

12 PICKERING HILLS

Pickering Hills is a lovely low-elevation area with rolling grassland hills sparsely covered with Douglas fir trees, aspen groves and prairie. Several duck ponds fill in the lowland basins. Scenic Bull Mountain, elevation 2641 m (8665 ft.), rises to the north between the Bull and Kootenay rivers. Its steep cone of rock punctuates the south end of the Steeples Range making it a perfect backdrop to the low Pickering Hills.

The terrain surrounding Pickering Hills roughly defines its borders. The Fort Steele/Wardner Road follows the western side, Little Sand Creek and Tie Lake lies on the southeastern edge, Highway 3 is south and the Bull River defines its northern boundary.

The Kootenay River flows into Lake Koocanusa near the Pickering Hills and the wide flats and slow-moving water are pastoral. The Bull River, small in comparison to the Kootenay, is sparkling, pale-blue and turbulent.

There are no specific routes in this area. The easy open terrain is good for spring and fall day hiking or for easy mountain biking. You can hike in Pickering Hills from either of two road accesses. From



Rating easy

Time short day hikes or bike rides

Elevation Pickering Hills 880 to 1370 m (2900 to 4500 ft.)

Trail old roads, grassy hills, duck ponds, no defined routes

Maps 82G/6 Elko
82G.043 1:20,000 map
82G.044 1:20,000 map

Drive

Road any vehicle

Road map page 23

Follow Highway 3/93 east from Cranbrook for 32 km or drive 10 km west of Jaffray to the east side of the Lake Koocanusa bridge.

Turn northeast just past the east end of the bridge on to the paved Wardner/Fort Steele Road. (See also page 24 for the directions from Fort Steele on Highway 93/95.)

- 0 km From Highway 3/93 at the Koocanusa bridge, turn left (north) on to the Wardner/Fort Steele Road.
- 5 km Turn right (northeast) uphill off the Wardner/Fort Steele Road on to a small sand and gravel road. (This turnout is 700 m southeast of the Bull River bridge and 100 m southeast of Bull River Inn.)
- 5.4 km The sandy road forks in three; take the centre branch.
- 6.2 km Park in a large flat meadow (1.2 km uphill from the Wardner/Fort Steele Road). Hike or bike ride on roads approximately southeast for 2.6 km to the first pond.

Another Access to Pickering Hills

Stay on Highway 3 for 2 km southeast of the Lake Koocanusa bridge. Turn left (north) on to a small dirt road. Park anywhere along the roadway. Walk or bike ride to Bronze Lake, 5 km north of the highway along this dirt road.



Kay walks in the rain, across a wet meadow by a pond in Pickering Hills.

a side road off the Wardner/Fort Steele Road you can hike or bike to one pond about 2.6 km southeast of the parking area. The other access is from Highway 3, just 2 kms east of the Lake Kooconusa bridge. Hike or bike along this dirt road for about 5 km north to Bronze Lake.

Hiking or biking along the roads provides direct access to the ponds or to the high points for views. The roads are frequently closed to motorized vehicular use; signs are posted. These sandy or soft dirt roads meander around the hills, so pay attention to landmarks to prevent getting lost. All these hills and valleys look similar to each other and with low clouds covering Bull Mountain, it is easy to get confused with the topography.

We learned an easy lesson in routefinding one relaxing sunny day at Pickering Hills. The highest point of the Pickering Hills is a rounded summit, marked on the map at 1341 m (4400 ft.). When we reached the “top,” our altimeters did not agree. We still had about 150

m (500 ft.) to climb. How could this not be the summit, when everything else dropped downhill from the top of this knoll?

Another clue that we were wrong was our attempt to pinpoint our location on the topographic maps using two compass bearings. Our map location showed us that we were 1 km away from the top of the hill. The Pickering Hills are so easy to navigate through, that we made a hypothesis based on visual clues only. Our carefully measured facts totally negated our assumptions.

Forests disguised the summit we wanted to reach. It looked like part of the nearby mountains. We hiked directly to it and as expected, it was exactly 1 km away and 150 m (500 ft.) higher. When we dismissed our facts in favour of our visual clues, it led us to an error in routefinding. Now, while routefinding through more difficult terrain, we remember our practical lesson from Pickering Hills—trust both our technical and visual data.