

Heart of the Rockies



2002 Amory Adventure Award First Place Winner

by Susan Mackie

Photos: The 1st Whitecourt Venturer Company

“Our real objective was to delve into the heart of an untouched land, to turn the un-thumbed pages of an unread book, and to learn daily those secrets which dear Mother Nature is so willing to tell to those who seek.”

– *Mary Schaffer, explorer*

The Canadian Rockies. Majestic. Spectacular. Everlasting and eternally beautiful. No wonder the 1st White-

court Venturers chose this area for the challenge that would win them the first place 2002 Amory Award.

No other location in the Canadian Rockies is as closely linked with a single individual as Maligne Lake is with Mary Schaffer. Plucky and courageous, with the heart of an explorer, Mary was the first non-native woman to explore much of Banff and Jasper national parkland. Her most famous venture was a major expedition of 1907, when she completed a four-month backpacking trip along the Athabasca River through the Maligne River Valley.

Almost one hundred years later, a group of Venturers from British Columbia would feel Mary's spirit with them as they completed an eight-day hike through the Skyline trail.

Day One – Whitecourt, Alberta to Beauty Creek Hostel (Jasper National Park)

The Venturers met at the Scout Hall at 9 a.m. After carefully checking and packing up their gear, they piled into a minivan and headed to the Jasper townsite. At the trail office, the attendants wished them good luck, and gave them a brief synopsis of cur-

rent trail conditions. There were no trail closures, but some grizzly bear activity was a warning they would heed. They spent the night at Beauty Creek Hostel, enjoying pizza that would be their last restaurant meal and real bed for 8 days.

Day Two – Beauty Creek Hostel to Four Point Campground (13.8 km)

Loaded with gear, supplies and high spirits, they started down the trail at a steady pace. They found their unconditioned legs were burning by the time they got to the top of the pass; as yet unaccustomed to the rigors of hiking. Stopping to bask in the spectacular views seemed a great reward for their hard work.

After their first lunch on the trail, they filled their bottles in the cool clean waters of the Brazeau River. They forded the river quite easily, stepping in shallow pools and (carefully) on rocks. Amazed at their own speed, the Venturers found themselves in Jasper National Park before they knew it.

Sheer slopes quickly changed to a switchback trail as they headed into the Brazeau valley. By the time they

reached the second bridge across the river, they wisely stopped to check their feet for any signs of blisters. None were found, but they quickly started moving again, prodded by highly motivational horseflies and mosquitoes.

Arriving early in the day at the Four Point campground, the Venturers were able to enjoy a spaghetti supper followed by a bracing dip in the river. Since they had arrived so early they took advantage of the late afternoon sunlight to write in their journals.

Day Three – Four Point Campground to Jonas Creek Campground (19.1 km)

The day broke at 7 a.m. The trail snaked along the Brazeau for a half kilometre before turning steeply northwest, uphill, where a few switchbacks led them up through 150 feet of dense conifers. With legs still aching from the day before, they broke the treeline and emerged into the sun, through untouched meadows fragrant with ferns and grasses. At only ten a.m. the sun made its presence known, beating down mercilessly on the Venturers' heads. Wrapping shirts around their heads as makeshift turbans, they managed to prevent the rays from scorching their necks.

After lunch at a nearby stream, the group lingered to savour the sight of the massive cliffs of Four Point Valley and the spectacular views below. The heat of the afternoon sun had turned the few small pools of water that had collected into parched, dry dirt. The view of the glaciers took their breath away.

Day Four – Jonas Creek Campground to Avalanche Campground (20.1 km)

The Venturers were up with the dawn again. Today they would hike



On top of the world

the longest section of trail, that would take them along parts of the Pobokton Creek, and the Maligne Pass trail.

Originating on the Banff-Jasper highway, the Pobokton Creek trail is an alternate access to the park's southern limits, and one of the first official trails blazed in this park. It was created in 1922 by Warden J. Christie and a work crew. To their dismay, the Venturers found the trail beaten down by horses, since it is now used primarily by equestrians. On the positive side, the horses had flattened and widened the trail, making it the best walking path on their trip so far. For the first time, they were able to thoroughly enjoy the walk without having to constantly look at their feet.

Though the forests were beautiful, they could not compare to the spectacular glacial views of the previous day. But the next campground made up for this, as they ate their lunches of trail mix, dried fruit and beef jerky next to a cascading waterfall – where branches of water fell in crystal, foaming streams split by the jagged rock.

Filling up their water bottles at Poligne Creek, the 1st Whitecourts headed down the same route Mary Schaffer used when she became the first non-native woman to discover Maligne Lake. They actually followed much of the route Mary's group had used when they explored this area close to a century ago. As one of the Venturers put it, they were "tracing in the footsteps of a legend".

When they finally reached Avalanche Campground, they were weary and sore but satisfied in their completion of this piece of Rocky Mountain history. Sleep came fast and easy that night.

Day Five – Avalanche Campground to Mary Schaffer Campground (17.8 km)

This fifth day of hiking would lead the Venturers over a mountain pass. From their vantage point at the top of Maligne, they understood what Mary Schaffer meant when she said she "never saw a fairer valley". Like a watercolour painting the meadow swept down from the purple mountain peaks, to blend its delicate pale

The adventure begins.



greens, yellows and pinks into the darkest green of the forest below.

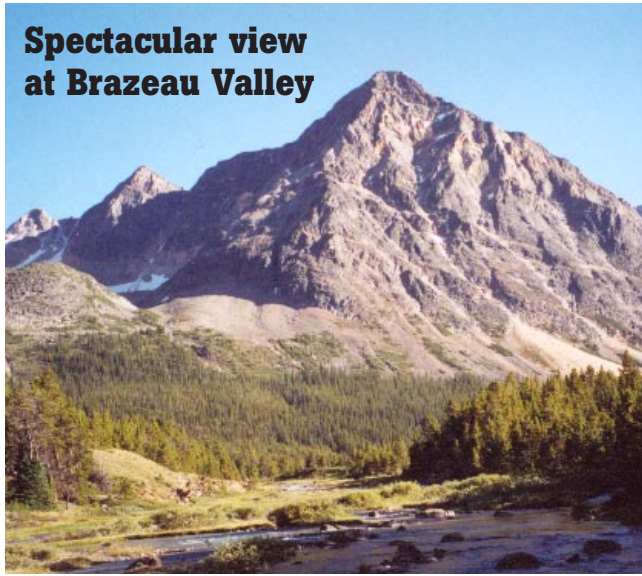
**Day Six – Schaffer
Campground to Trapper
Creek Campground
(14.1 km)**

Today the Venturers experienced the great luxury of sleeping in until 8:30 a.m. A vibrant, brilliant sun coaxed them out of bed, but they spent the morning relaxing – not getting underway until after lunch. This day, they travelled the west side of Maligne River; its shore lined with tall pines. Reaching Trapper Creek, they decided to test the waters and go for a swim – which was refreshing but not so easy with the strong undercurrent.

**Day Seven – Trapper
Creek Campground to
Snowbowl Campground
(17 km)**

At long last the Venturers reached Maligne Lake. It was 5 kilometres from Trapper Creek, a hike made easier by their lighter loads. They would never forget the feeling as they came face-to-face with their dream -

**Spectacular view
at Brazeau Valley**



**“Reaching the eastern
slope, I think I never saw
a fairer valley.”**

– Mary Schaffer, explorer

the surrounding forest quiet and pristine; the lake the colour of sapphire.

Soon it was time to begin another phase of their journey: the world-renowned Skyline Trail. Through openings in the predominantly lodge

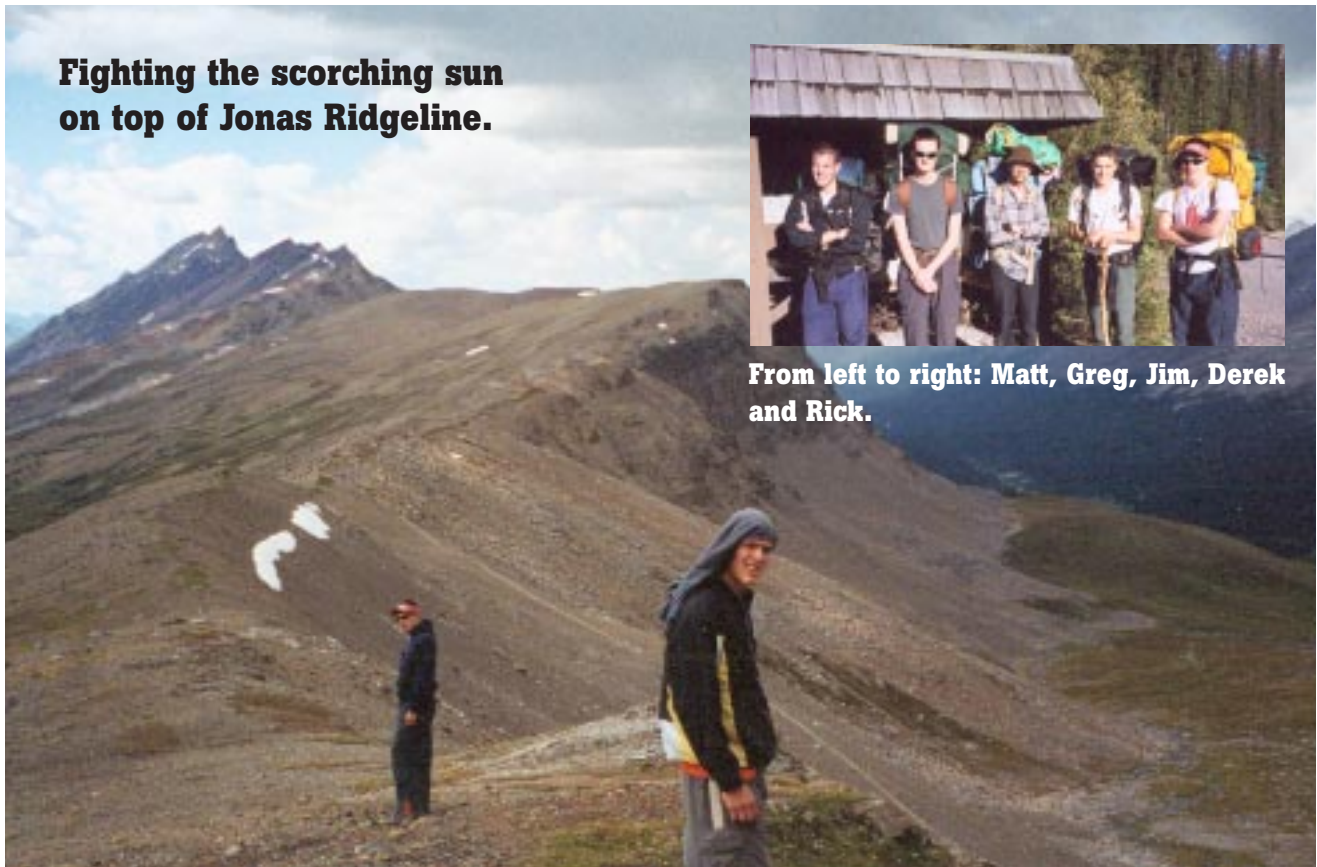
pole pine forest, they caught glimpses of Mona and Lorraine lakes: quick flashes of sparkling blue among the forest green.

Crossing a bridge at Evelyn Creek, the group followed a steep, switch-back trail for a rise of about 400 metres. The scorching sun forced frequent rest stops, but allowed them to bask in the splendor of the scenery around them. From the top of the world, the sweeping panorama below was magnificence itself; a picture postcard for the Rocky Mountains. Maligne Lake sparkled in the southeast corner; Sampson peak punched a hole through the clouds; and the pinnacle of the Rockies, Mt. Robson, stood silent sentinel.

**Day Eight – Snowbowl
Campground to Tekkara
Campground (19.8 km)**

Sometimes the hardest days of a hike are the most rewarding. As one of the Venturers would note in his log, “this day would prove to be one of the most exciting, beautiful and awe-inspiring days on our trip”.

**Fighting the scorching sun
on top of Jonas Ridgeline.**



From left to right: Matt, Greg, Jim, Derek and Rick.

The winding trail was a tough slog, through deep trenches, fallen branches and thick sticky mud that clung to their boots. But the flinty trail's toughness made way for a path at the top of Big Shovel pass, where they came upon a flock of mountain sheep, grazing lazily in the hot afternoon sun. This secret glimpse of wildlife was a thrill usually hidden from the eyes of travellers.

Exhausted and hungry, they stopped for a welcome lunch, which their fatigue made delicious in the fresh air. Once again, they decided to go for a swim, but where "refreshing" described Trapper Creek and "mellow" expressed the Brazeau River, the Fiddle River could only be termed "painfully chilling" – a true polar bear plunge!

At the end of almost 20 kilometres of hard hiking, a drizzling rain would lull them into a grateful sleep.

Day Nine – Tekkara to Trail's End (13.7 km)

That same rain woke the 1st Whitecourt Venturers on the final day of their hike. After the spectacular vistas of the days before, this leg of the trip would prove, as one of the Venturers put it, "downhill all the way". This was not disappointing, since their packs were now lighter than ever before.

The slow, cold drizzle reflected their feelings that day; they were tired and ready to go home. But along the trail a lone elk appeared, as if to say goodbye; a final reminder of the beauty they had seen on their journey through the heart of the Rockies.

Participants: Derek Bakker, Matt Greene, Greg Hilchie, Rick Greene, Jim Hilchie. X



"We were tracing in the footsteps of a legend."

(The Venturer company's boots pictured below, remind us of the previous trek of years ago.)



PLAN YOUR AMORY ADVENTURE NOW!

You don't have to trek the Rocky Mountains to get an Amory Adventure Award. Almost any well-planned multi-day trip (over the course of four days) can qualify. Start planning your Amory Adventure challenge now. It is awarded annually to the company that displays the most initiative in conceiving, planning and executing an outdoor adventure activity.

Your adventure might include almost any challenge your Venturers want to reach for. Some past winners involved hikes and adventures to:

- Mount Everest base camp
- Continental Divide
- Chilkoot Pass
- West Coast Trail
- Cadwalder Mountain range

Meet the Deadline!

Adventures must take place before October 31 of the award year. Entries must be postmarked no later than two weeks after the date of close. For complete rules, regulations and how to apply, surf to www.scouts.ca

For More Information

The Venturer Handbook has all the information you need to register your Amory Adventure, including deadlines and rules. If you have additional questions, address them to your council office or to Ian Mitchell at the National Office, 1345 Baseline Road, Ottawa, ON K2C 0A7, Phone: (613) 224-5131 Email: imitchell@scouts.ca.

Who knows how far you'll go with your Amory Adventure Challenge!

CORRECTIONS

The article, "Sailing Into the Wild Blue Yonder – Part I" (April, 2003) made reference to an insignia incorrectly attributed to that of a Sergeant. The caption should have read, "Staff Sergeant's Insignia". The *Leader* regrets this error, and appreciates the vigilance of the Rt. Rev. Dr. Hans F. Lorenz.

"Finding Our Way – the Making of a Team on the Juan De Fuca Trail" (May, 2003) listed Coquitlam, B.C. as the location for the 11th Richmond Scouts. The 11th Richmond Scouts hail from Richmond, B.C. The *Leader* regrets this error.