

# THE PACKRAT



## RMRA Newsletter

HIKING - SKIING  
BACKPACKING  
CLIMBING - CYCLING  
CANOEING - SCRAMBLING  
SNOWSHOEING



## APRIL 1992



**THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN RAMBLERS  
ASSOCIATION**

**ACTIVITIES:** Hiking, Backpacking, Climbing, Skiing, Cycling, Mountain-Biking, Snowshoeing, Canoeing, Educational and Awareness Programs and Social functions.

**MEETINGS:** WEEKLY- Wednesday evening at 8:00 PM  
Rosemount Community Hall  
2807 - 10 Street N.W.

**MAIL:** P.O. Box 3098 Station 'B'  
Calgary, AB T2M 4L6

**FEES:** Annual Membership: Single \$ 25.00  
Family \$ 35.00

**TRIP INFO.:** 282 - 6308 RMRA Hotline  
and at Meetings.

**R M R A EXECUTIVE 1991/92**

**PRESIDENT** Reg Fryling  
**VICE PRESIDENT** Alicean Van der Voet  
**TRIP COORDINATOR** Dave Reid  
**TREASURER** Brian Westcott  
**SECRETARY** Irene Willett  
**PROGRAM DIRECTOR** Philip Spaulding  
**SOCIAL DIRECTOR** Deirdre O'Brien  
**EQUIP. COORDINATOR** Ken Frank  
**NEWSLETTER EDITOR** John F. Schleinich

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## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

The objectives of our club as taken from the Coordinators Manual are as follows:

"To protect the interests of Ramblers, and to maintain their rights and privileges, to foster a greater love, use and knowledge of the countryside, to assist in the preservation of countryside amenities, to secure travel facilities for Ramblers, to function as a Bureau of Information and to organize social functions for the members."

In my opinion one of the great purpose of our club is its acceptance of any person as a unique individual and to afford that person equal rights and privileges as a Rambler to pursue the outdoors.

From time to time a suggestion is heard which would limit some aspect of our non-motorized outdoor activities. I would hope we can continue to pursue a wide range of outdoor activities at various levels of difficulty provided competent coordinators and participants are willing. Happy rambling.

Reg Fryling

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### SOCIAL ACTIVITIES 1991-92 (still to come) by Dee O'Brien

Greetings from the Social Committee.

On the Wednesday may the 6th RMRA is having an open house. Come and welcome Newcomers. Spread your outdoor enthusiasm - let them know that RMRA is the right group to associate with - friends you can trust.

This year's social functions yet to come:

Open House	May	1992
Stampede Breakfast	July	1992
Car Camp	Fall	1992
Award Dinner	Fall	1992

Committee members and Alicean, our vice president, will be available to meet informally with newcomers to the club on Wednesday nights to provide general information.

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In Memoriam. Mr Thomas Petrunia of Calgary a former member of our club, passed away at General Hospital in Calgary on February 28, 1992 at the age of 51 years. He is survived by his loving wife Kathy, his three sons Marc, Trent and Eric, and many friends he made in his long and active life.

# HEART MOUNTAIN HIKE

by Mark Gottlieb

Was it vision, was it his relationship with the Lord established at weekly prayer meetings, or was it simply the celebration of Valentines day that caused John, the editor of N.W. Calgary's literary event to call a summer hike up Heart Mountain in the dead of winter?

John's decision was right on the money. After a 45 minute spin, three of us arrived in the Heart Creek Trail parking lot. We were too late for breakfast judging from Peter Cottontail's scant remains beside the trail.

Two thousand ninehundred and twenty vertical feet later we reached the penultimate peak of Heart Mountain. We ascended the northwest ridge which was almost bone dry. There were a few pockets of snow near the top that made gaiters desirable but not necessary.

We descended the same way because we reckoned the snow on the shadowy side of the mountain would have made the northeast ridge hazardous if not impassable.

Interestingly, Heart Mountain divided the snow zone to the south and the relatively dry zone to the north.

A brilliantly sunny day, seven degree temperatures, and great company made for a tremendous physical and mental workout.

One of the subjects, creating mental activity, but fear to be discussed, was the correlation between the entry of record numbers of women into the canadian workforce over the past twenty years - and the increase of Canada's national debt during that same period, from twenty to four hundred billion dollars.

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## To the Bow hut by moonlight

by Wilf Twelker

So many times have we been to the Bow hut before, but how about by moonlight? I suggested the trip to the club members, testing the waters, but everybody looked the other way. Well, be it as it may, I was going to do it by myself. February the 15th looked like a good weekend, nearly a full moon and the weather forecast looked favourable. So off I went from Calgary that Friday night and after a brief 'coffee stop' at Mosquito creek picnic shelter (9pm) I found myself walking (actually skiing) across Bow Lake about 10pm under partly cloudy sky but with a bright moon. As I entered the canyon after Bow Lake, it was - 8 C and of course no sweat, and good moonlight. Getting

out of the canyon into that wide open valley, leading toward the hanging glacier in the back, I put in a stop, somewhere around 11:30 by then. What a different picture. The partly cloudy sky left part of the country in the dark, while the other part was in bright moonlight a weird picture at times as the clouds kept moving over the moon. I carried on. The snow was good and so was the trail. No problems, and I arrived at the hut at 1:00 after midnight. All was fine, but I did feel a bit cold and tired by then, so I had a good night's sleep and slept in till 10 in the morning.

The first skiers arrived about 11 am. "When did you get here?" I was asked. "In the moon-

light, this morning" I replied. There was a bit of disbelief. "Well" I said, "I happen to like a little bit of adventure too."

The rest of the weekend went as usual. I skied the upper slopes toward Mt. Gordon in fair weather but good light. No white-out. That night the Bow hut was 3/4 full and I had no problems finding buddies to play that standard game of 'hearts'.

Next day, Sunday, was very windy in the morning. Yet two parties were setting off, one to do the Sherbrooke traverse and staying at the Scott Duncan hut and the other going the same way but skiing out via Hector Lake.

I myself skied the slopes above the Bow hut one more time, left at noon and went home.

What should I say about those moonlight excursions? Well, it can be done, no problem, never used my headlights once, not even in the hut undoing my pack. But it won't become my standard trip. The indicator of your comfort level in your body may signal that there are better things to be done at 10 pm, than running up the slopes to Bow hut. ( If your "better-half" is with you, she might have some input into your adventure too.) However, I do feel, one should do such a trip sometimes, it is rather different.

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### FIFTEENTH ANNUAL SNOW CAVE TRIP by Art Davis

Late March 1991 I coordinated a snow cave trip to the South Molar Pass area and told everyone there that it was my last trip of this nature. Well, I lied. I decided a while ago that I would take one more to make it my 15th. On March 7th eleven of us left Mosquito Creek campground and loaded down with backpacks headed up the Mosquito Creek trail. The weather was nice, mild, clear and mostly calm. The trail was not as nice as the weather, however, being hard packed and slippery. After I struggled along for about half an hour of sliding backward on the slightest upgrade, I applied red wax to my skis and it made a dramatic improvement.

We all congregated at the MO-5 campsite for lunch and after a pleasant break skied up the summer trail for about 10 or 15 mins. then followed the creek up to the last bridge, then followed the hiking trail and turned off at the South Molar Pass trail junction. I had skied in here last month to check on the survey tapes I'd placed in trees to mark the hiking trail and had to move about half a dozen of them up higher as they were almost snow covered. Once up the trail on the top of the ridge it is a fairly level run to our proposed campsite at 2225 m or 7300 ft. elevation. We made it in about 3 hours, the same as the previous year, (not including lunch and rest stops) arriving around 15:00 hrs. The trip is just under 9 km with an elevation gain of 400 m or 1300 ft.

On arrival everyone went into action. Wilf Twelker started to erect an igloo with slave labour of cutting and carrying snow blocks by Kathy Bangay and Ron Folkins. Two snow caves were being excavated, one by Alastair and Gail DesMoulins and the other by Tony Forster, Eric and Kister Horne. Mary Fletcher and Bob Farrel put up a tent after spending some time in stomping the snow down for a base, doing a good imitation of an Indian war dance. I thought I'd be lazy this time

and build up a couple of snow walls with a fly sheet over the top that tapered down to the foot of my "bed".

Mary and Bob burned up quite a few calories excavating the fire place, the top of which was about half a meter below the snow surface then dug further out and outwards to make room for the group to stand around later. With a fire lit, the work completed, we had supper and a pleasant evening; it had been a bit cloudy in the late afternoon and early evening but it was calm 99% of the time. Around 20:30 hrs. it was around -10 degree C. Most of us headed for the sleeping bags about this time, by now the sky was mostly clear with stars twinkling and a crescent moon trying to beam a little light on us.

I had a freeze dry beef stew and I think it was made with a base of EX-Lax, as around 6:15 I had to get out from my snug sleeping bag and ski into the trees. There was a roar of an avalanche at 6:42 but have no idea where it was, there was sign of one in our area. By 7:30 we were coming out of our respective abodes, so I lit the fire and we proceeded to have our coffee, etc. and then breakfast. It was cool. around -18 C but clear and calm. The sun did not hit our campsite till about 10:00, then it was real mild. There had been a light dusting of snow during the night or early morning hours.

Alastair and Gail headed off over South Molar Pass and then eventually got up a 9200 ft. peak in the vicinity of Molar Mountain, being able to ski up to within a couple of hundred feet of the summit and going the rest of the way on foot. They were rewarded with a pleasant stop on the summit and superb views. As they were on a more extensive trip, they did not arrive back at the camp site until an hour or so after we had left.

The rest of the group split up, some ski-ing the slopes across from the campsite, Wilf leaving his usual spectacular ski tracks down the slopes. Others skied up the ridge that overlooks Molar Meadows and the North Molar Pass and enjoyed a good run down. I just hung around camp, keeping the fire going and drying out my fly sheet in the sunshine.

After 13:00 hrs. we started packing up in a leisurely fashion and were ready to leave at 14:00. Ski-ing out was good, most of us again following the creek down to MO-5 campsite where we took a break in the brilliant sunshine. Once on the last couple of kilometres of trail the fun ended, the trail being worse than the day before. I skied off to the side in unbroken snow as much as possible and found it to be easier. The last steep section just before the highway I found too much of a challenge with a backpack, and I walked down this part.

The weather could not have been any better, with the lack of wind except for wearing a fleece jacket I didn't put on my over jacket all weekend. There were no complaints from anyone about being cold. However, if I go again next year I will dig a cave and be real comfy.

Between the youngest and the oldest on this trip there was a difference of 49 years; you don't have to be a supper-jock to participate in this kind of trip, however, a strong back and a weak mind are distinct advantages.

My thanks to all who participated in the trip making it a great success. If I definitely decide not to go in 1993, perhaps some other coordinator will continue winter trips in this area as there is always good snow there for snow caves and igloos.

## QUEEN CHARLOTTE ISLANDS HOLIDAY

by Bob St.John

In the last two weeks of August, 1990, I joined two friends on a trip to the Queen Charlotte Islands off the northwest coast of British Columbia. The holiday consisted of one week sailing the waters of southern Moresby Island, and one week exploring northern Graham Island by car. It is possible to fly into Sandspit on Moresby Island from Vancouver, however we chose to take BC Ferries from Vancouver Island to Prince Rupert and hence across Hecate Strait to Queen Charlotte City on Graham Island. If you have the extra 2 days the ferry trip is spectacular up the Inside Passage route to Prince Rupert. Reservations for the ferry in the summer months are recommended, especially if you have a vehicle.

The sailboat was the 55 foot sloop Ocean Light, an all wood vessel built especially for sailing the Charlottes. She accommodated eight guests and two crew comfortably with room on board for two canoes and a ten person zodiac. The whole group met at Sandspit prior to the flight by twin otter to meet the boat. We were an interesting mix of people, including the head of RCMP drug enforcement for Canada and his new bride, a photographer on assignment for National Geographic and two tree huggers from Vancouver. Needless to say over the next week there were many interesting debates about conservation etc., and stories of cloak and dagger law enforcement.

The main theme was one of discovering the new national park covering the southern half of Moresby, with emphasis on the Haida culture and now abandoned village sites. About half our time was spent either canoeing or exploring on shore using the Ocean Light as a base.

We met the boat at Tanu Island located about halfway down the east coast of Moresby. The east coast is protected from the Pacific and subsequently has the greatest number of Haida sites. At Tanu we visited a village site now overgrown with thick vegetation. The Haida maintain watchmen at each site to prevent misuse and to greet and guide visitors. The Ocean Light served as a resource centre with its library of books on the Haida and the Charlottes. Having read about each site before visiting still didn't prepare one for the experience of being in the site among the ruins of long houses and totems as night fell to darkness. The watchmen explained the meaning of the figures on the totems and how they related to the Haida in general and to the person in particular the totem was carved for. Many were burial poles with the thick ends up in the air to accommodate the remains of the deceased. The more important a person you were the more elaborate the pole you could afford. Needless to say slaves (yes, the Haida took slaves from raiding parties to the mainland) were unceremoniously thrown in the sea. Emily Carr spent much of her time painting at Tanu.

From Tanu we made our way south to Windy Bay with its enormous cedars. Here Mike Beedell from the National Geographic gave us pointers on taking nature photos. I believe his secret to good photos is to take a whole roll of shots where I might normally take one. He used over 200 rolls of film in seven days using three cameras, and got some impressive results. It must be nice to have Kodak backing you.

Next stop was Burnaby Narrows, a shallow channel between Moresby and Burnaby Islands. The wide variety and abundance of sea life here is mind boggling. From our canoes the clear water revealed crabs, urchins, starfish, anemones, abalone, oysters, and clams. Along the shore old Haida middens attested to this being a favorite summer place for them too. In the air were gulls, herons, sandpipers, oystercatchers, falcons, and more eagles than mosquitoes.

It is quite an experience to be in a canoe drifting slowly with the current though this natural aquarium and to have a seal poke its head up three feet from you. Burnaby Narrows revealed its riches by being easily accessible, however most of our trip was though equally abundant waters.

One day was spent on small islands with natural hot springs forming pools in the rocks just above the beach. Again this was a Haida site, and the watchmen there were hospitable and made you feel welcome. Another day we hiked along a salmon river which at the time had a run of pinks making its way upstream. For several days the salmon gather at the mouth of the river preparing for the fight upstream by jumping in the air. Of course eagles, bears and seals are ever present at salmon streams. Throughout the trip we ourselves enjoyed some fishing for salmon and halibut, but only for our own consumption. Yours truly managed to land the trophy fish of the trip, a 130 pound halibut.

Near the end of the trip we rounded the south tip of Moresby and headed up the wild west coast to Anthony Island or Ninstints as it is also known. Here the ocean swells and winds made for more interesting sailing. Ninstints is a world heritage site known for its many well preserved Haida totems. It is a wild landscape that is basically untouched by human encroachment. Here we made our way out to a sea lion rookery in the zodiac. It is a helpless feeling to lose sight of land in the swells and be surrounded by curious sea lions some weighing as much as us combined.

This trip was easily the best I've been on. It is moderately pricey at \$1550.00 per person from Sandspit for seven days on the water, however I feel I received good value. If you want to travel on the wild side, but with the comfort of the Ocean Light at hand, I recommend it.

The second stage of our journey was a car trip of northern Graham Island. Graham is somewhat more civilized than Moresby with Queen Charlotte City and Skidegate in the south and Masset on the north coast. Skidegate and Masset are the two main Haida villages today. Skidegate has a public museum and offers a weekly Haida feast for a very reasonable price. Masset is home to a native art industry, including carving and jewellery-making out of silver and argillite. If you are in the market this is the place to find bargains.

The northeast corner of Graham is preserved in its natural state as Naikoon Park. In contrast to the mountainous west coast, Naikoon is a flat marshland with sand dunes near shore. The east and north shores are continuous wide sandy beaches. We hiked along North Beach from Tow Hill to Rose Spit, about fifteen km. At low tide the beach is about 300 feet wide and is known for its agates and razor clams. Rose spit at low tide stretches out three km between Hecate Strait to the east and Dixon Entrance to the north. We reached the end of the spit as the tide started to come in. It was an exciting race back with waves breaching the spit behind us.

The Charlottes have some unique subspecies of flora and fauna, being isolated from the mainland and having missed the last glaciation. The black bear there is the largest subspecies in BC, and the deer very small and numerous. Until this century sea birds had no land predators to disturb their nesting sites, but now weasels have migrated from the mainland and are threatening some colonies.

Weather wise be prepared for rain, as these are also called the misty isles. We had a mixture of rain, mist and sun. It wouldn't seem right to visit the rain forest without some rain. If you do visit the islands try to make it a point to visit south Moresby, either by boat or sea kayak. North South Travel (Ocean Light) or Ecosummer Adventures (kayak) in Vancouver are two agencies to consider travel plans.



# AN ASCENT OF DENALI

by Phil Spaulding

No exercise in mountain climbing deserves the expression "fools rush in where angeles..." more than the ascent of Mt McKinley in the early summer of 1948. In case you are not aware, McKinley (renamed Denali, I suppose an Athabaskan Indian name) measures from the base to the south peak 20,300 feet (its north peak some 450 feet less) and it is the highest mountain in North America. This statistic alone should be sufficient to keep novice climbers from invading its slopes, but not six students at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, whose bravado was no doubt enhanced by gallons of beer and the long agonizing academic term stretching from early September to early May with hardly a break. And so it was one night in mid-March at a beer brawl in the Vets dorm that six of us male students decided to shake the accumulated lethargy and undertake an heroic odyssey of what we should have recognized as the unknown: to climb Mt. MacKinley. Only one of us, Moose Gonason (and a moose of a man he was) had had any relevant experience but even he was confined to relatively minor "hills" in the Washington State Cascades. My mountain climbing experience was typical of the remaining five having cavorted nothing larger than the 4,000 ft Mt. Mansfield in the Green Mountains of Vermont. I was later to return to Mansfield, the womb of my climbing experience to heal the wounds inflicted by McKinley.

Initial preparations for the expedition commenced in early May with the purchase of army surplus gear..boots, sleep

ing bags, parkas, etc.. and dehydrated fruits, milk and eggs (freeze dried foods were not yet on the market in the late 40is). I recall with considerable relish the long sessions in Hess Hall..the women's dorm ..in which surplus silk parachutes were converted into excellent mountain tents. Other supplies purchased included climbing ropes, ice axes and crampons. By the latter days in May the six of us.. by now somewhat cowed by the prospect of climbing this monster in the Alaska Range..had gained some confidence which came from what we thought was a pretty efficient set of preparations. Shortly thereafter we set forth for McKinley National Park on Alaska's own toonerville trolley--the Alaska Railroad.

Park Officials were amazed that this rag-tag bunch of University students would attempt such an ascent. One that had not been accomplished by such ill-equipped and inexperienced persons since the Mountain was first conquered, legend has it, by three old sourdoughs on three bottles of whisky. Consequently, we mountain climbers were more admired by park officials than pitied or maybe it was the other way around. But there were problems. A ninety mile road choked with twenty foot snow drifts lay in the way of access to the mountain. We were, therefore, hired onto the road crew clearing the road to Rainbow lake, a land mark some 30 miles from the base of Mt. McKinley. I am sure that the park officials saw this a way of getting us out from underfoot as well as practical allocation of free labour but its importance was far more than could have been realized at the time. It gave the six of us time to come to grips with the commitment we had made to each other and to those

beautiful worshipful women back at the University who had done so much to aid in our pre-climb efforts.

Anyway the launching of the expedition came on the sixth of June (actually I don't recall the exact date but 49-6-6 will do). From Rainbow Lake we set out across the tundra in the direction of this snow and ice covered mole. Oh yes one more statistic of which I have no reason to doubt: McKinley is said to be the highest mountain in the world measured from its land base to the apex of the south peak. The truth of this statement, it is argued, is verified in so far as the base of McKinley does not arise from supporting foothills but commences at a point not more than a couple of hundred feet above sea level. From the end of the road to the base of the mountain, the route lies over a gentle up-slope and finally into a shallow valley. With the exception of two or three sightings of Alaska Brown bears, animals were notably missing. The reason being the ubiquity of great clouds of mosquitos which dominate the tundra at this time of the year. As long as we human kept moving insect pests were barely tolerable but we stopped midway of the tundra for rest and food. The mosquitos descended on us in droves so thick that the scrambled powder eggs were absolutely black with the little beasties. This of course brought some grumbles but also some light hearted remarks that this was indeed nature's free gift of protein. Clearly, only humans and their second cousins the bears were foolish enough to venture into this pest ridden environment. The caribou, foxes, wolves, coyotes and the burrowing animals these predators live on, all head for high ground.\* One further obstacle lay before us: the McKinley Fork River.

The McKinley Fork at our point of crossing was at least a mile wide and, although shallow, consisted of a myriad of channels. At this time of the year when glacial melt was increasing, the average depth of the river was three to three and a half feet. Needless to say, the water was extremely cold and the flow quite swift. Indeed, keeping one's feet on the bottom would have been a real problem were it not for the heavy packs each of us carried. The cold water, however, turned out to be a boon to the feet which it tended to anaesthetize against the savage bruising rendered by fine river gravel invading the boots. Against great odds all six of us made it to the far bank whereupon Walt Sandstrom announced he had had enough and was therefore returning across the river and to the park headquarters. Efforts to persuade him to the contrary were futile and so we each with a sense of helplessness watched Sandstrom renegotiate the river only to learn after returning from McKinley that he had been killed in a plane crash. Big mountain climbing generates its own ironies.

\* Human travel on low lying tundra at this time of the year poses serious risks to survival. During our ascent of McKinley, a photographer for Life magazine had died while attempting to stave off mosquito attacks in this same area of the National Park. Though die he did rumour had it he died not from insect toxins but from self destruction as a result of madness induced by unsuccessful efforts to fend off the pests.

This article will be concluded in the June issue. Don't miss it.