

## 66 MAYO AND AILSA LAKES

The small, pristine blue gems Mayo and Ailsa lakes are typical of the lakes of the southern Purcells. Situated close together, they sparkle below the towering cliffs of Mount McKay.

Mayo Lake is a small, shallow tarn at the base of this massive headwall. The grey cliffs rise 750 m (2500 ft.) straight up from the south side of the lake, offering beautiful views and good photographic opportunities. Ailsa Lake is a 500 m-in-diameter subalpine lake that rests in a scenic, rocky basin upslope and west of Mayo Lake.

Whitebark pine, alpine larch, subalpine fir and Englemann spruce all share the rocky soil near the lakes. The mixed subalpine forest dotting these slopes is typical of this elevation, but it is rare that the different species of trees grow together on the same site.

If the overgrown road is too narrow for your vehicle, hike up the 2.3 km-long roadway gaining about 274 m (900 ft.). From the top of the road Mayo Lake is a 1.5 km hike. It takes about an hour to reach the little lake with an elevation gain of 120 m (400 ft.). Hike south from the landing toward the forest along the skid trails on the west side of the creek. At the first branch in the road follow the lower (left) trail. After about 500 m, a combination of logging slash and avalanche debris block the route. Stay just up from the creek where there are fewer fallen trees.

Cross this forest debris and continue south on a well-used trail near the base of the slope. The shallow lake rests at the base of a headwall and collects the avalanche snow from the cliffs. In mid-June, the lake is still covered with a metre of snow and ice.

Enjoy the views and the quiet of Mayo Lake before heading up to Ailsa Lake, another 1 km to the west (to the right if looking at the headwall) up a steep, short climb of 268 m (880 ft.). This is a moderate scramble up on top of late melting snow, but as the snow melts later in the summer, the hike ascends through a thick mat of alders. Climb up the alder slope to subalpine talus, dotted with a few hardy trees and up to the lake basin. Ailsa Lake nestles in a narrow gouged-out basin below the steep mountains.

**Rating** easy trail to Mayo Lake moderate to Ailsa Lake

**Time** short day hike

**Distance** 2.5 km to Ailsa Lake

**Elevation gain** 364 m (1180 ft.)

Mayo Lake 1646 m (5400 ft.)

Ailsa Lake 1914 m (6280 ft.)

**Trail** forest trail, short walk in forest to Mayo Lake below cliffs, bushwhacking to subalpine Ailsa Lake

**Map** 82F/9 St. Mary Lake

**Trail map** page 200

### Drive

**Road** moderate-clearance vehicle, narrow with stiff alders

**Road map** page 180, 200

Drive the Meachen Creek FS Road, see page 197.

0 km At the junction of St. Mary Lake Road and St. Mary River Road, turn left (south) on to the St. Mary River Road. Cross a wooden bridge.

0.6 km Turn right at the second dirt road (south) on to St. Mary/Hellroaring Creek FS Road.

1.6 km Turn right on to St. Mary/Meachen Creek FS Road.

17 km Turn left for Mayo and Ailsa lakes, an unsigned road (after 16-km sign). (This side road is unmaintained and too overgrown to drive on. Walk a portion of it before driving it.)

19.3 km Park at a landing at the end of the road.

The side road is 2.3 km long and gains 240 m (800 ft.). If walking, it adds over an hour to the hike to Mayo Lake.