

## Rocky Mountaineer Train Trip – Sept. 14-24, 2019



The **Rocky Mountaineer** is a Canadian rail-tour company in Western Canada that operates trains on rail routes through British Columbia and Alberta.

It has been awarded the "World's Leading Travel Experience by Train" at the World Travel Awards seven times for its service, and was recognized by National Geographic Magazine as one of the "World's Best Journeys" in 2007. The Society of American Travel Writers, the world's largest organization of professional travel journalists and photographers, rated the Rocky Mountaineer as the world's top train ride in 2009. There are two types of rail cars that passengers can experience. The Gold Leaf and the Silver Leaf. The Silver Leaf was the best fit for us. Rocky Mountaineer's Silver Leaf service is a custom-designed, single level glass domed coach with oversized windows and reclining seats.



The Rocky Mountaineer entering a tunnel



Inside the Silver Leaf coach

Guests onboard are attended to by two to three onboard hosts, and offered a hot entrée option for breakfast and lunch served at their seat, plated to their preference. Complimentary beverages are served throughout the journey including wine, beer, spirits, and non-alcoholic drinks. Gourmet snacks are also offered throughout the journey.



Doug/Sally

Donna/Carey

We were accompanied on our trip by our friends Doug & Sally Borrett. This picture was taken at the Phoenix airport where we had lunch before flying to Vancouver. We stayed overnight at the Hampton Inn & Suites in downtown Vancouver.

The next morning (Sunday – Sept 15) we boarded the MV Coastal Celebration ferry boat heading to Victoria to visit Butchart Gardens, a group of floral display gardens in Brentwood Bay, British Columbia on Vancouver Island. The gardens receive over a million visitors each year and have been designated a National Historic Site of Canada.



Crossing the Strait of Georgia from Vancouver to Victoria by ferry



Arrival at Butchart Gardens

It all began with one woman's vision and passion. With a former limestone quarry for her backyard, Jennie Butchart envisioned landscaping a sunken garden in its place, transforming the property for her family—and visitors—for generations to come. Today there are 5 major garden areas and several special attractions such as the Rose Carousel, Waterwheel Square and of course, the Visitor's Center & Gift Shop. This place is a garden lover's paradise.



We spent several hours touring the gardens, checking out the Rose Carousel, then had dinner at Nautical Nellies in Victoria, after our mid-afternoon ice cream break. Later we boarded the MV Spirit of Vancouver Island ferry for our trip back to our hotel in Vancouver.



The next morning (Monday – Sept 16) we were loaded on a bus and taken to the train station to board the Rocky Mountaineer. The train station was more crowded than we expected. A total of 29 cars with 50+ people per car made up this train to Kamloops.



Crowd at the train station

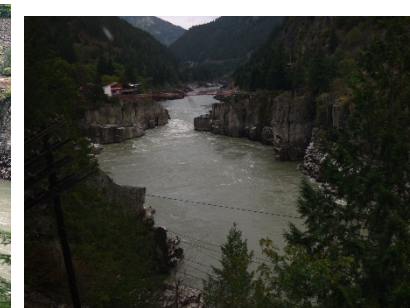
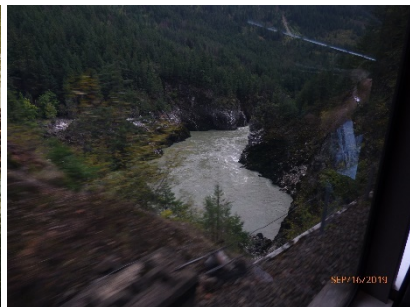
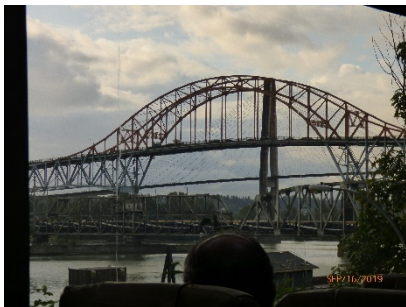


Boarding the Rocky Mountaineer



Our seats in car #14

We spent the rest of the day sightseeing from the train; enjoying our breakfast & lunch on board, capped off with a choice of drinks. (All day Happy Hour). Our only responsibility was to sit back and enjoy the view. Each new turn of the track brought another heartwarming story or historical tidbit from our hosts – Kiki and Naomi, or from our onboard chef. There was an open-air vestibule at the rear of the car that we could visit anytime. There were also two restrooms (one for handicap), and we could roam up and down the coach to take pictures or mingle with the crew or other passengers. The trip lasted approximately 9 hours after which we were bused to the Thompson Hotel in Kamloops for the night. The photos below will give the reader a feel for some of the spectacular scenery we observed during the trip.



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Lunch was great. See below.



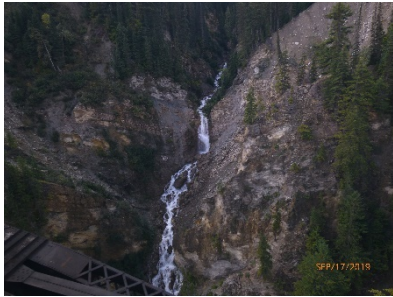
After arriving in Kamloops Donna & I took a walk through the town to Riverside Park.



After our walk we met Doug & Sally at the Fric & Frac restaurant only a few blocks from our hotel.

The Riverside Park Garden was donated by the local Rotary club & district

The next day (Tuesday – Sept 17) we were back on the train headed for Banff.



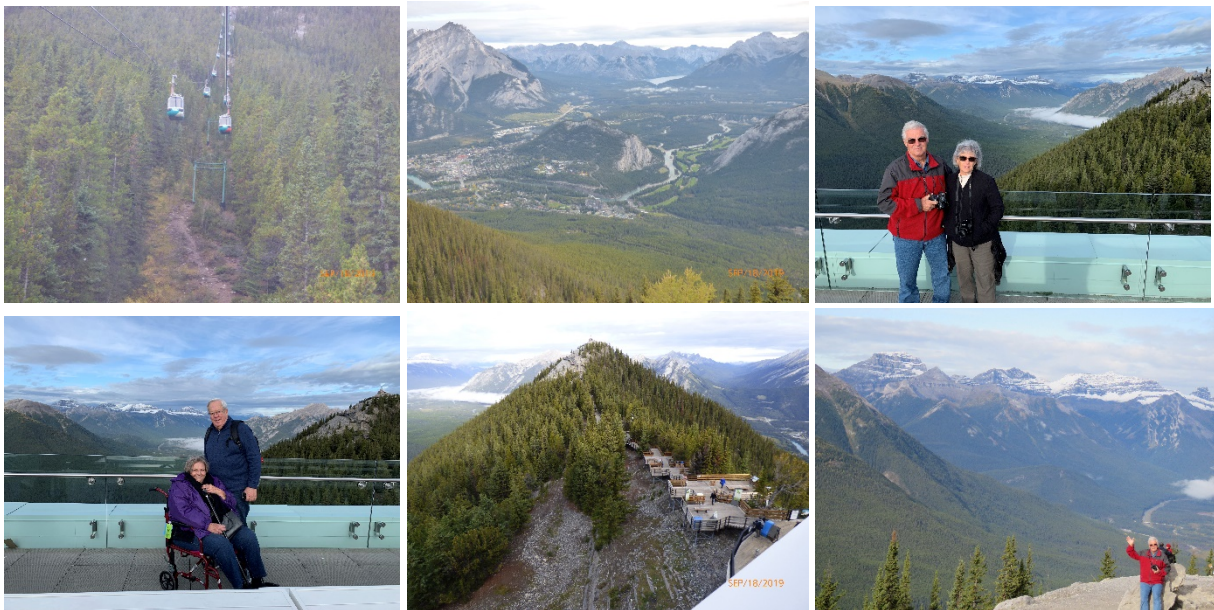
We stayed at the Caribou Lodge for the night after a late arrival in the town of Banff. Following breakfast at the Keg Restaurant in the hotel, the next morning we were taken by motor-coach on an extended tour of Banff National Park. Banff, Canada's first national park was established in 1885. Located in the Rocky Mountains, approximately 100 miles west of Calgary, Banff encompasses roughly 2,500 square miles of mountainous terrain, with many glaciers and ice fields, dense coniferous forest, and alpine landscapes. The Icefields Parkway extends from Lake Louise, connecting to Jasper National Park in the north. Provincial forests and Yoho National Park are neighbors to the west. The main commercial center of the park is the town of Banff, which is located in the Bow River valley.



Our tour included stops at the Cascade Gardens, Sulfur Mountain Gondola, Bow Falls, Surprise Point, the Hoodoos, and Lake Minnewanka.



Cascade Gardens is a well-landscaped garden with a varied mix of annuals and perennials surrounding the park administrative building.



The Banff Gondola has a 360-degree observation deck where you can view surround yourself with the greatest alpine views in the Canadian Rockies. There are 4 levels to choose from, including an interpretive center with interactive exhibits and a multi-sensory movie theater on level 2.

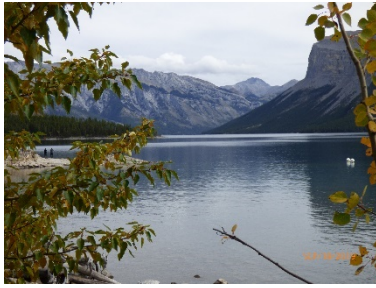


Bow Falls

Banff Springs hotel from Surprise Point

The Hoodoos – Sandstone Spires

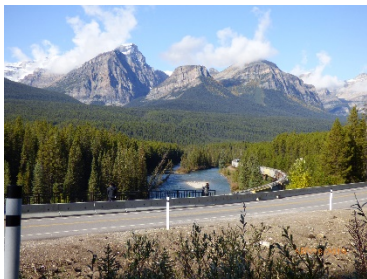
According to local legend, the Hoodoos are petrified gods or giants, protecting the land by throwing rocks at intruders.



Lake Minnewanka

Lake Minnewanka is a large glacial lake three miles from the town of Banff. The lake is 13 miles long and 466 feet deep. It is a beautiful spot, popular for picnicking, mountain biking, hiking, canoeing, diving, and snowshoeing. After the tour we celebrated Happy Hour in our room with Doug & Sally then went to Carlito's Pizzeria for dinner.

Thursday – Sept 19 – It was a short motor-coach drive to Lake Louise and the Fairmont Chateau, our home for one night. En route we stopped at the Spiral Tunnels, Emerald Lake and Natural Bridge an impressive natural rock formation that spans the flow of the Kicking Horse River where the slower-moving waters from the Field valley flats begin their descent through a canyon to be joined by the Amiskwi River.



Scenic viewpoint along the road



Spiral tunnels for train passage

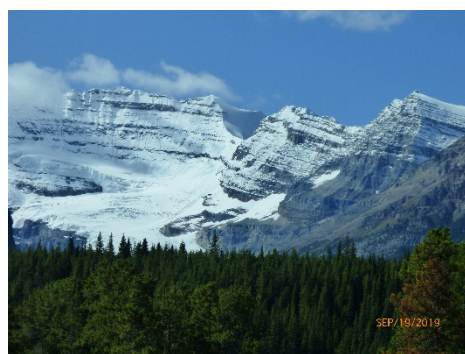
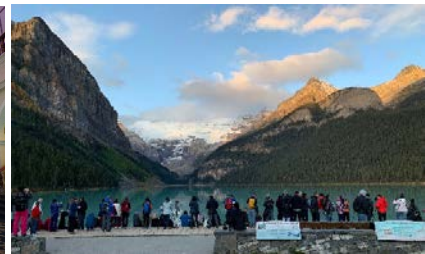
The Spiral Tunnels on the CP Rail Line were opened in 1909. The route called for two tunnels driven in 3/4 circles into the valley walls. The construction & extra track effectively doubled the length of the climb & reduced the gradient to 2.2%. The labor force to build these tunnels through sheer rock amounted to about a thousand, and the cost was about 1.5 million Canadian dollars. This is one of the steepest, most scenic railway lines in North America, crossing the Kicking Horse river, & running under Mount Ogden and Cathedral Mountain, towards the town of Field, BC.



Overhead land bridges for animal traffic control

← **Special Note:** In order to protect the animals from getting hit by vehicles on the highway, Alberta has built underground tunnels and overhead passes for the animals to cross. There are fences along the entire route of the highway, on both sides, so the animals learn to use the man-made structures to cross. Bears, moose, caribou, elk, and many smaller animals benefit from this arrangement. This is the first time we've seen this in any country we've visited.

Early afternoon we were dropped off at the Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise. This is without question, the most lavish hotel we have ever stayed in & Lake Louise is the most photographed location in all of Canada, for good reason. The view is incredible, almost breathtaking.





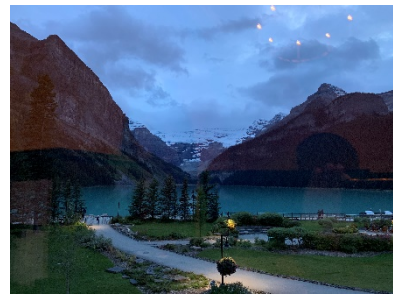
We had dinner at the upscale Fairview Restaurant in the Chateau following an afternoon hike on the lakeside trail.



Hike along the trail at Lake Louise



Dinner at the Fairview



Our view from the dining hall

On Friday morning we were on our way to Jasper National Park. This was a day filled with adventure. After stopping at Bow Lake, Waterfowl Lake and Nigel Peak, we had lunch at the Columbia Ice Fields before boarding a “glacier buggy” for a ride to and walk on the Athabasca Glacier.



Bow Lake



Entrance to the Glacier Ride/Walk



Doug at the Glacier Buggy



Walking on the glacier



Athabasca Glacier

The Athabasca Glacier is one of the six principal 'toes' of the Columbia Icefield. The glacier currently loses depth at a rate of about 16 ft per year & has receded more than a mile losing over half of its volume in the past 125 years. It is the most visited glacier in North America.

Our final sightseeing stop for the day was at the Skywalk. We stepped out on a cliff-edge walkway with giant glaciers perched above us and the spectacular Sunwapta Valley spread out below. This experience featured waterfalls and lots of people on a ½ mile walkway that lead to a platform where glass is all that separates us from a 918-foot drop.



Approaching the Skywalk

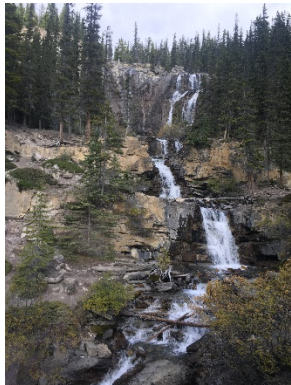


Close up of Doug on the Skywalk



Carey/Donna & others on Skywalk

As we made our way back to the Lopstick hotel for the night we spotted an amazing waterfalls flowing down from the mountain, and a herd of elk led by a large male. We then proceeded to Athabasca Falls for some photo ops. Following Happy Hour in Doug & Sally's room we walked to the Whiskey Inn for dinner.



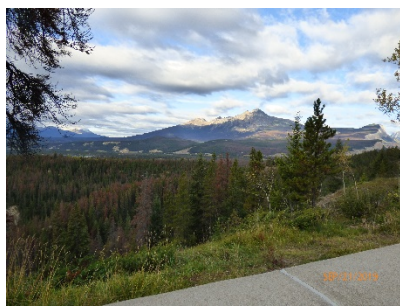
Athabasca Falls – 3 different views from the walking path

Athabasca Falls is not known so much for the height of the falls (75 feet), as it is known for its force due to the large quantity of water falling into the gorge.

Saturday brought us to the Jasper National Park highlights tour.



First stop was Hanging Valley, then Medicine Lake, Maligne Lake & Maligne Canyon. We spotted a bear on the drive between Hanging Valley and Medicine Lake.



Hanging Valley



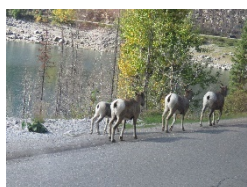
Black Bear



Medicine Lake

Medicine Lake is a geologic anomaly in the sense that it is not actually a lake but rather an area in which the Maligne River (flowing from Maligne Lake into the Athabasca River) backs up and suddenly disappears underground as a losing stream. During the summer months during intensified meltwater runoff the lake (which during the winter months is a meandering frozen river) fills to levels which fluctuate over time and with the runoff events. Much like a bathtub that is filled too fast for it to drain, it becomes laden with water (lake) until it can slowly drain as the tap flow (runoff) is reduced (river). The underground system is extensive and during the 1970s researchers used a biodegradable dye to determine the underground river's extent. The dye showed up in many of the lakes and rivers in the area to the point where it became clear that the underground system was one of the most extensive in the world.

We came across a herd of Big Horn Sheep on the way to Maligne Lake and Canyon.



← Big Horn Sheep  
Maligne Lake →



Malign Canyon is a slot canyon over 160 feet deep which is constantly being eroded by the churning and swirling of the water. We enjoyed a lunch with Doug & Sally here.



← Lunch with Sally & Doug at Malign Canyon.  
Overnight at the Lopstick hotel in Jasper →



What is a “lopstick” ?? It is a tree trimmed of all but its topmost branches to serve as a landmark or marker. First Nations communities (the predominant indigenous peoples in Canada south of the Arctic Circle) used lobsticks since pre-history to mark trails and hunting grounds.

Later that day we walked into the town of Jasper stopping at the train station and the “Two Brothers” totem pole.

On Saturday, July 16<sup>th</sup>, 2011 as part of Parks Day and Parks Canada Centennial Celebrations, Jasper National Park along with many Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners pulled together to raise the Two Brothers Totem Pole in Jasper. →



Train Station where Rocky Mountaineer begins



One of the many pleasures of traveling with friends is that you can decide not to eat dinner but instead have Happy Hour (with drinks & grocery store bought snacks) and a movie in the hotel room. We did this twice on this trip where we went to Doug & Sally's room and watched movies – the "Roadhouse" starring Patrick Swayze – Sally's sexy favorite actor, and "National Treasure – Book of Secrets" with Nicholas Cage.

The final two days of our trip were on board the Rocky Mountaineer headed back to Vancouver with an overnight stop at Kamloops. The hospitality, hosts, food, wine and spirits on board were first class and we had the opportunity to see more of the spectacular beauty of the Canadian Rockies along the route.

In summary, this trip was incredible. The train ride was one of the best on the planet. Touring this amazing scenery and landscapes in western Canada by train and motor-coach, and staying at some of the most enchanting hotels with great friends and extended Happy Hours was a blessing bestowed on all of us.. The Canadian Rockies are a network of provincial and national parks that collectively make up a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Banff and Jasper national parks are connected by the Icefields Parkway, one of the most scenic drives in the world, and the Rocky Mountaineer lived up to its reputation of being "The World's Leading Travel Experience by Train." Add this to your bucket list.



**Safe Travels,**

**Carey & Donna Beamesderfer - Sept. 2019**

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