HARD THREE PEAKS STAIRS & CHAINS YEAR-ROUND

Stawamus Chief

Squamish's granite landmark, hiked properly: three summits, a lot of stairs and the best view of Howe Sound you can earn in an afternoon.

DO YOUR OWN RESEARCH FIRST. This is not a navigation tool and must not be your only source. Confirm everything with the land manager.

DIFFICULTY
Hard
BC Parks: steep and difficult

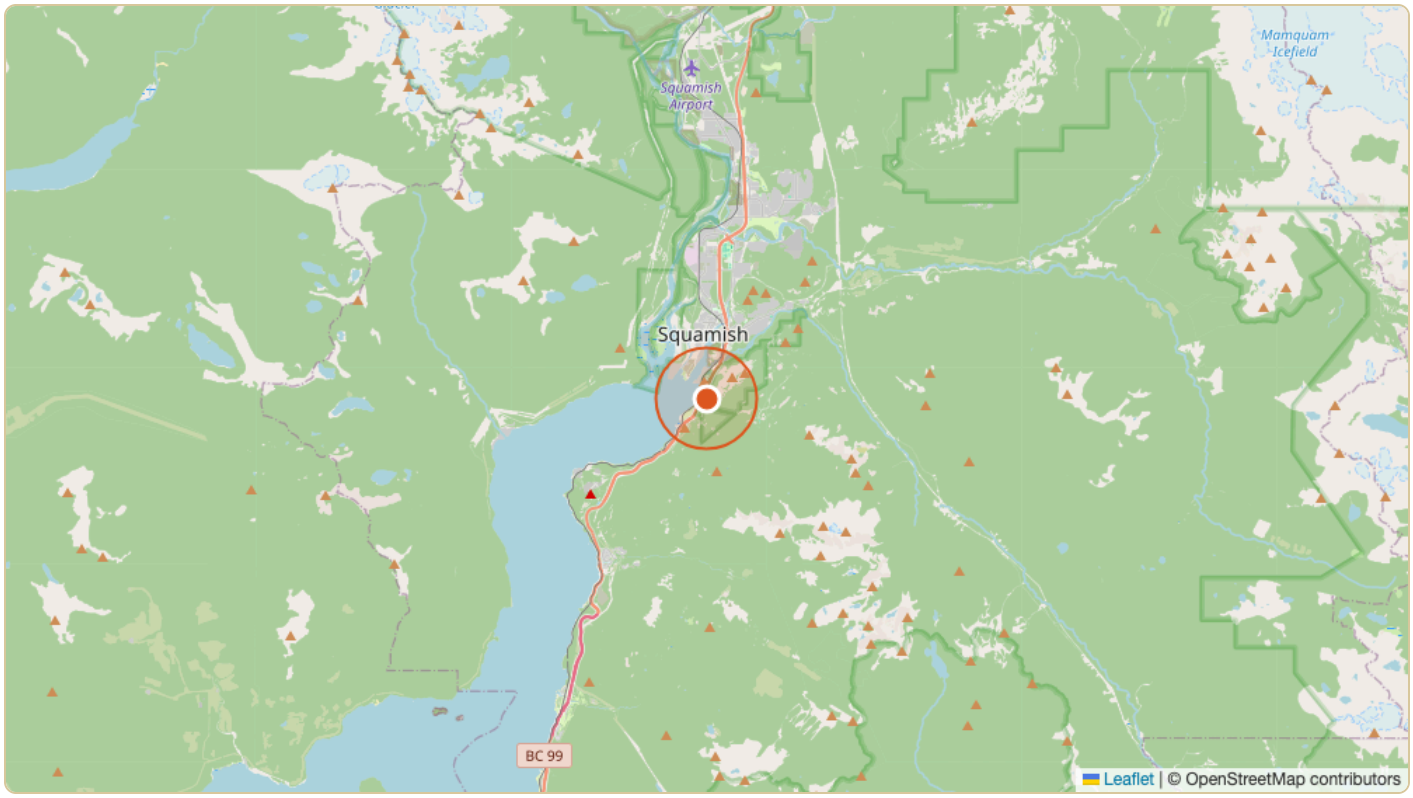
FIRST PEAK
1.5 km
540 m elevation gain

SECOND PEAK
1.7 km
590 m elevation gain

THIRD PEAK
1.8 km
630 m elevation gain

ROUTE TYPE
Out & back
Three summits, linked

SEASON
Year-round
Icy and slippery in winter



Approximate area only, not a trailhead or route. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors.

Park	Stawamus Chief Provincial Park
Access	Off Highway 99, south of Squamish
Difficulty	Hard (BC Parks)
Peaks	1.5 / 1.7 / 1.8 km
Elevation gain	540 / 590 / 630 m

Dogs	Leashed; check signs
Season	Year-round

Overview

The Stawamus Chief is the granite wall you see from Highway 99 as you drive into Squamish. The trail climbs to three separate summits, each with its own view over Howe Sound, the Squamish River valley and the mountains beyond. It is short, but it is not easy.

BC Parks describes the Chief Trail as a steep and difficult climb that requires good physical fitness. The park also holds a world-class climbing area, and bouldering at the base.

Stairs & chains · Three summits · Leashed dogs only · Icy in winter

Getting there

Trailhead Just off Highway 99 south of downtown Squamish. BC Parks: park only in designated lots; illegally parked vehicles will be towed.

Shannon Falls link BC Parks lists the distance from the Stawamus parking lot to Shannon Falls as 1.5 km, so the two combine into one outing.

Busy days The lot fills on summer weekends. Arrive early or late, and don't park outside the signed lots.

The three peaks

1. First Peak *1.5 km · 540 m gain*

- The shortest of the three summits, with wide views over Howe Sound and the town.
- The usual choice for a first visit.

2. Second Peak *1.7 km · 590 m gain*

- More distance and more climbing, with a different angle on the Sound and the valley.

3. Third Peak *1.8 km · 630 m gain*

- The longest of the three, and the biggest day out.
- BC Parks does not publish hiking times, so allow generously and carry a headlamp.

Rules & safety

Dogs BC Parks requires pets on a leash and says backcountry areas are unsuitable for dogs because of bears and other wildlife. Check current signs.

Winter BC Parks warns trails may be slippery in winter, with possible falling ice. Bring traction.

Climbing closures Climbing closures generally run from March 15 to July 31 to protect nesting peregrine falcons. Areas change by year, so check the current notice.

Camping Allowed only on designated sites, with tents and equipment kept within your site.

Climbers Commercial guiding needs a park-use permit. If you aren't climbing, stay on the trail and watch for people on the rock.

Respect the place The Chief is a sacred place for the Squamish (Sḵwx̱wú7mesh) people. Stay on trails and take your garbage out.

Questions

How long does it take to hike the Stawamus Chief?
BC Parks does not publish times. Most people allow a few hours return for First Peak and a longer day for all three. Allow extra in wet or icy conditions.

How hard is the hike?
BC Parks calls it a steep and difficult climb that needs good fitness: 1.5 km and 540 m of gain to First Peak, up to 1.8 km and 630 m to Third Peak.

Can I bring my dog?
Pets must be leashed in the park, and BC Parks says the backcountry is not suitable for dogs. Check posted signs and consider the stairs and chains.

Is it open in winter?
Yes, but BC Parks warns of slippery trails and possible falling ice. Bring traction and be ready to turn around.

Safety checklist

Tell someone your plan Leave your route, group size and expected return time with someone you trust, and check in when you are back. BC AdventureSmart (adventuresmart.ca) has a free trip-plan form.

Check conditions the same day Look at the weather, road and trail conditions, closures and (in snow season) the avalanche forecast on the day you go, not last week. Use the land manager's page for this guide.

Set a turnaround time Pick a time to turn back whatever happens, start early, and carry a headlamp. Most trips go wrong in the last hours of the day.

Carry the essentials Water, food, navigation (map and offline GPS), light, first aid, extra layers, sun protection, a whistle and fire or shelter. A phone alone is not a plan.

Emergencies Call 911. Cell coverage is unreliable or absent in much of the Sea to Sky backcountry, so consider a satellite messenger and know your location.

Water and wildlife Wear a life jacket on the water: cold water can disable you in minutes. Carry bear spray where bears are present, keep food secured and give wildlife space.

Sources & disclaimer

This guide draws on BC Parks: Stawamus Chief Park; BC Parks: Shannon Falls Park.

Last checked November 18, 2026. Figures marked ≈ are approximate, and sources sometimes disagree. Always confirm with the land manager before you go.

Outdoor recreation involves risk, including serious injury and death. This guide is general information compiled from the public sources listed above and was last checked on November 18, 2026. Conditions, access, closures, fees and rules change, and some figures differ between sources. It is not a substitute for current information from the land manager, for proper skills, equipment and preparation, or for your own judgment. You are responsible for your own safety and decisions. To the extent permitted by law, Sea to Sky Trails and its authors accept no liability for loss, injury or damage arising from use of this guide.

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