

Dayhikes in the Stehekin Valley

Easy Hikes:

Agnes Gorge: *Length: 2.5 Miles (5 Miles Round Trip) | Difficulty: Easy*

Agnes Gorge Trail takes you 2.5 miles to a 210 foot deep gorge with only 300 feet elevation gain. As far as scenery is concerned, this is my favorite of the easy trails. The trail opens up in a couple of places for a nice view of 8,115 foot Agnes Mountain. After two miles, you will reach a small stream that crosses the trail - be prepared to get your feet wet in early summer! From this stream it is only a half mile to the edge of the gorge where there was, at one time, a suspension bridge across to the other side. If you backtrack approximately fifty feet, you will find a path that continues upstream. Follow this and it will take you down to the water's edge near a 15 foot waterfall and a view of the gorge. This is also a great place for a lunch stop.

This trail is an excellent choice for a half-day hike for folks staying at Stehekin Valley Ranch. Hop on the bus or ride your bike the 2 miles to High Bridge, and you are ready to hit the trail!

To find the trailhead, cross High Bridge heading up-valley. At the top of the hill you will see Agnes Creek Trail taking off to your left. This IS NOT the trail you want. Continue past the road that leads to High Bridge Campground about 125 feet and you will see where the Agnes Gorge Trail leaves the road on your left. *This trail is well marked, but it is a much smaller trailhead, so pay attention on the road lest you walk right past it.*

Lakeshore Trail: *Length: Variable, maximum 17 Miles each way | Difficulty: Easy*

NOTE: *As a result of the Pioneer Fire in 2024, the Lakeshore Trail was closed due to ongoing hazards resulting from that event. Please contact the Forest Service and Park Service for more info and for an estimate as to when it may re-open.*

The Lakeshore Trail follows the north shore of Lake Chelan 17 miles to Prince Creek. The day hiker can go as far as he feels up to and turn around. Few will choose to go any further than the seven miles to Moore Point (14 miles round trip) before turning around and heading back to Stehekin. The trail has only slight ups and downs for the first four miles to Flick Creek. This is a good destination spot for a day hike as the lake is easily accessible and there is a campground and shelter.

This is the ideal trail for a morning or evening stroll if you are staying at the North Cascades Lodge at Stehekin because the trailhead is close by. Those staying at Stehekin Valley Ranch can use the bus system to get to the trailhead, or rent a bike for more freedom of schedule.

It is also a nice day hike with small children as it is easy walking and when they get tired, you can turn around and return to the Stehekin Landing area easily. Since you don't gain much elevation on this trail, the views are limited to the lake, Stehekin Valley, and the surrounding mountains. The best view on this trail is 5.9 miles down-lake at Hunts Bluff where you are 400 feet above the lake with a good view of the surrounding area.

To find the trailhead follow the road past the Golden West Lodge a few hundred feet. *It is a good idea to walk in front of small children as there are a few rattlesnake sightings along this trail every season.*

Howard Lake (aka Coon Lake): *Length: 1.0 Miles (2 Miles Round Trip) | Difficulty: Easy-Moderate*

Howard Lake is the beginning of the trail to McGregor Mountain, but don't let that intimidate you. This trail and the surrounding area are full of options to make a great experience for hikers of all skill levels.

Option 1 (The basic hike):

Begin at the High Bridge trailhead found just behind the horse corrals, and hike up via nicely graded switchbacks on your way to the lake. Along the way you can stop at various viewpoints to take in the amazing mountain scenes surrounding you. At 0.4 mi, you will encounter a junction - stay left to continue to the lake. A second junction will appear in another 0.2 mi - again you will want to stay left. At the 1.0 mile point, you will see the lake open up to your right.

At this point you may return via the same route for a 2.0 mile hike, or try one (or more) of the following options:

Option 2 (Side trip to some more views):

For those wanting a longer hike, you may continue past the lake and turn right onto the McGregor Mountain Trail. Don't worry, I'm not sending you clear up a mountain - just a little ways to get some more views. One mile up the McGregor Trail takes you to a nice view of the valley and to a falls which provides a scramble trail to water. The higher you go up the McGregor Trail, the better the view! Once you have had your fill of the mountain, you can turn around and return to the lake, and then on back to the trailhead.

Option 3 (Hike back to the Ranch):

If you are game for a little longer hike and/or don't want to coordinate with a bus, you can hike back to the Ranch. The route from the lake to the Ranch is 3.5 miles. Most of this route is via trail, although there is a bit that has been damaged by flooding, and we recommend hiking this short section along the road.

After leaving Howard lake, stay right at the first junction you come to (0.4 mi from Howard Lake), then take a left at the second junction (0.6 mi from Howard Lake).

This is the same trail that is used for horseback rides, so don't be surprised to see five or six horses. The best thing to do when meeting horses is to step off the trail on the lower side. Try to avoid abrupt movements. A horse will not spook when he sees you if you don't surprise him. It is best if you let them know you are there, if you are not out in the open, by chatting with the wrangler or guests.

On this route you will soon cross a large rockslide and have good views of the valley and Agnes Creek. Approximately one mile past the main junction, you will come to another junction. Staying left will continue on the trail towards the Ranch, a right will take you to the Stehekin Road. In another 0.5 mi, you will find yet another junction with the same options - left towards the Ranch, right towards the road. However, at this last junction, we recommend you take the RIGHT in order to avoid poorly maintained and flooded trails.

If ever in doubt on your return from the lake, go right - that will take you to the road, which you can follow back to the Ranch.

Option 4 (Make a loop past the lake):

To add a little bit of mileage without elevation gain, you can make a loop past Howard Lake and then back to High Bridge. Continue past the lake, and take a left turn at every junction you encounter. This will take you 1.0 past the lake and join the Stehekin Road at the trailhead for Bridge Creek.

SIDETRIP: While you are this far upvalley, you might want to take a side trip to Carwash Falls - where the road washed out impressively, destroying the road access to the upper parts of the valley. Go right at the road junction until you reach a turnaround where you will see a sign that reads "Road impassible beyond this point". Step around that sign and carefully continue down to where the road is quite clearly washed out. Then return to the trailhead, and continue down the road towards High Bridge.

If you don't want to see the washout, head to the left at road and hike 1.5 miles back to High Bridge where you can catch a bus back to the Ranch or town. This section of the road is more primitive, and does not get very much

traffic. You will also cross Tumwater Bridge which has amazing water features flowing below it. Total mileage for this option is ~3.5 miles.

To find the trailhead, go to High Bridge. The trailhead is located behind the horse corrals there.

Alternatively, you may continue another 1.5 miles past High Bridge, and use the trailhead there. You will essentially be doing Option 4 in reverse, so at every junction you will want to stay right in order to get to Howard Lake and then back to High Bridge.

Stehekin River Trail: *Length: 4.0 Miles (8.0 miles round trip) | Difficulty: Easy*

Stehekin River Trail takes you four miles to Weaver Point on the south shore of Lake Chelan where you will find a large public campground and a sandy beach for those who like cold water swimming. The way is mostly forested and you are only in view of the river along three different stretches. This is a nice cool hike for a hot day, and comes complete with a few fishing holes along the way.

NOTE: There is no direct land connection from Weaver Point to "the mainland", so you will have to return the way you came unless you have arranged a private boat to pick you up.

To find the trailhead go 4.5 miles up valley from the boat landing and cross Harlequin Bridge. The road splits 3 ways shortly after crossing the bridge. Take the middle fork and continue straight past the NPS maintenance areas until you reach the Stehekin Airport - which is a grass strip runway.

Watch out for air traffic as you cross the landing strip. You will find a trail on the opposite side paralleling the runway. Go left on this trail to join the Stehekin River Trail.

Moderate Hikes:

Rainbow Loop Trail: *Length: 4.4 Miles (Trailhead to Trailhead*) | Difficulty: Moderate*

Rainbow Loop Trail is a pleasant 4.4 miles with moderate elevation gains and fantastic views across the entire Stehekin Valley. While technically called a "loop" trail, hikers must utilize an additional 2.4 miles of the Stehekin Valley Road to complete the loop. Most hikers don't bother with this, and thus will need to be picked up at a different location than where they start. The good news is that this is easy to do with the bus system which services the valley all summer.

PRO TIP: We recommend getting dropped off at the "Upper" trailhead, hiking to the "Lower" trailhead, then walking 1/2 mile down the road to the Stehekin Pastry Co where you can treat yourself to a tasty ice cream cone while you wait for the next bus to pick you up.

We recommend starting at the upper trailhead as the elevation gain is a little less. Also, the first half of the loop is forested, so it is cooler uphill hiking. Two miles will bring you to the junction of Rainbow Loop and Rainbow Creek Trails; here you take a right. (An optional hike is to take a left here up Rainbow Creek Trail a little more than a mile which will take you to an exposed bluff with an excellent 180 degree view of Lake Chelan and the Stehekin Valley.) Continuing right at the junction you will keep you on the Loop Trail, which drops down a short distance to where the trail crosses Rainbow Creek. This is a nice spot for a rest or lunch beside the creek. After climbing up from the creek, the next .4 miles you will be on a flat bench that takes you past Boulder Creek Trail on your left. Stay right and you will start descending into the valley. On the way down there are several nice views of the valley and lake.

PRO TIP: If you do not plan on hiking the whole loop, the lower leg is your best choice for scenery.

To find the trailhead, the easiest thing to do is hop on a bus and tell the driver you want to go to the "Upper (or Lower) Rainbow Loop Trailhead."

But, if you want to get there on your own, here's where the 2 trailheads are:

The Lower Trailhead is 2.6 miles from the Stehekin Landing on the main road. (It is 6.4 miles downvalley from Stehekin Valley Ranch.) You will see the sign for it on your right as you head upvalley. It is directly across the street from a cute cabin that says "Rainbow's End".

The Upper Trailhead is 5.0 miles from the Stehekin Landing on the main road. (It is 4.0 miles downvalley from Stehekin Valley Ranch.) Again, the trailhead is on the right side of the road as you head upvalley. There is a small pullout across the road from it, but this trailhead is easy to miss if you aren't watching for it. The sign is a little ways up the hill, but visible from the road if you are looking for it.

*This trail has 2 trailheads which join the Stehekin Valley Road. Most people get dropped off at one trailhead, hike to the second trailhead, then get picked up there. This is 4.4 miles. If you intend to complete the loop by hiking the road between trailheads, the total mileage will be 6.8 miles.

Bridge Creek (on the Old Wagon Road): *Length: 5.4 Miles (10.8 miles round trip) | Difficulty:*

Easy-Moderate

The Old Wagon Road that was built to service the prospecting community of Bridge Creek has long been rerouted, but it now makes a very gentle and quite pleasant hike. The grade of this trail is fairly flat and easy to hike, but due to the distance you will have to travel to get to the end, we put this in the moderate category.

Be sure to continue past the campground to the actual bridge at Bridge Creek. The water features here are beautiful, and there is a great pool to swim in on a hot summer day.

The trail splits shortly after you get on it. The left path will take you 3.5 miles to Bridge Creek Camp. If you stay right on the trail you will connect to the Howard Lake trail system, from which you can access Howard Lake, McGregor Mountain, or High Bridge.

To find the trailhead catch the shuttle to High Bridge and continue up the road for another 1.5 miles. The Old Wagon Road trail will take off on your right.

Challenging Hikes:

McGregor Mountain: *Length: 7.7 Miles (15.4 Miles Round Trip) | Difficulty: Challenging*

McGregor Mountain is a fine choice if you desire to gain some elevation for a grand view. This 8129' mountain had a fire lookout at one time and you can be sure that wherever you find an old lookout site you will find a magnificent 360 degree view.

There are some great shorter options for those that want a little elevation without taking on the whole mountain. These are outlined in the description for Howard Lake.

It is 6.8 miles from High Bridge to Heaton Camp which is the only campsite on the mountain. Heaton Camp is a great final destination spot in and of itself, with sweeping views to the south. For those that want the full 360 view, keep reading.

From Heaton Camp, the trail takes you about another quarter mile to where the trail ends and a rock scramble begins. The scramble is just under 1 mile in length. *While this is not a technical climb it does have a high degree of exposure so use good judgment on whether or not you want to continue from this point.*

If you do decide to continue, do not head straight toward the peak which has the repeater antenna on it. If you are standing at the bottom of the scree slope, you should see a BIG rock up at the top of the scree. Carefully make

your way to this huge rock and then look to your left on the face of the cliff walls. You should see painted blazes to mark the route.

The route will take you through a notch a couple hundred yards to the left of the summit and from there you will gain the peak from the backside. We highly recommend visiting the NPS rangers at the Golden West Lodge for a picture and explanation of the route, or talking to some locals who have done the hike and can explain the route.

To find the trailhead, go to High Bridge. The trailhead is located behind the horse corrals there. You will essentially start by going to Howard Lake, and then continuing on up the McGregor Mountain trail. For more info about this first part of the hike, see the description for Howard Lake.

Alternatively, you may continue another 1.5 miles past High Bridge, and use the trailhead there. Make sure you take the first right (approx 500 yards in) to head towards Howard Lake. You will then look for the trail heading off to the left about 1 mile in. If you reach Howard Lake, you have gone just a little bit too far and missed the trail to McGregor Mountain.

Purple Pass & Boulder Butte: *Length: 8.0 Miles (16.0 Miles Round Trip) | Difficulty: Challenging*

Purple Creek Trail is a good option for getting some elevation at the lower end of the Stehekin Valley. You will get nice views of the lake and surrounding hills, but bring plenty of water, as this trail is challenging and does not have many places to refill water bottles.

Like many of the trails in the area you go as far as you would like to and return since this is not a loop trail. Good views of the lake and the lower valley begin at about 3 miles. For those more ambitious, start early and hike 7.5 miles to 6800' Purple Pass.

If you still have some energy left, the 360 degree view from Boulder Butte is well worth the extra 1/2 mile of hiking. It is no surprise that this is the location of a former fire lookout.

To find the trailhead, begin this hike on the Imus Creek Trail which starts behind the Golden West Visitor Center at Stehekin Landing. The junction for the Purple Creek Trail is on the right shortly after the first bridge crossing.