

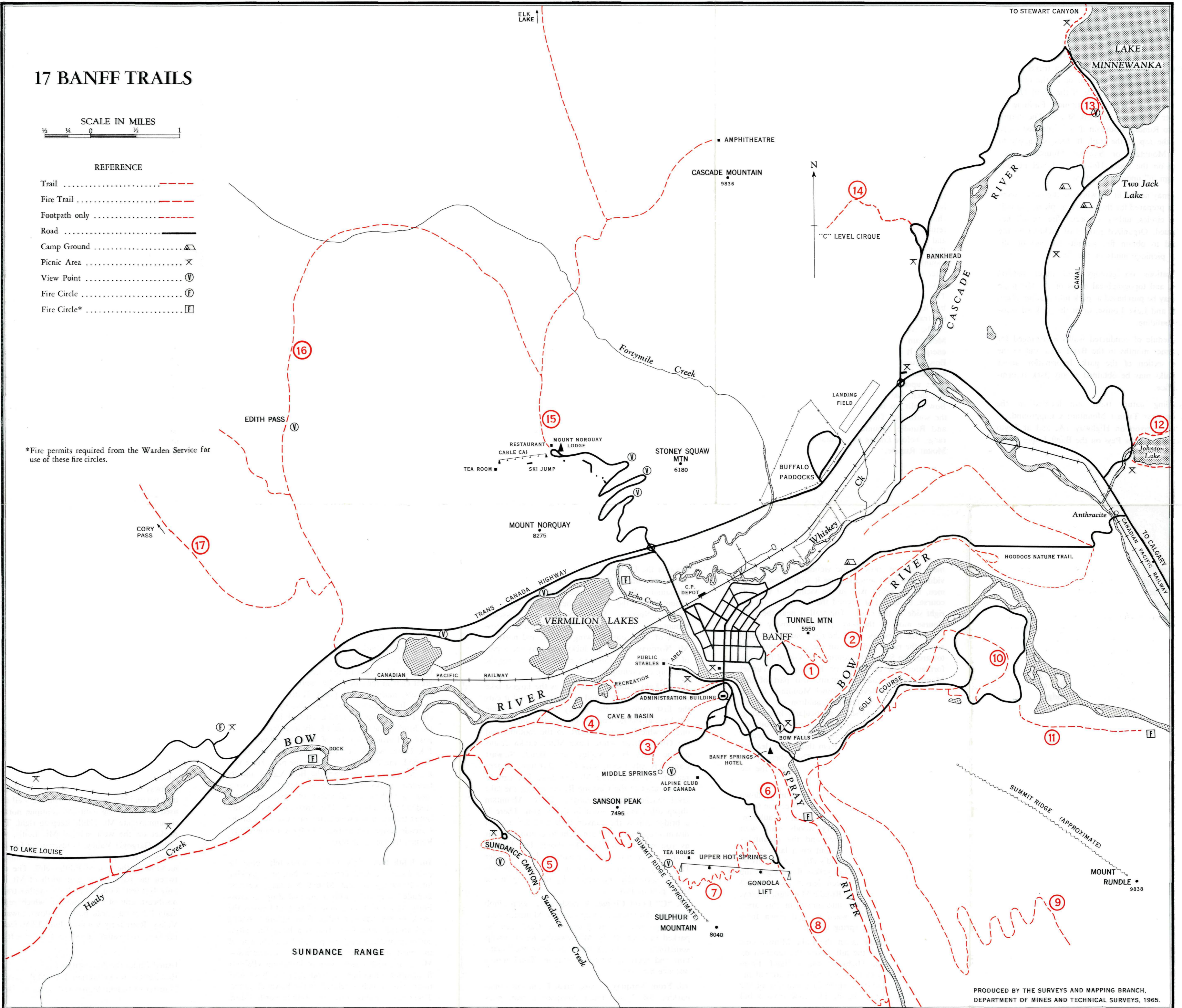
# 17 BANFF TRAILS



## REFERENCE

- Trail ..... - - - - -
- Fire Trail ..... - - - - -
- Footpath only ..... - - - - -
- Road ..... ————
- Camp Ground ..... ▲
- Picnic Area ..... X
- View Point ..... V
- Fire Circle ..... ⊙
- Fire Circle\* ..... ⊞

\*Fire permits required from the Warden Service for use of these fire circles.



Travel permits are required for all climbing off park trails and for overnight travel on trails.

Park regulations require that **anyone climbing a mountain in the Park must obtain a travel permit** from the nearest park warden, or at the office of the Chief Warden. The office of the Banff District Warden is in the Warden Equipment Building on the corner of Squirrel and Elk Streets. The permit applies to Rundle Mountain if it is intended to go beyond the top of the trail. It does not apply to Tunnel Mountain or Sulphur Mountain when climbing on the trails. Holders of travel permits must “sign in” upon their return.

Fires may not be lit anywhere in the park except in places prepared for them, such as picnic grounds and fire circles, unless a special fire permit has been issued. Organized groups of picknickers are requested to obtain fire permits for use of off-highway picnic-grounds or fire circles.

Publications on geology and other natural features, and topographical maps of the Mountain Parks may be purchased at park information offices in Banff and Lake Louise, or at the park administration building.

A schedule of conducted walks is arranged for the summer months in the Banff area and in the western section of the park. Information about these walks may be obtained at any park Information office.

Self-guiding nature trails are located at the Hoodoos near Tunnel Mountain Campground, at Johnston Canyon on Highway 1A, and at Peyto Lookout near Bow Pass on the Banff-Jasper Highway.

A panoramic view of the Banff area from the Upper Hot Springs, showing the Spray Valley, the Bow Valley, and the town of Banff. The view is from the Upper Hot Springs, looking south towards the town of Banff. The Spray Valley is visible in the foreground, and the Bow Valley is visible in the middle ground. The town of Banff is visible in the background, with the Bow River winding through it.

comprehensive view of the geological aspects of the entire region is obtained from the upper terminal of the lift and from the end of the ridge trail (½ mile).

**8. The Spray Valley Trails.** One approach to this valley has its entrance near the Upper Hot Springs, at the far end of the parking lot. Here a trail crosses the gondola lift right-of-way and makes a gradual descent to the Spray River Fire Road, which provides a return route to town. Round trip from the Bow Bridge is 7½ miles, or from the Upper Hot Springs back to the bridge 4¾ miles. The Spray Valley offers several variations. A pleasant walk of 8 miles may be made by going up the fire road from the Banff Springs Hotel to a bridge 4 miles upstream, and returning on the east side of the river. There is considerable variation in plants and scenery. For a short walk upstream, a trail cuts down from the fire road to a pony bridge less than a mile upstream, and back to a point near the Spray Bridge on the Golf Course loop road, just behind the first green of the golf course.

**9. The Mount Rundle trail.** Whether you wish only to go up the trail for the view, or to climb the mountain, take this east bank Spray fire road beyond the first green of the golf course. The Rundle Mountain trail turns off left within a half mile, climbing gradually southward and then switchbacking up through the timber. Finally, high on the slope, it continues southward across two gulleys to put you directly below one of the main peaks. This 3-mile trail ends about half way to the summit (in altitude). Any travel beyond this point is considered climbing (see note for climbers). One word of advice: there is no water on this mountain beyond about ½-mile.

**10. Golf Course Loop.** 5 miles return to the Spray Bridge, 7 miles from the Bow Bridge. One of the

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This selection of trails in the vicinity of Banff varies from a short stroll to an extended hike.

When hiking on any mountain trails, stay on the trails; taking a shortcut will lead to erosion which will gradually wash out the trail. Some of the trails mentioned are easier to reach by car but the majority are close enough to the townsite so you can walk.

**1. Tunnel Mountain**—1.6 miles to the summit, climb 1,000 ft. altitude.

The trail up Tunnel Mountain is one of the oldest and most popular in the Bow Valley. It starts in the townsite, on St. Julian Road, not far from the Banff School of Fine Arts. Tunnel Mountain lies in the middle of the Bow Valley. Altitude is 5,550 feet. Unless you make long stops you should be able to make the top in an hour; the return trip, including time for the views at the top and a good rest, 2 to 2½ hours. Preliminary Advice: There is no water on this little mountain, so take some fruit or something to drink after you reach the summit, especially on a warm day. Also, don't look for the tunnel—it isn't there. The railway had plans for one through the ridge but it was never built. Take it easy and stick to the trail, for a pleasant and rewarding walk.

The wonderful view from the summit of Tunnel Mountain makes the walk worth the time and energy. It lies like an island in the middle of the Bow River Valley, which at this point runs directly east and west, cutting across the ranges. A few miles upstream the riven swings out of the town and then, just east of the townsite, pours over the Bow Falls, to be joined by the Spray River from the southeast. The river has cut between Tunnel and Rundle Mountains, which are in the same range, before finding the natural valley northeast of Mount Rundle.

A panoramic view of the Banff area from the Upper Hot Springs, showing the Spray Valley, the Bow Valley, and the town of Banff. The view is from the Upper Hot Springs, looking south towards the town of Banff. The Spray Valley is visible in the foreground, and the Bow Valley is visible in the middle ground. The town of Banff is visible in the background, with the Bow River winding through it.

most pleasant trails in the vicinity of Banff, providing you don't mind sharing it with a few horse-men, is the bridle trail in the vicinity of the golf course. It starts just beyond the first green, on the right side of the road. The trail is near the Golf Course most of the way, providing lovely vistas across the fairways. Here the river has cut a valley across the range and you can see, as you start back towards the Spray, the continuous flow of the rock formations in the faces of Rundle and Tunnel Mountains. Cascade Mountain, also part of this range, is visible beyond Tunnel Mountain, on the outward walk. The Devil's Cauldron on the 8th hole of the golf course, is particularly interesting: it is a small clear green pond entirely surrounded by hill and mountain. This is a “kettle hole” created when the glacier retreated from this valley, leaving an enormous block of ice here. The debris of the glacier melt was deposited in hills around the ice block before it melted.

**11. The Dryas Meadow** is 1½ miles further down the Bow River, from a gate in the golf course fence about a half mile beyond the Devil's Cauldron. This is a cool and flowery woods walk with glimpses of the Bow River and the mountains northward. It finally comes out on a large gravel bar carpeted with Drummond's Dryas, a low growing plant of charming small yellow flowers growing from a mat of dark green leaves. A waterfall tumbles from the cliffs of Rundle Mountain nearby, and birch trees, rather uncommon in this area, grow from the gravel wash brought down from the mountain by the spring torrents.

**12. Johnson's Lake** is on the Lake Minnewanka road at the top of the hill, above the junction on the Trans-Canada Highway east of Banff. From the parking area there is a 2-mile trail around the lake, which provides a splendid panorama of the Bow Valley east of Banff. The view from a hill

#### 2. Trails in the Tunnel Mountain Area

For those seeking a pleasant walk near the town, but who don't want to climb the mountain, the trail around the mountain is worthwhile, with choices of routes for shorter or longer walks.

You may walk downstream along the Bow River from the north end of the Bow Bridge, to the view above the Bow Falls (1 mile), with the last part of the route on the road. This is a pleasant picnic spot with a fine view of the Banff Springs Hotel and the Spray River Valley framing Goat Mountain. Rundle Mountain is nearby on the left.

From here continue on the road a few yards to a sign on the right which announces “Trail to Hoodoos 2.9 M.” Take this trail downhill to a quiet backwater of the Bow River in less than a mile. The trail continues along the river bank at the foot of the Tunnel Mountain cliffs to Tunnel Mountain meadows. The months of June and July provide a fair variety of mountain flowers (to see but not to pick, please) and there are some very large old Douglas fir trees here which have survived the forest fires of a century ago because they were protected by their thick bark. The trail then climbs easily to a low east ridge of the mountain near Tunnel Mountain Campground. **To return** to town, turn left and follow the campground road (round trip about 5 miles) or continue along the ridge to the Hoodoos, 2 miles farther. There is a magnificent view here of the lower Bow River.

You will notice other trails along the ridge which will return you to the campground area, or bring you to the highway approaching Banff from the Trans-Canada Highway. These are pleasant to walk if you wish to go a little further and vary your route instead of “back-tracking” by the campground road to town. Extended circle trip is 10 miles.

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towards the far end of the lake faces the cliffs of Mt. Rundle across the valley and eastward, or left, Chinaman's Peak, the Three Sisters and Pigeon Mountain. To the west are the familiar shapes of Tunnel, Norquay, Stoney Squaw and Cascade Mountains. A surprise is the spectacular arrow shape of Mt. Louis showing beyond and north of Mt. Norquay. If you are lucky you may see a pair of loons feeding in this lake, more likely during the morning or evening hours.

**13. At Lake Minnewanka.** This is the largest lake in the Park, 11 miles, and at its eastern end it cuts the first range of the Rocky Mountains. Some blockage at the far end has created two small lakes one of which drains eastward to the foothills and the Ghost River, while Lake Minnewanka drains in the main Bow Valley near Banff. Stewart Canyon is only a short walk (½ mile) from the recreational area at Lake Minnewanka. The canyon is the outlet of the Cascade River; in fact the lake level reaches into the canyon. Rocky Mountain sheep often may be seen in this region. There is a bridge across the canyon to a trail for a short distance upstream, or turn right to continue as far as you wish above the lake shore. The District Warden can provide information about Aylmer Pass if you wish to make a day's hike in this region, scenically and botanically rewarding in the latter part of July.

**14. “C” Level Cirque.** A moderately steep climb from the Bankhead area up Cascade Mountain to a cirque gouged out by glacial ice. Cars may be parked in a lot off the Minnewanka Road. Sheep sometimes are seen on higher levels of the mountain and there is alpine vegetation. Total return distance 5 miles.

**15. From Norquay parking area.** From the winter parking lot 3 at Mount Norquay a trail goes

**3. Middle Springs** (footpath only) in Sulphur Mountain are easily reached by a ¾-mile trail starting in the gardens behind the park administration building. You will find the sign for this trail at the top of the gardens on the right.

This is a very gradual ascent to a natural sulphur spring which flows from small hillside caves. These and other springs in the area originate from rain and surface water that seeps into fractures or pores in the rock and circulates to depths where the temperature of the rock is very high. The hot water then returns to the surface along fracture zones dissolving lime and sulphur compounds from the rocks. The lime has formed the calcareous rock deposits (tufa) around the springs, creating an overburden on the bed rock and glacial till of the area. Hydrogen sulphide gives the odour to the water. The warm water also encourages plant growth not found elsewhere. Some plants remain green all year due to the warm water, and air near the stream. There is a very fine view from the open meadow here, revealing the Bow Valley near Banff, with, left to right, Mt. Cory, Mt. Norquay, Cascade Mountain with Stoney Squaw at its base, and beyond this to the right, the Palliser Range with Mt. Aylmer's peak. In the foreground, glimpses of the town on the slopes of Tunnel Mountain.

**4. Bow River,** south bank, west of town. This may be reached by a dike crossing the swampy area just before you reach the Cave and Basin springs, and follows a route westward between the swamp and the river. This is sometimes a good “birding area”, as waterfowl inhabit the swampy area and the river. There are warblers, chickadees and kinglets in the spruce forest. The trail crosses the Sundance road beyond the Cave and Basin, about 1½ miles from town. You may return to town along the road, or follow the trail further (across the road and up-

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northward. At ½-mile it branches. Stay right for the Amphitheatre on Cascade Mountain (4 miles one way, climb 2,000 feet plus 300 feet on the return journey), and for Elk Lake (8 miles one way with 2,000 feet gradual climb). This trail goes gently downhill to the valley of Forty Mile Creek, a clear and lively stream which furnishes the water for Banff townsite. Across the bridge the well-graded trail switchbacks up the western slopes of Cascade Mountain to the Amphitheatre. This is a great cleft in the side of the mountain where alpine flowers, marmots and pikas (Little Chief Hare) abide. It is occasionally visited also by goat, sheep, elk. Part way up this trail a left fork leads towards the head of the valley on a fairly level trail over the pass and around a ridge of Brewster Mountain to Elk Lake, which lies in a small hanging valley beyond, and 200-300 feet above the pass. Here you are completely away from the Bow Valley and its familiar peaks. The lake at 7,000 feet overlooks a high and wild valley of alpine meadows studded with alpine fir. The stream has an obscure outlet further north which cuts midway through the Cascade range and eastward to the Cascade River. Return by the same trail.

**16. Edith Pass.** This trail branches **left** about ½ mile from the trail entrance at Norquay parking lot. It swings around Mount Norquay, keeping altitude fairly well, with a gradual drop to cross Forty Mile Creek in 3 miles. The trail follows the creek to the base of Edith Pass before crossing back to the south side. This is a beautiful valley, cut deep and narrow, and presided over by one of the most spectacular peaks in these mountains—Mt. Louis, with a sheer wall of Devonian (Palliser formation) limestone, upbended at the base of a thrust fault which is related to the Sawback range. Three peaks in this range are, south to north: Edith,

hill), and then the road to Sundance Canyon (3.3 miles from town). Another alternative is the trail uphill and back across the lower slopes of Sulphur Mountain to the town streets, as shown on the map.

**5. At Sundance Canyon** a trail (1½ mile loop) has been developed in the canyon itself, crossing the stream and climbing amongst the rocks. The canyon is not spectacular, but rather pleasant with a lively stream tumbling and splashing over the edge of Sundance Valley on its way to the Bow River. Some interesting plants grow here; purple phacelia, golden corydalis and spotted saxifrage, are features of the canyon flora. The trail continues upstream for almost a mile, and then climbs a little above the right bank and turns back through the woods to a fine viewpoint of Mt. Edith across the valley, before descending the hill to the parking lot.

**6. The Upper Hot Springs** 2½ miles, 500 ft climb. Walking time about 1 hour. Walk along Spray Avenue and past the Banff Springs Hotel. Beyond the parking lot here, and above the entrance to the fire road, a well graded trail starts uphill on the right and comes out on the road just below the Upper Hot Springs and Gondola Lift lower terminal. This is probably no shorter than the main road to the springs, but you escape the traffic and pass through the pleasant and cool woods. From a point very near the Hot Springs building, the trail may be found for . . .

**7. Sulphur Mountain Summit**—3 miles or 2 hours, climb 2,200 feet. There is a trail access to the summit, besides the gondola lift. Drinking water may be obtained from a spring about 2 miles up, and refreshments are available in a tea house at the summit. Alpine larch and whitebark pine are trees unique to the summit and this altitude; alpine flowers also are found on the ridge. A particularly

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Louis and Fir. The trail climbs the pass between these handsome pinnacles and Mt. Norquay on the east.

The trail comes out on the Trans-Canada Highway 4 miles west of Banff. If you must walk back to town, cross the highway to the Vermilion Lakes Drive, which is more shaded and interesting. Distance from Norquay parking area to the Trans-Canada via Edith Pass is 8.5 miles, with an 800 foot climb on the north side. From the Trans-Canada, travelling in reverse, the climb to Edith Pass is 1,700 feet.

**17. Cory Pass.** Another mountain trail in this area is approached from the Edith Pass trail above Vermilion Lakes (see above). About ½ mile from the trail entrance, Cory Pass trail branches left to climb steeply on the south ridge of Mount Edith and follow the west side of the ridge into the Pass, which is 7,000 feet altitude. Distance from the highway is 4 miles, climb 3,150 feet. There is no trail beyond this point but if you are well shod and used to scrambling, you can continue northeast to circumnavigate Mt. Edith, keeping right. This wild pocket on the west side of Mt. Louis, which is called Gargoyle Valley, is fascinating for its gend-armes or rock pinnacles, and for the small alpine meadow at the foot of Edith's cliff. The drop between the passes west and north of Mt. Edith is only 400 feet. You will pick up another trail on the northeast side of the mountain which rejoins the main Edith Pass trail part way down towards Bow Valley. Round trip 9 miles, climb 3,550 feet including Gargoyle valley. This is a full day's trip.

Issued Under the Authority of the Honourable Jean Chrétien, P.C., M.P., B.A., LL.L. Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development