

Talus Lodge, with the Royal Group of Mountains beyond.

## Talus Lodge, BC

Discover a Rocky Mountain highlight reel at a remote fly-in lodge

By *Matt Mosteller*

**F**ew places feel like Talus Lodge. Maybe it is the perch, glued to the edge of an immense canyon. Or maybe it is the potential for discovery in every direction. With travel to this rugged region scarce — a place that snowmobiles still cannot access and summer through-hikers are non-existent — it is a location where you still feel like a pioneer.

It is fitting that the lodge owner, a professional forester and ACMG Hiking Guide, looks as rugged as the environment around him. Chris Espinel came to this place for its one-of-a-kind natural features, spectacular views, rock-bridges and waterfalls. It is a condensed place of intense natural beauty — like Banff and Yoho squeezed into a single valley.

“What drew me to the area is the pristine, isolated nature of it, where everything, including grizzlies and wolverines, can be observed as it is,” says Espinel. “The amazing setting and variety of the area as a result of dry and wet valleys and the spectacular surrounding mountains — particularly the Royal Group — is what I love most about Talus Lodge.”

For how remote this place is, it is relatively easy to get to. Just hop a short flight from either the Alpine Helicopters’ base in Canmore, Alberta, or from their staging area at

Mount Shark, in Banff National Park. Now settle in — no Wi-Fi, no more busying your mind with tasks from the daily grind — you’re on Talus Time.

Ridge-walks abound — touch the sky while venturing up one of the various spines that run towards White Man Mountain. The route leads from alpine meadow to rocky ridge, complete with views of familiar peaks from the edge of the Continental Divide, such as Mount Sir Donald and Mount Lehman.

Eastward, a labyrinth of limestone alleyways carves paths toward a vast basin — a region full of hidden tarns and a thousand waterfalls. This zone is part of the Albert River, a moisture-trap created by the Royal Group of Mountains, which collect storms to fill the lakes and create a symphony of splashing water; a perfect picnic stop.

One of my favourite routes combines summits and Stromatolites. I can’t pronounce it either, but these fossilized mounds will ▶

# THE **L O W D O W N**



THE  
LOWDOWN

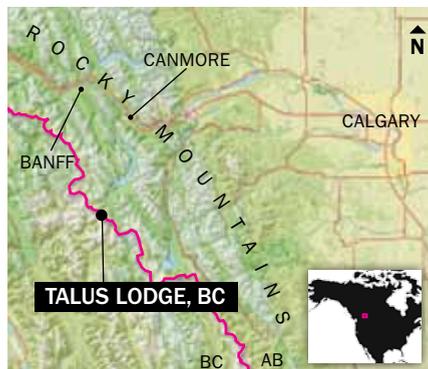
Secluded lakes abound; hiking routes to last a lifetime.



amaze. For billions of years, Stromatolites dominated life on Earth. We need to give gratitude to these pimples of rock, as they are believed to be largely responsible for increasing the amount of oxygen in primeval Earth's atmosphere. (A short ceremony to connect with ancient Earth might be followed by a common hiking delay — waiting out a late-summer thunderstorm under a car-sized slab of limestone.) Peaks for all levels of hikers await further on, with the Royal Group standing guard in the distance to keep your eyes as entertained as your feet.

At times, it is hard to even think of hiking when to the west, in front of the lodge, the stunning backdrop of The Thalon cradles two emerald-green lakes with snowfields etched on either side. A green basket sits in the middle; a wildflower-explorer's dream and a perfect half-day route from the lodge dubbed Angel's Landing.

The lodge team — a couple originally from Australia — offer good cheer and great food. Kieren and Sandra always have



ear-to-ear smiles, making everyone feel a part of the family as they create scrumptious meals for hungry hikers. Comfortable rooms with mountain views are heated by wood stove; drying racks ready your gear for the next day. But the stand-out is the Bucket Shower — like “the ice bucket challenge,” but with wood-fire-warmed water. Just pull a cord and get a splash! Or, here in the Rockies, you can hike to a secluded waterfall, strip down, and do it for real. ☪

## WHAT TO BRING?

Hiking poles come in handy for balancing your way through the boulder-strewn alpine. Solid hiking boots are necessary and a GPS unit is nice to assist

through the maze of limestone. Remember your sunglasses — you're in the Rockies, with many more sun hours than the Purcells or Selkirks. In

summer, bring a quality insulation layer to quell early morning or evening chills. Winter requires high quality snowshoes and/or metal-edged wax-less

cross-country skis or light ski-touring gear. And pack your beverage of choice — perfect after a sit in the sauna.

## TRAVEL INFO

Drive an hour west from Calgary International Airport (YYC) to Canmore, where you'll hitch a helicopter ride from Alpine Helicopters' Canmore Base. As most flight departures are in the morning, it is best to stay overnight in Canmore at PaintBox Lodge ([paintboxlodge.com](http://paintboxlodge.com)). Run by Olympic medalist Sara Renner and World Cup Champion Thomas Grandi, this boutique lodge also offers amazing cooking

classes. (Don't miss lunch at Communitea, just a stone's throw from PaintBox.)

In Canmore: During summer, head for a day hike up Ha Ling Peak for a view of the Bow Valley, or bike the paved pathway between Canmore and Banff. In winter, cross-country ski at the world-class Canmore Nordic Centre, where Canada's national team trains.

## TRIP PLANNER

**Best Time to Go:** This will be your toughest decision. In early summer, waterfalls and flowers will delight. In late summer, the glow of the larch trees and snow-free alpine rambling beckons. Or ski and snowshoe during winter.

**Beta:** Enjoy the long hours of summer from June 22 to September 28; packages (from \$1,195) include three nights' lodging, guiding, meals and helicopter flights. Snowshoeing or cross-country-skiing more your pleasure? Visit from mid-February to end of April; packages (from \$1,300) include three nights' lodging, meals, guiding and helicopter flights. [taluslodge.com](http://taluslodge.com)