

BOW GLACIER FALLS, BANFF NATIONAL PARK, ALBERTA

The trailhead for Bow Glacier Falls is located near the Num-Ti-Jah Lodge. The hike is 4.6 kilometers long: 3.6 kilometers to a viewpoint of the falls, then 1 kilometer further to the base of the falls. The trail first circles the north shore of Bow Lake, then heads almost directly towards the Bow Glacier Falls, crossing over and around some small hills. Just before reaching the viewpoint of the falls, the trail forks, with a route to the Bow Hut turning off to the left. This trail to the hut is no longer marked on park maps, nor is it maintained, but there is a sign here at the fork. I have inquired about the conditions of this trail at different nearby visitor centers in different years, and in all cases the park rangers have been happy to answer questions regarding this route (but I recall snow has been a concern further along the trail in past years). Note that at the beginning of this Bow Hut trail one must cross a boulder which is wedged in a narrow, cold-water-filled slot canyon; this is a very (!) effective "people-filter." Past the trail fork, the main Bow Glacier Falls trail reaches an excellent viewpoint, both of the falls and of the valley to the south in which the Bow Hut is located. From here, the trail is clear: it heads directly to the base of the falls.

Important note: Do not attempt to swim in Bow Lake without proper preparation. This water is very cold (it just came from a glacier!), and hypothermia is a real risk.

Earlier in the day we had attempted the hike to Taylor Lake, but when the trail became more like a river after about 2 km we decided to look for another hike that didn't have so much rain on this day. Here is the viewpoint for the Crowfoot Glacier, on our way towards Bow Lake; notice that you can't really see the glacier because of all the low clouds:



Panorama from the Crowfoot Glacier viewpoint:



Panorama of Bow Lake from the Bow Lake viewpoint; the trail to the Bow Glacier Falls goes up the valley seen in the center of the photo, and the big peak to the left in the photo is Crowfoot Mountain:



There were a few flowers blooming along the lakeshore at this viewpoint:



There were also a few flowers at the trailhead for the Bow Glacier Falls trail (note the falls are visible in the background center of this photo):



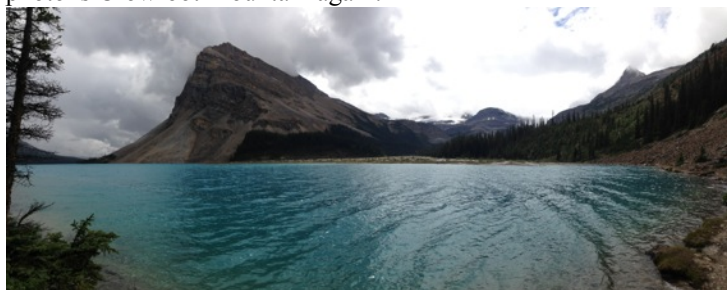
Panorama of Bow Lake from the beginning of the trail; note in future photos how the clouds were moving throughout the day, sometimes being thicker and darker in different areas:



The ridge to the left in this photo has Cirque Peak to the left and Dolomite Peak to the right, with Dolomite Pass, Lake Katherine, and Helen Lake in between:



The prominent peak to the left in this photo is Crowfoot Mountain again:



Panorama of the northwestern end of Bow Lake:



Note both the incredible blue color of Bow Lake and the blue of the river running into it from Bow Glacier Falls and the Bow Glacier:



As on our last hike out to Bow Glacier Falls (which I think was in 2007), the river was cutting away some of the trail in places:



Panorama with Crowfoot Mountain to the left and what I'm guessing is Mount Jimmy Simpson on the right. I don't think the top of Crowfoot Mountain is as accessible as it may appear from this photo:



The trail is much better maintained and more well-marked than it was in 2007:



As we continued along the trail, the weather began to improve and we were less concerned about getting rained on:



I think that the scenery along this trail must be some of the best on the short hikes in this area:



Up ahead, the river cuts through a gorge, and the trail climbs to the right of this gorge:



Looking back at the mountains to the north of this valley; unfortunately, there aren't any maintained trails up on this interesting ridge:



Panorama, with the stairs leading around the river gorge to the right (the bend in the river here is not as sharp as it appears in this panorama):



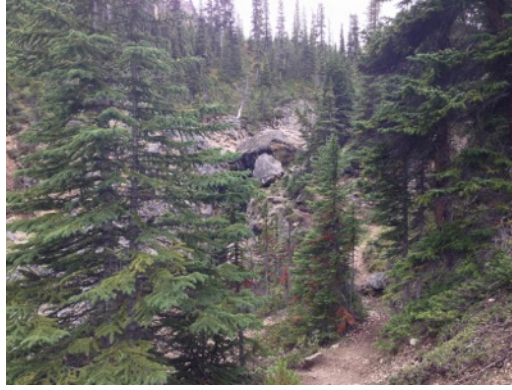
Looking across the river at a use trail on the far side:



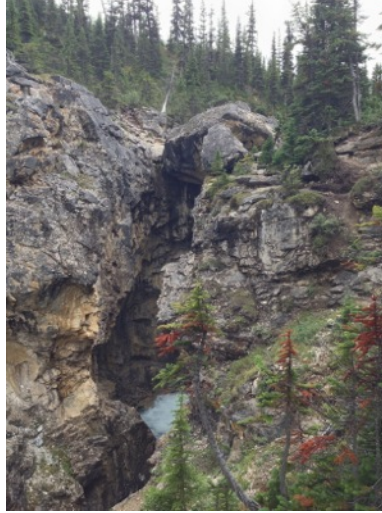
In many places it is possible to get closer to the gorge; however, the ground is unstable and the cliffs are sheer, so please be very cautious if exploring this area further:



From this use trail, a boulder wedged in the top of the gorge is just barely visible:



Looking across at this boulder, and the raging river below:



Another view of this boulder, which is actually substantially larger than it appears in this photo:



Looking out at the mouth of the river gorge:



Looking into the gorge, where the river goes down a waterfall and disappears from view:



From here, we returned to the main trail and continued up to the turnoff for the Bow Hut alpine route (this trail is no longer maintained):



The boulder I had been photographing earlier is this one; the trail to the Bow Hut first crosses the boulder. The boulder is quite wide, so the trickiest part would probably be just climbing up onto it and not falling off to one side (hopefully it wouldn't be raining on the trip out or on the return trip, because if the boulder were wet then the crossing would be a bit scarier!):



Looking down at the river gorge below the boulder:



Looking up at the river where the gorge starts to narrow:



There actually was what appeared to be a use trail leading down closer to the river, but it appeared too dangerous to check out:



From here, we returned to the main Bow Glacier Falls trail, and continued towards the viewpoint of the falls:



Looking up the valley towards where the Bow Hut is located:



Panorama from the falls viewpoint (I think we stopped here in 2007 since the trail wasn't as well maintained then and it had taken us longer to navigate around the river on our way out). Note the prominent small peak to the left in this photo which would be interesting to try to access from the Bow Hut trail:



Looking up the valley towards the Bow Hut again:



The falls is much more spectacular the closer you get to it:



Were it possible to cross the river which comes down from the falls, it might be interesting to ascend the ridge to the right in this photo:



Panorama of this area, with the Crowfoot Mountain visible to the far left:



Another view of the Bow Glacier Falls as we get closer to it:



It seems like it would be an amazing hike to get to the top of the Bow Glacier Falls (and perhaps even to the Bow Glacier above it; there appears to be a small lake right above the falls, between the top of the falls and the glacier). I haven't found any reports about accessing the top of the falls, and there doesn't seem to be a clear route around the cliffs and to the top:



Panorama of the cliffs surrounding the falls; the only potential hike-able routes to the top would probably be to the far left and the far right of the cliffs:



Looking out towards Bow Lake (left), with the falls to the right:



Another view looking out towards Bow Lake and Crowfoot Mountain:



It looks too steep and slippery to ascend to the ridge to the left of the falls (and from further back the trail it appears that the terrain is still steep and slippery above the top of the cliffs):



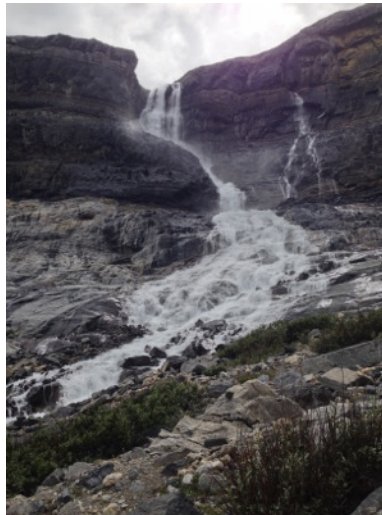
There were two small waterfalls to the right of the main falls, both of which appeared to be coming right out of the rock:



Even if a hiker could safely cross the (cold!) river, the cliffs and scree on the other side appear to be easily as difficult as nasty talus in Death Valley, so this is probably not the best route to the top of the falls:



Looking up towards the top of the Bow Glacier Falls:



Panorama towards Bow Lake from the base of the falls; note that where the river widens is probably the most likely place to be able to cross it, perhaps in a year when there is less water overall:



Two more photos looking up at this incredible waterfall:



As it looked like it could start to rain again, we began heading back down the trail:



There is so much spectacular scenery in this part of Banff National Park:



Looking across at the small bump below Crowfoot Peak which would be interesting to hike up to; some maps indicate that there is a small lake visible on the other side of this small bump, below the peak:



It looks like the most likely route to the top of the Bow Glacier Falls would start on the far right side of the cliffs surrounding the falls; however, this certainly will require more research:



Panorama back at the Bow Glacier Falls viewpoint, with the valley containing the Bow Hut visible in the center, and the falls off to the right:



Panorama from further back along the trail, of the trail to the Bow Hut where it follows along the top of the river gorge. That trail appears somewhat exposed from here, but realize that the Bow Glacier Falls trail probably also looks exposed from the Bow Hut trail:



Looking back out towards Bow Lake from the top of the stairs:



We briefly checked out the mouth of the river gorge; note how much water seems to be coming out of the gorge at this time:



I don't think there is generally this much water still coming down from the glacier at this time of year (August 2016):



Panorama of the river, with the Crowfoot Mountain visible to the right (again, the bend in the river here isn't as sharp as it appears; the distortion is from the panorama):



From here, we headed back towards Bow Lake. Near where the trail reaches the lake, we spotted this route which looks like a use trail; I'm not sure if it just goes to an unofficial picnic area, or if it ends up attaining the nearby ridge:



Looking back across Bow Lake at the just-barely-visible Bow Glacier Falls and the Bow Glacier; the clouds are finally starting to clear. I think the glacier on the left is near the Balfour Hut, while the glacier on the right is the Bow Glacier, and the peak in between is Mount Gordon:



The clouds are also beginning to clear above Cirque Peak. The red roof in the photo is the Num-Ti-Jah Lodge:



Looking down the Bow Valley:



Note how much less low clouds are in this photo than in the previous photos from near this location:



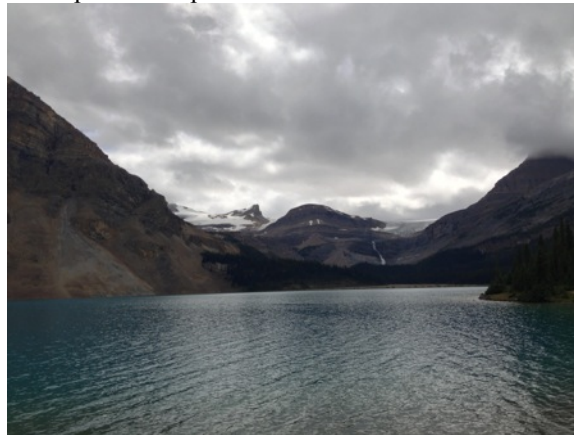
The views from this trail must be even more spectacular on a clear day:



Looking towards the Crowfoot Glacier:



One last view across Bow Lake towards the Bow Glacier Falls; one clearly would have to do a bit of climbing to get to the top of the falls. There is still much exploration I'd like to do in this part of the park:



We finally got a glimpse of the Crowfoot Glacier on our drive back towards Lake Louise; this glacier has receded quite substantially from the last time I saw it in 2007, and I remember even then it had receded quite a bit since our previous trip in 2003:

