

Day Hikes in the Banff Area



Welcome to Banff National Park!

Rushing rivers, snowcapped peaks, alpine meadows, and glacially-carved cirques make the wilderness surrounding the Town of Banff a popular destination with hikers. Hiking trails lace the Banff area, ranging from low-elevation strolls along boardwalks to more strenuous full-day outings that lead seasoned hikers to alpine passes framed by mountains permanently mantled in snow. One element all the trails have in common is that they provide an opportunity for everyone to enjoy the natural wonders of Banff National Park—with the prospect of observing wildlife such as elk, bears, and deer an added bonus.



Featured Hike

20 Sunshine Meadows/Rock Isle Lake
1.8 km to Rock Isle Lake; 105 m elevation gain; 1 hour round trip
Trailhead: Sunshine Village, accessed by a 6.5 km trail or a fee-based shuttle service
Reward to effort ratio doesn't get much better than this trail which crests the Continental Divide and then descends to a viewpoint above Rock Isle Lake, one of the most photographed backcountry scenes in the Canadian Rockies. From the viewpoint, the 4.9 km Grizzly-Larix Lakes Loop (allow two hours) is a natural extension for exploring the Sunshine Meadows region. The circuit follows the shoreline of two lakes, crosses an open forest of alpine larch, and passes a viewpoint where the panorama extends across the mountainous wilderness of Kootenay National Park.



20 Sunshine Meadows/Rock Isle Lake

Easy Trails

1 Johnson Lake
3 km loop; no elevation gain; 1 hour round trip
Trailhead: Johnson Lake day-use area, off Lake Minnewanka Road
Walking in a counter-clockwise direction, the trail winds through a lush montane forest before emerging at the far end of Johnson Lake. From this point, views extend across the water to the distinctive profile of Cascade Mountain. To complete the circuit around the lake, the trail crosses open slopes, passes some of Alberta's oldest Douglas fir trees, and detours around a shallow bay where waterfowl are often sighted.

2 Fenland Trail
2.1 km loop; no elevation gain; 40 minute round trip
Trailhead: Fenland Trail parking area, off Mount Norquay Road
This short self-guided interpretive trail under a canopy of old-growth spruce is a pleasant escape from the bustle of town. It also provides an opportunity to learn about the local ecosystem—and maybe view wildlife such as elk which call the area home.

3 Surprise Corner to Hoodoos
4.8 km one way; 90 m elevation gain; 3 hour round trip
Trailhead: Surprise Corner, east end of Buffalo Street
You can drive to the hoodoos, but don't. Instead, take this pleasant trail that passes below the steep cliffs of Tunnel Mountain and meanders along the Bow River. As the final section of trail ascends, views open up across the Bow Valley to Mount Rundle. In summer, the Roam bus provides an easy option for returning to town.

4 Spray River West and East
5.6 km one way from Spray River East trailhead (Golf Course Road) to Spray River Bridge
5.7 km one way from Spray River Bridge to Spray River West trailhead 65 m elevation gain, 3 - 4 hour round trip
Popular with hikers, cyclists and horseback riders, these two lengthy but relatively easy trails traverse rolling terrain along either side of the Spray River and are generally hiked together. A short walk around The Fairmont Banff Springs will link the east and west trailheads.

5 Sundance Canyon
3.9 km to end of pavement, plus 1.6 km loop through canyon; 145 m elevation gain; 3 hour round trip
Trailhead: Cave and Basin NHS, south end of Cave Avenue
Follow the paved trail beyond the Cave and Basin National Historic Site and within a few minutes of easy walking, views open up to a mountain panorama across the Bow River. After a steady climb away from the river, the paved section ends and a narrow trail loops through a water-filled canyon.

6 Silverton Falls
1 km one way; 60 m elevation gain; 40 minute round trip
Trailhead: Rockbound Lake trail, Bow Valley Parkway (Hwy 1A), 0.2 km east of Castle Junction
While nearby Johnston Canyon gets most of the attention, this short trail ends at the base of a waterfall that cascades over a series of narrow ledges surrounded by forest.

7a Johnston Canyon Lower Falls
1.2 km one way; 30 m elevation gain; 1 hour round trip
Trailhead: Bow Valley Parkway (Hwy 1A), 22 km west of Banff
Johnston Canyon is one of the most spectacular natural features in Banff National Park. Rather than running along the rim, a catwalk leads through the depths of the canyon and through a low tunnel to emerge at the impressive Lower Falls, where the cool mist of Johnston Creek lingers in the air.

7b Johnston Canyon Upper Falls
2.4 km one way (from parking area); 120 m elevation gain; 1.5 hour round trip
Trailhead: Bow Valley Parkway (Hwy 1A), 22 km west of Banff
Beyond the Lower Falls, this trail switchbacks up to a string of waterfalls along Johnston Creek, including the 30 metre-high Upper Falls. For a unique perspective, continue to the viewpoint at the top of the falls.

8 Stewart Canyon
1.5 km one way; no elevation gain; 40 minute round trip
Trailhead: Lake Minnewanka day-use area, off Lake Minnewanka Road
This low-elevation trail leads to a bridge spanning the smooth walls of Stewart Canyon, through which the Cascade River flows into Lake Minnewanka. But there's no rush to reach the canyon—along the way there are pebbly beaches strewn with driftwood and a number of enticing picnic spots.

9 Marsh Loop
2.8 km loop; no elevation gain; 40 minute round trip
Trailhead: Cave and Basin NHS, south end of Cave Avenue
Marsh Loop is an enjoyable trail that encircles a wetland filled by water from hot springs flowing out of the lower slopes of Sulphur Mountain. The unique environment is best observed below the Cave and Basin National Historic Site, where exotic plant species such as orchids thrive. An additional 1.1 km stroll on the Marsh Boardwalk will take you over pristine marshland and bubbling thermal waters.

10 Tunnel Campground Loop
6.5 km one way, 60 m elevation gain, 1.5 hour round trip
Trailhead: corner Tunnel Mountain Road and Tunnel Mountain Drive
The perfect place for an evening stroll, this lightly forested trail remains in sight of the campground at all times. Although the trailhead kiosk is along Tunnel Mountain Road, the trail can be joined at any number of points from within the campground.

Moderate Trails

11 C-Level Cirque
4.2 km one way; 455 m elevation gain; 3 hour round trip
Trailhead: Upper Bankhead day-use area, off Lake Minnewanka Road
Hike past concrete foundations and vents from the abandoned Bankhead mining operation to a massive glacially-carved cirque in the cool northern face of Cascade Mountain.

12 Tunnel Mountain Summit
2.4 km one way; 260 m elevation gain; 2 hour round trip
Trailhead: St. Julien Road (take Wolf Street east from Banff Avenue)
Accessible from downtown Banff, the switchbacking trail to this low summit provides sweeping views across the town and Bow Valley, with Mount Rundle rising dramatically to the south. The trail can be icy October through April (cleats recommended).

13 Boom Lake
10 km round trip; 175 m elevation gain; 3 to 4 hours round trip
Trailhead: Boom Lake picnic area and parking lot located 7.5 km west of Castle Junction on Hwy 93S
If you are looking for a rewarding trail-Boom Lake is it. This gradual elevation trail leads hikers through a picturesque forest to a large alpine lake surrounded by snow-capped mountains. Do not forget to pack a shore lunch.

14 Stoney Squaw
2.1 km one way; 190 m elevation gain; 1.5 hour round trip
Trailhead: Mount Norquay ski area parking
The best-known view of Cascade Mountain is from Banff Avenue, but for a close-up experience, plan on hiking to the summit of Stoney Squaw, across the valley from the town. Along the way, the trail passes through a forest of trees covered in wispy lichen.

15 Cascade Amphitheatre
6.6 km one way; 640 m elevation gain; 6 hour round trip
Trailhead: Mount. Norquay ski area parking
One of the longer hikes close to town, allow a full day to reach this hanging valley that is carpeted with wildflowers in July and August. Pick up the *Scrambler's Guide to Cascade Mountain* for information on route to the summit.

16 Ink Pots
5.4 km one way (from parking area); 330 m elevation gain; 4 hour round trip
Trailhead: 22 km west of Banff on the Bow Valley Parkway (Hwy 1A)
Beyond Johnston Canyon, a lightly travelled trail continues up and over a forested ridge to emerge in an open meadow where warm water bubbles up from deep below the Earth's surface into shallow pools.

17 Healy Pass
9.0 km one way; 655 m elevation gain, 6 to 7 hour round trip
Trailhead: Sunshine Village parking lot behind the main gondola station
This trail follows sparkling Healy Creek to its source amid open meadows above the treeline. Wildflowers bloom profusely from mid-July to late August, and in late September scattered alpine larch turn a magnificent golden yellow.

18 Bourgeau Lake/Harvey Pass
7.2 km one way; 725 m elevation gain; 6 hour round trip
Trailhead: Trans-Canada Highway, 13 km west of Banff
A steady climb through lush forest and across rushing mountain streams leads to Bourgeau Lake, the closest subalpine lake to the town of Banff. A glacially-carved amphitheatre provides a dramatic backdrop to the lake, with large boulders providing the perfect perch for a picnic lunch. Although most hikers make Bourgeau their final destination, a 2.2 km difficult trail continues upwards to Harvey Pass, from where exceptional views extend to snowcapped peaks along the Continental Divide.

19 Rockbound Lake
8.4 km one way; 760 m elevation gain; 6 to 7 hour round trip
Trailhead: Bow Valley Parkway (Hwy 1A), 0.2 km east of Castle Junction
A long, steady climb through a mixed forest leads behind the distinctive cliffs of Castle Mountain to open meadows and flower-fringed Tower Lake, 7-7 km from the trailhead. The trail then climbs a low cliff band and emerges in a glacial cirque filled by Rockbound Lake.



17 Healy Pass

21 Sulphur Mountain
5.5 km to top of gondola, plus 0.5 km to Sanson Peak; 655 m elevation gain; 4 hour round trip
Trailhead: Upper Hot Springs, Mountain Avenue
The switchbacks on the slopes of Sulphur Mountain provide a steady grade for the hike to a summit renowned for its breathtaking mountain views. Take a 0.5 km side trip on the boardwalk trail that departs from the top of the gondola along a ridge ending at Sanson Peak and you will find more great views, remnants of the Cosmic Ray Station, and the 1903 weather observatory.

Difficult Trails



12 Tunnel Mountain Summit

42 Cory Pass Loop
13 km loop; 915 m elevation gain; 6 hour round trip
Trailhead: Fireside day-use area, off the Bow Valley Parkway (Hwy 1A)
The strenuous uphill trek to Cory Pass from the Bow Valley Parkway takes around two hours. It is worthwhile for the unobstructed view of Mount Louis, an imposing limestone monolith that rises from the forested valley floor far below. Rather than returning to the trailhead from the pass, energetic hikers have the option of descending into the Gargoyle Valley before returning to their vehicles via Edith Pass. Route finding can be challenging beyond Cory Pass.

43 Aylmer Lookout/ Aylmer Pass
11.8 km one way; 560 m elevation gain; 7 to 8 hour round trip
Trailhead: Lake Minnewanka day-use area, off Lake Minnewanka Road.
The trail to Aylmer Lookout follows the western shoreline of Lake Minnewanka for 8 km before beginning a steady 3.8 km climb to the site of a decommissioned fire lookout. From the end of the trail, the panorama extends in all directions, with the lake itself, over 500 metres below, an intense blue colour. An optional hike is to backtrack 1.7 km from the lookout and the Aylmer Pass trail that spurs upwards for 3-4 km to open meadows of wildflowers and views to the slate-grey Palliser Range.

Bear warnings, restrictions and closures are common throughout summer along the Aylmer Lookout/ Aylmer Pass Trail. Obtain up-to-date trail information by contacting the Banff Visitor Centre.



8 Stewart Canyon

Common Critters, Birds And Wildflowers

While exploring the park on foot, take a moment to smell, hear and look around you to discover nature at its best! Wonder what the difference is between a chipmunk and a ground squirrel? Wondering why the raven stays here year-round? What is that pretty red flower, and why is it called Indian Paintbrush? Challenge yourself to answer your curiosities by learning more about the living things – big and small – that call Banff National Park home. There are a variety of sources to help you learn from, such as local experts, books, interpretive programs, and the internet.



Prairie crocus



Columbian ground squirrel



Common raven



Heart-leaved arnica



Red squirrel



Black-billed magpie



Indian paintbrush



Least chipmunk



Grey jay



Fireweed



Golden-mantled ground squirrel



Clark's nutcracker

Bears And People

The Canadian Rocky Mountain national parks are an important part of the remaining grizzly and black bear habitat in North America. Even in protected areas, bears are challenged to avoid people. Think of what it would be like to be a bear travelling through the mountain national parks in midsummer – trying to bypass towns, campgrounds, highways, railways, and busy trails – and still find enough food to survive.

To successfully raise cubs and sustain a healthy population, bears need access to as much quality habitat as possible over a short period of time, with few human surprises.

Before you hit the trail, think about the time of year, what the bears are doing, and give them the space they need to survive.



Tips:

- Carry bear spray with you at all times, ensure it is at hand, and know how to use it.
- Make noise. Being quiet puts you at risk for sudden bear encounters. Be alert through shrubby areas and when approaching blind corners. Travel in groups and always look ahead.
- Report bear sightings and encounters to Parks Canada staff at 403-762-1470, when it is safe to do so.

pc.gc.ca/banff-bears

Be A Mountain Park Steward

Safety

Safety is your responsibility. There are always hazards involved with outdoor recreational activities. Be prepared. Even short trips from the Town of Banff can have serious consequences. Minimize your risk by planning ahead.

- At the Banff Visitor Centre ask staff for advice regarding current trail conditions, weather, and trail classifications.
- Be prepared for emergencies and changes in weather. Choose a trail suitable for the least experienced member in your group.
- Bring extra food, water and clothing. Surface water may be contaminated and unsafe for drinking. Mountain weather changes quickly and it can snow any month of the year.
- Tell somebody where you are going, when you will be back, and who to call if you do not return.
- Carry a first aid kit and bear spray.

Trail Etiquette

Show courtesy to fellow outdoor enthusiasts!

- Leave what you find. Natural and cultural resources such as rocks, fossils, artifacts, horns, antlers, wildflowers and nests are protected by law and must be left undisturbed for others to discover and enjoy.
- Take out what you bring in. Pack out all garbage, including food waste.
- Dispose of human waste at least 100 m from any water source. Bury solid human waste in a hole 15 cm deep. Pack out your toilet paper.
- To prevent damage to vegetation stay on the trail and avoid shortcuts.
- These trails are used by a variety of outdoor enthusiasts. Be sure to yield to others.

Wildlife

- Do not feed, touch or approach wildlife. Stay at least 30 to 50 metres away from most animals, and 100 metres away from bears.
- Travel in groups of 4 or more and make noise to prevent surprise encounters with wildlife.
- If you are planning to take your dog out on a trail, please respect the following. Dogs can stress wildlife as they can remind them of predators such as wolves and coyotes. Keep your dog under control and on a leash at all times. Dogs are not permitted on trails with seasonal restrictions.

Avalanches

The right combination of snow cover and slope angle can produce avalanches. Be careful when crossing snow slopes or when exposed to avalanche paths. Check the avalanche bulletin before heading out www.avalanche.ca.

More Information

Banff Visitor Centre:
403-762-1550
224 Banff Avenue

Banff National Park Website:
pc.gc.ca/banff

Trail Conditions Report:
pc.gc.ca/banfftrails

Weather:
weatheroffice.gc.ca

For Banff area maps and guidebooks, visit a retail outlet in the Town of Banff.

In case of EMERGENCY, call 911 or, if using a satellite phone, call the park dispatch office 403-762-4506. Cell phone reception is limited within Banff National Park.

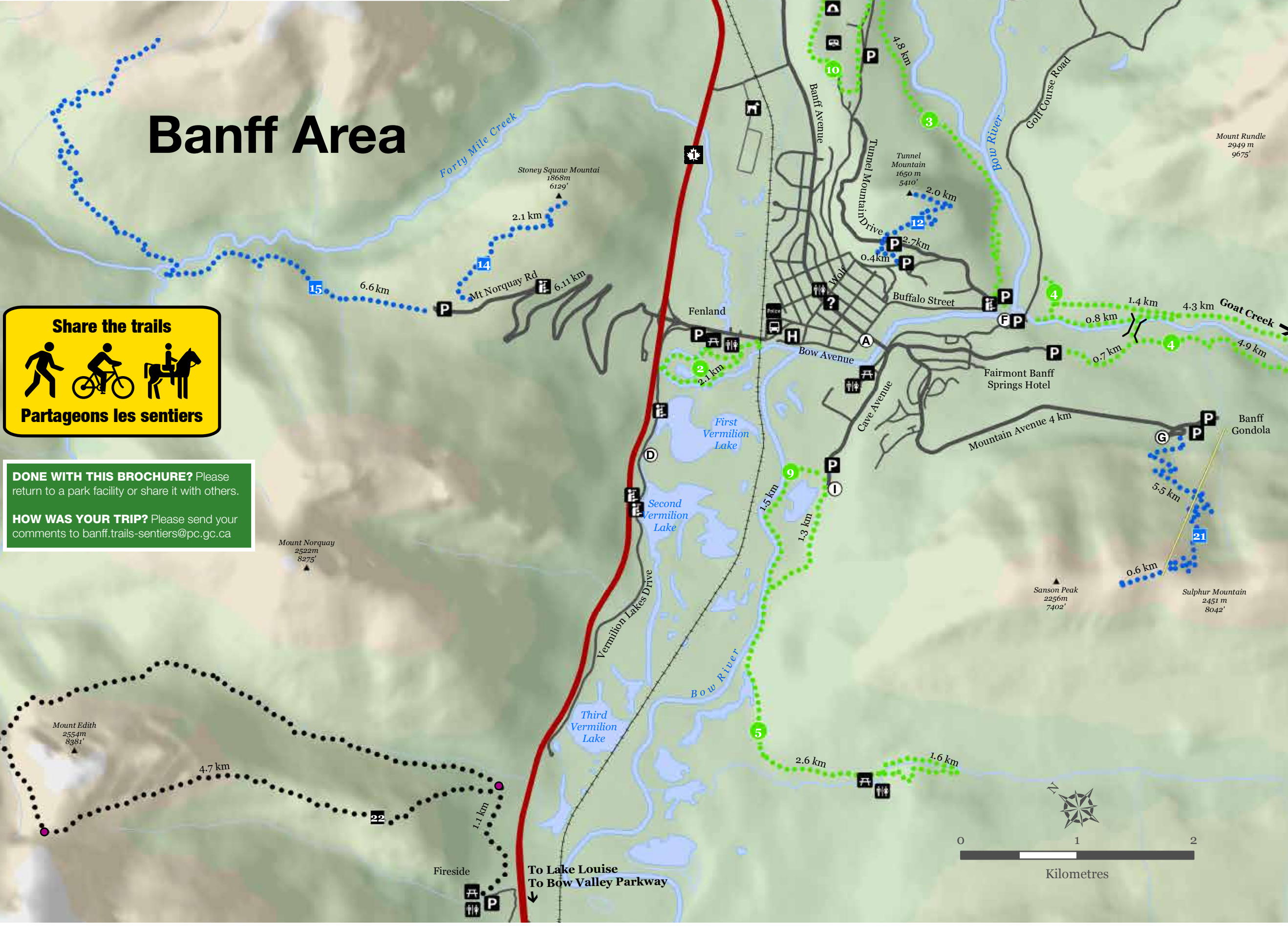
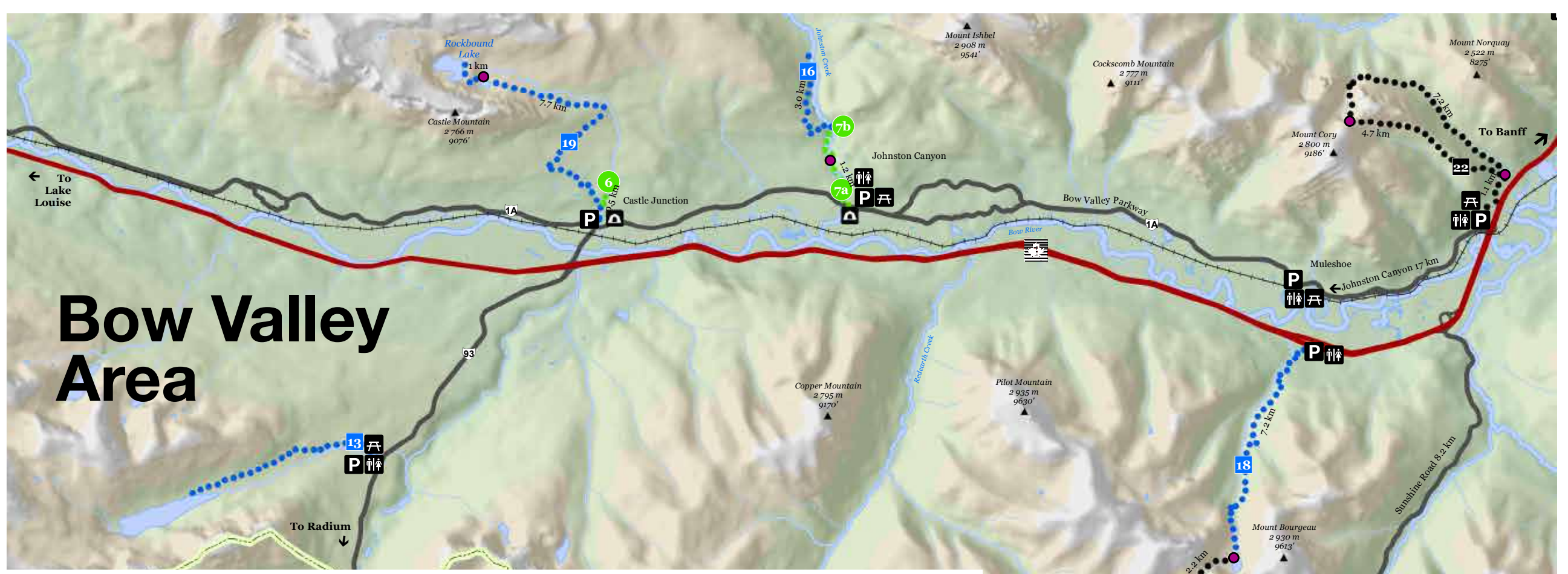
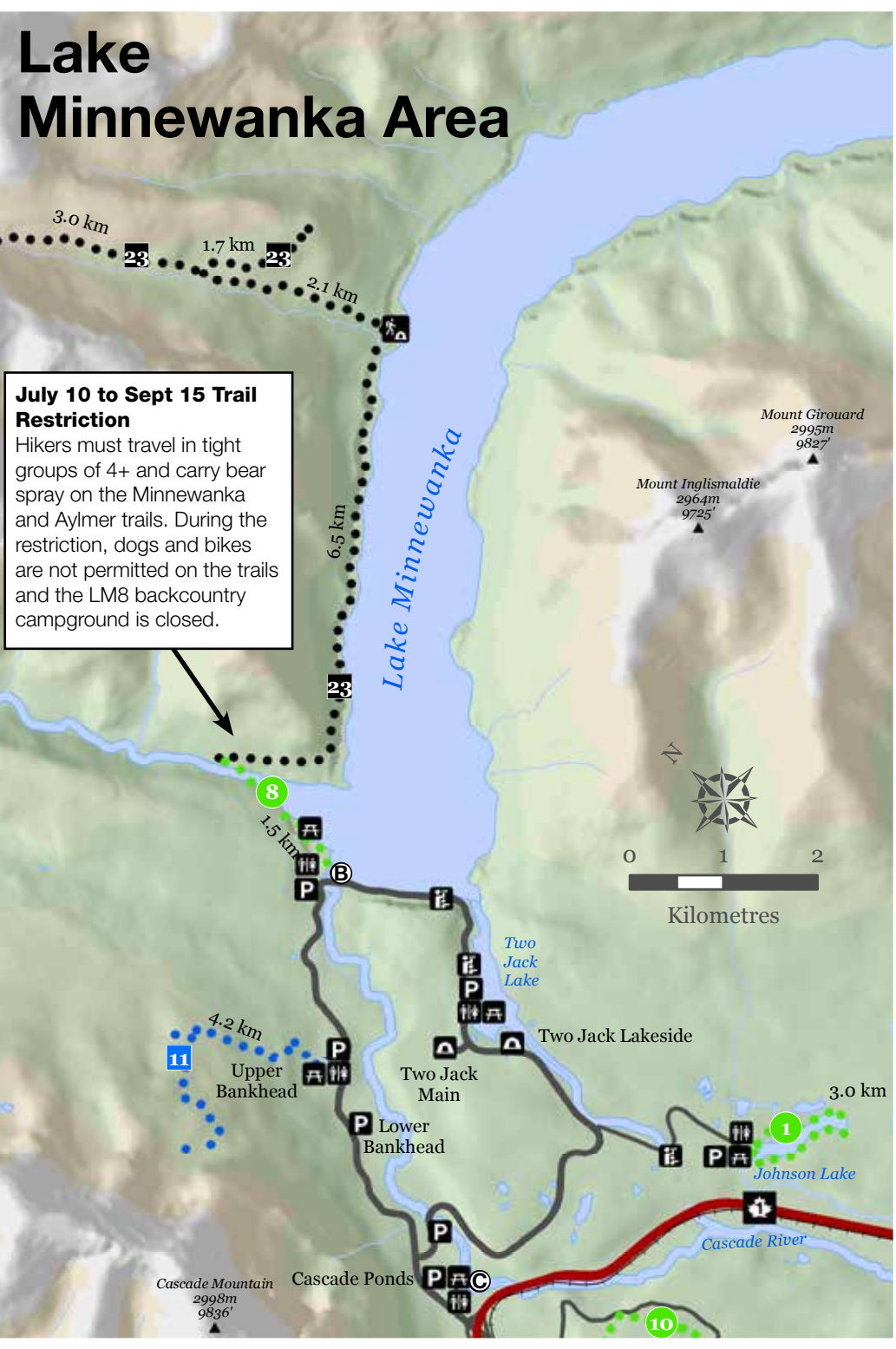
Ratings

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- Moderate
- ◆ Difficult

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Legend

- Easy trail ● Moderate trail ◆ Difficult trail
- Trans-Canada Highway
- Bow Valley Parkway
- Road
- Park Boundary
- Backcountry campground (wilderness permit required)
- Banff Visitor Centre
- Campground
- Day-use area
- Hospital
- Parking
- Police
- Viewpoint
- Washrooms
- Dog Park
- Banff Park Museum NHS
- Lake Minnewanka
- Cascade Ponds
- Vermilion Lakes
- Hoodoos Viewpoint
- Bow Falls
- Upper Hot Springs
- Cave and Basin NHS