

## Hiking Guide - The Black Tusk, Cheakamus Area

### Location

Just south of Whistler, British Columbia

### Distance

Round trip 29 km (18 mi) from parking lot. Allow 10 hours

### Elevation gain

1740 m (5700 ft) from parking lot. Average grade 13.4%

### High point

2315 m (7600 ft)

### Best time of year

July to October

### Driving distance from Vancouver

110 km (65 mi). Allow 1 hr 45 min

49°58'31"N 123°02'34"W

### Topo map

NTS 92G/14

The Black Tusk is a remarkably abrupt pinnacle of volcanic rock located in the Garibaldi Provincial Park, British Columbia. At 2315 metres above sea level, the upper spire is visible from a great distance in all directions. It is particularly noticeable from the Sea-to-Sky Highway just south of Whistler. Distinctive and immediately identifiable, the Black Tusk is among the best known mountains in the Garibaldi Ranges of the Coast Mountains. The volcano is part of the Garibaldi Volcanic Belt which is a segment of the Cascade Volcanic Arc, but it is not within the geographic boundary of the Cascade Range.

### Getting There

Arriving at the trailhead is fairly straight forward. When you hit Squamish on Highway 99 look out for Cleveland Avenue. When you get there set your odometer to zero and head north towards Whistler for 33 km (20 mi). You will see a BC Parks sign at the side of the Highway and less than 3 km (1.9 mi) later is the turn off to the Rubble Creek parking lot. The road branches off from the highway and is easy to miss. Try and spot it first time as you have to go past quite a way to turn around safely. The parking lot has one of the highest break in rates in the park so make sure to lock your vehicle and remove any valuables.

### The Hike

This is a long hike and by no means an easy one. You can do it in a day but camping overnight at Taylor Meadows or Garibaldi Lake is recommended. If you do decide to go for it in one day make sure you allow yourself about 10 hours for the round trip. It's only a 5 hour round trip from Taylor Meadows so it's preferable for most adventurers to make a weekend out of it.

Once you leave the parking lot the trail the trail zig zags its way up towards the meadows. Towering around you are impressive Douglas-fir and redcedar trees. You are likely to come across the odd Whiskey Jack or 5 also! The trail is quite wide and level with few tree roots and obstacles in the way. It's not dramatically steep, but long and "never ending". After 6 km (3.7 mi) there is a fork in the trail. You will see a map with directions and distances to various destinations. Heading right will take you to Garibaldi Lake. We want to go left though and up into Taylor Meadows. It's quite dramatic when the trees open up to reveal (hopefully) blue skies. It's a lot more barren in the meadows and the trees are much smaller. In the summer time it feels like you are walking onto the set of a western movie!

When you arrive at the campground and shelter you will notice that everything is connected by boardwalks. The terrain is so fragile here and has been damaged by thousands of hiking boots over the years. Please help rejuvenate the area by sticking to the trails. As you continue east you will head down to Taylor Creek which you will cross and soon come to the old ranger cabin. The trail forks again and you must go left, across the meadows, to Outhouse Junction. Stay to the left for a short distance (going right takes you to Garibaldi Lake) and you will come to yet another fork. Here you will see a sign that points to the left and says "Black Tusk 2.5 km". This is a new trail and ascends into the loose rubble slopes that surround this towering beast.

To the east of the Tusk is a saddle and a great place to call your destination. However, if you're up for it, you can go all the way. Continue westward under the south wall where you will pass several chimneys. The last of these chimneys is the only 'relatively' safe ascent. This is where the trail officially ends. There are plenty of handholds

on the way up and the view is outstanding. Make sure you take the same route back down and then rest for lunch on the little ridge to the east.

### **Indigenous**

To Skwxwú7mesh peoples, this mountain is known as t'ak't'ak mu'yin t'l'a in7in'a'xe7en. In their language it means "Landing Place of the Thunderbird", speaking of the supernatural in7in'a'xe7en or Thunderbird. The jagged shape of the mountain and its black colouring are said to come from the Thunderbird's lightning.

### **Geology**

The Black Tusk is considered to be the remnant of an extinct andesitic stratovolcano which formed between about 1.3 and 1.1 million years ago. Following glacial dissection, renewed volcanism produced the lava dome and flow forming its summit about 170,000 years ago. According to Natural Resources Canada, The Black Tusk was "perhaps the conduit for lava within a cinder-rich volcano. The loose cinder has eroded, leaving only the hard lava core." The exposed lava rock of the core is loose and friable. It is also black, giving the mountain its name and character. Cinder Cone, to the east of The Black Tusk, produced a 9-km-long lava flow during the late Pleistocene or early Holocene.

The mountain currently hosts two significant glaciers, in large cirques carved into the northeastern and northwestern flanks of the broad cone below the lava pinnacle. Both glaciers start from about 6900 ft (2100 m) and flow northwards to below 6000 ft (1800 m). The glaciers are heavily covered in rocky debris due to the crumbling nature of the Tusk's rock.

The Black Tusk is a member of the chain of volcanic peaks that run from southwestern British Columbia to northern California. The peaks formed in the past 35 million years as the Juan de Fuca, Gorda and Explorer plates to its west have been subducting under the North American Plate at the Cascadia subduction zone.

### **Recreation**

The Black Tusk's lower flanks and south summit are a popular backcountry hiking and scrambling destination. Most hikers approach from the Taylor Meadows campground to the south near Garibaldi Lake, although there is a second route from the north that travels by way of Helm Lake. A third option approaches from the west, from a microwave relay tower located at about 6000 ft (1800 m) on the western flank, which is reached by a dirt road from the Cheakamus River valley.

The upper summit area at the top of the lava column can only be reached by scrambling up a short but exposed rock chimney to reach the south summit. The true summit, only about a meter higher, lies just to the north across a precipitous drop. It is rarely climbed, requiring a rappel of about 30 ft (10 m) into a notch followed by a loose and dangerous reascent up the crumbling lava. On the northern side of the north summit stands an isolated and intimidating rock formation known as the "Bishop's Mitre", which is rumoured to be unclimbed.