

15 WASA TO PREMIER LAKE MOUNTAIN BIKE CIRCUIT

Helmet on! Packs secure. Four of us climbed onto our trusty mountain bikes and started the momentum to turn the pedals. As the spoked wheels gathered speed, I felt the wind cooling my skin and the marvellous energy of biking. I enjoy the efficient speed of mountain biking and its silent freedom. It's a pleasant alternative to hiking.

The scenic day trip from “Wasa Lake to Premier Lake Provincial Park” is one of my favourite mountain bike rides in the area. This is a fun, social and nontechnical ride that is great for casual cyclists. Awesome scenery is blended with the easy freedom of cycling. Cycle on old roadways below the skyline ridge of the majestic Rocky Mountains. Ride through shady, dry Douglas fir forests, beside scenic lakes and near wildflower meadows. Most of the ride is on compacted gravel roads over reasonable terrain.

The ride features nontechnical cycling and smooth pedalling. There are some intermediate uphill climbs that are balanced with bumpy, rocky and freewheeling downhill cruises. A few old roadways have eroded in some places, exposing sharp rocks. In other areas, the common round rocks and loose gravel made riding awkward on some hilly sections of road.

The cycling trip travels to the grassy meadows near Speculation Lake, then to the public beach of Premier Lake Provincial Park. At the lake we refilled our water bottles and enjoyed a short, refreshing swim. The circuit ride continues to the top of the scenic cliffs high above Quartz Lake and back to Wolf Creek Road.

Begin the ride from the Wolf Creek Road (near Wasa). Ride north onto the Wasa/Sheep Creek Road. After an hour of cycling, the roadway gains about 30 m (100 ft.). The first glimpse of blue water shimmers between the trees on your left (west). The southern end of Speculation Lake is obscured by thick forest, so continue riding north on the road. At 9.5 km from the beginning of the ride, cruise onto a large grassy meadow at the north end of Speculation Lake (which sometimes hosts range cattle). In the

Rating moderate cycling

Time most of a day

Distance 35 km round trip

Elevation gain 400 m (1340 ft.) total accumulation

Trail rocky roads, abandoned roads and busy vehicular roads, circuit ride

Maps 82G/13, 1:50,000 series
82G.082 & 82G.092, 1:20,000 series

Trail map page 54

Drive

Road any vehicle

Road map page 22, 23, 54

- 0 km Highway 93/95 at Wasa. Turn east at Wasa Lake Park Drive (north access). This road circles Wasa Lake and connects back to the highway.
- 0.9 km Left turn (north) on to Wolf Creek Road
- 6.1 km Wolf Creek Road bends east, cattleguard
- 7.3 km Left turn (north) on to Wasa/Sheep Creek Road
- 7.4 km Park at “Premier Ridge Area Closure” sign for motorized vehicles at 890 m (2920 ft.)

shallow water, the faded reflection of the Rocky Mountains emerges through the summer haze.

From Speculation Lake, cycle north on the road (same road you came in on) for another 5.3 km. Turn right (east) at a T-junction, toward Premier Lake Provincial Park. (On a cycling odometer it is 14.8 km along the ride.) Access to the provincial park campground is over loose gravel with a gentle uphill stretch for 4.6 km gaining another 120 m (400 ft.) During summer, a steady flow of recreation vehicles stirs up the thick dust on the roadway. We drank plenty of water to help wet our parched throats—knowing that fresh drinking water is usually available at the campground.

After the dry uphill ride into the park, we swooshed downhill to the Premier Lake beach. It took us almost three hours to ride the 19.4 km to the beach, at 900 m (2960 ft.). The cool lake beckoned. We changed our

clothes and jumped in for a refreshing swim. At the campground hand-pumps we filled our empty water bottles and casually lulled away an hour or so. No one wanted to tackle the next hot and “grunty” part of the trip.

The steep uphill to the Quartz Lake overlook is the hardest part of the ride. Retrace your route back through the park. Just uphill from the overflow campground (about 200 m), take the first small gravel road left (south). It immediately branches—take the right fork to the Quartz Lake overlook (unsigned). The “Premier Ridge Area Road Closure” sign with a road map is a short distance from this junction. (The left fork leads to the boat access for Quartz Lake, 2.2 km.)

Ride south up the steep, rocky and windy gravel road for 4.4 km. In the shady Douglas fir forest the road gains 195 m (640 ft.) elevation. The track finally levels off at a cattleguard, at 1090 m (3600 ft.) elevation.



Wasa to Premier Mountain bike ride, Jamie cruising downhill.



Kootenay Freewheelers Bicycling Club members enjoy a rest on the meadows of Speculation Lake.

See also Premier Ridge hike from Premier Lake page 58 for optional hiking directions to the top of Premier Ridge. This provides a terrific panorama view of the Rockies, Purcells and the Rocky Mountain Trench.

To continue the bike ride, head south on the road for about half a kilometre to the Quartz Lake overview (23.8 km along the ride). The rocky road quickly descends 18 m (60 ft.) elevation to where the forest opens out to a grassy meadow on the left (east) side. The flower-carpeted meadow is atop the rugged cliffs, which drop 60 m (200 ft.) into the shimmering deep blue/green Quartz Lake. The views feature the fabulous clear deep water and the Rocky Mountain skyline.

The steepest and longest downhill of this ride is south of this overlook. For the next 5.6 km ride the reasonably rocky, bumpy roadway that heads back to Wolf Creek Road. Descend 150

m (500 ft.) in elevation to 938 m (3080 ft.). We bounced and spun gravel under our wheels as we controlled the downward plunge of our bicycles over the rocky road. It isn't dangerously steep, just quick and rough. One curving large switchback with minimal elevation change is near the end of the road.

The rocky road emerges in a large meadow by Wolf Creek Road (at 29.6 km). Turn right (west) and ride on the smooth, hard, packed gravel of Wolf Creek Road. It is another 5.4 km back to the vehicles. The entire casual loop took us 6.5 hours including rests, but not including the swim at Premier Lake.

The Wasa/Premier Lake loop is a great trip for intermediate cyclists from late spring to late autumn. Savour this spectacularly scenic and diverse Rocky Mountain ride.