

CROSS-COUNTRY SKI TRAILS NEAR EDMONTON

In this section are articles on different ski areas around Edmonton. Most of these areas are within one to two hours drive of Edmonton. These articles first appeared many years ago in Edmonton Nordic's "Troll Tracks" newsletter. They have recently been revised. If you want to print them off for reference, they are designed to fit on both sides of a piece of paper.

In these articles I first cover the essentials on each ski area such as length and nature of the trail system, how far it is from the city and how to get there etc. Then, I add my "two skis (cents) worth" of personal comments on the area. I have tried to be as accurate as possible, but if you spot any mistakes please let me know so that I can update them. Also, in each of these articles is information on how to obtain maps on the individual trail systems. There are also links to the local club or authority's website or Facebook page where applicable.

The following twelve areas have been covered so far: Athabasca, Blackfoot, Bunchberry Meadows/Tucker's Field, Camrose, Chickakoo Lake, Drayton Valley, Edson, Fort Saskatchewan, St Albert, Strathcona Wilderness Centre, Tawatinaw and Vermillion.

Some of these areas are provincially or municipally owned and are looked after by the various authorities. Others are managed and looked after by volunteers from the local Nordic club. A few charge a small fee for using the trail system. I have found that it is good PR to give a small donation to those trail systems run by local volunteers, particularly when the grooming is good.

Happy skiing.

Mike Stern
revised 31/03/20

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
Revised 28/03/20

BLACKFOOT SKI TRAILS

The Essentials

Name of Area	Cooking Lake – Blackfoot Provincial Recreation Area
Location	40 km east of Edmonton
Km trails	~ 100 km
Km classic	~ 80 km
Km skate	22 km
Trail Rating	Easy to intermediate
Signage	Excellent
Grooming	Very good
Facilities	Unheated shelters & outside washrooms at trail heads & within trail system.
Trail Fees	No
Access Points	Waskehegan, Islet Lake, Central & Blackfoot Staging Areas
Other facts	No dogs are allowed on the trails set for classic skiing
Loppet	Canadian Birkebeiner on 2 nd Saturday in February
Description of trails	<p>The Blackfoot area contains the largest concentration of ski trails in Central Alberta. It is home every February to the famous Canadian Birkebeiner ski race that attracts upwards of 2,000 skiers of all abilities. The trail system can be accessed from four different staging areas all between 40 minutes to one hours drive from Edmonton.</p> <p>The trails undulate through forest passing many small lakes. All classic trails are normally double track set. The skating trails are only accessible from the Blackfoot Staging Area. The trails go out from each of the staging areas in a series of loops, so that if you get tired you can just turn back at the next junction. All junctions are marked with location maps. Excellent free maps are available at the trailheads. Most of the trails are rated easy to intermediate with a few steep hills & sharp corners.</p> <p>Lost Lake trail is the main through route between Waskehegan & Islet Lake, a distance of nearly 15 km. The route out & back can be varied by taking some of the numerous loops that branch off from this main trail. The two main huts, Meadows & Lost Lake are 5.5 & 4 km from Waskehegan & Islet Lake staging areas respectively. These shelters make a nice aiming point for a pleasant couple of hours ski where you can loop back on different trails.</p>
Trail map	Free at trailheads
Website	https://www.albertaparks.ca/parks/central/cooking-lake-blackfoot-pra/activities-events/trail-report/
Facebook	https://www.facebook.com/groups/210190552657329/
Trail conditions & more information	Nthn Alberta ski area report linked to ENSC website
Directions	<p>Waskehegan Staging Area</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proceed east on Wye Rd (Hwy 630) past Sherwood Park • After about 15km turn left (north) onto RR 210 (Note there is a white house that looks like an old store opposite this junction). • After 5km turn right into trailhead parking lot <p>Islet Lake Staging Area</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instead of turning off to Waskehegan continue east along Wye Rd for another 10 km & the road narrows & becomes TWP Rd 630 • Just after a bend to the right, turn left at the brown sign for Islet Lake & Central staging areas • Go past turn-off to Central Area & proceed for 2 km to the car park <p>Central Staging Area</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As for Islet Lake but turn right at sign for Central, then take 1st left & follow road to parking area <p>Blackfoot Staging Area</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proceed east out of Edmonton on Hwy 16 to Ukranian Village • 2 km past the Ukranian village turn right onto RR195 • Follow road until it ends at the trailhead parking lot <p>Driving time from Edmonton to all areas between 40 - 55 minutes</p>

Mike's Two Skis Worth

The Blackfoot recreational area is the largest and also one of the most popular out of town trail systems for Edmonton area skiers. Most skiers start from the Waskehegan Staging Area. On a good weekend in January the car park here is full to overflowing. Some of these skiers are practising for the Birkebeiner ski race and some of the more energetic head across to the Islet Lake Staging Area & back by various routes.

Personally, I prefer skiing out from the Islet Lake area for several reasons because it is far less crowded, it is prettier & the trails are a little more challenging. One of my favourite options is to head out from Islet Lake taking the trails that hug the lake shore including the Push Lake trail to Elk Push where you cross a fence line. From there I take the hilly Sitsika trail to Meadows hut & then by various routes I ski to Waskehegan. On the return depending on how I feel, I may just take the Lost Lake trail back to Islet Lake.

For more novice skiers I recommend skiing the loops close to Waskehegan. A pleasant couple of hours ski is to head out to the Meadows Shelter a distance of 5.5 km on Lost Lake & then return back via Grouse and Spruce Hollow trails. Note: on all but the warmest days the huts like Meadow and the ones at the trailheads can be very cool, unless someone before you has really stoked the fire up well. Even then, I find them barely warm enough to linger for more than a few minutes to eat a hurried snack. Many skiers like the Don's Way trail which follows the fence line in the southwest part of the park. I usually avoid this trail on days that have a high wind chill because it is very exposed.

As soon as there is enough snow the groomers make every effort to track-set a trail from Waskehegan to Islet Lake. However, early in the season it may not be track-set much beyond Meadows hut.

A few words of caution, there are a few trails in the middle of the park that are shared with equestrian users that include Round-up, Wapiti & the northern part of Winter. These trails are not usually track-set until a few weeks before the Birkebeiner. Often in the past when I have set out to do a longer ski in this area I have been either forced to retrace my route or trudge along for several kilometres over ungroomed portions of the trail system. For these reasons I do not usually recommend starting from the Central Staging Area because you may be restricted to a few small loops around the trail head with no through routes to the north & west except for the Moose Link trail towards Islet Lake. Those hoping to practice the full Birkebeiner route through from the Ukrainian Village may also be disappointed for similar reasons and also by the fact that the link to the village is only open for a few hours on the day of the race.

If you want to get away from the crowds around Waskehegan and the Meadows hut areas, you can try starting from the Blackfoot Staging Area at the north end of the park. I do not really know the trails in this area as well as in the other areas. This is also the only area of the park where you can go skate skiing but you may be sharing these trails with dog sledgers. Although this area is pretty, I find for me that some of the skating trails here a bit too narrow with a bit too much of a side camber in places for my style of skate skiing.

The parks staff posts updates on trail conditions that can also be accessed from the Edmonton Nordic website or go to the Cooking Lake Blackfoot Skiers Facebook page. Note, the Live grooming report was not been working this past 2020 season.

BUNCHBERRY MEADOWS & TUCKER'S FIELD SKI AREAS

The Essentials

Name of Area	Bunchberry Meadows & Tucker's Field
Location	25 km SW of Edmonton
Km trails	~14 km
Km classic	~14km
Km skate	nil
Trail Rating	Easy to intermediate
Signage	Good
Grooming	Fair
Facilities	Washrooms at Bunchberry trail head
Trail Fees	By donation
Access Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • E side of Bunchberry Meadows • SW side to access Tucker's Field
Other facts	Trails looked after by Parkland County
Loppet	None
Description of trails	<p>Despite the names the trails mainly go through hilly woodland surrounding some open areas. Bunchberry Meadows is a partnership between the Nature Conservancy of Canada and Edmonton Land Area Trust. The ski trails are actually on year round walking trails. About 2/3 of the trails are in the Bunchberry Meadows area while the remainder are in the Tucker's field area to the south. There is a link trail between the two areas.</p> <p>2019-20 was the first winter that these trails have been groomed for skiers. All trails are set with a single classic track and there is space alongside for walkers and people to snowshoe. This leaves little room to get both skis right out of the tracks to slow down on hills. Also, the walking portion can get cut up by users so if the trails are fast or icy it may be difficult to control your speed. There are trail maps at all major junctions..</p>
Trail map	Download from website: http://www.natureconservancy.ca/assets/documents/ab/Bunchberry-trail-map.pdf
Website	http://www.natureconservancy.ca/en/where-we-work/alberta/featured-projects/bunchberry/
Trail conditions & more information	Nthn Alberta ski area report linked to ENSC website
Directions	<p>Bunchberry Meadows</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From Edmonton head W on Whitemud Drive • Turn S onto 215 St/Winterburn Rd for 6.5 km • Turn W onto Hwy 627/Maskekosihk Tr for 1.6 km • Turn S onto RR 261/Flemming Drive for 5.6km • Turn R or W into the parking area by the sign (Note the sign is difficult to see when coming from the N) <p>Tucker's Field</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From Edmonton head W on Whitemud Drive or on Hwy 16A • Turn S onto Hwy 60 • About 1 km past the entrance to U of A Botanical Gardens turn E or L onto Twp Rd 512 • After 1.5 km reach a 'T' junction with Banksania Rd. Park here at the trail head. • In about 150m you will reach a power line, Tucker's Field is in the ¼ section to the S & E of that spot <p>Travelling time about 30 minutes from centre of city.</p>

Mike's Two Skis Worth

The 2019-20 winter season was the first time these two adjoining areas were advertised by Parkland County as being groomed for cross-country skiing. The area is very pretty and quite hilly. The names of the areas are rather misleading because the trails go mainly through woodland with some open areas. Being a new area for cross-country skiing I have only managed to get out to them once during this first season. Therefore, I would welcome any suggestions from other skiers to improve this description.

The best place to access the trails is probably from the Bunchberry Meadows trail head because there is a good parking area with decent washrooms. From there you can go in either direction on the Aspen Parkland Trail. Part of this trail along with the Tamarack Trail form a pleasant 6.5 km loop around the Bunchberry Meadows area. If you want a shorter ski just stay on the Aspen parkland trail where it joins with the Tamarack Trail.

Going right or north from the Bunchberry Meadows trail head you cross a couple of open areas before going past a horse farm in the NW corner of the area. At the junction with the Tamarack Trail you can either continue on the Aspen Parkland trail back to the trail head or head south on the Tamarack which basically takes a rolling course. Luckily most of the hills in this area do not involve tight turns but if the tracks are very fast there is usually not much space to slow down using a full snowplough, so in these conditions caution is advised.

The junction from the Tamarack Trail to the **Tuckers Field** area is shortly after the trail turns east in the SW corner of the Bunchberry Meadows area. The junction is signed. The trails at Tucker's Field are much shorter and total about 4 – 5 km in length. The loops are quite short, and some do cross an open field on a hilltop.

No dogs are allowed in the Bunchberry Meadows area, but I understand that dogs are allowed in the Tucker's Field area. Trail etiquette advises you keep pooch on a leash when encountering skiers.

At this stage I have not been able to find a downloadable trail map for Tucker's Field although there are maps at some of the junctions. There is a downloadable map for the Bunchberry Meadows area. (See the link on the previous page). Also, you can subscribe on the Parkland County website to receive trail grooming updates. This includes updates for the Chikakoo Lake area.

CAMROSE CROSS-COUNTRY SKI AREA

The Essentials

Name of Area	Camrose Nordic Centre
Location	100 km southeast of Edmonton
Km trails	20 km
Km classic	20 km
Km skate	20 km
Trail Rating	Easy to advanced
Signage	Fair
Grooming	Good
Facilities	Heated washrooms at Stoney Creek Centre trailhead + heated club waxing room (combination lock). Heated clubhouse at Biathlon.
Trail Fees	None
Access Points	From either Stoney Creek Campground or Biathlon Range
Other facts	Trails looked after by the Camrose Ski Club
Loppet	Olle Uffda Loppet (classic): 1.25, 2.5, 5, 15 & 30 km in February
Description of trails	<p>The trails are situated on the southern edge of Camrose, along the picturesque Stoney Creek valley. All trails are set for both classic & skate skiing. Many of the trails are one way. The perimeter route is about 15 km long and climbs up past the biathlon centre. The trails are generally very undulating with some steep uphill & downhill sections. Some of the downhill sections can appear quite daunting but because the trails are wide, they are not as tricky as they may appear from the top. The easiest route is to take the Rotary Trail that follows the valley floor quite closely.</p> <p>The main trailhead is at the Stoney Creek Centre campsite. Here there is a large heated building opposite the luge hill & old ski jump. The washrooms in this building are usually open during the day and there is ample room to change. On the lower level is the Camrose Ski Club's waxing room which is open for events and has a combination lock entrance for members. There is a 2.25 km lighted loop for night skiing from this centre.</p> <p>The SE part of the trail system can also be accessed from the biathlon range.</p>
Trail maps	Download from website
Website	www.camroseskiclub.com
Facebook	https://www.facebook.com/CamroseSkiClub/
Trail conditions & more information	Club website or from Nthn Alberta ski area report linked to ENSC website
Directions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proceed east from Edmonton on either Hwy 14 or head out past Sherwood Park and turn south onto Highway 21. • Drive south for ~60 km to junction with Hwy 13 & turn left onto Hwy 13. • (Alternatively head south on Hwy 2 from city & then east on Hwy 13) • Follow Hwy 13 into Camrose and turn right into 53 Street just before the bridge over the small lake • Follow road round for about 1.5 km and turn left into 39 Ave. Proceed through a modern sub-division and park near the clubhouse building that is across the valley from the old ski jump. • Travelling time is about 1 hour from centre of city. • To access the biathlon range: on Hwy 13 continue across the bridge over the lake and at the top of the hill turn right into 50 Street • Go past the college, go under the railway & over Camrose Rd (Ring Rd) • Right at 'T' junction onto Twp Rd 463 • Bear right at next 'T' junction into the biathlon centre.

Mike's Two Skis Worth

I prefer to start from the Stony Creek Centre because at least you have some heated washrooms and a place to change. Don't count on finding the waxing room open unless local club members are present. Many years ago, there used to be a tearoom on the upper level which made for a nice break between skis. I don't usually recommend starting out from the Biathlon Centre because the gate to the gun club range / biathlon range is only open when they are in use.

Many of the trails can appear a bit challenging for novice skiers but luckily, they are wide and some of the steepest hills can be bypassed. The trails are signed as a series of distance loops marked out from either the Stoney Creek centre or from the Biathlon Range. The major trail junctions are also numbered. Despite this the trails can be a bit confusing owing to the number of cut-offs and parallel trails, so take a map.

For a nice challenging ski, I find the route around the perimeter trails a good option. The route can be shortened at many points by taking one of the numerous cut-off loops. To start I usually head north from the Stoney Creek Centre past some houses and circle back along the east side of the creek behind the ski jump hill and head south down the valley under the railway trestle and road bridge. The climb up to the biathlon range can be a bit of a grunt but you are rewarded with a swift return along a ravine back to the main trail systems. After passing under the railway again, keep left and head back via a few more ups & downs on the west side of the creek to the clubhouse.

For a gentler ski take the Rotary trail along the valley floor (more or less) and pass under the railway & road until you reach a ploughed service road before heading back.

The Olle Uffda Loppet is one of the more arduous courses on the loppet circuit. The main event is normally two 15 km loops around the trail system broadly following the perimeter trail up to & back past the biathlon range.

Compiled by Mike Stern 09/09/09
2nd revision 28/03/20

CHIKAKOO LAKE CROSS-COUNTRY SKI AREA

The Essentials

Name of Area	Chikakoo Lake Recreation Area
Location	45 km NW of Edmonton or 15 km NW of Stony Plain
Km trails	14 km
Km classic	14km
Km skate	~10 km
Trail Rating	Easy to difficult
Signage	Good
Grooming	Fair
Facilities	Outside washrooms & unheated shelter at trail head
Trail Fees	By donation
Access Points	Two parking areas at south end of Chikakoo Lake
Other facts	Trails looked after by Parkland County
Loppet	None
Description of trails	<p>These trails are located in a beautiful wooded hilly area around several small lakes. Farms & cottages are tucked away nearby. The terrain is quite rugged. The easy loops follow the lake shoreline and are suitable for novice skiers. The intermediate & advanced loops have some quite challenging up & downhill sections that wind down on narrow trails through the trees. They should be avoided by less experienced skiers particularly when fast or icy.</p> <p>All trails are set with a classic track and there is usually a skating lane. However, be warned that the trails are often messed up by walkers and dog owners & even horse owners who think it is quite fine to use the ski trails in winter.</p> <p>New trail maps have been added at all junctions with your location marked on them.</p>
Trail map	Download from website: https://www.parklandcounty.com/en/live-and-play/resources/Documents/trail-map.pdf
Website	https://www.parklandcounty.com/en/live-and-play/Parks-Trails-and-Natural-Areas.aspx?mid=7748
Trail conditions & more information	Nthn Alberta ski area report linked to ENSC website
Directions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proceed west from Edmonton on Hwy 16 for 30 km to the town of Stony Plain. • Take exit #355 signed Calohoo Road & Stony Plain exit onto Hwy 779 on the west side of Stony Plain • Head north for 3 km & turn left onto Twp Rd 534 (signed) • After 4 km turn right onto Range Rd 13 at sign • Turn right at "T" junction & then left at next junction • Continue a short distance to the end to a parking area by the main trail head • Travelling time about 45 minutes from centre of city.

Mike's Two Skis Worth

If you want thrills & spills and some more exciting classic skiing this is where to go. I also think it is one of the prettiest of our outlying ski areas and it is well worth taking a camera along. I usually wait until just after a good dump of fresh snow. The advanced loop & even sections of some of the intermediate loops can be tricky when the conditions are fast and icy. I've often left my imprint on quite a few steep corners that I didn't quite make under these conditions.

My favourite trail is the advanced loop which is called Woodland Lookout or trail #3. This trail can be skied in either direction. It is reached from the main trailhead by skiing along some of the easier loops along the lakeshores. Either direction has its challenging bits. If you go around in an anti-clockwise direction the finale is an exhilarating long winding descent that used to have some hay bails strategically placed at one of the more dangerous corners, in case you don't quite make it.

On another section of this trail there is a steep dip called The Wall. If you approach from the higher side, you should have enough momentum to reach the top of the other side. The trick is to shift your weight at just the right moment when you are in the bottom of the dip otherwise; you face plant into the up slope. In my early skiing days, my success rate was less than 30%.

Another of my favourite routes is to go out via trail #2 or Nature's Way and then ski anti-clockwise on the intermediate Cranberry Corner (#4) & Woodland Lookout trails.

In years past, the grooming was sometimes a bit uneven. It is also unfortunate that some locals feel that they have to exercise their dogs & occasionally even their horses on these trails. I don't think they realise how much damage they can do to groomed ski trails, particularly to the skating lane.

Compiled by Mike Stern 14/10/07
2nd revision 28/03/20

DRAYTON VALLEY CROSS-COUNTRY SKI AREA

The Essentials

Name of Area	Pembina Nordic Trails, Drayton Valley
Location	150 km south west of Edmonton
Km trails	+15 km
Km classic	+15 km
Km skate	+15 km
Trail Rating	Easy to intermediate
Signage	Very good - maps at all major trail junctions
Grooming	Very good to excellent. Usually done over weekends.
Facilities	New lodge (Oct 2019) with wood stove and washrooms. There is also the old cozy ski chalet a with wood fire
Trail Fees	None. But a small donation can be made via Zone4
Access Points	From ski chalet. If gate to access road is locked you can park on secondary road in two spots, where trails come next to road.
Other facts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trails managed by Pembina Nordic Club • Ski lodge and chalet are open over weekends when trails are used by local skiers. When someone has lit the wood stove, it is a good spot to take a lunch break
Loppet	Eagle Point freestyle in mid January
Description of trails	<p>All trails are set with a classic track & a skating lane. They undulate through aspen & birch forest along the side of the N Saskatchewan River. To the west, there is an easy 4km trail called the Ridge Loop, which is ideal for beginners. Off this loop is the 2km advanced Bridge Loop that descends a steep windy hill. This trail can easily be bypassed & should be avoided by beginners or when icy.</p> <p>The trails to the north & east traverse more undulating terrain & are great for some intermediate classic or skate skiing. There is a perimeter trail with a series of shortcuts and side loops. There are a few steeper sections but the trails are wide enough for all but the very novice skier to negotiate.</p>
Trail map	Available at lodge
Website	www.dvhta.ca/attractions/pembina-nordic-ski-club/
Facebook	www.facebook.com/PembinaNordicSkiClub/
Trail conditions & more information	Nthn Alberta ski area report linked to ENSC website. Also Pembina Nordic Facebook page
Directions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proceed west from Edmonton on Hwy 16 for about 100km. • Turn south onto Hwy 22 near Enthwhistle • After about 40km turn left (east) onto Twp Rd 494 just north of Drayton Valley, (at the south end of the DV golf course). • Continue east on Twp Rd 494 for 5km. Note after 3km it becomes a gravel road. • Turn right opposite the County gravel pit & drive into the chalet parking lot. • If you miss the 494 turn off & end up in DV, just turn around at Boston Pizza, head north on 22, & you will find RR 494 about 1 mile north of BP's (it's the first right after BP's). • Travelling time is about 1hr 30m from centre of city. • Note: Those people living in the far south of Edmonton may prefer to get there by going south on Hwy 2 to Leduc then heading west to Drayton Valley & turn north onto Hwy 22 to reach Twp Rd 494.

Mike's Two Skis Worth

This is another one of those hidden gems of ski areas that I discovered quite a few years ago after seeing a notice in one of Edmonton's ski shops. The trails are rarely busy. They are looked after by a small and very friendly bunch of dedicated local skiers. Grooming is to a high standard and done regularly throughout the season as conditions dictate. The trails are usually well prepared for the weekends. Being located further west than Edmonton this area generally receives more snow which often results in good early and late season ski conditions.

The new lodge that opened in the fall of 2019 is a great asset. It has a wood stove and proper washrooms and with the fire going it is a great place to take a break or have lunch. There is also the old cozy old wooden ski chalet that can be rented. It is also fitted with a wood stove.

If I want a nice easy warm up ski, I take the Ridge Loop on the west side of the chalet. I normally bypass the steep Bridge Loop if the conditions are slick or icy. The trail back above the river has some lovely views across the valley. For a more energetic ski I go out on the Evergreen & North Loop trails, either direction is good. If you ski all the perimeter trails it is about 13km. For novice skiers there are also a couple of short easy loops close to the chalet.

Further along the same side of the Valley is a small downhill ski area and I understand that there have been long term plans to link

- the areas up with a cross-country trail
- up with some ski trails nearer the town.

I have found it useful before going to check the Pembina Nordic Facebook page for an update on current conditions & grooming.

If you want to contribute to the trail grooming and upkeep consider like me joining the Pembina Nordic Ski Club. You can register on-line via Zone4 and if you are a member of an existing affiliated Nordic ski club like Edmonton Nordic you get a discount on the membership rate. You also receive the code for the entry gate to the trail system so that you can drive right up to the lodge and chalet.

FORT SASKATCHEWAN CROSS-COUNTRY SKI AREA

The Essentials

Name of Area	Fort Saskatchewan
Location	35 km north east of Edmonton
Km trails	~15 km
Km classic	15 km
Km skate	15 km
Trail Rating	Mainly easy with a few intermediate sections
Signage	Poor
Grooming	Good to very good
Facilities	West lodge sometimes open on weekends in the afternoons. The heated toilets are open to the public daily from 8 am to 8 pm.
Trail Fees	None
Access Points	1. River Valley Road by lodge (on access road to boat launch) 2. Downtown by old Fort museum
Other facts	Trails looked after by Fort Saskatchewan Nordic Ski Club
Loppet	None
Description of trails	<p>The trails roughly parallel the south bank of the North Saskatchewan River. They now start from the lodge on the west side of downtown and continue to the old Fort Museum in downtown.</p> <p>There is a nice 4 km undulating loop starting from the lodge. This is in a fairly open area and the tracks can sometimes get blown in. Off this loop is the new Oxbow trail that follows close to the riverbank and heads off to the west for a few km to a turn-around point.</p> <p>Proceeding east from the lodge the trails loop through an open area along the river before climbing up to the top-of-bank trail. The main trail proceeds above the river in front of the houses for several km before dropping back down again. The trail climbs slowly up through some trees, crosses over Highway 15 by means of a footbridge before descending down to the river bank and then goes as far as the old Fort Museum where there is a turnaround point. The distance back to the lodge is 6 km from here.</p>
Trail maps	Download from club website
Website	www.fortsasknordic.ca
Facebook	https://www.facebook.com/Fort-Saskatchewan-Nordic-Ski-Club-210356715800578/
Trail conditions & more information	Club website or from Nthn Alberta ski area report linked to ENSC website
Directions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proceed north east from Edmonton on either Hwy 15 (Manning Freeway) or Hwy 21 to Fort Saskatchewan • If approaching from Hwy 15, head south & cross the river and then turn right (west) at the junction with Hwy 21 • Turn right at 2nd to last set of lights into Westpark Blvd – see below • If approaching north on Hwy 21 turn left at 2nd set of lights into Westpark Blvd. Then follow the brown boat launch signs to the river, i.e. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Turn right into Westpark Dr ○ Turn right into River Valley Dr • The lodge is located on the left at the bottom of the hill. Park outside the lodge. • Driving time from centre of Edmonton is about 35 - 40 minutes.

Mike's Two Skis Worth

A small but dedicated band of local Nordic club volunteers keep these trails regularly groomed. Signage is sparse but it is generally easy to find your way around the trail system.

This is an ideal place for novice skiers particularly for those that want to improve their skating technique without having to climb up an endless succession of hills. The snow here often lasts well into late March and I have had some excellent late season skate skis, especially when I have caught it right usually in the mornings before the heat of the day softens the snow too much. The trails along the river are mainly flat except where they climb up to the top of bank trail.

These days I usually start from the lodge at the west end of the trail system. The 4.5 km loop that starts from the lodge has some nice ups & downs. Until the trees mature this area is a bit exposed and visibility can be a challenge in poor light. Also, these trails in places can sometimes get drifted in. I then cross the road by the lodge and continue along the riverbank trail towards town. This section used to be cut up a bit by walkers but the nearby paved bike trail is now ploughed in winter for other users so there is less foot traffic on the ski trail. Once on the top of bank section the surface improves as there is a separate parallel trail for walkers. This is fast flat section which is nice for skate skiing. I then continue over Highway 15 towards the town trailhead by the old Fort Museum.

The trails used to extend beyond here crossing several roads through Turner Park and beyond to end close to a refinery. These trails are no longer groomed in favour of the newer trails by the main lodge.

For opening times of the ski lodge please see the club website.

Compiled by Mike Stern 05/11/09
4th revision 28/03/20

HORNBECK CROSS-COUNTRY SKI AREA, EDSON

The Essentials

Name of Area	Hornbeck Ski Area, Edson
Location	215 km west of Edmonton or 18 km NW of Edson
Km trails	25 km
Km classic	25 km
Km skate	25 km
Trail Rating	Easy to intermediate
Signage	Fair to Good
Grooming	Good
Facilities	Basic shelter at trail head with outside washrooms
Trail Fees	None
Access Points	From shelter.
Other facts	Trails looked after by Muskeg Fliers Ski Club
Loppet	Mooseheart freestyle loppet: 5,10 &15 km in late February or early March
Description of trails	<p>All trails are set with a classic track & a skating lane. They undulate through aspen & birch forest. The scenery is quite similar to parts of Blackfoot without the lakes. All loops are signed for distances e.g. 2.5, 5 km etc. at each junction but there are no maps at these junctions. The signs generally direct skiers in a clockwise direction from the trailhead.</p> <p>There are some short easy loops close to the shelter that are ideal for beginners. The 15 km loop, is the main perimeter trail and the middle part offers the most challenging skiing with some short & steep ups & downs with a few tight corners. The 5, 7.5, 10 km loops have mainly easy skiing with some steeper downhill sections. The 5 and 10 km loops take short cuts off the main perimeter trail via firebreaks.</p>
Trail map	Folded map usually available at site
Website	none
Facebook	https://www.facebook.com/groups/266312090182790/
Trail conditions & more information	Nthn Alberta ski area report linked to ENSC website
Directions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proceed west from Edmonton on Hwy 16 for 200km to Edson. • Continue on Hwy 16 through Edson and 5 km west of centre of Edson turn right onto Rodeo Rd (RR 180) by the red Brian Janesk sign • Proceed N for 6.5km then turn left at crossroads onto TWP Rd 540 • After 5 km the paving ends & continue for another 1.5 km & then turn right at T junction onto RR 184. • Proceed 0.6 km & turn left into ski area & park by the ski shelter • Travelling time is about 2hr 15m from centre of city.

Mike's Two Skis Worth

It's a bit of a long haul out for a day trip particularly in the early part of the season when the days are short, but it's not so bad later on in the season. It can also make a nice diversion either on the way out or on the way back from Hinton & Jasper.

To be honest I've sometimes found the grooming at least for skate skiing, a bit rough on occasions, but to be fair this was probably partly due to the lean snow years we have had. There are a few places where the trails are a bit narrow or have a marked camber that makes skate skiing a bit tricky.

For a pleasant ski, I find either the 7.5 or 10 km loops pretty good. Both loops start with a not too steep climb followed by a long gentle downhill section. The trail then undulates for several kilometres before the splits with the 7.5 and 15 km loops. The 10 km then follows a firebreak for a long straight 1 km descent. From the point where it rejoins the main perimeter trail it is basically flat all the way back to the trailhead. This last section I find makes for a nice skate ski.

For a more challenging ski, continue onto the 15 km loop from the junction with the 10 km. These 5 km will stretch your skills a bit and should probably be avoided by novice skiers.

The Mooseheart Loppet is one of my favourite events on the loppet circuit because it is more casual and low key than some of the others. Medals are rarely given out as prizes but all competitors receive some of the famed home made sausage made by one of the local members. Even though it is a freestyle loppet, there are separate categories for classic & skate skiers. I really recommend this loppet to skiers who want to start some recreational racing and are intimidated by some of the larger events. The 10 km distance is a great one to do if you want to enter your first skiing event.

ST ALBERT CROSS-COUNTRY SKI AREA

The Essentials

Name of Area	Kinswood Park & River Lot 56
Location	20 km north of Edmonton
Km trails	10 km
Km classic	10 km
Km skate	~7.5 km
Trail Rating	Easy to intermediate
Signage	Fair to Good
Grooming	Good
Facilities	Heated shelter & washrooms at Kinswood Park trailhead
Trail Fees	None
Access Points	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Kinswood Park Shelter 2. Baseball diamonds in Red Willow Park at west end 3. Poundmaker Road at southeast corner of River Lot 56
Other facts	Trails looked after by STANSKI (St Albert Nordic Ski Club)
Loppet	Family Day Fun Loppet in mid February
Description of trails	<p>The trails are situated near the centre along and close to the Sturgeon River valley. There are two areas adjacent to each other, separated by a road. They are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Kinswood Park Trails • River Lot 56 <p>The main trailhead is at the heated Kinswood Park Shelter. The trails in this area are set for both classic & skate skiing. Here there is a loop around the park. Branching off from this is a flat out & back trail heading west for over 2 km along the river towards downtown. This trail ends at the baseball diamonds where there is parking. In the other direction a loop branches off from Kinswood Park through a wooded area with one steep hill.</p> <p>Across the road from Kinswood Park are the River Lot 56 trails. The 5 km of trails in this pretty wooded area are more hilly. There are a few narrow sections in this area which are only suitable for classic skiing. At the south east corner of River Lot 56 is a trailhead with parking.</p>
Trail map	Map board at trail heads or download from website; https://1ece326b-2835-4d9f-81f0-7fb794a99dce.filesusr.com/ugd/df84cb_3e15da1dd7764d9eb81b7cf147f8f3e0.pdf
Website	https://www.stalbertnordic.com/
Trail conditions & more information	Club website or from Nthn Alberta ski area report linked to ENSC website
Directions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proceed north from Edmonton on St Albert Trail to St Albert • Head downhill towards the river & turn right at lights into Sturgeon Rd • Proceed for about 1.5 km and turn left at "T" junction into Sir Winston Churchill Drive. • After 0.5 km turn left at lights into Kinswood Park parking area. • To directly access the River Lot 56 trailhead proceed for another 0.5 km past the Kinswood Park turnoff and take next right into Poundmaker Road. • The trailhead is about 1 km along on the left.

Mike's Two Skis Worth

I usually start from the heated shelter in Kinswood Park, which is similar but smaller than the one in Goldbar Park. STANSKI are very good at keeping on top of the grooming in Kinswood Park. There is a big trail map board next to the shelter. The trails in this area are very easy to find your way around and this is a nice area for novice skiers or for those who just that want a leisurely ski. The easy terrain makes it particularly good for those novice skate skiers who want to practice their technique. A good practice route is to skate ski around the park and then head back along the river towards town to the baseball diamonds and back. There is also usually enough light from the streetlights to ski around the Kinsmen trails at night.

The trails in River Lot 56 have more variety of terrain and most are probably better suited to classic skiing because of a few very narrow sections. There are some pretty sections through some wooded areas. However, I find the signage in this area a bit spotty and it can be confusing at some trail junctions.

The Family Day Fun Loppet that is usually held in February is highly recommended for any skier who wants to try racing for the first time. It is very laidback affair and you can choose the distance & style you want to ski. There are also fun events and shorter races for the kids.

Compiled by Mike Stern 04/11/09
Revised 28/03/20

STRATHCONA WILDERNESS CENTRE SKI TRAILS

The Essentials

Name of Area	Strathcona Wilderness Centre
Location	20 km east of Edmonton
Km trails	12 km
Km classic	12 km
Km skate	12 km
Trail Rating	Easy to intermediate
Signage	Excellent
Grooming	Very good to excellent
Facilities	Heated lodge, ski rentals & lessons
Trail Fees	Yes
Access Points	Main lodge
Other facts	Opening times: 9 AM – 4.30 PM
Loppet	Beat the Blues Boogie Loppet in March
Description of trails	<p>During winter the Wilderness Centre becomes a proper Nordic centre with a heated lodge and lounge area where hot drinks & snacks can be consumed. You can also rent both classic & skate skis & take ski lessons. The trails are well signed with location maps at all junctions. An excellent free trail map is available from the lodge.</p> <p>The trails radiate out from the lodge in a series of short loops through a pretty & hilly forested area. The wider trails are usually double tracked with a skating lane in the middle. Some recent trail improvements have widened some of the narrower trails and reduced some of the side camber.</p> <p>The terrain is generally very undulating and most trails are rated easy to intermediate with the odd difficult section & steep hill. All trails are bi-directional. A ski around the perimeter loop is 7 km.</p>
Trail map	Free from lodge or click this link: https://www.strathcona.ca/files/files/at-rpc-swc_map_dec_2013-brochure_trail_map_side.pdf
Website	www.strathcona.ab.ca/wildernesscentre
Trail conditions & more information	Wilderness Centre website or from Nthn Alberta ski area report linked to ENSC website or click on the real time grooming report: https://skitrails.info/report/strathcona or call 780-922-3939
Directions	<p>From Edmonton</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proceed east on Wye Rd (Hwy 630) past Sherwood Park • Turn left (north) on RR 215 • Right at cross-roads onto TWP Rd 530 (Baseline Rd) • Turn third right onto RR 212 into the centre • Park in the car park by the lodge or if busy in the overflow lot <p>From Hwy 16</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proceed east past Sherwood Park • Turn right (south) into RR 212 to the centre <p>From Sherwood Park</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proceed east on Baseline Rd which becomes Twp Rd 530 • Turn right (south) into RR 212 to the centre <p>Travelling time from the centre of Edmonton is around 35 minutes & from Sherwood Park about 20 minutes.</p>

Mike's Two Skis Worth

This is my number one out-of-town place to go in really cold weather. There is nowhere on the trail system where you are more than a few kilometres or about half an hour from the comfort of the heated lodge and a hot drink. So I find it is an excellent place to go on those really cold days and ski for a short while and then to come in to warm-up before going out again. It is also an excellent place for families to ski. The only slight downside is that the centre closes at dusk, so there is normally no night skiing. A small trail fee is charged payable at the lodge.

The trails are groomed regularly and in my opinion the standard of grooming is the best in the greater Edmonton area. It is also a good place to try if some of the city trails are too icy to ski. The centre usually sends out a detailed trail report on Friday afternoon which you can go onto their website and subscribe to receive updates.

Some of my favourite trails are to head out on the west side of the lodge along the Moose Loop. The varied terrain makes for good classic and skate skiing in either direction. Another one of my favourite routes is to take Coyote Run in a clockwise direction and return to the lodge on the Owl Loop. Coyote Run has a few steep hills and sharp corners which are excellent for practising your step turns.

If you want a longer ski, take the trails that form the perimeter loop. This gives a distance of 7 km. This distance can usually be covered by the average recreational skier in about an hour. Another pleasant shorter 5 km ski that is suitable for the more novice classic skier is take the Owl, Wagon and Fox loops on the east side of the lodge.

In mid March the centre hosts The Great Pastry Caper which is a fun event where participants ski around the trails from one cookie station to the next. Also, in March the centre is the venue for the Beat the Blues Boogie/Fast Trax Loppet, a freestyle event.

TAWATINAW VALLEY CROSS-COUNTRY SKI AREA

The Essentials

Name of Area	Tawatinaw Valley
Location	90 km north of Edmonton
Km trails	14 km
Km classic	14 km
Km skate	14 km
Trail Rating	Easy to advanced
Signage	Good new maps and trails signs at all major junctions
Grooming	Good to very good
Facilities	Modern heated ski chalet at base of ski hill with washrooms, change area & cafeteria serving hot snacks
Trail Fees	\$6/day. Season pass available with very good rates for seniors.
Access Points	<p>Ski lodge & upper parking area.</p> <p>The trails are to the side and behind the downhill ski area. Main access is from the north side of the ski lodge although this entails a 1.6 km climb up to reach the rest of the trail system. You can avoid this by driving round to the upper parking lot. (From ski lodge return to main road turn left, proceed past a farm & take first left & follow dirt road RR240A uphill for ~2 km to the upper parking area on left. Note: This road is not always ploughed so 4-wheel drive or winter tires are recommended).</p>
Other facts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Downhill ski area & lodge open Fridays, weekends & holidays • Also sometimes open on other days when there is a school party booking • When closed you can access trails from upper parking lot – but no bathroom facilities here.
Loppet	Classic 7.5 ,15 & 25 km in late January or early February usually before the Birkie
Description of trails	All trails are set with a classic track & a skating lane. They undulate through aspen & birch forest. One trail goes past some abandoned farm buildings. A long 3.5km flat loop called Vowel Howel to the north borders fields & is great for skating. The inner area bounded by the Hwy 101 trail has a maze of nicely undulating trails that are good for both classic & skating. The Yodeller trail goes up from the lodge and is also now the ski out. Unfortunately, in recent years they have lost a few trails including the exciting Home Run trail back to the lodge that has had to be abandoned due to ice flows. Also the Geiger counter trail through a farm is no longer available for skiers. To compensate a few more loop trails have been added to the north of the system.
Trail map	Available at chalet or download from website
Website	tawatinawvalley.ca
Facebook	Friends of Tawatinaw Ski Hill: Tawatinaw Valley
Trail conditions & more information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 780-698-2212 • 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. • 21 km north of Clyde Corner turn right (east) at the Tawatinaw Valley sign. • After 3km you descend into a valley & can see the ski hill on the left. Park in the parking area by the ski lodge. • Travelling time about 1hr 10m from the centre of Edmonton

Mike's Two Skis Worth

The ski hill nearly closed but in 2017 the local community rallied together to save it under the banner of "Friends of Tawatinaw Ski Hill" and have been successfully running it ever since.

Some of you that know me well, may know that this has been one of my favourite ski areas. Why may you ask? Well it's relatively close to Edmonton, it has a modern heated lodge that serve hot snacks, a warm changing area and the trails are great for both classic & skate skiing and what's more they are never crowded, plus the scenery is lovely. In a typical (if there is such a thing now) ski season it frequently retains the snow long after Edmonton. Often you can still have great skate skiing here until early April.

The trail system is like a maze on top and is rather confusing. There are now in Dec 2019 new maps and trail signs at most major junctions with "you are here indicators." Copies of these maps can be obtained from the ski lodge or downloaded from the website.

Unfortunately, some of my favourite trails in the south part of the system are now no longer available for skiers. The Little Secret trail which after a windy descent to some abandoned farm buildings climbs up steadily through a small hidden gully is one of my current favourites. If I want a long easy ski, I take either the recently extended Vowel Howel loop or go out & back on the Nice 'N Easy trail. There is a steel warming hut with a picnic table and also an outhouse on the Vowel Howel trail.

One of the new trails called Deer Meadow, loops down in a very steep descent to the north of Little Secret before climbing just as steeply back up the side of the valley. Although very beautiful it should only be attempted by experienced skiers and in good ski conditions.

I have found it useful before going out to Tawatinaw, to contact some of the local cross-country skiers to find out about the current conditions as the website and information desk does not always have the latest information.

The 25 km loppet here is a good primer for the 55 km Birkebeiner ski race, occurring as it usually does a week or so before the Birkie. The 25 km course is two laps around the trail system.

If you decide to go to Tawatinaw mid week when the downhill area is closed, you can either park near the lodge or in the upper parking area.

Compiled by Mike Stern 04/08/07
5th Revision 28/03/20

VERMILLION CROSS-COUNTRY SKI AREA

The Essentials

Name of Area	Vermillion
Location	200 km east of Edmonton
Km trails	15 km
Km classic	15 km
Km skate	5 km
Trail Rating	Easy to intermediate
Signage	Good
Grooming	Very good
Facilities	Heated shelter at trail head with washrooms
Trail Fees	None
Access Points	From shelter.
Other facts	Trails looked after by Vermillion Nordic Ski Club
Loppet	Beckie Scott Loppet (classic): 5,10, 20 & 30 km in late January
Description of trails	<p>The trails are located on the NW edge of Vermillion, next to a campground. They are located on the wooded south side of a valley alongside a lake. Some of the classic trails are one way. The perimeter route follows a figure of eight course and is about 9 km long. The western most loop involves several climbs up some steep hills. There are no really tricky downhill sections on these ski trails. The Lakeside trail is a wide trail following a road & is set for both classic & skate skiing. This is the one of the easiest trails. Most junctions are signed with a map & a location marker.</p> <p>The ski lodge is a lovely old converted station building. It is often closed during the week. There are also some outdoor washrooms next to the car park.</p>
Trail map	None except at trail junctions
Website	http://www.vermilionnordic.com/
Facebook	None
Trail conditions & more information	Nthn Alberta ski area report linked to ENSC website
Directions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proceed east from Edmonton on Hwy 16 for 200km to Vermillion. • Take Vermillion off-ramp & turn left (north) into town • Pass under railway bridge & turn left at first set of lights • Drive about 2 km & turn right onto the Beckie Scott Trail • Follow road round for about 1 km through a campsite. Park in the car park near the old station building • Travelling time is about 2 hours from the centre of city.

Mike's Two Skis Worth

This is the former hometown of Beckie Scott, currently our most famous Nordic Olympian. Vermillion is another one of those areas that sometimes receives snow before Edmonton and can sometimes retain it longer. However, in more recent years they have suffered from poor snow conditions.

Although it is a bit of a long haul out for a day trip particularly in the early part of the season when the days are short, I have often found the trip well worth it. This is particularly when there is no decent snow in Edmonton. I have usually found the grooming to be very good. This ski area probably has more options for classic skiing.

For a pleasant ski with a reasonable variety of terrain, I find the 9 km figure of eight loop around the perimeter trails a good option. Be warned the back 3 km loop on this circuit has several very steep hills that require herringbone ascents. For a gentler ski take the Lakeside trail that as the name suggests follows a road along the lake shore for most of its course.

The Beckie Scott Loppet is another one of my favourite events on the loppet circuit because it still retains a casual atmosphere. The course is a series of laps roughly following the course of the perimeter trail, e.g. The 10 km is once round, the 20 km twice & so on. This loppet is another event I recommend to skiers who want to start some recreational racing and are intimidated by some of the larger events. The 10 km or 20 km distances are good ones to enter, as they are usually less competitive than the 30 km event.

Compiled by Mike Stern 25/03/08
1st revision 28/03/20