

Canadian trip (11-22 May 2015)

Monday 11 May 2015, 17.35, Heathrow Airport, terminal 5

Well! At last I am at the airport and thinking more about our long-planned holiday through the Canadian Rockies from Calgary to Vancouver. It'll be wonderful to commune with nature after the last few weeks of election campaigning and the horrible let-down as the results came out. At the same time last week I received my first rejection of my family memoir, albeit, I was led to believe, not on the grounds of quality, but because the series into which it might have gone, is no longer in existence. Consequently, a combination of exhaustion, nervousness and disappointment (both personal and political) has led me to have what might be called an *existential* crisis. So what I hope to do over the time I have away in Canada is to write myself out of this crisis or at least to seek to understand why it has happened and what I might do.

However as I start this reflection, I sit in terminal 5, Heathrow Airport which is clearly not designed to encourage introspection. The terminal is noisy, crowded, non-relaxing and tedious - full of the luxury shops that only seem to exist at airports.

Wednesday 13 May, Rundlestone hotel, Banff, Alberta in Canada, 1am

I have just woken up after the first hours' sleep that I have had for some time. I am wide awake as it's 8 am in the UK and my body has decided that sleep is no longer an option. So I thought I'd resume my writing. Since I last put finger to iPad, our tour of the Canadian Rockies has started - in glorious sunshine. We have seen some wonderful scenery, yet in the quiet times my thoughts have returned to UK politics and despair and disappointment once more have begun to churn my stomach and depress my spirits - but first, to the trip.

We were late leaving Heathrow by about an hour because of the late arrival of the plane and also because of a no-show passenger whose luggage had to be taken off. The journey of nine hours or so to Calgary proved comfortable and non-eventful - we were in 'economy plus' which meant extra leg room and a slightly better meals service. I passed the time pretty well by snoozing, watching movies and reading, and though somewhat dazed on arrival, managed to get myself through passport control and baggage handling without too much difficulty. We easily found the Travelsphere representative, Dee, and the coach taking us and our party of 21 persons to our hotel in Banff. We were in our hotel room by about 12.30 Canadian-time (6.30am UK-time) and though achingly tired, could only rest rather than sleep, till we eventually gave up and got up at around 6am to prepare for the day. Our room was large, clean and airy - so no complaint there. Still no joy for me in being on holiday away from home but rather a dread of the future, not so much for me but for my children and grandchildren and anyone not born into privilege and wealth. The next five years are going to be grim.

However, things started to look up at breakfast which was a rather good buffet in the hotel restaurant. I particularly enjoyed the cinnamon toast and pancakes in maple syrup (wonderful for jet lag) though managed to down some good stuff too - the fresh fruit salad tasted marvellous. Then we met our fellow tourists and had a tour introduction before heading out on our first full day away in and around Banff.

Spring morning in Banff, David in foreground



It was a sparkling spring morning and the sun stayed out for the rest of the day, although it was quite cold. Layers of clothing we were told were the thing, which could be peeled off as the day wore on. The scenery was spectacular – snow-capped peaks, waterfalls, unusual rock formations and breath-taking cable-car rides to see the spectacular (that word again) panorama. Our fellow tour participants are seemingly pleasant, about two thirds 'seniors', mostly couples but some groups of friends and a couple of singles. Dee is an experienced and approachable tour guide, and seems to know a lot both about the travel business and the particular tour we're on. But I made a crack to the coach driver about being pleased to be away from the UK because my side had lost in the election, and there was no response from the others - so I suppose them all to be Conservatives of some sort or other. I hope I'm wrong. Why do I have to be so tribal and partisan? Why has this election meant so much to me? Why do I still feel such despair?

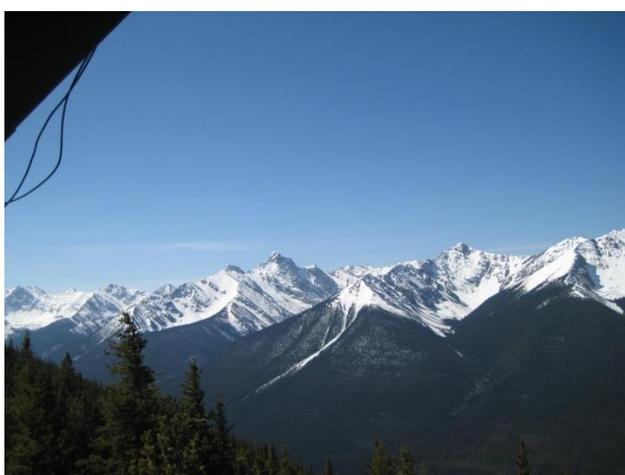
We have had easy access to the internet here through the hotel Wi-Fi system, so I have been receiving loads of emails from similarly distressed friends, and can also access all the angst and explanations about the election result, if I wish, through the Guardian and Mirror newspapers online and also Twitter and Facebook. But I have decided to wean myself of the latter, at least during this holiday, though I did post a photo of Banff against a backdrop of mountains onto my Facebook page yesterday.

We were left to our own devices yesterday afternoon, so we walked downtown in the sunshine to the town's main shopping area, our intention being to have swim later in the hotel pool before going out for dinner the evening. However jet lag took over and we spent the rest of the day holed up in the hotel room, eating bagels and liver sausage and watching bad Canadian TV programmes. We turned in around 8pm and I spent a few marvellous hours in a

deep sleep before waking up around midnight. The trouble with waking up early or not sleeping well is not only that I will feel grim for the rest of the day, although that is true, but that I play over and over again in my mind, British politics and what I might do and hope to expect for the future. Perhaps I have become obsessed. I don't know. Perhaps I am depressed. But for me this is a strange and frightening feeling and process. I can't talk to David because he doesn't share my despair nor can he seemingly empathise with it or me.

So, I have determined when I return to go to a counsellor or a therapist to help me get through what I am beginning to recognise to be depression and to rehearse my options of how I might deal with such feelings in the future.

Mountain range in Banff National Park



Wednesday 13 May, Rundlestone hotel, Banff, Alberta in Canada, 5.45 am

I spent the next couple of hours talking to David about my problems, or rather we talked about politics and our views of what had happened and the scenario that we might expect for the future, and also the things we were worrying about. I said I might be depressed, David said he'd respect that possibility; but nothing much more than that. A bit of a movement forward perhaps. Then we endeavoured to sleep, but no luck. So we are up and about and hope to go to the exercise room when it opened at 6am. David expressed concern about the possibility of another DVT - so the more exercise the better. And exercise helps with jet lag. I will endeavour to be more positive from now on.

Thursday 14 May, Rundlestone hotel, Banff, Alberta in Canada, 5.06 am

First, to say that I had much better sleep last night. Crashed out about 8 pm and woke properly about half an hour ago. That makes 8 hours sleep in toto which is a lot better than recently. My spirits are therefore up from yesterday, also because we had a fabulous day out in the Rockies yesterday. As already noted, our guide Dee is a highly experienced guide who

is also a trained nurse and bonkers about animals. She knows the tour well and seems to be pulling out the stops so that we have a good time. Yesterday was again spectacular. We were out early - 8.30am - in bright sunshine but cool temperatures, just above zero. The day was spent visiting (in no particular order) Lake Louise, a frozen lake a mile high in the mountains, Lake Emerald which is as green as its name, and tunnels original built for the Canadian Pacific Railroad.

Emerald Lake



We visited a natural bridge made out of limestone being carved out by waterfalls, Johnson's Canyon with a remarkable waterfall at the end, various beautiful vistas of the Rockies themselves, and so on.

Natural Bridge



Each of the vistas we saw could have come out of a picture postcard - absolutely gorgeous. We saw various animals - ospreys nesting, mountain sheep with curly horns, wild deer of various kinds and small mammals and squirrels. We managed to find coffee, sandwiches and fruit to sustain us during the day. On arrival at the hotel around 5 pm, and feeling pretty bushed, we decided to have an early meal in the hotel restaurant before we

became too tired for anything - David had a steak and I had some tasty pork ribs but actually wanted beef spare ribs which is a speciality of the region - so that's still to come. Then we went to our room and I can't remember too much after that.

Today we are moving on to Jasper (from Banff) and the ice field there. The weather is set to stay fair but again we have been told again to dress in layers as it'll be cold on the ice and early in the morning but warmer later in the day. I can't wait.

I am feeling much more positive today and less inclined to dwell on what's happening in the UK. I'm consciously doing so by deliberately avoiding the political news though I am managing to keep up with friends via my phone and iPad.

Friday 15 May, Lobstick Lodge, Jasper, Alberta in Canada, 5.50am

Have woken up early again feeling rather tense in my stomach again - so the feelings of depression and anxiety haven't quite gone away though I am doing my best to rise above them. But it's not so easy. I was trying to think good thoughts early this morning when David accidentally bashed me in the eye with his elbow when turning over. Sleep disappeared so I decided give up on sleep and turn to writing this.

It was another excellent day's tour yesterday which culminated with our sighting of a brown bear at the roadside, just before coming into Jasper for the night. It reminded me of our sighting of a tiger on my Indian tour some years ago when the group seemed to share a feeling of profound satisfaction and achievement. Anyhow the day had started early. After an ad hoc breakfast in our room mainly made up of eating the remainder of yesterday's sandwiches, we packed our bags and departed from the hotel *en masse* at 8.15am. This time the weather was less sunny and clear than on previous days, but nevertheless good enough to enjoy the sights of the day. Our first stop was to view the frozen Bow Lake, the source of Banff's Bow River. It was heaped with snow and reminded us of the beginning of the end of winter in the north of Sweden. Then on along the Banff- Jasper highway with stunning mountain scenery all the way to the Saskatchewan River crossing where we saw lovely views of the valley. We stopped for coffee at a small settlement nearby, then progressed to the main sight of the day -the Columbia ice field and eventually a walk on the Athabasca glacier. This was an amazing trip made up of two bus rides, the second, we were told, in a new Terra vehicle designed to cope with the ice and steep incline. To cap it all, it started to snow as we departed.

David and me on the Athabasca glacier



The rest of the day could have been an anti-climax - but we spotted the bear and also ended with a view of the wonderful Athabasca falls which were not only beautiful but gave an indication of how rock erosion causes the stunning scenery we have seen.

Bear on the roadside



We drove into Jasper around 5pm, which is a tiny town which started out as a fur-trading post and ended up as a major railway junction, though mainly for goods rather than people. We had to change our room at the Lobstick Lodge, due to peeling and stained wallpaper in the toilet - ending in a larger suite, comfortable but not particularly notable otherwise. The hotel seems in need of a makeover; apparently this is happening right now to its sister hotel usually used by the travel company; so perhaps one at a time!

After a shower, there was a so-called champagne reception organised by the travel company (Travelsphere) which in effect was two small glasses each of prosecco (and no nibbles) although I enjoyed a chat with Dee who seems to have taken a shine to me, well, to everyone really - interesting woman. Julia, one of the other travellers, David and I, then walked into

Jasper - it was a fine sunny evening - to check out what there was of the town and to have supper and eventually ate at a typical Canadian eatery chain, *Earls*, which offered 'fusion' food, i.e. anything and everything. It was pretty crowded with locals at 8pm, so we thought we had made a good choice. Julia and I ordered tasty noodle dishes and David had a 'very good' chicken salad.

We were back at the hotel and in bed by about 10pm. I had another reasonable night's sleep although I woke up at about 3pm and started to obsess again. I hope this feeling of dread goes away soon. The little news I manage to get from the UK doesn't help me at all.

Saturday 16 May, Lobstick Lodge, Jasper, Alberta in Canada, 5.50am

Nearly half way through holiday; so far so good. The weather continues to be brilliant and the scenery, absolutely dazzling - blue glacial lakes surrounded by snow-capped mountain peaks (Lakes Patricia, Pyramid and Maligne) deep canyons with stupendous rock formations and huge waterfalls (Maligne Canyon where we stopped for coffee and bought some calendars).

Patricia Lake



I have been videoing the waterfalls to keep the sounds of gushing water. We have also seen more animals - coyotes running along the roadside, another brown bear this time a cub clambering through the forest, a moose running across the road, white-bottomed deer by the roadside, and various smaller animals such as red and brown squirrels. We failed however to see any beavers on an evening hike for that purpose although there were plenty of mosquitoes about. We had been water rafting in the afternoon along the Athabasca River - the build-up made it sound a little dangerous but it wasn't- just fun and relaxing. A long and busy day but enjoyable and sometimes visually stunning. Hope my photographs do it justice.

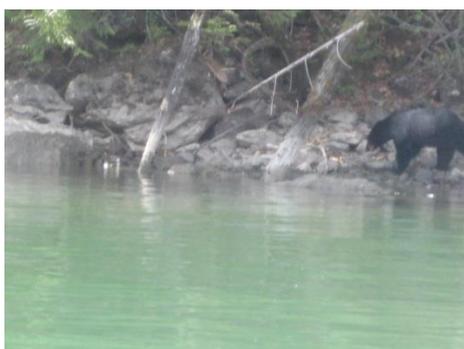
Today will be our last day in the Rockies and then we head down into British Columbia and the west coast. I'm still waking early and worrying about stuff but am managing to get a decent night's sleep, and still trying to avoid news from home. Thankfully there is nothing

here at all on TV about the UK.

Sunday 17 May, Hotel 540, Kamloops in Canada, 5.35am

This was my best night's sleep yet since I left the UK although I awoke anxious - so not quite right in the head yet. We turned out the light around 10pm yesterday and awoke around 5.30 this morning - seven and a half hours in toto. Augers well for today as it'll be a busy one. We left Jasper yesterday in the rain at 8am, bags packed and collected by 7.15am. Our first stop was the British Columbia border and then Mount Robson, the highest peak in the Canadian Rockies where we had coffee. It was raining at the border crossing but had cleared by Mount Robson although it was partly in the cloud, which I gather it is most of the time. We bought a couple of wolf t-shirts for the boys while we were there. The weather improved all the time as we made our way to what was described as a river safari on the Blue River. This was the high point of the day, not only because the weather cleared and the scenery was fantastic, but because we saw a bear and followed it for about 15 minutes as it strolled along the water's edge. – fabulous!

Another bear walking along edge of Blue River



The rest of the day was spent in the coach, heading down to Kamloops following both the Thompson River and the railway line. We stopped for a sandwich lunch at a camping resort on Dutch Lake - by this time it was hot and everyone was divesting themselves of clothes. We gradually made our way down to Kamloops, stopping only once at a waterfall, the name of which I know not - yet another amazing rock formation and waterway.

We arrived in Kamloops around 4.45pm, checked into the hotel which was comfortable and modern, and after waiting for our cases to be delivered to our room, set out to have a quick look at the downtown area. Kamloops is predominantly a railway and administrative town in the centre of British Columbia. It is also a university town so we found some student-y shops and bars as well as the usual North American urban sprawl. We had a rather nice meal at a Japanese restaurant near the hotel – yum-yum - and then popped into supermarket to buy some bits and pieces for breakfast. We have again to leave early today as we are making the long trip down south towards the coast at Vancouver and a ferry crossing before we stop for two nights in Victoria, capital of BC. It's supposed to be an 'English' town whatever that

means, so we shall see. Only four more nights now and we are on our way back to the UK and reality!!!!

Wednesday 20 May, Downtown Best Western, Vancouver, Canada, 6.30am

I have been rather remiss in writing the diary of my trip but as I have begun to sleep better there has been less time each day before the tour day starts and I have been too tired generally at the end of the day. One great thing about the tour has been the quality and location of the hotels - great beds and right in the centre of town.

Since I last wrote we have crossed the border from Alberta into British Columbia which is also a date-line, an hour further away from UK- time. We have left the fabulous Rockies, and driven towards the west coast. As noted, we have been on a river safari along Blue River where we followed a black bear. That was matched by a whale-watching trip out from Victoria on Vancouver Island. The weather was good and the crew were hopeful that we would catch a glimpse of at least a couple of the 24 orca whales in the school. In fact we were very lucky, the weather was calm and there were many sightings including four or five jumping right out of the water about 50 metres in front of us - brilliant although my camera wasn't up to getting any good pics.

As noted, we had overnighted in Kamloops in the middle of British Columbia, at the confluence of several rivers, and set in the middle of a desert-like dry region. The weather was damp on leaving the town which prevented us from having a good sighting of Mount Robson, the highest mountain in the Canadian Rockies. But it quickly cleared as we made our way westwards down to the coast and on the ferry to Victoria on Vancouver Island.

Shore marina at Victoria BC



Our main day in Victoria was spent watching the local parade celebrating Queen Victoria's birthday (24 May - the formerly-named Empire Day) in the morning and watching whales in the afternoon, followed by a fish supper at a 'traditional' fish and chippie in the early evening.

After two nights in Victoria BC, we paid a morning visit to Butchart Gardens which had wonderful displays of Spring flowers, before we headed back to the mainland on the ferry.

Butchart Gardens, Vancouver Island BC



The crossing back was calm, and was followed by a comprehensive tour of Vancouver, a rapidly expanding, sky-scraper city right on the edge of the Pacific Ocean with a mountain range as a backdrop. We ended up in the glorious Stanley Park from which I took the picture below of downtown Vancouver

View of city from Stanley Park



The Vancouver tour was also the last occasion when we would be with our driver Myles, so a humorous poem was read out by one of the tour, punning on the miles we had been driven by Myles, and Dee made a short speech about how good a driver and support Myles had been.

David and I had a quick brush-up at the hotel before we met up with some of his academic colleagues/admirers here in Vancouver. We had a drink and a bite with two of them in a local bar - a nice break from the group we have been travelling with. Today, our last full day on the tour we shall be spending on our own looking round Vancouver and doing the last of our

shopping and gradually winding down to our long flight back tomorrow.

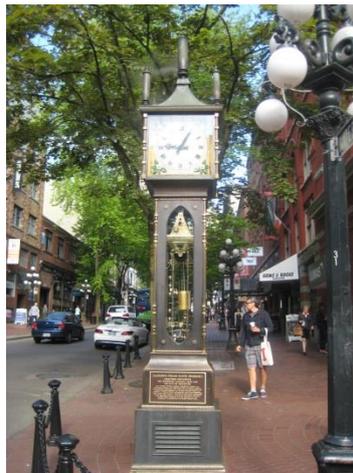
I can't say I'm looking forward to getting back to the UK but feel sufficiently chilled now (I hope) to cope with life as normal under the Tories.

Thursday 21 May, Downtown Best Western, Vancouver, Canada, 7.30am

To bring the holiday account up to date, yesterday proved as interesting and busy as ever although we ostensibly had the day free for ourselves. The weather dawned sunny and warm and stayed that way throughout the day. We have been so lucky with the weather - only two slightly damp mornings and otherwise sunshine all the way - although temperatures have varied from just above minus C in the mountains to 21C or more on the west coast. We left the hotel early - at 8.30am - as we had forgotten to buy milk for our usual cereal breakfast.

We walked into Gastown which is the oldest part of Vancouver, photographed the historic steam clock and then made our way to Robson Street in the West End, the main shopping area of the city - but not really comparable with London or any other of the major cities.

Steam clock in Gastown, Vancouver



En route we had breakfast (bagel and oatcake respectively) in a coffee shop, David bought a pair of shoes in the Ecco shoe shop on Robson and we also bought some small items at the Art Gallery. Following this, we came back to the hotel to dump our purchases and for me to change shoes, and then embarked on the main walk of the day – across Granville Bridge to Granville Island with its marvellous food market, art and gift shops and water front, and then to Broadway, and an outdoor and sports Coop shop which David wanted to visit where he bought some kind of gadget.

Granville Island Shore-line, Vancouver BC



We had a salad lunch at a typical Japanese-run 'fusion' restaurant on the way. Back to the hotel after stopping off for a delicious iced tea, tired but pleased with ourselves for having covered some 15 miles - no bad thing the day before the long flight back to the UK. We had arranged to meet at 6pm anyone in the group who was interested in partaking in a shared meal on our last evening. We waited and waited and no-one came which was surprising given that our group has been exceptionally punctual. Eventually someone came down on the way to buying milk for her breakfast, and mentioned that the meeting time was 6.30pm. In the end, there were ten of us. Because people were tired, we decided to eat in the hotel restaurant. The food was fine, the wine was excellent and the conversation flowed. Some of our co-travellers have indeed turned out to be good company, and have even said that they might come to visit us in Lewes; and so to bed and a reasonable night's sleep. We now have to pack, leave our bags in our hotel room, before meeting in the lobby for a 'foodie' tour at 10.15. We leave for the airport at 2 pm.

Tuesday 26 May, Lewes, East Sussex, 4.45pm

It has been some days since we arrived home, and I have been overtaken by jet-lag, things that need doing and editing photographs, so haven't had time to draw this account to a close. So briefly, our last morning in Vancouver was spent on a so-called foodie tour of street food providers.

Green area, Downtown Vancouver BC



There were only five of us on the tour (with Dee) - and we were open to new tasting experiences; but in the event it was mainly a walk round the city with a bit of food thrown in – spicy hot dog (half per person), crispy chicken wrap (best), candied salmon pieces (too dry), a regional speciality apparently, and spicy cookie (yum).

Foodie tour participants with Dee, our guide, on left



It was nevertheless a relaxing way in which to spend a couple of hours before a long flight, because the weather was fine and we got some gentle exercise – and we didn't need to buy lunch! The coach left the hotel around 2pm (on time) and we were at Vancouver airport in about 30 minutes and through security and passport control seemingly in a flash. The plane left on time and we had a shorter flight time than when we came out, despite the more westerly position of Vancouver. Apparently there was a tail wind which meant that we arrived in Heathrow half an hour before scheduled time. Again, we progressed rapidly through passport control and customs, and had cleared the airport in 45 minutes which must be something of a record for Heathrow (Terminal 5). Tube and train were speedy and we were home around 2pm (6am Vancouver time). And that was the end of the tour and the holiday.