



BACKCOUNTRY VISITORS' GUIDE

BANFF NATIONAL PARK OF CANADA



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, 50 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

This guide will help you plan a safe and enjoyable visit, while keeping the park's natural environment as healthy as possible.

Have a wonderful trip!



Canada

ON THE TRAIL

What to Expect

Banff National Park offers a range of backcountry experiences. In more popular and accessible 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 designated primitive campsites or stay at trail shelters indicated on your Wilderness Pass.

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. Remote areas provide a greater opportunity for solitude with minimal evidence of human presence.

Sharing the Trail



Hikers share the trails and campsites with horse parties and/or mountain bicyclists in certain parts of the park. Respect for others can go a long way towards reducing conflicts. You may wish to plan your trip to avoid encounters with other user groups. Trails that have commercial horse use may be muddy.

Trail Shelters and Backcountry Lodges

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. Commercial backcountry lodges provide a higher level of service than the shelters, and should be booked through the commercial operators.

PLANNING YOUR TRIP

Where to Go?

The trip ideas on the back of this guide are a good starting point for selecting a hike. More detailed trail guidebooks and topographic maps are available through the Friends of Banff National Park (see *Additional Contacts*). Park Information Centre staff can also provide you with up-to-date trail conditions, warning and closure notices, and other essential information.

When to Go?

The hiking season usually lasts from May to October. From mid-May to late June, many passes are still snow-bound with most trails accessible only at lower elevations or on drier, south facing slopes. Trails tend to be muddier during the spring. Towards the middle of July, most passes are usually open.

Although the climate is generally drier from September to October, temperatures are lower with a greater chance of snowfall occurring, particularly at higher elevations.

Mountain weather is unpredictable. Be prepared for rain or snow at any time, particularly at higher elevations. Freezing temperatures are not uncommon above 1500 metres, even in summer.

Transportation

Trailheads can be difficult to get to without a vehicle. Public transportation to outlying park trailheads is limited. Park Information Centre staff can assist you with information about available options.

Permits

The **Wilderness Pass** is a mandatory permit for anyone planning an overnight trip into the backcountry of Banff National Park. It specifies the campsites you are using and the number of people and tents in your group.

You will also require a **National Park Pass** for entering the national parks. A National Park fishing license is required for angling, and a Grazing Permit if you are traveling by horse.

Reservations

Backcountry campsite and shelter reservations can be made up to 3 months in advance of your trip by phone or in person at Park Information Centres and the Calgary Service Centre. Reservations are advisable during the peak hiking months of July and August.

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

Wilderness Pass and reservation fees are used to offset the costs of trail and campground maintenance, bridge building, backcountry assistance, and other services that help shape memorable visitor experiences in the national parks.

Voluntary Safety Registrations

If you plan on participating in any backcountry activity and do not have a reliable local contact to leave your detailed travel information with, you can 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. You must report back immediately upon your return to a Park Information Centre, or if they are closed, call the Park Warden Office at (403) 762-1470.



Cooking and Campfires



Consider campfires a luxury and bring a stove. Campfires are not permitted in some backcountry areas (see map on reverse). Keep your fire small and use only deadfall. At designated campsites, **fires are permitted only in metal fire rings – where provided**. Tend your fire at all times and ensure it is completely out before moving on.

Washing

Wash well away from any lakes, streams or rivers and keep the use of soap to a minimum. Even biodegradable soaps are pollutants. When washing dishes, strain out those last bits of food waste and pack them out. Disperse grey water on land, spraying it around over an area that is a good distance from water sources and campsites.

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. Use as little toilet paper as possible. Pack out feminine hygiene products.

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. Animals may be injured by scavenging in garbage left lying around. Do not dispose of garbage in pit privies—it may attract animals.

The Basics

✓ **Select a trip** which best suits your party's abilities and experience, interests, equipment and the time you have available.

✓ The **maximum group size** is 10 people.

✓ **Familiarize yourself with the trail** you have selected. This includes using additional reference guides and topographic maps. These are available through the Friends of Banff National Park.

✓ You may **reserve** the campsites you wish up to 3 months in advance. A non-refundable reservation fee applies. Book early for popular campsites.

✓ **Obtain your Wilderness Pass** from a Park Information Centre.

✓ **Check conditions** prior to departure. Weather, trail, road reports are available at Park Information Centres and through our website. (see Information Sources).

✓ **Be prepared** to be self-sufficient during inclement and rapidly changing mountain conditions by packing the right clothing and camping gear.

✓ **Bring along** a backpacker's camp stove and fuel for cooking.

✓ **Let a responsible friend or family member know** about your travel plans, or use the safety registration system.

✓ **Check the trailhead kiosk** prior to your hike for important updates.

SAFETY

Playing it safe

Your safety is your personal responsibility. All outdoor activities involve some degree of risk. 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.

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 and may contaminate the water supply. Boiling, filtering or treating the water is recommended.

Dogs

Consider leaving your dog at home. Wild animals see dogs as either prey or predator, and this can provoke confrontations with wildlife and affect your safety. Dogs must be on a leash at all times in a National Park, and are not permitted in backcountry shelters.

Wildlife is Wild

Never forget that park animals are wild and can be dangerous. Any animal can become aggressive if it feels threatened, so keep your distance 30 metres from most animals, and at least 100 m from carnivores (such as bears, cougars, wolves).

Bears

Both black and grizzly bears are of special concern to backcountry travellers. Learn more about how to reduce the risk of bear encounters by reading the brochure *Bears and People: A Guide to Safety and Conservation on the Trail*, available at Park Information Centres and the park website.

Information Sources

Main Contacts

For Wilderness Passes, safety registrations (in person only), trail reservations & information: **Banff Information Centre**
224 Banff Avenue, Banff, AB
tel (403)762-1556; fax (403)762-1551
e-mail: banff.trails@pc.gc.ca
Lake Louise Information Centre
Samson Mall, Village of Lake Louise, AB
tel (403) 522-1264; fax (403) 522-1212
e-mail: LL.info@pc.gc.ca
Parks Canada-Calgary Service Centre
13 flr, 635-8 Avenue SW
tel (403) 292-4401

Additional Contacts

Banff National Park Website

More detailed trip planning information including: weather, trail, road and avalanche reports
www.pc.gc.ca/banff

Trail Report tel (403) 762-1305

Weather Report tel (403) 762-2088.

Winter Avalanche Report tel (403) 762-1460.

Mountaineering Information:

Banff Warden Office tel (403) 762-1470

Lake Louise Warden Office tel (403) 522 -1220

Friends of Banff National Park

Retail outlets for guidebooks, topographic or recreational maps
tel (403) 762-8918, www.friendsofbanff.com

Continuing beyond park boundaries?

Alberta Parks and Protected Areas - Kananaskis Country
tel (403) 678-5508
www.cd.gov.ab.ca/enjoying_alberta/parks/index.asp

B.C. Provincial Parks – Kootenay Regional Office
tel (250) 489-8540

www.env.gov.bc.ca/bcparks/index.html

IN CASE OF EMERGENCY Call 911

OR Satellite Phone: (403) 762-4506

Cell phones are not always reliable in the backcountry.



Managing Human Use

The wilderness experience in Banff National Park is one of the best in the world. But given rapid regional population growth and anticipated increase in visitation, it will become increasingly important to manage human use in the park to protect that wilderness experience.

As indicators of ecosystem health, grizzly bears are especially sensitive to human disturbance. Banff National Park plays an important role in helping maintain a viable population of grizzly bears on the regional landscape. Female grizzly bears form the bedrock of a healthy bear population. The park supports three concentrations of female grizzlies: the Lake Louise, Flint's Park and middle Spray Valley - Bryant Creek areas. Human use will be managed more directly within these areas to improve the habitat security vital for female bears to forage and nurture cubs.

Ongoing dialogue with stakeholders and backcountry users will continue to be important as we implement and evaluate human use management.



Collecting Natural or Cultural Objects

Please leave rocks, fossils, horns, antlers, wildflowers, nests and all other natural or historical objects as you found them for others to enjoy. It is unlawful to disturb, damage or remove any natural or cultural resources within a National Park.

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.

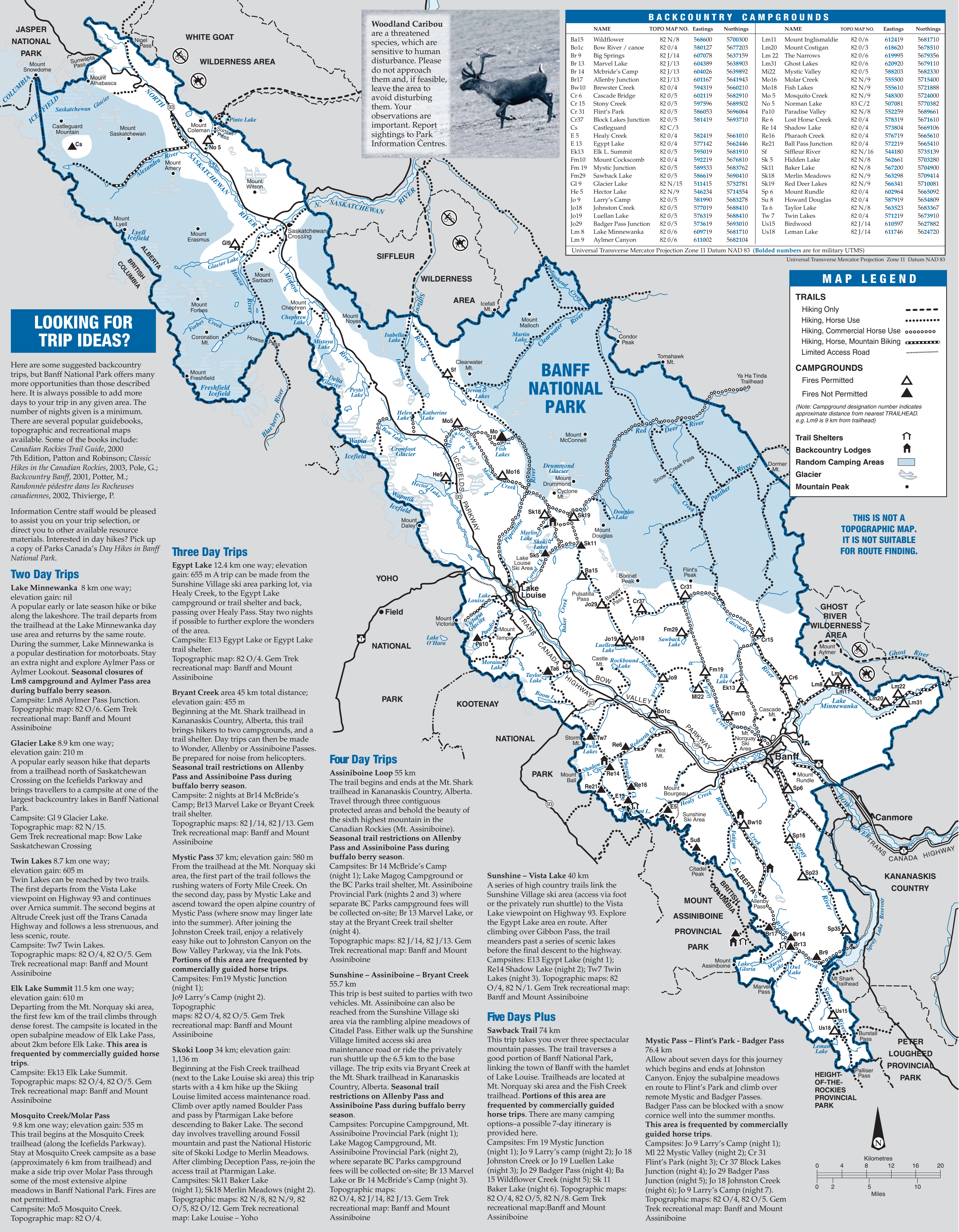
For more information on low impact travel in the backcountry contact:
Leave No Trace Canada,
1-877-238-9343, www.leavenotrace.ca

Horse Use

Be prepared to encounter horses, since many park trails are shared with equestrians. Be aware that some areas are frequented by commercially guided horse trips. Park Information Centres have information about guided day or overnight horse trips in the park. Consult the Horse User's Guide and the Banff Warden Office to obtain information about a backcountry horse trip and required permits and fees.

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 and Cycling Guide publication at Information Centres.



Looking for Trip Ideas?

Here are some suggested backcountry trips, but Banff National Park offers many more opportunities than those described here. It is always possible to add more days to your trip in any given area. The number of nights given is a minimum. There are several popular guidebooks, topographic and recreational maps available. Some of the books include: *Canadian Rockies Trail Guide*, 2000 7th Edition, Patton and Robinson; *Classic Hikes in the Canadian Rockies*, 2003, Pole, G.; *Backcountry Banff*, 2001, Potter, M.; *Randonnée pédestre dans les Rocheuses canadiennes*, 2002, Thivierge, P.

Information Centre staff would be pleased to assist you on your trip selection, or direct you to other available resource materials. Interested in day hikes? Pick up a copy of Parks Canada's *Day Hikes in Banff National Park*.

Two Day Trips

Lake Minnewanka 8 km one way; elevation gain: nil
A popular early or late season hike or bike along the lakeshore. The trail departs from the trailhead at the Lake Minnewanka day use area and returns by the same route. During the summer, Lake Minnewanka is a popular destination for motorboats. Stay an extra night and explore Aylmer Pass or Aylmer Lookout. **Seasonal closures of Lm8 campground and Aylmer Pass area during buffalo berry season.**
Campsite: Lm8 Aylmer Pass Junction. Topographic map: 82 O/6. Gem Trek recreational map: Banff and Mount Assiniboine

Glacier Lake 8.9 km one way; elevation gain: 210 m
A popular early season hike that departs from a trailhead north of Saskatchewan Crossing on the Icefields Parkway and brings travellers to a campsite at one of the largest backcountry lakes in Banff National Park.
Campsite: G1 9 Glacier Lake. Topographic map: 82 N/15. Gem Trek recreational map: Bow Lake Saskatchewan Crossing

Twin Lakes 8.7 km one way; elevation gain: 605 m
Twin Lakes can be reached by two trails. The first departs from the Vista Lake viewpoint on Highway 93 and continues over Amica summit. The second begins at Altrude Creek just off the Trans Canada Highway and follows a less strenuous, and less scenic, route.
Campsite: Tw7 Twin Lakes. Topographic maps: 82 O/4, 82 O/5. Gem Trek recreational map: Banff and Mount Assiniboine

Elk Lake Summit 11.5 km one way; elevation gain: 610 m
Departing from the Mt. Norquay ski area, the first few km of the trail climbs through dense forest. The campsite is located in the open subalpine meadow of Elk Lake Pass, about 2km before Elk Lake. **This area is frequented by commercially guided horse trips.**
Campsite: Ek13 Elk Lake Summit. Topographic maps: 82 O/4, 82 O/5. Gem Trek recreational map: Banff and Mount Assiniboine

Mosquito Creek/Molar Pass 9.8 km one way; elevation gain: 535 m
This trail begins at the Mosquito Creek trailhead (along the Icefields Parkway). Stay at Mosquito Creek campsite as a base (approximately 6 km from trailhead) and make a side trip over Molar Pass through some of the most extensive alpine meadows in Banff National Park. Fires are not permitted.
Campsite: Mo5 Mosquito Creek. Topographic map: 82 O/4.

Three Day Trips

Egypt Lake 12.4 km one way; elevation gain: 655 m
A trip can be made from the Sunshine Village ski area parking lot, via Healy Creek, to the Egypt Lake campground or trail shelter and back, passing over Healy Pass. Stay two nights if possible to further explore the wonders of the area.
Campsite: E13 Egypt Lake or Egypt Lake trail shelter. Topographic map: 82 O/4. Gem Trek recreational map: Banff and Mount Assiniboine

Bryant Creek area 45 km total distance; elevation gain: 455 m
Beginning at the Mt. Shark trailhead in Kananaskis Country, Alberta, this trail brings hikers to two campgrounds, and a trail shelter. Day trips can then be made to Wonder, Allenby or Assiniboine Passes. Be prepared for noise from helicopters. **Seasonal trail restrictions on Allenby Pass and Assiniboine Pass during buffalo berry season.**
Campsite: 2 nights at Br14 McBride's Camp; Br13 Marvel Lake or Bryant Creek trail shelter. Topographic maps: 82 J/14, 82 J/13. Gem Trek recreational map: Banff and Mount Assiniboine

Mystic Pass 37 km; elevation gain: 580 m
From the trailhead at the Mt. Norquay ski area, the first part of the trail follows the rushing waters of Forty Mile Creek. On the second day, pass by Mystic Lake and ascend toward the open alpine country of Mystic Pass (where snow may linger late into the summer). After joining the Johnston Creek trail, enjoy a relatively easy hike out to Johnston Canyon on the Bow Valley Parkway, via the Ink Pots. **Portions of this area are frequented by commercially guided horse trips.**
Campsites: Fm19 Mystic Junction (night 1); Jo9 Larry's Camp (night 2). Topographic maps: 82 O/4, 82 O/5. Gem Trek recreational map: Banff and Mount Assiniboine

Skoki Loop 34 km; elevation gain: 1,136 m
Beginning at the Fish Creek trailhead (next to the Lake Louise ski area) this trip starts with a 4 km hike up the Skiing Louise limited access maintenance road. Climb over aptly named Boulder Pass and pass by Ptarmigan Lake before descending to Baker Lake. The second day involves travelling around Fossil mountain and past the National Historic site of Skoki Lodge to Merlin Meadows. After climbing Deception Pass, re-join the access trail at Ptarmigan Lake.
Campsites: Sk11 Baker Lake (night 1); Sk18 Merlin Meadows (night 2). Topographic maps: 82 N/8, 82 N/9, 82 O/5, 82 O/12. Gem Trek recreational map: Lake Louise – Yoho

Four Day Trips

Assiniboine Loop 55 km
The trail begins and ends at the Mt. Shark trailhead in Kananaskis Country, Alberta. Travel through three contiguous protected areas and behold the beauty of the sixth highest mountain in the Canadian Rockies (Mt. Assiniboine). **Seasonal trail restrictions on Allenby Pass and Assiniboine Pass during buffalo berry season.**
Campsites: Br 14 McBride's Camp (night 1); Lake Magog Campground or the BC Parks trail shelter, Mt. Assiniboine Provincial Park (nights 2 and 3) where separate BC Parks campground fees will be collected on-site; Br 13 Marvel Lake, or stay at the Bryant Creek trail shelter (night 4). Topographic maps: 82 J/14, 82 J/13. Gem Trek recreational map: Banff and Mount Assiniboine

Sunshine – Assiniboine – Bryant Creek 55.7 km
This trip is best suited to parties with two vehicles. Mt. Assiniboine can also be reached from the Sunshine Village ski area via the rambling alpine meadows of Citadel Pass. Either walk up the Sunshine Village limited access ski area maintenance road or ride the privately run shuttle up the 6.5 km to the base village. The trip exits via Bryant Creek at the Mt. Shark trailhead in Kananaskis Country, Alberta. **Seasonal trail restrictions on Allenby Pass and Assiniboine Pass during buffalo berry season.**
Campsites: Porcupine Campground, Mt. Assiniboine Provincial Park (night 1); Lake Magog Campground, Mt. Assiniboine Provincial Park (night 2), where separate BC Parks campground fees will be collected on-site; Br 13 Marvel Lake or Br 14 McBride's Camp (night 3). Topographic maps: 82 O/4, 82 J/14, 82 J/13. Gem Trek recreational map: Banff and Mount Assiniboine

Sunshine – Vista Lake 40 km
A series of high country trails link the Sunshine Village ski area (access via foot or the privately run shuttle) to the Vista Lake viewpoint on Highway 93. Explore the Egypt Lake area en route. After climbing over Gibbon Pass, the trail meanders past a series of scenic lakes before the final descent to the highway. Campsites: E13 Egypt Lake (night 1); Re14 Shadow Lake (night 2); Tw7 Twin Lakes (night 3). Topographic maps: 82 O/4, 82 N/1. Gem Trek recreational map: Banff and Mount Assiniboine

Five Days Plus

Sawback Trail 74 km
This trip takes you over three spectacular mountain passes. The trail traverses a good portion of Banff National Park, linking the town of Banff with the hamlet of Lake Louise. Trailheads are located at Mt. Norquay ski area and the Fish Creek trailhead. **Portions of this area are frequented by commercially guided horse trips.** There are many camping options—a possible 7-day itinerary is provided here. Campsites: Fm 19 Mystic Junction (night 1); Jo 9 Larry's camp (night 2); Jo 18 Johnston Creek or Jo 19 Luellen Lake (night 3); Jo 29 Badger Pass (night 4); Ba 15 Wildflower Creek (night 5); Sk 11 Baker Lake (night 6). Topographic maps: 82 O/4, 82 O/5, 82 N/8. Gem Trek recreational map: Banff and Mount Assiniboine

Mystic Pass – Flint's Park - Badger Pass 76.4 km
Allow about seven days for this journey which begins and ends at Johnston Canyon. Enjoy the subalpine meadows en route to Flint's Park and climb over remote Mystic and Badger Passes. Badger Pass can be blocked with a snow cornice well into the summer months. **This area is frequented by commercially guided horse trips.**
Campsites: Jo 9 Larry's Camp (night 1); M1 22 Mystic Valley (night 2); Cr 31 Flint's Park (night 3); Cr 37 Block Lakes Junction (night 4); Jo 29 Badger Pass Junction (night 5); Jo 18 Johnston Creek (night 6); Jo 9 Larry's Camp (night 7). Topographic maps: 82 O/4, 82 O/5. Gem Trek recreational map: Banff and Mount Assiniboine

BACKCOUNTRY CAMPGROUNDS									
	NAME	TOPO MAP NO.	Eastings	Northings		NAME	TOPO MAP NO.	Eastings	Northings
Ba15	Wildflower	82 N/8	568600	5700300	Lm11	Mount Inglismaldie	82 O/6	612419	5681710
Bo1c	Bow River / canoe	82 O/4	580127	5677203	Lm20	Mount Costigan	82 O/3	618620	5678510
Br 9	Big Springs	82 J/14	607078	5637159	Lm 22	The Narrows	82 O/6	619995	5679356
Br 13	Marvel Lake	82 J/13	604389	5638903	Lm31	Ghost Lakes	82 O/6	620920	5679110
Br 14	Mcbride's Camp	82 J/13	604026	5639892	Mi22	Mystic Valley	82 O/5	588203	5682330
Br17	Allenby Junction	82 J/13	601167	5641943	Mo16	Molar Creek	82 N/9	555500	5715400
Bw10	Brewster Creek	82 O/4	594319	5660210	Mo18	Fish Lakes	82 N/9	555610	5721888
Cr 6	Cascade Bridge	82 O/5	602119	5682910	Mo 5	Mosquito Creek	82 N/9	548300	5724000
Cr 15	Stony Creek	82 O/5	597596	5689502	No 5	Norman Lake	83 C/2	507081	5770382
Cr 31	Flint's Park	82 O/5	586053	5696064	Pa10	Paradise Valley	82 N/8	552259	5689661
Cr37	Block Lakes Junction	82 O/5	581419	5693710	Re 6	Lost Horse Creek	82 O/4	578319	5671610
Cs	Castleguard	82 C/3			Re 14	Shadow Lake	82 O/4	573804	5669106
E 5	Healy Creek	82 O/4	582419	5661010	Re16	Pharaoh Creek	82 O/4	576719	5665610
E 13	Egypt Lake	82 O/4	577142	5662446	Re21	Ball Pass Junction	82 O/4	572219	5665410
Ek13	Elk L. Summit	82 O/5	595019	5681910	Sf	Siffleur River	82 N/16	544180	5735139
Fm10	Mount Cockscumb	82 O/4	592219	5676810	Sk 5	Hidden Lake	82 N/8	562661	5703280
Fm 19	Mystic Junction	82 O/5	589533	5683762	Sk11	Baker Lake	82 N/8	567200	5704900
Fm29	Sawback Lake	82 O/5	586619	5690410	Sk18	Merlin Meadows	82 N/9	563298	5709414
Gl 9	Glacier Lake	82 N/15	511415	5752781	Sk19	Red Deer Lakes	82 N/9	566341	5710081
He 5	Hector Lake	82 N/9	546234	5714554	Sp 6	Mount Rundle	82 O/4	602964	5665092
Jo 9	Larry's Camp	82 O/5	581990	5683278	Su 8	Howard Douglas	82 O/4	587919	5654809
Jo18	Johnston Creek	82 O/5	577019	5688410	Ta 6	Taylor Lake	82 N/8	563523	5683367
Jo19	Luellan Lake	82 O/5	576319	5688410	Tw 7	Twin Lakes	82 O/4	571219	5673910
Jo29	Badger Pass Junction	82 O/5	573619	5693010	Us15	Birdwood	82 J/14	610597	5627882
Lm 8	Lake Minnewanka	82 O/6	609719	5681710	Us18	Leman Lake	82 J/14	611746	5624720
Lm 9	Aylmer Canyon	82 O/6	611002	5682104					
Universal Transverse Mercator Projection Zone 11 Datum NAD 83 (Bolded numbers are for military UTM)									

Universal Transverse Mercator Projection Zone 11 Datum NAD 83 (Bolded numbers are for military UTM's)

Universal Transverse Mercator Projection Zone 11 Datum NAD 83

MAP LEGEND

TRAILS

Hiking Only

Hiking, Horse Use

Hiking, Commercial Horse Use

Hiking, Horse, Mountain Biking

Limited Access Road

CAMPGROUNDS

Fires Permitted

Fires Not Permitted

(Note: Campground designation number indicates approximate distance from nearest TRAILHEAD. e.g. Lm9 is 9 km from trailhead)

Trail Shelters

Backcountry Lodges

Random Camping Areas

Glacier

Mountain Peak

THIS IS NOT A TOPOGRAPHIC MAP. IT IS NOT SUITABLE FOR ROUTE FINDING.