

Saddleback

The hike to Saddleback is the steepest and most demanding hike from the shores of Lake Louise. It is also one of the most rewarding, boasting the best viewpoint for Mount Temple's massive north face, wildflower meadows, and stands of golden-needled alpine larch in late September.



NEED TO KNOW

LENGTH: 3.7 km (2.3 miles) one way

ELEVATION GAIN: 600 metres (1,965 feet)

WALKING TIME: 1.5 to 2 hours one way

RATING: moderate/difficult

TRAILHEAD: Exhibit area between the lake's outlet bridge and the Lake Louise Boathouse.
(N51°24.969' W116°12.964')

SADDLEBACK TRAIL DESCRIPTION

THE HIKE: In its early stages the trail climbs steadily through the forest. At the end of the first kilometre it crosses a major avalanche path on Fairview's northeast slopes, where you have a view back to the Chateau and distant Mount Hector. Farther along, the trail angles up to the southwest and begins the final steep, switchbacking ascent to the pass.

Views improve just below the summit, stretching down the length of the Bow Valley to the mountains near Banff. You also pass through a stand of unusually large and very old, alpine larch (core samples from similar trees in nearby Larch Valley reveal ages of more than 400 years).

THE DESTINATION: Saddleback is a pleasant upland meadow where buttercups, western anemone, alpine speedwell and many other wildflowers bloom in early summer. And as Outram noted, the towering north wall of Mount Temple (3544 metres, the third highest mountain in Banff National Park, dominates the view south of the pass.

The best view of Mount Temple, looming over tiny Lake Annette and Paradise Valley, is found a short distance southeast of the trail along the summit ridge. Follow a faint path through scrub alpine fir to an open promontory overlooking Sheol Valley—a classic alpine viewpoint that has even been exploited by Hollywood (John Barrymore gripped his leading lady Camilla Horn in a passionate embrace here during the filming of *Eternal Love* in August, 1928).

OPTION: With the glacier-crowned summits of Mount Victoria, Mount Temple and Sheol Mountain close by, and the turquoise waters of Lake Louise a vertical kilometre below, the 2,745-metre summit of **Fairview Mountain** offers a true alpine experience. The peak is arguably the highest trail-accessible point in the mountain parks, though the 1.3-kilometre track scratched up its rocky slope many decades ago has largely disappeared. Follow faint trail northwest from Saddleback summit to begin the ascent. Continue upwards on often vague, switchbacking track, or simply scramble over loose rock towards the obvious summit. (You may have to skirt snowbanks early in the season.)

SADDLEBACK TRAIL OUTLINE

- 0.0 Trailhead (elevation 1,730 metres).
- 0.3 Junction. Fairview Lookout right. Saddleback ahead.
- 0.4 Junction. Moraine Lake-Paradise Valley left. Saddle back ahead.
- 1.1 Avalanche path.
—Moderate to steep uphill begins.
- 2.7 Alpine larch stands.
- 3.7 Saddleback summit (elevation 2,330 metres).

