GLACIER'S 5 FIVE BEST DAY HIKES

Avalanche Lake

TIM RAINS /NPS

by **ASHLEY ARCEL**

THERE'S NO DOUBT ABOUT IT: GLACIER NATIONAL PARK IS A HIKER'S PARADISE. Ask most avid hikers, and they'll tell you that you can hike in Glacier for years without ever walking the same trail twice. If you're visiting the park this summer and looking for a scenic trek to take with your family, check out these accessible, stunning day hikes:

Trail of the Cedars

JACOB W. FRANK

1 TRAIL OF THE CEDARS AND AVALANCHE LAKE

One of Glacier's classic hikes, **AVALANCHE LAKE** is a simple, straightforward hike that offers stunning views *and* accessibility. The trail begins in the Lake McDonald Area, on the wheelchair-accessible trail of the Cedars Loop boardwalk. This one-mile segment of trail winds through ancient cedar trees, many of which are 100 feet tall or higher, and more than 500 years old.

If you're out for a short jaunt, you can complete the loop and head back to your car. If you'd like to make your way to Avalanche Lake, though, you'll leave the **TRAIL OF THE CEDARS** behind and climb gradually along the crystal-clear waters of Avalanche Creek for about three-quarters of a mile.

After that, the trail winds through an old-growth forest and across an avalanche path from 2011. Eventually, you reach the lake itself. The lake is known for its stunning "glacial milk" color, created by particles of light-colored silt suspended in the water. Fed by waterfalls that spill off of the Sperry Glacier, Avalanche Lake is an excellent place to enjoy a picnic and a leisurely summer afternoon.

SPECS: 4.5-mile round-trip hike with a modest 730 feet of elevation gain. Bathrooms are available in the Lake McDonald Lodge area.

INSIDER TIP: If you're hiking Avalanche Lake during peak season (June, July, or August), start the day early. Parking in the Lake McDonald area is limited and fills up quickly.

Hidden Lake Trail

2 HIDDEN LAKE OVERLOOK

While Avalanche Lake sits in the low-lying valley of the park, a hike to **HIDDEN LAKE** takes you to the top of Logan Pass. To get there, drive up Going-to-the-Sun Road and park at the Logan Pass Visitor's Center. Set out on the well-marked trail behind the visitor's center to make your way to the overlook.

The trail starts on a wide, wooden boardwalk that keeps hikers above the fragile alpine ecosystem present at the top of Logan Pass. As you hike, keep your eyes peeled for wildflowers, mountain goats, bighorn sheep, marmots, and more. As you near the overlook, the goats (typically present in the rock formations on the right side of the trail) are particularly photogenic, but remember to keep your distance!

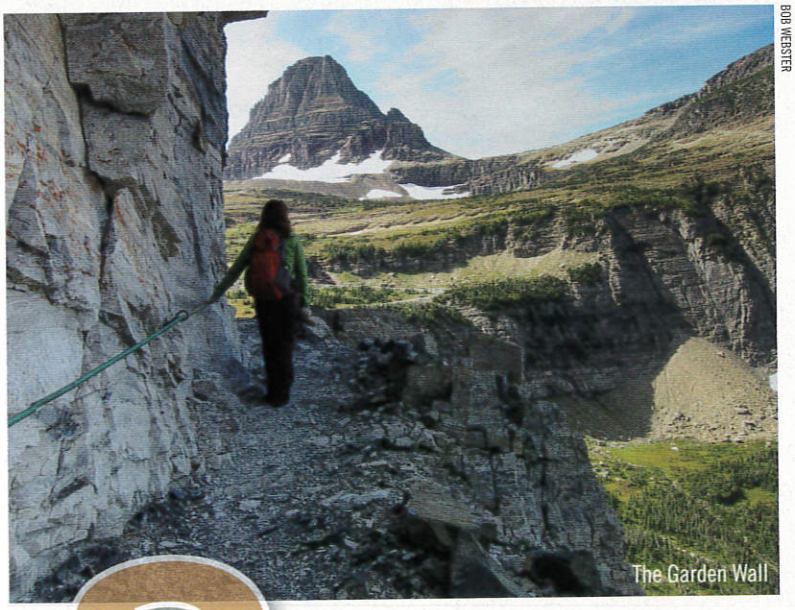
The outlook itself offers sweeping views of Hidden Lake in the valley below. If you'd like to hike down to the water, keep going past the boardwalk, and make your way down the remaining 1,000 feet of switchbacks and rough trail.

SPECS: 2.7 miles round trip with 540 feet of elevation gain. Bathrooms are available at Logan Pass Visitor's Center.

INSIDER TIP: Parking is competitive at Logan Pass, so get an early start. Also, remember to pack layers, since it can be windy and unseasonably chilly at the top of the pass. Finally, the Hidden Lake Overlook trail begins with some large, uphill steps on the boardwalk. Don't let this discourage you, though. The trail evens out once it reaches elevation.

Hidden Lake Overlook

Highline Trail



BOB WEBSTER

The Garden Wall

3 THE HIGHLINE TRAIL

THE HIGHLINE TRAIL IS ONE OF THE MOST SCENIC HIKING TRAILS IN THE COUNTRY, AND THE VIEWS ARE IMPOSSIBLE TO BEAT.

If you want stunning views and aren't afraid of a little exposure, head to the **HIGHLINE TRAIL**. Starting at the top of Logan Pass, the Highline Trail is one of the most popular routes in the park. While the entire trail runs 11.8 miles, down to The Loop section of Going-to-the-Sun Road, most people use it as a simple out-and-back—hiking as far as they'd like before turning back toward Logan Pass.

Because you're already at the top of Logan Pass, the trail is virtually flat and even downhill in places. It winds out from the Logan Pass Visitor's Center parking lot, through an alpine meadow, and—famously—along the Continental Divide, where it cuts into the side of the **GARDEN WALL**, offering stunning views and a unique hiking experience.

If you're afraid of heights, don't worry—this section of the trail is short, well-trafficked, and features sturdy cables bolted into the rock.

SPECS: 11.8 miles to The Loop, with a total elevation gain of 1950 feet. Bathrooms are available at the Logan Pass Visitor's Center.

INSIDER TIPS: Bring a camera and a few snacks when you set out on the Highline Trail. This is one of the most scenic hiking trails in the country, and the views are impossible to beat.

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Located in the Many Glacier Area on the east side of the park, this trail starts at the Swiftcurrent Pass Trailhead, near the far end of the parking area at Swiftcurrent Motor Inn. The path is gradual and suitable for hikers of all ages.

A mixture of sun and shade, the trail takes you along a chain of lakes on the valley floor. The first lake is Fishercap Lake, which is a great place to stop and take a sip of water. The second is **RED ROCK LAKE,** which offers beautiful swimming beaches. If you'd like to hike to the falls, make your way to the head of the lake, where you'll find dozens of great places to sit, have lunch, and take a few pictures.

SPECS: 4.2 miles round trip with 285 feet of elevation gain. Bathrooms are available at Swiftcurrent Motor Inn.

INSIDER TIP: This trail can be an easy out-and-back or the start of a more strenuous hike. If you have extra energy once you make it to the falls, keep going to Bullhead Lake. If you'd like to go even further, the trail winds over Swiftcurrent Pass, to Granite Park Chalet, and down Going-to-the-Sun Road. This is an advanced route, and only suitable for experienced hikers.

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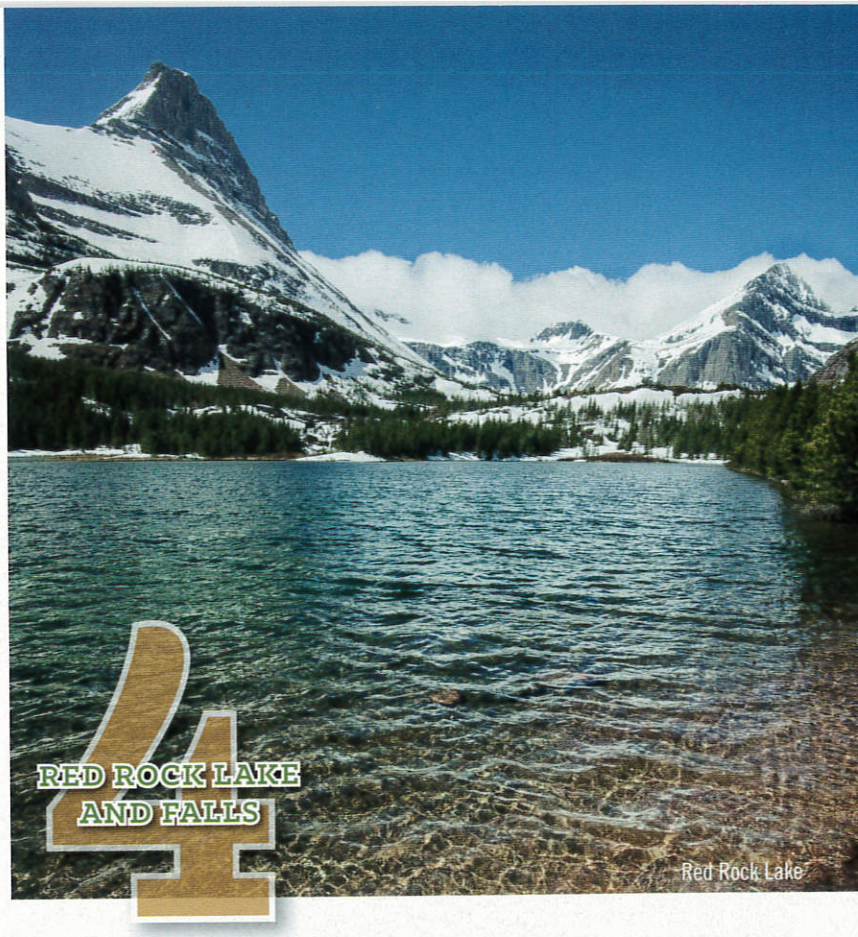

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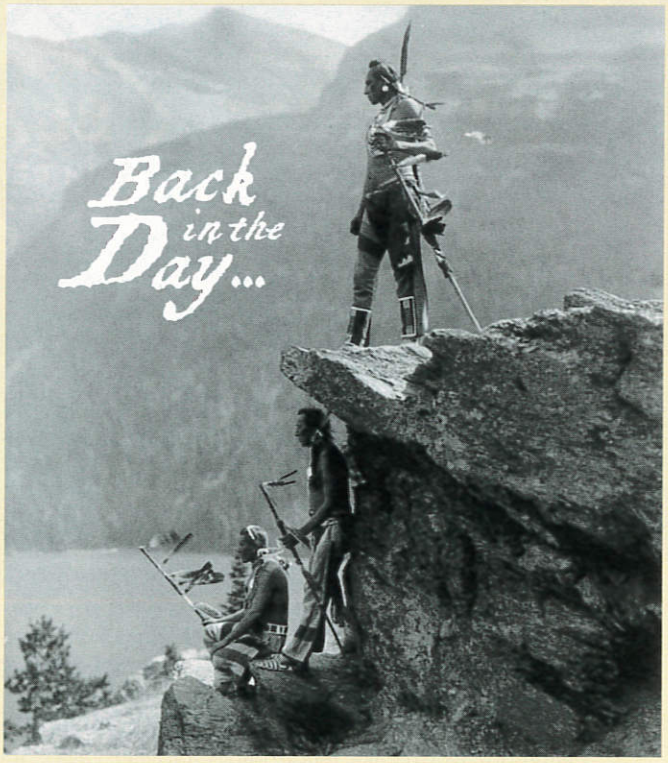
GRINNELL LAKE is on the east side of the park, in the Many Glacier Area. Featuring breathtaking turquoise waters, lots of wildlife, world-class huckleberry picking during July and August, and an easy route well-suited for hikers of all experience levels, Grinnell Lake has two access points.

If you want a slightly longer hike, start at the Many Glacier Hotel, along the Swiftcurrent Nature Trail. If you prefer to shave a few miles off the hike, hop on one of Glacier Park Boat Company's historic tour boats and cruise across Swiftcurrent and Josephine Lakes.

Once you get off the boat, the lake is just a short hike into a basin above you. As you hike, keep your eyes open for bighorn sheep, mountain goats, moose, and other wildlife, which are prevalent in this area.
SPECS: 3 miles round trip, with 220 feet elevation gain. Bathrooms are available at the boat dock and Many Glacier Hotel.
INSIDER TIPS: Taking the boat adds an exciting element to this hike. While trips sell out daily in the summer, you can reserve tickets online as early as January!

ENJOY SOME FAMILY-FRIENDLY HIKING THIS SUMMER

Regardless of whether you want sweeping vistas, sparkling lake views, or glimpses of elusive wildlife, Glacier has something for you. These five day hikes are some of the best and most beautiful in the country. Even better—they're suitable for hikers of all ages and abilities. So, what are you waiting for? Get out there and cover some miles this summer!



Blackfoot Indians at Glacier National Park circa 1905.
Photo courtesy of the National Park Service