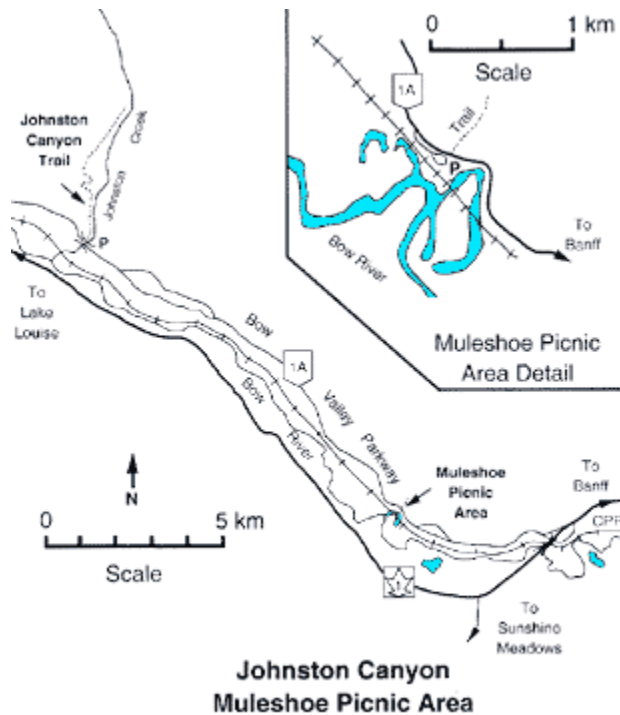


Johnston Canyon *by Dave Elphinstone(1993)*

Johnston Canyon is a narrow, steep-sided gorge located adjacent to Hwy 1A (the Bow Valley Parkway), just east of Eisenhower Junction. It is one of the most popular (and most crowded) short hikes in Banff National Park. The magnet which draws birders however, is not the pleasant scenery but a small breeding colony of Black Swifts. Winter Wren can also be found here, plus several montane species which are sometimes difficult to find elsewhere. The swifts arrive at the beginning of June and may be observed until early September, when the young fledge. Early morning is the best time to bird the canyon as the crowds start to build up by ten. To see the swifts flying, time your visit to just before dusk. With an early start,

Johnston Canyon can be combined with a visit to the Lake Louise area.



To reach Johnston Canyon drive west for about 5.5 km on the TransCanada Highway (Hwy 1) from the Banff Townsite/Mt. Norquay interchange, and exit to the right onto Hwy 1A (the Bow Valley Parkway). Continue for 17.8 km and park in the public parking lot on the right, just east of the Johnston Canyon Resort complex. Eastbound travellers on the TransCanada can take the Hwy 93 exit. In this case, go north for 1.5 km and turn right onto Hwy 1A and drive a further 6.4 km to the parking lot. Along the Bow Valley Parkway watch for both Three-toed and Pileated Woodpeckers. Occasionally, Blue Grouse may be seen beside the

highway in early spring. At the lodge, check the ornamental flowers and the occasional feeder for Rufous Hummingbird.

The trail to the Lower Falls has a mild uphill grade; the distance is approximately 1.6 km return. To the Upper Falls it is 4.8 km return. The trail winds through a moist, mature forest of Lodgepole Pine and Engelmann Spruce beside noisy Johnston Creek. Hearing birds can sometimes be a challenge. At the narrowest point the path is carried by means of a suspended walkway bolted to the canyon wall. American Dipper should be seen along the creek - in recent years it has nested near the Lower Falls. About half-way to the Lower Falls, on the opposite side of the creek, watch

for a rock fall with the scattered remains of many fallen trees. This is one of the best locations for finding Winter Wren.

Check for Western Flycatcher as you approach the suspended walkway; Townsend's Solitaire usually nests on the cliff face in this area too. Several Black Swift nests are located in the vicinity of the Lower Falls. They are always in inaccessible and often wet places (look for patches of green slime) on the canyon walls but good views can be obtained from the trail. From the bridge at the falls, facing upstream, scan the rock face to the left of the falls. This is usually the most visible nest. Others might be observed from the trail above the falls. Only one egg is laid and the young hatch towards the end of July. Swifts are rarely seen flying in the canyon during daylight hours as food is usually brought at dusk.

Above the falls, bird species typical of mature coniferous forest can be heard along the trail. Watch for the difficult to see Townsend's Warbler, the common Yellow-rumped Warbler and species such as crossbills. Further up the trail you may find Spruce Grouse.

Washrooms are located at the parking lot or campground across the highway. Food and accommodation can be obtained at Johnston Canyon Resort.