

61 WESLEY CREEK TRAIL TO MOUNT ST. MARY

The mature forest ecosystem of Wesley Creek is protected within the Purcell Wilderness Conservancy. It's a long hike up along the Wesley Creek trail to the slopes of remote Mount St. Mary, a stark Purcell mountain. The views along the way keep changing as the path traverses many diverse habitats, from forest, avalanche slope to alpine. The terrain is not too steep; it gains elevation at a steady but even pace.

On a summer morning after a rain, the forest smells sweet, its fresh coniferous fragrance filling the cool air. The bush is thick and overhangs the trail, so prepare for wet conditions. Overnight rain or heavy dew is frequent in the mountains around the St. Mary River. Hiking through the dark and moist spruce and fir forest beside tumbling Wesley Creek is satisfying.

The valley-bottom access is scarred by numerous avalanche slopes. Crossing these slopes in the sunlight is a change from hiking through the forest. In some years, abundant huckleberries cover the avalanche openings. However, consider the wildlife that depends on these berries for food. Their right to this essential food source far exceeds our need for treats.

The cleared trail leads to tree line, and from here the route is steep and becomes more difficult. Shaley slopes and broken ridges near the summit of Mount St. Mary require skill and attention. Mountain routefinding skills and a topographic map are essential for the subalpine and alpine sections of this climb.

Good views from the alpine ridge lead into St. Mary's Alpine Provincial Park between Mount St. Mary and Nowitka Mountain. The park boundary follows the rocky divide separating Dewar Creek and White Creek.

At the parking lot turn right (approximately east) and hike up the road a short distance to a creek crossing.

For the next 5 km the trail heads northeast with Wesley Creek on the right. The trail then bends to the east. This corner is confusing for a while, as another major tributary joins from the north, from Radiant Peak. The trails wander around at this confluence. Cross the creek and keep head-

Rating moderate/long

Time full day hike

Distance 10 km

Elevation gain 1523 m (5000 ft.)

Mount St. Mary 2896 m (9500 ft.)

Trail forest, overgrown avalanche paths and talus scrambling to an alpine ridge

Map 82F/16 Dewar Creek

Trail map page 187

Drive

Road any vehicle

Road map page 180, 187

Drive St. Mary FS Road west from Highway 95A at Marysville for 38.1 km (49-km sign). See page 182.

The turnoff to Dewar Creek FS Road is 500 m beyond the prominent White Creek bridge. (Avoid the left turn on to the signed West Fork St. Mary River Road.)

Turn right (north) on to Dewar Creek FS Road and continue for 22.7 km to the end of the road and park in a large cleared area.



Looking up Wesley Creek to large talus slope (centre), which is the access up from the forest to the alpine. Nowitka Mountain left side of photo.

ing east. For the next 2 km the trail continues up Wesley Creek.

After several hours of hiking in the mid-elevation range, the forest gradually becomes less dense and the trail diminishes as well. Routefinding is necessary for the rest of the hike. There are moderate routes leading up through the subalpine meadows and into the difficult terrain of the rocky alpine. A landmark route is not clearly visible—check the maps.

Climb up the light grey talus slope near the end of Wesley Creek on the right (south) side of the valley. This talus reaches far down the mountain-side and is one route up to the grassy hillsides above.

From these alpine meadows above

the rock slide, hike to the left (north-east) up a spur ridge. The route breaks into steep, loose scree. Angle up this rubble slope heading north-east toward the rocky exposed pass at 2682 m (8800 ft.).

Mount St. Mary is a short scramble northeast up the ridge from this pass, gain another 183 m (600 ft.). Nowitka Mountain, elevation 2926 m (9600 ft.), is another scramble southwest along this high ridge. For access to the north end of St. Mary's Alpine Park, hike east from this pass and down toward Bleak Lake.

The forest, subalpine hiking and the scramble to the summit of Mount St. Mary make this a long but worthwhile adventure.