

Skoki backpack 11th to 14th of July

A rather mixed squad of the CAMC, adventurer Neil, denglish speaking greenhorn Stefan, joined by the entertaining female backcountry singers Amanda, Claudette, Pat and Sandy, and lead by trapper Steve, left Red Deer on Thursday afternoon for a promising trip to Skoki valley. Our first destination was Lake Louise hostel. There we received last advice from Steve and did our final preparation for marching out early the next day.

Friday at 8am we met Professor Jack at the Skoki Lodge parking area. He was responsible for the educational segments of the backpack trip.

Although the first kilometres dragged on a gravel road, the other conditions could not be better for the 15km and 740m elevation hike. The sun was shining but the temperature was not too hot. Before leaving the gravel road behind us we took our first short break for drinking water, having a little snack and refilling the water bottles.

The next section to half way hut lead through forest. Steve had several encounters with bears in the past. The frightened group hiked closer together. Singing released the strain for the backcountry singers. And there we found the first signs of a bears: poop! For the greenhorn it looked like horse droppings. But Professor Jack gave all-clear right away. The dried droppings had been there for several days. „Bear poop looks very similar to horse droppings in the spring,“ he explained. „The diet is simply the same. “

Getting to the half way hut for the next break was necessary. The usage of the outhouse was required and it was lunch time already. There we met two other European greenhorns, a middle-aged Dutch couple for the first time. They were also heading to the Skoki Valley campground. After a little small talk with them, we kept going again. Boulder Pass, leading to Ptarmigan Lake, lay ahead of us. On the trail we found several lovely alpine flowers which Sandy and Jack could define. From the lake we climbed the slope up towards Packers Pass, the next section of the hike.

But first, the next break was due. This time Jack filled it with geology information about the Rockies. We were hiking between the front and main range of the Rocky Mountains. The mountains of the Front Range have thrust themselves sideways leaving overhanging precipices on one side and gentle slopes on the other like Brachiopad Mountain. They are located between the Continental Divide and the foothills in the eastern part of the Rockies, which is the earliest development. In the main range the mountain are built of horizontal layers of sediment, eroded by the glaciers from all sides at the same time. The slopes are steep all around as we could see at Temple Mountain.

Another local phenomenon was the different coloured lakes, turquoise glacier Myosotis Lake compared with the regular dark Ptarmigan Lake. Glacier lake water is filled mostly with fine grind of the rock(rock flour) surrounding them, caused by water erosion. The rock flour reflects the sunshine and gives the lakes the beautiful turquoise colour.

After the lecture we took off to the highlight of the hike, Packers Pass. Through snow fields and steep boulder fields below the Wall of Jericho, we got down to Myosotis Lake. Arriving

down at the lake we could hear voices from above. The Dutch couple could not find their way down. Steve climbed all the way up again and helped them to get down.



Preventing further trouble, Steve let them join us for the rest of the day. They did not expect what was ahead of us. Following the shore line of the lake we reached a 90 degree profound abyss. First we could not see any way down. But Steve knew a steep scramble with a tunnel downwards. With Jack's and his support everybody arrived safe at the bottom. The Dutch were relieved, but did not want to show at home any pictures we had taken. Their children would not let them go again.

The remainder of the day was easy hiking, passing the historical side of Skoki Lodge discussing its royal outhouse problems of the last year. Finally we arrived at the campground. Everybody was happy to get rid of the heavy backpacks. It was enough! Quick we put up the tents and made supper. The food varied from several dehydrated meals to steaks, noodles and salad. Stefan was happy to get rid of some extra weight (fresh food) of his overweight backpack. After supper everybody secured their food in the bear hang. Steve organised firewood and got a campfire going. While the guys discussed hockey with two Americans, the girls moved to the warmth of the campfire. They started their deviant, eh diverse (I apologize for my denglish) infotainment and entertainment program. (for more detailed information you better call Claudette @ 403) The

laughter at the campfire let everybody of the campground join in. Later the cold of the night got so intense that more and more people left for the tents and warmth of the sleeping bags. At the end of the day Steve was all of a sudden in great demand. The Americans and the Dutch requested detailed information how to get back to civilisation. We, on the other hand, were looking forward to great day hike to Merlin Lake.

The next morning it was very chilly: -5° Celsius. Nobody was eager to leave the warmth of the sleeping bag. So it got a little bit of a lazy morning with a late start. Finally at 10:30 we left camp with a lot of lighter backpacks. The lower line trail we tried for ascent to Merlin Lake. The water levels were still quite high from the June rains in the valley. First we just left the trail only a few feet to the right or left. Proceeding, the hike turned more and more into bush whacking beside the creek to find a decent crossing spot. Instead we found a trail to the highline trail. We switched plans, using the highline trail for both, ascent and descent. Above the tree line we passed through Alpine ranges well-stocked with beautiful flowers. One of them was the Alpine lily. Grizzly bears love the roots of the flowers. We wandered basically on the drive through lane of Grizzly's McDonalds. But no bears were seen around.

Further up the highline trail leads mostly over scree and boulder fields. The higher the elevation got the steeper the trail dropped away on one side. But we made it safe to the lake where we stopped for lunch break enjoying the amazing surrounding scenery with Merlin Castle, Richardson and the Wall of Jericho.

Still enough time left we decided to move forward to the other end of the lake. Guided by Amanda, surprisingly we did not get lost and nobody took a dip in the lake. At the other end we took a break again. Jack entertained us with bolder climbing supported by Steve. It was time to turn around and get back to camp.

On the way back Neil lost ground and slid down the steep scree, but not far.

He caught a few bruises on his shin and scrapes on his right hand and wrist. Sandy and Jack provided First Aid. Getting to Skoki Lodge the incident was quickly forgotten. We got witness of Monty Python`s Holy Grail remake. Hiking poles got lances and the cell phone was a camera of course. Poles were flying and a dead royal body pierced by a lance was found by the lodge. It was odd and everybody was laughing again.

Back at the campground we made supper. Everybody was tired from the events of the last two days and went to the sleeping bags early this evening. An early break-up was planned for the next day at 8am.

On Sunday morning all of us were up at 6am. The tent had to be taken apart and folded together into the backpacks. A quick breakfast had to do it this morning to ensure leaving at 8am. Everybody was ready to hike out even a couple of minutes earlier.

Professor Jack had to leave even hour earlier to join the next inquisitive group with his enormous knowledge in Canmore on time.

We hiked the same way back we came two days before. At the top of Packers Pass we stopped for lunch. Between there and the half way hut the group spread apart more than usual, only to get together at the hut before the grizzly troubled forest had to

be traversed again. This time the backcountry band not only kept the bears away, Steve, Neil and Stefan followed with a decent gap.

Finally we all arrived safe and sound at 2.30pm at parking lot. We changed into fresh and clean clothes and decided to join in Canmore again for supper. At the restaurant, The Wood, we found great meals and an even better completion of the wonderful and adventurous backpack weekend in Skoki. Many thanks to Steve, Sandy and Jack and everybody for this great weekend.





