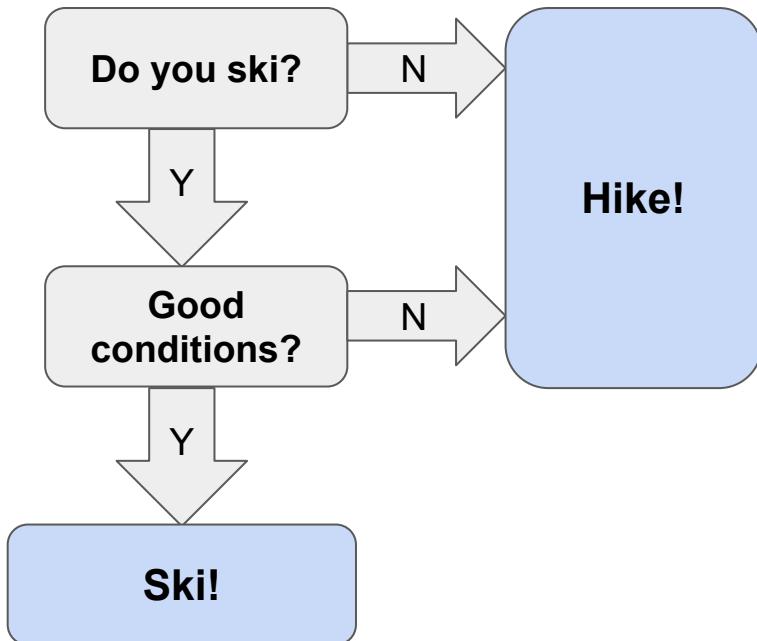


Winter Hiking



Why hike in winter?



- Exercise - works muscles differently than skiing; maintains fitness for next summer
- More people are getting out in winter, so trails are often packed (don't need snowshoes as often)
- Transition between seasons
- Interesting things to see - snow, ice, animal tracks, atmospheric conditions

If you mitigate the risks, you'll enjoy it more.

Hazard	Mitigation
Cold hands and feet	Hand or foot warmers. Battery mittens, socks. Boots big enough to accommodate warm socks. Mitts better than gloves. Wind- and water-resistant overmitts.
Condensation and moisture	Carry multiple buffs/neck warmers/mittens. Cloth to clean iced-up glasses. Nose cloth.
Icy/slippery terrain	GOOD microspikes or trail crampons.



Hazard	Mitigation
Cold temperatures	<p>Insulated sit pad.</p> <p>Water bottle in cozy or carried upside down. Spare water buried inside pack.</p> <p>Carry electronics close to body.</p> <p>Bring food that's efficient to eat and can handle the temperatures; consider a thermos.</p> <p>Be fast whenever you need to take off your pack; coordinate with timing of other people; carry things in pockets.</p>
Deep snow	<p>Gaiters (or pants that cover boot tops).</p> <p>Poles with snow baskets.</p> <p>Shovel, if venturing off-trail.</p> <p>Watch for holes in talus/boulder fields and near small trees/bushes.</p>
Sunburn, snow blindness	<p>Sunglasses and sunscreen, hat with brim on sunny spring days.</p>
Wind	<p>Balaclava/face covering, well-fitted toque that covers ears, jacket with hood.</p> <p>Goggles.</p> <p>Lip balm.</p>

Biggest mistakes related to layering

1. Hiking in too many warm layers.

- Take off extra layers as soon as you feel warm but before you start to sweat. Don't delay.

2. Hiking in heavy insulated jacket.

- These retain moisture - you will get colder as day progresses.
- Same goes for handwear - the mittens you wore in the morning will be damp and cold in the afternoon. Bring multiple pairs.

3. Not putting on extra layers as soon as you stop for more than a couple of minutes.

- This is the only time you should be wearing your heavy insulated parka.

Winter trip planning

Travel is slower and days are short - lower your distance/elevation expectations and plan to be back at car early.

Look at the forecast overnight lows. Do you have enough gear to handle those temperatures if something goes wrong?

- Emergency communication device
- Headlamp
- Extra clothes/gear to keep you alive if you have to shelter in place for a few hours
- Consider carrying tarp, matches, firestarter, extra snacks

Links for weather, conditions, etc. are on <https://www.ramblers.ab.ca/Reference/Links>

Changing conditions

Look at multiple weather forecasts (spotwx.com plus your favourite websites).

- Beware of incoming storms or snow starting earlier than forecast.

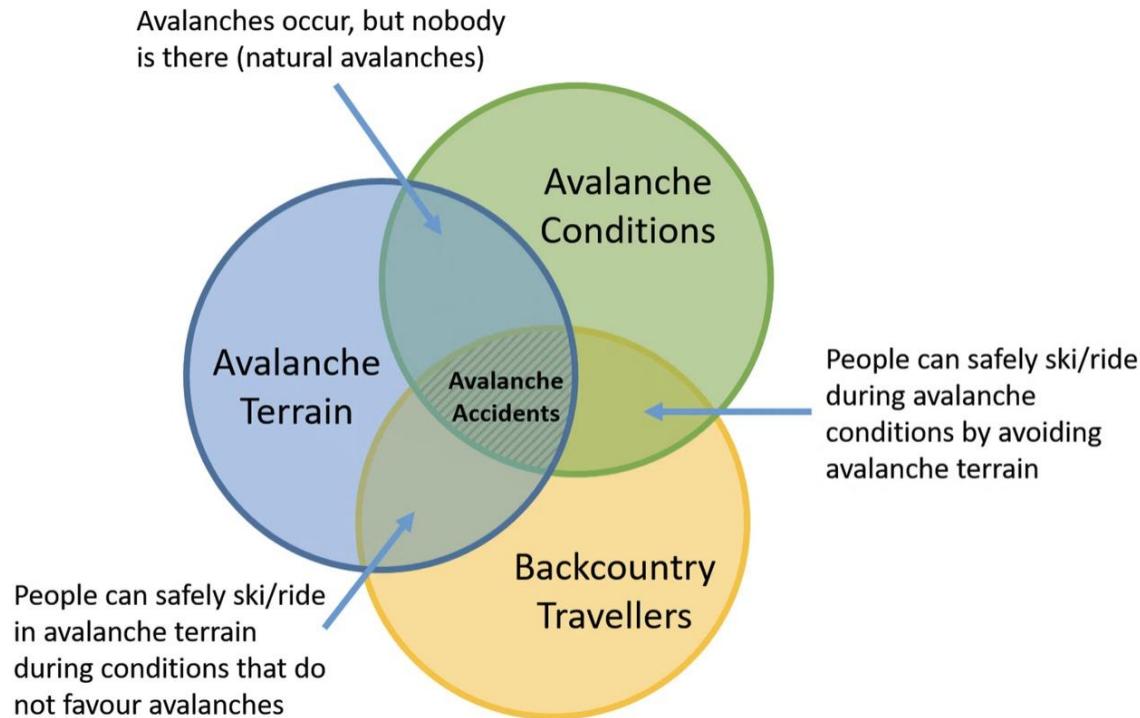
Stay aware during the day:

- Temperature increasing => slippery terrain, unsupportive snowpack, tree snow bombs, avalanche hazard increases.
- Temperature decreasing => hypothermia, wet clothing freezing, icy conditions.
- Wind and snow => obscured tracks, whiteout, cold/wet, exhaustion, avalanche hazard increases.

Extra need to monitor participants for warmth, fatigue, ability to handle terrain, equipment problems.

Avalanches

Avalanche accidents occur when backcountry travellers are exposed to avalanche terrain during conditions that can produce avalanches.



Avalanche Terrain

Simple: exposure to low angle or primarily forested terrain.

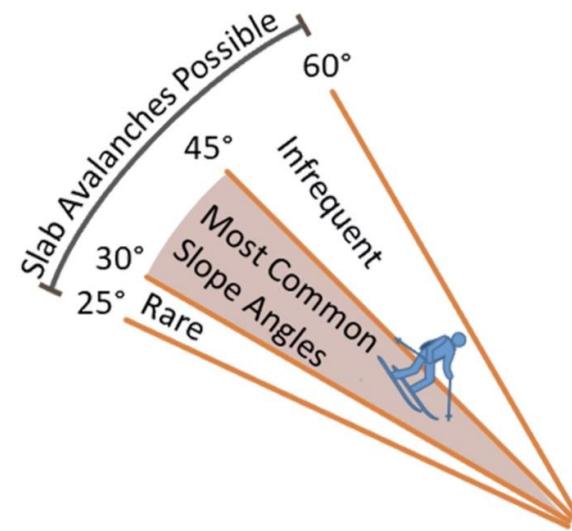
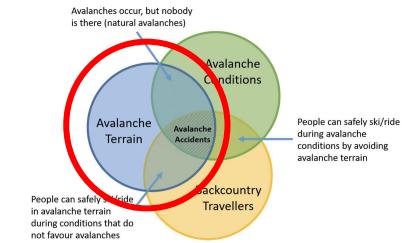
Challenging: exposure to well defined avalanche paths, starting zones, or terrain traps.

Complex: exposure to multiple overlapping avalanche paths, large expanses of steep/open terrain, multiple avalanche starting zones, and terrain traps below.

Terrain traps increase the consequences of being caught in an avalanche:

- *trees, rocks, cliffs, open water increase the risk of physical injury*
- *gullies, flat sections, crevasses increase burial depth*

Avalanche accidents occur when backcountry travellers are exposed to avalanche terrain during conditions that can produce avalanches.

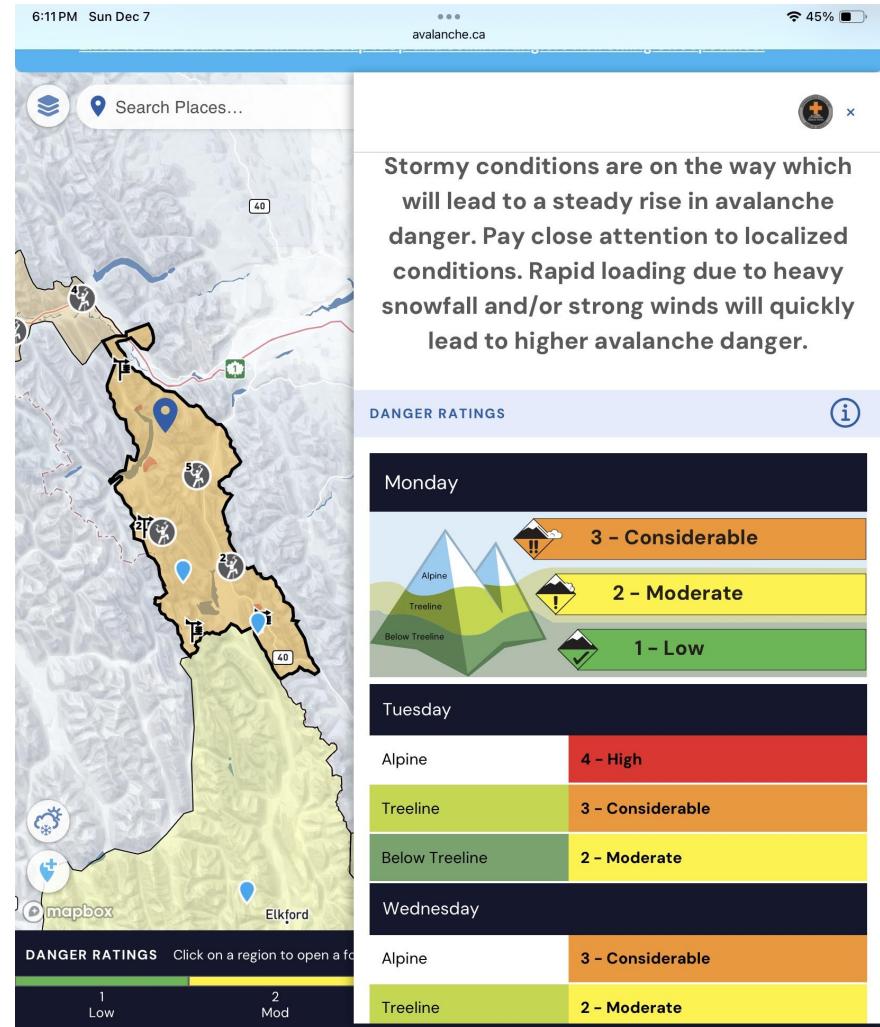
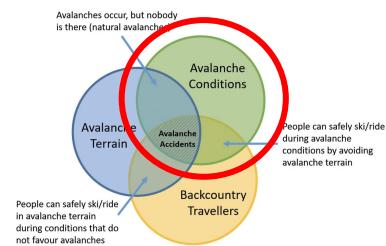


Avalanche Conditions

Snow + Weather = snowpack with strong and weak layers.

avalanche.ca danger ratings and MIN reports

Avalanche accidents occur when backcountry travellers are exposed to avalanche terrain during conditions that can produce avalanches.

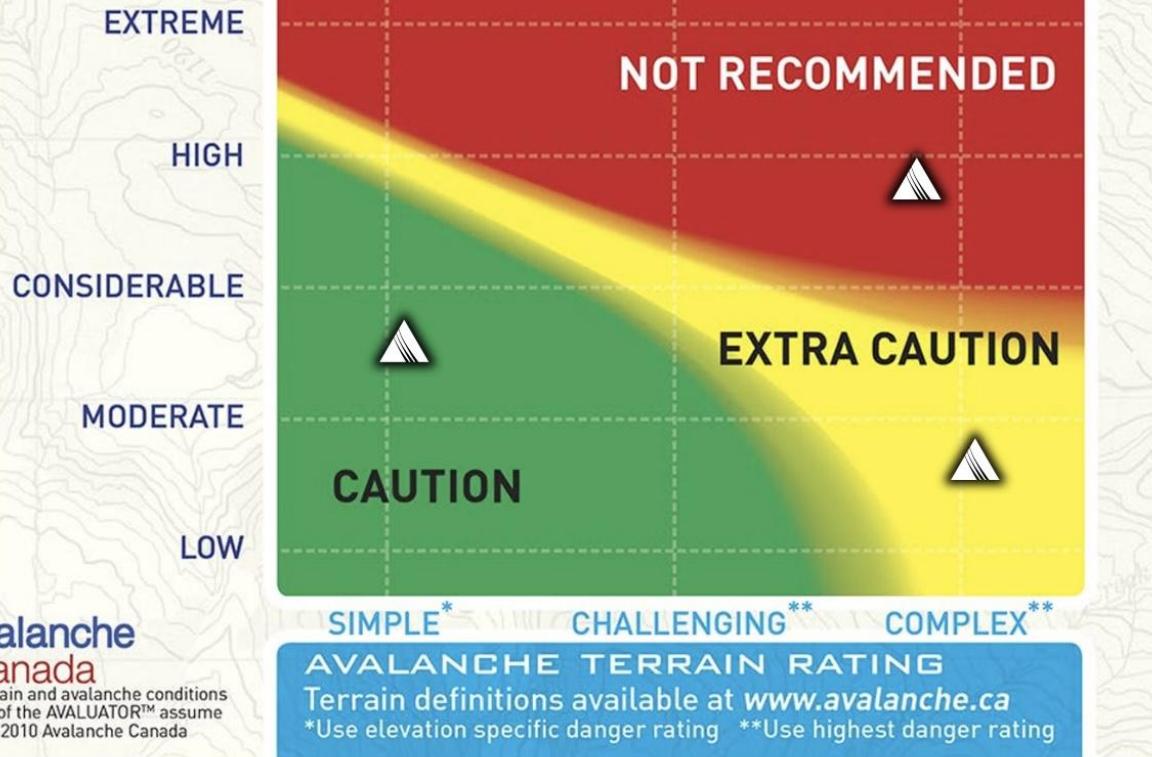


AVALUATORTM v2.0

TRIP PLANNER

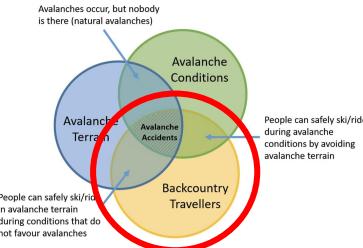
Remember to verify all information used during the trip planning stage at the trail head. Confirm that the trip decision is still within the comfort zone and skill level of your group.

DANGER RATING
Refer to public bulletins for danger ratings at www.avalanche.ca



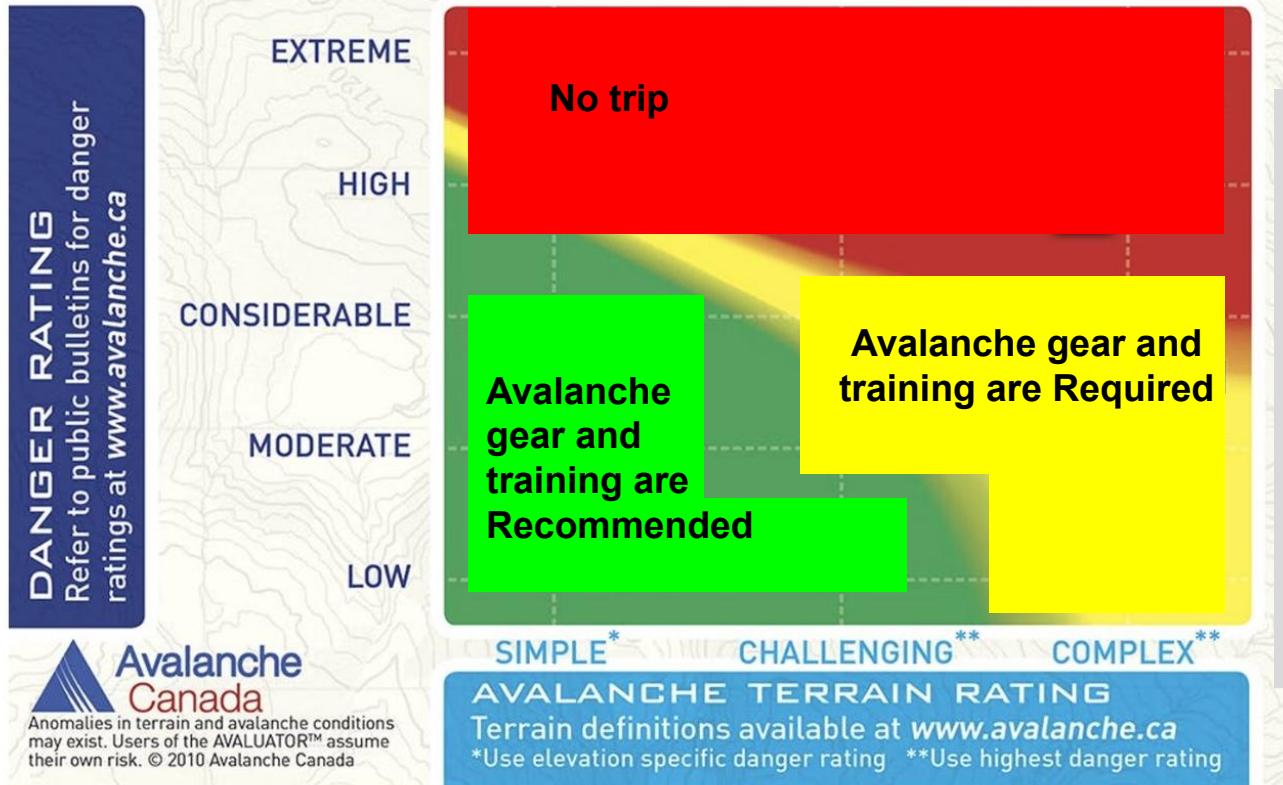
Anomalies in terrain and avalanche conditions may exist. Users of the AVALUATOR™ assume their own risk. © 2010 Avalanche Canada

Avalanche accidents occur when backcountry travellers are exposed to avalanche terrain during conditions that can produce avalanches.



Ramblers avalanche risk management policy is based on Avaluator

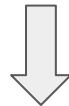
Remember to verify all information used during the trip planning stage at the trail head. Confirm that the trip decision is still within the comfort zone and skill level of your group.



Ramblers avalanche policy follows Avaluator except:

- We are more cautious with Moderate danger in Challenging terrain (because *Moderate means that human-triggered avalanches are possible*).
- We have added additional terrain called Simple With Overhead Exposure (see next slide).

Ramblers Avalanche Policy

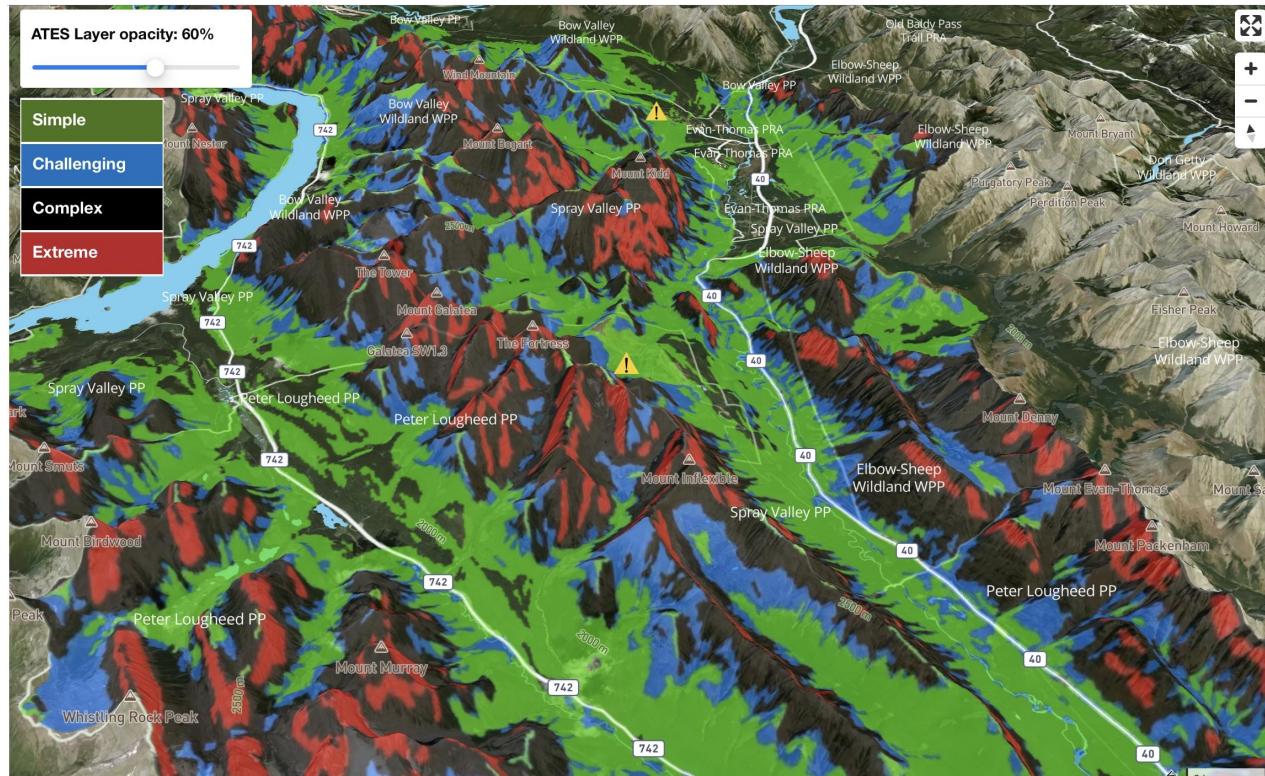


Terrain:	simple terrain	simple terrain with overhead exposure	challenging terrain	complex terrain
	class 1	class 1A	class 2	class 3
Danger				
extreme in area of travel	No Trip	No Trip	No Trip	No Trip
high in area of travel	No Trip	No Trip	No Trip	No Trip
considerable, moderate, low or spring in area of travel; high or extreme above	Recommended	Required	Required	Required
considerable or spring in area of travel	Recommended	Recommended	Required	Required
moderate in area of travel	Recommended	Recommended	Required	Required
low in area of travel	Recommended	Recommended	Recommended	Required

This table determines whether avalanche gear and training are Required vs. Recommended, or whether no trip is allowed into avalanche terrain.

ATES (Avalanche Terrain Exposure Scale)

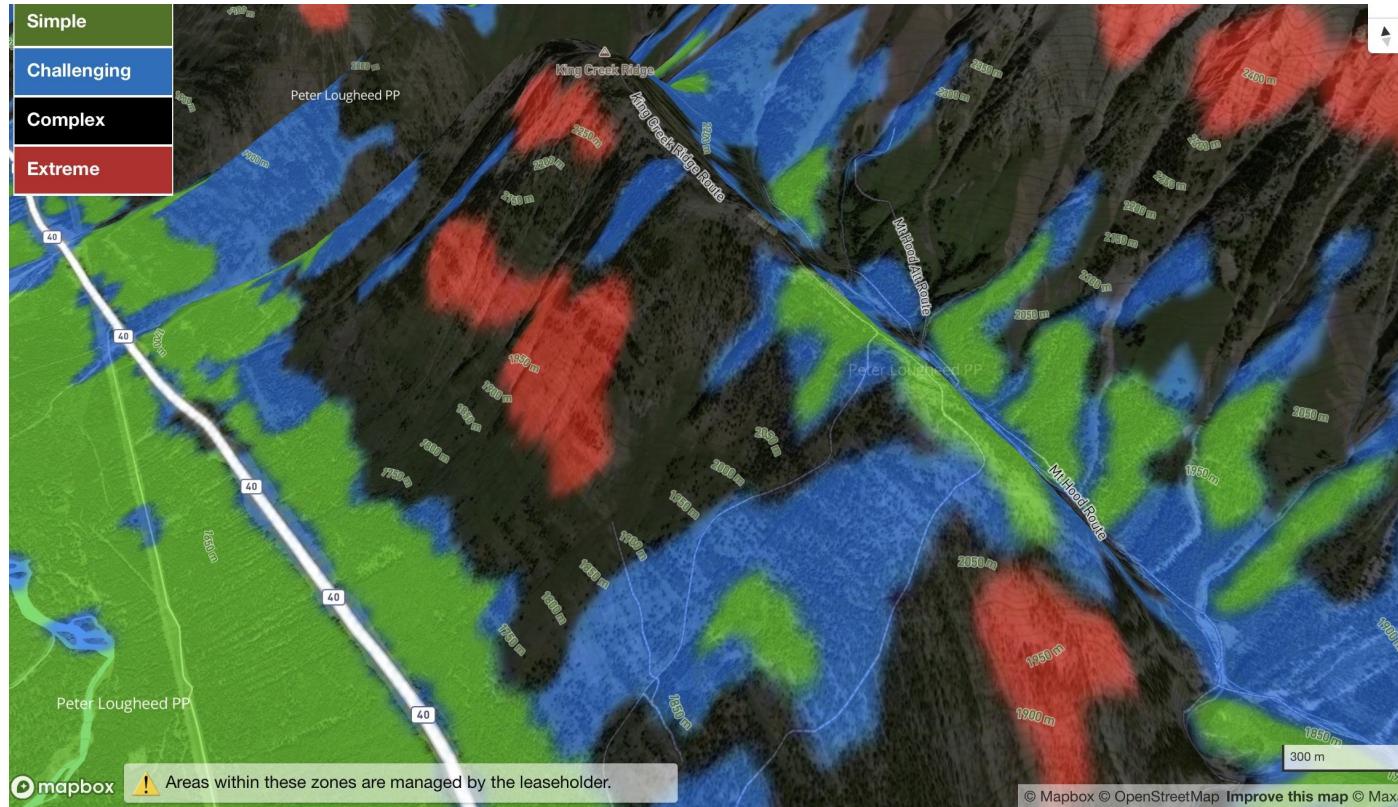
<https://albertaparks.ca/albertaparks-ca/advisories-public-safety/outdoor-safety/winter-safety/ates-disclaimer/kananaskis-country-avalanche-terrain-ratings-scale-ates/?park=kc>



Chester Lake - no avalanche hazard



King Creek Ridge



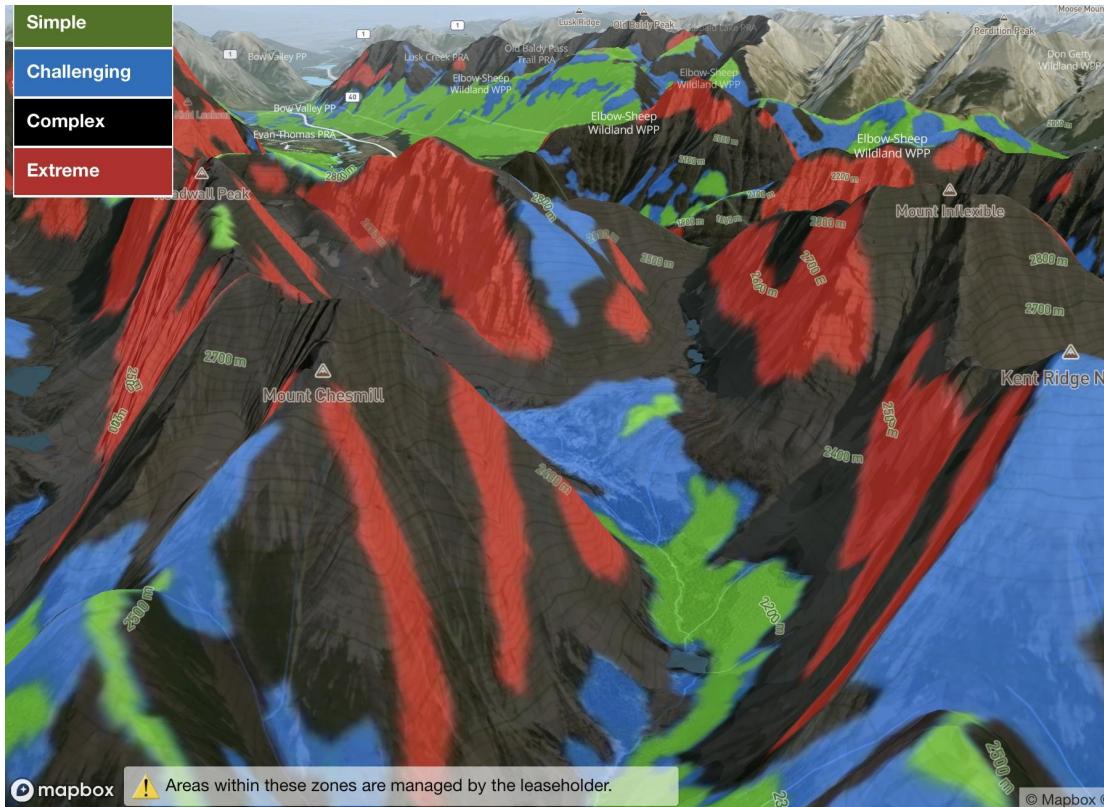
King Creek Ridge - Challenging terrain

1. King Creek Ridge is classified in the Ramblers database as **Challenging terrain at treeline**. This shows up when a coordinator searches for and calls a trip.
2. The avalanche.ca forecast will show a danger rating for Alpine, Treeline, and Below Treeline.
3. These two items above determine **whether avalanche gear and training is Required or Recommended for participants on the trip**. This will show in the Calendar posting.



Terrain:	simple terrain	simple terrain with overhead exposure	challenging terrain	complex terrain
	class 1	class 1A	class 2	class 3
Danger				
extreme in area of travel	No Trip	No Trip	No Trip	No Trip
high in area of travel	No Trip	No Trip	No Trip	No Trip
considerable, moderate, low or spring in area of travel; high or extreme above	Recommended	Required	Required	Required
considerable or spring in area of travel	Recommended	Recommended	Required	Required
moderate in area of travel	Recommended	Recommended	Required	Required
low in area of travel	Recommended	Recommended	Recommended	Required

James Walker Lake



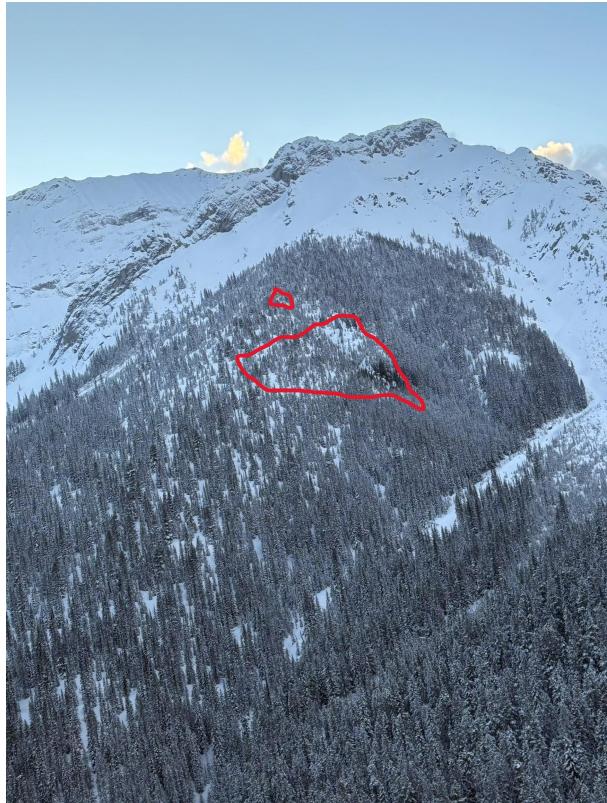
James Walker Lake - Simple terrain with overhead exposure

1. James Walker Lake is classified in the Ramblers database as **Simple terrain below treeline with overhead exposure**. This shows up when a coordinator searches for and calls a trip.
2. The avalanche.ca forecast will show a danger rating for Alpine, Treeline, and Below Treeline.
3. These two items above determine **whether avalanche gear and training is Required or Recommended for participants on the trip**. This will show in the Calendar posting.



Terrain:	simple terrain	simple terrain with overhead exposure	challenging terrain	complex terrain
	class 1	class 1A	class 2	class 3
Danger				
extreme in area of travel	No Trip	No Trip	No Trip	No Trip
high in area of travel	No Trip	No Trip	No Trip	No Trip
considerable, moderate, low or spring in area of travel; high or extreme above	Recommended	Required	Required	Required
considerable or spring in area of travel	Recommended	Recommended	Required	Required
moderate in area of travel	Recommended	Recommended	Required	Required
low in area of travel	Recommended	Recommended	Recommended	Required

If you're in trees, is it safe?



March 14, 2025
Black Prince area
100m W x 90cm D crown
1 fatality

Unusual in that avalanche
start zone was treed.
Openings within forest are
large enough to avalanche.

An almost identical incident... on the same day



March 14, 2025
Lake Louise area
300m W x 1m D crown
1 fatality

Again, there are trees in the start zone and area impacted.

Rawson Lake



AST1 course

Anyone hiking/skiing in the backcountry in winter should consider taking Avalanche Skills Training 1 (AST1), which covers:

- avalanche formation and release
- identifying avalanche terrain (and therefore learning terrain and conditions to avoid)
- trip-planning basics
- optimal use of tools and resources like the avalanche forecasts to mitigate your avalanche risk
- using appropriate travel techniques in avalanche terrain
- intro to companion rescue

Available through U of C Outdoor Centre, Yammuska, other providers.

Avy Savvy

This online avalanche awareness course from Avalanche Canada is a great resource for learning about avalanches.

Recommended both for initial learning as well as annual refresher.

<https://avysavvy.ca/>

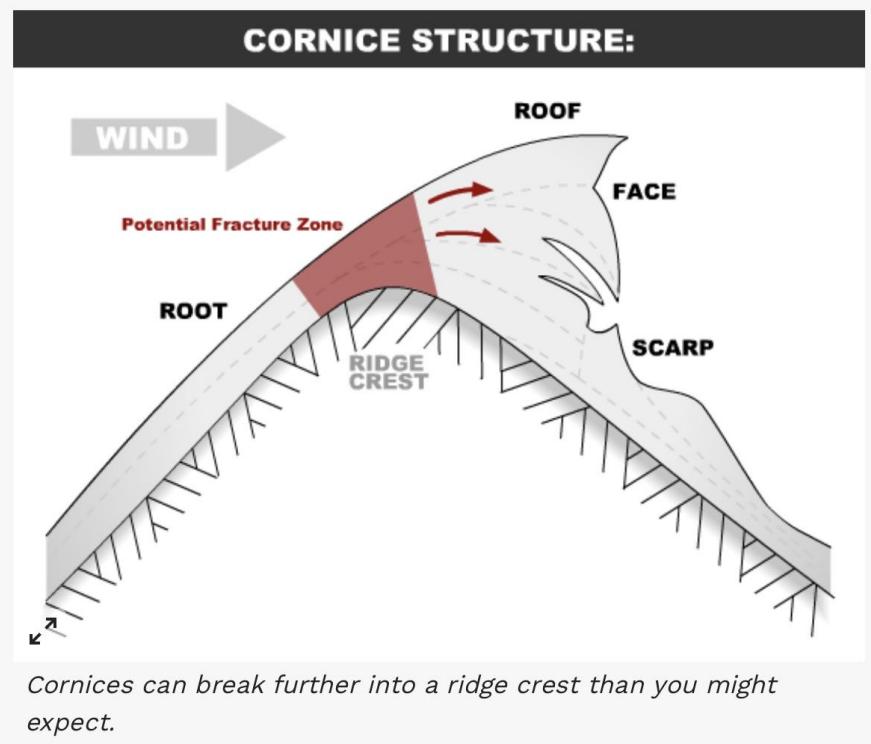
Additional things to observe

Don't blindly follow other people's tracks without observing the terrain.

Stay well back and on windward side of cornices.

Beware of tree wells if the snow is deep.

Never walk or snowshoe on ski tracks!



Researching trips

- “Trusted” online trip reports (e.g. Bob Spirko)
- Snowshoeing guidebooks (e.g. Nugara)
- Parks Canada and Kananaskis information centres and websites
- Satellite view on Google Maps or GPS apps
 - look for avalanche slopes, runouts, cliffs, trees, what's above you
 - Aspect of route - e.g. open SSW-facing slopes will be warmer, less snow.
 - Windward will be drier, lee side will have heavy drifts.
- Avalanche layers on Gaia, Caltopo, Kananaskis ATES
- Beware of social media and apps like AllTrails! They can be useful for information on recent conditions, or photos showing terrain, but...

Issues with AllTrails (and other social media)

[Download](#) [Map](#)

The south peak is about 550 meters up from the trailhead and is a steep climb with amazing views.

This trail is well-worn and quite slippery in places, and the first section up to the lake is often extremely muddy. Proper hiking boots with good grip are strongly recommended. Hiking poles will also be extremely helpful, even for more experienced hikers. It is very important that each member of your hiking party wears a bear spray canister, as bears are known to frequent this area. Bringing a bear spray canister is advised.

No mention of avalanche hazard

In fall, winter, and spring, visitors should come prepared with microspikes for much-needed extra traction and plenty of warm, layered clothing in case of inclement weather.

[Download](#) [Map](#)

Search reviews

Nice views. Knee deep snow. Snow shoes would be good to bring.

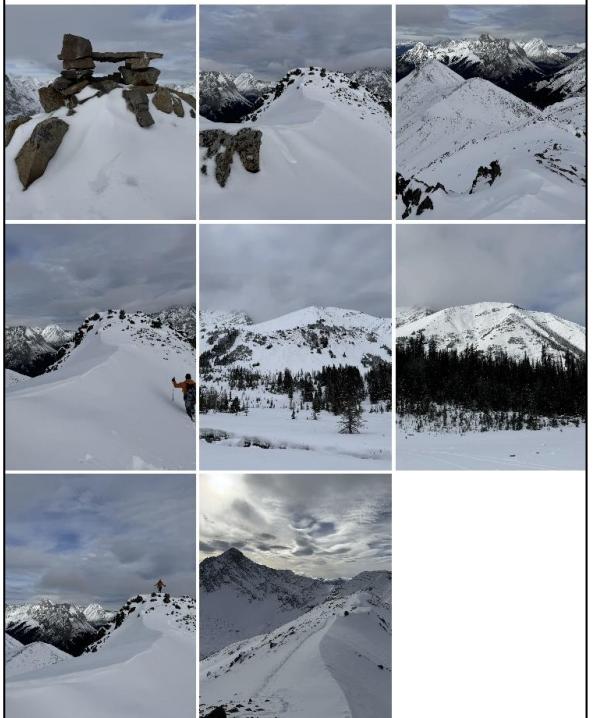
Difficulty: Hard

Hiking

Monday 17/25 - spectacular. Packed or post holed trail to follow most of the way. Used spikes to the summit and then snowshoes down to the forest. No wind. Avalanche activity spotted.

Nov 18

Trail is Pocaterra Ridge south summit



2 days prior: skier-triggered avalanche



Gillean Daffern's winter lists

Easy Winter Walks

In lower elevation areas there is seldom enough snow to warrant using snowshoes. Microspikes are recommended when melt-freeze starts usually mid February.

Grassi Lakes	3.4 km return	162 m	Canmore Area
Grotto Creek Canyon	4.0 km return	200 m	Bow Valley
Broken Bridges Loop	6.3 km loop	86 m	Bow Valley
Heart Creek Interpretive Trail	4.4 km return	64 m	Bow Valley
Drumlin & Whale Lake	5.7 km loop	32 m	Bow Valley
Ribbon Creek Winter	9.2 km return	150 m	Kananaskis Valley
Troll Falls Loop	3.7 km return	30 m	Kananaskis Valley
Diamond T Loop	4.2 km loop	128 m	Elbow Valley
Paddys Flat Interpretive Trail	3.0 km loop	46 m	Elbow Valley
Beaver Flat Interpretive Trail	1.8 km return	15 m	Elbow Valley
Alder—Banded Peak Connector	5.9 km return	220 m	Elbow Valley
Fullerton Loop	6.7 km return	230 m	Elbow Valley
Snowshoe Hare	6.1 km loop	189 m	West Bragg-Elbow
West Meadow Horse Trail	7.7 km lollipop	150 m	West Bragg-Elbow
Snowy Owl - West Crystal Loop	2.9 km loop	90 m	West Bragg-Elbow
Jumped Up Trails	7.2 km loops	165 m	Jumpingpound
Sibbald Viewpoint Trail	2.0 km loop	100 m	Jumpingpound
Pine Woods Loop	3.5 km loop	135 m	Jumpingpound
Ole Buck Loop	4.7 km return	177 m	Jumpingpound
Moose Creek Loop	3.5 km loop	60 m	Jumpingpound
Deer Ridge Loop	7.1 km return	280 m	Jumpingpound
Beaverpelt Hill	6.3 km return	200 m	Jumpingpound
High Noon Hills	5.9 km return	320 m	Sheep River
Sandy McNabb Hill	4.2 km return	97 m	Sheep River
Sandy McNabb Interpretive Trail	1.9 km loop	24 m	Sheep River
Long Prairie Ridge	5.4 km loop	131 m	Sheep River
Mount McNab	8.6 km loop	350 m	Sheep River
Mesa Butte	4.3 km return	236 m	North Fork

Longer Winter Walks

Here are some longer winter walks. After a major snowfall you may want to carry snowshoes. Microspikes are recommended when melt-freeze starts usually mid February. At higher elevations, where there is more snow, you may be able to walk on trails early in the morning, assuming they freeze overnight, but you will be post-holing later in the day without snowshoes.

Yamnuska Great Moraine Loop	8.6 km loop	109 m	Bow Valley
Yamnuska Aspen Jungle Loop	8.4 km loop	39 m	Bow Valley
Riverbank Loop	10.9 km loop	127 m	Bow Valley
Raven's End - Yamnuska	7.5 km return	520 m	Bow Valley
Bow Valley Provincial Park Loop	8.7 km return	156 m	Bow Valley
Lusk Creek Valley Loop	8.1 km loop	214 m	Kananaskis Valley
Prairie View Trail	12.0 km return	633 m	Kananaskis Valley
Sugar Daddy - Sugar Momma	12.4 km loop	502 m	Elbow Valley
Snagmore Hill	8.8 km loop	162 m	Elbow Valley
Elbow Valley - Riverview Loop	7.6 km return	240 m	Elbow Valley
Pneuma - Family Guy Loop	12.7 km loop	551 m	Elbow Valley
Prairie Link Loop	12.3 km loop	395 m	Elbow Valley
Prairie Mountain	8.0 km return	690 m	Elbow Valley
North Bragg Loop	8.6 km loop	370 m	West Bragg-Elbow
Ranger Hill Loop	10.2 km loop	340 m	West Bragg-Elbow
Telephone Ridge South	9.7 km loop	339 m	West Bragg-Elbow
Snowy Owl - Strange Brew	8.4 km loop	226 m	West Bragg-Elbow
Grouse Ridge	4.2 km 12	260 m	Jumpingpound
Eagle Hill via Seventy Buck	8.2 km return	305 m	Jumpingpound
Jumpingpound Loop	9.5 km loop	244 m	Jumpingpound
High Noon Hills	5.9 km return	320 m	Sheep River
Wolf Creek Hill	6.0 km return	300 m	Sheep River
Muley Ridge Loop	6.6 km loop	320 m	Sheep River
Neato-Aspen-9999 Loop	7.8 km loop	390 m	North Fork
Sinnot Hill	7.4 km return	250 m	North Fork
Grass Pass	5.4 km return	427 m	Highwood East

Where to go - generally safe

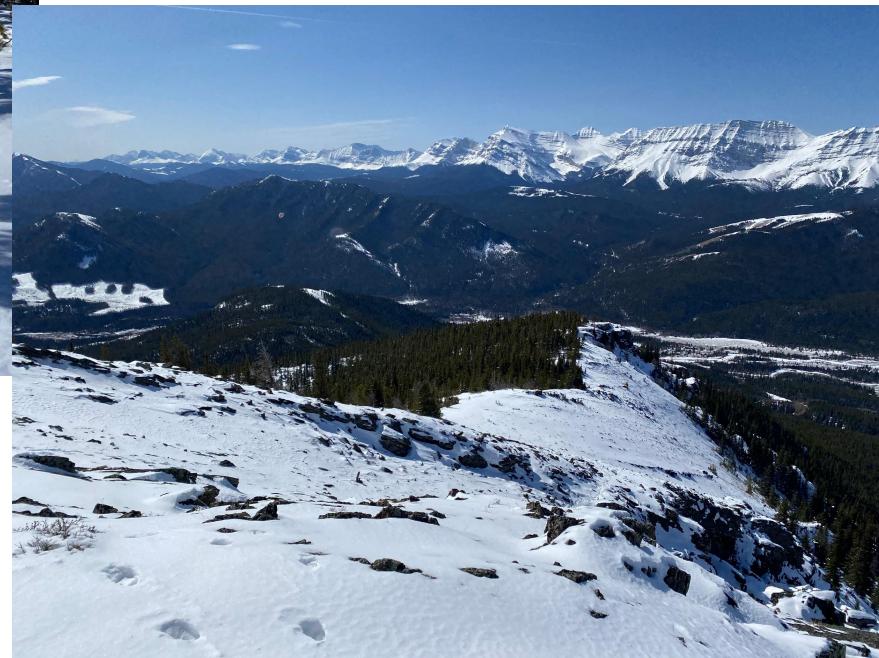
Highway 66 & West Bragg Creek	West Bragg Creek and Fullerton areas - lots of options for loops and distance Prairie Mountain Prairie and Powderface creeks Canyon Creek ice cave
Around Highways 1 and 40	Raven's End Prairie View/Barrier Lookout Wasootch Ridge Evan Thomas waterfalls
Foothills hikes	Muley/Carry ridges Sandy Mcnabb trails and loops Eagle Hill, Jumpingpound loop Grass Pass/Bull Creek Hills
Banff	Sulphur Mountain Ink Pots
Smith-Dorrien	Chester Lake Rummel Lake

More interesting, but some avalanche terrain

- Cox Hill
- Ha Ling
- South End of Lawson
- Gypsum Ridge
- South Kent
- James Walker Lake
- Rummel Ridge
- Little Lougheed
- Many more options if the snow and avalanche danger are both low



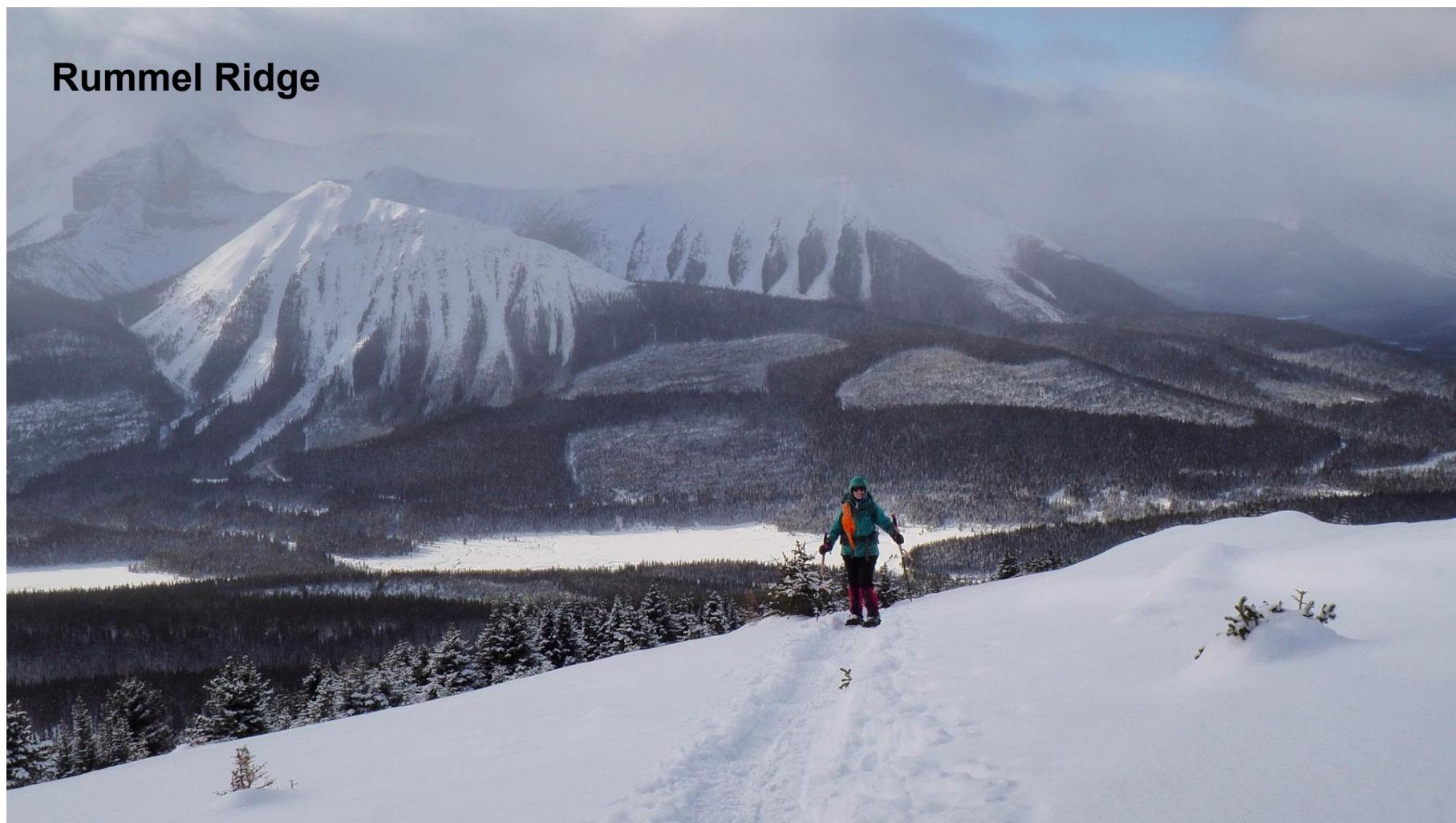
Junction Hill



South Lawson



Rummel Ridge



Ha Ling



View of Miner's Peak from Ha Ling



Cox Hill





Wasootch Ridge





Green
Monster /
Evan
Thomas
waterfalls

Prairie Mountain - much more interesting in winter!



Animal tracks



Animal tracks



Animal tracks



Animal tracks



5.5 - 8 cm L x 3 - 6 cm W



10 - 14 cm L x 7 - 12 cm W



Animal tracks



Mystery tracks



And if none of this appeals...

