

Scrambler's Guide Mount Rundle



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About Mount Rundle

Mount Rundle, the prominent wedge-shaped peak immediately south of the town of Banff, is one of the most popular climbs in the Canadian Rockies. Rundle's close proximity to the townsite and the relatively easy route it offers to the top often make this the first "real" climb for many visitors.

While Mount Rundle is considered an easy scramble, 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: 2 949 m (9 675 ft.)

Elevation gain of climb: 1 577 m (5 175 ft.)

Distance: approx. 11 km round trip

Average round-trip time: 7-8 hours

Difficulty: The easiest route up Mount Rundle ascends the gently sloping right-hand profile of the mountain, as viewed from Banff. This is a non-technical climb if on the correct route and in the right season. Aside from sturdy hiking boots, no special climbing gear is required. Most of the route to the summit entails very steep, strenuous hiking. On much of the climb, the sloped footing can be awkward and tiresome and can be very slippery in wet conditions. The standard route is straightforward, but there are several places where mistakes can lead to disaster.

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! Mount Rundle is a summer climb.

Route conditions are best when there is no snow. The mountain's shape and direction allow the west face to melt off earlier in the summer than many other local peaks. It is easy to check for snow—the entire route is visible from the road up to Sulphur Mountain and the Upper Hot Springs in Banff.

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 2 900 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 west slopes of Mount Rundle dry off early in the 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. For Mount Rundle, the road to Sulphur Mountain and the Upper Hot Springs is perfect for this.
- 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. This is especially important on Mount Rundle for the return section to the hiking trail on the descent. **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 Mount Rundle (see **X** symbol on route description photo).

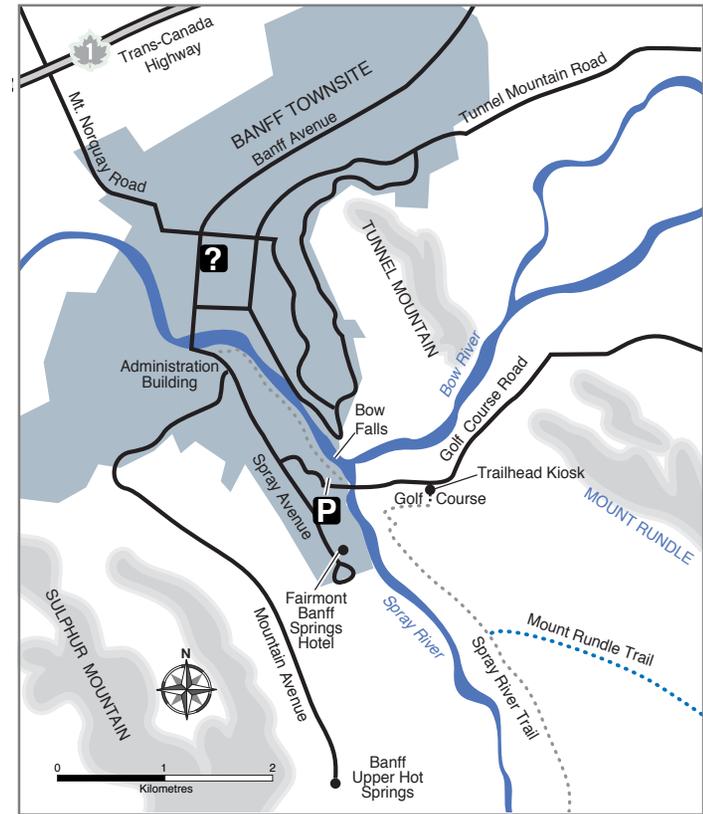
10. Lightning – Summer electrical storms are common in the mountains. Lightning strikes and associated ground currents can be deadly. Lightning storms often occur on warm afternoons, and strikes are most likely to hit peaks, ridges, and prominent objects, such as climbers, on open slopes.

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

The trailhead for Mount Rundle is located near the Spray River bridge on the road to the Bow Falls viewpoint and the Banff Springs Golf Course. Park at the Bow Falls Day-use Area. Also accessible by an easy 20-minute walk from downtown Banff.

Walk across the bridge. Follow the Golf Course Road 350 m to the Spray River East trailhead kiosk on the right. Go past the kiosk and head 100 m west on the dirt trail. Take the east-most trail that branches left up the hill at the Spray River Trail sign. (Note: This is not the trail along the shore of the Spray River.) Follow the Spray River East trail for 600 m to the Mount Rundle Trail junction on the left.

The route description in this brochure starts at this point.

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.

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)

Mount Rundle viewed from the west

X Sites of serious accidents

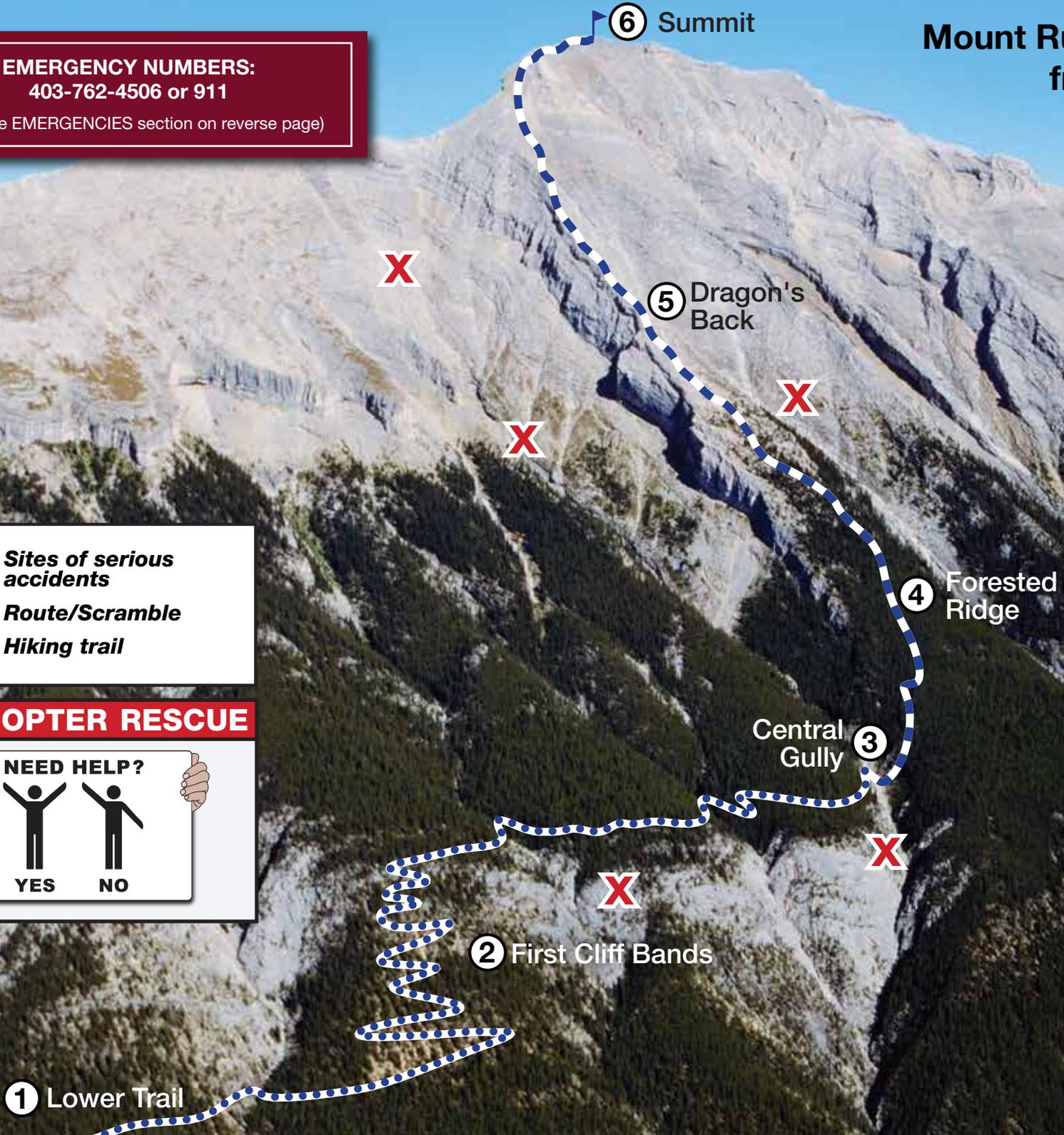
--- Route/Scramble

..... Hiking trail

HELICOPTER RESCUE

NEED HELP?

YES NO



Route Description

This route description begins at the junction of the Mount Rundle Trail and Spray River Trail (see map on other side of this brochure). The following description matches the numbers on the route photo.

1 Lower Trail

Follow the excellent constructed trail that climbs steadily across the lower forested slopes of Mount Rundle. As the mountainside steepens, the trail begins to contour horizontally to the right. After almost an hour of hiking, reach the start of a dozen switchbacks that lead straight up the slope.

2 First Cliff Bands

On the route photo, notice the series of switchbacks actually leads up through a band of rocky cliffs that extend across the mountainside at the same elevation. This obscure cliff band is a significant hazard associated with the climb. Stay on route!

At the top of the switchbacks, the trail resumes a horizontal traverse to the right and soon heads down across the first of two large forested ravines. Shortly after the second ravine, the trail comes to an abrupt end at the edge of a large, rocky gully, known as the Central Gully.

3 Central Gully

The Central Gully marks the end of the hiking trail and the start of the “scrambling” section of the trip. The route to the summit crosses this gully and ascends to the top by way of the forested ridge beyond.

Two key safety pointers here:

- **Do not climb up the Central Gully!** Despite appearances, it is not a safe route to the summit. The gully is easy at the start but gradually steepens, forming dangerously smooth slabs where several people have been killed!

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(Also, see EMERGENCIAS section on reverse page)

- *On the descent, it is critical to return to this point and stay on the hiking trail for the rest of the way down.* From across the gully, the end of the hiking trail is surprisingly difficult to see. Several fatal accidents have occurred when descending climbers missed the trail and fell while on a shortcut through the first cliff band that lies 100 m downhill from here. Yellow marker signs help define the route beyond the gully as a guide back to this crucial route home.

From the end of the hiking trail, descend a few metres and cross the gully (which may contain some old avalanche snow) to the bottom edge of an open rocky outcrop on the opposite slope. Scramble around the bottom of the outcrop to its right-hand side.

From here, **[look back]** and spot the marker at the end of the hiking trail.

4 Forested Ridge

Scramble up the steep track in the trees just right of the rocky outcrops. Stick to the most obvious path that climbs directly up the slope. There is no “built” trail—only a few cut trees, and the path is slippery in places. About 100 m up the slope, the path traverses horizontally to the right and away from the steeper slopes overlooking the Central Gully.

From here on, the route climbs almost straight up through the forest. The path is well worn but continuously steep and smooth. Near the treeline the path has eroded badly to expose the smooth bedrock underneath. This entire section can become extremely slippery when wet.

5 The Dragon’s Back

The slope that the route follows is actually a ridge bounded by the Central Gully on the left side and another similar large gully on the right. This ridge leads most of the way to the top. Above treeline the ridge gradually narrows to form the “Dragon’s Back”, a sloping spine of rock between the two gullies. Its surface is the smooth slope of the limestone bedrock. For much of the way, it is covered by loose gravel, and there are steep cliffs on each side. Careful footing! **[Look back]** for landmarks.

6 The Summit

The ascent beyond the Dragon’s Back is a long and straightforward slog up the loose scree to the summit ridge. The ridge crest is a sharp edge with the vertical east face of Mount Rundle below. Traverse to the right along the ridge for about 100 m (mostly along the right side of the crest) to the summit high point marked by a cairn. There is a modest flat spot here to rest and enjoy the view.

- **Cornices** – Stay well back from the edge if there is any snow along the ridgeline. “Cornice” snow usually hangs out over the edge of the mountain and forms a deathtrap for the unwary!
- **Traversing to any other peaks along the ridge is not recommended.** Peaks are farther away than may appear and require technical climbing skills and equipment.

The Descent

Descend by the same route you climbed following the marked route. Retrace your steps. No shortcuts! **Do not attempt an alternate descent down either of the gullies below.** These may appear feasible options when viewed from the top, but dangerous terrain lies out of sight downhill. People have been trapped or killed in both gullies.

The Dragon’s Back ridge leads down to the trees. The yellow markers guide the way back to the Central Gully. If the trail has been missed and party members have descended too far, the only choice is to climb back up to the trail. Do not attempt to descend any cliffs!

Note: Damage to the switchback area is caused by people taking shortcuts on the way down. Please, stay on the path.

You’ve climbed Mount Rundle! If you are interested in more scrambling at this level, see similar brochures by Parks Canada for Cascade Mountain near Banff and Mount Temple near 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!

