



## R.J. Ritche (Balfour) Hut

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R.J. Ritche (Balfour) Hut by Jackie Clark

# R.J. Ritchie (Balfour) Hut

## Booking, Payment and Cancellation Policy

View the Booking, Payment and Cancellation Policies at [www.alpineclubofcanada.ca/facility/reservations.html](http://www.alpineclubofcanada.ca/facility/reservations.html)

### Rates

Visit [www.alpineclubofcanada.ca/facility/rates.html](http://www.alpineclubofcanada.ca/facility/rates.html) for current hut and wilderness pass prices.

## Getting There

The Rob J. Ritchie Hut, also known as the Balfour Hut, is found on low, rocky hills at the toe of the Vulture Glacier, approximately 28 km northwest of the town of Lake Louise, AB. It is east of Balfour Pass and the Continental divide, just inside the Banff National Park boundary.

The following information should be used in conjunction with the correct topographic map and guidebook information (maps and guidebooks are listed below).

### North Approach – Peyto Hut to Balfour Hut (summer and winter)

|                            |                                                |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Trailhead location:</b> | Refer to the trailhead to Peyto Hut            |
| <b>Hiking distance:</b>    | 7 kilometres                                   |
| <b>Elevation gain:</b>     | 430 metres height gain, 430 metres height loss |
| <b>Approximate time:</b>   | 5-7 hours                                      |

### North Approach – Bow Hut to Balfour Hut (summer and winter)

|                            |                                   |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>Trailhead location:</b> | Refer to the trailhead to Bow Hut |
| <b>Skiing distance:</b>    | 7 kilometres                      |
| <b>Elevation gain:</b>     | 580 metres gain, 430 metres loss  |
| <b>Approximate time:</b>   | 4-6 hours                         |

### South Approach – Scott Duncan Hut to Balfour Hut (summer and winter)

|                            |                                                         |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Trailhead location:</b> | Refer to the trailhead to Scott Duncan Hut              |
| <b>Skiing distance:</b>    | 10 kilometres                                           |
| <b>Elevation gain:</b>     | 520 metres gain, 245 metres loss                        |
| <b>Approximate time:</b>   | 5-6 hours in the winter, a few hours more in the summer |

### Portering Services

Need help carrying your load? Check out our portering services!

### Trailhead location

The trailhead to approach the Balfour Hut is from either the north or south routes onto the Wapta Icefields, whichever you decide to start at. You can either cross the Icefields from Bow or Peyto Huts to arrive at Balfour, or access the hut from the south across the Waputik Icefield from the Scott Duncan Hut. Please refer to the webpage for the aforementioned hut of your choice for an exact trailhead location.

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## Summer approach

Access to the Balfour Hut in both summer and winter is via the same routes. Both the south and the north approach routes travel over the same terrain in the winter and the summer, with route adjustments for crevasses, avalanche hazards, and so on. For winter access, a summary of these routes is given below. This information describes the character and difficulty of the undertaking, but is inadequate to plan or carry out the trips themselves. Please refer to *Ski Trails in the Canadian Rockies*, or *Summits and Icefields* by Chic Scott for complete access information.

## Approach from the North

The approach from the North is the most popular access route to the hut in both winter and summer. Under good conditions Balfour can be reached easily in a day from either the Bow Hut or from the Peyto Hut further north.

From the Peyto Hut the route ascends the Wapta Icefield to the southeast, and passes St. Nicholas Peak on its west side. From the Bow Hut, the route ascends onto the glacier in a northwesterly direction and circles back to the south around the west side of St. Nicholas, where the two approaches from the north join and follow the same route. From the west side of St. Nicholas, the route ascends to the St. Nicholas-Olive Col, crossing onto its east side before descending the Vulture Glacier to the hut at its terminus. Refer to Chic Scott's guidebook *Ski Trails in the Canadian Rockies* or *Summits and Icefields in the Canadian Rockies* for a detailed route description.

From the Peyto Hut you will gain 1,400 feet (430 metres) to the Olive-St. Nicholas Col, before descending another 1,400 (430 metres) to the Balfour Hut. In the summer, six to eight hours are required for the whole trip from the Peyto Hut and about three to five if you are starting from the Bow Hut. In the winter, five to six hours traveling from the Peyto Hut should be sufficient in good conditions.



Balfour Hut by David Zemrau

## Approach from the South

The Scott Duncan Hut is located some 10 km south of the Balfour Hut. It is not common to access the icefields from the south, and the route between the two huts is usually done from north to south (from Balfour Hut to Scott Duncan), but the trip is occasionally done in the other direction. This section of the Wapta/Waputik is one of the most demanding from both a terrain and navigation standpoint. It is recommended that this trip (or the reverse trip) only be undertaken in favorable conditions with stable snow and good visibility.

Leaving the Scott Duncan Hut, proceed across the Waputik Icefield to the northwest and up to the Balfour High Col. From the col, continue for a kilometre or so in a northwesterly direction parallel to the ridge line of Balfour (potential danger from icefall from above) until the terrain steepens and it is possible to turn right and pass a large cliff via a steep and narrow ramp on its left. From the bottom of the ramp, proceed north to the toe of the Vulture Glacier and the Balfour Hut. Refer to Chic Scott's guidebooks, as mentioned above, for a detailed description of this route in the winter.

From Scott Duncan the route ascends about 800 feet (245 metres) to the Balfour High Col, and then descends 1,700 feet (520 metres) to the Balfour Hut. This route can be traveled in five to six hours in the winter, but expect it to take a few hours longer in the summer.

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## Maps and Guidebooks

All of the following books and maps can be purchased through the ACC office or online through the ACC online store at: [www.alpineclubofcanada.ca/store/index.html](http://www.alpineclubofcanada.ca/store/index.html)

### Map and GPS references

|                         |                                                 |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Map reference:</b>   | 82N/9 Hector Lake                               |
| <b>Grid reference:</b>  | 375157                                          |
| <b>GPS coordinates:</b> | 51°35' 30"-116°27' 18" NAD83 11U 537754 5715765 |
| <b>Hut elevation:</b>   | 2,470 metres (8,100 feet)                       |

### Maps

- Gem Trek Publishing 1:70, 000 topographic map entitled "Bow Lake and Saskatchewan Crossing". This excellent map shows trails and highlights in detail.
- "Touring the Wapta Icefields" 1:50, 000 topographic map by Murray Toft. This is an excellent map that highlights the popular ski traverse routes used in the wintertime. A great close-up view of the entire Wapta Icefields area.
- The 1:50,000 Canadian Government issued standard topographic map "82N/9 Hector Lake".
- The 1:50, 000 Canadian Government issued standard topographic map "82N/10 Blaeberry River". This map is useful to view the remainder of the Wapta Icefields if you choose to travel north to the Bow and Peyto Huts.

### Guidebooks and general interest books

- *Backcountry Huts and Lodges of the Rockies and Columbias*, by Jim Scott
- *Ski Trails in the Canadian Rockies*, by Chic Scott
- *Summits & Icefields Canadian Rockies, Alpine Ski Tours*, by Chic Scott *Backcountry Banff - Walking, Hiking, Backpacking, and off-trail Scrambling in Banff National Park*, by Mike Potter
- *Canadian Rockies Trail Guide*, by Brian Patton & Bart Robinson
- *Don't Waste Your Time in the Canadian Rockies*, by Kathy & Craig Copeland
- *The 11,000ers of the Canadian Rockies*, by Bill Corbett
- *Selected Alpine Climbs in the Canadian Rockies*, by Sean Dougherty
- *Artists of the Rockies*, by Jane Lytton Gooch
- *Handbook of the Canadian Rockies*, by Ben Gadd

## Website Links

### Current conditions

**Weather:** Go to [www.weather.gc.ca](http://www.weather.gc.ca) click on <Alberta>, then scroll down to <Banff>. The weather forecasts are updated 3 times daily.

**Avalanche Hazard:** Go to [www.avalanche.ca](http://www.avalanche.ca) click on the <Public Avalanche Bulletins> and review the section for <Banff/Yoho/Kootenay National Parks>. The avalanche forecast for this region is kept currently updated.

### Area information

**Avalanche Terrain Rating System (ATES):** Parks Canada has developed a classification system for avalanche terrain, and has applied ratings to approximately 250 trips in the Mountain National Parks. For more information, visit [www.pc.gc.ca/pn-np/ab/banff/visit/visit7a1\\_E.asp](http://www.pc.gc.ca/pn-np/ab/banff/visit/visit7a1_E.asp)

**Google Earth Reference:** The Vulture Glacier area is covered in medium resolution on Google Earth. Go to <http://earth.google.com/>. You will find the Vulture Glacier at 51°35' 30" N, 116°27' 18" W.

**1:50,000 Topographic Map:** The Canadian Government offers free downloads of their regular 1:50,000 topo maps. The map files are large (25 MB) and take a few minutes to download. You will find this service at:

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<http://www.geogratis.gc.ca/geogratis/en/product/search.do?id=10119>. Perform your search by selecting “NTS Mapsheet”, and enter 082N09. Next, press “Search” under “Search Options” (without changing any of the information in “Search Options”). Select 082N09 from the options and download it.

## Parks Canada Info

### Wilderness Passes in National Parks

Banff, Jasper, Kootenay, Yoho, and Glacier National Parks collect a fee for backcountry overnight use in the Parks. The fees collected from the wilderness passes go towards maintaining trails, supplying the voluntary registration service, avalanche forecasting, backcountry bridge-building, etc. Overnight users of the ACC huts (ages 16 and over) are required to pay this fee. A copy of the wilderness passes should be carried in the backcountry at all times as a Parks Canada representative may ask to see proof of purchase.

We encourage you to buy these passes from the ACC, as 40% of the monies collected goes to a special huts account for our heritage huts and environmental improvements. You will be offered the option to purchase the pass when you make a reservation, or you can buy an annual pass from our online store at: <http://www.alpineclubofcanada.ca/store/index.html>. For current rates, visit: <http://www.alpineclubofcanada.ca/facility/rates.html>.

### Vehicle Permits

All vehicles stopping in a National Park must have a Park Motor Vehicle Permit. Annual or single day permits can be purchased at most Park entrance gates and Park visitor centres and soon through the Alpine Club of Canada’s national office.

### Maximum Group Size

The maximum group size for hiking is 10 persons. If your group is larger, you will need to split into smaller groups.

### Voluntary Hazardous Activities Registration

It is recommended that anyone participating in hazardous activities in the backcountry register with the Park Wardens. This registration is free and is the best method of ensuring that someone comes looking for you should an emergency happen. You can register at any Parks Canada Visitor Centre.

## What Is At the Hut

### Summary

|                        |                                                        |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Heating:</b>        | None                                                   |
| <b>Lighting:</b>       | Propane                                                |
| <b>Cooking:</b>        | Propane stove, cookware, dishes & utensils provided    |
| <b>Sleeping:</b>       | Two rows of bunks on thick foam mattresses             |
| <b>Capacity:</b>       | 18 in the summer, 16 in the winter                     |
| <b>Drinking water:</b> | Small glacial stream 150m north of the hut or snowmelt |
| <b>Human Waste:</b>    | Outhouse                                               |
| <b>Dishwater:</b>      | Ground sump pipe next to the outhouse                  |
| <b>Garbage:</b>        | Pack it out!                                           |

# R.J. Ritchie (Balfour) Hut

## The building

The Balfour Hut is a single-room building in the same style as the Whyte (Peyto) Hut further north on the Wapta. There is a long two-tiered bunk along one side of the hut, a long cooking counter on the other, and several tables with benches along the middle. The greatest concern when there are large groups staying in the hut is the organization of everyone's gear, since storage space is limited.

## Capacity

The hut sleeps a total of 18 people in the summer and 16 in the wintertime. The sleeping arrangements are two long rows of platform bunk beds in one large room, which is not heated.



## Kitchen

The kitchen is well supplied with dishes, cutlery, utensils, pots and pans. There are several sinks and two-burner propane stoves for cooking.

## Lighting

The hut is lit by several propane lights. Propane is supplied by the ACC via a large outdoor tank.

## Heat

The hut is well insulated and stays warm in the winter with body heat, the lanterns on, and a bunch of cooking happening, but there is no wood-burning stove to warm the hut.

## Tools

The hut has a good supply of tools including water buckets, axes, saws, shovels, etc. for proper maintenance of the hut.

## Drinking Water

In the summer drinking water can be reached from a small glacial stream 150 metres north of the hut. In the winter, water is made from snowmelt and it is recommended that all water be boiled or filtered before drinking.

## Grey Water

There is a grey water disposal pipe sticking out from the ground beside the outhouse.

## Human Waste

The outhouses are located just outside the front door of the hut. The Balfour outhouse is a barrel fly-out system, please do not leave any unnecessary garbage in the outhouse.

## Garbage

All paper garbage and food scraps should be carried out with you as well as all other garbage, bottles, and unused food should be packed back out of the hut. Do not leave anything behind!

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## What you need to bring

- Reservation form from the ACC stating how many beds you have booked and the length of your stay
- Parks Canada overnight or annual wilderness pass (the former will be on your reservation form if you purchase it through the ACC)
- sleeping bag
- food for the length of your stay
- toilet paper
- newspaper for lighting the fire
- matches
- first aid kit
- 9V battery for the smoke detector

## Hut Rules

Here is a list of simple rules we ask that you follow in order to maximize everyone's enjoyment of the "hut experience".

### While at the hut:

- No smoking.
- Dogs are not permitted in any ACC facility (with the exception of seeing eye dogs).
- Some Parks also outlaw dogs entirely; leashed or not. Check before you go!
- If you arrive at the hut before 2:00pm, put your belongings where they will not disturb the previous nights' occupants.
- Please be considerate of others; the hut should be quiet by 10 pm.
- Carry out all of your garbage.
- Do not do personal washing in cooking pots or nearby streams - use wash basins and slop pits.
- Fill stoves and lanterns outside the hut and leave extra fuel outside.
- Clean the stoves after using them.
- Clean up after yourself.
- Follow posted instructions for care and maintenance of toilet systems so that they function properly with minimum odor and environmental impact.

### When leaving a hut:

- If your belongings will be in the hut after 2:00pm, and you are not staying that night, be sure to pack everything up and leave it out of the way in a corner so the new guests can move in.
- Leave all tools inside the hut when not being used.
- Empty all water containers and slop buckets before leaving the hut.
- Take out all leftover food as food left in the hut encourages rodents. (Other people generally won't use it as they don't know how old it is.)
- Bring out damaged axes, lanterns or stoves and discharged fire extinguishers - advise the national office.
- Close & latch the outhouse door when leaving to keep out rodents & snow.
- Close/lock hut, replace shutters (if applicable), before leaving the hut.
- A nearly full outhouse, damage to hut & similar matters should be reported to the national office (you may call collect)

**Please leave the hut in better condition than you found it.** Thank you for your consideration in following these rules, and have a great time!

# R.J. Ritchie (Balfour) Hut

## Things To Do Around the Hut

### Mountaineering

There are not as many mountaineering objectives accessible from the Balfour Hut as from the northern huts on the Wapta. Mt. Balfour, however, is one of the most challenging peaks on the Icefield, and is a great objective in both summer and winter. The North Ridge and the Northeast Face Routes are best accessed from the Balfour hut; the Southeast Ridge is best accessed from the Scott Duncan Hut. The ascent of Mt. Olive is also a popular outing from the Balfour Hut.

### Ski Mountaineering

The ascents of Mt. Olive and Mt. Balfour fall into this category in the winter. Mt. Balfour requires a good deal more climbing after you have taken your skis off, and is more challenging than most of the peaks accessible from the Wapta huts. Refer to Chic Scott's guidebook *Summits and Icefields in the Canadian Rockies*.

### Backcountry Skiing

The Vulture Glacier and the lower slopes of Mt. Olive provide for some good skiing, and just over Balfour Pass, the Diableret Glacier to the south makes an excellent run.

## History

The Balfour Hut has seen significant changes over the years – changes in location and jurisdiction and changes in operators, as well as in style and facilities of the hut itself.

Conceived by guide Peter Fuhrmann, paid for by Vici and Lucho Modolfo and constructed by the Calgary ski club and the Alpine Club of Canada, the original fiberglass igloo at Balfour Pass was the first hut on the Wapta Icefields. During the igloo's life from October of 1965 to the summer of 1971 it withstood many storms, was totally dismantled and reconstructed with Swiss Army Knives, and crashed into a moraine while being airlifted whole to a new location on the Yoho side of Balfour Pass. Marauding bands of wolverines eventually looted and plundered the hut and reduced it to worthless stench-filled fiberglass, effectively ending its useful existence.

The second-generation Balfour Hut was constructed of cedar Pan-Abode logs rather than fiberglass and was located at a new site on the south side of Mt. Olive to the west of the Continental Divide in Kootenay National Park. The hut serviced ski tourers in this location for almost 18 years, but was eventually replaced with the existing structure at another new site at the toe of the Vulture Glacier, back in its original home of Banff National Park.

Today, with a durable metal exterior, the Balfour Hut could be compared to the brick house in the story of the three little pigs; fiberglass and cedar would be straw and sticks against the vicious storms which howl over the Wapta. The hut was built in the fall of 1989, using a reliable design which had tested successfully with the Whyte Hut and Neil Colgan Hut, two other locations operated by the Alpine Club of Canada since its reconstruction in Banff in 1989.