

# The PackRat

NEWSLETTER OF THE ROCKY MOUNTAIN RAMBLERS ASSOCIATION

MAY/JUNE 2007



PHOTO CREDIT: CARL POTTER

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packrat@ramblers.ab.ca

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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.

E-mail 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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**Part 1**

**Springtime in Guatemala**

I am sitting in my room, all my homework is done, my English class is ready and my supper has not arrived yet. Letty(maid)) has a new sweet habit. She speaks Spanish with a Maya dialect so we do have trouble understanding each other. Her nice habit is to write me messages on Luis'(son) white board in the kitchen asking me what I want for cena (supper)

earthquakes seem to cut off phone contact, what is easy at home was not easy here. I finally got a phone call at school and all I was asked was if I were in Guatemala (after they had just phoned there.) No ID of any sort was asked for!!

Last year some Ramblers asked how I got a teaching job in Guatemala, why I came to such a dangerous country and would I show pictures to them. And etc.

1. I went on the Internet and searched 'volunteering in Guatemala.' This is my fourth time



PHOTO CREDIT: TRAVIS JACOBS

*The class cubicles surround a beautiful garden. There is a swimming pool to the right.*

and just general messages so I get to practice reading Spanish. I correct her spelling errors and today she corrected mine!! I write back to her in Spanish. Not many Maya people of her genre can read and write.

My Visa card has been frozen for the third time in a year. Visa said that anyone being out of Canada for more than two weeks had to notify Visa of where they were and for how long. Notification had to be oral, and in Guatemala where wind and

here. I never come sponsored, or with a group. Some groups expect to be paid for one to volunteer. My choice this year was influenced by the fact that the school had a pool (3 feet deep!) so I could get exercise.

2. Who could come to Guatemala? Anyone who would not be too worried about danger, would not miss the comforts of home. This is my first year with hot water and cleanliness. A tuk tuk driver tried to take me away into the surrounding jungle and he

did it because I was a female, alone, and was a good target for robbery. I got away, the school took my picture for future ID and forbid me from going out alone, even in the day time. I am now walking alone, but with eyes wide open and not getting into any moving vehicles. People in pairs, especially if one half of the pair is a man, would be a safer way to go.

3. I come here because the living is cheap and they teach a great type of Spanish, and they will always give me a volunteer job that is to my liking. They always promise the volunteer job but it never has existed when I get here. I just fuss until a job materializes. Latinos are laid back, never are on time, are so friendly and helpful. I now have a family in Guatemala City that have a gorgeous home (but it is like a fortress,) who meet my plane, take me home with them, deliver me to my teaching village, pick me up at the end, take me to the airport and send me home. This year, the mother(Carmen) even took a few days off work to come with me to northern Guatemala to see the spectacular Maya ruins. Arriving in Guatemala City has to be in daylight and it is important to have a private car waiting. Criminals posing as taxi drivers will take a fare, then drive the new arrivals to an accomplice nearby, who will rob them and they are put out on the street. Thanks to Carmen and her family I feel safe, but without any sense of freedom.

4. Carmen has an email address. Ask me if you want it. She charges for her services but



PHOTO CREDIT: TRAVIS JACOBS

*Another view of the school. The cubicles are around a garden and swimming pool. Here I climbed up on the roof to see the volcanos. There are three visible around the city. Only one, in the far distance, is still somewhat active, spewing smoke and ash from time to time. Everything is open-air as no screens are necessary in this climate. That big tree in the middle is also a "landmark" to be able to find the school easily. It is very tall and can be seen from all over town.*

they are worth every penny (quetzal.)

5. The school that I attend and where I teach English is close to that of Carmen's B&B in Antigua. The name of the school is 'Academia Espanol Guatemala.' The jefe (principal) has supplied the pictures that accompany this article.

6. How about pictures. Taking pictures of people frightens them and is just not done. Even taking pictures of the general area is considered to be in bad taste. They think that we are poking fun at odd customs and a pretty basic way of living.

7. Touching...it is not done, especially to children and to members of the same sex (homosexual.) Kissing, right cheeks, one kiss, is acceptable, but it seems that you have to know the person to do this.

8. Would I recommend coming here? Well, sort of. Of all the places that I have been, Antigua seems the safest. Try to come with a man, if you are a woman. They seem to be very hesitant when they see same sex couples traveling together.

9. Of course there are exceptions to all that I have written.

10. The Guatemalteca consul in Calgary suggested that I not come this year, but I would come back.

11. Canada is the best place for beauty that I have ever seen in my travels. What one sees when traveling to other places may be historical and different cultures, but without the extreme beauty and safety of Canada.

*Adios, cuidese.  
Dawn (Aurora) Jones.*

## Cuba Si

by Dorothy-Ann Reimer

**H**uge numbers of tourists travel annually to Cuba to enjoy beaches, sun and sea. From Britain, Germany, Holland, yes, even from Canada. But very few Americans go unless they are prepared to enter via Toronto or another non-US city. In the Spring of 2006 I joined an Explore guided adventure tour there and was thrilled with the experience.

Being in Cuba is like watching a giant lab experiment where no one knows what the final results will be, even after nearly 50 years of testing. But through it all, the Cuban will to survive, no matter what, shines clearly.

In this two-week trip, we traveled 3029 km in a comfortable, nearly-new air-conditioned bus, with an Explore guide and a Cuban driver (trained as a veterinarian). We feasted on history, culture, took a few nature walks, listened everywhere to Cuban music (some good, some mediocre), stayed in minimum 3-star accommodation and ate plenty of fish, chicken, rice and black beans.

For this article, I'll focus on two locales; Santiago de Cuba and the Viñales Valley and throw in a couple of comments about the famous Ernesto "Che" Guevara.

Santiago de Cuba, port city at the eastern edge of the Sierra Maestras (the mountains where Fidel & Che established their

headquarters while they gathered strength for their final push to oust Batista in Dec., 1956). It was one of the original seven villas settled by Spain in 1515. The first African slaves arrived here (slave population grew to nearly ½ million by 1862) and it was to Santiago that many

PHOTO CREDIT DOROTHY-ANN REIMER



*Statue of Che in Santa Clara*

French coffee-planters escaped when revolution spread over Haiti. Thus culture is more mixed here than in the rest of the country.

Lots to see and do. San Juan Hill (our hotel was here, next to the Zoo from which we were roused in the morning by bellowing lions) which Teddy Roosevelt made famous in America when he "led" a charge of Americans and Cubans against Spanish in 1898 during the Spanish-American War.

El Castillo del Morro San Pedro de la Roca is a nearby castle built in 1630s to ward off

pirates. However, to the chagrin of the town, the only time it was 'attacked' was in 1662 when an English pirate took control and found it completely unguarded.

Today, it is a tourist attraction and site of a daily ceremonial canon volley at sunset. We had a great time scrambling around the ramparts and followed it all with a delicious meal in a nearby illegal 'home restaurant', feasting on fresh lobster.

The Viñales Valley, famous for tobacco growing, is probably the most beautiful part of Cuba with its vivid red sandy soils, its mogotes (low flat topped mountains) that rise up dramatically from the plains. We walked among farm fields with one of the best local guides of the entire trip. He explained the farm-ownership system, the sometimes-peculiar rules that they operated under. The farmers we met were welcoming, fed us breadfruit, coconut, cold fruit drinks and doughnut holes. Tobacco drying barns were easily identified by their 'fragrance' up to half km away. Whew!

A few words about "Che" Guevara. Prominent figures of the regime, even Fidel Castro, are not advertised or pictured. The exception is Che who has become a cult symbol – something he would have disliked.

The museum to Che is in Santa Clara, an impressive exhibit. His statue sits atop a tall pedestal with the words "Hasta de la Victoria Siempre" (Always or ever onwards to Victory). In

### 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,  
Website, and at Meetings.

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### 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.



PHOTO CREDIT DOROTHY-ANN REIMER

*The Vinales Valley*

the city itself is a wonderful life-size statue of Che adorned by symbols of his life (e.g. on the shoulder is a child riding a goat to suggest his leaving his home in Argentina).

Cuba has produced rice, tobacco, sugar but its enduring fame is the quality of its rum so I'll leave you with the recipe for a tasty local rum drink called a Jincila cocktail, copied from the notice on the bar wall: "Havana Club rum, ginger roots, honey bee, mineral water, lemon".

What do you think?

## Kananaskis Trail Users Meeting March 21, 2007

by D. Reimer

The latest meeting of Trail Users with K Country was chaired by Mike Benny, K Country Operations Support Manager with Regional Director Dave Nielsen present. What we

discussed follows. My personal issue is with continued year-round closure of Gorge Creek Road.

### Sheep/Blue Rock Management Plan

Stalled going to Minister due to a Fall/06 Government directive to more actively involve Native Bands in consultation. Lengthy process & main concern seems to be hunting rights.

### West Bragg Ski Trails

Tracksetting was handled jointly by K Country & Bragg Creek Volunteer group. Volunteers hope to add a loop to the trail system we at of Sundog. Many thanks to these volunteers.

### Wind Damage

November storms did major damage...some damage not visible from air reconnaissance. Hikers are asked to advise K Country of damage on Desig-

nated Trails – location, type of damage, pictures if you have them. E-mail your info to Bill Johnston at [bill.johnston@gov.ab.ca](mailto:bill.johnston@gov.ab.ca)

### SPRING CLEANUP

K Country has some permanent staff (not many) to do this and also hires contractors. Cleanup will start with camping and picnic areas first.

### WINTER ISSUES

#### 1. Lynx Trail Re-route

Ski trail was re-routed a few years ago from boggy area. New trail includes steepish hill with some Seniors don't like because it's too steep. K Country won't do this. Real concern is *lack of easier trail*. Sub-committee of trail users was set up to look at finding ways to solve problem.

#### 2. Sawmill Trails & Track-setting

Issue was raised again (best snow around for X-Country) but K Country can't do it as it doesn't have the \$ or staff to handle it. They already run 20 hours/day, Mon.-Fri. and would need to lease one more machine and hire 2 more people or drop one of the other areas.

#### 3. Facilities Improvements

Some facilities (e.g. Pocaterria Hut) suffer from heavy use. Again, K Country has very little \$ to improve, enlarge or add facilities.

However if a group comes to them with \$ for specific improvements, K Country can accept (as long as it isn't something the Government is man-

dated to provide).

### Mt. Indefatigible Trail Closure

This trail is removed from Designated Status and won't be maintained. Main reason is bear activity with a high risk of human-wildlife encounters. The trail will still be accessible & will not be reclaimed.

### SUMMER THINGS

#### 1. Fortress Access

Road currently closed as unsafe (bridge damage, erosion, slumps). Road is held under a License of Occupation from Alberta Infrastructure by the current lessee (Banff Rail Co.) and it is this company's responsibility to fix road.

#### 2. Gorge Creek Road Access

This road was closed after the 2005 flood, partly opened in 2006. The section between Gorge Creek trailhead and



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

Volcano Ridge trailhead is undamaged but remains closed. K Country recommended closure of this road in its Sheep/Blue Rock management plan. Trail users object.

K Country recommended that I phone Tas Kollias, Operations Manager with Alberta Infra-

structure (403-297-7661) to check on status of the road.

**POST-MEETING:** I called Mr. Kollias March 27. He claimed to know nothing about this road and had never had any request to open it. He said he would check it out and let me know in two or three weeks.

#### 3. Pine Top Day Use Site

Sites been closed for ages but K Country will upgrade and re-open by summer (if they get the budget).

#### 4. Friend of K Country Trail Care Volunteer Work

Jeff Gruttz reported that volunteer hours Trail Care group were down to about 556 with 70 volunteers. This is quite low but could be result of two of the five Saturdays being rained-out.

### NEXT MEETING: MAY 16

Guests invited for this meeting are Kathy Wilcox, Friends of Kananaskis Country and Gord Lehn, Spray Lake Sawmills re pine beetles.

If you have any issues you want raised, give me a call, 225-2499 or

[reimerda@evoco.com](mailto:reimerda@evoco.com)

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*“A journey is like marriage. The certain way to be wrong is to think you control it.”*

- JOHN STEINBECK

## EXPERIENCE ICELAND - JULY 2 TO 13, 2007

Iceland is the land of the midnight sun! Trek on volcanic terrain, marvel at the view atop Iceland's "Grand Canyon", stand at the edge of the most powerful waterfall in all Europe, & relax in the soothing thermal waters of the Blue Lagoon. From Reykjavik all the way up to the northern fishing village of Husavik, days are packed full of awesome sights and experiences. This is a once-in-a-lifetime adventure!

## DISCOVER SLOVENIJA - JULY 30 TO AUGUST 11, 2007

Discover the fairy-tale setting of Slovenija with its Julian Alps, medieval castles, baroque churches and Dragon Bridge. Hike behind the thundering Slap Pericnik waterfall and through Vintgar Gorge gushing with white water. Trek up the impressive Mt. Triglav and around the glacier-fed Lake Bohinj. Discover unspoiled Slovenija.

## LA BELLE SAGUENAY - AUGUST 25 TO SEPT 2, 2007

Hike along the 2<sup>nd</sup> longest fjord in North America! Explore 3 of Quebec's most celebrated parks - all in the Saguenay-Lac Saint-Jean region. Highlights include superb hiking trails, whale-watching in Tadoussac, a Quebecois dinner on a family farm and even a little free time to sightsee in Quebec City. Our hotel is nestled on the hillside overlooking the tranquil Baie des Ha! Ha! and offers some of the best in French cuisine.

## SAVOUR TUSCANY - SEPTEMBER 15 TO 29, 2007

Mouth-watering gelatos, world-famous vino, gastronomic feasts, passionate locals and some of the most picturesque hiking in the world await you on this 2-week adventure in glorious Tuscany. Join us as we hike the region famous for its vineyards, olive groves and renaissance architecture. You will be captivated by the scenery and charmed by the towns and villages that can only be best appreciated on foot! You will truly get a taste of *La Dolce Vita!*

## EXPLORE NEW ZEALAND - NOVEMBER 4 TO 23, 2007

Spring in Kiwi country! Explore Rotorua, Tongariro, Abel Tasman National Park, and last but not least, the Milford Track – long described as the finest walk in the world! Just **one spot left** for a lady wishing to share accommodations!

## LET'S HIKE! - NEWSLETTER

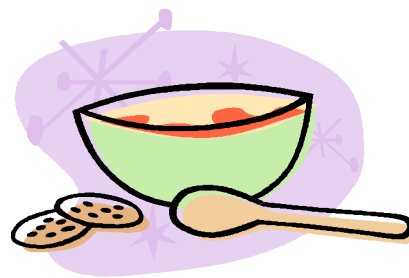
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## Recipe Corner



## Cranberry Cookies

### Ingredients:

- 1/2 cup butter or margarine
- 3/4 cup white sugar
- 3/4 cup brown sugar
- 1 egg
- 1/3 cup milk
- 1 tsp lemon juice
- 3 cups flour
- 1 tsp. baking powder
- 1 tsp. baking soda
- 1/2 tsp. salt
- 2-1/2 cups fresh whole cranberries
- 1 cup chopped walnuts

### Directions:

Preheat oven to 375°. Cream butter, add white and brown sugar. Beat until smooth. Beat egg and then add to mixture along with milk and lemon juice. Mix well. In a separate bowl, sift together flour, baking powder, baking soda and salt. Gradually add flour mixture into wet ingredients. When well mixed, fold in cranberries and nuts. Drop 1 tbsp. of dough onto greased cookie sheets. Bake for 8 to 10 minutes.

# Impressions of Mexico's Copper Canyon

By Carl Potter

I am passionate about visiting canyons. Most years, I head south to explore more canyons in the American Southwest, usually in the Colorado Plateau country.

This year I extended my range "south of the border, down Mexico way," and explored the maze of five major canyons (two deeper than the Grand Canyon), which deeply incise the Sierra Madre Occidental, known also as the Sierra Tarahumara, after the 50,000 Tarahumara Indians who escaped into the mountains hundreds of years ago to flee the marauding Spanish Conquistadors.

In the Copper Canyon, I discovered a totally different world, so near but so far away - a land time forgot. Here were huge canyons, grand as the Grand, and even deeper, but wait- sit still and gaze.

After a while, I notice a trail, then another, then a myriad of pathways criss-crossing absolutely everywhere, trodden by

goats grazing from meadow to meadow, and from people who live in every nook and cranny of the rough landscape. And then I spot a one-room house, a mile straight below me, then another, and another. Down at the bottom of the canyon, with no roads, only paths for foot and hoof, the Tarahumara's winter

friendly dogs. What are they doing? Where are they going? Where do they live? No answers. They just sit patiently while their dogs sleep, giggling, smiling shyly. And later, more children, beating a Tarahumara drum.

It is the week before Holy Week, when thousands will

dance and drum day and night with wild costumes and body painting as bizarre as those you see in Olympic Opening Ceremonies. The drums are an important part of their culture and religion.

Across the canyon I spot a real village, which has recently been connected by road to the outside world. My guide spoke only a few words of English and I only a few words of Spanish, so we exchanged

pleasantries and got to know each other a little, while I soaked in the sensations of the unfamiliar canyon. There were no mechanical sounds. The beautiful song of the canyon wren could have been coming out of a Southwestern canyon, and so could the twisted pines be Utah



PHOTO CREDIT: CARL POTTER



PHOTO CREDIT: KEN WATSON

homes. I gaze more, then realize every tiny flat spot on the steep canyon walls is a terraced field - extending 6,000 vertical feet, miniature fields tilled by stick a long walk from home. Then, out of nowhere, three little girls suddenly appear, giggling in their distinctive way, with their



or Arizona, but when we came upon a cliff-dwelling alcove, it was still being used as a granary and goat shelter. There were little mounds of dirt, where corn was being cultivated by a stick, in the same way as the Anasazi did a thousand years ago.

Another day, our Tarahumara guide materializes at the side of



PHOTO CREDIT: CARL POTTER

the tortuous dirt road that drops over a mile to the town of Urique, at the bottom of the Urique Canyon. Half of our group of eight tourists (Dennis from Los Angeles, his sister Mary from Washington, D.C., Roswell and Verna from New York, Lou and Bonnie from Traverse City, Michigan, and our own Ken Watson, and I) leave the van and follow our guide, in native breechclout and colourful shirt. True to his cultural norm, he avoids eye contact with strangers, never saying a word. He could out hike any of us in his Tarahumara sandals, made from discarded rubber tires. Like the Bedouin of the movie *Lawrence of Arabia*, he carried no water, moving steadily through the hot,

dust-bowl conditions of the lower canyon like a shimmering apparition. As we entered the sleepy town, replete with foraging mules, burros and cattle, he led us to the home of our host, Mario's sister, and vanished.

Taking a short hike to an ancient cliff-dwelling alcove, we pass through a dusty dirt field

with its scattered Tarahumara houses. The Indian ladies and girls don't miss a beat. Quicker than we can walk, they scoot ahead to our destination, to lay out their beautiful baskets and jewellery for us to see. This is a constant. Everywhere we go, the ladies are always there. At our lodge, they appear on the veranda at 6 a.m., hard frost notwithstanding, patiently waiting. No solicitations, no bargaining, simply lay out the wares and wait. They are at the train stations, of course, but no matter where we hike, they are there. By now we are "all basketed out," some carrying large bags of their purchases home. At the cliff-dwelling, by the petroglyphs, a little girl

plays—Often at American Anasazi ruins, I get an eerie sensation of the ancient ones living, working and playing in this space in a different time dimension, but here that dimension fades in and out, blurring the distinction from present reality.

I stand in the box of a 40-year old pickup truck, complete with tattered car seats, on a street in Batopilas, a magical town at the bottom of an awesome canyon, only reached by a 170 km trek on a stupendous, cliff-hanging dirt road. My friends have gone into an art store to purchase some pictures, but I am transfixed by the street scene. With Holy Week approaching, the Tarahumara are steadily drifting into town, in their colourful shirts and breechclouts. I can't tear myself from this kaleidoscope. A grizzled Tarahumara man appears, stops, comes over to the back of the truck. Like visitors to the zoo, we size each other up. He pauses, then extends his hand. I grasp his hand in the gentle Tarahumara handshake. They do not grip your hand like Europeans. It is just a caress. The more they grip, the more they have been assimilated into our culture. He turns and leaves without uttering a word. I have been blessed to be here. I hope this place remains as isolated as it is forever, is never spoiled by hordes of tourists.

Victoriano lives in a one-room house with no windows. When he was 55 years old, he won a footrace in Colorado, over 100 miles and two 12,000 foot passes, by 40 minutes. He had



PHOTO CREDIT: ROBERT GOINGS

never trained for this, and wore only the Tarahumara sandals, made from old rubber tires. The Tarahumara play a game of kicking a ball over long distances in rough canyon conditions. Their name means the runners. Here is no other way to get around in the canyons.

He wasn't home when we wandered over for a visit, but we could peek through the cracks in the boards. There are beautiful blossoms and lovely flowers in his otherwise dirt yard. He's probably into the tesquino, the corn beer of the Tarahumara! Their religion emphasizes the rhythm of subsistence in the desert—"no corn without rain, no rain without tesquino (and dancing), no tesquino without corn."

The next evening Victorio came to dance a rain dance and a rabbit dance for us, around a crackling fire in the high elevation chill. He didn't say a word, true to the Tarahumara culture. It had not rained for two months

and no rain could be expected for another two months. Within 36 hours it rained thundershowers like the rainy season. I hope Victorio got his rabbit.

*See Non-Ramblers Trip Reports on the website for another photo essay on the Copper Canyon, and watch for my slide presentation.*

**Deadline  
for next PackRat  
June 29, 2007**



## Welcome New Members



*Shawn McDonald*

*Sharon Cairns*

*Stephen Fairley*

*Mike Rogers*

*Carolyn Trueman*

*Yvonne Beatty*

*Carson Cassidy*

*Sheila Powell*

*Mary Engler*

*Wendy Pugh*

*Flora van Wageningen*

*Jan Francois*

*Regine Wattiez*

*L. Howard*

*Sally Jones*

*Hilda M Kearney*

*Joe Kearney*

*Nancy Lahoda*

*Ken McDermott*



## Welcome Back

*Bob St. John*