

## **Canadian Rockies Explorer**

Reviewed by Rob Alexander

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The Canadian Rockies is a well-covered place. There's umpteen books, especially guidebooks, about the Rockies, and that's without even taking into account the staggering volume of newspaper, magazine and web-based articles; all told, it's probably enough to dam the Bow River and turn the Bow Valley into a lake.

So is there room in bookstores and on bookshelves for yet another guidebook?

Absolutely.

At least, there is when it comes to an informative and comprehensive guidebook like the freshly completed *Canadian Rockies Explorer* written by Graeme Pole, which he will launch with an illustrated talk at the Banff Public Library on July 2 at 7 p.m.

This book is not entirely new; it had its genesis in the early 1990s, published by the defunct Altitude Publishing as the *Canadian Rockies SuperGuide: An Altitude SuperGuide*.

Pole based the new *Canadian Rockies Explorer* on the 1997 revision of that SuperGuide, cutting and pasting some of the passages directly from the old edition to the new, but as little remains static in the Rocky Mountains, the bulk of the book has changed.

Pole began the work two years ago, adding new sections, such as the drive from Calgary to Canmore, and beefing up current sections that had been glossed over in earlier editions, such as mountain building.

All told, Pole said, he sought to elevate the level and quality of information. "This isn't a slam against publishers, but they just don't seem to want to treat readers as intelligently, with this kind of book at least, as readers are and give them information that they want," he said, adding he hopes to spur readers' passion and give them the opportunity to become interested in a subject. "I wanted to strike something of that balance that would be useful not as an encyclopedic reference, but as a general reference to describe most things, some of them in real detail, and some of it in just enough detail to give them the hang of it."

The first version of this book was 288 pages; it is now 320, and much better for it. Pole has packed a remarkable amount of information into those pages, covering numerous topics that include geology, geography, natural and cultural history, mountain building, history, safety, insider knowledge and tips, even an interesting sidebar on what has changed in the Rockies in the past decade, along with individual sections for each specific region that comprise the southern Canadian Rockies from Waterton through to Jasper.

Like Ben Gadd's *Handbook of the Canadian Rockies*, Pole's *Explorer* is a little intimidating at first glance, given the volume of information. But with a wee calming breath and a steady thumb, it quickly becomes apparent that neither the text nor the presentation – designed by Canmore-resident Scott Manktelow – is bland, boring or overwhelmingly detailed.

After nearly two decades, Pole has a good idea of what works and what doesn't and the book includes a number of devices designed to make the book friendly and useful, including colour coding and sidebars. Pole also writes clearly and cleanly and his text is not overburdened with unnecessary details.

Books of this nature and caliber are a reminder of how much there is to learn about the numerous facets of the Canadian Rockies and the benefit of having one of the best in hand. It can take a lifetime to acquire the information, knowledge and understanding guidebook authors like Pole and Ben Gadd have compiled and books such as the *Canadian Rockies Explorer* make that task shorter, easier and in some ways more enjoyable as readers don't have to pore over technical geologic textbooks, for example, to gain even a simple understanding of the complexity of the Rockies and how they were formed.

As the foundation of the book is landscape and environment, Pole reminds readers to speak up and take action. It's not, as he said, an overbearing message in the book, "but where there are instances that can be touched on in a way that indicates these are protected places, but sometimes in name only, I go for that".

The mountain caribou is one such example. "I have great concern for some species of the Rockies, such as the mountain caribou, and feel the frustration that a lot of people feel that the government is not acting to protect a species that has slipped past the brink," he said.

*Canadian Rockies Explorer: A Canadian Rockies Companion Guide,*

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