

# 2005 MOUNTAIN BIKING AND CYCLING GUIDE Banff National Park



Welcome to Banff, Canada's first and most famous National Park. Its spectacular landscape of rugged mountains, broad valleys, glaciers, alpine meadows and turquoise lakes provides habitat for a variety of species including golden eagles, bighorn sheep, black and grizzly bear, and cutthroat trout.

With more than 190 km of mountain bike trails and numerous road riding options, biking is an excellent way to explore this special place. Trails range from easy to difficult and the biking season typically extends from May to October. This guide will help you plan an enjoyable biking experience, while keeping the park's natural environment as pristine as possible.



## Mountain Biking in a National Park

Banff National Park supports the use of mountain bikes as a means of appreciating and enjoying the tremendous natural values preserved within the park. If your objective is freeriding or downhill, please consider areas such as Golden or Fernie, B.C. or Canada Olympic Park in Calgary, where these activities are both appropriate and encouraged.

## Responsible Mountain Biking

Mountain biking in a national park comes with stewardship responsibilities. Riding non-designated or closed trails, building new trails, or riding off-trail displaces wildlife and destroys soil and vegetation. These activities are also illegal and violators may be charged under the National Park Regulations. Good stewardship of the park and respect for other users will help ensure that mountain biking continues to be a permitted activity within Banff N.P.

- Share the trail – see inset, top right corner.
- Mountain biking is allowed only on designated bike trails. It is your responsibility to know where you can and cannot legally ride.
- Avoid riding during extreme conditions; wet, muddy or very dry trails are more likely to be damaged.
- Help preserve the quality of our trails. *Ride, don't slide*—avoid skidding your tires by hard braking. Ride over obstacles, not around them. If obstacles are above your skill level, walk your bike.



Keep trails open by setting a good example of environmentally sound and socially responsible off-road cycling.

### Rules of the trail

- Ride on open trails only.
- Control your bicycle!
- Never scare animals.
- Leave no trace.
- Always yield trail.
- Plan ahead.

## BANFF TOWNSITE AREA

All park maintained trails in the immediate vicinity of the Banff townsite are open for cycling except Tunnel Mountain Trail, Sulphur Mountain Trail (from the Upper Hot Springs to the Summit), Sundance Canyon loop, the Cave and Basin boardwalks, and marked sections of the Bow River and Bow Falls trails. The townsite trails are popular with other users including commercial horse groups—please ride respectfully.

## Banff Area Trails

Difficulty ratings are based on trail length, steepness, elevation gain and remoteness. TCH = Trans Canada Highway  
Trails #3 and #11 are not shown on the map.

**1 Sundance**  
3.7 km one way, elevation gain 30 m, easy  
**Trailhead:** Cave and Basin National Historic Site  
Perfect for kids and tot trailers, this paved trail winds along the Bow River and climbs gently to the Sundance Canyon picnic area and hiking trail. You are likely to encounter hikers and horseback riders on this busy route. Connects with the Healy Creek Trail (#2).

**2 Healy Creek**  
4.8 km one way, elevation gain 20 m, easy  
**Trailhead:** Branches off Sundance Trail (#1)  
This gravel and dirt doubletrack winds and dips through the forest and comes out on Sunshine Road near the TCH. You can retrace your route, or return by the TCH. If you choose to ride back to Banff on the highway, please be careful on this busy road. Connects with the Brewster Creek Trail (#3).

**3 Brewster Creek to Allenby Pass (not on map)**  
36.8 km one way, elevation gain 1000 m, difficult  
Ride the Sundance Trail (#1), then the Healy Creek fire road (#2) until you get to the Brewster Creek Trail. This trail, a former road, climbs gradually up Brewster Creek valley to Sundance Lodge (service for guests only). The ride to the lodge is appropriate for intermediate riders and is a 29 km return trip. Beyond the lodge is a rugged, muddy singletrack suitable for advanced riders with wilderness travel skills. The route continues up the valley, then climbs steeply to Allenby Pass. There is no cycling beyond the pass. Please watch for horse users. NOTE: beginning this ride from the Healy Creek Trailhead on the Sunshine Road reduces the trip by 7.2 km.

**4 Spray River Loop**  
12.5 km, elevation gain 200 m, easy  
**Trailhead:** Begins at the Fairmont Banff Springs Hotel and ends at the golf course (or vice versa)  
A pleasant roll through the woods, this trail follows former roads on both sides of the Spray River. The good views, rushing river and deluxe picnic spot at the furthest point are highlights of the ride. Suitable for kids and tot-trailers. Yield to horses.

**5 Spray River and Goat Creek**  
19 km one way, elevation gain 360 m, moderate  
**Trailhead:** Fairmont Banff Springs Hotel  
This popular double-track follows an old fire road for 10 km to the junction with Goat Creek (turn left). It then ascends gently along Goat Creek below Mount Rundle to a parking lot on the Smith-Dorrien Road above Canmore. Most riders arrange a vehicle shuttle and reverse the trip for a gentle downhill cruise. Combine with Rundle Riverside (#6) and the Golf Course Drive (#15) for a challenging 48 km loop.

**6 Rundle Riverside**  
14 km one way, elevation gain 180 m, difficult  
**Trailhead:** Banff Golf Course Road (kiosk at far end)  
Intermediate and advanced riders may enjoy this rocky, roller-coaster of a trail linking Banff and Canmore. This singletrack trail offers 8 km of rough, root riding before joining a gravel doubletrack for a fast 6 km to the Canmore Nordic Centre. More challenging than most riders expect.

**7A Cascade Ponds - Bankhead**  
2.5 km one way, elevation gain 100 m, easy  
**Trailhead:** Cascade Ponds Day Use Area, Lake Minnewanka Road  
From the ponds, ride north along the creek and follow the trail past the picnic tables. The trail crosses the Minnewanka Road and follows the old Canadian Pacific railgrade to the ghost town of Bankhead.

**7B Cascade Ponds - Watertower**  
4.2 km one way, elevation gain 120 m, moderate  
**Trailhead:** Cascade Ponds Day Use Area, Lake Minnewanka Road  
The trail begins at the northeast corner of the ponds, crosses a small creek, leads into the trees and climbs up an almost "impossible to ride up" set of steps. The remainder of the trail to the watertower is a sweet single-track that snakes along the edge of the escarpment above the TCH. From the water tower a short section of gravel road leads to Johnson Lake.

**8 Lake Minnewanka**  
30 km one way, elevation gain 75 m, difficult  
**Trailhead:** Lake Minnewanka Picnic Area (far end)  
This rough, and exposed sidehill singletrack, leads east to the park boundary at Devil's Gap. Day trip destinations include the Aylmer Pass hiking trail junction (16 km return) and the warden patrol cabin (32 km return). This trail is popular with hikers and can be quite congested for the first 4 km. Early start recommended in May – June

**9 Cascade**  
14 km one way, elevation gain 180 m, moderate  
**Trailhead:** Upper Bankhead Parking Lot  
Formerly a fire road, this gravel trail leads into the wild Cascade valley and runs through prime bear habitat. The cycling trail ends at Stoney Creek primitive campground—buy a Wilderness Pass and try backcountry bicycle camping.

**10A Upper Stoney Squaw Loop**  
2 km one way, elevation gain 150 m, difficult  
**Trailhead:** Mt. Norquay Ski Area Parking Lot  
This narrow, technically difficult, root-infested little trail climbs, sometimes steeply, to the summit of Stoney Squaw Mt. From the summit, continue north and descend a rocky trail to the old ski runs above the lodge. Many riders link this trail with Lower Stoney Squaw (#10B). NOTE: Upper and Lower Stoney Squaw are the only legal bike trails in the Mt Norquay area.

**10B Lower Stoney Squaw**  
5.2 km one way, elevation loss 170 m, moderate  
**Trailhead:** Mt. Norquay Ski Area Parking Lot  
Ride past the day lodge and down the ski area service road for 1.4 km. Watch closely on the right for a sign indicating the trail. The trail features rough and rocky sections and drops almost continuously to the highway. Combine with Mt. Norquay Rd. (#12) for a challenging 15 km loop from Banff. Please watch for bears and horse users on this fast, downhill ride.

**11 Redearth (not on map)**  
12 km one way, elevation gain 320 m, moderate  
**Trailhead:** TCH, 20 km west of Banff  
This trail, once a fire road, provides bike access to some very scenic backcountry hiking near the Great Divide. Bring a lock, as you must leave your bike at the end of the road. Popular hiking destinations include Shadow Lake Lodge (stop for tea), Shadow Lake and Egypt Lake.

## Banff Road Rides

Difficulty ratings are based on ride length and elevation gain. All road ride distances are from the Banff Information Centre, with the exception of #17.

**12 Mt. Norquay Road**  
7.5 km one way, difficult  
**Starting Point:** Norquay Overpass on the TCH  
This steep road climbs steadily up the mountain to the Mt. Norquay ski area. A lookout near the top provides a great view of the town of Banff in the valley below.  
NOTE: all trails leading off this road are closed to biking.

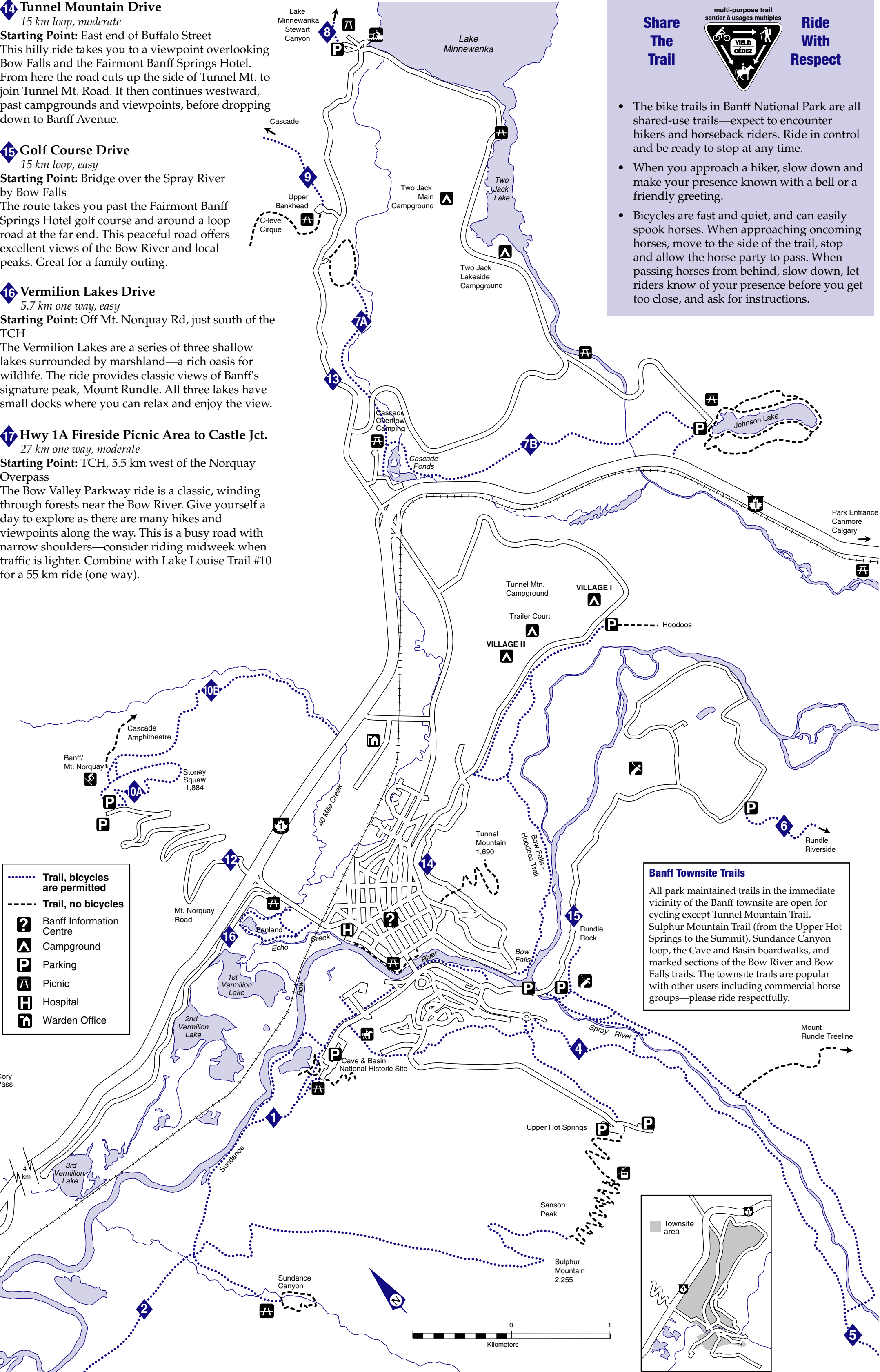
**13 Lake Minnewanka Road**  
24 km loop, moderate  
**Starting Point:** Minnewanka overpass on the TCH  
You will pass many attractions on this route including the Cascade Ponds, Bankhead, Lake Minnewanka, Two Jack Lake, and Johnson Lake. Be cautious—the road is narrow and can be quite busy during the summer.

**14 Tunnel Mountain Drive**  
15 km loop, moderate  
**Starting Point:** East end of Buffalo Street  
This hilly ride takes you to a viewpoint overlooking Bow Falls and the Fairmont Banff Springs Hotel. From here the road cuts up the side of Tunnel Mt. to join Tunnel Mt. Road. It then continues westward, past campgrounds and viewpoints, before dropping down to Banff Avenue.

**15 Golf Course Drive**  
15 km loop, easy  
**Starting Point:** Bridge over the Spray River by Bow Falls  
The route takes you past the Fairmont Banff Springs Hotel golf course and around a loop road at the far end. This peaceful road offers excellent views of the Bow River and local peaks. Great for a family outing.

**16 Vermilion Lakes Drive**  
5.7 km one way, easy  
**Starting Point:** Off Mt. Norquay Rd, just south of the TCH  
The Vermilion Lakes are a series of three shallow lakes surrounded by marshland—a rich oasis for wildlife. The ride provides classic views of Banff's signature peak, Mount Rundle. All three lakes have small docks where you can relax and enjoy the view.

**17 Hwy 1A Fireside Picnic Area to Castle Jct.**  
27 km one way, moderate  
**Starting Point:** TCH, 5.5 km west of the Norquay Overpass  
The Bow Valley Parkway ride is a classic, winding through forests near the Bow River. Give yourself a day to explore as there are many hikes and viewpoints along the way. This is a busy road with narrow shoulders—consider riding midweek when traffic is lighter. Combine with Lake Louise Trail #10 for a 55 km ride (one way).



**Share  
The  
Trail**

multi-purpose trail  
sentier à usages multiples

**Ride  
With  
Respect**

- The bike trails in Banff National Park are all shared-use trails—expect to encounter hikers and horseback riders. Ride in control and be ready to stop at any time.
- When you approach a hiker, slow down and make your presence known with a bell or a friendly greeting.
- Bicycles are fast and quiet, and can easily spook horses. When approaching oncoming horses, move to the side of the trail, stop and allow the horse party to pass. When passing horses from behind, slow down, let riders know of your presence before you get too close, and ask for instructions.

## Lake Louise Area Trails

Difficulty ratings are based on trail length, elevation gain and remoteness.

### 1 Bow River Loop

7.1 km loop, no elevation gain, easy

**Trailhead:** Lake Louise Campground or Bow River Bridge opposite the historic Lake Louise train station (Station Restaurant)

Ideal for families, this gentle riverside trail travels both sides of the Bow River and can be shortened by cutting across any of the bridges. Interpretive signs along the way highlight the Bow River ecosystem. This trail is popular with pedestrians who may not hear your approach above the river's sound: ride respectfully and make your approach known. Connects with the Tramline Trail (#2).

### 2 Tramline

4.5 km one way, elevation gain 195 m, easy

**Trailhead:** Opposite Lake Louise train station (Station Restaurant) beside Bow River bridge. This wide trail is the former route of a tramway (1912 to 1930). It offers a quiet ride up and down from the valley floor to upper Lake Louise. The trail comes out at the upper Lake Louise parking lots, an alternative starting point for a downhill ride on this trail.

### 3 Ross Lake

7.3 km one way, no elevation gain, difficult

**Trailhead:** Tucked behind the Chateau Lake Louise staff residences

This trail winds and dips through sub-alpine forest to a small lake nestled against an impressive rockwall. Expect to yield to horse traffic on the first 100 m. A challenging 1.3 km trail down along Ross Creek connects to the Great Divide Road (#8) allowing a loop return.

### 4 Moraine Lake Highline

10 km one way, elevation gain 305 m, difficult

**Trailhead:** Small parking area on the right, 2.5 km up Moraine Lake Rd

The most demanding of the Lake Louise area trails, this single-track trail climbs onto the shoulder of Mount Temple and then descends to Moraine Lake. Hikers are mainly encountered on the first km from the trailhead. Roots and rocks on the narrow trail challenge your skills. The upper trail section, often exposed as it sidehills along, offers tremendous views. Combine with Moraine Lake Road (#9) to make a loop. When buffaloberries, an important bear food, ripen in mid to late summer, the upper section of this trail is closed to all users. This allows grizzly bears to forage undisturbed and keeps people safer. A stub trail allows access from the trail to the Moraine Lake Road at the bottom of the seasonal trail closure. Check with Lake Louise Information Centre staff and trailhead signs for closure dates and important information.

### 5 Pipestone

6.7 km one way, elevation gain 165 m, moderate

**Trailhead:** Slate Road, turn off Trans-Canada Highway~1.5 km west of Lake Louise

This well-defined gravel and dirt trail heads up along the Pipestone River into the Pipestone Valley north of Lake Louise. Watch for horse users and bears. Not far from the trailhead, an 800 m side trail offers a short, sometimes muddy, trip to Mud Lake. Cyclists are not permitted beyond the bike turnaround point at km 6.7.

### 6 Temple Access Road

4.0 km one way, elevation gain 305 m

**Trailhead:** Fish Creek parking lot off Whitehorn Road near the Lake Louise Ski Area

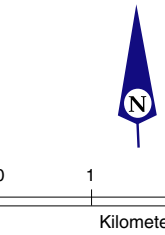
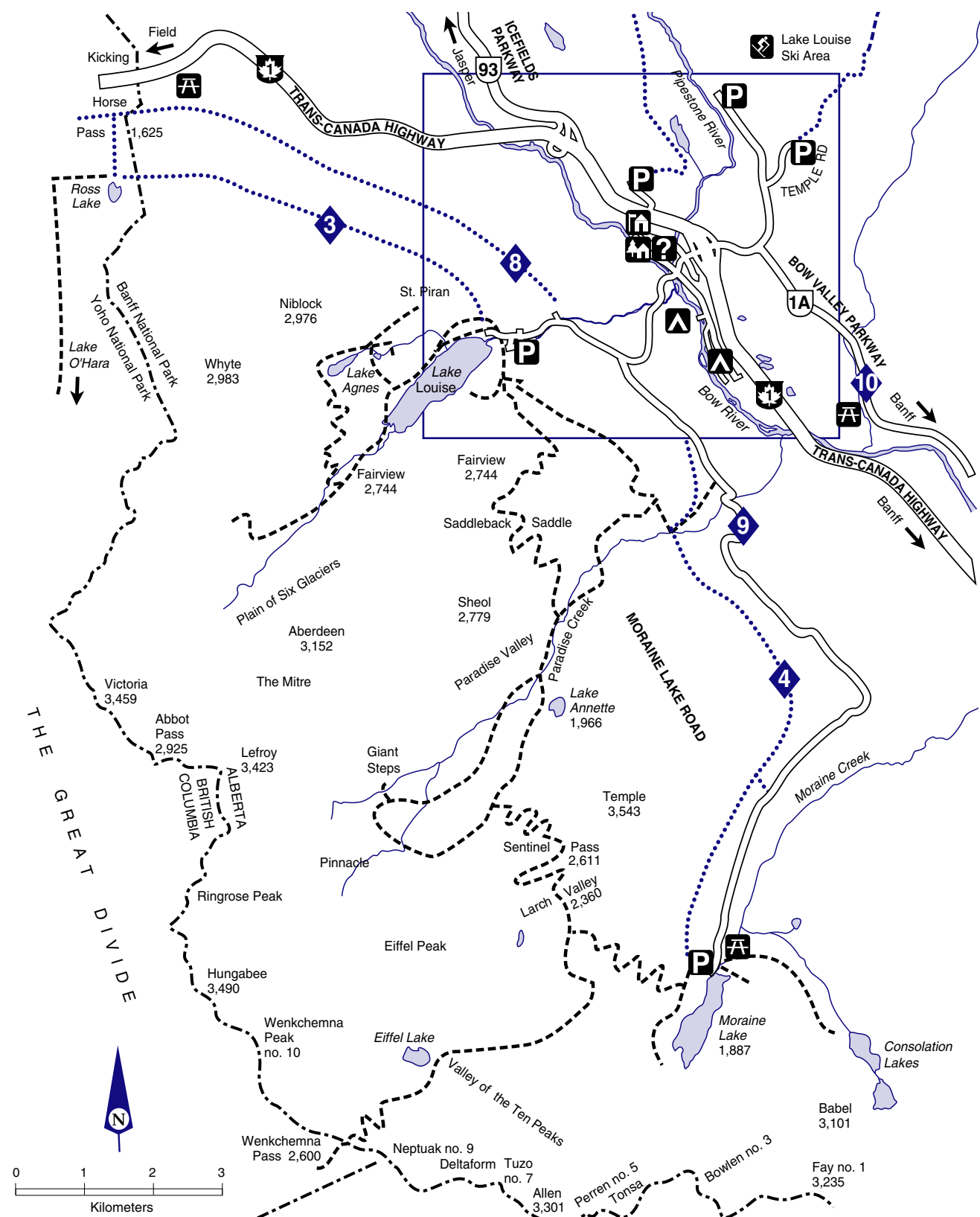
This steep gravel road provides maintenance access to Temple Lodge. The road ends by the lodge; the hiking trail beyond provides access to Skoki Valley and is not open to bikes. Watch carefully for vehicles, hikers, horse users and bears. To give several resident female grizzly bears the space they need to survive, ski hill runs, other ski hill roads, and all trails leading off Temple Road are closed to biking.

### 7 Alexandra River (not on map)

20.8 km one way, minimal elevation gain, difficult

**Trailhead:** Small unmarked pull-off, west side of the Icefield Parkway (Hwy 93 N), 26 km north of Hwy 11 junction.

This unmaintained route offers rough and tumble riding on an old fire road. After the first 6 km the trail becomes a serious challenge. The first unbridged crossing of the Alexandra River occurs at 11.7 km. Other difficult creek crossings and the rampaging



Alexandra River make this a trip best done at low water levels in late summer by advanced riders with solid backcountry skills. Bushwhacking is necessary to get by recent washouts.

## Lake Louise Area Road Rides

Difficulty ratings are based on ride length and elevation gain.

### 8 Great Divide

10.5 km one way, minimal elevation gain, easy

**Starting Point:** Parking lot at 3.6 km mark of Lake Louise Drive

This route (formerly the 1A Hwy) is closed to vehicles. Though paved, the surface is rough. It winds past the Great Divide at 7.5 km and continues to the Trans Canada Highway in Yoho. About 500 m west of the Divide, a challenging 1.3 km trail up along Ross Creek connects to the Ross Lake Trail (#3). It allows an alternative return to the trailhead for mountain bikers.

### 9 Moraine Lake Road

15 km one way, elevation gain 385 m, difficult

**Starting Point:** Lake Louise Information Centre

This narrow, mountain road has no shoulders, rough pavement, and heavy mixed traffic; it's best to ride it and Lake Louise Drive early or late in the day when traffic volume is low. From the turnout at the 3 km mark of Lake Louise Drive, Moraine Lake Road climbs to spectacular views of Consolation Valley and the Valley of the Ten Peaks. Mountain bikers can create a loop by combining with the challenging Moraine Lake Highline Trail (#4).

### 10 Bow Valley Parkway

28 km one way, elevation gain minimal, moderate

**Starting Point:** Lake Louise Information Centre From Lake Louise to Castle Junction, the Bow Valley Parkway (1A) winds through montane forest near the Bow River. This is a busy road with narrow shoulders; consider riding midweek when traffic is lighter. Numerous short hikes, viewpoints and inter-pretive signs are accessible from the road. Combine with Banff Trail #17 for a 55 km ride (one way).

## Lake Louise: Keep Bears Wild!

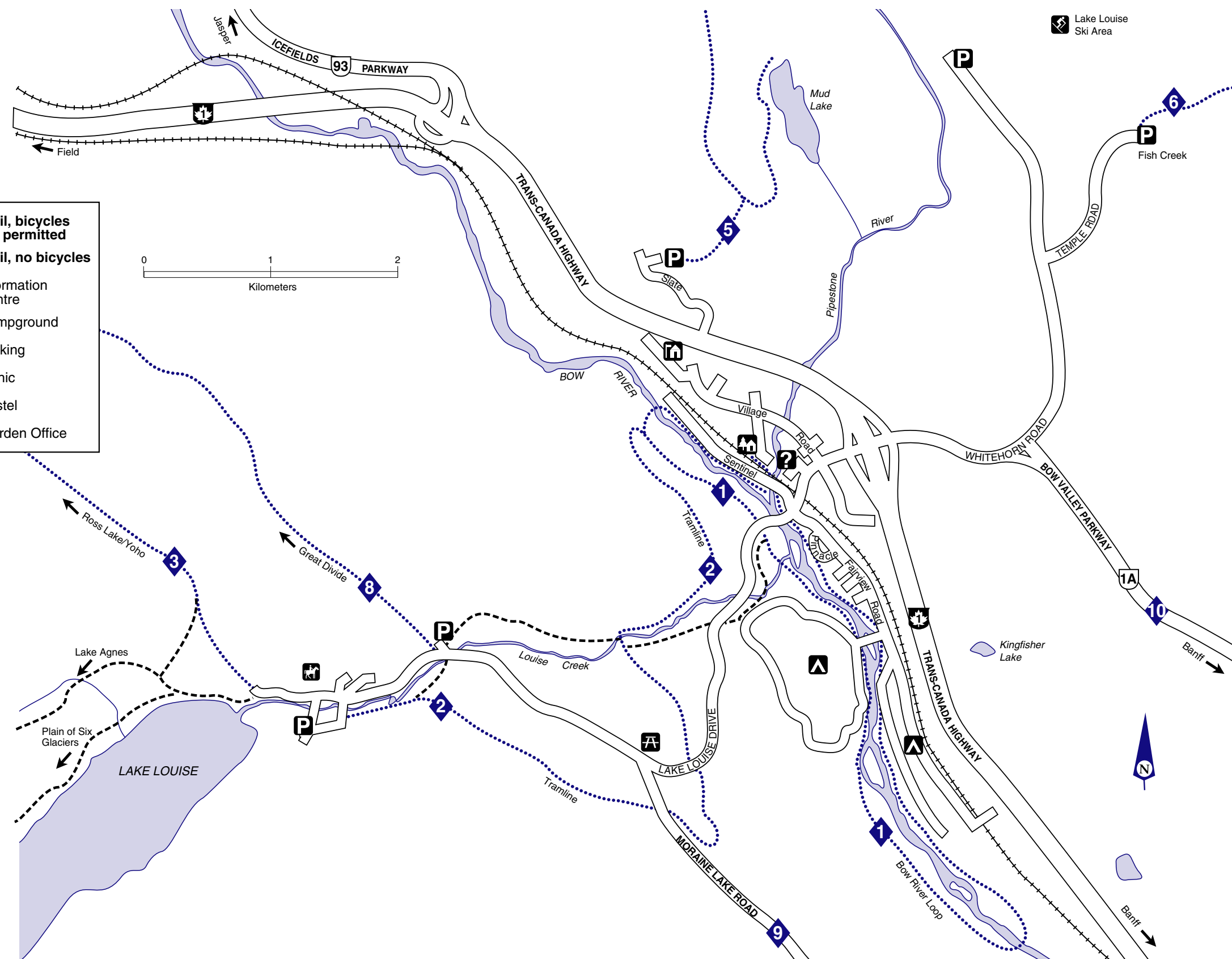
*The Lake Louise area is important wildlife habitat and is heavily used by people. When you venture out on the trails, you influence how wildlife uses habitat and moves through the landscape. But with thoughtful consideration of how you use wilderness, you can help conserve it.*



In the Lake Louise area, human development and activity have fragmented prime wildlife habitat into patches. The habitat remains, but bears are challenged to use it without bumping into people. Adolescent bears and adult female bears tend to dominate this group. Through constant, repeated exposure to the sights, smells and sounds of people, these bears lose their natural fear of people and they become habituated. Habituated bears are more likely to die a human-caused death on our roads and railways or be destroyed as "problem wildlife".

A number of adult female grizzly bears live in the Lake Louise area. To survive and successfully raise cubs, these bears need safe, predictable, quality habitat. You can help protect bears and keep yourself safer:

- Stay on designated trails: give these animals breathing space in an already tight situation;
- Bike "Bear Aware": minimize your chances of encountering a bear.



## Living with Wildlife in Banff and Lake Louise

One of Banff National Park's greatest challenges is to protect wildlife populations while providing visitors with opportunities to enjoy a healthy mountain ecosystem.

- Please respect all Warnings, Closures and Restricted Activity postings. These legal restrictions are used to help keep you safe and to give wildlife the space they need to survive in Canada's oldest and most visited national park.

- **Bike Bear Aware:** Cyclists are particularly susceptible to sudden, dangerous bear encounters because of the speed and silence of their travel. *Slow down, stay alert and scan ahead.* Bear bells are not enough. Yell and let bears know you are coming, especially when biking through dense vegetation, near streams, on windy days, or when approaching corners.

- Watch for bears and signs of their presence such as tracks, droppings and diggings. Leave the area if you encounter a bear or see fresh sign, and report sightings to the Banff (403-762-1470) or Lake Louise Warden Office (403-522-1220)

- If you choose to carry bear spray, keep it handy.
- If you come across a dead animal, leave the area immediately and report the carcass to the Warden Office.

- Remember that park wildlife are wild! Animals will act aggressively if they feel threatened, so keep your distance. Stay at least 100 m. (10 bus lengths) away from bears and large carnivores, and 30 m. away from other wildlife. For more information, contact park information centres or the park web site.

- Dogs may be an intrusion to other trail users, and provoke confrontations with wildlife. Dogs must be kept on a leash at all times. This is unsafe for both the rider and the animal. Consider leaving your pet at home.

## Waste Disposal

- Pack out all garbage including diapers, tampons, food waste and foil.
- If you need to relieve yourself, select a spot well away from trails and 100 m from water sources. Dig a hole 12 cm deep, down to the dark-coloured, biologically active soil layer. Fill the hole with soil afterward; do not pack it down. Pack out used toilet paper or burn it if the fire hazard is not extreme.

For more information on low impact travel, contact:  Leave No Trace [www.LNT.org](http://www.LNT.org)

## Safety

- **You are responsible for your own safety.** Be prepared for a breakdown or accident. Know how to repair your bike and carry the tools and parts to do so.
- Choose rides that match your abilities. Be conservative—start with easier, shorter trails. Park staff or bike shop employees can help you select a suitable route.
- Wear a helmet and appropriate safety gear.
- Bring extra food, water and clothing. Mountain weather changes quickly and it can snow any month of the year. Surface water may be contaminated with Giardia.
- Always tell someone where you are going and when you'll be back.
- Travel with others and keep your group together.



Bow Valley Mountain Bike Alliance volunteers maintaining the Lower Stoney Squaw Trail, May 2004.



## For More Information

Banff Information Centre, 224 Banff Avenue  
Tel (403) 762-1550 [Banff.trails@pc.gc.ca](mailto:Banff.trails@pc.gc.ca)

Lake Louise Information Centre, Samson Mall  
Tel (403) 522-3833 [LL.info@pc.gc.ca](mailto:LL.info@pc.gc.ca)

Parks Canada - Calgary Service Centre  
Tel 1-800-748-7275

Banff National Park Web Site  
[www.pc.gc.ca/banff](http://www.pc.gc.ca/banff)

Banff National Park Trail Report  
Recorded Message: (403) 760-1305

Environment Canada Weather Forecast  
Recorded Message: (403) 762-2088

Park Radio 101.1 FM  
Weather and Trail Reports

Friends of Banff  
Retail outlet for maps and guidebooks  
Tel (403) 762-8918  
[www.friendsofbanff.com](http://www.friendsofbanff.com)

## References

- *Backcountry Biking in the Canadian Rockies*, Doug Eastcott (2001)
- *Mountain Bike! The Canadian Rockies*, Ward Cameron (2000)
- Gem Trek recreational maps

## Get involved in mountain bike education and stewardship.

- Bow Valley Mountain Bike Alliance: [bvmbanff@telusplanet.net](mailto:bvmbanff@telusplanet.net)
- Calgary Mountain Bike Alliance: Tel (403) 220-1868 or [info@cmbalink.com](mailto:info@cmbalink.com)

## Camping and Fishing

If you plan to stay overnight in a backcountry campground, shelter or hut, a Wilderness Pass is required. Anglers require a National Park Fishing Permit and knowledge of National Park Fishing Regulations.

**In case of EMERGENCY, phone 911.**