



friendship force international

Friendship Force of Central North Carolina

Journal of Ambassadors

Exploring the Rockies in Southern Alberta

Home Stay with Friendship Force Club of

Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada

Journey # 23147, August 20 – August 26, 2023



The Leth Bridge over the Old Man

Exploring the Rockies in Southern Alberta

As we planned our journey to our Lethbridge friends, the nearby Rocky Mountains beckoned irresistibly. It had been that way ever since the journey was first announced almost two years ago. That our travel agent, Kelly Dibben, dutifully kept all the tour arrangements updated bespoke the excellence of her customer service ethic, but also the warmth of her connection with the Lethbridge Friendship Force Club of which her parents are members. From our arrival in Calgary and our first meeting with Arsen Hovhannisyanyan, our tour director, he worked tirelessly with care and good cheer to foster friendship among us. Our Friendship Force group was less than half the total group of international visitors on the tour bus, but we all became happy travelers and friends, no longer just tourists, when we parted ways at the end of the week.

Here are a few images from that wonderful week.

Athabasca Glacier, Roger & Nan Poplin



Peyto Lake, Banff National Park



Spirit Island, Maligne Lake, Jasper National Park



Lake Louise, Charles & Marylin John



Lake Louise

Limericks All Around Lethbridge

by Bill Gramley

If you take a trip to the Rockies,
Don't go barefoot or wear stockings
Cause your feet will get numb
And I know you're not dumb;
Instead ride a horse like the jockeys!

Begin with some bitters and ales.
When you dine at the Prince of Wales,
Don't act like you're sober,
Place an old order
Like oatmeal, cheesecake and snails.

See, the Royal Mounted Police;
Their leggings have nary a crease.
They ride with great speeds
On their galloping steeds
and hold down their hats with their teeth!

If you try their buffalo jump,
You can't see there's a hidden hump
And down you will go
Faster than you know
With no time to say, "I'm a chump."

We took a tour of Coyote Flats
And reminisced over this and that's,

But the treat of the day

We each got a subway.

To our own hosts we bow with our hats.

We have seen the eagle and owl,

Up close they look like your pal.

Bu in the wild

Hold on to your child

Their talons can make you say "ow!"

August 20 & 21, 2023 by Sandra & Bill Gramley

Fifteen of our Friendship Force members gathered in the lobby of the Marriott Hotel at Calgary Airport. Some members had been in Canada the prior week for a bus tour of the Canadian Rockies visiting sites and participating in typical tourist activities in and around Lake Louise, Jasper and Banff.

We rode a bus to Lethbridge, some 200 kilometers southwest of Calgary, with a rest stop at a Tim Horton restaurant. Tim Horton is a Toronto based restaurant chain named for hockey great Tim Horton. We noticed that the countryside was flat, planted with crops like wheat (already harvested), hay (also cut and baled), and some canola, cows, and numerous silos and barns. Many fields had large mobile irrigation equipment that could irrigate fields over vast areas, necessary because of dry conditions during much of the growing season. We went through several small towns. Then and later we saw three-bladed windmills that generate electricity for distribution to local areas. The weather was pleasant, not too hot.

When we arrived at the Canadian Motor Association building in Lethbridge, a city of 100,000, our hosts greeted us even though we were an hour later than expected. The Gramleys and Norths were the only couples doubling up with one host family, Enid and Herman Gom. Lundee Amos and Marta Rhodes doubled up with the Stephens, Deb and Stu. Judy Greene was hosted by Helen Nagy. Of the remaining four couples, the Kiszelys were hosted by Suzanne Sirias, the Poplins were hosted by Liz Arthur, the Johns were hosted by Erwin Fellner and Edith Tanne, and the Pfeiffers were hosted by Barb Clarke.

On Monday, August 21, we had light rain most of the day, unusual for summertime, so it was a bit cool. Our hosts took us to various downtown sites such as the courthouse with fresco-like cemented images on columns outside depicting significant settlers and developers including first nation persons. Some of us toured a senior center where meals could be purchased along with many activities both active and quiet. Coffee was available and some stopped to enjoy that. A monument to Canadian Police and other markers showed men who served and died in World War 1.

Of special interest was the mile long steel bridge, shown on the cover, built in 1905 for trains to cross the Oldman River. The bridge is 300 feet high in the center. Down below we learned where coal had been mined beginning in the 1880s by digging tunnels or drafts into the rolling hills along the river, and we saw a display of how the coal was brought out on small railcars and moved up the hills. It was good quality coal and was in demand as railroads needed it as well as other industries. Lethbridge was pretty much built around the coal business.

In the early afternoon we drove to a park where the Lethbridge Friendship Force had added an FFCNC plaque to a post which held numerous such markers from other Friendship Forces over the years. We had our photos taken there.

Then it was time to tour the Japanese Garden, developed in 1967 to mark the 100th anniversary of the city's founding. Our guide explained the features, the tea house (which was built in Kyoto and brought here), the waterfall, how the small stones were gathered for the stream, and the significance of various sounds, including a large gong that was available which Charles put into action by pushing a heavy wooden post against it. The light rain continued and for dinner we all gathered at Frank and Lorna's house, where we were photographed next to a Mountie named Nick and had salad, baked beans, ham in rolls, cake and pie, and famous Tabor corn on the cob.

August 21 by Ray & Doris Kiszely

We were up early at 7:30 a.m. for our first day of activities after a good night's rest on the Murphy bed in our own ensuite accommodations at the home of Suzanne Sirias in Raymond, Alberta.

Breakfast was prepared by Clarence Beler, longtime partner of Suzanne. Scrambled eggs, sausage and toast, coffee and fresh fruit. We drove to Lethbridge about 20 miles north for a self-guided tour of the Town Center at City Hall. The entrance to the Town Center is adorned with a series of columns on which bas reliefs of persons important to the history of Lethbridge has been sculpted. One figure, Anne Robinson, stood out because of her connection to Lethbridge FF club member Erwin Fellner, who hosted the Johns.

Erwin comments as follows,

"Mrs Anne Campbell was a long-time director of girls' youth choirs in Lethbridge. Her Choirs were considered the best in Canada. She won many competitions in Canada and in international competitions in Wales and England. I traveled with her choir to Germany where her choir performed in Baden-Baden. Both of my daughters were in her choir."

Beautiful work, interesting subjects.

We toured other art works nearby, bronze statues of men and horses and other war memorials with the names of soldiers from World Wars 1 and 2, and the Korean War. The statue shown here, Turul Madar, was donated by the Hungarian Canadians in memory of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, which was

brutally crushed by the Soviets. "Turul" is a mythological falcon, a national symbol, in Hungarian tradition.

Nearby there is a large steam locomotive #3651 that was in very fine condition, having been rebuilt by the Canadian-Pacific Railway in August 1927. "Transportation" with a sketch of a locomotive is part of the symbol of Lethbridge. The City Seal also shows a wheat sheaf haystack symbolizing agriculture and a man's arm holding a pickaxe symbolizing coal mining.

We then took a short drive to the Galt Museum, at the edge of the coulee. Coulee describes the river valley created by the ice age melt and subsequent erosion of land by the Oldman River which runs through the valley and it is beautiful to see.

The Galt Museum was closed, (it is Monday), so we just hung around and waited then walked until it was time to go to the picnic area for lunch at the bottom of the "coulee".

In the meantime, a large white tail deer buck walked up from the "coulee" toward the museum stopping to graze on the bushes in front of the Museum, A handsome 10-point buck, still in velvet. After a while he walked toward a housing condo complex and disappeared.

We drove from the Museum parking lot to the area at the bottom of the "coulee", near the river's edge. First we saw a replica of a coal mine house and a kiosk which had a coal mine wagon capable of holding about one ton of coal, horse drawn on narrow gauge tracks from deep in the coal mine.

The early history of coal mining in Lethbridge is in itself quite interesting, playing an important role in the successful industrial part of the region's development.

At the end of the road was the Helen Schuler Nature Centre Society building, brightly lit, very comfortable and designed for Children's hands-on experience with flora and fauna of the region.

Then a short walk down the road to the picnic shelter, we found choke cherry trees with lots of fruit. Looking like small berries about 1/2 to 3/4 inch in diameter but grouped similarly to grapes. Tart to the taste, and flavorful, each with a miniature cherry pit, not much flesh, so it is used mainly for making Jellies and Jams with added sugar.

At the Picnic Pavilion we met our other FF Ambassadors and hosts for a picnic lunch of subway sandwiches and water. Nice change of pace meal wise, and good chance to meet all our host families.

Following our picnic Suzanne, our host drove to Nikka Yuko Japanese Botanical Garden. The brochure says "Peace, tranquility and friendship await you at the garden". A perfect description of a place of serenity. Established during Canada's Centennial in 1967, built to recognize the contributions by citizens of Japanese ancestry of the multi-cultural community of Lethbridge, Canada. The name Nikka Yuko means Japan-Canada Friendship.

We had a guided tour by a young Irish immigrant, Rebecca. She gave us a wonderful tour of the Japanese Garden. A highlight was when Charles John rang the huge brass bell that is rung by striking it with a small wooden log.

We finished off the tour with a cup of tea at the coffee/tea shop near the entrance of the Garden.

A short drive later we had a welcome dinner at the home of Frank Spanbauer. A wonderful meal at the beautiful home of a longtime Friendship Force member. A highlight of the evening was a chance to get your photo taken with a recently retired NWMP (Northwest Mounted Police) and current member of Lethbridge Friendship Force. Good Food, Good Company, and a great time had by all.

We drove back to our home host's town of Raymond about 20 miles south of Lethbridge to retire for the day. A busy start to a great Journey.

Whoop Up Days Fair, August 22 by Marilyn Moniquette-John

The yearly Whoop Up Days Fair commences with a Whoop Up Days Parade. Charles, our host Erwin and I, armed with folding chairs and umbrellas, set out in light rain for the parade which started at 9:00 am. A fairly large crowd including many excited and expectant children awaited the parade.

The parade was headed by Miss Rodeo Canada followed by mounted cowboys and police and a horse drawn carriage carrying the Mayor of Lethbridge.



A Streetcar and Lethbridge Municipal Railway representation was followed by a mounted First Nation Princess,



other princesses and an exhibition and representation from the town of Medicine Hat. It became clear as the parade continued that some nearby communities were represented. Participants included representatives from the academic, business, arts, medical, Lethbridge City and County services, farming and agriculture sectors. There was an impressive display of horses and agricultural equipment including combines, tractors etc.

As the parade proceeded, the rain got heavier and heavier and we got wetter. A feature of the parade was candy distribution by participants. This delighted the children who scrambled in the rain to collect as much as possible. Cheerleaders danced through the rain.

The parade ended around noon, and we returned drenched to the home of our host Erwin where we changed clothes and had lunch.

After lunch we set out with Erwin and Edith to visit the University of Lethbridge which was established in 1967 and had a new addition. We also visited a new YMCA which was very impressive because of the size and scope of the facilities. It was the first time our hosts had visited it.

We returned to our host's home to prepare for dinner guests at 6 PM. Erwin and Edith prepared a Lasagna dinner for our guests Jim and Barbara North, Bill and Sandra Gramley. The dinner commenced with Erwin playing a CD of his daughter Heidi performing Canadian folk songs. This was followed by lively conversation until the guests departed.

August 23 by Nancy & Peter Peiffer

We got an early start after breakfast on Wednesday and headed west to Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump, one of the oldest and best-preserved buffalo jumps, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

For 6,000 years Native people hunted buffalo every year by marking a route to herd the buffalo by placing rocks and bushes along the perimeter. The native scouts dressed with wolf skins on their backs and ran alongside of the herd steering the buffalo over the cliff to their death while the scouts jumped to safety on a ledge below.

They then butchered the carcasses using every part of the animal for many uses. This may seem cruel, but it was how the indigenous people survived. At that time there were 40 million bison (if my memory serves me correctly without my notes that I left in Lethbridge) and they killed only a couple thousand a year.

Two First Nation guides explained their way of life before we viewed an excellent short film of the reenactment of the buffalo jump. We proceeded to the top floor of the interpretive center and walked out to the windy place where the buffalo jumped (or fell) and then went back inside and viewed the exhibits on each floor as we went downstairs. We were supposed to have seen a First Nations dance but the dancers had gone to the fair in Lethbridge.

We proceeded to Fort Macleod, a small town of about 3,000, for lunch. When we got to the fort and museum, young Royal Mounted Police cadets entertained us with a “musical ride”. Two rows of horses and riders pranced in formations that intersected with each other in time to music. It was a colorful photo op. We then toured the museum exhibits and fort itself.



Fort Macleod was originally established in 1874 by Colonel James F. Macleod for the North West Mounted Police who were trying to control the whiskey trade in the area. It was rebuilt at its present location in 1883 known as NWMP Barracks.

After a long ride back to Lethbridge and a short rest, we took our wonderful host and driver every day, Barb Clarke, out to dinner at the Water Tower. This old water tower was purchased by a restaurateur who made it into two floors of restaurants and noisy bars high above the city of Lethbridge.



Ray and Doris Kiszely and their hosts, Suzanne and Clarence, joined us for a pleasant evening. It had been a long day and we meant to get to bed early, but we sat up talking with Barb until after midnight. We really enjoyed our stay with her and hope she will visit us soon.

A Day Trip South of Town, August 24 by Barbara & Jim North

Over the river, through the gorgeous coulee, and past the beautiful fields of baled straw and hay we traveled to the Remington Carriage Museum in Cardston, Alberta. The largest museum of its kind in the world, the Remington Carriage Museum tells the story of horse-drawn transportation in North America.

The museum features interactive displays, horses, a working restoration shop, carriages, wagons, and sleighs. It all began with a donation of 48 carriages from Don Remington, a local man, who restored and collected horse-drawn vehicles and today the museum's collection has expanded to over 330, 271 of which are on display.

The other notable site in Cardston is the beautiful Mormon Temple, the first of its kind in Canada.

Cardston was also the birthplace of Faye Wray, the famous Canadian actress in the 1933 King Kong movie and the birthplace of George Woolf, the jockey who rode Sea Biscuit to victory in the famous Pimlico horse race in 1938. A life-size, bronze statue of George and Sea Biscuit sits on the grounds of the Remington Carriage Museum.

Having bagged our lunches at our host families that morning, after our guided tour of the museum we were free to eat lunch at the museum or travel on to Waterton Lakes National Park. . The carpool we were traveling with (Peter and Nancy Peiffer and their host Barb Clarke) chose to continue to Waterton to find a lovely picnic spot by Waterton Lake near Waterton Village and the famous Prince of Wales Hotel.

Waterton Lakes National Park, now a UNESCO World Heritage site, makes up half of the Glacier-Waterton International Peace Park, which was the first of its kind when it was established in 1932. With its beautiful mountains, lakes, waterfalls, and hiking trails, it is an outdoor lover's paradise.

After filling our stomachs sufficiently at lunch, we began our afternoon adventures by first visiting beautiful Cameron Falls in Waterton Village, one of their main tourist attractions followed by a visit to the Waterton Heritage Center. We then strolled the two to three blocks of the main street with its numerous gift shops, eating places including ice cream shops. And as we were leaving the Waterton Village area, we stopped to see the famous Prince of Wales Hotel, a National Historic Site.

It was built in 1927 by the Great Northern Pacific Railroad on a bluff overlooking the Waterton Valley. Since the railroad never came to this area, it never achieved the notoriety of other resort hotels, i.e., Chateau Lake Louise. It has breathtaking views of Waterton's Upper Lake, the village, and the Rocky

Mountains. And last but not least a picturesque ride on the Red Rock Canyon Parkway to Red Rock Canyon, a small canyon created by a mountain stream revealing beautiful red rock walls with a lovely walking trail and lots of people playing in the stream and rocks. We left Waterton Lakes National Park late that day with pictures galore in our cameras and etched in our memories.

Those in our car had high hopes of returning to Lethbridge to attend the Pro-Rodeo in Lethbridge that evening. We did return in time but alas got caught in the town's massive traffic jam trying to find parking for the rodeo and the fair which was also in full swing. After a half hour passed without success, our hostess gave up and we all agreed it was time to go back to our respective homes and relax. There would be no rodeo for us that night but nevertheless we had a beautiful day from beginning to end.

The Rodeo, August 24 by Sandra & Bill Gramley

A great way to top off Thursday was attending the Lethbridge and District Pro Rodeo on the grounds of The Whoop Up Days Festival, For someone who had never been to a rodeo, it was quite exciting, especially since I had Deb Strube along to tell me what was going on in each category of competition! I learned about the time limits for each and what the judges were looking for in both the animal and the rider. The ladies barrel racing, the bareback riding, steer wrestling, tie-down roping, saddle bronc, team roping, break away roping, and bull riding were all exciting and had substantial monetary prizes. But the event that drew the most audience fervor were the relay races, where First Nation members raced bareback around the track, jumping off and immediately onto another horse after they had returned to their starting points. They did this three times until the fastest rider won. The audience was roaring their enthusiasm the entire race, which added to the excitement. Great fun!

August 25 by Roger & Nan Poplin

After last night's Rodeo, the three of us "slept in" (all of 15 min.) and had a relaxing morning. Lis prepared her usual generous breakfast – pancakes, eggs, bacon and toast with Huckleberry Jam. (I suppose we'll need to change our habits when we return to NC) . While we were all a little tired from the activities of the week, the effort was worth it.

First stop of the day – 10 AM

Coyote Flats, a 25 minute ride north of Lethbridge. Coyote Flat Pioneer Village is owned and operated by Prairie Tractor and Engine Museum Society. Most of the exhibits are from the late 1800's through the turn of the century. All the exhibits were walk-through. We should add our docent did an excellent job. The exhibits included:

An old schoolhouse

A post office with an old-time switchboard
A church
A blacksmith shop
Farm exhibits with tools, wagons other vehicles
Fire engine and an old fire extinguisher that used crystalized oxygen

Perhaps the highlight for some of us was the mail order home (a beautiful house) ordered from Thomas Eaton (similar to a Sears mail-order home).

After the tour we were presented with lunch (Subway sandwiches) capped with ice cream and cookies from the old town's Ice Cream Parlor.

We also played a game, What's this, identifying children's skates, bum shaper, hair dryer, bed warmer, chamber pot. We seniors did so well the docent went back and retrieved another item for us to guess – we guessed a jewelry box.

As we traveled we saw many small orange tents in the fields for keeping bees that pollinated the plants used for Canola Oil.

Second stop of the Day – Birds of Prey Rescue Center

After lunch, we traveled to nearby Alberta Birds of Prey Foundation in Coaldale AB, where we enjoyed various demos, talks and exhibitions of eagles and owls. Again, we had impressive presenters.

From there, we returned to Liz's home for a short rest as well as to replenish our appetites for the Farewell Dinner.

The Farewell Dinner provided wonderful food, fellowship, speeches. singing and just generally great fun. I think all would agree that our collective hosts did a wonderful job with the entire week and the dinner capped it off. "Eh! "You betcha!"

Ah!! Tomorrow is our departure.

August 26 by Lundee Amos

FFCNC departed Lethbridge, Canada on August 26, 2023, at 12:22 pm.

Deb and Stu, our hosts, served us a Tim Horton's breakfast: bagel, lettuce, tomato, turkey bacon, and cheese with coffee or tea. Before leaving their home Marta and I showed them where we lived on a NC

Map towel. Deb showed us a map where she knew people who were evacuated from the fires. She said that she gets tears in her eyes as she reads and sees information about the fires. The evacuation planes do not have seats. People are piled in with their belongings. She and Stu lived in some of the towns. We appreciate their wonderful kind hospitality and felt sad leaving them. Deb's brother and family were coming Sunday night for a visit, so they were VERY busy.

We met the FFCNC ambassadors and their hosts at 11:30 at the AAA of Canada where Kelley, our travel agent (Deb's and Stu's daughter) works. The host families and the ambassadors bid each other farewell before departing for the Acclaim Hotel in Calgary. Our bus driver was from Nepal which was exciting for me since I had visited Katmandu.

The smiling host families wished us a safe happy journey home. We enthusiastically shared stories from our visit which included some adventures.

The warm sunshine with low humidity felt good to our faces. The winds of Lethbridge blew gently bringing soft breezes. The fires had not created a hazy sky.

On our drive to Calgary airport, we saw: many farms, horses grazing, corn fields, water spraying fields, large to small farmhouses, silos, bales of hay, trains moving cargo, and tires covering grain to protect for the winter. You could see for miles on the flat farmland. Occasionally a machine we saw machines harvesting wheat. Saw leaves dancing in trees with winds. Could see single oil wells digging in the land. Could see many campers in parks. Industries along the roads and pro golf driving range were spotted. Saw rest areas and mountains in the distance.

In small towns we passed Tim Horton restaurants which were started by a famous ice hockey player. We saw agricultural coops and Shell stations with gas 148.9 cents / liter.

We passed museums and farms. Some fields were green as if they had been recently irrigated.

Saw a sign that said: Welcome to authentic Alberta. Also, there was a vet clinic, wild thyme café golf club, B & B, campgrounds, and barns (one with a huge smile).

We passed a huge brick High River Baptist Church.

Saw a sign about the Casino Inn and RV World Woody's. Observed people tubing with an umbrella.

Passed Austria Canadian Club, Body Therapy Wellness Center, Calgary Herald & Post, and Columbia College. Even saw a sign for golf lessons at a Golf Course.

We arrived at the Acclaim Hotel in Deerfoot City around 2:50 p. m.

Everyone retired to their rooms or took a walk.

I walked to the Thai Express for dinner and met other ambassadors as they ate dinner at the hotel.

On Sunday we left for Calgary airport at different times since our flights were different.

Doris, Ray, and I were on the same flight to Atlanta at 5:44 pm. The Delta agent could not print our boarding passes, so we had to wait three hours for the next flight. Arrived in GSO around 11:00 pm instead of 7:00 pm I was happy to see Danny.

We experienced a lot of bliss on our journeys to Canada and are grateful to the leaders of FFCNC (Judy and Sandra), FFI, and FF Lethbridge (Barb, Enid, & friends) for their work to make it all happen.

TONS OF GRATITUDE. Tired Excited and HAPPY for an awesome creation of friendships with Lethbridge hosts and ambassadors from our club. I will treasure my memories for a lifetime. Lethbridge hosts rolled out the red carpet for FFCNC: forever grateful.