

# RECALL OF THE WILD

## **Herb Kariel - A Cautionary Mountaineering Tale**

*By Vivian Pharis*

“Recall of the Wild” was designed to be a column based on stories from those who experienced Alberta’s wild country prior to too much taming. Herb Kariel’s story is one of these although there is no uncertainty that his primary interest in nature has always been sharply focused on mountains and, especially, on getting to the top of them. For some mountaineers and, interestingly, some keen birders, their focus and their obsession can be so narrow that they are oblivious to the overall complexity around them, to ecosystems, nature’s balances and

the need to protect whole habitats and landscapes in order to support their particular passion. They don’t think about connection and conservation. Not so with Herb Kariel. He is a keen mountaineer with an environmental conscience and a commitment to nature, influenced by his long history of activity with the Alpine Club of Canada and such conservation groups as the Sierra Club, North Cascades Conservation Council and the Alberta Wilderness Association.

From the first European contact with Alberta, the Rockies have acted as a magnet, drawing people here. Some come and go as tourists and adventurers

while others are so attracted they stay. Herb Kariel was one who was lured to the Rockies and brought his career and family along to stay.

Herb was born on the banks of the Elbe River in Germany but the Kariel family immigrated to the United States in 1938 and settled in Portland, Oregon. With mountains almost on his doorstep, young Herb took to the outdoors in his teens and was soon climbing in the Cascade Mountains and conquering such notable peaks as Mounts Hood, Adams, Baker, St. Helens, Rainier and the Three Sisters. Climbing was a prime pastime while he attended university in Eugene

and while he was teaching primary school in Oregon.

Marrying Pat helped to hone his interest in nature and conservation and the two joined the North Cascade Conservation Council and helped establish the Pacific Northwest chapter of the Sierra Club. While on teacher exchange to New Zealand Herb became acquainted with the Southern Alps and a whole new set of plants, animals, landscapes and climbing challenges.

A master's degree in education was the next step in his career path. He followed his master's with a doctorate in geography and a variety of jobs in Washington and California before, in 1967, the Canadian Rockies attracted him to a position with the University of Calgary. Herb taught geography at U of C for 29 years, all the time being an active member of the Alpine Club of Canada as well as taking part in conservation activities including with the Sierra Club of Canada and the AWA. Herb served on AWA's board for several terms and remains a board member, emeritus.

Herb now lives in the Edgemont Retirement Centre in Calgary where he is curtailed by a nerve and muscle disorder, which, he assures me, has nothing to do with his many years of mountain escapades. As he explains: "I climbed over 250 different mountains, mostly in Canada and the USA, but also in New Zealand, the European Alps, North Africa and Mexico. Some I climbed several times. In all these climbs I was never hurt, probably for two reasons: I was always cautious and I always made decisions based on consensus within my party, if I was its leader." He went on to explain that caution sometimes meant his party got "benighted" – had to spend a night sitting on a ledge – rather than risk a descent in the dark. "We were always prepared for this," Herb qualifies, "we took extra food and clothes; we would put our feet in our knapsacks to keep them warm and we would try to get a bit of sleep."

When I asked Herb what it is about climbing a mountain that so entices

people like him, he sighed and said: "It's several things really, not just one. It's the sheer pleasure of getting there, of using and mastering techniques, it's the views and the natural environment, the clean, cool air and the exhilaration. But, mostly, it's the friendships that are built when each person in a party cares about and relies upon every other person."

Herb and Pat wrote a book together called *Alpine Huts in the Rockies, Selkirks and Purcells*. It examines the history of each hut. The book was well



*Herb, in 1988 on the top of Mt. Hungabee, a well known climbing peak between Banff and Yoho National Parks.*

received by the climbing community of Herb's generation, but is no longer in print. When I asked why it had gone out-of-print, Herb suggested, with regret, that he thinks the younger generation either just has little interest in history or no time for it.

What Herb spoke about with greatest passion were times spent on hut repair and cleanup trips and especially at base climbing camps throughout the Rockies where young or new mountaineering

enthusiasts were trained. These camps were organized by the Alpine Club, usually four each summer, at places like the Freshfield Glacier in Banff, Mt. Robson, the Ramparts in Jasper, Roger's Pass and the Bugaboos. Base camps would be established outside park boundaries and the climbing instructors and students would hike in with their gear or their gear would be transported in by pack horse or helicopter. Herb was an enthusiastic amateur leader at these camps and, for this work and his

work on a variety of Alpine Club committees over a span of more than 30 years, he received a number of awards including, in 1980, the Silver Rope for Mountaineering Leadership and a Distinguished Service Award in 1988. Incidentally, Herb is also a recipient of a Wilderness and Wildlife Defender's award from AWA for conservation activities.

One hut cleanup trip recollection illustrates the two principles Herb relied on to keep him from harm's way during his long career of adventuring in vertical terrain and participating in one of the most exacting sports in the world. Caution and consensus seem to have been his mantra, serving him long and well, including this time when he was acting as a volunteer guide. "We were climbing Mt. Kerr up in the Little Yoho Valley. I was guiding a lady named Bev Bendell who was taking part in a hut cleanup program that year. We were about half way up the mountain when we came to a particularly dangerous looking slope. I really felt uneasy about the way the snow was sitting and the angle of the slope. I turned to Bev and asked for her thoughts.

She deferred to me and to my experience. We turned around and I took a single step back when the whole slope behind us sheered away in an avalanche."

Herb told this story, then grinned and summed up his philosophy about mountaineering with a very apt quotation: "there are bold mountaineers and old mountaineers, but no old, bold mountaineers." 🍷

## BACKCOUNTRY RECIPES

### *Black Bean Chili*

If you don't like to rely on freeze-dried foods when out on overnight camping or hiking trips you might consider preparing the following vegetarian chili in advance, freezing it, and tossing it in your pack for at least one of your meals. This recipe is based on the black bean chili recipe found in Jane Brody's *Good Food Gourmet*.

#### **Ingredients**

2 tablespoons olive oil  
1½ cups chopped onion  
1 chopped and seeded jalapeño pepper  
several crushed dried red chili peppers  
2 teaspoons minced garlic  
2 teaspoons cumin  
1 teaspoon coriander  
1 teaspoon chili powder

1 large can diced tomatoes (796 ml)  
1 can black beans (540 ml), drained  
1 can lentils (540 ml)

1. In a large pot heat the oil over medium-high heat, add the onion, the chopped jalapeño and the minced garlic. Sauté the ingredients for one minute.

2. Stir in the cumin, coriander, chili powder and the crushed red chili peppers and sauté for an additional minute.

3. Add the tomatoes with their juice, the lentils with their juice and the black beans. Bring the chili to a boil and then reduce the heat, cover the pot, and simmer the chili for 30 minutes.

4. Be sure to stir the chili occasionally to prevent it from sticking to the pot.

- Ian Urquhart

## READER'S CORNER

*Jeff Gailus, The Grizzly Manifesto: In Defence of the Great Bear, (Calgary: Rocky Mountain Books, 2010).*

*Reviewed by Ian Urquhart*

*The Grizzly Manifesto*, at only 153 pages (and 4 ½ by 7 inch pages at that) is a short, small book. But, in this defence of the Great Bear, Gailus admirably confirms the proverb that "good things come in small packages." Anyone interested in the current state and prospects of Alberta's iconic grizzly bear – just recently, and finally, designated a "threatened species" by the Government of Alberta – should read this book.

Gailus takes his readers on a nine-chapter journey that is at once personal, analytical and prescriptive. The first several chapters help us understand why the author decided to devote much of the last decade to trying to secure a healthy future for the grizzly bear. Key here were the experiences and insights he gained in 2001 courtesy of an invitation from Louisa Willcox, then the co-ordinator of the Sierra Club's grizzly bear ecosystems project. Willcox invited him to Yellowstone National Park to learn first-hand about the plight of the park's

grizzly bears. There, in addition to the concerns expressed by some American biologists about the population's security, Gailus was moved by the arguments of an Albertan, Dr. Brian Horesji. Horesji warned that, if Yellowstone's grizzlies were still in trouble and should remain on the U. S. Endangered Species list, the circumstances facing grizzlies north of the 49th parallel were much more dire. Heading home to Canmore from Yellowstone Gailus decided he had an obligation to try to brighten the Great Bear's future.

The middle section of the book is analytical in several ways. First, it discusses essential biological and ecological aspects of grizzlies. This is where you can learn, in very accessible language, why a grizzly sow's fertilized egg may or may not become a cub. It also is where you are introduced to a key theme of the book – the crucial role that human access on the landscape – be it via railways or, more importantly, roads – plays in grizzly ecology.

Second, the section also examines the species' history and, in that respect, its cultural significance among aboriginal peoples. The provocative idea that grizzlies may have introduced

First Nations to the idea of life after death is found there. The Great Bear's cultural significance, combined with its fascinating biological characteristics, leads Gailus to the conclusion that we should make more room today for this remarkable species.

Third, the section also examines why grizzlies in Alberta, even those in National Parks, are threatened. Gailus's answer is politics. The answer may be stated best in the chapter "The Death of 56" – "56" being Banff National Park's Bear no. 56. That female grizzly, like other bears over the years, fell victim to a train. Her death was the catalyst for the formation of the Bow Valley Grizzly Bear Alliance. The Alliance, opposed by the pro-business Association for Mountain Parks Protection and Enjoyment, crafted its own grizzly conservation strategy and pressed Parks Canada to honour its commitment to reduce grizzly bear deaths in the Park. The outcome? A 2004 conservation framework Gailus dismisses as "a wishy-washy rag cleverly constructed by policy wonks in Ottawa to say everything and nothing at all."

Gailus sees further evidence that Parks Canada is sacrificing its commitment to protect the Great