

Paradise Valley



NEED TO KNOW

LENGTH: 10.3 km (6.4 miles) one way

ELEVATION GAIN: 385 metres (1,250 feet)

WALKING TIME: 3 hours one way

RATING: moderate

TRAILHEAD: Follow Lake Louise Drive from Lake Louise Village 3 km (1.9 mi) to the junction with the Moraine Lake Road. Follow Moraine Lake Road 2.5 km (1.5 mi) to the Paradise Valley parking area. (N51°23.763' W116°10.306')

PARADISE VALLEY TRAIL DESCRIPTION

A 10.3-kilometre trail runs up Paradise Valley from the Moraine Lake Road to the Giant Steps cascades. While it's possible to hike to the Giant Steps and back in a long day, most opt for a more modest and scenic objective, Lake Annette beneath the imposing north wall of Mount Temple.

THE HIKE: When Walter Wilcox and his companions climbed to the summit of Mitre Pass from Lake Louise in 1894, they looked into "a valley of surpassing beauty, wide and beautiful, with alternating open meadows and rich forests." They named it Paradise.

The first 3 km of trail are forest-enclosed, but at the first Paradise Creek bridge, views open to Mount Temple. In another kilometre, you cross back to the northwest side of the creek and pass the Sheol Valley-Saddleback junction. At km 5.1, the trail crosses the creek once more followed by a short but strenuous ascent to Lake Annette.

Lake Annette's rocky surroundings are typical of many subalpine tarns, but its backdrop is extraordinary—the ice-capped, 1200-m north face of Mount Temple. This wall is one of the most difficult ascents in North America and remained unclimbed until 1966. And if you see one of the massive avalanches that sweep the face, you will understand one reason why.

The trail continues southwest from Lake Annette, climbing through stands of alpine larch at the base of Mount Temple. Even if you don't plan on hiking to the Giant Steps, it's worthwhile continuing another 15 minutes or so beyond the lake to the trail's summit atop a major rockslide. Here views open to the valley headwall—Hungabee Mountain, Ringrose Peak, and Horseshoe Glacier—scenery that is blithely ignored by the marmots and pikas inhabiting the surrounding boulder field.

Nearly two kilometres beyond the trail summit, you reach a cutoff trail to the Giant Steps. This trail descends to a bridge over Paradise Creek then angles directly across the valley to the Giant Steps and Paradise Valley Campground. Sections of old trail loop further up-valley to the head of the Horseshoe Meadows, but there seems little reason to hike this slightly longer route.

THE DESTINATION: Nearing the Giant Steps, you pass the branch trail to Paradise Valley Campground. Stay right and, just 200 metres beyond this junction, reach the Giant Steps—a remarkable staircase waterfall on the north fork of Paradise Creek. The falls have been photographed many times over the years, but some of the earliest images were made by members of the Alpine Club of Canada, who held their second annual camp here in 1907.

OPTION: At the 8.4-km junction, take the left branch that continues along the southeast side of the valley. In another 0.4 km, you reach Sentinel Pass junction. The pass lies a very steep and rocky 2.3 km up to the left. Most hikers find it less strenuous to climb to **Sentinel Pass** from Moraine Lake and then descend to Paradise Valley. This 17-km traverse between Moraine Lake and the Paradise Valley trailhead is fairly popular with parties who can arrange transportation. (See [Larch Valley Trail](#).)

NOTE: Travel in Paradise Valley may require a group of four people hiking in close proximity to one another if special restrictions concerning grizzly bears are in place.

PARADISE VALLEY TRAIL OUTLINE

- 0.0** Trailhead (elevation 1,720 metres).
- 1.1** Junction. Moraine Lake left. Paradise Valley right.
- 1.3** Junction. Lake Louise ahead (4.0 km). Paradise Valley left.
- 3.4** Paradise Creek bridge.
- 3.9** Paradise Creek bridge.
- 4.2** Junction. Saddleback via Sheol Valley right 4.1 km.
- 5.1** Paradise Creek bridge.
- 5.7** Lake Annette (elevation 1,965 metres).
- 6.5** Trail summit (elevation 2,105 metres).
- 8.4** Junction. Sentinel Pass ahead 2.7 km. Giant Steps right.
- 9.1** Paradise Creek bridge, junction. Horseshoe Meadows left. Giant Steps ahead.
- 9.5** Junction. Horseshoe Meadows left. Giant Steps ahead.
- 10.1** Junction. Paradise Valley Campground left (0.2 km). Giant Steps ahead.
- 10.3** Giant Steps (elevation 2,000 metres).

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