Shuswap's Second Highest Peak
A *Shuswap Passion* column for the Shuswap Market News
By Jim Cooperman

It did not take me long on Boxing Day to decide on a topic for the first column of the New Year and decade, as I was then skiing a few hundred metres below the peak of the Shuswap's second tallest mountain, Mount Fosthall. We had considered going to the top, but since the snow surface was hard wind swept crust we chose to head to the pass and ski down the north side towards Peters Lake. Unfortunately, the snow on that side was also crusted, consequently we were forced to carefully side-slip and then scrape our way down until the crust turned to powder lower down and we were able to enjoy our turns.

At 2679 metres tall (8789 feet), Mount Fosthall towers above most all the other peaks located within the Shuswap watershed, including the 2487 metre high Tsuius Mountain, which I had incorrectly identified as Shuswap's highest point in 2005. According to the third edition of British Columbia Place Names by Helen Akrigg, the peak was named after a clerk in a Hudson's Bay post; however, there is no mention of the name in the Hudson's Bay archives. There is also an old gazetteer that makes mention of a nineteenth century steamer lodge on the west side of Upper Arrow Lake called Fosthall, named after the Hudson's Bay Company clerk who looked after it.

If it had been up to the local residents of the nearby community of Cherryville, the mountain would have been named after Bill Fraser, who homesteaded land at the north end of Sugar Lake in the early 1900s. The earliest recorded climb was in 1928, as indicated by a concrete marker at the base of the cairn on the peak with the names W. Fraser and F. Lehay inscribed along with the name "Mount. Fraser." The marker was last seen in 1974 and was subsequently removed from the cairn.

While the mountain's original mysterious name persevered, a nearby lake and creek was named after Bill Fraser. In those early days, the Fraser homestead was turned into a lodge frequented by fishermen, hunters and artists. The lake that is one of Monashee Park's key features was named after one of the lodge's visitors; a famous birdwatcher and botanist from England named Frank Peters.

Fosthall is part of the Gold Range of the Monashee Mountains and it is located entirely within Monashee Provincial Park. After Vernon photographer and naturalist, Doug Kermode first visited the area by horseback in 1946 with Bill Fraser, he wanted to see the area protected and returned with other conservationists in 1948 and in subsequent years. A major focus of the group was to stop the senseless slaughter by hunters of the remaining herd of Mountain Caribou. This group went on to lobby the provincial government throughout the 1950s and despite opposition from local hunters; Monashee Provincial Park was created in 1962.

Since then, the park has been well used by hikers, fishermen and naturalists who appreciate the rich old growth forests, the many lakes, the waterfalls, the extensive alpine areas, the wildlife viewing opportunities and the spectacular scenery. In 1993 a Park

Master Plan recommended an expansion to enhance its wilderness recreation and conservation features. As a result of the ensuing Okanagan Shuswap Land and Resource Management Plan process, the park was tripled in size making it the largest park in the Shuswap at 22,722 hectares.

Normally it takes two days to hike to the peak of Mount Fosthall, but often hikers first camp at Spectrum Lake, then they hike to the rustic campsite at Peters Lake before making the 3 to 4 hour hike up to the peak. I made it to the peak in the fall of 2008 in less than 4 hours from the Sol Mountain Touring Lodge that began operations in 2005 and is now available for summer and fall bookings in addition to its busy winter ski touring season.

It was a spectacular journey across a heavily glaciated alpine landscape to the rocky base on the south face and then a scramble up the gravelly western shoulder to the peak. From the top, we could see the Silver Star ski runs, as well as many Monashee peaks and the Selkirk Mountains to the east. How fortunate it is that Shuswap's second highest point is both easily accessible and is protected along with the surrounding landscape in such a magnificent, but little known, Provincial Park. The tallest peak in the Shuswap is Mount English, at 2701 metres.