



Castle Mountain Hut

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Castle Mountain Hut by Nancy Hansen

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Booking, Payment and Cancellation Policy

View the Booking, Payment and Cancellation Policies at www.alpineclubofcanada.ca/facility/reservations.html

Rates

Visit www.alpineclubofcanada.ca/facility/rates.html for current hut and wilderness pass prices.

Getting There

The Castle Mountain Hut is perched up on the Goat Plateau, halfway up Castle Mountain's steep cliff bands. The hut can actually be seen from the Trans-Canada Highway as a small white speck near the edge of the cliff on the sixth buttress from the east. Castle Mountain is located in Banff National Park just 4.8 kilometres west of the Castle Junction off the Trans-Canada Highway, about mid-way between Lake Louise and Banff.

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

Summer Approach

Trailhead location:	4.8 km west of Castle Junction on the TransCanada Hwy
Elevation gain:	914 metres (3000 feet)
Approximate time:	Approximately 3 hours

This is a summer hut. The Castle Mountain Hut is technically closed during the winter due to the nature of the approaches, the attraction of the area (most exclusively rock climbing) and the humble facilities. Exposure to avalanche hazard is also very high, so if you were to head up here in the snow you would need to be very cautious of avalanche slopes, both on the approaches and from above.

Fire Lookout Approach

This is the standard approach to the hut, although the Rockbound Lake approach is used more often by parties climbing Eisenhower Tower and not staying at the hut. The Fire Lookout approach, however, is a more technical climb and therefore may appeal less to some.

Trailhead: From the Castle Junction on the 1A Highway, drive west for 4.8km to a paved parking lot and the signed trailhead to the Fire Lookout.

Approach: Four kilometres of steady uphill hiking on an old fire road and trails takes you pretty close to the treeline and the site of the old fire lookout. With a commanding view of the entire valley, it is easy to see the logic in choosing this locale for the lookout. From here a number of trails continue up the slope in an easterly direction. The most advantageous trail is one which follows the left side of a rocky gully before crossing the gully at some boulders a few hundred metres up the slope. Once on the other side of the gully, follow more faint trails which switchback up toward the lower cliff band. Getting this lower cliff band is both the technical and route-finding crux of this approach. Many different (and more difficult) lines through here have been attempted by parties that did not locate the "diagonal break" through the cliff band. The diagonal break is the key to this approach – it certainly has the easiest climbing and is not too hard to find if you know what you are looking for. The correct break to ascend is one which diagonals upward to the right and is about 20m high. A very defined trail leads straight up to the base of it, and there is very little which looks climbable to its right (you end up in a large gross gully). If this does not seem like the piece of rock you are looking at, DON'T go up it. There are retreat slings from past parties in different places on this section of cliff; don't let these sucker you up a bad line! In fact, if there are slings on the route you are looking at, it is probably wrong. The diagonal break itself is not difficult climbing (low 5th class), but if you take into account overnight packs, big boots and unfamiliar terrain, the commitment increases dramatically. It is highly recommended that you carry a rope and a rack on this approach to belay on this section.

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Once above the diagonal break you will find trails and ledges leading up into a large gully. Follow these, and the small cairns which mark them. These trails eventually round a buttress in the gully and take you into a parallel gully on the right. This portion of the trail occasionally gives parties some grief, particularly early in the season when snow remains in the gullies, covering some of the trail. Follow the cairns carefully.

The right hand gully takes you up through more trails and ledges to a slightly more involved scrambling section higher up. There are many possible routes through this scrambling section, some much better than others. You can follow cairns through much of it, until it gets a little steeper, at which point you have to resort to following trails on the ledges and worn sections on the rock. At any rate, the scrambling here is easier than any of the climbing through the diagonal break.

This gully eventually deposits you on the Goat Plateau, half way up Castle Mountain. From this point, follow the trails across Goat Plateau to the east for a couple of hundred metres to the hut.

Time & Distance: From the parking lot to the hut is approximately 3,000 feet of elevation gain. This is the same for the Rockbound Lake approach – it's a pretty stiff grunt by either route. Standard time from the highway to the hut is three hours. This time will vary, of course, between parties. Expect to take slightly longer on your first time up this approach, as route-finding can be time consuming. The record for a trip from the hut to the Banff liquor store and back is 2 hours 50 minutes.

Rockbound Lake Approach:

This approach will appeal to those looking for a less technical route to the hut than the Fire Lookout approach, but while the climbing is easier, there is still a fair amount of scrambling to get onto Goat Plateau.

Approach: The approach hike begins at the Rockbound Lake trailhead about 50m east of Castle Junction. Follow the main trail for 4 or 5 km to where the trail rounds the base of the Castle Mountain and begins to head northwest. Here you will find a section of the trail which is braided and swampy for most of the season just before it levels out toward Rockbound Lake itself. Approximately 70m past this braided section is a faint trail heading off to the left from the main trail. Follow this faint trail along the forested crest of the ridge leading to the cliffs at the southeast extremity of Castle Mountain. Scramble up easy ground to an obvious ledge which traverses back around to the highway side of the mountain. The trail on this ledge is well worn and easy to identify. Follow this trail around the corner (less than 100metres) and scramble up more ledges (somewhat more exposed) toward an obvious large gully that takes you to Goat Plateau. The best trail to follow along the plateau to the hut is one which is high up on the plateau, at the base of the upper cliff. It might not be a bad idea to wear a helmet for this portion of the approach.

Time & Distance: This is going to be approximately the same as for the Fire Lookout Approach; about three hours and 3,000 feet.

Some literature, including the first edition of the ACC Facilities Directory, has suggested that an alternate route to the Goat Plateau is to traverse right instead of left around the lower buttress to another gully. This way takes you to the plateau from the Rockbound Lake side of the mountain rather than the highway side. This route is much more dangerous in both the traverse and the gully itself (actually quite gross), and it puts you on the far side of the mountain from where you want to go, be it the hut or the Eisenhower Tower. Anyone suggesting this route to you should be treated with suspicion.

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

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Map and GPS references

Map reference:	820/5 (Castle Mountain)
Grid reference:	737839
GPS coordinates:	51°18' 06" - 115°56' 30"
Hut elevation:	7,850 feet (2390 metres)

Maps

- Canadian Government Issued Topographic map entitled "Castle Mountain" 0820/5
- Gem Trek Publications 1:100 000 topographical map entitled "Banff & Mount Assiniboine"

Guidebooks and general interest books

- *Backcountry Huts and Lodges of the Rockies and Columbias*, by Jim Scott
- *Canadian Rockies Trail Guide*, by Patton and Robinson
- *Don't Waste Your Time in the Canadian Rockies*, by Kathy & Craig Copeland
- *Selected Alpine Climbs in the Canadian Rockies*, by Sean Dougherty
- *Scrambles in the Canadian Rockies*, by Alan Kane
- *Handbook of the Canadian Rockies*, by Ben Gadd

Website Links

Current conditions

Weather: Go to www.weather.gc.ca click on <British Columbia>, then scroll down to <Banff>. The weather forecasts are updated 3 times daily.

Area information

Google Earth Reference: Castle Mountain can be seen in medium resolution on Google Earth. Go to <http://earth.google.com/>. You will find the hut at 51°18' 06" N, 115°56' 30" 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 082N09. Next, press "Search" under "Search Options" (without changing any of the information in "Search Options"). Select 0820/5 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.

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 17 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

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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 the worst happen. You can register at any Parks Canada Visitor Centre.

What Is At the Hut

Summary

Heating:	None
Lighting:	Coleman lanterns, bring your own mantels
Cooking:	Propane stove, bring your own canister, odds and ends for dishes (bring your own)
Sleeping:	4 bunks with boards that slide in between to make room for 6
Capacity:	Six
Drinking water:	From the creek (boil or filter)
Human Waste:	Outhouse
Dishwater:	Porous rock field
Garbage:	Pack it out!

The building and sleeping arrangements

Perched 3,000 feet above the Bow Valley with views that span from Banff to Lake Louise, the attraction of this hut is most definitely the setting rather than the building. The hut itself is a modest one, one of the most modest in the ACC chain in fact, but serves precisely the need in this location.

Capacity

There are foam mattresses for six people to sleep in the hut. There are only four bunks but the boards between them pull out to make a sleeping space for six.

Kitchen

Don't go up to the hut expecting a luxury kitchen; you may encounter a few pots and dishes left behind but it is advised that you're prepared with your own, as well as a small stove and fuel for cooking since there is none at the hut.

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Lighting

Bring your own headlamp and mantels for the Coleman lanterns.

Heat

The hut does not have a wood-burning stove, but is small and well insulated and becomes very warm from body heat, lanterns and cooking.

Tools

The hut has a couple of brooms and a shovel (in case you get snowed in).

Drinking Water

The standard water source is the small creek at the top of the Fire Lookout approach. It flows in some manner for most summer months, and dries up completely only late in the season during very dry months. It is recommended that all water be boiled or filtered before drinking.

Grey Water

A grey water disposal site at the Castle Mountain 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 packed out as garbage.

Human Waste

The outhouse is located 40 metres to the east of the hut, at the edge of the cliff.

Garbage

All garbage, including unused food, must be packed out from the hut. Do not leave any food, even if non-perishable, in the hut, as it attracts rodents and leaves a big mess and it may be quite some time before the next visitors arrive. Don't leave anything behind, pack it out!

What you need to bring

- sleeping bag
- toilet paper
- food for the duration of your stay
- matches
- first aid kit
- 9V battery for the smoke detector
- reservation form from the ACC (to show the custodian)
- Parks Canada overnight or annual wilderness pass (the former will be on your reservation form if you purchase it through 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!

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- 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!

Things To Do Around the Hut

The main attraction at the Castle Mountain Hut is rock climbing. You may run into a little snow on the top of the mountain on your way to the descent gully early in the year, but that's going to be it, leave your crampons and your big boots at home!

Alpine Rock Climbing

The rock on Castle Mountain varies from excellent to absolute garbage, and most routes are going to have at least a taste of everything in between. Most of the routes are located on the upper cliff band, but there is excellent potential for a variety of climbs on the lower walls as well. Ultra Brewers on the lower wall has two of the best pitches on natural protection to be found anywhere on limestone in the province, and Brewer Buttress on the upper wall is quite simply the best long rock climb of its grade (5.6) in the Bow Valley.

The routes are typically Grade II or Grade III, follow the most obvious features, and incorporate a wide range of rock quality.

The best information on the standard rock routes on the cliff is found in Selected Alpine Climbs in the Canadian Rockies by Sean Dougherty.



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Sport Climbing

In addition to traditional rock climbing, the Castle Mountain Hut also gives access to one excellent sport climb. A single pitch straight down the lower cliff from the hut itself provides excellent climbing in a stunning “Verdon-esque” position. The approach involves rappelling from bolts at the edge of the cliff to a second bolted station 25 metres down the wall. The route is named Rim Job, and goes at 5.11a.

History

The Castle Mountain Hut began as a leftover. In 1964 the Calgary Mountain Club financed a project to build a high-altitude climbing hut in the Valley of the Ten Peaks. The six-person bivouac shelter, which was to become the Graham Cooper Hut, was designed and built by a construction class at the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology in Calgary. Because the hut was quite small and did not provide enough of a project for the class, a second identical hut, with no predetermined destination, was produced at the same time. This second hut sat for three years before it was erected, at its present site of Goat Plateau, halfway up Castle Mountain, and has long outlasted its sister hut which was replaced by the Neil Colgan Hut in 1983.

Upon its completion in July, 1967, the hut was turned over to Banff National Park. Operation of the hut was turned over to the Alpine Club of Canada in 1987.