

Scrambler's Guide Cascade Mountain



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About Cascade Mountain

Cascade Mountain is the spectacular peak seen to the northeast from the main street of Banff. There are technical climbing routes up the visible face, but the safest and easiest route is hidden from view far around on the west side of the mountain.

While Cascade is considered one of the easier scrambles in the Banff area, all mountains pose hazards. This brochure provides detailed route information and important safety tips, and helps develop skills that can also be used on other climbs in the Rockies.

This route description is aimed at strong hikers and scramblers.

Summit: 2 998 m (9 836 ft.)

Elevation gain of climb: 1 460 m (4 800 ft.)

Distance: approx. 18 km round trip

Average round-trip time: 9 hours

Difficulty: Most of the Cascade climb is a steep, strenuous hike, but a quarter of the route is on loose scree and talus. A few places require using hands for balance. Technical climbing gear is not usually required. There is no built trail. However, route markers are present on the standard route past the treeline. Some worn footpaths have formed but these can be intermittent, and some are “off-route”—in other words, the wrong way.

Gear List

- Lightweight rain/wind jacket
- Sweater
- Hat and gloves
- Sturdy hiking boots
- Food/lunch
- Water (take enough for a long day—there is often no water source on route)
- Trekking pole(s)
- Light first aid kit (especially tape)
- If you are wearing shorts, take lightweight wind pants
- Headlamp (in case of a late return)
- Cell phone (variable reception along the route), satellite phone, and/or personal locator beacon
- A copy of this brochure!

A climbing ice axe is likely required if there is snow on the route (see “Season” section).

Season

Important! Cascade is a summer climb.

Route conditions are best when there is no snow, usually late June or early July to September. Before climbing, check the left skyline ridge near the summit as viewed from Banff Avenue—if the ridge is snow-covered, parties may be forced to turn around and abandon the climb at that point in the route.

Further Information

- Banff Visitor Safety Specialists provide trip planning and mountaineering advice.
Call 403-762-1470 or drop by the Warden Office in the Banff Industrial Compound.
- Visit a Parks Canada visitor centre in Banff, Lake Louise or Field, or phone the Banff Visitor Centre at 403-762-1550.
- Guidebooks available in local bookstores:
 - *Scrambles in the Canadian Rockies* by Alan Kane, describes moderate mountain climbs in the Rockies
 - *Rockies Central Guide* by David P. Jones
 - *The 11,000ers of the Canadian Rockies* by Bill Corbett
- Private guide services offer guided climbs in the Mountain Parks: www.acmg.ca
- Check the Banff National Park website:
www.pc.gc.ca/banff (general information)
www.pc.gc.ca/banfftrails (trail condition report)
www.parksmountainsafety.ca (safety information)
- The Mountain Conditions Report (MCR) can be found on the Association of Canadian Mountain Guides website: www.mountainconditions.com

**In case of EMERGENCY, call 911 or
satellite phone: 403-762-4506.**

**Cell phone coverage is not
reliable throughout the national park.**

Climbing and Safety Tips

- 1. Tell a friend** – Always leave a detailed trip plan with a reliable person. Include trip destination, expected time of return, vehicle description, license plate number, parking location and the Banff Dispatch phone number: 403-762-1470.
- 2. Turn-around time** – Plan the trip with enough time to return home before dark. Turn back at a set time regardless of whether or not the summit was reached.
- 3. Stay together** – Parties that split up are one of the most common causes of problems that result in need for assistance. If your party must separate, make specific arrangements to reconnect.
- 4. Weather** – Mountain weather changes quickly. It often snows here in the summer! Climbing a 3 000 m peak is the same as travelling to a different latitude and it could feel like winter. No matter what the forecast says, always carry a backpack with protective clothing—see “Gear List”.
- 5. Take lots of water** – The higher you climb, the less likely you are to find water. Cascade is a particularly dry peak in summer.
- 6. A matter of perspective** – The further you stand back from a mountain, the more you can see. For a better view of the entire climb, study the route from a distance wherever possible. Once on the climb, close-up features can block your view of the route ahead. Cliffs hidden from sight can block the way. Well-used footpaths can lead you in the wrong direction. Cascade Mountain is a good example of this—pay attention! Remember that a marked route exists above treeline.
- 7. Look back** – After a long day, the way down always appears different. While ascending the route, make a conscious effort to look back and memorize landmarks for

the way down. **See [look back] reminders in route description.**

8. Descent – Descend by the same route you climbed. Changing the line of the descent route by even a few degrees at the top of a mountain can lead you to totally unfamiliar terrain by halfway down.

9. Avoid shortcuts – Stay on route! Shortcuts in the mountains can lead to serious accidents, and have done so on Cascade Mountain (see **X** symbol on route description photo).

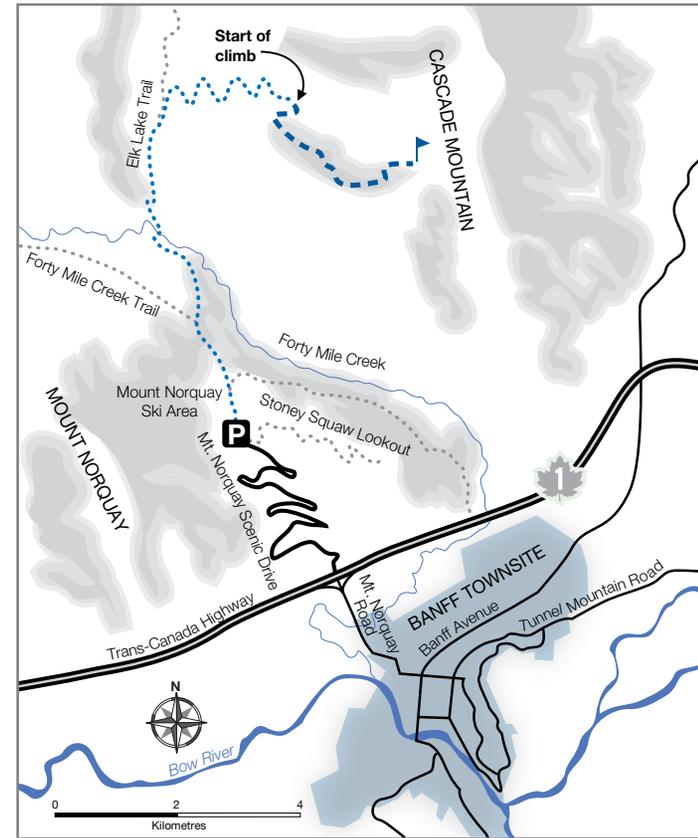
10. Lightning – Summer electrical storms are common in the mountains. Lightning strikes and associated ground currents can be deadly. Lightning storms often occur on warm afternoons, and strikes are most likely to hit peaks, ridges, and prominent objects, such as climbers, on open slopes.

If you hear an approaching thunderstorm:

Descend immediately to the safety of lower elevations.

If caught in an exposed area by a thunderstorm:

- Go to a spot away from any dangerous drop-off.
- Crouch down so your head is below the surrounding terrain.
- Sit on your pack at a distance from any metal belongings.
- Keep your feet together and try not to touch the ground with any other parts of your body.
- Do not shelter under overhanging rocks or caves in an electrical storm. The current will pass through you as it grounds through the rock above and below.



Trailhead

From Banff, follow the Mt. Norquay Road (the west access road to Banff) up to Mount Norquay ski area. The 7.4 km trail to Cascade Amphitheatre begins from the day lodge at the far end of the first parking lot on the right.

Walk by the front of the day lodge and follow a service road down through the ski area past the base of three chairlifts. A few metres beyond the Mystic Chair, pick up the trail heading downhill to Forty Mile Creek.

At the creek, turn right at the junction and follow the Elk Lake trail for another 2.5 km to where the signed Cascade Amphitheatre trail branches right. This forested trail climbs steadily up a series of steep switchbacks to the Cascade Amphitheatre, an open meadow at the end of the maintained trail. The scramble route description begins at this location.

EMERGENCIES

Out overnight

If, for any reason, your party is detained, be prepared to spend at least one night out (always carry spare clothing and high-energy food). Summer nights at altitude can be cold and uncomfortable, but are seldom life-threatening. If someone is injured, focus most of the group's resources on conserving that person's warmth and energy until help arrives.

Accidents

- If a serious accident occurs, respond with care—do not rush.
- Stabilize the injured person. Take measures to protect them from further danger. Provide them with shelter.

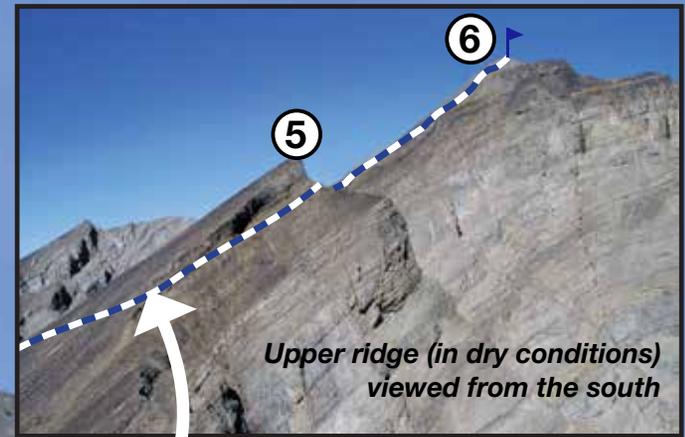
- If medical evacuation is required, call the emergency numbers below or send a person for help. Ideally, have someone remain at the scene to care for the patient. If you have a cellular phone, try it!
- Ensure the reporting person has all necessary information (exact location of patient, nature of injury and time of accident), and remembers details like car keys.

In Banff National Park, the **EMERGENCY NUMBER** is:

- **403-762-4506** (24hrs - emergency only)
- or call **911** (request help for a mountain emergency in Banff National Park from Parks Canada's mountain rescue team)

**EMERGENCY NUMBERS:
403-762-4506 or 911**

(Also, see EMERGENCIES section on reverse page)



*Upper ridge (in dry conditions)
viewed from the south*



Alternate route

Marked route

Main Summit

False Summit

First Peak

CASCADE AMPHITHEATRE

X Sites of serious accidents

--- Marked route

--- Alternate route

HELICOPTER RESCUE



Route Description

The route description to the summit of Cascade Mountain begins at the Cascade Amphitheatre (see map and trailhead information on other side of pamphlet for access to Amphitheatre). The following description matches the numbers on the route photo.

1 Amphitheatre Meadows

These meadows are the destination of the hiking trail, and the start of the scrambling route to the summit. The Amphitheatre is the huge basin ahead curving gradually around to the left. The route to the summit generally follows the skyline of the cliffs forming the right wall of the Amphitheatre. Take a moment to pick out the main features—the First Peak, False Summit and the Main Summit—as viewed from this point.

2 The Start

Follow the hiking trail along the meadows until nearly past the band of forest on the right. Turn to the right off the hiking trail and pick up a narrow footpath leading back to the right along the base of the steep slope. This path turns up the slope once past the end of the rock cliffs and safely gains the easier slopes along the top edge of the Amphitheatre cliffs. Follow this “edge” up to the last trees on the ridge. Do not traverse left across the steep ledges below the crest of the cliff.

3 First Peak

From the last trees, there are two options: follow a marked route through boulders that contours up and around the right side of the First Peak, or continue along the ridge crest up and over the First Peak.

Climbing Tip: From this point on, make a conscious effort to look back at the ascent route for landmarks to aid in the descent. Weather and visibility can change. See **[look back]** for key points in this route description.

4 Hidden Notch

Look towards the False Summit, which is the next main feature up the ridge. Careful route-finding starts here! As the name implies, many hikers have been surprised when they reached this peak to find that it is not the top, and that the way to the actual summit is blocked by a drop down a vertical cliff.

Beyond the First Peak, hike easily up the ridge crest on smooth dirt and moss. As soon as the ridge surface changes to solid rock, scramble down a small step (2 m) to the right. Continue up on easy ground just below a little cliff on the right side of the ridge until reaching an obvious notch in the ridge that, until now, has been hidden from view **[look back]**.

At this notch landmark, pick up an important detour around terrain difficulties that lie hidden beyond the False Summit. Ignore the well-worn track that leads straight up the slope above. Instead, take the narrow marked route that leads horizontally right across the 230 m wide slope to the right-hand skyline, onto the south side of the mountain, overlooking the Bow Valley **[look back]**.

5 The False Summit

[Refer to the inset photo] At the skyline, turn a corner and scramble a few meters down a small rock band. Follow a faint trail in the loose scree along the base of the rock band. If this slope is snow-covered, consider turning back. Within a few minutes, turn left around another small ridge and cross a steep slope to rejoin the main ridge beyond the False Summit **[look back]**.

This slope forms a steep bowl exposed to cliffs below. When the mountain is dry, walk across on soft dirt most of the way. It is easy but breathtaking! However, this is also the last place for winter snow to melt off this side of the mountain. A bad slip here could be disastrous. If snow is present, climb across this place with extreme care and be prepared to turn back if uncertain of safety. A climbing ice axe could be useful.

6 The Main Summit

From the notch beyond the False Summit **[look back]**, scramble up long, loose scree to the main summit. The summit is marked by a cairn. Enjoy the fantastic views but be sure to stay away from cornice snow along the summit ridge (most cornices eventually fall off in the summer). Summit elevation is 2 998 m.

The Descent

Descend by the same route you climbed following the marked route. Retrace your steps. No shortcuts! Follow the ridge, with detours around the False Summit and First Peak, and stay on course. Wandering off-route wastes time and can lead to dangerous terrain.

From the ridge just above the False Summit, a tempting shortcut is to climb straight down to the Amphitheatre. This is a potentially fatal mistake! Review the route photo to see the huge cliffs below which are hidden from view at the ridge.

The practice of looking back during the ascent will now pay off by helping you retrace the route quickly on the way down. At the First Peak, follow the marked route that bypasses the peak on the left side, or climb back up over the little peak and follow the ridge down to the last trees. On a clear day, the view down the southwest face to Mt. Norquay ski resort may look like an easy shortcut back to the parking lot. Again, this would be a serious mistake! This direction ends in cliffs and does not rejoin with the trail.

You've climbed Cascade Mountain! If you are interested in more scrambling at this level, see similar pamphlets by Parks Canada for Mount Rundle near Banff and Mount Temple in Lake Louise. If you have climbed these and want more, then it's time to select a route from the guidebook *Scrambles in the Canadian Rockies*, join the Alpine Club of Canada, hire a certified mountain guide, or take a rock climbing or mountaineering course. Good luck!

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(Also, see EMERGENCIES section on reverse page)

