

Help save our snakes by watching for and avoiding snakes basking on paved and gravelled roads.

Rattlers and You

Although prairie rattlesnakes are venomous, their bites are not fatal to humans if treated properly. Rattlers rarely strike at large moving objects unless they are provoked. Contrary to popular opinion, prairie rattlesnakes are very timid creatures and will try to escape from humans if given the chance. *Leave them alone and they will leave you alone!*

In the unlikely event that you are bitten:

- Stay calm, remember your life is not in danger
- Try to avoid running or other unnecessary movement since these actions may increase the spread of venom. If possible, immobilize the bitten area and keep it below heart level
- Go immediately to the nearest hospital (Town of Milk River) and report the bite to park staff
- Do not attempt to suck out the venom or apply a tourniquet – this can cause further injury
- Do not try to capture or kill the snake; leave it alone!

By following these precautions, you will be at very little risk if you meet a rattlesnake. Enjoy the experience of seeing one of nature's most fascinating creatures.



Prairie rattlesnake

Contact

For more information, please talk with the park staff, or contact the park office:

Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park

Box 297
Milk River, Alberta T0K 1M0
403-647-2364
Web: albertaparks.ca
Email: WritingOnStone@gov.ab.ca

Fire Bans in Alberta

Web: albertafirebans.ca

Illegal Activity/Public Safety (24/7)

Phone: 310-LAND (5263)

Emergency (Police, Fire, Ambulance)

Phone: 911



Prairie rattlesnake distribution in Alberta

Snakes

Writing-on-Stone/Áísínai'pi Provincial Park



Wildlife



Updated February 2025

Alberta

Writing-on-Stone/Áísínai'pi
A UNESCO World Heritage Site

Alberta

Types of Snakes

There are four different types of snakes found at Writing-on-Stone Provincial Park: the prairie rattlesnake, the bullsnake, the wandering garter snake and the plains garter snake.

Identifying Snakes

Prairie rattlesnake



Prairie rattlesnake

The prairie rattlesnake (*Crotalus viridis*) is the only venomous snake in Alberta. Their colour variation ranges from olive green to dark brown, with dark blotches along the back. Adult prairie rattlesnakes grow to be 1m to 1.5m (3.25' – 5') long. They can be distinguished from the bullsnake by their broad, triangular head and (usually, but not always) the presence of a rattle at the end of their tails.



Garter Snake



Rattlesnake



Bullsnake



Bullsnake



Bullsnake

Alberta's largest snake, the non-venomous bullsnake (*Pituophis catenifer*) is a constrictor and asphyxiates their prey before consuming it whole. They are excellent climbers and can be found in trees or high-cliffed areas. Bullsnakes are yellow or cream coloured with large brown blotches and heads that appear as a continuation of their body. Bullsnakes have adapted similar defense mechanisms to prairie rattlesnakes and can mimic a rattling sound by shaking their tail and hissing loudly.

Garter snakes



Plains garter snake

These small, slender snakes are two of the most common snakes in Alberta. Both garter snakes found at the park can grow up to 100 cm in length. Plains garter snakes (*Thamnophis radix*) are usually dark greenish black and have either an orange or yellow stripe down the midline of its back with two lateral light greenish-yellow stripes. Wandering garter snakes (*Thamnophis elegans*) are brown or grayish and have a cream-coloured stripe along the top of their back and down each side of their body; dark blotches may form checkered patterns between the stripes.

Visiting Rattlesnake Country

While in the Park, visitors should take a few simple precautions:

- Stay on trails – avoid rock piles and bushes
- Stay out of long grass – snakes are perfectly camouflaged to hide well in the grass
- Don't put hands and feet in cracks, holes and crevices, or under bushes
- Don't walk under ledges or reach above you if you can't see where you are putting your hands. Rattlesnakes can climb and like to bask on ledges, so there might be one above you
- Don't touch or handle snakes that look dead. Mature rattlesnakes sometimes lose their rattle, so **never handle any snakes**
- Don't bother snakes. Not only will you disturb them and make them more likely to strike, **it is against the law to harm or harass any animals in the park, including snakes**
- Keep dogs on short leashes and on the trails with you at all times.

Rattlesnakes will often, **but not always**, make a distinctive buzzing sound with their rattles if you approach too closely. If you hear this sound, do not panic. Stand still and look around you until you locate the snake. Do not jump back; often rattlesnakes will not rattle until you have passed by, so one could be right behind you. Once you see the snake, slowly move away from it. Rattlesnakes usually only strike at a human if they feel threatened by being cornered, or stepped on.



Prairie rattlesnake © Miles Maldner