



The Bow River and Sulphur Mountain

Self-Guided Walking Tour of Banff



Welcome to the Banff Public Library!

This self-guided tour will take you approximately two hours but, with plenty of stops that might pique your interest (including three museums and perhaps a picnic lunch), it could easily be stretched to last an entire day. Library staff can provide you with a street map of Banff to help keep you oriented.

Washrooms are available at the Library or just across the road by Banff's Central Park.

Food can be purchased opposite the Whyte Museum at Nesters Market, and of course there are numerous places to eat just off Banff Avenue. Ask the Library staff for their favorite!

History and natural history books that you might find useful for your tour can be found on our non-fiction shelves.

- We recommend *The Place of Bows* by E.J. Hart (HISTORY – Canada – Banff National Park – HAR), but there are many more concise guides depending on your interests.
- For natural history and just about anything else in the Canadian Rockies, Ben Gadd's *Handbook of the Canadian Rockies* is the go-to book (SCIENCE – Natural History – GAD).
- For local historical characters, go to the back-shelf biographies. Here, for example, you will find Chic Scott's excellent book *Mountain Romantics: The Whytes of Banff* (BIOGRAPHY & AUTOBIOGRAPHY – Whyte).



Banff Public Library

The Banff Public Library at its current location was founded by Peter and Catharine Whyte in 1962. Peter and Catharine were two of Banff's most famous artists and philanthropists. Peter was a local boy whose father ran the grocery store on Banff Avenue, Catharine was a wealthy heiress from Concord, Massachusetts. Despite coming from such different backgrounds, it was a love of art that brought these two together when they attended art school in Boston in the late 1920s, and it was a love of Banff and the mountains that always brought them back here after their many travels. They were married in 1930 and built their beautiful log cabin home that same year. It is the first stop on this tour.

Starting at the Library, turn left on Bear Street, and walk past the Whyte Museum.

Like the Library, the Whyte Museum is a legacy of Peter and Catharine and contains many of their beautiful paintings. It also houses the Archives of the Canadian Rockies, the collective memory of Banff. The museum is well worth a visit, and the Library can provide a family pass to library members.

After passing the museum and a brown log cabin with periwinkle blue shutters, which is known as the Moore Home, turn left onto a gravel path and you will arrive at Peter and Catharine's exquisite log cabin home on your right.



Peter and Catharine's home

Tours of the interior of the cabin are offered by the Whyte Museum. Peter and Catharine were great collectors of art but also collected log cabins! Here on the Museum grounds lie the former rustic residences of famous local characters such as First World War hero, hard man, and early Banff Park Warden, Bill Peyto, his Australian sidekick, prospector Jack Sinclair, and in the small white cabin, Bill Mather (look for the ships wheel motif), who ran the local boating concession. Rumor has it that Bill's wife gave birth to their first child in this cabin during a flood and that it was attended by a doctor dressed in hip-waders. Hard times indeed!



Windy Cabin

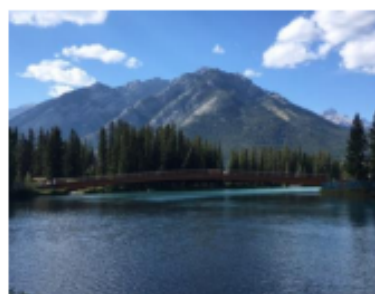
Just before you reach the river, on the left-hand side, is the "Windy Cabin," a fine example of a warden's patrol cabin. Hundreds of these cabins dotted the national parks and were usually a day's travel apart by horse. It was the warden's responsibility to build and maintain these structures.

Continue along the gravel path to the banks of the Bow River and turn left.

The Bow River traces its source back to the melting glaciers of the Columbia Icefields, high in the Canadian Rockies. These vast icefields make up the hydrological apex of Canada, and rivers from here flow north to the Arctic Ocean, east to Hudson Bay, south to the Mississippi River, and west to the Pacific Ocean. As you walk along the Bow, you might want to stop at a bench and ponder the fact that to the west of you, across the river, lies over 4,000 square miles of wilderness contained in four national parks (Banff, Jasper, Kootenay, and Yoho) and many more provincial parks. This area is hopefully large enough to preserve iconic species such as the grizzly bear, wild and free in their natural habitat.

Across the river is the fort-like Buffalo Nations Museum that features exhibits on Indigenous peoples of the region. This can be accessed by the latest edition to Banff's infrastructure, the Nancy Pauw Bridge. Nancy was a long time Banff resident and local philanthropist. A walk out onto this graceful bridge provides great views north (to your right) of Mt. Norquay, Banff's local ski hill, and south to Sulphur Mountain. Take a minute to enjoy the "Green River," as local poet Jon Whyte called the Bow, sliding gracefully beneath your feet.

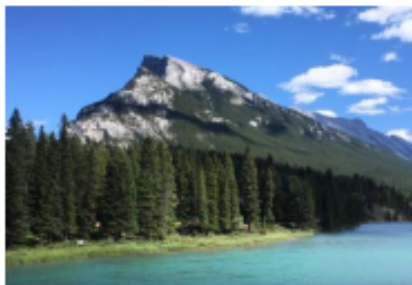
Don't cross the bridge but return to the north bank and continue round Central Park. Next you will pass the Louis Trono Gazebo on your left (named after a famous local trombone player). Coming up on your left, just before you pass under the road bridge, is one of Banff's most impressive early wooden buildings, the Banff Park Museum (1895).



Nancy Pauw Bridge and the Banff Park Museum

The museum is known as the "stuffed animal museum" by locals. It contains many fine examples of taxidermy, including some corpulent looking beasts that were slightly overstuffed as the taxidermist had never seen the animals alive.

Pass under the road bridge and continue along by the river until you arrive at a second pedestrian bridge that again allows you to walk out over the middle of the river and experience great views of the surrounding mountains.



Mount Rundle from the second Bow River Pedestrian Bridge

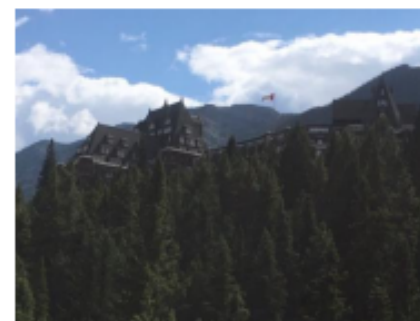
To the east is Banff's most iconic mountain, Mount Rundle. The cleanly defined summit ridge, vertical on the north face, with a gentler slope to the south, runs all the way to Canmore, 12 miles away. To the west is Mount Bourgeau, and more immediately to the south is Sulphur Mountain which can be accessed by gondola. Sulphur Mountain is the source of the hot springs that really put Banff on the map soon after the railway first arrived here in 1883.

Consider for a moment that Canada's Indigenous people and their ancestors have been passing through and dwelling in this area since the end of the last ice age, a period of over 11,000 years. Pit dwellings discovered adjacent to the Banff Springs Golf Course as well as a hearth site excavated above Vermillion Lakes attest to this ancient history. Indigenous peoples would gather at the confluence of the Bow and Spray rivers, just downstream from the bridge you are standing on now, for important meetings and ceremonies. For generations, they visited the hot springs and considered them a very spiritual place. With the arrival of the railway, the hot springs were viewed as a huge potential attraction and were developed, becoming the Hot Springs Reserve and the birthplace of Canada's National Parks. Indigenous peoples were forced onto reserves and were no longer allowed to gather here.



Bow Falls

If a canoe were to pass you going downstream, the occupants would be in for a big shock, for just around the corner are the roaring Bow Falls. Should you wish, you can continue across the bridge, turn left and, after about 30 minutes, you will come to a viewing point for Bow Falls. Further on and above you is the Fairmont Banff Springs Hotel. Built in the style of a baronial castle, no visit to Banff is complete without wandering around the public areas of this impressive hotel.



The Banff Springs Hotel

For those on a tighter schedule, return across the pedestrian bridge and continue straight on until you reach Buffalo Street. Ahead of you is the magnificent Cascade Mountain.



Cascade Mountain from Buffalo Street and St. Georges-in-the-Pines

It is no accident that this mountain is framed perfectly by Banff Avenue when looking north; the road was purposely aligned to provide for this view. Banff was indeed intended to be a tourist destination from the very start!

Turn left on Buffalo Street, then right on Beaver Street. Here is one of Banff's first churches.

The construction of St. Georges-in-the-Pines started in 1889 and took 30 years to complete. The foundation stone was laid by Lord and Lady Stanley (of Stanley Cup fame) and the nave is lit by some beautiful stained-glass portraying local mountains, skiers, hikers, a moose, a big horn sheep, and a red-winged blackbird. If the doors are open and no service is in progress, pop in for a peek.

Continue along Beaver Street, crossing Caribou Street, until you arrive at the Luxton Home and Museum on your right.



The Historic Luxton Home Museum (206 Beaver Street)

Norman Luxton, otherwise known as Mr. Banff, was one of Banff's foremost entrepreneurs. Apart from starting many local businesses, he also attempted to sail around the world in a West Coast Salish dugout canoe. Norman got washed overboard somewhere in the South Pacific, but his crewmate, Captain John Voss, completed the voyage two years later, which was an astounding feat of seamanship. The Luxton Home (1905) is a beautiful example of early colonial architecture and furnishings. The garden was Georgina Luxton's pride and joy and is not to be missed when in flower.

For those who wish to finish their tour here, head down Caribou Street to Banff Avenue. Still have some energy? Head up Caribou Street, away from Banff Avenue. Ahead of you is Sleeping Buffalo Mountain, which was given the more prosaic name Tunnel Mountain by the CPR.



Sleeping Buffalo Mountain from Caribou Street

During the construction of the railway, there was a plan to blast a tunnel through the mountain, but wiser heads and tighter purse strings prevailed, and the railway took a slightly more northerly route. Sleeping Buffalo is one of the first mountains many people climb when visiting Banff as it only takes a couple of hours and provides great views. Stay on the trail that starts ahead of you, along St. Julien Road, towards the Banff Centre. Careful not to stray near the top as there are large cliffs on the other side!

For those desiring a more contemplative end to your tour, turn right off Caribou Street on to Otter Street and then turn left on Wolverine Street to reach the Old Banff Cemetery.



Bill Peyto's grave is located just north of the Brett mausoleum

Careful to close the large iron gates behind you. Many of Banff's famous early residents are buried here, including Mary Schaffer whose home, Tarry-a-While, is just across the lane. Bill Peyto's soldier's grave is here, as is A.O. Wheeler's, the first president of The Alpine Club of Canada. Baby Adelia Woodworth was the first to be buried in this cemetery in 1890. The Woodworths were one of the first settler families in the area, living at Siding 29 at the base of Cascade Mountain before Banff even existed. Also in the cemetery are Peter and Catharine Whyte, side by side, with Mount Temple and Mount Rundle carved on their headstones.



Mary's headstone is toward the south-east side of the cemetery

Return down Buffalo Street, cross Banff Avenue, turn right after the Post Office, and you will be back at the Library.

We hope you enjoyed the tour!

