

## Preserving Our Natural and Cultural Heritage

(This article appeared in the Okanagan Historical Society's 77<sup>th</sup> annual report published in 2013.)

*By Sheila White and Bill Johnston*

*Summerland residents Sheila White and Bill Johnston have been members of the Okanagan Similkameen Parks Society for more than four decades and three decades respectively.*

As early as 1964, enthusiastic and knowledgeable volunteers played a substantial role in protecting and preserving land and water in the South Okanagan-Similkameen area for the benefit of both the natural landscape and people.

The original purpose of the Okanagan Similkameen Parks Society was the perceived need by Katy Madsen and others for a secure winter range for the California Bighorn Sheep at Vaseux Lake. Numerous meetings culminated in an open meeting in 1966 at which time the formalities of a name, constitution and bylaws were adopted.

The original executive consisted of: Ernestine Lameureux and John Woodworth (Kelowna); Dave McMullen, Katy Madsen, Brenda Liebert and John Kitson (Summerland); Bert Kinsey, Steve Cannings, Jack Stocks and Avery King (Penticton); and Joe Smith and Bill Kreller (Oliver).

Several committees were established: Osoyoos Arid and Biotic area (chair Steve Cannings); Vaseux-McIntyre Bluff (chair Bill Kreller); Cathedral Lakes Arid Alpine (chair Katy Madsen); and Scientific Fact-finding for Parks (chair Dr. Harold Madsen). There was additional interest in Brent Mountain-Sheep Rock; Okanagan Mountain and Fairview near Oliver for ecological and historical importance.

The purpose of the society was stated as follows:

- To work for the acquisition and preservation of parklands, especially in the Okanagan and Similkameen Valleys for the health, recreation, education and natural enjoyment of the public;
- To seek preservation of the habitat for wildlife, as well as protection of natural biotic areas for scientific study;

- To acquire lands suitable for parks or for scientific, wildlife or natural reserves, and to hold them until they can be permanently entrusted to a suitable agency;
- To raise funds for these purposes;
- To evoke public awareness and appreciation of the beauty and wonders of the natural environment for the quality of life.

This all-encompassing purpose has held true in over 48 years.

By 1972, the OSPS was a well established society with 774 paid members. A mimeographed, hand-addressed, folded quarterly newsletter kept everyone informed.

The OSPS has, from the outset, relied on independent committees to carry on their work, reporting to the executive as a whole for major plans and funding.

The committees at this time were:

Osoyoos Arid and Biotic Area (Doug Fraser and Joe Smith); Conkle Lake (Brenda Liebert); Cathedral Lakes (Robert Quadvlieg); White Lake Observatory (Bert Kinsey); Historic Trails (Victor Wilson, Randy Manuel and Harley Hatfield); Okanagan Mountain (Doreen Adams, Leon Blumer, John Kitson and Ted Dodd); Brent-Sheep Rock (Juergen Hansen).

The first significant project came about in 1966, when 800 acres (324 hectares) of rangeland, which was winter range for a large herd of California Bighorn Sheep on the east side of Vaseux Lake, owned by Vic Casorso of Oliver, was listed for sale. A fundraising drive secured the approximately \$23,000 purchase price.

This land was held by the society for two years until the Canadian Wildlife Service could raise the federal funds to purchase the land from the society.

From this original core purchase, the Vaseux Bighorn National Wildlife Area has expanded to its present size of 2006 acres (812 ha).

Funds from the sale of the Vaseux Lake property were invested in the purchase of 250 acres (101 ha) at the north end of Osoyoos Lake, known historically as the Haynes Lease and locally called the Osoyoos Arid Biotic Area. Eventually the provincial government raised the funds to purchase this land from the OSPS.

In 1980, the Haynes Lease Ecological Reserve was established as Ecological Reserve #100 on this property. The reserve is still an important area of study, observation and conservation today. Harold King (former chair of OSPS) and his wife Joan (residents across the valley from the reserve) were its wardens for many years.

The funds raised in 1966, returned to the society after the sale of the Osoyoos land, have been a legacy, sustaining all of the subsequent projects taken on by the society to the present day.

Reports on the unfavourable conditions at Conkle Lake caused by unrestricted camping at this beautiful lake spurred the Conkle Lake Committee to try for corrective action. Conkle Lake is in the Boundary Country, reached north from Highway 3 or west from Highway 33, but there seemed no one nearby to speak about the situation. At the urging of the OSPS, the area was declared a provincial park in 1973 and orderly camping, sanitation, etc. were instituted.

Obtaining park status for Brent Mountain has also been of concern to the OSPS. It is the only Okanagan mountain without a road to the top. Because the view from the highest point is great in all directions, it had been used as a forestry lookout, and a small cabin erected on the summit. Unfortunately, logging has continued on all sides until only the rocky summit is untouched. The trail is still a wonderful day's outing, and hope continues for protective status for the peak and surrounding area.

The Okanagan Mountain Committee, chaired by enthusiastic and superbly organized Doreen Adams, was extremely effective. Leon Blumer was a rock climber interested in Wild Horse Canyon; John Kitson, a sailor with vast knowledge of the lake, saw the need for a harbour-of-refuge around Squally Point; Victor Wilson, who lived in the Naramata-Indian Rock area and knew the proposed parkland, was a talented, fascinating orator. Ted Dodd of Kelowna was a keen member. This formidable team successfully lobbied the provincial government, and in 1973 Okanagan Mountain was declared a provincial park.

The OSPS published a booklet by John Woodworth titled "Is Everything All Right Up There?" that commented on adverse affects of clearcut logging as demanded by the government. It caused a considerable stir even beyond B.C. John then went on to organize and successfully rediscover the Alexander Mackenzie (Grease) Trail into the interior of B.C.

The OSPS was an early proponent of the value of the abandoned Kettle Valley Railway rail bed through the Okanagan. The society designed and distributed more

than 20,000 brochures showing the hiking/cycling routes along the rail bed from Midway to Penticton.

Cathedral Lakes is a unique area of arid-alpine near Keremeos. Although declared a provincial park in 1968, the OSPS lobbied for its expansion. Members Robert Quadvlieg and Vic Wilson consulted with and gained co-operation from ranchers, private land owners and a helicopter school. The OSPS submitted a brief of their recommendations to the provincial government in 1973, and in 1975 the park was greatly expanded. It has the distinction of including within its boundary private land with the only road leading to the lodge. Access via a steep hike or a steep drive on the road are the choices, but the lakes, mountains and wildflowers at the top are fabulous!

OSPS member Jack Stocks had investigated the possibilities of the Hedley Creek-Nickel Plate area, suggesting an access trail and picnic site for recreation or a mini park. When Bill Barlee, a noted historian and long-time OSPS member, became B.C. Minister of Tourism in the mid-1980s, he felt Hedley could become a tourist attraction and assisted in planning. He hoped there could be a train using the old line down the steep slope above and below the mine adit, but today there is a long stairway to the adit only.

Some would wonder what interest the OSPS could have in the White Lake Radio Astrophysical Observatory, though science was mentioned in the original OSPS aims.

Word was brought to the OSPS executive that the observatory's function could be compromised because of electrical interference. The federal government had searched diligently for the best location, found it at White Lake near Penticton, but failed to place a buffer around this "remote" site. The observatory's director asked the OSPS to intervene when a golf and housing development at St. Andrew's By-The-Lake was proposed and a power line planned to cross below the horizon.

In the early 1970s, Bert Kinsey and Doreen Adams particularly set about protecting the scientific locale. The power lines were moved south below the line of sight, and a list of electrical equipment, size and use was accepted by the developer.

#### Trails and other noteworthy projects

The Trails and Wilderness Committee had its origin with Harley Hatfield and the Okanagan Historical Society in 1967.

The historic trails in the area east of Hope that were used by Indians, then by the Hudson's Bay traders and then the miners and traders seeking a route to Kamloops and beyond were of interest to many people.

OSPS member Harley Hatfield of Penticton, a retired surveyor, decided to seek out the trails, now unused for more than 100 years. The Fraser Canyon was unusable for horse traffic until the CPR blasted its way through 10 years later, so the Royal Engineers had been commissioned to build a trail from Hope. They left journals, blazed trees and built a packhorse trail, which was understandably overgrown. Bob Harris, a Vancouver engineer, joined the search with Harley and others. It took several years of bush work, digging into journals and even helicopter flights to find the HBC Fur Brigade Trail.

Briefs to the B.C. cabinet were presented in 1972 and 1975 to protect the five main historic trails (Blackeye's Trail, antiquity; Hudson's Bay Brigade Trail, 1849; Whatcom Trail, 1858; Dewdney Trail 1860-61; and Hope Pass Trail, 1961) and the area surrounding the trails in the North Cascade Mountains north of Manning Provincial Park, to be known as the Cascade Wilderness Proposal.

In 1978, Bill Johnston joined the OSPS as chair of the Trails and Wilderness Committee and took over the "Proposed Cascade Wilderness" file from Harley Hatfield and the Okanagan Historical Society.

In 1979, a group presentation and written brief to the Environment and Land Use Committee of the Legislature in Victoria, organized and led by Harley Hatfield, was made by the Okanagan Historical Society and OSPS.

In 1987, at the recommendation of the Wilderness Advisory Committee, approximately 40 per cent (167 sq. km or 64 sq. miles) of our proposal was designated as the Cascade Recreation Area with the equivalent removed from Manning Park to compensate the Forest Ministry.

A 20-year-period of mineral exploration followed to ensure no commercial mineralization was present in the area.

While Bill Barlee was minister responsible for heritage in the 1990s, heritage trail designation was applied to the five historic trails providing a 10-chain (200 metre)-wide-corridor of undisturbed land along the lengths of the trails, outside of the

Recreation Area core, in the Cascade Mountains, north of Manning Provincial Park. This was absolutely critical to the integrity of the surviving historic trails in the area.

On May 7, 2012, 45 years after Harley Hatfield began the quest, the Cascade Recreation Area was upgraded to Class A park status and included within the boundary of Manning Provincial Park. This completed Harley Hatfield's "extension of Manning Park" as envisioned in 1967. The process has been the OSPS's longest and most expensive parks proposal (in terms of funding and energy expended) to date.

"Old Pack Trails in the Cascade Wilderness" booklets were produced by Harley Hatfield and Bob Harris with artwork by Randy Manuel. They are authentic in their sketches, locations and excerpts from Royal Engineer journals and remain a popular item in tourist information booths today with more than 13,000 copies to date.

In recent years the OSPS has provided financial support and encouragement to trail 'enabler and historian' Kelley Cook of Princeton – who continues to do a remarkable job of restoring historic trails in the North Cascades, improving campsites and providing signage for visitors to enjoy, and encouraging the use of the historic trails in their wilderness surroundings.

In 1996, under Premier Mike Harcourt, a system of Land, Resources and Management Plans were established in B.C. The major issues before every LRMP group were management of: water, supply and purity; old growth forests; resources affecting jobs by stability of the resource, i.e., timber supply; wildlife and fish habitat; and pest control.

Over many years OSPS directors Juergen Hansen, Joe Klein, Clive Johnson and OSPS chair Harold King participated in meetings with government and industry representatives on the Okanagan-Shuswap LRMP. They were all familiar with much of the LRMP area so were well able to discuss each section as it came forward.

By 2000, they had achieved new protected areas for conservation and recreation; detailed guidelines to manage values for protection and use while still protecting fragile ecosystems; guidance for commercial and non-commercial use of Crown land and resources; policy advice for government; and an annual review and monitoring process involving local groups and stakeholders.

The OSPS has provided funds to the Summerland section of the Trail Canada Trail (TCT), which is responsible for 61.5 km (38 miles) of trail (along the abandoned Kettle Valley Railway rail bed) from Penticton to 1.5 km (one mile) east of Osprey

Lake. The funds were for signage and safety fencing, which was needed to separate recreationists from crossing into the path of an active steam train in the vicinity of Prairie Valley Station and Faulder. About 20 km (12.5 miles) of this trail is in good condition with all four bridges completed.

However, a difficult problem remains. Dirt bikers and ATV drivers continue using this trail and others causing ruts, danger from speeding vehicles, dust and noise. Regulation of ATV traffic on trails has been an OSPS concern for more than 30 years. The OSPS has presented the Outdoor Recreation Council with guidelines for licensing and training, and for establishing areas and routes for non-motorized use. The OSPS continues to put pressure on the B.C. government to license recreational vehicles and keep them off the TCT.

The use of discarded rail beds for recreational purposes has been long recognized of great value, though Canada and B.C. both lagged in actually creating useful corridors. In 1986, such projects in Washington State excited a number of Oliver residents. John Bremmer, Dave Wight, Keray Levant and others formed the International Biking and Hiking Society and received \$1,000 in seed money from the OSPS. Go BC donated \$2,000 and four kilometres (2.5 miles) of multi-purpose recreational trail were developed along the Okanagan River dyke in Oliver. Since then this popular trail has expanded to 18.4 kilometres (11.5 miles). By 2008, the IBH Society felt it could no longer continue under more stringent environmental restrictions. The group disbanded, donating their remaining funds to the OSPS to assist future trail development. John Bremmer, always the IBH Society chair, has also been an OSPS director for many years and continues to look for new development opportunities.

In summer 2008, the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the building of the great Northern Railway Red Bridge across the Similkameen River near Keremeos was celebrated. OSPS director Mike Meheriuk was on the committee that planned its restoration, and the OSPS funded a pamphlet describing the bridge's history and restoration.

The OSPS has also financed signs for the Okanagan Brigade Trail in Summerland and for the waterfront natural area in Lower Town, Summerland.

At this time, the OSPS has no major project in hand. The directors meet monthly to monitor the existing projects, to comment on plans put forward by commercial interests and to check on forestry practices. The society also donates funds to groups such as the Nature Conservancy of Canada and the Nature Trust of B.C. for local land purchases and the annual Meadowlark Festival in Penticton. The OSPS has

always been supportive of the proposed South Okanagan-Similkameen National Park.

For information visit [okanagansimilkameenparkssociety.ca](http://okanagansimilkameenparkssociety.ca).