

see also: [Trip Ratings for all Hikes and Scrambles](#)

Here are Andy Dragt's ideas for a trip rating system based on the RMR system.

Ramblers System:

T (trail) 1, T2, T3, T4

OT (off trail) 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

S (scramble) 5, S6, S7

Some Examples:

T1 - Upper Kananaskis Lake loop, Lake Minnewanka shoreline

T2 - Chester Lake, Rawson Lake

T3 - Larch Valley/Sentinel Pass, Aylmer Lookout

T4 - Ha Ling, Mount Allan

OT2 - Wasootch Creek

OT3 - Grotto canyon, Horseshoe Canyon

OT4 - Mount Bourgeau

OT5 - Lady MacDonald to Summit Ridge

S5 - EEOR, Heart Mountain Horseshoe

S6 - Yamnuska Traverse, Mount Temple

S7 - Lady MacDonald true summit ( knife edge), Mount Chephren

Trail Hiking is the first category of hikes.

Technical Difficulty

- TL 1 walks have flat or easy gradients and a wide, smooth, solid trail tread. They are often well maintained and near civilization. Official Park Interpretive trails are good examples. Light hiking shoes are generally sufficient, or even running shoes if the trail is dry.

Example: Upper Kananaskis Lake Circuit

- TL 2 hikes have moderate slopes and generally solid trail tread. These trails are often purpose-built with erosion control features and switchbacks up hillsides. Some short rough sections or easy stream hopping may be encountered. Light hiking boots with ankle support are a good choice.

Example: Healy Pass

- TL 3 hikes may be narrow with steep sections. The trail tread may have a rough, uneven surface with rocks and tree roots protruding. Sections may have a loose surface requiring care to prevent slipping.

Often these trails go straight up the fall line of a hillside rather than having switchbacks. Erosion from running water often degrades the trail tread. Wading of shallow streams may be required. Boots with good ankle support and more aggressive tread are best for these trips.

Example: Prairie Mountain

- TL 4 hikes may have long steep rough sections with loose and uneven footing. At times they can be overgrown with bushes or have windfall (fallen trees) to climb over. More difficult stream crossings or some mild exposure to heights may be encountered. Boots with good ankle support and more aggressive tread are required for these trips. Hiking poles can be a definite asset for maintaining balance on these trails.

Example: Mt Allan

Off-Trail Hiking is the second category of Hikes that is next in popularity to Trail Hiking. A guideline for defining an Off-Trail Hike is when the route is not obvious and route finding becomes necessary. Most Off-Trail Hikes rise above treeline onto alpine meadows and exposed ridges. Others occur below treeline along open streambeds, or through meadows and parkland forest. At times when snow obscures trails above treeline Trail Hikes become Off-Trail Hikes.

#### Off-Trail Hiking Risks and Hazards

The risks and hazards of Trail Hiking apply to Off-Trail Hiking as well. Off-Trail Hiking routes are often on steep vegetated meadows which can become very slippery when wet or when covered by snow. Falling and sliding down these slopes is a definite possibility. Hiking poles can aid in preventing falls and arresting slides.

#### Technical Difficulty

- OT 1 routes have flat or easy gradients on firm open ground. Prairie, meadows, or open forest parkland near civilization are good examples. Light hiking shoes are generally sufficient.

- OT 2 routes have easy to moderate slopes and generally solid ground. Examples are routes on low rounded grassy foothills or up easy stream valleys with firm shingle or dryas flats. Some short rough sections or easy stream hopping may be encountered. Light hiking boots with ankle support are a good choice.

Example: Wasootch Creek

- OT 3 routes have increasingly steeper slopes and rougher ground. There may be some loose footing, boulder hopping, small easy rock outcrops, snow patches, some bushwhacking, and minor stream wading. Boots with good ankle support and more aggressive tread may be best for these trips. Hiking poles can be a definite asset for maintaining balance on these routes and on routes of higher difficulty.

Example: Whaleback

- OT 4 routes may have sustained steep hill climbs usually on grassy or wooded slopes. Streambed hikes may encounter long stretches of loose boulders to navigate. Bushwhacking, more difficult stream crossings, or some mild exposure to heights may be encountered. Boots with good ankle support and

more aggressive tread are best for these trips. Hiking poles can be a definite asset for maintaining balance.

Example: Kent Ridge

- OT 5 routes usually encounter short sections of scree (small loose rocks on low angle slopes). Rock outcrops can usually be negotiated without the use of hands. Occasional exposure to heights is to be expected. Sturdy boots with an aggressive tread (such as Vibram) are best for this type of trip.

Example: Opal Ridge

Scrambling is the third category of Hikes. A guideline for defining a Scramble is when an Off-Trail Hike requires the use of hands to maintain balance, but does not usually require specialized climbing equipment or skills. Most commonly, Scrambles are day trips that ascend mountain summits or high alpine ridges.

#### Scrambling Risks and Hazards

Scrambles almost always encounter long sections of scree (small loose rocks on low angle slopes) and/or talus (boulders on low angle slopes). Movement over scree and talus can be difficult and falls should be expected. Rockfall generated by other participants on these slopes is common. Scrambles often encounter rock bands that must be negotiated. Handholds and footholds can be loose and often give way. Rockfall from natural causes or from other participants is a constant threat. Participants may also be exposed to heights. Wet rock can be extremely slippery and treacherous, increasing the difficulty and danger to exposure dramatically. Many people find returning down a route more difficult than going up.

\* Make sure you are capable of returning down a route before proceeding up

#### Scrambling Equipment

Participants should wear sturdy boots with good ankle support and tread. Many bring hiking poles for balance which can be especially useful on scree and talus slopes. An ice axe is often standard equipment on difficult scrambles, and is used for self-belay and self-arrest on steep snow slopes. A half length of 9 mm rope is often taken to assist some participants over short exposed sections.

\* Helmets are required for All Scrambles

#### Technical Difficulty

Difficulty ranges from 5 to 7. These numbers correspond roughly to the "Easy, Moderate, and Difficult" ratings of a popular guidebook "Scrambles in the Canadian Rockies" by Alan Kane. The Yosemite Decimal System ("YDS") numbers 1, 2 & 3 correspond roughly as well. These Difficulty Numbers are for dry rock routes free from snow.

- SC 5 routes (Kane's easy, YDS 1) are hiking ascents on a rocky gradient with minor rock bands. This type of trip is often similar in nature to Off-Trail 5 trips. A problem with the 'use of hands' criteria for scrambles is that trip participants have differing levels of balance. Another criteria is that a Scramble 5 is a more 'serious' trip than an Off-Trail 5 trip. Expect to encounter longer stretches of scree or talus and mild exposure. Scramble routes are often in mountain environments with potential for more extreme weather and terrain conditions.

Example: Grotto Mountain

- SC 6 routes (Kane's moderate, YDS 2) will likely encounter rock bands requiring use of hands. Route finding to locate the best way is often necessary. Exposure to heights can be more serious.

Example: Mt Temple

- SC 7 routes (Kane's difficult, YDS 3) will likely encounter steep exposed sections that may have loose rock or smooth down sloping slabs. Frequent use of hands and a cool control of vertigo from extreme exposures is required. A fall could be significant enough to cause death. Route finding skills are generally necessary to find the most feasible way. Improper route finding may lead groups onto technical terrain. A rope may be required by some participants.

Example: Mount Chephren