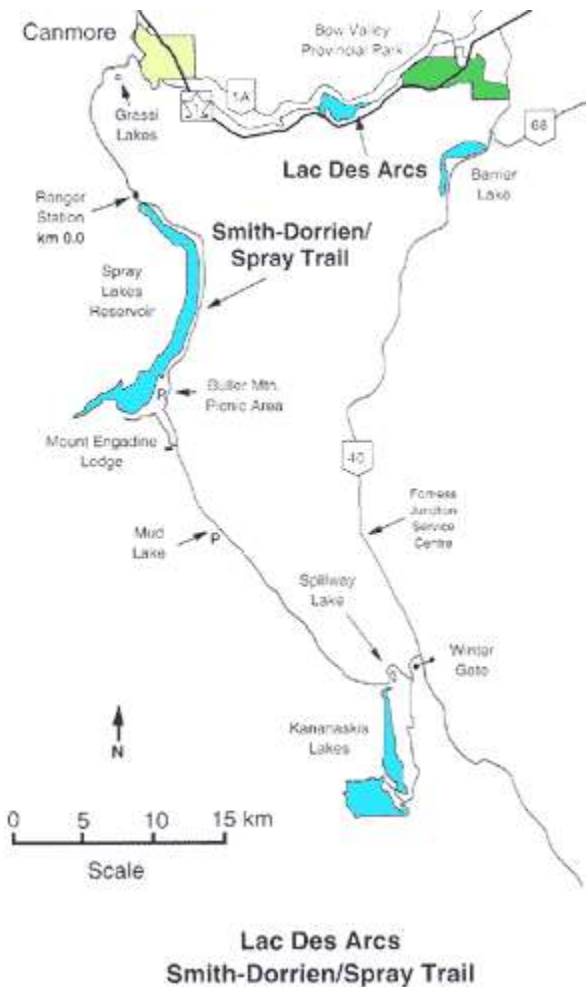


Smith Dorrien/Spray Trail by Louis M. Guillemette (1993); revised 2012

The Smith-Dorrien/Spray Trail (gravel-surfaced and rather dusty) stretches between the town of Canmore and Peter Lougheed Provincial Park, a distance of approximately 62 km. It allows access to a vast area containing coniferous forest, muskeg, subalpine and alpine habitats. Late spring through summer birding should produce species such as Spruce Grouse, Brewer's Sparrow and Townsend's Solitaire. A full day is required to cover all the sites in the area.



The fastest access is from downtown Canmore, where you follow the well-posted signs (white letters on brown or a white skier on brown) for the NORDIC CENTRE. While driving up, watch for Bighorn Sheep on the road and the fantastic scenery down below.

1.1 km past the entrance to the Nordic Centre is the turn-off to Grassi Lakes where there is a breeding colony of Violet-green Swallows. Turn left at the sign for the Grassi Lakes Recreation Area and drive 0.5 km to the parking lot. From this point there is a walk of about 1.5 km up to the lakes. You can choose between the hiking trail (marked) which is fairly steep but gives good views and the old powerline access road, which is less steep but has limited views. Grassi Lakes is a very attractive spot, where a cliff, pock-marked with caves, overlooks two small, algae-coloured lakes. The nesting colony of Violet-green Swallows on the cliff is

large and spectacular. Other birds which may be found are Western Flycatcher, American Dipper, Swainson's Thrush and Yellow-rumped Warbler.

Spray Lakes Reservoir is approximately 18 km from the centre of Canmore, roughly 2 hours driving time from Calgary. A campground is located to the west of the reservoir, accessed by the (rough) public road over the dam at

the northern end. An emergency telephone is available at the unstaffed Ranger Station, 0.2 km north of the dam.

Distances will be given from the Ranger Station, so set your trip-meter here (km 0.0). While driving south along the eastern shore, watch for Osprey fishing near the dam. Common Loon, Common Goldeneye and Common Merganser are also regular sights on the reservoir (which is said to be good for Lake Trout fishing).

After driving 14.1 km south from the Ranger Station, park in the small pullout on the right-hand side of the road. About 50 m beyond the parking area, on the left-hand side of the road, is a rather narrow (about 60 m wide) avalanche area, cutting through the forest. It stretches all the way up to an alpine meadow on the flank of Mount Buller. There is no man-made trail, but hiking up the 30° slope is not too difficult. Townsend's Solitaire and Hermit Thrush nest in the trees bordering the avalanche area (not dangerous in summer) you are climbing. Bohemian Waxwing, White-crowned Sparrow and White-winged Crossbill are also seen here. If you continue the ascent past the tree line, listen for the calls and song of Brewer's Sparrow - the alpine race of the species nests here. As you climb watch for a pair of Golden Eagles which sometimes can be seen gliding over the area. Flocks of Rosy Finches may occur in late summer and fall. Depending on the amount of time you want to spend searching the woods bordering the avalanche area, this climb could take anywhere from 1 1/2 to 4 hours; carry warm clothing as it can be cool and windy above the tree line.

Continue driving south and park in the first parking lot at the Buller Mountain Picnic Area (18.5 km). A short distance south of the parking lot lies a pond bordering the highway. Birding around the pond should yield Solitary Sandpiper (nesting in the trees close to the water), Olive-sided Flycatcher and Varied Thrush. Swainson's Thrush can often be heard singing across the road in the shrubs and the first trees of the slope. A half-hour walk along the trail which begins at the western end of the first parking lot will usually add Yellow-rumped (Audubon's) and Townsend's Warblers, Chipping Sparrow, Dark-eyed (Oregon) Junco, and Pine Siskin to your list.

After leaving the Buller Mountain Picnic Area, drive a further 3.5 km and then turn right (west) onto the Mount Engadine Lodge access road (22.3 km). Park on the right, just before the bridge. Walk across this bridge and bird along the road as it passes beside the muskeg basin. You should see Yellow-rumped and Wilson's Warblers; Chipping, Lincoln's and White-crowned Sparrows; and Pine Siskin. As the road turns around the end of the muskeg and up the hill, Varied Thrush, "Oregon" Junco and White-winged Crossbill may be seen. Keep walking to the top (about 1 km from the

bridge). A short distance further on, to your right, is one of the most interesting areas of the region. Slightly downslope from the road lies a re-growth area, now green with grass and low shrubs, and many old dead trees. Northern Flicker, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Mountain Bluebird and Townsend's Solitaire nest here, and Clark's Nutcracker is a frequent visitor. Some time spent walking the perimeter of this re-growth area and the surrounding woodland might yield Spruce Grouse. Three-toed and Black-backed Woodpeckers are also possible. In winter, feeders at Mount Engadine Lodge can be good for Steller's Jay.

Continuing your drive, the Chester Lake/Burstall Lakes trailheads are reached at 29 km. Mud Lake is immediately north of the junction. Bird around the lake and along the west shore of the creek flowing north from Mud Lake; this western shore can be reached by an unofficial footbridge, about 150 m north of the lake. You should be rewarded with Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers; Gray Jay; Common Raven; both species of waxwings; Common Yellowthroat; Chipping, Lincoln's, White-throated and White-crowned Sparrows; and with a bit of luck, a Red-naped Sapsucker.

About 2.5 km before Smith-Dorrien/Spray Trail ends at the junction with Kananaskis Lakes Trail, Spillway Lake can be seen on the right-hand side of the highway. This can be good for Common Loon, Ringnecked Duck, Barrow's Goldeneye, Osprey and Spotted Sandpiper.

As an alternative to retracing the route to Canmore, the drive may be continued on through Peter Lougheed Provincial Park until Hwy 40 (Kananaskis Trail) is reached. This highway provides access north through the Kananaskis Valley to the Trans-Canada Highway or south over the Highwood Pass.

Gas and snack foods are available at the Fortress Junction Service Centre (on Hwy 40). Full tourist facilities are available in Canmore.