

Sheep Mountain Trail, Kluane National Park

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Walk this Way

Step into spring with *Canadian Wildlife's* guide to Canada's greatest hikes

Hiking season has arrived, folks. It's May, and the Canadian Wildlife Federation is in the midst of its annual Walk for Wildlife campaign. It's a signature event for the federation—and a great excuse for you to get outdoors. But where?

That's a good question, so we asked outdoors writer Ryan Stuart to compile a list of Canada's 18 greatest hikes—and Ryan delivered. From easy strolls to rigorous overnight treks, the trails explored here add up to a brilliant buffet of outdoor experiences and opportunities to view wildlife of all manner and form. So strap on those boots and get on out. The good weather doesn't last forever, y'know.

BY RYAN STUART
ILLUSTRATION BY JOEL KIMMEL



Botanical Beach
Juan de Fuca Provincial Park
British Columbia

LENGTH 2.8 km
ELEVATION GAIN none
WILDLIFE grey whales, intertidal life, seals, sea lions, sea birds
DESCRIPTION When the tide ebbs at Botanical Beach, it creates dozens of pools and ponds full of marine life. There is a profusion of colour—green, purple, blue, brown, orange, red and black—and fauna of all shapes and sizes. The display of sea stars, mussels, algae, anemones, birds and more is better than any aquarium. Offshore, keep an eye out for migrating grey whales in March and April, Steller's and California sea lions from September to May and harbour seals and orca whales year-round. You can spend a day exploring Botanical Beach, or you can make a short loop hike by continuing north along the coast to Botany Bay.

DIRECTIONS Just outside Port Renfrew, the trailhead is the end of the Juan de Fuca Marine Trail. In town, head west on Parkinson Road, the extension of Highway 14, to its end in the parking lot.



Tip Trail
Point Pelee National Park
Ontario

LENGTH 1 km
ELEVATION GAIN none
WILDLIFE monarchs, migratory birds
DESCRIPTION Time your visit right, and the attraction of the short walk to the end of Point Pelee will be not only a visit to the most southern point in mainland Canada but also the migration madness that prompted protecting this peninsula as a national park. In the spring, all kinds of birds feed and rest in the wetlands and forest here after making the trip across Lake Erie. In late September and October, southbound birds are overshadowed by migrating monarch butterflies. Flocks of them turn trees orange and black along the Tip trail as they await the right conditions to cross the lake on their way to Mexico.

DIRECTIONS Follow signs for the park from Highway 401, just east of Windsor, south on Highway 77, and county roads to the park gate. Continue south through the park to the last parking area.



George C. Reifel
Migratory Bird Sanctuary
Delta, British Columbia

LENGTH various lengths
ELEVATION GAIN none
WILDLIFE lesser snow goose, western sandpiper, sandhill crane, migratory birds
DESCRIPTION Millions of migratory birds touch down on this chunk of protected land at the mouth of the Fraser River, a food-rich zone where salt water meets fresh. Some also spend the winter. During cold months, the most abundant visitors are lesser snow geese, numbering up to 100,000. Spring brings millions of western sandpipers. At least 280 other bird species have been spied from the sanctuary's flat paths, observation towers and bird blinds, including resident ospreys, various owls and sandhill cranes that nest here every year.

DIRECTIONS An hour south of downtown Vancouver, the sanctuary is in the bedroom community of Delta on Westham Island.



Wood Bison Trail
Elk Island National Park
Alberta

LENGTH 16 km
ELEVATION GAIN rolling terrain
WILDLIFE wood bison, moose, elk, deer
DESCRIPTION At the transition between the boreal forest, grassland prairie and aspen parkland, Elk Island National Park is stuffed full of big animals, including a herd of wood bison, the largest land mammal in North America. As its name suggests, the rolling Wood Bison Trail cuts through the herd's preferred terrain. Despite their size, the bison can be elusive, but you are sure to see signs of their presence. This is also ideal habitat for elk and moose, two of the park's other abundant big mammals. Also, keep an eye out for migratory birds that stop in the park in large numbers every spring and fall.

DIRECTIONS An hour east of Edmonton off Highway 16.

PARKS CANADA, JEFF SPEED



Wadena Wildlife Wetlands
Wadena, Saskatchewan

LENGTH 6 km
ELEVATION GAIN none
WILDLIFE sandhill cranes, piping plovers
DESCRIPTION The numbers tell the story: 300 species, more than 300,000 birds at a time, one million birds annually. Home to the largest saltwater lake in Canada—right on the Central Flyway migration route—Saskatchewan's Quill Lakes area is one of the most important migratory bird areas on Earth. Among the high-profile visitors are sandhill cranes, piping plovers and peregrine falcons. At Wadena Wildlife Wetlands, you can spot many of the spring and fall visitors by linking the Plover Path, Cattail Trail and Wildflower Way, out and back.

DIRECTIONS Find the paths in the Wadena portion of the lakes off Highway 16, midway between Yorkton and Saskatoon in central Saskatchewan.



Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre
Midland, Ontario

LENGTH Various lengths
ELEVATION GAIN none
WILDLIFE trumpeter swans
DESCRIPTION With 25 kilometres of all-season trails wandering through the wetlands of the Wye Valley, the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre's 3,000-acre preserve is an interesting place to visit at any time. There are channels to paddle, a birds-of-prey show, reptile viewing and plenty of local resident wildlife, including 14 species at risk. Although the centre is a year-round attraction, winter is a special time to visit. That's when the wetlands become a seasonal refuge for one-third of Ontario's trumpeter swans. You can watch the big birds from the park's trails on foot, cross-country ski or snowshoe.

DIRECTIONS About two hours due north of Toronto on Georgian Bay. From Highway 400, take 404 west to the wildlife centre entrance.



How to Wander Off the Beaten Path

Some folks like to add a bit of cross-country adventure to their outings. Follow these tips to stay safe.

Carry a map and compass and/or a GPS—and know how to use them. For longer trips, make sure you have enough battery power for the GPS.

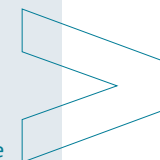
Use geography as a tool for way finding. Keeping a river valley, lakeshore or mountain range on one side makes it easy to find your way back, even in dense forest.

Look back occasionally, especially at breaks in geography—forest to tundra, forest to beach, for instance—so you know what to look for on your way back.

Learn how to set and follow a bearing with a map, compass and GPS, and then set up a series of waypoints at obvious locations along your intended route.

Spread out when walking off trail to minimize your impact on plant life. This is especially important in tundra or alpine regions.

Always let someone know where you are going and when you'll be back. Also, carry some kind of communication device: a satellite phone or personal locator beacon.



Legend





Reeds and Rushes Trail
P.E.I. National Park
Prince Edward Island

LENGTH 2 km

ELEVATION GAIN none

WILDLIFE dragonflies, damselflies, beavers, wetland birds

DESCRIPTION From dry land, through a marsh and out into open water of Dalvay Pond, this boardwalk provides a peek inside the life of a wetland. Interpretive signs help visitors understand how. Long ago, this bay was closed off from the ocean and a wetland formed, creating an oasis for 38 species of dragonflies and damselflies. Look for bird nests among the trail's namesake wetland plants. An industrious family of beavers is also spotted occasionally, particularly late or early in the day.

DIRECTIONS In Prince Edward Island National Park, near the town of Dalvay on Highway 6, half an hour north of Charlottetown.



Daly Point Nature Reserve
Bathurst, New Brunswick

LENGTH 6 km

ELEVATION GAIN none

WILDLIFE ruffed grouse, downy woodpeckers, Maritime ringlet butterfly

DESCRIPTION The saltwater marsh between the town of Bathurst, N.B., and Baie des Chaleurs is one of the only places the endangered maritime ringlet butterfly calls home. Walk Daly Point Nature Reserve's six kilometres of trail—through Acadian forest, over the marsh and along the waterways—for a chance to spot the delicate orange butterfly. You'll also have a chance to see some of the park's other residents: ruffed grouse, goldeneyes, downy woodpeckers, red-breasted mergansers, eastern bluebirds and red squirrels.

DIRECTIONS Just north of Bathurst, N.B., three hours north of Fredericton.



Des Mousses & Chemin-du-Roy
Île Bonaventure
Quebec

LENGTH 7.5 km

ELEVATION GAIN 50 metres

WILDLIFE northern gannet, other sea birds, whales

DESCRIPTION Eleven species of birds—including black-legged kittiwakes, terns, auks, Atlantic puffins and cormorants—nest on Île Bonaventure. But northern gannets dominate on this chunk of land off the tip of Quebec's Gaspé Peninsula. Up to 120,000 nest on the island each summer, making Bonaventure one of the busiest nesting sites in the world. Access to the island is via a short boat ride from the mainland. Once ashore, link the Des Mousses and Chemin-du-Roy paths to take in the best viewpoints (good spots to watch for whales offshore) and four gannet observation sites.

DIRECTIONS Drive Quebec Highway 132 to Percé, at the tip of the Gaspé Peninsula, 800 km east of Quebec City, and catch a boat shuttle to Bonaventure. The hikes start at the dock.



PARKS CANADA/STEPHEN DESROCHES; ISTOCK



Halte du Béluga
Parc National du Fjord-du-Saguenay
Quebec

LENGTH 6.4 km

ELEVATION GAIN none

WILDLIFE beluga, moose, seals, peregrine falcon

DESCRIPTION The Saguenay Fjord, a 100-kilometre-long slice through the north coast of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, creates a unique micro-climate that's perfect for a surprise resident—the St. Lawrence beluga. Far removed from their usual Arctic habitat, the white whales hang out in the mouth of the Sainte-Marguerite River during the summer and can often be seen and heard along the Halte du Béluga trail. Meanwhile, the river mouth is a good place to spot moose, especially early in morning. Peregrine falcons also nest on the high cliffs lining the fjord.

DIRECTIONS Follow signs to the Baie-Sainte-Marguerite sector of the Parc National du Fjord-du-Saguenay, 3½ hours northeast of Quebec City, a half hour north of Tadoussac, off Highway 172.



FIRSTLIGHT

Gros Morne Mountain
Gros Morne National Park
Newfoundland

LENGTH 16 km

ELEVATION GAIN 800 metres

WILDLIFE Arctic hare, ptarmigan, woodland caribou

DESCRIPTION Gros Morne means "big lone mountain." And that's just what Newfoundland's second-highest peak is, sitting 806 metres above The Rock's west coast. Its exposed expanse creates a chunk of Arctic tundra far to the south, housing cold weather specialists such as Arctic hare and rock ptarmigan and the calving grounds for woodland caribou. In fact, the hike to the summit opens only after the main calving season ends in early July. Then it's an arduous climb to the summit plateau, where small herds of caribou still hang out, and on to a viewpoint looking down on Gros Morne National Park's famous fjords, ponds and glacier sculpted coast.

DIRECTIONS The trailhead is off Highway 430, just east of Gros Morne National Park's main visitor centre, 64 kilometres from the nearest airport at Deer Lake.



Butte Creek
Grasslands National Park
Saskatchewan

LENGTH 16 km

ELEVATION GAIN mostly flat, gentle hill

WILDLIFE pronghorn antelope, swift fox, sage grouse

DESCRIPTION Grasslands National Park is a haven for endangered animals. It's home to a free-roaming herd of plains bison, a colony of black-tailed prairie dogs, reintroduced black-footed ferrets and swift fox. While you won't see them all on the Butte Creek Trail, this interesting trek to a grasslands viewpoint does pass through prime habitat for sage grouse and swift fox. After meandering up a creek bottom—watch for antelope and deer lazing away in the heat of the day—the route climbs to the top of a hill for expansive views over the badlands of the east block of the park.

DIRECTIONS A half-hour south of Swift Current in southwestern Saskatchewan. The trailhead is at the Rock Creek campground in the park's east block.



6 Pro Tips for Spotting Wildlife

Patience, knowledge and keen observation are the secrets of success

Animals tend to be most active in the early morning and evening. Plan your schedule accordingly.

Find a spot with a good overview of an area where you hope to see wildlife and use cover to keep out of sight. Sit quietly and see what happens. It's best if you can stay downwind of the area you are watching, with the sun at your back.

Scan the area around you constantly. Watch for movement and out-of-place shapes.

Use binoculars or spotting scope. These tools will do more than help you find wildlife. They'll also give you a more intimate view without disturbing the animals.

Never feed or bait animals. It can lead to habituation, which can result in death or injury to the animal or other people.

If you spot an animal on the trail, stop and observe its behaviour before getting closer. If it seems nervous or agitated, or is behaving differently than when you first spied it, you're too close. Back away slowly.



Are You Ready to Ramble?

Five items that will bring a knowing smile to any serious outdoor trekker



Oboz Bridger (\$185; obozfootwear.com) Rising to just above the ankles, with lots of support for rough terrain, these waterproof hikers are spry enough for boardwalk jaunts and tough enough for overnight treks.



Pentax 9x32 DCF BC (\$300; ricoh-imaging.ca) Weatherproof, compact and light enough to carry into the backcountry, these binoculars offer enough magnification to identify a distant speck. An ideal hiking companion.



Nikon N1 AW (\$850; nikon.ca) A waterproof, drop-resistant and cold-weather-capable shooter. Good for everything from snorkelling with salmon to winter swan viewing. Shoots 14.3-megapixel stills and full HD video.



Helinox Ground Chair (\$110; bigagnes.com) Unfold this half-kilogram wonder from its water bottle-sized bag to create a cosy and stable camp chair. Ideal for lunch breaks or patient hours watching a herd of sheep.



Camelbak Fourteener 24L (\$160; camelbak.com) The Fourteener's 24 litres of storage divides into zip pockets, a huge interior area, stash sleeves and a hydration area. On the trail, a segmented back panel funnels a cooling breeze.

Centennial Ridges Algonquin Provincial Park Ontario

LENGTH 10 km

ELEVATION GAIN 300 metres

WILDLIFE moose, forest birds, beaver, turtles

DESCRIPTION Arguably the best day hike in Algonquin Provincial Park, the Centennial Ridges trail connects two parallel ridges in a big loop. Walking it clockwise ends with spectacular views above Whitefish Lake. And that's just the best of several panoramas en route along the trail, which regularly skirts granite cliff tops. In between, it descends to ponds, wetlands and lakes, prime moose and beaver habitat. It also cuts through deciduous forests full of forest birds and butterflies.

DIRECTIONS Just off Algonquin Park's Highway 60 corridor, 37 kilometres from the west gate, 18 from the east gate.



Ochre River Trail Riding Mountain National Park Manitoba

LENGTH 25 km

ELEVATION GAIN 50 metres

WILDLIFE elk, moose, wolf

DESCRIPTION The best overnight trek in Riding Mountain National Park is also one of the best places to take in the park's varied topography and see the resident elk and moose on foot. Beginning on the edge of the prairie, the Ochre River trail climbs the Manitoba Escarpment and into a mix of boreal and eastern deciduous forest. Plan ahead and trade a tent for the Cairn Cabin, a midway wilderness abode. However you spend the night, keep your ears open; spotting one of the park's wolves is rare, but hearing them howl at night is not.

DIRECTIONS The trailhead is 23 kilometres north of the park's hub at Wasagaming on Highway 10.



Sheep Mountain Trail Kluane National Park Yukon

LENGTH 10 km

ELEVATION GAIN up to 1,300 metres

WILDLIFE Dall sheep, grizzly bears

DESCRIPTION Tachäl Dhäl — or Sheep Mountain — is the summer range of a herd of Dall sheep. They can be seen from the highway — as white dots grazing the hillside — but you can scramble up this steep route for a more intimate encounter. A faint trail leads all the way to the mountain summit, but it's worth the effort no matter how far you go. Besides the up-close views of sheep and the chance to see grizzly bears, the views are constant and ever-changing: blue waters of Kluane Lake far below, the eroded summits of the Ruby Range, the wilderness of the Slims River Valley and eventually the toe of the massive Kaskawulsh Glacier.

DIRECTIONS The trailhead is two kilometres north of Kluane National Park's Tachäl Dhäl Visitor Centre, an hour (70 kilometres) north of Haines Junction on the Alaska Highway



Harbour Rocks Kejimikujik National Park Nova Scotia

LENGTH 5.2 km

ELEVATION GAIN none

WILDLIFE piping plovers, sea birds, forest birds, white-tailed deer

DESCRIPTION The Harbour Rocks trail accesses one of Nova Scotia's wildest stretches of coastline, protected in Kejimikujik National Park. Starting in coastal forest, it crosses an orchid-rich bog on boardwalk before descending to a sandy beach. This is one of the few remaining nesting sites of the endangered piping plover, and the beach is closed during their nesting season, which runs from April to August. Offshore are numerous wave-swept islets where seals haul out to sunbathe. Head back the way you came or make it an adventurous loop and follow a rough route around Port Joli Head.

DIRECTIONS Two hours and 185 kilometres south of Halifax off Highway 103 at the end of the St. Catherines River Road.



ROGER GRUYS

Bugle Basin, Purcell Wilderness Conservancy Provincial Park British Columbia

LENGTH 22 km

ELEVATION GAIN 200 metres

WILDLIFE wolves, wolverines, deer, moose, elk, mountain goat, grizzly bear

DESCRIPTION Located in the Kootenay region's Purcell Conservancy, Bugle Basin is the place where hikers can camp while visiting the nearby Dewar Creek hot springs. Bubbling to the surface beneath an amphitheatre of alpine peaks, people come to the springs to soak in the wilderness pool. Ungulates come to lick the minerals left by the evaporating water. And the predators come, well... to eat the deer, goats, elk and moose. More than a rugged trek, this is also a sensitive wilderness area that demands visitors follow no-trace camping rules. And for good reason — the wildlife show can be world-class.

DIRECTIONS Follow a string of logging roads up the St. Mary River from the Fairmont Hot Springs resort and then hike three to four hours.



Wilcox Pass Jasper National Park Alberta

LENGTH 8 km

ELEVATION GAIN 330 metres

WILDLIFE bighorn sheep

DESCRIPTION Head up the Wilcox Pass trail in Jasper National Park and leave the tourists and buses that crowd the Columbia Icefield in your dust. This moderately challenging trail quickly climbs out of the forest and into an expansive meadow, with the views of ice-draped mountains getting better with every stride. Once in the wide open of the gentle pass, scan the flower-filled meadows for the resident herd of bighorn sheep. They love the lush tundra. The rocks at your feet also contain abundant fossils. You can hike through the pass to highway at Tangle Creek or just return the way you came.

DIRECTIONS From the Jasper townsite, drive an about hour south on the Icefields Parkway to the Wilcox Creek campground. The trail starts here.



PARIS CANADY/J.F. BERGERON