

Some Rockies on a Bicycle

and preliminaries in Seattle and Portland



**Don and Doug drove a car, rode bicycles and took some photos
in the United States and Canada in 2016. Now read on...**

I didn't bring a computer with me on this trip so this is not a journal, just recollections – aided by Strava records and random photos. It's disconcerting how much I forget, but c'est la vie.

It was Doug's idea to ride in the Rockies, and given the distances between towns it seemed the wisest thing was to join an organized tour, so that's what we did. The tour was 8 days but we went over a week before so we could take in some extras, including a couple of Blackbirds and the Spruce Goose – although we may not be calling it that any more since we discovered that was a derisory term coined by journalists when it became a problematic project.

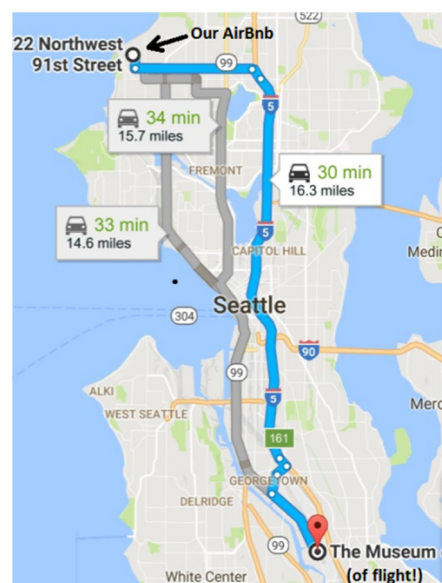
Seattle: Arrived July 30, departed August 2

We flew from Melbourne to Seattle via L.A., arriving around mid-day on Saturday 30th July. We collected our rental car from the Alamo office at the airport and set off for the AirBnb we had booked in Ballard, a funky Seattle suburb, depending on the new Garmin satnav provided. After my mixed performance on the narrow streets of Pyrenean France I was just a little apprehensive about driving on the right in a left hand drive car, but it was no problem because American streets are so much wider, plenty of margin for error. Although my passenger did express a different view from time to time.

The AirBnb experience, my first, was good, although there was the odd small thing. There was a car in what was supposed to be our parking space. It stayed for the duration but there was plenty of space behind it so not really a problem. The place should have been open when we got there but it was not. Luckily Doug's phone roamed successfully, allowing us to contact the 'host' and be advised to collect a key from the house next door. The place itself was quite spacious and comfortable, it's major drawback being a complete lack of clothes washing facilities, and its minor drawback being the lack of any sort of pot to cook pasta in and a corkscrew. They still use corks in the America, who'd have thought. I wandered down the street till I found a house with signs of life and borrowed a corkscrew.

Sunday 31 July: Museum of Flight

Our prior investigations had established that this was a very good aeroplane museum with lots of interesting planes, including a Blackbird, so this visit was a must. The drive down there was a doddle, straight into a convenient car park. First impressions were terrific, with a beautiful Lockheed Constellation parked outside the front door.



A part of its appeal lies in the elegant fuselage, which predated the subsequent discovery that a constant diameter tube was functional and cheaper to produce.

Subsequent impressions were also great. The Blackbird was of course a highlight, and I got to sit in a Blackbird cockpit - after waiting in a line with a lot of little children. It was very compact, but the standout impression was of the large number of switches and dials for the pilot to comprehend and use – because this was an aeroplane from the sixties, way before micro computers.

As well as the Blackbird the main museum contained lots of interesting planes, including a Starfighter, a little model aero-engined thing which flew the Atlantic and of course the Boeing Model 40, the mail and then passenger plane from the twenties.

Of course we enjoyed the 'Personal Courage Wing', because that's where the WWII fighters were to be found. And the Aviation Pavilion also, a huge hangar containing a range of aircraft parked on the ground, including Jets such as the Harrier, that wonderful British VTOL fighter, the F15 Eagle, a B17 and a B29.



SR71 Blackbird



Close fit..



Spitfire



Bf109



Pavilion



Harrier

But the most impactful display for me was the Boeing historical exhibit. It is the actual original Boeing Factory recreated with its woodworking machines and demonstration products, ie airframes and wings. Seeing the actual plant which routinely created reliable, relatively precise structures out of wood was inspiring – might even help my inner craftsman to emerge!

We intended to cook pasta in the apartment that evening but unfortunately our host failed to deliver our pot, so we ate out – at an Italian restaurant in downtown Ballard. Cost us US\$120, and was OK.

Monday 1st August: Boeing

Can you go to Seattle without doing the Boeing Factory tour? We thought not. You have to book, and the first available for us was mid afternoon, so in the morning we drove down to Discovery Park, a large park not far from Ballard. We ate our sandwiches on a rocky beach. But..we drove up to the Boeing Factory later and joined the tour we had booked. It was slick and highly organized, like a production line, but I'm glad we did it. Seeing such a huge facility turning out the planes which take us all round the world was like a demonstration of how big capitalism can get. But slick as it was, interesting general information was imparted. Starting from a position of general ignorance about Boeing, I learned that William Boeing not only designed and built his own airframes but that when he became dissatisfied with the available engines that he built his own. And then he started an airline to make use of his own planes. And then the government broke up the company, with Boeing ending up with the airline – which I think became United.

No photos were allowed on the tour, not since Airbus came into existence as a competitor. Boeing doesn't want to make it easy for information about their production process to be recorded – so said the guide, or words to that effect.

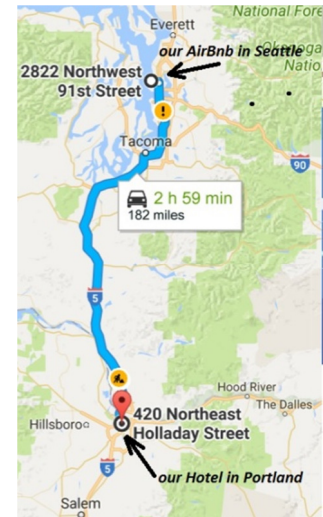
We ate in that evening, omelette and red wine.

Portland: Arrived August 2, departed August 5

The following morning we drove to Portland.

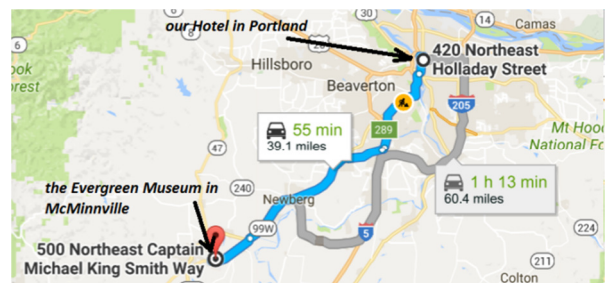
I missed a satnav instruction and subsequently drove a circle over a lot elevated motorway. Great fun, though there was no unanimity on this issue.

The hotel had no booking for us: not till the following night. We'd left Seattle a day earlier than planned. Talk about embarrassing! Cost us an extra night's accommodation and a day in Seattle – although we did enjoy the extra day in Portland.



McMinnville

This of course is where the Spruce Goose was located. We learned here that 'Spruce Goose' was a derisory term coined by contemporary journalists, so it somehow seems inappropriate to use it now. Its proper name is 'Hughes H-4 Hercules' – so we'll probably continue to call it the Spruce Goose!



Anyhow, this is one of the best aircraft museums I've been to. Doug compares it not unfavourably with Duxford, though it has fewer aircraft than Duxford. Wonderful guides, and worth it for the story about the B17 and the Messerschmitt, one of the most positive war stories I've heard.





H4



H4



SR71



Spitfire



FW190



Me262



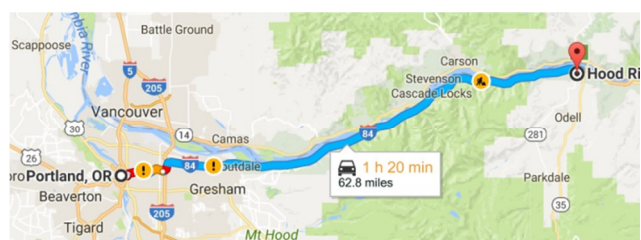
Mig15



Super Sabre

Discovery Gorge

On our unplanned extra day in Portland we drove East beside the Columbia River, the second largest in America, by Volume. Very beautiful, albeit a bit of tourist factory. Nice coffee in Hood River – at the cost of a parking ticket. We returned along the other, North side of the river. Great drive, less traffic.



On the road..



Columbia River



CascadeLocks

Tooling around Portland

We were due to return the car at Portland airport and fly to Kalispell in Montana to start our tour in the afternoon, so we had the morning to spend downtown on the Portland city bikes. These looked very funky and we enjoyed the experience – though they were terrible bikes. Designed by Nike, I would guess they weighed about 15 kgs and they were directionally unstable. Nice one, Nike! We had to buy a membership to hire one, which cost US\$14.

Coffee is a big thing in Portland, so we selected a purveyor, Heart Coffee Roasters downtown, and rode across the Steel Bridge, a lifting two story road and rail bridge spanning the Willamette River separating our hotel from downtown. Coffee was indeed excellent.

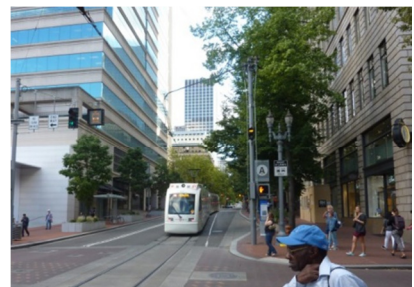
We, or at least I had planned to ride up a hill to the top of a cable car route which rose 500 ft from the river, but due to the weight of the bike we rejected that plan. Just as well because we discovered when we rode to the river end of the cable car that it was a small thing with no room for bicycles.



BikeTown..



Street animals



Tram..

PDX

That's Portland airport. I only mention it because it's the pleasantest airport I've been in. Most airports are busy, tense, uncomfortable places but this was positively relaxing. Plenty of room, good coffee and quality guitar accompaniment from a busker.

No problems with Alamo rental car return.

Getting to the Start of the Tour

We had booked at the Grouse Mountain Lodge, a bit out of the little town of Whitefish, which was where the bike tour was to start – in the Lodge car park. The Lodge shuttle picked us up from Kalispell airport – and later on took me to downtown Whitefish to buy batteries for my Vectors. Very comfortable place, good restaurant.

A Bicycle Cruise in the Rockies

So much for the preliminaries. Now we're getting to the reason for the trip: riding a bike in some awesome mountains.

The tour spanned eight days with a non-cycling day on day 5, but geographically was arranged in two parts, a three day southern part, in which we cross the Canadian border, and a 5 day northern part, with a 250 mile highway ride in the tour mini bus from Waterton to the Bow Valley Parkway close to Banff. On day eight we retraced our steps back to Banff for a bit of a ride there to end the tour. All of this is illustrated in maps at the end of this.

Day 1, Shakedown ride to West Glacier

After riding through downtown Whitefish we rode about 35 flat kms to lunch by the Flathead River. Then, after a bus ride over a corrugated gravel road we did a little bit of climbing to arrive at our first night's lodging in West Glacier, having tooled around Apgar, on the shore of Lake MacDonald, on the way.



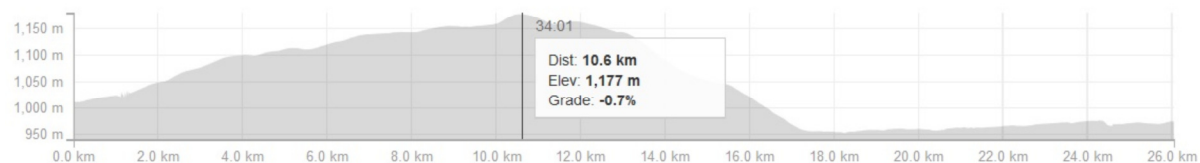
Bikes at the start



Lake MacDonald



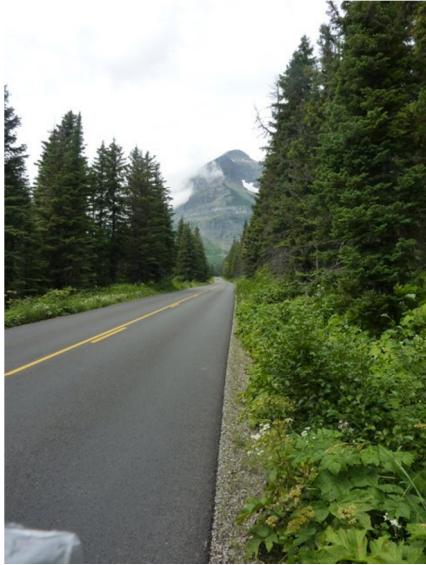
West Glacier..



Date	Strava file	Miles	Climbing, ft
Saturday Aug 6	Whitefish to the Flathead River for Lunch	22.1	863
	North Fork Flathead River to West Glacier	16.1	712

Day 2: Going to the Sun Road

From West Glacier we rode in the bus most of the way up Lake MacDonald to the ride start – I think to make sure everybody made it to Logan Pass by the cutoff. This ride was on Doug's bucket List. Topping out at over 6,000 ft on Logan Pass after a steady 14 mile climb at 5%, we had to be off the climb by 11 am, a rule applied to ease traffic congestion on the west side only. It is truly a magnificent road, but the gradient is so constant it's not a difficult climb to tackle at a steady pace. The east side descent was a little steeper, but there were no curves I didn't pedal through on the way down.



En route to the mountain..



Approaching the pass..



At the pass – again



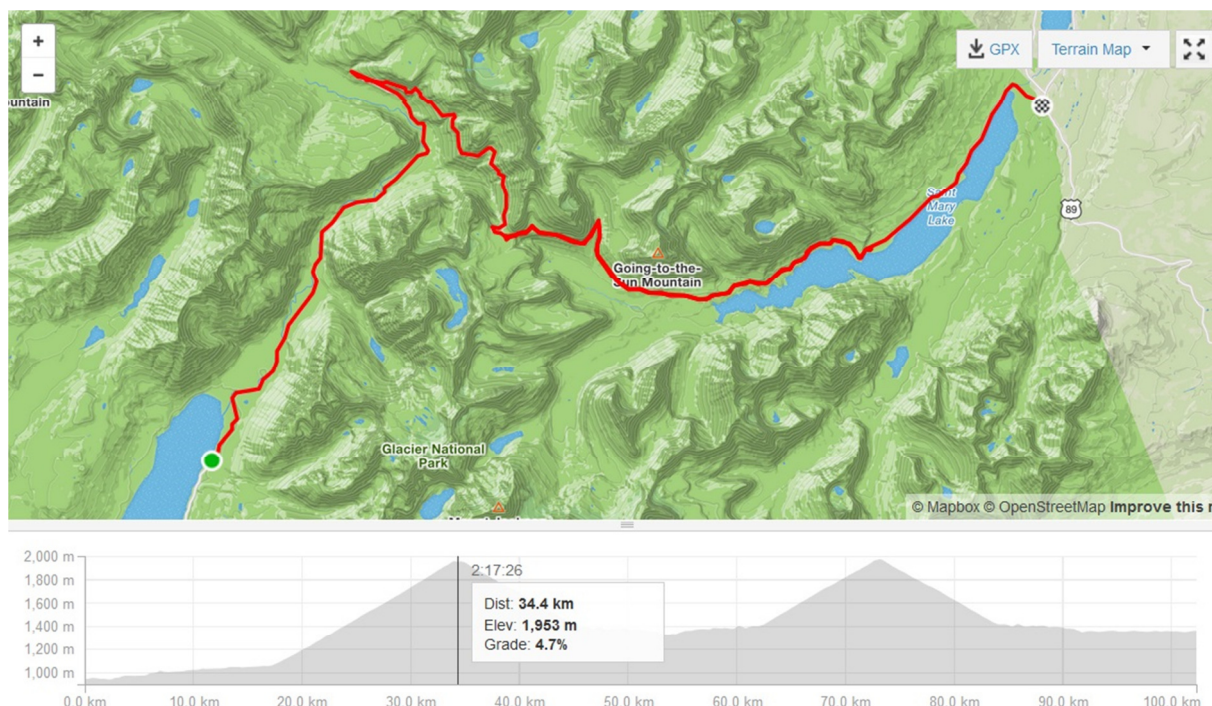
Ride's end: Saint Mary Lake.



Saint Mary Lodge.

I rode up the east side as well, so my mileage for the ride includes some duplication. At the top was a crowded visitor centre and a large, full car park, although our bus found a spot. First time at the top was covered in cloud, though not the second. The loo was interesting: a hole over a rushing torrent some 20 feet below. It was inside a building! I assume it flowed to a processing plant somewhere.

Lunch was beside Saint Mary Lake, and after a ride beside the lake we arrived at Saint Mary and our Lodge – top accommodation and dining.



Sunday Aug 7	Going to the Sun Road	2	63.5	6,112
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Day 3: Saint Mary to Waterton Park

Easy day. We got together before Canadian border control before showing our passports. Lunch beside the Belly River. Then..bear! As I was riding beside Waterton lake towards the wonderful Prince of Wales Hotel, our night's lodging, I notice a couple of cars parked ahead, and another car on a side road screaming at me. After a little mental processing I worked out that the lady was saying "Bear on the road!". As I pedalled forward, in a tentative sort of way, a huge, um quite small black bear was ambling about on the verge. In retrospect I wish I'd been cooler and whipped out my camera, but no, I shyly oozled past, on the other side of the road! Others in the group, Mark and Rebecca I think, who had taken a bike track rather than the road, saw it swimming in the lake. Wish I'd been there..

Anyhow, the Prince of Wales hotel looks like a Disney creation but it's not, it's the real thing. A treat to stay there. And getting fed refreshments by the lake by the support team was nice also.

Dining tonight was in downtown Waterton, independently for just the once.



Relaxing at ride end..



Start of a long bus ride



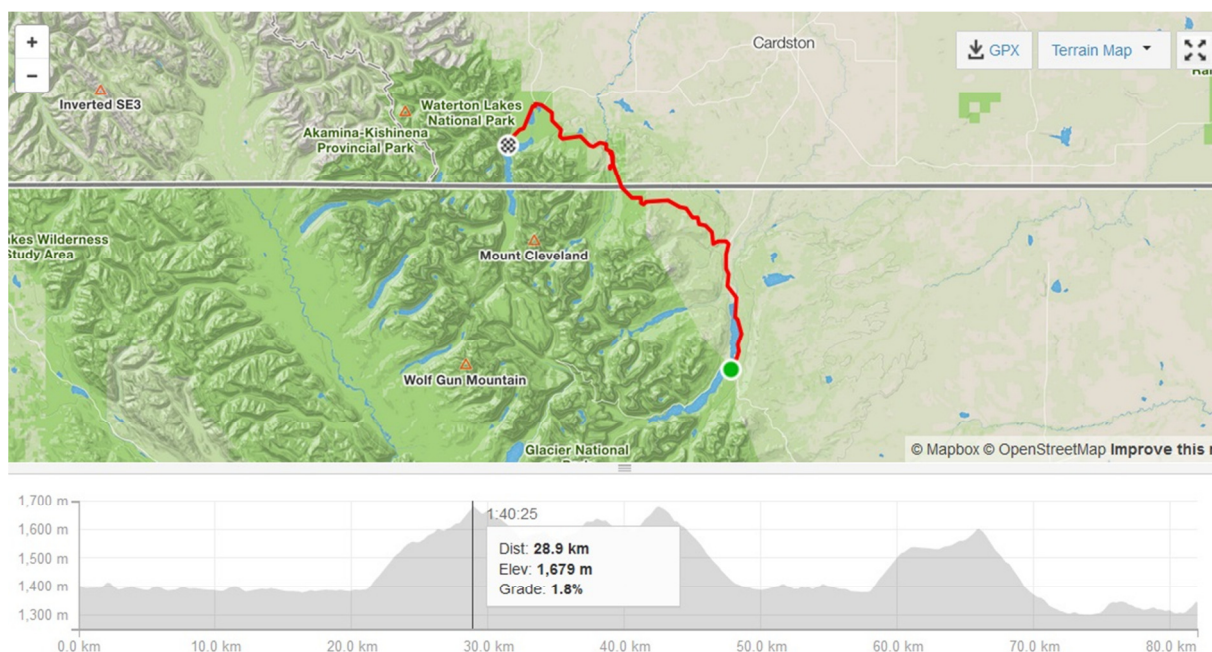
Hot Mongolian beef..



Douglas in the main lobby..



Prince of Wales Hotel



Monday Aug 8	Saint Mary to Waterton Park	50.9	3,202
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Day 4: Along the Bow Valley Parkway to Moraine Lake

After 250 highway miles in the little bus we began the ride near the start of the Bow Valley Parkway.



Leaving the Prince of Wales



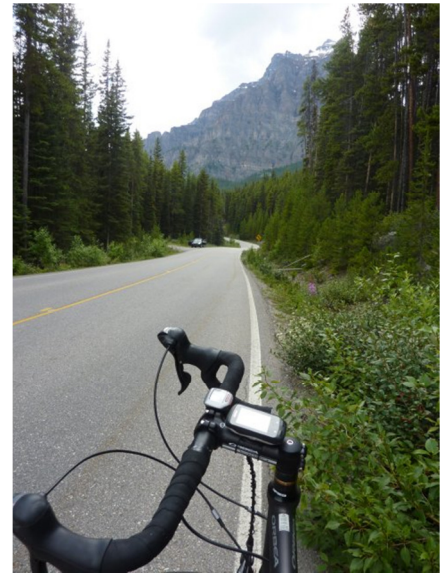
Lunch and ride start



Support in action



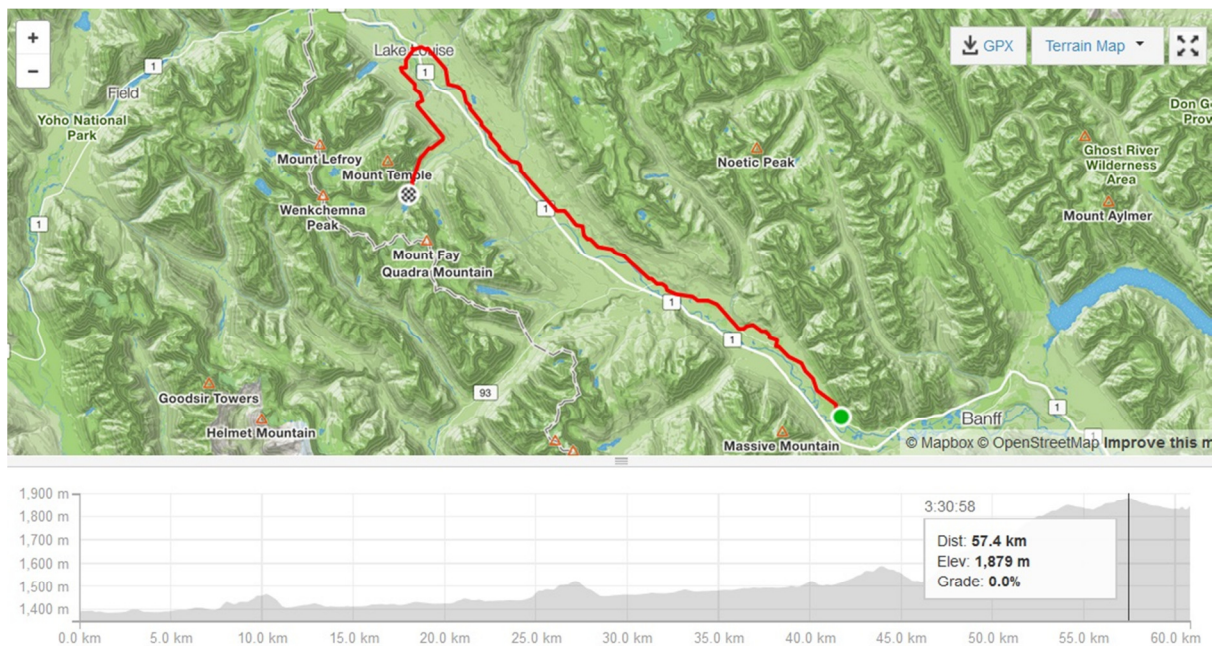
Beside the Bow River



Approaching Moraine Lake

The usual scenic ride, punctuated by puncture for me. Guides Ginny and Spencer were in attendance so quickly I only had time to remove the tube before they took over.

Easy scenic ride along the Bow River to the Lake Louise village, where the group got together and decided between the bus and the bike as a way of getting to Moraine Lake. I thought this last bit was the best ride of the whole tour, even without any bears.



Tuesday Aug 9	Along the Bow Valley Parkway to Moraine Lake	4	37.8	3,740
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Day 4: Off the Bike at Lake Louise



To my surprise, this day was a highlight. To Lake Louise, the lake, not the village, in the little bus, then a bit of a walk from the hotel beside the lake and up the hill to the amazing 'Teahouse', then onwards to the Six Glaciers Overlook. We met the creator and owner of the Teahouse, a charming and reputedly eccentric Australian from Bondi who used to carry supplies to his establishment on foot. These days they

appear to be transported by helicopter, and one chopper flight we saw was said to be carrying out loo product.

The final bit of the climb to the Glaciers Overlook was definitely the steepest slope we encountered on the trip, and not always easy to get a secure footing.

Back at Moraine Lodge in the afternoon, most unfortunately fell asleep, just a little grandpa nap, and didn't wake up till after 5 pm, when the canoes were no longer available. I had been really looking forward to a paddle on the beautiful green lake.

Moraine Lodge was super accommodation and the Restaurant was excellent: I can still taste that strawberry sorbet!



Our accommodation



Lake Louise



From further away



Teahouse



Moraine



Glacier



Moraine Lake

Canoes on Moraine Lake



Day 6: Moraine Lake to the Icefields Parkway

Nice descent from Moraine Lake to Lake Louise Village, but sadly, held up by cars on the only two decent bends. After that, easy ride among the now familiar awesome scenery, lunch – at Peyto Lake I think – then more riding among awesome scenery to Saskatchewan Crossing, where Spencer and Ginny put on a wine and cheese party in a gazebo out the back of the resort. Great cheese, Spencer!



Icefields Parkway



Lunch



Peyto Lake



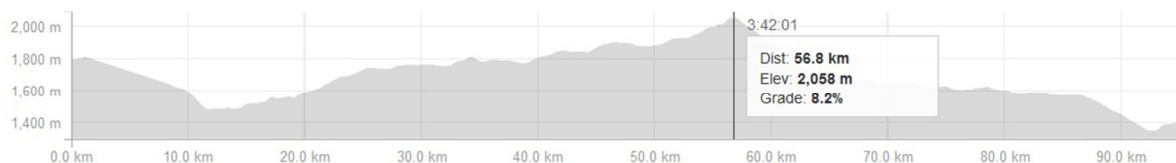
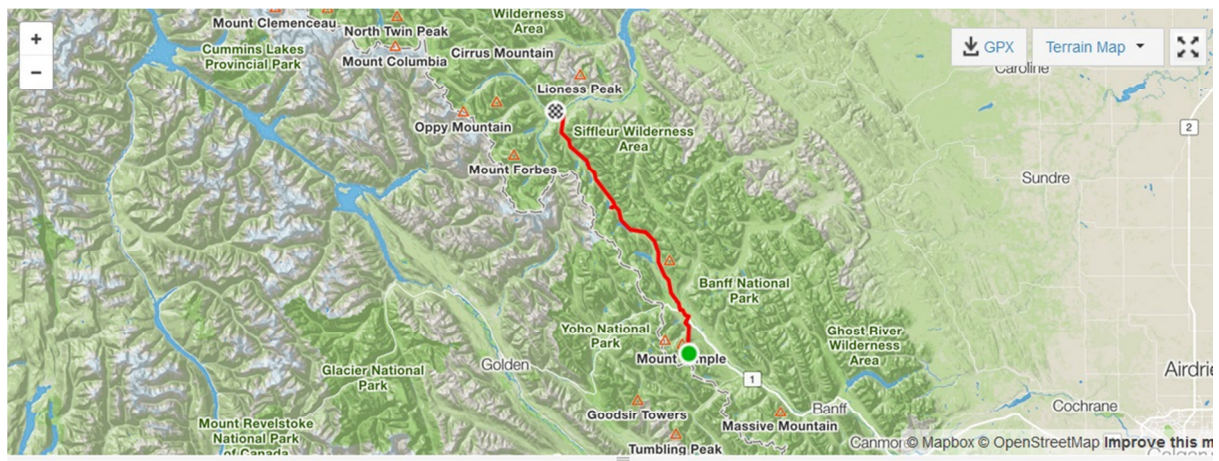
Some glacier..



Gazebo at The Crossing



Ginny at The Crossing



Thursday 11/8	Moraine Lake to the Icefields Parkway	59	2943
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Day 7: Icefields Parkway to Sunwapta Falls

The final scenic cruise, the real tour finale



Glacier at Saskatchewan Crossing



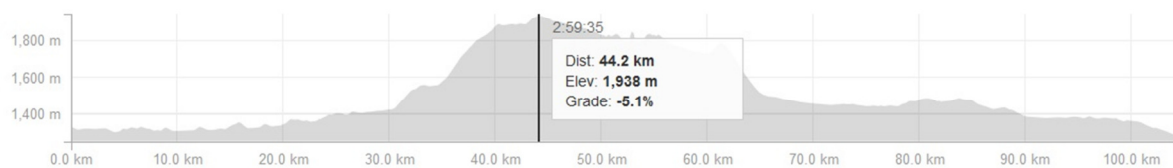
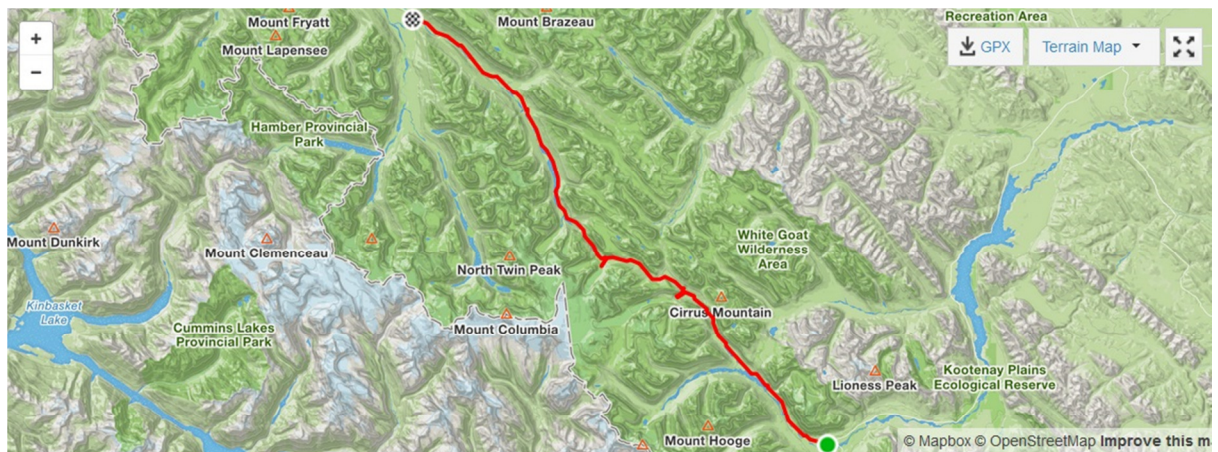
Leaving The Crossing



More Icefields Parkway



Above Sunwapta Falls



Friday 12/8	To Sunwapta Falls via the IceFields Parkway	64.7	3,665
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Day 8: Tooling around Banff

We left Sunwapta Falls early on the little bus for the return trip along the Icefields Parkway to Banff. There we had a short ride to a lake or two, then lunch, then a group ride in and around Banff.



Leaving Sunwapta Falls



Lake Minnewanka



Spencer on the group ride



Mounted wedding by the Bow River

Then it was back in the bus and to Calgary airport, and goodbye.

Saturday 13/8	Banff: Lake Minnewanka	12.7	735
	Tooling around Banff	9.5	200

Calgary and Home

Entering Calgary through miles of tacky tacky development was not inspiring, but then again, entering Melbourne on the Hume is not all that uplifting. Anyhow, not having been to Calgary before we thought we'd stay overnight downtown rather than at the airport, so that's where we'd booked our accommodation. At the airport we didn't have a clue how to get 'downtown', but were rescued by a volunteer guide in a mounties uniform who pointed us to the bus terminal. Bus to near our hotel was CAD\$3.30. After a bit of a freshen up, and a little nap, we picked a nearby eating establishment off the web and struck gold: a terrific, cool pizzeria. If you're in Calgary, go there: Posto Pizzeria and Bar, 1014 8 St SW, Calgary.

Next morning we had an early walk around the town, breakfasted at the hotel, got the hotel shuttle to the airport and hey presto, 25 hours later we were in Melbourne.

Reflections

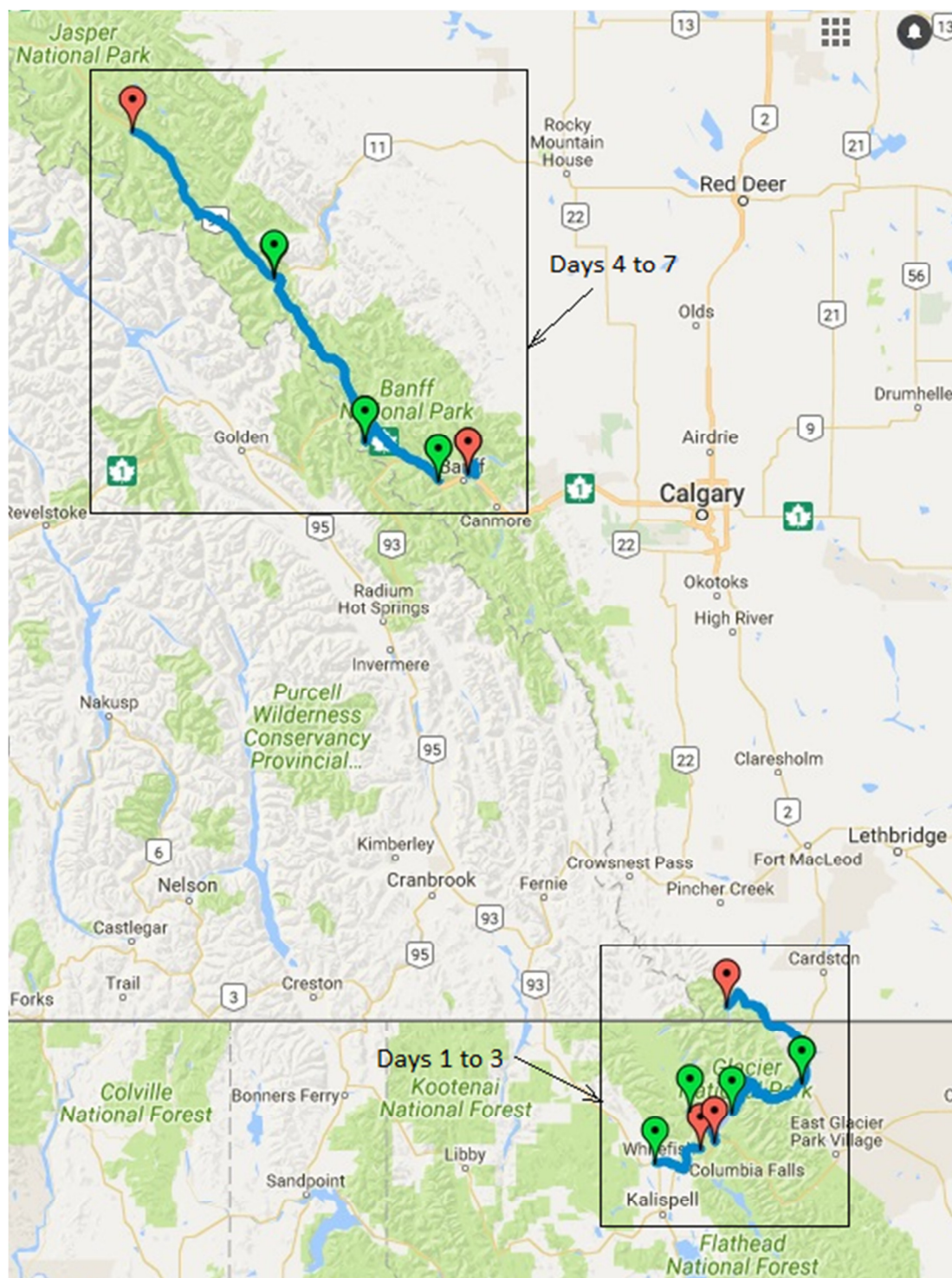
Awesome scenery: check. Almost too much. Comfortable accommodation: check. Bordering on luxury. Good eating? Double check. I gained 3 kgs, on a bike tour! Support? Faultless. The only thing that was slightly out of whack were the bikes. Did the job, not a problem, but a little clunky. Really, not a serious issue.

But..this ride was not what I was expecting. My fault entirely, I could have done just a little more research. I thought riding in the Rocky Mountains would be like riding in the Pyrenees but it was not, because..the roads are not great cycling roads. Long straight stretches, gentle curves and gentle gradients. Built for modern traffic. Plenty of room for bikes on the verge and mostly very smooth. While I can remember a lot if not all of the climbs I've done in Europe, I have a problem remembering individual bits of this tour. I do remember Logan Pass, of course, because that was Doug's bucket list ride and because it was labelled at the top, and the climb and descent to Moraine Lake, and I could list a few more, but there was a lot of riding that has disappeared into my internal void. I do recognize that my internal void is becoming more of a dominant feature these days!

The landscape will stay with me, however, even though my experience of it was quite shallow.

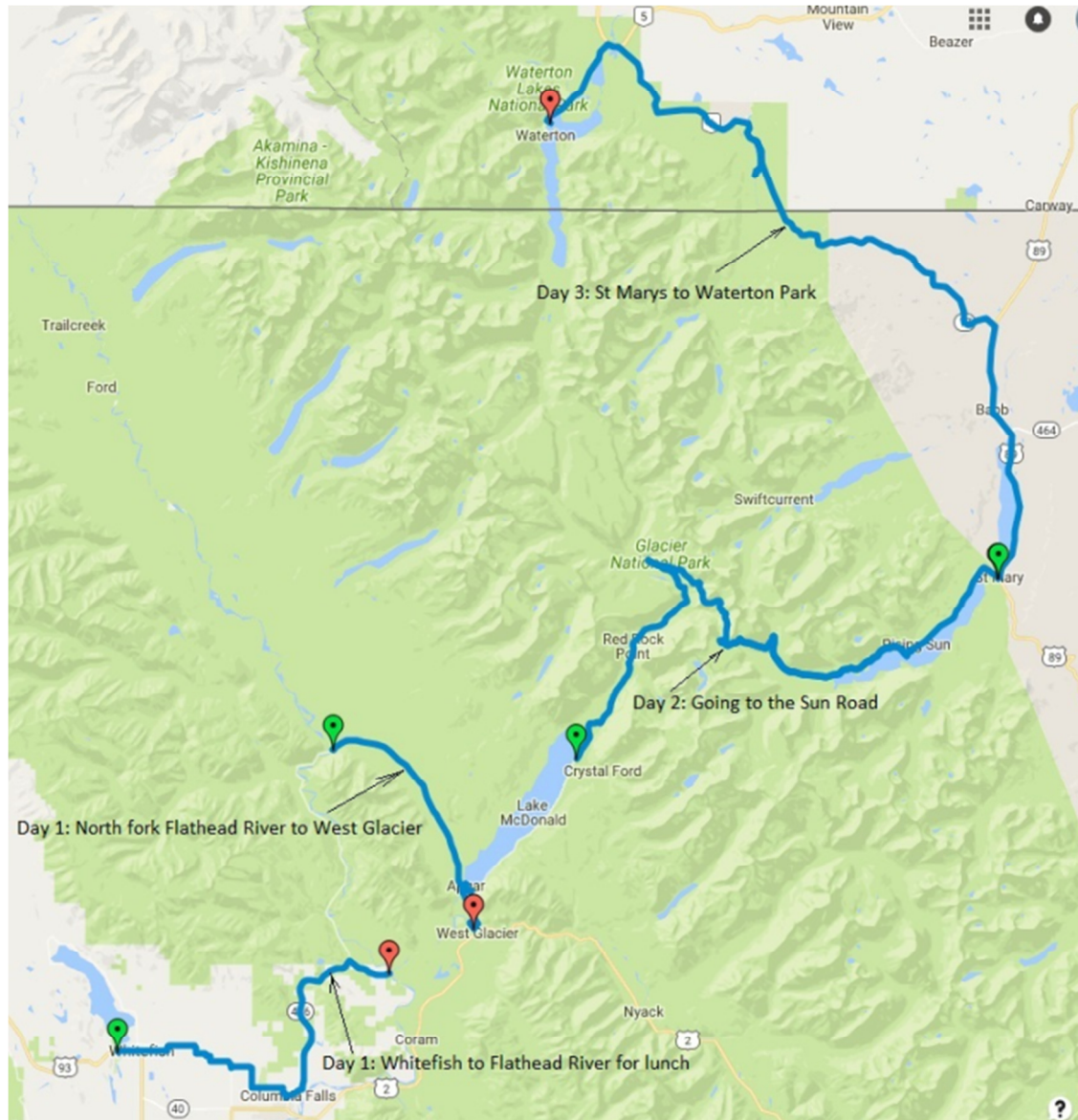
Appendix 1: Route Overview

The tour spanned eight days with a non-cycling day on day 5, but geographically was arranged in two parts, a three day southern part, in which we cross the Canadian border, and a 5 day northern part, with a 250 mile highway ride in the tour mini bus from Waterton to the Bow Valley Parkway close to Banff. Day seven ended at the Sunwapta Falls, thirty miles short of Jasper on the Icefields Parkway. On day eight we retraced our steps back to Banff for a bit of a ride there to end the tour.



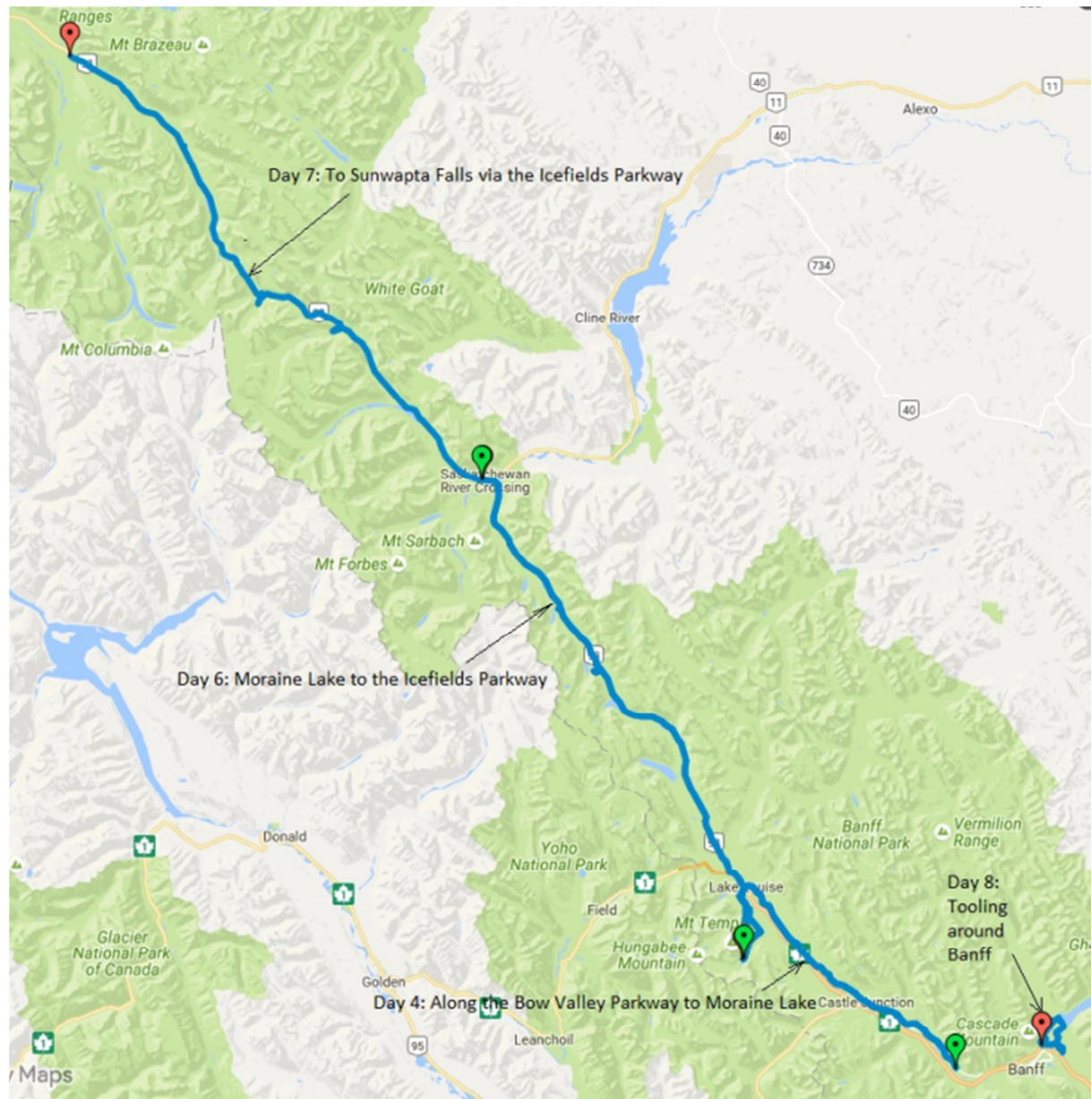
Appendix 2: Routes, Days 1 to 3, from Montana to Alberta, Canada

Day 1 was two short rides separated by lunch and a sixteen mile mini bus ride over a corrugated gravel road.



Appendix 3: Routes, Days 4 to 7, Bow Valley Parkway to Sunwapta Falls and Banff

Day 5 was a non-cycling day, including a hike beside and beyond Lake Louise.



Appendix 4: List of GPX Files

Date of Ride	File Name		Miles	Climbing, ft
Saturday Aug 6	Whitefish to the Flathead River for Lunch	1	22.1	863
	North Fork Flathead River to West Glacier		16.1	712
Sunday Aug 7	Going to the Sun Road	2	63.5	6,112
Monday Aug 8	St Marys to Waterton Park	3	50.9	3,202
Tuesday Aug 9	Along the Bow Valley Parkway to Moraine Lake	4	37.8	2,740
Wednesday Aug 10	Hike at Lake Louise	5		
Thursday 11/8	Moraine Lake to the IceFields Parkway	6	59	2,943
Friday 12/8	To Sunwapta Falls via the IceFields Parkway	7	64.7	3,665
Saturday 13/8	Banff: Lake Minnewanka	8	12.7	735
	Tooling around Banff		9.5	200