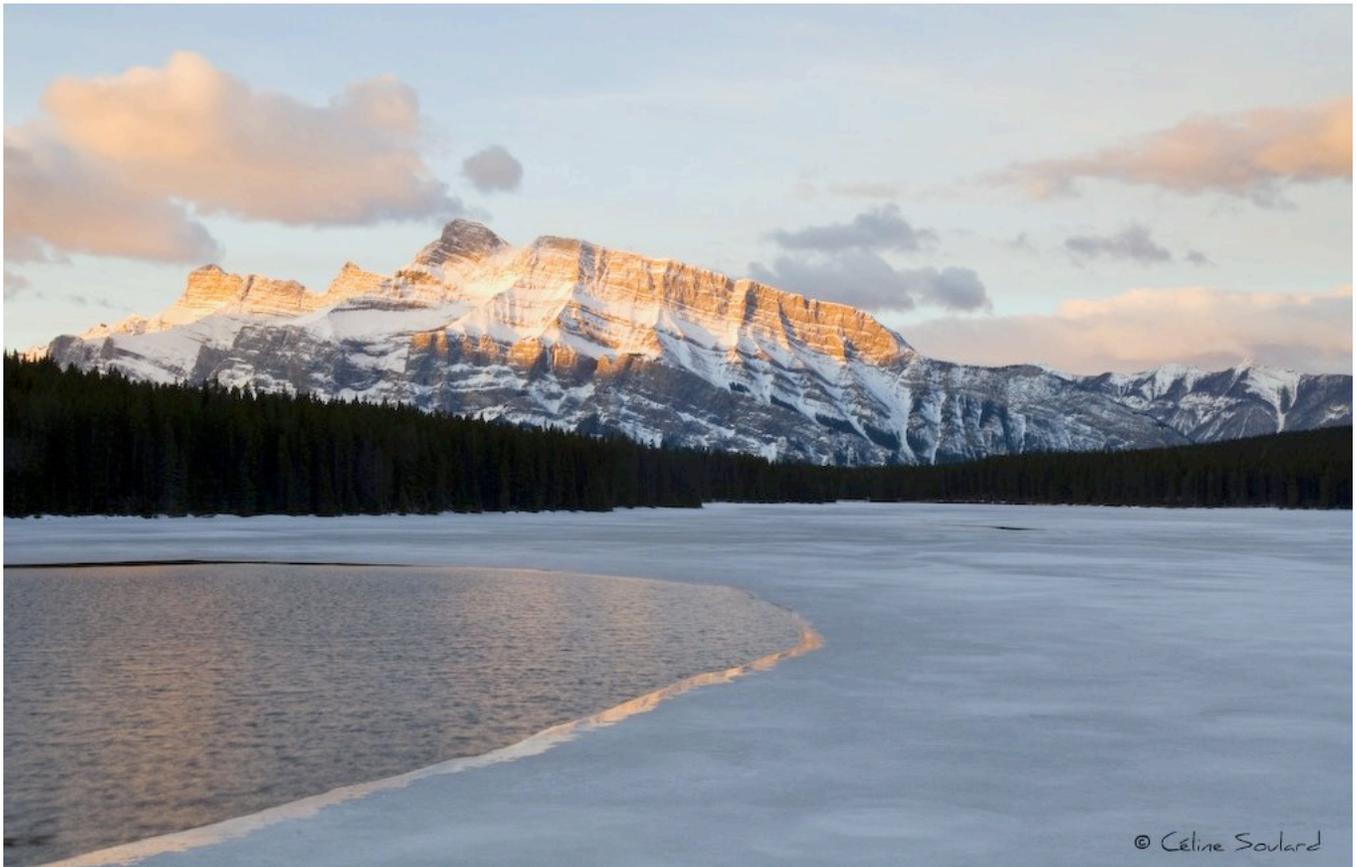


The

Pack Rat

Rocky Mountain Ramblers Association

January / February 2011



© Celine Soulard

Photo by Celine Soulard, Rundle in Winter

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INSIDE?



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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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Volunteer appreciation



A special thanks to Ron for all he does for the Ramblers

We should call Ron Hunter "Mr. RMRA". He quietly spends hours every week doing stats, working on website issues and helping people with reports, photos and membership problems. He's the one everybody flocks to when there's an issue. Recently, he spent several evenings helping Laszlo put up shelves at the clubhouse.

At the Valentine's dessert potluck, say *thanks* and give him a hug.

Join us for the
Rocky Mountain Ramblers'
Annual Valentine's

Dessert Potluck

7:30

Wednesday

February 16, 2010

Rosemont Community Centre

It's **Quiz Night** - name that mountain, or
Rambler... - contact Ron Mason if you have photos

It's a **beauty contest** with a difference - wear something
unusual - hat, horns, teeth, nose, tail...

It's a **dessert potluck** - bring a dessert, and bring cutlery, a
plate, a beverage and a cup

See the website for details.



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
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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.

Happy New Year

Rambles by the editor

As I put together this issue of the Packrat, I'm listening to CBC Radio. There are storms in Eastern Canada, floods in Australia; the dollar's too high; oil costs too much; and the first baby boomers turn 65 this year.

hmm...I'm a boomer, There are some nine million of us in Canada, born 1946 - 1965. We're a big bulge in the population and we're used to getting what we want. As we age, we'll still expect to get what we want. Should be interesting times.

I'm hearing that we're an active lot and that we're 'redefining aging'. We coined the term *60 is the new 50*. Or is that *70 is the new 60*?

This is what I wrote on the front page of my 2011 daytimer:
An optimist is someone who gets out of bed every day. That act alone means you're ready to take on whatever happens.

Ah - we boomers are wise. Learned the hard way, we did.

Every night when I go to bed, I think about all that I have to be thankful for.

I'm thankful I'm part of this group.

Wishing you all the best in
the new year.

Sharon

At 7:30 at the Feb 2 meeting at
Rosemont Community Center,
Dawn Jones will lead us in one
hour of **stretching** those hiking,
skiing and snowshoeing
muscles. Bring a mat.

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 **February 28**.



K-Country Trails Update

November 25, 2010

By Dorothy-Ann Reimer

A bit of history

Hiking, skiing and snowshoeing groups have been meeting with K-Country two or three times a year since September 2002. They were concerned about proposed fee increases. K-Country abandoned fee increases due to letters from seniors and a fall election which engendered second thought.

The goals in those early meetings was to improve communication and provide valuable input to K-Country from the non-motorized trail users.

Late last winter, Michael Roycroft, area manager for Canmore Nordic Centre, took over chairing these meetings. He wants clearer focus and guidelines, and a broader user representation to make these meetings function better.

What's next

The first meeting of this expanded group was November 25, 2010. Almost 30 people attended. WOW! I was stunned to see so many interests – ATVers, snowmobilers, bikers, equestrians, hikers, skiers, snowshoers. ranchers – even someone from AWA.

The most important thing to come from this gathering was a **budding desire to work with KCountry to manage our trails system for the benefit of all, while at the same time, avoiding destroying the environment that we all care about.**

✓ **Ranchers** worry that new trails will allow their cattle to stray out of their designated area.

✓ **Snowmobilers and ATVers** are upset that they pay fees to access trails but have a very small area that they can use. Meanwhile, hikers and equestrians pay nothing and go everywhere.

✓ **Dirt bikers** work hard to build and clean up trails and to educate their members but still get bad-mouthed.

✓ **Hikers** worry that trails keep getting taken out of the system and maintenance is poor.

✓ **Skiers** fret because their track-set trails are reduced and there is fear of a fee for them alone.

In the midst of all this, we covered the planned winter program and we finished with a few action items.

Winter stuff

✓ Parks had to fight hard to get ANY budget for track-setting this year and we may have to face some sort of fee system next year.

✓ If you're a snowmobiler, Cataract Creek trail packing was eliminated but the staging area is still open.

✓ **PRIORITY** for track-setting:

- (1) Canmore Nordic Centre
- (2) Peter Lougheed
- (3) Ribbon Creek
- (4) Mt. Shark

They use snowmobiles to track other areas, as conditions permit. West Bragg is tracked in conjunction with volunteers.

✓ Due to construction, the road down to Sandy McNabb is closed. SW trails are closed – N are open.

✓ **The Sawmill parking lot WILL be plowed and toilets serviced.**

Action stuff

✓ Bikers want a hunting ban for Moose Mountain Road (they have a

trail parallel to it) but no-go. It's possible K-Country will put up warning signs.

✓ They'll replace Green Mountain Trail signs and will look at re-routing to fix major trail damage by cattle.

✓ Work is ongoing for new trails in the Sheep. The Dafferns and Alf Skrastins flagged and GPSed a partial trail to Bluerock which is under consideration.

Money, money, money

By far, the biggest concern for K-Country is lack of money. I think it may be even worse than in 2002 when we started investigating funding.

Much of the operating budget gets tied up in contracts (road work, facilities, back-country services) and very little is left for day-to-day work.

Five staff positions can't be filled because there is NO money.

PLPP pays for the helicopter contract (back-country services) and is left with barely \$40,000 budget for all of the K-Country trails. This doesn't include the Nordic Centre which has a separate budget.

Pine beetles

Everyone was pleased to learn that last winter's cold temperatures did some good. Infected trees were down from 5500 to 250. Spray Lake Sawmills will move cut trees out but they won't be cutting this winter.

Fortress

Action is going on with Fortress. We hope to see details in a few weeks. Keep checking the *Discussion Section* on the website.

Next meeting February 17, 2011

If you have any concerns you want to raise, let me know.

Researching a canoe trip to the Great Slave Lake

Dear Fellow Ramblers:

I have just started to research a canoe trip to the East end of the Great Slave Lake. The topography is mainly glaciated shield granite islands running NW/SE, offering many shelters from the prevailing SW winds.

We'd take three days to drive to Hay River or Fort Resolution, and then fly into the islands. I anticipate three to four weeks of paddling to get to Yellowknife, depending on weather, paddling skills, fishing success and general idleness.

We'd arrange to have our vehicles driven around the West end of the lake and then we'd take at least four days to drive home.

I'll be paddling a collapsible canoe, maybe with a sail and outrigger because the lake is flat (most of the time). It's generally not good to mix canoes and kayaks on a trip because of the different speeds.

A beginners level should be OK.

The planning is at a preliminary stage and I'd welcome any comments.

Ron Mason
403-217-4671



A warm welcome to our new members

Deborah Peters
Paul Ruchlewic
Lynda Galeski
Tom Galeskiz
Mark Wilson
Clifton Potter
Julie Imbach

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

Happy trails to you!

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2011 HIKING CALENDAR

Get our new 2011 Hiking Calendar! E-mail or call with your address & we'll add you to our guest list. You'll also receive our e-newsletter "**Let's Hike**".

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!



AUSTRIA

(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!



CROATIA & SLOVENIJA

(August 29 to September 11, 2011)

The dynamic duo of holidays!

First, come with us to Croatia for a week along the Dalmatian Coast. Hike along pristine pebble beaches, enjoy al fresco dining & swim in the Adriatic. Then cross the border into Slovenija with its Julian Alps and medieval castles. Hike behind the thundering Slap Pericnik waterfall, up the challenging but rewarding Mt. Triglav and around glacier-fed Lake Bohinj.

The smallest state in India...

Trekking and touring in Sikkim

by *Francisco Gali*

Sikkim, nestled in the Himalayas, is one of the smallest and least populated Indian states. It's bordered by Nepal in the west, China in the north and east, West Bengal in the south and Bhutan in the southeast. Though small, Sikkim is rich in flora and fauna. Kangchenjunga, the third highest peak in the world, is located in the NW. It can be seen from most parts of the state.

We arrived in Sikkim in April of this year. It was a four hour rise from the hill station of Darjeeling where we obtained our entry permit, to Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim. In the afternoon, we managed to book a tour to north Sikkim, to arrange for

a trek and to get a stern lecture at the police station for smoking in a public place.



The following day we hired a taxi to visit the Buddhist monasteries around Gangtok. Then we hired a jeep and a guide and driver for the five days tour of North Sikkim.

On the first day, we drove to the Lachen Valley to visit monasteries and waterfalls. The farther north we went, the more rugged the landscape became, with steep valleys covered in dense forest.

We stayed one night in the village of Lachen at 3000 m, where we saw many traditional lepcha houses.

The next day we drove 32 km to the village of Thangu and the start of the Tsopta Valley. Unfortunately, clouds were hiding the high peaks.



On the third day we arrived in the Lachung Valley during a heavy rain and hail storm.

The next morning, the sky was clear. We left early to drive to the Yumthang Valley. Rhododendrons were in full bloom and the meadows were carpeted in primulas - all of this surrounded by a wall of spectacular peaks.

The road, now no more than a jeep track continues climbing out of the



Old houses in Lachung



Young monks at play



First light on Kabru (7353 m)

valley in tight hairpin bends to its end at Yume Samdong (4800 m). No flowers here, brown meadows with the icy peaks in the Tibet border.

Sikkim. We started from the village of Yuksam at 1750 m.

The first day was long and tiring. We hiked 19 km and 1300m climb to the small settlement of Tsokha, from where the first view of the peaks appear.

Rathong, Kabru and culminating in the south summit of Kanchenjunga at 8500 m. Kanchenjunga is the third highest of the eight-thousanders - the third highest mountain in the world. We'd planned a day hike to a high pass but by 11 am, a thick fog had enveloped everything so we cancelled our hike. This is one of the



A colourful Mani wall

On the second day, we hiked only nine km and 1000m climb to the alpine meadows of Dzongri (4000 m). We arrived early in the afternoon wearing shorts but there was a raging snowstorm, cold and miserable.

disadvantages of spring trekking, compensated by the abundance of flowers.



Lachung village

We returned to Gangtok and then left for a five day trek in West

The next day, we woke at 5 am for the highlight of the trip - the climb to the top of Dzongri ridge for sunrise over the mountains. It was clear for the magnificent views: the

Singalila ridge undulating far to the south, then the peaks in the Nepal border - Kokthang,

After the trek, we spent a few days visiting some of the most notable monasteries such as Tashiding and Pemanyangtse. Then we flew back to Bangkok for some well-deserved R&R on the beach. ##



Rhododendrons



Kanchenchunga (8500 m)

Hakuna Matata...no worries

African Safari

Part 1: Kenya

by Lorri Badran

The hours following our summit of Mount Kenya were anti-climactic. We had a scenic, 14 hour trek down the **Chogoria trail** to our banda (hut) at the base. There we were greeted by signs at the huts stating that 'wild animals prowl at night – do not leave your hut!' OK, point taken. Although we'd seen little more than tree and rock hyrax, we knew larger animals were out there and we couldn't wait to get on with the Kenya safari.

As we were ready to leave, our mountain guide, Francis, announced the first of several elephant sightings that morning. We hurried to a viewpoint that overlooked a small glade surrounded by dense forest. After a moment 'he' came into view ... a very large male with enormous tusks, bending and pulling down treetops with his trunk to eat the tender leaves. It was amazing to see him in this natural setting – a sight we'll never forget. On our bumpy drive back to **Nairobi** we spotted a morning chicken, a tree hyrax and another large bull elephant. He was leery of our approach but ran along the road a



ways before veering into the jungle, leaving a beaten down trail behind him. What a sight! In Nairobi, we headed to an Italian restaurant for dinner with our 14 companions for the coming Explore! safari. The adventure continued ...

Kenya Safari

This was an off the beaten path, camping safari. We chose it specifically to afford us a more personal glimpse of Africa. Our first stop overlooked the **Great Rift Valley**. Although cloudy, we could sense the enormity of the place. And we bought fake souvenirs ('ebony' carvings and such), thinking we were supporting the local economy.

At our first campsite on the shores of **Lake Navaisha**, we spotted zebras and Colobus monkeys. It was beautiful park. However some of the inhabitants are far from that. We wandered to the edge of the lake to look at the huge Marabou Storks – hideous creatures really. They stood as tall as a man, black and white with what looks like a big soggy grey work sock hanging from their red throat, and with 8' wings outstretched to cool themselves in the breeze.

Colobus monkeys were a treat to watch as they scampered through the trees searching for fruit ... and for food left out by unsuspecting campers.

After setting up our tents, we walked to "**Crescent Island**". The animals were brought here years ago for the filming of "Born Free" and "Out of Africa" and then left in the area. Their numbers have grown rapidly as there are no predators. We walked freely amongst the animals ... a giraffe with three



babies, elegant gold bushbucks with their large spiral antlers, fish eagles, zebra, gnu, wildebeest, Thompson's and Grant's gazelle, antelope, several adorable but shy Dik Dik (a tiny deer no larger than a small dog with enormous brown eyes), several varieties of plover birds and vervet monkeys. Two zebra were play fighting, honing their skills for future battles – rearing, driving each other down to sitting positions and kicking up a lot of dust! A couple of flocks of Guinea fowl rounded out the day. It was a unique experience – the only place in Kenya where you can walk in a game reserve.

I awoke to the hippos grunting at 4:00 am so I headed out, alone, towards the lake shore. Stealthily, I crept along to the viewing area (there's a barbed wire fence just before the lake) and crouched down to watch. At first, I heard more than I could see. Large black shapes moved slowly a short distance away. I crept along the fence for a better view and a moment later, one of the hippos stomped his feet, ran towards the water and gave a loud trumpet. Egads, I'd been spotted. They all stopped eating. I stayed perfectly still, hoping they'd resume munching so I could creep away. They didn't resume, so after a couple of minutes, I started moving

slowly towards camp. All I could think of was the lecture I'd heard about hippos killing more people in Africa than all other animals combined. Great.



The hippos slowly relaxed. A few resumed munching so I picked up the pace and took a roundabout route to our tents. Crossing the open fields, I remembered there might be others lurking Lesson learned.

We were up early the next morning to visit **Hell's Gate National Park**. We walked through the gorge, hopping back and forth over creeks and boulders to the viewpoint. A stunning vista. The road was alive with animals. We saw many antelope, zebra, warthogs and cape buffalo in the distance. We also spotted several birds including an augeur buzzard and very iridescent long-tailed bee eaters.

It was a six hour drive to the **Loita Hills** and the road deteriorated to a dirt track. We saw zebra, antelope and a long-crested eagle. From a distance, a large elephant with one tusk was eating in the bush, a wildebeest following closely behind.

We camped at a Masai village with guards looking out for us at night. They were elaborately dressed in red plaid blankets and they carried large staffs, spears and bows and arrows. We could hear the yapping of hyenas in the distant.

We spent a couple of days with the Masai and three guides, hiking in the Loita Hills. They told us about their culture, their way of life and the flora and fauna. One of our guides was dismayed to hear I had no land, cattle, sheep, goats or children. The concept of an apartment in the city was foreign to him. Oh dear, I had definitely lost much of whatever status I had in his eyes.

Then they showed us how to build a fire by rubbing two sticks together and delivering the glowing embers to dried cotton-like flowers from the nearby trees. We were all invited to try. Several men tried and one succeeded. Not to be outdone, I took up the challenge and got down to business. A few moments later, success! I'd made embers and we soon had a good fire going.

Later we met Chief Moses who showed us their irrigation project. The area is very lush with huge yucca plants and their towering spires of flowers. At the village, a lady was kind enough to show us her home. It was a cow dung covered wood frame divided into two areas ... one to cook and sleep and the other to bring in new calves from the elements. What a privilege it was to see this.

After the tour we were treated to a show of dancing - two dozen men and women, led by an Urhu warrior with braided hair that was dyed red by ochre. Of course we joined in!

Ladies came from all around with their handicrafts and set up a bit of a bazaar. We enjoyed the beautiful beadwork and bartering and everyone bought something.

The next morning we drove to the famed **Masai Mara game reserve**. We saw Masai tending cattle or sheep and goats which is commonplace everywhere in Kenya. We also saw two separate sighting of families of what appear to be Meercats scampering into the fields with their 'watchmen' vigilantly keeping lookout. We saw birds - Secretary birds, a colorful blue stork, a majestic Martial Eagle with white wide-spread wings soaring overhead, colourful bee eaters, Superb Starlings and a Kori Bustard taking flight. And we saw many of the regulars (zebra, wildebeest and antelope) as well as more gazelle and ostrich.

A special treat was running across 21 giraffe near the road. The largest was an older, almost black male.

We hit the Mara park gate and the scenery changed to quite lush. Due to the lack of domestic grazing, the grass is tall and plentiful. The antelope and zebra grazed contentedly. Our drive through the park to our campsite turned into a real adventure as we had our first close up encounter with a family of elephants. There were about a dozen, including two younger calves. What a treat to watch them make their way through the jungle. One of the last sightings of the day was a falcon on the wing carrying a large snake.





Then we passed a group of ostrich, a couple of giraffe and large Topis (gazelles) with their colourful dark brown and gold colouring and gracefully curved horns. Another treat was watching a newborn Grant's gazelle struggle on trembling legs to stay upright and keep up with mom and dad.

Camp that night was in permanent tents with cots – what luxury! On our way for a tepid shower, a young boy was tending a freshly delivered calf – helping it to stand and suckle. He was very proud of his cows and beamed a bright smile. The people here are so content and rich in their own ways.

Our afternoon game drive was an absolute success. The skies were stormy with rain in the distance, and thunder and lightening causing herds of zebra, topis and gazelle to scatter. A bit further on we came to a number of parked vehicles and three lionesses with three or four cubs lying in long grass. What excitement! We couldn't believe our luck as they were very near the truck. Our first predators!

We continued driving and a few minutes later, we spotted more vehicles and a cheetah laying on a large rock. He was beautiful, well marked and healthy.

It began raining heavily so and we returned to camp. One more pass of the lionesses treated us to a great look at two of the cubs. The dirt tracks on the road were turning into deep, muddy rivers and we came upon a large truck (which we would see stuck several times in the days to come) up to its axels in slick mud.

I woke at 3 am to 'something' gnawing on 'something' just outside our tent. I didn't investigate, hoping our guards were vigilant. An hour later, the hyenas were still yodeling and a lion roared in the distance.

In the morning the Masai guard let us know that a leopard had visited our tent during the night! Lo and behold there was a rather large footprint just outside our tent flap ... we are very excited indeed. However, for safety reasons, the guards hung a lantern outside our tent on the following nights.

We'd concluded that in Africa, it's not only the animals that have teeth but also the trees and shrubs. Acacia thorns, giant Candelabrum cactus and aloe, flowering deadly datura, poinsettia, plenty of mountain

bamboo, milk bush, Thorn cactus and yucca were everywhere. After it rained most of the night, we left early to drive towards some Cape Buffalo spotted in the bush. Soon after, our truck got stuck in the mud. Try as our driver might, he couldn't rock it free. Eventually and reluctantly, we got out to help. The buffalo were standing, watching us from an uncomfortably close distance so we left a couple of 'spotters' in the truck, and then we were able to free the truck quickly.

Once on our way, the viewing improved. We spotted three black-backed jackals, seven hyenas (some of which had collars – must have been the tame ones), several secretary birds and elephants and giraffe. After five hours we returned to camp for lunch.

The afternoon game drive was plagued with heavy rain, thunder and lightening so we beat a hasty retreat back to camp. Our spirits picked up when we heard the Serengeti is much drier this time of year. We were tucked into our sleeping bags early as we planned to leave camp very early in the morning en route to **Lake Victoria in Tanzania** and will bid farewell to Kenya, for now.

##



The 2010 Ramies and award pins

These trip coordinators were recognized at the 2010 Christmas potluck dinner and awards night.



BLUE RAMMY

10 or more trips

OR 100 or more person days

Ron H, Anita O and Alastair S

RED RAMMY

20 or more trips

OR 200 or more person days

Christine G, John D, Dorothy-Ann R,
Carl P and David M

GOLD RAMMY

30 or more trips

OR 300 or more person days

Carl V, Bob W and Ivan P

BRONZE PIN

50-99 official trips days since Oct 1, 2000

John D, Dawn J, Douglas D, Cornelis V
and Madeleine M

SILVER PIN

100-149 official trips days since Oct 1, 2000

Bob W, Dave R

GOLD PIN

150 trip official days since Oct 1, 2000

Dave M - 250 trip days
Ivan P - 300 trip days

