

Iceline Trail ~ *Beginner Backpack 101*



Day 1: Takakkaw Falls to Twin Falls Campground

This was a beginner backpack trip and there was lots of learning for the newbie's and the old pros alike. The first lesson occurred in the parking lot as Sherry cut up an old yoga mat for seat cushions – a cheap solution that worked great on the rocky trail over the next three days.

We started at Takakkaw Falls with beautiful +26 weather and the sun at our backs. After a confidence building 4 km to Laughing Falls, where we stopped to enjoy the scenery, we tacked on another 3kms to Twin Falls - a bit of gradual up but nothing too hard at this point. We set up camp in our "5 star" campsite (tables, bear pole, and designated tent sites) beside a flowing glacial creek where we hosted a "happy hour" of wine and cheese and got to know the hiking companions we would spend the next three days with. Lots of discussion about different kinds of stoves and back country cooking tricks until thunder chased us to our tents for a while. Some of the more adventurous ones returned afterwards for a game of cross-crib while the others stayed bedded down in their tents for the night.

Day 2: Whale Back to Little Yoho Campground

Feeling a little more confident the next morning, the group opted to take the more challenging Whale Back route and leave the easy Laughing Falls route for the true back packing beginners! After a hearty breakfast we hit the trail at about 9am and started the climb to the historic Twin Falls Chalet.



Built by the CPR in the early 1900's as a backcountry rest house - you can still rent a room at the Twin Falls Chalet for the night from a wonderful woman who cooks all the meals and maintains the place year round.

Once we finished exploring the chalet we continued up another 3km to the top of Twin Falls where we started to get glimpses of the spectacular glaciers around us. A great reward for an uphill grunt and a hint of what was to come!

After lunch at the top of the falls, we continued to the Whaleback, winding through grassy meadows and the remnants of winter snow. We could now see clearly down the valley, the glaciers around us, Mt. President, and the Iceline we would tackle the next day.



As a glimpse of what was to come, the temperature began to fall as clouds rolled in and we gained elevation. At the summit of the Whaleback we were welcomed with snow, pelting hail and unrelenting wind. We broke out warmer clothes and rain gear and learned backpack lesson #2: be prepared for anything - including snow storms in July! Once it subsided it was time to start descending down Whale Back into the valley on the other side and to Little Yoho, our next campsite. The down was steep and woke up our shins and calves as we hiked through avalanche tree falls, finishing with a gentle 3km valley walk to Little Yoho. The Stanley Mitchell hut was

right by our campsite and I am quite sure a few of us wished we were staying there for the night as the temperature had now dropped to a chilly 3 degrees.



By the time we made Little Yoho we were "done" for the day! We enjoyed some social time with warming soup, fortified hot chocolate and a little red wine as we started supper.

That's when the rain returned with a vengeance, further testing our resolve and our knowledge of cold, wet backpacking. I don't think we all expected just HOW cold it was going to be that night. We rushed to finish our supper under the shelter of the trees and learned a few more strategies for staying warm for the night [temperature had now dropped to a bone chilling 1 degree!]. Nalgene bottles full of freshly boiled water were added to sleeping bags while toques, gloves and dry warm clothes were donned in multiple layers. For the second night in a row we retreated to our tents, expecting to wake up to white ground in the morning!

Day 3: Iceline Trail

Early morning revelry with hot tea and coffee!

We woke to a chilly but sunny morning with some forest fire smoke in the air but no white stuff on the ground!

We left camp again at 9am – day 3 was underway.



Word for the day: **WOW**

With a surge of adrenalin and early morning enthusiasm, we hiked the first 4 km towards the Iceline summit at a good pace. It didn't take us long to leave the trees behind and climb onto glacier moraine. We spent most of the third day on the moraine hiking among disappearing glacial giants. We were surrounded by outstanding views of glaciers on all sides – albeit at times a little smoky!



The scenery was unbelievable and awe inspiring - for me the best day of hiking without a doubt!

It definitely reinforced just how fortunate we are to have the Rockies in our backyard.

We stopped for lunch at the base of the Iceline summit – some of us climbing the short hill to the top to enjoy the panoramic views. We had certainly returned to civilization at this point as there were lots of day hikers on this part of the trail. It seems as if we had left the back country behind.



After lunch we continued on over the moraine and crossed several glacier creeks until early afternoon. The final 3 km was a quick descent through a series of switch backs in a lush forest setting with tons of trees and green plants – in sharp contrast to what we had just left.

We learned a lot on this beautiful back packing trip and the last lesson had to do with leadership. Our trip leader, Barb, made this trip a memorable one for everyone involved. Barb infused every aspect of this trip with her upbeat enthusiasm, regardless of the conditions, and it was contagious.



We had a phenomenal trip with spectacular views; great learning about backpacking, weather and the challenges you might face; gourmet back country food, and incredible company. I couldn't imagine any other way to spend three days in the backcountry.

Thanks All,
Tom

Parting Shots

