

# The PackRat

Newsletter of the Rocky Mountain Ramblers Association

March/April 2005



*Overlooking Ptarmigan Lake from Boulder Pass*

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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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## President's Report...

**I**t was great to see all the activity regarding avalanche awareness. A dozen ramblers took the Recreational Avalanche Course put on by the University of Calgary. There was a movie night about avalanche safety and we had Albi Sole, from the University of Calgary, give a talk about the "human" component of backcountry travel. There was a considerable effort put out to increase the "awareness of avalanche danger".

The Wednesday night meeting format has changed by placing the program first, followed by the regular section that announces trips going out and trips that went out. If there is a program, the regular section has started around 8:00 PM to 8:15 PM. By doing this, the club can definitely state the starting time to the speaker. Also some members are just interested in the program and come out just for the program.

Also, we are experimenting with some Wednesday meetings being a "social" only. No "trips going out" announcements and no "trips that went out" reports. This experiment is to see what would happen if no *regular* meeting took place, but rather just a social meeting. The social was combined with a slide show and it seemed to be well attended. Through these different approaches to the regular meeting, we hope to discover what will bring the most Ramblers out on the Wednesday night.

I have placed the minutes of the executive's meeting under the *Discussion Forums* menu choice, in the *General Ramblers Discussion*. If you want to know what we are discussing, then please enjoy the read. I placed the minutes on the web site so members could post a reply if they so desired, but please keep it constructive. One day you may want to participate on the executive and these minutes reflect the type of activity that takes place.

There has been an increase in snowshoe activity this year. More trips going out, going further and more ramblers are joining in this activity. This is a fairly new activity to the club and takes members into the backcountry. Those who are participating are actively engaged in assessing avalanche danger and being aware of their routes.

Keep up the fun and enjoy the winter season!

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***"Life without faith in something is too narrow a space to live."***

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*George Lancaster Spalding*

## Avalanche: 10 years later

By D. Reimer

*“Sunday, February 19, 1994, Burstall Pass. Warm but very windy. Avalanche, Ron died. Mary survived as did the rest of us.”*

So reads my record of a day which still haunts me and which changed Ramblers forever. Ten years have passed but I remember.

It was a large group, 16 or more Ramblers, that set out on skis. Brilliant blue sky above, good snow, a SW wind. A stop at the base of the steep gully leading to the first bench to put on skins. A bit of chatter, gossip, a few comments. “Does anyone know what the avalanche rating is today?” “I think it’s high?” “How do you know?” “Weren’t they saying something on the radio yesterday about it?”

Up we went, straggled out over a kilometre. In the meadow above, we saw some backpackers who had spent the night camped there. A few Ramblers decided to stop for lunch there and head back early. The rest carried on up another wider drainage where we stopped for a welcome lunch by some trees. Off the trail the snow was very deep, very soft.

Shortly after 1:00 PM, ten or 11 skiers set off for the pass. A few, without skins, soon chose to turn around but eight carried on.

Wind still strong. Mary added her down jacket. An earlier skier’s tracks, traversing

the slope, beckoned. We followed.

Fifth in line, I looked up at large cornices and muttered something about avalanches to Kay behind me. My thoughts were jumbled. “Maybe we shouldn’t be here.” “Should I shout to the front people and say something?” “Wait a sec. If I shout that might trigger an avalanche.” Then I saw the lead skier start to angle downhill a bit. “Oh, he’s angling down, maybe it’ll be all right.”

A small copse of trees lay ahead. Dave, Ron and Mary had passed through. Hannah, at the edge, looked up and screamed “Avalanche” as a huge cornice gave way above. Ron looked up and the snow caught and buried him. Mary turned downhill and raced. In less than a minute she, too, was buried.

The edge of the snow caught and built a wall in front of our trees, swirled around and covered Kathy; only the fingers of one hand poked up. Hannah, next to the snow wall, was thrown sideways, her legs and skis caught. She struggled to release her skis and finally succeeded.

For long seconds I stood, stunned, crying over and over, “I don’t know what to do. I don’t know what to do.” Suddenly, the sight of Kathy’s fingers jerked me to reality. I grabbed one of my skis and started digging around her. Kathy’s face appeared. She was alive but too shocked to speak. Ken had by now arrived from the rear. While

Hannah climbed up the snow wall to help the front three, we dug frantically to free Kathy.

A shout came from back up the trail. The backpackers had come up and wanted to know what happened. All I remember is screaming, “Come. Help us. Help us. Hurry.” And they did.

They had shovels and probes and quickly moved out over the debris. With Hannah’s direction, they tried to set up a probe search to find Mary and Ron. Dave, in front, had by now freed himself from above-knee deep snow and rushed to help. But the panic the rescuers felt made it hard to be disciplined.

Miraculously they found Mary, unconscious but alive, a full meter deep, 20 min. after her burial.

At this point I realized that someone had to go for help so Kay led off while Kathy and I followed. Further down, we met a young couple who told us the fellow’s father had already set off to alert Park staff.

At the scene, the rescuers found Ron’s body, buried very deep. Taking turns, they tried CPR for a long time, unwilling to give up but had to accept their failure at last.

Meanwhile, they took Mary to a more protected area and worked to warm her, building a fire, wrapping her in sleeping bags.

When Kathy and I reached the parking lot, rescue efforts had begun. The lot had been cleared of most cars. Park

### Activities

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

### Meetings

Every Wednesday  
evening at 7:30 p.m.

### Mail

Rocky Mountain Ramblers  
Association  
c/o Calgary Area Outdoor  
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](http://www.ramblers.ab.ca). If  
we have your email ad-  
dress, you will be au-  
tomatically notified that an  
electronic copy of the  
Packrat is on the website.



vehicles and an ambulance were on site. A helicopter was preparing to take off. We gave them the bare details; yes, they could land there and probably there was one fatality.

A Park officer piled us into her truck and someone else thrust mugs of hot tea into our hands. I still have tears of gratitude for how kind these people were to us.

As we waited for the helicopter to return, we talked to the Park officer. As I told her of my misgivings when we had started for the pass, she gave the advice I have followed from that time on. Her words: "If you have doubts and something inside is warning you: **always, always listen**. Never, ever be talked into what your gut feeling is rejecting."

No one ever condemned us for going out in high-risk conditions without a scrap of avalanche gear. How foolish we were and what terrible consequences we suffered as a result. We learned though. Tragedy taught us so many things.

Throughout the next year, Ramblers set up the Safety Committee and worked to bring forward the safety policies you have today. Other clubs, shocked by our loss, followed suit and did the same thing.

Ron, I miss your quirky sense of humour and your sense of adventure – I'm just so sorry we had to lose you to learn such a valuable lesson.

## Hiking in the Canaries

By W. Drew

Soon the spring hiking season will come here. You can get a much earlier start by going far enough south. Last Spring, I went on a British Ramblers walking/hiking holiday in the Canaries. The islands are named for feral dogs, not the birds.

In the latter part of March and early April, I went walking/hiking in Spain's Canary Islands off the coast of West Africa in subtropical latitude. I had to overnight both ways at Luton Airport northeast of London since we flew to Tenerife Sur Aeropuerto from there early in the morning and returned in the evening. England is very expensive now. Spain is much more expensive than it used to be too as things are priced in euros instead of pesetas.

From Tenerife Sur, we took a bus to Los Cristianos port and then a big ferry to the island of Gomera. An unusually strong westerly wind and high seas made the crossing take longer than scheduled. From the dock at San Sebastian de la Gomera, it was just a short bus ride to our hotel downtown for the week. San Sebastian is a pretty little town set against green hills (in winter and spring). The whole island has only 20,000 people.

There were 14 in our group and an English leader who was quite the character. He hiked in open sandals and no socks even though we were advised to bring mountain boots for the rocky trails. He just wore shorts



*Walking near Agulo on Gomera*

with no sun protection, not even on his balding head. He didn't eat or drink all day on the hikes unless he got the chance to buy beer or wine along the way. He was fit and led good hikes.

The British group was mainly middle aged. I was the oldest except for one man who didn't do the walks/hikes. As usual I was the most fit so the hikes were too slow with too many rest stops for my taste. The hotel buffet breakfasts were OK and the Spanish restaurant dinners were good. We bought supplies for our trail lunches in Supermercado.

Those volcanic islands have steep slopes that drop into the Atlantic. Gomera is more a hiking than a beach island. There is an extensive network of good trails that are often steep and rocky and offer scenic views.

We would go by bus to different parts of the island for each

day's hike, except a couple that we did from town. We ranged from small beaches to the highest point on Gomera, Alto de Garajonay at 4880 Ft/1487m. It was a windy 3°C/37°F with fog and drizzle; so, we didn't stay long up there. Otherwise we had nice comfortable spring weather with several windy days. The sun was powerful.

Our surroundings varied from fairly open slopes with chaparel type vegetation such as alaveras, yuccas, cacti and flowers to forests. I hiked from town on our free day.

One evening, we walked from our hotel to a theater in San Sebastian for a free concert of classical music by a 15-piece string orchestra. I was amazed to find that in such a small remote place.

For our second week, we took the ferry back to Los Cristianos and bussed around the south

and east sides of Tenerife to Perto de la Cruz on the north coast. Our hotel was in the middle of that larger town with a rugged coast backed by low mountains. It was nice to walk along the sea wall or promenades and watch the crashing surf in my spare time. The German-operated hotel and breakfast were not nearly as nice as the Spanish ones in San Sebastian.

The program on Tenerife was run the same as on Gomera, except we commonly went by public bus rather than on our own. The more populous island had more infrastructure. The country looked different too with more villages and agriculture.

The high point was going up to El Teide National Park. El Teide is Spain's highest peak at 3718m/12,199 ft. and was white with snow. I was hoping we would go to the top but it



*Mt. El Teide*

was too windy to run the approach gondola so we just hiked around the desert terrain in the caldera at the base never getting above 2356m/7,730 ft.

This was a very easy trip with no vaccinations or malaria pills needed and tap water was safe to drink.

## KTUA: The Latest News

*By D. Reimer*

**K**ananaskis Trail Users Assoc. has now presented its concerns to both Liberal and Conservative MLAs for Calgary and surrounding areas, asking again for increased and sustainable funding for K Country.

In an earlier phone conversation with the new Community Development Minister, Gary Mar, KTUA learned that, while the current capital value invested in **all** Parks and Protected Areas is over \$450 M, the

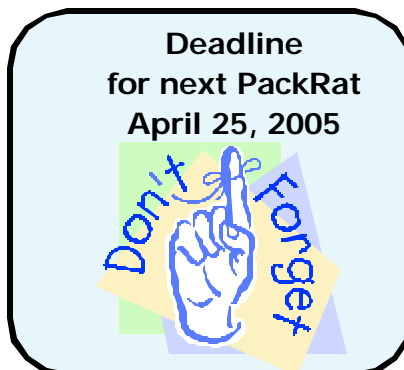
province puts in only 1/3 of 1% (.3%) annually for maintenance. Other jurisdictions invest 1-3% annually so Alberta Parks reinvestment is drastically below what it needs to be.

It needs to be said also that Sustainable Resources (under Minister David Coumts, MLA for Livingstone-MacLeod), which has responsibility for a good part of K Country, is equally strapped for money.

To help improve this situation, **you** can

- ◆ write, e-mail, or phone your MLA, the Minister, the Premier;
- ◆ collect evidence of the result of chronic underfunding (e.g. pictures, details of violations);
- ◆ write letters to the Editors;
- ◆ tell everyone who'll listen (and even those who don't want to listen); and
- ◆ emphasize the connection between health, education, and recreation.

Log on to KTUA's website, [www.kananaskistrailusers.org](http://www.kananaskistrailusers.org) for lots of background information. You'll also find links there to the names of all the Calgary & region MLAs (addresses, phone nos., e-mail, etc.) plus suggestions for things to say in a letter.



## Eight Gifts that Do Not Cost a Cent

The **GIFT OF LISTENING...**But you must **really** listen. No interrupting, no daydreaming, no planning your response. Just listening.

The **GIFT OF AFFECTION...**Be generous with appropriate hugs, kisses, pats on the back, and handholds. Let these small actions demonstrate the love you have for family and friends.

The **GIFT OF LAUGHTER...**Clip cartoons. Share articles and funny stories. Your gift will say, "I love to laugh with you."

The **GIFT OF A WRITTEN NOTE...**It can be a simple "Thanks for the help" note or a full sonnet. A brief, handwritten note may be remembered for a lifetime, and may even change a life.

The **GIFT OF A COMPLIMENT...**A simple and sincere, "you look great in red," "you did a super job," or "that was a wonderful meal" can make someone's day.

The **GIFT OF A FAVOR...**Every day, go out of your way to do something kind.

The **GIFT OF SOLITUDE...**There are times when we want nothing better than to be left alone. Be sensitive to those times and give the gift of solitude to others.

The **GIFT OF A CHEERFUL DISPOSITION...**The easiest way to feel good is to extend a kind word to someone. Really, it's not that hard to say, "Hello" or "Thank You".

*Author Unknown*