

Cooking Lake- Blackfoot

Provincial Recreation Area

Winter Trails

The 97 square kilometre Cooking Lake-Blackfoot Provincial Recreation Area contains forests, pastures and wetlands. It is a multiple use area that supports a variety of activities, including agriculture, wildlife management, natural gas extraction and outdoor recreation. Active wildlife management programs in the area have created a wide range of habitats that support numerous wildlife species. Recreational opportunities include horseback riding, cross-country skiing, hiking, mountain biking and snowmobiling. The area provides excellent wildlife viewing opportunities along its more than 170 km of equestrian and cross-country ski trails.

Cooking Lake-Blackfoot Provincial Recreation Area is the site of the **Canadian Birkebeiner Ski Festival**, held each year in February.



Photo Credit: Delbert Kostura
Canadian Birkebeiner Society



Forget how close you are to the city!



Recreational Use

- Cooking Lake-Blackfoot is open daily from 7:00 a.m. until 11:00 p.m.
- Garbage receptacles are not provided along trails or in backcountry areas; please pack out all garbage.
- Open fires are permitted only in firepits and stoves provided; for cooking, portable stoves are recommended.
- Staging areas are equipped with shelters and privies; the cisterns and handpumps provided at staging areas are inoperable during winter months; potable water is not provided in the backcountry.
- Do not disturb wildlife herds in fields.
- Leave all gates as you find them.
- Do not approach, harass or attempt to feed wildlife or livestock.
- Keep your pet on a leash at all times.
- To prevent travel problems and conflicts with other users, please respect all cautionary & trail closure signs.
- Snowshoeing is allowed, except on track-set ski trails.
- Skating is available at Waskehegan Staging Area behind the cook shelter.
- If you encounter a steel animal trap, do not remove or tamper with it; a registered trap line is used to manage problem wildlife, especially beaver (beavers breed rapidly, cause extensive damage to trails and other facilities, and are responsible for flooding nearby farms and residential lands).

Hunting

- Permitted during hunting season (valid hunting licence required for the kind of wildlife & the wildlife management unit to which the open season applies); Aboriginal hunting may occur in the area year-round.
- Discharging firearms is not permitted within 400 metres of staging areas (boundaries are identified by bright orange-yellow signs), or within 200 metres of backcountry shelters.
(Note: under the *Provincial Parks Act*, bows are considered to be firearms.)
- Discharge Permits are available at the Blackfoot Recreation Area Administration office (780-922-3293). If no one is in the office, leave your name and number for contact.

Travel on recreation area trails can be hazardous. Weather can change quickly; many of the trails are remote and are not patrolled on a regular basis; it is important that you be prepared by carrying the following in your pack or saddlebag:

- first aid kit
- warm clothes
- extra food & drinks
- headlamp or flashlight
- lighter or matches
- pocket knife
- whistle
- map & compass
- hoof pick & leather sticker (equestrian users)
- extra ski tip (x-c skiers)
- if possible, a cell phone

Hypothermia & Frostbite

Hypothermia, the lowering of body temperature, is caused by exposure to cold and can occur even on relatively warm days; as the body cools, it loses its ability to function normally; symptoms include shivering, confusion and clumsiness; to avoid hypothermia, keep warm and dry; dress in layers of loose-fitting clothing and wear a hat; carry extra socks and an extra sweater or warm jacket.

Frostbite is the freezing of living tissue; fingers, feet, ears, nose & cheeks are most susceptible; the first sign of frostbite is the skin turning red, then suddenly becoming a grayish-white colour; to treat frostbite, gently warm the area by breathing on it or placing it under an armpit; avoid rubbing or massaging the skin - this can destroy skin cells.





Trail Information

Cross-country ski trails

- Trails are packed & groomed regularly, as snow conditions warrant. Dogs are not permitted on track-set trails.
- There are trails for both novice & advanced skiers: 65 km track-set; 35 km packed for skating; numerous non-groomed trails; trails are double-tracked for 2-way traffic; warm-up shelters are provided along trails.
- Skiers should keep left when passing & step off to the right when stopping; downhill traffic has right-of-way; use caution when approaching steep slopes & bridges.

Equestrian trails

- Pastures, alleyways & winter equestrian trails may be used for horseback riding (alleyways are also used by snowmobiles); for a quieter ride, use marked equestrian trails from Central & Waskehegan staging areas; Blackfoot staging area trails are closed to horses from Nov. 1 to Mar. 31; Roundup, Wapiti & Winter (North) trails are normally set with 1 track, except during the Canadian Birkebeiner Ski Festival in February, when 2 tracks are set.

Snowmobiling

- Snowmobile areas can be accessed from Waskehegan & Central staging areas only; snow machines must be transported to staging areas on trailers; there are designated fields, as well as approximately 17 km of trails for snowmobiling (there must be at least 25 cm of compacted snow before snowmobiling is permitted on the trails; in the area), selected fields are open for use when there is sufficient snow, as indicated by signs at each field entrance; **snowmobiles are not allowed on equestrian, cross-country ski & boundary trails.**

Dogsledding

- Available from Blackfoot Staging Area.



Waskehegan Staging Area

The first four loops follow gently undulating terrain for 14 km and are ideal for families with children. Rest stops are spaced along the first three loops and there's a larger shelter at Lost Lake/ Meadow junction. Pockets of spruce in low areas along trails are evidence of the mixed boreal forest that used to dominate this area.

Ski trails

Detour (2.1 km) - shortens Wanisan loop, following ungulate fence on the inside.

Don's Way (3.7 km) - runs along boundary fence from Spruce Hollow to Wanisan junction; used for mini-Birkie.

Flattail (0.1 km) - named for the beaver that live in the area (& sometimes drop trees along the trail).

Grouse (1.2 km) - named for one of the area's bird species.

Hare (0.8 km) - watch for snowshoe hares along this connector between Siksika & Lost Lake trails.

Lakeside (1.0 km) - follows east side of Wanisan Lake outside ungulate fence.

Lost Lake (14.9 km) - connects Islet & Waskehegan staging areas.

Meadow (0.8 km) - short connector with views of grazing fields; white-tailed deer & moose are sometimes seen.

Neon Lake (1.6 km) - an easy trail that circles part of Neon Lake.

North Trail (0.4 km) - part of an old road, most of which was renamed Blackfoot Trail in the early 1980s.

Siksika (4.6 km) - remote trail in hilly terrain, with numerous beaver ponds; moose are sometimes seen along this trail.

Spruce Hollow (2.4 km) - passes through some of the few spruce untouched by fire in the early 1900s.

Waskehegan (1.3 km) - connects forests north & south of grazing fields; equestrian use permitted north of Central Trail junction.

Wanisan (4.5 km) - portion runs near east shore of Wanisan Lake; main trail section does not receive regular maintenance & is outside the ungulate fence.



Equestrian trails

Baker Springs (1.3 km) - location of a natural mineral lick used by animals in the area.

Blackfoot (25.5 km) - longest equestrian trail in the area; extends from Waskehegan to Blackfoot Staging Areas.

Cutoff (0.5 km) - connecting trail between Blackfoot & Waskehegan trails; continues into Elk Island National Park; equestrian use is not permitted north of Elk Island boundary fence.

J.J. (0.9 km) - begins at gate in northwest corner near Range Rd. 210; connects onto Blackfoot Trail.

Running Dog (3.0 km) - runs along north shore of Running Dog Lake; group shelter just off the trail.

Swan (0.7 km) - named for swans often observed in the area during summer months; link from N.U.L. north to shelter on Running Dog Lake.

Waskehegan (1.3 km) - equestrian use permitted north of junction with Central Trail.

Winter (3.7 km - South 2.4 km; North 1.3 km) - excellent wildlife viewing; south portion is for skiing, north portion is for both equestrian use & skiing.

Central Staging Area

Skiers & equestrian users share portions of these trails; skiers meeting horses should stop & step aside to allow them to pass. Moose Link Trail connects Central & Islet Lake staging areas. Trails around Central are fairly flat, with one major hill on Beaver Loop heading west from Central staging area.

Beaver Loop (2.6 km) - active beaver colonies are numerous along this easy trail.

Central Alleyway (16.8 km) - main alleyway connecting Waskehegan & Central staging areas; can be accessed from either end.

Roundup (5.1 km) - links trails in Central area to those in Blackfoot area; shared by equestrian users & skiers.

Tie-In (1.1 km) - this easy route joins Beaver Loop & Roundup trails.

Wapiti (6.6 km) - passes through one of the best areas for elk viewing.



Blackfoot Staging Area

Most of these trails are packed but not track-set, allowing free-style skiers to avoid conflicts with classic & touring skiers and dogsledders. Trails are challenging & very scenic; excellent wildlife viewing. This staging area is closed to equestrian use from Nov. 1 until Mar. 31.

Buck Run (2.3 km) - good wildlife viewing along this trail, especially for white-tailed deer.

Elkhorn (1.6 km) - the large 6-point antler this trail is named for can be viewed at the Waskehegan Friends of the Blackfoot Heritage Interpretive Centre.

Faraway (5.2 km) - used for practice & preparation for dogsled racing events.

Heron Hollow (2.1 km) - short connector through Blackfoot Lake drainage on Norris Creek; named for blue herons that frequent the area.

Muskkrat (1.1 km) - longer loops can be made using this trail & equestrian trails in the Blackfoot area.

Morningside (1.3 km) - follows gas transmission line & provides access to loops of varying length.

Norris Ridge (2.1 km) - follows ridge above Norris Creek.

Outlet (0.5 km) - provides access to ungulate fence from northeast loop of Blackfoot Trail.

Springs (2.4 km) - provides access to Ukrainian Cultural Centre via Elk Island boundary.

Well Site (1.0 km) - there's access to the ungulate fence from this abandoned well site.

Whitetail (3.1 km) - be on the lookout for white-tailed deer along this trail.



Blackfoot Staging Area

More than 30 km of x-c ski trails can be accessed from this staging area. Two short loops with small hills (Highline & Middle trails) are for novice skiers; trails around Elk Push Lake are more difficult. Islet & Waskehegan trails are linked through Elk Push shelter.

Highline (2.4 km) - mainly follows ridge crests; excellent bird watching.

Lost Lake (14.9 km) - connects Islet & Waskehegan staging areas.

Middle (1.3 km) - allows several loops of varying lengths to be made in the Islet Lake area.

Moose Link (2.5 km) - Islet Lake trails can be accessed from Central Staging Area using this trail; named for unusual moose antlers found along the route (antlers on display at the Heritage Interpretive Centre office).

Porcupine (0.8 km) - many porcupines in the area; keep pets on leash to avoid nasty vet bills!

Push Lake (1.9 km) - this hilly trail accesses the west side of Elk Push Lake; dividing ridge between Islet & Elk Push lakes; excellent viewpoint.



Photo Credit: Delbert Kostura, Canadian Birkebeiner Society



Additional Information

Cooking Lake-Blackfoot
Provincial Recreation Area
P.O. Box 57104 Eastgate Post Office
Sherwood Park, AB T8A 5L7
Information line: 780-922-4676
Fax: 780-922-5554
Emergencies only: 780-922-3287, or call 911

To obtain assistance in an emergency, use the pay phone at the recreation area office; to reach area staff, call 780-922-3287; call 911 to reach police or other emergency help. Be prepared to give a detailed description of the incident, your location and any action you have already taken.

Visit the Parks & Protected Areas Web site at
www.cd.gov.ab.ca/parks