



# Avalanche Terrain Ratings for backcountry touring in the Mountain National Parks



Fourth edition

Avalanches are part of life in the mountains, an integral piece of the winter cycle. Anytime snow and steep slopes are combined, avalanche potential results. If you wish to travel through backcountry terrain that is exposed to avalanches, you must accept that you're taking a risk. You need to understand these risks before taking them, and the information included here will help give you a better sense of the type of trip you are planning.

The avalanche forecast provides ratings of avalanche danger that are based on the snowpack conditions, which change regularly with the weather – from day to day, or even hour to hour. Terrain however, doesn't change much. The angle and shape of the ground, or the number of established avalanche paths won't vary from day to day. By using the Avalanche Terrain Exposure Scale (ATES), you can begin to measure your skills, experience and risk tolerance against the landscapes through which you choose to travel.

**AVALANCHE TERRAIN RATINGS AND AVALANCHE FORECASTS MUST BE USED TOGETHER FOR EVALUATING HAZARDS AND MANAGING PERSONAL RISK IN THE BACKCOUNTRY.**

Également offert en français



## Do I still need to read to the avalanche bulletin every day?

Absolutely - terrain is only part of the picture. When the avalanche danger is “High”, you should select conservative terrain. Alternatively, when the danger is “Low”, this might be the time to consider that next level of terrain you have been contemplating. The two must be used together for understanding the big picture of how to manage your risk in the backcountry. Daily avalanche information is available at Park Visitor Centres, or at [www.parksmountainsafety.ca](http://www.parksmountainsafety.ca)

## When should I use this system?

These ratings are intended to supplement pre-trip planning material. This means reading guidebooks, studying maps and photos, talking to friends, checking weather and avalanche conditions, and referring to the ATES ratings while planning the trip. All of these resources together will give you a better sense of the route you are choosing.

## How do I use the scale?

The list of rated trips represents the most common destinations in the Mountain National Parks. Don't use this scale alone – you'll need additional material to learn about the trip you are proposing. The following guidebooks are recommended:

1. *Summits & Icefields, Columbia Mountains* – by Chic Scott & Mark Klassen
2. *Summits & Icefields, Canadian Rockies* – by Chic Scott & Mark Klassen
3. *Ski Trails in the Canadian Rockies* – by Chic Scott
4. *Ski Touring in Rogers Pass* – by J.P. Kors, John Kelly & Eric Dafoe

These publications are widely available at local mountain specialty stores. For further information on specific trips visit any Parks Canada information centre in the Mountain National Parks – or check with a local professional guide service.

## How much experience do I need for these trips?

**Simple (Class 1)** terrain requires common sense, proper equipment, first aid skills, and the discipline to respect avalanche warnings. Simple terrain is usually low avalanche risk, ideal for novices gaining backcountry experience. These trips may not be entirely free from avalanche hazards, and on days when the avalanche danger is rated “High” or “Extreme”, you may want to re-think any backcountry travel that has exposure to avalanches – stick to groomed x-country trails, or within the boundaries of a ski resort.

**Challenging (Class 2)** terrain requires skills to recognize and avoid avalanche prone terrain – big slopes exist on these trips. You must also know how to understand avalanche forecasts, perform avalanche self rescue, basic first aid, and be confident in your routefinding skills. You should take an Avalanche Skill Training Level 1 course before traveling in this type of terrain. If you are unsure of your own, or your group's ability to navigate through avalanche terrain - consider hiring a professional, ACMG certified guide.

**Complex (Class 3)** terrain demands a strong group with years of critical decision making experience in avalanche terrain. There can be no safe options on these trips, forcing exposure to big slopes. A recommended minimum is that someone in your group should have taken an Avalanche Skills Training Level 2 course, and has several years of backcountry experience. Be prepared! Check the avalanche forecast regularly, and ensure everyone in your group is up for the task and aware of the risk. This is serious country - not a place to consider unless you're confident in the skills of your group. If you are uncertain - consider hiring a professional, ACMG certified guide.

## Disclaimer

There are inherent risks in backcountry travel, and most of the routes described here will at times be unsafe due to potential snow avalanches. The Parks Canada Agency has done its best to provide accurate information and to describe the terrain characteristics typical of each general region. However, it is up to the users of this information to learn the necessary skills for safe backcountry travel, access additional trip planning materials, and to exercise caution while traveling through the backcountry in any national park.

Users of this information do so entirely at their own risk, and the Parks Canada Agency disclaims any liability for injury, injury resulting in death or damage to anyone undertaking a trip into any of the regions described. This information is no substitute for experience and good judgment.

## Avalanche Terrain Exposure Scale (ATES)

Description	Class	Terrain Criteria
<b>Simple</b>	1	Exposure to low angle or primarily forested terrain. Some forest openings may involve the runout zones of infrequent avalanches. Many options to reduce or eliminate exposure. No glacier travel.
<b>Challenging</b>	2	Exposure to well-defined avalanche paths, starting zones or terrain traps; options exist to reduce or eliminate exposure with careful routefinding. Glacier travel is straightforward but crevasse hazards may exist.
<b>Complex</b>	3	Exposure to multiple overlapping avalanche paths or large expanses of steep, open terrain; multiple avalanche starting zones and terrain traps below; minimal options to reduce exposure. Complicated glacier travel with extensive crevasse bands or icefalls.

## SIMPLE – CLASS 1

### Banff National Park

Baker Creek  
Baker Creek powerline  
Bath Creek – 7 km from Hwy 1  
Bow Riverside loop  
Brewster Creek to Sundance Lodge  
Bryant Creek  
Cascade Fire Road  
Cave and Basin trails  
Fairview loop  
Glacier Lake  
Goat Creek  
Great Divide Trail  
Healy Creek – Sundance to SSV road  
Johnston Creek to Inkpots  
Lake Louise shoreline trail  
Merlin Valley from Skoki  
Minnewanka lakeshore  
Morain Lake road trackset  
Mosquito Creek to MO5  
Natural Bridge from Skoki  
Pharoah Creek  
Pipestone trails  
Redearth Creek  
Skoki via Boulder/Deception Passes  
Skoki via Pipestone River  
Spray River Trail  
Sulphur Mountain backside trail  
Sulphur Mountain trail under gondola  
Sundance Pass  
Telemark trail  
Tower Lake  
Tramline trail  
Twin Lakes from Hwy 1  
Upper Lake Louise nordic trails

### Jasper National Park

Astoria River to Tonquin/WH hut  
Athabasca Falls loops  
Athabasca Falls/Meeting of the Waters  
Bald Hills Lookout trail – to hitching rail  
Cabin Lake fire road  
Edith Cavell road – to hostel  
Lorraine and Mona Lakes trail (to Evelyn Creek campground)  
Marjorie and Caledonia Lake  
Mina Lake loop  
Moab Lake  
Moose Lake trail  
Palissades Lookout  
Patricia Lake loop  
Poboktan Creek  
Pyramid-Bench loop  
Shangri-La to Snowbowl only  
Stutfield Creek (valley flats only)  
Summit Lakes/Jacques Lake  
Sunwapta Falls/Athabasca River

Valley of the Five Lakes/Wabasso Lakes  
Whistlers campground loop

### Kootenay National Park

Chickadee Valley (valley bottom only)  
Dog Lake  
Dolly Varden  
East Kootenay  
Hector Gorge  
Simpson River (to KNP boundary)  
West Kootenay

### Yoho National Park

Chancellor Peak Campground  
Emerald Lake designated nordic trails  
Field to Emerald Lake nordic trail  
Ice River fire road  
Kicking Horse trail  
Lake O'Hara circuit (avoid the north shoreline)  
Lake O'Hara road to EP hut  
Morning Glory Lakes  
Ross Lake circuit  
Sherbrooke Lake (to lake only)  
Wapta Falls  
Yoho Valley road trackset

### Glacier National Park

Beaver River  
Rogers Pass ski hill (forest cuts behind hotel)  
Wheeler Hut approach and vicinity

### Mt. Revelstoke National Park

2km & 5km loop trails  
Inspiration Woods  
Lindmark trail to Parkway intersection  
Meadows in the Sky Parkway  
Summit Trail to 8 Mile Crossing

### Waterton Lakes National Park

Akamina Pass  
Akamina Pass to Forum Lake  
Bear's Hump trail  
Cameron Lake trail to lake only  
Crandel Lake  
Dipper  
Wishbone

## CHALLENGING – CLASS 2

### Banff National Park

Boom Lake  
Bow hut to Balfour hut via Nic/Olive col  
Bow Summit area  
Castlegard Mt.  
Cirque Peak  
Crowfoot Pass  
Diablalet Glacier  
Elk Lake Summit  
Forty Mile Creek  
Fossil Mountain loop  
Gibbon Pass  
Haiduk Lake via Shadow Lake  
Healy Creek – SSV to Healy Pass  
Hidden Bowl region  
Hilda Ridge  
Katherine/Helen Lake circuit  
Lake Louise resort backcountry accessed from ski area  
Mt. Gordon (YNP)  
Mt. Olive  
Mt. Rhonda South  
Mt. Thompson  
Observation subpeaks  
Paradise Valley  
Parker Ridge  
Peyto hut to Bow hut  
Saskatchewan glacier  
Skoki Mountain loop  
Sunshine to Healy Creek  
Sunshine Village backcountry accessed from ski area  
West Nile

### Jasper National Park

Amethyst Lakes/Moat Lake  
Athabasca Glacier to first icefall  
Bald Hills area  
Fraser Glacier  
Fryatt Creek  
Little Shovel Pass  
Maccarib Pass to Tonquin  
Maligne Pass  
Marmot Basin backcountry accessed from ski area  
Shangri-La past Snowbowl  
Skyline Trail  
The Brazeau Icefield  
Whistlers Creek  
Wilcox Pass

### Yoho National Park

Amiskwi Fire Road  
Kiwetinok Pass  
McArthur Pass  
Odaray Plateau  
Opabin Plateau

Ottertail Valley Fire Road  
Glacier National Park  
Avalanche Crest - to treeline  
Cheops Glades  
Flat Creek valley trail  
Grizzly Shoulder  
Hermit Meadows  
McGill Shoulder  
Sifton Col  
The Hourglass

### Mt. Revelstoke National Park

Balsam Lake to Eva & Miller Lakes  
Balsam Lake to Mt Revelstoke Summit  
Lindmark Trail above Parkway Intersection  
Summit Trail above 8 Mile Crossing  
Woolsey Creek Road

### Waterton Lakes National Park

Akamina Pass to Wall Lake  
Bertha Lake  
Forum Ridge  
Lakeshore  
Summit Knob to Boundary Creek  
Summit Knob to Cameron Lake  
Summit Lake

## COMPLEX – CLASS 3

### Banff National Park

Balfour to Scott Duncan Huts  
Ball Pass  
Bath Glacier exit to Hwy 1  
Bonnet Icefield  
Bow Hut approach  
Castle Mt. - to summit  
Cirrus Mountain  
Crowfoot Mt.  
Dolomite Peak circuit  
Drummond Icefield  
Hector Lake Wapta access  
Mike Wynn circuit  
Mt. Baker  
Mt. Balfour  
Mt. Coleman  
Mt. Fairview  
Mt. Hector  
Mt. Jimmy Junior  
Mt. Jimmy Simpson  
Mt. Mistaya  
Mt. Niblock via Divide Creek  
Mt. Patterson  
Mt. Rhonda North  
Mt. Wilson  
Mystic Pass  
Observation Peak (summit)  
Oyster Lake  
Packers Pass  
Pat Sheehan Traverse

Peyto Glacier approach  
Plain of Six Glaciers trail  
Ptarmigan Peak  
Pulpit Peak area  
Pumpkin Traverse  
Surprise Pass  
White Pyramid

### Jasper National Park

Athabasca Glacier past first icefall  
Diadem Creek  
Mt. Columbia  
Mt. Kitchener  
North Twin  
Snow Dome  
South Twin  
Stutfield Peak

### Kootenay National Park

Chickadee Valley - above valley bottom  
Stanley Glacier Valley  
Storm Mt.  
Tokkum Creek

### Yoho National Park

Emerald Pass  
Emerald Peak/Slide Path  
Isolated Col  
Little Yoho Valley approach  
Mt. Cathedral  
Mt. Collie  
Mt. Des Poilus  
Mt. Field  
Mt. McArthur  
Opabin/ Wenkchemna circuit  
Popes Peak  
President Pass  
Schaefer Basin  
Scheisser/Lomas route  
Sherbrook Lake Wapta access  
Yoho Traverse

### Glacier National Park

3 Pass Traverse  
8812 Bowl  
Asulkan Hut/Tree Triangle  
Asulkan Pass  
Asulkan Valley Practice Slopes  
Avalanche Crest bowl/slidepath  
Balu Pass  
Bonney Glacier  
Bruins Pass  
Cougar Valley  
Dome Glacier  
Flat Creek slidepaths  
Fortitude  
Glacier Circle  
Grizzly/Little Sifton Traverse

Illecillewaet Practice Slopes  
Illecillewaet Neve access  
Lily Glacier  
Lizards Tail  
Lookout Col  
McGill Bowl - McGill Pass  
Mt. Rogers  
Mt. Swanzy  
Mt. Tupper Traverse  
NRC Gullies  
Perley Rock  
Sapphire Col  
Smart Ridge  
Steps of Paradise – Youngs Pk  
Terminal Peak  
The Cone  
The Mouse Trap  
The Ravens  
Ursus Major  
Ursus Trees  
Vaux Moraines/Sir Donald/Uto Col  
Vent Shaft slopes  
Video Peak  
Youngs Pk via Illecillewaet

### Mt. Revelstoke National Park

Hamilton Creek Upper Meadows  
Clachnacudain Creek  
Clachnacudain Creek east fork  
Saint Syr Creek  
Coursier Creek  
Woolsey Glacier- Coursier Peak  
Clachnacudain Glacier-Inverness Peaks  
Mount Klotz above treeline  
West Woolsey Creek  
Maunder Creek

### Waterton Lakes National Park

Akamina Lake Chutes (The Fingers)  
Alderson-Carthew  
Lineham Lake  
Rowe Bowl/Peak (CV 13)  
Rowe Lake