

# Paul and Molly in the Canadian Rockies

## A Travel Log

*We must say the Canadian Rockies are one of the most beautiful places on earth. If they aren't on your "bucket list" to visit, they should be.*

*After returning from each day's adventure, I worked on pictures and blog for the trip. Every night I download the day's pictures and decided which of the many pictures to keep, then labeled them while memories were fresh. Similarly, I documented a trip to Scotland, taken many years ago. Today, reading it brings back so many memories that I decided to document this trip, too. Hope you enjoy the daily blog and taste a bit of the Canadian Rockies just as we did. Even better, take the trip yourselves. (Molly)*

### **8- 27-10 Friday**

A long day! We left Greensboro a little after noon to catch a 4:30 pm flight from Charlotte. The itinerary was Charlotte-Atlanta-Minneapolis-Calgary. Normally we would never book a ticket with so many stopovers, but Paul found these tickets for free using his sky miles points. We couldn't book the 2 leg itinerary that we wanted, but for \$1000 in savings, we decided this would work. Security was high in Charlotte. We had a full body X-ray followed by a pat down. I guess they had to do something with all the TSA agents standing around –most of whom were talking to each other. In Atlanta, the trains weren't working – the first time I ever remember seeing that happen- so we walked a good way through the airport. Of course, this wasn't too difficult for me since I had my "pack mule" Paul. After years of traveling alone, I can't believe how nice it is to have a man that insists on carrying my bags. I guess I'm totally spoiled. Dinner was a Quizno's sub from the Atlanta airport. Maybe we were both hungry, but it tasted surprisingly good. The flights were uneventful – which is a good thing.

We finally arrived at the Radisson Airport in Calgary at midnight local time (2am for my body). We booked the hotel using Paul's points so we saved quite a bit on this vacation using his accumulated awards. The "Sleep Number" bed was calling my name so it was lights out soon after we arrived.

### **8-28-10 Saturday**

We woke up ravenous so we decided to have breakfast in the hotel. The Eggs Benedict was pretty good, but the service was not. We had to constantly flag the waitress for any request. After breakfast, we wanted to go back to the airport to pick up a rental car, but once again, service was lacking. All the employees seemed to be working from a different set of rules, never explained and changed at will. After getting very frustrated and expressing our displeasure, we finally caught the shuttle back to the airport.

We picked up our Avis rental car and headed to Drumheller in the Canadian Badlands and the Royal Tyrrell Museum of Paleontology. The museum has a collection of more than 120,000 fossils, many of which were found nearby. It is a great museum with an impressive number of exhibits. Although it has a lot of dinosaur displays, it also has exhibits on the Burgess Shale and the related Cambrian fauna, a conservatory of plants from the age of the dinosaurs, and a very nice exhibit on the Ice Age. My only complaint was the layout. For some reason, Paul and I had difficulty following the flow.



We kept ending up on dead ends and having to backtrack. Most of the dinosaur museums I've seen have replicas of the fossils. Many of the ones here are the real thing – some still encased in rock. What impressed me were the number of species that have only been discovered in the last 30 years. To think that there has been this kind of advancement in the years since I've been out of college – must be a pretty exciting field. The museum had a good balance of technical information (not too “dumbed down”), but was still interesting to children. I'm not sure that was a good thing as far as we were concerned. The kids were everywhere and after a couple of hours we'd had enough of wading through the strollers. I guess it would have been better if we had planned our trip during the week.



We decided to eat lunch in Drumheller and chose Whifs Flapjack House on the recommendation of a local. WHIFS stands for Waffles, Hamburgers, Ice Cream, Flapjacks and Salads. The restaurant appears to be part of a low end motel, but inside it is clean and cozy. There is a toy train that runs around the ceiling. They were very busy, but the service was good and friendly. Unfortunately, our hamburgers had been cremated and had no taste.



The drive to and from Drumheller was very interesting – through the Canadian Prairie planted with all kinds of grain. The silos outnumbered the houses by at least 20:1. We saw lots of cattle and a few horses. I'm really a farm girl at heart so I totally enjoyed the views. The weather was absolutely gorgeous. The high was about 58 F (my Centigrade to Fahrenheit conversion is close, but not guaranteed to be completely accurate) with clear, blue skies – you could even see the Rockies in the distance on the drive back.

Dinner in Calgary was a treat. We used Tripadvisor to find a restaurant near the hotel and picked Da Guidos on Center Street. What a find! The calamari was perfectly done – probably the best we've ever had. Paul and I both had a veal dish and we were completely pleased. Prices were reasonable by Canadian standards with the exception of the wine which was almost 3 times retail price. The total bill was \$115 before tip which is about what we pay for a really nice Italian dinner in Greensboro.

We spotted a liquor store right across the street from the restaurant and decided to stock up for the week. Everything I'd read said that provisions were less expensive in Calgary than in the more touristy Banff and Jasper. Scotch was very expensive so we took a pass. Wine prices were pretty much what we pay at home so we bought 5 bottles to last the rest of the trip.

### **8-29-10 Sunday**

Paul spotted a Perkins on the way from the airport Friday night so we decided to have breakfast there. We both liked the restaurant when they had one in Greenville. The food was very tasty and a good value. We started out for the National Parks in the rain. I'm sure the drive is beautiful with the Rockies looming in the distance, but all we saw were clouds. We did get lucky and the clouds and rain subsided as the day went on. We stopped in Canmore for gas and a boxed lunch since the availability of both is limited on the Icefields Parkway. We bought snacks



and sandwiches at Sobeys grocery store – the sandwiches were as good as any deli. We entered the National Parks at Banff. Even on Highway 1, the scenery is beautiful. We took a short, unintentional detour to British Columbia. They were doing road construction at the intersection of the Trans Canada Highway and the Icefields Parkway and we missed our turn.

Back on the Icefields Parkway, we had only driven a short distance when we saw a black bear sitting beside the road feasting on berries. A few turnouts later, we saw an eagle. We continued up the Icefields Parkway in some of the most amazing scenery. National Geographic Traveler named the Icefields Parkway as one of the 20 most scenic drives in the world and it lives up to the reputation. The water in the rivers and lakes is either turquoise or emerald. You basically ride in a valley between two magnificent rows of mountains following a river. We saw some snow as we passed the Columbia Icefields

and the temperature dropped to 32F. Both the Sunwapta and Athabasca Rivers flow through waterfalls as they crash down the mountains.



We stopped at the Kerkeslin Goat lick, but weren't lucky enough to see any mountain goats. As we neared Jasper, we took a detour off on a gravel road following the Athabasca River and were rewarded with beautiful views of the turquoise water and awesome mountains.

Jasper is a much smaller town than I imagined. It's only about three blocks wide and five blocks wide and has beautiful

views in all directions. Although it has a lot of accommodations catering to the tourists, it actually looks like a town where you could live. Our hotel for the night was the Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge. What a disappointment! The setting is beautiful with unbelievable flowers everywhere. It sits on the emerald-colored, spring-fed Lac Beauvert.



Unfortunately, the service was Motel 6 quality. We tried to make dinner reservations, but no one would answer the phone at the concierge station. Paul finally gave up and walked back to the main lodge only to find the concierge talking with her coworkers while the phone rang off the hook. After complaining about the lack of service, he was

guaranteed a window table for dinner. When we were seated in the Cavell, not only did we not have a window table, but I had a beautiful view of a construction dumpster. Complaining again, we were moved to a window table, but still had the dumpster view. By this time, we'd had enough and decided to walk out. We were both ticked off at the poor service of this supposedly five star resort. It's pretty obvious that they cater to bus tours and have completely forgotten about customer service. Both Paul and I were angry enough for it to ruin our evening. We headed into Jasper and found a little Greek restaurant – the Palisades. The food was good and pretty inexpensive by Canadian standards. Paul had a Greek platter and I ate lasagna. Total bill without wine was \$43. We



went back to the hotel and debated demanding our money back for tomorrow night and finding another place to stay. However, we decided that would probably just make us angry again and spoil another day so we decided to stay.

### **8-30-10 Monday**

We started the day back at the Palisades for breakfast. Paul has eaten Eggs Benedict every morning and said this was the best yet. They also had free internet access and he waited until morning to check Emails. We refused to pay the \$13.95/day access fee at the Jasper Park Lodge. It really ticks me off when a place charges \$300+/night for a room and then wants to nickel and dime you to death. We made a pact that they would not see another penny of our money beyond what we had already spent for the room.

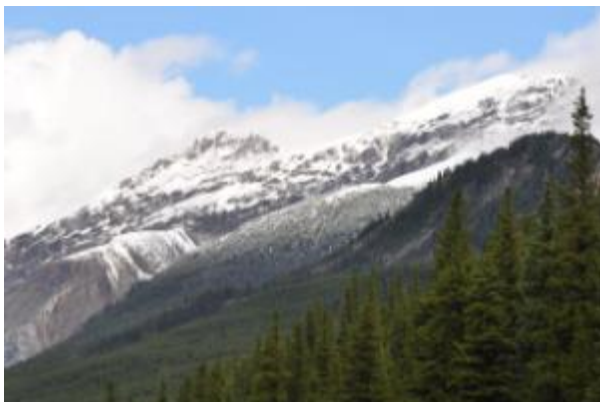
Today's adventure started with the Maligne Valley. We stopped at the Maligne Canyon viewpoint. It may have been because of the low hanging clouds, but it was not very impressive.



Hoping that the weather would clear, we then drove straight through to Maligne Lake, the second largest glacier-fed lake in the world. We were greatly surprised to find the owner of the Palisades sitting in a canoe getting ready for a day of trout fishing. Unfortunately the weather was grey and a little misty so the color of the lake was not as vibrant as expected. Because of this, we decided not to go on the lake cruise. Paul did purchase his fishing license and I snapped quite a few pictures. We picked up

sandwiches for a lunch stop on the way back to the hotel and I had my picture taken with a stuffed bear dressed as a Canadian Mountie. One thing to keep in mind is that there are very few convenience stops available and you have to plan ahead for fuel, food and bathroom

breaks. My investment in a collapsible cooler paid for itself many times over.



With his fishing license burning a hole in his pocket, Paul had to stop at the next legal river and put a line in the water. I sat at a picnic table and a very friendly ground squirrel climbed up my pants leg. Paul adjusted his fishing gear and decided to go back to Medicine Lake to test his luck. The mountain views on this drive are awesome. In fact, you quickly achieve "WOW" overload.

Medicine Lake is an incredibly beautiful spot. It is turquoise with emerald green channels. This lake fills every spring with snow melt and drains through fractures in the bottom to mud flats by



the late fall. The Native Americans did not know about the fractures and thought the mysterious disappearance of the water was “big medicine”. This area is also home to the Woodland Caribou. We didn’t see any. In fact, there aren’t many to see because this is a threatened species.

We ate our sandwiches at the picnic table overlooking the lake and watched an osprey fishing for his lunch. Paul decided to challenge the osprey to a fishing contest and I stayed up at the viewpoint taking some more pictures. Paul returned with a bouquet of wildflowers and stories of the ones that got away. He said there were trout in the lake, but they weren’t interested in anything he was throwing.



We decided to head to Mount Robeson – the highest peak in the Canadian Rockies. We made it to the park, but turned around before we got to the visitor’s center because we were low on gas.

We ended our day of sightseeing at Patricia and Pyramid Lakes. These are beautiful emerald green lakes bordered by mountains. The color of the lakes is due to the glacial silt in the water. Depending on the particle size

of the debris, the color changes from white to turquoise and green influenced by the mineral content of the water.



On the way back to the lodge, we stopped at the bridge over the Athabasca River and enjoyed the beautiful view. We were sitting out talking with the couple next door when elk strolled through the property. There were 2 females and 2 calves making their way down to the lake. We had seen a herd earlier in the day feeding on a fallen sapling. However, these didn’t seem very afraid. I think they must be accustomed to wandering the grounds at will. I followed

a safe distance away and snapped some great pictures.

Dinner was at Earl's – a Canadian chain. We both had fish and chips – halibut and Yukon gold potatoes. The halibut was fantastic, even better than we had in Alaska. We continued our streak of finding great, reasonably priced meals.

### 8-31-10 Tuesday

This morning we headed out of Jasper. We had breakfast at the PetroCanada gas station. According to the owner of the Palisades, this is where the locals eat. The Canadian back bacon was especially good. Sandwiches to go and we were ready to head back down the Icefields Parkway. We made our way back to the Columbia Icefields and stopped to take in the view. With the wind whipping across the glacier, even I needed a jacket. Climbing the stairs up to the visitor's center quickly made you aware of the elevation. I was breathing heavily at the top. What amazes me is the number of cyclist we've seen on the parkway. At this elevation, with all these hills, those people must be in amazing shape. We continued stopping at all the major viewpoints along the Icefields Parkway – Bridal Veil Falls, Bow Lake, Crowfoot Glacier and the Waterfowl Lakes.



Going through Banff, we stopped at Lake Minnewanka. It was somewhat disappointing after all the beautiful water we've seen in the last few days. It's a reservoir and doesn't have the beautiful blue-green water of the glacial lakes. I didn't see any reason to spend the money for a boat trip on the lake. On a clear day, I think Maligne Lake would be much more beautiful. It was posted that many of the trails and campsites around Lake Minnewanka were closed because a mother grizzly has become aggressive. No problem with me wanting to go on those trails – she can have them. We timed our arrival in Canmore perfectly for our 4 pm check in. The condo has a nice layout and a beautiful view. It will be nice to stretch out and have some room after four nights of hotel rooms. We went shopping at Sobeys and bought enough food for three days for \$80.

It really does save money to stay in a condo where you can cook in. So far our expenditures on food have been nothing close to what I budgeted and we have been eating extremely well.

### 9-1-10 Wednesday

Today was a bit of a lazy day. I think both of us were glad to be in the condo. It's nice because I can get up early and not worry about waking up Paul. We found a Canmore fly shop listed online so Paul visited and talked with the guy about local fishing spots. He also recommended a drive through Kananaskis Country so we made a large four hour circle from Canmore. The drive was beautiful, but you can only be awed by the scenery so long before you "wow out". I find that I'm taking fewer pictures every day, not because the scenery is any less amazing, just because I've already seen so many beautiful vistas this week. The highlight of the day was seeing two herds of bighorn sheep. Unfortunately, there were only ewes and babies, no rams with the huge horns. We saw the first herd in the Peter Lougheed Provincial Park and the second near Spray Lakes. We cooked dinner at the condo and had another quiet evening. Early to bed for me (I'm not trying to adjust to the time difference since it will just make it more difficult to get up for work next week) and Paul stayed up later watching TV.



### 9-2-10 Thursday

After Breakfast, it's off the Yoho and Kootenay National Parks. We crossed the Continental Divide as we drove into British Columbia and entered Yoho NP. Yoho is a Cree word that means "WOW" so I guess I have a new word to use for all these impressive views. We stopped at the Spiral Tunnels, an engineering marvel that allows the trains to double back on themselves and make the ascent and descent of the mountain at a safer grade.





Takakkaw Falls were impressive, but not as awe-inspiring as I had anticipated. I really think I'm getting jaded – views that would have stopped me in my tracks a week ago, now only register a "that's really nice". We also saw the Natural Bridge and Emerald Lake in Yoho NP.

Near Emerald Lake is where the Burgess Shale fossils were discovered. It is one of the major finds of soft-bodied fossils – trilobites and other creatures I've never heard of. It is hard to believe this area was once a seabed, but 8000 years ago there was a forest under what is now the Athabasca Glacier so things do change with time. We continued through Yoho beside the Kicking Horse River to Golden. We saw another herd of Bighorn sheep right beside Highway 1. This one had some young rams with slightly bigger horns.

We then turned south following the Columbia River toward Radium Hot Springs and Kootenay National Park. We saw a young mule deer beside the road, but no other wildlife. Radium Hot Springs actually contains very low levels of radioactivity that was once believed to be therapeutic. The water is fed into large swimming pools. Since it was late in the day and we didn't bring our swimsuits, we decided to keep driving.

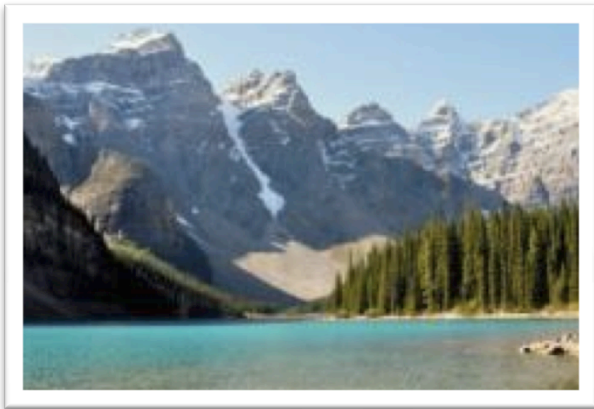


There are not as many viewpoints in Kootenay National Park as there have been in the other parks so we just drove through with no stops. Forest fires ravaged much of the area in 2003 and the mountainsides are still bare. We arrived back at the condo about 5 pm. After freshening up, we went to dinner at Tapas in Canmore. We thought the food was very good and the prices were reasonable. Paul and I both like small plates with lots of flavor so the restaurant was perfect for us. We had calamari and a chorizo/garbanzo bean stew. Then we made a mistake and ordered the empanada platter. It was way too much food. We managed to eat 4, but the other 4 had to come home with us. Our favorite was the mushroom. I didn't try

the duck because Paul said it had a very strong duck flavor which didn't appeal to me. The total bill was \$85 and that included a pitcher of sangria.

### 9-3-10 Friday

We are winding down the vacation so today was a bit of a lazy day. We drove to Moraine Lake. Paul and I both thought it was probably the prettiest place we have ever been. It was a gorgeous, sunny day – the clearest of the week and the sunshine made the water look even more turquoise.



We drove to Lake Louise, but the crowds had already descended by the time we arrived (10:30am). Paul and I both hate crowds so we decided it wasn't worth it to fight the multitudes for a view of the lake so we headed back to the condo.

After lunch we went to the Ammolite Factory. This stone is a fossilized ammonite – a

prehistoric shelled animal similar to a nautilus. The mineral deposits determine the color and give an iridescent appearance similar to an opal. We have a tradition of buying a piece of jewelry as my souvenir from our trips and this was the perfect choice since this stone is only found in Alberta.



We stopped in the main shopping area of Canmore and decided to sample the homemade soft drinks at Grizzly Paw Brew Pub. The check out girl at Sobeys recommended the place and when we told her neither of us was a beer drinker, she told us about the soft drinks. I had a black cherry and Paul had a root beer.

Refills didn't have to be the same drink so I tried a cream soda and Paul had a black cherry after sampling mine. The restaurant was open to the patio with a view of the street so people watching was a great way to spend the rest of the afternoon.

We went back to the condo and I worked on the pictures and blog for the trip. I find that I'm snapping a lot more pictures with my digital camera. Every night I download



the day's pictures and decide what to keep. I'm also trying to get everything labeled while the memories are fresh. I'm going to try something different this time and include the blog in my scrapbook. I got the idea when I found a travel diary that I wrote many years ago on a trip to Scotland. Reading it brought back so many memories that I decided to document this trip. I think including a little commentary with the pictures will make the scrapbook even more interesting.

We ate grilled pork chops at the condo for dinner and watched a John Wayne movie – another exciting evening for us! We were both somewhat disappointed at missing Lake Louise and decided it would be a shame to come all this way and not see one of the major attractions in the area. We decided to get up early in the morning and try to beat the crowds.

### **9-4-10 Saturday**

Our plan worked! We arrived at Lake Louise at 8 am. It did not look like the same place we saw yesterday. There were about 25 cars in the parking lot instead of the 300+ yesterday. Unfortunately, the weather did not cooperate and it was much cloudier than yesterday. We took a lot of pictures, but the water did not appear as turquoise without the sunlight. It was still beautiful with the Victoria Glacier and the huge mountains surrounding the lake.



We came back through Banff. It's smaller than I expected. Somewhat more "touristy" than Jasper – lots of souvenir shops. It looks quite a bit like Switzerland with the old-style buildings surrounded by mountains. There were flowers everywhere. It must be a pleasure to garden here where the days are cool and there's no drought. The eggs benedict the best of the trip. I had a crab and asparagus omelet that was out of this world. We split an order of hashbrowns which proved to be a mistake. They were so good that I think we should have had an order for each of us. I must love Paul because I gave him the last bite.

We checked to be sure the Earl's in Banff had the halibut and chips that we enjoyed so much in Jasper. We've been talking about those all week and want one more round before we head home. We also did a little shopping. Paul wanted a travel mug as a souvenir and an all stainless one has proven difficult to find. We saw exactly what he wanted at Moraine Lake, but it belonged to an employee and she said they were sold out. We finally found an acceptable one in a little store called Pika. We also wandered into a store with a lot of jewelry – mostly

jasper and agates, my kind of jewelry. I restrained myself since I have the ammolite, but I'll probably regret it.



We toured the Banff Park Museum – lots of stuffed animals, some of which are nearly a century old. Not sure it was worth the entrance fee, but the building was beautiful. It was built in 1903 in the “railway pagoda” style and has exquisite woodwork.

We drove by the Fairmont Banff Springs. It is called “the Castle in the Rockies” – a well deserved name. The hotel was styled after a Scottish Baronial Castle and opened in 1888. It was so beautiful that I almost broke my vow not to spend another penny at any Fairmont property. I considered going inside for a drink, but told myself that the service was probably as bad as in the Jasper Park Inn and that I would regret it. My mind won over my heart and we continued back to the condo.



We cleaned up the leftover empanadas for lunch. They were almost as good the second time around. I have been impressed with how well we have eaten for the money this week. I guess the research on Tripadvisor paid off.

Dinner was back to Banff for another order of Halibut and chips at Earl's. This time we were smart and split an order with a shared calamari for an appetizer. Banff was significantly more crowded than earlier today, but we got extremely lucky and found a park in the lot just down the street. I didn't think about Labor Day being a holiday in Canada, but we were told that it is the last three day weekend and the mountains fill up with people from Calgary. We noticed that all the hotels were showing “no vacancy” - something we haven't seen all day. As we headed back to the condo, we noticed traffic lined up at the Banff Park entrance gate. I'm glad we are heading home tomorrow. I don't think fighting the crowds for the rest of the weekend would be a good thing.

9-5-10 Sunday

Headed home! We left the condo this morning at 5 am. It was supposed to be snowing, but it was about 40F and raining instead. It was a miserable drive with some hydroplaning – I'm glad Paul was driving. We made it plenty early and dropped the car. Customs clearance was nothing. There was only one person ahead of us in line. I had read that the wait was often two hours during the peak summer tourist season. We ate a bad breakfast –typical overpriced airport food and caught an 8:25 am flight to Minneapolis. The return flight went through Memphis instead of Atlanta so we ate BBQ at Neely's Interstate Barbeque. We had a three hour layover and had been overwhelmed by the smell of barbeque since we arrived. Maybe it's because it was airport food, but the barbeque was certainly nothing special. The smell was much better than the taste. I think I'm spoiled by Paul's BBQ anyway. We arrived in Charlotte on time at 9:30. By the time we picked up the luggage, it was 10:15 when we started home. We finally made it to Greensboro at midnight. It's been a great trip, but I'm glad to be home. I have to say that the Canadian Rockies are one of the most beautiful places on earth. If they aren't on your "bucket list" to visit, they should be.