



## Hiking with Rumi

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Like for many, this pandemic year has brought many challenges and opportunities. We were not the only ones rediscovering, going beyond where we had never gone before and exploring new territory in our own backyard. In a year that we expected fewer tourists in the valley, we were gobsmacked at the bumper-to-bumper "local" traffic regularly jamming up the Trans-Canada highway between Calgary and the mountain parks, sometimes almost bringing it to a standstill.

Although we had many great hikes throughout the season, perhaps it was the fortune of a glorious and unusually extended fall that made it an unexpected highlight. With our three young adult children busy again with studies and irregular work schedules, we suddenly found ourselves the only family members ready for weekend adventures. At the same time, come September, our latest addition was robust enough and eager to hit the trails. Along with Rumi, our 6-month-old Mini Australian Shepherd, we became the weekend warrior trio as one week after another we rumbled up the Spray Lakes Road ready to check out yet another rugged draw off of the back side of the peaks facing our hometown of Canmore.

Rummel Lake was one of the shorter of our destinations and a good place to start to give us a baseline for our pup's endurance. The beginning of September is always a hectic time for our family being an intense time for our work and for falling back (more like grinding back!) into the school routine. So when the first available weekend came, we were so ready for the meditative focus required to navigate the gnarly, rooted trail and the chance to fill up on the crisp alpine air and drink in the colours of fall. One thing hasn't changed during these unprecedented times. Hiking continues to be just what the doctor ordered - a balm for the soul that helps to restore and refresh perspective.

Chester Lake is a popular trail for good reason. It's a family-friendly hike, with a wide, moderate trail leading to a classic alpine lake surrounded by towering peaks. What recipe could be better? We had enjoyed this trip many a time and had even explored the mind boggling collection of "Elephant Rocks" above the lake. (How did they get there?) But this time we carried on beyond the beaten path to Three Lakes Valley, leaving the crowds and the good weather behind. The curvy trail passed meadow and waterfall arriving at an idyllic little lake wrapped in the golden embrace of the fall larches. Climbing above, the trail gave way to rugged rock. With the change of landscape, came a blast of wind as cold and as grey as the surrounding cirque. The mild fall weather can lull one into complacency until, always too late, one realizes that it's already time to be packing the gloves, toques and other layers!



The weather was equally threatening the day we explored Sparrowhawk Tarns. Fortunately, we were armed with more layers as we would put them on and peel them off between whiteout and sunshine before the day was through. Although the tarns were dry when we made it to the upper reaches of the valley, their terraced ledges were unique in their own right. It was here in the remote alpine above treeline that, having seen only a handful of people, we decided to – sssshhh - let Rumi off her leash! When she realised her freedom, she bounded with unbridled joy over moss and boulder. The expression of sheer exuberance is indeed a sight to behold! We definitely look forward to returning to this place to experience it in all its summer glory.

Although there was not a golden larch to be seen on the trail to Headwall Lakes, the warm, bluebird early October day was a fall gift not to be taken for granted. Lounging in the sun is definitely savoured when you only need to step into the shade to notice that the chill of the next season is lurking right there. Being neighbours to each other, all of these hikes followed a similar pattern, having an approach followed by a steeper climb up a headwall and then an "aha!" arrival moment at an attraction surrounded by an upper cirque. Headwall Lakes, earned its name for a reason. Its headwall is definitely the most rigorous climb of the neighbourhood! Fresh air and exercise make for a winning combination for all adventurers alike. Rumi never seemed tireless while on the trail but, without fail, she promptly curled up and fell asleep on the travels home. Just like when the kids were toddlers, we have a new favourite thing - a tired dog!



Our last outing to South Buller Pass was cut short by a more intense whiteout. It looks like it will soon be time to trade our hiking boots in for cross country skis. Whatever the season or weather, we are grateful for these trails and the adventures to be had. In times when travel to distant wonders is not advised, rediscovering one's own backyard is a silver lining. And what a backyard we have!