



Station Creek Trail:
It's a Vertical World

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Some have called it a slog, but I say it could be paradise. At least, that part of paradise which is an endlessly ascending ramp flanked by cheap, green shag carpet. I mean... moss.

This is one of the few trails in our area that begins at the edge of town. In New Hazelton, drive up Laurier St. to 12th or 13th, turn left, go one block and turn right on McBride. Follow McBride after it turns to dirt, and eventually you come to a locked gate and a parking area with a small trailhead kiosk. Because you will be hiking in the watershed for New Hazelton, the kiosk warns you to keep your pets away from streams. You are at 420m elevation. Six kilometres from now you will be 1000m higher, in a secret wilderness of boulders above treeline.

The Station Creek trail is all about gaining elevation. It helps to think of it as having four distinct sections.

Section 1. This is the warm-up: ascend 80m as you hike 2km. Start the trail by ducking under the gate and continuing along the road through the cedar forest. In about ten minutes, you will see a sign directing you off the road to the left, onto what looks like an old road. Shortly, another sign reading "Hagwiget Peak" directs you to the right off the old road onto a trail – which soon crosses a small creek and begins to ascend gently through a parklike cedar forest. (When returning, do be careful at this creek crossing to follow the trail you came in on from the old road – there is another trail leading off somewhere else.).

Section 2. This is the serious bit: ascend 370m over 1.25km. About 30 minutes in (elevation 500m), you begin to hear Station Creek and the ascent gets serious. The trail remains quite wide but with a consistent, very steep, grade. There are a few switchbacks. Station Creek, draining a north-facing bowl and therefore a reliable supply for New Hazelton, remains far down to the right in a gorge. You'll have no access to water until just over an hour in, when you come to a reliable stream and, just beyond it, the first level piece of ground you've seen in a while, whose birdhouse of a sign names it "First Cabin."

Section 3. You've earned another casual section: ascend 180m over 1.8km. From here (elevation 870m) the grade eases and the trail narrows to ordinary width as it works its way through spruce-fir forest, around the noses of ridges, and quests into the deepest corner

of the mountain, the canyon that Station Creek issues from. (At about 950m elevation note a side trail to the right, which is for those attempting the direct ascent of Hagwilget Peak.) At about 110 minutes you are alongside the creek itself, and soon you cross a bridge of logs laid over a tributary coming in from the left (elevation 1050m).

Section 4: The final tough bit that you've been saving your energy for: ascend 350m over 1km in a boulder field. At first you do not recognize it as a boulder field. You are in the forest and the trail has become a degree more obscure in the salmonberry. But soon the occasional bottomless hole appears in the moss, and you realize that at times the creek is flowing beneath you. The trail more or less disappears, and you continue working your way up a narrow gully that the stream comes tumbling down. There are high cliffs on each side leading to a notch in the skyline ahead.

Still, the boulders are mostly moss covered until, near the final tree, the clothes come off and you see they are the almost specular white granite that is the heart of the Rocher Deboile. From here the jumble is steep and fresh and unstable, and you work your way up any way you can. Rockfall exposure is high and if you hear rocks coming down off the cliffs you might re-evaluate whether it's a safe day to be there.

When you top out in the notch, at some 1400m elevation, you are at the lip of an alpine bowl that, incredibly, seems entirely filled with boulders. Rugged, unnamed summits surround it, the Blue Lakes valley being behind those straight ahead. The high point of Hagwilget Peak (Stekyawdin) is somewhat behind you to your right.