



84 Kris Oetter dropping off Mt. Becher.

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 activity 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 ski hill 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



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

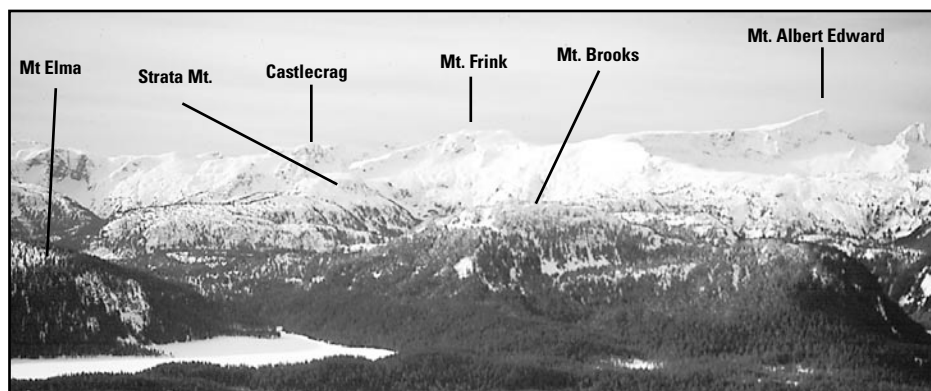
Most Vertical Descent Possible: ~600m

Difficulty/Duration: To summit B2 / 1-2 days

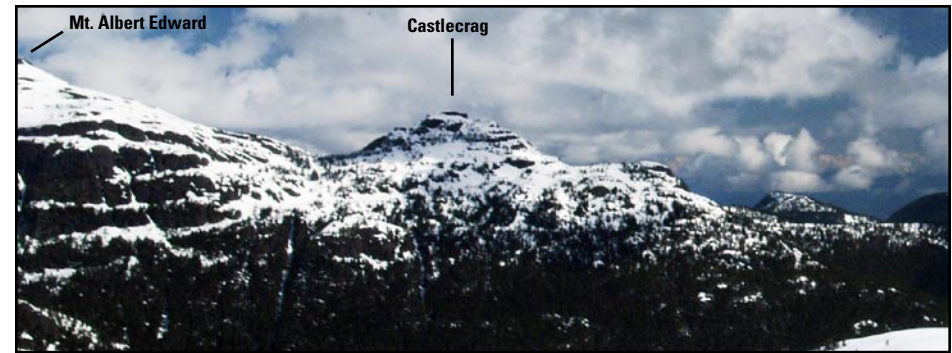
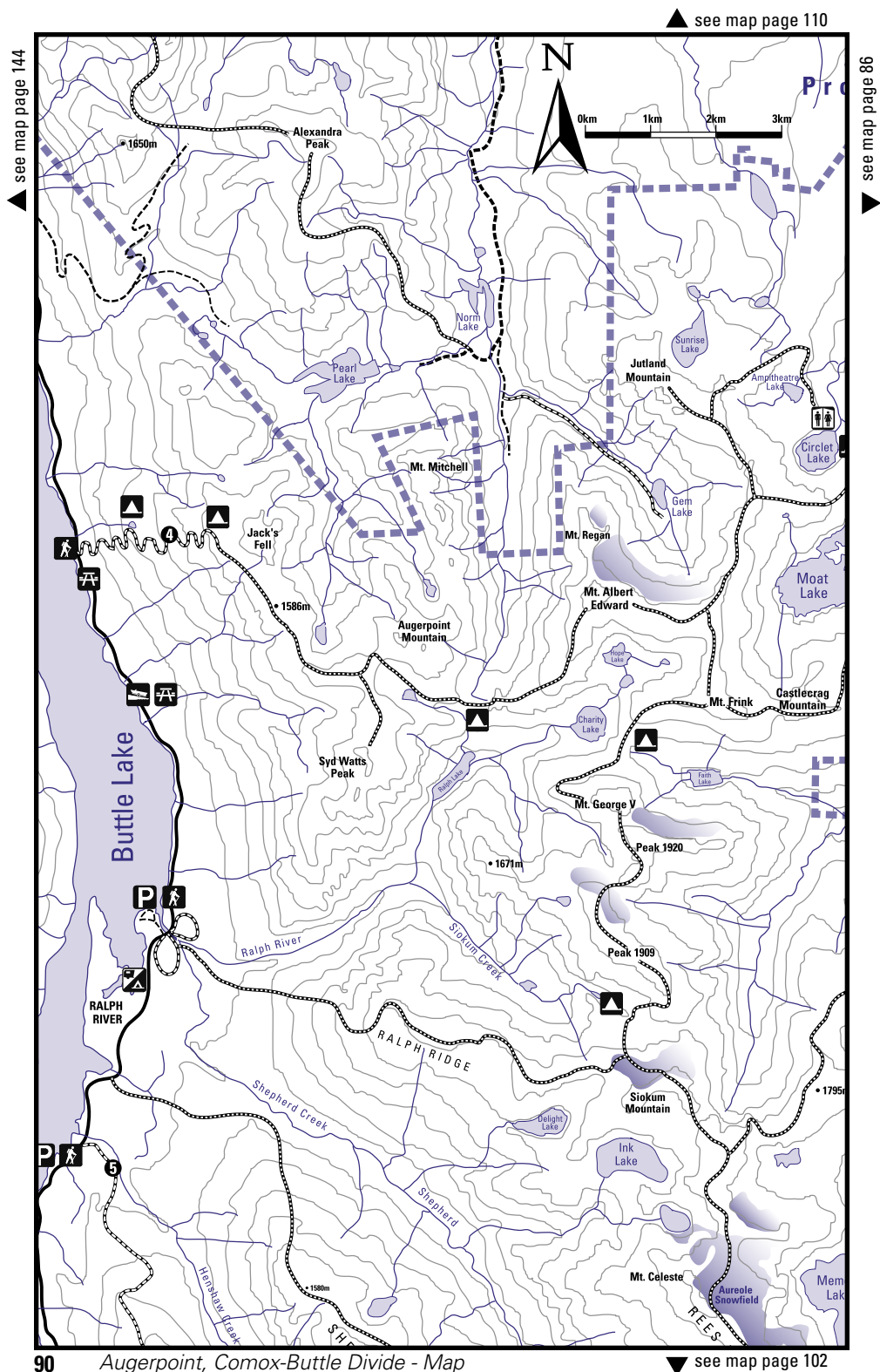
Map Sheets: 92 F/11 Forbidden Plateau

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.

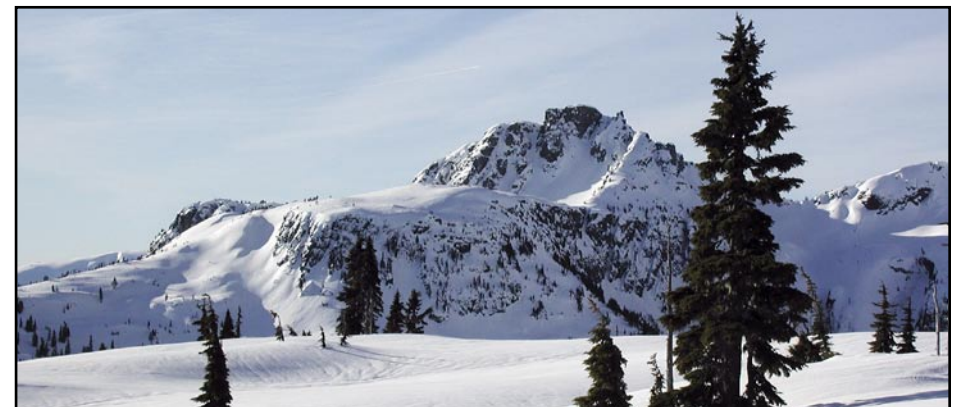
From the Brooks-Elma pass continue along the general route of the trail, past the Park's hut south-west to Hairtrigger and Kwai lakes and on to the low saddle between Moat and Circler lakes. Here you decide which direction to complete the Castlecrag Circuit. If you plan to spend the night out Circler 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 Circler Lake. More directly follow the summer route to Mt. Albert Edward and descend due east down the steep ridge between Circler Lake and Moat Lake. Continue down to Circler 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.