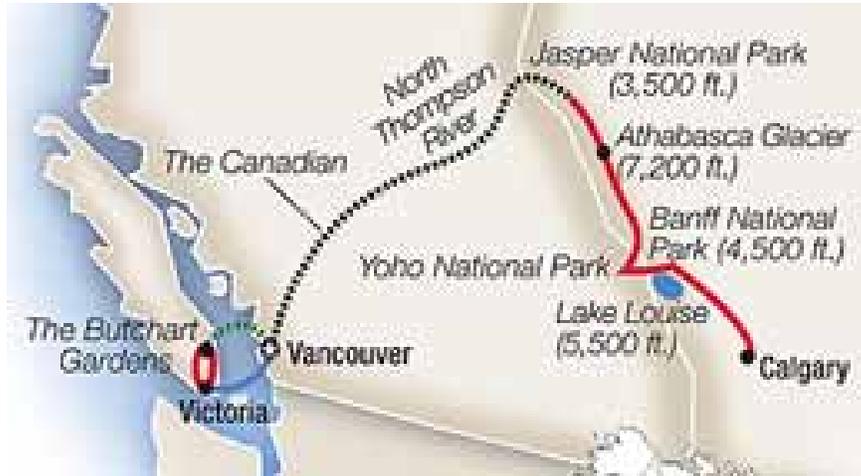


WESTERN CANADA 2015

We got a brochure from a company called America by Rail that had an interesting trip through Western Canada. The problem was it was a 13 day land trip, which Kathy and I thought was too long. We had also looked at the Rocky Mountaineer, but the price for a 2 day trip was \$2700 per person! We recently went on a Tauck tour on the East Coast and enjoyed it, so I went to their website, and found a similar tour that was shorter and less strenuous. The only problem was that it was more expensive. However, since we are traveling less, it will fit our yearly travel budget. Other considerations are we are in 4 of the hotels for 2 nights, and this tour spends more time in Jasper National Park, plus goes to Lake Louise. I had skied at Banff and Lake Louise many years ago, and I was looking forward to seeing it in the summer.

We also found out that since we had traveled with Tauck before, we get extra hotel night in Vancouver. This worked well on our last trip, as we had a day to relax and recover from the airport experience.



VANCOUVER

We were picked up by our airport car and taken to Burbank Airport, which is smaller and closer to us than LAX. We took a United Airlines flight from Burbank to Vancouver, changing planes in San Francisco. Unfortunately, our flight to Vancouver was cancelled and was replaced with one that left 2 hours later from San Francisco. To make lemonade out of the situation, I went to the San Francisco Airport website and downloaded the location of all the restaurants, especially seafood ones. That solved the problem of not getting fed on the planes.

I found a place called Yankee Pier right near our gate, and we had clam chowder and split a New England lobster roll. This was far better than anything we would get on the plane.

On December 3, 2014 San Francisco Airport launched a new program, titled "Wag Brigade," to bring trained dogs to the terminals to make passenger travel more enjoyable. The San Francisco Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) brought dogs certified through their Animal Assisted Therapy (AAT) Program to roam the terminals. Carefully selected for their temperament and airport suitability, the dogs wear vests that read "Pet Me!" identifying dogs of all sizes and breeds by name.



Flying for four hours was a pleasure, since most of our previous flights have been 10 hours or more, especially the flight from Los Angeles to Moscow, which was 14 hours!

Tauck arranged a transfer from Vancouver Int'l Airport to The Fairmont Waterfront. The hotel was located within easy walking distance of Vancouver's lively Gastown District. Since we got there a day earlier, it was nice to kick back and relax and do a little sightseeing on our own.

That night we went into the dining room to get a quick bite as they had a pub menu. We ordered steak tartare served in a marrow bone, and I had steamed mussels that were huge!

The next day I wandered down to Gastown because I wanted to get a picture of the famous steam clock which I missed on our last trip to Vancouver.



The clock is powered by steam and chimes every quarter hour. On the way back to the hotel, saw the brewpub named Steamworks that we stopped at in 2007 before our Alaskan cruise. They offered as Smoky Scotch ale that reminded me of the smoked beer I drank in Bamberg Germany.

That night we met our Tauck Tour Director Denise, and travel companions at the welcome reception followed by dinner.

We started our Western Canada tour with guided sightseeing including Chinatown and Stanley Park, where we saw a totem pole display





From there we were taken to Prospect Point, where there were some lovely gardens. They even had the dahlia we have in front of our home! The yellow flower is called Bishop of York.



From there we were taken to Granville Island, which has grown since I was there last in 1998! There was a fantastic Farmers Market with all manner of fruits and vegetables. There were all kinds of restaurants and fast food places to eat. We found a great place for lunch, and then hopped aboard the ferry to Victoria, British Columbia's capital.



The BC ferry system has 49 ferries of various sizes, from the largest one on the Vancouver to Victoria route, to smaller ones calling at some of the islands. The one we were on was the largest, as can be seen in the picture on the left.

Our route was very scenic, and took us on through a passage between Mayne Island and Galiano Island. I took some pictures of the Mayne Island lighthouse for my brother in law who is a member of a lighthouse society.



The day was absolutely beautiful, because there were some clouds to make the photographs have some dimension.



VICTORIA

After docking on Vancouver Island, we were taken to the Hotel Grand Pacific where we spent two nights in a balconied, Grand Harbor View room overlooking Victoria's beautiful waterfront.

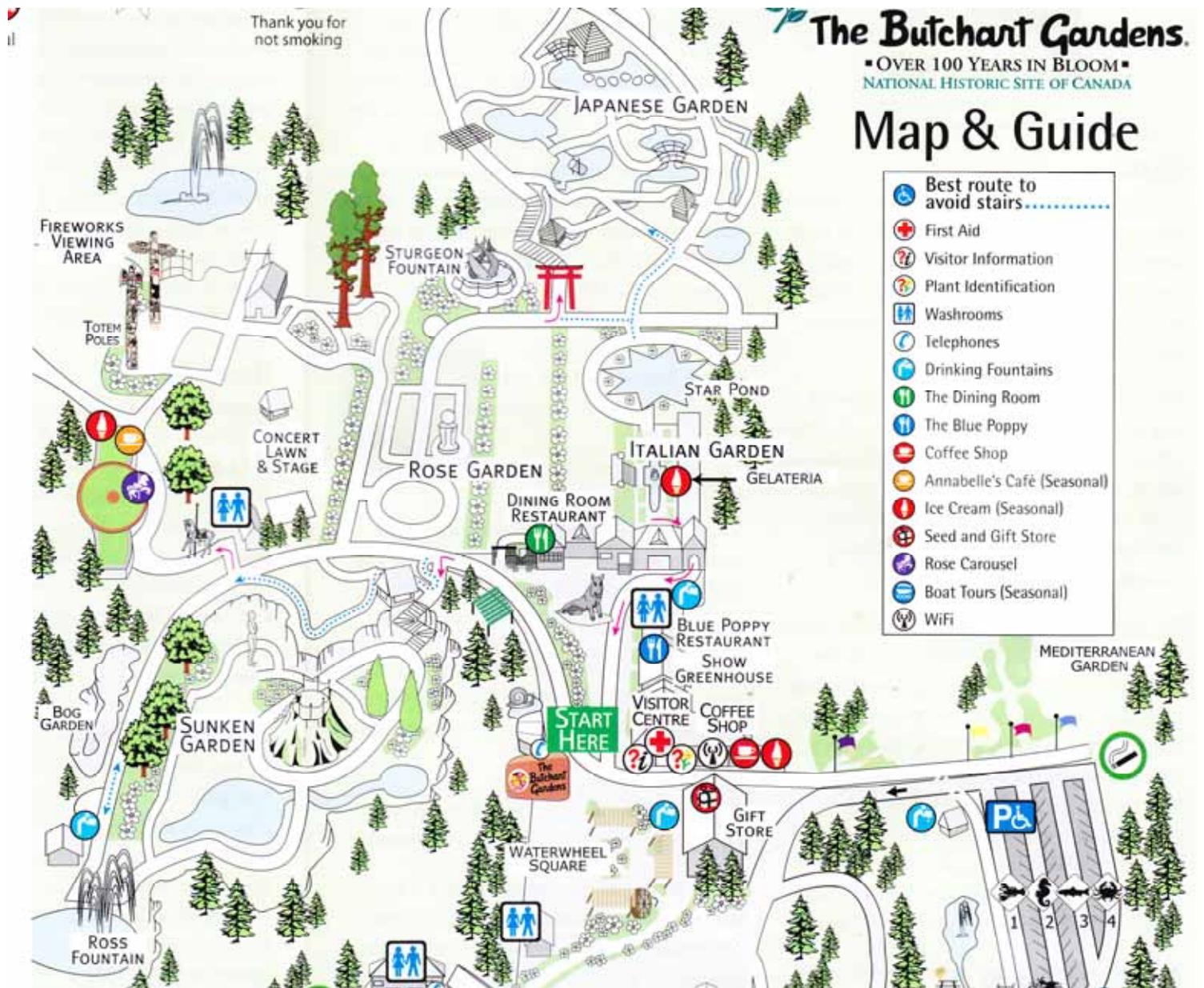
Throughout our stay in Victoria, we discovered more than a bit of British influence in its double-decker buses, horse-drawn carriages and formal gardens, all surrounded by the rustic beauty of the Pacific coast.

Our last dinner in Victoria was great. We started out with pork belly buns for Kathy and steamed local mussels and clams for me. We both had duck breast done two ways. We were so full we took our crème brulles back to our room. They made for a great breakfast.

After the sun had set, we discovered that the Hudson Bay Company store and the Parliament building were illuminated.



During our visit the next morning, we explored Butchart Gardens, in what has grown to encompass 55 magnificent acres of flowers and show gardens, including the Japanese, Italian and Rose gardens.



The first place we visited was the Sunken Garden, which was beautiful.



The big surprise was the fountains at the end of the Sunken Garden as well as the variety of flowers.



Kathy's mother-in-law used to grow beautiful dahlias, and some of the ones here reminded her of the ones she had seen.



We then walked through the Italian Garden to the Japanese Garden.



In the early afternoon we went to the IMAX Theater to see a program about gold prospecting in Canada to pass the time until we went to afternoon tea at the Fairmont Empress.

AFTERNOON TEA AT THE EMPRESS HOTEL

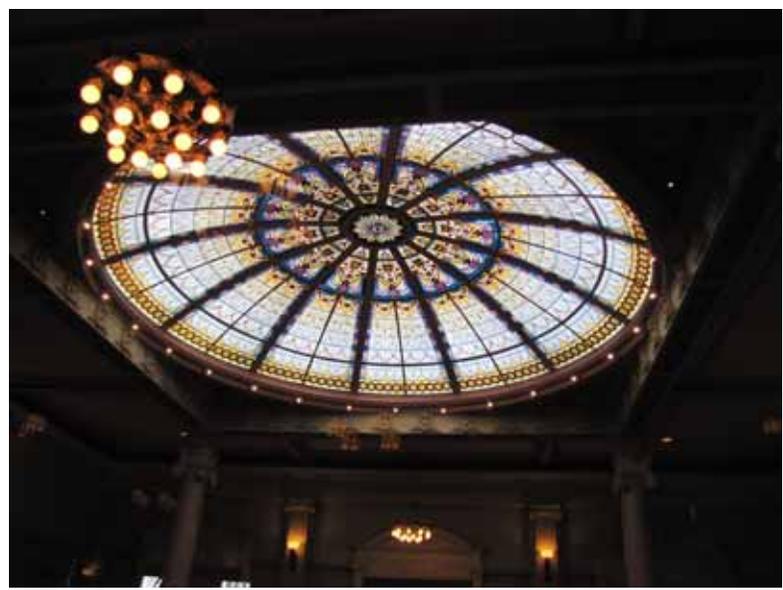
The Chef and Team serve hand-made signature Empress Scones, delectable pastries and tea sweets prepared in house daily, reflecting locally sourced ingredients to ensure an authentically memorable experience. From the original blend of The Empress Tea created specifically for The Fairmont Empress, served in dainty William Edwards china and sterling silver service to the enchanting ambiance of the live piano, Afternoon Tea is an absolute 'must do' for all who visit Victoria. The last time I was here it was sold out, so this will give me a chance to experience it.

TEA FUN FACTS

- Afternoon Tea was started by the Duchess of Bedford in the 19th century when she had a "sinking" feeling in the afternoon. The Duchess had the chef prepare a little meal with tea, and soon it became known as Afternoon Tea
- During the centennial restoration in 2008, the hotel's original Tea Lobby floor was replaced and the wood of the original floor was transformed into delicate Afternoon Tea tables; - one may say you're eating off the floor

- Nearly 100,000 guests are served tea annually with an estimated 500,000 cups of tea
- Although very popular and reservations are recommended, rarely are guests ever turned away from Afternoon Tea. Often the artful hand-cut glass dome of the Palm Court adjacent to the Tea Lobby is transformed into an additional Afternoon Tea space
- Our Tea servers are some of our most tenured colleagues in the hotel with over 42 years of service
- The most recent royal visitors to enjoy Afternoon Tea were the Emperor and Empress of Japan.
- The Empress Tea China was originally presented to King George V in 1914 upon the opening of the Booth factory in Stoke-on-Trent, England. The china was first used by The Empress in 1939 for the Royal visit of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth. The pattern is now produced by William Edwards exclusively for The Fairmont Empress
- The portraits in the tea lobby are King George V and his wife Queen Mary, who originally intended to wed his brother, Prince Edward, who died of pneumonia. The portraits have been in place since the hotel opened in 1908
- The difference between high tea and afternoon tea? High tea is generally taken at 4:00 p.m., and was more of a "working man's" dinner and they included hot savory items. High tea is mistakenly thought to include champagne or sparkling wine, but this should be referred to as Royal Tea
- Notable guests have included Queen Elizabeth II, Rudyard Kipling, Shirley Temple, Spencer Tracy, Princess Margaret, Rita Hayworth, the King and Queen of Siam, Bob Hope, John Travolta, Barbra Streisand, Joan Lunden, Sarah McLachlan, Mel Gibson and Nelly Furtado
- The Empress Tea Blend comes from six estates, including Kenya, Tanzania, South India, Assam, Sri Lanka, and China. We were each given a small box of tea bags as a souvenir of our visit.



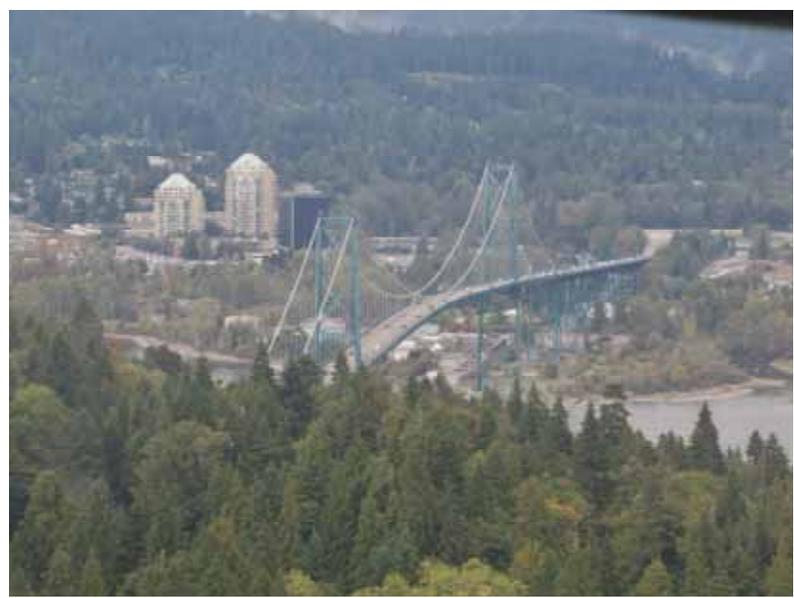


All in all, it was a fantastic experience to finally have High Tea at the Empress. After leaving the Empress, we took a taxi down to the seaplane landing for our flight back to Vancouver. Our bus had taken the ferry back with our luggage and met us at the seaplane landing.



The view from the plane was great, as we passed over the islands we had sailed by the other day.





Just prior to landing in Coal Harbor, we flew over the Lion's Gate Bridge which connected North Vancouver with the rest of the city.

Our next stop was Vancouver's historic Gastown district where we had dinner at the Steamworks before embarking on our train trip.

Our room on the train was quite comfortable, although compact. The pictures below are of the daytime and night time configurations. There were little shelves to put things on, plus overhead individual lights.

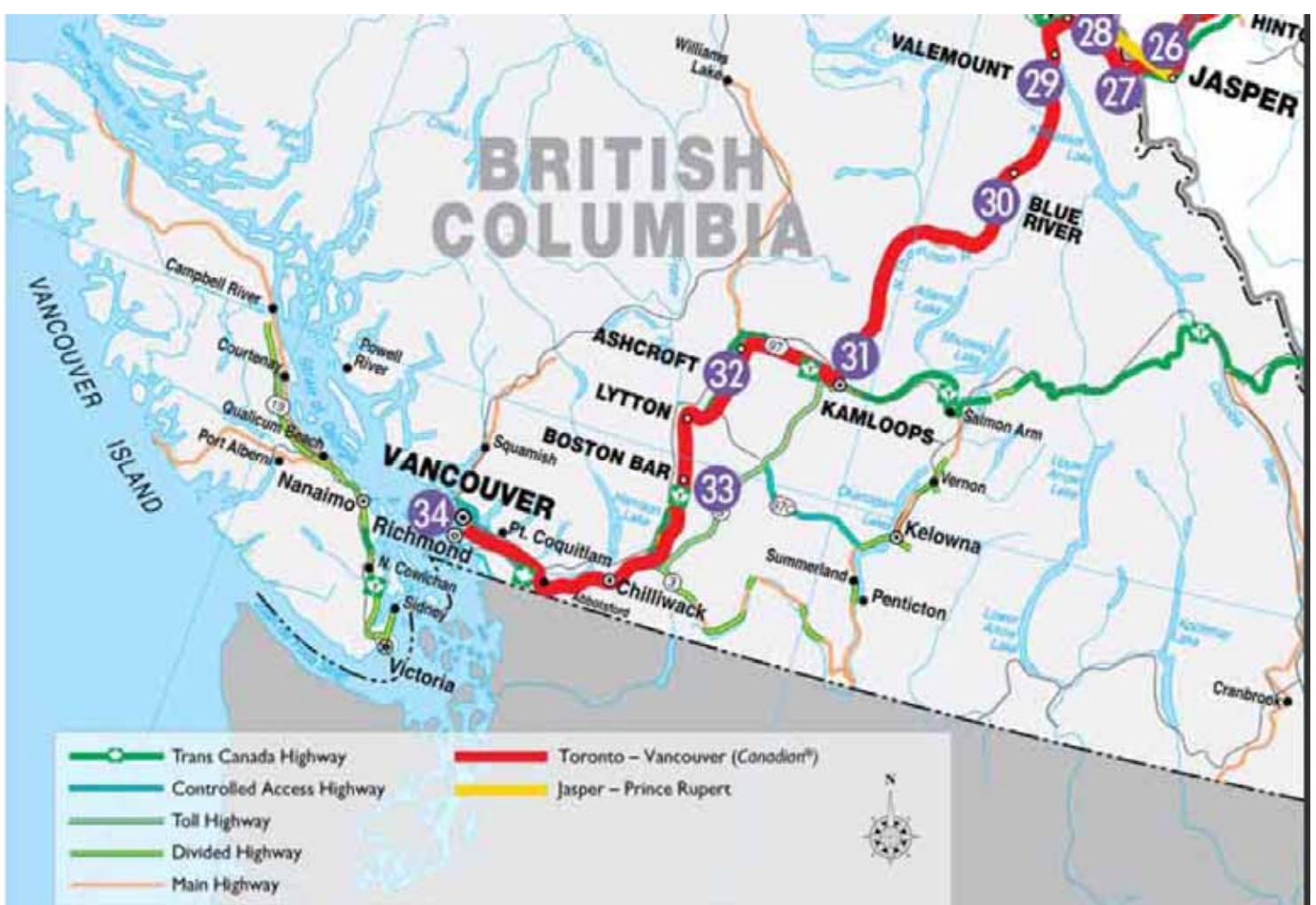


We boarded the sleek, newly restored rail cars of VIA Rail's *The Canadian*, and celebrated the start of our overnight journey to the Canadian Rockies with a champagne toast. We slept on board the train that night, the same as we did on Kathy's birthday trip from Seattle.

TRAIN THROUGH THE CANADIAN ROCKIES

Into the Canadian Rockies by rail to Jasper, the vistas were nothing short of spectacular from Tauck's reserved seats aboard VIA Rail's beautiful new panorama car aboard *The Canadian*, as our western Canada tour continued across British Columbia, where towering peaks and glaciers highlighted the route.





After leaving Kamloops, we followed the Thompson River. Outside of Blue River, the train slowed so we could get pictures of Pyramid Falls.



We crossed the Continental Divide into the province of Alberta and arrived in Jasper National Park for a two-night stay at The Fairmont Jasper Park Lodge. At the Jasper station, I found an old steam engine on display.



We were taken to our cabin and were blown away the setting. We were right on the shore of Lake Beauvert. The scenery was fantastic, and I rented a kayak so I could take pictures of the surrounding mountains away from the trees.



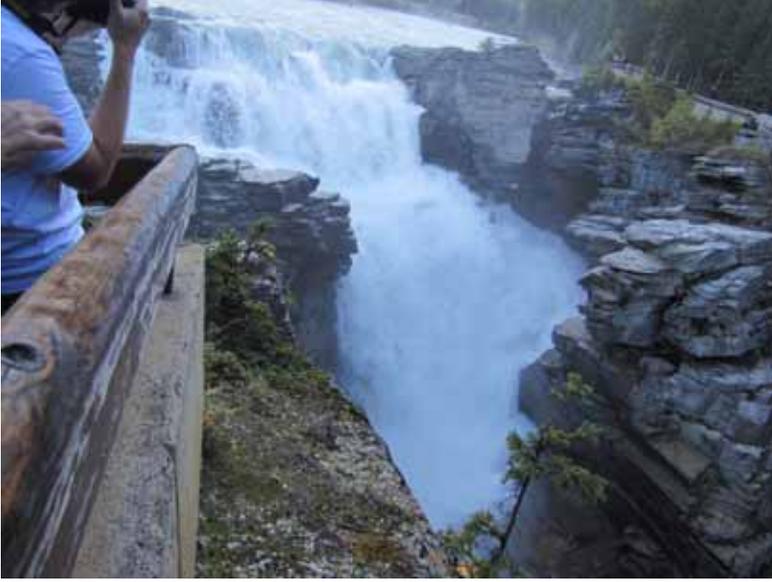


As we were leaving our hotel in Jasper, we came across a bull elk on one side of the highway and a cow on the other side. I wonder if they got together.



LAKE LOUISE

The next morning we drove the Ice fields Parkway, headed towards Lake Louise passing through the Rockies with fantastic snow covered mountains on both sides. We stopped at Athabasca Falls for a break in our travels.



We traveled along looking at all the snow covered peaks. We could fill pages here, but will just post a few pictures to give the flavor.



We stopped at the Athabasca glacier and took a specially designed ice coach on to the glacier. On the way to the glacier we had to navigate a road that had a 34 percent grade. That means for every 34 feet the road drops one foot! It was like being on a slow motion roller coaster.



We were let out on the flat area of the glacier because it was safe with no crevasses or sink holes. In the distance we could see people on the ice with an instructor in a red jacket. He was teaching them the use of ice axes and pitons.



It was a very interesting experience, and one we did not have to go to Alaska for. We continued on to Bow Lake, the headwaters of the Bow River, seeing more spectacular mountains on the way.





We then continued on to our chateau-style hotel on the edge of Lake Louise overlooking Victoria Glacier, for a night in a Lake View room. I was there many years ago in the winter, so I did not get to see the lake.



That night we had dinner in a German restaurant sharing a fondue appetizer, and then we each had an Alberta beef rib eye steak, which was delicious.

We got up early the next morning to see the sunrise on the lake and the surrounding mountains. It was great watching the shadows creep across the glacier. All of a sudden, Kathy says, "Look there is an avalanche!" I grabbed my camera and shot a video of the ice fall. The picture below is a frame capture of the video.



About 20 seconds after we saw the icefall, we were hit with the roar! The sound had to travel 5 miles.

BANFF

We traveled via the Bow River Valley to Moraine Lake. There was a 100 foot high rock pile that afforded a great view of the lake. I saw some people climbing it, so I figured it was safe. The most difficult part was negotiating some driftwood logs to get to the bottom of the rock pile. When I got up to the top, the view was great, but much to my surprise I met some of the people on the tour. It seems I took off before they were told about the trail on the other side of the rock pile. However, I did use it on the way down.



We continued through Kicking Horse Pass into Yoho National Park. We saw the Natural Bridge; a rock formation over the Kicking Horse River.



Off in the distance was Mount Stephen, so I had to get a picture.



From there we went to see Bow Falls, but after seeing Iguassu Falls, it was not that spectacular. We stopped there before setting off for The Fairmont Banff Springs for a two-night stay inside Banff National Park. Often referred to as "the Castle in the Mountains," the resort has been a Rocky Mountain icon since the 1880s.



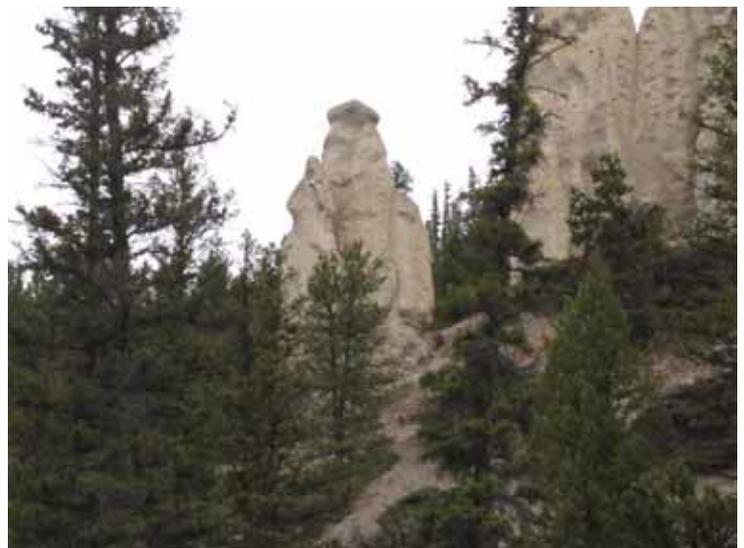
As we came into the hotel grounds, we saw Mount Rundle, with an unusual peak. When we got to our room on the top floor, we saw it looked out on the Bow River and golf course.



Our last day in the Canadian Rockies started off overcast, but fortunately no rain. We embarked on a float trip along the Bow River in two rafts, as only half of our tour opted for the trip. The launching site for the rafts was just below Bow Falls.



As we floated down the river, we had a great view of the Banff Springs Hotel. When we turned a corner in the river, we came upon some hoodoos. A hoodoo (also called a tent rock, fairy chimney, and earth pyramid) is a tall, thin spire of rock



For some reason, the second raft was far behind us, so we waited for them in a backwater. We had no problem with that, as it gave us more time on the river. Just before we got to the takeout point, we saw a young bull elk. It was a fitting end to our float.



Fortunately the weather cleared in the afternoon, and Kathy suggested we have lunch in the golf club house. We took the shuttle there and had a nice lunch. While we were there it rained off and on. We felt sorry for the golfers out on the course.

. We wrapped up our western Canada tour in the evening with a festive farewell reception followed by dinner. At the reception we had a retired Mountie in full formal dress give us the history of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. He described the development of the uniform which was quite humorous at times. We also found out there was no Sgt. Preston or Dudley Do Right!

CALGARY

We traveled from Banff National Park to Calgary, Alberta this morning, a distance of approximately 80 miles. Our western Canada tour and mountain adventure ended at Calgary International Airport. We had to change planes in Vancouver after a short flight from Calgary.

Because of the price difference, we opted to fly home to LAX rather than Burbank. It costs slightly more for our airport transportation, but it saves us a lot in air fare.

However, much to our dismay, Air Canada Rouge is the cheap version of Air Canada. Our flight was delayed about 2 hours because of weather in the San Francisco area. A request was made in the check in area that we check some of our carryon luggage to speed up the boarding process. We will NEVER do that again! After we got our checked luggage, we had to wait another half hour until they found the carryon luggage for a number of passengers.

We should have been home by 8:30, but ended up getting home after 10!

In conclusion, despite Kathy spraining her bum knee the last night, this was one of our more remarkable and memorable trips in terms of the sheer beauty of nature in comfort! We highly recommend this trip with Tauck Tours, and our fabulous guide, Denise Girouard-Kruz.

© Steve Goch