

Hiking To and Around Mount Assiniboine 'Matterhorn of the Rockies'

Eldon's 2012 trek, September 10 to 15



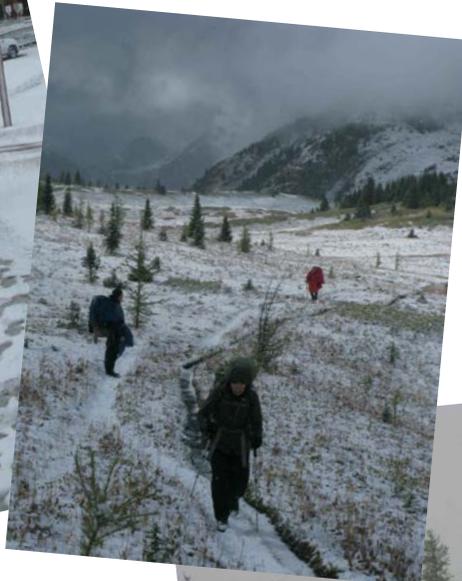
In the Canadian Rockies, they call this Sunshine

<http://www.besthike.com/> rates the Sunshine Village to Mount Assiniboine hike as the best hike in Canada's Rockies and one of the top ten hikes in the world. This was the first two days (or three for Ed and Linda) of our 2012 hike in the Rockies. It passes through vast alpine meadows interspersed with forested valleys and rocky peaks. Because of the weather, I speculate that not everyone in our crew of nine (Judy Bartel and Bert, James and Olwin Burr, Ed and Linda Burridge, Di Ingram, Eldon and Wayne Schmitz) would rate this part of our hike so highly; but like cockroaches, tourista and poison ivy, I see weather as being a key element in nature's beauty and an important contributor to the memories and marvels of outdoor adventures.

BC parks says the hike from Sunshine Village to Lake Magog via Quartzridge, Citadel Pass, Golden Valley and Valley of the Rocks is a distance of 27 km, with an estimated hiking time of 8 hours, an elevation change of 488 metres and a maximum elevation of 2,408 metres. Members of our crew may argue that the distance traveled between



The sheer joy at being in the mountains and on the trail was apparent in the hikers' expressions as they started down the trail from Sunshine Village.



While most of us seemed destined to hike under gloomy skies,



blue skies followed Wayne wherever he went.



disembarking the bus at Sunshine Meadows to pitching tents at Lake Magog was closer to 35 km, and this is why we took 13 or 14 hours to hike the distance. We also went slower because we wanted more time on the trail to inhale the mountain air, watch snow flakes gently drift horizontally in the refreshing late summer breezes and enjoy the feel of the mud on the trail squishing from under our boots.... in short to immerse ourselves in all the wondrous beauty that nature had to offer.



Mountain flowers were beautiful, even through the blizzard



As you may expect when it is snowing, temperatures for the first couple of days of the hike were near or below freezing. There was a few minutes of blue sky on the hike from Sunshine Meadows to the Porcupine campsite where we spent the first night, but it is the last five km of the hike that will be best remembered –steep, downward switchbacks. A group of campers already at the site were trying to keep a fire going in a fire pit, but they could not find enough dry fuel to sustain a flame let alone get a fire of sufficient size to throw enough heat to warm and dry our wary crew. We turned in early after supper and slept late.

After breakfast, we packed up damp tents and gear and headed for Lake Magog, near the Mount Assiniboine Lodge and the base of its namesake mountain. Our first day of hiking had taken some of the spring out of our step.

James had downloaded the days hiking trails onto his handheld GPS which enabled him to keep us informed as to our location and progress, or lack of it. We discovered that the trails we were on, which were signed as being the main trails and appeared to be the main trails to our destination, were in fact not in the correct location... sometimes 450 meters too far to the west, sometimes 80 meters too far to the east. Someone needs to contact Parks about getting the trails back where they belong.

Well into our hike, near Lake Og, Di, who was in the lead, had a close encounter of the bear kind. She then others from our crew watched from a distance along with a tour group from the Lodge as the bear dug for lunch. When the bear got a Richardsons Ground Squirrel, Di did not go over to scold and try to convert it vegetarianism it but stayed with the larger group and remained silent on the issue.



As we walked to Lake Magog with the tour group, the group leaders gave us some info regarding the water supply at Lake Magog, and said they had set out a bucket of water for

us earlier in the day. At camp, the bucket of water in the cooking shelter had about two inches of ice over it. That was in the heat of the day.

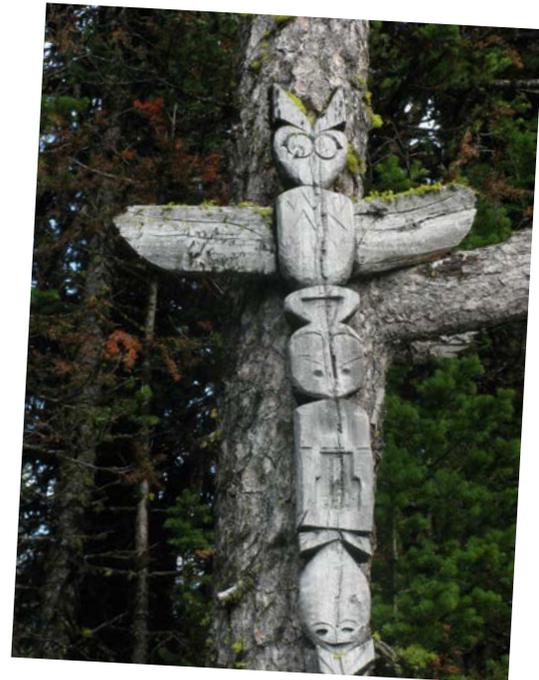
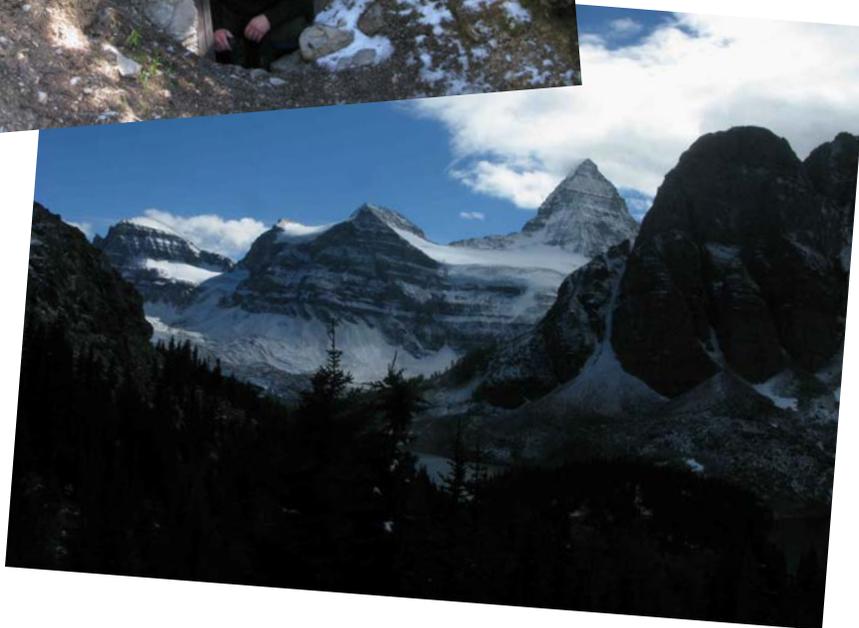
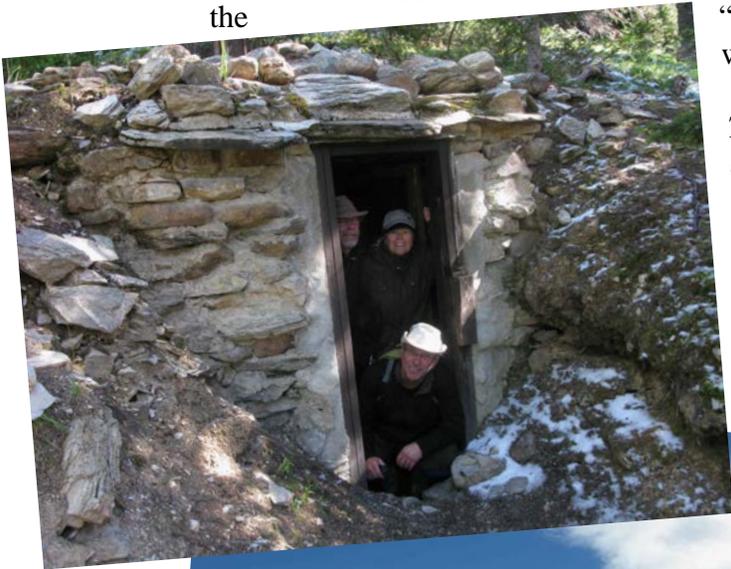
In time, Eldon and Wayne arrived in camp and advised us that Ed and Linda had stopped for a night's rest at Lake Og. No open fires were permitted at this campground so after supper, we all sought the shelter and warmth of our tents and sleeping bags early.

On day three, Wednesday, the sun came out and not just for Wayne this time. We all enjoyed clear blue skies and sunshine for the rest of our time in the mountains. On this day, I think that I was not the only hiker that I wondered if he/she would be able to get up and walk in the morning or later, when we were hiking, to stand up and continue after stopping for a snack/rest break. However, we all did get up and go for a walk. Ed and Linda walked from Og to Magog, and those of us already at Magog headed off to see Sunburst Meadows and the Nub.

James had downloaded a Sunburst hike onto his GPS. It pointed in a different direction than the signpost for Sunburst Lake. There was a difference of opinion as to which direction to go. The "old school four" decided that Sunburst Meadows would be behind Sunburst Lake and went in the direction of the signpost. James, a firm believer in modern technology led Olwin and Di to follow the GPS track. Apparently the people that put up the signpost were onto something. In time, James's crew turned around from a hike that was apparently to the summit of Mount Sunburst. In time, they caught up with the

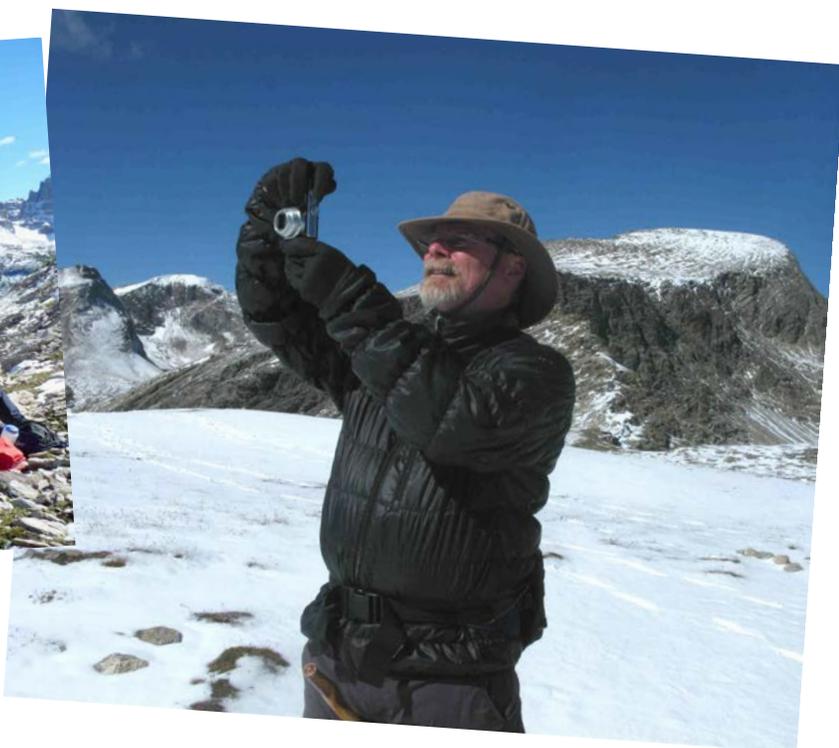
"old school four" on the Sunburst Lake trail and walked on with them to the Nub.

Those that were observant saw a Hobbit hut and a totem near the Sunburst Lake Ranger Cabin. The hike also afforded some great views of Mount Assiniboine.





On the way up to the Nub, we stopped for lunch. At the Nub, Eldon stopped to do some flash pornography.



On the Nub, Eldon and Bert chatted up some other hikers, including Marie Linda, a nurse from Cochrane, Alberta celebrating the end of her fiftieth year with some hiking (solo) in the mountains. When we were back at camp having supper, she dropped by to visit some more. We fed her our leftovers and when she heard that Linda would be going out by helicopter on Friday, the same day as she was flying out, she offered Linda transportation back to town and accommodation at her house. That evening, we also enjoyed the company of Erin and Jackie, staff from Kluane National Park, who were in Mount Assiniboine for a belated honeymoon. Their pet husky was a hit with the dog people in our crew. Temperatures were still cool, so we again hobbled off for the warmth of our sleeping bags right after sunset.

On Thursday, day four of our hike, our chosen hike was Og Pass to Windy Ridge. Most of the soreness was gone from my legs, but my energy levels were still lagging, and apparently I was not alone in this, because several of our crew did not hike all the way up to Windy Ridge.



Weather was great for the hike up to Windy Ridge.



While temperatures were warmer, there was still snow in the shadows, even at lower elevations



Hikers that went all the way up to Windy Ridge were rewarded with spectacular views that were the highlight of their week.



As we were on our way down from Windy Ridge, we encountered Marie Linda on her way up, solo. She said it was her fifty-first birthday and the last day of her hike. Someone needed to go with her to take pictures. Eldon and Bert drew straws to decide, and Bert won the draw so headed back up to the ridge with her. He took a few pictures, then said he would hike part way down and wait for her. That way, she could enjoy the ridge and its views on her own time.

Marie Linda is a woman of boundless energy. Over the next hour she hiked up to the peaks on either side of the ridge and then trotted down the mountain for another photo or two with the ridge and its peaks as a backdrop. On the hike back to camp at Lake Magog, I enjoyed her delightful conversation and we shared stories. She then took Bert on a side hike to show great venues for sunrise photos of Mount Assiniboine. The hike added a couple of kilometers to a long day's hike and included some bush whacking to find our way back onto a trail. Where were James and his GPS when I could have used them, or was this another case of Parks having the trails in the wrong place? Marie Linda confirmed arrangements for Linda Burrige in the morning, I wished her a happy ending to her birthday. She headed to her cabin and I to my camp. I got home about dark.

That evening, the Westman crew babysat the husky while Erin and Jackie went to the lodge for their honeymoon banquet. In the morning, Bert got up before sunrise to take some sunrise photos. Lake Magog was not smooth as glass so his pictures do not have postcard perfect reflections of the mountains, but it was a pleasant way to start the day, even if it was a bit cool. Apparently Sunburst Lake offers the most glorious mountain views and reflections at sunrise, but that was realized a day too late. Next time....

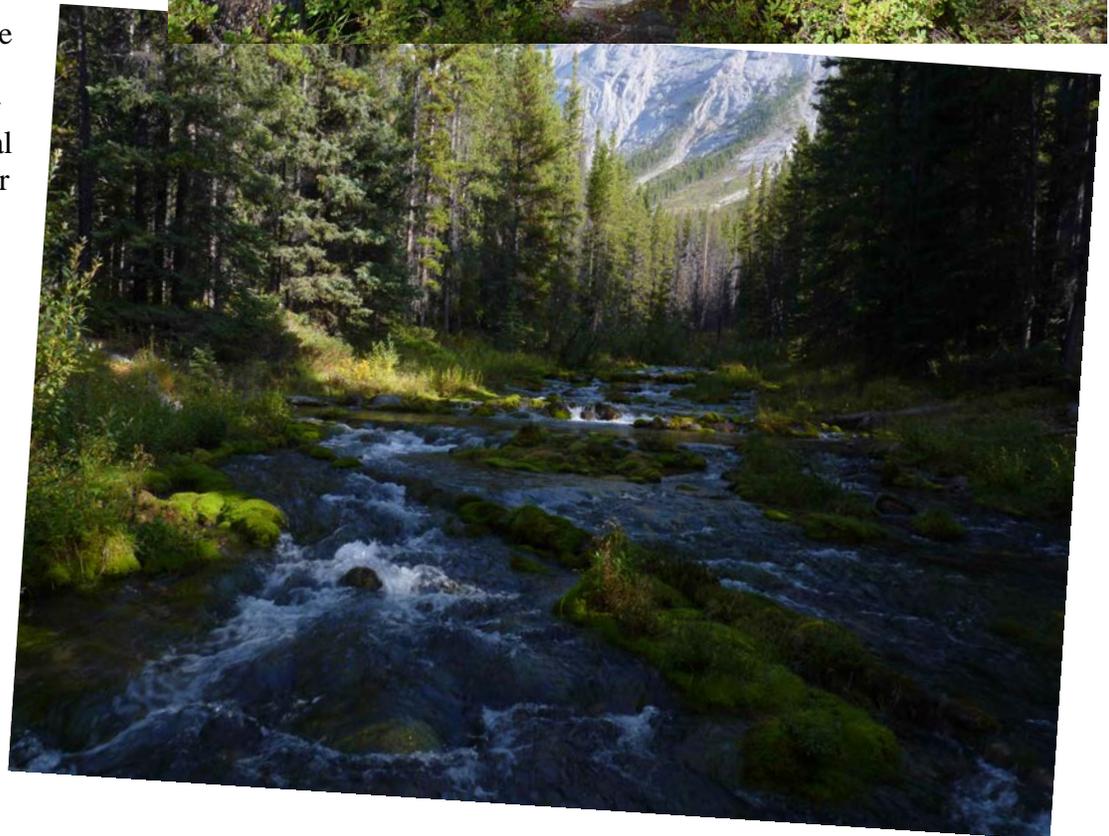




Sunrise is not only good time to photograph mountains, it is a good time to photograph flora. Ground cover was covered with frost until well after sun-up.



The hike out was two very pleasant and (relatively) easy days. It included several stream crossings, with bridges and was primarily through forested areas. The trail was mostly wide, smooth, dry and after the initial hike up to Wonder Pass, was mostly gently sloping down. As we descended, temperatures increased and our last night of camping was comfortably warm – with pleasant early fall temperatures as opposed to the late fall temperatures we experienced “up top”.





With the warmer temperatures, came more flowers, bee activity on flowers and an interesting array of fungi and mushrooms. Wayne kept on hiking under blue skies.



After our first two days of hiking, Eldon commented that he thought it was the toughest hike of his life. The weather was certainly a factor and some might erroneously suggest age as a factor. I think a key factor was that the trails were not in the right the spot. If Parks gets James's GPS tracks and moves the trails back where they belong, all will agree that this hike is not only one of the most beautiful hikes in the world, it will also be one of the easiest.

Thank-you Eldon for organizing this hike - for those that participate, these mountain excursions are the highlight of our outdoor year; and thank-you Wayne for the blue skies.

James has posted his hike photos at

<https://picasaweb.google.com/101649491842932613628/MtAssiniboineSep10152012?authuser=0&authkey=Gv1sRgCP-e15mohe2C1QE&feat=directlink>

bert