

LOWER WELSH LAKE, BRITISH COLUMBIA

The trailhead for the Welsh Lakes is located approximately 38 kilometers from Radium Hot Springs. There are four lakes accessible from the Welsh Lakes trailhead: The three Welsh Lakes, and Aberystwyth Lake. We only had time to see the lower Welsh Lake. I highly recommend checking in at the Radium Hot Springs Visitor Information Center to pick up a (free) copy of the British Columbia Forest Service's Welsh Lakes Trail Guide (available as of the writing of this trip report, August 2016), as well as to find out about the current road and trail conditions. Also, I would recommend obtaining a good map of the logging roads traversed to reach the trailhead; I recommend the East Kootenay Topographic Adventure Map from Backroad Mapbooks (the free BC Rockies Map is not sufficiently detailed). As of the writing of this trip report, porcupines do not yet appear to be causing damage to vehicle parts while hikers' vehicles are parked at the Welsh Lakes trailhead for a day hike; however, I would advise anyone considering a trip to the Welsh Lakes to confirm that this is still the case.

To access the Welsh Lakes trailhead:

From Radium Hot Springs, turn west at the 4-way stop and drive along Foresters Landing Road for 9 kilometers. There will be a 4-way junction at this point; continue straight. The road you've crossed is called Westside Road, and Foresters Landing Road turns into Horsethief FSR. After 4 kilometers, at marker 13, turn right on Forster Creek FSR. Continue on Forster Creek FSR for 23 kilometers, to the 36 km marker. Shortly thereafter, there is a signpost labeled "Welsh Lakes Trail" which points to the left. Turn left here. If you have a high-clearance 4WD vehicle which can handle a steep, narrow, bumpy, and potentially slippery road, then you can continue the 1.6 km to the upper trailhead; otherwise, find a spot to park within the first 200 meters of this side-road, that isn't blocking traffic. If you have concerns about your vehicle not being able to handle this road, do not attempt it because it is impossible to turn around after the first (and only) switchback. Be forewarned, this is a very steep road—we found 4WD to be much more necessary than high clearance, although road reports indicate that after rains the road may degrade and high clearance will also be very much necessary. Note that there are a few small logging roads which branch off the main road, but the direction to proceed should be clear; as mentioned earlier, it is highly recommended to have a good map of these logging roads. **From Invermere**, follow the signs towards Panorama Mountain Village. Just after crossing the Toby Creek Bridge, turn right towards Wilmer. Stay on the pavement through Wilmer to Westside Road (there are some side-roads that may cause confusion, but most importantly remember that you want to head north). Continue on Westside Road for 10 kilometers, until you reach the 4-way junction with Foresters Landing Road (right) and Horsethief FSR (left). Turn left, and continue based on the directions above.

The Welsh Lakes Trail:

The distance to the Lower Welsh Lake from the upper trailhead is approximately 4 kilometers (trail guides disagree on the exact distance). The first 2 kilometers or so is an easy walk along an old logging road, with a relatively moderate elevation gain. Views are limited through here due to the dense forest. Then, the trail becomes rougher, crossing roots and large rocks, with increasingly good views of the surrounding mountains. After winding through more forest, the trail finally reaches the base of a large rockpile. Here it is easy to lose the trail; the key is to look for the lighter-colored rocks and the cairns. The trail climbs quickly and relentlessly to the lowest lake. Note that this is a difficult 4 kilometers, with the last 2 kilometers being the hardest. We did not start the hike early enough in the day to continue on to the other three lakes; however, trail guides give the following information: There is no maintained trail to the Middle Welsh Lake, but if one continues counterclockwise around the Lower Welsh Lake (which is not particularly easy due to the rocky terrain surrounding this lake!) then one will first pass the inlet from Aberystwyth Lake (which is a difficult hike with no well-defined use trail—excellent navigational skills are a must), and then encounter a use trail at the inlet from the Middle Welsh Lake. This supposedly visible trail leads to the Middle Welsh Lake. From there, one can continue to the Upper Welsh Lake; I did not find any reports on the status of this route. Also see the free Forest Service trail map or a good TOPO map for more information.

According to the East Kootenay TOPO map, further up the Foresters Landing Road there are trails to Thunderwater Lake, Whirlpool Lake, Forster Falls, and Olive Hut.

The cinnamon-colored mountains in this area immediately reminded me very much of Ouray, Colorado:



Panorama of these colorful mountains from the parking area; I hadn't seen reddish peaks in this area before:



The trail immediately crosses the Welsh Creek on this nice log bridge:



At first, the old logging road which the trail follows gains elevation rapidly:



After a little while, the trail begins to get less steep:



There is a small clearing where hikers can get a first glimpse of the ridge to the north:



Looking ahead towards one of the peaks above the Welsh Lakes:



There were numerous small streams coming down off of the peak to the south, which I think is called Donegal Peak:



At this point, the old logging road ends and the trail begins to get narrower and rougher:



The trail also gets rockier, and the hiking becomes much slower:



The trail actually goes to the left in this photo, across the roots and rocks. Note that the trail is in reality very well maintained; it just seems to be a tricky area in which to put in a trail:



Looking across at Donegal Peak again:



The trail starts to follow Welsh Creek more closely; note the blue color of the creek is already obvious:



Up ahead we can see the ridge below Welsh Lakes (right of center in this photo):



Looking back at where the trail is following the creek; the blue color of the creek is very similar to the stunning blue color of the Welsh Lakes:



Looking up at Donegal Peak again (I think Connemara Peak may be one of the points seen to the right in this photo, but I'm not entirely sure):



Looking at the ridge which lies between where we are and the lower Welsh Lake:



To the northwest is Harlech Peak and Marioneth Peak, above a large rockpile which must be crossed to reach the last steep stretch before the lake:



The trail itself is difficult to see through here, but at least there are many cairns which are easy to follow once you spot them:



Some stretches of the trail through the rocks are easier to find because they consist of lighter rather than darker, mossy rock:



To the center in the photo is Donegal Peak, to its right is Connemara Peak, and to the right of these are the Irish Peaks:



Looking back down the trail; the route is much easier to find on the way back, but it took a little time on our hike out to find the trail:



The trail through the rocks begins to get relatively steep, but not as steep as it will soon be:



Looking across at the Irish Peaks from here; it looks like there should be a lake below these peaks, but according to the maps there isn't one there. It still looks like it would be a very interesting area to check out:



As we gain elevation, we start to get views of the reddish colored peaks across the valley:



Looking ahead, we see that the trail will follow the ridge to the right above the river gorge, then will bend to the left to go through the notch to the far left in this photo:



The reddish peaks are to the far left, in the center is Donegal Peak, Connemara Peak, and the Irish Peaks, and to the far right is Harlech Peak:



This nice waterfall was visible from the ridge; if we'd had more time, it would have been nice to hike to the waterfall, from further down the ravine where the terrain isn't as steep:



The river is now far below, and it's a long, steep way down:



Looking across at the Irish Peaks again; that looks like a very amazing place to hike, but unfortunately there aren't any maintained trails there, and I can't find any indication that there are use trails heading in that direction:



Looking back down at where we have climbed up from, and across to the reddish peaks again (which are so different from the rocky peaks up by the Welsh Lakes):



The trail continues along the ravine with the river far below; note the waterfall is visible again in the lower center of this photo:



Zooming in on this interesting waterfall:



Panorama with the Irish Peaks to the far left, and the trail continuing to the right. Note how steep the side of the ravine next to the trail is:



We are also getting increasingly good views of the reddish peaks across the valley:



Looking across Welsh Creek at some interesting diagonally-striped rock formations:



This view shows how steep the hillside we are ascending is; the switchbacks we have just climbed are barely visible below:



The trail soon gets rougher, and crosses this rock pile; however, although caution is required, at no place is the route overly difficult:



The trail next ascends the rockpile, as seen to the right in this photo:



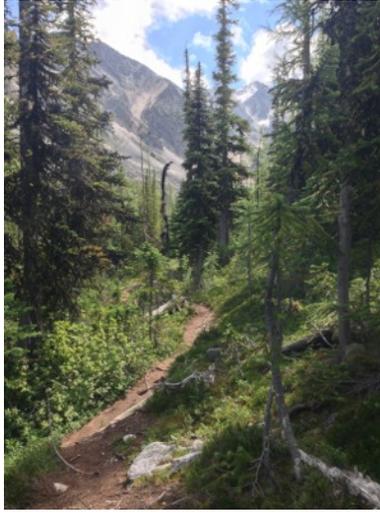
Looking across at Harlech Peak (left) and Marioneth Peak (right). It seems like Harlech Peak might possibly be accessible from the Aberystwyth Lake, which is located between this peak and the Lower Welsh Lake. The valley between Harlech Peak and Marioneth Peak also looks interesting to check out, although I'm not sure what would be the best way to access it:



We are getting a very good view of the reddish peaks now:



The trail finally crosses the ridge and levels out, and we start to get views of the peaks behind Welsh Lake:



This view is of the Welsh Creek just before it descends the steep gorge:



There is a nice meadow-like area before the lake is reached, which may have more nice flowers during other times of the year:



There were a few cotton-ball shaped flowers along the creek here:



There also were some of these purple flowers, and numerous bees:



This was our first view of the Lower Welsh Lake:



I think the peaks behind the Welsh Lakes are part of the Irish Peaks, but I'm not entirely sure of all the place names in this area. Note the small island in the center of this photo:



This would be a great lake to have lunch at, or even camp, but unfortunately the numerous mosquitoes prevented us from stopping longer than just to quickly take some photos:



The amazing blue color of the lake is more noticeable from further south along the western lakeshore:



We ascended a ridge to the northwest of the lake to see if we could find a good route to the middle Welsh Lake, but no route was obvious. Unfortunately, due to getting a late start on this hike because of the long drive to the trailhead, we decided not to continue on to any of the other lakes. I think the best way to get to the next lake is probably just to follow the lakeshore until the inlet to this lake is reached:



Another panorama of the incredible blue color of the Lower Welsh Lake:



One last photo of the lake before we headed back down the trail and away from the majority of the mosquitoes:



These algae mats in a pond near the northern end of the lake were quite interesting:



Panorama of the ridge north of Welsh Creek from just before we descended from the lake area; Harlech and Marioneth Peaks can be clearly seen to the left of center:



Another view of the interesting jagged and striped rock formations visible on the southeast side of Welsh Creek just below the lake:



Again, note how steep the terrain is through here; the switchbacks themselves are also very steep:



Looking back down the valley:



Panorama of the upper Welsh Creek valley, with Welsh Creek itself visible in the lower half of the picture:



Looking up at one of the peaks on the southeast side of the valley, this time with a better sun angle on our way back down:



There were a few of these blooming plants along the trail and also along the road up to the parking area; I think this is fireweed:



One last photo of the interesting reddish-cinnamon colored peaks across the valley from where we had been hiking; the Septet/Tiger Pass trail and the McLean Lake trail are on the other side of these peaks, and I wonder if the reddish color is as noticeable from that side as it is from here:



On the way back, we noticed a bigger bridge structure near Welsh Creek (center of photo, on the other side of the creek); I wonder if this is part of the old bridge from when this road was a logging road:

