

# COLUMBIA ICEFIELD

The Columbia Icefield is located in the Canadian Rockies on the boundary of Banff and Jasper National Parks. One of the largest accumulations of ice and snow south of the Arctic Circle, it has an average snowfall of 7 metres per year and covers an area of nearly 325 square kilometres. The continuous accumulation of snow feeds eight major glaciers, including the Athabasca, Dome and Stutfield glaciers. They are all visible from the main road—the Icefields Parkway. The Columbia Icefield is a true hydrological apex. Its meltwater feeds streams and rivers that pour into three oceans: the Arctic, Atlantic and Pacific oceans.

The Athabasca Glacier, part of the Columbia Icefield, is a tongue of ice 6 kilometres long and 1 kilometre wide. It is one of Canada's most accessible glaciers.

Visitors can take a tour onto the icy slopes of the Athabasca Glacier in specially designed buses, on a 5-kilometre round trip. At the mid-point, right in the middle of the glacier, visitors have the opportunity of stepping out onto ice that was formed from snow falling as long ago as 400 years. This is a place where time is measured in centuries.

The buses are designed and proudly manufactured in Canada, and they provide an all-terrain mobility capacity to transport fifty-six people. Large side and top windows provide greater viewing opportunities.

## Athabasca Glacier facts

**Type:** Outlet valley glacier

**Area:** 6 square kilometres

**Length:** 6 kilometres

**Depth:** 90–300 metres

**Icefall speed:** 125 metres per year (An icefall is a portion of the glacier characterised by a more rapid flow and occurs where the glacier bed becomes steeper and/or narrows. Most glacier ice flows at speeds of a few hundred metres per year, or less. However, the flow of ice in an icefall may reach thousands of metres per year. Such rapid flow causes the ice to fracture, forming deep crevasses.)

**Toe (terminus) speed:** 15 metres per year

## Snow bus facts

**Height:** 3.8 metres

**Length:** 13.0 metres

**Width:** 3.6 metres

**Weight:** 19.5 tonnes



Photograph: A. Horsfield