

# The Columbia Icefield

The Columbia Icefield is located in the Canadian Rocky Mountains. It is one of the largest accumulations of ice and snow south of the Arctic Circle, covering nearly 325 square kilometres. The continuous accumulation of snow feeds eight major glaciers, all visible from the highway, the Icefields Parkway. Meltwater from the Icefield flows to three oceans: the Pacific, Arctic and Atlantic via Hudson Bay.

Glaciers store about 75 per cent of the world's freshwater. If all land ice melted, the sea level would rise approximately 70 metres worldwide. The sheer weight of a thick layer of ice combined with gravity's influence causes glaciers to flow very slowly. Movement along the underside of a glacier is slower than at the top because of friction created as it pushes over the rocky surface.

The Athabasca is the most-visited glacier in North America. Its ice is in continuous motion, creeping forward at the rate of several centimetres per day. Because of a warming climate, the Athabasca Glacier has been receding for the last 125 years, losing half its volume and retreating more than 1.5 kilometres.

## ATHABASCA GLACIER FACTS

**Area:** 6 square kilometres

**Length:** 6 kilometres

**Depth:** 90–300 metres

**Icefall:** 2700 metres

Visitors can walk on the toe of the Athabasca Glacier after a short bus ride from the tour centre near the Icefields Parkway. The buses provide all-terrain transport for up to 56 passengers. Equipped with large, low-pressure tyres, the buses can be used to transport tourists in on-road and off-road situations.

## BUS DIMENSIONS

**Height:** 4 metres

**Length:** 13 metres

**Width:** 3.5 metres

**Weight:** 20 tonnes



Photo by A. Horsfield