



By Karen Rudolph Durrie
Photos by Karen and Tory

DAY 1

I'm standing opposite a lanky figure dressed in a mashup of Victorian and Old West garb pinned with the futuristic insignias of *Star Trek*. This steam-punk soul with the precisely waxed moustache is Trekcetera Museum docent Michael Mangold, and he's regaling us with a wealth of fascinating stories and movie and TV trivia.

The Trekcetera Museum (motto: "from the wild west to the final frontier") is the first stop this morning on a weekend visit to Drumheller, and Mangold tours us through its collection. Here are props, costumes and memorabilia from shows including *Hell on Wheels*, *Superman* (on which he worked), *Brokeback Mountain*, *Titanic* and, of course, the many *Star Trek* TV shows and movies.

We hold "real" phasers from the show, and touch a floor tile from the actual RMS *Titanic*. The enthusiasm of Mangold and co-owner Devan Daniels is infectious.

On this sunny autumn weekend, my daughter Tory, 23, and I are eager to explore Drumheller beyond the obvious attractions. Dinosaurs and Badlands hikes are on our agenda—because they're awesome—but our mission is largely discovering new adventures. From Trekcetera, we head to the Star Mine Suspension Bridge in Rosedale, 12 minutes away. (We soon discover everything we want to see is less than 20 minutes from Drumheller—great when you want to cram

lots in and still have some downtime). Originally used by coal miners, the c. 1931 pedestrian bridge is 117 metres of wobbly expanse over the Red Deer River. It gives access to great hiking terrain. In the hills, we see remnants of the old Star Coal Mine.

Early in the afternoon, a short, scenic drive through the river valley takes us to the East Coulee School Museum. The Red Deer River Valley's settlement owes much to its rich coal seams, and East Coulee had some of the best. The museum, housed in a c. 1930 school, boasts rooms of artifacts, stories and photos dedicated to coal mining, life in the valley, local fossils and a classroom where school groups immerse in a typical 1930s school day. The town of East Coulee, population 160, once had more than 3,800 residents, many of them European immigrants.

Open from May to September, the museum has a tea room that shouldn't be missed.

It's mid-afternoon in downtown Drumheller, and we remark on the area's reverence for history, beyond the ubiquitous (and whimsical) dinosaur statuary around town. Here, many vintage buildings with wood, brick and sandstone facades showcase early 1900s architecture. Galleries and antique shops make for interesting shopping, and we're treated to a veritable comedy duo at Treasures on Centre, where the banter of Jim and Kellie Krueger amuses. Kellie displays her repurposed miner's glass creations amid antiques.

By now it's 6 p.m. Tummies rumbling after a busy day, we head on Highway 10 to the hamlet of Wayne and the storied Last Chance Saloon for grub. After a few hairpin turns and a mind-boggling (and Guinness-record-holding) 11 narrow bridges in six kilometres, we arrive at the old Rosedee Hotel, home of the saloon.

The rustic watering hole is loaded with memorabilia—old cameras, taxidermy animals and a working 1940s band-in-a-box that gets cranked up by request. We dine from a comfort-food menu, and I enjoy a pint of the one draft on tap.

No matter how many times you visit Horsethief Canyon, the strange, layered domes of the badlands against blue sky never fail to dazzle.

Strangest sight in the nearby 'ghost town' of Dorothy: a phone booth stacked with CB radios and a child's toy phone. Has E.T. been here?

DAY 2

After a good night's sleep at the Canalta Jurassic (with its massive hot tub and free, fresh popcorn in the afternoons), we're ready to hike among the hoodoos. The landscape of the Canadian Badlands is already weird enough, but it gets even more mysterious near these eerie sandstone pillars created over millennia by wind and water erosion. A protected historic site, the hoodoos off Highway 10 South are accessed by a fenced pathway and stairs.

The morning sun blazing bright, we steer to the pioneer "ghost town" of Dorothy (about a dozen people still live there), with its grain elevator, abandoned structures, vintage vehicles and two little wooden churches you can enter. Each has pictorials of recent restorations on display.

At 1 p.m., we meet Mike Todor, owner of 3rd Avenue Arts, for our next adventure. He shows us around his shop, showcasing 30 Canadian artists in all manner of ceramic, stained glass, wood and paint. Todor rents out bright yellow touring bicycles, and we're pedaling around town for the next hour. We cruise a river pathway near the World's Largest Dinosaur and wander to Riverside Park with its old-growth trees, cycling sedately past smiling citizens. We meander through the townscape, viewing vintage houses and buildings.

Appetites officially worked up, we put down a hearty late lunch at O'Shea's Eatery and Ale House, then make our way to the Royal Tyrrell Museum of Palaeontology, keen to take in the new "Grounds for Discovery" exhibit, featuring what's been called the best-preserved dinosaur fossil ever found. The 112-million-year-old Nodosaur's skin and armour are intact. This is way beyond bones. Tory gazes through the glass and cries, moved by the creature's realism.

At Horsethief Canyon, we walk the edge, trying to spot fossils. We'll return for a real hike down to the bottom on another day, when there's more daylight left. We can't wait. ■