

The

Pack Rat

Rocky Mountain Ramblers Association

September / October



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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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The Rocky Mountain Ramblers Annual General Meeting

Wednesday October 13, 2010
Rosemont Community Centre
7:30

Be there - support your club.

Consider running for office
The benefits are enormous.



[The minutes of the 2009 AGM are on our website.](#)

The Rocky Mountain Ramblers Annual Dinner and Dance

Friday October 22, 2010

Calgary Winter Club

cocktails at 6:00

buffet dinner

a 30-minute class in **jive** with Tibor and Megan

Details to follow. Check our website.

Activities

Hiking
Backpacking
Cross-Country Skiing
Downhill Skiing
Snowshoeing
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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c/o Calgary Area Outdoor Council
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1111 Memorial Dr NW
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Packrat Newsletter

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

Website

www.ramblers.ab.ca

Visit our website for information about
trips, meetings and special events.

Some of the best views of the city

Tour de Calgary

by Sharon Wingenbach

Three avid cyclists – a hot summer
day – a tour of the city.

Trent Edwards of the Calgary
Herald scouted a bicycle route
around the city, writing it's 94 km
long, and you can probably do it in
six to eight hours:

calgaryherald.com/outdoors.

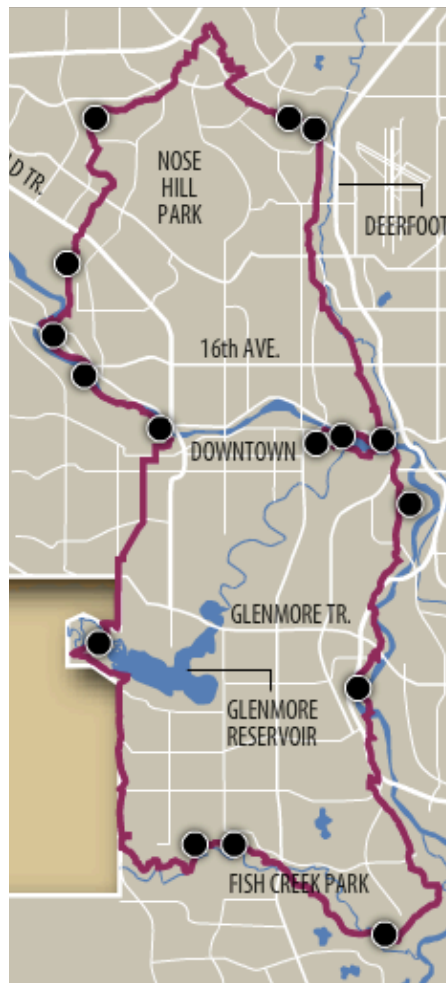
We took eight hours. We could
have cycled faster, but we slowed
to enjoy some of the best views of
the city. And we could have taken
longer; but we brought our own
drinks, snacks and lunches, and
we ate in the parks.

Starting at the zoo, we randomly
chose to go clock-wise, and we
were glad we did. The sun and
wind were mostly at our backs,
and we think the hills were in our
favour.

The steepest hill was the hill
getting out of the Weaselhead.

We were on pathways most of the
time, with only a few sections
where we had to go on the road –
like between Glenmore and

Edworthy, and at the top of Home Road. No problem – claim the lane –
you're a vehicle.



Above Bowness

Each of us had traveled
on most of the trails
before. It was fun
learning they all string
together for a good, long,
urban ride.

But none of us had
traveled all of the trails.
The Edgepark Ravine
was a beautiful surprise
to me – a gentle incline



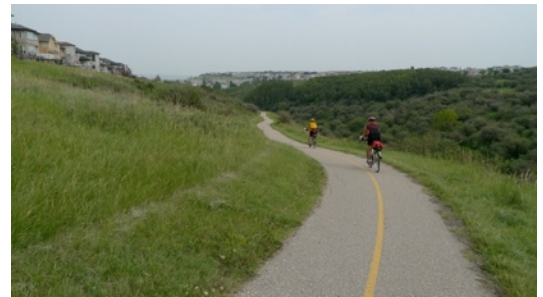
that goes forever, through aspen groves and grasses. I'd never been on top of the golf course on the North side of Nose Hill. I used to cycle the Nose Creek pathway a lot. It's still a big secret – quiet and never busy.

I used my front bicycle bag with a map on top, and followed our progress like I did when I cycled in Europe.

The tour doesn't go East of Deerfoot Trail. That's coming, when the city puts in a bicycle path associated with the ring road.

These are the parks we visited on our ride.

- Pearce Estate Park Interpretive Wetland
- Inglewood Bird Sanctuary
- Beaverdam Flats
- Carburn Park
- Fish Creek Provincial Park
- Weaselhead Natural Environment Park
- Glenmore Lake
- Edworthy Park
- Shouldice Park
- Edgepark Ravine
- Confluence Park
- Nose Creek Pathway



Edgepark Ravine



Fish Creek



Shouldice Park



Tunnels under the big roads



Life is good



A dream come true - a lemonade stand. These young girls were raising money so they could walk for cancer.

One waterfall for every day of the year

Rain Forest Walking/Hiking in Dominica

by Wally Drew

What we call hiking, the British call walking. In November 2009, I did a walking/hiking holiday to the Dominica with the British Ramblers.

Toronto to Barbados was a long 10 hours flight, and yet cheap Air Canada didn't give us anything to eat. After that, I spent 24 hours in Barbados before flying back north to Antigua to join the England group.

The four Caribbean flights we took with LIAT Airlines were on Dash 8s – little two-prop planes. Since seating wasn't designated, I made sure I got there early so I could get a choice seat with a good view.

As on my eight previous Ramblers holidays, I was the only one not from the UK.

We spent the first day exploring Antigua by bus and foot.

The next day, we flew to Dominica. Rain forest walking/hiking was the main objective of the trip.

The islands

Antigua is a tourist island with 365 beaches, one for each day of the year.

Barbados is the most developed of these three island nations.

Dominica is the least developed, with a population of only 70,000.

It's a nature island, mostly mountains covered with rain forest, with 365 waterfalls. The many waterfalls we hiked to were on steep, slippery trails.

It's also a very wet island - hot and humid. We had rain every day except for one – huge downpours. It never rained for an entire day.

They have strong British heritage including speaking English and driving on the left – and the people are black.

Service is good. Food is good. Tap water is safe everywhere. Breakfast is a buffet. There's no malaria. And there's nothing poisonous in Dominica.

It doesn't take long to see most of these tiny countries.

The hiking/walking

We had our own buses and drivers. We commuted daily from our basic hotel in **Roseau**, the capital where we bought supplies for our trail lunches. All the food was imported and about three times what we pay at home. The drive to the trail head was usually up steep, narrow blacktop roads.

We started with two half-day hikes but usually did full day ones. Usually, we were in dense rain forest where we couldn't even see the sky, although now and then, we got some open spots with views. We'd hear downpours hitting the forest canopy nearby in time to deploy



umbrellas or ponchos before they hit us. We did some creek crossings and occasional short SC 5. Many steep trails had crosswise log steps but the logs were as slippery as the mud.

We did the tourist bit one day and visited the Kalinago Barana Autee **Carib Cultural Village by the Sea** to learn a little about their culture. The native Caribs are not quite as dark as the Africans.

The visit to the Carib village was in transit from doing the South part of the island from Roseau to doing the



Trafalgar Falls

North part from beach cottages on the NW coast.

There were mosquitos and a lizard in my little cottage. The air conditioner made enough breeze over the bed to keep the skeeters away, but it didn't work after the first night. Fortunately our stay there was brief. The hikes were shorter and easier. We swam at the beach in front of the cottages too.

On a couple of the hikes down south, we'd seen tiny ants on the trails. We figured they'd given us the tiny red bites on our legs.

Dominica was an interesting adventure in a new country but I prefer the hiking in our Rockies and foothills.



###

(photos were found online)

A big warm welcome to our new members

Suzanne Ware

Bert Barlaan

Andrew Rowsell

Nathalie Roulin

Victoria Scanlon

Helen LeFebvre

James Waugh

and welcome back Pat Jamniczky

Happy trails to you!

At least the officials were polite.

The Train Diaries: Beijing to St. Petersburg - Part 1

by Dorothy-Ann Reimer

Prologue

In May 2010, I joined a Sundowners' tour to travel by train from Beijing, China to St. Petersburg, Russia.

Our group consisted of four women and two men: two Australians (Helen & Carie), one New Zealander (Michael), one Brit (Suzie) and our Chinese tour leader (Alex).

We travelled on sleeper trains, with no freight cars attached. Each car (or wagon, as they're called) had four-berth compartments except for first class with only two berths. Our berths were pre-booked, always one compartment for the four women and two berths in the adjacent compartment for the men.

Each car had one bathroom (rarely two) with a Western-style toilet and a provodnitsa, or attendant, generally female, who had her own quarters and bathroom. She



cleaned and looked after the car's samovar, keeping it full of hot water for us.

The journey was broken into five sections by stops in four cities. Each section was unique.

Here are chapters taken from my notes to describe each segment of that long ride.

Stage I Beijing to Ulaan Baatar

Tuesday May 11

7:30 am

After a short delay (we had to go back to pick up Alex's bag of food for meals on the train), we're finally on the train and ready to leave in a few minutes.

We find our compartment and fall into it, literally. There's four of us with all our bags and other passengers are trying to squeeze by us down the narrow corridor.

I'm the last one in so I end up with a top bunk. There's a little ladder that unclips from beside the door.

Somehow I have to use this and all the strength I can muster to heave my bags up. Then I struggle to push and wiggle my stuff into a storage space that extends back from above the door to a space that's over the corridor. The ladies below have a better deal – they just have to shove their bags under their beds.

8:30 am

I check out the toilet (there are two in our car). A hook holds up the toilet





I look along the train length. The attendants for each car are standing by their door. The platform isn't covered and there are vendors hawking sweets, souvenirs, drinks.

chair, private sinks, maybe even a toilet (couldn't tell for sure). We'll be at **Erlian** in another hour where the wheels get changed. Chinese tracks are different gauge from Mongolia and Russia.

Midnight

seat (not the lid but the seat) and the toilet rim has wide strips on top of either side of the bowl. The Australians explain that this is for the Chinese who are used to using Asian-style (squat) toilets. They'll stand on those foot supports. I must remember to put the seat down first.

All the smokers are standing about, puffing away. Smoking is not allowed in the cars, but it is allowed between the cars and the smoke still drifts through the train. Unfortunately, our car is blessed with an attendant who smokes.



We're passing through the mountains north of Beijing – Alex says the maximum elevation is only about 400 m – and we go through tunnel after tunnel. We can't get our lights to turn on so the only light in the tunnels is in the corridors. In between the tunnels, I see that we're following a small river which has valleys feeding into it.

4:00 pm

Six minutes for **Jining** - another coal city. Several large apartment blocks. Hot in the compartment, 26 degrees. We have a fan on our window wall, high up which we've switched on.

Still in Erlian. Uniformed men disappeared with our passports around 8:45 pm. It's dark but I go out to the platform for a few minutes to escape the heat in the car. Even with the fan on, it's hot. Have to go back in as now the shunting of cars begins.

10:00 am

We've left the mountains behind and we're out in the open now. The land is dry and the only trees seem to be planted as if in orchards. Trees in Beijing were in full leaf but here, spring hasn't come yet. We pass through a town – energy from windmills and solar panels.

5:00 pm

What's that on the hillside? Some sort of mural, galloping horses, spread across the slope. Wonder what it's for.

2:00 pm

We're stopped here in **Datong** for 24 minutes. The train arrival and departure times are posted in the corridor and it proves to be exact. Datong is a major coal centre. I climb down to the platform and walk up and down for a bit of exercise. We get the attendant (this one is a man) to lock our compartment when we all go out.

7:30 pm

Supper's over. I had ½ package of backpacker meal that I brought from home. Very tasty. We all went up to the dining car as Alex wanted us to meet for an info session. We passed two of the 'posh' cars, compartments roomy, mahogany coloured walls, desk and swivel

We can't feel much movement as the cars are moved into an open-sided barn-like structure, raised up and given new wheels (bogies). The only reason I know this is because I see cars on parallel tracks rise up and then drop down. I can't see the wheels and we can't get off the car.



About 11:00 pm, I give up and crawl into bed. Finally they return the passports and I think we're about to move.

12:20 am

Good grief. Stopped again. Mongolian customs. I hand over my passport and entry card, pretty groggy, as I'd just fallen asleep. How long now?

2:00 am

At last. Someone shoved the passports back into our compartment and we're on the go.

Wednesday May 12

6:00 am

Woke up - off to the toilet to find water all over the floor. Yuck. The sky's glowing pink with early light but I'm going back to bed.

9:40 am

Stopped at **Choir** (fuel?). We're running about 30 minutes late. Had breakfast of Alpen cereal (from home), banana and tea. We're in **Mongolia** now. The landscape looks barren. Alex says we have a new dining car, Mongolian, which is fancier than previous one. Think I'll check it out for lunch.

1:50 pm

Lunch on the train is adequate but barely. Décor is nice but of the many items on the menu, only three or four are available. I suspect that the crew hadn't brought that much aboard for the short trip (12 hours) from the border. My eggs and rice took about 40 minutes to come, and Michael's meat meal took almost as long.

Just pulling in to **Ulaan Baatar**, capital of Mongolia, and that's the end of stage 1.

**Stage 2:
Ulaan Baatar to Irkutsk**

Saturday May 15

9:00 pm

We're on a different train for this next section. Our car is behind the engine, a different colour than the other cars. They're all green and ours is red and grey. I got the upper berth again but I'm getting used to climbing up and down. Very warm and windows don't open – no fan this time and minimal air conditioning.



Really tired after a long day traveling from the Ger Camp and wandering around Ulaan Baatar. I caught a cold so I'm ready for a lazy day on the train, and maybe I'll catch up on sleep.

Sunday May 16

8:30 am

We seem to be becalmed somewhere in Mongolia. Been here since 5:30 am. Around 7:00 I stepped out in the corridor to find a toilet. Of course, the train toilets are locked when the train's stopped. The attendant pointed across the platform to a white building, and said the cost was 150 rubles (about \$5). Turned out

to be 10 rubles (maybe 35¢) – bathroom very clean, cold water, Western-style toilets minus seat.

9:15 am

Must be the border as Mongolian officials just collected our passports. We can't go anywhere anyway since we have no engine. Our orphaned car sits isolated. It's very quiet, cold but sunny. I'm curled up in the upper berth, nursing my cold, glad I brought instant soup for lunches because that's what I think I need.

1:30 pm

Well, we finally got attached to a Russian train around 10:30 and crossed the border soon after. There was a fence at the border (no pictures allowed). As we neared the border post (just beyond the border) we saw that the fence had barbed wire. Officials came aboard and gave us two sets of forms to fill out. We dutifully filled them out as best we could; fortunately there is enough English for us to do this.

We know this is a Russian train because we have a provodnitsa (attendant), a woman who looks very competent, and an electronic sign at each end of the

car that gives the car temperature and the date and time in Moscow. All Russian trains run on Moscow time which, at this location, is three hours earlier. Russia does have seven time zones and China has only one.

5:00 pm

I rouse myself enough to take a couple of pictures. The landscape is hillier, more reddish-brown but with few trees. And the trees don't have leaves. We didn't get away from the border stop until after 3:30 - that's ten hours to get out of Mongolia and into Russia. At least all officials were very polite.

AND I got to sleep lots.

7:30 pm

We're passing a large body of water and a village with low uniform-looking houses clustered near its shore. Is this the SE edge of **Lake Baikal**? Having spent most of the daylight hours waiting on various customs, I don't think I've missed much scenery. Tomorrow will be a better day.

Monday May 17

6:20 am

Pulling into **Irkutsk**. If our hotel rooms are available, I think I'll just sleep for another few hours before I start some more sightseeing. Stage 2 finished.

###

(Part 2 - Stage 3 - next issue of the Packrat)

What's your story?

**Have you travelled somewhere amazing?
Feeling pumped?**

Consider writing about your adventure and sharing it with your fellow Ramblers. Contact the editor for details. I can help.

The next Packrat deadline is **October 30**.



Old skis I
happen to
own.
50s?

Third time, but it's not my favorite walk....

The Pennine Way - Again, in June 2010

by David Mulligan

In the UK, there are about 15 long distance paths. The original and longest is the Pennine Way, 430 kms that stretches from east of Manchester, up the middle of northern England to just over the Scottish border.

I've hiked it twice before, in spring **1969** soon after the 1966 opening and again in spring **1977** just prior to emigrating to Canada. Has it



changed? I decided to find out by hiking it again in June/July 2010. Yes, it has changed and not for the better. It's now paved, or large chunks of it are paved or equivalent.

But it still takes a good line up the best of northern England, with friendly people, great beer and good views. To start at the beginning...

For background information, see my article In the Packrat October 1992.

To reduce weight, I used hostels and B+B's. I estimated 19 days at about 24 km average per day with one rest day. I walked the more usual south to north route: wind and sun behind me and the guidebook is written south to north.

I started making hostel and transport bookings online (from India) about two weeks before departure. Most of the remaining B +B accommodation I arranged by phone either from my sister's home near Brighton on the south coast or by cell phone en route. Prior to starting, I'd booked the first five nights and the last three and some in between.

When you book buses and trains in advance, you get considerable reductions. For example, London to Manchester by bus was only GBP 6, and Berwick near Scotland to Brighton by train was GBP 44, each about 20% of the onsite price.

The Pennine Way – A Cicerone Guide by Martin Collins, with 1:50,000 strip maps, was all I took and needed for directions. In general, the sign posting was very good but occasionally you'd be left stranded, wondering the small details. For example, somewhere in Yorkshire, after several kms of moorland path, you come straight to a wall. There's no sign. You have to jog left 100 m and then continue. This detail is difficult to see on the map or on the ground.

At the start, England enjoyed a rare heat wave (+26c) and it was very dry. All told, I had one terrible day of horizontal rain over **Great Shunner Fell**, two days of drizzle and a few days of high winds (80 kph?),



and the rest good.

I disagree with the guidebook on one important aspect. Boots are not needed. I regret not using running shoes. I used my lightweight boots,



which after a few days of hard surface and hot weather, once again gave me appalling blisters on the balls of my feet. Coupled with my usual English cold, I was forced to stop for three nights in the lovely village of **Malham** to recuperate. After skipping about 40 km, I continued more comfortably in a new pair of walking shoes I bought in **Skipton**. The old boots hit the garbage.

In 1969 and 1977, wet bog and erosion were major problems. For the most part this has been resolved by laying flagging stones: yes 1 m square slabs of hard rock for several kms of moorland. Erosion is solved and route finding is much easier, but it's very hard on the feet. I estimate that at least 50% of the trail is paved or equivalent (minor road or gravel track). For this reason, I wouldn't recommend the trail. The views are great and I loved the friendly northern accents and people, but unless you like many kms of paving stones, forget it.



My pack was slightly larger than a daypack and weighed about 7 kg without food or water. This included a lightweight sleeping bag used in two camping barns and intentionally in the emergency shelter near the Schill to break the 45 km last stage in two. I could have cut this weight slightly.

Good water was an issue and usually available at pubs, B+B's, hostels and such.

I ate many pub meals and drank a few beers. With some exceptions,

the meals were nothing special but the beer sure went down easily. Most of the seven hostels served a good breakfast (GBP 5) and sometimes a very acceptable evening meal (GBP 10). A full English breakfast of cereal, egg, bacon, sausage, beans, hash browns, tomato, toast and tea or coffee makes for a substantial start to the day if you can stomach it (I could) but English bread is terrible.

All seven B+B's were excellent.

I met others who were doing the complete trail, mostly older men walking south to north. A few carried tents. Obviously this was cheaper and allowed more flexibility, but it was heavier. Water was still an issue and usually you have to use the established campsites. Frequently, it rained at night.

An older threesome were pleased to be using a Sherpa service which transports your heavy stuff,

leaving you to carry only a daypack. However, for this to work, you have to stick to a schedule.

I'm pleased I completed (most of) the Pennine Way again, but I won't repeat it. The 300 km Coast to Coast or 135 km Hadrian's Wall may be a better bet.



(photos from the national trail website)

nationaltrail.co.uk/pennineway

(includes a 2.1 MB accommodation guide)

yha.org.uk/

nationalrail.co.uk/

nationalexpress.com/coach/

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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

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AMAZING THAILAND

(February 6 to 20, 2011)

Experience Thailand as a traveller and not as a tourist. Hike through fields of coriander, have lunch in a hilltribe village, bathe rescued elephants & get up at the crack of dawn to offer alms to the monks. This trip is filled with new and unique experiences every single day.



CORFU, GREECE

(May 15 to 28, 2011)

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 the shade of ancient olive groves. We promise - you will never tire of the deep, deep blue of the sea that surrounds you. Opa!



IRELAND

(June 7 to 17, 2011)

With more shades of green than you can imagine, the Emerald Isle lives up to its deserving reputation. From historical Dublin to picturesque Killarney & parts in between, we will take you hiking through some of the most sought-after scenery the country has to offer - and we'll even make a few pub stops along the way!



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