

A Classic Hike in the Rockies

By Larissa Barlow

Banff Crag and Canyon, May 11, 2011

Graeme Pole can look at a trail in the middle of nowhere and know exactly what's changed on it after a winter season.

He can point out the newly fallen trees or where boulders have rolled onto the trail. It's probably because he's hiked the trail more than once. In fact, he's probably hiked it 50 times.

It's Pole's job, after all, as the author of *Classic Hikes in the Canadian Rockies*, to know a thing or two about the trails in these mountains.

Now in its third edition, the hiking book has changed a bit since its first year in print in 1994. A few hikes have been added, and a few taken out, while the whole book has been tightened up with some editing to keep it full of information but still portable in a backpack.

"If I did it with 100 words in the second edition, I did it with 85 in the third," he said of trimming down his descriptions.

He made sure to put in tidbits about geology, biology and a quick wildflower section to help you identify the plants on your journey through the mountains. "It's not an encyclopedia but it does give you all the common wildflowers you will see," he said.

And, something not seen since the first edition of the book - historical quotes about the many trails you'll pass over to get a sense of the history of the place. "I really liked them and I wanted to bring them back," he said.

The result is 288 pages of trail knowledge from Banff, Waterton Lakes, Jasper, Yoho and Kootenay National Parks with a few other areas thrown in between. He's been on the trails for years with a notebook and a camera snapping pictures and jotting down notes to bring the area to life in words.

"This is the best job in the world," he said. "To be able to get to know a landscape very well and render it for people - it's a real joy. It's not a hardship at all."

And years on the trails will give you a good sense of the wilderness around you. Not only can he pick out changes to trails, but he can pretty much predict the landscape.

"After years and years and years of hiking, you get the sense when you're coming up a ridge crest. You get the sense of how vegetation will look and you can kind of feel a glacier coming up," he said.

There aren't any hikes in the Rockies that Pole dreads having to go over again, but he does cringe when seeing a full parking lot at a trailhead. He acknowledges he's partly responsible for creating that by writing a guide to popular places to hike, but he urges people to respect the landscape they're travelling on. In the preface, he speaks of how some places in the wilderness should just be left alone.

"It's a special place," he said of the backcountry. "By advertising for people to go there, you maybe contribute to making it less special. So go with respect so we don't lose that special part."