

33 Arnica Lake—Twin Lakes

Vista Lake Viewpoint to Arnica Lake—5.0 km (3.1 mi)

Vista Lake Viewpoint to Upper Twin Lake—7.2 km (4.5 mi)

Half-day to day trip

Allow 1.5 to 2 hours to Arnica Lake

Elevation gain: 580 m (1,900 ft)
loss: 120 m (400 ft)

Maximum elevation: 2150 m (7,050 ft)

Maps: Mount Goodsir 82 N/1
Banff 82 O/4

Access: Follow the Banff-Radium Highway to the Vista Lake viewpoint, 8 km (5 mi) west of Castle Junction and 2 km (1.2 mi) east of the Banff-Kootenay Park boundary at Vermilion Pass. The viewpoint is a broad, paved pull-off on the south side of the highway overlooking Vista Lake and the Altrude Creek valley.

- 0.0—Vista Lake viewpoint (1690 m).
 - Steady downhill through old burn.
- 1.4—Vista Lake outlet (1570 m).
 - Steady uphill moderate to steep.
- 4.0—Trail enters subalpine forest.
- 4.2—Small pond.
 - Steady climb.
- 4.6—Trail levels off.
- 5.0—Arnica Lake (2150 m).
- 5.8—Arnica Summit (2285 m).
 - Steady downhill.
- 7.2—Upper Twin Lake (2090 m). Twin Lakes Campground (Tw7).
- 8.0—Junction. Twin Lakes trail from Altrude Creek left. Gibbon Pass ahead. Lower Twin Lake right.
- 8.2—Lower Twin Lake (2055 m).

Though the distance to Arnica Lake is not great, the hike is somewhat arduous—you start out by losing over 100 m of elevation, then gain nearly 600 m over the last 3.6 km. Yet, despite all its ups-and-downs, the hike to this tarn nestled against the imposing east face of Storm Mountain is one of the most popular along the Bow Valley Highline route. You can also make a full day trip—and a four-lake grand slam—by continuing on to Twin Lakes.

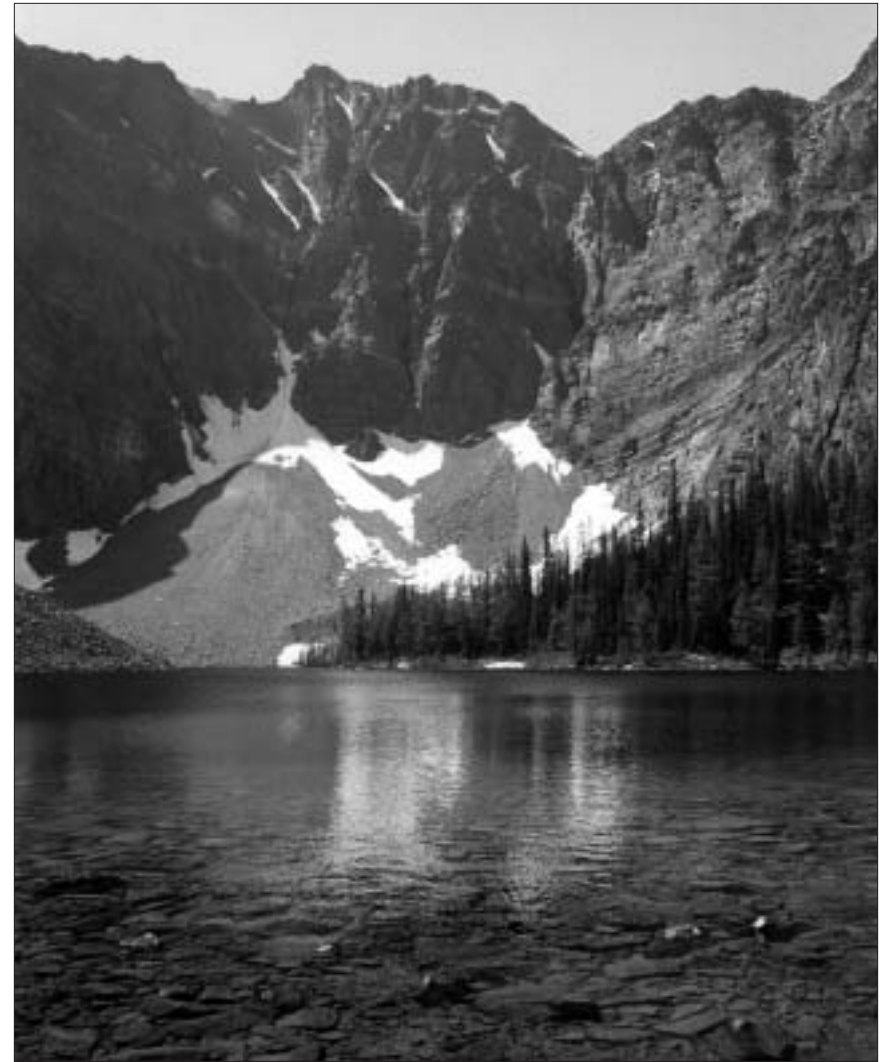
Starting at Vista Lake viewpoint on the Highway 93, the trail descends steadily through the silver spars of trees killed by a forest fire that swept Vermilion Pass in early July 1968. It soon reaches its lowest elevation beside Vista Lake, a peaceful green body of water that is a pleasant destination for less energetic hikers. You will want to spend some time here relaxing and enjoying the scene before tackling the steep climb ahead.

From the lake's outlet bridge, the trail climbs eastward across the lower slopes of Storm Mountain. Views along this stretch were quite open immediately following the '68 burn, but a dense cover of lodgepole pine, which seeded after the fire, is beginning to enclose the trail once more.

At km 4.0 you leave the burn and enter a mature subalpine forest, and not long after passing a small pond you reach the shores of Arnica Lake.

The lake is backed against the sheer cliffs of Storm Mountain and enclosed on three sides by a typical upper subalpine forest of Engelmann spruce and alpine fir with a scattering of larch. Its name comes from the yellow-flowered arnica, which blooms in this cool, moist forest during early summer.

From the lake's outlet the trail climbs for another 0.8 km to the summit of a forested ridge extending northeastward from Storm Mountain. By leaving the



Arnica Lake

trail and climbing along the ridge to the southwest, you are rewarded with extensive views north and south along the Bow Valley.

Twin Lakes. The trail continues over Arnica Summit to Twin Lakes, reaching Upper Twin and the campground after a steady 1.4-km descent. We prefer this approach to Twin Lakes over the more

direct route from lower Altrude Creek because it is more open and scenic, and the distance is virtually the same. However, we often arrange transportation between the two trail heads and hike down to the Altrude Creek trailhead at Castle Junction on the way out, thereby avoiding all the ups-and-downs of returning via Arnica and Vista Lakes. (See also *Twin Lakes* and *Bow Valley Highline Trail*.)