

The Stawamus Chief

British Columbia, Canada

 4 Hours / 6 KM  Out and back  Medium



Peak 1 (South Peak) as seen from Peak 2 (Centre Peak) © Karl Woll

Easy access and rewarding views of Howe Sound make this a must-do hike. On this hike there are three separate summits you can climb: the South (Peak 1), the Centre (Peak 2), and the North (Peak 3). You can do each summit individually, or, if you're feeling ambitious you can tackle all three.

The Stawamus Chief is one of the most popular hiking trails around Vancouver and is also a popular rock climbing site. Simply referred to as the 'The Chief', this hike is located in Stawamus Chief Provincial Park in the District of Squamish.

The hike has a roughly 500m elevation gain to Peak 1, and 590m and 630m gains to Peaks 2 and 3. It is considered an intermediate hike, and takes about 90 minutes to reach Peak 1, and slightly longer if you choose to ascend one of the other two peaks. This guide describes the hike as completing both Peaks 2 and 3, as this offers the best views, least amount of people and most bang for your buck. There is also a spectacular drop off between the Peaks 2 and 3, which provides a great view. But you can try all three, or pick just one.

ASCEND AND DESCEND

 630m  630m

SCENERY



PRACTICAL INFO



Why the Stawamus Chief

This Chief provides an amazing views over the District of Squamish, Howe Sound, and a few of the nearby mountains of Garibaldi Park. The trail is steep, and provides a good challenge to always keep things interesting, including several sections of scrambling on your hands and feet.

The Chief also provides a few different options in the route you take, in terms of which of the three peaks you want to climb and the order.

Over 50,000 people make the hike up 'The Chief' annually, making it one of the most popular hiking trails around Vancouver.

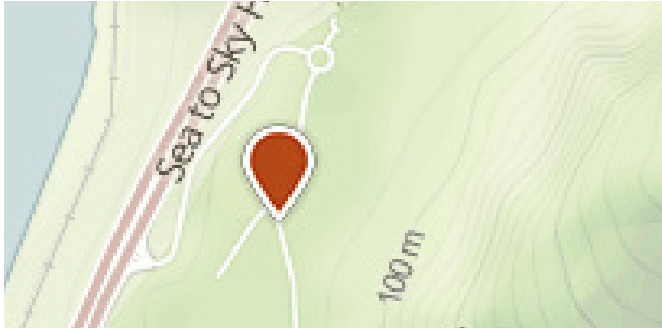
When to go

JAN FEB MAR APR MAY JUN JUL AUG SEP OCT NOV DEC

The Stawamus Chief gets snow during the winter, but not as much as some of the other nearby mountains. For this reason, The Chief enjoys a fairly long hiking season. The summit is usually free of snow in the early spring, making this a great warm-up hike for the summer months ahead.

Also, The Chief is one of the most popular hikes around Vancouver, and the trail gets exceptionally busy during the summer. If you want to avoid the long lines of people hiking up and down the trail, you're best to go during a weekday, or in the spring and fall.

Starting point



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STARTING POINT

Stawamus Chief Provincial Park, Parking Lot,
Squamish

TRANSPORT TO START



Take Highway #99 heading north past Horseshoe Bay towards Squamish. Keep driving along the Sea to Sky highway all the way towards Squamish for about 35 minutes. Watch for the signs for Stawamus Chief Provincial Park. The parking lot is just a few seconds beyond the pull-out for Shannon Falls, which will also have signs.

From the Stawamus Chief parking lot, you will walk up the gravel road to the outhouse and camping area. Enter the trail into the camping area, and follow it for a few minutes. You will come to the trailhead with a signboard.

How hard

The hike is relatively short - only 1.5km to reach Peak 1 (South Peak) and roughly 2.5km to reach Peaks 2 or 3. However, the trail is very steep and some sections are very technical. There are chains and ladders to assist your climb at various points. Also, the peaks themselves are open, exposed, and steep. If it has been raining the smooth granite is very slippery. This hike is rated as intermediate, but there are many abrupt cliffs if you stray from the path at certain points, and people have fallen before.

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🕒 4 Hours / 6 km ⬆️ 630 m ⬆️ 630 m



© Mapbox © OpenStreetMap

On this hike there are three separate summits you can climb: the South (Peak 1) **1**, the Centre (Peak 2) **2**, and the North (Peak 3) **3**. I will describe the hike as completing both Peaks 2 and 3, as this offers the best views, least amount of people and most bang for your buck. But you can try all three, or pick just one.

To start the hike, you will find the trailhead **4** at the east end of the Stawamus Chief campground **5**. There will be a sign warning you that the climb ahead is not for the ill-prepared. The initial climb will take you up a series of wooden stairs and immediately get the blood flowing. The main trail begins climbing alongside Oleson Creek and very soon there is a junction **6** which connects to Shannon Falls. Stay left. (As an aside, you can also park at the Shannon Falls lot, and begin your hike from there.

This junction is where you will join the Chief trail).

Further up the trail, there is another split **7** for the Upper Shannon Falls and Sea to Summit Trail. You will also stay to the left here. Shortly after, there is a third minor junction and once again you will stay left. Then, you will come to a major split in the trails with signposts to direct you. Left will take you to the Peak 1 (South) and/or Peak 2 (Centre). Right will take you directly to the Peak 3 (North), which is the trail you will return on, completing a mini-loop. So head left towards Peak 1 and you'll quickly come to yet another split **8** in the trail. This time, head right on the trail marked for Peak 2.

From here just climb on up following the trail markers until you finally reach the rocky, open surface of Peak 2.

Scramble up the final few meters to find a view, taking extra caution if the rock surface is wet and slippery, as it often is. There is no shame in using your hands and going slowly here. Once you've scrambled up, take a rest here, enjoying the views of the Peak 1, Squamish and Howe Sound. You should be able to clearly see a small crowd of people on top of Peak 1.

When you're ready to carry on, keep pushing on over the Peak 2 summit and look for the orange markers in the trees. It may take a few minutes to locate the markers, but they are there. Follow the trail down through to the North Gully **9** and an incredible view of Mount Garibaldi. Continue to follow the trail as it climbs back up. You'll come to a narrow ledge with a chain-rope to assist your climb. Simply follow the trail markers from here and you'll quickly come to the open, smooth-rock surface of Peak 3. Scramble up, again taking caution on a few steep and narrow sections of rock, that may be extremely slippery.

From the summit you can soak in the view of Mount Garibaldi and the Tantalus Range and rest your legs for the long descent ahead. To return back to the parking lot, reverse down Peak 3 back to the North Gully. However, instead of carrying all the way back to Peak 2 from which you came, you can shortcut down onto the trail that bisects Peaks 2 and 3, right down into the gully. Descend down the steep, technical trail until you eventually cross Oleson Creek once more back onto the main trail. You'll come out where the major junction for Peak 1/2 is. From here, simply follow the way back down to the parking lot.

If you are interested in camping, there are 47 campsites in the Stawamus Chief campground, which are a short walk-in from the parking lot. They are non-reservable and \$8/person per night, for persons over the age of 6.

About the author

Karl Woll

Born and raised in Vancouver, has been passionately exploring the area's local mountains over the last decade. Beyond hiking, Karl fulfills his desire to be in the outdoors by kayaking, cycling, scuba diving, snowboarding, and most frequently, trail running.

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