

## 51 ELBOW LOOP

Elbow Loop is an outstanding mountain bike trip along former four-wheel-drive roads through spectacular high mountain country. Now closed to motor vehicles, the roads have reverted to trail status and the whole area is now part of the Elbow-Sheep Wildland Provincial Park. Although this popular route provides enjoyable cycling in either direction, I prefer counter-clockwise, which leads up the Little Elbow trail over Little Elbow Pass to the forks and returns via the Big Elbow trail.

The dirt and gravel road along the Little Elbow River offers easy cycling in a scenic valley. At the Mount Romulus backcountry campsite the work begins as the road takes you up a beautiful climb to Little Elbow Pass. Rest stops are rewarded with striking views of Mount Romulus to the north and the Opal Range to the west. A trail 1 km north of the pass offers an optional trip to Tombstone Lakes. At the summit of the pass the limestone peaks of the Opal Range tower above the larches and meadows while the Misty and Highwood ranges form the southern skyline. The descent from the pass is an exciting roll on somewhat loose gravel. Watch for the big sign indicating the Big Elbow trail to the left before the bottom of the hill (lots of cyclists have raced past this junction), but don't rush away—make an excursion at least to the Elbow bridge. This area of subalpine meadows, surrounded by rugged limestone peaks, is one of the most scenic and beautiful places in the Rockies.

The Big Elbow trail offers slightly more challenging cycling on several sections of singletrack built to bypass the rampaging river and on some steep, rocky downhill. Gravity is your friend on this part of the trail and the speeds are exhilarating. The trail descends into the broad Elbow Valley for a delightful roll on gravel "tripletrack" with occasional washed-out sections where creeks cross the road. Pine and poplar forest and meadows highlight the peaks that surround this beautiful valley. A suspension bridge crosses the Little Elbow River and returns you to the trailhead.

### Classic high mountain ride

**Type** loop on 4WD roads and singletrack

**Rating** difficult/intermediate

**Other users** hikers-3 equestrian-4

**Distance** 43 km

**Time** 3-6 hours

**Maps** 82 J/10 Mount Rae

82 J/15 Bragg Creek

**Season** July to mid-October

**Land agency** Kananaskis Country

### Access

From Bragg Creek drive 32 km west on Hwy. 66 to Little Elbow recreation area. Parking is provided near the campground entrance as well as at the suspension bridge where the trip log begins. The route leads west along the campground road.

- 0.0 trailhead
- 1.0 gate
- 11.6 Mount Romulus camp to right
- 18.8 Little Elbow Pass
- 22.0 junction, turn left (Tombstone Camp, Elbow headwaters to right)
- 38.0 Threepoint Mountain trail to right
- 42.9 suspension bridge
- 43.0 end of ride



