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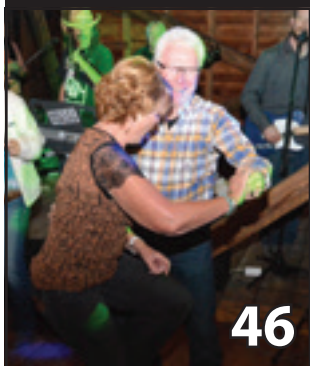
3

## KONIG COMPETES



10

## BARN STORMERS



46

## OKTOBERFEST ART

Children of all ages celebrated Oktoberfest traditions in style, sporting colourful face painting designs and enjoying animal balloon-making demonstrations at the fun-filled festival that took place in Invermere on Saturday, October 4th.

*Photo by Erin Knutson*



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## The WVMHA is looking for a few more referees. Referee Clinic

Monday October 20th, 2014  
5:30 p.m. • Eddie Mountain  
Memorial Arena/Mezzanine

Please pre-register at [bchockey.net](http://bchockey.net)

For more information contact

David Oaks  
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ALPINE PALETTE — Limestone bedrock, a teal-blue lake and golden larches form a striking colour contrast in the alpine southeast of Mt. Assiniboine.  
Photo by Greg Amos

# Larches abound at Talus Lodge

By Greg Amos  
Special to the Pioneer

As the nights get colder and traces of snowfall begin to accumulate, something special happens in the alpine environment exactly halfway between Invermere and Canmore. From the summit of Mount Queen Mary in Height of the Rockies Provincial Park, follow an imaginary straight line nine kilometres to the northwest. Fly over folded mountains and glaciers, over the Albert River, and past the stunning Sharkfin Peak — a.k.a. Talon Peak — to arrive at one of the most beautiful autumn displays possible in the Canadian Rockies: a stunning scene painted in bold strokes of golden-yellow alpine larch, glowing emerald lakes, and bleached white ex-

panses of limestone.

This is the backyard of the Talus Lodge in the days leading up to the fall equinox, where the sun's ever-lowering arc conspires with the conifer's photosynthetic withdrawal to light up the larches' needle-leaves in a way that makes Christmas trees pale in comparison.

The hardy, ancient *Larix lyallii* trees — one of which, found in Alberta's nearby Kananaskis Country, was dated at 1,917 years old in 2012 — are a big part of what brings shoulder-season hikers up to the lodge. Built by Invermere's Chris Espinel, a retired forester and experienced mountaineer, the Talus Lodge has been the base camp for eager alpine explorers to discover life on the 2,200 metre-plus plateau for more than a decade.

*Continued on the next page . . .*



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HIKERS' HEAVEN — Above: Hikers ascend the mountain led by Chris. Below: Lovely Leman lake shines in all its glory.  
Photos by Greg Amos

... 'Larches' from previous page

In a muted world of rock and snow, the fall larch display is a last big, bold burst of spectacular colour to relish before the trees, like the surrounding cirques and cols near the lodge are buried under more than 12 feet of snow.

The absurdly abundant larches are just one of the reasons why lodge co-owner Chris chose this location in 2003, just east of the continental divide on a high plateau between the Cross River and Albert River. But it's not only about the spectacular alpine setting of Rocky Mountain peaks, age-old glaciers and tropic-like blue-green alpine lakes and tarns — the site was also picked for its sheer inaccessibility.

A decade later, the area is as serene as ever. Only the occasional jet silently crossing the skyline from Calgary betrays any trace of civilization nearby.

For a group of seven adventurers exploring the limestone expanse in mid-September, the result was an alpine environment that took on a spectacular park-like setting — one that dwarfed the larch needle displays seen each fall at tourist-trampelled destinations like Larch Valley at Moraine Lake and Lake O'Hara in Yoho National Park.

Trekking across the broad limestone plateau — it's all alpine route finding here, so all outings are always a

choose-your-own-adventure experience — one can't help noticing the only natural feature perhaps more abundant than the larches: huge holes left by grizzly bears digging for marmots on which to fatten up for the winter. Judging by the sheer number of holes and overturned boulders, it takes a lot of attempts before each bear is rewarded with hoary marmot meal.

Other rodents of the rocks observed included picas, weasels, and Columbian ground squirrels. Much smaller prehistoric animals also made their presence known — trilobites lurked in the limestone, extinct crinoids crunched underfoot, and on the microscopic end of things, oxygen-producing stromatolites clustered in colonies fossilized into rock. The interesting bulges and circular patterns, once explained to the group by Chris, were impossible not to see. And they're worth our appreciation regardless — we owe our atmosphere to the Precambrian cyanobacteria that bound sedimentary grains of rock into the structures we see today.

On this visit, our group consisted of a well-rounded cast of fifty-something professionals from B.C., Alberta and Ontario. After an initial dose of rain and cloud, the next two days offered nothing but brilliant T-shirt weather, an unexpected treat in the late summer alpine environment.

Continued on page 22 . . .



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We wish to thank all the businesses, individuals and volunteers that helped to make the second annual **Butterfly Barn Dance** a success.

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**A special thank you to our Hosts Bob and Barb Shaunessy**  


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*SUB SUMMIT — Looking almost directly up the Continental Divide, as delineated by White Man Pass, Mt. Assiniboine towers to the northwest.*  
Photo by Greg Amos

... Continued from page 21

Our daily treks took us to the historic meeting ground of Rendezvous Point (a sub-summit in the vicinity of Mount Vavasour and Mount Leval, and above the gorgeous Leman Lake in the Spray Valley) and the mind-blowing larch forests en route to Waterfall Lake, a glacier-fed, stunningly cold (as verified by our swimmers) body of water that flows into the Albert River. In two full days of exploring, the group encountered seven lakes and large tarns, with varying shades of teal and emerald.

To the northwest of the lodge lays the 3,618 metre Mt. Assiniboine — the sixth-highest peak in the Rockies. But wherever hikers — or in the winter, backcountry and cross-country skiers — choose to venture out from the lodge, the much closer Talon Peak towers above the lodge like a beacon. It's visible from many points on the plateau, providing an easy way back to the lodge for anyone on a self-guided adventure.

For the experienced, the plateau is an open book to explore. For those newer to

hiking or less comfortable with the objective hazards that come with wilderness terrain, Chris proved a capable and captivating host. Encouraging his guests by the prospect of downhill hikes featuring “flatish” (read: uphill) return trips, and giving each person expert guidance on positioning feet on slopes and on the use of hiking poles, Chris guided guests of all abilities towards a sense of deep satisfaction. Despite the remote location, visitors who are seeking more of a “lodge lizard” experience can find most of the creature comforts they might crave at the lodge. Odour-free outhouses and hot showers (rigged up with watering cans secured on pulleys above the showerer's head) connect to the main lodge via a short wooden walkway, and the alpine cuisine is exemplary.

High-altitude night sky watching within a stone's throw of the two-storey lodge offered a counterpoint to the sun-basked glory of the larches. It's enough to make one realize the whole notion of there being a special time of year at the lodge — as though there's a time when it's not so special — is merely an abstraction.

## COUGAR, BIGHORN & BEAR



Join Kara Haugseth, our WildsafeBC Coordinator, for a presentation on wildlife issues in Radium Hot Springs.



British Columbia Conservation Foundation



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