

Popular Day Hikes 2

Canadian Rockies



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Introduction

Hiking in the Canadian Rockies

The Canadian Rockies is an area of high limestone peaks (up to 3954 m), glaciers, waterfalls, blue-green lakes, boisterous streams and forested valley bottoms of spruce and fir with larches at treeline.

Alpine meadows are the reward for hiking up through sometimes dense forest. For too brief a time, from early July to mid-August, they are crammed with flowers. In particular, overseas visitors will be intoxicated by the gaudy colours of North America's Indian Paintbrush. I advise all flower buffs to buy a field guide to put in the pack.

Getting to the trailhead

See the map on page 6. Other than a few buses that run along the Trans-Canada Highway and from Banff to Jasper, there is no public transportation. I have included one trail in both Banff and Jasper where you can walk or ride town transit to the trailhead. You can also walk up to the lake if you are staying in Lake Louise Village. For all other trails, you need a car.

Weather

The higher elevations trails of the Canadian Rockies enjoy a very short hiking season. Winter snowfall can be heavy, so many trails are not completely clear of snow until mid-July. Hiking usually starts in mid-May on lower elevation trails. In May there is usually a period of warm sunny weather. Rains fall mainly in June—the peak run-off time. During July and August temperatures can reach the mid 30s and there may be late afternoon thunderstorms. However, snow can fall in any month of the year and conditions at higher elevations can be really foul. The weather starts cooling off in mid-September. Indian summers can occur in late September through October and are glorious, bringing sunny stable weather. By the end of October, there is usually too much snow at higher elevations for hiking.

Drinking Water

Most locals drink from the creeks. However, there is a chance the water, especially at lower elevations, may be contaminated by *Giardia lamblia*, a parasite that can cause severe gastrointestinal distress. It is best to carry water from your home, hotel or campground.

Wildlife Concerns

It is unlikely that you will encounter bears if you are hiking these popular trails during normal daytime hiking hours. Having said that you should constantly be alert for signs of bears (tracks, scat), particularly in early fall when the berries ripen. Parks Canada will often close a trail until a bear has moved out of the area. See the Group Access information for the Moraine Lake Area on page 53, which requires hikers to travel in tight groups of four. Make a lot of noise if you suspect there is a bear in the area.

Elk and moose should also be given a wide berth, especially in fall during the mating season, when males get very ornery. Lately, cougars have become a year-round worry. However, they are rarely seen, as are wolves. Be wary of picas, ground squirrels and chipmunks. They bite and could carry disease.

Dogs in Jasper National Park

Dogs are not allowed on trails in Jasper National Park in important caribou habitat, in order to reduce stress on this threatened species. Dogs are not allowed on any of the trails in the Maligne Lake area nor at Cavell Meadows.

Lake O'Hara

Lake O'Hara is only accessible by pre-booking a bus or by hiking 11 km up the access trail. The bus service runs from mid-June to the end of September. The first bus leaves at 8:30 in the morning and the last bus out is at 6:30 in the evening—ample time for a good day's hiking. For reservation information go to www.reservation.parkscanada.gc.ca. Be sure to arrive early. Bus reservations become invalid 10 minutes before departure time and may be given away.

In order to fully appreciate this beautiful area you may choose to use one of the two accommodation options available to those who have not booked in at the Lodge a long time in advance.

Camping

Campground reservations may be made up to three months in advance by calling Parks Canada at 250-343-6433. Your campground reservation also secures you a place on the bus. Visit the Parks Canada's web site mentioned above for more information.

Elizabeth Parker Hut

You can stay at the Alpine Club of Canada's Elizabeth Parker Hut if space is available. Call 403-678-3200 for reservations. Your reservation also secures you a place on the bus. Be sure to visit www.alpineclubofcanada.ca before you consider this option. Follow links Huts>Booking Huts.

Le Relais Day Shelter

Operated by the Lake O'Hara Trails Club, this small concession provides trail information, hot drinks and snacks (cash only).

Bus schedule

To O'Hara 8:30, 10:30 a.m. and 3:30, 5:30 p.m. From O'Hara 9:30, 11:30 a.m. and 2:30, 4:30, 6:30 p.m.

Sunshine Meadows

Access to the Sunshine Meadows is via a gondola or shuttle bus. The gondola operates Fri to Mon inclusive during July and August. The shuttle bus is available Tue to Thu in July and August and 7 days a week during the first 3 weeks of September. No pets. At other times you will have to walk up the access road.

The gondola and shuttle bus leave from Sunshine Village parking lot from 8 am to 6 pm. Last bus down is 5:45 p.m. Fares in 2018: gondola \$42 adults, \$21 children 6-15; bus \$35 adults, \$19 children.

Reservations are recommended, but not required. Visit banffsunshinemeadows.com for more information and to make reservation, or phone 403-705-4000.

There are also several buses a day from and back to Banff. The service is complementary with a gondola or shuttle reservation. You can reserve online or buy tickets on the bus. Check online for times and pick-up points.

Lake Louise and Moraine Lake

Accessing parking at Lake Louise and Moraine Lake is getting very difficult. Parking lots are filling by 6:00 am and Parks Canada is struggling to deal with a large influx of visitors. Various schemes are being tried (2018) such as public transit from Banff and shuttle busses from the Lake Louise overflow area east of the village on the Trans Canada Highway.

If you want to do any of the hikes that start from Lake Louise or Moraine Lake it is absolutely essential that you phone or call in at the Lake Louise Visitor Centre, or contact Parks Canada for the latest access information. See page 144 for details.

Using this book

How the trails were chosen

For their popularity, first of all. You are not likely to be alone. They are easily accessible from a road, start from parking lots that usually have biffies and picnic tables and are generally well-marked. To give variety they range from short to long and from easy walks to scrambles.

Trails

In this book, most of the trails are obvious and have signposts at junctions. Above treeline watch for cairns or paint splodges on rocks. A few of the lower-elevation trails near Banff or Jasper are shared with mountain bikers and equestrians.

Options

Type in blue indicates Going Farther, Alternatives and Optional Returns.

Hazard or regulations

Occasional red type is used to convey a warning either of hazard or a regulation that must be followed.

Numbers in text

For clarity the text is written in short, numbered paragraphs. Numbers in the photo captions refer back to the paragraph numbers. Numbers in photo captions with an O in front of them refer to the option.

Difficulty

Describes conditions underfoot and the steepness of the grades. Scramble steps are noted. A few of the Going Farthers involve scrambling or going off trail.

Except after rain or during run-off, minor creek crossings can usually be jumped or crossed on rocks. All major creeks are bridged.

Distances

Distances are round trip, car to car, from the exit of the parking lot to the end of the trail as described in this guide.

Height gain

Height gains in this guide are total height gains for the round trip and include any significant height gained on the return.

Sketch maps

Red lines indicate main trails. Red-dashed lines are options. Black-dashed lines are other trails and are generally only shown where they intersect the red trails. Distances and positions of red lines were obtained using GPS track logs. Black-dashed lines are not guaranteed to be accurate. North is at the top of all maps. Contour interval is 100 m.

Do I need other maps?

Providing you stay on the trail it's possible to hike the trails using the maps in this book. Gem Trek publishes maps that cover all of the trails here, but you need to buy a lot of maps to cover them. Gem Trek maps are available at most outdoor stores, bookstores and gas stations in the region.

What to wear for the trails

Be prepared for fast weather changes and pack raingear. For walks and scrambles above treeline take a wind jacket, long pants and extra warm clothing. During the summer a sun hat, sun cream and mosquito repellent are must-takes. Light hiking boots suffice for all the trails in this book. Heavier boots are to be preferred on some of the scrambling options.

Doing more

If you have enjoyed the trails in this book and wish to hike in other areas of the Canadian Rockies consider Kananaskis Country, located south and west of Calgary in the eastern foothills of the Rockies, stretching from the Trans-Canada Highway to south of Longview.

A companion book to this one, *Popular Day Hikes 1: Kananaskis Country* by Gilleen Daffern features 35 hikes throughout Kananaskis Country.

Area Map



The Trails

Banff Area

- 1 Spray River Loop – 8
- 2 Cascade Amphitheatre – 11
- 3 C-Level Cirque – 16
- 4 Cory Pass–Edith Pass Circuit – 19
- 5 Sunshine Meadows – 23
- 6 Johnston Canyon to Inkpots – 28

Lake Louise and Moraine Lake

- 9 Lake Agnes–Beehives Circuit – 38
- 10 Plain of Six Glaciers – 42
- 11 Mount St. Piran – 46
- 12 Fairview Mountain – 49
- 13 Larch Valley & Sentinel Pass – 53
- 14 Eiffel Lake – 57

Icefields Parkway

- 23 Bow Glacier Falls – 94
- 24 Helen Lake – 99
- 25 Chephren & Cirque Lakes – 103
- 26 Nigel Pass – 106
- 27 Parker Ridge – 109
- 28 Wilcox Pass & peak ridge – 111

Kootenay National Park

- 7 Arnica Lake – 32
- 8 Stanley Glacier – 35

Yoho National Park

- 15 Yoho Lake Loop – 61
- 16 Iceline–Celeste Lake Loop – 64
- 17 Yoho Valley to Twin Falls – 68
- 18 Lake Oesa & Lake O’Hara – 72
- 19 Wiwaxy–Opabin Alpine Circuit – 76
- 20 Lake McArthur – 82
- 21 Emerald Lake Circuit – 86
- 22 Emerald Triangle – 90

Jasper Area

- 29 Geraldine Lakes – 115
- 30 Cavell Meadows – 119
- 31 Valley of the Five Lakes – 123
- 32 Mina Lake–Riley Lake Circuit – 126
- 33 Opal Hills – 129
- 34 Bald Hills – 132
- 35 Little Shovel Pass – 135
- 36 Sulphur Skyline Trail – 138
- 37 Virl, Dorothy & Christine Lakes – 141

24 Helen Lake

Distance 13.8 km to ridge above lake

Height gain 570 m

High point 2520 m

Moderately strenuous

July to end of September

Start: Icefields Parkway 33 km north of the Trans-Canada Hwy. at Lake Louise and 7.7 km south of Bow Summit. Trailhead parking is on the east side of the road opposite Crowfoot Glacier viewpoint.

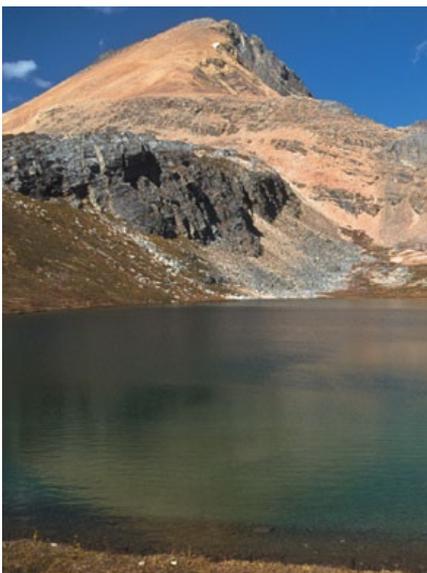
Difficulty: A well-graded trail, moderately steep in places. The ascent of Cirque Peak is a non-technical scramble up scree with one easily negotiated rock band.

1. The trail ascends at a moderate grade through light subalpine forest then steepens as it ascends the side of an open slope and rounds the end of the ridge into more open terrain.
2. The grade eases and the trail works its way into the open subalpine cirque below Cirque Peak. Rock-hop across Helen Creek and ascend gently to Helen Lake.
3. Don't stop too long by the lake. Head for the ridge above the lake where the panoramic view is well worth the extra 125 m of height gain. Most people turn around here. If you want to extend your day see the two options on the following pages.
4. Return the way you came.

Top: The trail above Helen Creek soon after breaking out of the trees. The haze is from forest fires in British Columbia.

Bottom: Cirque Peak from Helen Lake.

Easy access to flowery meadows with alpine lakes, stunning views, Hoary marmots and an easy peak for the more energetic.





Helen Lake from the ridge leading over to Dolomite Pass.

Looking down onto the wide expanse of Dolomite Pass. Katherine Lake to the right. The other small lakes are unnamed.

Going farther to Dolomite Pass

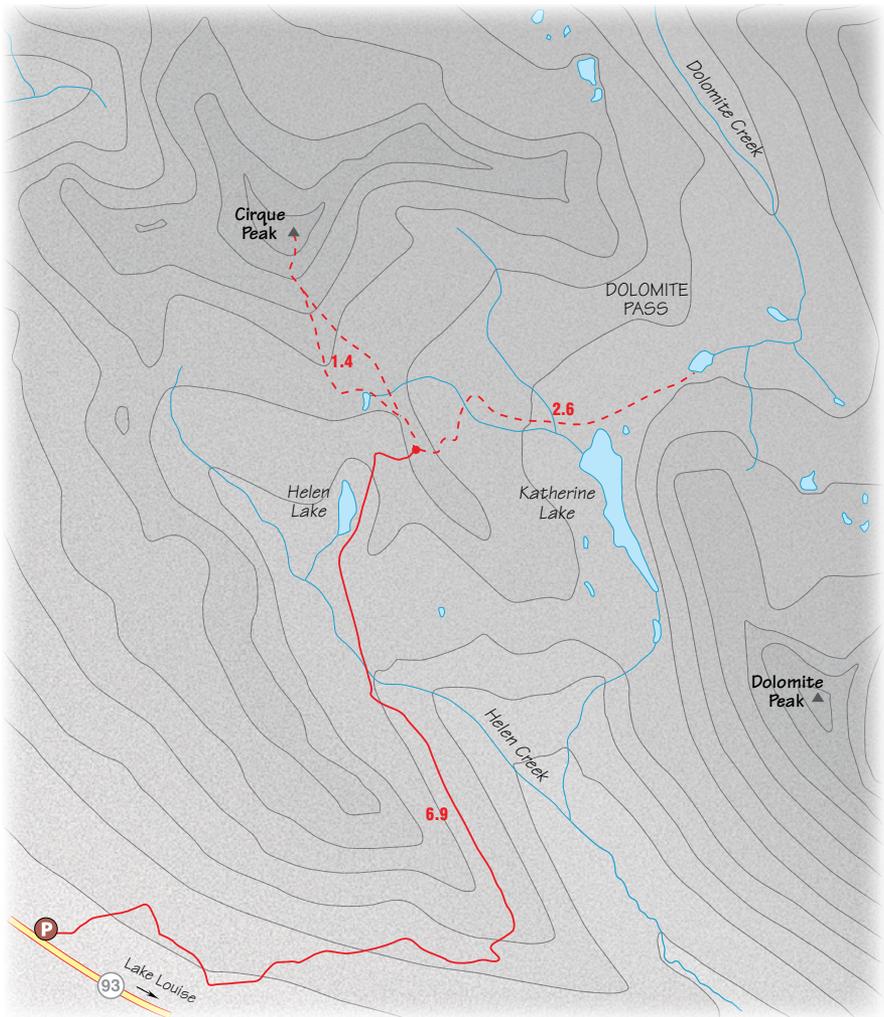
Distance: add 5.2 km

Height gain extra 125 m to pass on return

An excursion to Katherine Lake and the barren alpine region of Dolomite Pass.

1. From the top of the ridge above Helen Lake, descend 125 m to Katherine Lake and follow the faint trail to a small lake in the environs of Dolomite Pass.

2. Return the way you came. Back up to the ridge!



Scramble up Cirque peak

Distance: add 2.8 km to east summit
 Height gain 473 m from ridge
 High point 2993 m

An easy non-technical ascent to a fabulous viewpoint.

1. The route can be seen from the ridge above Helen Lake. Head across rock and

scree to pick up the trail that ascends the open scree slope to the ridge or scramble onto the end of the ridge.

2. Follow the ridge to the west summit. An easy scramble will take you to the marginally higher east summit where you can sign the summit register.

3. Descend the way you came.



The route up Cirque Peak can be clearly seen in this picture.



Bow Lake and the Wapta Icefield from the summit of Cirque Peak.



View to the south from the summit.