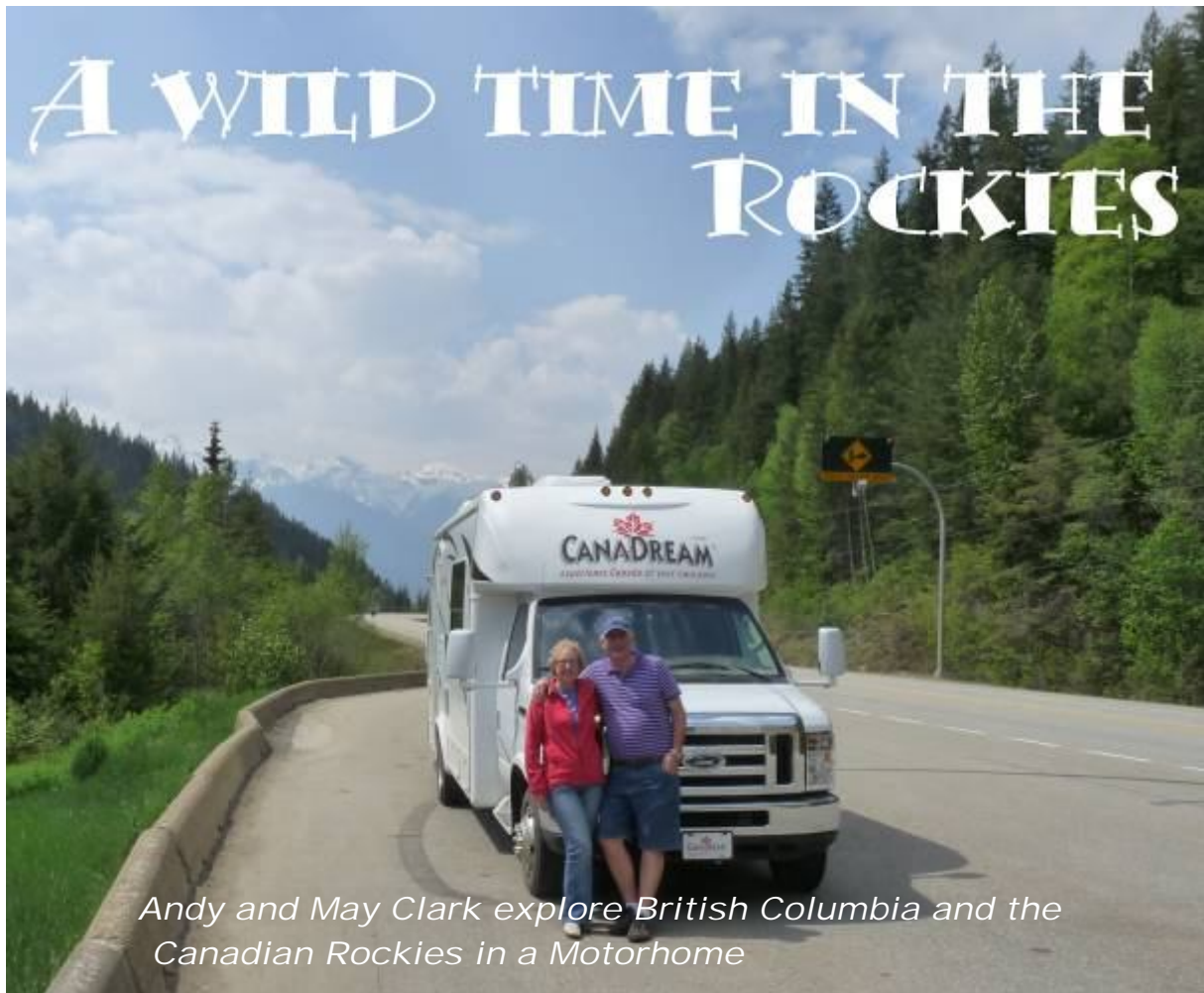


A WILD TIME IN THE ROCKIES



Andy and May Clark explore British Columbia and the Canadian Rockies in a Motorhome

My wife and I had celebrated milestone birthday's and to mark this momentous occasion we wanted to book a long haul holiday that was different. We spent months scouring travel brochures, holiday magazines and the internet, without much success, then one morning out of the blue a travel magazine popped through our letterbox and inside was our dream trip: an Escorted Tour of British Columbia and the Canadian Rockies in a motor home. Neither of us had driven a motor home before but a Canadian Rockies adventure appealed to the both of us. Excitingly we phoned the travel agent, only to be disappointingly told the trip was fully booked, but they were taking names for a reserve list and if they got enough interest, they would consider a second trip. A few weeks later the travel agent called us back, the second trip was defi-

nitely on and we paid a deposit to secure the booking. The travel day finally arrived and as we boarded our flight to Vancouver we were like excited school children. We arrived in Vancouver the day before the rest of group and made our own way from the airport to our hotel. Getting a taxi was hassle free and just over forty minutes later we arrived at our hotel in downtown Vancouver, our accommodation for 3 nights.

That evening we experienced Canadian cuisine for the first time and enjoyed dinner at the upmarket Pacifico Italian restaurant on Smithe Street, not far from our hotel, although the food was delicious it was a bit on the expensive side. The next morning after breakfast we headed downtown to Canada Place, where all the cruise ships dock. As we walked along the promenade we stopped at regular

intervals to admire the spectacular scenery and watch the riverboats and seaplanes arrive and depart from the harbour.

Welcome meeting.....

Later in the afternoon we met up with our Tour Escorts Nelson and Barbara and the other 15 couples in the party for a welcoming meeting, and to go over the itinerary. We don't normally do rallies but we were quickly put at ease with the friendliness of our new found camping companions

A bus trip around Vancouver was organized for the next morning so we could enjoy the many highlights this bustling city has to offer. First stop was Stanley Park and a group photo round a totem pole, then onto the Lion Gate Bridge, before heading up to the impressive Queen Elizabeth Park and finally back into town for a tour round Gas Town and China Town. That

evening the group enjoyed dinner at the top of the revolving Lookout Tower restaurant in the bay area. As the sunset over the bay we had spectacular 360 degree views of the city, mountains and harbour from our elevated position. After breakfast on Saturday morning a bus transferred us to the rental station to pick up our motorhomes. With such a large group descending on the rental station it got a bit chaotic, especially as everyone had to check in, get a presentation on how to operate and drive the vehicle safely, so a bit of patience is required. The staff though were

monster trucks, especially with a powerful 4.5 litre petrol engine under the bonnet, but you soon get the hang of it.

We headed towards the ferry terminal at Tsawwassen for a 95 minute sail over to Vancouver Island, but as we were booked on the 5 o'clock ferry we had time to stop at Safeway's to stock up on groceries. We recommend you apply in store for a Safeway Card before commencing shopping, as most of the offers are only available on its presentation, and the savings can be substantial, another added bonus is they have store's right across



Totem poles in Stanley Park

heart of the city. Also onsite is a marina with berthing facilities, and luxury floating condominiums are available for hire or purchase. That evening we had a barbeque around the campfire and as we enjoyed drinks and tasty food we had our first opportunity to mingle with our fellow travellers.

The next morning we walked into Victoria town centre via a footpath that runs alongside the harbour, this takes about 45 minutes. It was a beautiful sunny day and the city was bustling with British tourist's who arrived on two cruise ships, berthed up in the Harbour. We spent the day exploring the harbour area, the Old Town, the Historic Market Square, and the impressive Parliament Buildings visiting many other local tourist attractions on-route and enjoying the relaxed atmosphere in this beautiful city.



The Scenic Vancouver North Shore

exceptionally friendly and after a few minor hiccups we were soon on our way.

Canadream is one of the Canada's biggest hirers of motor-homes, with depots across the country. The motor-homes come in a range of sizes; ours was 24 ft long and slept 4. At the rear was a full kitchen, large fridge/freezer, bathroom with a wash-basin, shower and toilet, in the centre a dining area and a double bed. There is also plenty of storage space, crockery, and the vehicles are roomy and comfortable.

Behind the wheel.....
Having never driven a motor home before it felt a bit strange at first driving one of these automatic

Canada...The sail over to Vancouver Island was spectacular as we passed between a range of scenic Island's on route to Swartz Bay. By late afternoon we arrived on our first campsite: West Bay Marine Village. The campsite has hard standing fully serviced pitches (most with spectacular views of the city), a laundry, washroom and shower facilities, Wi-Fi, a bar and grill, and water taxi's leave regularly from the campsite into the



Barbeque night at West Bay Marina Village

On our way back to the campsite we stopped at Spinnakers Micro Brewery for a taste of real ale. The pub is set on a hillside overlooking the harbour and serves a fantastic range of beers, all brewed on the premises. Back at the campsite we enquired about whale watching trips, but at £90 each and no guarantee of seeing any, we decided to give it a miss.

Another premier tourist attraction's on the Island is the impressive Butch Gardens. The 55 acre site has an amazing array of Italian, Rose, Japanese, Sunken and Mediterranean gardens and every Saturday evening during the summer months they arrange a magnificent firework display.

On the road again.....
It's now day seven and we are

heading to the ferry port of Nanaimo for our sail over to Horse-shoe Bay. On the mainland the first part of our journey took us along a very scenic coastal road, before we head inland for the start of our 1000 mile journey across to Calgary, and our first taste of the Canadian Rockies. We are now entering bear country..... our next one night stop-over is at Riverside RV Resort and Campground just outside Whistler.

Beware of the bears....

As we checked into the campsite the warden told us to be careful, as a bear had been seen in the campsite earlier that morning. She gave



Blackcomb Mountain, Whistler

us a Bear Smart leaflet which explains the do's and don'ts while stopping over in the campground. My wife May turned towards me with a terrified look on her face and said "!!!!!!!!!!!!!! "bear's in the campground- that's the last thing we need"!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

That evening around the campfire the bear in the camp earlier in the day was the main topic of conversation, nearly everyone had a tale to tell about the wildlife they had spotted on the journey over from the ferry terminal .

Some saw black bears, another a bald eagle and someone even-claimed to have seen a cougar. Nelson our tour escort asked if anyone had seen a moose and offered a bottle of wine for the first person who could produce a photo of one. Well I am sorry to say we never saw a thing,.....but we would be taking up the challenge of a bottle of wine for the first



The Parliament Building, Victoria

moose photo.

After a restless (but bear free) night we were back on the road, Whistler Village was just a few miles away and we decided to spend the morning their shopping. The world renowned ski and snow-boarding resort was a venue for the 2010 Vancouver Olympics and Paralympics Winter Games. This pedestrian friendly village has over 200 shops, ranging from bakeries, coffee shop, supermarkets, boutiques, sport shops, art galleries, petrol station, in fact you can get most items here. The local tourist information office also gave us some ideas about tourist sights on-route to our next campsite, 145 miles away.

It's a beautiful sunny morning as we leave Whistler behind and make our way up through the aptly named Suicide Pass. As we climb up into the mountains the road gets very winding , with no safety

barriers and huge drops on either side you have to concentrate on the road ahead, although it did get a bit scary at times, we began to appreciate the true scale of the amazing Canadian Rockies.

First stop though was Nairn Falls, the mile long trek up to the falls is quite physical and good footwear is required, but at the top you are rewarded with some spectacular views of the waterfall and the surrounding countryside.

We continued along a very quite road to our next stop: Joffre Lake. As we parked up our motorhome we met up with some of our group, who explained it was too dangerous to access the path to the Lake as huge snow drift 's blocked the way, reluctantly we decided to give it a miss. Back on the road we stopped off at Seton Lake for lunch. As we sat outside enjoying a well deserved break everything around us was so peaceful, and the views



Nairn Falls



Nigel's birthday cake

which surprisingly was closed for dinner, but was open for breakfast the next morning.

That evening it was one of the groups birthday, and as he blew out his single candle attached to a small jam sponge doughnut, we all sang happy birthday, even the light rain did not dampen our spirits as

Wells Gray Golf Resort and RV Park, a four hour drive and a stop-over point for 3 nights.. It poured down for most of the journey and the scenic Rockies we had admired the previous days looked drab, so much so we decided to give the city of Kamloops a miss and head straight for the campsite. We were

of the lake looked stunning against the scenery filled landscape.

Caught in a storm.....

By mid afternoon as we headed towards our next campsite: Historic Hat Creek Ranch, dark clouds suddenly filled the sky and before long it was raining heavily, the wind got so strong it started rocking the motor-home, we appeared to be in a type of whirlwind, as the rain got heavier the wind became gale force. After about an hour the wind suddenly died down ,and the rain eased as we arrived at Historic Hat Creek Ranch campsite for our overnight stopover.

This grass field campsite was very basic with no electrical connection, but had was a restaurant on site



Around the campfire at Two O' Clock Creek

we enjoyed drinks and chatter round the campfire.

It rained heavily overnight and most of the next day as we made our way to our next stopover:

first to arrive at the Wells Gray Provincial Park, one of British Columbia's largest and most spectacular parks, a vast untamed wilderness.



The five o'clock bear grazing in the meadows



Helmchen Falls

The campsite although basic had 50 fully serviced pitches, toilet/shower block and a small gift shop, but the main attraction was the immaculate manicured 9 hole golf course, a golfers dream in a beautiful mountain setting.

Bears.. bears.. and more bears....

As we checked in we asked the warden innocently if any bears ever came around the campsite. She pointed down to the ninth tee and began telling us about a huge black bear that feeds in the meadows every evening around five o'clock. Later in the afternoon we headed down to the meadows not sure if the warden was kidding, and there before our very eyes was an amazing sight of the huge Black Bear feeding on dandy-lions. With a small lake separating us he never looked threatened by our presence, and feeling quite safe I began taking some amazing photo's of this friendly bear enjoying dinner in his natural setting, wild and free. As I clicked away he looked as if he was enjoying his new found fame.

It dried up in the evening and round the bonfire I showed the group the photo's of the Black Bear that I had taken earlier, everyone was fascinated by my tale.

The next morning it was still pour-

ing down ,we decided to do some shopping and fill up with fuel. Clearwater is a small village about 20 miles from the campsite, here they have a full service supermarket serving everything from groceries to home ware. (but you won't get much retail therapy here). With improving weather conditions and some sunshine we decided to spend the day exploring Wells Gray Provincial Park.

Amazing waterfalls.....

The park is a vast wilderness of lakes, forest's , mountains, rivers, wildlife and has three amazing waterfalls, Dawson, Helmchen and Spahats, all worth visiting.

First stop was Dawson Falls, it's a 15 minute walk from the car park to the Falls. Given the amount of rain that had fallen the previous few days conditions were very muddy underfoot. At the Dawson

Falls the fast flowing River Murtle is 91 metres wide and as we stood on the viewpoint we could feel the vibration of the water thundering downstream.

Just as we left the car park heading towards our next destination we could see movement ahead, as we slowly inched forward a huge bear was grazing at the side of the road, we stopped for a moment to take some photo's then headed for Helmchen Falls, the fourth highest waterfall in Canada. A short walk from the car park is a viewing platform where you get stunning panoramic views of the water cascading over the 143 metre fall with such force it creates a cloud of mist in canyon. After a tiring day trekking around the park and on our way back to the campsite, we passed countless bears feeding by the side of the road and deer foraging in



Dawson Falls



May and the impressive Mount Robson in the background

the forest, but the novelty of seeing bear's had now worn off. The next morning on our way to our next campsite we headed down to Spahats Falls, it's only a five minute walk to the viewpoint, where you get amazing views of this 70metre two tier waterfall cascading through a narrow gorge in the rock face. Near the viewpoint is a steep path that descends over 300 metres to the bottom of the creek and even better pano-



It's a Elk

ramic views of the Falls. It was a beautiful sunny day as our journey continued through the Rocky Mountain Pass towards Mount Robson and the scenery becomes breathtaking. Most of the day was spent taking photo's of turquoise coloured rivers and snow capped mountains, this was the Canadian Rockies at their very best.

By early afternoon we arrived at Robson Meadows Campground for a overnight stop. This 125 pitch campsite is in a forest setting with large hard standing pitches, modern toilet blocks, but the campsite surprisingly had no electric hook ups. Around the park there are lots of trails for short or long distance walks.

Highest peak in the Rockies.....

After lunch we headed down to the Mount Robson visitors centre where their is a small shop, a tourist information centre and viewing platform with stunning backdrop views off Mount Robson,(12972 ft) the Highest peak in the Rockies. It's now day 13 and with improving weather we head further east for a short journey to Jasper. As we enter the huge Jasper National Park we have to purchase a National Parks of Canada Pass which cost's \$57.90 each (about £40) The park is Canada's largest mountain park and spans an area over 4200 square miles. By early afternoon we arrived at Whistlers Campground to check in, this huge campsite in a forest setting has 781 pitches, electric and waste hook ups and is divided into small sec-

tions, which disguises how vast the site is.

It's an Elk.....

At the entrance grazing in the field was a Moose, (or so we thought) quick as a flash I grabbed the camera and snapped some photo's as proof of our sighting. At our nightly meeting around the campfire I showed the group the photo's of the moose I had taken earlier in the day, and was confident the bottle of wine would be mine, Nelson agreed-he thought it was a Moose, but one of our learned friends who knew better said it was a Elk; at that point I could feel the bottle of wine slipping from my grasp. If its wildlife you want to see Jasper National Park has them in abundance: black and grizzly bears, elk, deer, wolves, wild bighorn sheep, mountain



Columbian ground squirrel

goats, caribou, cougar, coyotes, ground squirrels and of course, the elusive moose. Not far from the campsite is Jasper, a small compact town with a population of about 5,000 residents. In the summer months this number rises dramatically to over 30,000, so the local business's are very much reliant on tourism for their

area take a trip on the Jasper Tramway cable car, the 7 minute (8205 ft) trip takes you up Whistler's Mountain where you get picturesque views of mountain ranges, glacier fed lakes, The Athabasca River and Jasper town.

Stunning scenery.....
A 60 minute drive from Jasper is Maligne Lake, the largest lake in



Wild bighorn sheep



The boathouse on Lake Maligne

survival. In the centre of town there is plenty of free parking for RV's and a wide range of shops, cafes, restaurants, bars and a couple of supermarkets cater for all your grocery needs. In and around Jasper there is plenty to fill in your time, on the main street is the famous Jasper Heritage Railway station. Built in 1926 the railway station is an important stopover point for the famous Rocky Mountaineer which passes through the town twice weekly on route to Calgary and Vancouver. The high observation cars ensure un-interrupted views of the spectacular scenery.. If you want to get a bird's eye view of the Rockies and surrounding

the Canadian Rockies and one of the most scenic lakes in Canada. The lake, 14 miles long was partly frozen over when we visited in early June, and the boats were out of service, so we never managed a cruise of the lake or a trip over to Spirit Island. Near the car park at the top end of the lake is a cafeteria/gift shop with terraced wooden decking, here you can enjoy a coffee or a meal while admiring the magical blue coloured water and spectacular views across the lake towards the old boathouse, and the snow capped mountains. It was late afternoon as we headed back to the campsite, on route

vehicles were parked by the side of the road, the occupants were photographing some wild Big Horn sheep grazing dangerously on the edge of a rock face, we stopped and took some photo's, and later on the outskirts of Jasper a huge wolf ran across the road, just in front of our motorhome. That evening we all met up to discuss the next few days travel arrangements, as we enjoyed drinks, toasted marshmallow and chit chat around the campfire, cute little golden mantled ground squirrels played happily, undisturbed by our presence. The next morning we headed into Jasper to fill up with fuel and



A huge Ice Explorer snow coach

propane as the next filling station was over 75 miles away. Petrol is on average 86 pence a litre, a huge difference from what we pay at home. Back on the road we headed east on the Icefields Parkway and were rewarded with some of the most spectacular scenery in the Rockies, before long we arrive at Maligne Canyon, a popular area for trekking and picnics. On the upper reaches of the Canyon there are lots of walks and self-guided hiking trails all clearly signposted so you can't get lost, but it's on the 4 bridges where you get spectacular views of the waterfalls, the deep narrow gorges and the river running through the Canyon below. Sadly no camera can capture the natural beauty of this amazing scenic spot.

Athabasca glacier.....

Our next stop was meant to be the highlight of the trip, a visit to the biggest tourist attraction in the Canadian Rockies: **Athabasca Glacier**, the largest icecap in the northern hemisphere south of the Arctic Circle. We joined up with the rest of the group at the visitors centre and were bussed up to the transfer station before boarding a specially designed giant Ice Explorer snow coach for the 3 mile full commentary journey onto the Glacier. The public access area on the glacier is restricted to less than an acre and you are limited to where you can walk, which was disappointing, but we took some

fantastic group photo's on the glacier with the impressive Mount Columbia (12293 ft) towering in the background. After another busy day we made our way our next stopover: Cavalcade Group Camp at Two O'clock Creek. The campsite is in the wilderness miles from the nearest town, no hook ups and very basic facilities, but the location was amazing, with spectacular mountain views, it was a refreshing to be camping out of the forest, in such an open outlook. After parking our motor homes in a huge circle we collected wood for the campfire. That evening we had another birthday in camp, the birthday girl was presented with a custard doughnut with the customary single candle attached, and a bouquet of greenery collected from the forest. The drinks flowed freely all night as we all chatted merrily around the campfire and a beautiful sunset brought another

day to a perfect end. It's now day 18 and another fine sunny morning greets us as we travelled a further 120 miles along Highway 93 towards Banff.

On the way we will be making a couple of stops, first the perfect blue coloured Peyton Lake, some say the most beautiful lake in the world, but even by Canada's standards that's a big statement to make. The best panoramic views of the lake, mountains and valley are from Bow Summit the highest point on the Icefields Parkway- but first you have a 10 minute walk up a steep pathway onto the viewing platform. We stopped for lunch on the eastern shores of Lake Louise. It's now early June and the lake is still partly frozen over, it's hard to imagine what it would be like here, in the height of the winter. The view across the lake and the impressive Victoria Glacier backdrop are simply awesome, and it's said this is one of the most photographed lakes in the Rockies. Lots of money has been spent on the roads and infrastructure in and around the village and lake, developing the area into a top class all year round ski and mountain resort. Just behind the lake is the impressive 550 bedroom Fairmont Château Lake Louise Hotel built in 1890, this huge historic building was fully restored a few years back, offers five star accommodation and breathtaking views of the lake and



The group on Athabasca Glacier



A partly frozen over Lake Louise

the spectacular natural mountain scenery. By late afternoon tired and a weary we arrive at our final stop over: Tunnel Mountain Campground on the outskirts of Banff. This is a huge well run campsite with electric and waste hook ups, modern toilet blocks, picnic benches and stunning views of Mount Rundle. Outside the campsite a herd of Elk's graze by the roadside.

Upmarket resort.....

About 2 miles downhill is the premier upmarket resort of Banff. The town overlooked by the Cascade Mountain ranges is a favourite spot for outdoor pursuits such as hiking, biking, skiing and snow-

boarding, in fact nearly every type of outdoor activity.

We loved the town's quiet relaxed atmosphere and it was sunny and warm during our stay, so we saw the area at its very best. Busy Banff Avenue is where you will find most of the upmarket boutiques, bars, restaurants, souvenir and coffee shops and this long avenue continues right down to the Bow River. On the south side a riverside path takes you along to the Bow Falls. The falls were made famous by the legendary Hollywood actress Marilyn Munro who cascaded over them in a raft during the making of the classic 1954 movie "River of no Return", and just beside the falls is another clas-

sic "The Fairmont Banff Springs Hotel", this luxurious hotel styled on a Scottish Baronial Castle opened its doors in 1888 and was the base for the cast during the filming. There is lot's to see and do in and around Banff: a 15 minute drive is the largest lake in The Banff National Park: Minnewanka Lake. In 1941 a new dam was built to supply the town with Hydro Electric, this raised the water levels by over 30 metres and submerged the resort village of Minnewanka Landing in the process, the underwater ruins are now a favourite spot with scuba divers.

If you want stunning views of Tunnel Mountain, Bow River , Banff and surrounding area take a ride on the Sulphur Mountain Gondola, at the summit is an observation deck, restaurant and gift shop.

Last night.....

It's the last night and we head downtown for our last meal together, over dinner everyone sat chatting about their holiday highlights, and before we headed back to the campsite we enjoy one last stroll around Banff. The next morning we make our way into Calgary to return the motor home,



Downtown Banff



Drinks night at Tunnel Mountain Campground

after we passed the town of Canmore there is a dramatic change in the landscape, as you leave the Rockies behind the stunning scenery becomes a distant memory.

At the rental station our vehicles are checked over and we wait in reception for our transfers back to the airport. Sadly we have to say our goodbyes to some fantastic people. The holiday was everything we had hoped and more: we loved the freedom of the motor home, the vast scale of the Rockies, the breathtaking scenery, the majestic snow capped mountains, the crystal clear lakes, the free roaming wildlife, the huge national parks, the wilderness, glaciers, canyons,

forests and the sunny weather (most of the time) I could go on for ever!!!! And not forgetting our tour Escorts Nelson and Barbara-who were

friendly, informative and helpful The memories of our Rockies adventure will live with us for the rest of our lives!!!!!!!!!!!!



Our Route



Heading down to Banff for the last night dinner