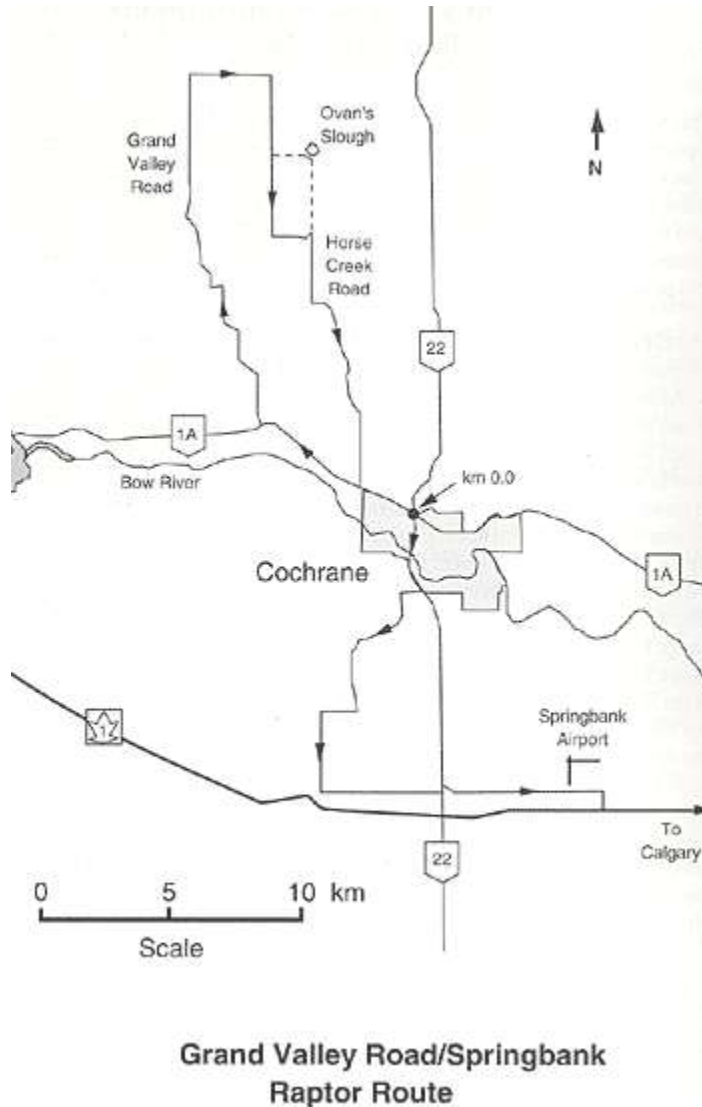


Grand Valley Road / Springbank Raptor Route *by Ross Dickson(1993)*

This scenic area provides the opportunity for observing the spring raptor migration close to the city. Although the Grand Valley / Horse Creek section is noted for large numbers of eagles in early spring, some raptors should be seen here at any season. The Springbank section is on gravel roads and offers less variety. These are suggested routes only. Most roads west of Cochrane will have some raptors at this season.



The Grand Valley Road portion of the route begins in Cochrane at the intersection of Hwy 1A and Hwy 22 (km 0.0). Hawks are often seen hovering at or soaring above the hills on the north side of the highway.

Head west on Hwy 1A for 6.7 km to Grand Valley Road (marked by a green and white sign) and turn right. The route from this point is poorly paved and the roadway is narrow; some sections are being upgraded and may be gravel-surfaced. For the next nine winding kilometres, during the spring migration peak from mid-March to mid-April, Bald Eagles are especially common. In the early morning hours they may be seen on fenceposts or sitting on the ground, waiting for thermals to develop or for the prevailing westerly winds to begin.

Hawks also are seen here in early April, so check any kettles of soaring birds for the distinctive flight silhouettes of eagles, buteos, falcons or ravens.

The prominent ridge on the western side of this picturesque valley is known as the Wildcat Hills - it is private range land and is not accessible to the

general public. A small gravel road, Wildcat Hills Road (11.9 km), crosses the ridge, however, and birding is possible from this.

Northeast of the intersection with a gravel road from the east at 15.4 km, an exposed rock outcrop provides a well-used vantage point and perch for eagles and a favourable wind current for soaring raptors. To the west is the meandering Grand Valley Creek, impeded at this point by a series of beaver dams.

Turn right (east) at the next intersection (22 km). Watch for accipiters and kestrels along this section in summer. Another turn to the right (25.3 km) will start the southbound portion of the trip. To the southeast is the gradually deepening and widening Horse Creek valley which you cross when you turn left (east) at 31.8 km. The road then heads south until Hwy 1A is reached. Compared to Grand Valley Road, more hawks but fewer eagles will be seen in the Horse Creek valley.

OPTIONAL SECTION: In spring, if the roads are dry, you may turn east at 28.5 km onto a gravel road and up a fairly steep short hill.

After 1.6 km a large pond (locally known as Ovan's Slough) is reached, on the north side of the road. Most waterfowl can be seen here. Turn right at the slough and drive south for 3 km to rejoin the main route.

The Springbank portion of the route also begins at the junction of Hwy 1A and Hwy 22 (km 0.0). Head south on Hwy 22 and after crossing the Bow River watch for a road on the right at the top of the hill (3.5 km). Turn west here. At the T-intersection (4.4 km) turn left and head south along a winding road around Towers Ridge; bluebird nest boxes are numerous here. Turn right (west) at the first intersection (10.5 km) and then left at the paved road (11.9 km). To the west, the Copithorne Ridge may have small numbers of either eagle species during migration. At the crest of the steep hill prepare to make a left (east) turn, opposite a double row of spruce trees (15.1 km). There are natural hedges on both sides of the road for the next 5 km. These hedges can trap snow in drifts deep enough to stop any car - so avoid this section immediately after a severe storm. Turn left onto Hwy 22 (20 km), then after only 0.2 km turn right (east) onto the continuation of the gravel road paralleling the Trans-Canada Highway. Turn south at 28.4 km for the Trans-Canada Highway and the return to the city.

Gas and food are available in Cochrane.