

Bow River

Calgary to Carseland

Why Go

This is a scenic prairie paddle on a modestly fast flowing stream.

Duration of Tour(s)

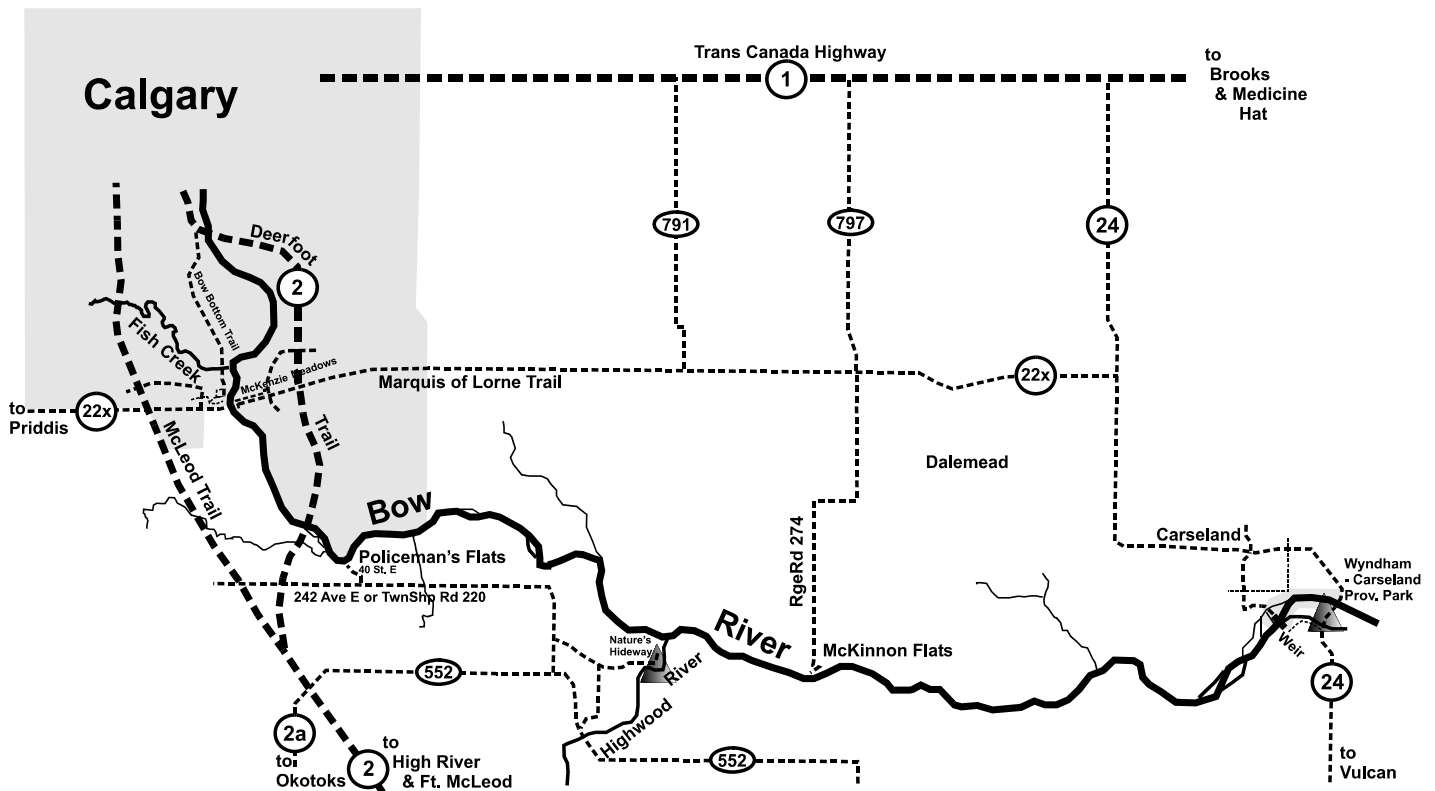
- * 52 km
- * ½ to 2 days

Classification

1. Rapids: Class I to II
2. Skill of Paddlers: Intermediate River, or Novice River with good leadership.



Looking north across the Bow at the Highwood Confluence, Aug. '97



Start

This report and run starts at the Fish Creek Provincial Park boat launch just 300 m upstream of the Marquis of Lorne Trail Bridge. The best access to this start is by following Bow Bottom Trail through to the boat launch. River access from the east is also possible from under the bridge for the Marquis of Lorne Trail, via McKenzie Meadows Drive.

Finish

Finish for this run is at the west end of Wyndham-Carseland Provincial Park, on Johnson's Island, on the north bank of the river. This point is reach by going south from the town of Carseland on Range Road 260. This road turns east and then drops down into the river valley and crosses onto Johnson's Island.

Intermediate Access and Distances

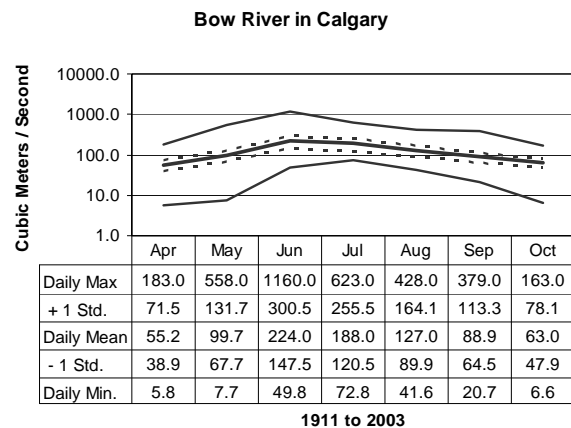
Location	Elevation meters	Km down	Km up	Km between	Access / Bank or Rapid / Class	MGRS	Gradient m/km
						datum	
						NAD 1983	
						Zone 11U	
	1006		-5				
Marquis of Lorne Trail		52	0			QS 103 423	
	991	51	1				2.5
						Zone 12 U	
	983	47	6				1.8
Policeman's Flats		44	8	8	right bank	TB 923 364	
	975	42	11				1.6
	968	39	13				2.5
	960	35	17				2.1
	953	30	22				1.4
Highwood River		28	24	16	right bank	UB 042 332	
	945	26	26				2.0
	937	23	30				2.4
McKinnon Flats		22	30	6	left bank	UB 097 315	
	930	18	34				1.6
	922	14	38				1.9
	914	5	47				0.9
	907	2	51				2.1
Johnson's Island		0	52	22	left channel	UB 272 334	
Carseland Weir						UB 280 330	

Gradient

This reach of the river flows pretty consistently to below McKinnon Flats. I'm suspect of the last contour line and average gradient as the river at most water levels does slow down above the weir, and branches out into a number of channels before Johnson's Island and the weir itself.

River Volume and Flow Rate

Rivers change over time, and especially rivers like the Bow that do not carry as much water as they did nearly 100 years ago when records were first kept. Thus normal ranges are now less than the chart to the right might suggest. This means that in this day and age, the best paddling is to be had on this reach with flows ranging from about 80 cms through to about 200 cms.



Maps

1 - First choice maps for the run would be the ARCA River Guide *The Middle Bow River: Ghost Dam to Carseland* and an *Alberta Road Map*.

2 - NTS 1:250,000	1:50,000
82 J Kananaskis Lakes	82 J/16 Priddis
82 I Gleichen	82 I/13 Dalmead (90% of this reach is on the 1:50,000 Dalmead sheet!)
	82 I/14 Gleichen

Camping

Public campgrounds are available at the end of this run in Wyndham-Carseland Provincial Park (403.934.3523), but below the weir. Nature's Hideway (403.938.8185) is about 1 km up the Highwood River, and could easily be lined up to.

Wilderness camping is practical all along this reach on any of the many islands, or below the high water mark once past the early summer high flows. Virtually of the land along this river is privately owned and permission should be sought if camping along the banks.

Wildlife

As you might guess from the "drift boat" picture below, this reach is a "fishing" reach. This reach of the Bow is world famous for rainbow trout, and is one of the few streams in Alberta that truly supports a sport fishing guiding industry. There are Bow River specific regulations for this fishery and anyone interested in fishing this reach must be familiar with the provincial regulations – seek guidance at the local fishing shop and in the annual provincial Fishing Guide.



Drift Boat on the Bow River, Aug. '97

If there are fish, there will be "fish eating krysters" as my old friend and paddling guide the late "Mister Kievitt" would say. Yes, bald eagles, pelicans, osprey and kingfishers can be spotted on this run. And given the open hills along much of the run, Red Tail and Swainson's hawks are likely to be seen soaring and hunting on any sunny day with a breeze. Besides the feathered and hairless fishermen on this run, with a little luck you might catch a glimpse of a mink, but more likely a beaver.

Trip Notes

This is a classic Calgary paddle. With a few river skills and some trained leadership, just about any paddler can tackle this run. If you're "self guided" and working your way up the river difficulty ladder, make sure you've paddled the middle and lower Red Deer, and the Bow through Calgary before trying an overnight down to Carseland. And if relatively new to all of this, when you set up your shuttle at Carseland, go over and have a look at the weir, and take a very good look at the channels into the take out on Johnson's Island. You do NOT want to miss the take out! Look at the pictures at the end of the previous report!

When I paddled the run down to McKinnon Flats a few years ago I was surprised at how much fast water, and how many bouncy, splashy small rapids there were. It was a great paddle on an early, hot August Sunday. As always with such runs keep a sharp eye out for those boulders that hide just under the surface, and sweepers or logjams (relatively infrequent) and take care around the bridge piers.

Given that the waters of the Bow usually come from the bottom of the reservoirs it does remain cold for a long way out of the mountains and past Calgary. The mouth of the Highwood River is a favorite lunch, or afternoon rest stop for the run down to McKinnon Flats. On hot days it can be hard to keep the younger, and even the older paddlers out of the water.

Other Reaches

See the previous report for the reach through Calgary. From Carseland to the Grand Forks, the confluence with the Oldman and formation of the South Saskatchewan river there is another 250 kilometers of paddling. Besides the Carseland weir to portage, there is Bassano Dam. One must consult the flow reports for any paddling below Bassano Dam. In dry years, during irrigation season, more than one paddler has found insufficient water below Bassano dam to float their boat! All of this lower run is easy paddling, with rapids to only Class I.

Other Local Activities or Destinations

A visit to the Bar U National Historic site west of High River can be a great way spend a non-paddling day. And my daughter (an editor for this guide), will always suggest a trip to the Calgary Zoo!

Rentals and Shuttles

Rentals:

Aquabatics 403.288.9283
Mountain Equipment Co-op 403.269.2420
Rocky Mountain Paddling Centre 403.202.8490
Sports Rent 403.292.0077
Undercurrents 403.262.4327
U of C Outdoor Program Centre 403.220.5038

Shuttles:

Louise Shotton Shuttle Service 403.282.5071
Bow River Shuttles 403.278.9165
Calgary Bow River Shuttle Service 403 510.0138



looking up the Bow River from the Highwood River confluence, Aug. '97