



"Adventure Tourism Information About Places Ya'Gotta Go To!"

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Ya'Gotta - Grande Cache and Willmore Wilderness Park

By: Bob Kenyon



**Willmore Wilderness Area, near Grande Cache
Photo Credit: Travel Alberta**

If you're seeking a location, that's close to the mountains, but lacks the commercial tourism of many adventure tourism centres, then Grande Cache, Alberta is a must! A mining, logging and trapping centre of north central Alberta, Grande Cache is emerging as a pristine centre for hiking, backpacking, trail riding, water sports, winter activities.

Grande Cache is accessed from the Yellowhead Trans-Canada Highway, via Highway 40 (The Ram Highway), that runs from west of [Hinton](#). Known as the "Scenic Route to Alaska", the highway goes on to Grande Cache, Grande Prairie and west to northern British Columbia and the Yukon. A word of caution...If you take this highway, fill your gas tank at Hinton, or use non-fossil fuel burning vehicles. For this reason and also due to the light traffic on the highway, it can be a great cycle trip.

The area, around the town, has many hiking and biking trails offering various degrees of challenge and the grassy, lower summits closer to the town are also excellent for scrambling. For those seeking a short, scenic trek, make sure to take in the spectacular view of the confluence of the Sulphur Gates.

The Sulphur Gates Recreation Area, north of the town, is the northern staging area for Willmore Wilderness Park. The park can also be accessed from Rock Lake staging area (98 kms. off Hwy. 40) at the north end of William Switzer Provincial Park. There are also other staging areas, off Hwy. 40 at the Berland and Cowlick Creek Staging Areas.

No motorized off-road transportation is allowed in Willmore Wilderness Park, so it makes for an excellent trek by foot, bicycle, or horseback. The park also offers opportunities for ridge walking, exploring for the graves of trappers, or taking a secluded, long trek into the north wilderness area of Jasper National Park.

For those experienced in map and compass, food storage and bear avoidance, Willmore Wilderness Park is a must do. For inexperienced back country travellers, there are many guiding services available and are recommended. One good book, does exist, that provides trail guides to the Willmore Wilderness Area Park. It's called [94 Hikes In The Northern Canadian Rockies](#), by Vicky Spring & Dee Urbick. 1983, Douglas & McIntyre Publishers, Vancouver, BC (ISBN 0-88894-381-4). Unfortunately, you'll have to search used bookstores and websites, for this out of print book.

For climbers, Grande Cache is ringed by mountains and the local Passport to the Peaks program identifies each mountain as bronze, silver or gold depending its level of difficulty.

Grande Cache has also become home to extreme racing with it's famous Canadian Death Race, an over-the-mountains and through-the-rivers race, held each Heritage Day long weekend (approx. August 1st). There's events for all, even spectators, with the adventure festival atmosphere. The best is watching the kids, 15 years and under, compete in their own 5 km. race. All the kids that complete the course, in the allotted time (90 minutes) get a medallion.

With rivers and lakes in abundance, the area is also has the best selection of white water in the province, with class I - V rapids for canoeing, kayaking and white water rafting. There are also many excellent locations for lake canoeing and either lake or stream fishing.

Grande Cache has the Marv Moore Municipal campground, in the town and two provincial campgrounds north of the town at Smoky River (for river access) and Sulphur Gates (for Willmore access). For campers or trekkers needing to clean-up or those just wanting a swim, go to the Akasaka Recreation Centre (on Hoppe Avenue). There are also campgrounds, on the Ram Highway between Hinton and Grande Cache, as well as north of Grande Cache on the way to Grande Prairie.

There are several hotels and motels offered at a variety of prices and some bed and breakfast lodgings. For food and dining, there are a variety of restaurants, cafes, as well as an excellent grocery store.

Winter brings a whole new season to this wilderness, winter wonderland with abundant opportunities for snowshoeing, x-country skiing and, for the experienced, ice climbing.

At the south end of the town, there is the excellent Grande Cache Tourism and Interpretive Centre, where visitors can find out about the history of the area (including the dinosaur!), wildlife and trails. Climbers can register for the Passport to the Peaks program. Visitors wishing information contact:

Grande Cache Tourism and Information Centre
Box 300
Grande Cache, AB T0E 0Y0

Phone: (780) 827-3300 Toll Free: 1-888-827-3790

The Grande Cache Tourism Operators Association operates a centralized booking service available online, or by toll free phone at 1-866-3975677.

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