President's Report

Lots of events have happened since our spring Newsletter. The Willmore Wilderness Foundation decided to join the Alberta Outdoors Coalition (AOC) due to the increasing changes within Alberta Parks, which have had NO public consultation. The AOC's common issues include ACCESS of public land. We believe that Parks & Protected Areas must operate in a transparent manner. The AOC is made up of the Foundation for North American Wild Sheep; Alberta Outfitters Association, Alberta Bowhunters Association, Alberta Fish and Game Association, Alberta Professional Outfitters Society, Alberta Trappers Association, Alberta Off Highway Vehicles Association, Alberta Snowmobiles Association, Safari Club International: Northern Alberta Chapter, and the Willmore Wilderness Foundation. We have a lot on our plate since we became aware that Parks and Protected Areas has entered into discussion with the Federal and B.C. Governments regarding the nomination of Willmore and the Kakwa areas as potential World Heritage Sites. We feel that this designation under UNESCO would eventually phase out trapping, hunting and horse use in the Willmore/ Kakwa areas.

People & Peaks of Willmore Wilderness Park was launched in June 2007. The book has been a fantastic

Photo by Susan Feddema-Leonard
June 2007

success and we have recouped our costs. We are now making a profit on the publication. A big thanks goes out to Estella Cheverie, editor and Susan Feddema-Leonard, author and designer.

The Willmore Wilderness' summer was busy with trail clearing events. We spent fourteen days clearing the trail between Big Graves Flats and Zenda Creek *or* Little Graves Flats. It was a big job, but our team worked hard in the sweltering sun, which resulted in the main artery of the park being re-opened. We also cleared the trail through last year's burn to Ptarmigan Lake. The good news is that most of the lake

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December 2007

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Memories of Mountain Men & Women

It has been a sad year with the loss of Outfitter Carl Luger, Outfitter George Kelley, Trail Cook Rose Findlay, Outfitter Ron Moore and Outfitter Tom Vinson.

Susan Feddema-Leonard was able to interview all these individuals, with the exception of Ron Moore. All of the interviews have been published with the exception of George Kelley's story. This transcript will be published in the next book called, *People & Peaks of Willmore Wilderness Park: 1950s to 1980s.*

It is hard to express the sadness that we feel, with so many old friends moving into a parallel universe back onto the mountain trails that they so loved. Our feelings are best expressed with a poem that Heidi Hill wrote.

Watch our websites for our 2008 Conventions

WillmoreWilderness.com

Edson- Feb 2/07

Grande Cache - Feb 23/o7

Grande Prairie - Mar 1/07

Edmonton - Mar 29/07

My Memories of Old Tom

Leading a pack string through streams of crystal clear
Are some of the memories of Old Tom that I hold dear.
I can still see him riding down the trail proud and tall
On his horse Prince, Tom's favorite big grey of all.

Oh, the adventures he would tell while around the fire we sat.
You wondered how many more were under his weathered hat.
The knowledge that Tom had was often called upon
And was savored by some of us greenhorns that had hired on.

Guiding guests over mountain passes he would lead the way
And fill the camp with his warm presence at the end of the day.
You would often see Tom leaning against a hitching post
While chatting with guests and being a welcoming host.

Back at the ranch house, Tom had his favourite chair
And as you walked in, his voice would fill the air.
We would gather around the table and enjoy a cup of tea
Or watch Saturday night hockey on TV.

Tom was both a husband and father to those he held dear,
For others he was a friend and in our hearts will be kept near.
Pictures and memories of Old Tom will be there to enjoy.
I'm so thankful that I had the opportunity to know this cowboy.

Views from Sheep Creek

Brian Bildson - Executive Director

Greetings Willmore supporters. For those of you who do not know me, my connection to the Willmore Wilderness all started with the purchase of a trapline, most of which falls within the Park. November 1st. is the beginning of trapping season and yesterday found me out on my line getting ready. If not for a little mechanical trouble, I'd still be out there today.

I find it hard to explain to someone else what being on a wilderness trapline means to me. Some might call it a spiritual experience but for me it's more a sense of belonging. Out there I feel at home and in tune with the natural world around me. I am fortunate in that I have a trapline that gives me such a feeling of connectedness to nature.

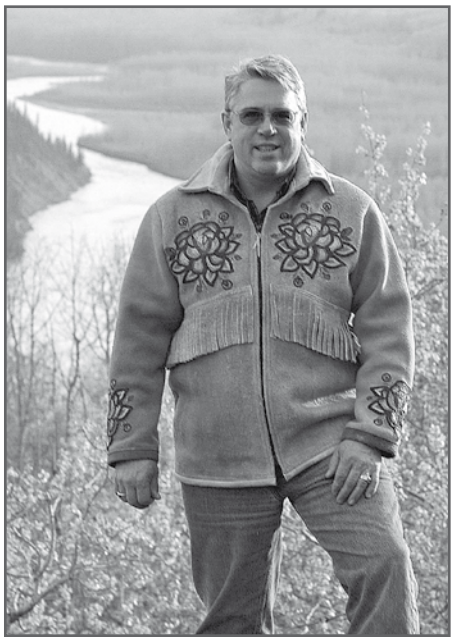
However, I know I am not alone in these feelings. I've spoken to many Foundation supporters over the last few years that have expressed this same sentiment in their own words. While their connection may come about through hunting, hiking, or trail riding, the same passion burns inside them. They have a connection with the land that sustains and inspires them.

What happens though when you have land managers who do not share that passion, or have a different vision of what conservation is about? I'd suggest you get what we have today, a dysfunctional system. In my opinion, there is a creeping preservationist attitude that is taking over within our Park managers. By preservationist attitude, I mean a fundamental belief that the Park would be better off without any users or, at the very least, non-consumptive ones. In their vision, activities like hunting and trapping are archaic and do not belong inside the Park.

I've come to this realization through personal conversations with Park staff and their own actions. I can see a Park's vision where we old dinosaurs are humored for now, but slowly and surely weeded out of the Park over time. For example, while reviewing my trapline file at my local ASRD office, I saw a notation that Parks must be notified should I relinquish or attempt to transfer my Willmore trapping rights.

I know from previous conversations with Parks that should my trapline become vacant, they would like to have the Registered Fur Management Area removed from inventory, never to be trapped again. As a trapper, I find that insulting. What is the rationale for that decision? Does it mean that trappers have no value, that our activities are worthless, or that we're a disturbance on the landscape and don't fit into the vision of a Park?

I'd suggest that consumptive users, be they trappers, hunters, gatherers, or anglers, belong within Willmore Wilderness Park more than a bureaucrat who flies over in a helicopter and makes management decisions. We touch, feel, and taste our environment. We immerse ourselves in the rhythm of nature and, for that moment, reconnect with a way of life that brought all of humanity to where we are today.



Photograph courtesy of Brian Bildson. May 2007

So in closing, I'd like to share this thought. I don't expect everyone to share my passion for consumptive use of the Willmore. If your thing is low-impact hiking while practicing a vegan life style, I welcome you to the Park, and there is a place here for you in the Foundation. However, to those who believe they've "evolved" to a higher level and no longer see the need for hunting or trapping inside the Willmore, I'd say open your eyes and your minds. In truth, we are more in sync with our natural surroundings and have stayed connected with the circle of life. We eat organic meat that we harvested with our own hands, feast on berries collected off a hill slope, or remove surplus fur populations providing a renewable natural fur for human use.

Billy McGee - Predator Control Officer

Author Jim Babala

Photo by Susan Feddema-Leonard

February 2007

Jim started professionally guiding and outfitting hunting parties in 1946 in the Cadomin-Luscar area, with brother Bill. In 1949 he ventured out in his own business and outfitted a party to the Hay and Sulphur Rivers—on his first trip into what is now Willmore Wilderness Park. He guided hunting parties in this area until 1972 when he took his outfit north to the Yukon. Jim still lives with his wife in Whitehorse Yukon.

Wilbert Nelson (Billy) McGee was born at Bawlf, Alberta June 1, 1910 and was of Irish descent. He had a saying, "As Irish as can be, don't try to make a Scotsman out of me." Billy McGee was a very methodical person. Everything he did, he made up his mind to do expertly. The best way to describe him is to say he was a perfectionist. Billy was also well known for his saddle making. Once he made a saddle, you had it for a lifetime. He sized you first and made a saddle that was tailor made to fit you.

Billy was also known as a traveler and rambler, moving all about the country, mostly working as a farm hand. He spent the summer and winter of 1929 in the Peace River and Grande Prairie area of Alberta. He returned to Edmonton in 1930 and worked on the Athabasca Ranch at Entrance, Alberta near Hinton. He worked as a handyman at fifty cents an hour.

Billy loved the mountains and made his home among them. He worked at the Entrance General Store and later settled down to the life of a trapper. He was among the most successful of trappers, coming up with many new ideas, which he passed on to other trappers. He also worked with the Alberta Wildlife Branch in the early 1940s, and helped move several truckloads of elk into the Entrance area, which is now known as William Switzer Provincial Park.

Prior to 1942 very few elk were seen in the area, although it was told to me by Mike Kelly, a veteran trapper of that time, that George Chase had seen elk along the Berland River in 1930. He had shot a large mature bull elk for meat. There were very few other elk seen and it is believed that this elk transplant is what started the population in this area.

Billy had trapped his line for many years and was successful. In 1944 he became trapper and Predator Control Officer for the Alberta Government. During the later part of the 1940s and early 1950s, the wolves and coyotes became so plentiful that they were killing off big game at an alarming rate. When the Alberta government saw what was happening, they started a predator control program and hired Billy McGee as Predator Control Officer, along with several others throughout the province. Billy proved to be the most successful by taking the most wolves with minimum effect on other fur-bearing animals.

Billy set out from Entrance to Obed to his trapline during the winter of 1952. He went along the Athabasca River and took sixty-five wolves, along with a number of foxes and coyotes. This line was about twenty-five miles back from the river.

There had been many complaints from the residents of Entrance and Hinton and neighboring homesteaders of wolves killing their horses, cattle and also dogs. In time the cries for help came from as far away as the Coal Branch and Nordegg mining areas. Billy was assigned these areas from 1952 to 1960. He found the area too large to work efficiently by

This is a picture of Billy McGee with his fur catch late 1940s or early 1950s. Billy was predator control trapper for the Alberta Government during the 1950s and 1960s. Photograph courtesy of Jim Babala.

himself, so the Game Branch hired another trapper to assist him. Ernie Ploenshe, a trapper from Marlboro, Alberta was hired. Ernie was assigned to the Pembina, McLeod, Cardinal River, and Coal Branch area. He took many wolves from this area. I'm sure the number would be well over one hundred during the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Billy McGee made many friends among the trappers and other people from the surrounding areas. They liked his progressive way of trapping and poisoning wolves, which took very few furbearers or birds. He had the respect of almost everyone, especially that of the trappers, hunters and guides and outfitters. His work contributed to better hunting with a vast increase of game populations, which all enjoyed throughout the 1960s.

I always said Billy McGee should have been an outfitter. He would have been one of the best-organized outfitters in the business with the best equipment and would have come up with many good ideas for the betterment of outfitting. I spent an afternoon in November 1985 at Billy's home talking with him. He was fighting a battle with leukemia and his health was failing but he was still the same Billy and still had a keen sense of humour.

We got onto the subject of wolves, as once again wolves were making headlines with a buildup of their populations. There was much controversy and criticism regarding wolf management going on. Billy again explained to me his ways of trapping and poisoning wolves and managing wolf populations. In my opinion he was right on.

We also discussed the rabies control program during the 1950s and both agreed the rabies scare was somewhat exaggerated and was carried further than it should have been. It really got out of hand. Rabid animals had been found in northern Alberta and B.C. First a fox was revealed in northern Alberta and then a number of other animals were discovered. Once rabies broke out, the program was stepped up to remove more carnivores. More trappers were hired to do the job. Forestry officers were given poison pellets to put out—and cyanide guns were set out in various locations. Signs were appearing in a number of places saying, *"Poison bait in this area!"* It was both Billy's and my opinion that many people were hired that had no knowledge of the use of poison or of trapping, to do the job.

....continued on page 6

Billie McGee - Continued from Page 5

Billy McGee courtesy of Jacquie Hannington

Billy was a man who enjoyed the mountains and outdoors to the utmost.

To my knowledge the worst case of mismanagement of the use of poison bait was in the Rock Lake-Sulphur River area, which is now part of the area known as the Willmore Wilderness area. One character was hired and given the area from Rock Lake to Big Graves, which was along the main forestry trail. I never met this person but he definitely was not a lazy person. His method of putting out poison bait was something else again. The Alberta Game Branch had issued poison in cans containing small cubes of strychnine. Each cube was supposed to contain enough poison to kill a 250-pound animal. The way this character went about his method was to melt down a large piece of moose fat. He took a number of small waxed paper cups that restaurants used for jam. These cups held about one tablespoon. He would fill the cup half full of tallow, let it cool and then place a cube of strychnine on top, then fill the cup with more tallow. He must have made hundreds of these tallow pellets. He made several hundred small pegs, flattening one side something like a spoon. He started at Rock Lake and taking a brace and bit with him he walked the main trail. He drilled a hole at the base of a tree; every fifty yards at the most, drove in a spoon, shaped a peg and placed one of the tallow pellets on it.

This trapper had four cabins from which he carried out his work during the winter months. He covered part of the Indian trail from Eagles Nest Pass cabin. He also went up the Kvass Creek trail from Big Graves cabin. He must have put out hundreds of these pellets and the result of this poisoning program was seen and felt for several years. In my guiding and outfitting in this area, I found many dead animals and birds even as long as a year after. Fortunately this practice stopped. I found fresh dead porcupines, eagles, hawks, magpies, foxes, wolves, wolverine and one black bear but no grizzlies. I heard of dead grizzlies that were killed by cyanide guns. Dead mink were even found along streams.

This method did the job of taking as many carnivores as one could but it was devastating to the future years of trapping. Trappers who tried to make a living after this practice were forced to stop. Billy McGee told me this same method was used on the lower Muskeg and Berland Rivers. If you mention putting out poison to the Indians and trappers of the Grande Cache and Muskeg River areas, you touch a very sore spot. That feeling exists even to this day.

One can hardly blame these people for being upset, as I believe poison was handed out too liberally by the Alberta Game Branch to people who didn't know how to handle it properly. Some less knowledgeable ones might have asked, "What is the proper way to use poison?" Personally I do not recommend its use, unless it's in the hands of a professional.

During my last visit with Billy, he told me in great detail of his methods and ways of putting out baits in his predator control practices; but put more briefly, these were his methods. When Billy first started, he said he made his baits too small. They were picked off by smaller animals and birds, such as jays and magpies. This caused him to lose track of much of his bait,

resulting in the killing of other small animals and birds he hadn't intended to target. He said he made his share of mistakes before abandoning his use of small baits.

He then decided to use large pieces of meat for bait—in fact the whole hindquarter or front shoulder of an animal. He had no problem getting all the bait he needed as he had the use of wild animals such as moose, deer or elk that were killed along the highway. Also he was able to get meat that was confiscated by the Game Branch. He would take a quarter of meat, skin it out, load it up with poison and then pull the hide back over it, letting the whole thing freeze. He would then take it out into an open meadow with very few trees and light brush. Next he would tie the quarter to a tree trunk or heavy windfall with a nylon cord that had been soaked in horse manure or blood to take away any scent the cord might give. The heavy piece of moose or elk hide was pulled well over the meat so no small animals or birds could move it off. This way it would take an animal at least the size of a coyote, wolverine or wolf to gnaw the hide off the meat.

Later he made a number of smaller sets, about ten to fifty yards from the main quarter of meat. He would take a large bone, like a leg bone from a moose, leaving a limited amount of meat on it, and would freeze two pieces of poison bait into the bone. He covered this with a large piece of hide so none of the smaller animals or birds could carry it off.

Billy left this and didn't return to it until it was hit by a large animal, as no small animals could move it. Sometimes small animals as weasels, shrews, martens and mink did dig down under the snow and get to the bait. However, none of these got away, as they fed and died under the hide. Billy always gave these animals to the trapper who ran that particular line. Billy always made a point to make his wolf sets away from the streams so as to not to take mink. He tried to stay away from timbered draws that marten and other small animals used. He was very successful at not taking birds or small fur-bearers. By using large bait stations, he found that large animals like wolves stayed around eating until the poison acted on them and they died right there, instead of traveling any distance and not being found. He designed this type of set especially for wolves.

The problem with small baits such as those the "character" of Rock Lake and Grave Flats used was that the wolf or coyote could carry the small bait in his mouth, if he didn't eat it. Sometimes he cached the bait. If he gulped the bait down during cold weather it could take from five to ten minutes for the fat to thaw and the poison to start to work. In this length of time an animal turned off the trail. The wind and snow would cover its tracks and quite often the animal was lost.

Billy said by using the large bait method, it was easier to keep track of all pieces of poison bait. He kept a note of each set he made. On the line he set between Entrance and Obed in the early 1950s, he had six such sets. He always checked his baits from a distance with his field glasses and never went up to them unless they had been hit by wolves or disturbed by other animals and needed tending. Billy told me of many other methods he used. One for example was to hang a front shoulder or side of ribs in a tree with no poison in it at all. This would attract a great number of magpies, eagles, and ravens. With all the fuss and commotion, it would bring the coyotes and wolves around, as they knew what it meant when birds were squawking and flying about. Then these animals would find the poisoned set Billy had put out on the ground. These were only a few of his ideas and he had many more that less knowledgeable people couldn't think of. I learned a lot from Billy that day and it was the last time I saw him.

For the past several years, I have been making fall trips to Alberta to hunt geese, ducks and whitetail deer. I guess you could call this a pilgrimage to where I was born. When I arrived in Hinton, Alberta in November 1986, I heard Billy was in the hospital there. I planned to visit him but had to make a quick trip to central Alberta, as I had brought a number of frozen salmon and halibut. I always distribute these fish to my farmer friends who let me hunt on their lands. I spend the summer fishing salmon and halibut in Haines, Alaska and give ninety percent of my catch to friends.

The area I hunt in Alberta is near Bawlf where Billy McGee was born. I thought of Billy as I drove through Bawlf. When I arrived back in Hinton I found out Billy had died and been buried. A great outdoors man passed away on November 17, 1986. Billy was a man who enjoyed the mountains and outdoors to the utmost. Now when I pass through Bawlf, I remove my hat to the memory of Wilbert Nelson (Billy) McGee.

The Moccasin Telegraph

Urban Assualt on Rural Alberta

by Susan Feddema-Leonard RN

Susan Feddema-Leonard
May 3, 2007 at the Brule Rodeo.

Photo by Jaeda Mae Feddema

On page 9 of the document called "*Global Overview*," they admit that they have PAID honorariums to selected regional "experts" to identify our local wilderness areas and nominate them for "universal values."

So much has happened over the past year since Premier Stelmach took over the leadership of Alberta. During the change of government in late 2006, Parks and Protected Areas orchestrated a clandestine signing of the Willmore/Kakwa Inter-Provincial Park. Sadly, there was NO public consultation locally, regionally or provincially regarding the Inter-Provincial agreement.

During the leadership transition, Orders in Council (OC) were also quickly and quietly pushed through with NO public consultation. Seven OCs were signed on November 22, 2006 creating new Provincial Parks. Hunting in most of these Provincial Parks is not allowed, while trapping remains an allowable activity—for the moment. Sadly, Albertans have lost the traditional rights in these parks—and never had a chance to express their concerns. This is yet another notch in the belt of those trying to stop traditional activities such as hunting and trapping.

I was one of eighty-eight Albertans who were appointed to the Alberta Land Use Forum (LUF) Committee this past summer. I was on the Policy Committee and represented the Willmore Wilderness Foundation. During one of our committee meetings, I was surprised to learn that there is no centralized vision or agency for land use in this Province. To date, decisions have been made piecemeal within each department furthering individual agendas, and often unaware of each other's mandates. The good news in the LUF process was that the Policy Committee made a recommendation to have a centralized body that would look at the overall vision for Alberta Land Use. The bad news is that there is NO centralized body at this moment in time and Alberta government departments continue working their own private agendas with respect to our lands.

The Willmore Wilderness Foundation received a copy of an email dated July 30, 2007 from Kyle Clifford of Parks and Protected Areas. The email had been forwarded from Archie Landals of Parks and Protected Areas. Archie stated, *"We are in the initial stages of discussions with Parks Canada and BC Parks to consider expanding the current Rocky Mountains World Heritage Site. This will not be done without consultation. UNESCO requires consultations before any site is established as a World Heritage Site or prior to any boundary changes."* To date the Willmore Wilderness Foundation, Grande Cache community groups and the Grande Cache Aboriginal populations have not heard from Parks and Protected Areas. In fact we are unaware of any groups being contacted that live and work in the Kakwa/Willmore areas.

With NO centralized vision for Alberta land use and NO public consultation with the stakeholders, one might get nervous by the fact that Parks and Protected Areas has admitted to the fact that it is in

discussions with Parks Canada and BC Parks. This uneasiness is exacerbated by the fact that Ivan Strang the West Yellowhead MLA has indicated that Alberta's elected Ministers have not discussed nominating Willmore Wilderness Park and Kakwa Wildland Park as World Heritage Sites. It appears as if the Alberta Caucus is unaware that Mr. Landals has openly admitted to putting the Kakwa/ Willmore areas on the table for discussion.

Landals' June 30, 2007 email continued, *"We will certainly make sure that the Willmore Wilderness Foundation is involved in the discussions if it is decided that Willmore is a suitable candidate for consideration as an addition. There is currently a lot of misinformation floating around about World Heritage Site status. Designation as a world heritage site does not transfer management or authority away from the province nor does it specifically preclude any activities that are currently permitted in our various classes of protected areas."* To date the Willmore Wilderness Foundation has not heard from any representative of the Alberta Government.

Mr. Landals appears to be trying to calm jitters; however, any agreement is legally binding. Albertans might ask the question, "Does Willmore Wilderness Park need another layer of protectionism from an international partner?" The Willmore Wilderness Act is a unique piece of legislation and should be strengthened. Why get into bed with an international partner when we already have a special piece of legislation for Willmore? Some have suggested expanding the Willmore Wilderness Act to include the Kakwa Wildland Park. We need to ask what would be in the best interest of our grandchildren fifty years from now.

I was recently forwarded a copy of a document called, *"Global Overview of Mountain Protected Areas on the World Heritage List."*[1] I went through the 32-page document and found that there was NO mention of trapping or horse use on the World Heritage Sites listed. There was however ONE mention of hunting on page 14, which read**, "***Activities of residents within sites include commercial fishing, subsistence hunting and gathering, pastoralism and visitor service communities."* It is distressing to read that the World Heritage Sites mentioned, do NOT appear to acknowlege the activities of hunting and trapping.

The Aseniwuche Winewak or Rocky Mountain People and Mountain Métis have a proud history of GUIDING & OUTFITTING in both the Kakwa and Willmore area. I felt that the *Global Overview* document used a derogatory statement of ALLOWING SUBSISTENCE HUNTING in a patronizing way. The Willmore and Kakwa have a proud history of guiding, outfitting and trapping, which includes all Albertans. Trapping and hunting have successfully been used as wildlife managment tools.

After reading the *Global Overview*, one is left thinking that World Heritage Sites are based on a high level geographically-driven exercise, which totally ignores the local inhabitants and cultural history. Sadly this is an academic view of what is best for the "world." On page 9 of the document, they admit that they have paid honorariums to selected regional "experts" to identify our local wilderness areas and nominate them for "universal values." Let's stand up and make sure our local values prevail.

I recently met Syd Marty an author at a writer's conference and was expressing my concern over the fact that those in urban areas were pushing their hidden agenda on unsuspecting rural residents who live in this great province. Syd coined a phrase that still sticks with me to this day: **"It's an urban assault on rural Alberta."**

With an election coming in the spring, I am concerned that Mr. Landals may use the transition period to once again further his agenda with NO consultation. I would suggest that everyone get close to their MLAs and let them know what is happening before our eyes (or behind our backs). ***If you fool me once, shame on you. If you fool me twice, shame on me.***

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1 For copies of *"Global Overview of Mountain Protected Areas on the World Heritage List" call 780-827-2696*

TALES & TRAILS IN THE WILDERNESS - *Part 2*

Continued from Part 1 in the last Newsletter

Traveling Lighter

In 1967 we bought two saddle horses, Casey and Sandy. They came from southern Alberta. The first few trips out, they would shy at big rocks and stumps, and also have difficulty drinking from swift running streams. Casey was trained to be "ground tied", so when we stopped to let the horses feed along the trail, he just wanted to stay in one spot. After a few trips out and feeling hungry, he soon forgot about that earlier training. Later we bought another saddle horse Joe, but used him as a packhorse. Our plan was to travel faster, lighter and see more country. Joe was a pure white horse and the other two were bays. Joe had to be right behind the lead horse, so naturally I got to bring up the rear of our little string. Even as we acquired more horses, he still tried to maintain his position and I maintained mine.

To travel lighter we always packed along some dried food with our regular supplies of garlic sausage, onions, eggs and potatoes and, of course, we always took a fold-down fishing rod. The eggs were carefully packed in a plastic twelve-egg container with a few pieces of paper napkins tucked around the eggs. In all the miles over the years we traveled, we had very few broken eggs. That could have been because of the special packing job or just that we always had them on the smoothest horse. In earlier years cigarettes with a good supply of matches were always packed with great care that we would have enough to last our duration in the bush. We never packed lanterns, a power saw or some of the other stuff that some bigger outfits did. Candles were our only supply of light at nights. At first we tried a little pup tent but that only lasted a couple of trips. The tent was so small that when you got inside of it, you did not have room to even change your mind, never mind changing anything else. So we decided we would just travel with a chunk of clear plastic for our shelter. Good lightweight sleeping bags were a must.

On one trip at the end of June, we left Rock Lake early in the morning. It was drizzling rain. The longer we rode, the more it rained. Our yellow rain jackets sometimes seemed to be just as wet on the inside as they were on the outside. We traveled about eight miles up the Wild Hay River trail towards the Carson Creek cabin. The old log cabin had been used in coal exploration days. The log walls were still in good shape but the roof was rotting away from the weather and lack of repair. After about another three miles up the trail, we came to Thoreau Creek. Cabins could be seen in the distance but as it was still raining, we carried on towards the Eagle Nest Pass. At the Eagle Nest Creek, we stopped to let the horses have a drink. The cold, clear creek flows out of the Eagle Nest Pass. The Eagle Nest Pass is very scenic; the majestic Cathedral Mountain towers nearby. It was not much of a climb as we were proceeding west, but it can be a little tougher climb coming the opposite direction. Once we were through the Pass and down on the other side, we reached Rock Creek, which runs into Rock Lake. We traveled northwest up Rock Creek to the summit and finally reached an abandoned Ranger's Station, and the cabin door was not locked. We had ridden about twenty-eight miles that day with the rain not letting up. We checked the cabin out for packrats or whatever might have been in it and finally decided to put our sleeping bags down; light the old stove and proceeded to dry out while we cooked a hot meal. The next day it was still raining at times but we carried on down the trail towards the Sulphur River. It was not long before we came by an old Indian grave right beside the trail. The horses shied a little at the rotting logs that made up the grave shelter. On a closer look, an old skeleton was in the grave, the bones bleached white from the passing of time. What a peaceful resting place!

As we traveled about three or four miles down the trail, we came to Zenda Creek. There was a good campsite there but we had not traveled very many miles so did not stay there. We let the horses feed for a while on the lush grass and wild flowers. There was another old trapper's cabin near the campsite but it was in bad shape. The stench of packrats was overwhelming. So after a short break, we decided to put a few more miles in before calling it a day. There were two different trails down the Sulphur to the Big Grave. One was a trail through the bush, or you could head down the river. If the water was high, it was not a good trail to travel and meant you had to criss-cross in and out of the river, picking a trail. On this particular trip, we chose to go through the bush. The lead person and horse get the job of shaking off a good deal of water from the willows and brush as you head through the bush trail. Bringing up the rear of a string of horses can have its advantages at times like this.After traveling in the bush for a mile or so, we came to a creek that

was about five-to-six feet wide and one-and-a-half deep. This creek came to an end only about a half-mile or so and it was actually a big spring. After another hour of riding, we reached a big open meadow and came upon another grave, pretty well in the middle of the flat. This one is known as "Big Grave". There are only a few bones remaining; the skull did not appear to be there. It was quite a surprise to see how well the covered grave had weathered all the years out in the open, protecting the Indian buried there. No one had disturbed the grave marker, although some of the logs were starting to rot with the passing of time. A large meadow surrounded the grave and was a welcome stop for the horses to have a feed of grass, and a great time for us to stretch our legs. A Forest Ranger's cabin was nearby. This cabin looked to be in good shape and was locked. That particular day we did not see the Ranger.

We put up our plastic lean-to in the campground and before long had a fire going in front of it. The fishing was good and it was not long before we had enough for a good-sized supper. Nothing tasted better than freshly caught fish fried in butter. When you are out in the fresh mountain air, even a can of pork and beans and some fried bacon and onions can be a pretty tasty meal. It was not long before we settled down for the night, comfortable in the lean-to with the fire out front, and a belly full of fish washed down with strong black coffee. The rippling sound of the Sulphur River nearby had a very lulling effect.

A clear morning greeted us. The rain had quit and the night had been a crisp one. The water pail had a thin crust of ice on it. Our water pail was a canvas bag and surprisingly, held water well. Once it got wet, it held water and could be hung off a lower tree branch. It was always kept full and it was the last thing we packed when we left a camp. Once the fire was put out, the water pail was folded up and packed. That morning we headed out towards Rocky Pass. It was about a four-mile climb. There was an old slide area with trees ripped out. We traveled past a small lake, which was named Eric, before we reached Rocky Pass. The pass is well named. The horses picked their way carefully among the rocks as a breath-taking view greeted our eyes as we wound our way through the pass. Over years the trail changed some as flash floods gouged out rocks, and trees were blown down in the wind. Once we got through Rocky Pass, we came out to the west fork of the Muskeg River. After about three miles, there was a fork in the trail and we headed up the south fork of the Muskeg and over the summit to the north fork of the Berland. That evening found us camped at Persimmon Creek. The next day found us hitting the trail early and we decided to make our way back to Rock Lake. We traveled up the south fork of the Berland and climbed up the summit to the headwaters of the Wild Hay on the Bury Ridge, and back to Eagle's Nest. There are two trails to take; one is up on the ridge and the other one is down low but is muskeg most of the way. From Eagle's Nest we came back to Rock Lake via the river trail. It cuts off some miles but is a hard trail on the horses, as they had to pick their way in and out of the river. Coming that way cost extra time, so we seldom used that trail.

A story by Ethel Miller (deceased) printed by permission of her husband, Charlie Miller (since deceased in 2007). The story will be continued in succeeding issues of this newsletter.

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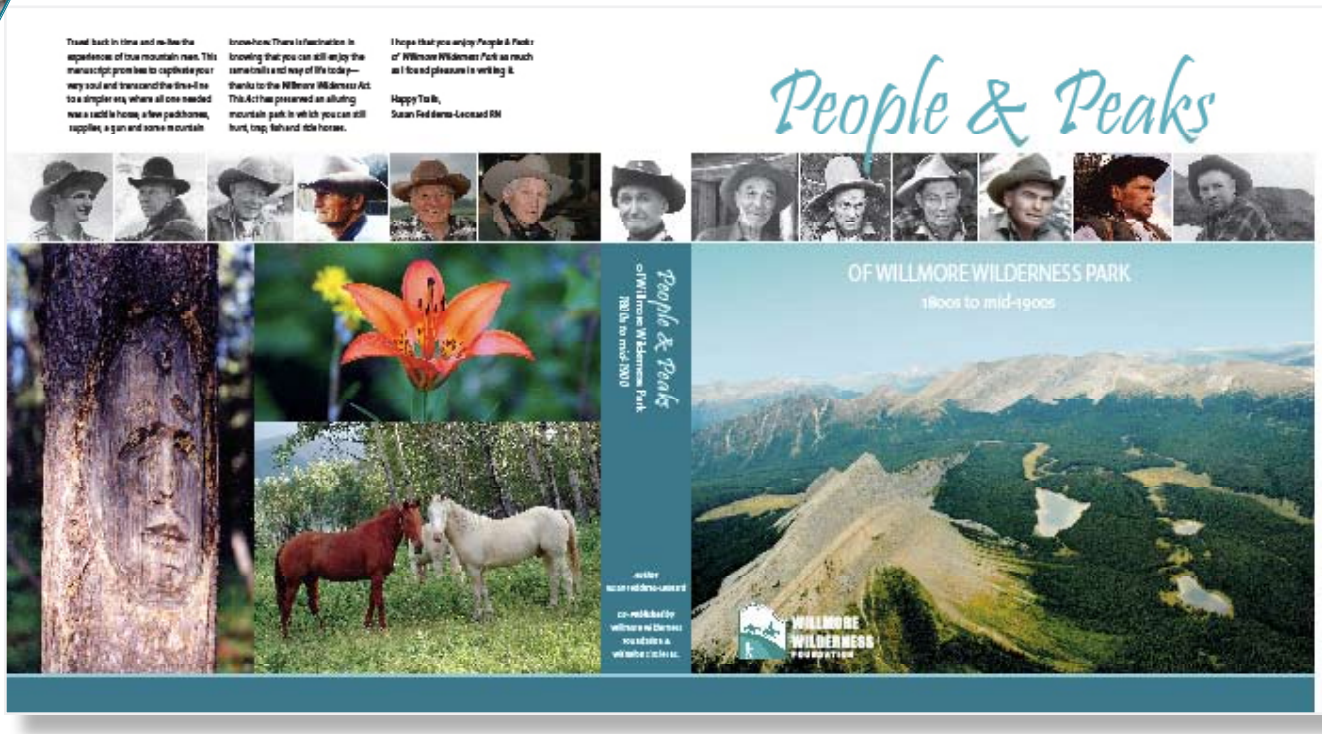

Lost Horses !

By Hilary Shannon

Willmore Wilderness is a special place to those who seek to escape the hustle and bustle of everyday life. Out there life becomes a little slower, a little more relaxed and, truly, makes you feel like you don't want to leave it.

I decided to head into Willmore leaving from the Rock Lake staging area with my packing partner. He was a rancher friend who took time off from haying to come along. My other cohorts were Bandit, a grey gelding who was a good packhorse and a smooth ride. Rolly a coloured buckskin was good at finding trails. Buzz my son's horse, a young dappled steel-grey with a bald face, had his faults as he tended to wander off the trail. Rose, a solid sorrel mare was a well-mannered packhorse that was raised and trained by Sue and Bazil Leonard. My other partner was my dog Pirate who walked every step with us and more.

All my senses came alive again when I entered Willmore. My ears were overwhelmed with the clatter of shoes hitting the rocks, and the jingle of hobbles banging against bells. The majestic masses of mountains seem to crawl toward us as we rode slowly, one hour at a time. Then the Rockies towered over us with awe-inspiring solidness. They seemed to invite us to climb them and rest in their shadows. The wild flowers along the trail were a spectacular cacophony of colour. The deep red of the Indian Paint Brush; the pale yellow of Columbine; the untamed purples and pinks of Fireweed, Elephant's head and Monkshood took my breath away. There were so many flowers that I couldn't name them all. My horse was solid beneath me, enjoying seeing new country, as he set a pace that would put walking to shame. However, we were all glad when it was time to make camp.

We had time to enjoy our spot after the horses were unpacked and camp was set up. It made me smile to watch the sight of our four, very different-coloured horses grazing. I listened to the wood crackling and watched the sparks fly as we started the fire. I smelled the wood smoke and the food cooking. We enjoyed the cool, clear water from the glacier-fed stream and savoured our meal in the wilderness.

Later that evening thunder and rain beat down on the tent, breaking the silence. I looked out the door to see our horses standing in the rain, looking miserable as the drizzle streamed down their backs. As I lay waiting to fall asleep, my heart beat to the rhythm of the creek running past camp.

Lying in the tent in the morning, I heard the dog barking and the lonely call of the wolf. They roused me from my slumber only to see the early morning light slowly illuminate the mountains—and for a brief second they seemed to glow. The damp morning mist rose off the creek and from our horses' backs as they dried. The heat, coming off the fire as breakfast cooked, was irresistible. I basked in the sun as

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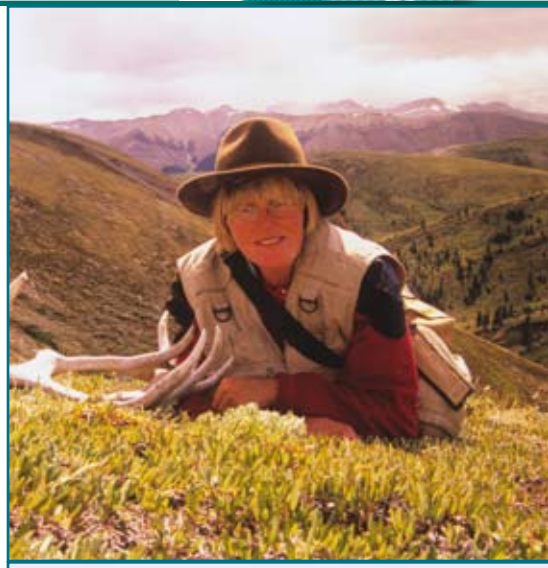


Photos by Hilary Shannon

Lost Horses

Continued from page 13

it slowly warmed my soul. It was a leisurely day as we packed up camp and headed out.

As we wandered along the trail that followed Rock Creek, we saw eight caribou cross the trail ahead of us. Then suddenly we were surprised by a team of Fiords pulling a wagon from Summit cabin. My horse was sure that the team pulling the tarp on wheels was out to get him and those were no relatives of his! We took time to say hello to the riders and continued on our way.

The next day we had opportunity to ride up high. Touching snow in July is the ultimate experience—to lay in it and make an angel is celestial. I could sense the ghosts of mountain men who had traveled before; who had stood on the peaks and surveyed the landscapes. Riding back down the mountain, I revelled in the feel of the horse beneath me. I loved how my chaps felt, cocooning my legs, protecting me from the brush that we had to ride through.

The following morning I stood in the creek and photographed the reflections of the mountains in the early morning light as it painted the landscape. My partner brought me breakfast while my dog kept me company. We packed up our horses and moved once more, to our final night's camp at the burn.

We had not moved far that day and were close to Summit cabin. We set up and went exploring behind our camp. We found a dancing noisy creek that followed the rugged trail up to the end of the canyon. We saw sheep so left our horses grazing and crawled up a mountain above us. Our horses were mere specks hobbled below us. We could see for miles and I asked myself, "Does life get any better than this?"

We rode back to camp and made dinner while the horses grazed. We had hobbled two and had two with halters on. I had a hankering to climb the hill covered with burned trees by our camp and my traveling partner came with me. We looked at each other and thought about tying horses—then made a big mistake. We should have known better—and have been told many times since, that a skinny horse tied up is better than a fat horse lost. This fact was etched on my brain after my adventure; I would never again leave horses loose unless I was right next to them. Oh yes, I would never trust a horse!

We went up the hill—another good climb— and I took photos of huge burned trees, their limbs ghostly in the evening light. We watched the clouds and breathed the fresh air on the hillside, enjoying our last night in the mountains.

We arrived back at camp, to silence…….no bells and no horses. My heart was in my throat, "How could we have been so stupid?" I thought. The water running down the creek seemed to mask any sounds of bells we might hear as we searched up the trail. Walking up the rough trail, we found a hind shoe from my big grey packhorse and a halter off my riding horse. It was like the horses had gone up in smoke. Dusk was setting in as we hiked down to the end of the canyon, expecting to find the runaway horses around every bend. As the light disappeared, we followed our flashlight beams through the darkness, which was so complete that without the glow of our lights we could easily have lost the trail. It was certainly a gloomy moment. We wondered what had possessed us to head up that hill and leave horses loose. That night we went to bed hopeful that they would be back in the morning.

Next morning we could only hear the sounds of the creek as we got up and started moving. We had breakfast and went up the canyon again to look for the runaways. My packing partner had been kind enough to abandon haying to come out with me and now needed to get back to his ranch. I had provided all the horses and food, and put together the outfit. He had come along to keep me company, help me pack and keep my 83-year-old mother from worrying. So after scouring the hillsides and trail for sign of horses, we dragged our feet and weary hearts back to pack up camp and head out, sixteen more miles. I made up posters and put them on trees on the way out, describing the fugitives. We had our holiday, now the four horses were on theirs. My partner had a hard time believing that I was not in hysterics. My horses are

tough, mountain raised and bred. I knew that they could look out for themselves. (The runaway bastards!)

It was a long hike, for two people who had planned to ride. We had good hiking socks and we changed them every hour, to keep our feet dry—and there were many creek crossings. Putting in one toe, then my whole foot, then walking in the icy, glacier-fed streams, and feeling the rocks beneath my feet as they turned blue is like no other feeling in the world. It was refreshing to say the least.

It was funny, we were still laughing and talking to each other. I was happy and grateful I had two feet to walk on and that we were both fit enough to walk. I was grateful for the beautiful day. I do admit to asking Don how much my mother paid him to come with me. He said not enough, and I told him I was going to tell her it was too much. Laughter was great medicine.

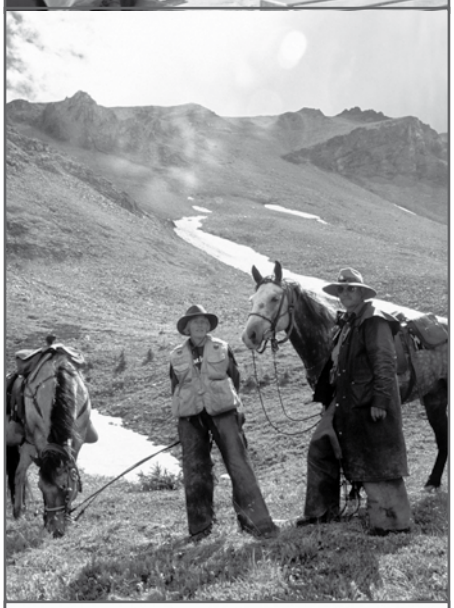
We thought the horses might head back to the parking lot and we might be lucky enough to find them along the trail—but no sign of horse, nor the sweet sound of bells. We hit the parking lot at 10 p.m. and headed home to the Black Cat Ranch. The next morning my packing partner headed home to hay and I made phone calls. I contacted outfitters, the RCMP, Parks Canada, and some friends that said they might ride back there with me.

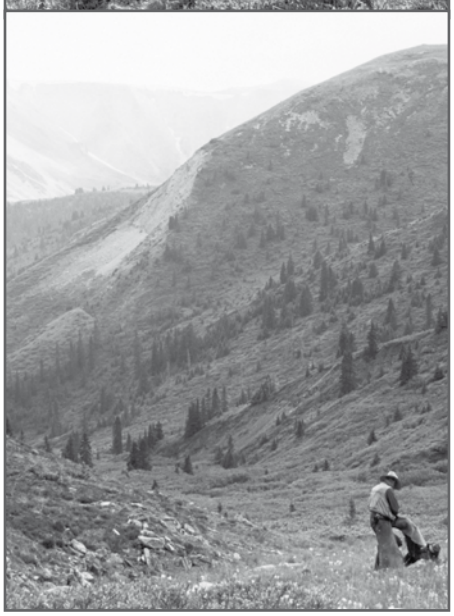
I ended up flying in a plane over Willmore, which made me realize the vastness and the incredible wildness of the area. I saw braided streams meandering through the valleys, and sheep and moose recognizable by their shadows. I loved seeing the craggy mountain peaks. I saw other people's horses, dwarfed by the landscape, looking like caterpillars. I saw friends below wave at me from their camp. I thought as we flew over: there is so much left to explore.

To make a long story short, my horses were found twelve days later on top of a mountain, all looking fine. With the help of friends, I rode up to Eagle's Nest and brought the horses back to my ranch. When I talked to people about losing horses, they shared their stories of lost horses. I was not alone—but at least I got my horses back. It had been lonely looking out our window on the home place ranch without my beloved horses.

I had the best holiday ever, which fed my spirit. I gained more appreciation for life, laughed at myself, developed blisters and wore out a pair of boots. I appreciated the trip and learned a lesson. I think I wore out my packing partner, so if you would like to apply, I promise to never let my horses out of my sight. Would I go back to Willmore? In a heartbeat! But I have learned my lesson: never, ever trust a horse with freedom.

I would just like to thank everyone who took time to help me out: look for horses, fly me around and give me moral support when I was missing my darned horses. Thanks for being good friends.





Photos by Hilary Shannon

Earth Changes

By Susan Feddema-Leonard

Caribou taken near the Huckleberry Tower Road on Highway 40.

Photo by Susan Feddema-Leonard

Lack of burning has also affected all the game population, including the caribou. Natives and early mountain men traditionally burned the major river valleys each spring—that is, before governments took over managing the eastern slopes. With a no-burn policy, it didn't take long before the country grew up with buck brush and willows. The wolves hid and easily picked off the ungulates' young.

Mac Elder worked as a packer and guide for a ten-year period in and around Willmore Wilderness from 1947 to 1956. He left the outfitting industry to become a Jasper Park Warden. Mac, like his peers in the Service, was already a competent trail man before he hired on with Parks Canada. He was one of the last of an era of highly skilled 'mountain men' who only needed a 'little polishing' when employed by the Wardens Service. His trail experience put him in good stead to make 'common sense' decisions when he served the Canadian Parks Services for the next thirty-four years. I recently interviewed Mac on September 16, 2007 during the Jasper Centennial. I was very interested in hearing his perspective regarding the disappearing caribou, moose, and his opinion with respect to earth changes on the eastern slopes.

I was curious about the plight of the caribou, as it has become an extremely 'political animal.' Mac had lived and traveled with the caribou more than half a century ago—and had tried to do something about the diminishing caribou problem years ago. "The caribou were in trouble the first day they built the Hinton Pulp Mill in the late 1940s," Elder stated. "The caribou were on the Snake Indian River, from the Hardscrabble and Sulphur Rivers. They came out of the Smoky Watershed through Glacier Pass to the Mud Creek Licks near Willow Creek. Willow Creek was a wintering area for large herds of elk and horses, but its lush grasslands have been taken over by willows. The brush reaches higher than a horse now and the grass does not grow. The caribou migration came out of Blue Creek and Little Heaven Summit. The herd would congregate around the licks in December then migrate on through to Rock Lake."

Outfitter Bazil Leonard also witnessed caribou migrations in Willmore Wilderness Park. During his years of operating hunting trips in the Big Graves area he witnessed caribou migrating up and over Rocky Pass and down the Muskeg River to their winter range. The herd was moving into lower country for the winter. Leonard observed groups of approximately twenty-five to thirty head of caribou during this 1970s period.

In the 1950s Elder stated, "During the winter months I witnessed approximately one hundred and fifty caribou migrating east out of Jasper Park—coming through to Moberly Creek, the Little Berland and Big Berland Rivers. They went on to the Simonette Region. This whole eastern slope was their winter range. A road was put into the area in 1948 when the oil and gas industry drilled their first well at Teepee Creek. This newly developed country created highways for both hunters and wolves. A ploughed road makes a good road for the wolf packs."

Lack of burning has also affected all the game population, including the caribou. Natives and early mountain men traditionally burned the major river valleys each spring—that is, before governments took over managing the eastern slopes. With

a no-burn policy, it didn't take long before the country grew up with buck brush and willows. The wolves hid and easily picked off the ungulates' young. Rock Creek was overgrown with willows; however a recent fire has given some reprieve. Future burns in this area would be beneficial for the game populations.

Elder outlined that historically there was an abundance of moose—and there were two areas that they called the Moose Farm. One area, which was rich with a large moose population was between Rock Lake and Willow Creek. The once-succulent willows have turned to a thick, coarse growth, which is higher than horses, and that the moose rarely eat. This type of encroachment has taken over many of the mountain valleys. "There are not very many moose anymore—at least not like it used to be in the 1940s and 1950s," stated Mac. "Today, you are lucky to see a moose!" Elder notes that there was also another place called Moose Farm between Mile 59 and Little Graves Flats.

Mac Elder shared a story about Bob Jones a former Jasper Park Warden in the Blue Creek area for a twelve-to-thirteen year period, around 1939 to approximately 1954. "Bob said that one could walk on the snowy trail without snowshoes due to the caribou traffic at that time. The caribou made a good trail to travel on."

Elder continued, "I don't think there is anything that you could do about the caribou. You couldn't stop all the drilling on the eastern slopes. It's unstoppable. They made the country considerably smaller for the caribou. Once they opened up the eastern slopes, the caribou were cleaned out—some by wolves and some by hunters. There is no solution. The environmentalists are 'spitting in the wind' with their constant cries of trying to save the caribou. It's just too little, too late."

Elder believes that the caribou problem is a headless monster. "It's a done deal, like the buffalo—its part of the cycle of life. It is too late to curb the dwindling populations, as you need a large gene pool to get a good caribou herd. A few of the species, here and there, is not enough to make this happen."

Mac continued, "The elk were brought into Jasper in the 1920s by railroad. There were natural herds of the ungulates on the Brazeau and Southesk country, Beaver Hills and Pincher Creek. There were no elk north of Highway 16. National Parks brought a couple of stock cars of elk from Jackson Hole, Wyoming and led them to Cottonwood Creek in the town site of Jasper. There were between fifty-eight and sixty in the herd and they were eased out of that area. Prior to this, National Parks of Canada had introduced a small herd of elk to Banff. There was a heated debate at that time by the Parks officials to determine if the elk were indigenous to the mountain region or not. The fur trade had disrupted the balance of the wildlife populations in the major river drainages. No one knew for sure, and there was no proof that there was a historic elk population in the mountain region."

"It took quite a few years more before the elk went as far as the Smoky River," Mac stated. "The bulls migrated first—they like to travel. The elk were localized near Jasper for a while and then they dispersed and went everywhere. In 1953 they migrated over Cairn Pass and mixed with the native elk of the Brazeau area. By 1955 they were pretty continuous and had intermingled with the Brazeau herd."

Emil Moberly is a Victor Lake trapper and guide. Emil's great-grandfather was Henry J. Moberly who was the chief factor of the Hudson's Bay Company in charge of Jasper House in the early 1860s. Emil's father Adolphus Moberly was evicted from Jasper when the Canadian Federal Government passed an '*Order in Council*' for the creation of Jasper Forest Park. Emil stated, "1948 was the first time I ever saw an elk in this country. It was at Mile 119, which is one hundred and nineteen miles on the railway line north of Hinton—at the Wanyandies' home place. That year, Louis Delorme[1] was hunting on the north side of the Smoky River at Corral Creek. He heard something and he didn't know what it was. The next day he went hunting and he heard something again. He wanted

1 Louis Delorme was an original descendant of Jasper. He relocated to the Grande Cache area after he was evicted from Jasper in 1907.

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Earth Changes Continued

Continued on from page 17

to see what the noise was. At first he thought the wild studs were fighting, because they had a lot of horses. Finally he saw the elk. That's the first time—in 1948—that the elk came up here. Henry Joachim[2] had never seen the elk before, either." Emil Moberly, Henry Joachim and Louis Delorme lived most of their lives in a traditional lifestyle, hunting, trapping and guiding, as Grande Cache remained a wilderness area until a coal mine was developed in 1969.

Moberly continued, "And whitetail *(deer)*—it was 1952 the first time they came up in here. I was living at Victor Lake *(near Grande Cache).* The deer were on the side hills and it was springtime. It was well before the leaves came out, and there was deer there. They were funny looking. My brother Joe lived there as well. I got Joe and we went out to track them. The tracks weren't too far from the house. We saw a long-tailed deer. We couldn't figure out what the heck they were. We looked and looked at them. We figured that they were half mule *(deer)."*

Mac Elder stated, "Now the elk are everywhere. They follow the big horn sheep on the sheep range and the horses on the horse range. They pushed the caribou out and overgrazed the country. Jasper Park did an elk slaughter around the town site, in the early 1950s. The Park Wardens took a small number of elk and gave them to aboriginal families. It was a lot of work to field dress an elk and it was a very slow process. It wasn't until they got more mechanized around 1969 to 1971 that more elk were taken. The elk certainly had an effect on the caribou populations, but not as much as the pulp mill. The cumulative effect of roads, industry, hunting, wolves and the introduction of elk have all had an effect. There is also a reduction of natural timber due to logging. The traffic and machines definitely disturb the caribou herds."

Elder confirmed Moberly's observation stating, "The whitetail deer arrived in this country in the 1950s." Retired Willmore Wilderness outfitter, Glen Kilgour agrees with these two trail men. He stated, "In 1952 I saw the first whitetail deer and in 1948, the first elk were seen in the Willmore country. One time the authorities wrote me and asked if I had ever seen any caribou in the Sheep Creek area. I wrote back and told them that I had seen quite a bunch of caribou up there—up to one hundred and twenty on one ridge. The caribou would come out of British Columbia and climb a ridge there at the headwaters of the Sheep."

Elder stated, "The caribou were at Coffin Top (Casket Mountain), Gunsight Pass, Sheep Creek and traveled all over. They were the same bunch that went east to Ptarmigan Lake, up Hardscrabble Pass, up to Winifred Lakes, up Rockslide Creek and migrated east to Snake Indian River, Rock Lake and back to the Simmonette Region." Mac Elder stated, "The caribou ran all over the country in the summer and fall. We used to say that they were going

2. Henry Joachim was an original descendant of Jasper. He relocated to the Grande Cache area after he was evicted from Jasper in 1907.

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Caribou on Gunsight Pass. The backside of Mt. deVeber is seen in the background. The picture was taken by Ishbel (Hargreaves) Cochrane on a 1942 hunt. This area is close to their camp at Donald McDonald Meadows at the headwaters of Morkill River.

Photo Courtesy of Ishbel Cochrane

some place or they were coming back from somewhere. Caribou don't stay still—they like to ramble. They are not a localized animal like the moose. They would start the migration in December or January. I used to see them migrating when I worked for the Parks Warden Service."

Mac acknowledged that, "In the 1940s and 1950s there were between 150 to 200 caribou that migrated outside of the northeast side of Jasper National Park during the fall and early winter. They migrated to their wintering areas on Moberly Creek, the Big and Little Berland watersheds and over to the Simonette region. The mountain caribou, a sub-species, preferred to winter in old growth and mature forests where lichens grow. This was one of their favourite winter foods. This herd of caribou has been in steady decline since the late 1940s and early 1950s. The impact of the roads and especially the snow-ploughed roads, as well as the logging of the habitat—a reduction of their winter range—have had a very serious effect on the decline of the Caribou in Jasper National Park and the Willmore Wilderness area."

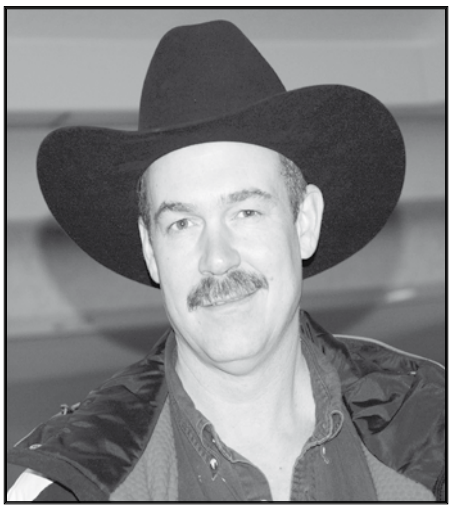
Societal evolution parallels animal population patterns. Emil Moberly, along with the Rocky Mountain People or Aseniwuche Winewak, the Metis, other mountain men, trappers, guide and outfitters freely roamed the eastern slopes—that is, until 1969 when a coal mine was developed on the Smoky River near Grande Cache. These people have been forced to move aside to allow industry and modern civilization to take hold of their once traditional land base. Fortunately, they have one place left in which to find refuge in their traditional wilderness—and that is in Willmore Wilderness Park, which has been protected under the Willmore Wilderness Act. This Act allows the traditions of hunting, trapping and horse use for all Albertans.

Change is the constant. Just like with the caribou and other creatures, man is subject to this universal law. There has been a passionate outcry regarding the plight of the caribou and disruption from industry encroaching on their traditional habitat. Yet the tearing apart of the social fabric of aboriginal and mountain community has gone completely unnoticed. These people possess old-time knowledge, which could provide scientists with a complete picture of the biodiversity of this mountain region. Yet these earth people have been virtually ignored—and run over in the mad dash we call 'modern civilization.'

We need to recognize that the earth is a living organism and all its creatures, including man, have a place in the ecosystem. The caribou, moose, deer and elk are all part of the earth's cycle. The caribou populations are bound to change—just like the buffalo that once abundantly roamed the eastern slopes. The elk and whitetail have come to take their place. Earth changes are inevitable for both man and beast alike.

Willmore Wanderings

By Mark Engstrom



Mark Engstrom 2007
Photo by Susan Feddema-Leonard

One of the wonders of the Willmore Wilderness is its mountain goat population. These sure-footed ungulates inhabit some of the most rugged terrain in the Park. There are an estimated 2400 goats in Alberta: 1650 on provincial lands and the remainder in National Parks. About half the goats on provincial lands reside in the Willmore.

The Mountain Goat (Oreamnos Americanus) is not actually a true goat; it belongs to its own separate genus. It is a magnificent animal to look at, with its dense white coat, which is often stained yellow, contrasting with black hooves, horns and eyes. They live at moderate-to-high elevations in steep terrain, often dominated by cliffs. They are capable climbers and use cliffs as an escape from predators.

A limited mountain goat hunt is currently in place in Alberta. Eight special draw licences are available, in a lottery type draw. One tag is issued in each of three zones located in southern Alberta and five zones in the Willmore Wilderness. The chances of getting drawn for this prized draw are about 0.2%. Unbelievably, two people I know got drawn for the 2007 season. I begged to go along on both hunts and got my wish.

The first to find out he was drawn was my friend Yoeme (aka Larry Garrett). When he phoned and told me he got drawn, I was sure he was telling me one of his many stories. It took me getting his drivers licence number and WIN number, and getting my sister to check online (I was driving home from work), and getting confirmation from her that he was in fact drawn, before I believed him. He only had a couple weeks to prepare for the hunt, which was a monumental undertaking as he was working in southern Saskatchewan. He had to find a replacement for work, round up his horses and gear, and get ready for a hunt, which can be one of the most physically demanding hunts there is.

He managed to arrange everything, and arrived a couple days before the season opened. His nephew Jason came along for the trip. Jason had guided for goats in BC before and proved to be a great spotter and judge of goats on the trip. The area Yoeme was drawn in was a three-day horseback ride into the Willmore. We spent a total of eleven days on the hunt; seven of those were spent riding. After the long ride in, we spent a day spotting. The next day we donned our packs and climbed a rather large mountain. We spotted a good goat, made a game plan, and went after him. He ended up with a couple other smaller billies, and was headed over a mountain when we caught up with them. The long climb and final approach up a sixty-degree slope may have been too much. Yoeme missed the decidedly large billy goat cleanly, and it disappeared over the mountain. It was now late in the day, and we headed down the mountain. Yoeme was clearly dejected and more than a little upset with himself for missing the shot.

The next day we had to head back and move our main camp to our current camp. This took most of the day. We had just finished unpacking and having supper when Jason spotted a lone goat on a high ridge above us. I watched Yoeme start to get ready to go after him, and after a bit I said to him "I'll go up there with you". As soon as I said it, he was raring to go. We took off and climbed that ridge in an hour and a half. We must have picked the right route up, because once we topped the first cliff and scrambled across a very steep drainage, we came out right on top of the goat. Yoeme made no mistake this time, and a few minutes later we were admiring an Alberta mountain goat up close. We dressed the goat and headed down to camp, arriving back in the dark with my buddy's trophy of a lifetime.

The second person to find out was an acquaintance from Grande Cache, Deb Busson. I had met her and her husband Jean-Marc at a couple of Willmore

Foundation and Ducks Unlimited banquets, and also while Deb was out elk hunting last fall. Both of them put a great deal of preparation into Deb's goat hunt. With a three-month-old son, she had a lot to consider and plan for. Prior to the hunt, Jean-Marc and I spent five days in the area she was drawn in. We had picked out a good mountain with lots of goats, and packed out and cached some supplies for the upcoming hunt.

Deb had arranged for her mom to come and take care of the baby and her two older daughters. Once her mom arrived, Deb, Jean-Marc and I were on our way. After a full day's ride, we arrived and set up camp. Little did I know I was about to take part in one of the hardest hunts I've ever been on.

We rode two hours from camp and spotted the mountain where Jean-Marc and I had previously located the goats, and at two o'clock in the afternoon, we had picked out a lone goat with good horn length. As it was late in the day, we hummed and hawed about going after it, but our excitement got the best of us and up the mountain we headed. We left the horses in the meadow we were spotting from, one tied and the rest loose, feeding. The mountain was incredibly steep, especially with our backpacks on. Three hours later, and after passing several nannies with their kids, we crested the last hill to where we had spotted the goat we were after. There it was! Deb set up, and fired. Nothing—clean miss. The goat started moving up the hill towards the cliffs above us. Deb fired a couple more shots, but the excitement must have been getting to her as she missed again. She finally settled down and seemed sure of herself. The goat was now on top of the cliff above us, and it was her last chance. She steadied herself, and boom! Finally the goat dropped. We watched in silence as the goat disappeared from sight above us, and then watched in amazement as it tumbled off the cliff and into the next drainage from us. Deb got her goat!

We traversed the steep hill and found the goat. A beautiful goat and a great trophy, one I'm sure Deb will always treasure. After a few quick pictures, we caped and de-boned the goat and loaded it into our packs. Jean-Marc and I each had eighty pounds in our packs. We headed down the mountain—by now it was dark. We were walking down a creek; we couldn't chance walking in the trees or grass on this steep of a mountain in the dark, for fear of losing our footing. As the light failed, we would throw rocks ahead and listen for the sound to see how bad the drop-offs in the creek were. Jean-Marc told it best:

"At midnight we arrived at a cliff in the creek, which from what we could see was impassable. One more rock throw and about a five second delay before it made contact with the ground; this one we could not chance. The legs were weary and we could not see well enough, and the risk of someone getting hurt was too great. We quickly decided it was time to hunker down and try to find some wood for a fire. What a challenge in the dark. We exited the creek and got into the short trees, rummaged around using Mark's lighter for light and managed to get a small fire going. We were on a steep slope with a tiny fire; we could see the lights of Grande Cache off in the distance. Things didn't seem too bad until it started snowing. It snowed for roughly two hours, and then changed to rain. Deb seemed to be sleeping but Mark and I were afraid to close our eyes for fear of developing hypothermia. Mark managed to find an old stump a few meters up the hill and built a fire under it with the remaining dry firewood. At about 3:00 a.m. the only thing left to burn were green, fir branches that gave us intense heat for five minutes at a time. Mark would break them off and toss them down to me and I would put them on the fire, which constantly rolled downhill on the steep slope. There was very little conversation. I was thinking back on the years I have spent hunting; and

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Top: Deb and Jean-Marc Busson. Deb with her goat in Willmore in Oct. 07.

Bottom: Yoeme spotting his goat.

Both photos by Marc Engstrom.

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Yoeme's Goat Trip in 2007.
Photo by MarK Engstrom.

Willmore Wanderings continued...

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how a situation like this was bound to happen sooner or later; and how easily it could have been avoided; when Mark looked at me and said, "Boy this is fun!" Somehow we did make it to daylight, traversed into the next drainage. Three hours later we were down off the mountain and back to the horses, only to discover that my horse had grown impatient with us and had headed back to camp. Needless to say I was not overly impressed with the additional two-hour walk that was ahead of me carrying my horse's bridle!"

We spent a couple days in camp after the hunt, relaxing, before heading home. It will be a trip I will always remember. I loved the hunt, but the best thing about it was Jean-Marc and Deb went from being acquaintances to being good friends.

Editor's Note: Mark Engstrom is on the Board of Directors of the Willmore Wilderness Foundation.

Presidents Report -

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was untouched and the view is still magnificent. The bad news is that there is a two-hour ride through the blackened timber to get to the glacial fed lake.

The Foundation was fortunate to have received funding called a Skills Link Grant to train two young ladies to work in the Willmore Wilderness Foundation office. Estella Cheverie and Susan Feddema-Leonard will train the women, who will be on a one-year work experience. Heather Devoe has been hired and the second position is presently being advertised.

We certainly hope to see everyone out to our fundraising conventions this year. You will be pleased to see a short documentary film of our summer trail clearing expedition between Big Graves and Little Graves. Out staff has mastered the Adobe Production Suite and we have acquired video editing hardware. We hope to create television standard productions to educate the public on Willmore Wilderness Park. We want to share the traditions of hunting, trapping and horse use with the television viewers.

Last but not least, please make a point to mark your calendars and come out to our Conventions. We need your support.

Happy Trails, Bazil Leonard