

Classic Hikes a Wealth of Information

Jasper Fitzhugh, May 11, 2011

Graeme Pole has been writing about the human history and the natural history of western Canada since 1989. According to his biography, Pole has ascended 250 peaks in the Canadian Rockies, with some of his favourite hikes being in Banff and Jasper. In his writing, Pole gives detailed information about some of the greatest hikes in the Rockies, while also speaking out against the urbanization and commercialization of landscapes.

In *Classic Hikes*, Pole provides detailed trailhead and route descriptions, and a colour map for each hike to help get you to the trailhead and keep you on route. The hike descriptions provide information on history, geology, wildlife, wildflowers, and side-trip options. The wildflower guide is made up of Pole's own research and photography and even references to where you will find each flower. Tips on equipment, food, drinking water, backcountry etiquette, minimum impact travel, hiking with children, preparedness, and bear safety make this a must have for any type of hiker. The new edition also includes five "new" hikes and a foreword by Robert Bateman.

"It was a real gift to have someone like Robert Bateman write the intro to this book," Pole says. "To have somebody like him lend their voice to this was a great thing for me and really adds something to the project."

Regarding the choice of trails included in the book, Pole says he chose all the trade routes and classic trails in the Rockies.

"I'm a bit of a traditionalist," he says laughing, adding that the included hikes are respectful of the landscape.

Pole says he also wanted the book to include a variety of hikes that targeted all the various ecological niches in the Rockies. He also wanted to ensure coverage of early and late season options, and hikes that could be done with the family. There is an entire page on this subject taken straight from Pole's own experiences hiking with his family, including his three daughters – ages 11, seven and one.

When queried about his own personal favourite, Pole refers to the Brazeau Loop. "I love the front range geology, the vegetation on the passes and, because halfway in you are away from the highway, you get a real feeling of being 'out there'," he says. "For a day hike, you can't really beat Cavell Meadows or Wilcox Pass – they are incredible."

For people who are not from the Rockies and are adventurously travelling through by hiking, Pole included a section on "home between hikes" that is great for the long term traveller. The section details campgrounds and hostels that are in close range to the trails.

“I have never seen that pointed out before,” he says of the special section.

When writing a book like this one, Pole says he feels it’s okay to editorialize a little, so he decided to include a bit of information for those that want to bring their technology into the wild with them. He includes information on keeping devices “turned down” so as not to disturb those that are out to get away from technology for a while. Pole also includes some information on star watching, something he says fits in nicely with Jasper’s recent designation as a Dark Sky Preserve. He also addresses climate change in the book and even talks about the plight of the Jasper area caribou with respect to hiking and ensuring their territory remains undisturbed.

Pole, who has done a lot of hiking in the Jasper area, says that the Jasper hiking material really provides a grounding for people in the way the landscape is arranged.

“You can really get a feel for how the first explorers and discoverers saw the land, and get an understanding of the botany and geology of the area as well,” he says. He adds that a lot of people who are familiar with the Jasper area will know many of the hikes, but they and newcomers to the area can use the guidebook to help enrich their hiking experiences. He also hopes the information in the book can help hikers to be responsible stewards of the area.

“This is the one [the book] that is dearest to me,” he says. “It is densely informative and has the most work in it.”

Pole has completed every hike in the book, some 20 to 40 times over. This first hand experience has really added to all of the information he includes in the latest edition of Classic Hikes. Pole’s latest book can be found at Friends of Jasper National Park, Jasper Camera and Gifts and Maligne Tours.