

DRIVING **MOUNTAIN** **HIGHWAYS**

Featuring: BC & Alberta Mountain Highway Routes



BY: RON HAIDENGER

DRIVING

Mountain Highways

Every year, many people drive to the mountains for camping and to appreciate the beautiful scenery. However, driving in the mountains can be stressful and risky, especially for those who are not accustomed to it. To ensure safety, it is important to be aware of the unique challenges of mountain driving.

Driving Mountain Highways provides helpful tips and information, as well as special assistance for those driving or towing an RV.

BC & Alberta Mountain Highway Routes

For those travelling through the Rocky and Coastal Mountain Ranges of Western Canada, maps and route descriptions help guide you safely to your destination.

About the book

This book's first release, "Fall & Winter - Through The Canadian Rockies" was written to help Canadians wintering in RVs get to warmer climates on the BC coast during the Covid travel restrictions. Its ongoing popularity has identified a broader need for "flatlanders" venturing into the mountains and finding driving conditions very different.

This second release, renamed "Driving Mountain Highways" is really two books in one.

Section 1 addresses mountain driving in general terms that apply to all mountain highways, everywhere. Just some of the topics it addresses are road grades and how to read the signs, the safest way to ascend and descend steep grades, selecting the best roads for your vehicle, and how to deal with extreme road conditions.

Section 2 goes back to the book's roots and provides a detailed look at the various routing options for RVers and others tackling the impressive mountains of western Canada. Not only does this provide route-specific details, it also alerts you on things to consider when planning your mountain routes, wherever they may be.

Regardless of your mode of transportation, if it rolls on wheels, and you are heading into the mountains, this book will have value and help make your journey safer and less stressful.



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Introduction

If you seldom drive in mountainous terrain the highways can be intimidating. You have dramatic elevation changes, winding roads, and, at certain times of the year, severe weather conditions. If you are driving or towing an RV, the intimidation arrow tips off the scale.



Fortunately, you are not totally without options in terms of minimizing these concerns. You may have some control over when you travel or which roads you take, plus you can take steps to ensure you and your RV are as prepared as possible.

In **Driving Mountain Highways** we'll look at popular routes through the mountains and alternate routes for many of the most common destinations. Factors such as how windy a road is, its elevation changes and the amount of traffic all impact ease of travel.

We'll also consider the impact of the seasons, such as when RV and tourism traffic is heavy in certain areas or where weather impacts road conditions and how your vehicle must be equipped. If you are towing or driving an RV the style and evaluation change can have a major impact in the fall and winter.

And lastly, are you and your vehicles prepared for the roads ahead? Climbing steep grades in the summer heat results in many overheated engines sitting along the roadside, a flat tire in town is an inconvenience but a major problem in the mountains where there may not be cellular coverage, and, is your vehicle even legal to drive when and where you want to go?

Section 1

Mountain Driving

Mountain driving is different from urban or flatland driving in a number of ways.

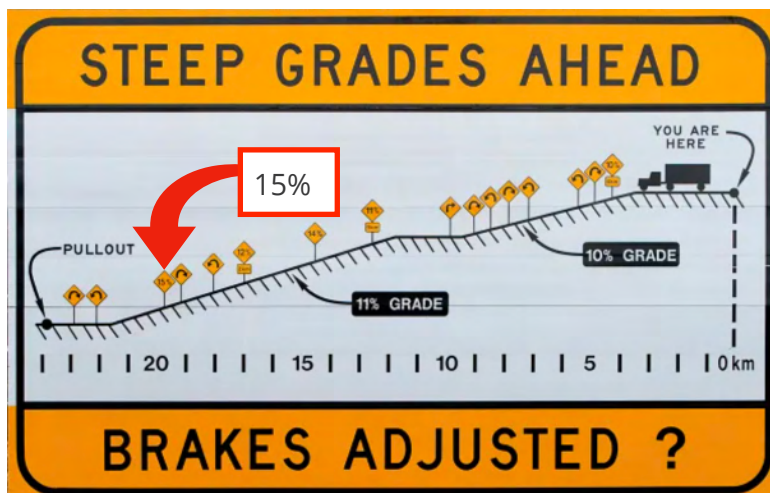
- The terrain often results in winding and hilly roads, with steep grades and blind curves.
- Mountain weather can be unpredictable. Sudden changes in temperature and precipitation, sometimes in the form of snow, can intensify driving conditions.
- Though mountain roads are often less congested than urban roads, they can still be busy during peak travel times and passing can be difficult or even impossible.
- Mountain roads are more demanding on vehicles, especially those which are large, heavier, and have a high centre of gravity.

In this section of *Driving Mountain Highways*, we'll examine each of these and address how to approach and manage them.

Making the Grade

Mountain grades can make it difficult to maintain a consistent speed, reduce traction, and put a lot of additional stress on your brakes and engine.

Gear selection or management is important both going up and down steep and long grades. In the summer heat, it is important to watch your engine temperature and, if necessary, stop and allow your engine to cool down. And, when descending long steep grades, take it slow and manage braking as appropriate for the type of braking system used on your vehicle.



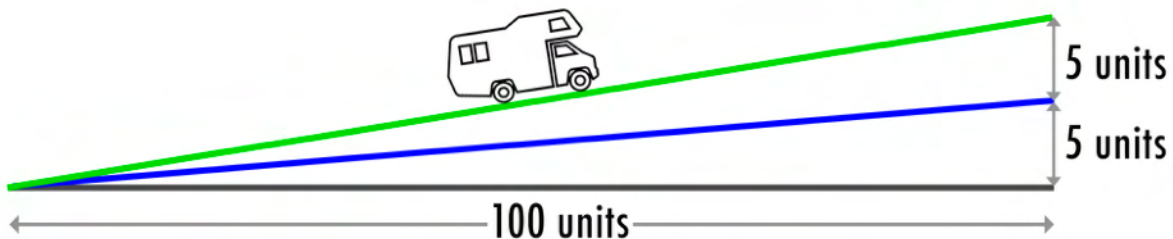
Grade warning signs help you in managing steep grades safely. They advise you, ahead of time, what to expect in terms of grade (elevation change) and sometimes the length of the grade. It is important that you understand the meaning of these grade warnings and heed them.

So, what exactly do they mean?



A grade warning sign can be a diamond-shaped traffic sign with a yellow background and black lettering or a larger sign indicating multiple grades. It may or may not indicate the grade in a percent format, and it may or may not include a vehicle image. Regardless of the vehicle displayed on the sign, it is applicable to all.

The indicated grade percentage is based upon a calculation of the amount of incline or decline in elevation proportionate to a given distance, using the formula: $\text{elevation change} / \text{distance} = \text{grade} (\%)$.



Using the illustrated example, the distance of 100 units, which could represent 100 yards, meters, miles or kilometres, and two elevation rises of 5 of the same units each.

Base to blue elevation: $100 / 5 = 5\%$ grade
 Base to green elevation: $100 / 10 = 10\%$ grade

Handling steep inclines & declines

These signs indicate the severity of an elevation change so when you see this sign, slow down if necessary, downshift to the appropriate gear and be aware of engine and/or brake heat build-up. Being prepared for the grade ahead of time is the key.

How best to handle steep grades is largely dependent on the vehicle you are driving. A car may take little in terms of preparation or handling change while a large RV will be very different.

When climbing a long hill, use the lowest gear possible to increase power. If your vehicle is equipped with some form of power mode, such as "tow mode", use it especially if hauling a heavy load.

When going down a long hill, use the engine to slow your vehicle down by downshifting to a lower gear. Avoid using the brakes too much, as this can cause them to overheat and fail. If you do need to use the brakes (hydraulic), use them smoothly and gradually.

If your vehicle is equipped with some form of braking assist, such as an engine brake, engage it beforehand to preset a safe descent speed. Press the brake pedal firmly when

you feel the vehicle is starting to pick up too much speed. Do not pump or ride the brakes and maintain awareness of your air pressure. If you feel the brakes start to fade, pull over.

If you find your engine temperature climbing on a steep uphill grade in the summer or you are experiencing a lack of power, turn off your air conditioning.

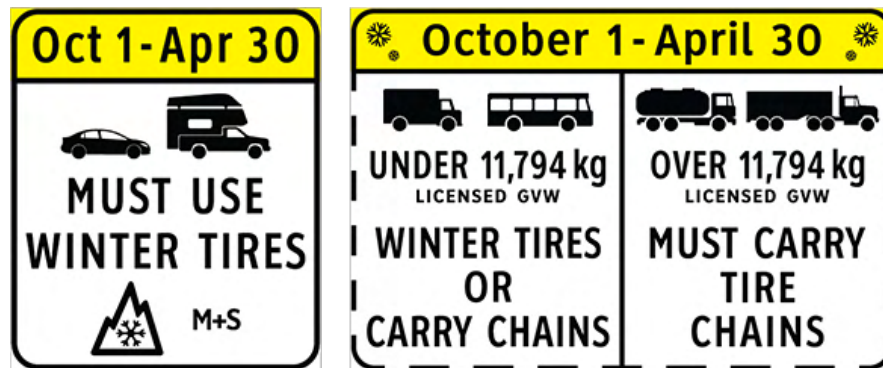
A common term in heavy highway trucking is to go down a hill in the same gear used to climb it. Preselecting the right gear can dramatically reduce the need to use your brakes.

Traction Time

Fall and winter bring snow and ice conditions to mountain highways and specific tire and traction requirements come into effect in most areas with mountain highways. You must check the laws and requirements for the areas you plan to drive in.

British Columbia's requirements are pretty standard and demonstrate a base for what's required in most areas.

From October 1 to April 30, all vehicles travelling on BC highways, outside urban areas, must be equipped with winter tires labelled with a mountain/snowflake symbol or the mud and snow (M+S) symbol, and the tires must have a minimum tread depth of 3.5 mm. This applies to all vehicles, including those with four or all-wheel drive.



Vehicles not fitted with the proper winter tires may be fined or could face other consequences if involved in an accident.

It's important to note that these requirements apply to designated mountain highways, which are identified by signs posted along the road. Drivers should also be aware that winter driving conditions can change quickly and unexpectedly, and should always be prepared for the worst.

Note: Many large RVs, such as diesel pushers, carry chains rather than put on winter tires. This may not satisfy the letter of the law.

Mountain Driving Tips

Driving mountain highways is best in the summer, but that is also when traffic is heaviest and more RVs and scenic gazers are on the road. Driving in the winter makes for less traffic but also more challenging road and weather conditions.

- ☑ Prepare your vehicle before departure. A pre-trip mechanical inspection of the vehicle and tires is a smart trouble-saver and make sure you have the proper tires for your drive, such as proper snow tires for winter driving rather than all-season tires designed for urban roads.
- ☑ Plan ahead, so you know exactly where you are going and how to get there, check the weather forecast and pack accordingly.
- ☑ Let someone know your route and when you expect to arrive.
- ☑ Be prepared for changing conditions and emergencies. Mountain weather can change quickly, regardless of the season, so be prepared for anything. Bring a hard copy map in addition to your GPS device in case of cell phone service outages. Dress in layers, so you can adjust to changing temperatures. Bring sunglasses and sunscreen to protect yourself from the sun.
- ☑ Carry emergency supplies such as extra water, a blanket and a first aid kit. You should also have a good spare tire along with all the tools and knowledge to enable a roadside tire change.
- ☑ In winter, bring a shovel and some form of traction aid such as tire chains, some sand and emergency warning triangles or flares.
- ☑ Obey the speed limit. Speeding is dangerous, especially on mountain roads. Be aware of your surroundings and take breaks often to rest and stretch.
- ☑ Be patient. Mountain roads can be slow-going, so be patient and don't tailgate other drivers.
- ☑ Enjoy the scenery! Mountain highways offer some of the most beautiful scenery in the world, so take some time to appreciate it.

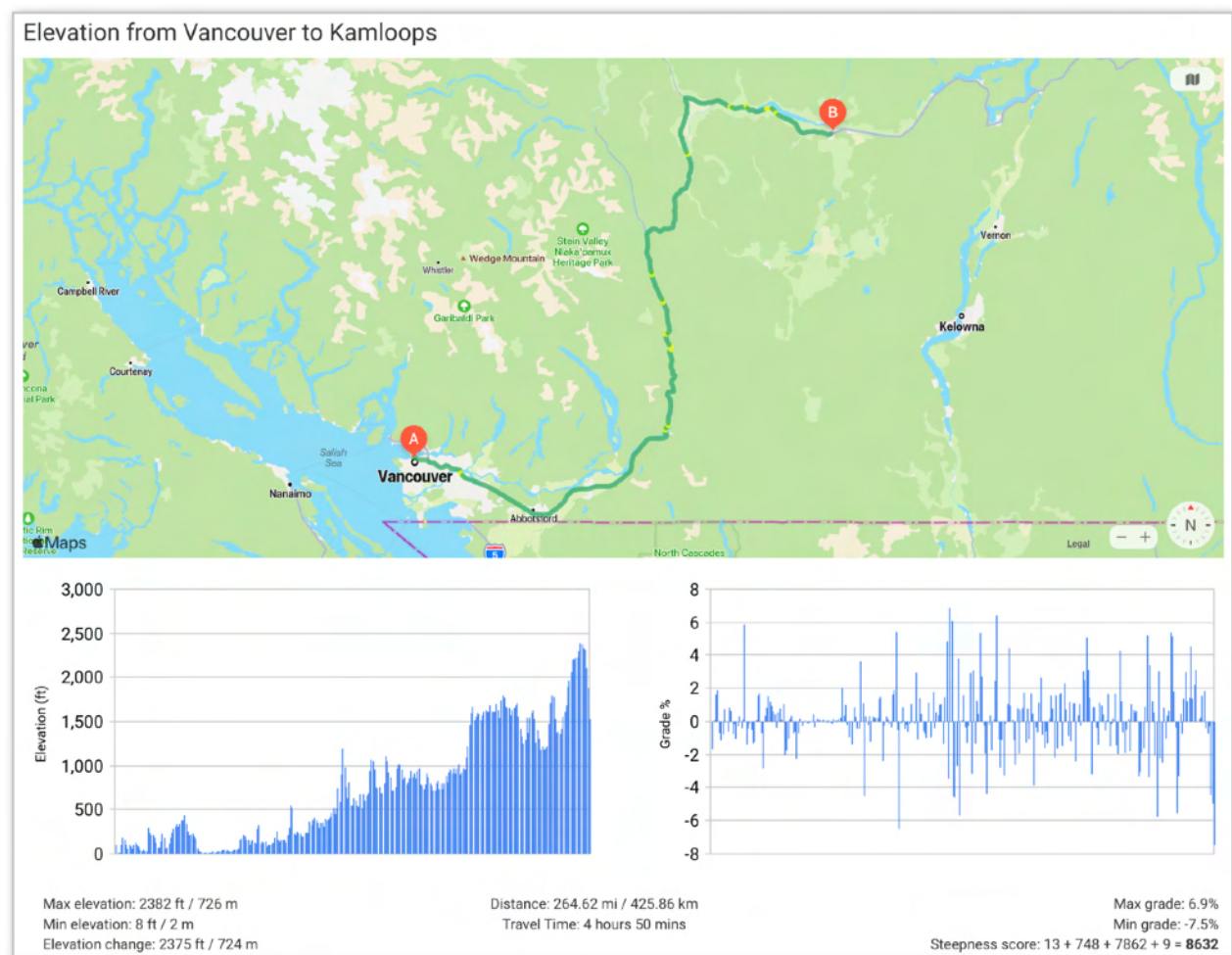
Mountain (and other) Driving Resources

Flattest Route

Flattest Routes (<https://www.flattestroute.com/>) is a website that helps you find the flattest route between two points. It is a great resource to help choose between multiple mountain highway routes.

The website calculates the difficulty of a route, including the elevation gain, the distance, and topography and displays it in a chart. A map, indicating the route, also contains colour coding to highlight the most difficult sections.

The following shows the Flattest Route screen for the highway between Vancouver and Kamloops, BC.



The yellow patches along the highway indicate 5-10% elevation changes and if you mouse over lines in the graphs, their location and elevation data are indicated on the map.

Flattest Routes is a free service that is available to anyone. It is a great resource for anyone who wants to find the flattest routes between two points.

Mountain Directory



The Mountain Directory is a series of two books (east and west) and apps that provide information about mountain passes and steep grades in the United States (*not available for Canada*). These are commercial products, not free.

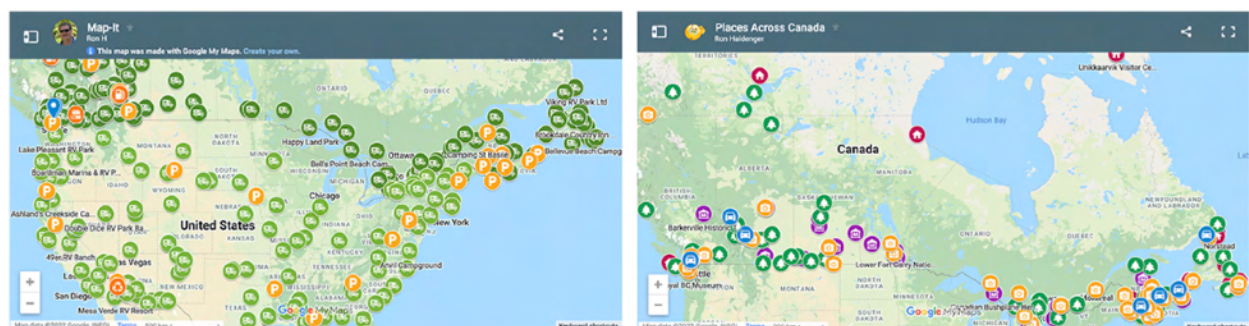
The Mountain Directory books and apps provide information on about 700 mountain passes and the steep grades in 22 states. The information includes the location of the passes, the length and steepness of the grade. It also indicates the type of road, and the presence of any escape ramps, switchbacks, or sharp curves.

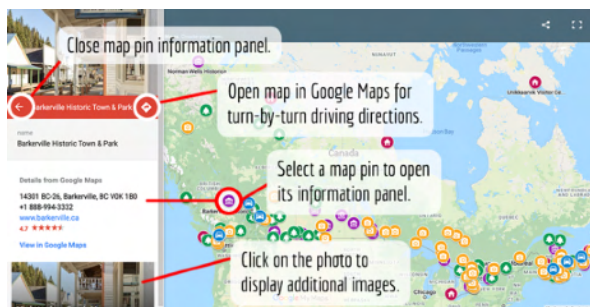
The Mountain Directory books and apps are a valuable resource for anyone who drives in mountainous areas in the US. The information can help you plan your route, avoid dangerous passes, and be prepared for the challenges of mountain driving.

The Mountain Directory books are available for purchase on the author's website (<https://mountaindirectory.com/>), and the Mountain Directory apps are available for purchase and download on the App Store and Google Play.

Places Across Canada & Map-it Campgrounds

“Places Across Canada” and “Map-it Campgrounds” are not mountain travel specific but useful to both flatland and mountain travellers. These are interactive maps of places of interest and campgrounds. Each entry is indicated by a map pin and when you click on a pin, a window displays information on that location.

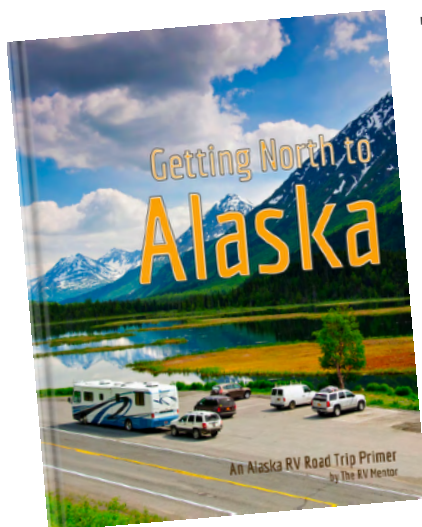




These maps are free services, accessible through the Travel page of the “The RV Mentor” website.

(<https://www.thervmentor.com/travel>)

Getting North to Alaska



"Getting North to Alaska" is a digital book describing the highways going north through BC to the Yukon and Alaska. Though it is not mountain driving specific, it does cover a number of mountainous routes going to the north.

The book is divided into 3 sections; one providing valuable travel information and links, another showing the available routes through western Canada and up through the Yukon to Alaska, and a third detailing a suggested route to and from Alaska that takes the guesswork out of maximizing a northern adventure.

The book is published as a PDF document and can be downloaded free of charge from the FILES section of either the "Yukon & NWT Travel" (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/yukon.nwt.travel>) or "The RV Mentor" (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/thervmentor>) Facebook group.



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Section 2

Western Canadian Mountainous Routes

There are many highways through the mountains and covering them all would be confusing, but the major ones are all covered from the western communities of Alberta, where the mountains start, to the west coast at Vancouver.



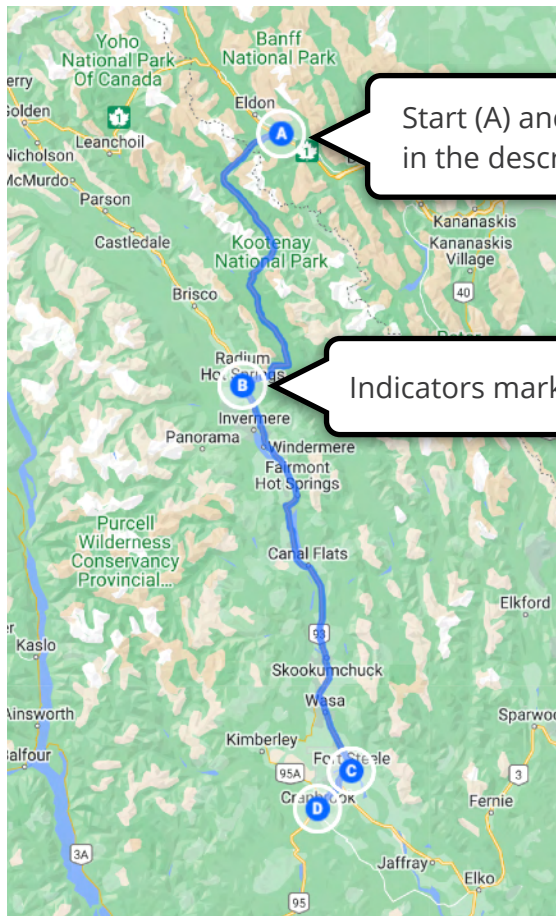
We cover the longer and more major routes first, such as the Trans-Canada Highway from Canmore, AB to Vancouver, Hinton to Prince George, and Pincher Creek to Vancouver. With these major east-west routes covered, we'll then address the various connectors between them as well as alternate and secondary routes.

In addition to indicating the routes, we'll also look at the elevation changes, alerting you to elevation grades and distances through informative charts.

Reading Routes Info

Each route description includes explanatory text, a map visualizing the route, an elevation and grade chart and a Google Maps link that empowers you with additional information and flexibility in using the data.

Map

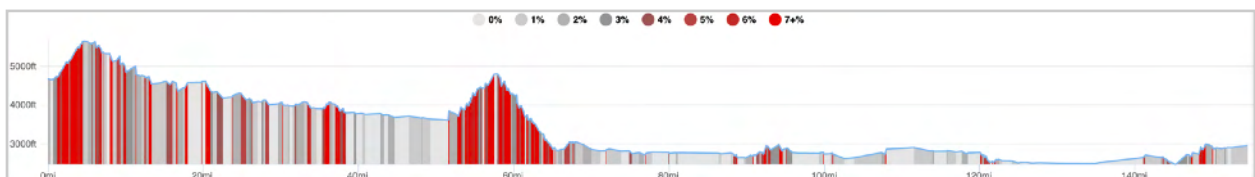


Start (A) and end points indicate the direction of travel used in the description.

Indicators mark key points along the route.

Route maps created in Google's "My Maps".

Elevation



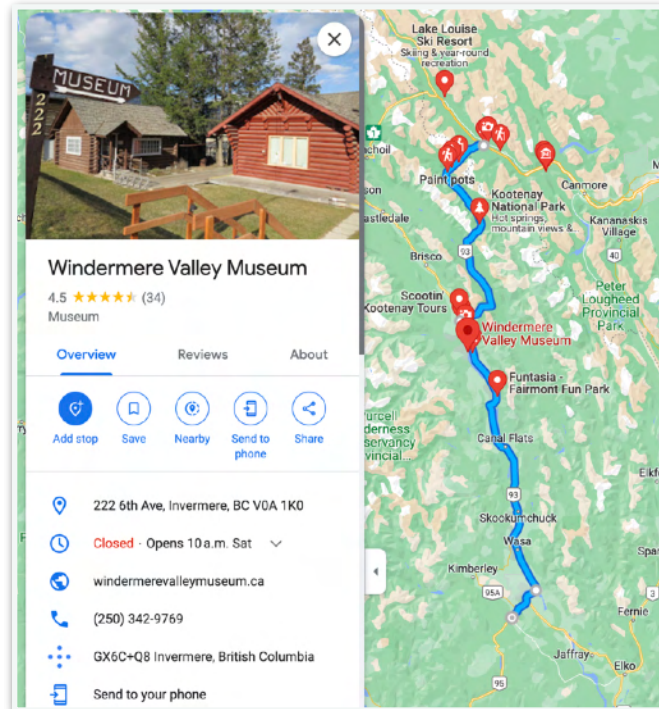
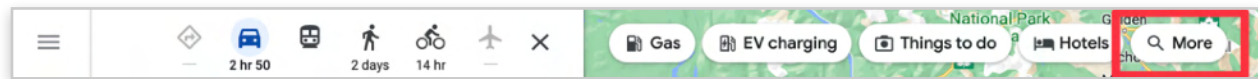
Elevation graphs created in RV Life Trip Wizard.

Elevation changes from the start to the end of each route are displayed visually, with colour indicators of the road grade.

Maps Link

Google Maps link: <https://goo.gl/maps/HVzvPoFrLSZXeBfd7>

Each route includes a link to Google Maps. With the route displayed in Google Maps, click the More button, along the top of the map to indicate available services.



The “More” button enables the identification of hotels and campgrounds, food and fuel, and attractions available along the route.

Click on any of the Search buttons and the selected items will appear as pins on the map. Click on any of the pins to view data and contact information for that location.

Hinton to Tête Jaune Cache

Google Maps link: <https://goo.gl/maps/QECuDchsPWxoFv6B6>

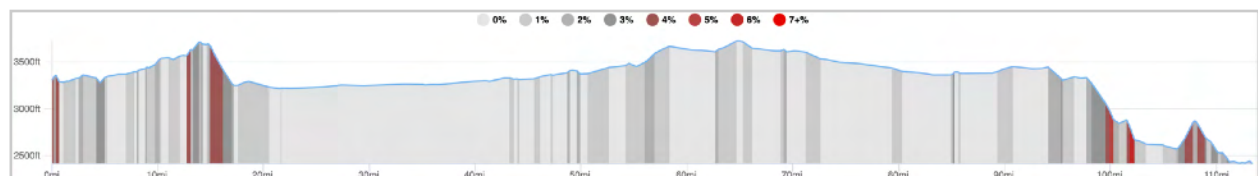
Hinton, AB lies on Hwy-16, 288 km west of Edmonton, in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. It is the starting point for travellers heading to Kamloops via Hwy-5 or continuing on Hwy-16 to Prince George. These two routes split at Tête Jaune Cache.



The most notable town along this route is Jasper, but there are a couple of other items to be aware of. Upon entering Jasper National Park, watch the speed limit and keep a sharp eye out for wildlife. There are often mountain sheep and elk between the eastern park entrance and the town of Jasper. Due to safety concerns with wildlife on the road and people stopping to view them, the RCMP keeps a tight reign on traffic flowing through this area.

On the west side of Jasper, you also find the northern end of Hwy-93, the Icefield Parkway.

In the summer, traffic can be extremely heavy in the Jasper area with lots of RVs and tourists from around the globe.



There is not a lot of elevation change along this route. You start out at about 990 m and the road does not change in elevation a great deal until you drop about 200 m a short distance before Tête Jaune Cache.

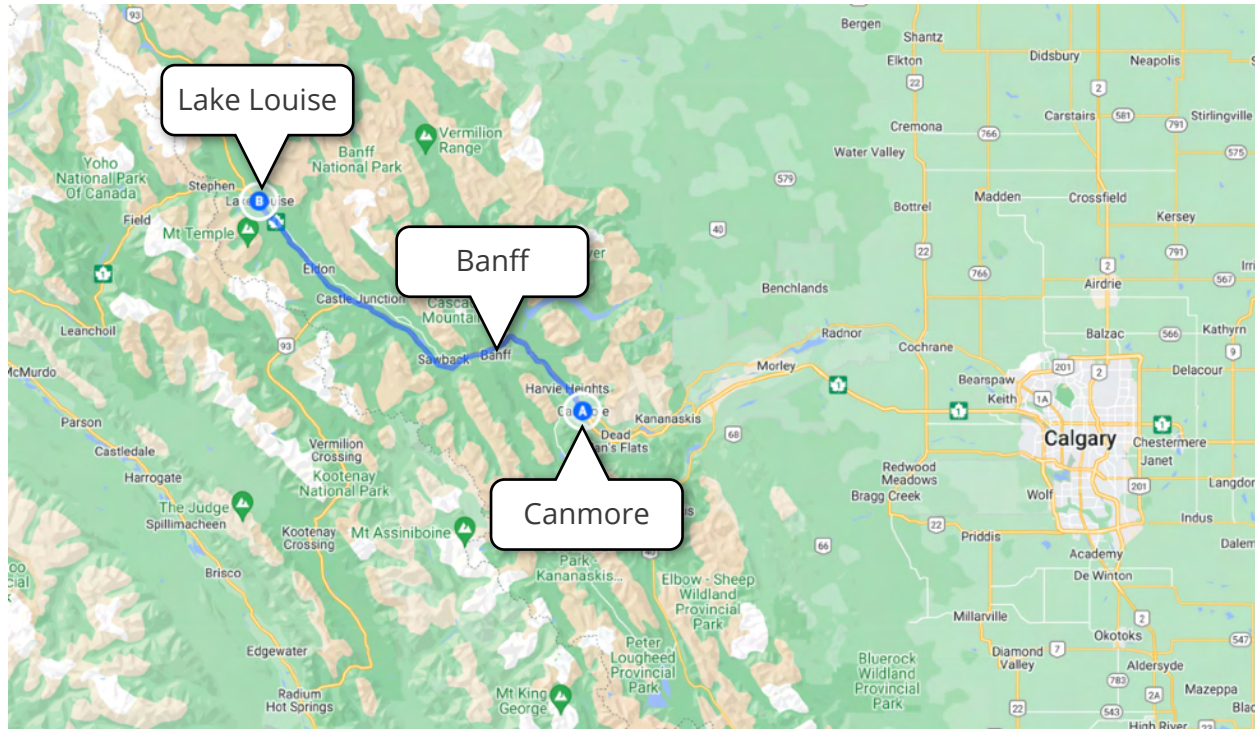
There is a good deal of snowfall in this area, but winter driving conditions are generally good.

At Tête Jaune Cache, you can continue on to Prince George, but I have not included that road segment in this book as there is no notable elevation change other than a few smaller hills. This is however a heavy snowfall area and fairly isolated most of the way.

Canmore to Lake Louise

Google Maps link: <https://goo.gl/maps/4octnmwr7zwCvLYk7>

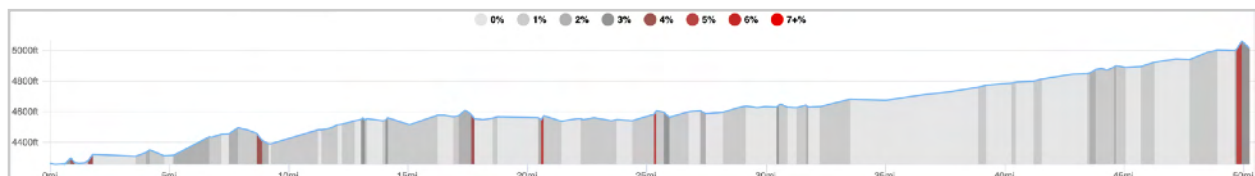
Canmore, AB is located on the Trans-Canada Hwy, 102 km west of Calgary. It is nestled in the foothills at the base of the Rockies.



It does not matter what time of the year it is, this area and route are busy through all four seasons.

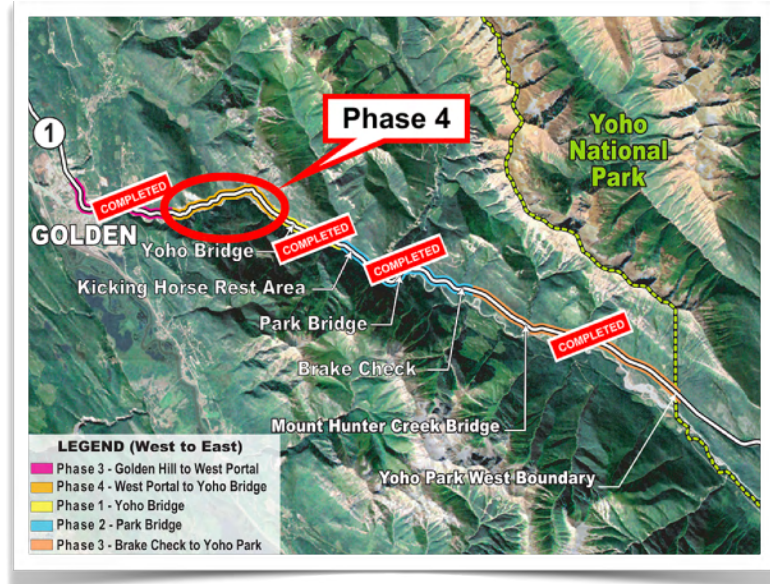
The Trans-Canada Hwy is fairly flat through here as it winds through the Bow River Valley and being so busy, it gets lots of attention from road maintenance crews. Do note however that the speed limit drops throughout most National Parks.

Soon after entering Banff National Park you will pass by the entrance to the town of Banff, located just south of the highway. 31 km past Banff you'll reach the junction with Hwy-93 leading south to Radium Hot Springs and Cranbrook, then, just a few kilometres later you'll arrive at Lake Louise.



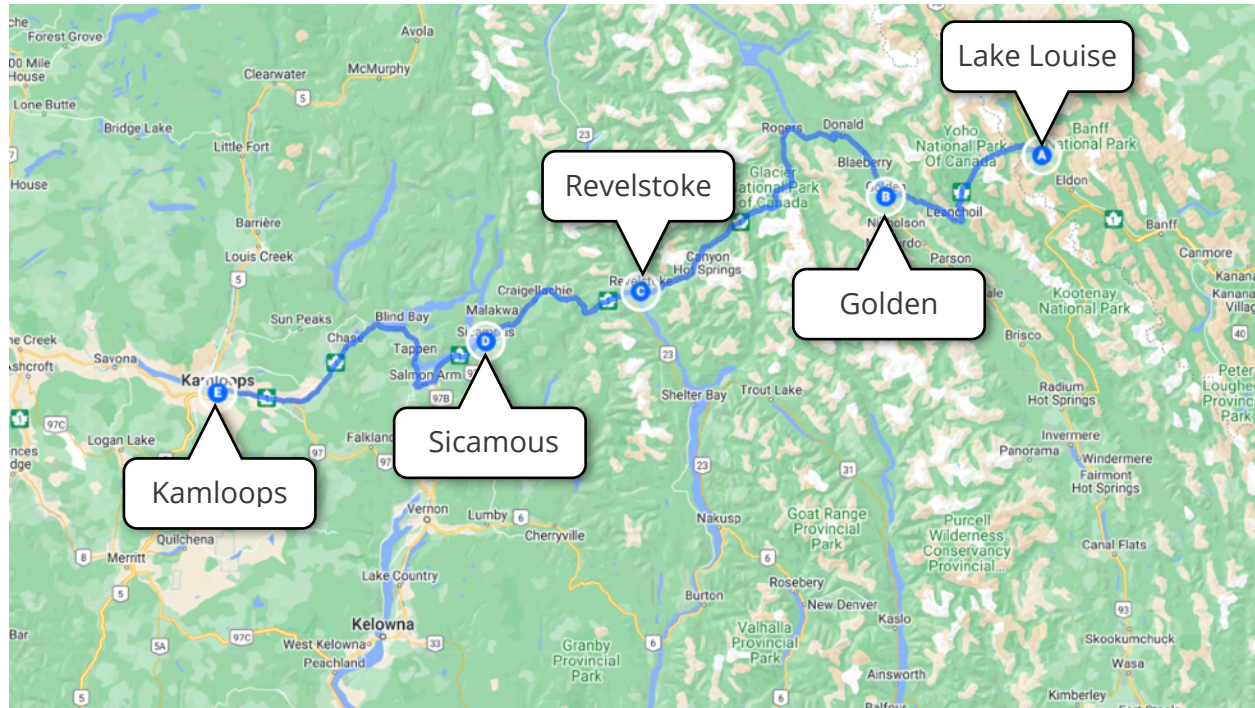
Though you do gain in elevation along this route, it is gradual and minor.

Note: As of this writing, major road construction is taking place in Kicking Horse Canyon, just to the east of Golden. This project is currently in its fourth and final stage and is due to be completed in the winter of 2023-24. Until then, the highway is subject to occasional closures. When these closures occur, traffic detours through Radium Hot Springs to the south via Hwy-93 and Hwy-95. You can check the construction status at DriveBC (www.kickinghorsecanyon.ca/construction/drivebc/).



Lake Louise to Kamloops

Google Maps link: <https://goo.gl/maps/7L531nKm6H5AmYLCA>



Lake Louise lies at the end of a valley with two choices offered. You can go north on the Icefield Parkway (Hwy-93) to Jasper or continue on the Trans-Canada Hwy toward Golden and Kamloops. On either route, you will now experience Rocky Mountain driving.

On the Lake Louise to Kamloops route you begin mountain driving immediately after passing under the Hwy-93 junction. The road is good and 4-lane in many areas, but elevation changes are significant and winter driving conditions are often challenging. It is a beautiful drive in the summer but be prepared before proceeding in the winter.

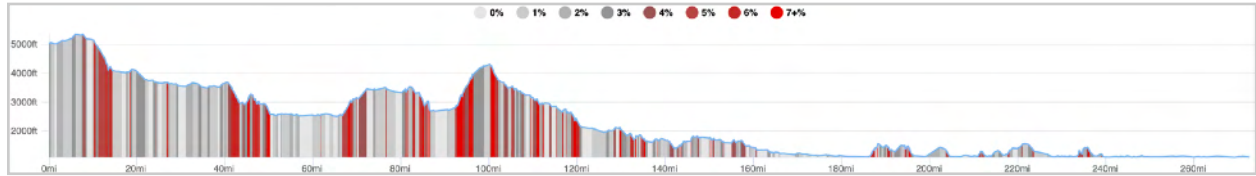
Elevation changes are constant through much of the distance from Lake Louise to well beyond Revelstoke. These changes continue almost to Kamloops but with less severity past Sicamous.

The highway from Lake Louise to Revelstoke is challenging for those unfamiliar with mountain driving or with under powered vehicles, but the road itself is quite good with numerous 4-lane sections and passing lanes in 2-lane sections.

From Revelstoke to just east of Kamloops, the highway is mostly 2-lane and can be windy in spots. Passing lanes are also less common here.

Golden, Revelstoke, and Salmon Arm all provide ample accommodations and services.

The junction with Hwy-97A, south to the Okanagan Valley, is also located in Sicamous.

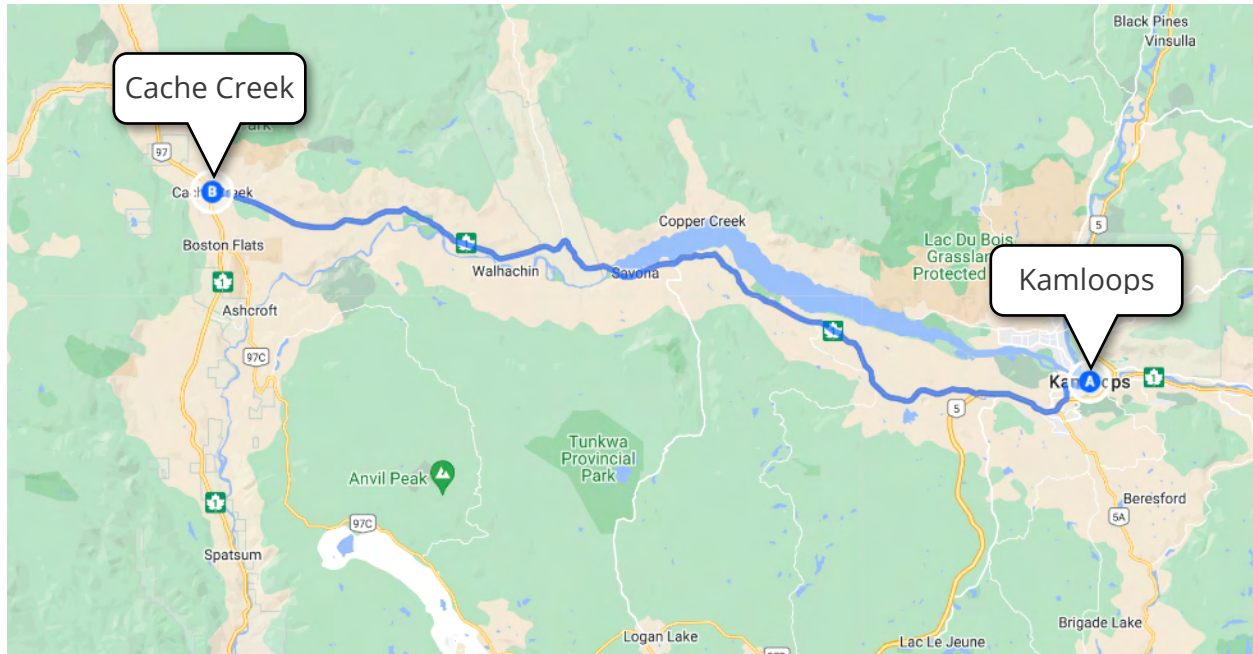


Though it may seem you are doing a lot of climbing, taking this route from east to west, you are mostly losing altitude. That does not mean there are no significant grades, however, because there are. Having enough power and engine cooling capacity are vital for climbing these grades but good brakes and the intelligent use of gearing are even more important going down the long and steep grades.

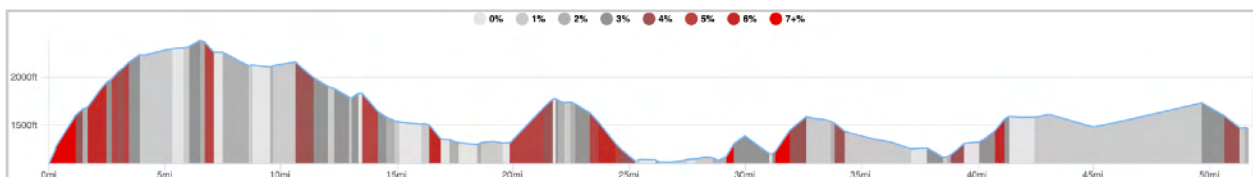
Kamloops to Cache Creek

Google Maps link: <https://goo.gl/maps/uh8SW2wBjvwLqjvJA>

This short 84 km route does not really merit its own description, but it links two important locations where other routes diverge. So, we'll keep this one short.



You'll experience good pavement over this entire route. It is mostly 2-lane but with some 4-lane. If stuck behind slow-moving traffic, wait patiently for the next passing lane. If you need a break, there is a good rest stop and viewpoint on top of a hill, about halfway between the towns of Tobiano and Savona. Restroom facilities are also available there.

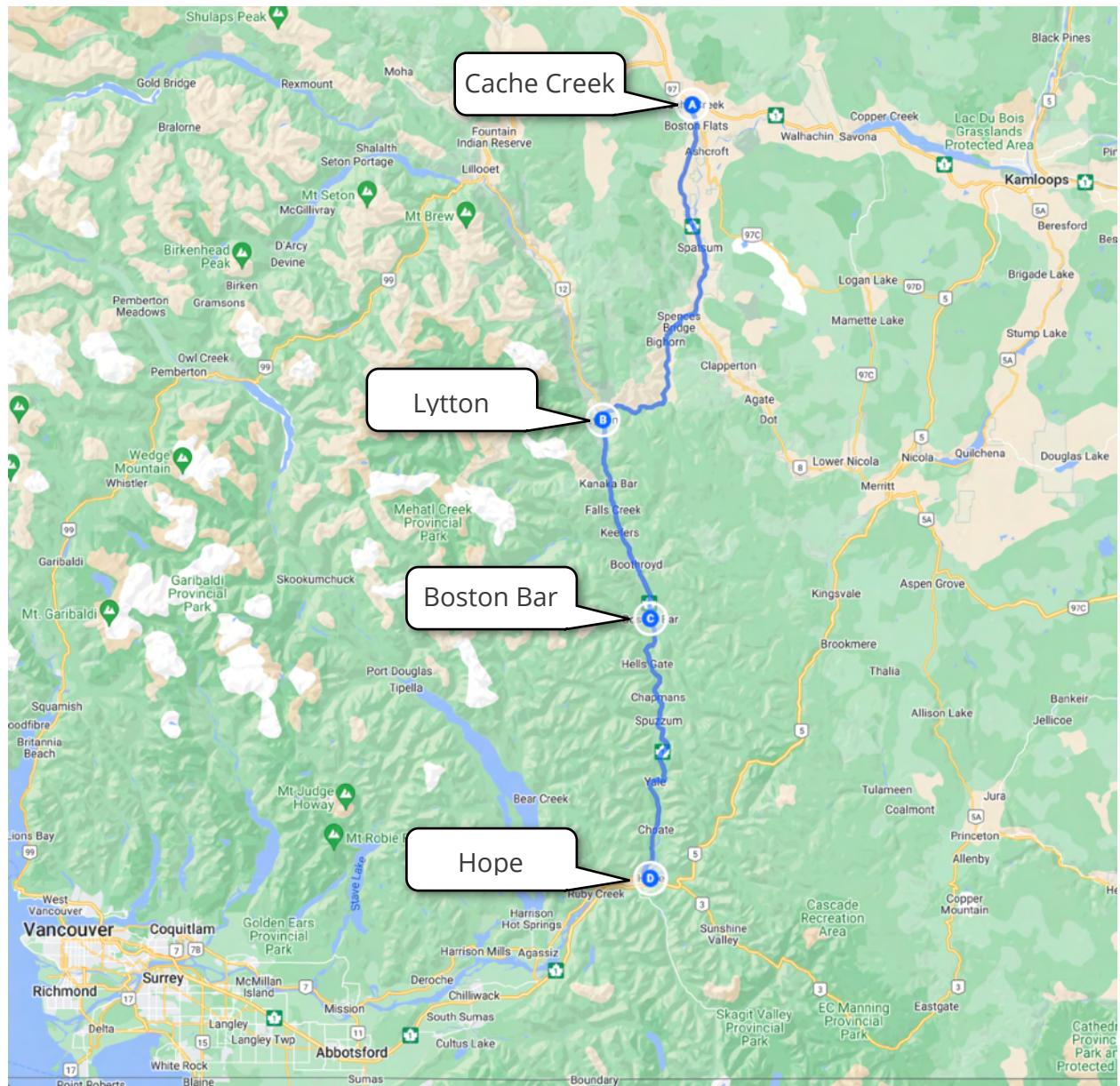


This drive contains a few significant elevation changes, but its short length means it has only a few. The climb to the west side of Kamloops is one of the more significant, but there are a couple more along the way.

Cache Creek to Hope

Google Maps link: <https://goo.gl/maps/3b4WNBinu53LUcQ76>

This is simply a wonderful drive down the famous Fraser Canyon through some spectacular scenery. You must take this route at least once — I take it whenever I can.



This section of the Trans-Canada Hwy (Hwy-1) is mostly 2-lane asphalt with scenery that changes dramatically as you work your way south.

Cache Creek is sometimes described as a bustling oasis town in the midst of cactus, tumbleweed and a desert-like climate. This is apparent as you leave town and drive down

to the small community of Spences Bridge. Soon after, the highway hugs the Thompson River and, in the summer, you might spot groups of white water rafters working their way downriver. If you stop to take some photos, be careful to pull off the roadway as it is narrow and can be congested during tourist season.

The scenery takes a dramatic turn at Lytton, where the Thompson and Fraser Rivers converge. The town of Lytton was burned to the ground in a wildfire on June 30, 2021, and all that remains are a few charred building skeletons. For the next while, you'll drive up along the heavily treed valley hillside.

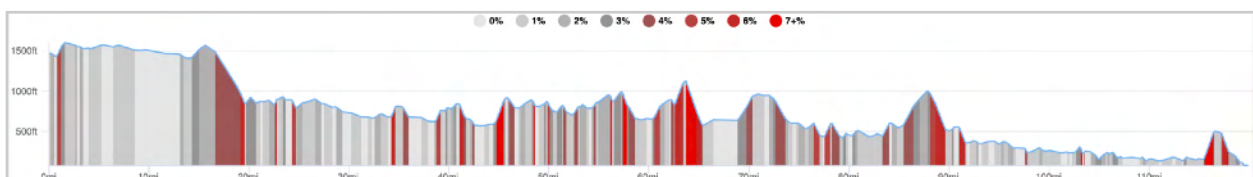
Watch your speed all the way through the Fraser Canyon as some of the curves may be tighter than they first appear, and you will likely see RCMP patrolling the highway or manning speed checkpoints.

You will also pass through several tunnels along the Fraser Canyon section of the Trans-Canada — there are seven of them.

Boston Bar provides a few places to eat and refuel. Just a little further south, you'll reach Hell's Gate, an abrupt narrowing of the Fraser River. You can cross over the river in an airtram and check out the fish ladders, provided for spawning salmon.



From Hell's gate, it is only 55 km to Hope. There is some elevation change along this route, but it is probably less severe or dramatic than other roads leading to the coast from the BC interior. If you are concerned with weather and road grades, this is the route to take.

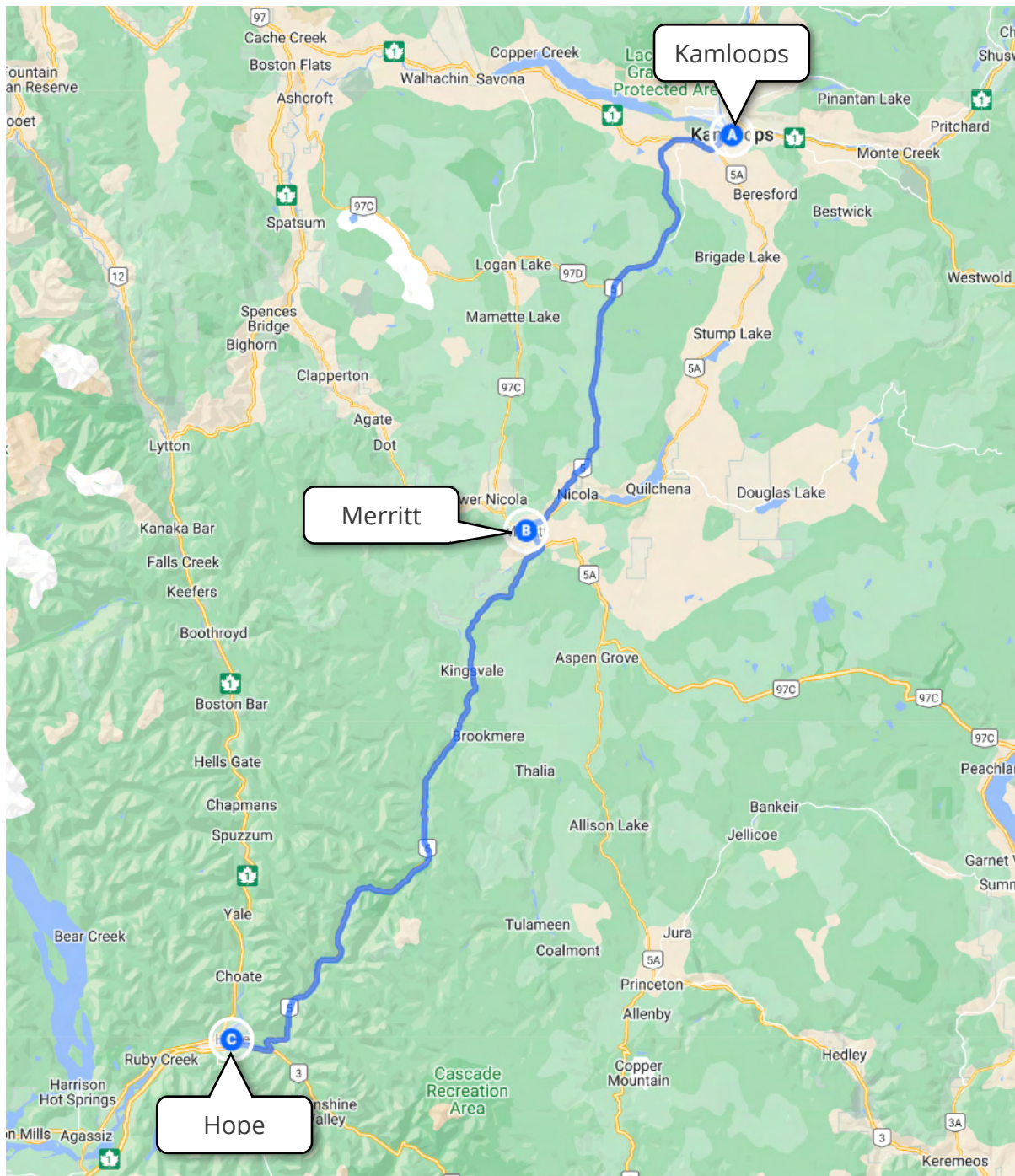


I have not included the highway from Hope into Vancouver as it is out of the mountains and is mostly flat 4-lane highway.

Kamloops to Hope

Google Maps link: <https://goo.gl/maps/uiXU6i8VCAVPVsc7A>

This is the fastest route between Kamloops and Hope. The Coquihalla Hwy is 4-lane divided road virtually all the way and its variable speed zones often permit driving at 120 KPH. The downside is, it has lots of heavy truck traffic and some extreme elevation changes.

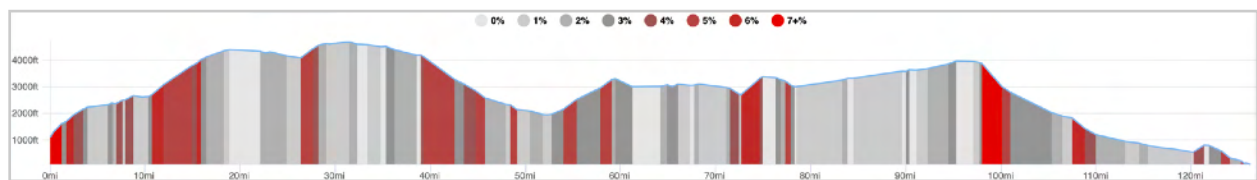


For this route, you'll pull out of Kamloops on the Trans-Canada Hwy (Hwy-1) and then change to Hwy-5 just a few miles west of town.

You'll start climbing immediately after you hit Hwy-5, and it will be up and down grades all the way to Hope. Though faster, due to higher speed limits and divided highway, fuel mileage will suffer, overheated engines are not uncommon in the summer and, if you have a large RV, you must be mindful of your brakes on long declines.

There is little for towns or services along this route, other than Merritt, located at about the halfway point. Merritt has a good selection of fuel stations, restaurants and other services.

At the south end of the town is the junction of Hwy-5A and 97C, the Okanagan Connector.



You will be climbing or descending virtually all the way along this route, with the highest elevation being the Coquihalla Summit at 1,244 m, in sharp contrast to Hope at a mere 41 m. If you are driving or towing a large RV, stay in the right lane as much as possible to avoid slowing traffic.

I have not included the highway from Hope into Vancouver as it is out of the mountains and is mostly a flat 4-lane highway.

Pincher Creek to Cranbrook

Google Maps link: <https://goo.gl/maps/eZpJ3jTh4yAhVKis7>

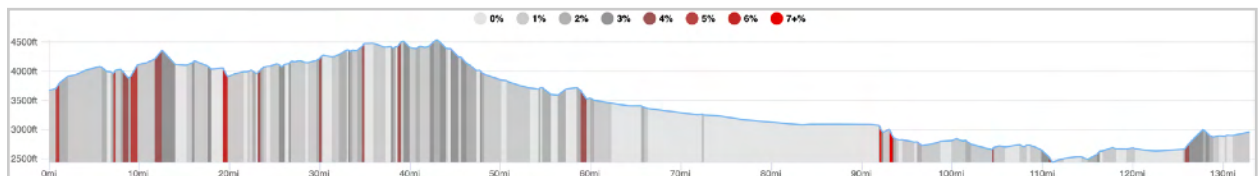
Pincher Creek, AB is located near the southwestern corner of Alberta, 99 km west of Lethbridge. Hwy-3 is also known as the Crowsnest Hwy.



This route is scenic, passing through many small mining communities. The elevation changes are not dramatic, but it is mostly a 2-lane highway twisting its way through the Rockies.

You'll travel through old mining communities from Bellevue to the Crowsnest Pass and then again near Sparwood. The old mills and coal dust make it obvious what was mined here then and still today in the Sparwood area.

Fernie is the largest town along the route. It offers a full array of services and it's a popular ski area in the winter. After passing through Elko, the landscape will change to pasture and grazing land with limited elevation change. A short distance before Cranbrook, you pass the junction of Hwy-94, heading north to Fort Steele and Radium Hot Springs.



There are elevation changes after that, but it is not dramatic nor are the grade changes long. Snow and ice can make this challenging during the winter.

Cranbrook to Osoyoos

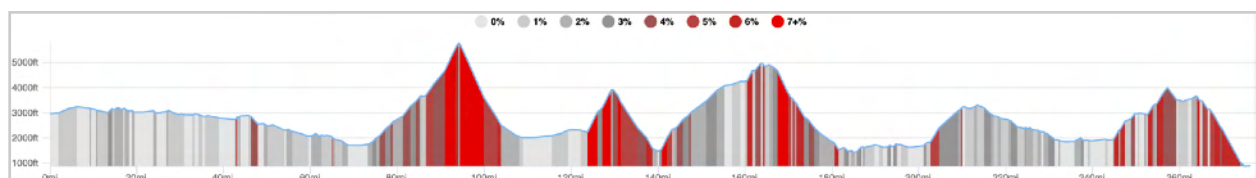
Google Maps link: <https://goo.gl/maps/sW2Los9T2FeTifsw8>

From the fruit-bearing orchards of Creston, over the Salmo Pass and on to the rich orchards of Osoyoos in the Okanagan Valley, this is a scenic route, but not without its challenges.



The drive from Cranbrook to Creston is pleasant and uneventful, but as you head west out of Creston, you begin climbing up the Salmo Pass to an elevation of 1,775 m. It is a big climb in the summer and in the winter, the amount of snowfall can make it a real challenge.

You'll reach Castlegar next and then Grand Forks and Osoyoos, gaining and losing elevation all along the way. At this route's start, the surroundings will be dry, but treed, and as you progress it will become lush with forests until Grand Forks where you enter another drier region.

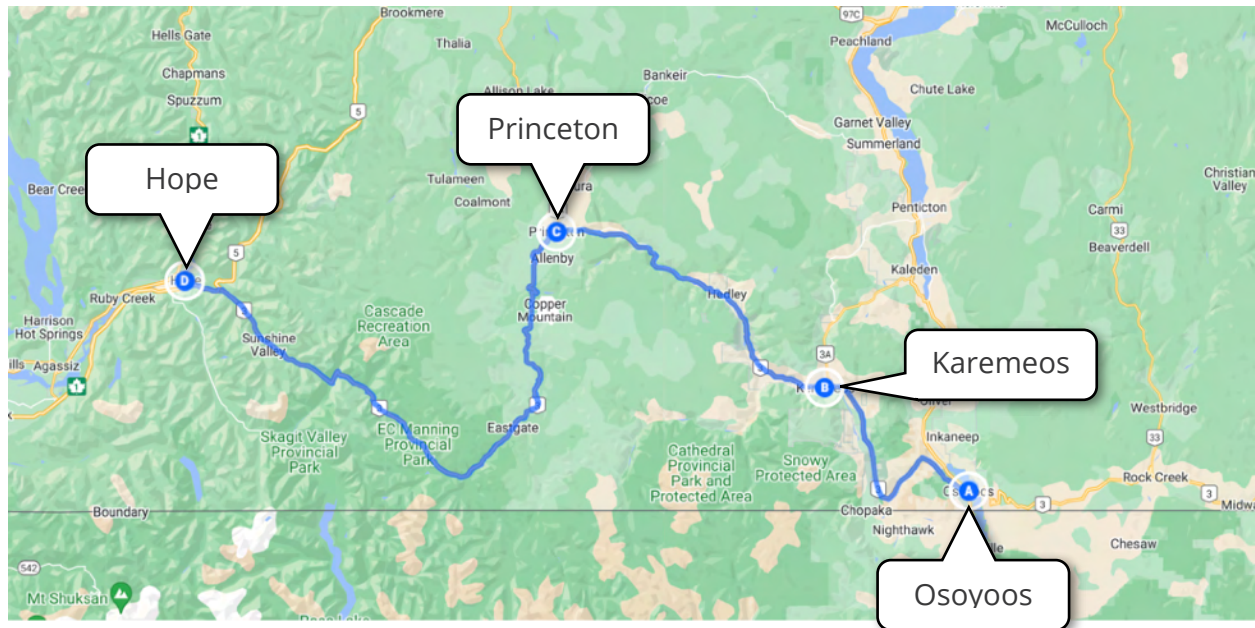


As indicated by the elevation chart, this route is up and down nearly all the way. A couple of hills worthy of special note are the climb west of Rock Creek and the steep and windy hillside east of Osoyoos, coming down into the Okanagan Valley. Take caution on this hill, coming down or going up, both in the summer and winter — it is extreme.

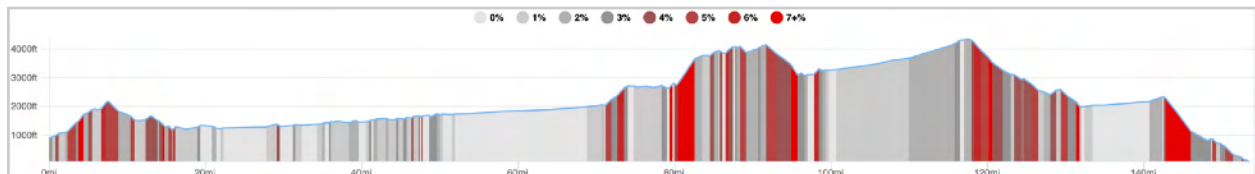
Osoyoos to Hope

Google Maps link: <https://goo.gl/maps/FDodPhztucc37Xdh9>

Travelling Hwy-3 from Osoyoos to Hope is scenic, 2-lane highway with lots of hills and sharp curves west of Princeton.



You'll climb out of the Okanagan Valley immediately after leaving Osoyoos and you'll soon reach Keremeos, your last chance to buy fruit fresh from the orchards, assuming it's fruit season.



The road remains reasonably flat, but twisty, all the way to Princeton. Coming west out of Princeton, you'll encounter a significant elevation change, but a good 4-lane highway. Not long after, the highway goes down to 2 lanes and the elevation changes continue. In several spots, you have a steep downhill grade, a tight curve over a bridge and then a steep climb. This continues until you get near E.C. Manning Provincial Park. Here the road flattens out a bit and gets better until the last big hill coming down to join Hwy-5 at the site of the Hope Slide.

I have not included the highway from Hope into Vancouver as it is out of the mountains and is mostly a flat 4-lane highway.

Lake Louise to Jasper

Google Maps link: <https://goo.gl/maps/4PE2jVsrDYHtQ26z5>

The drive from Lake Louise to Jasper is simply stunning. It is an easy drive packed with scenic splendour that is sure to have you snapping pictures to show friends and family back home.



Lake Louise is a wonder of its own, from the Chateau Lake Louise to the stunning mountains and lake beyond. But, this is only the start with more to come.

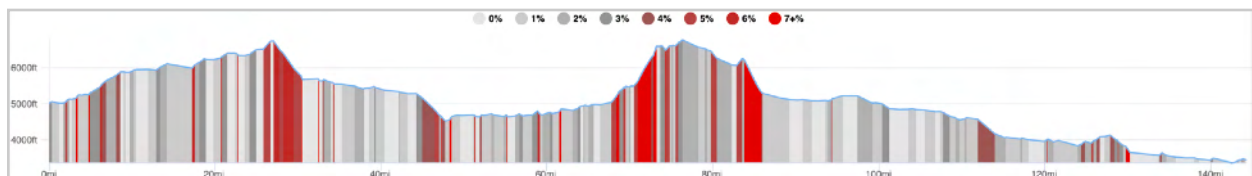
If you are just travelling east/west through the parks, and you are not planning to stop along the way, you do not have to pay a park entrance fee. On the Icefield Parkway (Hwy-93), the park entrance fee is mandatory, but worth it.

The only fuel along this route can be found at Saskatchewan River Crossing, at the junction of Hwy-11 going to the town of Rocky Mountain House.



Further up the road, you'll pass through a flat valley with high walls along the east side and at its north end you'll find the only steep grade along this route. Once atop of The Big Bend, it's 14 km to the Columbia Icefield Glacier. Stop, and take a walk on the glacier.

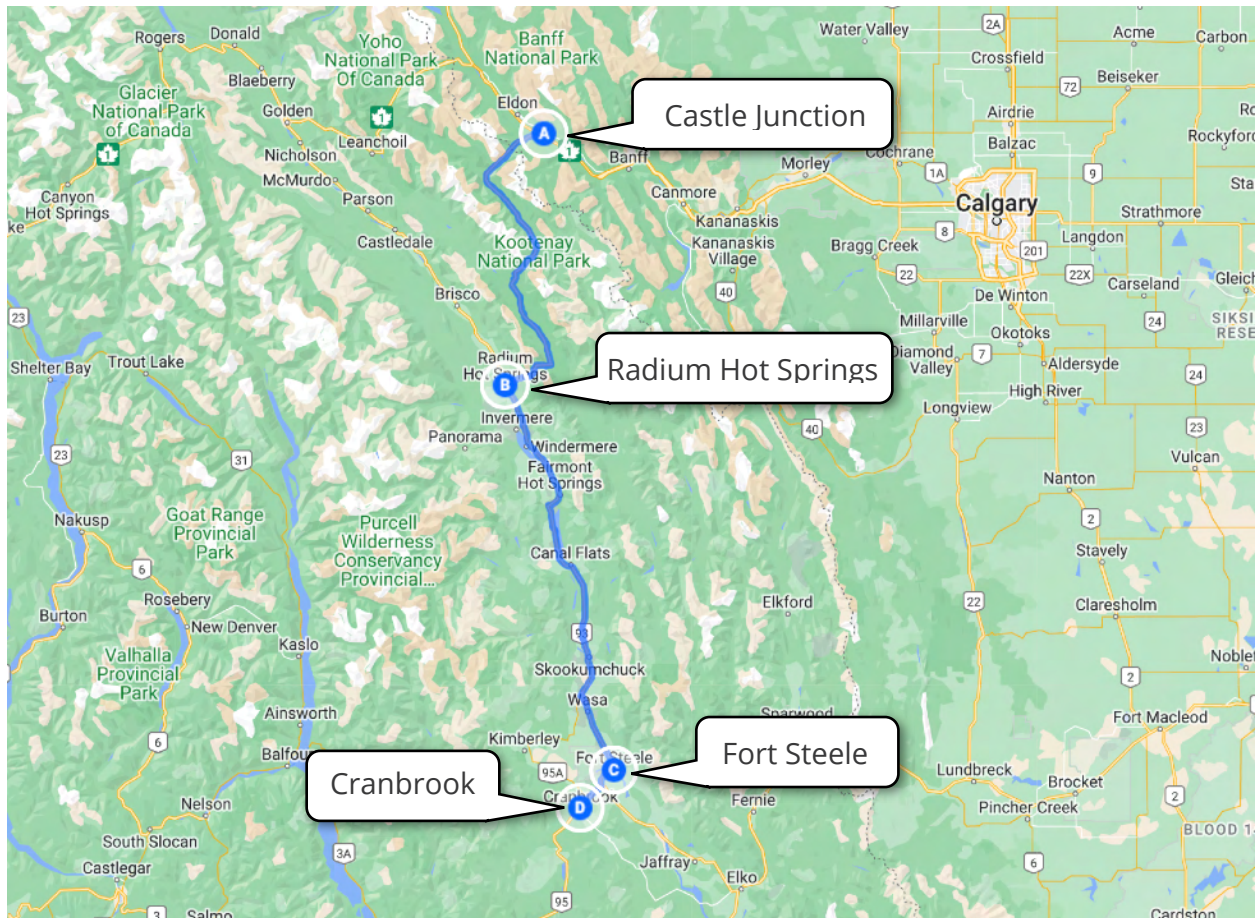
The last "must stop" location before Jasper is Athabasca Falls.



The Big Bend, a long winding hill, is the only notable elevation change on this route.

Castle Junction to Cranbrook

Google Maps Link: <https://goo.gl/maps/mcrZNpdEinvgxZL88>

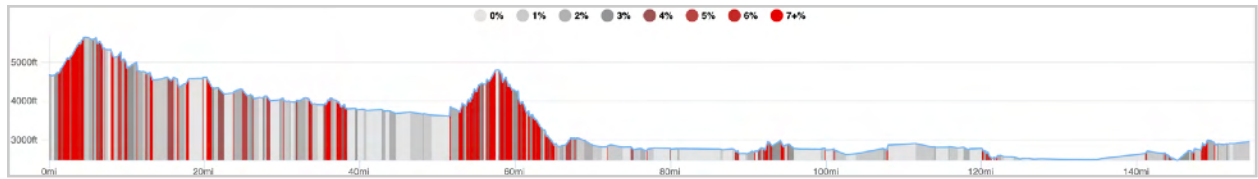


Upon departing the Trans-Canada Highway onto Hwy-93 you will start to climb, and you'll be in mountainous terrain all the way until Radium Hot Springs. The curves are gentle and the grades are significant, but the scenery is pretty spectacular all the way along this northern section of the route.

As you exit Sinclair Canyon at Radium Hot Springs your surroundings suddenly change and become more arid. You still have hills, but they are minor and remain so for the remainder of this route.

If you are taking the northern portion of this route, due to Kicking Horse Canyon construction, you'll turn north on Hwy-95, to Golden, at Radium Hot Springs.



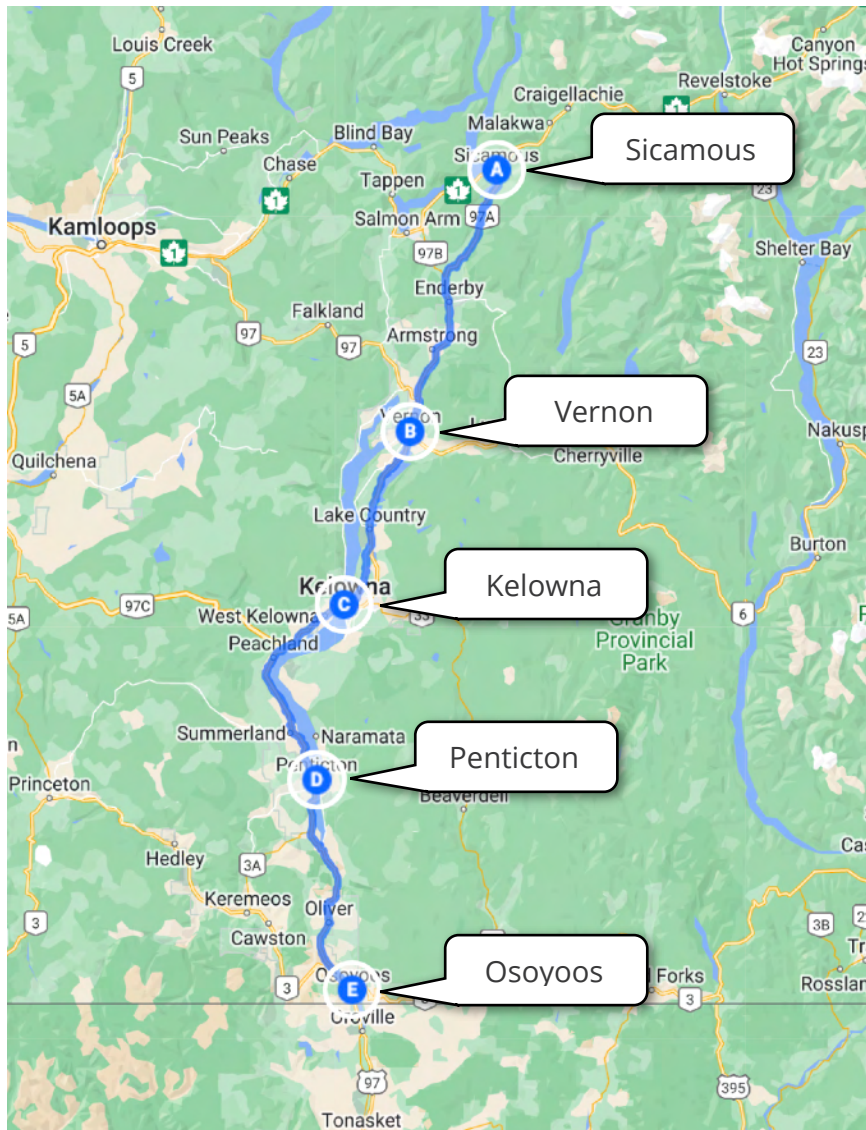


The big dip midway along the elevation chart is Canel Flats, and it is flat until Fort Steele, not far from Cranbrook.

Sicamous to Osoyoos

Google maps link: <https://goo.gl/maps/dZ4tvnxpPvpw2N7WA>

This drive takes you down through the Okanagan Valley, world-famous for its fruit, vineyards and wineries. This entire route is extremely busy with tourism traffic all summer long, attracting vacationers from all of BC and Alberta.



It is mostly a 2-lane highway with some 4-lane further south between Kelowna and Penticton. Take it slow and be patient.

In the north, you pass by forested lake country that will give way to farmland.

As you approach Vernon you will see orchards and more lake country and this will remain constant all the way to Osoyoos. This is a favourite destination for families and RVs.

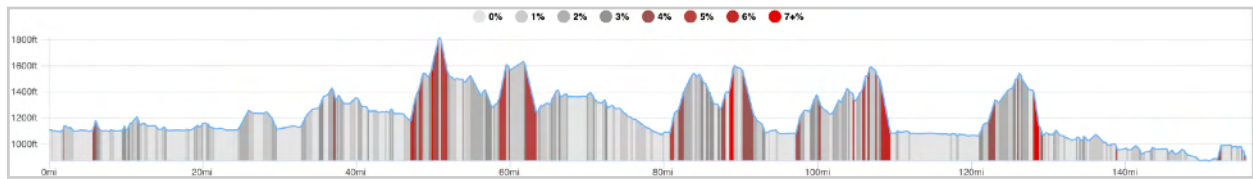
Kelowna is the largest city in the Okanagan Valley with a population of a little more than 150,000 and hosts more than four million visitors each year.

Across the lake and a few miles south is the junction of Hwy-97C, the

connector between the Okanagan Valley and Merritt on the Coquihalla Hwy.

Further south, are the cities of Penticton and Osoyoos. These are popular summer destinations and winter homes for many Canadian RVers seeking warmer winter weather.

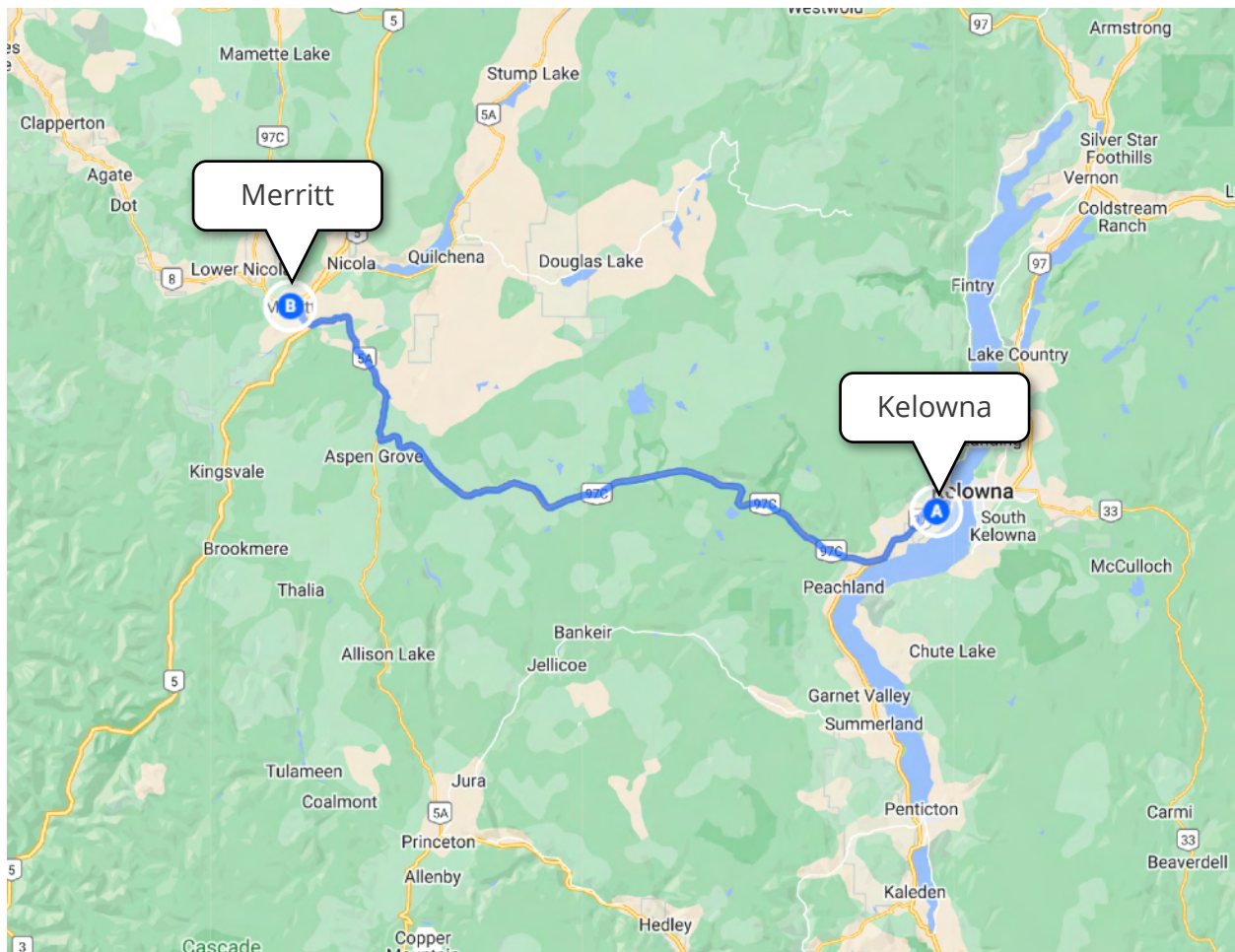
The elevation chart for this route can be misleading. It looks like a great deal of elevation change, but most grades are not terribly steep or long. The biggest downside of this route is that it is a busy area from early spring until late fall.



West Kelowna to Merritt

Google Maps link: <https://goo.gl/maps/qC4uSYK8WNxwnKCP6>

Hwy-97C, also called the Okanagan Connector or Coquihalla Connector, was opened in 1990 between West Kelowna and Merritt, cutting hours off the drive time from Vancouver to the Okanagan Valley. It is a good 4-lane highway all the way, but it has some pretty impressive elevation changes from 484 m at West Kelowna and 605 m at Merritt up to 1,728 m on Pennask Summit.

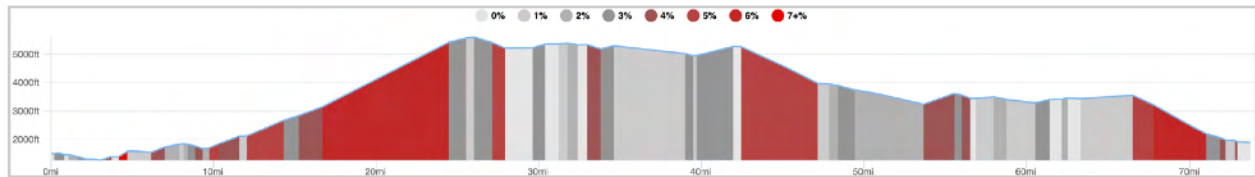


Shortly after heading south out of West Kelowna you'll pull onto Hwy-97C and begin climbing. It starts out gradual but changes to aggressive soon after. Fortunately, being 4-lane you are not hampered by trucks and RVs fighting gravity.

In the summer, heat can be a problem so consider pulling off at a pullout if your temperature gauge starts climbing. You don't want to be stranded by an overheated engine on the roadway. Some of the rest areas also provide restrooms.

About 2/3 of the way through this route you'll find the Loon Lake Rest Area, accessible from both travel directions. This modern rest stop has washrooms with flush toilets, wi-fi and EV charging stations.

A little further on you'll come to the junction of Hwy-5A, going south to Princeton. The last notable item for this route is the long steep hill leading down into Merritt.



The long steep grades of this route will challenge most heavy vehicles and even cars that are not in top shape. The heat is an issue in the summer and the heavy snowfall makes it a challenge in the winter.

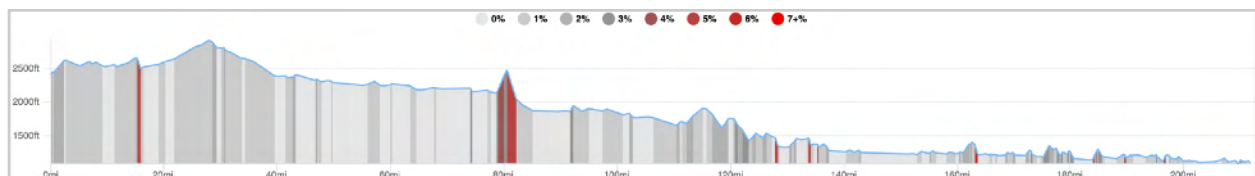
Tête Jaune Cache to Kamloops

Google Maps link: <https://goo.gl/maps/osse2Fknt4wYCjYZ8>



Tête Jaune Cache to Kamloops is a nice drive with minimal elevation change and good 2-lane highway all the way.

Accommodations, fuel and food are available at Valemount, Blue River, Clearwater and Barrière.



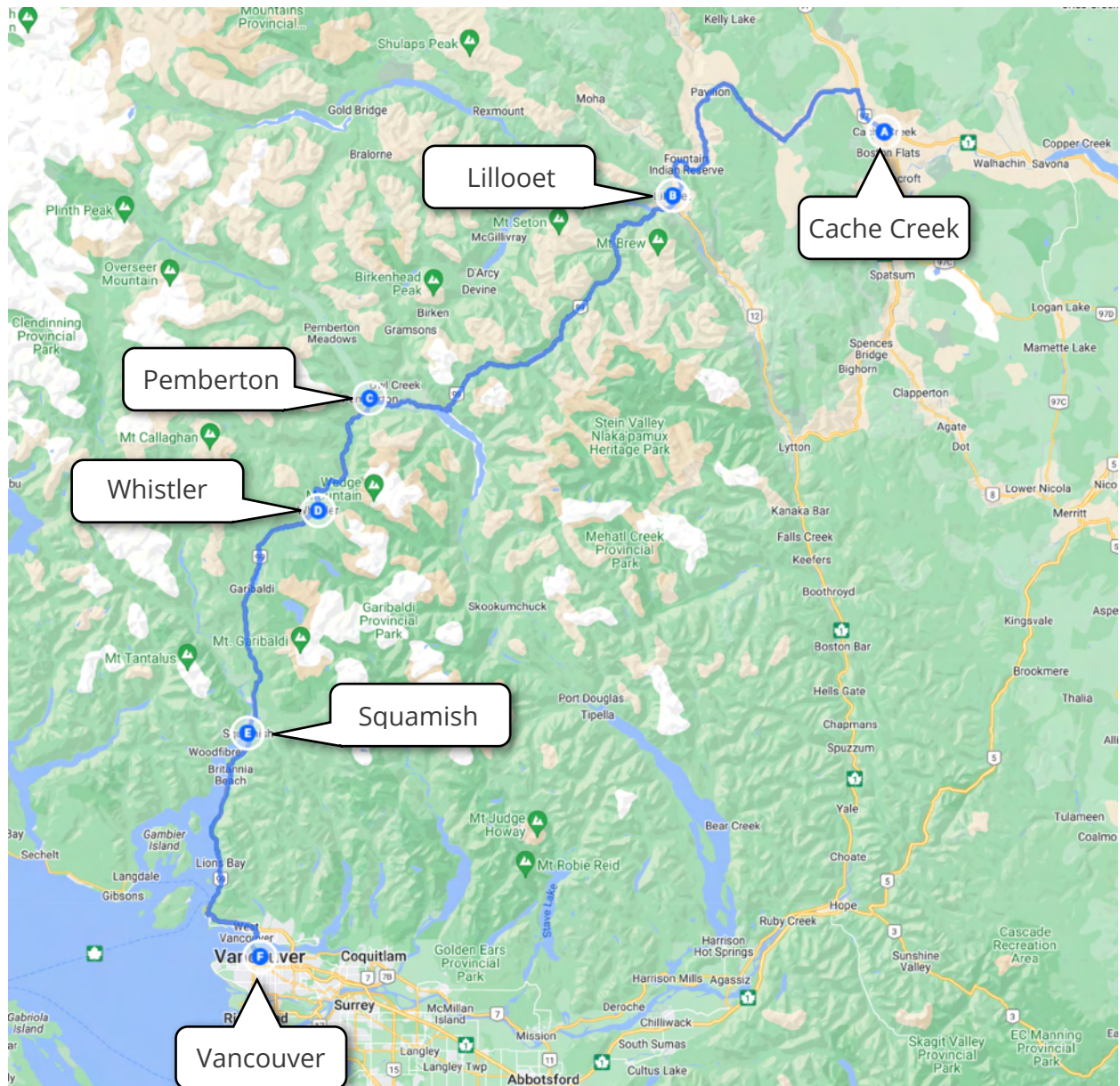
This is a great route for those travelling in the fall and winter and hoping to avoid steep elevation changes and hazardous winter weather driving conditions.

Cache Creek to Vancouver, via Whistler

Google Maps link: <https://goo.gl/maps/mSYp8u9KY3ZwbCzL9>

I suggest taking this route in the summer only, unless you have considerable winter/mountain driving experience. But, in the summer it is a wonderfully scenic drive.

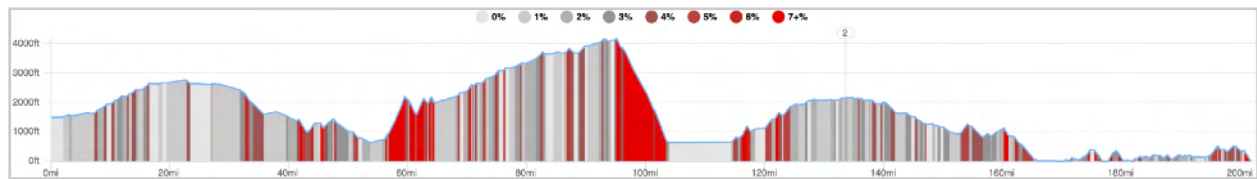
The first portion of this route is an older 2-lane highway while the highway from Whistler to Vancouver is mostly a modern 4-lane road with some 2-lane stretches.



The section between Lillooet and Pemberton has some sharp curves and a few significant grades with one being a serious 13%. I don't recommend this road for those without

significant mountain driving experience, during the winter months. In the summer, it is a wonderfully scenic and more adventuresome route.

This route starts north of Cache Creek where Hwy-99 joins Hwy-97. The first town is Lillooet and from there to Pemberton is what's called the Duffy Lake Road. The road and general driving conditions improve at Pemberton and from Whistler on its modern 4-lane highway with some 2-lane sections.



The highway from Whistler to Vancouver is what is known as the Sea-to-Sky Highway, and you'll understand its meaning as you work your way down to Vancouver on the mountainside along Howe Sound.

Fall RV Routes Summary

Each fall RVers from across Canada migrate to BC for its warmer winter temperatures. Some head for the southern Okanagan Valley, to Penticton or Osoyoos, but the majority have destinations in the Vancouver area and on Vancouver Island.

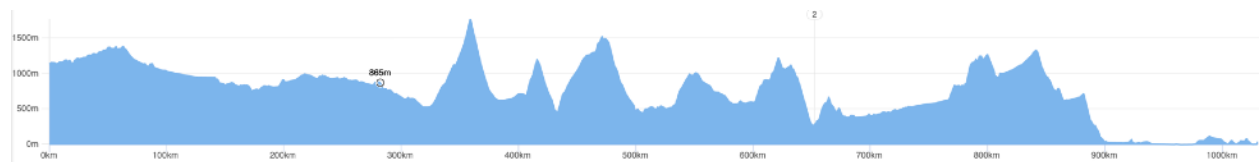
If you are a Canadian looking for warmer winter weather, this chapter is for you. It provides an overview of the major routes with an eye toward fall driving conditions for those driving or towing an RV. The three routes we look at are (1) Pincher Creek to Vancouver, (2) Canmore to Vancouver, and (3) Hinton to Vancouver. Each starts in western Alberta and ends in Vancouver, on the BC coast.

Additional detail is available in the appropriate route description above.

Pincher Creek to Vancouver

Google Maps link: <https://goo.gl/maps/w13QBuWWUHWbcUGp7>

The southernmost of the three main routes starts out in southwestern Alberta and follows Hwy-3 all the way to Vancouver. It is a slower and windier route with the greatest chance of snowfall in the Salmo Pass area, west of Creston.

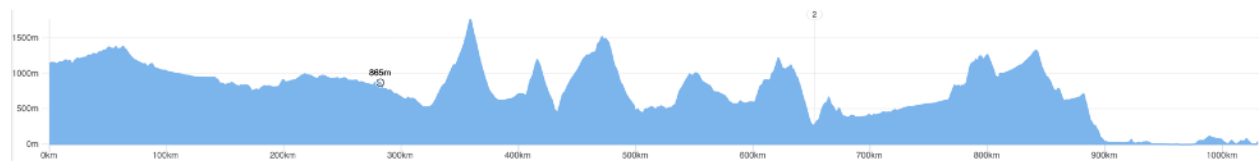


Distance: 1,023 km
Est. Drive Time: 11 hr 41 min
Flattest Route Steepness: 9,214

Canmore to Vancouver

Google Maps link: <https://goo.gl/maps/qZbzFDBDZ7rpDiHD9>

This is the fastest of the three routes in terms of driving speeds, but it is the most prone to delays due to weather and road conditions, and it also has the most extreme elevation changes.



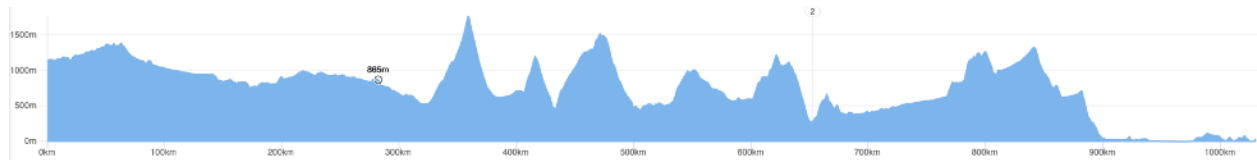
Distance: 1,117 km
Est. Drive Time: 12 hr 41 min
Flattest Route Steepness: 10,414

Hinton to Vancouver

Google Maps link: <https://goo.gl/maps/w13QBuWWUHWbcUGp7>

This northern route is the easiest in terms of extreme weather and elevation changes. If you are coming from the south, it may seem out of the way, but it has many advantages for fall and winter travel.

It should also be noted that this route diverges from the Canmore to Vancouver route at Kamloops. The Canmore to Vancouver follows Hwy-5, the Coquihalla Highway whereas this route goes through Cache Creek and comes south through the Fraser Valley on Hwy-1.



Distance: 847 km
Est. Drive Time: 9 hr 11 min
Flattest Route Steepness: 7,042

Summary

The drive times are based on car traffic, so your time will likely be longer if driving or towing an RV. They also leave from different start points that may or may not align with your start location, so you'll have to factor that in as well.

As for ease of travel and the least likelihood of weather and road-related delays the Hinton to Vancouver route is the best and this is confirmed through the Flattest Route steepness score that is substantially lower than the other two options.

My Journey

Since retiring from the world of leading-edge technology development, I have travelled east to west across North America and north to south as far as the roads and oceans allow. My wife and I have travelled more than 75,000 miles, exploring sights, cultures and experiences in our RV. This book is one of the ways I have chosen to pay it forward by sharing the knowledge and experience we have gained with you.

I lived in British Columbia and Alberta most of my life and I grew up travelling mountain highways. Over the years I have driven each of the highways mentioned here, and many others, numerous times in all types of vehicles from motorcycles, to cars, commercial highway trucks and buses, in all seasons and weather conditions.

I invite you to come and explore the mountain highways away from the urban rush and enjoy the scenic wonder these remote areas have to offer.

My Passion(s)

I enjoy helping others and I have demonstrated this throughout my life and career. I have started and helped grow user groups and given presentations on TV and at professional conferences.

Now, in retirement, I continue to express my passion for RVing and travel through social media such as Facebook and the World Wide Web. Please stop by and check out my website and join my Facebook Discussion Groups.

World Wide Web:

The RV Mentor website was started to provide a repository for information on RVs, RV travel and the RV lifestyle. It includes a wide variety of information and resources, some of which cannot be found elsewhere on RV-related websites.

<https://www.thervmentor.com/>

Facebook Discussion Groups:

"The RV Mentor" Facebook Group is a friendly and informative resource for new and seasoned RVers. Here you can gather information, discuss ideas and issues and access tools and skills to improve your RV journey.

A "Guides" section provides fast and easy access to many of the most asked-about topics. If you can't find what you are looking for post a question and your fellow group members will jump in with answers.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/thervmentor>

The “Yukon & NWT Travel” Facebook Group is for all types of travellers, on a motorcycle, car, or RV, even those flying in to experience northern Canada. Feel free to ask questions, share your insight and experience, and enjoy our friendly community.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/yukon.nwt.travel>



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