

32 Arnica Lake—Twin Lakes

Vista Lake Viewpoint to Arnica Lake—5.0 km (3.1 mi)

Vista Lake Viewpoint to Upper Twin Lake—7.2 km (4.5 mi)

Half-day to day trip

Allow 1.5 to 2 hours to Arnica Lake

Elevation gain: 580 m (1,900 ft)
loss: 120 m (400 ft)

Maximum elevation: 2150 m (7,050 ft)

Maps: Mount Goodsir 82 N/1
Banff 82 O/4
Banff-Egypt Lake (Gem Trek)

Access: Follow the Banff-Radium Highway to the Vista Lake viewpoint, 8 km (5 mi) west of Castle Junction and 2 km (1.2 mi) east of the Banff-Kootenay Park boundary at Vermilion Pass. The viewpoint and trailhead are at a broad, paved pull-off on the south side of the highway overlooking Vista Lake and the Altrude Creek valley.

- 0.0—Trailhead (1690 m).
N51°14.476' W116°02.131'
—Steady downhill through old burn.
- 1.4—Vista Lake outlet (1570 m).
—Steady uphill moderate to steep.
- 4.0—Trail enters subalpine forest.
- 4.2—Small pond.
—Steady climb.
- 4.6—Trail levels off.
- 5.0—Arnica Lake (2150 m).
- 5.8—Arnica Summit (2285 m).
—Steady downhill.
- 7.2—Upper Twin Lake (2090 m).
Twin Lakes Campground (Tw7).
- 8.0—Junction. *Twin Lakes* trail from Altrude Creek left. Gibbon Pass ahead. Lower Twin Lake right.
- 8.2—Lower Twin Lake (2055 m).

Though the distance to Arnica Lake is not great, the hike is somewhat arduous—you start out by losing over 100 m of elevation, then gain nearly 600 m over the last 3.6 km. Yet, despite all its ups-and-downs, the hike to this tarn nestled against the imposing east face of Storm Mountain is a popular day trip and well worth the effort. You can also make a full day trip—and a four-lake grand slam—by continuing to Twin Lakes.

Starting at Vista Lake viewpoint on the Highway 93, the trail descends steadily through an old burn (1968) that is filling in with lodgepole pine. It soon reaches its lowest elevation beside Vista Lake, a peaceful green body of water that is a pleasant destination for less energetic hikers. You will want to spend some time here relaxing and enjoying the scene before tackling the steep climb ahead.

From the lake's outlet bridge, the trail climbs eastward across the lower slopes of Storm Mountain. Views along this stretch were quite open for a couple of decades after the 1968 Vermilion Pass burn, but like the descent to Vista Lake, pine forest is enclosing the trail once more.

At km 4.0 you enter a mature subalpine forest, and not long after passing a small pond you reach the shores of Arnica Lake.

The lake is backed against the sheer cliffs of Storm Mountain and enclosed on three sides by a typical upper subalpine forest of Engelmann spruce and alpine fir with a scattering of larch. Its name comes from the yellow-flowered arnica, which blooms in this cool, moist forest during early summer.

From the lake's outlet the trail climbs for another 0.8 km to the summit of a forested ridge extending northeastward from Storm Mountain. By leaving the trail and climbing along the ridge to the southwest, you are rewarded with



Arnica Lake

extensive views north and south along the Bow Valley.

Twin Lakes. The trail continues over Arnica Summit to Twin Lakes, reaching Upper Twin Lake and Twin Lakes Campground after a steady 1.4-km descent. We prefer this approach to Twin Lakes over the more direct route from Altrude Creek because it is more open and scenic,

and the distance is virtually the same. However, we often arrange transportation between the two trailheads and hike down to the Altrude Creek trailhead at Castle Junction on the way out, thereby avoiding all the ups-and-downs of returning via Arnica and Vista Lakes. (See also *Twin Lakes* and *Bow Valley Highline Trail*.)