

Friends of Black Mountain Sntsk'il'nten Regional Park

September 2016 Newsletter



In search of badgers but finding only spear grass.



View from the Tower Ranch end of park

Spear Grass

Mid-August is not the time to go wandering in the grasslands of Black Mountain. Take it from me! This grass will hook into your socks and shoes and like a fish hook it takes time to remove. I spent an hour picking spear grass out of my socks and shoes after a walk in the grasslands of Black Mountain. It's like several needles pushing into your feet and I found myself constantly stopping to remove a few that made walking painful. The person best prepared for the walk was Glen

who had on gaiters which did not seem to pick up the nasty little barbs. It goes without saying that dogs with their furry bodies are perfect carriers of these grasses and can embed into the dog's body. After plucking out the barbs from my shoes and socks, I noticed a number of little black seeds all ready to embed into new soil to spread their ruthless offspring wherever they can get a foot hold. Be warned!



http://i.embed.ly/1/image/Resize?key=92b31102528511e1a2ec4040d3dc5c07&width=1560&grow=true&url=http://farm4.staticflickr.com/3030/3092570094_0d99f915e1_z.jpg

The American Badger – *Taxidea taxus*

by C. Millar

‘Once well underground,” he (Mole) said, ‘you know exactly where you are. Nothing can happen to you, and nothing can get at you. You’re entirely your own master, and you don’t have to consult anybody or mind what they say. Things go on all the same overhead, and you let’em, and don’t bother about ‘em. When you want to, up you go, and there the things are, waiting for you.’

The Badger simply beamed on him. ‘That’s exactly what I say,’ he replied. ‘There’s no security, or peace and tranquillity, except underground.’ (1 The Wind in the Willows p. 75)

Both moles and badgers are hole diggers, but with their powerful front claws, badgers cannot be beaten. Badgers “can excavate a tunnel faster than a man can dig a ditch of the same length...When burrowing, badgers loosen soil with the curved fore claws and send it flying with the shovel-like hind claws.” (2 The Wonder of Badgers) Grasslands provide the perfect habitat for digging and also for providing homes for the ground squirrels and marmots that badgers prefer to prey upon.

It is no wonder Mole was impressed by the extensive tunnel network, of Badger. Badger tunnels or setts “all have the same features: a long entrance tunnel with an eight to twelve-inch elliptical opening, a breeding chamber, and a safety area to which the female can flee if her burrow is invaded.” (2 The Wonder of Badgers) The American Badger often digs multiple setts and some are as long as 30 feet in length.

Badgers are solitary creatures and nocturnal, but if you are lucky, you may spot a badger or even a sett that has evidence of occupation. They are red listed, that is a species at risk, so finding one is unusual. Estimates are that there are fewer than 250 badgers existing in the Okanagan Valley and Cariboo Region.

Therefore, when Ron Lancour had a very unsettling encounter with a badger on July 26th of this year, it was both unusual and surprising that it happened at all in broad daylight.

“Outdoorsman Ron Lancour was alone in his boat on Sheridan Lake near 100 Mile House. Enjoying a peaceful day fishing, a full-grown badger suddenly jumped on board.

“He was telling me to get out of that boat, because he was coming in there. I guess he was tired of swimming,” Lancour said.

“I grabbed my net. With the handle I tried to poke him back into the water, but he was gaining ground on me.”

Lancour said he then fought off the badger three more times with a wooden oar before he was able to push it back into the lake.

But the persistent badger then jumped back in the boat from a different side, and Lancour had to fight it off again.

“I knew that I had to stun him somehow. I certainly didn't want to hit him across the head and kill him — they are a protected species in B.C.,” he said.

Lancour says he finally managed to escape for good by speeding away from the animal.” (3 CBC Radio)

Ron had worked with wild animals and knew that you should not mess with badgers. Badger jaws “are exceptionally powerful...the lower jaw is so hinged that the skull must be fractured before it can be dislocated.” (2 The Wonder of Badgers)

It may be surprising then that female badgers or sows, are very gentle and caring of their kits. The males or boars, wash their hands of any care giving, but the females create little dens in the setts with “grass lined bedding chambers” which they fastidiously clean. For 10 to 12 weeks the mothers look after the young and carry them with their teeth if they need to move – which they frequently do. (4 Badger: Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection)

What do these formidable animals eat? Their diet consists mainly of: “burrowing animals such as ground squirrels, pocket gophers and marmots, but also includes animals that take refuge in burrows including snakes, rabbits and chipmunks.” (5 Ministry of the Environment)

Badgers are survivors. During the winter months when food is scarce, they stay quietly in their warm setts and go into a “mild torpor... to slow their heart rates and body temperature.” (4 Badger: Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection) Despite their reduction in numbers due to habitat loss, rodent control programs

(poisoning) and highway kills, there have been sightings in the Kelowna area this year including on Black Mountain.

Perhaps badgers are survivors as Kenneth Grahame prophetically wrote in 1906. In the words of Badger, “But we remain. There were badgers here, I’ve been told, long before that same city ever came to be. And now there are badgers here again. We are an enduring lot, and we may move out for a time, but we wait, and are patient, and back we come. And so it will ever be.” (1 *The Wind in the Willows*, p. 78)

If you do spot a badger or evidence of activity in front of a badger den, you should try to photograph it and report it to the Ministry of the Environment at 1-888-223-4376 or www.badgers.bc.ca

Footnotes:

1. *The Wind in the Willows*; Grahame, Kenneth. Charles Scribner’s Sons, New York. 1961
2. *Wonders of Badgers*; Lavine, Sigmund A. Penguin Publishing Group, 1985. ISBN 0396085814
3. *With files from Brady Strachan and Maryse Zeidler* CBC, July 26, 2016
4. Badger; Ministry of Water, Land and Air Protection, 2002.<http://wlapwww.gov.bc.ca/wld>
5. Ministry of Environment - Okanagan Region - Badger
www.env.gov.bc.ca/okanagan/esd/atlas/species/badger.html



http://www.earthrangers.com/content/wildwire/american_badger_walking.jpg

Notice the black ‘badges’ on its cheeks – hence its name.

A Brief History of the Park

Information from Ian Pooley and RDCO

*First Nations habitation of Black Mountain or Sntsk'il'nten goes back centuries. Sntsk'il'nten means "place where flint is found" and was a prime spot for gathering material for and fashioning stone tools. It is speculated that an isolated crop of rhyolite may be the mineral source used for these tools.

*1860 was the beginning of francophones use of the park. Ranching was the prime occupation of settlers in what is now parkland as it has extensive grasslands and creeks running through it.

*1893 saw the beginnings of ranching in the park area by Daniel Prather. He was the first to use irrigation here. Other endeavours in the park included logging and gold panning. Colin Keith Lee Pyman, along with help from a cousin, had an early horse ranch on the west side of the park. Although somewhat dilapidated, the log farm house can still be seen in its prime location. Four American families settled on or near Black Mountain in 1893: Oliver Bruce Prather, Jeremiah Clark, John McClure, and Prior Brown, and three years later, John McClure's brother James.



*From 1909 to 1920 various irrigation projects were introduced. The Belgo Canadian Fruitlands irrigation ditches marked both success and failure: the big ditch, although inefficient, successfully carried water to the new orchards in the Belgo area, but the projected extension to Rutland was a failure, and although the right of way was prepared, the ditch was never completed, and never carried water.



*1920's – 1950's, Preston Ski Hill which was in Joe Rich was relocated to the bowl of Black Mountain after WW1 as a result of gasoline rationing as it was closer to Kelowna. Locals recall a truck hauling skiers up to the site as it is high up on the mountain.



*1953 saw the construction of the Forest Service Road which goes to the summit and is still in use today. Originally a fire lookout was stationed here in 1954 and the concrete foundations still exist at the top. Several communication towers are maintained at the top and are visible from the highway.

*2007 – 2008 the beginnings of a co-management model between First Nations and Regional Park was conceived. And, in 2014 – 2015 the regional park was established through a combination of fee simple acquisition, ecological gift and a 30 year license of occupation on crown land. The Friends of Black Mountain was formed. They assist where possible with local knowledge of trails and observation of resident birds, animals, vegetation and with monitoring damage to park lands.

Black Mountain and the French-Canadian Mission Creek Placer Miners

By Ian Pooley

Directly south of Black Mountain and the new Black Mountain/Sntsk'il'ntən Regional Park lies the Mission Creek canyon, the site of an early gold-mining rush. The Mission Creek placer mining area was initially established in 1861 by American miners who had previously discovered gold at Rock Creek in 1860. The American miners, however, did not stay more than a season. After the initial discovery, the Mission Creek site was principally exploited by French-Canadian settlers who had taken up farming at l'Anse au Sable, also known as Okanagan Mission. The same group also exploited the placer mining site at Cherry Creek east of Vernon, established in 1862. These early settlers, as described by historian Duane Thomson, combined subsistence farming with gold mining. In the summer season, they worked their diggings in the upper Mission Creek canyon or at Cherry Creek, often leaving their wives and families at the main settlement at the mouth of Mission Creek to tend the family garden.ⁱ A diary entry quoted by Thomson gives us a glimpse of one of these families:

“Saw two half breed women on the trail today.¹ One middle-aged and about three-quarter Indian, the other pretty, fair, and younger. Both with gay coloured handkerchiefs round their heads. The younger woman with three children, the eldest perhaps three years old, riding a little horse tied securely to the saddle. The younger ones, one sitting behind the mother and the other in front, on the same horse. Both women riding straddle. The one with children going to her husband at Cherry Creek. “ (Dawson Diary, 5 July 1877)

Early francophone settlers like William Pion, Ledoux, Calmels, Louis Christian, Peter Bissette, George Leblanc, Vincent Duteau, and Charles Christian engaged in this dual mode of production, earning a cash income from their mining activities to supplement their subsistence farming and support their families. Placer mining

on Mission Creek and at Cherry Creek tapered off in the late 1880s and early 1890s. In the final years of Mission Creek mining, the activity was carried out by both whites and Chinese: In 1888, four whites and eight Chinese were still working mining claims in the canyon.

¹ See Duane Thomson, "A History of the Okanagan. Indians and Whites in the Settlement Era, 1860-1920," Ph.D. Dissertation, UBC, 1985.

¹ Dawson uses a term common in his day, but now unacceptable, to refer to people of mixed-race ancestry.



Photo courtesy of
Kelowna Museums
Archives KPA 1657