

The

# Pack Rat

Rocky Mountain Ramblers Association

March / April 2011



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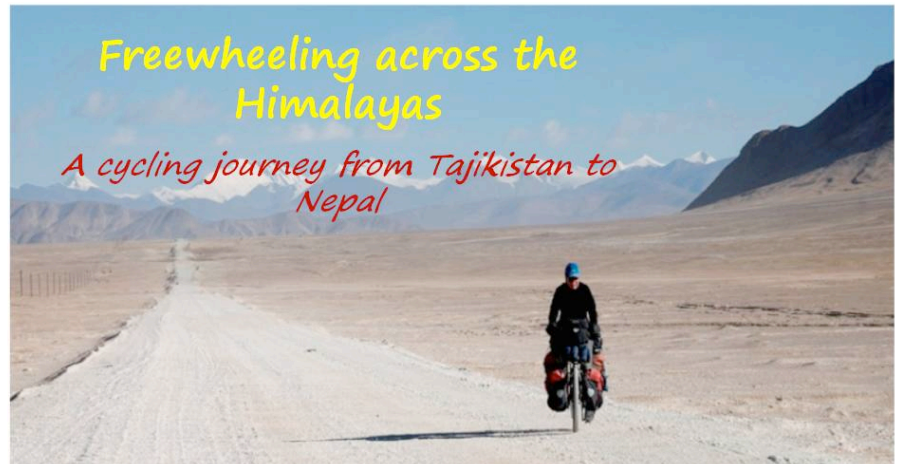
The Packrat is published six times a year by the Rocky Mountain Ramblers Association. We welcome articles, comments and ideas from our members, and if content is deemed suitable and space permits, we will use it.

E-mail contributions to the editor at [packrat@ramblers.ab.ca](mailto:packrat@ramblers.ab.ca)

or forward to RMRA  
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Calgary AB T2N 3E4

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## Part 1: Dushanbe to Kashgar Wednesday April 13<sup>th</sup> 19:30



*...My alarm went off at 4AM. After only few hours of sleep and on an empty stomach, I loaded Ladybug (the bike) ready to commence my journey from Tajikistan to Nepal. 5000 km away over high mountain passes and mostly on dirt roads. Somehow it seems so far away but as long as I keep pedaling, I will get there eventually!...*

July 2010

For the next six months I cycled and hiked through some amazing scenery in Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Kyrkzstan, China, Tibet and Nepal.

My best memories are all the friendly people I had the chance to meet along the way and the moments we spent together.

You're invited to join me for a slide show on Wednesday April 13<sup>th</sup> at 19:30 at the Rosemont Community Hall. I want to share with all of you some of the stories, experiences and photos of this cycling adventure.

Celine



## Activities

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

## Meetings

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

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Write to the Rocky Mountain  
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## Packrat Newsletter

If we have your e-mail address,  
we will automatically notify you when  
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## Website

[www.ramblers.ab.ca](http://www.ramblers.ab.ca).

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

# Spring is coming



## Rambles by the editor

Now that I've got your attention....

According to the Farmers' Almanac, people long ago believed that bad spirits could affect the weather adversely but that bad weather was always balanced with good weather. So, if a month came in bad (like a lion), it should go out good and calm (like a lamb).

According to CBC morning radio, this year,  
March came in as frozen mutton.  
Hang in there.

Sharon



## What's your story?

### Have you gone somewhere amazing lately?

Consider writing about your adventure and sharing it with fellow Ramblers.

OR

Got a great photo you want to share  
but you don't want to write about how  
you got it? Then consider just sharing  
the photo.

Contact the editor for details.  
I can help.

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



# K Country trail users

February 17, 2010

By Dorothy-Ann Reimer

We covered winter and summer trail concerns and plans. Hikers, bikers, skiers, snowmobilers, ATVers and ranchers were there.

## Winter trails

Conditions are really good this year. Very few staff are available to do the grooming (2 ½ people). West Bragg is done mainly by volunteers of the Greater Bragg Creek Trails Association (GBCTA).

## Summer trails

K Country expects to hire seven seasonal workers for Bow Valley/ Peter Lougheed but none for the rest of the region. Some of the back country camp fees will be used for trails.

## Budget

Much the same as last year (in other words, slim).

## Trail repair priorities

K Country has 28 projects for Bow Valley, Ribbon and Peter Lougheed. Sheep, Elbow or Highwood weren't mentioned. Projects include:

### Bow Valley

Trails in Heart, Hi-Line, Ribbon Creek and Falls, Galatea, Tom Snow, Benchlands, Cox Hill (this requires \$25,000+ to upgrade).

Peter Lougheed  
Eau Claire, Elk Pass, Mt. Shark, Ptarmigan Cirque, Pointe Campground, Chester, Amos, Buller Pass and Turbine Cabins.

### Elbow-Sheep

There seems to be only one staffer wanting work here so negligible work is planned.

### West Bragg

The GBCTA continue to meet, raise money, work on trails and follow its plan. Some trails have been flagged and cut and more will be done.

## Approval of new trails

K Country presented a draft document to cover the procedure to build, repair or re-route a new trail. Clubs are asked to give their opinions by mid-March.

Some key points are:

New trail proposals are made by groups who wish to build a new trail anywhere in K Country. Examples are bike trails on Moose Mountain (Calgary Mountain Bike Alliance) and the new West Bragg trails.

Categories There are two: Parklands and Public/SRD (Sustainable Resources Department) lands.

They follow three processes, depending on what's to be done:

- A. Build new trails
- B. Improve current trails
- C. Make minor trail changes and emergency work

In practice, processes B and C are less complicated than A and would normally be put forward by a Parks person. These would go through the



Kananaskis Trails Committee (KTC) who are all government people. Process C is where it gets more complicated as these trails are proposed by groups (not individuals) outside K Country staff.

There are five stages: idea, initial proposal through to the concept plan, detailed design and finally, implementation.

There should be close interaction with K Country but the bulk of the work is done by the 'proponent' (i.e. proposing group). Maps (area and detail), public consultation, funding, and maintenance plans are all needed as the process unfolds.

**NOTE: Rambler's executive has decided the club can help with hiking and skiing trails.** This help would fall under process B or C.

## Other member items

Village Centre in Kananaskis Village – The building is being transferred to Delta Lodge and the future of the popular lounge is uncertain. If you want it kept open, e-mail Michael Roycroft at [Michael.Roycroft@gov.ab.ca](mailto:Michael.Roycroft@gov.ab.ca).

Sawmill trail signs were removed in 2009 when they decided not to plow the parking lot. No plan to replace. M. Roycroft thinks these trails are not designated trails. However earlier maps class them as designated summer bike trails.

Bill 29 – Biggest concern was that, instead of being protected by law, access and usage could be

**Kananaskis.com**

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decided by the minister alone. The bill is being re-worked for future presentation.

☑ Designated Trails Authority (DTA) – A proposal has been made to set up this arms-length body to manage recreation for ALL trails in the province. This includes planning, approvals,

funding and charging usage fees. NOTE that the SRD no longer manages recreation for trails on its lands. The DTA is not final yet.

☑ XC ski trail fees – None are planned for this coming year but it's definitely possible for the following year (no doubt after the next provincial election in 2012).

☑ Snowmobiles – 85,000 registered in Alberta but only 10,000 operate here. The rest go to BC, and Alberta loses revenue. (Personally I'm not sorry but perhaps I'm being a bit selfish.)  
##

Next Meeting late April.

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## The Alberta Hiking Association

The Alberta Hiking Association (AHA) is an umbrella organization for hiking clubs across the province. AHA is a registered non-profit society and provides a stronger province-wide voice for hikers who have had little or no such voice in the past.

*You are the people who have the local experience and the boots on-the-ground knowledge. We need your eyes and ears to protect our parks and wildlands. We need to work together to ensure that we and future generations can continue to enjoy them in the future!*

The AHA was incorporated in June 2008.

Rambler Carl Von Mirbach is an AHA director.



To learn more about AHA, and how you can become a member, check the AHA website. [www.abhiking.ca](http://www.abhiking.ca) AHA is also looking for members who'd like to run for an AHA director position.

The following was taken from the new year's message to members by David Wasserman, Chair. It highlights the accomplishments for the past two years and the plans for the future.

In the past year, the AHA has made a number of steps forward.

☑ had our first real annual general meeting—it's tricky having an AGM with no definable membership list

☑ made our existence known to Alberta Tourism, Parks and Recreation, Alberta Sustainable Resource Development and Parks Canada

☑ established ourselves as the source of the hiking representative on the board of Alberta TrailNet

☑ made links with several environmental organizations and participated as individuals and member organizations in the **campaign against the Alberta Parks Act (Bill 29) which resulted in the bill being shelved**

☑ was represented at meeting of a steering committee led by the Alberta Off Highway Vehicles Association to investigate the establishment of a delegated administrative organization to administer trail development in Alberta

For the coming year, we need to retain the relationships we've established and more.

☑ expand the organization by adding more member organizations and individual members so as to represent a wider range and greater number of hikers

☑ encourage more dialogue among members so as to identify the issues of most importance to hikers and the means to act on those issues

☑ do what we can to make sure that the next version of the Alberta Parks Act removes the many flaws of Bill 29 ##

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First, come with us to Croatia for a week along the Dalmatian Coast. Pristine pebble beaches, old fishing ports, and unspoiled islands make central Dalmatia an irresistible pleasure and the Makarska Riviera is its centerpiece. Our hotel is an attractive boutique hotel right on the Adriatic Sea and minutes away from the port and lively waterfront cafes. From Makarska, we shall hike through the Biokovo foothills, along the Cetina Gorge and to the top of Vidova Gora on the sunny island of Brač. You cannot go to Croatia and not visit Dubrovnik, so we have included a full-day excursion complete with a guided tour and walk of the city walls.



Then cross the border into Slovenija with its Julian Alps and medieval castles. With a population of around 2 million, Slovenija is a country of amazingly unspoiled beauty virtually undiscovered by the tourist hordes. Our hotel is in the charming, lakeside town of Bled with its medieval castle 300ft above the lake and fairytale baroque church in the middle of it. The hotel has a pool, sauna and sun terrace overlooking the majestic peaks of the Julian Alps. Hikes in this area will include the trail around the north wall of 9500ft Mt. Triglav, the waterfall-filled Vintgar gorge and glacier-fed Lake Bohinj.

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*Jim Byers, Travel Editor, The Toronto Star: I call Slovenia the "tiny perfect country." It's got alpine meadows, stunning mountains of jagged rock straight out of Heidi, a lovely capital of Ljubiana that looks a bit like a mini-Salzburg and enormous caves just meant for exploring. ...Lake Bled might be the prettiest body of water in the world, featuring a dominating castle high on a cliff and a beautiful church perched on a solitary island. Sheer heaven in a pint-sized package.*

The best part of the trip was the food....

## Thailand, Laos and Cambodia

by Wally Drew

My next big trip this year was in the first three weeks of November to Thailand, Laos and Cambodia. I'd done Thailand before and really went for Laos and Cambodia. They're never done alone. Only the first four days were in Thailand. We got to the Golden Triangle after flying North from Bangkok.

I went with the British Ramblers again and joined the tour at London Heathrow Airport. I had a long night and morning flight to LHR, 11 1/2 hours in the Terminal 3 and an even longer night and day flight to Bangkok. Lucky I don't get jet lag because there was also a 14 hour time change. The Ramblers had me crammed in a middle seat for the long flight.

Bangkok Airport has a huge modern new terminal and in area, is supposed to be the largest airport in the world. Bangkok now has 8 1/2 million people and six million vehicles. You can't imagine the traffic. The 55 km drive in our bus to our hotel, mostly on multi-lane multi-level freeway, took 2:05 hours.



After leaving the Golden Triangle and visiting the Opium Museum, our bus took us East to Chiang Kong, the confluence of the Mekong and Dosag Rivers where Thailand, Myanmar and Laos meet. We spent the night in a basic hotel on the Mekong River in Chiang Kong.

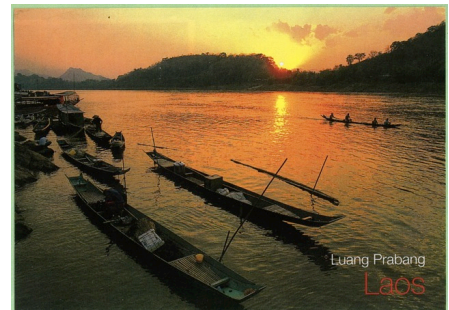
Next morning, three-minute van drives took us to Thai Emigration to exit Thailand. Small motor boats took us across the Mekong River to Laos. Exit and entrance formalities were quick and efficient. Our visas at the border were included in tour price as were most meals, three local flights and of course all transport and lodging.

This Laos village was Houei Sai. We boarded our nice private motor launch there. Like all boats on the Mekong, it was long and narrow: about 30 m/100' long and 3 m/10' wide. It had a roof, open sides, tables and chairs, lavatory, kitchen, etc. We could help ourselves to bananas, oranges, coffee, tea and drinking water. We tossed the peels into the river for the big cat fish to eat. Thus began our two-day cruise down the Mekong River in Laos. At the beginning of the dry season, it was hot and we only had one afternoon thunder shower.

It was a scenic cruise as the big river flowed through the forested mountains of Laos with occasional villages. We went ashore to walk through some villages. Meals were cooked on board and we served ourselves buffet style. For the night, we stayed in a lodge up above the river by the village of Pak Beng. It was quite basic with cold water but nice view. On the way to Louang Phabang, we



docked to go into the Pak Ou Caves. It was touristy with hundreds of little Bhudas. We reached Louang Phabang before sunset and it looked much like this...



Except for local flights, we did the rest of our tour in nice coaches/buses with more than enough seats and good local drivers. We also had our national guides in each country. There were also interpreters. Few in those countries know English and our English Ramblers leader and his wife didn't know the local languages. The guides were very nice and efficient but too long winded. We would have frequent long lectures, usually while standing in temples and other tourist sites. Information overload....

Louang Phabang is the old royal capitol and a nice town. We had three nights there, longer than any other place. One day we went to open air zoo to see Asian black



bears. Then a few of us walked up steep dirt path to top of Tat Kuang Si Falls. That was the best exercise I got on this soft trip.

I enjoyed the karst/limestone mountains of Laos, especially from Van Vieng, and walking across the Nam Song River on the narrow bridge.



Next was Vientiane, the biggest city and capital of Laos with

population of 700,000. Laos is a communist dictatorship, and they aren't allowed to travel to the USA. They were on the Viet Cong side in the Vietnam War. But the people, mainly lowland Laos, are very nice. It's an extremely safe country—no beggars even though they're poor. It was perfectly safe and comfortable for me and a few others to walk 2 km through Vientiane alone back to the hotel after 10:00 PM. We visited the usual temples, bhudas, government buildings and street markets.

From Vientiane we had another local flight to Phnom Pehn, the capital of the Kingdom of Cambodia, population 3,000,000. As on all of these local flights of one hour or less, we got a nice lunch, in contrast to our cheap North American airlines where no



food is served on flights up to six hours. We visited the Genocadee Museum and one of the Killing Fields in and near Phnom Pehn. Then we drove across the flat low plain to Siem Reap to visit the Angkor Wat temples complex. Temples and ruins are up to 30 km apart in jungles. Some are restored and some are being devoured by trees and their roots.



The best part of the trip was the food, like Thai and Vietnamese. All breakfasts and many dinners were buffets. The farewell dinner near Angkor Airport between flights from Siem Reap and to London was the best of all. We had more than 100 buffet items including salmon, sea bass, lobster and blueberry yogurt ice cream. I liked all the varied Asian food on the whole trip and in fact, that's all I ate. ##

## **A warm welcome to our new members**

Robert Desruisseaux  
Heather Marie Brown  
Ursula Gardynik

**Happy trails to you!**

### **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



Our final look at Africa...with a backdrop of Kilimanjaro lit by the morning sun...

# African Safari

## Part 2: Tanzania

by Lorri Badran

After Kenya, we crossed into Tanzania on the east coast of Africa. The entry itself was more a bizarre marketplace than a border and we were left to fend for ourselves with the fruit and jewelry sellers while our bus and party were cleared.

Tanzania immediately took on new life. The countryside was clean and lush, with fewer grazing cattle and goat herds. Small farms had tidy gardens and crops with neatly tended thatched roofed mud or brick houses. Like Kenya, we saw little fields of garbage or burning rubbish. The surrounding hills were covered in enormous rocks precariously balanced on one another.



**Tanzania border crossing**

We drove 11 hours to Speke Bay, our campsite on Lake Victoria. The lodge was \$50 well spent. The white concrete and wood roundhouses were on the beach with a wide thatched roof, stone floors and a shower. Mosquito netting hung over the king sized bed.

The sunset across the huge lake was breathtaking, made even more special by large sailboats, or

Dhows, slowly floating by. Exhausted, we had a very peaceful sleep to the sounds of night insects and lapping waves.



The following morning we took a canoe to a village. It was very busy with the fishermen beating their nets clean on the beach as the women did laundry. Egrets, Sacred Ibis, Herons and Marabou storks were commonplace, waiting patiently for a free meal. Once we pulled ashore, each of us was 'captured' by one or two small children who held tightly to our hands the entire visit. The village was small and very poor but the fish market was thriving. Returning, our paddlers sang a spirited song and beat a rhythm by slapping the sides of the canoe with their oars.

En route to the **Serengeti** we saw a variety of wildlife with great herds of wildebeest, zebra and gazelle. We detoured to a suspension bridge over a small river. Walking across, we were treated to views of hippos and two very large crocodiles sunning on a sandbar.

Back in our safari truck we approached a green oasis, which turned out to be a lush palm tree lined river creating quite a contrast with the bleak plains all around. We spotted a dozen hippos with three babies in their midst. A moment later, two lionesses with several



**Speke Bay fisherman**



young cubs, a large golden waterbuck with gracefully curved horns, and several elephant who lazily swayed from side to side. Overhead was a leopard lazing over the branches of a tree. Wow! What luck! It was obvious the coolness of the place attracted one and all.

No sooner did we get going again when we spotted two full grown male lions asleep under a tree very close to the road. Next, we saw two hyenas approaching the river. It was amazing to see so many animals in such a concentrated area.

Several large groups had arrived at the bush camp. The moment we finished putting up our tent, a large elephant sauntered through our camp and stretched up and over the 400 gallon water tank for a drink. Obviously he'd done this before. Hyenas and baboons also passed through to drink from the spout on the tank – interesting visitors to our campsite and we found the event to be a daily occurrence.

A balloon ride over the Serengeti shouldn't be passed up. We arrived at the launch site for a briefing while the balloons were filling and the sun rising. There are 16 balloons operating in the Masai Mara (8000 km<sup>2</sup>) but only two in the Serengeti (15000 km<sup>2</sup>).

We had a smooth lift off and glided effortlessly over the treetops. Following the river, we spotted several herds of gazelle and impala as well as giraffe, Cape buffalo and hippo – their backs covered in white egrets riding shotgun. It was amazing to watch the egrets and eagles soaring beneath us and espying Vultures sitting on their huge nests. Just before touchdown, we spotted a very large pride of more than 20 lions.



### **Ngoro Ngoro elephant close up!**

Once on terra firma, we were greeted with a glass of champagne and toasted our fantastic voyage over the plains of the Serengeti!

Next was a trip to **Oldavai Gorge** (pronounced Olda-Pai) where evidence of first man is documented. Mary Leaky's discovery of "Lucy" and her partners' footsteps in the ash from 3.6 million years ago were cast and are displayed here. The gorge is very large—90 km long and 45 km wide.

We toured the tiny onsite museum and then drove to our campsite on the rim of the **Ngoro Ngoro crater**. We've arrived on a full moon,

camping at 2300 m, finding it cold and windy. The next morning, we woke to a dense fog and a chilly -2 C.

After viewing Ngoro Ngoro from the rim lookout, we descended 600 m (and +30 degrees!) into the crater. Wildebeest, zebra, gazelle and impala grazed contentedly. The almost dry alkaline lake was home to hundreds of pink Flamingo. We witnessed several displays of ostrich courtship as well with males racing along, wings outstretched to the females who lie on the ground. The males then lay beside them, swaying their giant wings to one side and the other and flapping them up and down. The females seemed impressed indeed. Several lions stretched out on the sun-warmed rocks overlooking a green oasis. This was home to many hippos as well as herons, egrets, Egyptian Geese and other species of waterfowl such as terns.

It was a beautiful spot, very lush with the blue pool filled with water-cress—a vivid green against a bleak backdrop of open grasslands.

Animals were plentiful in the crater except giraffe as their long legs don't allow them to negotiate the steep sides. No one could tell us why there were no female elephant but the males actually have to leave the crater to seek mates.

Our next destination was **Karatu** and we were off to track down a tribe of elusive nomadic Bushmen. The pot-holed dirt roads continued to be a gut wrenching, body thrashing experience and we were thankful to finally disembark.



### **hunting party of bushmen**

Eventually we met a young man who found us wandering through the bush. The tiny bushmen have no permanent home or possessions other than what they carry. They hunt birds, small game and monkeys. They fashion their own bows and arrows and are very capable at their craft, using everything at their disposal including tendons, feathers and pieces of tree bark. They sleep in the bush, on the ground or in the rainy season, they take refuge in the hollows of huge Baobab tree trunks or nearby caves. It seems a very difficult life.

Soon we joined them in a hunt. Off we went, trotting up a sandy, dry riverbed. One young man shot a pigeon and the arrow hit its mark. Several failed attempts later, they made a fire with donkey dung and plucked the wee bird to roast. It was set over the flames to charbroil and a few minutes into the cooking process, it was split up and placed back on the flames to finish off. The youngest were fed first and even the dogs were given their share of the tasty bounty.

En route to **Arusha** (gateway to Mount Kilimanjaro), we visited a Government school to drop off pens, small gifts and stationary. This was a primary school for grades 1-7 with 24 teachers and 1400 students, an



### **Amboseli NP - Kilimangaro in background**

average of 60 children per classroom. They learned Swahili, English, geography, social studies and math. All were curious about us and asked questions. We were delighted when they saw us off with a couple of songs.

Arusha was a bustling city with souvenir sellers and touts everywhere. Our guide pointed us to a patisserie with lovely baking and cappuccino coffees. We were tired of the seriously deteriorated camp food and welcomed the change. While our bus was being serviced, we walked to local parks and flower stalls.

When we left Arusha for **Amboseli National Park** and crossed back into Kenya, the border was crude and once again, the Masai mobbed us with trinkets for sale.

In Amboseli, we caught a glimpse of Mount Kilimanjaro just before its glacier-capped summit clouded over. There were huge numbers of Savannah (water) Elephants here, very large and VERY plentiful. We also happened across a lioness with three cubs feasting on a fresh zebra kill—quite a sight.

We arrived at camp after dark. The grounds were protected by an electric fence which, judging by the tracks in the sand, didn't seem to deter many animals. To our amazement, the camp had a bar with cold beer and soda – what a welcome sight.

This was our last night on safari and while dinner was being prepared, a group of young Masai men in full tribal dress gave us a show. They were striking – loud and colorful. They started a large fire and performed three different dances although to us, one pretty much looked like the next. The roaring firelight made a wonderful display.



**family portrait**

We were up early for a game drive before heading back to **Nairobi**. The sky was clear and we had a wonderful view of the Kilimanjaro, it's snow covered cap colored pink. Overnight a large tree in the middle of our camping area filled with playful Vervet monkeys. We found that

out in a most unpleasant way as the monkeys began their morning 'victuals' by peeing on a few folks cleaning up camp. Then the monkeys raided our food and garbage and we found ourselves fending them off until we were on our way.

A last stop in the park took us to "Observation Hill" where you walked to a lookout that affords a great birds-eye view of Amboseli National Park.

**Our final look at Africa was Cape Buffalo, hippos and elephants in abundance, up to their bellies in the cool water, with a backdrop of Kilimanjaro lit by the morning sun.**

Back in Nairobi we finished the safari with dinner at The

Carnivore restaurant. As the name implies, there was plenty of wild game on the menu. We tried ostrich, crocodile and various other morsels – a departure from goat meat.

From here we bid our group farewell and left early the next morning for our final African adventure ... a week scuba diving trip in the **Pemba channel**, about 60 miles north of the spice island of **Zanzibar**.

Africa is a wonderful destination for adventure travel, tours are varied and sightseeing is endless. From mountains to plains to sea, there's a story and picture waiting around every corner—definitely worth pushing higher up the Bucket List. ##