



## A Summer in the Castle

by Robert Kershaw

This past spring Joe Obad, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society conservation director for southwest Alberta (Calgary/Banff Chapter), asked me if I wanted to research and write a hiking/field guidebook to Castle Wilderness. Ten years ago I had helped to research and had written much of the material found in the Southwestern Alberta Recreation Trail Map put out by the Southwest Alberta Business Development Centre (SWABDC) here in Pincher Creek.

Joe and I agreed this map had some useful information about the area. We also agreed, any hiking guide/field guide to the Castle would have to be oriented differently. We acknowledged that the map's "origami" was wrong, that its scale was too ambitious and that it had errors in accuracy. Of more significance with respect to the Castle, the map also profiled off-road vehicle use and did little to inform readers about the region's fragile state. (It should be noted that SWABDC has generously allowed me to use any information found on their map for the book.)

The book will be divided into two main sections—a general introduction and description of the Castle as well as a trail guide. Given the present situation in the Castle it was felt a book targeting outdoor enthusiasts, primarily hikers and naturalists whose pursuits impart a lower impact on the region's ecology, will help bring a new constituency of sensitive users to the area. (The book adopts the CCWC's list of acceptable activities). The book will help inform through trail maps, photos and descriptions, where, when and how to enjoy the Castle while protecting its ecology. The book will also offer the user a general account of the area's culture, natural history, climate, flora and fauna, as well as explanations of present day uses and developments.

### What I've experienced so far.

I began hiking on June 30. Since then I have hiked (with some mountain bike access along the roads) over 20 trails in the Castle through the Front Range Canyons, the South and West Castle Valleys as well as the Lynx/Lost/Carbondale drainages. Some of these have been with CCWC members, other times with friends from farther abroad. But most of the time I've hiked solo. The experience has been profound. Revisiting past

hikes while discovering new ones has refueled a passion for the Castle that had flat-lined over the past few years.

I am often asked what I have seen on the trail. Overall my experiences have been positive. I have hiked in relative solitude. And although I have seen less wildlife than anticipated, I've witnessed a wildflower season beyond any in my recent memory. I've wound my way through beargrass-choked meadows up Three Lakes Ridge, struggled to stay on the trail through the lush ground cover in the post-fire Lynx Creek/Goat Creek drainages, come across a late-season vibrant meadow of shooting star on Victoria Ridge, and hiked through healthy fescue in Spionkop.

But there have been some disturbing scenes too, not so much on the high trails, although I have seen signs of motorized vehicles in the alpine—a muddy out-of-bounds track leading to a small patch of late season snow off the North Kootenay Pass road, detours around mud bogs, the odd beer can and vehicle parts—but rather in main random camping areas throughout the lower elevations. One has come to expect (not necessarily accept) the crush of motorized campers in the Castle River, Syncline and Lynx Camping areas, but the areas just outside the Beaver Mines Lake campground, along the Carbondale and Westcastle rivers are equally overrun. These campsites are often noisy, dusty and garbage strewn, others less so, but all have impacted my experience.

I have been hiking mostly during the weekdays, but even midweek the density of trucks, trailers, dirt bikes, and quads is significant. And during the times I have ventured out on the weekends, their intensity is staggering. Alder-choked side trails off the South Castle and West Castle roads indicate to me that most off-roaders are obeying the "no motorized



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see *Castle Guide* on page 2 ...



# CASTLE-CROWN WILDERNESS COALITION

Box 2621, Pincher Creek, Alberta T0K 1W0  
Telephone 403 627 5059  
e-mail: office@ccwc.ab.ca  
website: www.ccwc.ab.ca

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Judy Huntley, Executive Director  
(address/phone/e-mail as above)

James Tweedie, Conservation Director  
403 628 2422  
e-mail: tweedie@telusplanet.net

## Upcoming Meeting

Members are welcome to attend board meetings. Please contact the office if you wish to be notified.

## Newsletter

Editor: Judy Huntley.

This newsletter welcomes comments and/or submissions from members and others. Please send submissions by mail or e-mail to the office. Please check with the office for submission deadlines.

The opinions, evaluations, claims and assertions contained in articles appearing in the Castle Wilderness News are the responsibility of their authors, and may not reflect the policies of the Castle-Crown Wilderness Coalition. The office takes responsibility for articles, notices, etc., for which an author is not identified.

Production: Murray Coppold. Thanks to Rosemary Coppold, who addresses, stamps, stuffs and mails the newsletter to you.

*Donations to CCWC are tax creditable  
and greatly appreciated.*

## Volunteers and AGM

Thanks to all who came to the 2005 AGM, and particularly to our new Board members, Michelle Spencer and Nancy Tripp. CCWC depends on volunteers and we extend warmest thanks to our Directors, Stewards, and Hike Leaders. We would also be delighted to have occasional volunteers in the office.

## Support

As always, we are hugely grateful to the people and organizations whose financial contributions make CCWC's work possible.

... *Castle Guide*, continued from page 1

vehicle beyond this point" signs. But with so many vehicles in the Castle Wilderness they have to be going somewhere. I suspect the damage done along the many lower trails is extensive.

Admittedly, my most disturbing experience was hiking through the "Fire-smart" logging on lower Haig Ridge just to the south of the Castle Resort (see CCWC May 2005 newsletter). A new road, an enhanced ski run, a landing area for future logging ... there seems to be nothing fire smart about it.

I still have areas deep in the South Castle to explore. By the end of fall I hope to have 24 to 26 routes documented and photographed. Then comes the task of consolidating my notes and photographs the GPS data with the Mistakis Institute and writing the manuscript.

The book will not contain every possible route in the Castle. Nor will it provide a definitive assessment about the state of the Castle—that's not its goal. But as I come across sights and sounds along the trail, I am obliged to write about these experiences. The intangible goal of the book is to add active voices to those already working to prevent further development and decay within the Castle. •

*If anyone has questions about the book or wants to contribute trail information, photographs or comments please contact me at rkershaw@telus.net. The book is to be published by Rocky Mountain Books sometime in 2006.*

## Fall Celebration

CCWC invites our hikers and volunteers (and other members as well) to join us for a celebration of a superbly beautiful year. On September 17 the scheduled hike is to Vicki Ridge to watch raptors with Wilbur Tripp. Please register early. If there is a large group, a second hike will be scheduled as well. The hosted supper is free beef on a bun or vegetarian lasagne, with salad, soft drinks, and dessert; from 4:30 on; at the Gazebo in Beaver Mines. Please register early at <office@ccwc.ab.ca> or 403 627 5059 so we have enough food on hand.

## Memberships

May is CCWC membership renewal month. If anyone forgot, late renewals are welcome, and are only \$10.00. Forms are available at www.ccwc.ab.ca, or by calling the office .

## Email

Some of you prefer to have newsletters only by email. CCWC apologizes for not getting this organized sooner. Please send an email to office@ccwc.ab.ca if you wish **not** to get paper mailings.



# CCWC's Summer Stewardship Activities

by James Tweedie

CCWC volunteers have participated in a number of Stewardship activities this summer, in addition to providing stewardship reports for selected areas of the Castle. Thanks to all involved and to those who have provided reports. We look forward to hearing back from other stewards before the fall, so that we can compile a worthwhile *State of the Castle Report* at the year's end.

Despite the flooding in early June, Alberta Environment went ahead with their inaugural Water Quality Awareness Day, modeled after the World Water Monitoring day program, providing kits for volunteers to sample local streams and waterbodies for four basic properties: clarity/turbidity, pH level, dissolved oxygen and temperature. The CCWC participated in this sampling and provided records for about 40 stream locations in the headwaters of the Castle-Carbondale. As one might hope, the overall results reflect a healthy system, at least for the measured parameters, with only a few anomalies. These could readily be attributed to either the impact of the Lost Creek fire (unusually high acidity in ponds/standing water) or a direct connection with Shell's road and bridge-building activities in the Iron Creek tributary of the Carbondale (high turbidity). In the case of the Wetlands Ecological Reserve, there was a difference of 8°C between the water on the river side of the road and the water on the ski hill side that receives the run-off from the ski hill: a very clear and direct signal of how CMR Inc can impact its surrounding environment.



On a Friday afternoon at the end of June, after the season's flooding event in the Front Range Canyons, a number of CCWC members participated in a field trip and hands-on workshop in Pincher Canyon, organised by Michael Gerrand in conjunction with his Cows and Fish staff and four Grazing Coops, to hone their skills for assessing streambank and watershed health. As well as providing all of us with better resources and pointers for the task (including walking us through the *Caring for the Green Zone Field Workbook* methodology), the afternoon gave us the opportunity to share our views of the present management practices in the Castle with some of the local ranching community who hold grazing allotments or leases on these public lands. Mike Alexander, as Range Manager for Public Lands Division of ASRD, also gave a brief introduction to his *Rangeland Health Assessment Manual*, which is modeled closely on the Cows and Fish program's approach of vegetative assessment.

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July 9th saw many CCWC members bent double for hours on end digging and pulling Blueweed from the creekbanks, gravel flats and adjacent riparian pastures of Pincher Creek between the Shell Plant and the former Alberta Ranch by the Christie Mines road. The extent of this infestation of Blueweed is daunting, but the organisers of what has now become an annual event assure us that our efforts are indeed making a difference, at least in helping to stop the spread into downstream areas of the M.D. of Pincher Creek. The most interesting encounter of the day was made by Bob Grier who spotted and briefly detained an enormous Western Toad. •



## Synopsis of Current Knowledge

by Judy Huntley

CCWC wishes to thank the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, the World Wildlife Fund, and Shell Canada, for recently releasing its *Selected Ecological Resources of Alberta's Castle Carbondale: A Synopsis of Current Knowledge*.

This document, a thorough review of current scientific literature on the area, is intended to serve as a reference for all "parties concerned with the area's future, including recreationists, disposition holders, the general public as well as decision-makers charged with administration of the Castle Carbondale Region."

Author Martin Jalkotzy has gathered and reviewed a massive amount of scientific literature and presents summary information on the existing ecological knowledge on vegetation, aquatic, and terrestrial communities, and human use and conservation issues.

Shell and CPAWS jointly presented the report to the government, and got their acceptance of it. As we go to press, the press release "CPAWS and Shell release scientific study on Alberta's Castle Region" dated August 22, is the lead item on the Shell Canada website and is the second item under "What's New" at <http://www.cpawscalgary.org/>. The Globe and Mail gave it excellent coverage (Dawn Walton, August 22, page 1 of the business section) and it was on the front page of the Pincher Creek Echo on August 23, quoting Shell spokesperson Laurieanne Lynne as saying "We both agree that the area needs to be protected and respected" referring to CPAWS' recommendation that "There needs to be a core protected area in the region."

CCWC hopes that finally enough knowledge has been assembled to make it clear to the Alberta government that it is time now to declare the Castle Wilderness. •



# A Great Summer for Hiking

by James Tweedie

The CCWC's hiking program continues to attract folks from all around the province, as well as our local members. This summer has seen hikes scheduled for almost every other weekend, with participation at the highest levels ever.

Apart from an early season hike planned for Little Pincher Canyon that had to be called off as a result of the June flooding in the Canyons, the wet summer made for fabulous flower conditions throughout the region. And even in the case of the June 11th hike, Patricia Wagenaar was able to arrange to take the small group to Tapay Hill, at the northeast edge of the Castle-Carbondale, where they enjoyed a full array of our early flowers, reversing the seasons as they ascended the hill: paint brush and balsam root on the lower slopes and stands of glacier lilies still blooming towards the ridge. "Just a fabulous wild garden on top in the lee of the ridge," said Patricia. "We sat down and made ourselves sandwiches from sweet cicely and sorrel."

Earlier in the season Patricia had taken a group of 15 hikers to the top of Antelope Butte where the birding was equally spectacular, particularly for birds of prey: ferruginous hawk, Swainson's hawk, American kestrel, sharp-shinned hawk and red tails were all seen. The CCWC would like to thank the Lynch-Staunton family for allowing us access to this great early spring location for a hike.

In June, Reg Ernst led a group onto Adanac Ridge, as well as leading his annual hike to the Big Sagebrush Natural Area. Dr. Ernst has been extensively studying rare plant occurrences in the Castle Wilderness for the last several years, as well as acting as the Volunteer Steward for the Parks and Protected Areas Branch of Alberta Community Development. His site inspection report noted the presence of a number of species listed in the Alberta Natural Heritage Information Centre's Tracking list, including, of course, *Artemisia tridentata* (Big Sagebrush). Unfortunately he also noticed increasing amounts of smooth brome and timothy, and reported extensive stands of invasive downy brome along the road in the valley.

The CCWC's award for stalwart leadership has to go, once again, to Dave Sheppard, for leading a group of over 40 hikers of all ages up the South Drywood/Blue Lake Trail on the July long weekend. "The meadows under the larches were just glorious and the upper slopes were carpeted with moss campion. I've never seen anything like it," was Dave's comment. The following day many of the same group joined James Tweedie on a fairly strenuous hike up Table Mountain. Other hikes visited the Lynx Creek and Snowshoe Creek valleys in the Upper Carbondale, the quiet wilderness of the flood plain of the Westcastle Valley, and a full day from Beaver Mines Lake across Table Mountain to Whistler Ridge and the South Castle Valley.

To end our very successful season, the CCWC is inviting all hikers to join us for a barbeque on September 17th (see announcement on page 2). •



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## Congratulations

by James Tweedie

The CCWC is delighted to congratulate Dr. Sheilah Martin, formerly with Code Hunter LLP, on her appointment to the Court of Queen's Bench Alberta. Dr. Martin acted for the CCWC in pursuing our Judicial Review of the Government of Alberta's decision-making around the CMR Inc expansions, and obtained a favourable ruling from Madam Justice Kenny in July 2004. The CCWC's response to the Government's Appeal of that ruling in May this year was ably handled by Dr. Martin and her associates at Code Hunter LLP, Ms Katherine Reiffenstein and Mr. Eric Groody. We are very pleased that Dr. Martin's experience in administrative and environmental law now has a place on the Bench in Alberta. We still await a ruling from the Court of Appeal. •



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Michael Gerrand jumps for joy at top of Spionkop saddle (above) and beargrass on Middle Kootenay Pass (right).