



Neil Colgan Hut

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Neil Colgan Hut

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 Neil Colgan Hut is located in Banff National Park, right on the Continental Divide in a col between Mts. Little and Bowlen (peaks 2 and 3 in the Valley of the Ten Peaks). The hut is the highest permanent structure in Canada, edging out the Abbot Pass Hut by about 100 feet.

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

Summer

Trailhead location:	
Hiking distance:	
Elevation gain:	3,500 feet (1067 metres)
Approximate time:	

Trailhead location

There are three common routes up to the Colgan hut; two technical routes from Moraine Lake, and the more circuitous route up Tokumm Creek via the Fay Hut area. Moraine Lake is located 15 km from Lake Louise Village, located just off the Trans-Canada Highway. Take the exit off the Highway into Lake Louise, and drive straight through the village and continue up the Moraine Lake Road for about 20 min.

Summer approach

In the past, particularly in the days of the Graham Cooper Hut, the 3-3 ½ couloir was used as an approach to the area. However, the rock in the Valley of the Ten Peaks area is generally quite rank (some people will tell you that this is where the Rockies got its reputation for lousy rock), and the decaying walls that tower above this couloir regularly send debris screaming through it with no warning. As a result this route has been the scene of several fatalities. This route is far too dangerous to be recommended as an access to the area, or even a climb in its own right. Do not go here.

Perren Route

Begin the approach by hiking along the north shore of Moraine Lake to the creek which flows from the Wenkchemna Glacier and the end of the boardwalk. From here either plow straight through the cold water or head up the creek to the north for 50 m to a log-and-cable crossing. If you opt for the water, it is advisable to wear an old pair of runners or sandals (maybe even wear them from the car) and carry a ski pole or other such implement, as the water is fast. The log crossing is a good option unless, of course, you fall in. The logs are slimy, the cables are loose, and depending on the time of day and season, the logs may be under water. If you are packing crampons along for the trip anyway, it is recommended you throw them on for the crossing.

From the south side of the creek head along a trail through the forest for five to ten minutes until it opens up into a boulder field. Work your way through the large boulders and up a talus slope, trending left, toward the base of a large quartzite buttress. A good trail runs along the base of quartzite ledges to the top of the talus slope, where it is possible to break left onto a well-defined trail and ledge system. The trail ascends over ledges and trails toward two obvious cliff bands. At the first cliff band, follow a line which scrambles through a gully; at the second

cliff band, the technical climbing begins. Put on the rope and begin climbing a few metres from the extreme left side of the cliff where several pitons and a chain mark the route. Also marking the route is an orange triangle/arrow painted on the rock at the bottom stance – an interesting souvenir from the old days. The route is easy to follow, and involves three separate pitches; the first is the steepest and hardest, the second, a traverse to the right (following bolts) to a large ledge; and the third a less technical, but more run-out pitch to the base of the glacier. There are several ways to climb the final pitch, the easiest of which begins about 25 m along the large ledge, and slightly past a fixed anchor which is used for descending the lower wall. Climb a slab just left of a small groove, and then step right into a large groove. Trend left on good ledges, which take you to the top of the cliff and a fixed anchor (25 m). It is a good idea to familiarize yourself with the descent anchors on your way up, particularly if you plan to return this way. One rope is sufficient to rappel this line, but just. Don't try it with a rope less than 50 metres long. You will need a set of quickdraws to clip the bolts and links of the chain as you climb up through the 5.7 sections, a lead rope, and of course, helmets. A few wired stoppers and a couple of camming devices may add some peace of mind in a couple of places.

The Perren route itself tops out at the glacier at grid reference 572838. It is a good idea to keep this reference number handy in the event you are descending this route in poor visibility. From the top of the rock climbing, proceed up the glacier in a southerly direction toward Mt. Little, until it is possible to gain a ridge of snow on the glacier and contour across the north slopes of that mountain to the hut at the Little-Bowlen col. This approach gains 3,500 feet from Moraine Lake up to the hut. Five to seven hours is standard, and keep in mind that there is a great deal of hiking uphill through scree and over ledges which could be harder to follow and more work if there is snow on the ground. There is also a formidable section of rock climbing involved, and climbing with heavy packs or setting up to haul them will also take time. Gage your own ability accordingly.

Schiesser Ledges Approach

The route begins by following the north shore of Moraine Lake to then end of the boardwalk. Stay on the north side of the creek following a good trail until you reach a swampy meadow. Cross the swampy meadow to a terminal moraine which has a trail on its left flank. Follow this trail to the base of a large crescent-shaped lateral moraine. The key to this section is identifying the crescent-shaped moraine at the base of Peak 3½, and following the trail on its crest. This trail will take you to the base of the 3½ -4 couloir. The ledges and small cliff bands to the left of the couloir are the Schiesser Ledges route. Ascend the scree slopes to the left of the lower couloir to a point where you must take to the rock. The beginning of the route is obvious when you find it, as it is marked with a large splotch of red paint. Continue up the ledges and over scree to the col, following red paint splotches and keeping well left of the couloir. At the col, the route contours around the southwest side of Mt. Bowlen to the Little-Bowlen Col, and the Neil Colgan Hut.

This approach gains 3,500 feet in elevation and should take about five to seven hours, but allow for more time if there is a considerable amount of snow on the ground. Beware that there is some objective hazard from rockfall. Also, the chains, cables, and anchors that are found on this route are old and should not be trusted.

Fay Hut Area Approach

This is the longest, but certainly the least technical of the three approaches to the Colgan Hut. From the Fay Hut location, proceed in a northwesterly direction over faint trails to the mouth of an obvious canyon. Do not proceed up the canyon. On the north side of the canyon, and several hundred feet higher than its mouth, is a large open plateau which takes you to the moraine and the glacier. To gain this plateau, cross the creek at the mouth of the canyon and follow a faint trail which takes you left of the canyon, around an orange buttress of rock and onto a treed slope. Ascend the treed slope on a faint trail to the open plateau above it. Follow the moraine and glacier in a north-northeasterly direction toward the Little-Bowlen col. Approach the col from the Mt. Little side, contouring across its west slopes to the col and the hut.

It takes a pretty big effort to reach the Neil Colgan Hut from the road in a single day via this approach; total traveling time is going to be in the seven to ten hour range. The elevation gain from the trailhead is a little over 4,800 feet.

Winter Approach

Not many people visit the Colgan Hut in the winter months, it is a long ski tour in with significant avalanche hazard. Experience navigating through serious avalanche terrain, avalanche rescue skills, and proper knowledge of glacier travel and crevasse rescue are required by skiers visiting the hut in the winter.

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

Map and GPS references

Map reference:	82N/8 (Lake Louise)
Grid reference:	566832
GPS coordinates:	51°17' 42"-116°11' 12" NAD83 11U 556706 5682945
Hut elevation:	9,700 feet

Mountaineering

This site, at the col between Mts. Little and Bowlen, is a convenient location for climbing. The peaks of The Valley of the Ten Peaks are all over 10,000 feet and the hut, at 9,700 feet, is an ideal base for bagging these summits. It is standard to climb a number of peaks in a day, and it is not uncommon to stop back at the hut for lunch on the porch, or another cup of coffee between summits.

The routes accessible from the hut range from walk-ups of Mts. Little and Bowlen, just outside the hut, to the north face ice routes on Mt. Fay. The snow and ice routes in the area are very good, but the rock is abysmal. In fact if you came up the Perren Route to the hut, you have done all the worthwhile rock climbing in the area. The north face routes on Mt. Fay are classic summer alpine ice outings, and are the biggest attraction of the area. Information on these routes can be found in the book Selected Alpine Climbs in the Canadian Rockies by Sean Dougherty.

Ice Climbing

There are a number of classic ice routes in the surrounding area, but they are all very serious undertakings. There are two ice climbs located on the lower North Face of Mount Quadra, Gimme Shelter, a 300 metre VI, WI 5+ -7R and Arctic Dream, a 300 metre VI, WI 6. The classic Sans Blitz, a 600 metre VI, 5.5, WI 7 on Mt. Fay is also a very committing route nearby.

History

Second to the scene of Lake Louise set against the backdrop of Mt. Victoria, Moraine Lake is perhaps the most photographed and best known mountain scene in the Canadian Rockies. The area behind the first row of peaks which can be seen from the lake provides excellent alpine climbing on snow and ice routes, and makes an ideal location for a high altitude climbing hut.

The area saw its first hut in 1964 when the Calgary Mountain Club erected a hut at the top of the couloir between peaks 3 and 3 ½. This original hut was named for Graham Cooper, who died while descending after the construction of the hut. The hut was in a poor position, however, because it encouraged use of the couloir as an access route to the hut. By the late 1980s the couloir had seen many rockfall accidents and several fatalities. The hut was dismantled and replaced by the Neil Colgan Hut in 1983.

Neil Colgan was a warden in Banff National Park when he died from injuries sustained in a horse accident in the backcountry. The hut was largely funded by his family in his name.