

ICELINE TRAIL SUMMIT, YOHO NATIONAL PARK, BRITISH COLUMBIA

The trailhead for the Iceline Trail is located near the Whiskey-Jack Hostel, across from Takakkaw Falls. According to Wikipedia, Takakkaw Falls is the 45th tallest waterfall in British Columbia, with its highest point being 302 meters (991 feet) from its base, although its "free-fall" is only 260 meters (850 feet). Please note that you are not supposed to park in the Whiskey-Jack Hostel parking area for this hike. Instead, hikers must park in the Takakkaw Falls parking area, approximately 0.6 kilometers further down the road. As the road is narrow near the trailhead for the Iceline Trail, at the turnoff to the Whiskey-Jack Hostel, also please do not park along the road here (there were cars parked in the dirt on both sides of the road through here when we left, and in some places it had become a one-way road where only one vehicle could fit through because of where the cars had been parked).

For this hike, after parking at the main Takakkaw Falls parking lot, we walked back along the main road to the trailhead, then ascended the main trail to where it joins the Iceline Trail, passing turnoffs for Hidden Lake, Yoho Lake, and the Highline Trail. From there, we followed this trail to where we first obtained a closer view of the glacier that the Iceline Trail follows for most of its distance. I'm not entirely sure what the name of this glacier is, but from TOPO maps it appears to be part of the Emerald Glacier. At this point, we began looking for a good place to access the toe of the glacier (we had hiked up to this glacier on our previous trip to the Iceline Trail, in 2008 or 2009). There are multiple faint use trails that lead to the glacier toe, and it is fairly straightforward to find a route that leads up to the glacier. After checking out the glacier, we continued on to the Iceline Summit, before returning to where we had parked at the Takakkaw Falls parking area (this time via the trail which gives a view of Takakkaw Falls rather than walking back the main road from the Whiskey-Jack Hostel). For this hike, having a good map is very helpful but not an absolute must. I used the GemTrek Lake Louise and Yoho TOPO map.

The optional detour to the foot of the glacier is certainly worth the trip. Since my last hike in this area (2008/9), the glacier appears to have receded some distance (I would guess at least 50 meters, but my memory may not be very accurate). At some point after the building of this trail, the glacier was right alongside the trail, but I don't recall how long ago that was. The most well-defined use trail to the toe of the glacier appears to begin near where a fairly large stream crosses the main Iceline trail, at the southeastern end of the trail just before the trail crosses a small rise. Please use extreme caution near the toe of the glacier, because large pieces of ice could break off at any time. Also, please do not attempt to hike on the glacier or enter ice caves on or at the toe of the glacier without being experienced with such endeavors. The glacier appears to be accessible from multiple places further along the Iceline Trail. One of these places is shortly after crossing the first small rise beyond the first glimpse of the glacier, and another is near the two small lakes located at the Celeste Lake trail junction. It also appears that an interesting hike would be to head southeast along the toe of the glacier from where we reached it, along the rocky ledges. I do not know how far one could progress in this route, nor how dangerous it might be, but it certainly would give some nice views of the glacier and surrounding areas.

Hiking distances:

Takakkaw Falls Parking Area to Iceline Trailhead: 0.6 kilometers

Iceline Trailhead to Hidden Lake turnoff: 1.1 kilometers

Hidden Lake turnoff to Yoho Lake turnoff: 0.2 kilometers

Yoho Lake turnoff to Highline Trail turnoff: 1.2 kilometers

Highline Trail turnoff to Celeste Lake turnoff: 3.2 kilometers

Detour to the glacier: about 1 kilometer (round trip)

Celeste Lake turnoff to Iceline Summit: 0.7 kilometers

Total: about 15 kilometers (round trip)

Note that the distances listed on the Lake Louise and Yoho GemTrek TOPO map sometimes appear to disagree with the distances listed on the trail signs; the TOPO map seems to be more accurate, although the trail signs may be indicating different locations than are on the TOPO map.

Additional hikes in the area include Yoho Lake (see my trip report from 2013 on this lake, which we accessed from the Emerald Lake trailhead rather than the Takakkaw Falls trailhead), the Iceline/Celeste Lake/Laughing Falls loop (I did this one in 2008/9 but did not bring a camera; it is about 17 km), and the Iceline/Little Yoho Valley loop (this is a long and very strenuous loop that I hope to do someday; it is about 20 km). There are also some destinations in the Yoho Valley and the Little Yoho Valley which cannot be accessed by maintained trails and require excellent navigational skills to reach. I do not know the details on completing the following hikes, but interesting future destinations include Kiwetinok Lake, Fairy Lake, and the Daly Glacier (I think this glacier can be accessed by a route near the Angel's Staircase, but I could be wrong). Another interesting, but very difficult, hike is the route up from Sherbrooke Lake to the Niles Glacier and to the Scott Duncan Hut.

There was still some fog remaining in the Yoho Valley when we started out on this hike. Note the peak visible to the far right in this photo is The Vice President, which is the peak above the glacier to which we hiked:



Looking up at where the Iceline Trail and the Highline Trail meet (above Whisky-Jack Falls):



The trail gains elevation rapidly through a series of switchbacks, and we soon get a view of Takakkaw Falls across the valley (compare this photo, with the fog, with the photo from our trip back, at the end of this report):



The trees in the distance being just barely visible through the fog made for interesting photos:



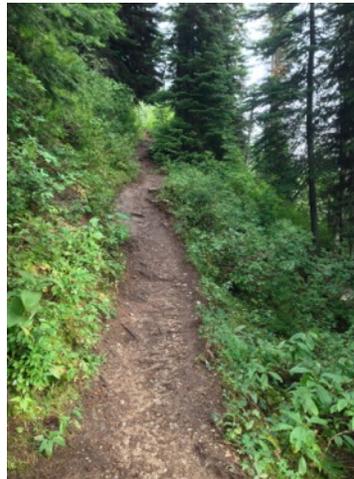
This is the junction with the Hidden Lake trail (I think it is much longer than 0.8 km to the Takkakkaw Falls parking area; it's more like 1.8 km to the actual parking lot where we parked):



The junction with the Yoho Lake trail is shortly after the junction with the Hidden Lake trail. We hiked to Yoho Lake in 2013 from Emerald Lake (see my trip report from this hike):



The trail begins to head northwest from here:



Panorama looking out towards Takakkaw Falls; the clouds are very thick right now:



The trail becomes rocky after a while, and starts leaving the tall trees:



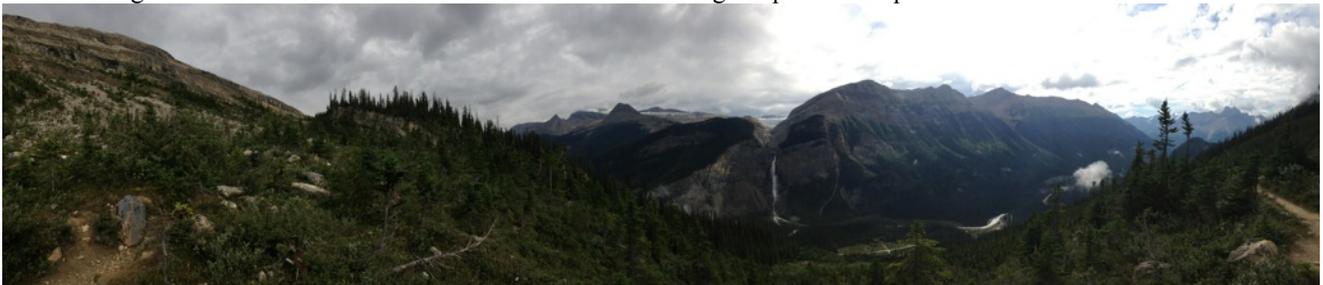
These purple, bell-shaped flowers appeared only once along the trail:



Panorama of the ridge above the Highline Trail; it might be possible to access this ridge from further up the Iceline Trail, past its junction with the Highline Trail:



There is a nice clearing with an excellent view of Takakkaw Falls which is a good place to stop for second breakfast:



Looking out the Yoho Valley; I think the prominent peak on the right is Wapta Mountain, which would be interesting to hike up towards from Yoho Lake:



The trail finally levels out somewhat, and the hiking is quite enjoyable through here:



This is the junction with the Highline Trail (the 2.8 km to Takakkaw Falls is more accurate here):



Looking at the route the Highline Trail takes over towards Yoho Lake; note that it appears to stay just above tree-line, and doesn't seem to go up into the interesting cliffs noted previously:



The trail is very well-defined through here, and it climbs steadily towards the ridge seen in the background center of this photo:



Panorama of the excellent view we have here; note the Daly Glacier is becoming increasingly visible above Takakkaw Falls:



Rock steps have been put in on this trail recently, making both the ascent and the descent of these steep stretches of trail much easier:



The trail follows the side of the hills here towards the bottom of the rock wall visible in the background of this photo:



Another view of the great views that we have along this trail:



This was our first view of the very nice series of waterfalls below the Iceline Trail:



The trail switchbacks, and hikers are able to choose between the "shortcut" with stairs and the switchback:



The glacier finally becomes visible; I think it is part of the Emerald Glacier, but I'm not entirely sure:



Panorama of this spectacular glacier below The Vice President (the peak on the right); the peak in the center appears to be unnamed, and Michael Peak is out of view to the left:



Looking out at the view towards Takakkaw Falls; we are now starting to see many more peaks than we had previously seen, because of all the elevation we have now gained, and we will soon be able to see even more:



There are many possible routes up to this glacier, so hikers can choose whichever looks best:



Hiking along the plateau to the far left in this photo would probably provide some incredible views of the surrounding scenery. I'm not sure how far one can safely get by going in that direction, but I'm hopeful that it's possible to get to the southern end of the glacier below Michael Peak (not visible in this photo). Perhaps one could even access the Yoho Pass Trail from this route, although that would undoubtedly require excellent route-finding skills at the very least:



To get to the glacier, we chose to head towards the twin waterfalls seen to the left in this photo:



The amount of water coming down from the glacier was even more spectacular the closer we got to the glacier:



These are the twin waterfalls that we were aiming for; I'm not sure if they will look the same in future years:



If I recall correctly, on our last trip to this area (2008 or 2009) the glacier toe was just above this cliff:



There is a well-worn but slippery use trail that leads to the top of this rock ledge:



Panorama of the glacier from the top of this ledge:



There was even more water coming down the rocks here, and we would cross rocks on what appeared to be dry ground only to notice water running underneath the rocks beneath our feet:



Panorama of some more waterfalls, with the glacier behind them:



This was a very scenic spot, although the closeness of the glacier made the air very cold, and in addition we were concerned about chunks of ice coming down from further up the glacier:



Looking up at the glacier above these waterfalls:



The actual toe of this glacier was just above one more ledge here:



This huge ice-cave would be much too dangerous to explore:



As can be seen from this photo, the ice above this cave was melting fast enough to create numerous waterfalls coming straight down from the ceiling. I'm not sure how deep this cave is since I didn't want to get too close for safety reasons, but I certainly couldn't see the end of it :



This was a smaller ice-cave that didn't go in very far (the end of the is clearly visible from a safe distance outside):



Looking along the edge of the glacier from here; it certainly seems to have receded noticeably, if I am correct in recalling where it was 7-8 years ago:



Panorama looking out towards the Yoho Valley:



The top of the glacier here is coated in rocks and dirt, making it appear safer to walk on than it really is:



Looking southeast along the toe of the glacier, where it is further back along the rocks:



The views of the Yoho Valley and Takakkaw Falls were very nice from this spot at the toe of the glacier:



Panorama of the glacier, with the ice cave on the far right. It would have been nice to continue southeast along the toe of the glacier for additional views, but we didn't have time to check that out today because we were continuing further along the Iceline trail:



Panorama of the entire expanse of glacier that we could see from here:



Another view southeast along the rock ledges at the toe of the glacier; notice all the waterfalls cascading down the rock. There is still so much exploring to be done in this part of Yoho National Park:



A closer view of all these waterfalls:



One more panorama of the peaks above Takakkaw Falls:



Looking down from the top of the ledge above the double waterfalls we had climbed up next to:



Looking back at the ice cave we had seen (far left), and another one that we didn't get to (center):



Looking out at a small pond, and up the Yoho Valley:



Panorama with the double waterfalls on the far left (this is a 270-degree panorama, so the cliff seen on the far right in the photo is actually the same cliff seen to the far left, and this wall is fairly straight):



Looking back at the cliffs below the toe of the glacier from near the small pond noted previously:



Panorama with Takakkaw Falls on the left and the glacier on the right. Note the rockpile to the right in this photo; this was part of an interesting line of large rocks that I'm guessing were pushed there by the glacier when it came closer to the Iceline trail:



Looking southeast again towards the ledges that I hope to check out on a future hike:



Panorama of the water coming down from this small pond, which has been filled by the water melting off of the glacier. The water actually wasn't as cold as I would have expected it to be, probably because the pond and stream aren't very deep and hence the water has been warmed by the sun:



This was an interesting plant which appeared infrequently along the trail:

