

## Canadian Rockies in the summer of 2012

Although not an LMC meet these notes may be of interest to those planning future visits.

Our first camp which we pre-booked via the internet was at Bow River Campground near Canmore this is an easy drive from the airport and a convenient location for Heart Mountain [2135m] which is a good and enjoyable scramble and a suitable introduction to Rockies limestone. Canmore is also a super base for Bow Valley sport climbing and we enjoyed a fine afternoon climbing on perfect rock at Heart Creek.

Our next venue was Kananaskis country the hills hereabouts are known as the near ranges and weather is often settled when the main ranges are stormy. The valley offers super hill walking and scrambling and good campgrounds but we were hindered due to Parks Management closing areas where the bears were feeding and fattening up for winter hibernation.

We returned to Canmore via the Dorian Spray road, a good dirt track through some fine scenery and then carried on to Banff which of course is rather touristy but a good place to refresh and restock. The ever popular Mount Rundle [2949m] overlooks the town and offered a fine ascent of 1570m initially through forest then out onto the exposed and open slopes of the mountain for quite a slog up scree slopes to the very rewarding summit.

Radium Hot Springs was well worth the visit although given its popularity and the heat of the day (26 deg C) we opted for a quieter late evening plunge and it was magnificent. Radium is in the Rocky Mountain Trench through which runs the mighty river Columbia. We travelled north along the trench to Brisco (this area is super for bird watching) from where crossed the river and took the 50km dirt road to Bugaboo National Park.

The park is famous for its magnificent granite spires which have names such as Bugaboo Spire, Pigeon Spire and Snowpatch Spire. Accommodation is by way of the Alpine Club of Canada's Konrad Kaine hut or two basic campgrounds set on the rock terraces in amongst the glacial moraines. Access to the hut and the campsites is via a good but steep path which gives magnificent views improving with altitude and culminating in the mind blowing sights to be had from the hut and the camps.

Golden is the town where the Kicking Horse and the Columbia rivers merge and we had a day there for rafting. The trip runs for 20km down grade 3/4 rapids and was a super fun day being very well organised by the Glacier Raft Co. The Kicking Horse Resort just outside Golden is a mecca for technical mountain biking but at 100\$/day for bike hire?

Yoho Park is the home to the very impressive of 800 ft high Takawawa water fall and is also the location of the Iceline Trail which is a 20km path across the upper meadows of the valley giving wonderful views of the peaks and glaciers of the Yoho region.

Lake Louise is without doubt the tourist mecca of the Canadian Rockies and justifiably so. The crags at the head of the lake are fine if you don't mind the tourists gawking at you as you climb or worse fail on your route!

Next door to Lake Louise is Moraine Lake and here we are talking of somewhere rather special. The scenery is truly magnificent and the ambience is almost Cathedral like. We climbed 'the ultimate scramble' Mount Temple [3544m] via Sentinel Pass. This is a lovely but challenging hill affording wonderful views of all the peaks around Moraine Lake which are known as the Wenkchemna Peaks; Mt Fay [3235m]; Mt Little [3193m]; Mt Bowlen

[3071m]; Tonsa [3054m]; Mt Perren [3051m]; Mt Allen [3301m]; Mt Tusso [3245m]; Deltaform Mountain [3424m]; Neptuak Mountain [3237m] and Wenchemna Peak [3206m]. The ascent of mount Temple is not an easy one as route finding is complex and there are a couple of rock bands which demand exposed scrambling it's certainly not the place to be in bad weather but the surrounding scenery makes it well worth the effort.

The Icefields Parkway runs north from Lake Louise to Jasper and is billed as one of the great road trips of the world, we don't dispute the claim. '..... road climbs through an amazingly diverse range of Rocky Mountain scenery, from surging rivers and high alpine glaciers to mountain passes and brilliant blue lakes'. The scenery is just magical with wonderful views all the way and the many other sightseers are very easily avoided by simply leaving your vehicle and taking a hike! The added bonus of doing this is that the views are even better from higher up on the trails. Good camping is available just south of the Columbia Icefields visitors centre.

Jasper was enjoying temperatures of 30 deg C when we arrived and fortunately our hire vehicle had air conditioning. The downside of the heat was that the hanging Ghost Glacier on Mount Edith Cavell had fallen off and landed in the lake below causing a tsunami which resulted in half a metre depth of gravel being deposited on the car park of Cavell Meadows, the demolition of the washrooms, destruction of the trail and the closure of the access road by the Parks Service. We never did get to see the mountain close up. We visited the Fiddle River valley and hiked the Sulphur Mountain Skyline Trail, this was rather disappointing as it really is only a hike and seems rather tame after the delights of the parkway. The bonus is Miette hot springs which allows for a lovely shower and very hot bath at the days end. We also took a day out west from Jasper on the Yellowhead highway to visit Mount Robson. The mountain is very often in cloud but we enjoyed another day of 28 deg C temperatures and clear blue skies the hike up to Kenney Lake giving magnificent views of the South West ridges. This trail runs up to Berg Lake which lies below the Robson Glacier and is well into bear country all the back packers had 'bear spray', 'bangers' and 'screamers' complimenting their heavy sacks. Jasper also has some fine cragging sites and we enjoyed a super day at Morrow Bluffs which lies just off the Jasper/Edmonton highway the area has a series of fine limestone slabs with a good selection of 4.7, 8 & 9 grades ideal for us!

Out flights were Manchester/Calgary direct with Air Transat and the hold baggage weight limit of 20kg/person worried us until we noticed the extra allowance of 20kg for 'camping equipment' in the fine print. Thankfully there were no questions at check in regarding our three large bags other than the usual 'any forbidden stoves or fuel?' Our luck was in with our basic hire car from Dollar Thrifty Rentals when we explained that our trip would often take us onto dirt tracks the clerk kindly upgraded it to a Jeep Patriot at no extra charge. Most of our trip could have been done in a standard car but it was very nice not having to worry about bottoming out or damaged tires on the more remote tracks.

Campsites with the exception of our first one were booked adhoc as this gave us good flexibility we had no problems but on Canadian public holidays it is essential to pre-book the pitches. Facilities at all were excellent and very well maintained the average cost being £18/night.

Weather was perfect averaging 25/28 deg C with only a couple of hours of rain. Locals all said it was exceptional and we were very lucky not to have had thunderstorms.

All the people we met on the trip were very nice and often helpful but special thanks go to James the janitor of the Sundance Mall in Banff a fine guy with great alternative laundry facilities!

### Books and Maps

- Scrambles in the Canadian Rockies by Alan Kane a couple of volumes are available. Ours was old and some of the info was dated. The easier grades tend to be footpaths and hence busy, the more difficult grades are most certainly scrambles. Times are reasonable. Descents are sometimes vague and need care.
- Lonely Planet's guide to Banff, Jasper and Glacier very useful for general info.
- Canadian Rockies Explorer by Graham Pole good for general info about the Rockies flora and fauna, history etc.
- GemTrek series of maps for Banff, Jasper, Lake Louise and Yoho useful for planning but we could have managed without them.
- Bow Valley Sports Climbing

Conclusion - an excellent trip, and given more time we would have spent another couple of days on the parkway ascending more trails and peaks to make the most of the truly magnificent views.

Dave & Julie