

PART ONE OF THREE



A magnificent, postcard-perfect scene in the Jasper area at the Pyramid Lake Resort. PHOTOS: CURT WOODHALL

AN ALBERTA ROAD TRIP DONE BY THE BOOK

With travel opening up, Mhairri Woodhall and family let a kids' tale be their guide.

Bedtime stories are a nightly adventure in our house. I love the escape that books afford, and my eight-year-old daughter Brooklyn is equally enamoured with the power of fiction. Reading together allows our imaginations to soar and inspires new dreams, some of which we even catapult into action. I Met an Elk in Edson Once, written by Calgary variety show host and writer Dave Kelly and illustrated by Canadian Wes Tyrell, is one such example. The quirky, delightful rhyming tale follows a boy on a whirlwind exploration as he helps a new friend search for her missing uncle. With local travel restrictions easing, we're making this summer the year to explore Alberta's iconic places. Kelly's book has become the ultimate guide for our epic road trip. So let's start at the beginning, in Edson, of course, where we first meet Rusty the elk.

As the halfway point between Edmonton and Jasper, Edson is a popular stop for travellers driving the Yellowhead Highway. After checking out the town sights, we agreed on our top three "must-see" sights. Begin at the Galloway Station Museum to learn about local history and Alberta wildlife. Brooklyn's prize picks include the creatures featured in the Natural World, the trapper's cabin depicting the life of early fur traders, and the mini-replica of the buildings that once lined Edson's historic main street. Before leaving, pop outside and meet the town mascot, Eddie the Squirrel. Make the Lil' igloo Drive-Through your next stop. Order burgers and old-fashioned shakes to go for a picnic at Kinsmen Park. Kids can burn off any excess energy in the splash pad (daily 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.) and playground.

Fully satiated, we continued west toward Jasper. For me, the beauty of a sightseeing road trip is to abandon our standard "let's just get there" mentality completely. This new-found way of thinking is how we saw our first wild beaver, busy doing what it's best known for, building a dam. If you're passing through Hinton, please visit the Beaver Boardwalk. It's a local treasure, the world's longest freshwater boardwalk, and an absolutely

idyllic place to explore with kids. The area is also famous for mountain biking, as is the 30-acre Hinton Bike Park, which has the largest free-access trail network in the province.

From Hinton, Jasper is an hour's drive southwest, mostly within the majesty of the national park. Touring the Canadian Rockies is always a showstopper; however, approaching from the east provides vistas different from our usual route. Sadly, no matter how hard we surveyed the passing scene, not a single creature graced us with its presence — until we reached the town limits. There, as if standing in welcome, a pair of mountain goats completely blocked our passage. After 10 minutes, we managed to manoeuvre past Jasper's unofficial greeters and drove through town to Pyramid Lake Resort. It's a stunning setting, fringed by evergreens and glimpses of beachfront, with the lake's namesake mountain soaring above.

The resort is newly renovated and our guest room overlooking the lake was pristine. While the outdoor hot tub wasn't open during our stay, the boathouse was in full swing, and we happily spent our free time on the clear, glacier-fed lake. Paddleboat, kayak, canoe and mountain bike rentals are available on-site, making it easy to explore the resort's natural landscape. An early morning paddle followed by breakfast in the Pines Restaurant is the ideal way to start every day in Jasper. Our sun-drenched afternoons were spent watching Brooklyn hurl herself off the dock into the emerald lake. In early summer, the water temperature is best suited to locals, children and penguins.

The only downfall with Pyramid Lake is finding the motivation to explore beyond the grounds. There are two sights, however, that we always make time for. Driving to Maligne Lake is one of them. The scenic route, winding through a forested corridor, is one of the best places for wildlife viewing in Jasper National Park. We've seen bears, moose and deer along Maligne Lake Road, and every visit proves a new adventure. The lake also



Brooklyn Woodhall, 8, framed by the view at the top of the Jasper Gondola, holds the inspiration for her family's travels around Alberta this summer.



Brooklyn explores the Beaver Boardwalk in Hinton.

offers plenty of family fun, including the 90-minute boat cruise to Spirit Island. We like to grab a treat from the Waffle House and wander along the lakeside trail. On the drive back, we always stop at the Maligne Canyon Wilderness Kitchen for house-smoked Alberta beef brisket. The Jasper Skytram is our other favourite park attraction: My photographer husband never tires of the mesmerizing views

of glacier-fed lakes, rivers and stunning mountain ranges.

Following Rusty's route, we bid farewell to Jasper and drove to Banff along the Icefields Parkway, making a quick stop at Glacier Skywalk. It's a dizzying experience that begins on the Discovery Trail to learn how the Sunwapta Valley was formed and includes some fast facts about the area's geology, wildlife and fossils. After a short interpretive walk, it was time to

TRAVEL SERIES

IF YOU GO

Alberta residents can enjoy significant savings this summer on Banff and Jasper hotels, restaurants and attractions — including the Maligne Lake Boat Cruise, Glacier Skywalk and Banff Gondola. Simply register for Pursuit Rewards at www.banffjaspercollection.com.

On the next leg of our 'I Met an Elk in Edson Once' journey, we'll follow the Cowboy Trail to create our very own western fairy tale.



Brooklyn gets up close with Eddie, Edson's town mascot.

venture onto the Skywalk's glass platform for a bird's-eye view of the valley far, far below.

In Banff, we booked in at the Elk & Avenue Hotel in the heart of town, primarily for its exceptional location and new Farm & Fire restaurant. Apparently, the wood-fired craft kitchen is the hottest place in the park — for good reason, we discovered. Every dish is perfection, including the scotch eggs, honey roasted carrots and signature whole rotisserie chicken. A children's menu is available; however, the portions are beyond generous and ideal for sharing family-style.

Downtown Banff boasts a new vibrancy now that much of Banff Avenue is designated for pedestrian traffic. We spent a blissful 24 hours biking around town and relaxing at the playground in Central Park, next to the Banff Museum.