

Cross-Country Skiing in Edmonton – Frequently Asked Questions

This document is designed to answer some common questions about cross-country skiing in and around Edmonton. It is not a technical how to guide because there are many articles and videos on the internet showing you for example how to apply grip wax to your skis and what is the best clothing to wear etc. Many of these answers are derived from questions I have received by email over the years.

Mike Stern
15/02/21

Where can I ski within the city of Edmonton?

Most of the ski trails are located in the parks and golf courses in the Edmonton River Valley system. In total there are about 35km of trails. Unfortunately, the connecting trails between the ski areas are no longer maintained for skiing. Most trails are set for both classic and skate skiing except for the trail that follows the riverbank between Groat and Buena Vista Bridges via Hawrelak Park which is set for classic skiing only.

In the SW of the city the South West Area Council of Community Leagues groom trails in neighbourhoods west of Calgary Trail and south of Whitemud Drive. These are mainly single-track classic trails on relatively flat terrain. Between 10 – 20km of trails are groomed.

River Valley Trail Areas

Most are located on the south side of the river going east to west:

- Goldbar & Goldstick Parks
- Capilano Park
- Riverside Golf Course
- Argyll Park (in Millcreek)
- Kinsmen Park
- Victoria Golf Course (on North bank)
- Mayfair Golf Course
- Hawrelak Park

For more details please refer to file: *Summary of Ski Areas in Edmonton.docx*

For more details on city groomed trails please go to

https://www.edmonton.ca/activities_parks_recreation/cross-country-skiing.aspx where you can sign up to receive regular grooming updates.

SW Edmonton Trails

Some of the areas that are usually track set include:

- Bearspaw
- Blue Quill
- Confederation Park
- Ermineskin
- Kaskitayo
- Olgilvie Ridge
- Royal Gardens
- Terwilliger Towne

For more details and grooming updates please go to the SkiLocal Facebook page at

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/257625614635280/>

West Edmonton Trails

Glastonbury Community League have started in 2021 grooming 5km of trails in:

- Glastonbury Park
- Grange District Park

They are located between Anthony Henday Drive and Range Rd 215

Some Other Trails in Greater Edmonton Area

There are several golf courses who groom ski trails for use by the public, some for the first time in 2020-21 including:

- Millwoods Golf Course - ~8km classic
- Broadmoor Golf Course in Sherwood Park - 3km trails skate and classic

There are also a few private golf courses such as the Derrick Club who also have ski trails and they usually restrict access to golf club members only.

Where can I ski after dark in Edmonton?

1. **Goldbar and Goldstick Parks** where there are 10km of classic and skate trails lit for night skiing. Also next to it on the west side of 50th Street are 2.5km of trails in Capilano Park which are illuminated by nearby streetlights.

Access to these areas is to proceed north from Capilano Mall on 50th Street and turn right just before the river at the Goldbar Park sign. Continue for 1km to the parking area at the end of the road. Here there is a heated shelter with washrooms. Trails start from the parking area and the adjacent shelter.

2. **Kinsmen Park:** There is a flat 0.5km lighted loop around the Huskies football field with a link trail on the south side up to an undulating 1km lighted loop around the pitch and put course. The trails are set for both classic and skate skiing.

Access is to enter the Kinsmen Sports Centre area and drive round the north side and park on the west side of the Huskies pavilion just before you get to the High Level Bridge. The trails are immediately to the north of this parking area.

Where can I skate ski within the city of Edmonton?

You can skate ski on most of the groomed trails in the Edmonton River Valley apart from the riverside trail between Groat and Buena Vista Bridges and the trail around Hawrelak Pk. Most of the skating trails are fairly flat apart from the trails in Goldbar, Goldstick and Capilano parks.

The trails in the SW area of the city are mainly all groomed for classic skiing only

How many km of groomed trails are there in Edmonton?

There about **35km** of groomed trails within the Edmonton River Valley system. There is also between 10 – 20km of classic trails in the SW part of the city west of Calgary Trail and south of Whitemud Drive. These trails are maintained by the South West Area Council of Community Leagues. In addition there is a total of another 15 – 20 km of trails on various golf courses in Edmonton, some are not for public use.

Where is the best place to ski in Edmonton?

This can be subjective, and it depends on your level of skiing. Undoubtedly the best and most regularly maintained trails are those groomed by Edmonton Nordic in **Goldbar, Goldstick and Capilano Parks**. The 10 km of trails in Goldbar and Goldstick are lit for night skiing & are set for both classic & skate skiing. There are 3km of easy flat trails in lower Goldbar around the lake including a training grid. The two loops in upper Goldbar are classed as intermediate. The most demanding trails in the city limits are the loops in Goldstick Park.

There is a heated shelter with washrooms next to the parking area in Goldbar Park. To find Goldbar which is on the south side of the river continue north on 50 street until you almost reach the river. Turn right into Goldbar Park next to the sewage works. Proceed for 1 km to the parking area. The trails start from the hut. Maps of these trails can be found on the city trails ski guide.

Do I need to pay a trail fee when I cross-country ski in Edmonton?

No, most of the ski trails in Edmonton are in parks or public areas so there is no trail fee. However, a few skiers that frequently use the trails groomed by Edmonton Nordic in Goldbar and Goldstick Parks make a donation to the club's trail grooming fund.

Do the other ski areas outside of Edmonton charge trail fees?

A few such as Strathcona Wilderness Centre and Tawatinaw charge a small daily trail fee or you can purchase a season pass at very reasonable rates. Most ski areas are run by volunteers and currently do not charge any trail fees. However, they appreciate donations towards their trail grooming. It is good practice and PR when skiing in these places to offer a donation towards their trail grooming. Frequent trail users sometimes join these local ski clubs as a way of supporting them.

Is it possible to ski from one end of the Edmonton river valley to the other end?

It is possible but these days it is not perhaps practical without having to take your skis off in several places and doing a lot of walking. In theory many years ago you could ski mainly on groomed trails from the Biathlon Centre in Strathcona Science park all the way to Whitemud Creek. However, over the years the ski trails linking the various ski areas have been eroded or not been maintained or have been ploughed for use by walkers, runners and cyclists.

Until a few years ago a group of Edmonton Nordic skiers organised an annual ski through the river valley over the Xmas period from Goldbar Park to the top of the old Keilor Road, a distance of about 20km. The last time they did this they ended up having to walk about 5km of the route.

What other ski areas are there close to Edmonton?

There are more than a dozen ski areas within an hour or two drive from Edmonton. Here is a list of most of them. More details on most of these areas can be found by going to the Northern Alberta Ski Area Guide link on the Edmonton Nordic

website: <https://sites.ualberta.ca/~dwiens/TrailReport/TrailReport.html>

North

- **St Albert** – 20km north. +15km Skate and classic. Some skating lanes are narrow.
- **Fort Saskatchewan** – 35km NE. 15km Skate and classic. Easy to intermediate
- **Tawatinaw Valley** - 100km north. 14km trails - easy to difficult. Skate and classic. Lovely scenery, heated ski lodge. Excellent grooming. Usually holds snow well into late March & early April.
- **Athabasca** (Muskeg Creek) - 150 km north. 15km trails right in town. Skate and classic

West

- **Bunchberry Meadows/Tuckers Field** – 25km SW. 14km single track classic
- **Chikakoo Lake** – 45km NW. 12km some hilly and challenging with some easy trails around the lakes. Skate and classic
- **Somerset Pumpkin Farms** – 50km W. 7.5km skate and classic. Open only on weekends. Small fee. Advance booking required.
- **Edson, (Hornbeck)** – 215km west 25km mainly easy to intermediate. Skate and classic

East

- **Strathcona Wilderness Centre** – 40km east. 12km mainly easy with some more difficult. Skate and classic. Excellent grooming and heated day lodge. Ski rentals and lessons are available.
- **Cooking Lake - Blackfoot** - 40km east. 80km mainly double track classic. Includes about 20km skate. Generally easy to intermediate. There are four main access points. Site of Canadian Birkebeiner ski race in February
- **Elk Island Park** – 50km east. 55km single track classic. Mainly easy to moderate. **Not currently groomed.**
- **Vermillion** – 200km east. 15km mainly classic. Easy to difficult.

South

- **Devon** – 40km SW. 10km mainly classic. Mainly easy.
- **Miquelon Lake** – 65km SE. About 15km classic. **Not currently groomed**
- **Camrose** - 90km SE. About 20km of trails. Hilly, challenging. Skate and classic
- **Pigeon Lake** (Rundle Mission) – 90km south. 5.5km single-track classic
- **Pigeon Lake Park** – 105km south. 10km easy single-track classic.
- **Lacombe** – 120km south. 7km mainly classic
- **Drayton Valley** - - 150km SW. 15km trails, easy to intermediate. Skate and classic. New heated day lodge. Excellent grooming. Usually holds snow well into late March & early April
- **Red Deer (Big Bend)** – 150km south. 10km easy to difficult. Skate and classic
- **Red Deer** (Heritage Ranch) – 150km south. 10km easy. Skate and classic

What are some of the best areas to ski near Edmonton?

This can be subjective depending on your level of skiing and your requirements. Two of the best and most popular areas are:

- Strathcona Wilderness Centre
- Cooking Lake – Blackfoot Park

Strathcona Wilderness Centre is acknowledged by many local skiers to have some of the best kept and groomed trails in this region. The trails are groomed regularly to a high standard. Trails vary from easy for novice skiers to more difficult for more experienced skiers. All trails are set for classic and skate skiing. It is a safe place to go in very cold weather because you are never more than 30 minutes from the heated day lodge. Ski rentals and lessons are available. A small trail fee is charged. Also, a weekly comprehensive trail report is issued, and you can subscribe to receive it. It is located 20km to the east of Sherwood Park.

Cooking Lake – Blackfoot Park has the most extensive trail system in the region with about 80km trails that can be groomed for skiers. Most are set with a double classic track. About 20km of the trails are set for skate skiing only in the northeast area of the park. The park is located east of Sherwood Park just east of the Strathcona Wilderness Centre. There are four staging areas to access the trails from. The easiest trails radiate from the Waskahegan Staging Area which is also the closest one to Edmonton. There are huts and washrooms at the trail heads and throughout the system. These huts have to be heated by log stoves. The park is the site of the annual Canadian Birkebeiner ski race on the second Saturday in February. This is the largest cross-country ski race in Western Canada

More details and directions to these areas can be found on the Northern Alberta Trail reports page found on the Edmonton Nordic website: <https://sites.ualberta.ca/~dwiens/TrailReport/TrailReport.html>

Where can I find out about ski trails and conditions?

The best place is the Trail Conditions page on the Edmonton Nordic website. Here is the link: <https://www.edmontonnordic.ca/category/trail-conditions/> Here are posted conditions and links to trails in:

- City of Edmonton
- Northern Alberta
- Southern Alberta
- Strathcona Wilderness Centre
- National Parks

The Northern Alberta Trail reports page maintained by Doug Wiens has updates and links to most trails from Red Deer north and it is an excellent resource. Similarly, SkierBob at <http://skierbob.ca/> issues frequent reports on the trails in the southern part of the province including Banff and Kananaskis Parks.

Another good source is the Edmonton Nordic Facebook page at: [\(3\) Edmonton Nordic Ski Club | Facebook](#)

There is also a new App for phones on local ski trail conditions at: [YEG Cross Country Ski Conditions - Apps on Google Play](#)

How long does the ski season last in Edmonton?

Snow can come anytime from late October and last until early April. Typically, there is often enough snow to ski on from late November or early December and it lasts in the city until late March. During winter it is not uncommon to have a few freeze-thaw cycles which may make the trails icy for a few days.

In some outlying areas within 100km or so of the city the snow often lasts longer, and it is often possible to ski into early to mid April.

Where can I rent skis in Edmonton?

1. Totem Outfitters at 7430 99 Street NW. Tel 780-432-1223. www.totemoutfitters.com
2. MEC (Mountain Equipment Coop) have two stores in Edmonton: www.mec.ca
 - Downtown at 11904 104th Ave NW. Tel 780-488-6614
 - South Edmonton Common at 1624 99 Street NW. Tel 780-433-0293
3. Strathcona Wilderness Centre about 35 minutes east of the city have skis to rent for their lessons & to use **only** on their trail system. You can also rent skate skis and wax less skin skis there. They can be reached at 780-922-3939

Note that due to the covid-19 pandemic both MEC and Totem Outfitters are not renting ski equipment this season 2020-21

Where can I take ski lessons?

1. **Edmonton Nordic** Ski Club offers ski lessons at various levels from novice to expert throughout the season. To register you have first to be a club member. Depending on the course the lessons are held either in the evening's mid week or over the weekend. For details and how to register please go to the Edmonton Nordic website at <https://www.edmontonnordic.ca/>

Unfortunately the club does not have any rental ski equipment. You can normally rent skis from either Totem Outfitters in 99 Street or from Mountain Equipment Co-op.

2. **The City of Edmonton** provides ski lessons and also supplies ski equipment. Contact them at 311 or 780-442-5311 from outside Edmonton.
3. **Strathcona Wilderness Centre** about 30 minutes east of the city conducts lessons and has skis to rent for their lessons & to use on their 12 km of trails. They can be reached at 780-922-3939
4. **The Canadian Birkebeiner Society** also runs classes for beginner to advanced skiers who might want to try any of the races from the shorter distances up to the 55 with a pack. Ski technique as well as racing tips and Birkie info are included in the classes. Check their website at: <https://www.canadianbirkie.com/>

Where can I buy cross-country skis in the Edmonton area?

The main outlets are:

1. Fast Trax Run and Ski Shop
2. Mountain Equipment Co-op – 2 locations
3. Totem Outfitters
4. Track 'N Trail – 2 locations

In addition, the Atmosphere sports shops (multiple locations) and some alpine ski shops sell a limited range of cross-country skis and equipment. For a more detailed list with locations, websites and phone numbers please refer to the attached file: *X-country ski shops in Edmonton Area rev7.docx*

Where can I buy used cross-country skis and equipment in Edmonton?

Totem Outfitters at 7430 99 Street NW. Tel 780-432-1223. www.totemoutfitters.com

Who looks after the trail grooming in Edmonton?

1. **Goldbar/Goldstick/Capilano Parks and the Biathlon Range** in Strathcona Science Park are groomed on a regular basis by Edmonton Nordic. They have a contract with the city to look after these trails. There is also snowmaking in Goldbar Park. Grooming updates are posted on the club website and Facebook page.
2. **Mayfair Golf Course** are groomed by their own staff. Updates are posted on the Edmonton Nordic Facebook page.
3. The **remaining river valley trails** west of Capilano Park are groomed by the city's Parks and Rec staff. They have a priority schedule based on popularity. Updates are posted on the city's website here: https://www.edmonton.ca/activities_parks_recreation/cross-country-skiing.aspx You can subscribe to receive notification of grooming updates.
4. **SW Edmonton trails** are groomed by the South West Area Council of Community Leagues. Grooming updates can be found on the SkiLocal Facebook page.

Where can I do biathlon in the Edmonton Area?

The Edmonton Nordic Ski Club has a biathlon range and trails in Strathcona Science Park on the eastern part of the river valley. There are programs for youth and adults. For details go to the Edmonton Nordic website.

Can I take my dog on the ski trails?

In theory you can ski with a dog on most of the city groomed trails providing the dog is on a leash no longer than **1.8m**. However, in areas that are very popular with skiers such as in Goldbar and Goldstick Parks and also on Victoria Golf Course you are likely to come into conflict with skiers at busy times. Riverside Golf Course & the inside loop in Hawrelak Park are not as busy and you are less likely to experience negative comments from skiers. Note that dogs are not allowed on the ski trails in Mayfair Golf Course

Outside of the city most ski areas do not encourage or allow dogs on the trails. At Cooking Lake - Blackfoot Provincial Park east of the city, dogs are banned from the classic trails but are allowed on the packed skating trails in the northeast area of the park accessed from the Blackfoot staging area.

Where can I go Skijoring with my dog?

There are no official skijoring trails within the city of Edmonton. Some dog owners use the 5 km of trails at Riverside Golf Course for skijoring because it is mainly flat and is not so well used as other city trails.

The other area to try is the northeast part of the Cooking Lake - Blackfoot Provincial Park east of the city. Access is from the Blackfoot staging area reached from Highway 16 by turning south just after the Ukrainian Village.

Can I ski on the actual river in Edmonton?

No, nobody is allowed on the frozen river in winter in Edmonton because it is too dangerous. People have fallen through thin ice and been swept away and drowned by the current. It is sometimes possible to ski along some of the frozen creek beds such as in Whitemud Creek.

Are there any recreational ski groups I can join?

Edmonton Nordic runs an adult recreational ski program. They arrange throughout the season:

- Show up and go skis on Wednesday evenings. Just meet at the Goldbar Park shelter ready to go at 7 PM for an hour or so casual ski. Afterwards skiers socialize at a local Second Cup over hot drinks.
- Sunday day trips weather permitting to outlying ski areas usually within an hour or so drive of the city. Depending on where they are going, they normally meet either at 9 or 10 AM at one of several car pooling points around the city. On these outings they usually ski for several hours and cover distances between 12 - 25 km. Often the group is split into a shorter or longer distance or a fast & a slow group depending on peoples' inclinations. For liability reasons you should be an Edmonton Nordic club member to join these trips. Skiing ability range is novice to intermediate.
- Other ski and social events.

For details go the Edmonton Nordic website

The SOS or Seniors on Skis is a group that meets weekly during the season at various ski venues in the Edmonton River Valley for an hour or so ski. Skiing level is very relaxed.

The **Rocky Mountain Seniors Ski Club or RMSSC** have launched in 2020-21 a pilot recreational cross country ski program. Please see their website for details.

Where can my kids join a Jackrabbit program?

Many of the local area ski clubs run Jackrabbit programs for children. These include:

1. Edmonton Nordic <https://www.edmontonnordic.ca/>
2. St Albert Nordic <https://www.stalbertnordic.com/>
3. Fort Saskatchewan Nordic <http://www.fortsasknordic.ca/>
4. Strathcona Wilderness Centre also run programs for children. Tel 780-922-3939

Check the club websites or Facebook pages for details.

What is the Canadian Birkebeiner or Birkie?

The Canadian Birkebeiner or "Birkie" as it is locally known as, is a cross-country ski event held annually on the second Saturday of February in the Cooking Lake Blackfoot Provincial Park. It is the largest cross-country ski event in Western Canada. The main event is a 55km point to point classic race skied across the park with or without a pack. There are also several other shorter events aimed at different levels and ages of skiers. Poor snow conditions and cold weather has caused a few cancellations in recent years and the number of participants are down but despite this it still attracts well over 1,000 skiers. For more details go to the Canadian Birkebeiner website at: <https://www.canadianbirkie.com/>

Where can I get my skis glide waxed?

All of the major Nordic retail outlets will apply a hot glide wax to your skis. The price ranges from \$15 - \$35 for a pair of skis depending on where you go and how dirty your ski is. Some places will also for a small fee put on a base binder wax in the grip area of your classic skis. A list of the main Nordic retail outlets is attached.

Where can I learn how to wax my skis?

Most of the major local Nordic retail outlets periodically conduct waxing seminars or clinics during the season. These are usually more of a demonstration where a waxing expert shows people how to apply glide and grip wax to a ski. Check with the Nordic retail outlets when they plan to hold these waxing sessions. There is sometimes a small fee for participants.

Some of the local Nordic clubs also run waxing sessions for their members. Check your club website.

There is also a skier, Mike Stern who conducts practical waxing clinics from his basement throughout the season. These are hands-on clinics where with his help you will learn how to prep your own skis and apply hot glide wax and then a base binder with grip waxes. Check both the Edmonton Nordic website and Facebook pages for his schedule or contact him at mikestern@telus.net. Due to safety concerns during the Covid-19 pandemic **these clinics have been suspended** for the 2020-21 season.

How often do I need to glide wax my skis?

It depends on how abrasive the snow is and if there is a marked change in temperature. For **recreational** skiers a good hot glide wax can last between 80 – 100km under normal conditions. If the skis slow down or the base goes grey or white in places it is an indication that you need to apply more glide wax.

How do I store my skis over the summer?

In order to prevent the ski bases from drying out during summer, it is recommended that you cover your glide area with a layer of warm glide wax as follows:

1. Clean off the old grip wax or Klister with a scraper & some base cleaner
2. Brush the glide area a few times with a bronze or metal brush
3. Iron on some warm yellow (cheap) glide wax onto **the glide area only**
4. **Do not scrape off the glide wax** until next season
5. Also use some base cleaner & a rag to clean any bits of old grip wax stuck to the upper surface of the ski

I have heard about these new wax less skin skis, what are they?

Instead of using fish scales or applying wax to the grip area of the middle of the ski, they have a hairy felt pad instead to give the ski grip. In the last few years, this has revolutionised skiing particularly for recreational skiers. They generally work much better than the fish scale type of wax less ski. They work well in a wide variety of conditions especially at close to zero temperatures where it is often difficult to find a grip wax that works well, through to icy conditions where you would normally have to use a sticky Klister to get good grip. They can be a bit slower on the glide than a conventionally waxed ski but if you are not racing this probably is not a big disadvantage. One of the main advantages is the convenience, you can just grab your skis and go. However, you will still have to periodically apply glide wax to the tip and tail areas.

They can in sticky snow conditions like many classic skis sometimes ice up. Applying a special spray before you go out to the felt strip in these conditions will reduce the chance of icing. When the felt grip pad wears out it can be replaced. This can be done by your local ski shop or with some of the latest skin skis by yourself.

Do I need special equipment to skate ski?

Yes, you do. Skate skis are a bit shorter than classic skis. They are also of different construction. The main visual differences are that the base is all glide area and the tips are shorter or blunter. You will also need longer poles. Typically, the poles are about 10cm longer than your usual classic poles. You will also need boots that are more rigid and give more ankle support.

It is possible to skate ski on classic skis but not efficiently. First you have to remove all the grip wax otherwise you will stick on the uphill. However, the skis will be tip heavy and will be lacking the glide from the grip area.

How do I shorten my cross-country ski poles or replace my grip handles and tips?

It is not too difficult to do.

1. Remove the grip handles by either:
 - a) Immersing in a bucket of near boiling water for a minute or so to soften the glue (you should probably remove the straps first)
 - b) Or warm with a hair dryer or carefully with a heat gun (on low heat) to soften the glue.
2. The handles should now pull off quite easily.
3. Cut the top of the poles to size using a hacksaw.
4. Replace the handles after first coating the top of the poles with glue. I use a hot glue gun but contact adhesive should also work. Make sure the handles are correctly orientated with respect to the tips.
5. You can also use the same procedure to replace the tips.

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