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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.

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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

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
Simple	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.
Challenging	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.
Complex	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 shorline)
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
Diablaret 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

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