

The Pack Rat

Newsletter of the Rocky Mountain Ramblers Association December 03/January 04



PHOTO BY CARL POTTER

It's early, but Merry Christmas! Hallmark hasn't got anything better than this idyllic view just behind the Sheep River Information Centre.

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President's Report...

It is starting to look like we are going to have a "real" ski season this year so we might be able to have lots of winter activities for a change. After last winter where the back-country was a risky endeavour, perhaps we can look forward to a more stable snowpack. Keep an eye out on the calendar for avalanche awareness courses or presentations to keep your skills up if you want to try venturing off the trackset trails.

As you can see from the Executive listing, in this PackRat I am back for another year as president. We get to welcome Ghulam, Evelyn, Shirley and Jim who are going to help out to make the club run smoothly. Jim is putting together an extensive program of presenters for Wednesday evenings which should make for interesting meetings.

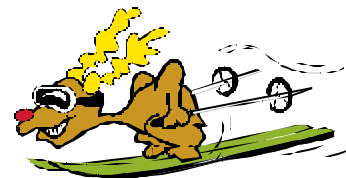
Looking forward, we will be trying to make the operation of the Ramblers more efficient so that the workload is not too onerous for the volunteers. Thanks to Greg Deabler working with Keith Walker and Bob St. John, we have the website membership

renewal form that can be printed already filled out and coincidentally updated on our membership records. Next we'll hopefully have a similar form for new members.

Also, if the technology works as expected, by mid-year we'll have a text to voice system which will match up our website listings and the phone listings (note: if the skiing is really good, the developer may be led astray and implementation may be delayed!).

Of course, the big event will be the 50th anniversary with a busy couple of days on the July 17th weekend plus a few other activities which will be announced by the Anniversary Committee.

In the meantime, have a merry Christmas season and see you on the ski trails.



Kananaskis

25 Years Later

by D. Reimer

By now, many Ramblers will have read a copy of the information newsheet published in mid-October by the Kananaskis Trail Users Association (KTUA). We have distributed about 3,700 copies so far, including one to each MLA.

We've also been able to get some press coverage. The Calgary Herald did a fairly accurate write-up on November 24. A-Channel has done an interview with co-author, Linda Vaxvick. We are hoping that the CBC will do something as well. It is quite nerve-racking to talk to the press. One never knows quite what they will do with what you tell them.

Although it cost over \$1,200 to do the newsheet, many clubs have come through with funding and, we have paid off most of the debt. Ramblers were the first to contribute over \$200 as individuals (yeah!). We are so grateful to you all. Originally I planned to thank you all personally but so many donated that I decided to say "**Thanks**" here instead.

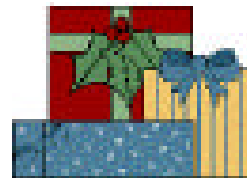
So far, K-Country is continuing with their ski trail grooming and no fees have been set though many of their people expect to be told to institute them soon. KTUA has asked to be included in any discussion on how such a plan would be implemented if it comes to pass. With early snow, it is likely that K-Country will run out of budget early. Last year they barely scraped by because the ski season did not start until late December.

A group of people from Bragg Creek are working on a plan to take over the winter program from K-Country on a volunteer basis (they did the first grooming at West Bragg) but nothing is final yet. Lots of things to consider such as equipment, insurance, skills, and so on.

For now, let's just enjoy what we have and remember to write a letter to your MLA. If you see something **good**, tell them about it (and K-Country also)!

Thanks so much to Ramblers for your support. Together we **can** make a difference. Happy Skiing!

**Deadline
for next PackRat
January 28, 2004**



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 or forward contributions to RMRA, c/o Calgary Area Outdoor Council, 1111 Memorial Drive NW, Calgary, AB T2N 3E4.

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Activities

Hiking, Backpacking,
Skiing, Cycling,
Climbing,
Scrambling,
Mountaineering, Educa-
tion & Awareness
Programs, Social
Functions

Meetings

Every Wednesday
evening at 7:30 p.m.

Mail

Rocky Mountain Ram-
blers Association
c/o Calgary Area Out-
door Council (CAOC)
1111 Memorial Dr NW
Calgary, AB T2N 3E4

Trip Info

282-6308 Information
Line and at Meetings

Website

The Packrat is available
on the RMRA website at
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.

A Russian Adventure

By Bob St. John



Caucasus Mountains from Elbrus West Summit

From July 1 to August 11, 2003 I travelled to Russia to climb Mt Elbrus, and then on to Kyrgyzstan to climb Peak Lenin with Jerry Skvaril. My original plan only included Lenin, but since I would be going by Elbrus, I thought it would make a good acclimatization summit. Weather played a decisive role on both mountains, and while I managed to summit Elbrus I was turned back on Lenin.

Mt Elbrus at 5640m is the highest summit in Europe. It is situated a few kilometers north of the Russian-Georgian border in the Caucasus Mountains.

The main range of the Caucasus, being of primarily sedimentary rock, looks much like the Alps or the Rockies. Elbrus. However, it is a massive volcano and stands apart in stark contrast from the main range. Its high altitude and considerable size produces its own weather patterns, resulting in glaciers flowing down on all aspects. Thus, not only does it attract hordes of climbers in the summer months, it receives skiers all year round. So if you're looking for a wilderness experience, forget it, at least on the standard route. But if you want to ascend a

relatively easy high altitude summit, then this would be a candidate.

Since I was on my own, I hooked up with Pilgrim Tours, a Moscow based travel-guiding service company. They offer a wide range of services, from merely handling the paperwork, to the full deal. I chose their Standard 11-day Elbrus Tour which started the moment I got through customs at the airport in Moscow. If I were to do this climb again, I may not use their guiding service, but I would still use them to handle the paper shuffling and transportation. (Their guiding is fine, but I would prefer to have the flexibility of a non-guided trip.)

They put me up in the Hotel Rossiya, an immense concrete monstrosity in a well-situated location across from St. Basil's Cathedral and the Kremlin. It has tight security with guards everywhere checking your identity. Large darkened sections of the hotel are off limits as I found out late that night as I tried to get some money exchanged. There was a somewhat tense moment as I tried to explain my presence in a dim hall-

way to a KGB agent without knowing anything but '*good morning*' in Russian. Stephen King should write a horror story here.

I met the six others in my group: Kim, Kim (yes, two Kims), Thomas, Søren (all from Denmark), Chris from England, and Sandy from Calgary of all places. The next day we were off on a two-hour flight to Mineralnye Vody, and then a four-hour drive to Terskol in the Baksan Valley. We stayed in the MBS Lodge, a building once used by the Ukrainian government but now leased out to whomever they can. Many buildings that were built by Soviet era governments and agencies are now falling into disrepair as ownership issues are still unresolved.

The strategy the guides took was to get the group acclimatized as quickly as possible. Thus, the first day we took the lower chairlift up Cheget Mountain and then hiked to the summit at 3600m. Here we had fine views of Elbrus as well as the main Caucasus Range including Mt Donguzorun with its '7' shaped glacier.

The following day we took the gondolas (2 sets)

and chairlift to the Barrel Huts (3900m) and hiked up to the Diesel Hut at 4100m. The views of the Caucasus are spectacular from Elbrus, spoiled only by the visual noise of the ski area. On each of these two days we returned to the MBS Lodge. The third day we took the lifts again and hiked up to Pastukhov Rocks (4800m), and returned to stay at the Barrel Huts.

There are ten Barrel Huts, each sleeping five comfortably with plenty of storage space. A three-season sleeping bag is all you need. If you are self-supported, then bring a stove fitted for burning gasoline or kerosene. There is also a large cookhouse available for groups to use - some groups arrange for a cook to prepare their meals. Running water is available from a spring.

Up to now the weather had been perfect with calm clear skies. As luck would have it, the weather deteriorated over the next three days, which were our summit attempt days. On the first night we had a really good thunder storm. A bolt must have hit our hut, or at least the wiring, as I wit-

nessed an amazing fireworks display coming out of the socket at the foot of my bunk! In the morning threatening skies forced us to confine our activities to another hike up to the Diesel Hut. At least we had a bit of fun bum sliding back down the slopes. The guides got in some action as well with their 'shorty' skies.

That night the group elected to reserve the services of a snowcat to get us up to just below Pastuckhov Rocks (4600m). It would cost the group \$200 US if we went, and \$100 if we cancelled. Unfortunately when we rose at 4:00 AM, the mountain was socked in. Another hike up to the Diesel Hut ensued later that day, which was made somewhat easier now that we were \$100 lighter. (It seemed odd that in a part of Russia where wages are very low, the cat driver gets decent coin by sleeping in.)

On the third and final summit attempt day it was still blowing and socked in, but we took the cat anyway up to the P Rocks. The three

guides supposedly knew this route well, and we trudged up into the gale not being able to see more than 50m. Along the way we observed other climbers who were obviously confused, and some joined our group. Two in our group wisely called it quits and returned with one of the guides. The rest of us made it to just below the Saddle (5400m) where the

own GPS. Apparently the guides were just issued theirs and were still on the learning curve. Fortunately all ended well for us, and we regrouped near the Diesel Hut and made our way down to the Barrels.

Sadly, one Pole died that day from exposure, and three Austrians almost met their end in a crevasse. They used two ice screws in a self-rescue. About 30 die each year on Elbrus, usually by getting caught in bad weather.

Not making the summit is no reason for Danes not to party! So after returning to the valley we (they) sought out a local restaurant equipped with karaoke and plentiful vodka. After hearing Danish screech music, I myself, after many swigs and encouragement from Sandy and others, added my musical stylings to the evening. At least that was the little I remembered the next morning. Thankfully I had elected to remain four more days, as I do not think I would have survived the drive and flight back to



Mt Elbrus from Mt Cheget

winds were particularly fierce, and decided to return as well. (This was a very good decision, as the rest of the route would have been ugly in that gale.) Our return was not without some excitement as all three guides got off-route. I was somewhat annoyed with myself for not using my

Moscow.

I had planned four days in Moscow before I went on to Kyrgyzstan, but decided to use three of them (making 4 altogether) to try once more for Elbrus. The first was devoted to paying the price of mixing vodka and karaoke with Russians and Danes. Well, what the heck, it was worth it. The second day I had planned on hiking up the service road under

hand gestures (which I did understand) convinced me to retreat. So I rode the lifts once more and met my guide Dmitri at the Barrels.

Again, the weather played its tricks. Over these last two days it was fine, but sure enough another electric storm cancelled our early morning start on the third day. Instead we hiked up to the P Rocks in blustery conditions. The fourth and

of Elbrus over Donguzorun - it was going to be a great day! Apparently others felt the same as dozens of climbers were ascending the route. What a difference there was between this day and the last summit attempt with the group. Now the route was obvious, with marker stakes every 100 meters or so. We had a short break at the Saddle, then joined the horde enroute to the summit, arriving on top at 10:00 AM. The clear sky afforded 360° panorama of the Caucasus stretching west to the Black Sea, the jagged peaks of Georgia to the south, and the great plains of Russia far to the north. Yippee!

Upon returning to Moscow, I had one day to see the sights. I was again at the Rossiya, and took advantage of its location by taking a Lonely Planet walking tour of Kitai Gorod, a merchant section of old Moscow known for the architecture of its buildings and churches. I was pleased to see that the old buildings were being restored and refitted instead of being torn down and replaced with steel and concrete. I later walked



PHOTO BY BOBST, JOHN

Barrel Huts with Caucasus Mountains behind.

the lifts, but surely workmen who were blasting foundations for a new gondola turned me away. I attempted to circumvent them by climbing off-road, but their yelling (which I didn't understand) and their

last day brought a calm and clear starry sky, ... finally. We set out from the Barrels on foot at 2:30 AM, and made it to the P Rocks as dawn broke with a full moon over the Caucasus. Soon the rising sun cast the shadow

around the Kremlin, and observed the fascinating changing of the guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. I didn't have time to take the tour inside the Kremlin walls, but judging by the crowds it must be worthwhile.

I would like to return one day and do the place justice. There is lots to do and see, but be warned it is not an inexpensive city.

Editor's Note: Read about Bob's summit attempt on Lenin Peak in the next issue



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.

Third Year into Middle Aged Fitness

By D. Mulligan

Continuing from previous Packrat articles (March '03) and somewhat following up in jest, a couple of people have asked what I did this past year. I must emphasize that I am not aiming at breaking any Rambler or other records. But I originally started keeping track of my outdoor activities to compare with those of Bill Leach and Arnold Westberg in the summer of '76 (each 61,000m of vertical hiking). I know several other Ramblers keep track of their vertical hiking and it would

be interesting to see the comparisons.

Despite the smoke, the long hot summer of 2003 was very conducive to scrambling and I was out one day most weekends. Although negligible before Christmas 2002, the snow was excellent in the spring permitting a successful ascent of Mt. Columbia on May 19, 2003 by three Ramblers average age 55.

The statistics are below: (height in metres, distance in kms).

ACTIVITY	2003	2002	2001
Hiking Vertical	41,050	41,340	34,520
Skiing Vertical	20,470	14,250	15,690
TOTAL VERTICAL	61,520	55,600	50,210
Hiking Distance	1,300	1,294	1,120
Skiing Distance	508	384	478
Running Distance	334	144	736
TOTAL DISTANCE	2,142	1,822	2,334
Squash Matches	47	8	92
Road Cycling	890	1,636	674
Tent Nights	52	20	32
Hostel/Hut Nights	12	32	12



December 6, 2003
January 17, 2004
Trip Co-ordinator Sessions

December 13, 2003
January 24, 2004
General Member Sessions

The trips are subject to weather and snow conditions. The group size is limited to six skiers per session. To register call Ken Park at **244-6809**.

Here's an opportunity to get some **FREE** input on your ski technique from a former professional cross-country ski instructor. Ken has Level 2 CANSI certification and National coaching credentials in both theory and practical. The format is a regular day trip but with ski tips from the co-ordinator as we ski. There will be two categories: trip co-ordinator sessions and regular member sessions.

NOTE: The tours are intended for fit skiers who have taken a recent previous ski course or who have recent active ski experience.

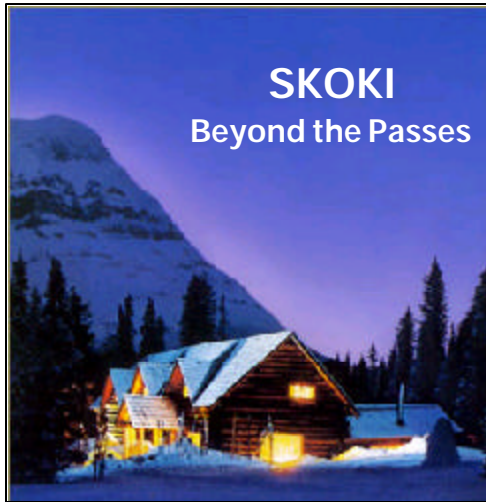


The Packrat

Christmas Pot Luck **December 10 at 6:00 pm**

Please bring an appetizer, main course item or dessert sufficient for 6 servings, plus a plate, cutlery, cup and/or glass and most importantly, a food donation for the foodbank. There is a fire regulations limit to the capacity of the hall so if you plan to attend, please let Shirley Tajcnar know. Phone 249-0859, fax 249-4666, email social@ramblers.ab.ca or add your name to the sign-up sheet which will be circulating at the meetings.

February 20 - 24, 2004 3 days, 2 nights



Historic Skoki Lodge is western Canada's first backcountry ski lodge. This is a trip back in time. Re-trace the ski pioneer's route from Temple Lodge, past the halfway hut, up and over Boulder and Deception passes and down the valley into the Lodge. Enjoy ski touring, telemarking, home-cooked meals and chatting round the fireplace. Price includes two dinners, two breakfasts, two lunches, snacks, lodging, GST and Alberta hotel tax. To reserve call trip organizer, Ken Park at 244-6809. **Deadline for registration is January 21, 2004.**

Main Lodge: \$144.72 p/person p/night
Out-Cabins: \$168.32 p/ person p/night
Deposit: \$100 ASAP
Maximum: 8 persons

NOTE:

Skiers should be fit and have minimum intermediate skills. Avalanche equipment required.

.....



"12 Days of Christmas" Carol



Have you ever wondered what in the world do leaping lords, French hens, swimming swans, and especially the partridge have to do with Christmas?

From 1558 until 1829, Roman Catholics in England were not permitted to practice their faith openly. Someone during that era wrote this carol as a cat-

echism song for young Catholics. It has two levels of meaning: the surface meaning plus a hidden meaning known only to members of their church. Each element in the carol has a code word for a religious reality which the children could remember.

❖ The partridge in a pear tree was Jesus Christ.

- ❖ Two turtle doves were the Old and New Testaments.
- ❖ Three French hens stood for faith, hope and love.
- ❖ The four calling birds were the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
- ❖ The five golden rings

The Packrat

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from this. . .



PHOTO BY CARL POTTER



To. . .



This!

**Two Ramblers,
Wendy and Keith,
say 'I Do' on
Thanksgiving
weekend.**

PHOTO BY CARL POTTER



recalled the Torah or Law, the first five books of the Old Testament.

- ❖ The six geese a-laying stood for the six days of creation.
- ❖ Seven swans a-swimming represented the sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit: Prophecy, Serving, Teaching, Exhortation, Contribution, Leadership, and Mercy.
- ❖ The eight maids a-milking were the eight beatitudes.
- ❖ Nine ladies dancing were the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self Control.
- ❖ The ten lords a-leaping were the ten commandments.
- ❖ The eleven pipers piping stood for the eleven faithful disciples.
- ❖ The twelve drummers drumming symbolized the twelve points of belief in the Apostles' Creed.

And that's how the song became a Christmas carol!

RMRA Hiking/Climbing Camp Summer 2004

A hiking/climbing camp will be held at the Elizabeth Parker Hut in the Lake O'Hara area. Thanks to Dave Mulligan's efforts we were selected in an Alpine Club (ACC) lottery for exclusive use of the hut for the week of August 1 to 7, 2004.

The camp will be available to members of RMRA only. No guests, no dogs, and no partial weeks will be accepted. An assortment of day trips will be planned for each day.

Approximate costs (including a maximum estimated food cost of \$150, but excluding transportation to the Lake O'Hara parking lot or vehicle park passes). The cost for ACC Hut eligible members is \$375 and for all others, it is \$420. Interested RMRA members should submit their letter of application complete with a \$50 deposit payable to RMRA via mail to:

Rocky Mountain Ramblers Association
c/o Calgary Area Outdoor Council
1111 Memorial Drive NW
Calgary, AB T2N 3E4

Or, personally deliver to Dave Mulligan or Anita O'Reilly at regular Rambler meetings. The deadline for applications is January 20 2004. As the maximum number of participants that can be accommodated is 24, a lottery will be held for the available spots at the Ramblers meeting January 21, 2004.

Deposits will be returned promptly to applicants who were not selected. A waiting list will be retained to ensure opportunity to replace any forfeited spots.

Members who have been chosen in the lottery will be notified and expected to pay the total remaining cost by April 30, 2004 or forfeit their position. More detailed information will be available at

www.ramblers.ab.ca.

Questions can be directed to Anita O'Reilly or Dave Mulligan.