

## 4 The Trail Maker

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Like his mountain-climbing exploits, Lawrence Grassi's trail making is not always easily documented. Even accounts by people who knew him and who witnessed or took part in his projects do not often provide exact dates, or provide only approximately remembered ones. Written accounts, published or unpublished, are sometimes strikingly and frustratingly misleading or else fragmentary. This is especially so in the case of his first major trail-building project, leading to Grassi Lakes on a ridge overlooking Canmore, as we will see. Much of his work has survived to the enduring enjoyment of Canmore residents or of tourists and hikers at Lake O'Hara in Yoho National Park and elsewhere. Much, however, has also disappeared, obliterated by time and the advance of modernity, or by bureaucratic decisions. What is left reveals much about a man who was complex and multifaceted, and whose withdrawn and solitary life revealed little beyond an almost total dedication to the mountains.

Such was Lawrence Grassi, coal miner and world-class mountain climber and guide, who generously led people to places they would otherwise never have reached, and when that was not enough he built the trails that eased their way there. The man whom Sydney Vallance called "one of the finest, if not the finest, rock climbers and guides of this continent" felt ill suited to play that part, or to exploit his talent for personal gain. Instead, he lived alone and modestly in the cabin he purchased in 1918, until he could no longer look after himself and moved into a retirement home for his final years. He was modest to the point of reticence as a chronicler of his own deeds, an attitude that reflected the nature of mountaineering in his day, as compared to the competitive sport it sometimes is today. It is instructive to consider the