



## Lake O'Hara Alpine Circuit

**Full Circuit: Wiwaxy Gap – Huber Ledges – Yukness Ledges – All Souls' Prospect – Grandview Prospect**

The Alpine Circuit at Lake O'Hara is boasted by many to be the most impressive day hike in the Canadian Rockies. The beauty of the Alpine Circuit is the opportunity it offers for hikers to complete it in small sections, linking as few or as many legs as their heart and lungs desire.

Although the circuit can be hiked in either direction, here it is described clockwise.

**Warning:** The alpine routes, while spectacular, are also much more challenging and difficult than the lower trails, and are recommended for experienced hikers only. The routes cross rocky terrain, have periodic exposure to heights, and are sometimes hard to follow. Some scrambling involving hands may be required. Hiking these trails during inclement conditions such as rain, snow, and sleet will significantly increase any challenges. Blue and yellow painted trail markers mark these trails.



Exposure and snowy conditions on Wiwaxy Gap/Huber Ledges Trail.



## Wiwaxy Gap

**Hiking time:** 1.5 to 2 hours

**Length:** 1.5 km

**Elevation Gain:** 495 m

The steep grind to Wiwaxy (wi-WAX-ee) Gap may leave your heart pumping, but it will also leave your eyes popping at the stunning views. Don't forget to take the occasional moment to turn around and admire the sights. Be kind to your knees and hike up this route, not down it.

To access Wiwaxy Gap Alpine Route, start at the Warden's Cabin on the Lakeshore Trail, and head to the left (north) as you are facing the lake. Turn left (northeast) at the trail junction 0.2 km after crossing the bridge over the outlet stream. A series of switchbacks finds you quickly gaining elevation before traversing through the trees under a small cliff.

Once above the cliff, you come across a huge tree, which is a perfect rest stop. The route then climbs up the slope, crossing a couple of stream beds before eventually breaking out onto a heather-and scree-covered slope just below the gap. A couple more switchbacks and you will arrive at your destination, with wonderful views in all directions.



## Huber Ledges

**Hiking time:** Wiwaxy Gap to Lake Oesa – 50 min.

**Length:** 1.7 km

**Elevation Loss:** 260 m

The hike from Wiwaxy Gap to Lake Oesa via Huber Ledges Alpine Route provides more astounding views of the incomparable Lake O'Hara landscape. All four alpine lakes in the hanging valley lie beneath you. Mountain goats can often be spotted lazing on the grass-covered patches that pepper the slopes of Mt. Huber.



Alpine Route Markers

(orange and red are old, blue and yellow are new)

As you gaze down at Lake O'Hara from Wiwaxy Gap, head to the left (east) and follow the sometimes-indistinct route as it slopes gradually down toward Lake Oesa. Keep your eyes peeled for the alpine route markers that will guide you. Shortly before reaching the lake, you come to a junction. Turn right (south) here, and about 100 metres later, you will join the trail coming up from Lake O'Hara. Left (southeast) will take you to the shore of Lake Oesa.



## Yukness Ledges

**Hiking time:** Lake Oesa to Hungabee Lake on Opabin Plateau: 1.25 to 1.5 hours

**Length:** 2.2 km

**Vertical elevation gain:** 50 m

This is a relatively flat route, gaining only 50 vertical metres above Lake Oesa before descending to Hungabee Lake via Yukness (YUKE-ness) Ledges. However, don't be lulled into a false sense of security, as the route has a fair amount of exposure once you pass the Victoria Lake Cut-off. Thereafter, Yukness Ledges offer spellbinding and uninterrupted views across to Mount Odaray and beyond Duchesnay Basin.

From Lake Oesa, follow the trail to the right (south), across the open slabs that form the shoreline of Lake Oesa until you get to the lake's outlet stream. Walk to the right (west) on the ledge above the stream for a short distance before descending to the stream and crossing it. Yukness Ledges Alpine Route begins here.

The route heads straight across the lower scree slopes of Yukness Peak and continues across a series of large slabs before entering a landscape punctuated by broken boulders. Be sure to follow the route as it takes a quick right (north) and descends for a short distance. Many people have gotten off track here, mistakenly going straight and

finding themselves perched on a ledge high above the route, trying to figure out how to rejoin it.

You soon reach the junction with Victoria Lake Cut-off. Yukness Ledges route turns left (west) here. Continuing straight (north) offers a shortcut back to Victoria Lake and down to Lake O'Hara.

The route meanders along a rocky bench overlooking Yukness Lake before traversing a short scree slope. You then descend for a short distance before regaining elevation and rounding a corner to head south. The route continues in the shadow of a large cliff before entering a talus slope and finally descending to Hungabee Lake on Opabin Plateau.

To continue on the Alpine Circuit, cross Opabin Plateau to West Opabin Trail, then continue on All Souls' Prospect Alpine Route.



### **All Soul's Prospect**

**Hiking time:** West Opabin Trail to All Soul's Prospect – 45 minutes to 1 hour, All Souls' Prospect to Schaffer Lake – 30 to 60 minutes

**Length:** 2 km from West Opabin Trail to Schaffer Lake

**Elevation gain:** 245 m

All Soul's Prospect Alpine Route starts at a clearly marked junction with West Opabin Trail, crossing a small stream before climbing through a series of large rocks and small cliffs. After leveling off, the route meanders beside a series of large rock slabs criss-crossed by the flowing water of a nearby stream. Tommy Link, an early visitor to the area who helped construct many of the trails, called this place the "Hanging Gardens of Babylon" for the little outcroppings of plants and moss that grow beside the stream. The route then rises onto the lower scree slopes of Mount Schaffer, continuing to what seems like the top of the world - All Souls' Prospect.

To descend from All Souls' to Schaffer Lake, you must head northwesterly off the prospect: as you face Lake O'Hara, the route descends slightly to the left. Do not head down the gully, which is farther to your left. The route becomes obvious once you begin to descend. When you reach the junction with Big Larches Trail, the circuit continues to the left (southwest) toward Schaffer Lake and Lake McArthur. (The trail to the right (northeast) leads down Big Larches Trail to the Day Shelter.)



## **Odaray Highline to Odaray Grandview Prospect**

**Hiking time:** McArthur Pass to Odaray Grandview Prospect: 1 to 1.25 hours

**Length:** 2.5 km from McArthur Pass

**Elevation gain:** 315 m from McArthur Pass

To get to McArthur Pass, see trail description under Lake McArthur via Schaffer Lake.

In order to limit disturbance to the wildlife that use the McArthur Pass area as a movement corridor, Parks Canada restricts the number of hiking parties that travel the **Odaray Highline** Alpine Route. Check the sign-in book at McArthur Pass to assess whether your group should continue or not. **Please respect these restrictions so that future visitors can use this area.**

Although the objective of this trip is usually Grandview Prospect, the hike along Odaray Highline has its own spectacular rewards. Slopes carpeted with mountain heather and alpine flowers make this trip truly unique.

Odaray Highline Alpine Route leaves the kiosk at McArthur Pass and meanders alongside an alpine meadow before briefly entering the forest and emerging into a draw at the base of Mount Odaray.

Continue along Odaray Highline until you reach its terminus, indicated by the trail closure signs. Turn left (west) up the hill onto Odaray Grandview Prospect route. You will soon reach the base of a cliff. Continue to ascend beside the cliff, where you work your way through a series of rock steps before emerging onto a broad plateau. From here, the 270-degree view takes in almost all of Lake O'Hara's numerous lakes.

