

# The PackRat

Newsletter of the Rocky Mountain Ramblers Association August/September 2003



"Backpacking in the Middle of a Stampede?"  
-- Photo by Carl Potter --

(This was what the Ramblers encountered on a recent backpacking trip in June around the Highwood area. Luckily no one got in the way of the herd. See more photos on the back page.)

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## President's Report....

**M**Y LAST CHECK of the membership list indicated we are above 340 members with over 100 who were not members last year so welcome to all those who are enjoying this year's activities.

You may have noticed we now have an on-line survey area in the Members Section of the website. Currently there are two surveys, one regarding possible ideas for the fiftieth anniversary in 2004 and the other duplicates the general survey that was available as a paper copy. You can view the survey results for each in both summary and detail and I encourage you to fill them out. Paper results are summarized on the Feedback discussion forum.

We had an Executive meeting in June and we had to regretfully accept the resignation of Joyce as Social Director. Thanks for your efforts, Joyce. Her Social Committee collectively ran a successful pancake breakfast on July 5th despite the monsoon conditions; thanks Kay, Barb, Colleen, Barb and especially Brian & Marietta for hosting the event. Colleen Taylor has offered to serve as Social Director for the balance of the year.

Two motions were passed at the meeting. The first authorized a budget of \$600 for purchase of hardware and software to enable our phone system to be integrated with our website server. This would update the phone line so it would automatically put a voice message on the phone for each trip on the website. Members would also be able to press a number to go to the next trip instead of listening to each in sequence, go back one trip, etc. Setup and testing will be required so we will have more information in the fall.

The other motion was to present to the members a document entitled "Discussion of a Possible Transition to Monthly Regular Meetings". This is included with the paper copies of this PackRat and as a separate e-mail to web receivers. A copy has also been put on the website Discussion Forums. Given the growth in the club and the increase in Calgary's size it may be time to consider a change, however we have been quite successful with the current format. We would like to hear your views, pro or con, or any alternative suggestions you may have.

Lastly, there will be a Coordinators Council meeting in September and if you have any suggestions regarding someone who would make a good coordinator, let the Trips Director or one of the Executive know. Any potential Coordinator should have some navigational skills, a bit of group organizational ability and be prepared to take a basic first aid course. Application forms are available on the website, Members area- Member Activities-Printable Forms & Documents, or at a meeting. It is a great way to get to go on the trips you want!

## Pic du Midi

By Ron Mason

**T**HE PIC DU MIDI DE BIGORRE is an unusual mountain. It is in the French Pyrénées with an altitude of 2872 metres and is located above the Col du Tourmalet at 2115 metres. This col is crossed every year by cyclists of the Tour de France. On that day they cover over 160 km and climb 2400 vertical metres all in the heat of the afternoon. Needless to say we drove up to the col, but there were lots of cyclists training.

The unusual thing about the Pic du Midi is that there is no real summit, it is covered by a huge observatory with dozens of different telescopes, accommodations for staff, even a museum, restaurants and gift shops for the tourists who arrive by télécabine.

I decided I wanted to climb it despite (or maybe because of) the funfair on top, and I persuaded Micheline and my sister Brenda to come along.

"It's dead easy just a walk up a road!"  
Words I lived to regret!

We set out behind a column of about thirty French soldiers, who gradually pulled ahead up the road. Soon we found out why the 'road' wasn't open to traffic – huge rockfalls and snow blocking it in many places.

There were some tricky exposed traverses on hard snow and muddy scree, helped by the many boots of the French soldiers ahead, but most of the way was good at a steady gradient. At least until it steepened and the zig-zags became more frequent. At one point the snow became too hard, too much and too exposed, so we had to cut a few corners up my favorite terrain vertical grass. In fact after negotiating a snow slope we even had to tackle a grass cornice with loose soil all around.

The ladies were not the least bit assured and took some coaxing before finally reaching the road again some 50 metres higher up.

We took a break at a hotel on a col, not yet opened for the season, and watched the army and other intrepid hikers sweating up the final pyramid, which appeared to be a pile of loose rock and scree. It was.

Up above loomed two huge phallic symbols – a telescope mounted in a dome on top of a tower, and a microwave/TV antenna at least 100 metres high. With these in sight the ladies gained fresh impetus and slowly but surely we climbed into the shadow of the telescope and on up to the 'summit'.

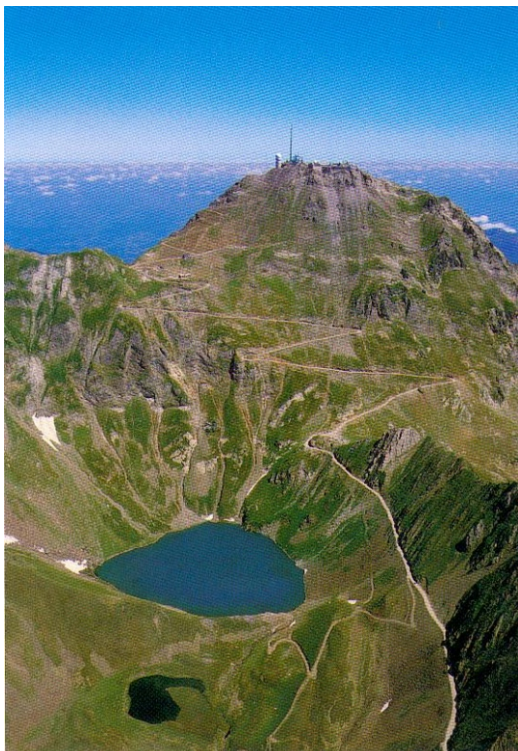


But where was the summit? No rock was visible, only concrete! After a brief look around we plunged through an iron Door into a corridor, down some stairs, around corners, through a dark passage which was labeled 'sortie' and emerged.....in the gift shop!

Hundreds of people were milling around, buying plastic souvenirs, eating lunch in an elegant dining room, looking for bathrooms, queuing for ice cream what a crowd! We found a picnic table for lunch

and admired the view, largely obscured by telescopes, towers, télécabines, and tourists.

Nevertheless, it was a perfect day to see the Pyrénées stretching forever, and the flat country of Southern France to our north. We visited the astronomical museum and I struggled with the French captions.



Micheline and Brenda wisely decided to go down on the télécabine, not wanting to face descending the vertical grass and snow slopes. Since the car was at a different place from the bottom of the cable car I descended alone to pick it up – not really alone because the soldiers were ahead of me. By a bit of crafty shortcutting and glirrating I actually passed them and was down well ahead.

That made my day.

That and the big beers we all had when we were all reunited at the bottom of the télécabine.

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### **Activities**

Hiking, Backpacking, Skiing,  
Cycling, Climbing,  
Scrambling,  
Mountaineering, Education &  
Awareness Programs,  
Social Functions

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### **Meetings**

Every Wednesday  
evening at 7:30 p.m.

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### **Mail**

Rocky Mountain Ramblers  
Association  
c/o Calgary Area Outdoor  
Council (CAOC)  
1111 Memorial Dr NW  
Calgary, AB T2N 3E4

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### **Trip Info**

282-6308 Information Line and  
at Meetings

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### **Website**

The Packrat is available on the  
R M R A w e b s i t e a t  
**[www.ramblers.ab.ca](http://www.ramblers.ab.ca)**. If we have  
your email address, you will be  
automatically notified that an  
electronic copy of the Packrat is  
on the website.

## JAMES BAY

by Reg Fryling

**J**AMES BAY FORMS the lower part of Hudsonson Bay, partly in Ontario and Quebec. Moose Factory, my destination in early September 2001, is situated on one of the delta islands in the mouth of Moose River that flows into James Bay.

It is the ancestral home of the Cree; and an early destination for European fur traders, with Hudson Bay Post and Factor (thus the name). Except for a few remote settlements, this huge watershed is miles of muskeg, wetland and scrub brush (thought it would appeal to you mountain types).

After lining up three highway maps to check the driving route to Cochrane, Ontario, I opted to fly to Toronto, and go north by bus. The congestion gradually gave way to larger farms and more trees in the fading light.

At one stop, standing on a deserted street in the cool midnight air, a massage therapist worked the driver's sore neck and shoulder muscles before we remaining three continued on to North Bay.

I have a photo of some brightly painted antique fire hydrants on display in a mall in North Bay, a city of over 50,000.

The land became wilder, and the farms even more scattered as we rolled north into heavy cloud the next afternoon. The bus splashed into Cochrane, the end of the highway north, about midnight. I stepped out under a canopy, and straight into Station Inn.

The bus/train station has been completely remodelled and includes rooms and restaurant, as well as the railroad offices, etc. The passenger subsidized rail system is part of Ontario Northland, running from Toronto to Cochrane; and on a separate train, to Moosonee (James Bay). Cochrane is a little smaller than Cochrane, Alberta, supported by lumbering, railroad, agriculture, and tourism (mainly hunting and fishing).

The next day I met Brian Ratcliff, our congenial and knowledgeable tour director (Quest Nature Tours), and the other five members of our party (all from Ont./Que.), shortly before standing in a long line of locals burdened with boxes and black plastic bags waiting to board the Polar Bear Express for five hours on the rails to Moosonee.

As we swayed and click-clacked north through gently rolling, countryside, the farms quickly disappeared, and there were only the majestic trees (spruce, and an array of hardwoods mountain ash, maple, poplar, alder) broken periodically by a glimpse of a lake/reservoir, or a shack along the tracks.

### **PACKRAT ADVERTISING**

#### **RATES**

The Club offers advertising space in **PackRat** and the following rates apply:

Quarter Page \$10

Half Page \$20

Full Page \$40

Payment **MUST** be received prior to publication.

By halfway, the trees got smaller and signs of civilization few as we rolled gently down, what a few hundred years ago, was the salt water of James Bay.

Moosonee, at the end of steel, and adjacent to Moose Factory on an island in the Moose River, started in earnest when the French Revillon Freres (fur trading post) was established there in 1905; and competed with its long established English rival Moose Factory.

Moosonee's 2000 people, like Moose Factory's 2700, are mostly Cree with some government employees from outside. Both towns have native arts and crafts centres, and museums depicting Cree culture, and early days in the area. Moose Factory also has a Friendship Centre where we attended evening talks and displays by an artist, and an amateur astronomer. Some hiking trails exist around each community; and more options and facilities are being planned and expedited in an effort to attract visitors.

We were soon weaving our way expertly around hidden shoals and between broad, tree covered delta islands by Jimmy (a non treaty Cree) in a professionally crafted dinghy with a homemade plywood canopy painted bright yellow and red. Fifteen minutes later we could see the impressive Ecolodge, (designed and operated by the Cree) with a high, glassed a-frame dinning room dominating the attached two-storey sleeping rooms. Lorrie and Richard, our two young Cree hosts met us at the solid new dock and showed us to our bright, all-wood rooms, with low energy light bulbs and eco toilets (internally processed waste). The dinner menu with such items as wild rice, caribou stakes (brought in commercially), and wild cranberries, was another gesture to help guests experience the land and culture.

On one boat tour, Jimmy told us tall stories such as the time they caught a whale and were pulled north so far the fishing line was finally cut by the ice; and it took them 3 months to come home. After the trip I thanked Jimmy for the trip and the stories. "Oh", he said, "We could get a fire going, and the coffee pot on, and I'll tell some more." Jimmy's dad journeyed over from the east shore to work on the building of the railroad in the 20's; and Jimmy, like many others without Treaty status have remained. The east half of Moose Factory Island is composed of non-treaty natives, while the west half is a Reserve (MoCreebec, I believe).

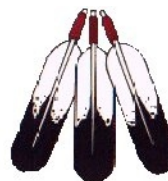
Our days, filled with tours, hikes, walks, talks, displays, and boat trips to various islands featuring birds, fossils, and other interesting flora and fauna, passed quickly; and too soon it was time to go home.

#### **NOTES**

Planning: Our package tour with guide was convenient and well planned, but one could do it all independently more cheaply with greater flexibility. Train/bus schedules and accommodation could be sorted out on internet. An independent traveller joined a couple of our boat tours.

Seasons: About the second week in September seems ideal – the biting bugs are mostly gone (probably pretty thick in the spring and summer); and cranberries, currants and blue berries are ripe and ready.

References: The Calgary Public Library has some written information, and video tapes. One tape I especially enjoyed is: Cree Hunters of the Mistassini, a view of the life of Cree people still living off the land.



## HAPPY 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY ROCKY MOUNTAIN RAMBLERS

**T**HE 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee would like to invite members to participate in the preparations by:

1. Submit photos of the rock garden on the Mount Allan trail. The committee and Glen Boles will choose a picture for a limited edition sketch to commemorate the anniversary.
2. Offer to work on trail maintenance in partnership with Friends of Kananaskis on Mt. Allan on September 13, 2003.
3. Enter the T-shirt design contest. The design must have Rocky Mountain Ramblers and a commemorative phrase (50<sup>th</sup> anniversary or 1954-2004, or est. 1954) and be transferable to a T-shirt. The prize for the winning entry will be a ticket to the reunion dinner and a T-shirt.
4. Submit historical photos (preferably people pictures) for a historical on-line photo album and stories and photos for a scrap-booker type album.
5. Please submit names and addresses of any former Ramblers to Ann Moran so we can send invitations to everyone.

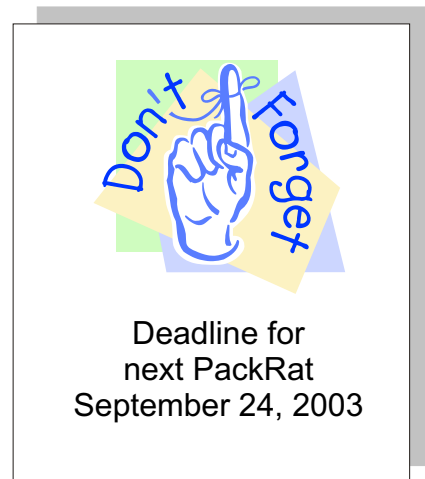
It is our intention to plan a reunion weekend in early July 2004 comprising of a Stampede breakfast, hiking and a barbecue dinner at a facility in Kananaskis.



## Westman Wilderness Club of Manitoba

**A**L F STANLEY, President of Westman Wilderness Club of Manitoba, welcomes all members of our club as guests at their events should you be traveling to Manitoba or are planning to do some hikes there. One of their upcoming events will take place in the Kootenay National Park. A backpack to the Rockwall is scheduled from the 1<sup>st</sup> of September to the 5<sup>th</sup> of September. For more information, call Eldon at 1-204-834-2541 or you can check their website for other events at:

[www.westmanwildernessclub.ca](http://www.westmanwildernessclub.ca)



The Packrat is published six times a year by the Rocky Mountain Ramblers Association. We welcome comments, articles, and ideas from our members and, if content is deemed suitable, will be used as space permits.

Email submissions to the newsletter editor at [packrat@ramblers.ab.ca](mailto:packrat@ramblers.ab.ca) or forward contributions to RMRA, c/o Calgary Area Outdoor Council, 1111 Memorial Drive NW, Calgary, AB T2N 3E4.

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"Scenes from the June Backpacking Trip"



Joyce cautiously crossing the Fitzimmons Creek with Carl's guidance. Photo by Irene Willett



Ramblers making sure the cattle have crossed the creek and have been rounded up before resuming their hike. Photo by Greg Neustaedter



Admiring the panoramic view on top of Coyote Hills. Photo by Greg Neustaedter



View of Mt. Armstrong from Strawberry Hills.



Shooting Star. Photo by Greg Neustaedter