

# The Kestrel

Quarterly Newsletter of the  
Rocky Mountain Naturalists  
2019 winter solstice



Lyle Grisedale

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Can you find a good kestrel picture (our local species, the American Kestrel) for this spot? If so, please email it to the newsletter at [rmnatskestrel@gmail.com](mailto:rmnatskestrel@gmail.com).

# Canada Day Paddle: a Send-off for Claire Dibble

July 1

What's an article about a summer paddle doing in the winter issue of *the Kestrel*? Good question, so I'll tell the story from the beginning.

We met Claire Dibble at the Wings Over the Rockies outing to the Source of the Columbia, and she mentioned that she was planning to paddle the river source-to-sea this year. She planned to set off from the very bridge on which we were standing on July 1. And she welcomed the idea of some RMNats joining her for a send-off paddle.



Claire sets off in her handmade kayak.

Gretchen Whetham



well-wishers at Tilley Memorial Park joining Claire on the the first day of her journey

Bob Whetham

and we searched for the pictograph. After a shore lunch most of us returned to Canal Flats, now into a stiff headwind, and then drove to Columere to meet up with Claire and enjoy a BBQ potluck generously hosted by Elaine Doran.

Claire continued to send weekly updates from her travels over the remaining 2000 kilometers, reaching the Pacific at Astoria, Oregon, and connecting with communities and nature along the way. Claire 'tasted salt' in mid-October, and that's why we have this article in the winter issue. You can read more about the project at <https://www.watershedmoments.art/> or check out her photos on Instagram.



lunch stop partway up Columbia Lake

Gretchen

Gretchen Whetham

## If you can't reach the ammonite go for the old growth

September 19

Sometimes things don't go as planned. But that can be a good thing as nine members of the Rocky Mountain Naturalists Club found out on September 19.

The plan had been to hike to the giant ammonite fossil up Coal Creek near Fernie. The fossil is a 150 million year old specimen embedded in solid rock deep in the woods in a secret location not known to the general public. An ancient member of the cephalopod class and ancestor of the modern-day shelled nautilus, this ammonite measures almost five feet across and was discovered in 1947 by geologists looking for coal seams.

The Jurassic Period creature was carnivorous, feeding on crabs, fish and shrimp before the Rocky Mountains were formed, when the land was covered by a large, shallow sea. As the prehistoric sea retreated, the tire sized creature likely sank into the silt and became fossilized, keeping it virtually frozen in time for millions of years.

Needless to say, club members, most of whom had never seen the giant fossil before, were quite excited about the prospect of viewing the legendary creature's fossil, but it wasn't meant to be.



Coal Creek in August

Gerry Warner



Coal Creek on September 19

Gerry

The culprit was the weather, which had been raining off and on for about a week and turned Coal Creek into a torrent that couldn't be crossed safely, bringing our eager expedition to an untimely end. Only three weeks before, I'd hiked in when Coal Creek could be crossed by jumping from rock to rock without getting ankles wet. But the raging, brown torrent before us now made that dangerous, if not impossible.

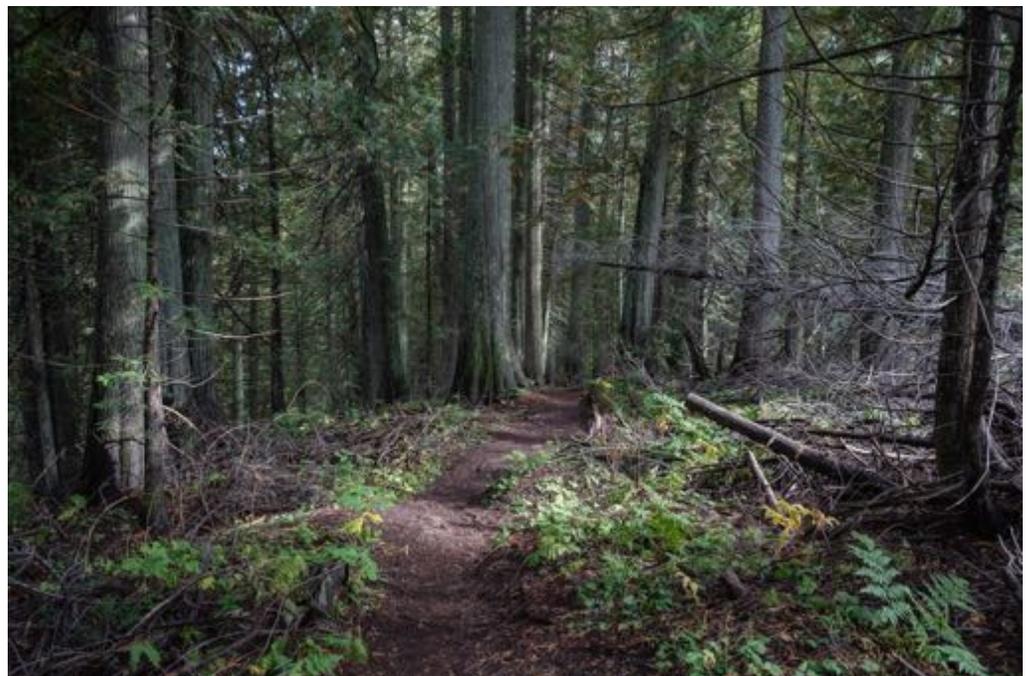
However, we learned an important lesson. Coal Creek doesn't normally get low enough to cross safely until August (see the pics), and sometimes



Lyle Grisedale

### the Old Growth Trail

early September, but definitely not on the day we were there. We did find a large log that spanned the creek, but it was slippery and too dangerous to risk. So the nine of us turned in our tracks and decided to hike the nearby Old Growth Trail on the Island Lake Lodge property, which we greatly enjoyed as the weather improved and cast long sunbeams through the giant



Lyle

conifers along the trail. We discovered a huge orange fungus on a stump. Lyle identified it as chicken of the woods (*Laetiporus sulphureus*).

The giant fungus was amazing, but, most of all, we enjoyed the ancient western redcedar, western larch, Engelmann spruce and Douglas-fir trees along the mossy trail as well as a scattering of deciduous species such as trembling aspen, white birch and black cottonwood. Huckleberry



the huge orange fungus, growing on a cedar stump Lyle



another specimen Lyle

bushes were also present along the trail, but they'd long since been stripped of their delicious berries. Later, we relaxed over coffee and a beverage on the Island Lake Lodge deck and reflected on how enjoyable the day turned out even though we didn't accomplish our original objective.

Lesson learned? If circumstances force you to abandon your original objective, don't be afraid to try something else. It may even turn into something better. And that ammonite fossil will still be around next August. It has waited millions of years for us already.

Gerry Warner



Lyle

# Monroe Lake Paddle

October 7

There were whitecaps on Elizabeth Lake, so I was a little apprehensive about how much wind we would encounter up on Monroe. We were early so we checked out Moyie on our way, and you could have surfed on that lake, the waves were so big. For safety's sake we also pulled in to Mineral Lake just in case Monroe was inhospitable. We are very lucky to have so many options here close to where we live. Mineral was flat, so we had a plan "B". But



Tammy Oats



George Rogers

when we got to Monroe it looked fine to start our autumn paddle.

There were four naturalists and one guest, all in kayaks. It was a little breezy, but the sun was out and provided some warmth to keep our spirits up. We went in a counterclockwise direction as this is the best way if you are expecting any wind to appear during the day. Most of the lily pads were dying off so, at the



Tammy



Tammy

end where the old beaver lodge is, it was easy going even though the water level was quite low. The pump house was humming away to tell us that maybe there was some prospecting in progress that day.

As we turned around and headed to the far end of the lake the wind started to blow. But once we got around the first corner the wind became less of a challenge. Down the west side we came upon the water slide feature that was put in around two years ago, complete with pump and



Tammy



Tammy

cistern to send water down with the slider. It was a little chilly to give it a try, but maybe we will next year - in the warmer months.

The underbrush was in full colour and beautiful to behold.

We made another full about turn and headed back to the place we put in. The wind that we expected to be at our backs disappeared (go figure). Oh well. At least it wasn't uphill.

After a leisurely paddle back to the dock we headed home. We had spent about 2-2.5 hours on the water, and the day was enjoyed by all. Nats Rob, Bob, Marianne, George and our guest and photographer Tammy all had a good time and look forward to getting on the water again soon.

George Rogers



Tammy

# Wilks Woods Fall Walk

November 3

A mild early November day found 17 Naturalists walking through open interior Douglas-fir forest. The Douglas-fir predominated, with a mix of western larch, ponderosa and lodgepole pine and a few shrubs. These included saskatoon, choke cherry, antelope-bush, soopalallie and a few snowbrush (*Ceanothus velutinus*).

At several viewpoints we were able to enjoy the classic landscape of golden western larch hillsides. September rains had moistened the soil enough to encourage fungal fruiting bodies. We noticed where a few mushrooms had been stashed in tree branches by red squirrels while other fungi were nipped off by deer. Ungulates



Daryl Calder

often browse several species of mushrooms to supplement their diet. Some fungi that are poisonous to us have no ill effects on deer.



descending from Whisky Jack

Helga Knot



on Sunflower Hill, looking down the St. Mary Valley to Aq'am

After a view of Aq'am from the top of Sunflower Hill, we tromped downhill to complete the loop hike. It was a fine Sunday afternoon outing, visiting with friends and enjoying nature.

Marianne Nahm and Daryl Calder

Helga

The 2018 hike to Moose Slough [*The Kestrel*, 2018 winter, page 15] was a slog in the fog through 12 cm of snow; the 2019 hike was planned with hopes for better views. Although the morning of November 10 was bright and sunny, by the time fourteen of us set off from the Baker Road parking lot, the sky had become grey. As we headed up Logger's Lane, graupel began to pellet us. The old Douglas-fir snag had fallen across the trail,



fallen big Douglas-fir snag  
Helga Knote



counting tree rings  
Gretchen Whetham



group hug of the Big Tree

Helga



Moose Slough

Stewart Wilson

and its huge cut diameter made us regret we had no magnifying glass to attempt to count rings. After a group hug of the Big Tree, we proceeded under the powerline, skirted Bumpy Slough, then walked along the west side of Moose Slough. Bumpy Slough has its name from the hummocks that cover it when it is dry, and Moose Slough, because for many years one could reliably see a moose, and sometimes a calf, there.

We turned west then south, appreciating the cover from the denser trees, as it had begun to blow and snow seriously.



enough snow to tease the skiers among the group

Gretchen

Previously interesting tracks of grouse, voles and deer were buried, and it was beginning to look a lot like Christmas. We returned via Floyd, Floyd Right, the Bumps and Pole 62 trails, completing a 9-kilometer circuit. Stay tuned for a 3.0 attempt next year; weather permitting we'll see the full panorama of the Rockies and Purcells.

Gretchen Whetham



Stewart Wilson

Gretchen had a plan and she stuck to it. Almost!

It all happened on a Saturday afternoon when about a dozen Rocky Mountain Naturalists set out from the Fraggie Rock trailhead to do a moderate loop hike west along the Chewbacca Rocka Trail then up several steep pitches heading north, skirting the private land, to the giant juniper tree visited by our club a few years ago [see *The Kestrel*, 2016 winter, page 5] and then a long meander down past Double Duck Lake followed by some twists and turns eventually taking us back to the Fraggie Rock Trailhead. Phew! The rest of us did our best to keep up with Gretchen as she sped along like the Andean trekker she is.

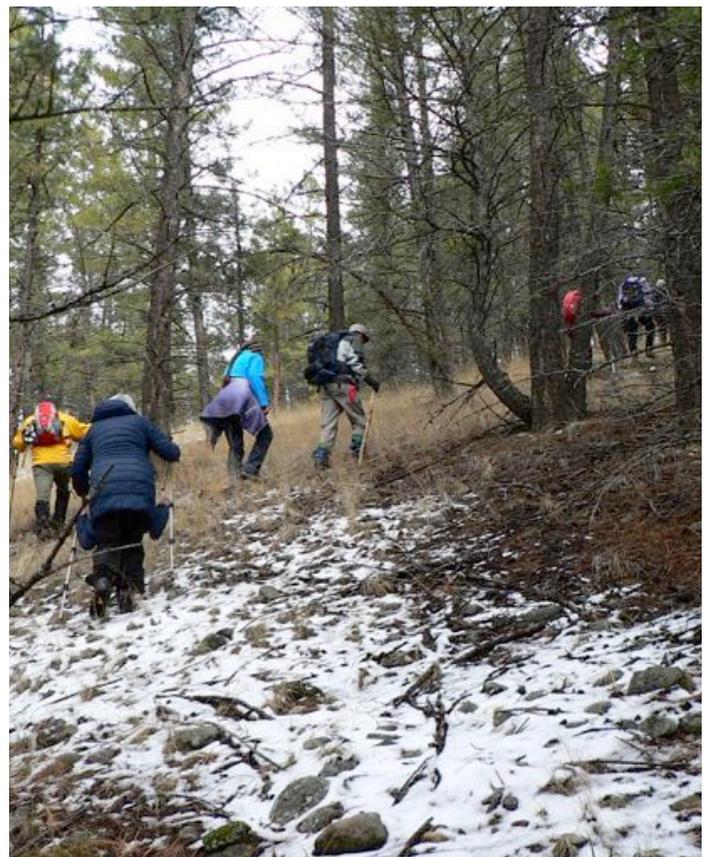
In all we walked up and down a little over eight km on a brisk but calm November day with a skiff of snow on the frozen



coyote

Stewart

ground to make things interesting. And it got interesting quickly when not far into the hike we came across the frozen carcass of a young coyote, snout down in a bed of dirt and pine needles. Being the good naturalists we are, we decided to roll the poor beast over to determine the cause of death, but there were no clues. However, the fact that there was no obvious trauma lead to the supposition that this *Canis latrans* (Latin for barking dog) might have been poisoned. We'll never know. As



uphill

Stewart



...and downhill

Stewart

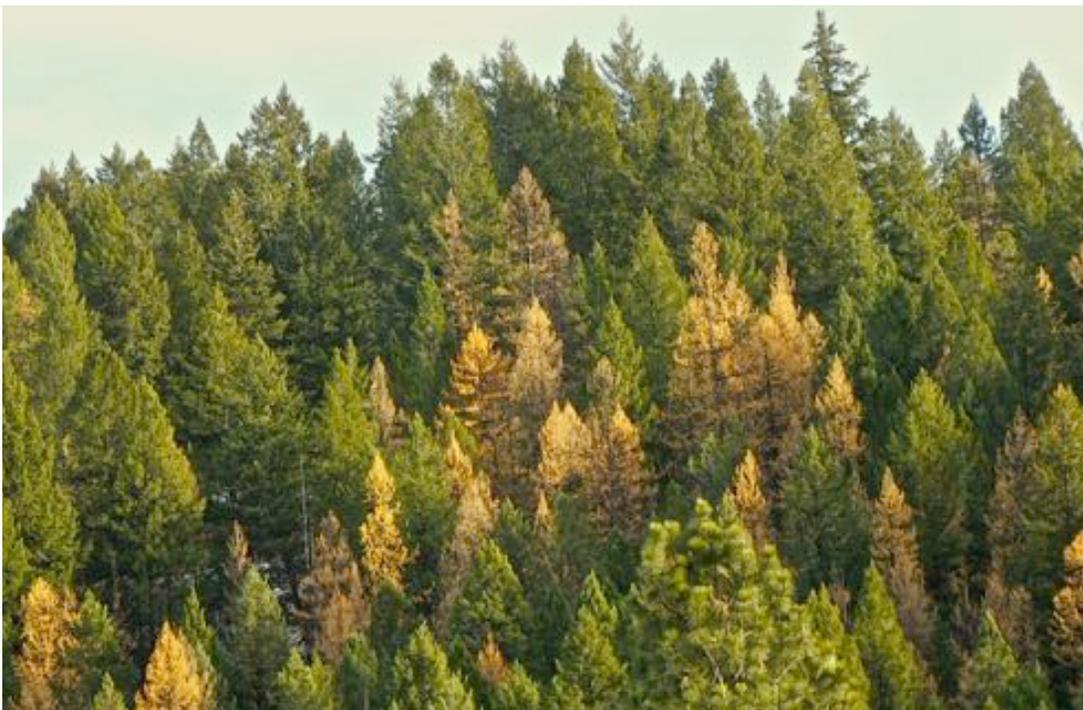


frosty feathers Stewart



a high point of the hike

Helga Knote



a forest of larch, Douglas-fir and ponderosa pine

Stewart

always, Nature has her secrets.

Other than that, the hike was uneventful except for the usual camaraderie naturalists enjoy on their outings. It was nice to see that the tall, twisted juniper, found by Virginia on the earlier naturalists' hike, is doing well and standing tall as a



view of The Steeples from the way down

Stewart



the big juniper

Helga

record specimen on the official BC Big Tree Registry\* should - and we really enjoyed that extra 300 feet of vertical that Gretchen inserted in the middle of the hike so that we could better enjoy the view over the Rockies and the Purcells.

Gerry Warner

\* In 2015, Lorne Sinclair and Susan Walp registered this big juniper with the BC Big Tree Registry. Nobody else has registered a larger juniper in this province, so this juniper (Rocky mountain juniper, *Juniperus scopulorum*) is number one. - editor



Helga Knot

Beacon Hill is a local landmark north of the City of Cranbrook, easily identified at night by a red blinking light. The light is a navigational aid for aircraft, and the hill is the site of several communications towers for both commercial and emergency services. Hikers are able to enjoy 360-degree views of the Cranbrook area by accessing several routes via different parking areas.

On a Sunday afternoon in November, seven Naturalists took the opportunity to check out the views, get some exercise and enjoy camaraderie in the great outdoors. Our hike began at the east end of Albert Road in the Wilks Kahn Subdivision. We enjoyed some new terrain with a variety of surfaces and local features such as Skunk Hollow. A broken lichen-encrusted branch and shafts of late day sunbeams against conifer trunks added interest to our outing.



lichen-encrusted branch  
Gretchen Whetham

Near the end of our six-kilometer loop route we checked out a very old mining exploration area. We would not want to fall into these vertical sided exploration pits, hand dug and blasted into the bedrock in the quest for a lucky strike of some copper staining.

Marianne Nahm



on top of Beacon Hill

Helga

## Hawk Owl

Lyle Grisedale photographed this beautiful bird one evening just past the middle of November. It was at China Slough on the LD Ranch Road.



## What ground squirrels do during the cold seasons



These photographs are evidence of hibernating mammals, likely Columbia ground squirrels (their exhalations captured in frost at the burrow entrances).

Virginia Rasch



## Internet Links

The website for Rocky Mountain Naturalists can be found at:

<http://www.rockymountainnaturalists.org/>

It has a calendar of events, a blog with photographs, archived newsletters, and more.

Make sure you are up to date on the latest techniques for keeping yourselves safe in the wild. Visit this site now and then to see how the science has given us new information.

[www.wildsafebc.com](http://www.wildsafebc.com)

Curlew locations <http://birdscanada.org/research/speciesatrisk/index.jsp?targetpg=lbcu>

Cranbrook Community Forest <https://www.cranbrookcommunityforest.com/>

Bird Observations <https://ebird.org>

Big Tree Registry <https://bigtrees.forestry.ubc.ca/>

Claire Dibble's Columbia River Paddle <https://www.watershedmoments.art/>

## About Field Trips

Leader responsibilities:

- Radios and first aid kits are available from Paula.

- Find a replacement leader if necessary.

- Keep the group together.

- All leaders must have trip waiver forms [available from Paula] in case any non-members come along on the trip. Non-members must sign, and forms must be returned to Paula. Non-member insurance costs \$2.00.

- Make sure everybody leaves the parking area safely.

- Get someone to write an account of the field trip for the newsletter. Send it in to [rmnatskestrel@gmail.com](mailto:rmnatskestrel@gmail.com), along with pictures, as soon as possible.

Carpoolers: Please offer to chip in for gas. On a round trip with a driving time of under an hour the compensation should be \$5.00 and on a round trip with a driving time of an hour or more the compensation should be \$10.00.

No dogs on field trips, please

## Club Information

### Executive

President	Helga Knoté
Vice President	Marianne Nahm
Past President	Virginia Rasch
Secretary	Jim Hurvid
Treasurer	Gretchen Whetham
BC Nature Representative	Rob Woods
Director at Large	Wendy Maisonneuve



Beacon Hill hikers

Helga Knoté

### Committees, Co-ordinators and Representatives

Bats	Scott Bodaly
Bluebirds	Marianne Nahm
Bylaws and Policies	Virginia Rasch
Christmas Bird Count	Dianne Cooper
Club Camp	Jackie Leach
Communications	Virginia Rasch
Early Morning Birding	Jim Hurvid
East Kootenays Invasive Species Council	Frank Hastings
Elizabeth Lake	Stewart Wilson
Field Trips	Paula Rogers
Internal Communications	Paula Rogers
Kootenay Conservation Program	Helga Knoté
Little Big Day	Greg Ross
Membership	Sue Ross
Newsletter	Susan Walp
Presentations	Paula Rogers
Records	Wendy Maisonneuve
Rocky Mountain Trench Society	Jo Ellen Floer
Skookumchuck Prairie IBA	Dianne Cooper
Turtle Monitoring	Greg Ross
Web Masters	Dianne Cooper

Upcoming Events These are events planned at the present time. Watch your inbox for more details, possible changes and additional events.

Christmas Bird Counts	Creston	27 December 2019
	Cranbrook	28 December 2019
	Kimberley	4 January 2020

RMNats meetings - every two months, on the third Wednesday of odd-numbered months

Next meetings -	Wednesday	15	January
	Wednesday	18	March