

Canada 2016

The map on the right shows the extent of our West coast travels starting in Vancouver where we picked up our hire car. To the West we went as far as Tofino on Vancouver Island, to the North Jasper and to the East Calgary, where we dropped the hire car off and flew to Toronto.

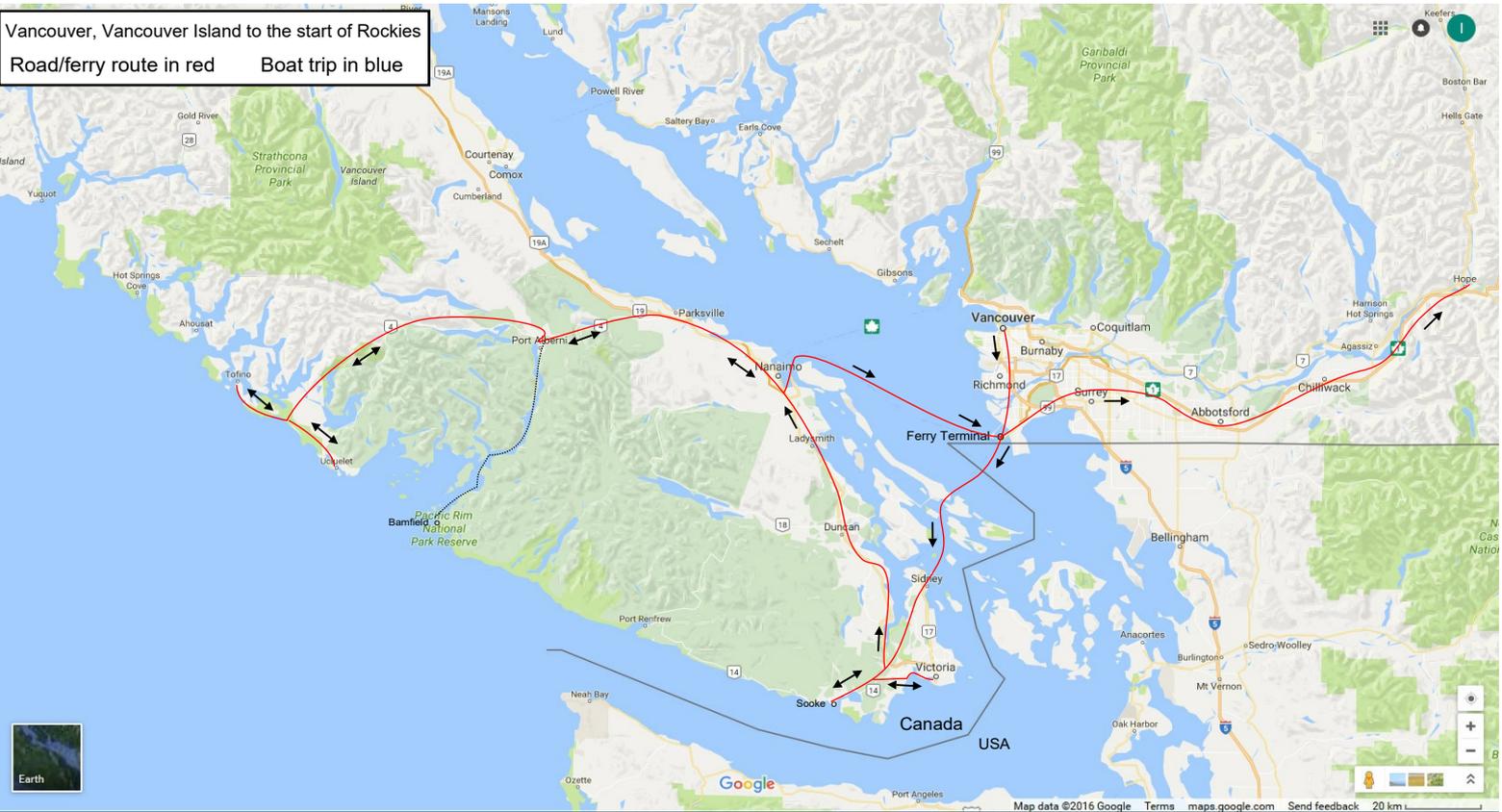
The maps below show in more detail the routes we took in Vancouver Island and through the Rockies

We stayed with friends in Toronto and did have four days away with a night in Kingston and two in Ottawa as well as local sightseeing.

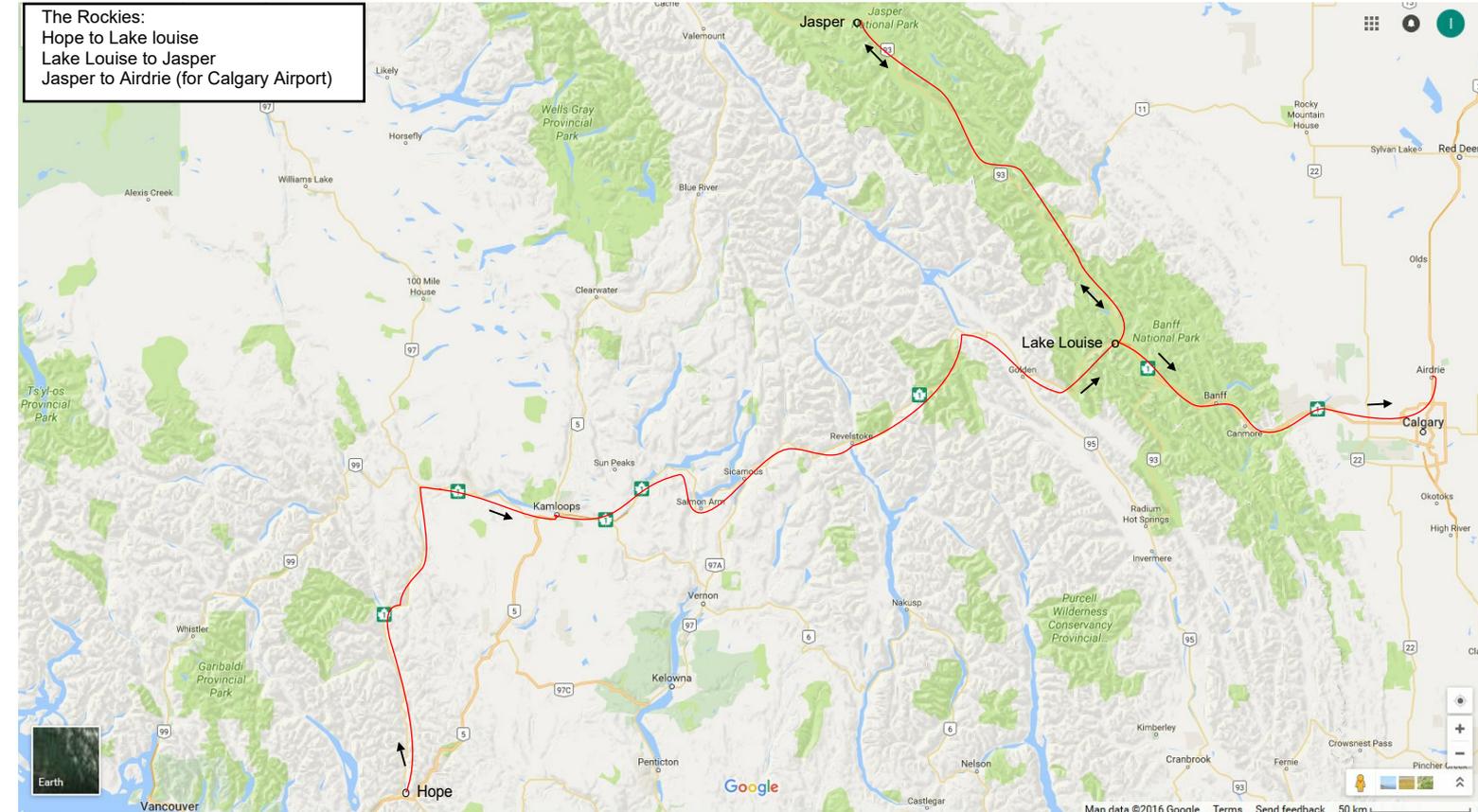
On the following pages there is a full description of our trip and a selection of photos.



Vancouver, Vancouver Island to the start of Rockies
Road/ferry route in red Boat trip in blue



The Rockies:
Hope to Lake Louise
Lake Louise to Jasper
Jasper to Airdrie (for Calgary Airport)



Our Canada trip 2016

After many invitations from our friends Mel & Chris we decided that 2016 was the year to re-visit them in Canada. Although we see them, either in the UK or France, most years, the last time we visited them in Canada was in 1975. They lived in Montreal then, now they live close to Toronto.

After talking it over with them we came up with a plan to visit in June, with a flight to Vancouver to see some of the West coast and the Rockies to start with. With the benefit of their advice, as they have visited the West Coast in the past, we decided to spend 16 days taking in Vancouver itself, Vancouver Island and the Rockies before flying from Calgary to Toronto. We planned the itinerary pretty thoroughly in advance as there were some things we wanted to do that could only be done on a certain day. We decided that we did not want to mess about with multiple car hire or carrying all our luggage on public transport so chose to simply hire a car from Vancouver airport and drop it off at Calgary airport. Although that meant we had to pay to take it across to Vancouver Island on the ferry it seemed to be so much more convenient and it definitely turned out that way. We got a pretty good deal on a Hertz rental by booking it through the company we booked the flights with, in their pre-season sale. It was way cheaper than anywhere else, including booking directly with Hertz, and there was no extra charge for the one way hire. We pre-booked all the hotels through Booking.com as we did not want to get caught out, particularly in the Rockies where hotels can be expensive and in short supply. I picked up a set of North American maps for my sat-nav on ebay for £20, a much cheaper option as hiring a sat-nav with the car was around £7.50 per day. It meant that I was able set it up in advance with all the hotels we had booked as well as specific places we planned to visit. I also used it to work out estimated driving times between towns, very useful when planning where to stop overnight. It was certainly worth the effort and things could not have gone any smoother. We booked our flights from Manchester and stayed with good friends who live not far from the airport the night before our departure. We were able to leave our car at their house too.

Part 1: West Coast and the Rockies

Day 1: It was mid afternoon, local time, by the time we got out of Vancouver airport and picked up the car. We had booked an intermediate sized car, a Toyota Corolla automatic. We knew that there would be days when the car was going to be parked with most of our luggage in it so wanted one with a boot that was big enough to hide everything. We also wanted a car that would be comfortable for the amount of driving we were going to do. We started with three nights in Vancouver itself, in a slightly dated but adequate hotel but at a really good price so headed straight there. It was not in the smartest part of town but we had no problems and it had free parking. There was a decent sized supermarket opposite so we were able to pick up stuff for breakfast as well as coffee etc for our picnics. We had taken a stainless steel thermos flask with us, one that we bought in Australia in 2012. So far it has been to New Zealand, San Francisco, the UK and Canada, it is well travelled. We like the freedom of travelling at our own pace and being able to stop in the middle of nowhere, if it suits us, for coffee or a picnic lunch.

Day 2: We packed a lot into our first full day. First we headed through Stanley Park and across the Lions Gate Bridge to the Capilano Suspension Bridge Park. The main attraction of the park is the suspension bridge itself, a footbridge 140 metres long and 70 metres above the Capilano River. The park also has a semicircular cliff walk, suspended from one side of the gorge, and treetop walkways that take you through the canopy some 30 metres above ground level. Coming back we got held up in a queue to get back over Lions Gate Bridge but stopped for a late picnic in Stanley Park where we spotted a raccoon foraging around some bins. To finish the day went to Granville Island which is near the centre of Vancouver and is something of a tourist centre with markets and craft shops. By the time we got there most of them were shutting for the day but we picked up a couple of large ice creams, took some great sunset shots and ate outdoors at a fish restaurant before making our way back to the hotel.

Day 3: We went back to Stanley Park in the morning to explore it in more detail. It covers a large area and we knew that we had not done it justice on day 2. The collection of totem poles there is well worth seeing. In the afternoon we drove into downtown Vancouver and visited the Gastown area where we saw the steam powered clock. After that we took a trip up the Lookout Tower which gives great 360 degree views over the city and harbour. It was very interesting looking down on the seaplanes as they landed. They are everywhere and as we found when we got to Vancouver Island most of the coastal towns have a seaplane service.

Day 4: We headed south out of town to the ferry terminal for the crossing to Vancouver Island. It is a two hour crossing and very scenic as it weaves its way between smaller islands in the final part of the journey. We got into the terminal at Sidney, which is several miles north of Victoria, in the early afternoon and headed straight for the Butchart Gardens which were not too far away. We spent a full afternoon there. The gardens are wonderful with different themed areas including the sunken garden based around an old quarry and the rose garden. The grounds extend to the water's edge where there is a small creek and harbour so visitors can even arrive on their own boat if they wish. It is perhaps a shame that many organised tours to Vancouver Island seem to consist of a one day trip only taking in the gardens and Victoria itself. They are well worth seeing but as we found out the island has so much more to offer. We had booked 2 nights at a place called Sooke which is West of and about a 45 minutes drive from Victoria. Mel had mentioned the area to us previously and when I was looking for accommodation near Victoria I spotted a waterfront cottage there which looked to be in an idyllic position. What a perfect choice that turned out to be. It was right on the water's edge with its own jetty, a hot-tub on the back decking, humming birds on the feeder and a bald eagle nesting at the top of a tree in the garden two houses away. All with a view over an inlet sheltered by a long low spit of land. We had a self contained room with bathroom in the end of the owner's house, with its own entrance. There are also 2 separate cottages on the site for larger groups of visitors. Included was a 'welcome' food pack which included home-made banana cake and date and walnut cake, along with slices of cheese, homemade spreads and all you could want for a good breakfast. It was all topped up for the following day. We would have loved to have stayed longer. We can only highly recommend the place, Salty Towers Ocean Front Cottage, the excellent reviews on Trip Advisor are fully justified.

Day 5: Whilst looking around Google Earth when planning the trip I had come across a place called Fort Rodd Hill (almost expected Emu to be around somewhere!) on the coast between Sooke and Victoria and overlooking Fisgard Lighthouse, very picturesque. As one of Canada's Historic Sites the entry fee was nominal and we spent the morning there on our way to Victoria. Amongst the few other visitors at the time was a small group which included David Blunkett. We had our picnic lunch at the beach below the fort and then carried on into Victoria. We parked on the waterfront and wandered around the harbour and the Parliament buildings before enjoying fish and chips at a particularly popular kiosk right on the water's edge. It was a lovely evening when we got back to Sooke so we took a glass of wine down onto the jetty and watched the world go by.

Day 6: Time to move on and this was to be our longest day's journey on the island as we headed to Tofino, the farthest point up the island we were going. It is on the West coast but the terrain is such that the main road up the island is on the East coast. One of the advantages of staying in Sooke was that we could cut up to the main road without going back into Victoria. It was a scenic run up the East coast, passing Nanaimo, before crossing the island, through Port Alberni, to the West coast close to Tofino. We were stuck in a huge queue of stop-start traffic on the main road at one point for a good hour and more but never found out what the cause was. With that and the length of the journey it didn't give us much time for stopping on the way. That was not an issue as we knew we were going to retrace a good part of the route, back to Nanaimo, at a leisurely pace. We did stop however briefly at a place called Coombs where the Old Country Market has a grass roof which is kept in trim during the summer months by having goats living on it. It has become quite a tourist attraction and the market itself is an Aladdin's cave carrying a wide range of food and non-food items.

Day 7: Tofino is a place to go whale watching from, that is why we were there, and we had pre-booked our boat trip for the afternoon. We had chosen a decent sized boat, a fast catamaran with inside seating and several outside viewing areas. Some of the trips use open Zodiac inflatables which give a very bumpy ride and you have to be kitted out in a full wet weather outfit, not for us. We passed a large school of sea otters on the way out to find whales, although we were moving too fast to get a decent photo of them. We went on to find a pod of around five Orcas and also a large grey whale. As we drifted near the coast, the grey came within a few metres of the boat, a very successful afternoon.

Day 8: A leisurely day retracing some of the route we had followed 2 days earlier. We stopped off at a few places on what was quite a wild Pacific west coast, south of Tofino and also went into Ucluelet, which we had not passed on the way there. We then drove halfway back across the island to Port Alberni where we were booked in for the night. The motel was a little less grand than the description and photos had suggested. The suite of rooms was large, a lounge/kitchen with full oven etc, separate bedroom and a bathroom where a refurb at some point had included painting both the bath and wall tiles yellow! It was in a convenient position for getting to the dock area which was one reason I had chosen it. We ate at a rather good waterfront fish restaurant that evening.

Day 9: We had to be at the docks at 7:30 am for a full day's boat trip down Barkley Sound from Port Alberni to Bamfield and back. We knew about it because Mel and Chris had been on it on one of their visits and recommended it to us. It only runs on certain days of the week and our itinerary on the island was built around getting there on the right day. The Frances Barkley is a working historic ship (built in 1958) that delivers and collects goods, including the mail, at various settlements along the sound which are not accessible by normal roads. One of the stops was at the only floating Post Office in Canada. In some places it just stopped in the sound and a smaller boat came out to load and unload goods including gas bottles and an outboard motor. At Bamfield we had an hour and a half free time to wander around before the ship returned to Port Alberni. One of the sights we saw on the way was the use of a helicopter to pick up trees that had been felled on the steep slopes of the sound, with a grab on the end of a long cable, and drop them into the water where they were eventually corralled by small tug boats. After arriving back at Port Alberni at around 4:30 pm we immediately set off on a one and a half hour drive to Nanaimo. We even managed to find time to stop at Coombs to see the goats again and spend more time in the market. There are two main ferry routes from the terminal on the mainland, which is some distance south of Vancouver. One is to Sidney, near Victoria, which is the one we took on the way out. The other is to Nanaimo which is farther up the East coast. Both crossings take about the same time but the Nanaimo crossing was much more convenient for the return.

Day 10: Just enough time to visit the harbour in Nanaimo before getting to the ferry port which was a little way out of town. After another 2 hour crossing we were back on the mainland and cutting south of Vancouver to head for Hope, our first stop in the Rockies. Although this was a relatively short drive it was a bit slow through the built up area south of Vancouver. Hope was the ideal place to start our tour of the Rockies so staying there set us up nicely for the next day. We got to the motel towards the end of the afternoon and found that it had a washing machine and tumble drier on the site. Because we arrived in good time we were able to do our first clothes wash of the holiday, perfect timing really. Hope is not a big place but because we had eaten a full meal on the ferry we just picked up a couple of sandwiches to eat that evening.

Day 11: After picking up some rolls at the Subway in Hope we set off Northwards up the Fraser Valley. Our first stop was at Hell's Gate one of the main tourist centres on this route. This is a point where the Fraser River passes through a narrow gorge, creating rapids and a fierce current that presented quite an obstacle to the pioneers who first tried to navigate up this river. We took a cable car across to a visitor centre on the other side. It was quite a long drive that day but the journey up the rest of the Fraser Valley was well worth it. We eventually turned off to the East to stop for the night at Kamloops, a decent sized town where we had got a good deal at a Howard Johnson motel which include breakfast. We went out in the evening looking for somewhere to eat and came upon a Greek restaurant with a few specials on offer. We went for a slow cooked piece of lamb which was both enormous and delicious it just melted in the mouth. It came on a large oval plate with a large Greek salad and a full portion of rice and sautéed potatoes. We were well and truly stuffed after that. We noted a group on a nearby table who struggled to get through their equally large starters and left the main course virtually untouched!

Day 12: Kamloops to Revelstoke. We stopped at a place Called Salmon Arm for our picnic lunch, in a park at the edge of a large lake. We needed to cross the railway line to get to it but had to wait for about 10 minutes whilst a train lumbered past. The Canadian Pacific Railway goods trains are huge, later in the holiday I videoed one passing through the station at Lake Louise and afterwards counted it at 150 wagons, which I reckon made it well over 2 km long. Later in the day we stopped at a small tourist site alongside the track where the last spike was hammered in to complete the Pacific Railway. By the time we got to Revelstoke we were well and truly in the Rockies with snow capped peaks all around. After checking into our motel we headed upwards into the Revelstoke National Park on the Meadows in the Sky Parkway. What we had not anticipated was that even in mid June the snow had not cleared all that much and as we entered the park we were told that the last stretch of road was still closed because of the snow so we were unable to get to the highest point. Nevertheless we still had some good views back down onto the town.

Day 13: We left Revelstoke heading towards Lake Louise, which is a very popular but expensive tourist area. As a result I had ended up booking two nights at the Great Divide Lodge, around 15km west of the town. Still not cheap but better than anything else. We had a good morning with several stops to take photos of craggy snowy peaks. However by the afternoon the weather had closed in and it rained for the rest of the journey. Fortunately we were able to park right outside the entrance so did not get too wet unloading the car. The lodge sat just back off the main highway facing a lake and we had a room at the front with a balcony, which would have been great if the weather had been kinder. The railway ran along the other side of the lake and beyond that on either side of the view were two peaks which mark a dividing line in the mountains. At this point we only had their word for it as the mist was so low that they could not be seen. There was nothing else around but their restaurant did a help yourself evening buffet with a good range of main courses and coffee was free and

on tap all day. There was a rudimentary breakfast included in the price, mainly cake based but nevertheless a bonus as the booking had said no meals included. A few extra cakes were handy to add to a picnic lunch!

Day 14: A murky start to the day but we did see the Rocky Mountaineer pass by on the other side of the lake, as well as regular freight trains. Fortunately as we got into the town of Lake Louise the sun came out and we had a lovely day. We first went to Moraine Lake and then onto Lake Louise itself. Both were impressive but we preferred Moraine Lake. I nearly saw our first bear there. I had been taking photos around the lake and was heading back to the car park when someone coming the other way said that there was a grizzly on the other side of the car park. When I got there the wardens were keeping people back and I just caught the briefest of a glimpse of the top of its back as it disappeared into the woods. Throughout our trip I had been Whatsapping (I guess that is a now a legitimate verb) photos of animals and birds back to our grand-daughter each day but since getting into the Rockies I had only been able to report 'no bears yet'. We ate in Lake Louise before returning to the lodge at the end of the day. As we got within about 5 km of the lodge the weather turned murky again. It was as though it was sitting in its own little micro-climate.

Day 15: We got up to a bright sunny morning and were finally able to see and photograph the view from our balcony across the lake opposite. After passing the town Lake Louise we headed North from there along the Icefields Parkway, the main route through the Jasper National Park. The scenery on this route was really spectacular, lakes, waterfalls, glaciers, rivers. You name it we saw it, everything except bears. Progress was leisurely, as expected, and we were stopping what seemed like every 5 minutes to take photos. We would stop at a beautiful view, get out, take photos and then a few minutes further on find an even more beautiful view! Just before we go into Jasper there were a couple of elk grazing at the side of the road and it was starting to rain after being sunny all day. We arrived at our motel in pouring rain but it had stopped by the time we went into the centre of town later on to find somewhere to eat. The following day was Val's birthday so we settled for a rather up-market restaurant where we had an elk steak for our main course and an amazing chocolate and goats-cheese cheesecake for desert. Well it was a special occasion! It would have been nice to have spent a day around Jasper but our schedule did not allow us to fit that in. The drive there and back was not to be missed so that was a fair compromise.

Day 16: the day started off with a Whatsapp voice message from Amélie-Grace singing happy birthday to Val, lovely to hear from her. We had a long drive ahead all the way to Calgary, some 430 km. I had considered stopping over in Banff but decided there was no point in doing that as we would have arrived there too late in the day to spend any time looking around. We would have had no time the following day either as we had to be in Calgary and drop off the car in time for our 12:30 pm flight to Toronto. The first part of the journey retraced the route back to Lake Louise so we did need to stop as often as we had done that on the way up. Despite that we did stop quite a few times for photos as heading in the opposite direction meant the sun was lighting the scenery quite differently. We were beginning to think we would never get to see any bears. However about 2 hours down the road we saw a line of vehicles pulled over so did the same to be told there was a black bear down by the river below. I caught a glimpse of it and got a couple of shots of it, half hidden through the trees and then it disappeared. Everyone was trying to see where it had gone when someone said 'there it is'. It was walking along on the other side of the Armco barrier at the side of the road munching away at plants and flowers and several metres beyond us. We managed to get ahead of it as it walked along and I got some still shots and video as it ambled past probably no more than 5 metres away, still on the other side of the Armco. We headed back to the car then but as we looked back it had crossed onto the road and walked along for a bit before entering the woods on the other side. At last our first bear. We continued on our way and it was not long before we spotted some more vehicles stopped at the side of the road. This time it was a grizzly walking along a wide flat area of scrub are on the opposite side between the road and the woods. Although it was much farther away than the black bear had been, this time we stayed in the car to take the photos as the grizzlies have a much fiercer reputation. What a success. South of Lake Louise we left the main road to drive through the Bow Valley Parkway, more wooded and less wild than the Icefields Parkway but still pleasant. Eventually we had to rejoin the main highway. Once we had by-passed Banff the Rockies very quickly gave way to flat land, quite a contrast. We skirted around Calgary, which was quite busy, to get to our Hotel in Airdie, chosen because it was North of Calgary but on the same side of the town as the airport.

Day 17: The day started with a nice easy 15 minute run to the airport. We dropped the car off, having covered around 2800km in it and caught our flight to Toronto for the second part of our holiday.

Part 2: Ontario

On our first full day with Mel & Chris we met up with a group of their friends, mainly ex-pats they play golf with from time to time, at the apartment of one of them. A very pleasant and relaxing social gathering and we were made very welcome. Towards the end of the afternoon the results of the UK Brexit vote were starting to come in and we were all somewhat taken aback to find that the early results were already indicating the leavers were heading for a win. By the next morning the result was confirmed and the Pound had started to nosedive against all currencies including the Canadian Dollar. Fortunately up to that point most of our spending had been on our credit card which gives commission free transactions at an exchange rate close to the business rate and we had not used much of the cash we had taken with us. The exchange quickly got worse than the rate we had bought the cash at so we were in as good a position as we could have been.

Our next day out was to Niagara on the Lake, followed by a wine tasting at a local vineyard and then onto Niagara Falls with a trip on the boat for good measure. We had been to Niagara Falls on our previous trip in 1975 (then we had flown in to Toronto and stayed with some family friends before getting the Greyhound bus to Montreal) but had not done the boat trip. It was good to revisit as I think we are more experienced travellers now, we were novices back then. On the way back we stopped to eat at a pub that did very good food and enjoyed a lovely sunset over Lake Ontario. The next day we pottered around a few of the more local picturesque towns and harbours on the lake.

Mel and Chris had planned a few days away for us all in Ottawa and had already booked accommodation. We set off the next morning for Kingston which is approximately halfway. We were to spend the night in the university halls of residence as they let rooms out when the students are not there. Once we had checked in we went down to the waterfront where we took a three hour boat trip along the Saint Lawrence River to an area known as Thousand islands. This is where the river leaves Lake Ontario and the US/Canada border runs down the middle. There are homes of all levels of grandeur on islands of various sizes and Canadian and American flags were in abundance. In some instances a house will cover a small island completely. The weather was good and it was a very enjoyable afternoon with plenty of photo opportunities. The next day we carried on to Ottawa where Mel had booked a city centre hotel for 2 nights so we had a full day to explore the city on foot. There happened to be a summit meeting that day with the Canadian Prime Minister, and the presidents of the USA and Mexico so the parliament buildings were closed to the public. Men in black were everywhere and we had one motorcade go wailing past complete with sirens, flashing lights and speeding motor cycles. We spent some time by a series of large locks that join the Ottawa River to the Rideau Canal and then took a water taxi to the other side of the river, which meant we had crossed from Ontario

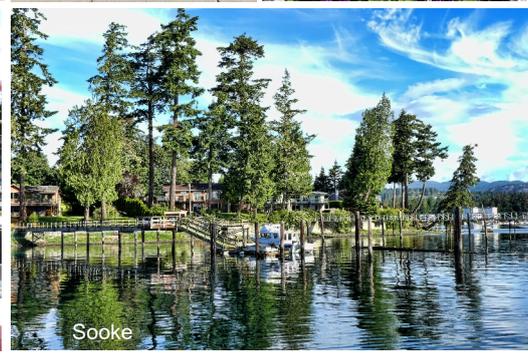
to Quebec. There we visited the Canadian Museum of History, a very elegant modern building close to the river. We had only gone into the entrance area to see what was there but before we knew it Mel had bought tickets to go in. The main double height hall, with a floor to ceiling windows along its full length, houses a large collection of totem poles. That was very impressive. It took us most of the next day to drive back to Toronto.

After that trip we spent the next day chilling out around the house before our final full day which just happened to be the 1st of July, which is Canada Day and a public holiday. We drove to a local station and took a train to downtown Toronto where there were various celebrations going on. We just wandered around some of the open spaces, taking trams between areas. Towards the end of the afternoon we took a ferry over to Toronto Island. Because it was a public holiday it was heaving with people with long queues for the ferry back so Mel and Chris got straight into the queue to reserve a place while we had a quick look at the island. One of the benefits of being on the island and the ferry was the view across the water to the Toronto skyline and the CN Tower.

Our flight the following day was in the early evening so having packed our cases in the morning we went out at lunchtime for a help yourself buffet at an Indian restaurant. After that Mel and Chris took us to the airport in the afternoon for an overnight flight back to Manchester and the end of a memorable holiday.

Photos on this page are in Vancouver





Fisgard Lighthouse



Sooke

Sooke

Victoria



View from the Great Divide Lodge





Ottawa

