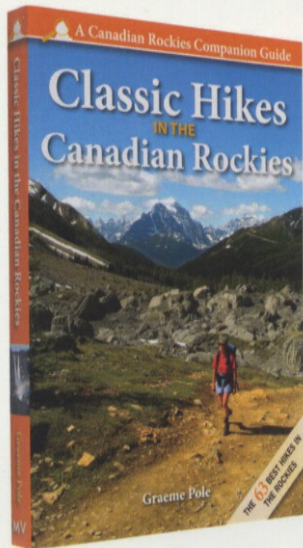


**Graeme Pole, *Classic Hikes in the Canadian Rockies*, (Hazelton: Mountain Vision Publishing, 2011).**

By Ian Urquhart



Magnificent subjects demand the very best from those who write about them. Many such treatments have blessed the natural magnificence of the Canadian Rockies. Well-thumbed non-fiction favourites in my library include Ben Gadd's *Handbook of the Canadian Rockies*, Brian Patton and Bart Robinson's *Canadian Rockies Trail Guide*, and Sid Marty's *Switchbacks: True Stories from the Canadian Rockies*. Last year Graeme Pole's *Classic Hikes in the Canadian Rockies* joined that list.

Pole's book is first and foremost a guide to established routes in Canada's five Rocky Mountain National Parks, B.C.'s Mt. Assiniboine and Mt. Robson Provincial Parks, and Alberta's Akamina-Kishinena Provincial Park and Kananaskis Country. Pole's phrase "established routes" hints at his wilderness ethic; some wild places must be left alone and sticking to established trails helps to ensure that.

Sixty-three classic hikes are described in this book's nearly 300 pages. They are presented in eight sections (colour-coded for easy reference); 27 of the hikes are in Banff, 11 in Jasper, 8 in Yoho, 3 in Kootenay, 4 in Waterton, 8 in Kananaskis Coun-

try, the Berg Lake trail in Mt. Robson, and the Forum Lake-Wall Lake trail in Akamina-Kishinena.

Attractive colour photographs of the destinations covered in the guidebook accompany each trail description. If you tire on the trail to your goal picturing those photos in your mind has to give you the energy needed to continue (I'm less confident you can always count on your destination to be bathed in as much sunlight and fair weather as they are illustrated in the book). Colour maps accompany each trail description as well. The maps, while omitting contour lines, contain much useful information about the peaks, glaciers, lakes, and other natural features surrounding your journey.

A "Trail Thumbnail" text box offers impressive details about the routes you're considering. There you find precise information about how to get to the trailhead, whether the author regards the outing as a day-hike or multi-day trip, elevations and distances along the route, and the relevant National Topographic Survey and Gem Trek maps (Pole suggests the Gem Trek maps are the best maps for hikers).

Photographers may especially appreciate Pole's suggestions in some of the thumbnails about what time of day offers the best lighting to view these destinations. For example, in his view Jasper's Cavell Meadows are flattered most by the morning light while the light is best at Banff's Castle lookout in the afternoon and evening.

While the book is primarily a trail guide you also can see the influence of other works, such as Gadd's seminal book, throughout. Text boxes about the natural history of the Rockies are liberally placed throughout the guidebook. In them you'll find answers to questions such as: What makes Mt. Arethusa in Kananaskis Country a classic example of the geological forces that have forged the front ranges? What's the difference between a cirque glacier and an outlet valley glacier? What makes Clark's nutcracker vital to the propagation of whitebark pine? How many rivers flow in the Maligne canyon? What makes the common butterwort a very uncommon

perennial? What amphibian species might you encounter in the mountain parks?

I also appreciated the vignettes of human history that Pole offers in *Classic Hikes*. Mary Schäffer, Jimmy Simpson, Ken Jones, A.P. Coleman, and James Hector are some of the characters mentioned in the book. The same can be said for the quotes from quite a wide range of books and writers that you'll find in text boxes throughout Pole's work. Many of the quotations are magical; they help you *feel* the mountains. One of my favourites is from Jon Whyte's *Mountain Chronicles*: "The day had perhaps fifteen minutes of bright wonder and we were there for all of them. A quick glissade down the snow patch and we were back in the dismal soup. The sunlight continued to scatter itself about the day, but we had drunk our fill. Time had stopped up there, as occasionally it does in mountain places. We had transcended summer, autumn, spring and winter. Yea, it is barren, but it is so beautiful." As much as I enjoyed the historical works from which the bulk of the quotes are taken I would like to see more contemporary mountain authors appear in future editions.

There are many other aspects of Pole's book that warrant its place on your bookshelf. The Mountain Marvel section offers much useful information for making your trip an enjoyable one. Examples include data on temperatures and precipitation, the hikes that will "get you high," those that are best if you want to get out early or late in hiking season, what you might do in the Rockies if your hike is rained (or snowed out), and how to minimize your travel through the mountains.

The Nuts and Bolts section also will be invaluable for many hikers, especially those who are newer to this form of recreation. Its full of advice about the equipment you should consider taking into the backcountry with you (including a checklist of items to include for an overnight hike).

If you're looking for something to enrich your backcountry experiences please consider picking up a copy of *Classic Hikes in the Canadian Rockies*.▲