

Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary

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The name, Mary, is familiar to today's travelers in the Canadian Rockies. Mary Lakes, Mt. Mary Vaux, and Schaffer Mt. refer either to Mary Vaux (rhymes with fox) or Mary Sharples Schaffer Warren. At a time when most women remained at home and enjoyed quiet, indoor pastimes, these two Marys defied convention and became early explorers of the Canadian Rockies. This paper will examine the question found in the lines:

Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary
Why do women play?

Both women came from Philadelphia Quaker families. Mary Vaux first visited the Canadian Rockies in 1887 with her father and brothers. Beginning in 1897, she returned annually until a few years before her death. In the early years she assisted her brothers in their study and photography of glaciers. Her interest in the mountains led to climbing and exploring. She was the first woman to cross Abbot Pass, to climb over 10,000 feet in the Canadian Rockies, and, with Mary Schaffer, to explore the Deutschman Caves. In 1914, when Mary was over fifty years of age, she married Dr. Charles Doolittle Walcott, secretary of the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C. Reportedly, Mary Vaux Wilcott celebrated her 75th birthday with a twenty-mile ride in her beloved mountains and continued to visit them until shortly before her death in 1940.

Mary Sharples Schaffer Warren traveled to California as a teen-ager with her family. At the suggestion of her friend, Mary Vaux, she first visited the Canadian Rockies in 1890. While staying at the Canadian Pacific Railroad's new hotel, Glacier House, she met Dr. Charles Schaffer, a Philadelphia physician with a strong interest in botany. After both returned to Philadelphia, their friendship blossomed into courtship and, then, marriage. Beginning in 1891, the Schaffers returned to the Canadian Rockies each year to continue Dr. Schaffer's classification of the region's flowers. He suffered from a heart condition which did not permit strenuous camping, an arrangement which suited Mary who disliked both camping and horses. Dr. Schaffer died suddenly in 1903. Determined to finish her husband's work, Mary hired William "Billy" Warren to teach her to ride and camp. Within a few years, Mary became an enthusiastic trail rider, making important discoveries and exploring the mountains. At the age of 54 she married Warren and moved to Banff where she died in 1939.

Mary Vaux and Mary Schaffer each traveled thousands of miles in the Canadian Rockies and were active in the early years of Canadian and American Alpine Clubs. Based on their lives and writings, both women knew that they did not fit the mold of the typical woman of their time. They loved the out-of-doors, enjoyed taking risks, and endured many hardships. Schaffer called her adventures 'play' and Vaux wrote of her 'delight' in her mountain trips. Based on this investigation, it can be posited that women of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries hiked, climbed mountains, rode trails, and camped because they found a highly personal satisfaction and enjoyment in their summer days crowded with excitement and adventure and free from the demands of fashionable clothing and city responsibilities.