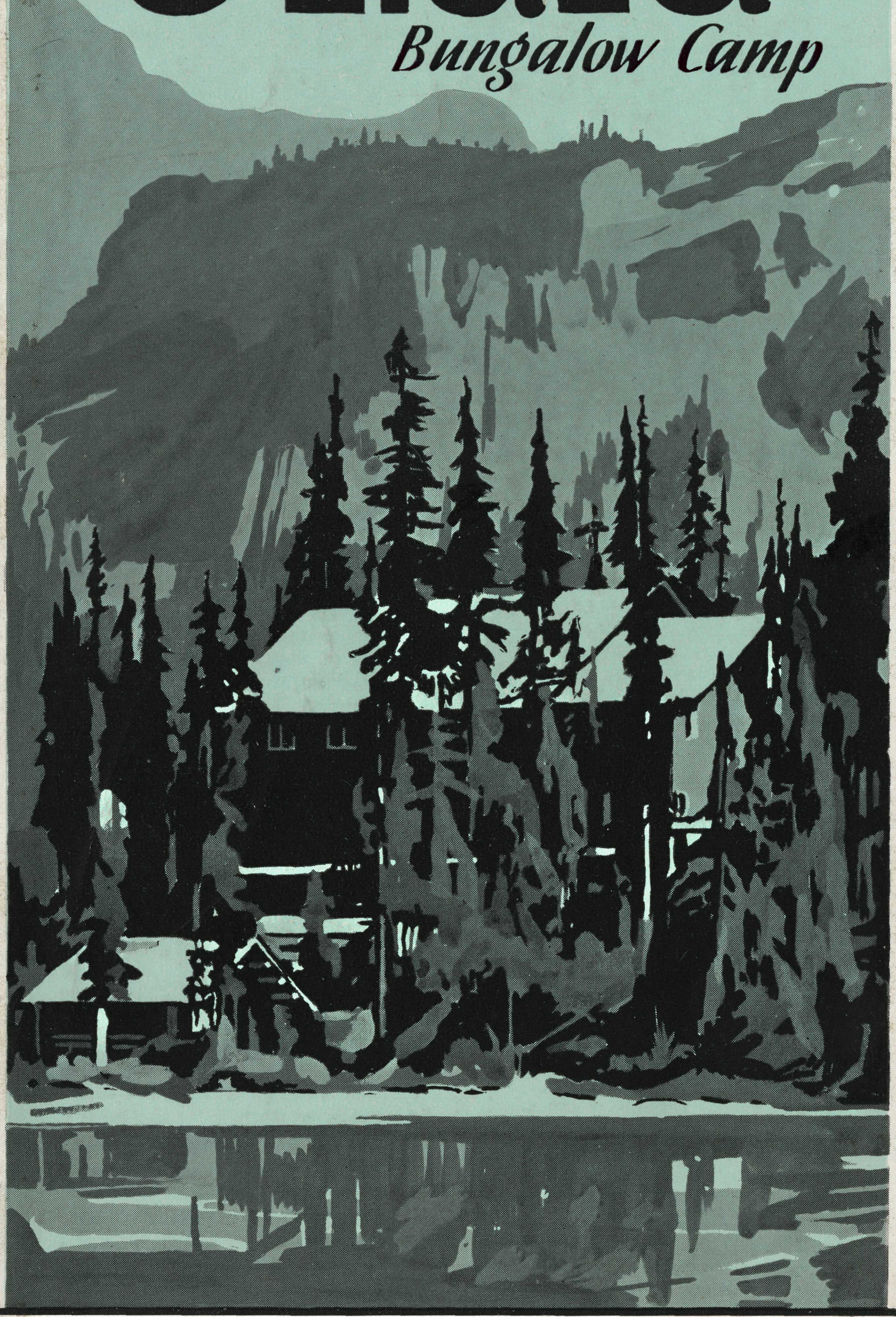
35°°

1931

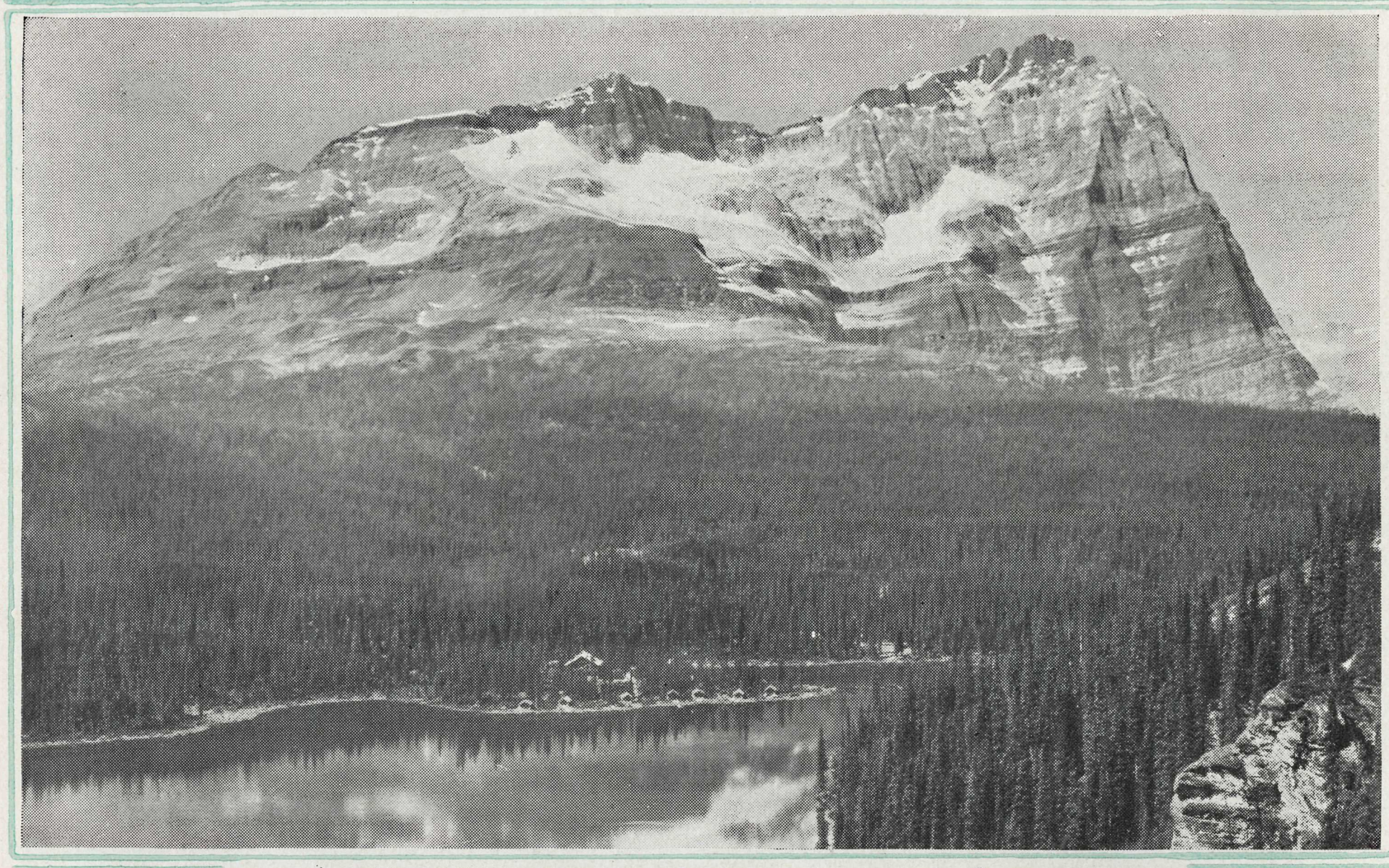
Lake O'Hara

Bungalow Camp



CANADIAN ROCKIES

J. Patrick
Aug. 1994



LAKE O'HARA CAMP

IF YOU must have the glories of Rocky Mountain scenery plus such trappings of modern luxury as magnificent hotels, ball rooms, golf courses, automobiles and swarms of visitors, go to Banff or Louise. O'Hara's appeal is rather to those who prefer to take their scenery straight. To these, the fact that the only way to reach O'Hara is on foot or by pony, and that the accommodation at the lake is confined to a log chalet and a group of bungalows, so modest and so happily conceived that they seem to melt into their background, are counted as not the least of its many advantages.

Such happy people refuse to admit that a grate fire and comfortable chairs, hot and cold water baths, simple but well-cooked meals, and beds that are a benediction to tired bodies, should be classed as modern luxuries. At any rate one has yet to hear of the visitor to O'Hara who gave these conspicuous features of the Camp anything but his whole-hearted blessing.

Which is the Lovelier?

It would be extremely difficult to say which of these two glorious mountain lakes—O'Hara or Louise—is the more beautiful. Each has its own incredible and indescribable colour, a colour that is seldom constant for more than a short time, that sometimes changes with bewildering rapidity under the influence of passing cloud or wind, like a gigantic opal. Each has its marvellous setting of mountain peak and glacier and forest, seemingly incomparable until the other is seen. If the eye travels from the glory of Louise up to its matchless background and back again to the exquisite lake, and concludes that this is Nature's supreme masterpiece, the vision of O'Hara, set like a priceless jewel in its circle of glittering peaks, compels one to the same decision.

It must, however, be said there is a great sweetness and friendliness about O'Hara which is lacking in Louise; no doubt the trees, those noble companions of man, are responsible for this, for the mountain slopes are treed to the water's edge, and less austere. There are always some artists at Lake O'Hara endeavoring to give its subtle charm to the world.

Four Routes to O'Hara

There are four routes to Lake O'Hara. From Lake Louise by a recently opened trail the distance is just over twelve miles. Another is the trail from Wapta. The early morning train can be taken to Hector, or one can motor from Louise to the mouth of the Kicking Horse River—which rises in Wapta Lake—where the trail that leads to O'Hara starts a few hundred feet away. The most enjoyable way of reaching this starting point is, of course, to spend a day at the Wapta Bungalow Camp, exploring that district a little, leaving early the following morning for this eight mile trip. Of the other two routes we will speak later.

There are two trails leading from the south shore of Wapta Lake to O'Hara; one starts not far from the west end of the lake up a steep hill, the other starts east of Hector station, at the water tank. This is really the prettier trail, for it follows Cataract Creek, a mad turbulent stream which cuts its way through steep rocks. Both trails join in the meadows some distance beyond the top of the hill. For about three miles you canter along a level plain,

PRINTED IN CANADA 1931

Another view of the Lake

and then the ascent is rapid. Emerging from the jade temple of a forest, you enter an alpine garden where the botanist can count seventy-five varieties of wild flowers in half as many minutes. Delicate as a muted harmony, many of them, others flame with regal insolence, and the whole meadow is so thickly carpeted that picking your way through it without damaging some of the blossoms is utterly impossible.

On the Trail

To the left are Narao Lakes, small sheets of blue. Towering mountains rise in all directions; Narao Peak is to the left of the valley, Vanguard and Cathedral Mountain to the right. After passing through the meadows the trail leads for miles through heavy timber. Mountain after mountain comes into view—Mount Huber on the left and Mount Odaray rearing its summit above the valley on the right, while a succession of other peaks loom in the distance. Many small streams are crossed, several very beautiful, flowing through deep banks of moss. The siren-song of a cascade calls; you push on, passing through a grove of spruces, and the richly colored waters of Lake O'Hara invite your admiration.

There is something about the very stillness of these mountain solitudes that is appealing. One conceives that it might become appalling to some restless souls, but to the average man or woman, fresh from the unfettered clamor of modern city life, it bears the magic of cool, compassionate fingers upon a fevered head.

Think of it! One comes from hard, wearing labor in a hot, dusty town; from the nerve-wracking discordances of city streets; from a hodge-podge of smells in which those of gasoline and hot asphalt are only minor evils—to the heart of this earthly paradise. One sinks down upon a mossy bank and breathes in the life-giving air of the mountains, pure fresh, pine-scented. One feels the soothing harmony of this enchanted spot; the gentle surf in the tree-tops on the mountain-side and the almost indistinguishable murmur of wavelets on the shore.

A lone sandpiper curtsies on a rock and a couple of wild-ducks bob up and down on the lake. An eagle soars up in the cloudless sky, his keen eyes alert for some unwary marmot. One's eyes are drawn up and up to the glorious peaks that stand guard about O'Hara—Wiwaxy's jagged top sharply defined against the skyline, the towering mass of Huber, the white splendor of Victoria and Lefroy, and the encircling majesty of Yukness, Hungabee, Biddle, Schaeffer and Odaray, with the vast towers of Cathedral in the distance. There has been rain in the mountains, which has strengthened that exquisite colour and melody, freshness and fragrance that Nature keeps for her own.

Trail's End

Lake O'Hara was discovered by J. J. McArthur of the Dominion Land Survey, and for its name geography is indebted to an Indian Army Officer, who spent much time camping here.

It is a far cry from the primitive tents and teepees of Colonel O'Hara to the cosy Bungalow Camp that is one of the most picturesque and attractive resorts in the Rockies. It is the kind of place one dreams of finding at the trail's end.

The Bungalow Camp is on a slight elevation overlooking the lake, the cabins—encircled with tall pines and spruces—on the shore. One of

these cabins can be claimed as a mountain home, or a room in the Chalet. Some people prefer the Chalet because there is a real bathroom there with hot and cold water, while others like the idea of going to sleep in a little house of their own and watching the moonlight shining across the placid lake.

The Bungalow Camp

The Chalet, serving as the dining room and lounge, is a rustic building on the style of a Swiss Chalet, built of huge logs. Its interior is charming. The ceiling extends to the full height of the building, and a number of sleeping apartments open off the balcony that runs around four sides. The room is furnished with a rustic simplicity that is not too rustic to be comfortable. There are long, low chairs and lounges arranged about a blazing log fire, and gaily decorated tables in front of the windows facing the Lake, where you attend three times a day to your more material needs.

Perhaps you think that food would be unimportant in these inspirational surroundings, but here the mountain air is buoyant and fresh, and you find that at meal times your interest is almost equally divided between the delicious dishes set before you by dainty waitresses in Swiss costumes, and the sight of the sun playing on the green surface of Lake O'Hara and the wooded slopes of the surrounding mountains.

Alpine Meadows

No words could depict the beauty of an Alpine meadow half a mile from the Bungalow Camp. The trail, leading through the woods a short distance, comes out near a small stream that runs into the lake. The first Bungalow Camp was built in these meadows, and here, also, Alpine Club of Canada held one of their camps. The first tiny mountain hut built in this district still stands. Further up stream and away from these cabins one can find the peace on earth of which we all dream. The whole area is covered with short grass, a velvety sward relieved of its monotony of green by flowers of brilliant hues. The stream adds to this pastoral beauty, and breaks the silence of the meadows, while further up a tiny lake enhances its sylvan loveliness. Mountains close in the meadows, but they are far away and do not intrude, knowing their rugged grandeur has no place here.

The old Camp is deserted save by gophers and pack rats, and one gets that feeling of almost intolerable loneliness that is never associated with nature, but broods over human habitations that are no longer inhabited. In the stillness a sudden crash in one of the cabins becomes startling. One suspects that a bear has managed to get trapped, but on reconnoitring through a window, it turns out to be nothing more formidable than a gopher who, in his inquisitive scampering about the room, has managed to overturn an empty box standing on the edge of a high shelf.

Carefree you set out from O'Hara to see some, at least, of the worth-while things that are to be seen and enjoyed in this little world of lakes and waterfalls, mountains and alpine meadows and cool forest depths. It is a wrench to leave O'Hara, but there are advantages in tramping away from it to see other sights, for one returns by one trail or another to a lake that is never quite the same, from varying points of view and under ever-changing conditions of light and shade and atmosphere, but always rarely beautiful.

To Lake McArthur

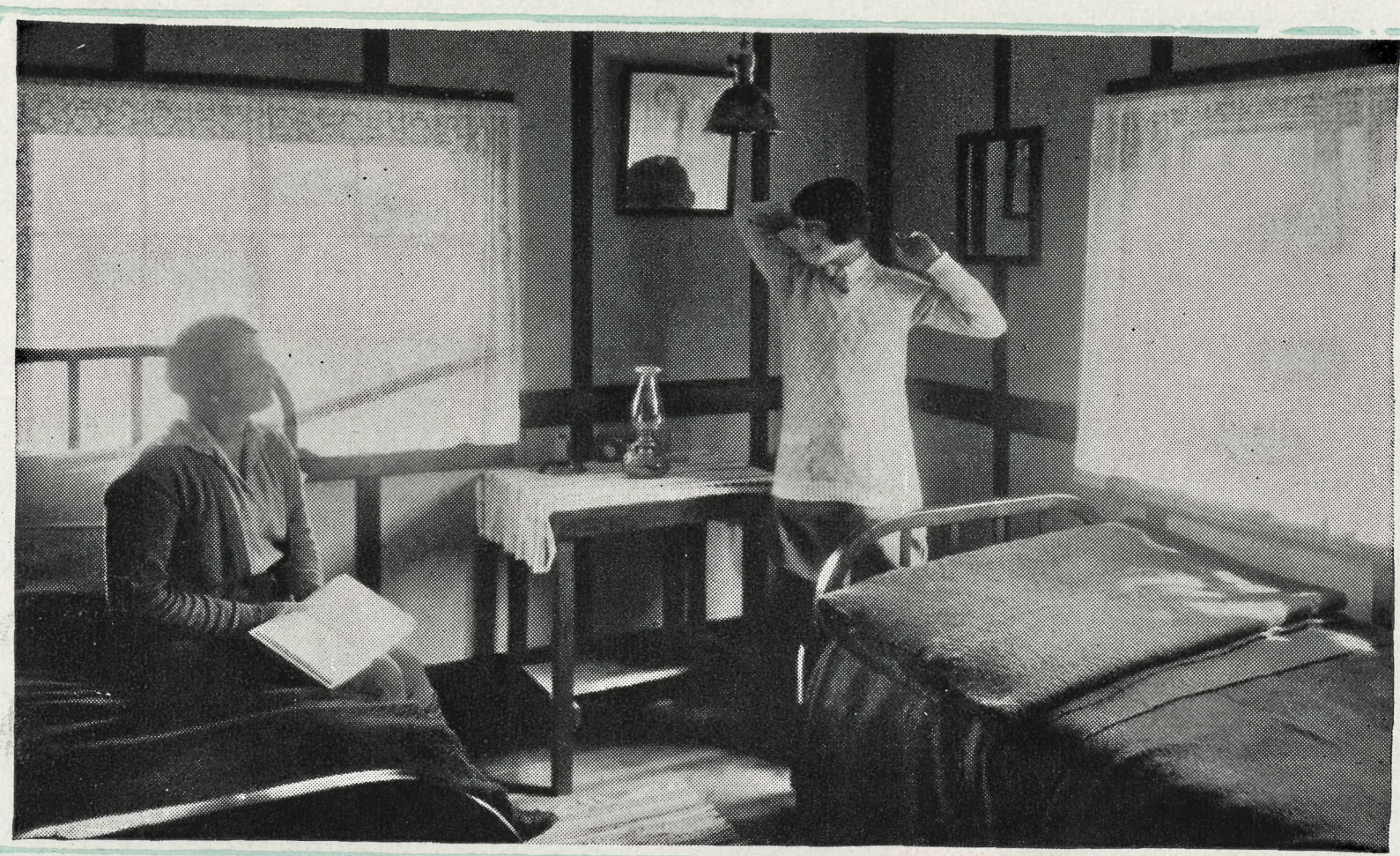
The trail to Lake McArthur is neither long nor particularly difficult. It leads from the shore past the old camp, climbs steadily through the forest, and emerges finally on a green meadow of some extent with a shallow pond in its midst. Here the trail forks, one branch leading up to the flanks of Odaray and McArthur Pass, and the other to McArthur Lake. Here one has to negotiate a short bit of steep trail around the shoulder of Mount Schaeffer. Up and up it zigzags, until at length, we scramble up the last few feet and find ourselves in a rocky basin, a high valley about 7,300 feet above the sea. From the entrance, looking back, there is a splendid view down the Ottertail Valley, with the trail from McArthur winding up its opposite side.

Perhaps now we hear a long-drawn whistle. Can it be that there is another party on the trail approaching us? It comes again, somewhat more prolonged, still identical to a human call. But we are (as we presently find) entirely alone; the whistle is that of a little furry dweller in this rocky amphitheatre—the hoary marmot, or "whistler." These articulate animals live among rocks at the base of a slope, their favorite recreation being to lie in the sun by the hour. One can see them scurrying among the rocks, watch them on some high rock whistling and waiting for an answer.

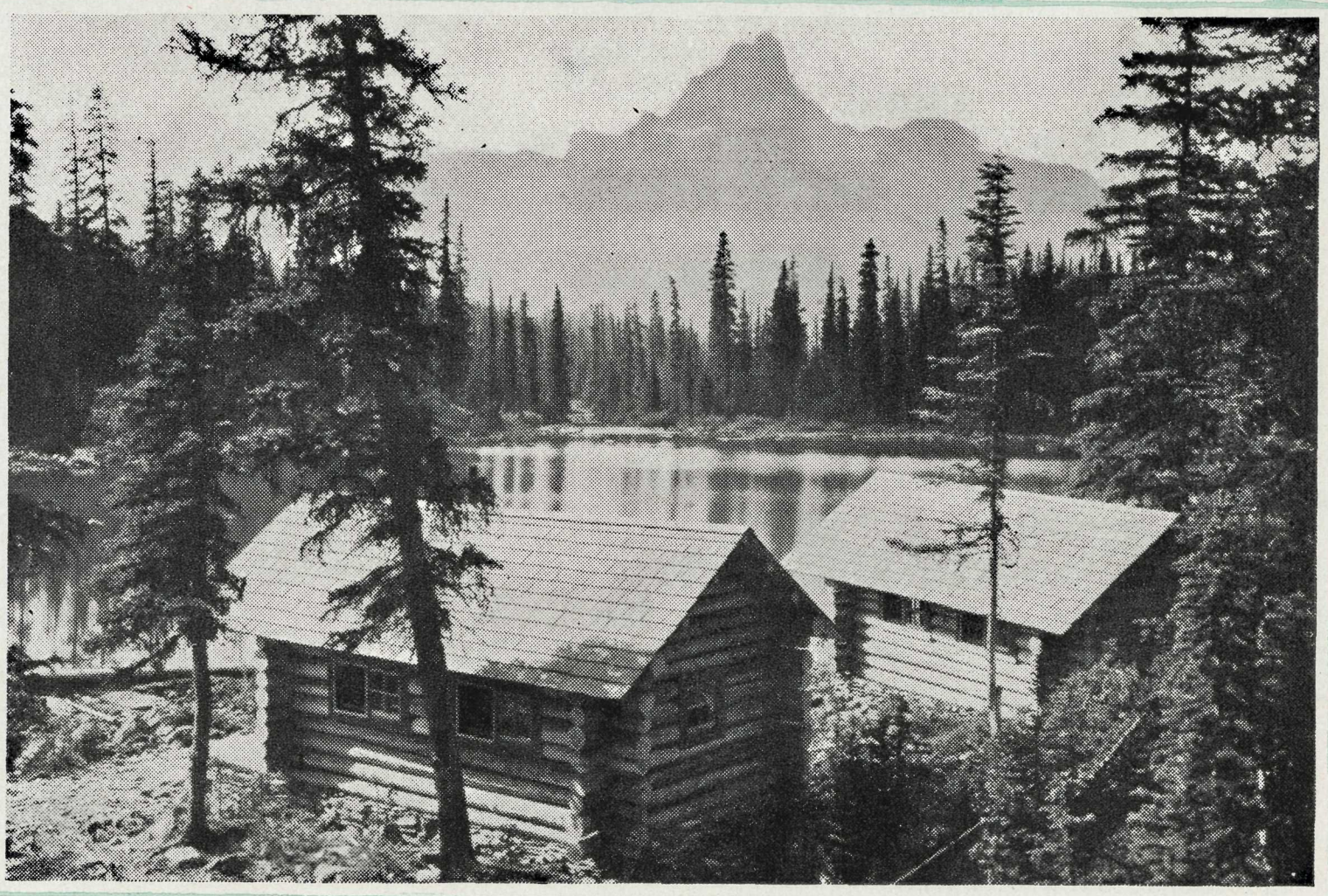
Unearthly Beauty

Turning about we look anxiously for Lake McArthur, but it is nowhere in sight. Surely this cannot be the wrong trail? We climb over the rocks, and suddenly it is there below—a thing of unearthly beauty—in the foreground a little tuft and a few flowers. Sombre peaks towering above it—no sound but the lapping of the waves and the sound of a little waterfall on the right. And its colour? Blue, every conceivable shade of blue—aquamarine—sapphire—cerulean—a glorious gem, its surface covered with dancing points of silver; a vast shield of damascened steel. Walter D. Wilcox in his "Rockies of Canada" points out that McArthur is one of the few mountain lakes whose waters are unmistakably blue—often the very blue of the sky—as though a bit of the heavens had fallen to earth. And the reflected colors, despite the sombre cliffs that surround the lake, range throughout the blues, lilacs and purples to bronze and gold.

Lake McArthur is above the line of vegetation, with only a few Alpine flowers clinging to the shelter of the rocks. These higher cirque lakes, above timberline, enclosed only by cliffs and snow, or with a glacier, as there is at the end of this lake, have an austere beauty all their own. There is no sight or sound of human habitation, even the marmots do not invade its shores.



Three pictures of Lake O'Hara Camp which show its substantial construction. At the top is one of the sleeping rooms in the central chalet; at the side is a picture of the Living Room of the chalet.



The return trail reveals new wonders of the mountains, gigantic ridges and pinnacles and pyramids, dazzling summits, sombre slopes, deep valleys, silver threads of distant streams. We scramble down the steep descent and rest for a while in the meadow, finding relief in the song of birds and the graciousness of flowers. A swim in the secluded waters of the lakelet in the forest prepares one for the evening meal at O'Hara.

O'Hara by moonlight! Every aspect of this wonderful lake is memorable, but one must carry away unforgettable memories of O'Hara glowing softly in the light of a full moon. The air is chilly at this hour, but one forgets such discomforts as the silver disk creeps up behind an ebony peak, throwing it into sharp outline; then slowly emerges, hovers for a moment on the very summit like a glorious pearl, and sails out over the lake whose velvet depths receive its other self.

The Song of the Seven Sisters

It is at this enchanted hour that you can sometimes hear the song of the Seven Sisters Waterfall. We can visit the Seven Sisters to-morrow. They are separate falls, lazy streams whose cadence adds to the beauty of the lake. The trail is from the Bungalow Camp to the property owned by the Alpine Club, on a point jutting out into the lake—not the poor trail around the lake at the water's edge, but one farther back in the woods, as hard and firm as a macadam road.

But now for the song of the Seven Sisters—a sad song like the falling of millions of tears. Long, long ago, when the world was very young, a group of dryads and naiads asked Mother Nature to give them a playground that would be indisputably their own. They begged for a distant and secret place free from the intrusion of giants and titans and satyrs, and so, with her finger on her lips, Mother Nature led them to a mile-long jewel, nearly seven thousand feet above the sea, and hidden partly by the copper skirts of Wiwaxy, partly by the towering ramparts of Lefroy, and partly by a fortress of trees standing so close together that the sun is defeated when he tries to throw a blanket over its shimmering surface.

Blue as a Sapphire

Blue as a sapphire, green as a peacock's tail-feathers, amethyst and rose, this little lake was the playground of fairy-folk for many a long year. Then, one day, a curious two-legged creature who had lost his horns and tail along with his immortality strayed into the hidden garden. Following him there came a soft-treading, fleet-footed Indian, and later a trapper or two. It was terrible when, for the first time, the fairy-folk heard a gun fired at one of their gentle companions. In a panic, they fled to the far end of the lake, and besought protection of the Giant Lefroy. And the benign old rocks gathered them in a sheltering embrace—and there they are today, the Seven Sisters Waterfall, mingling their tears in an agony of bereavement over their lost paradise.

Among the other worth-while things at Lake O'Hara is the trip to Crystal Cave. The scramble up will seem arduous enough to the average climber, but the view from there is a high reward. The Cave itself is not particularly remarkable, for it is now nearly closed. Only the mouth remains open, but some pieces of rock are very white and clear. The trip from the Chalet and return can be made in a morning.

Lake Oesa

But the most interesting trail of all is the one to Lake Oesa, and the lake itself is of a conquering beauty. One follows the trail from the Chalet to the foot of the lace-work of the Seven Sisters, and clambers up a steep bit to the left of the waterfall to a plateau, covered for the most part with rock fragments varying in size from a football to a small house. Through this wilderness one makes one's way to the shores of a small and nameless lake, and from there climbs up a series of sharply-defined terraces, with occasional glimpses into a spectacular gorge, and past two somewhat larger lakes, also apparently nameless, to the upper plateau in the bosom of which rests Oesa.

Oesa is much smaller than either O'Hara or McArthur, and its coloring is different—more of an aquamarine. Its beauty, although more austere than that of McArthur, is none the less authentic. Set far up in the mountains, beyond the tree line, beyond all vegetation except moss and alpine flowers; surrounded by gigantic rock walls and pinnacles and glaciers; brooded over by the very spirit of silence; serene and undisturbed, it seems to be as remote from the living world as if it were in the moon.

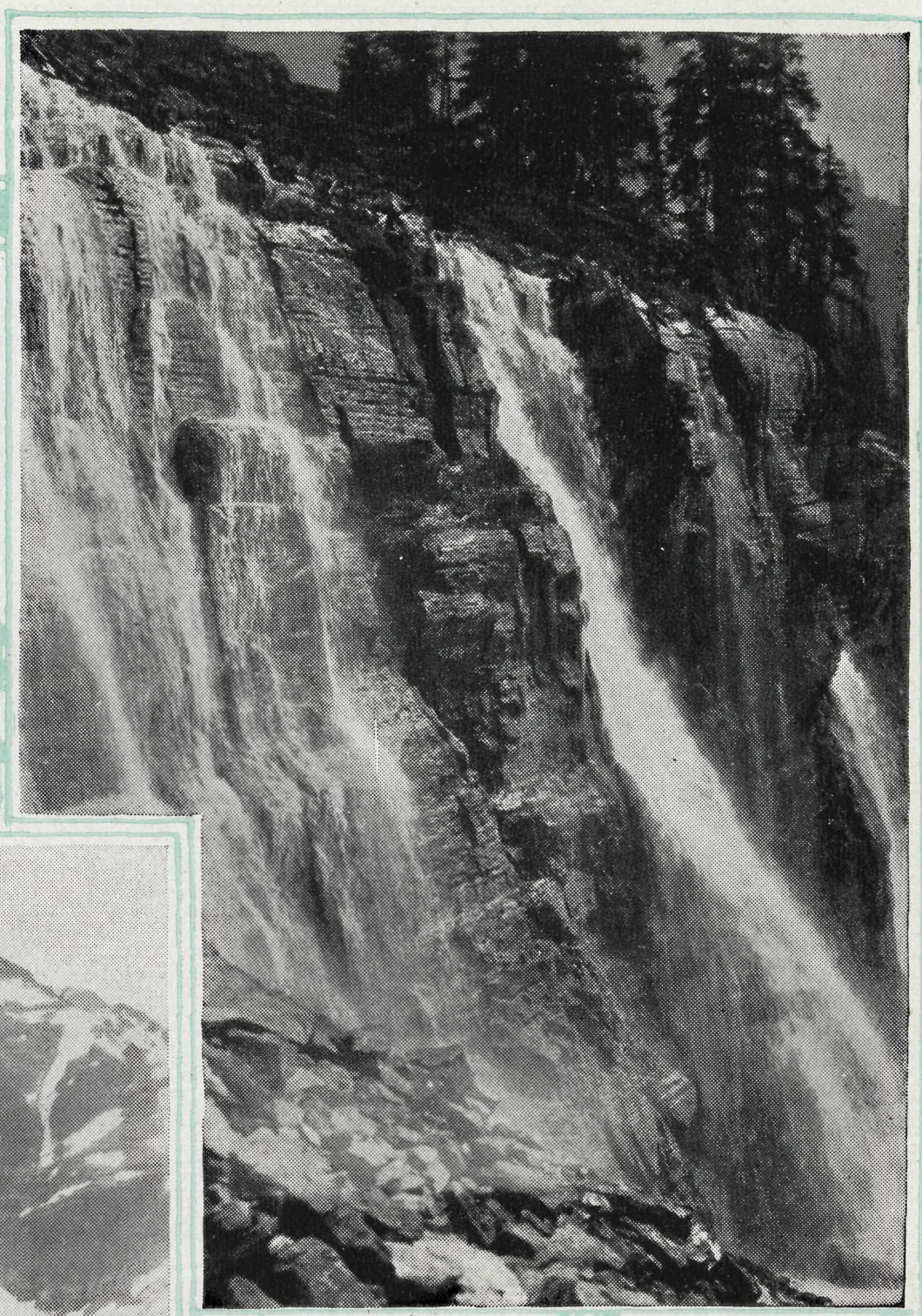
To the right an immense shale slope runs down to the lake. On the opposite side snowbanks survive usually throughout the summer. A glacier tongue touches the border of the lake. In the background looms mighty Lefroy. Fleets of miniature icebergs sail across Oesa even in midsummer. The silence is broken, or emphasized, by the mournful whistle of a marmot. An enterprising mosquito —Heaven only knows what brought him up here!— adds his minute song.

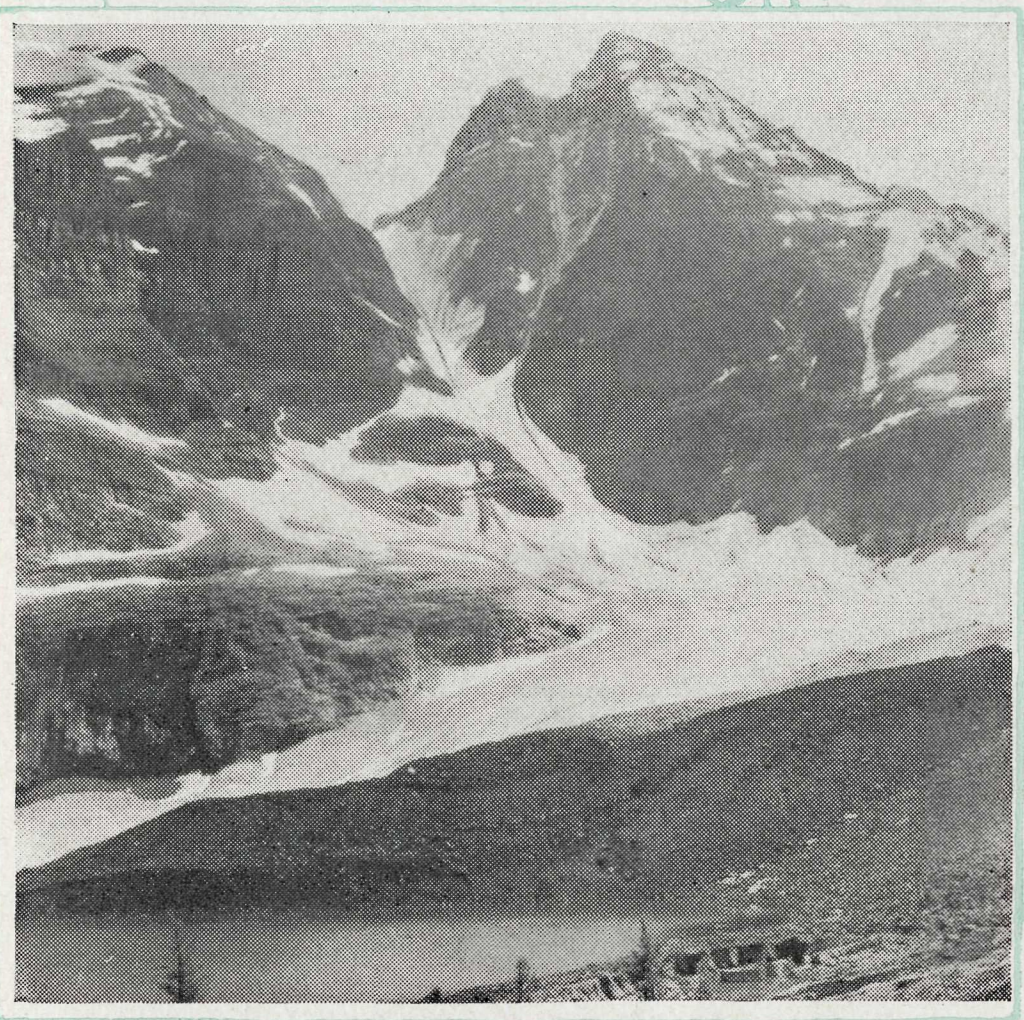
One would not have missed Oesa, made perhaps all the more attractive because of the strenuous quality of the trail, but one's regret in leaving it behind is tempered by the thought that one is returning to an even more beautiful lake in the valley below. The vision of O'Hara through the tree-tops from the plateau above the "Sisters," who wear coral veils at sundown, is just one more revelation of the infinite variety of the moods of that entrancing pool.

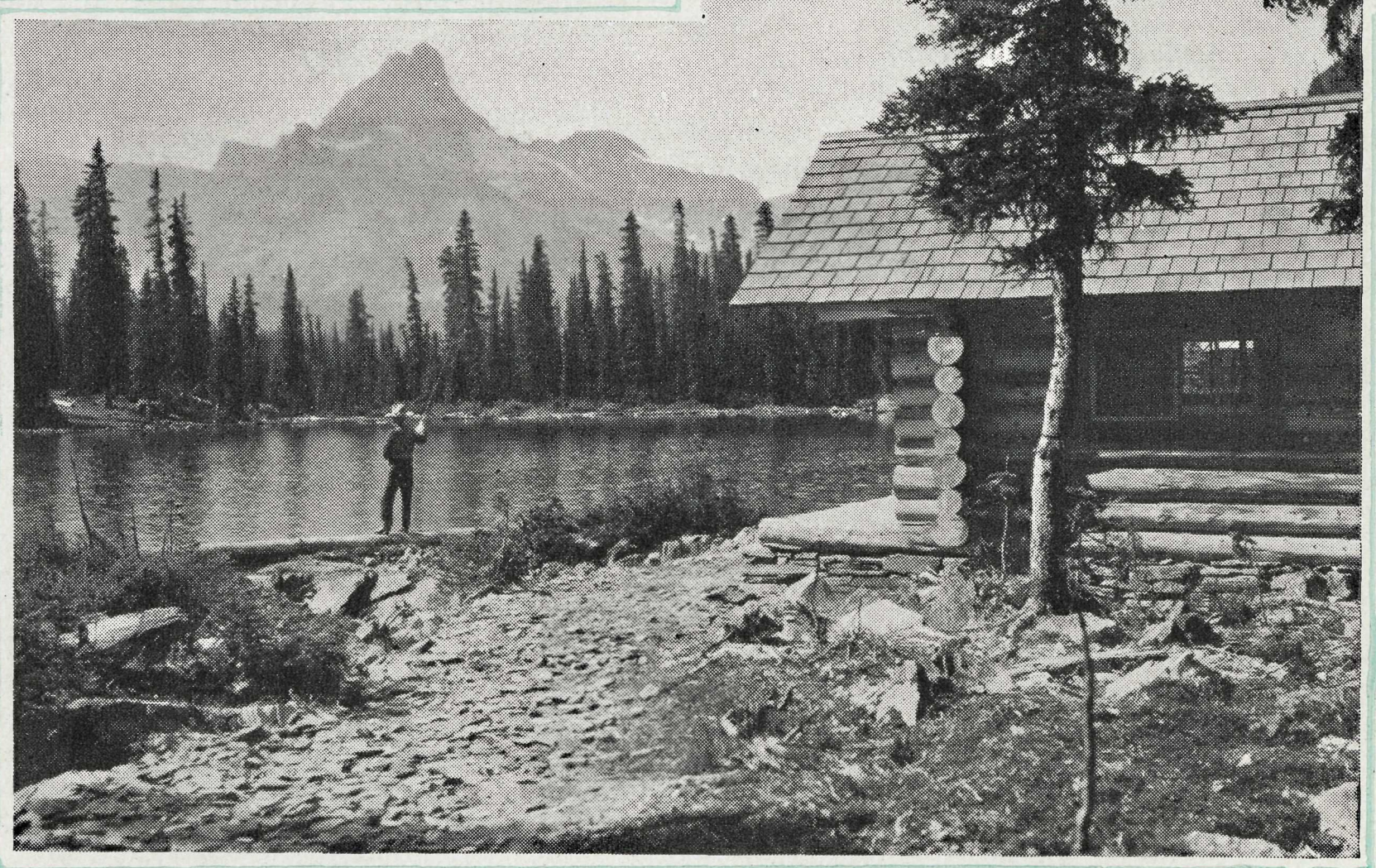
The Abbot Pass Route

We spoke away back of other routes to Lake O'Hara; and this, by Lake Oesa, is the third. It is the Abbot Pass route to and from Lake Louise. This is not a trip for the unseasoned, the inexperienced, or the foolhardy, for it is on foot over glaciers; but provided you have a sturdy con-

Here (*at the side*) are seen the Seven Sisters Falls. (*Immediately below*) Lake Oesa. (*Bottom*) There is excellent trout fishing in Lake O'Hara







Lake McArthur

stitution, especially plenty of "spares" in the matter of breathing gear, a guide, proper climbing clothes, and about eight hours of fair weather, you can make this magnificent excursion easily.

Take a Swiss Guide!

Dozens of people make this trip every summer. It is difficult enough to be an achievement, but not dangerous or exhausting. It is absolutely imperative, however, to employ a Swiss guide. Arrangements may be made at either of the starting points—Lake O'Hara or Lake Louise, preferably the latter.

Abbot Pass lies between Mount Victoria and Mount Lefroy, and has been called "the gateway to Cataract Valley"—that is, from the Lake Louise side of the range. It reaches 9,598 feet above sea level and was named after Philip Stanley Abbot, a distinguished member of the Appalachian Mountain Club (Boston) who lost his life while trying to capture the peak of Mount Lefroy.

Abbot Pass is a V-shaped notch, whose secluded summit is hemmed in between mighty precipices from which avalanches constantly thunder and from which the outlook commands nothing but naked pinnacles, snow and cataracts of ice. There is not a sign of life—neither tree nor shrub nor blade of stunted grass within the range of vision. It is a dead world, locked in the frozen grip of snow and ice.

"It is a picture," writes Sir James Outram, "of weird wonder and desolate majesty, almost incomparable and boundlessly impressive in its might and its eternal suggestiveness."

At the summit of the Pass is an Alpine Hut, fast becoming almost as well known as the adjacent resorts. The majority of people use it as a lunch objective, but it is convenient for parties who wish to remain the night, and witness the miracle of day unfolding on the mountain peaks and glaciers. From it descent is made to Lake Oesa.

The Ottertail Route

And now for the fourth route to Lake O'Hara—the Ottertail route, providing a spectacular glimpse of the Ottertail Valley and Range. You motor or ride west from Field to the picturesque cabin of the game warden, some five miles, and from there your pony carries you to the conjunction of the Ottertail with McArthur Creek. Leaving the latter where it ought to be, on the floor of the earth, you ride up an almost perpendicular wall and feel intense surprise, upon reaching McArthur Plateau and Pass, that your head is not touching the ceiling. From McArthur Pass, O'Hara is distant about three miles.

Wapta Camp

We have said very little about Wapta Camp. But besides being the starting point for this trip to O'Hara, it is a very delightful place in itself. Situated on the northern shore of beautiful Lake Wapta, it consists of a large club-house and a number of small sleeping cabins, with a total capacity for 55 guests. It is one of the principal pivotal points from which the attractions of Yoho National Park can be visited. Sherbrooke Lake, Ross Lake, and the Kicking Horse Canyon Tea House are within easy reach. Attractions include fishing, boating and riding.

The Alpine Hut at Abbot Pass

Yoho Camp

The Yoho Valley is one of the most beautiful in the entire Rockies. Near the end of the motor road from either Wapta or Field, and opposite the spectacular Takakkaw Falls, is the Yoho Valley Bungalow Camp.

This is one of the finest drives in the Rockies. The road follows the milky, glacial-fed stream to where it joins the Yoho River, near the entrance of the valley at Mount Field, round which it swings, and up the valley until some precipitous cliffs are reached. Up these it zigzags to a higher level, ending a short distance past the Takakkaw Falls.

From Yoho Camp the visitor can take a trail into the upper part of the valley, past Laughing Falls and the Twin Falls to the Yoho and President Glaciers and the Waputik ice fields. The Yoho Glacier is one of the most interesting in the Canadian Rockies, and highly picturesque.

A lodge is operated at Twin Falls, with accommodation for eight and the visitor can spend the night there, visiting the glacier the next day and then returning to the Yoho Valley Camp.

Emerald Lake

Or from Wapta Camp, one can take the motor road into Field and, crossing the Kicking Horse River to the base of Mount Burgess, take the Emerald Lake road. This road leads through a forest of balsam and spruce, passing on the way the Natural Bridge—a barrier of rock damming the Kicking Horse River. Emerald Lake, of most exquisite colouring and sublimity of surroundings, lies placid under the protection of Mount Wapta, Mount Burgess and Mount President. On the shore of the lake is the delightful Emerald Lake Chalet and its bungalow camp annex.

Emerald Lake can also be reached from the Yoho Valley by a magnificent trail trip on the back of a sure-footed mountain pony, over the Yoho Pass (altitude 6,020 feet). From the summit an extraordinarily fine view can be obtained. Summit Lake, small but beautifully coloured, has a small rest house; and thence descent is made to Emerald Lake.

When one has reached Summit Lake, from either Emerald Lake or the Yoho Valley Camp, there is an alternative return over the Burgess Pass—one of the most magnificent of the easily accessible pony-rides in the mountains. It affords a breathtaking panorama of a sea of peaks. The trail skirts the great mass of Mount Wapta, and passing between Mount Field and Mount Burgess, drops down through wooded slopes to Field.

Separate booklets have been issued on the other bungalow camps in Yoho National Park—Wapta Camp and Yoho Valley Camp, as well as one on Emerald Lake Chalet, and can be obtained from Canadian Pacific agents.

Lake O'Hara Bungalow Camp

At beautiful Lake O'Hara, in Yoho National Park, close to the Great Divide of the Canadian Rockies. Eight miles south of Hector Station, by trail. Also reached from Lake Louise over Abbot Pass.

The camp consists of a Chalet for dining and recreational purposes, and separate sleeping bungalows. Some sleeping accommodation is also provided in the Chalet. Accommodation for 34 guests.

Open (subject to trail conditions) from June 15th to September 15th. Rates $5.50 per day, $35.00 per week, American plan.

Hector Station is on the main line of the Canadian Pacific Railway.

The motor road from Banff to Golden passes Wapta Camp. Distances from Wapta Camp—Banff 50 miles, Lake Louise 8 miles, Yoho Camp 13 miles, Emerald Lake Chalet 15 miles.

Postal Address, Lake O'Hara Bungalow Camp, via Hector. B.C.

REACHED FROM LAKE O'HARA BUNGALOW CAMP

Wapta Bungalow Camp

Close to Hector Station
Sleeping accommodation for 55

Abbot Pass Alpine Hut

Between Lake O'Hara and Lake Louise
Sleeping accommodation for 20

The mountain pony, mountain-bred, fool-proof, untiring, can be ridden by practically anyone, whether he or she has ever before been on a horse or not. Some trail trips are of one day's duration only; others stretch over several days, necessitating carrying camping outfit. It is customary, on all long trips and even on some short ones, to engage guides who supply horses, tents, food, etc., and do the necessary cooking.

The Trail Riders' Association

Those who have ridden fifty miles or upwards in the Canadian Rockies are qualified for membership in the Trail Riders of the Canadian Rockies, which affords an unusual opportunity for those interested in trail-riding to get together. The aims of the Trail Riders' Association are, principally, to encourage travel on horseback through the Canadian Rockies, to foster the maintenance and improvement of old trails and the building of new trails, and to encourage the love of outdoor life.

Membership is of several grades, according to the distance ridden—50, 100, 250, 500, 1,000 and 2,500 miles. There are now 1,100 members.

The Annual Pow-Wow

Each year an annual "Pow-Wow" and Official Ride is held, lasting several days and bringing together a large number of men and women interested in the fine recreation of trail riding. For 1931 two Official Rides are planned. The first, a four day ride, will leave Banff on July 30. The second will be a ten day ride. Full information is available at the hotels and bungalow camps in the Rockies.

Circle Trail Rides

In addition to these official rides circle trail rides will be operated during July and August around the Bungalow Camps in Yoho Park. These are under the auspices of the Trail Riders' Association. The trip, starting once a week, will last six days, with the following itinerary:

First day—Motor or ride to Wapta Camp. After lunch, ride to Lake O'Hara Camp.

Second day—Side trip to Lake McArthur, spending the night in a new cabin and tent-camp on McArthur Creek.

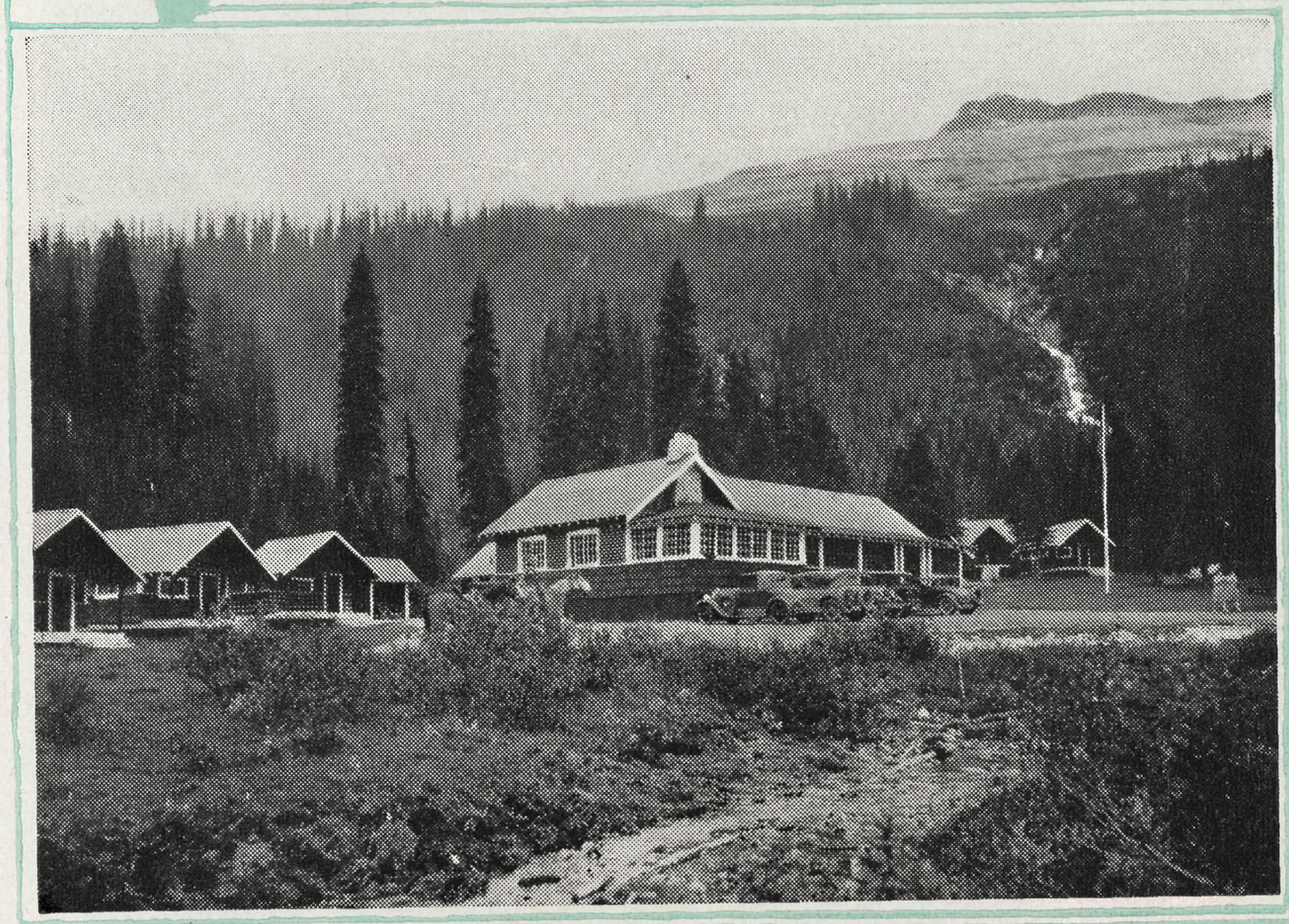
Third day—Ride from McArthur Creek down the Ottertail trail to Emerald Lake.

Fourth day—From Emerald Lake ride over Yoho Pass to Yoho Valley Camp.

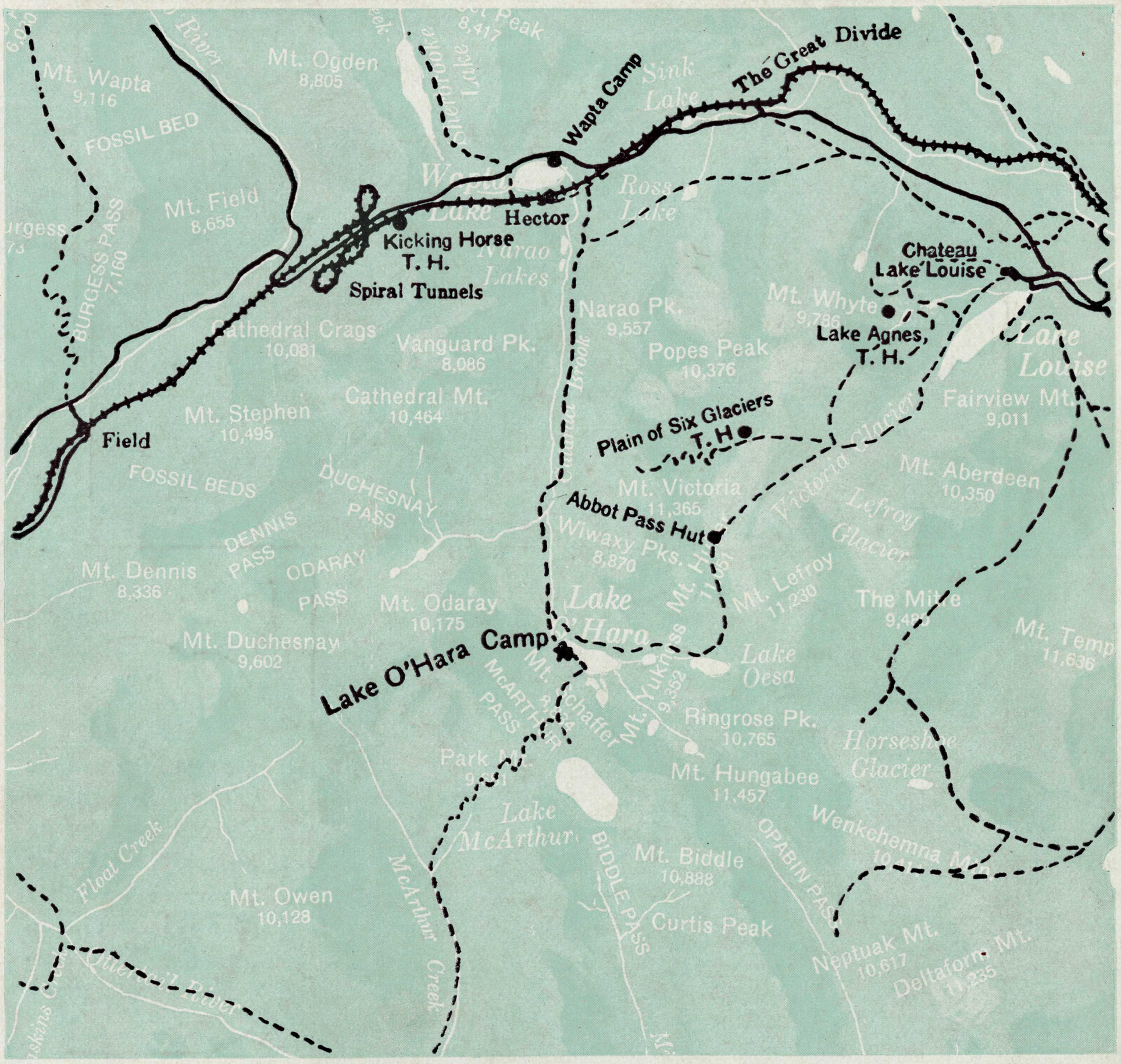
Fifth day—Side trip to Twin Falls, spending the night at Yoho Camp.

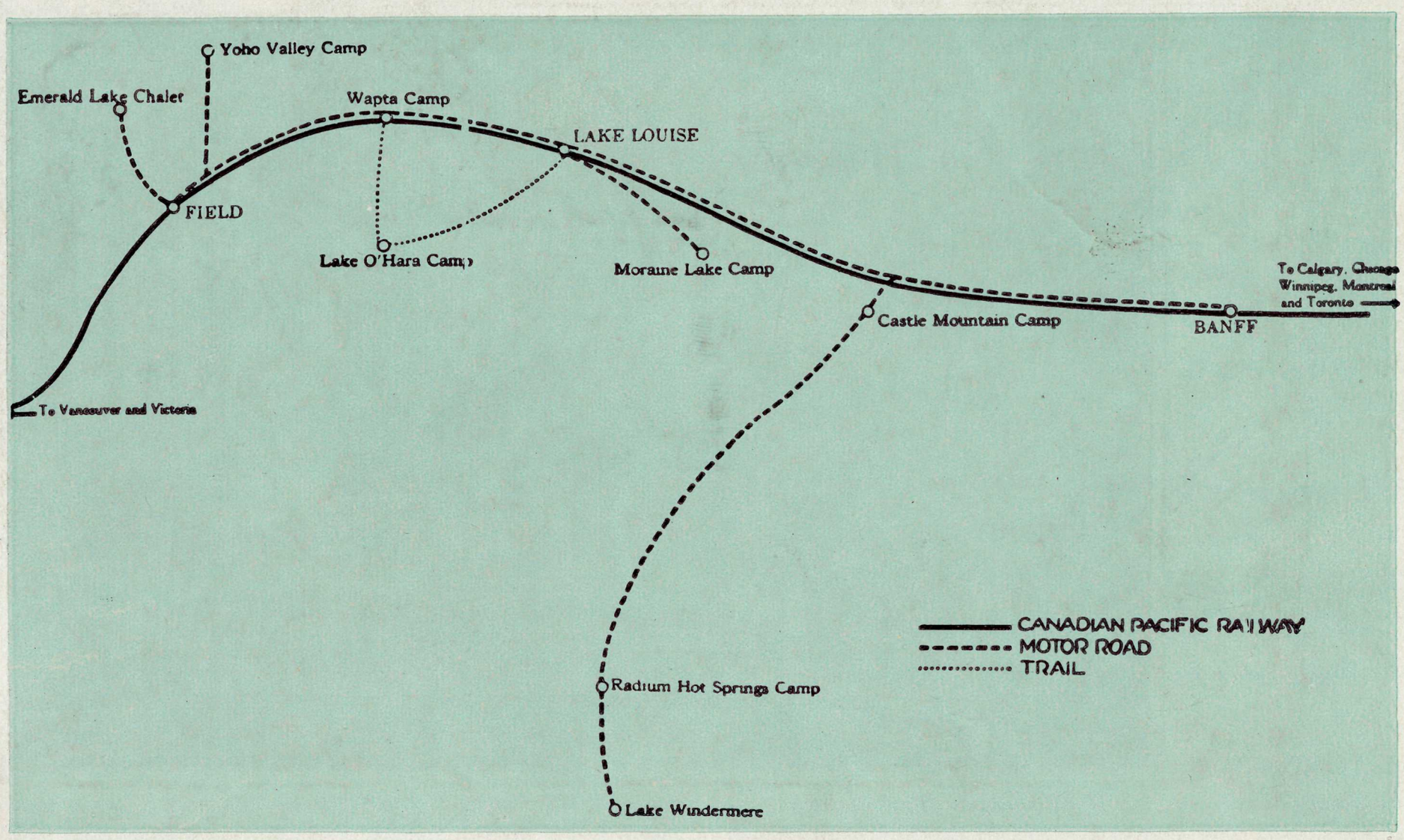
Sixth day—Ride over Burgess Pass to Field, and motor or ride back to Emerald Lake.

The rates for these Circle Trips are $10.00 per day per person inclusive of pony, food, guide and sleeping accommodation (except for the Emerald Lake day, which will be $13.00).



Delightful journeys from Lake O'Hara Bungalow Camp bring you to Emerald Lake Chalet (*above*)—Yoho Valley Bungalow Camp (*centre*) or Wapta Bungalow Camp (*below*)





Part of Yoho and Banff National Parks