

# The PackRat

NEWSLETTER OF THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN RAMBLERS ASSOCIATION

September/October 2006



*On the Great Divide trail.*

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# Canadian GDT – Summer 2006

by D. Mulligan

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### President

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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](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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## Introduction

The idea for a high level long distance route along the Western Canadian Rocky Chain was fermented by various volunteers in the 1960's. Although considerable volunteer work was done around that time, it never received enough political support and funding to become an approved official trail. Nevertheless it was attempted and completed by various backpackers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century including Scot Chris Townsend who wrote a book on his trek. In 1996, Dustin and Julia Lynx hiked the trail from the USA border in Waterton Park to Kakwa Lake about 300 km North of Jasper. Total distance 1200 km. In 2000, Rocky Mountain Books of Calgary published his excellent guide book "*Hiking Canada's Great Divide Trail*". He also presented to RMRA around that time.

Thanks to Gary Kelman of Edge Technologies who laid me off at the end of June 2006, I had the opportunity to hike this trail. I could not have done it without the assistance of several Ramblers notably Arnold, Stuart, John, Andy, my friend Stan and their wives, and several members of the public who went out of their way to give me car rides to resupply points. Inspiration also came from Alistair and Gail Desmoulin

who hiked the 2600 mile PCT from Mexico to Canada in six months in 2003.

I started in Waterton on the USA border on July 23, 2006 and finished via Robson Park seven weeks later on September 17, 2006. I covered about 1040 km of the 1200 km described in Dustin's book. About 175 km at the northern end remains for another time. I hiked 44 of these days with six days off at resupply points. Assuming an average of 450 m vertical per day gives 20,000 vertical m. This may be a high estimate,

*"The scenery was magnificent only marred by smoke from Manning Park."*

though some days it exceeded 1,000 vertical m, e.g. Rockwall. In general, I hiked 8-10 hours/day at an average speed of 2.5 km/hour giving 20-25 km per day. But there were a few 12+ hour

days. I followed closely the itinerary suggested by Dustin on [www.rmbooks.com/gdt/itinerary](http://www.rmbooks.com/gdt/itinerary). I found that trail quality made a huge difference, e.g. on the usually excellent Park trails I would walk at 5 kph when actually walking. On poorer horse damaged trails about 3 kph and only 1-2 kph when route finding in bush. The weather was exceptionally good with only five rainy days in seven weeks. A few cms of snow fell one night near Saskatchewan River Crossing and later

North of Jasper.

The scenery was magnificent only marred by smoke from Manning Park. Mosquitos were rare. River crossings were not a problem - the deepest being below the knee (again North of Jasper). In general, the day time temperatures varied from +5C to +30C. Nights were usually 0C to +5C but the coldest (at Og Lake and Robson Park) was -7C. Only a few backcountry camp sites were busy, e.g. Egypt Lake on a Friday. Frequently I was the only camper. On some occasions I went several days without seeing anyone, e.g. five days North of Jasper, four days in the Beehive area. I only met one other GDT hiker, and we walked together for several days in the Spray/Assiniboine area, before he had to exit for resupply. A Fish and Wildlife person in the South had seen five groups in 2006. One of these groups was me. I saw one bear (near the K-country car campground), several moose, elk, marmots, etc. But I did not see any horse riders, mountain bikers, porcupine or members of the weasel family. I only saw two signs referring specifically to the GDT- one in the Beehive area, the other at Jasper's Maligne Canyon Skyline trailhead. This latter purported to be the northern end of the GDT and so annoyed me that I added my own comments that it was "bs" and that the trail extended at least 300 km further north. Essentially I treated the trip as 7 x 1 week backpacks put together. Walk a week, take a complete day off, walk a week, etc. The day off was essential

both physically and psychologically.

### Highlights

1. Waterton to Blairmore via Dustin's alternate route. This is the **best** ridge hike in Canada. About 150 km, 9 days, some scrambling.
2. Assiniboine/Citadel Pass area.
3. Rockwall.
4. Cataract Pass to Jonas Pass.
5. Skyline Trail.
6. Moose Pass.
7. Robson Park via Berg Lake.
8. Generosity of several car drivers who went out of their way to give me a ride to a hostel or trailhead.
9. Excellent quality of National Park trails and campgrounds (except trail North from Howse Pass to the river - about 8 km).
10. Good assistance from Jasper warden (Brian?) for trail North of Jasper.

### Lowlights

Really there are none, but I'll mention some aspects that I did not like.

1. Huge open strip mining by Elk Valley Coal NW of Crowsnest Pass
2. Trails ripped up by horses, e.g. Maligne River trail. However in places the GDT only existed because of horse traffic.
3. Fires lit by other campers not in authorized fire rings.
4. Government of Canada maps. The confusion of contouring (100 ft, 40 m split 20/40 m, 50 m) and datums 1927 or

1983 are a disgrace for a developed country.

5. Stuffy room and high cost of some YHA beds, e.g. Lake Louise member rate = \$37/night in August.
6. Thin Merlino wool socks that started to hole after only seven days use.
7. The railroad corridor from Ottertail trailhead to Field. This is not an acceptable route - you should walk the highway.

### Cost

This is difficult because what do you include of stuff that you have already and did not purchase specifically for the GDT, e.g. Family Park Pass (\$140?), Annual Wilderness Pass(\$60?), camera film, clothes, maps. So, not including stuff similar to the above we have:

Transport (to Waterton, from Jasper)	\$130
Items bought on trip e.g. Freesole	\$ 30
Other recreation e.g. hostels, restaurant meals	\$445
Groceries on trail	\$310
Prepared Groceries	\$150
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1065</b>

This works out at very roughly \$1/km or \$20/day (Cdn).

### Gear

Without going into extreme detail, I will say that I adopted many ideas advocated by Ray Jardine in his book "*Beyond Backpacking*". I could/should have adopted more. It is essen-

### 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,  
Website, 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 address,  
you will be automatically notified  
that an electronic copy of the  
Packrat is on the website.

tial to get the base weight, eg. all items excluding food, water, fuel as low as possible. It should be less than 10 kg. Mine was nearer 13 kg. My complete pack weight with ten days food at the start was 24 kg. My ending pack weight with negligible food was 15 kg.

*“The only gear that really failed was the unproven Merlino wool socks.”*

To list some of the major items:

1. Standard Serratus 69 litre backpack with lid and 2 extra pockets: 2.30 kg
2. MEC Gosling down sleeping bag +5C 0.90 kg
3. Plus North of Saskatchewan Crossing Penguin 2 overbag synthetic +15C 0.75 kg
4. MEC Silicon Scout tarp (2.1x 2.8 m) inc. rope ties and 8 pegs 0.50 kg
5. 2 mm 1 m x 2.2 m plastic ground sheet 0.14 kg
6. Thin yellow foamy and plastic bag 0.22 kg
7. MSR Wisperlite stove and spares 0.43 kg
8. Pair Addidas Exiconb running shoes (S. of Sask Crossing) 2x480 gms 0.96 kg
9. Pair Marks Windriver boots (N. of Sask Crossing) 2x600 gms 1.20 kg

The only gear that really failed was the unproven Merlino

wool socks. Initially, I alternated two pairs of these, each of which started to hole after about seven days of use. The third pair, I kept to the end and it survived 11 days inside a thicker older sock in boots without holing. I consider these socks garbage and MEC re-funded the full price of these three pairs without question.

I consider a comfortable pack with waist strap essential, but this is against Ray Jardine philosophy. Considerable (2 kg) weight saving is possible here. The silicon tarp worked perfectly, but with any mosquitos, it would be a problem. Henry Shires makes some good light-weight Tarp-tents. You should aim for less than 1 kg/person with floor, pegs, etc. My sleeping bags were okay. You could spend good money here to get a -5c down bag for about \$250 and maybe under 1.5 kg, e.g. Integral Designs. It may be justifiable. The 0.2 kg yellow foamy was good enough for me especially when I remembered to dig a small cereal-sized hole for my hip. Others may prefer better. Z-rests at 0.40 kg are popular.

The MSR wisperlite worked fine using standard white gas. I was down to 60 mls fuel/day using an improvised thermos system. However, for another trip, especially solo, I would look into the beer can or cat stove that burns methyl alcohol - essentially the same system as for fondue. MEC sells the Trangia stove burner for about \$12 which is the same thing, but slightly heavier or a complete system for \$29. I needed more

experience with fuel usage of this system, and was uncertain of the availability of methyl alcohol.

I walked in robust running shoes from Waterton to Saskatchewan Crossing, about 700 km, without a problem (except the socks fell apart). For the 350 km North of Saskatchewan Crossing, I used a cheap (\$80) pair of lightweight boots from Marks Work Warehouse. For the two snow days and soggy conditions North of Jasper, I was glad of the boots.

Otherwise the running shoes were fine even for the scrambly Barnaby Ridge. Although it might have been different in a wet summer, I recommend running shoes. Buy them big, Jardine recommends 1-2 sizes larger than normal – he's right. Wear them for some kms before the trip. My running shoes were nowhere near new, probably had about 300 km running on them. They worked but now stink. Both the running shoes and boots are still very serviceable for walking, not running. I also used mini-gaitors throughout.

## Food

Take as much as you can carry and gorge at resupply. I figured about 1 kg/day. Breakfasts were my usual 150 gms of granola-muesli with protein powder. Lunches were dominated by Tortilla bread and cheese, about 120 gms bread and 100 gms cheese per day. Dinner was often pasta (150 gms), instant potato or rice.

Snacks consisted of chocolate, trail mix, beef jerky, dried fruit, homemade "trek bars", etc.

Since I figured that I was burning 4,000-5,000 cal/day, it seemed essential for dinner to be at least 1000 cal. Read the labels - this is difficult to achieve. I also looked at cal/dry food weight, e.g. 150/30 gms of cereal gives 5:1. Anything less than 3:1 is useless; 6:1 is very good.

***"I did not filter the water at all and had no problems."***

After about seven days of backpacking you can eat just about anything. Most of my prepared dinners were dehydrated at home which saves back-country fuel and ensures quality and quantity. I lost about 2 kg over the trip and on occasions had to stop between meals to eat (or probably faint). One extreme example was at 9.30 am after a 7.30 am breakfast. I did not filter the water at all and had no problems.

## Other

I shot slide film on an old camera (750 gms). Digital is the better way to go here. I deliberately did not take a GPS. The only real place that it would have been useful was in the area ruined by Elk Valley Coal where the ground did not resemble the map. I took a compass and a full set of 1:50,000 maps (about 20 in total), 6-8 at one time. These are heavy, you may do better from digital software. I found a silk sleeping bag useful (180 gms), as was a small Petzl

headlamp (70 gms). Clothes included a wide brimmed Tilley hat (130 gms) and a fleece toque (60 gms). Dancing Lite Gear market (to USA only) a full set of silicon rain gear for less than 200 gms. Mine was about 500 gms. I took a small radio (100 gms) but got very limited reception. An ipod or equivalent would be a better luxury. Duct tape is essential. The route just north of the Crowsnest to

Tornado Saddle should be re-evaluated to find the best compromise in this messy region.

I had a \$10 7-eleven phone card giving 4 cents/minute to Canada, USA or UK. There are many other phone cards with similar rates. I did not take a satellite phone or emergency locator beacon. I did not carry bear spray, bangers or a gun (as suggested by a cottage owner in BC). I made noise by yelling, clapping hands or whistling and never had a problem.

Permits: Chris Willett suggests (a) do everything the Park's way or (b) follow the principle but not the letter of the law or (c) do nothing and hope you never meet a warden. I did (b). I had a (family) car pass, an annual wilderness pass but not a specific permit to camp at a campsite on a specific night, for I saw and see little point in this when it's likely to change and there's no realistic way of modifying it. Quite naturally, a warden I encountered near Egypt Lake was horrified at this approach and insisted that I get one before venturing on the

popular Rockwall Trail on a Sunday.

Unfortunately, the information centre that she pointed me to at Vermillion Crossing was no longer allowed to issue permits and the alternatives involving some hours of hitchhiking or days of highway walking seemed ridiculous to me. That Sunday night, Floe Lake was 1/3 full and Macarthur Creek later was empty. However, I did obtain a permit for backcountry camping further north. But, as partially expected, did not maintain the precise schedule and ended up on the rightly popular Skyline Trail at the wrong site on the wrong day.

The warden encountered near here was more realistic (or did not want to mess around with radio messages for paperwork) and let me continue unobstructed. Mid-week, one site was empty, the other 3/4 full. So I suggest getting a permit for your camping, just make your best guess, it keeps Parks happy, but don't worry if you miss the schedule. They are free with a \$64 annual wilderness pass.

If I were to do the GDT again, I would look into:

1. A lighter actual pack;
2. A different stove, eg. methyl alcohol;
3. A digital camera;
4. Henry Shires tarp-tent;
5. Ipod;
6. A companion;
7. Alternate route from Crowsnest to Tornado Saddle and also from Jasper

- to the N. Boundary Trail;
8. Permits for camping in the Parks; and
9. **YES, I would do the GDT again without hesitation.**

### References

*Hiking Canada's Great Divide Trail* by Dustin Lynx

*Beyond Backpacking: Guide to Lightweight Hiking* by Ray Jardine

[www.rmbooks.com discussion forum3](http://www.rmbooks.com/discussionforum3)

[www.rmbooks.com/gdt/itineray](http://www.rmbooks.com/gdt/itineray)

[www.pierce.ctc.edu/faculty/cwillett/gdt/index.html](http://www.pierce.ctc.edu/faculty/cwillett/gdt/index.html)

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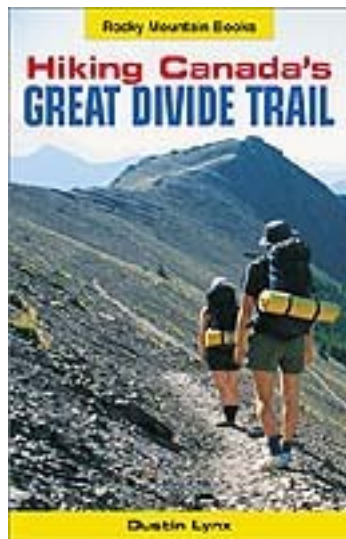
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[www.trangia/se](http://www.trangia/se)

[www.integraldesigns.com](http://www.integraldesigns.com)



### Canada's East Coast Top Ten To-Do List for 2007

- ※ Long Range traverse, NFLD (Gros Morne) HIKING
- ※ Cape Chignecto, NS HIKING
- ※ Mount Kadahdin, MAINE - HIKING
- ※ Fundy Footpath - HIKING
- ※ Cape Chignecto, NS KAYAKING
- ※ Mount Carelton, NB HIKING
- ※ Green Gardens, NFLD (Gros Morne) - HIKING
- ※ Tobique River, NB CANOEING
- ※ North Rustico, PEI KAYAKING
- ※ Bonshaw Trail System, PEI - SNOW SHOENING, HIKING, AND MTN BIKING

### Don't Forget!

To attend the Annual General Meeting on October 25, 2006 at 7:30 PM in the Rosemont Community Hall.

### Also

The Annual Dinner & Dance at the Calgary Winter Club on Saturday, October 28, 2006. Deadline to purchase your tickets is October 23. For more information, email Barb at [social@ramblers.ab.ca](mailto:social@ramblers.ab.ca).

## THE APEIRON SOCIETY FOR THE PRACTICE OF PHILOSOPHY

This is the Society's 20<sup>th</sup> year of philosophical seminars and discussions. All who are interested in the practice of philosophy in everyday life are welcome. This year's theme is: "Freedom and Identity"

### PROGRAM FOR THE FALL OF 2006

October 24	Valerie Prueger (Research Social Planner) "Riding the Freedom Trail: The Experience of Freedom in the Margins"		
November 07	Valery Efimenko (U of C Continuing Education) "Philosophy of Identity: National and Individual, Eastern and Western"		
November 21	Tom Flanagan (U of C Department of Political Science) "Canadian Identity(ies) in the 2006 National Election: Stories from the War Room"		
December 05	Richard Bickley (Psychologist) Topic TBA		
Meetings	7:30 pm sharp, at the Scandinavian Centre, 739-20 Avenue NW		
Membership	Annual: \$30	1 Jan to 31 Aug: \$15	
Entrance Fee	Members & 1st Visits: \$3	Students & Seniors: \$5	Non-Members: \$7
Contacts & Info	www.ApeironSociety.org	Laszlo @ 252-7332	Jerry @ 202-1671

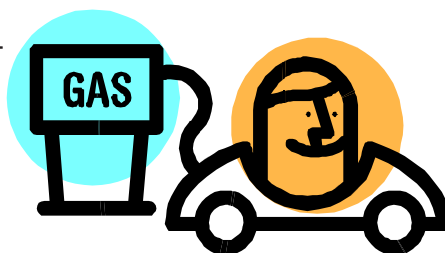


## Climate Change: Things You Can Do

There are many things you can do to help prevent climate change that are simple, inexpensive and easy to remember. Even small changes in your routine can make dramatic improvements to your carbon footprint on the environment...and even your bank account.

**Give up your gas-guzzler:** Driving a hybrid or a fuel-efficient car that gets more kilometres per litre could be the single biggest thing you can do to prevent climate change and cut your carbon dioxide emissions. But until hybrids become more affordable, consider driving less by telecommuting, car

pooling, using public transport or even walking. And if you can't part with your guzzler just yet, even simple acts such as regular tune-ups can reduce your fuel consumption.



**Bring home a bright idea:** Light your home with energy-efficient compact fluorescent lightbulbs (CFLs). They use a quarter of the energy of incandescent bulbs, produce more

light and last for years.

**Watch your water:** Save energy by washing your clothes with cold or warm water only. And only run fullloads in your dishwasher and laundry appliances.

**Power shower:** A lot of household energy goes down the drain with each shower. Use less with a low-flow showerhead and cut down on your shower time.

**Become a green gardener:** Installing a rain barrel and growing drought-resistant native plants will allow your garden to prosper on rainfall alone.

**The two-degree rule:** Move your thermostat up two degrees in summer and down two degrees in winter. You'll save hundreds of kilograms of carbon dioxide emissions a year.

**Double-duty:** Double-pane windows trap more heat than single panes, helping you save energy on home heating. And you can always triple up by putting on a sweater.

**Upgrade:** Save hundreds of dollars a year and reduce your emissions by updating all your appliances when they get too old and start wasting energy.

**Get unplugged:** Many electronic gadgets still use energy even if they are turned off. Plug devices such as phones, TVs, and computers and monitors into power bars that have an on/off switch and remember to turn the bar off when not in use.

**Support local business:** If you buy locally, you are lessening the demand for other products made farther away and shipped over large distances. Buy close to home and save them the trip.

## Welcome New Members

*Janice*

*Christine Parsons*

*Valerie Morsette*

*Bruce*

*Shari Ball*

*Laurie*

*Margo Coppus*

*Gerry Sheridan*

*Bert Scott*

*Margo Scott*

*Doug Van Staaldwine*

*Ken Fargey*

*Janice D.*

*Erica Phillips*

*Ken Ryba*

*Linda Selby*

*Suzanne McInnes*

*Robin*

*Jeff*

# Happy Halloween!

**"The true test of  
a first-rate mind is  
the ability to hold  
two contradictory  
ideas at the same  
time."**

*- F. Scott Fitzgerald*

