



## Great Cairn Ben Ferris Hut

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Great Cairn Ben Ferris Hut by Glen Boles

# Great Cairn Ben Ferris 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 Great-Cairn – Ben Ferris Hut sits on a red bedrock bench, 4 km north-west of Mt. Sir Sandford in the heart of the Northern Selkirk Mountains in BC.

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

### Portering Services

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

### Trailhead location

Access to the Great Cairn – Ben Ferris Hut is either very expensive or very difficult. The two overland approaches are very long, and are serious route-finding undertakings. The other option is shelling out some big bucks and flying from Golden or the Gold River Bridge directly to the hut. As G. Gordon Liddy said “I’ll break your legs or steal your girlfriend – your choice, Mister.”

### Overland Route from Fairy Meadow:

This is a big day in the mountains! The route goes over three passes, crosses two major glaciers and covers about 11 km of serious mountain terrain. The Gothics Glacier between the Friendship Col and Thor Pass can be very nasty with crevasses, particularly around the south ridge of Sentinel Peak, at any time of the year. Parties making this crossing should be adept at glacier travel and crevasse rescue.

**Approach:** There is a well-used trail in the direction of Friendship Col from behind (south of) the Fairy Meadow Hut. The trail is well marked with cairns, but becomes less obvious as it ascends talus slopes toward the Col, particularly with fresh snow. It is important to note that the Col is incorrectly labeled on 82N/12, and should be located west of Mt. Damon at grid reference 333406. The route stays to the right (north) of a buttress and follows the crest of Gog and Magog to Friendship Col.

From Friendship Col, descend onto the expanse of the Gothics Glacier and head toward Thor Pas at grid reference 398307, keeping well south of the south ridge of Sentinel Peak to avoid large crevasses. On the other side of Thor Pass descend a steep rocky slope to the Thor Glacier (unmarked glacier on 82N/12). Talus slopes lead to the flats of the Adamant Glacier. With good visibility, Azimuth Notch is obvious from Thor Pass, with a square notch-like appearance. In poor visibility you will want to take a bearing from the pass on the notch at grid reference 385285 (Azimuth Notch is also misplaced on 82N/12).

After crossing the Adamant Glacier, the notch is best approached from the east, crossing the usually tame bergschrund wherever convenient. In good visibility (and particularly if the sun is reflecting against the metal roof), you can pick out the hut from Azimuth Notch at 392268 on the red bedrock bench just south of the creek flowing from the Silvertip and Haworth Glaciers. From the notch, descend to the creek and follow it to the hut. Crossing the creek can be difficult late in the day, or after large amounts of precipitation. It is easiest to cross it close to the Silvertip Glacier itself, but this involves adding an extra kilometre or so to the trip at the end of a big day.

You could take a more direct line to the hut by wading through the fast, cold water. If this were the Sunwapta River and you had just come out from the Lloyd MacKay Hut, things would be a lot simpler – you would just stomp through the water in your mountain boots, throw them wet into the back of your truck or the trunk of the car and start thinking about where you could get some beers to wash down the nachos you were going to have for dinner.

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But approaching the Great Cairn Hut, the last thing you are going to want to do is dry out your boots for the next two days. So backtrack to the Silvertip, or spoosh around in the cold glacial melt – again, your choice.

**Elevation Gain:** Because the Fairy Meadow hut sits at 6,700 feet and the Great Cairn Hut – Ben Ferris at 6,200, there is a net loss in elevation on this trip, but it is sure not going to feel like it by then end of the day. From Fairy Meadow, you will gain 2,200 feet to Friendship Col, lose about 400 feet onto the Gothics Glacier, gain almost 1,000 feet to Thor Pass, lose 1,800 feet to the Adamant Glacier and gain 500 feet to Azimuth Notch, before the final descent of 2,100 feet to the Great Cairn – Ben Ferris Hut. The total elevation gain for the trip is approximately 3,700 feet.

**Time:** Don't plan to make an attempt on Sir Sandford the same day as you make the crossing. In fact, don't plan for much of anything for the remainder of the day. This trip takes strong parties eight to ten hours in the best conditions. Fresh snow could slow you down considerably by making the trail to Friendship Co hard to follow and by covering the crevasses on the glaciers. Breaking trail through deep snow the whole distance would pretty much preclude a one-day crossing. It would be astute to scope out the route from the Fairy Meadow Hut to Friendship Col (if you do not know it already) and leave the hut early.

## Goat Glacier to Sir Sandford Pass:

Another big day in the mountains, this trip involves four-wheeling, serious bushwacking through serious bear country and a ten-kilometre glacier trip. This access route does, however, have the advantage of providing a one-day route to the Great Cairn Hut without flying.

**Approach:** Follow the description for driving to the Fairy Meadow trailhead to a junction just before the Gold River Bridge (kilometre marker 87). Take this road (the “black road” in reference to the kilometre markers) to the left. The road is rougher and steeper than the red road toward the Fairy Meadow Hut and a four-wheel drive vehicle, or at least one with high clearance, is recommended. Once on the black road, you will come to junction at kilometre markers 89 and 98; stay right at both junctions, the second of which takes you onto the “gold road” which turns away from the junction of Bachelor Creek and follows the Gold River. There is one more junction at kilometre 108; stay to the right again, following the Gold River toward Moberly Pass as far as the road will take you. This should place you at about 360175 on 82N/12 (estimated grid reference). At the end of this road you will find some steep switchbacks that afford a view up the Gold River valley toward Moberly Pass. Park here. The pass itself is not visible from this point, and neither is the Goat Glacier. The glacier in the distance is not the Goat Glacier, but rather an unnamed glacier on 82N/12 directly west of it. Goat Glacier itself will not be visible until you round the west ridge of Citadel Mountain and begin to approach it.

Okay, here's the ugly part. From your vehicle, descend to the Gold River and follow it a short distance upstream where two equally unattractive options are possible. The first option is to begin gaining elevation immediately on the north slopes of the river. Use avalanche paths to proceed upwards wherever possible, and traverse in a northwesterly direction through slide alders toward the lowest reaches of the west ridge of Citadel. From here, scramble over easy ledges and talus toward the southernmost part of the Goat Glacier. The second possibility is to pound laboriously up the river itself. Alternate travel on one bank or the other, as it seems best, in the general direction of Moberly Pass. A single, long, direct avalanche path begins west of Citadel Mountain and comes down almost to the river approximately 1km east of Moberly Pass. This avalanche path provides access to the lower reaches of the west ridge of Citadel and the Goat Glacier beyond (the glacier is not visible from the river). From the top of the avalanche path the glacier is visible and is accessible by easy scrambling and talus.

It seems as though one access to the Goat Glacier is as good (or as bad) as the other. Both involve grunting in alders through very serious bear country. The first option does, however, have the advantage of traveling through prime raspberry, blackberry, and huckleberry terrain late in the year. Following the river may be preferable if using this route as a descent from the Goat Glacier, when you are not going to be as concerned about getting your feet wet.

Ascending the Goat Glacier will likely be the most technically challenging aspect of this approach. The middle part of the glacier is steep and crevassed. A wide ramp starting on the right side of the glacier and angling up and left presents as easy passage to the final slopes to Sir Sandford Pass. Expect technical terrain on this portion of

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the glacier, and large crevasses for the entire trip. From the summit of the pass, proceed to the northeast down the Sir Sandford Glacier in the general direction of Ravelin Mountain. On the east side of the lower Sir Sandford Glacier there is a large lateral moraine which runs between the northwest face of the Ravelin and the northwest ridge of Vidette Peak. Cross this moraine as soon as it is convenient, and travel the remainder of the glacier on the right (east) side of it. This route provides an easy exit from the glacier onto the moraine around the north side of Ravelin Mountain. From here contour around to the west of the Ravelin until it is possible to descend on mud, rocks, slab and moraine back to the toe of Sir Sandford Glacier. Cross the toe of the glacier to the northwest. From here there are faint trails which contour across the slope and lead to the final scramble up the red bedrock bench to the hut.

**Time & Elevation Gain:** From the end of the logging road to Sir Sandford Pass, there is an elevation gain of approximately 3,500 feet. From the pass, the route steadily descends 2,300 feet down the glacier to the hut. This trip takes nine to ten hours in good conditions.

## Palmer Creek Approach:

This was the original route to the Sir Sandford area by Howard Palmer and friends early in the century. Herb and Pat Kariel, in *Alpine Huts in the Rockies, Selkirks, and Purcells*, recorded that the next attempt at pushing through this route was in 1976. A rough description of the route is included here for historical relevance and reverence, and because the route is apparently obvious on the map.

It is clear where the effort would start (the Gold River Bridge) and clear where it would ideally end (the hut), but there are very few details available about travel in Palmer Creek. From above, the bush looks mighty thick. In Palmer's words:

"If the truth be told, our introduction to the chevaux-de-frise of the Selkirk Wilderness was about as bad as can be imagined. Stumbling through pools of water up to our knees, fording shallow streams, falling into rotten stumps, and, of course, grabbing prickly devil's club for support, we forged ahead. At each halt, relief from the attacks of our tormentors could only be obtained by waving a leafy branch continuously, for head-nets cannot be worn to advantage in thick undergrowth."

**Elevation Gain:** From the Gold River Bridge to the hut you will need to gain 3,700 feet. In the Palmer Creek, these will be hard won feet, every one of them.

**Time:** Who knows? Palmer took the better part of four summers to climb Sir Sandford by this route.

Unfortunately, not much more is known about this route, except that it would be very difficult bushwacking. Enjoy!

## Helicopter from Golden:

Winter or summer, this is definitely the most civilized route to the hut. It allows you to carry fresh food, more red wine than you could carry on your own, firewood for the stove, and it puts you at the hut fresh for the following day's activities.

**Approach:** You have the choice of flying directly from the helipad in Golden or from the Gold River Bridge on the road to Fairy Meadow. Flying from the bridge allows you to shuttle vehicles into position for a return hike, be it out from Fairy Meadow, down from the Goat Glacier, or (shudder) down Palmer Creek. Flying from the bridge also gives you the flexibility of flying an additional load into the hut without having to pay for a return trip to Golden to do so. This may be an issue even if you are only planning to have one flight, as maximum loads in helicopters vary with the weather conditions.

For winter flights into the Great Cairn Hut, refer to the information on Canadian Helicopters on the Fairy Meadow webpage.

**Time & Elevation:** From the Gold River Bridge on the approach road, there is a 3,700 foot elevation gain. From the Gold River Bridge the trip is five to six minutes, and from Golden the trip takes about 24 to 30 minutes.

**Costs:** The cost to fly is going to depend on a number of different factors. Helicopter time is charged by the

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hour, and differs for different machines. Canadian Helicopters in Golden flies with either a four or a three-seater, depending on availability. The greatest cost is getting the helicopter from Golden to the staging area at the Golden River Bridge (.3 to .4 of an hour); flying from the bridge to the hut is around .2 of an hour return (all helicopter time is estimated due to wind and weather conditions). Costs per person will decrease as the number of trips from the bridge increases (and the initial trip from Golden is split more ways). The maximum load per person, including gear, is 250 pounds. Determine how many people and how much gear will be going to the hut, and phone Canadian in Golden at (250) 344-5311.

## 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/12 (Mount Sir Sandford)
<b>Grid reference:</b>	390269
<b>GPS coordinates:</b>	51°41' 24"-117°52' 54"
<b>Hut elevation:</b>	6,200 feet (1,890 metres)

### Maps

- Canadian Government Issued 1:500,000 standard topographical map 82N/12 (Mount Sir Sandford).
- Guidebooks and general interest books
- Backcountry Huts and Lodges of the Rockies and Columbias, by Jim Scott
- Summits and Icefields – Columbia Mountains, by Chic Scott
- Selkirks North – by David P Jones
- Handbook of the Canadian Rockies, by Ben Gadd

## Website Links

### Current conditions

**Weather:** Go to [www.weather.ec.gc.ca](http://www.weather.ec.gc.ca) click on <BC>, then scroll down to <Revelstoke> and <Golden>. The weather forecast is not accurate for the exact location, but should be similar enough to give you an idea of the conditions in the area.

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

**Highway Conditions:** Go to [www.pc.gc.ca/pn-np/bc/glacier/index\\_e.asp](http://www.pc.gc.ca/pn-np/bc/glacier/index_e.asp) click on <Road Conditions Report> on the left side. Parks Canada updates their "Mountain National Parks Road Conditions Report" by 9:00 am daily when road conditions change.

### Area information

Google Earth Reference: An overview of the trip into the Great Cairn Hut can be seen on Google Earth. Go to <http://earth.google.com/>. You will find the hut at 51°41' 24" N, 117°52' 54" 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: <http://www.geogratis.gc.ca/geogratis/en/product/search.do?id=10119>. Perform your search by selecting <NTS Mapsheet>, and enter 082N12. Next, press <Search> under <Search Options> (without changing any of the

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information in <Search Options>). Select 082N12 from the options and download it.

**1:50,000 Topo Map:** Area specific version – YellowMaps.com offers access to the Canadian Government maps, but in smaller, area-specific versions.

## What Is At the Hut

### Summary

<b>Heating:</b>	Wood stove
<b>Lighting:</b>	White Gas
<b>Cooking:</b>	White Gas
<b>Sleeping:</b>	6 people
<b>Capacity:</b>	From the creek (boil or filter)
<b>Drinking water:</b>	Outhouse
<b>Human Waste:</b>	Ground porous rock
<b>Dishwater:</b>	Pack it out!
<b>Garbage:</b>	Pack it out!

### The building and sleeping arrangements

Sitting on a bench with a front row seat for the many moods of Mount Sir Sandford, and built from stones from the area, the Great Cairn - Ben Ferris Hut is one of the most attractive huts the ACC operates, as well as one of the most spectacularly positioned. The hut sleeps six people quite comfortably, has a mouse-proof wooden food locker and a small table with four stools.

### Heat

The hut is equipped with a wood-burning stove; however, wood is not supplied by the ACC. Firewood can either be collected as avalanche debris from surrounding slopes in the summer or flown in.

### Kitchen

Man, are there dishes in this hut! Probably due to the fact that this hut is remote, many parties have assumed that they should bring in enough kitchen supplies for their group and the dishes get added to the collective inventory for the hut. At last count the hut was fully equipped for a dinner party for 18. The hut has a two-burner white gas Coleman stove, white gas is not provided by the ACC. Do not leave any unused non-perishable food behind as it attracts rodents.

### Lighting

There is one Coleman white gas lantern. Visitors must bring in their own white gas.

### Tools

There is a good bow saw and a spare blade for cutting firewood, as well as various tools.

### Water Supply

The creek running from the Haworth and Silvertip Glaciers passes by the hut a short distance to the west, and is easily accessed slightly upstream. There are also some deep pools of water which form in the rock around the hut, and they can be used for bathing when the weather is really warm.

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## Grey Water

A grey water disposal site at the Great Cairn Hut is not presently designated. It is recommended that strained water be dumped into porous rock fields in the vicinity of the hut to disperse it. Strained food scraps from the grey water should be burned in the wood stove or packed out as garbage.

## Human Waste

The outhouse is located 50m to the northeast. Do not dispose of any unnecessary waste into the outhouse.

## Garbage

Burn all paper garbage and food scraps in the wood stove. All other garbage and unused food must be packed out or flown out by your group. Do not leave anything behind, pack it all out!

## What you need to bring

- sleeping bag
- toilet paper
- newspaper for lighting the fire
- matches
- first aid kit
- reservation form from the ACC

## 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.

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- 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!

## Things To Do Around the Hut

### Mountaineering

Mount Sir Sandford, the highest summit in the Selkirks, is without a doubt the prime attraction of the area. There are nearly a dozen routes and variations on the peak, the most worthwhile being on snow and ice. Other moderate snow and ice routes exist on Silvertip, Citadel, Cornice Peak, the Footstool, and others.

An exception to the generally poor rock climbing in the Sir Sandford area may be the rock on the northwest side of Ravelin Peak. No routes exist, but the potential seems great.

To the northwest, there are brilliant routes on the excellent granite peaks of the Adamants. The Blackfriars and Belvedere Peak are accessed best from the Great Cairn – Ben Ferris Hut. The exceptional rock routes on the south side of the Stickle, Turret Peak and Austerity are accessed from the hut, but usually involve a bivouac.

An alternative to the peaks is a crag below the snout of the Silvertip Glacier. It is undeveloped, but faces southeast, provides very fine rock and enjoys a fabulous position overlooking the hut and Mount Sir Sandford. Some limited but exceptional bouldering can also be found on this formation. Information on these mountain routes can be found in Columbia Mountains of Canada, Central.

### Ski Touring and Ski Mountaineering

The Great Cairn – Ben Ferris Hut is not the ski destination that its rich cousin the Fairy Meadow Hut is: the telemarking slopes are not as extensive and the facilities at the hut are more limited (no propane stove, no firewood). Rather, the Great Cairn – Ben Ferris is a remote hut with fabulous glaciers and tons of potential for exploration and touring. It is occasionally used as an overnight destination from the Fairy Meadow Hut for small groups looking for something a little bit different and a challenging backcountry adventure.

## History

Between 1908 and 1912 Howard Palmer traveled, climbed and extensively mapped the area around Mt. Sir Sandford, the highest mountain in the Selkirks. In 1912 he succeeded in climbing the peak, and in 1914 wrote of his adventures in one of the greatest books ever published on mountaineering in Canada: *Mountaineering and Exploration in the Selkirks*. The Silvertip, Haworth, and Sir Sandford glaciers have all receded substantially since Palmer's expeditions; the present site of the Great Cairn Hut was under 20 to 30m of ice where the three glaciers met in Palmer's day.

In 1953, a party from the Harvard Mountaineering Club was on a climbing trip in the area and on a rainy August day built a 20-foot high cairn, known as the Great Cairn. In 1963, Bill Putnam and Ben Ferris visited the area and began plans for the construction of a climbing hut. The hut was built the following year and finished in 1965. The Great Cairn Hut was financed by Putnam and the ACC, and was built from the stones of the Great Cairn, which was dismantled for its materials.