



BACKCOUNTRY VISITORS' GUIDE BANFF NATIONAL PARK



You have chosen a very special place to enjoy a backcountry experience. Canada's oldest national park protects large tracts of stunningly beautiful mountain wilderness. As a backcountry traveller, you will be able to visit natural wonders seen by only a small percentage of Banff National Park visitors. A wide range of backcountry experiences are available, supported by over 1500 km of trails, 53 backcountry campsites, 2 trail shelters, 4 backcountry lodges, several alpine huts, 2 commercial horse outfitters, and numerous licensed guide services.

Backcountry visitors have a special responsibility to minimize their impact on the park's rich natural and cultural heritage. Over the coming years Parks Canada will introduce a human use management strategy to minimize the impacts people are having on the natural and cultural resources of the Park. Information is provided in this guide to help you plan a safe and enjoyable visit, while keeping the park's natural environment as healthy as possible.

Have a wonderful trip!



THE BANFF BACKCOUNTRY EXPERIENCE

A Range of Experiences

In the more popular areas, you may find maintained trails and designated campsites with amenities like outhouses, tent pads, food storage cables, rustic picnic tables, and metal fire grates at sites where campfires are allowed. You are required to camp at the designated primitive campsites or stay at trail shelters indicated on your wilderness pass. You are likely to meet others on the trails in these areas.

In more remote parts of the park, trails are not as well maintained and travellers must be prepared for random camping (certain restrictions apply). You will have to ford rivers as there are few bridges. Route finding skills may be required in remote areas. There is a good chance you will not encounter other visitors.

Trail Shelters and Backcountry Lodges and Huts

Rustic trail shelters are provided at Egypt Lake and Bryant Creek. They can be booked in the same way as campsites by paying a surcharge on your Wilderness Pass. The Alpine Club of Canada operates a number of mountaineering huts in the Park. For bookings, please contact them directly (Alpine Club of Canada (403) 678-3200). Commercial backcountry lodges provide a higher level of service than the shelters, and should be booked through the commercial operators.

Continuing Beyond Park Boundaries?

Information on Jasper, Yoho and Kootenay national parks is available from the Banff or Lake Louise Information Centres or from the Parks Canada Calgary office.

Information on nearby Alberta parks, recreation areas and wilderness areas is available from: Alberta Environmental Protection, Tel: (403) 678-5508 <http://www.gov.ab.ca/~env/nrs/kananaskis>

Information on nearby British Columbia parks and wilderness areas is available from: B.C. Parks, Kootenay District Office, Tel: (250) 422-4200 <http://www.env.gov.bc.ca/bcparks/explore/kootenay.htm>

PLANNING TO CAMP IN BANFF'S BACKCOUNTRY?

PLEASE REMEMBER TO...

- ✓ **Select a trip which best suits your party**, your abilities and experience, your interests, your equipment and the time you have available. Consider the elevation changes you will encounter and the unpredictability of mountain weather.
- ✓ **Find out more** about the trails you have selected by using additional reference guides and topographic maps (described elsewhere in this brochure).
- ✓ Obtain your **mandatory Wilderness Pass** at a Park Information Centre, Parks Canada's office in Calgary, or via fax within 24 hours of your departure.
- ✓ You may **reserve** the campsites you wish to use by calling the Banff or Lake Louise Information Centres or Parks Canada in Calgary, up to 3 months before your departure date. Book early for popular sites. A nominal reservation fee applies. Your permit can be mailed or faxed if necessary.
- ✓ **Be prepared** to be self-sufficient in inclement and rapidly changing mountain conditions by packing the right clothing and camping gear, and knowing how to use it. Bring along a backpacker's campstove and fuel.

✓ **Let a friend or family member know** about your travel plans. You may also choose to use the Voluntary Safety Registration system outlined later in this brochure.

✓ **Check the current trail conditions, avalanche and weather forecasts** by calling the numbers identified in the Key Contacts section of this brochure.

✓ **Check the trailhead kiosk prior to your hike.** It contains valuable information.

While in the Park your actions are governed by the National Parks Act and Regulations.

Read the rest of this guide carefully for additional information on park opportunities, regulations, low impact travelling, key contacts, wildlife and more.

PLANNING YOUR TRIP

Where to Go?

The trip ideas in this guide are a good starting point for selecting a trip that meets your party's objectives and abilities. More detailed trail guidebooks and topographic maps are available (see *Key Contacts*). Nothing beats discussing your trip plans with knowledgeable Park Information Centre staff, who can provide you with up-to-date trail conditions, warnings or closures, or other essential information.

When to Go?

Whenever you travel in the mountains, you are likely to encounter a variety of weather conditions. Snowdrifts can remain in high mountain passes well into the summer months and avalanche hazards may be present.

Backcountry skiing opportunities abound in Banff National Park. There are, however, a number of winter hazards to consider. Skiers travelling above tree line should be prepared to find their way in whiteout conditions. Knowledge about travelling in avalanche terrain is essential. Be sure to call (403) 762-1460 for current avalanche conditions. Winter camping is permitted in most of the park and conditions for random camping apply. A Wilderness Pass is required and you may wish to fill out a voluntary safety registration form.

Your Wilderness Pass

Purchase of a Wilderness Pass is mandatory for any overnight backcountry visit. Your Wilderness Pass will specify the campsites you are using along your route, or whether you are travelling through a random camping area. If you have not made a reservation, plan to visit a Park Information Centre to purchase your Wilderness Pass. Frequent travellers can purchase an Annual Wilderness Pass.

Transportation

Trailheads can be difficult to get to without a vehicle. There is limited public transportation beyond major centres such as Lake Louise and the Town of Banff. Information Centre staff can assist you with options for getting to and from trailheads.

Mountain Weather

The most predictable thing about mountain weather is that it is unpredictable. It can rain or snow at any time of the year and freezing temperatures are possible even during the summer. The best way to deal with the weather is to prepare for any condition. For a detailed weather forecast, call the Environment Canada weather office at (403) 762-2088.

Reservations

Campsite and shelter reservations are advisable during the peak hiking months of July and August. You can make reservations up to three months in advance of your trip by contacting a Parks Canada Information Centre. A non-refundable reservation fee applies plus a modification fee for additional changes to your itinerary.

If your Wilderness Pass is mailed or faxed to you, we strongly recommend that you contact a Park Information Centre prior to departure for updates on trail conditions, closures and other pertinent information.

Water

Giardia lamblia and other water borne parasites are spread by humans and some domestic and wild animals. These parasites can be in any surface water (lakes, streams, and rivers) and may contaminate water supplies that come from these sources. Boiling, filtering or treating the water is recommended.

SAFETY

Playing it Safe

Your safety is your personal responsibility. All outdoor activities involve some degree of risk. Rapidly changing weather, steep, rugged or unfamiliar terrain, avalanches (at any time of year), cold, swift-flowing streams, canyons, rapids and waterfalls, glacial crevasses, falling rock and wild animals are all backcountry hazards visitors may encounter. Caution and self-reliance are essential. You or your trip leader should have a knowledge of natural hazards, experience in avoiding them and a plan to deal with them successfully when required. Ensure that there is some flexibility in your plans in the case of severe weather or encounters with other natural hazards. Cellular telephone coverage may not be dependable in Banff National Park.

Wildlife is Wild

Never forget that wild animals can be dangerous. Any animal can become aggressive if it feels threatened, so keep your distance. For your safety and to avoid disturbing animals, stay at least 100 m from carnivores (such as bears, cougars and wolves) and at least 30 m from other wildlife.

Do not feed wildlife. Feeding, touching, or enticing wildlife in a national park is illegal. Read the park brochures pertaining to wildlife safety available at park Information Centres.

You can help to keep wildlife wild by giving them the space they need. Approaching them too closely threatens their survival. Once animals become accustomed to being around people, they are in danger of losing that very thing that makes them special—their wildness.



Voluntary Safety Registrations

If you plan on participating in any backcountry activity and do not have a local contact to leave your detailed travel information with, then you may choose to register your trip in person at the time you purchase your wilderness pass. A safety registration ensures that, if you do not return by the date and time recorded, a search will be initiated on your behalf.

Safety registration is recommended for individuals or small groups engaged in activities such as mountaineering, canoeing, kayaking, skiing outside of regularly tracked routes and any activity on glaciers or icefields. We also recommend it for solo travellers without a local contact. The safety registration system is voluntary, but by law you must report back if you choose to use it. It is your responsibility to register in person and provide a comprehensive and accurate description of your route, including side trips. You must report back immediately upon your return to a park Information Centre, or if they are closed, call the Park Warden Office (403) 762-1470.

Key Contacts

Main Contacts

Banff Information Centre, 224 Banff Avenue tel (403)762-1550 fax (403)762-1551 e-mail: Banff_Trails@pch.gc.ca <http://www.parksCanada.gc.ca/banff>

Lake Louise Information Centre, Samson Mall tel (403) 522-3833 fax (403) 522-1212 email: LL_info@pch.gc.ca

Additional Contacts

Warden Offices
Banff Warden Office (for mountaineering information and horse grazing permits only), Industrial Compound: (403) 762-1470

Lake Louise Warden Office (mountaineering information only), Industrial Compound: (403) 522-1220

Parks Canada-Calgary Service Centre
For information on all four mountain national parks and others in the region:
Harry Hayes Building
Rm 520, 220-4 Avenue SE, Calgary AB
(403) 292-4401, 1-800-748-7275

Friends of Banff National Park
Retail outlets for guide books, topographic or recreation maps at both Information Centres.
(403) 762-8918
<http://www.canadianrockies.net/friendsOfBanff>

Park Radio 101.1 FM, in the town of Banff area, for the latest Park Information

Trail report information, call (403) 762-1305

For a detailed weather forecast, call Environment Canada at (403) 762-2088.

For winter avalanche conditions, call 762-1460.

IN CASE OF EMERGENCY CALL 911

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ON THE TRAIL

Horse Use

Be prepared to encounter horses, since many park trails are shared with equestrians. Park Information Centres have information about guided day or overnight horse trips in the park. The Horse Users' Guide provides detailed information to individuals or small groups planning a horseback trip on their own. Horse users must contact the Banff Warden Office to obtain the permits required for an overnight trip. Fees apply.

Trail Bicycling

Bicycling is only permitted on designated trails. All other park trails are closed to bicycles. Ask for the Banff National Park mountain biking brochure at Information Centres.

Climbing, Mountaineering & Glacier Travel

Highly specialized equipment and knowledge are necessary for safe mountain climbing and glacier travel. If you plan to take part in climbing or mountaineering activities you may wish to discuss your plans with a Park Warden in Banff or Lake Louise. A number of excellent guidebooks are available at information centres and bookstores. Since climbing and mountaineering activities involve some risk or hazard, a voluntary safety registration is also recommended.

Mountaineering parties can apply to bivouac in non-vegetated areas. Special restrictions apply.

The Alpine Club of Canada operates several mountaineering huts in Banff National Park. To find out more about the huts, or to make a booking, contact the Alpine Club (403) 678-3200. <http://www.alpineclubofCanada.ca>

Backcountry Wardens

National park wardens conduct backcountry patrols throughout the year. They are there to assist you in case of emergency, provide information, and ensure that the park's natural and cultural resources are protected. Any park warden you encounter in the backcountry will ask to see your Wilderness Pass and Fishing Licence. Since their duties require them to travel long distances, you should not count on being able to find a warden in case of emergency. Prepare to be self-reliant.

Managing Human Use

The last two decades have seen a dramatic shift in the way people use Banff's backcountry. Day use on park trails is in some cases 15 times greater than overnight use. Areas once considered remote have seen increased use due to development adjacent to the park, new technology such as mountain bicycles, equipment improvements, and rising numbers of park visitors.

In particularly sensitive areas of Banff National Park, some use restrictions may be in place. Be sure to check all trailhead kiosks for the most up-to-date information. If you have specific questions on how Parks Canada is attempting to better manage use in the park, please contact an Information Centre.

Parks Canada continues to evaluate and implement human use management approaches for the benefit of the park's wilderness and its visitors.

Camping

Please camp only at those campsites indicated on your Wilderness Pass and use the tent pads (where provided). If your route passes through a random camping area, choose a campsite at least 5 km from the nearest trailhead, at least 50 m off the trail and 70 m from the nearest water source. Do not stay at one site longer than 3 days. Sleep well away from food storage and cooking areas.

Cooking and Campfires

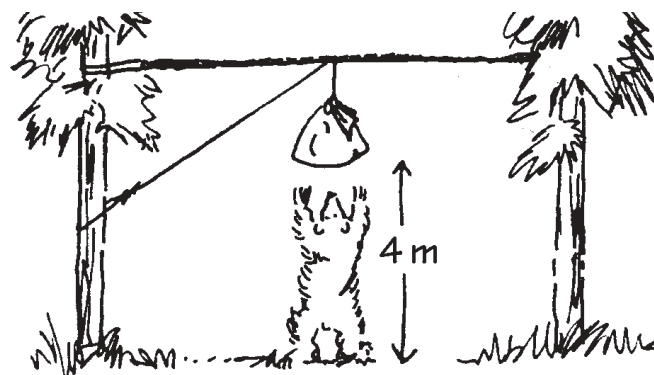
Gas stoves are clean and efficient for cooking. We recommend you use one.

Campfires are a luxury in the mountains and are not permitted at all campsites (see map on reverse). Fire bans may be initiated throughout the year. Be sure to check with Information Centres for the latest fire hazard information. If you choose to have a fire, use the metal fire grates provided, keep your fire small and use only deadfall. Tend your fire at all times and smother it completely before you move on. Be sure to remove any garbage that was not burned.

In random camping areas, remove all traces of your fire, including fire rings, before moving on.

Food Storage

To reduce your campsite's attractiveness to bears, all food, garbage, toiletries and cooking equipment must be suspended from the food storage cables provided at



designated campsites. In random camping areas, if you do not have a bear resistant storage canister, find two stout trees and hang your food at least four metres above the ground and two metres from each tree trunk (bring two 20 m lengths of rope along with you). Please remember that food left in vehicles may encourage damage by bears. Avoid leaving excess food in your vehicle.

Pets

Pets may provoke confrontations with wildlife and affect your safety. Dogs must be restrained on a leash at all times while in a national park, and they may be happier if left at home. Your pet may affect other users, so please be courteous. Dogs are not allowed at Backcountry Shelters.

Washing

Wash well away from any water body and keep the use of soap to a minimum. Even biodegradable soaps are pollutants. Dispose of grey water on land, a good distance from water sources and campsites. Strain out those last bits of food waste and pack them out.

Fishing

Fishing is permitted in most backcountry lakes, however, some lakes are catch and release only. A National Park Fishing Permit is mandatory. Fishing permits can be purchased at park information centres and at several Calgary and Banff retail outlets that sell angling supplies. Be sure to obtain the Fishing Regulations Summary brochure. It covers opening seasons, bait and tackle restrictions and catch and possession limits. Seasonal closures may be in effect on some lakes to allow fish populations to recover from over-fishing.

Human Waste

Use the pit privies provided if possible. If there are no facilities nearby, select a spot away from trails, campsites and at least 70 m from water sources. Dig a hole 12 to 16 cm deep with a stick, the heel of your boot or a small trowel to reach the dark-coloured biologically active soil layer. Fill the hole with soil afterward—do not pack it down. If you are in an alpine area and there is no soil, be sure to step well away from the trail and any water source, cut out a portion of sod and replace afterward. Urinate on rocks—this will help prevent animals from digging up earth and defoliating plants. Use as little toilet paper as possible. Pack used toilet paper out or burn it if the fire hazard is not extreme.

Collecting Natural or Cultural Objects

Rocks, fossils, horns, antlers, wildflowers, nests and all other natural or historical objects in a national park are protected by law. You may be prosecuted for violating this regulation. Leave them as you found them for others to enjoy.

Please, Leave no Trace!

Garbage

Please, if you pack it in—pack it out. By law, you are responsible for everything you take into the backcountry and this includes garbage. Litter in the backcountry is both unsightly and hazardous. A piece of broken glass or shiny bit of foil could magnify the sun's rays enough to start a forest fire. Animals may be injured by scavenging in garbage left lying around. Do not dispose of garbage in pit privies—it may attract animals.

Sharing the Trail

Hikers share the trails and campsites with horse parties and/or mountain bicyclists in certain parts of the park. You may wish to plan your trip to avoid encounters with other user groups. Trails that have commercial horse use may be muddy. Respect for others can go a long way towards reducing conflicts. If possible, move off the trail to allow horse parties to pass, and avoid sudden movements. When cycling, yield to hikers and horses, slow down, make your presence known and pass with caution.

Stay on the Trail

Please take the extra steps required to stay on the trail. Shortcutting between trail switchbacks damages both the soil and plant life. This not only ruins the look of an area, but also makes it susceptible to further damage by erosion. Staying on the trail is especially important when soils are wet and susceptible to damage and in fragile vegetation communities like the alpine.

For more information on low impact travel in the backcountry contact:

Leave No Trace
<http://www.lnt.org> <http://www.lnt.org>



Bears

The backcountry of Banff National Park is bear country - home to both black and grizzly bears. Backcountry users have a responsibility to prevent conflicts with bears - for their own safety, and to ensure the survival of healthy bear populations into the future. Learn more about how to reduce the risk of bear encounters by reading the park brochures relating to wildlife safety available at Park information centres.

Over the coming years we will be looking into ways of managing backcountry use in Banff National Park so that the park ecosystem remains protected. Grizzly bears are especially sensitive to human disturbance—they need secure areas in the backcountry where they can reproduce and raise their cubs. Parks Canada is seeking the input of backcountry users as plans are developed for future use in the Park.