

BOOK REVIEW - 1996

By Yorke Edwards, now retired, worked successively as wildlife biologist, park interpreter, wildlife interpreter, and museum director. He has been writing about natural history for over 50 years.

TITLE: Nature Wells Gray: Volcanoes, Waterfalls, Wildlife, Trails and More

By Trevor Goward and Cathie Hickson. Lone Pine Publishing, Edmonton, Alberta and The Friends of Wells Gray Park, Box 1386, Kamloops, British Columbia. 1996. 224 pages, second (expanded) edition, soft cover, \$14.95 Canada.

This is an unusual and well crafted book. It has two roles, one as a guide for exploring a large park, another as a rich collection of information about its wild wonders. The authors are a biologist and a geologist, both well-known experts and both good at writing for those less expert. The result is a book of many virtues, two of which are found throughout: an open door to the power and beauty of a very special place, and much detail about what the park's landscapes communicate to knowing eyes.

Because I have been there many times, I am biased in my enthusiasm for Wells Gray Park, but I am also humbled by this book. While reading it, I wished I could have had the book's insights when, years ago, I enjoyed parts of Wells Gray as a naturalist and wildlife biologist. Back then I saw much, while understanding little; I still have good memories of the park's rocky diversity and its rich flora and fauna.

The authors divide the book into four parts. Part One is an outline of the natural history of the park: an interesting march through the basics of local geology, plants, and animals.

Part Two, which makes up half of the book, features the much-visited Clearwater Valley and its surrounding mountainous heights. This section is about access roads and trails: how to get to them and what to look for when you explore. Here, as elsewhere throughout this book, the texts read well at home; the many highlights hold the reader's attention in a sort of mental trip while sitting in a chair near the fire.

Part Three is about the park's major lakes, a new feature in this expanded edition of the book. The expansion has meant more text, more photographs, and maps that are more detailed throughout the book. Scattered through this section, as elsewhere in the book, there are brief essays framed for the reader's instant recognition. They are mostly about the wild lives that are at home in the park. One is a story of loons on Murtle Lake in which two sentences had me remembering earlier years. "*All summer long Murtle Lake ripples with loon music. During June and July the music has mostly to do with defining and maintaining breeding territories; maniacal yodels and falsetto wails are common refrains* (p. 172)."

Part Four is different and quite unusual. Not many naturalists in British Columbia have written about nature in cold and snowy winters. Here are 29 pages crammed with information about winter trails, icy waterfalls, moose, birds and their nests, trees, weather, snow, caribou, shrews, rodents, deer, weasels, rabbits, insects, the Wells Gray Christmas Bird Count, and more. I left out wolves because there are some especially good words about them: *“Much has been written about the howling of wolves, but none of it is likely to prepare you for the experience of actually hearing wolf music for the first time. Or even the hundredth time (p. 208).”* Late February to mid-March is recommended as the best time for wolf watching (or listening) in Wells Gray Park.

If the above review has not moved you to plan a trip up the Clearwater Valley, I have saved some good bait to move you more. The valley has been a hot spot; don't miss its volcanoes and lava flows.