

Club works to honour Centennial with Mount Robson Hut

PHOTOS AND STORY BY DAVID TOOLE

In 2002, as planning for the Alpine Club of Canada's Centennial started, the concept of a lasting legacy in the form of a new hut was popular. At the ACC Board of Directors meeting in October of that year, a resolution was passed – unanimously – to find a location to build such a hut in celebration of the ACC's first century.

Acting on this resolution has not been easy. Parks Canada's policy dictates that there should be no new backcountry accommodation. Helicopter and cat skiing operations have taken over most of the desirable mountain terrain within BC Forestry lands and these leases do not allow for other occupants of the land. Alberta's government has a policy that there should be no roofed backcountry accommodation within its parks.

At the time the Club's resolution passed, there was no provision within BC Parks' policy for any new backcountry accommodation of any kind. Subsequently, the BC Ministry of Environment developed its Fixed Roof Accommodation Policy (FRAP) for BC Parks. The full policy was not released until August 2006 along with Requests For Proposals for backcountry accommodation in 12 of its parks – one of them being Mount Robson Provincial Park. The ACC applied to build a Mount Robson Hut, and the proposal was accepted in December 2006.

Many ACC members feel it fitting that a new hut recognizing the Club's Centennial be located in Mount Robson Provincial Park, since A.O. Wheeler, the Club's founding president, played a key role in the creation of this park. Wheeler recognized the importance of protecting the unique alpine regions surrounding the Canadian Rockies' highest mountain. The ACC's proposal to build a new hut in that park is consistent with

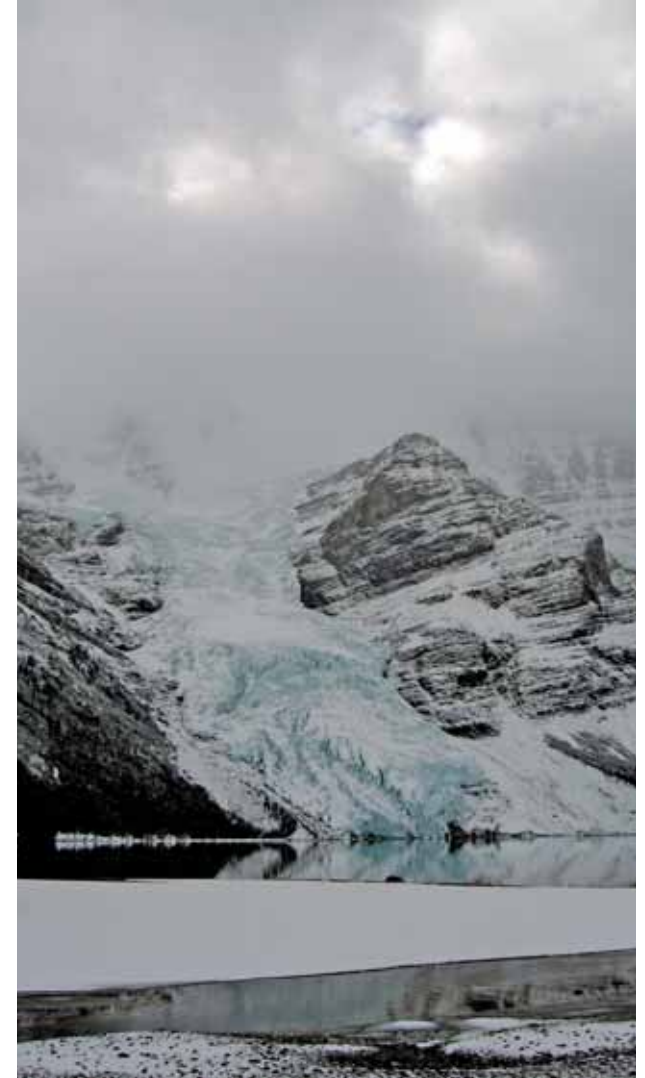
Wheeler's vision and the founders' beliefs, as reflected in the Club's Constitution, that the ACC should establish huts in Canadian mountains.

The Club's application was conceptual, envisioning a hut design that would have minimal impact on the surrounding area. The hut should reduce visitor impact by concentrating activity in the hut area and reduce potential conflicts with wildlife. The hut should also draw visitors away from the campground area and thus provide BC Parks with an opportunity to reduce camper impact by decommissioning existing campsites. A mountain hut would improve access to this remote area for people of all ages and abilities.

The ACC recognizes that some individuals and groups have concerns about certain aspects of the FRAP under which this hut would be built. However, the ACC is the premier provider of modest alpine hut-style accommodation within our national and provincial parks. The Club has earned a reputation for a high level of environmental stewardship in all its endeavors.

In proposing to build a Mount Robson Hut, the ACC is not unreservedly embracing all aspects of the FRAP, nor endorsing front-country or resort-style development within BC Parks. In the past, the ACC has opposed developments that it views to be inconsistent with responsible stewardship of wilderness areas, and will continue to speak out if such developments are proposed in the future.

In relation to a Mount Robson Hut, the Club intends to continue working with all concerned to ensure that this project makes sound environmental sense. Specifically, the ACC has discussed options on the building site, size, and helicopter use with interested parties, and believe agreement can be reached on all these points. In late



Berg Glacier and Berg Lake, Mount Robson

April, the ACC reached an understanding with the Coalition for BC Parks – comprised of organizations opposed to further development in BC Parks – to develop the hut by building out the existing BC Park Ranger cabin. Recognizing the broad interest shown in this project, the ACC intends to continue working with those interested groups in preparing the detailed design. Members of the ACC Prince George Section have been particularly helpful in providing input into the hut design.

Building a Centennial Hut at Mount Robson is a complex project and several steps must be taken to bring the process to completion over the next few years. The scope of that work is becoming clearer following meetings with BC Parks, site visits and consultation with Prince George Section members, and with representatives from the Coalition for BC Parks.

The ACC Executive Committee recommended to its Board that the project be approved, and on May 5, 2007, the entire Board did just that.

In a parallel process, the Club will need to raise the funds for this hut as it has done for the recent Fay Hut, Boswell Cabin and Jim Haberl Hut projects. Given the success with these projects, it is not expected fundraising will be an issue.

Building the Centennial vision into a lasting legacy should be an exciting new venture for the Club.

Prior to his assuming the Facilities Director staff position on June 1, David Toole served as the ACC's Director of Planning and Development on the ACC Board of Directors.



Benefits of building an ACC Mount Robson Hut

1. Provides shelter from the elements
2. Improves the potential for access to a World Heritage Site by people of all ages and levels of fitness
3. Reduces potential for human/wildlife conflict because it separates humans, their food and waste from wildlife, increasing safety for both
4. Offers a smaller footprint than camping
5. Minimizes environmental damage by concentrating and controlling human use
6. Provides the potential for the ACC to build a “Green” building which will
 - Allow implementation of renewable energy sources
 - Facilitate the use of efficient heating and lighting systems
 - Improve the processing of black and grey water
 - Facilitate the provision of potable water
7. Facilitates exploration by allowing users to carry less gear (tents, fuel, stoves utensils bedding, etc.)
8. Enhances social and cultural experiences
9. Provides a venue for educational opportunities
10. Provides the potential for reduced campground use (Kokanee Glacier Park was able to rehabilitate the campground below Slocan Chief Cabin and reduce the total number of campsites in the park after the building of the new cabin)