

ATHABASCA CROSS-COUNTRY SKI AREA

The Essentials

Name of Area	Muskeg Creek Trails, Athabasca
Location	150 km north of Edmonton in town of Athabasca
Km trails	15 km
Km classic	15 km
Km skate	15 km
Trail Rating	Easy to advanced
Signage	Excellent. Maps at all trail junctions
Grooming	Good to very good.
Facilities	Log cabin with wood stove at trailhead. Outside toilets. Cabin is now normally kept locked owing to recent vandalism. There is also a small basic wood shelter on the opposite side of the creek on the upper trails.
Trail Fees	None
Access Points	Main trailhead is over the road from the log cabin that is located next to an elementary school. Trails can also be accessed from the school grounds and from the University of Athabasca grounds above Muskeg Creek.
Other facts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short loop lit for night skiing • Arrangements to have cabin opened up can sometimes be made by contacting the executive of the local Nordic club • Convenience stores located nearby in town centre
Loppet	Freestyle 5 & 10 & 20 km usually in January
Description of trails	<p>The trails are situated in the town of Athabasca in & above the wooded Muskeg Creek next to the University. All trails are set with a classic track & a skating lane. There are maps at all trail junctions showing your exact location. Most trails are easy to intermediate but there are a few tricky steep descents down to the creek bottom. The trails are mainly in the trees.</p> <p>The lower 5 km loop offers good variety of terrain. Starting in a clockwise direction with an undulating climb then a sharp descent to the creek bottom followed by a short but steep climb and then nicely undulating terrain back to the trailhead.</p> <p>The upper trails above the creek are relatively flat, but there is a very steep long climb from the trailhead to reach them. Then it is an easy ski for the next 4 km or so past the university buildings and past some nice viewpoints before dropping back into the creek trails.</p>
Trail map	Yes – sometimes available at site.
Website	
Trail conditions & more information	Nthn Alberta ski area report linked to ENSC website
Directions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proceed north from Edmonton through St Albert on Hwy 2. • Continue on Hwy 2 for about 60 km through Clyde Corner where the highway doglegs right & left. • 70 km north of Clyde Corner enter the town of Athabasca. • Turn left at the lights at the bottom of the hill. • Take 6th turn on left into 56th Street & proceed up the hill for 0.3 km. • The cabin with parking area is on the left by a school and the trailhead is to the right by a large ski trail sign. • Travelling time about 1hr 30m from centre of city.

Mike's Two Skis Worth

This is another lovely ski area that is free from crowds. It is only half an hour further up Highway 2 than Tawatinaw Valley. Because it is a little bit further north it often receives more snow and retains it longer than in Edmonton. For example in 2006 (a low snow year) when there was not enough snow to ski in the city, they had reasonable conditions from late January onwards.

If I want a long easy skate, I climb the steep trail on the right (north) side to get above the creek. It's a real grunt up and the trail narrows at the steepest part just when you are running out of steam, so it is difficult to maintain your rhythm. However, it's worth it because from here on it is an easy glide along the top of the valley for about 4 km, with some good views before dropping back into the creek trails. There are a couple of tricky corners on the descent but the trails are wide enough for the average skier to negotiate them relatively easily. Otherwise their 5 km loop offers a moderately challenging ski over varied terrain.

The loppet starts from the school grounds and the current 20 km course is four x 5km laps around some of the trails. Unfortunately, owing to cancellations because of weather & conditions the loppet in some recent years has not been as well attended, as it could be. I find it one of the friendlier lower key loppets on the circuit. They also serve some of the best homemade chilli on the circuit.

Compiled by Mike Stern 04/08/07
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