

Forbidden Plateau



Chris Lawrence ski touring up to Mt. Becher, March.

Forbidden Plateau

The magic of Forbidden Plateau is hinted at in a story perpetuated by Comox Argus publisher Ben Hughes that tells of the supernatural spirits that dwell there. It is among the wizened sub-alpine trees and exquisitely be-laked terrain of Forbidden Plateau that Island skiing can claim its deepest historical roots. While the Coast Salish people regarded the high country with caution, colonialists in the early 1900s quickly saw the potential for recreation on the plateau and the mountainous interior of Strathcona Park beyond. By the 1920s a well worn horse trail led from Bevan, near Cumberland, up to Forbidden Plateau and the wonders of the mountain air were touted in local brochures. A few cabins were constructed and camps dotted the picturesque alpine during the summer months as local outdoors people and visitors came to explore its beauty.

The interest in Forbidden Plateau for winter recreation naturally evolved with the sport of skiing the world over. In the 1920s skiers trekked up to Mt. Becher and there can be little doubt that a great deal of the plateau was explored at this time by local skiers. Around 1949 a ski lift was installed at Wood Mountain Park and the facility eventually became known as Forbidden Plateau. For many Vancouver Islanders of this generation Forbidden was where they learnt to ski and it remains in fond memories since the day lodge collapsed due to excessive snowload in the epic winter of 1999. The lodge has since been torched by vandals but the site is bound to receive a new life eventually.

With the surge in growth and the improved road access to Mt. Washington Alpine Resort much of the acitivity on the plateau is now centred around the groomed nordic ski trails that wind across the Paradise Meadows region of Forbidden and the bustling village and skihill at Mt. Washington.

Highest Point: Summit of Mt. Brooks 4,921 ft / 1,500 m

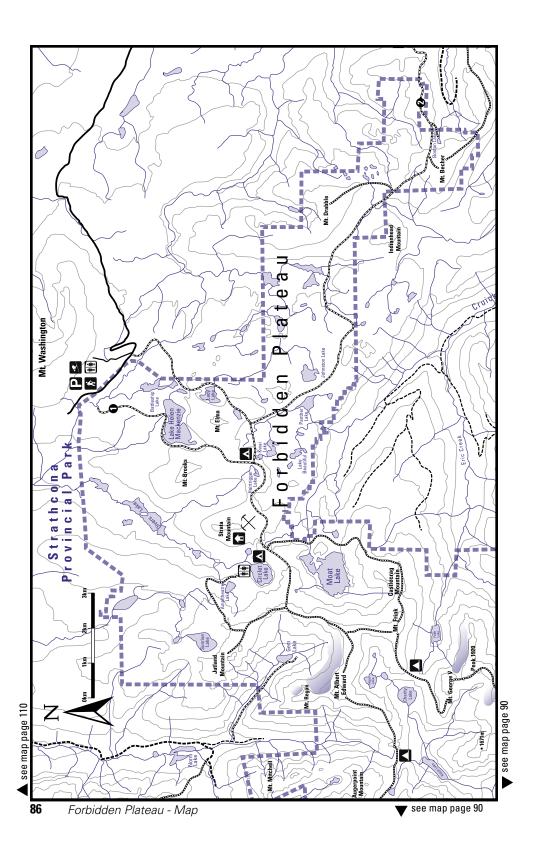
Most Vertical Descent Possible: ~400m

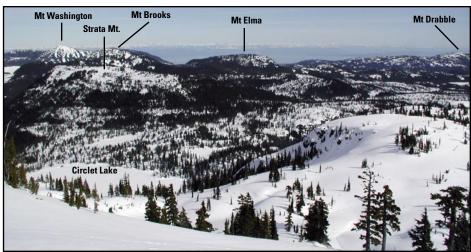
Difficulty/Duration: Forbidden Plateau Traverse A2, Day tips A1 / 1-3 days

Map Sheets: 92 F/11 Forbidden Plateau

Access: Forbidden Plateau is served by well-maintained roads on its eastern and northern edge. Plateau Road winds up from Courtenay and the Inland Island Highway to the site of the now defunct

Kris Oetter dropping off Mt. Becher.





Looking from Jutland-Albert Edward col across Forbidden Plateau toward Mt. Washington, March.

Forbidden Plateau Ski Area. This road is generally open year round and there is ample parking at the old lift area lots. Hiking or skiing up the runs to the base of the old T-bar (down and to the right (north) of the main chairlift line) leads to the Becher trail trailhead just a hundred metres or two uphill from the T-bar base. The Becher Trail heads west across the plateau to the low summit of Mt. Becher. The Dove Creek Trail continues further across Mackenzie Meadows and the heart of Forbidden Plateau to Paradise Meadows and the village base-area at Mt. Washington Alpine Resort.

The groomed cross country ski trails from Mt. Washington across Paradise Meadows offer superb access into Strathcona Park weaving through the meadows to Lake Helen Mackenzie where the backcountry begins up onto the main plateau. To reach Mt. Washington village and the Paradise Meadows trailhead leave the Inland Island Highway 19 at Exit 130 on the Strathcona Parkway. The Parkway is a wide, usually well-maintained paved road servicing the growing attractions of Mt. Washington's Alpine Resort. Turn left just below the village on the clearly signposted road to Paradise Meadows and the Raven Lodge Nordic Lodge where you'll find the Paradise Meadows trailhead.

Turns

Look for lines off Mt. Jutland down to Circlet Lake and even Rossiter Lake, steep tree skiing off the north and east aspects of Mt. Brooks and great open treelines on the west side of Mt. Elma down to the pass with Mt. Brooks. Mt. Becher is worth a look for its easy day trip access and some nice if short drops.

Tours

The gentle terrain and easy access make Forbidden Plateau an ideal destination for cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and ski touring on both day trips and weekend overnight camping trips. It is perfect for novices and a good destination to keep in mind for periods of poor weather and/or snow stability. One of the best routes follows the Becher trail route from the old Forbidden Plateau ski area across the plateau to Paradise Meadows and Mt. Washington. There are a number of good side trips possible up Mt. Becher, Mt. Drabble, Indianhead Mountain, Mt. Elma and Mt. Brooks along with a maze of meadows and lakes to explore. Checkout the Cruickshank Canyon view near Johnston Lake.

Good map reading and compass skills will be handy navigating through the flat terrain. For longer trips and more experienced parties Forbidden Plateau provides access to more difficult terrain including Mt. Albert Edward and the Castlecrag Circuit.

Additional Info: Hiking Trails III 9th Edition, Island Alpine 1st Edition p.143-148, Beyond Nootka online www.members.shaw.ca/beyondnootka



Castlecrag Circuit



The Castlecrag Circuit and Mt Albert Edward south-east aspect from Mt Becher, March.

Castlecrag Circuit

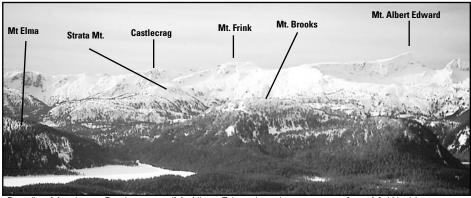
Castlecrag is a small but jagged summit, south-east of Mt. Albert Edward, overlooking Moat Lake. The Castlecrag Circuit is a superb, easily accessed ski tour around the height of land encircling Moat Lake. It can be undertaken in either direction and takes in some of the most dramatic terrain in this region of Strathcona Park including an easy side trip to the summit of Mt Albert Edward.

Highest Point: Summit of Mt. Albert Edward 6,868 ft / 2,093 m

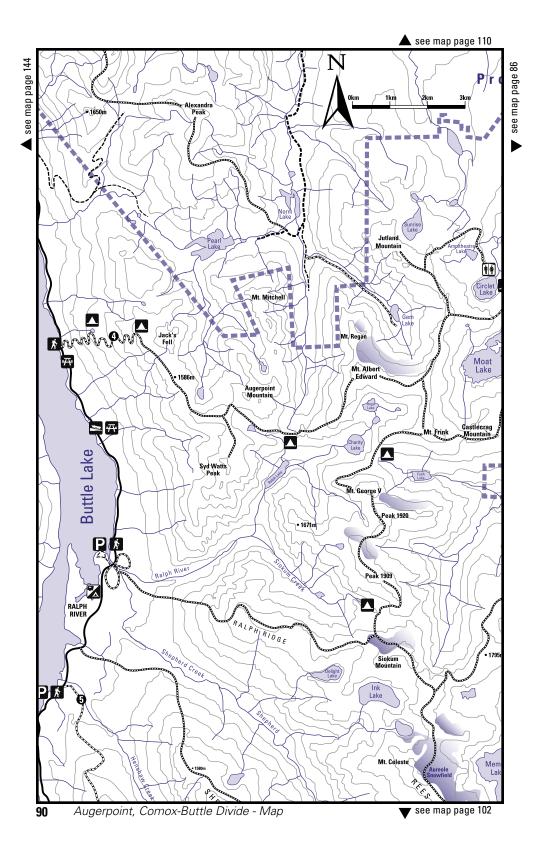
Most Vertical Descent Possible: ~600m Difficulty/Duration: To summit B2 / 1-2 days Map Sheets: 92 F/11 Forbidden Plateau

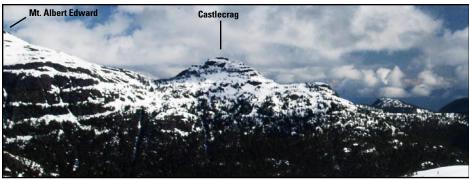
Access: The only recommended way to start the Castlecrag Circuit is from Mt. Washington Resort taking the Paradise Meadows trail, via Lake Helen Mackenzie, to the ridge between Circlet and Moat lakes.

Route Description: From the parking lot at Mt. Washington's Raven Lodge, head south-west either on the groomed cross-country track with a pass, or off-piste 'sans billet', following the Paradise Meadows trail up to Lake Helen Mackenzie. If conditions allow cross the lake directly, aiming for the low pass between Mt. Brooks and Mt. Elma, if the lake is too thawed or otherwise impassable follow the trail counterclockwise around the north and west shores of the lake and gain the Brooks-Elma Pass.



Paradise Meadows, Castlecrag and Mt Albert Edward north-east aspect from Mt Washington





Mt. Albert Edward (L) and Castlecrag (C) south aspect from Siokum Mountain, May.

From the Brooks-Elma pass continue along the general route of the trail, past the Park's hut southwest to Hairtrigger and Kwai lakes and on to the low saddle between Moat and Circlet lakes. Here you decide which direction to complete the Castlecrag Circuit. If you plan to spend the night out Circlet Lake is the best place to plan a camp. The recommended direction to complete the Castlecrag Circuit is clockwise, so from the pass between the lakes descend due south to the outlet of Moat Lake.

Follow the shore of Moat Lake south and continue straight up onto the shoulder of the north-west ridge of Castlecrag. There is some short ski terrain from here back to Moat Lake. To continue higher up choose a safe line near the 1400m contour and make a long traverse across the east flank of Castlecrag to the open slopes on its south side. Switchback up the south face to take in the summit of Castlecrag. If time allows take advantage of some of the short but sweet ski lines on this face of the mountain down into the timbered slopes below (see photo above).

Cross the south face from below the summit to the col between Castlecrag and Mt. Frink then ascend Frink's east ridge to its top. A few short turns lead down onto the wide open terrain of Mt. Albert Edward's east ridge. If plans permit, make the long steady climb up to the summit of Mt. Albert Edward. On fast snow you'll enjoy some nice carves off Albert Edward retracing your line back down the east ridge. Swing north-east following the natural height of land toward the col with Jutland Mountain.

Fit parties or those with more time may want to continue along the ridge to Jutland Mountain and descend some of the steeper terrain down to Circlet Lake. More directly follow the summer route to Mt. Albert Edward and descend due east down the steep ridge between Circlet Lake and Moat Lake. Continue down to Circlet Lake to camp or return along the Paradise Meadows trail to the parking lot.

Additional Info: Island Alpine 1st Edition p.146-154



Castlecrag north aspect from approach to Albert Edward-Jutland col, March.