

# Banff National Park of Canada

## Climate

Dramatic variations in Banff's climate are caused by a combination of elevation, rainshadow effects, and latitude. Generally, winters are long and summers cool and short, with only occasional hot spells. Average January highs are  $-7^{\circ}\text{C}$ , while July averages to  $22^{\circ}\text{C}$ . These temperatures apply to valley bottoms. At higher elevations temperatures are about  $5-7^{\circ}\text{C}$  cooler. Annual precipitation ranges from less than 380 mm at lower elevations to over 1 250 mm at higher elevations.

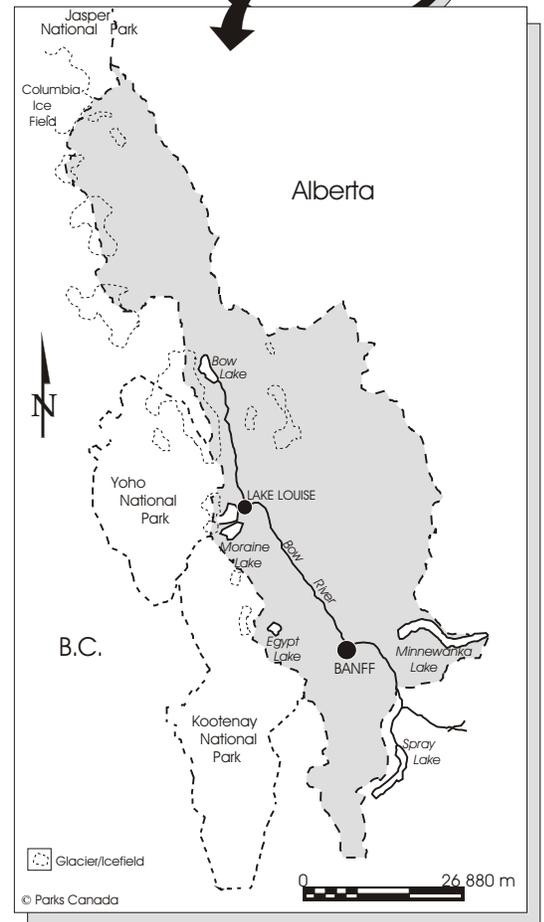
## Geology

The Rockies and their foothills are the eastern part of a larger system of mountains, the Western Cordillera, which includes all the ranges between the Rocky Mountain foothills and the Pacific Ocean, and extends from Alaska to Mexico. The Canadian Rockies are divided into three main sets of ranges running parallel to each other in a more or less northwest to southeast line. These are the Front Ranges (to the east), the Main Ranges, and the Western Ranges, of which the Front and Main Ranges are represented in Banff National Park. The range of summit elevations tends to be similar for the Main and Front Ranges (2 500 m - 3 500 m), but the tallest peaks are generally found in the Main Ranges.

The Front Ranges of the Rocky Mountains are found in Banff and are composed of thick layers of limestone and shale. These mountains have a tilted, tooth-like appearance that occasionally show folded layers of these sedimentary bedrocks. It is believed that the Rockies have seen at least four ice ages, but the jagged peaks indicate a relatively young age for these mountains, compared to the ancient Appalachian chain that runs along the eastern part of the continent. For protecting a part of one of the earth's true scenic treasures, Banff (along with Jasper, Yoho, and Kootenay) was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1985 on the park's 100th anniversary.

## Location

Banff was established as Canada's first national park in 1885. Located in southwestern Alberta on the British Columbia border, Banff epitomizes the world-famous Rocky Mountains with all their rugged splendor and scenic beauty. The  $6\,641\text{ km}^2$  park is about 130 km west of Calgary, and is perhaps the most well-known of the five national parks (also includes Yoho, Kootenay, Jasper, and Waterton Lakes), that represent the Rocky Mountain Natural Region. Banff is located in the Montane Cordillera Ecozone.



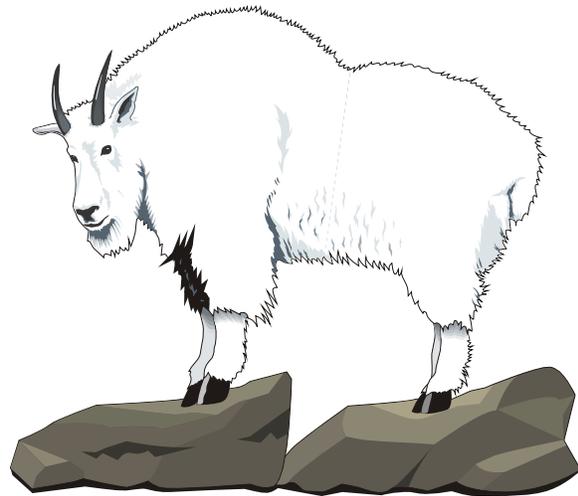
## Vegetation

Three distinct vegetation zones exist in this mountainous region, largely because of the inherent changes in elevation. The montane zone is the lowest of the three, and is characterized by grassy meadows, and forests of Douglas fir, white spruce, trembling aspen, and lodgepole pine. The subalpine zone of the slopes supports a largely closed coniferous forest of Engelmann spruce, subalpine fir, and lodgepole pine. Some open meadowland can also be found here. During summer, these meadows are covered with a thick carpet of wildflowers. The highest of the three zones, the alpine region, cannot support trees. Vegetation is sparse, with some alpine meadows, and as one goes higher up still, one enters the exclusive domain of hardy lichens that cling to the bare rock.



## Wildlife

Banff is famous for its wildlife. Some 54 mammal species are found here, including moose, elk, mountain goat, bighorn sheep, white-tailed deer, mule deer, cougars, black bears, and grizzly bears. More than 260 species of birds, including golden and bald eagles, have been identified. The park's major watersheds contain rainbow trout, brook trout, lake trout, bull trout, and whitefish. Reptiles and amphibians are scarce because of the severe climate. Only three species of toad, two frogs, one salamander, and one type of snake have been recorded.



## Activities

Visitors to Banff can enjoy a multitude of activities, including camping at one of 14 campgrounds, hiking along 1 500 km of trails, boating on the Bow River and Lake Minnewanka, and driving the scenic Icefields Parkway. The park, which attracts over four million visitors from all over the world each year, offers fishing, mountain climbing, cycling, horseback riding, downhill skiing, canoeing, and swimming. Taking a dip in the hot springs is also popular. A small resort-like parkland established around these hot springs was the forefather of what would eventually become Banff National Park.

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