average of **57** (compared to last year's visitor count of **4579** with a daily average of **59** over **78** days). Without the extreme heat and smoke from forest fires of the previous summer seasons, it is surprising that we did not see more visitors. However, the statistics from the counter at the Trailhead (when they become available) may reveal a rise in numbers that we did not see in the SPWC.

The distribution of provenance is returning to what was observed in pre-Covid times. The greatest number of visitors still come from Vancouver Island; the percentages have differed little from last year.

**Visitor Provenance Summary for the SPWC in 2024. (2023 %s in brackets)**

56.7% from Vancouver Island	(57.5% from Vancouver Island)
12.1 % from mainland BC	(11.5 % from mainland BC)
10 % from other parts of Canada	(10 % from other parts of Canada)
21.2 % foreign visitors	(21 % 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. The TrailRider was taken out on 4 occasions for day-trips up to Battleship Lake.

**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 28<sup>th</sup> and September 16<sup>th</sup> for **a total of 38** days. We were unsuccessful in attracting a student specifically to work weekdays at the hut, but we had 8 of our regular Buttle Volunteers and one new one, as well as artist James McBeath who covered half of the 38 days. **A total of 890** visitors were recorded for the 38 days, making an average of 23.5 per day (compare an average of 24 per day over 32 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 (30% of VI visitors at Buttle, 56.7% at PM). One third of the visitors were again of foreign origin, a pattern observable pre-covid resuming last year and this, with three quarters of that total coming from Europe.



#### **Visitor Provenance Summary for the Buttle in 2024 (2023 %s in brackets)**

30 % from Vancouver Island	(39 % from Vancouver Island)
19 % from mainland BC	(15 % from mainland BC)
18 % from other parts of Canada	(10.5 % from other parts of Canada)
33 % foreign visitors	(35.5 % foreign visitors)

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

##### **Scheduled Interpretive Walks, Hikes and Workshops**

We continued this summer to offer a full summer programme of weekly interpretive walks and hikes, and we held 4 workshops out of our tentative plan of 8 workshops for the “**Discovering our Biodiversity**” Series (3 in the end were not scheduled and 1 was cancelled by the presenter). We put on 7 Interpretive Walks in Paradise Meadows in July and August, 10 Hikes from late June to the end of September, on the Plateau and in the Buttle area. For the most part we continued to limit registration, and so the average number of participants for Interpretive Walks, Hikes and Workshops was 10, but we did not restrict numbers for special presentations and the Chris Carter Memorial Hike and Tea, with average attendance about 30. Our student Mateo Jaeckel, as Program Coordinator for the third year, oversaw the schedules and handling of registration and waivers, as well as leading a couple of hikes. Leaders included 5 Guest Presenters, 7 Volunteers, plus 4 Directors and 3 students, Mateo Jaeckel, Paige Stuart and Zeke Gilmore.

##### **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. We have also produced a brochure about Volunteering with SWI, designed to encourage those who are familiar with the Park to consider using their love and knowledge of the Park to help visitors appreciate all that it has to offer



### **SWI Data Collection Project on iNaturalist 2024**

This year we again assigned 2 of our CSJ-funded students 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. 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, as well as input from Research Director L. Maingon, the SWI's Species Count now stands at over 2900 (as of October 31st) and still heads the "leaderboard" by some 900 species in the BC Parks overall Project on iNaturalist. One of our students, Zeke Gilmore, set up a separate "Slime Moulds of Strathcona Provincial Park" project, joining three other projects devoted to specific organisms in the Park- Lichens, Fungi and Bryophytes.

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. This year's Webinars were devoted to Slime Moulds and to the Aquatic Ecology of Buttle Lake.

### **Family-oriented Programs and School Groups**

We scheduled a Jerry's Rangers nature-oriented program for kids at the Buttle Lake Campground in August, but in spite of posting many notices, physical and electronic and in-person advertising no families showed up. No programs were requested or offered to Schools.

### **Workshops**

The first of the SWI "**Discovering our Biodiversity**" series this year was devoted to the Canada Jay Research Project in Paradise Meadows. Dan Strickland, the project leader gave two presentations in the morning and in the afternoon Dan, along with SFU PhD researcher Sandy Siemens and her assistant Zoe Strothkamp, demonstrated the family dynamics of breeding groups in one of the nesting territories in the Paradise Meadows area.

The 6th Annual Mycology Workshop took place September 21<sup>st</sup> in the Ruth Masters Nature Hall at the SPWC, followed by a hike into Divers Lake on the 22<sup>nd</sup>. 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, Bryce Kendrick, Tom O'Dell and Erin Feldman). We were fortunate that the cooler moisture weather in later August into September prompted a much better range of species in the subalpine than we have seen for several years. And the on hike to Divers Lake on the Sunday the participants were not disappointed in their observations. The feedback from our participants was overwhelmingly positive.

Other workshops through the summer included an Introduction to the Lichens of Strathcona Park, led by Loys Maingon, with morning sessions of presentations in the Ruth Masters Nature Hall, followed by afternoon practicum out on the trails. Diverging from the scientific focus of the above, we also scheduled "Inspired by Wilderness", specifically through watercolour painting, led by director Claire Gordon, to demonstrate how other media can elicit ways of understanding the natural world of Strathcona Provincial Park.

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

June 15<sup>th</sup> : **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 2023 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. A group of about 20 enjoyed cake and refreshments in the Ruth Masters Nature Hall on a somewhat cool afternoon.

September 28<sup>th</sup> : the **2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Chris Carter Memorial Hike and Tea.** It was a near perfect day for a fall hike, with an overcast sky but no rain. We had 18 participants – family and old friends of Chris- on the day-hike to Croteau Lake and above, led by Director Loys Maingon with the assistance of Janet Beggs. We organized a short walk in the Meadows in the afternoon for those who preferred to enjoy the brilliance of Fall in the subalpine on a walk around the Ponds in the Meadows. Then at 3.00 pm about 25 friends of Chris and family members gathered inside the Ruth Masters Nature Hall for tea and cookies. As everyone noted, it was a memorable day on which to think about Chris and his enduring presence in Strathcona Provincial Park.

