

The

Pack Rat

Rocky Mountain Ramblers Association

November / December 2010



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your new executive

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and special thanks to **WebGuy**
John Duerden

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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Fun contest

One member on the executive is new. Who is it?

Answer on page 5.



Join us for the Rocky Mount Ramblers' Annual Christmas Potluck Dinner

7:00

Wednesday

December 8, 2010

Rosemont Community Centre

See the website for details



Ramblers and the annual river cleanup

Thank you, Tony, for organizing a group of Ramblers to clean up garbage along the banks of the rivers last May.

The Ramblers have taken part in the annual river cleanup for many years, but 2010 may be our last. The area is shrinking as more groups get involved, and the amount of garbage collected is down.

And those are good things. Job well done.



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

Visit our website at
www.ramblers.ab.ca and select
Contact Us

OR

Write to the Rocky Mountain
Ramblers Association
c/o Calgary Area Outdoor Council
1111 Memorial Dr NW
Calgary, AB T2N 3E4

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.

It was the coldest winter ever. Many animals were dying
because it was so cold.

The porcupines decided to group together. This way they
warmed and protected each other.

But their quills wounded their
companions and after a while,
they started to distance
themselves from each other.
And then they began to die,
frozen and alone.

So they had to make a
choice: accept the quills of
their companions or die.



A baby porcupine

Wisely, they decided to go
back to being together. They learned to live with the little
wounds caused by close relationships, and they were
warm, and they survived.

Moral: The best relationships aren't about bringing together
people who are perfect, but bringing together people who,
with all their imperfections, appreciate each other.

Life's about learning to love the pricks in your life.

A warm welcome to our new members

David Kirk

Holly Minor

Robin Kresnyak

Rick Maunsell

Mark Rubensohn

Kevin Sullivan

Angela Ulrich

Happy trails to you!

enough historical sites to last a lifetime...

Turkey

by Denise Taylor

My Dad's a veteran traveler. At 17, he lied about his age, took the overnight ferry from Victoria to Vancouver, joined the Navy and then served the last few months of the Second World War. I don't remember him being home much when I was little but I do remember him bringing me grass skirts from Hawaii and kimonos from Japan when his ship brought him home on leave.

My Dad just turned 84. This year he invited the whole family to go to Turkey with him. He's been there several times – it's his favourite place.

So in September, my Dad and his partner, my brother from Ottawa and his wife, my brother from Victoria, and my adult daughter and I met in Chicago and flew to Istanbul for 3½ weeks of unbelievably remarkable travelling.



Istanbul bridges Europe and Asia. Seventeen million people live there. Wonderful.

We took overnight trains, buses, boats and airplanes to get around this country that has enough historical sites to last a lifetime.



The highlights are: Istanbul (! amazing), Cappadocia (beautiful and very intriguing), the Mediterranean (take me back to St. Nicolas Island), and Ephesus (unbelievable).

I'd rather be outside today than at the computer so that's all Sharon gets – some pictures and a short note.

Any Rambler wanting more information on Turkey – email and we can talk! #





And the answer is...

Christine Grotefeld is the new **program director**. If you have an idea for a Wednesday evening program, or if you'd like to present your own travel slides, contact Christine.

(sorry – no prize for a correct answer)

The lid on my stainless steel coffee cup creates a near-vacuum, and it takes a lot of effort to twist it off.

One day, I was standing by the coffee machine, and I'm sure my face was red from my efforts. Two men came by.

In days long ago, when men opened doors for women, the men would have offered to help. This day, one man said, 'You can do it!' encouragingly and then they both walked away.

And of course I could.

Chivalry isn't dead, but it certainly has changed a lot.

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

A 8500 km train ride...

Train Diaries: Beijing to St. Petersburg - Part 2

by Dorothy-Ann Reimer

(Part 1 - see the October/November
issue of the Packrat)

Stage 3: Irkutsk to Ekaterinburg

Wednesday May 19

5:30 pm

This will be our longest train journey, something like 50 hours. We arrived at the station in Irkutsk at 4:00 but couldn't board yet so we watched life flow around us.

I have a lower bunk this time!
Thank goodness. We're just sorting out our stuff and working on making our various suppers. I've got my zucchini lasagna backpackers meal, (just add water). Others have noodles (just add water), bread, cheese, fruit.

Thursday May 20

1:00 am

Just back from the bathroom. Looks like it's raining but not heavy. We're traveling further north. Is there a chance of snow?

7:15 am

Well, wherever we are it must have rained last night. Puddles on the roads that we pass. Woke to lovely sunrise, mist rising up over small streams.



We keep passing other trains, some stationary, some on the move. Many are loaded with logs. This country has vast reserves of timber and lumber is a major product. Some of the trains have tanker cars with petroleum, which is another of the major commodities.

10 :15 am

Stopped at Krasnoyarsk Pass. I jumped out and bought a couple of bottles of orange pop (Mirinda, sort of like Fanta). Cool, barely 3 degrees. Clouds almost total. Is snow possible? It even feels like bits of flakes on the platform.

2:00 pm

Well, snow it did. Soon after leaving Krasnoyarsk Pass, the weather closed in and fine light snow was

blowing across the fields. Lasted about an hour with no accumulation.

Lunch over; had instant potato soup. Michael is trying the dining car again. The woman in charge of the dining car has just been around selling wieners cooked in rolled pastry.

Landscape is hillier, more trees and more leaves are out. Different trees also, not just the birch. More evergreens, some poplars.

7:00 pm

At the Marinsk stop around 4:30, I did a few laps up and down the platform. Five degrees. Brr. Few snow patches here and there but very thin. We seem to have passed out of the snow now though still cloudy.

The ladies have trotted off to the dining car for a meal and drink. I had my lentils and rice meal, very tasty, better than the other one I brought. We've snoozed a fair bit today. Michael is still reading his back copies of the Economist. I'm deep into my "Modern History of Russia" plus the mystery book I brought for light relief.

Two other tour groups are on this train - a Toucan and a GAP. Toucan's leader is bunked in with Michael and Alex. We met some of them - mostly American, a couple of Aussies, all young, probably well under 40 and several in their 20s. Toucans stopping in Ekaterinburg and going on to Moscow but timing a bit different to ours.

10:00 pm

Had to stay awake until now. We've stopped at Novosibirsk, the largest train station on the railway. Very modern city, population about 1.5 million. It lies along the wide Ob River. It is light much later now at this latitude. There are scads of tracks, different trains and engines. We all get out for a stretch.



A group of young soldiers is waiting for a train, all neatly lined up. This prompts us to ask about military service in Siberia. Conscripted men only, 18-30 year olds and service required is 12 months.

Friday May 21

10:15 am

Ishim stop, quick brisk walk outside. Brisk is the weather also, 3 degrees but the sun is out again. Landscape very green now. Birch leafed out, lovely with their white bark and the soft green of new leaves. Often the fields have burning stubble, a practice which we rarely see on our own prairies any more.

2:30 pm

Tyumen stop. Wow – temperature is 12. At last it's warming up. I've

changed my watch to 12:30 local time (Ekaterinburg) and now only two hours ahead of Moscow. We should arrive in another three hours.

Not many trains with logs - more petroleum. Crews doing work on the tracks, putting in extra line perhaps.

4:15 pm

Whew! Finally at Sverdlovsk station. Sverdlovsk is Ekaterinburg's original name – in fact, both names have been in use right up to now. We almost fall off the train and into the arms of our local guide Katya who is incredibly enthusiastic. Lots of history here as this is where the last of the Romanovs were murdered in 1917.

Stage 4: Ekaterinburg to Moscow

Sunday May 23

9:10 am

Back on the Trans-Siberian Railway. Again we have four berths in one compartment and two in the adjoining one. This time we have two bottom bunks in the second compartment. Alex has decided that one of the ladies must have the second bottom one. I drew the short straw. This means I get to share with Michael and two Russians.

Our first roomies are two women. The younger one sits on the lower berth for a short while then climbs up above, pulls a sheet over herself and seems to fall asleep. We hear nothing more from her for the next 10 hours. The other lady, Irina, maybe in her 40s, has a few words of English and tells me her husband



Village in Russia

would love to see Canada. Later, I wonder if that's really what she meant as she keeps busy flirting with a couple of guys in the same car. Hmm. Both are going to Kazan, arrival time around 8 pm. The Toucan group went yesterday to Moscow so they aren't in our car.

1:00 pm

The train is passing through more smaller towns now. Village homes are mostly wood construction and often there is a veggie garden, sometimes quite big. I expect Russians are very good at raising their own produce after all the years of state controlled farming. All during the Soviet times, they tried desperately to look after themselves any way they could.

Irina settled on one of the Russians and is happily chatting him up in the corridor. They went out for smokes on the platform at the last stop.

This car is dirtier than any we've been in. Other trains had protective runners on the carpet, this has none. No curtains on windows. Toilet not that clean. But bed linen crisp and clean and samovar is hot.

9:30 pm

Thought we might have the top bunks free when the ladies left but Mr. Red Shirt and Mr. Never Smiles (as I named them) arrived to take over. The provodnitsa made their beds for them – we never get that kind of service.

Red Shirt climbs into his bunk and is soon asleep. Mr. Never Smiles disappears, probably to the dining car. I'm going to ask everybody to step outside the room so I can get ready for bed. That should work OK (I hope).



Russian Cottage

Monday May 24

12:30 am

Had to get up for the bathroom and couldn't get the door open. Mr. Red Shirt's hand comes out and unlocks a catch at the top. I had no idea there were two locks for the doors. The locks are in the frame instead of the door itself as we've had before.

6:00 am

Stopped at Vyekovka. Since I'm dressed, I went out on the platform. Warm and sunny, pleasant but a few mosquitoes. Platform deserted. Passed picturesque villages, mist rising, lupines along the banks. Villages further east looked devoid of people but these seem better populated.

9:23 am

Dribbled into the station after poking along past suburbs of Moscow. Passed one commuter train packed with workers. No more sunshine, skies pretty grey. But now we will visit one of the most famous cities in the world.

Stage 5: Moscow to St. Petersburg

Wednesday May 26

11:30 pm

I sit patiently on my pack. We're in the middle of Moscow's train station, a huge space with shops on both sides, doors behind and open archways to the platforms. A large clock above the arches keeps us posted with the time. An electronic board tells us what trains are at which platform. Our last leg of this mammoth journey is near.

We thought our train was to leave at 11:55 pm but learned at supper it goes at 00:55 am. It is a private train and is supposed to be a better class than the regular train.

Lots of activity, people wandering or striding about. Lighting too dim to read, just have to wait.

Thursday May 27

1:10 am

On the train at last. We went out to Platform 5 at midnight when our train number appeared on the board. There aren't many cars and the doors are locked. On the opposite side of the platform was a longer train with people preparing to board. Most of the passengers are sailors, young fellows full of energy, boisterous. I'm glad I won't be on their train – wouldn't get much sleep I expect.

Finally our doors open and we find the beds are made with colourful patterned sheets and blankets. Very nice. For the first time we have toilets that operate even when the train is parked. I'm beat. Tomorrow we're supposed to have breakfast

provided on the train. In case that doesn't happen, I still have a bit of cereal. It's started to rain again. Hope it lets up for St. Pete.

7:30 am

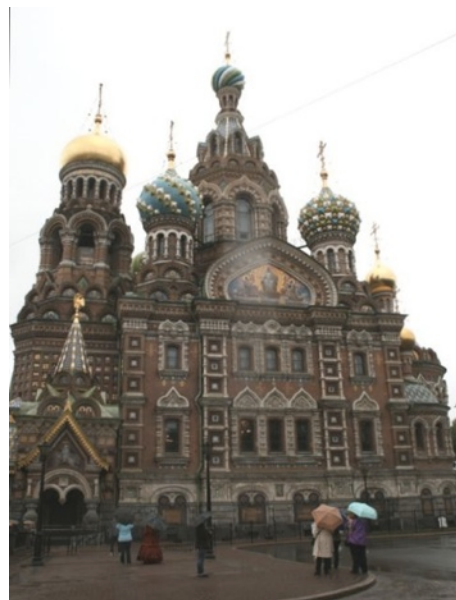
In the dining car trying to get breakfast. No one speaks English and the staff appear unwilling to serve us unless we agree to pay. But breakfast is included we insist but of course they don't understand. I get some hot water for my cereal and eat that. However, I notice that the staff keep leaving the dining car carrying trays of fried eggs.

8:30 am

Mystery solved. Breakfast is to be served IN our compartment. Sadly no one bothered to explain this to us beforehand. I'm glad we didn't sort it out earlier as my cereal was definitely preferable to those fried eggs.

9:03 am

The end of nearly 8,500 km. We step off the train and Tatiana meets us to welcome us to our last city – the very beautiful 300-year old St. Petersburg. #



Church of the Savior of Spilled Blood

all of Africa opens up through the clouds below...

Mt. Kenya

by Lorri Badran

Africa, the Dark Continent, has long held man's fascination. The birthplace of mankind, it's bizarre animals like ... the long legged giraffe helping themselves to the treetop feasts - the black and white striped zebra - the regal elephant, long persecuted for it's famed ivory tusks, - and predators like the stealthy cheetah and king of the beasts, the lion.

This is home to diverse tribes of people, from nomadic herdsmen to the big city dwellers.

This is the story of my summit of Mt. Kenya, one of many exciting events in many weeks spent discovering this enchanted land.



I'd spent the last several days trekking to my objective, taking in the scenic **Teleki** and **MacKinder Valleys** studded with giant lobelia, plants which resemble a sturdy, squat palm, the snow capped mountains and an array of wildlife, like the emerald and gold coloured bee eater birds constantly flitting

from plant to plant in search of bugs and other delectables and families of sweet rock hyrax sunbathing on the warm stone, looking like large and content guinea pigs. Mt. Kenya is remote and rugged, not as well known as other mountains, like distant peak **Kilimanjaro**, but beautiful and challenging to climb.

My last night is spent at **Shipton's Hut**, a sturdily built wooden shelter comprised of a long wooden table with benches in the makeshift kitchen area and sleeping quarters that were basic wooden slats. The hut perches on a saddle of rock just below the peak.

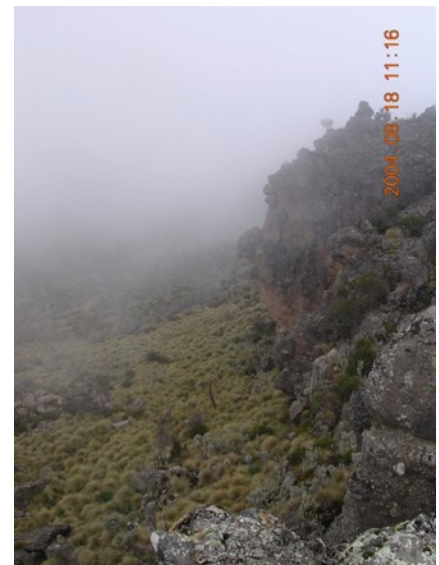
I'm up at 2:30 am and meet a few campers who, dealing with high winds and torrential rain, have migrated from their tents to the comfort of the hut during the night. I pack my sleeping gear and pots and pans. We don our heavily weighted backpacks onto our shoulders and head out into the darkness.

Leading the way is my guide, Francis, as well as Tall Stephen, our head porter. Stephen has never missed summiting with a client. He explains the people in his village believe that God and evil spirits alike live on **Point Lenana**, the peak of Mt. Kenya. They don't believe it can be climbed. He's proved with



photographs and stories that it is attainable, but they're still skeptical.

As I step out of the hut, I'm blasted by a cold rush of mountain air. The rain has stopped but the wind continues to blow unabated. A moment later I shut off my headlight to enjoy the brilliant, clear night.





The Milky Way blazes across the sky and there are too many shooting stars to count. I'm sure it is the night sky, not the altitude, which takes my breath away.

Our trek to the summit is up loose scree to a rib, which leads to the main ridge. It is well trodden but very steep and difficult to negotiate in the darkness. The rock is battered by wind and rain and has a thin coating of ice to deal with and the trail is a faint dent in the mountain side. I move upwards knowing my climbing boots will hold me fast to the rock. Moving quicker than anticipated, we slow our ascent both to continue acclimatizing to the altitude as well as to minimize time spent waiting for sunrise on a cold, windy peak. The final break comes just before arrival at the summit. We perch out of the wind, warming

cold bodies with hot, floral Ruiboss tea and enjoying the quiet that accompanies a sky filled with stars. It is in this magical moment that Tall Stephen delights us with folk songs, sung in his native

Kikuyu. Of course I don't know the words but his deep, even tone sings to me and I feel my soul stir at the sound. The emotion in his voice conveys his love for this moment, this land and his people.

At last the sun begins to blaze an early morning red across the sky. The horizon colors brilliantly with



pink, red and orange stripes as the myriad of stars rapidly disappear. I scramble up for a view of the glorious pre-dawn sky from atop Point Lenana. I've made it! The summit rises over 5,000 meters from the plains of Africa. I spend more than an hour on the summit watching the changing light dance across the neighboring peaks of **Bation** and **Nelion**, the dawn colours softening their jagged, exposed peaks. A moment later, all of Africa opens up through the clouds below.

Some say it's the journey, not the destination. I'd risen above the Dark Continent into a land of radiance and majestic beauty. Sometimes it IS the destination. #

What's your story?

Have you travelled somewhere amazing?
Feeling pumped?

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

The next Packrat deadline is **December 31**.



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2011 HIKING CALENDAR

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You'll also receive our e-newsletter "*Let's Hike*".

In addition to the great trips listed below, we also have available:

Corfu • Croatia & Slovenija • Mount Kilimanjaro • Turkey • Cuba

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.



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!



AUSTRIAN ALPS

(July 10 to 22, 2011)

One of the world's best hiking experiences! Come to beautiful Vorarlberg where we will conquer the Alps, trek past glacial lakes, ride chairlifts and cable cars, and enjoy breakfasts some 6,000ft above sea level. Our Austria Holiday is consistently regarded by past guests as their favourite C.H.H. trip – find out why!



ICELAND

(August 2 to 12, 2011)

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, enjoy the most dramatic landscape anywhere.



Here's what the Ramblers did this year...

Trip Stats October 2009 to September 2010

	Hiking					X-C Skiing				Sno Shu	DH Ski	
Trips	TL	OT	SC	MN	Other	TS	TL	OT	MN			Total
2008-09	97	108	53	4	7	18	28	24	5	18	3	365
2009-10	83	77	44	1	11	10	22	57	3	15	1	324
+ / -	-14	-31	-9	-3	4	-8	-6	33	-2	-3	-2	-41
	-53					12						
	Hiking					X-C Skiing				Sno Shu	DH Ski	
PDays	TL	OT	SC	MN	Other	TS	TL	OT	MN			Total
2008-09	938	1005	373	29	34	89	166	211	106	126	11	3088
2009-10	740	745	450	12	50	49	124	410	35	121	3	2739
+ / -	-198	-269	77	-17	16	-40	-42	199	-71	-5	-8	-358
Dif	-391					33						

Trips Director Report

The past twelve months from October to September saw a decline in trips from 365 to 324. This is a decrease of 11% from last year. It appears to be caused by a late spring and poor and variable weather this summer, as hiking trips declined 21%. Snow activities, on the other hand, increased 10% as the backcountry contingent doubled off-trail skiing activity. Person-days were more or less in line with the variations in trips.

Membership	
2008 - 2009	342
2009 - 2010	346

I think most members were happy with the variety of trips called, although there has certainly been a trend for trips to be posted later in the week, making it difficult to plan your weekend in advance. Rapidly changing weather forecasts that seem to be more common these days don't help.

Forty coordinators volunteered their time to call trips. We welcomed two probationary coordinators who became full coordinators: Sandy Chilton and Zorica Knezevic. Currently we have four probationary coordinators: John Gapp, Manfred Czechak, Terry Manning and Peter Houtzager.

Injury incidents on club trips were minimal, my fractured arm being the only one reported.

I'll be returning as Trips Director and any feedback to improve the activity experience is welcome.

Ron Hunter