

The

Pack Rat

Rocky Mountain Ramblers Association

January / February 2008



WHAT'S INSIDE?



- 3 Old Climbers Never Die
- 4 Valentine Day Pot Luck
- 5 Table Top Mountain in S. Africa
- 6 if only
- 7 Herman Koetsier - 75th Birthday
- 8 Comfortable Hiking Holidays
- 9 book review - Infidel
- 10 Dos and Don'ts of Hiking
- 12 Dave Harding is Back



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

E-mail contributions to the editor at packrat@ramblers.ab.ca or forward to RMRA c/o Calgary Area Outdoor Council 1111 Memorial Drive NW, Calgary AB T2N 3E4.

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Message from the Editor

Last year about this time, I set a lofty resolution to do x number of Rambler trips in 2007. But this year, I'm not setting any such resolution because it just doesn't work that way. What happens is - on any one weekend, I decide if I'm free to go on a hike. If I can make it, I go. If I can't make it, I don't go. No guilt trips.

I will say one thing, though - I've never struggled to the top of a mountain and then stood there and said, 'This just wasn't worth the effort.'

Happy new year.
Happy hiking.

*Sharon Wingenbach
Editor*

Introducing Michael Eberhard

Michael is going to be my partner in editing the Pack Rat. He's got a lot more expertise in working with graphics than I do.

This can be a lonely job - yet another task that keeps me staring at a computer for hours on end. I'm thrilled to have someone to bounce ideas off of.

Welcome New Members

Lu Hall
Ray Potvin
Glyn Jackson
Michelle Balmer
Returning: Alfred Potter



A Couple of the Upcoming Events

January 16, 7:30 - before the regular Ramblers' meeting
- **Tierra del Fuego to La Paz**, a slide show by Ron Mason and Micheline Barbeau

February 27, 7:30 - before the regular Ramblers' meeting
- a book reading and presentation by Sharon Stratton, author of **Between Forest and Sky - A Fire Tower Journal**

Sharon's book is an enthusiastic and beautifully described account of one woman's career as a fire-tower observer: a simple, satisfying lifestyle that embraces life without modern amenities.

Through her words, it's possible to experience the rush of adrenaline she feels when she spots and reports fires from atop her 100-foot tower, and to discover with her the beauty and diversity of the flora and fauna.

PACK RAT ADVERTISING RATES

The Club offers advertising space in Pack Rat and the following rates apply:

Quarter Page	\$10
Half Page	\$20
Full Page	\$40

Payment MUST be received prior to publication

Old Climbers Never Die - They Join the Ramblers

The other night, I had a Faustian dream. It is unusual for me to remember dreams at all, but this one was vivid and startling.

I dreamt the devil came to me with an offer. "I will give you back your body as it was when you were 21 years old, but you will retain all your skills, experience and knowledge that you have now. For five years, you will be able to climb every mountain that you desire."

I couldn't believe this offer. "There must be a downside," I asked.

"Of course!" replied the devil. "After five years, I will return and take your soul."

Well, the offer was a no-brainer to me. I was about to accept when...

...I woke up!

Such are the ravages of time. We would do almost anything to find the fountain of youth, a search that has been pursued since the beginning of time.

Looking back on my youth, when I was between 15 and 23 years old, I was fit and fanatical about climbing. Climbing was the most important thing in my life.

Then at 19, I had a serious lead fall. Saved only by my skillful and alert climbing mate, I escaped with only minor injuries, but the psychological damage was considerable. Although I continued to love the mountains and to climb, my fanaticism was

diminished. Over the next many years, my climbing ability did not decrease, but it did not increase either. I became much more circumspect when climbing - I'd learned that I was not immortal any more!

I suppose my mountaineering 'high point' came when I was elected president of my university mountaineering club. I was a mountain climber, but now I was a social climber too.

This was followed by another hiatus - I married and started to raise a family. For the next 15 years, I seldom went to the mountains.

By the end of that time, I was living in Canada and I marked my middle-age crisis by skiing and climbing once again. My skills and fitness had almost evaporated, but my enthusiasm had not. Taking up cross-country skiing proved to me that I was still very capable of gaining new skills, and as my confidence increased, it spread to



Climbing on Ben Nevis

climbing and mountaineering. I was a climber again.

One incident sticks in my mind -- when my son (then 18) led me up an exposed 5.5 route in the Adirondack Mountains, he asked me to lead the last pitch. Of course, as his father, failing was not an option, and I did it. This was a very moving experience. My son has since gone on to do great things in the Rockies, the Alps and the Himalayas. I get to follow his exploits vicariously.

My search for the Meaning of Life became intense when I was trekking in Nepal. I had heard of a very wise Rinpoche who lived in a cave in the mountains. After struggling over scree and rock, ice and snow, I finally reached the guru sitting in meditation at the mouth of his cave.

"Tell me the Meaning of Life," I asked.

After some time, he answered, "The Meaning of Life is a teacup."

"That is just impossible. How can it be a teacup?"

"Well, maybe it isn't a teacup."

We moved to Calgary too late in life, at age 56. We wanted to be near the mountains. Very soon, I realized that my age and bulk were catching up with me. My strength-to-weight ratio had hit rock bottom and my stamina was fading away. Fortunately, my love for the mountains remained, and spending more time there than ever, especially hiking and skiing, was imperative. I continued to climb vicariously through my son and my library of mountaineering books.

My enjoyment of the mountains only grows with time. I realize that there

cont'd on Page 4

Activities

Hiking
Backpacking
Cross-Country Skiing
Downhill Skiing
Cycling
Climbing
Scrambling
Mountaineering
Camping
Education and Awareness Programs
Socials

Meetings

Every Wednesday evening at 7:30
Rosemont Community Hall
10 St NW at Confederation Park

Contact Us

Rocky Mountain Ramblers
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1111 Memorial Dr NW
Calgary, AB T2N 3E4

Trip Info

The Information Line at 282-6308,
our website and weekly meetings

Website

www.ramblers.ab.ca

If we have your e-mail address,
we will automatically notify you when
an electronic copy of the Packrat
is on the website.



Everest Base Camp - North Face of Everest Behind

are many mountains on my "to do" list that I will never climb. Still, I have few regrets. My son and my grandsons continue the quest.

Living in Calgary is inspirational. With more than five senior outdoor clubs in the area, there is no shortage of like-minded companions with energy and enthusiasm for life. I constantly see 70- and 80-year-olds on the trails, with more vigor than most teenagers.

I hike slower now, which reaps certain benefits. Instead of racing to the summit, you become keenly aware of the surroundings. Sitting

and resting on the trail can be a spiritual experience. You watch the clouds and shadows moving across the snow and the rock. You notice animals in their environs. And it all adds greatly to the wilderness experience. Even after many times on the same trail, there is always something new to see...

On my 65th birthday, determined to do something new and exciting, I went paragliding over the Sacred Valley of the Incas in Peru.

Any suggestions for my 70th????!

Ron Mason

Join us for one of the top Rambler events of the year

The Annual Valentine's Day Dessert Potluck

Wednesday, February 13
7:30 pm
Rosemont Community Hall

Bring something sweet to share

Brenda Domeij and Joanne Jansen will show their slides of Mount Kilimanjaro.

Table Mountain in South Africa

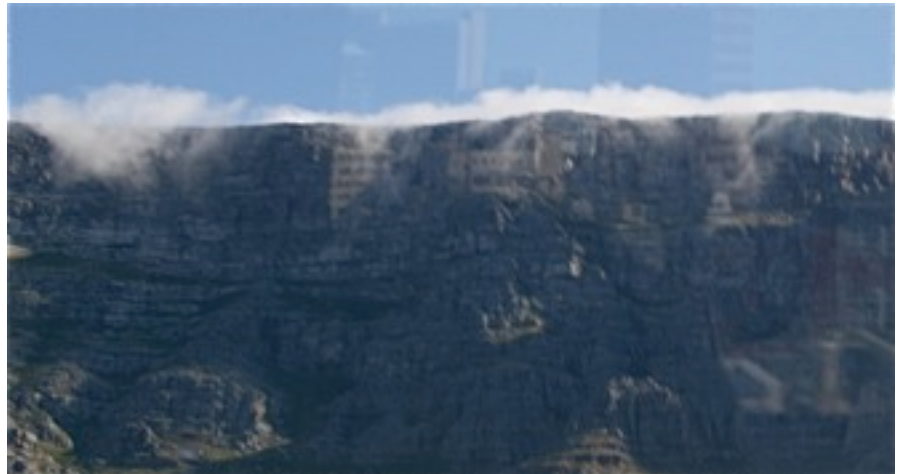
"Look out the window as soon as you wake up in the morning. If the mountain is covered in cloud, go back to bed."

That was what they told us on the first night of my holiday in South Africa. Table Mountain reared up barely a km away from our hotel in downtown Cape Town. If the next morning had been clear with no wind, we would have left to climb the mountain before 8:30 am. Thank goodness it was windy and clouded - I was still suffering from jet lag and welcomed the one day reprieve.

The second morning, conditions were perfect, so we piled into our transportation and headed up to the start of the Platteklip Gorge. This is the shortest and one of the steepest routes up Table Mountain, barring the scrambling routes for the really adventurous.



Upper End of Platteklip Gorge



The "Table Cloth" on Top of Table Mountain

Table Mountain is the highest and most northern peak of a range that rises from Cape of Good Hope, 40+ km south, along the peninsula. Table Bay and Cape Town mark the north boundary. The maximum elevation is 1085 m, marked by a huge mound of rocks called Maclear's Beacon. The north face is steep but has some narrow gorges that make access possible.

We were loaded with extra water (Platteklip Gorge faces due north and becomes a furnace in the mid-day sun), extra clothes (the weather can change in minutes, from warm sun to freezing gales) and cautions of "Do not, under any conditions, walk alone. Be in groups of no less than 3 or 4."

The caution was necessary as many people have been mugged, stabbed, beaten and robbed on this mountain.

We were on the trail about 9 am, starting from a point about 2 km east of the lower cable car terminal.

The plan was to climb up the gorge, walk

across the plateau and catch the cable car from the upper terminal. Then we would ride down in comfort. The trail was clearly marked and well built, with good footing and support on narrower sections. However, I think it might have been built for 3 m tall giants - much of the steps were gigantic boulders that I struggled mightily to step up on. The shortest person in our group, Sonia, was not quite five feet tall and needed a lot of boosts to make it up.

At 80 years old, Sonia was also our oldest member.

cont'd on Page 6



Cable Car

Two hours later, we re-grouped at the top of the gorge. The temperature was 11 degrees - not exactly what one expects in October in South Africa.

Then we stepped out onto the open mountain top. The wind blew wildly from the SE. The views were spectacular - Cape Town and Table Bay spread out below, the Townships to the east, the Atlantic to the west.

Yes, the cable car was still running. After fortifying ourselves with hot drinks at the mountain-top restaurant, we crowded onto the 60 passenger car. The car rotated us around 360 degrees as we descended the 600+ m that we had just climbed so labouriously.

That was my first trek up Table Mountain. Exactly five weeks later, I went up again, this time with a British Rambler group of 16 or 17. We didn't start until 11 am. The sun was shining and the breeze was light.

This time, we went up the east slope through Skeleton Gorge, a route that is longer than Platteklip Gorge but not as steep and more treed. We only had to make it through a few tricky sections, one of which had a set of five ladders to help us.

Smuts Track led us from the top of the gorge, up another 200 m to

Maclear's Beacon on the Eastern Table. Elevation gain on my first trip through Platteklip Gorge had been 600 m - this climb was 900 m.

The top of Table Mountain is a fabulous colourful garden of 'fynbos' plants. "Fynbos" is a term for the variety of shrubs and small plants that grow in profusion in South Africa and nowhere else in the world. From the tiny ericas (heath-like plants) to the flamboyant proteas, it is a wonderful sight to behold.



Going Up Skeleton Gorge

We wandered across the Central Table, losing the marked trail (painted footprints on the



Protea Flower

rocks). We meandered on the many unofficial trails until finally reaching the top of the Platteklip Gorge. From there, it was a dash to the Upper Terminal of the cable car. The car took us down to our transportation. Once back at our hotel, we enjoyed a celebratory supper.

Dorothy-Ann Reimer

if only

if only i had gone left instead of right
worn the red dress not the blue
gone north instead of south

said more or less
talked or listened

done this instead of that
said yes instead of no

had a coffee not the tea
held out my hand or took yours

if only i were taller thinner
younger older
lived here or there

if only i were you were
we were

it would be different then

Rosemary Manning



HERMANUS KOETSIER

TURNING 75 FEBRUARY 2



Hermanus Koetsier has been a Rambler for a very long time. In fact, he's hiked with such life members such as Bob Pattison, Bill Leach, Toni and Anne Moran and Wally Drew.

Next month - on Saturday, February 2, Groundhog Day - Herman will celebrate his 75th birthday. For those who know Herman, maybe give him a phone call and wish him a happy birthday.

Herman moved to Calgary from The Netherlands in 1960, expecting to find Canada a quieter place. And at that time, it was quiet - population 200,000.

Once he joined the Ramblers in 1972, Herman enjoyed hiking, scrambling and canoeing with the club. But everything changed four years later when, after a big backpacking trip, Herman had his first heart attack.

This slowed him down, but it didn't stop him. It was a full 20 years after that before he hung up his hiking boots. His last hike with the club was one of the 50th anniversary hikes in 2005.

Happy Birthday, Herman - and many more

COMFORTABLE HIKING HOLIDAYS

Hike an adventure. Rest in comfort.



COME MEET US!

We'll be at the **Calgary Outdoor Adventure Show**

- **April 5th and 6th**

- **Stampede Park, Booth #129**

Please stop by and introduce yourselves; we would love to chat with you in person!

MAKE YOUR RESERVATION TODAY!

ANDALUCÍA, SPAIN

April 13 to 26, 2008

The Spanish passion for living is deliciously contagious! Hike the picturesque Andalucía region with its "white villages" nestled in the mountains and bottomless gorges where vultures nest. Experience the history of the Alhambra Palace & let Ronda charm you.

CORFU, GREECE

May 11 to 24, 2008

This Greek island is the perfect combination of European flare and tranquil sea-side living. Hike to the heavens to visit holy monasteries and trek in shade of ancient olive groves. We promise - you will never tire of the deep, deep blue of the sea that surrounds you. Opa!

FRANCE

May 31 to June 14, 2008

Hike with us in SW France from the medieval town of Sarlat. The honey-coloured stone of the 1000 year-old buildings, gas lighting and complete lack of overhead wires make it a photographer's paradise. Included in our hikes are guided tours of chateaux, visits to magnificent sculptured gardens, a leisurely boat ride on the Dordogne and winery tours, of course!

ICELAND

July 14 to 25, 2008

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 to the northern fishing village of Husavik, days are packed full of awesome sights and experiences.

SAGUENAY FJORD

August 16 to 24, 2008

Discover the beauty in your own backyard with our 1-week hiking holiday to La Belle Province. Voted one of the 10 best national parks for wildlife by Explore Magazine, the Saguenay-Lac Saint-Jean region offers superb hiking trails along the fjord, whale-watching, and a feast of French Canadian culture.

TUSCANY

September 13 to 27, 2008

Mouth-watering gelatos, world-famous wines, 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. Get a taste of *La Dolce Vita!*

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book review...

Infidel

by **Ayaan Hirsi Ali** (2007),
available through the
Public Library

A gripping and possibly disturbing read

Born in Somalia and raised in Somalia, Kenya and Saudi Arabia, Ayaan grows up as a "good muslim girl" and tries very hard to fit into her family's rules and traditions. It just doesn't work out and eventually she escapes from home and from an arranged marriage to end up in Holland as a refugee. Here she discovers the West and struggles ever more intensely trying to reconcile Islam, her family traditions and the West. She eventually becomes a Dutch citizen and politician, and her outspoken, questioning nature lead to conflict with members of Islamic groups to the point that she is today in hiding due to "fatwa's" issued against her.

Not only does the story describe some of the complex family traditions that govern traditional Somalian society, but it is fascinating to read about Ayaan's transformation from somebody deeply rooted in the Somalian Muslim tradition to a fully westernized person. As she struggles to maintain contact with her roots, yet fit into

modern western society, the reader gains some insight into the profound differences between African muslim traditions and Western thought. This autobiography is very helpful in trying to understand what some immigrants might feel and the difficulties they may face when coming to a country like Canada.

Ayaan's experience supports the contention of thinkers such as Roger Scruton, who write about the gulf between Western civilization and "the rest", as he calls it, in "The West and the rest" (2002). The reader of "Infidel" is invited to draw their own conclusions about the possibility of fruitful coexistence between Western secular society and Muslim / tribal traditions. In Ayaan's case it was possible, but many of her countrymen find it impossible.

*Reviewed by
Laszlo Jamniczky*

If you received this newsletter in the mail, but instead you prefer to receive it online, send an e-mail to the editor. About 85% of Ramblers receive the Packrat online only.

Online, you can see all the brilliant colors in the photos, and you save trees....

packrat@ramblers.ab.ca

Dos and Don'ts of Hiking OR How to Enjoy the Show

Within three hours of Calgary, you can find a multitude of first class trails, among the best in North America. More and more Calgarians are taking advantage of this.

In recent years, there has been a considerable change in the demographics of hikers. Definitely, there is a surge in young people twenty-something, but people of every age are joining the hiking crowd for fitness, weight loss and health.

First time hikers might think hiking is just an extension of walking. But compare an urban walk - one to two hours on a relatively predictable flat surface - to a hike in the mountains - four to 10 hours on trails of gravel, rock, roots and scree.

Even a moderate mountain trail can strain your feet, spine, hips and knees, so choosing the right gear is essential for enjoyment and prevention of injuries.

Boots

Leave your tennis shoes and running shoes at home. They are simply too soft for rocky, root-y and muddy terrain, and would tax your foot bones and muscles after just a few hours. You also need the ankle support and rigidity of good hiking boots to protect against twisted ankle injuries.

Hiking boots are the most important hiking equipment you need. There are many types of hiking boots and many outdoor stores that carry them. Shop at a reputable store and

deal with a salesperson who is knowledgeable and experienced.

If you plan to do mainly light day hikes, you need a very different boot than if you go backpacking, scrambling or mountaineering.

There are also many brand names. Some reputable American and Canadian companies outsource their production to China, and many other brands are produced in those same Chinese factories under a different brand name. They claim that quality control does not suffer. The European companies, especially German and Italian, were always at the forefront of quality in hiking boot manufacturing. They tend to cost a bit more, but these companies also tend to produce boots in their own factories, where quality control is king. You need to decide if it is worth investing \$300 in a European-made boot vs. a boot made in China that might cost \$200.

The main characteristic of a hiking boot that makes it different than a walking shoe is that it has a stiffer sole; the stiffer it is, the more demanding service it is destined for. Also, a heavier boot is more suitable for backpacking, scrambling or mountaineering than a lighter one.

The uppers of the boot can be made of leather or nylon. Leather is stiffer and more protective of rocks and other hard surfaces. However, ballistic nylon, used in many boots, can provide similar adequate protection.

Lastly, consider water protection. Around Calgary, we usually hike in dry conditions. However, when backpacking, you might face a very wet couple of days, and Gore-Tex lined boots would save a day or two. Beware: some companies claim to use Gore-Tex lining, but they only

use it on the upper part of the boot, not as a liner sock within the boot construction. That makes the boot prone to water seepage from the sole, and that's where cracks can develop.

All of this can be confusing. Forget it for a moment and consider that the most important factor is the feel and comfort of the boot. And also forget the braking-in period because a well-fitting boot feels good from the get-go. Walk around for a few minutes. If your feet feel good, with no pressure points, no chaffing, and with a lot of space for the toes, the boot might be the right one for you.

When you are hiking, the moment you start to feel a pressure point, stop and put a medical tape or band aid on your foot, to prevent further damage.

In summary, choose a boot from a reputable store and manufacturer. It should fit comfortably from the get go. If you're choosing between two comfortable boots, take the stiffer, heavier boot as it will provide you with more support in a wider variety of hiking conditions.

Good boots will serve you well for about five years or until they start to feel inadequate or the sole wears out. At that point, the boots can be re-soled, which would cost a lot less than buying new boots. However, consider that the internal structure of the old boot is probably worn out and "tired" too.

Socks

There is an on-going battle of thick vs. thin, and wool vs. synthetic fibers. In general, your feet heat up and swell in the summer. Thinner socks provide more space for a swelled foot, and wool or wool blend

cont'd on next page

socks provide better temperature regulation. If you are sensitive to wool, any synthetics with wicking capacity will do. Do not use cotton or cotton blends because they hold moisture rather than wicking it away and thus, lose the insulation characteristics.

Sole Inserts

While boots already have inserts, these are no match to the well designed inserts available on the market. Hiking inserts are stiffer than your standard "sock inserts" and after a long hike, that makes a great difference in your feet. Avoid gel base inserts as they are not meant for hiking.

Packs.

After boots, a backpack is your second most important piece of hiking equipment and it too needs to be well-fitted. Hikers need to carry water, food and a change of clothes. This might not weigh a lot, but if you add a camera, a thermos and the weight of the pack itself, it might be well over 10 lbs.

A well-designed pack, even a day pack, should have a built-in load

bearing belt to allow the majority of the weight to sit on your hips. For heavy overnight backpacks, the rule of thumb is to have 90% of the weight on your hips.

For backpacking trips, also consider the length of your torso. You can buy packs that are short, medium or long, and packs that are adjustable.

There is a huge difference between just a pack and a well fitted quality pack. Unfortunately, there are too many packs sold and too few specialists selling them. Beware: it is not the brand but the knowledge of the sales person that sells the pack to you.

Trekking poles

Poles give you added support and balance and take some of the load off your hips and knees. Some hikers swear by poles and some don't want to use them.

There are many poles on the market - some expensive, as much as \$200, and some at a quarter of that.

Whatever you choose, don't use your old ski poles as they are not

designed for hiking. Their tips slip on rocky surfaces; their grips chafe your hands. Invest in yourself and buy proper trekking poles.

Accessories and Clothing

In general, you should use the same clothing that you might use for other outdoor activities, such as XC skiing or biking. The base layer, shell and so on, should be light, breathable and warm when you need it to be warm. Don't use cotton, except for thin outside fabrics on hot days.

I will pass on anti-bear paraphernalia and on hydration methods as I assume that most of people heard about these from other sources.

Don't use the annoying bells, which might psychologically calm the wearer, but are useless against the bears. And they are very, very annoying to other hikers.

*taken from Alec Bialski of the
Norseman Ski Shop*

*Ramblers get a 10% discount at
the Norseman Ski Shop*

Dos and Don'ts on the Trail

- The hikers going up the trail have the right of way because it is harder to go up and an uninterrupted breathing rhythm helps. Step to the side to let people going up pass you. Don't step off the path and continue walking on the grass or moss. This, especially in sub-alpine areas, would prevent the destruction of slow growth plants and the creation of ugly breaded trails.
- Speak normally - do not shout. Avoid talking loudly. Be one with the nature.
- Speaking of nature, if it calls, relieve yourself far from water. If it is a major production, bury it in the soil.
- Take back with you all your waste, such as sanitary napkins, tampons, packaging materials ... and dispose of it at the trail head if there are garbage cans or at home.
- Do not wash clothes or dishes in lakes or streams. But you can wash your dishes by taking the water out of the stream; wash the dishes a few meters away from the water and dispose of the wash water on the ground away from the shore.
- Smile and say hello to other hikers on the trail. You share one of the best shows on earth.

Dave Harding Is Back in Town

Dave the 'iker came back. And we're excited because, frankly, we need him to coordinate some snowshoe trips this winter.

A Rambler for six years, and a coordinator for most of that, Dave left us last summer for the Maritimes. He bought a business and a house, and he was content - for a month or so.

The adventurer did join a hiking group in Nova Scotia, but the pounding waves and the cool breezes off the ocean didn't

compare to the 'top of the world' feeling of hiking the Rockies.

To Dave, the mountains are freedom, space, and peace. He missed the mountains. And he missed the people at The Club.

'I lived in Nova Scotia for 24 years. I loved it there - 'iking, canoeing - but after living 'ere and 'iking in the mountains, this is where I belong.'

So he came back.

'Even just walking along Glenmore Lake, I can look West and see the mountains, and they are so beautiful. I knew after my first snowshoe trip back 'ere, that I'd made the right decision.'

Dave has always loved the outdoors. Growing up in Wales, he was forever taking off hiking some where. 'No one could find me,' he smiles. That makes him sound like a quiet antisocial guy but for those who know Dave, he's anything but antisocial - or quiet.

Welcome back, Dave. We're glad to have you home again.

