

North American Classic Route

Description



Mt. Assiniboine, North Ridge

Grade IV, 5.6

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Getting There:

If hiking: Take the Spray Lakes Road south from the center of Canmore for about 38km. This is asphalt at first, but soon turns into a well-maintained broad gravel road. Follow signs to Mt. Shark. There is a large parking lot here with toilets, and the heli pad is just above. The Watridge Lake trail leads north out of the parking lot (well signed), and eventually drops down to the lake where it crosses a bridge over Bryant Creek to join with the Bryant Creek trail. There are many XC ski trails criss-crossing this area, but just stay on the main trail. (horses). The Bryant Creek trail is relatively flat for the first 10km, with water available at intervals. The most convenient water is a spigot at the Bryant Creek Shelter. Follow signs to Assiniboine Pass, and drop down to the Lake. You can check in with the warden by hiking a couple of km south to the warden cabin, stopping by the lodge to inquire about space available in the RC Hind hut, and pay for your spaces there if desired.

By helicopter: Get the latest phone numbers and extensive information on helicopter access to Lake Magog by searching for "Mt. Assiniboine Lodge" on the web. The helicoptered leaves Canmore and Mt. Shark only on certain days of the week. You can inquire in Canmore as well.

Approaching the RC Hind Hut:

(1) The Gmoser Highway:

Continue on the tourist trail around the north side of Lake Magog until well past the campgrounds. A sign directs you to the right at a "Y" in the trail, which is now much smaller. The trail climbs above the meadows to enter a large talus slope. Head for an obvious dark gully up and right in the first cliff band. Climb it (often running water), and continue on the same grade to a second higher band, where another big gully permits passage. Now watch for the frequent cairns as you gain ever higher ledges, then traverse horizontally for a long distance to a round snow field. Follow the path of least resistance across it or below it, and continue traversing almost to the edge looking down on the central snow couloir. Some 4th class climbing on blocky rock leads up, then right, then up again over several small cliff bands. Some passages look highly unlikely, but look carefully for the cairns. If you encounter climbing beyond 4th class you are off route! After breaking through the rock bands, several trails lead up talus and onto a morainal area where you can clearly see the monster cairns on a black shelf above. Traverse around to the left of the shelf, then up a final talus slope to the hut. 3 hours from Lk. Magog.

(2) The Central Couloir:

Continue on the tourist trail around the north side of Lake Magog until well past the campgrounds. At the sign at a "Y" in the trail, take the left fork. The trail leads over the old terminal moraines

of the glacier, then up to the tongue of the couloir. It would have been wise to inquire about conditions, and study it with binoculars from the lake before committing to this approach. Although technically easy, there are significant hazards from rockfall, especially late in the day, and from undercutting of the snow by a running stream. The hazard is similar to crevasses on a glacier, but if you drop through here, you could be washed under the snow. This approach is now rarely used, and not recommended in summer.

THE CLIMB:

Contour toward the mountain from the hut, then drop down a moraine to the basin below. Depending on snow cover, the most efficient path around the basin might cross some flat snow. Look for a big cairn on the lower part of the ridge above, and aim for it on one of the many faint trails on this 'angle of repose' talus slope. Once on the ridge crest, follow a good trail up to the bottom of the first rock band, where a short fun steep section gets you onto the ridge proper. The route stays pretty close to the ridge from here up to the red band, but many variations are used, including climbing on the face to the right on solid rock. This involves lots of weaving back and forth on ledges. The face often has good snow slopes that allow rapid progress in the morning with crampons, but are unsafe on a summer afternoon. Approach the Red Band via a right-tending ramp to the narrowest section of the Band, which you should have noted from well below and kept in your sights. The passage through the Red Band could be 4th-class rock, or snow & ice, depending on conditions. There is a fixed anchor at the top used for rappelling. Above this, do an easy traverse left on a ledge (often snow underlain with ice), to rejoin the ridge. Stick close to the ridge the rest of the way to the top, the only exception being a short traverse to the right at the base of the Gray Band from a fixed anchor at the base of an obvious steep gendarme. There are many fixed anchors along the ridge, useful more on the descent. Move around the corner to the right about 10m to an obvious line of weakness through the Gray Band. The pitch goes steeply up a corner on good horizontal holds. There are adequate fixed pins for this pitch. Above this there are at least two more steep sections of 5th-class; the rest is all third-class. The angle relents in a few more rope-lengths, then it's a narrow snow ridge to the top. What appears to be the summit off to the left as you climb the upper part of the ridge is not - the real summit is 3-4 ropelengths further to the south.

Note: It is possible to stay closely on route for most of the climb by following crampon scratchings on the rocks. There are also many cairns, but not all these are reliable.

Gear suggestions (summer only):

- Ice axe and crampons (any season, any conditions)
- 6 regular length (24") slings
- Wires, small to medium (5)
- Chocks, a few medium
- Cams, small to #2 Camalot (5)
- Ice screws, 2
- 8mm x 60m rope (use doubled for leading, simul-climbing, and rappels)