

# Alberta, Canada



## Wednesday September 1<sup>st</sup>

-Today is the start of our fifteen day vacation to Canadian National Parks in Alberta and British Columbia, Canada.

-Marcia and Jim depart on a United Airlines flight from Albany NY at 2:30PM. Marie (Marcia's sister) and Kal leave Dayton Ohio at about the same time. We meet at O'Hare Airport in Chicago, have a quick dinner and depart Chicago at 5:45PM CDT for the three hour flight to Calgary, Alberta Canada.

-We have planned this trip ourselves; i.e. no travel agent or tour group, based on information from tour books and the internet.

-We will spend the first night of our trip in Calgary and then drive our rental mini-van to Banff and then north through Lake Louise and over the Columbia Icefield Parkway to Jasper. We will spend four nights in Jasper, then four nights in Lake Louise and then four nights in Banff before returning to Calgary for our flight home on September 15. Our daily activities will be centered on hiking and exploring Jasper, Yoho, Kootenay and Banff National Parks.

-We land in Calgary at 8PM Mountain time, quickly clear customs and pick up our Dodge Caravan mini-van. After a few miss-steps, we find our hotel for the night, the Airport Radisson.

## Thursday September 2<sup>nd</sup>

-Well, we're calling this Day 2, but it's really our first full day in Canada, as our plane landed in Calgary, Alberta at 8PM last night (10PM EDT).

-We are up early and on the road at 7AM (in our rental mini-van) for our eight or so hour drive west to Banff, then north past Lake Louise and on to the Columbia Ice field Parkway to our destination, Jasper.

-A most beautiful drive on a crystal clear weather day... high temperatures near 70 degrees. We spot a coyote and then a deer near the roadside before we stop in the quaint town of Canmore for breakfast. Then on past Banff and Lake Louise, stopping frequently for short hikes and pictures.

The scenery is not to be believed..... we are surrounded by beautiful snow capped mountains, glaciers, beautiful blue lakes, and fast flowing streams and rivers. We sight what we believe is an Elk and spy mountain goats on a cliff side.





-Later, we stop at the Athabasca Glacier where we hike up a steep slope (past markers showing how quickly this glacier has been receding) to reach the face of the glacier, walking against a very stiff and cold wind blowing down the face of the glacier.

-After this “invigorating” hike, we complete our trip to Jasper and check into our shared cabin at the Bear Hill Lodge. Then, into town for shopping and a check with the Jasper Park Rangers to get a “bear update”, in advance of the hikes we have planned for the next two weeks. The ranger tells us we should

be safe if we hike as a group of four, make a lot of noise, and have a can of “bear spray”. Next, we’re off to a sporting goods store to buy the bear spray.....an aerosol pepper spray.....that you are to spray in the face of a charging bear to scare them away!

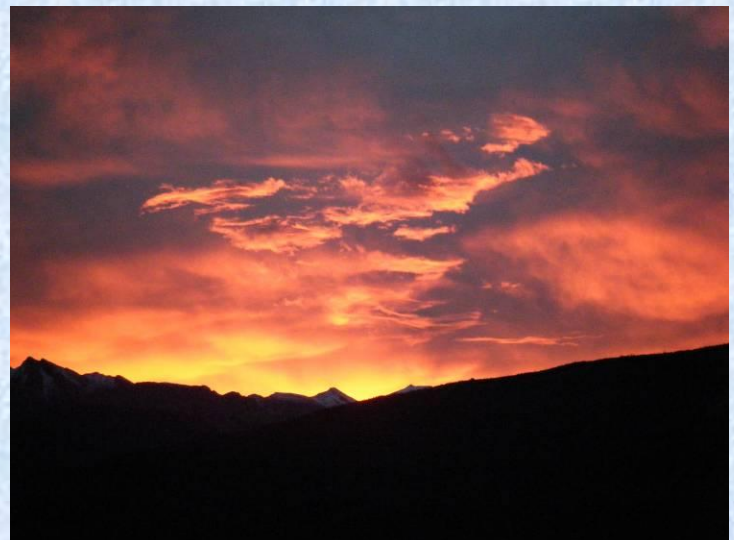
-We return to our lodgings, then walk back into town for an enjoyable dinner at an Italian restaurant. Back to the Bear Hill Lodge where Kal goes on line to check on THE Ohio State University’s first football game of the season and Jim watches live tennis from the US Open.



### **Friday September 3<sup>rd</sup>**

-I woke up early this morning, after our first night in our “cabin” at the Bear Hill Lodge in Jasper, Alberta Canada. The town of Jasper was originally founded as a stop on the Canadian National Railroad line when the railroad was completed in the late 1800’s. The main rail line still goes right through the middle of Jasper and remains an important employer. Jasper’s permanent population is less than 5000 folks, but at least 20,000 “spend the night” during the summer tourist season, as Jasper is the main lodging destination in Jasper National Park, which is the most Northern National Park in the Canadian Rockies and in all of Canada.

-Shortly after 6AM I depart our cabin and walk into Jasper Township for a cup of coffee.....waiting for the sunrise and being rewarded with some great photos of the “red” sunrise over the mountains to the East of Jasper.



Then even better shots of the morning sun first hitting the snow covered peaks of the mountains to the West of Jasper.



-Now, the weather forecast for today looks great, but future days are said to be getting worse.....colder and rainy. So, last night, we decided we'd do two of our most "strenuous" hikes (really climbs) today.....when the weather will be good and the air clear at the high altitudes we'll be at.

-Shortly before 10AM we arrive at the Jasper Tramway, built in 1964, and rising up the side of Whistler Mountain to an altitude of 7500 feet. We catch the first gondola car, along with 30 others, and enjoy the 7 minute (steep) ride to the unloading platform, which offers amazing views

down to the Town of Jasper, the Jasper National Park, lakes, rivers and many mountains, including the highest in the Canadian Rockies, Mt. Robson (at 12,970 feet). Now, this doesn't sound too grueling, but the hike from the unloading platform to the top of Whistler Mountain rises to a height of 8100 feet, a vertical rise of 600 feet up a steep dirt trail.



We head off, enjoying great views of the scenery and of the local wildlife ... cute, fat little birds, Ptarmigans ... Marmots ... Columbia Ground Squirrels ... and Chipmunks. Marie and Kal make it all the way to the summit, while the Marcia and Jim stop a little short of the summit to enjoy the views!



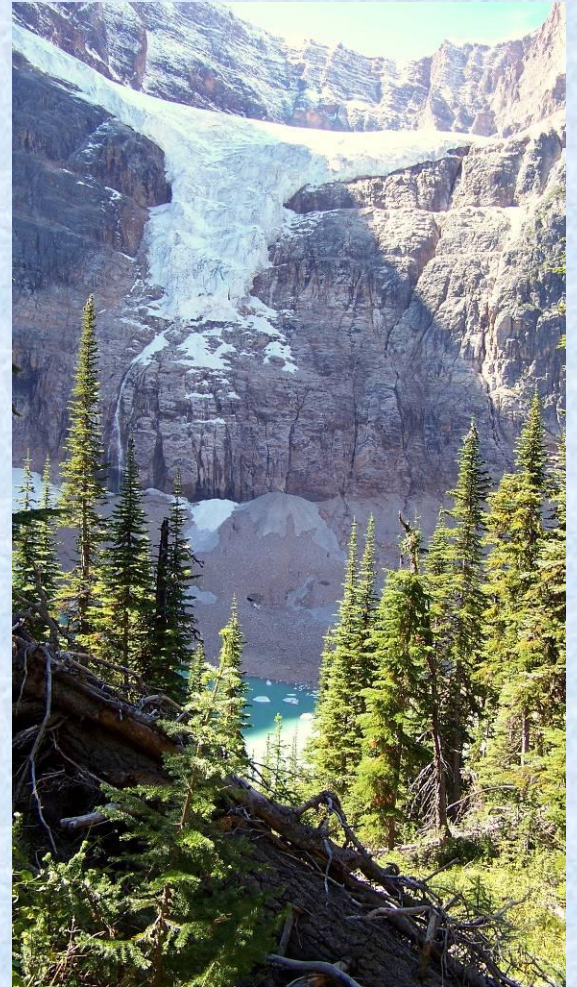
-Next, back down on the gondola to the base of Whistler Mountain and we

drive to Mount Edith Cavell. Here, we start a 4 mile hike, and a steep one.....we will walk a vertical rise of 1000 feet. This

took several hours and was quite strenuous, although the “trekking poles” that we brought with us helped (except for those of us that have only one pole ... but that’s another story).



A great hike (really a climb) but we were rewarded with excellent views of mountains, of the Angel Glacier on the side of Mt. Edith Cavell, the lake filled with icebergs below the glacier, and the occasional “calving” of the glacier.



We also saw much wildlife, but fortunately no bears. At the start of the hike there was a warning of a mother Grizzly and two cubs spotted on the trail, but we figured the number of hikers on the trail, and Kals' “Bear Spray” would scare them off!



-Then, back down the winding 15 mile road to the main roadway, dodging a deer that jumped across the road stopping at the edge of the Athabasca River to view the rapids and watch a large raft shoot them ... then back to our cabin at Bear Hill Lodge



-We walk into town for an enjoyable dinner at a brew pub specializing in "Bison Burgers". I may go back and try one if Kal makes it through the night!

### **Saturday September 4<sup>th</sup>**

-Today is forecast to be cool (high around 50 degrees) with on and off rain. It was raining when we arose at 6:30AM, after our second of four nights at the Bear Hill Lodge in Jasper, Alberta Canada. Today we've picked activities that should work well in iffy weather.

-At 9AM we head out in our rental mini-van for a short drive to the Maligne Canyon.



This is a deep canyon formed by the outlet from Maligne Lake. We hike along a well developed trail following the route of the canyon (170 feet at its deepest point) ... many beautiful falls, rapids and whirlpools. We then return to our starting point, experiencing a vertical rise of 410 feet. Total length of the hike is about 4-1/2 miles. As yesterday, the folks we meet on the hiking trail are probably 40% German and 20% Japanese. There are a lot of American tourists in the area, but they seem to be mostly on motor coach tours and not spending a lot of time on the hiking trails! So far, we have been pleasantly surprised at the lack of big crowds on this trip (even though this is a holiday weekend in Canada ... they also celebrate Labor Day). We really enjoyed this spectacular hike, and the weather was pleasantly cool with only a brief shower and even some breaks of sun.

-Next we continue driving up the beautiful, winding Maligne Lake Road ... destination, 20 miles away, is the north end of the lake.



About half way on our drive we notice two cars stopped on the road and soon see why ... a large black bear is feeding on berries at the edge of the road. Thursday, a Park Ranger told us that each bear is now trying to eat 250,000 berries a day, (the berries are small!) to bulk up for their winter hibernation. We have a good view of this bear quickly devouring all the berries and leaves on the branches of the bushes and we get some good photos. Before long about twenty cars were stopped on both sides of the road, watching the bear (this is what they call a "bear jam"). Then some idiot claps his hands, and the bear runs off into the woods.

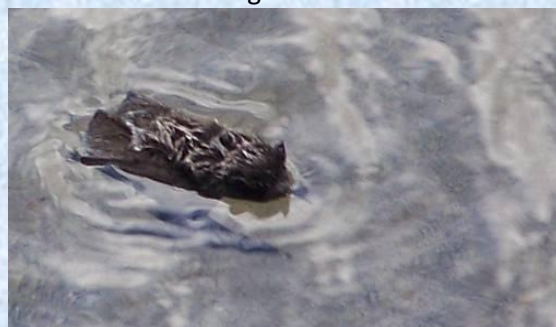


-We continue on and arrive at Maligne Lake ... it's started raining. We are able to buy tickets for the 1PM boat tour of the lake. This is a 90 minute, narrated trip on an enclosed boat (good ... as it's still raining and a little cold) with a small, open rear deck area. There are 34 folks on our boat, and we learn from our guide that Maligne Lake is the largest glacier fed lake in Canada (and second largest in the world). It's 14 miles long, 320

feet at its deepest point, stays frozen until late June, and the current water temperature is 38 degrees. Also, at an elevation of 5500 feet, one of the higher large lakes around! We enjoy the trip down the lake, with towering mountains on both sides (up to 10,000 feet above sea level), Lodgepole Pines and Engelmann Spruce from lake shore up to the tree line, then steep bare slopes up to the snow capped mountain peaks. Towards the southern end of the lake we dock and have about 10 minutes to view the classic "Spirit Island".

The lake has a beautiful blue/green color, caused by the glacier silt from the runoff of the melting glaciers. Motor boats are not allowed in these Canadian Rockies Parks, but this company has been "grandfathered", as they started tours in 1928, and the law was not put into effect until 1930. This was a most enjoyable tour and the weather was OK ... not too much obscured by the clouds, little rain, and even some breaks of sun.

-We next drive about half an hour back towards Jasper, stopping to drive through the grounds of the Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge, which is actually not one large lodge, but a very attractive collection of small and medium size building and cabins.



-Before we drive through the lodge area, we drive by Lake Annette and Lake Edith. We stop at Lake Edith and walk to the lake to get photos. We notice a large leaf seem to fall from a



pine tree into the lake ... and it starts to move. We soon realize it's a bat! We watch for fifteen minutes as it swims to shore, tries to dry off, and attempts to walk/pull itself up the slope to level land (and probably back up into the tree). We believe we may have discovered a new species... The Canadian Swimming Bat!

- Back to our lodgings, then out later for a great dinner at “Jasper Pizza”... outstanding thin crust wood-fired “diet” pizza.
- Looking forward to tomorrow ... weather may be poor, but we’re flexible!

### Sunday September 5<sup>th</sup>

-It’s 27 degrees (Fahrenheit!) when we awake this morning. Now, the weather forecasts for this area seem to be “all over the place”. On the internet, if you believed “Weather.com”, you’d pack up and go home ... cold and rainy (and even snow) for the next 10 days. “Accuweather.com” is always much more optimistic! The TV weather reports are also all over the place. So ... we’ve learned not to worry about the forecast more than a day in advance.

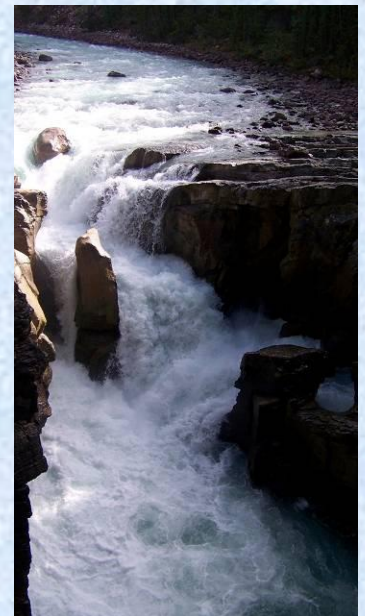
However, today’s “consensus” forecast is for cool weather and rain in the afternoon, so we decided last night to get an early start this morning, which will be our last of our four days in the Jasper area.

-The four of us depart our lodgings at The Bear Hill Lodge for a half hour drive to our first stop, Athabasca Falls.

We take a scenic route and are rewarded with an Elk sighting (we think!) and definitely some white-tail deer.

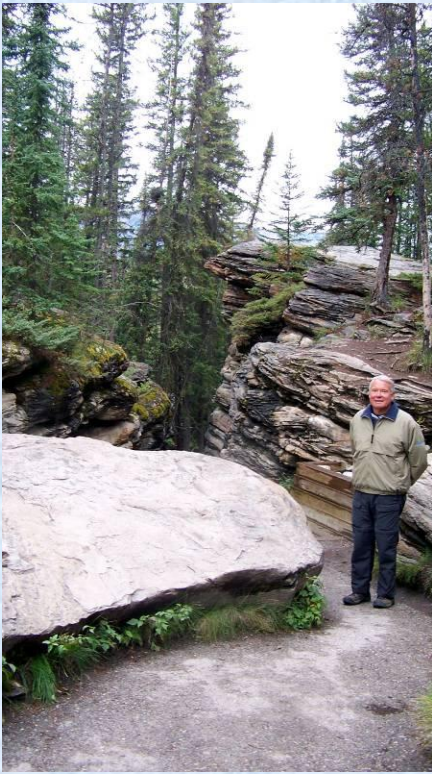


-It’s probably about 33 degrees and cloudy when we arrive at the beautiful Athabasca Falls .... a spot where the Athabasca River is forced through a narrow gorge and over a cliff into boiling rapids. We enjoy our walks to the several viewing points and then along a path up the river. We are all dressed in several layer of clothing, but find the visit “invigorating”.



-After about an hour, we drive south to our next stop, Sunwapta Falls on the Sunwapta River. We decide to first hike the 1.2 mile trail to the “lower falls”... it’s still quite cool and I think we are all a little “cold” on the hike down to the lower falls. We are rewarded with a great set of falls, cut through rock and boiling out into whirlpools and rapids. Walking back, slightly uphill, the sun comes out and we feel quite comfortable when we arrive at the upper falls and have another enjoyable time walking around and viewing the falls and rapids from different viewpoints. The water has a beautiful blue/green color from the glacier influence.





-It's after noon when we head back north for our next stop, the Hike of the Valley of the Five Lakes. We begin a four mile hike that is somewhat disappointing at the beginning, as we walk through a forest of lodge pole pines, across a small stream, then up and down over several ridges ... not a lot of great views. Then, we get to the good part and enjoy the hike past five beautiful, small mountain lakes ... these are the "classic" mountain lakes ... pristine with great views of towering mountains in the background, often with the mountains reflected on the surface of the lakes. While we continue to be surprised at how "uncrowded" the Jasper area roads and hiking trails are, on the holiday weekend, this trail had a bit more activity, as it is quite close to Jasper. We saw several mountain bikers on the trail, a dozen people hiking at least part of the trail with their dogs, and "evidence" of horses. We enjoyed this hike!

-We next drive back to Jasper and stop at the southern shore of Lake Beauvert. The Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge is located on the northern shore of this lake, and we enjoy a short walk on a trail around part of the lake. Then back to our lodgings for rests or



for shopping. This has been a cool day .... high temperature only about 50 degrees, but, except for a few sprinkles, the rain held off and we had another great day of sightseeing and hiking.

-We meet at 5:30PM and make the short walk to Jasper for our final dinner in the town. We have a great one at "O'Shea's" in the Athabasca Hotel, established in 1923.

### Monday September 6<sup>th</sup>

-Foul weather is predicted for the next 10 days, but we're optimistic. They seem to have a hard time with accurate weather forecasting in this country!

-We're all up at 6:30AM, pack up our bags and our rental mini-van, and say goodbye to Jasper and our lodgings for the last four nights, The Bear Hill Lodge.

-We depart Jasper at 8AM for the relatively long drive to Lake Louise, where we will be spending our next four nights. It's 35 degrees when we depart, and we immediately notice that the overnight precipitation has fallen as snow on all of the mountains around us. Instead of a few white glaciers on about every other mountain, now all of the mountain tops are snow covered down to the tree line or lower!



-Shortly after departing Jasper, we see a few cars parked at the side of the road. We pull over and find they have spotted a huge Elk just inside the woods. Marcia and Kal exit our car and get good shots of the Elk.

-We continue on a 1-1/2 hour drive down what has to be one of the most beautiful roads in the world, enjoying the snow capped mountains, great scenery, and constant banter.



-We arrive at our first hike of the day ... Wilcox Pass, in the Columbia Ice Fields. The trail and surrounding foliage is actually coated with snow as we start the hike. For the next 2-1/2 hours we hike the trail (5 miles long, 1,115 foot elevation gain) that first climbs through a forest of stunted Enhlemann spruce and subalpine



fir to a narrow ridge with panoramic views of the valley, Mt. Athabasca and the famous Athabasca Glacier. After that, the trail enters an alpine meadow leading to a waterfall and the summit of the mountain overlooking the valley. Clear views in all directions make this a most memorable hike.

Now, it is only about 38 degrees when we start the hike, and 40 degrees when we end, but no rain, little wind, some sun, and we are dressed in many layers, so we are quite comfortable on this hike. Marie and Kal make it to the top, while the Marcia and Jim stop a little early to enjoy the scenery.

-We next drive a further hour south on the spectacular Ice Field Parkway, arriving at the site of our next hike, Bow Lake. This is a beautiful glacier fed lake, and for the next 3 hours we hike along the shore of the lake, over a ridge, along the river running from the glacier that feeds the lake, then finally up a steep hill and a set of rough stairs to an overlook of the glacier and the main waterfall feeding the river. A great hike ... amazing views ... only 40 degrees, but the rain continues to



hold off, the sun is mostly out, wind is minimal, we are well dressed, so it is a most comfortable hike. The only issue was on our return when Kal found a shortcut (rather than the route along the river). We grew alarmed as the trail grew narrower and we found ourselves 40 feet above the river. As "Kal's" trail died out, he found a route to the river below, and we slid down a cliff. Marcia is pretty sure her ankle will be OK



tomorrow!

-Back on the road, we arrive in Lake Louise at 5PM and check into the nice Lake Louise Inn. For the next four nights, we two couples will be sharing a suite, with two separate bedrooms/baths, a shared living room with gas fireplace with a third TV, balcony, and full kitchen. We have dinner at one of the hotel's casual restaurants (we have calzone or pizza), then back to our lodgings to watch the US Open tennis. Marcia "rehab's" her battered body in the Jacuzzi in our bathroom.



-Another great day!

## **Tuesday September 7<sup>th</sup>**

-It started raining after our dinner last night but it had stopped when we awoke this morning ... after the first of four nights in our shared suite at the Lake Louise Inn in Lake Louise ... accommodations which we are all finding quite comfortable and most excellent.

-We leave for our days activities at 9AM, all dressed in many layers with rain gear available, as it's 37 degrees, quite overcast, and the forecast high is in the low 40's. Actually, with the "strenuous" hikes we've been doing, these low temperatures are just fine. One of the reasons we picked these dates was to avoid hot weather for hiking ... but these temperatures are lower than normal averages for this area.



-We drive to the famous Fairmont Lake Louise Chateau ... built in the late 1800's by the Canadian Pacific Railroad after their completion of the transcontinental line across Canada. This hotel sits on the shore of Lake Louise, which is quite beautiful ... although we have to squint a bit to see through the low clouds, fog and mist.



-Our first hike of the day is to Lake Agnes. This is a 4-1/2 miles hike (up and back down) with a total elevation gain of 1312 feet! We hike all the way to Lake Agnes uphill, but this keeps us warm ... we actually shed our outer coats on the way up ... this is a rather grueling hike for some of us. Arriving at the end of the trail, on the edge of Lake Agnes, we can see no more than the closest edge of the lake due to the low clouds and fog. We are now at an elevation of 7003 feet ... 1900 feet higher than the highest point in New



York (Mt. Marcy) and probably 6900 feet higher than the highest point in Ohio! At the end of the trail, there is a "Tea House" where we enter and have a nice tea/hot chocolate break (all provisions for the Tea House

being brought up by horse). We are delighted, when we leave the tea house, to see that the fog has lifted and we can see all of Lake Agnes and the mountains behind it.



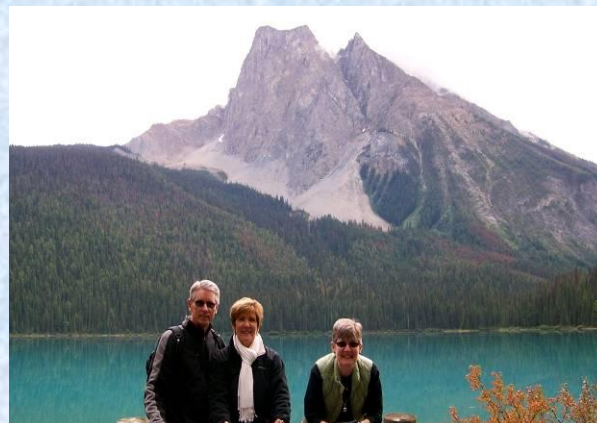
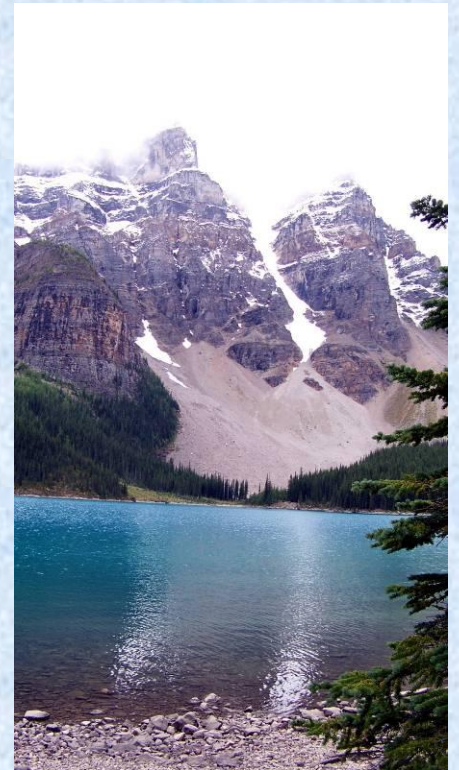
-We return to the base of the trail around noon time and immediately depart on our next hike ... 2 miles around and back along the north shore of Lake Louise; flat ground with good views. Then we drive to Moraine Lake and have an enjoyable hike up its length ... enjoying the blue/green water and mountains ringing the lake. The rain has held off for the most part, and the temperatures never get higher than the mid-40's and we see almost no sun ... but no problem; we are having a great time.

-We dine tonight at a restaurant across the street at the Post Hotel ... very good.



Then back to our lodgings to watch the US Open Tennis, turn on the gas fireplace and plan tomorrow's hikes (or "Forced Marches"), as Marcia refers to them.

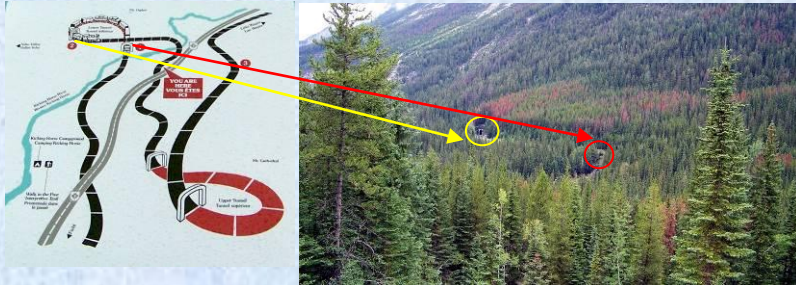
Best, Jim



## Wednesday September 8<sup>th</sup>

-It rained again over night, and is very overcast and cool (36 degrees) when we wake up after our second night in Lake Louise. Local folks we talk to say this time of year normally has great weather, but what we are experiencing is not so great. The weather is actually quite nice for our hikes (cool temperatures), but we are disappointed that we are not getting the "best" (sunniest) pictures! Other than that, we are having a great time.

-We depart our hotel at 9AM for today's trip to Yoho National Park in British Columbia. It is a short ride west and we leave the Canadian province of Alberta and enter British Columbia. The border between the two provinces is defined by the "Continental Divide" ... the highest ridge in the Canadian Rockies ... water on the East side drains to the east ... eventually



the Great Lakes ... water on the West side drains to the Columbia River and the Pacific Ocean.

-Our first stop in BC is the Spiral Mountain Viewpoint. When the Canadian Pacific Railroad was built across Canada in the late 1800's, the pass across the Continental Divide went through this area. Due to the mountains, the 4.5% was made too steep for

railroad grade of

safe train travel ... trains needed four engines to make it up the grade, and runaway trains were common coming down the grade. The solution was to build a "double spiral" through the mountains at allow a safe grade of 2.5%.

-Next stop is the highest waterfall in Canada, Takakkaw Fall. It's fed by a glacier and the falls are 840 feet high. A great short hike takes us right up to the base of the falls. As hoped, the weather on the west side of the Rockies seems to be better ... occasional sun and temperatures near the 50s.



-Our next stop is Natural Bridge, a unique formation on a fast moving river.

-We next spend several hours at beautiful

Emerald Lake, a 5000 foot high glacier fed blue/green lake, surrounded by 10,000 foot high mountains. We hike the four mile

trail around the lake, getting many great pictures featuring mountain reflections in the clear, calm water. We also take the short, steep hike to Hamilton Falls, which are not that great.



-Back to our lodgings, off to do a little shopping, back to help Kal open a bottle of wine then off to our favorite Italian restaurant.

-Today was an easy hiking day ... Kal has plans for a really grueling hike tomorrow!



## Thursday September 9<sup>th</sup>

-We wake up early today, our third day in Lake Louise, as we had made plans to go out early and “look for critters”. At 7AM (which is when the sun rises, here) we leave in our mini-van and started driving, very slowly, up the two lane mountainous Moraine Road that runs up to Moraine Lake ... we are looking for large, four footed mammals ... bear, elk, deer, moose.

-There is very little traffic out at this hour. After just a few minutes we see a car stopped n the road ... normally a sign of an animal spotting. Sure enough, we pull up and can see a large Black Bear devouring small red Buffalo Berries by the side of the road (we had learned that bears eat 250,000 of these small berries each day, trying to bulk up for the winter) ... the berry bushes can't grow in the pine forests due to lack of light, so they grow by roadsides and in meadows ... that's where you find the bears. The car in front of us is nice enough to pull forward so that we can get a good view, and we shoot pictures and videos for several minutes. By now, more cars have pulled in behind us, and we pull out, to give the newly arriving cars a good view, and continue on our slow drive.

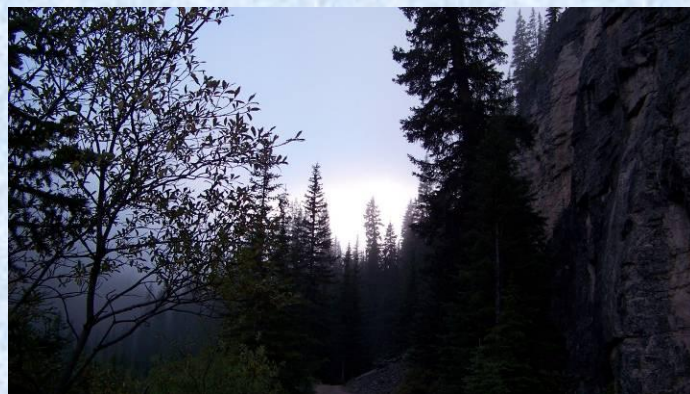


-We drive up to Moraine Lake without seeing any more wildlife, but we are enjoying this morning very much. Despite the poor forecast, there are breaks of blue sky and nice views of snow capped, towering mountains with the sun shining on their tops ... fog lays in the valleys ... it's about 38 degrees. We exit our vehicle and walk to the lake, then return and drive back down the road. We have learned that the Canadian glacier fed lakes have few fish. They are cold (only getting to 38 degrees in late summer), and the silt from the glacier clouds the water, preventing plant growth and even preventing fish from seeing food sources. Attempts at “stocking” these lake have not been successful. Nearing the end of the road, we again stop as we see the same bear feeding and we get some more photos. A tour bus approaches,

sees us, and slows ... it's full of Japanese tourists ... we point out to the driver where the bear is ... he pulls right to where the bear is feeding, and we can imagine the many photos being taken by the tourists ... we think we see the bus lean to its right side!

-Back to our hotel, snack, clean up, and head out at 9AM to our big hike ... the highly rated Plain of the Six Glaciers hike. We drive to the parking lot of the Fairmont Hotel, and walk to the front of the hotel to start the hike.

-This is about a seven mile hike (round trip) with an elevation gain of about 1,400 feet. We first, again, hike the 1.2 mile trail that borders Lake Louise, then start a steady climb through stunted forest, steep cliffs, and glacial moraines. We are very much enjoying this hike, as there are views almost all through the hike (we are hiking on ridges and sides of mountains), so can see great sites ... 10,000 foot high mountains, glaciers. The fog is starting to lift and we see a lot of blue sky and the sun for the first time in a few days!



-Halfway up, we see three Mountain Goats on ledges right above us (maybe 300 feet) and get great photos and videos. Occasionally, we hear the sound of a glacier “breaking” and sending ice and snow down the side of a mountain cliff. After a little more than two hours of pretty grueling climbing, we arrive at the Glacier Tea House, originally built by the railroad, it sits at an altitude of 6,888 feet. The four of us sit on the second floor balcony and enjoy an excellent light lunch ... tea, sandwiches and soup. By now it has warmed up to about 50 degrees in nice sunshine. After lunch, Marcia relaxes and

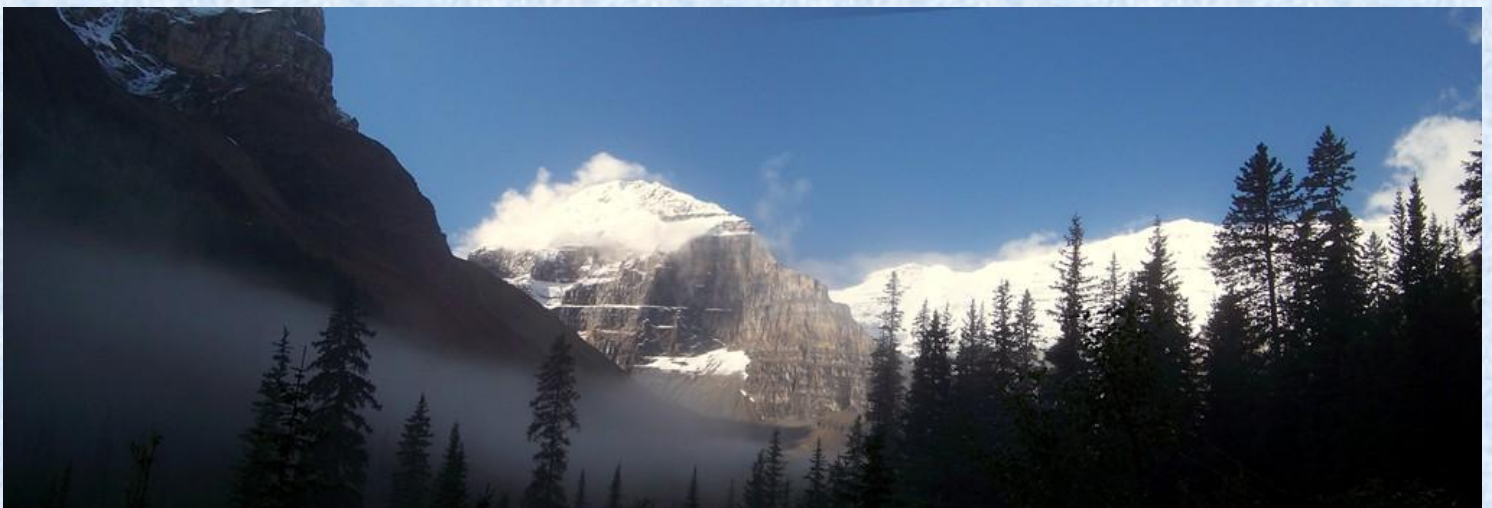
watches our backpacks while Marie, Kal and I hike for another six-tenths of a mile, on a narrow ridge on the side of a mountain, then on the very narrow top of a lateral moraine to a viewing area where we get views of six glaciers, all on mountains between 10,000 and 11,400 feet in height.

-The three of us walk back down to the Tea House, Marcia joins us and we walk back down to Lake Louise. We hear and then see another glacier piece break away and crash down a mountain ... Kal gets video. Incredible photos, on the way down, of mountains, waterfalls and rivers, Lake Louise and the Fairmont hotel at its end and the Banff ski area in the background. We arrive back at our car, in the Fairmont parking lot, about six hours after we started ... this was an excellent hike ... our favorite so far ... we are all a little "worn out", but feel great at our accomplishment and the great sights we have seen. The sun is out and temperature about 50 degrees when we finish.



-Back to our lodgings, then out to dinner at our "favorite Italian restaurant" which is actually the Pizza/Pasta place in our hotel. We have another great dinner, and the same waiter, Sean, as last night ... we've enjoyed talking with him about the area, especially the best sites and hikes. He surprises us with bringing us each a "free" desert ... Tiramisu. Back to our suite and Kal and I

watch the US Open tennis while Marcia and Marie go for a walk ... looking for critters. -Tomorrow we leave for our last four days ... in Banff.



## Friday September 10<sup>th</sup>

-We are up early this morning, pack, and then check out of the Lake Louise Inn, our excellent home for the last four nights. Weather forecast for today is again cool, cloudy with showers, but we are optimistic.



-We depart the hotel at 7:30AM and slowly drive south on the Bow Valley Parkway, looking for wildlife. We have not spied any when it's time to head West. Soon we are entering British Columbia and Kootenay National Park. Our first stop is "Fireweed Trails". Here, there is an original marker designating the Continental Divide. We take a twenty minute hike through a forest destroyed by fire in 1968, and see how the forest eventually rejuvenates itself. By now it is 10AM, but still about 40 degrees, but we see signs of blue sky and even some sun breaking out!

-Next stop is Marble Canyon, where we take a mile and a half walk along a great canyon (130 feet deep but incredibly narrow) with many great rapids and small waterfalls, all flowing



through another area that was cleared by wildfire ... this time in 2003 ... this fire consumes 174 square kilometers, 12% of the area of Kootenay Park. Next we stop and hike to the "Paint Pots", an area saturated with Ochre, which was used by the Indians for body paint and later mined by white settlers for paint pigment. By now it's sunny and reaching 50 degrees, so we are extra happy.



-Next, we head back East into Alberta, stopping at a steel truss bridge to take pictures of the Bow River and the snow capped mountains. Before we re-board our mini-van, we notice a huge bird's nest on top of the bridge ... and a large bird sitting on top of the nest. We investigate and find that we have discovered a Bald Eagle on its nest!

-Next we stop at Johnston Canyon and hike several miles along trails and walkways, admiring mighty rapids and high falls ... these are great, as is the improving weather ... it's now 58 degrees and sunny.



-We now drive to Banff, where we will be staying for our last four days in the Canadian Rockies, and check into our hotel, at about 3PM, the Best Western Siding 29. The Marcia and Jim and Marie and Kal have adjoining rooms, which we find to be very nice and roomy.

-At 3:30PM we walk into town, checking out the many shops and then walk to the Cascade Garden, beautiful terraced rock and flower gardens that we enjoy walking through. At 5PM we have an excellent early dinner at a restaurant "Coyotes",

recommended by one our travel guide books.

-Back to our hotel to rest up ... Kal's scheduling a grueling hiking day for tomorrow!



## Saturday September 11<sup>th</sup>

-We wake up after our first night in Banff, the accommodations at the Best Western Siding 29 proving very comfortable. We meet at 8AM in the hotel breakfast room for (an included) breakfast and to discuss our days activities. It had rained heavily overnight, and is still sprinkling as we eat ... the forecast for today was the same as for most all of the past days ... cold, cloudy and rainy. However, as the weather has always turned out a little better than predicted, we're getting "cocky" and decide to ignore the forecast.

-So ... we decide we will do the highly rated Sunshine Meadows hike. This will take place on top of a mountain (which is also a ski area in the winter). Now, you can't drive to this mountain top area, and the ski lifts are shut down, so you need to book a reservation on a shuttle that will take you up to the hiking trails. We contact the shuttle company and buy four tickets for their 11AM shuttle ... the first available.

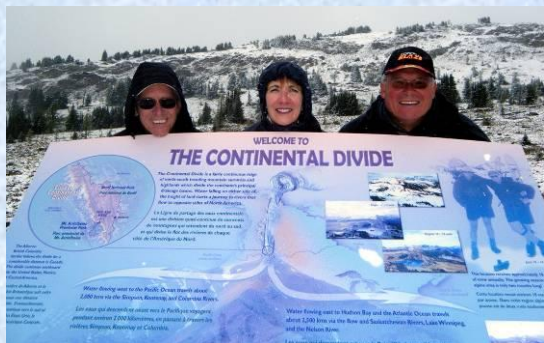


-As some time to kill, we take a one hour walk through Banff ..... with our umbrellas and rain gear, as it's still sprinkling. Now, today is a special day in Banff, as they are holding the first Banff Triathlon ... first swimming, then biking, and finally running (750 competitors) to win the competition. There has been a bit of controversy, as the lake the athletes have to swim in is quite cold. The promoters claim that when they measured the temperature in the lake a month ago it was 67 degrees. Now it's 53 degrees, and they have decided to shorten the swimming portion to 330 yards. Roads are blocked to traffic, but it does not bother our walks. We do see several of the competitors on their bikes.

-We walk through town, then along the Bow River to what is called the Bow River Falls, getting a great view of the famous Fairmont Banff Springs Hotel before returning to our hotel a little after 10AM.

-We drive for about half an hour, driving half way up a mountain to meet the shuttle bus, which takes us up the rest of the way to Sunshine Meadows. On the way, the rain stops and the sun comes out, so we are figuring our luck is holding!

-We start our hike at Sunshine Meadows, walking initially up a fairly steep rise ... we stop and put on our waterproof rain gear as it starts to rain ... wait, that's not rain, it's snow! For the next three hours we hike four or so miles, up and down, in light to moderate snow ... occasionally a bit of sun, but mostly we're in the clouds with very little visibility.



Obviously, it's probably about freezing. Actually, we have a great time. We have the right clothes on, and the activity of hiking keeps us warm. It's fun hiking with the snow falling, and the views (or lack of views) are constantly changing. We have a lot of laughs at our situation ... hiking on top of a mountain (at 9000 feet) with the snow falling. We actually hike across the Continental Divide, entering British Columbia from Alberta. We stop at the Simpson Overlook for a look down into valleys 3000 feet below, but we see *nothing* as visibility is about three feet! On the way back, we get very close to three "Mule Eared Deer" and see several little Marmots.





**Sunday September 12<sup>th</sup>**

-We wake up early on our second morning in Banff, Alberta Canada. I check the weather forecast and see that they are calling for another cloudy and cold day with showers (as is the forecast for the next few days). Ironically, when we were hiking, yesterday, in Sunshine Meadows (this place is miss-named!) in the snow, we heard other hikers saying they were in Banff the same week last year and it was in the 80s all week. Anyway, we are having a great time and the cool weather is welcomed during some of the hikes Kal has us on!

-We are up early as we are going to go looking for large four-legged animals this morning. We meet for breakfast at 7AM, then soon leave in our mini-van ... just after sunrise. The route we've planned to drive will take us northeast of Banff through scenic country on two lane roads that should have little traffic on a Sunday morning. Our "trolling for critters" technique calls for the driver to drive at 15mph or less, keeping an eye out for traffic coming up from behind (and then pulling over to let them by) while the other three team members scour the forest and the sides of the road for any sign of wildlife ... you'd be surprised how many rocks and tree stumps look like bears ... right Marcia?



-Shortly after leaving the town of Banff, we spot three White-tail Deer on the side of the road; we stop and get some photos. We continue on and take the turnoff for Bankhead, which was a coal mining town, established, along with the coal mine, by the Canadian Pacific Railroad, but shut down in 1922 due to low coal prices, a labor strike, and the desire of the Canadian Government to end mining activities in the new

National Parks. We now enjoy a walk along a trail past the ruins of the mining operations, with many placards explaining the significance of the ruins



and the mining process and life in the early 1900s.

-Back on the road, we soon come across a large female Elk, get more photos, and enjoy watching her munch on plants at the side of the road. We next stop at Lake Minnewanka, a reservoir dammed in the early 1900s for electricity, and now the largest lake in Banff National Park. We continue on and soon come across a family of five Big Horn Sheep. More photos, then we pull off to visit Two Jacks Lake (where the Triathlon swimmers competed yesterday... I put my hand in the water ... yep, feels like about 53 degrees). The Big Horn Sheep seem to have followed us down to this lake, so more great photos. Back on the road, we now come upon a family of five Elk ... more super photos. After a side trip to scenic Johnston Lake we end our "animal quests" and head back into the town of Banff.







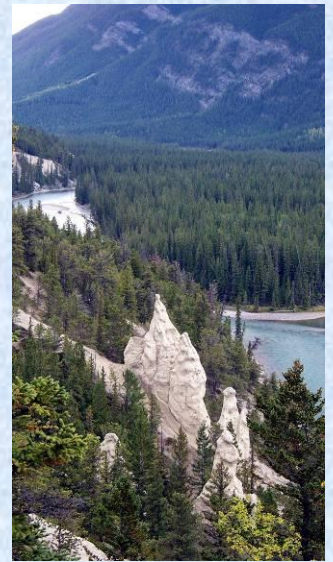
-We drive to view the “Hoodoos”, walking along a trail to get views of these spires formed by the erosion of soft rock around harder rock. Then we drive part way up Tunnel Mountain to the trailhead leading to the summit. Tunnel Mountain is a relatively small mountain (elevation of 5,543 feet), but said to offer superb views of the Banff area. We hike about two miles (roundtrip, elevation gain of

about 700 feet) and get some great photos.

-By now its “warmed” to about 50 degrees, but still heavily overcast with occasional “spits” of rain. We head to the massive Fairmont Banff Spring Hotel and spend some time walking the grounds and exploring the inside, especially the shops.

-Next, we drive to the Cave and Basin National Historic site, known as the “birthplace of the Canadian National Parks system”. Here, in 1883, three railroad workers discovered hot sulfur springs. We walk around the area for a while, before returning to our hotel to check on the US Tennis Open Men’s Final (rain delay), the NFL, and rest up for dinner.

-We have a nice dinner tonight at “Earl’s” then walked home in a cold drizzle – but we had fun anyway.



### Monday September 13<sup>th</sup>



-Up early again, after our third of four nights in Banff, as we are going to go out and look for animals. We meet for breakfast when the Best Western’s breakfast room opens at 7PM, and hit the road at 7:30AM. We drive west past the Vermilion Lakes and spot one deer, many ducks, and one heron. We then drive up a twisting mountain road to the summit of Mount Norquay. Not only do we not see any animals, we can’t get good views from the mountain view points (yes, it’s another lousy weather day ... cool, foggy and cloudy).

-At 9AM we drive to the trail head for a hike ... to Sundance Canyon. We start the hike (which will take us about three hours, as we hike about 4+ miles with an elevation gain of about 400 feet). Many “bear warnings” posted, as the “Buffalo Berries” are in full bloom, and the bears are said to be devouring them in preparation for hibernation. Kal takes the lead (with his canister of “Bear Spray” ... a special pepper spray to spray on a charging bear) and we keep a sharp eye for any “shaking” bushes ... a sure sign that a bear is stripping berries. Soon after we start we see another couple hiking quickly and closing on us. We stop and ask them to pass us by (and become “bear bait”); they reply that they were trying to catch up with us so that they could join us on the hike (rumor has it that no group of four or more hikers has ever experienced a bear attack ... too much noise ... it scares them off). We welcome this couple from Minneapolis, Linda and Byron, who have been travelling through the US and Canadian National Parks for several weeks.



We hike up a canyon, by a falling river, then a large loop through the woods, and back to our starting place. We see evidence of bears (Marcia sees a footprint and we see bear “scat”), but no bears. Unfortunately, we have no views from the heights we climb, due to the weather, and cannot see the mountains that surround us. At 11AM it starts raining, so out comes our rain gear. We rename Sundance Canyon “Rain Dance Canyon”.

-We finish our hike at noon, and decide further hikes in the rain (and cool weather and no views) would not be any fun, so we return to our hotel. We rest or go out shopping (in the rain, and cool and windy weather).

-At 5:15 we meet to walk to dinner at Banff’s best restaurant ... the Saltlick ... celebration of our last night in the Canadian Rockies. It’s a cold, wet 15 minute walk to the restaurant, and a colder, wetter walk back, but we couldn’t have had a better time at dinner.





## Tuesday September 14<sup>th</sup>

-Today is our last day in the Canadian Rockies. Tomorrow we fly home.

-Marcia, Jim, Marie and Kal meet for breakfast at 7:45AM in the breakfast room of the Best Western Siding 29 hotel in Banff, and finalize the day's activities. We next finish packing, check out and depart at 8:30AM. Temperature is in the mid-30s, it's foggy, cloudy, with occasional rain, but we are optimistic!



-We drive for an hour, leaving Banff National Park and entering Kananaskis County Provincial Park. Our first stop is the rapids at Canoe Meadows. We sight a deer on the way in. Then on to Upper Kananaskis Lake, where we plan to hike to Rawson Lake. Weather still quite overcast, we cannot see any of the 9000 foot high mountains lining both side of the route we drive. When we arrive at Upper Kananaskis Lake, we see a posting that a bridge is out on the Rawson Lake trail, and no one is allowed to attempt to ford the large creek ... so that hike is out. We spend an hour hiking around part of the lake on a flat path.



-Back on the road, we are delighted when one a large Moose runs across the road right in front of our van. Moose are rare to spot, and we've been joking the whole trip about hoping to spot one. We stop, and I exit the van and get some photos of the Moose, just off the highway in the trees.



-Our next stop is further south ... Highwoods Pass, the highest road pass in Canada at 7310 feet. By now the weather has improved ... temperatures in the mid-40s, and even occasional breaks in the clouds and some sun! We start on the Ptarmigan Cirque hike, a 4 mile hike with an elevation gain of 750 feet. The first part is steep, but then we hike above the tree line into the alpine zone. Beautiful views of mountains around us, glaciers, waterfalls, and meadows. On the way down we spot a herd of 14 Pronghorn Sheep (at least that's what we think they were). This is one of our favorite hikes of the whole trip ... great views, good weather.



-After the two hour hike, we depart for Calgary (and the rain starts again) at about 3:30PM.

-We stop at the information site in the park and Kal donates our unused bear spray. We've been told we can't put this in our luggage. The ranger was very grateful.

-While we have been in Canada, the trees have started to change, with the Larch (a pine tree) turning yellow and the Aspen (a deciduous tree) also turning yellow. The trees here do not get the red shades we are used to in the Northeast in the fall. We arrive at the Radisson Hotel a little after 5PM. We have driven about 1200 miles in the last two weeks. Dinner in the hotel restaurant then time to pack and get ready for our 7:15AM flight from Calgary to Chicago (we will depart the hotel at 5:15AM).

### Wednesday September 15<sup>th</sup>

-Today we fly home from Canada. We meet at 5:15AM and leave the Radisson Airport Hotel in Calgary, driving to the airport, dropping off our rental car, checking in, clearing USA customs, and boarding our United Airlines flight for an on time departure for Chicago at 7:15AM.

-We arrive in Chicago at 11:45AM Central Time. We say goodbye to the Tinka who need to travel to terminal F for their 1:15PM flight to Dayton, while we wait in terminal C for our 2PM flight to Albany.

-Both couples make it home on time ... a great vacation.

Comments on our Canadian Rockies Vacation:

-It was fun planning the vacation and the details "on our own", rather than going with a tour group or even a travel agent.

-Great Scenery ... maybe the best of all of our trips (which include lovely Switzerland and New Zealand).

-Good wildlife viewing!

-Weather ... not the best, but the cool weather was good for some of the grueling hikes (my mother taught me to always say something nice!).

-Lodgings ... fine but not cheap ... parity with the Canadian dollar hurts.

-Food ... very good but not cheap.

-Rental Dodge Mini-Van ... just right for the four of us.

-Hikes ... Great ... thanks to Kal for all of the research and the final selection of each days hikes.....a lot of work.

-Crowds ... sparse compared to other places we've vacationed. We never had an issue with crowding or waits.

-Locals ... everyone was great, especially the staff at the hotels and restaurants.

-Traveling Companions ... as always, the Marie and Kal are the best!

Best, Jim

