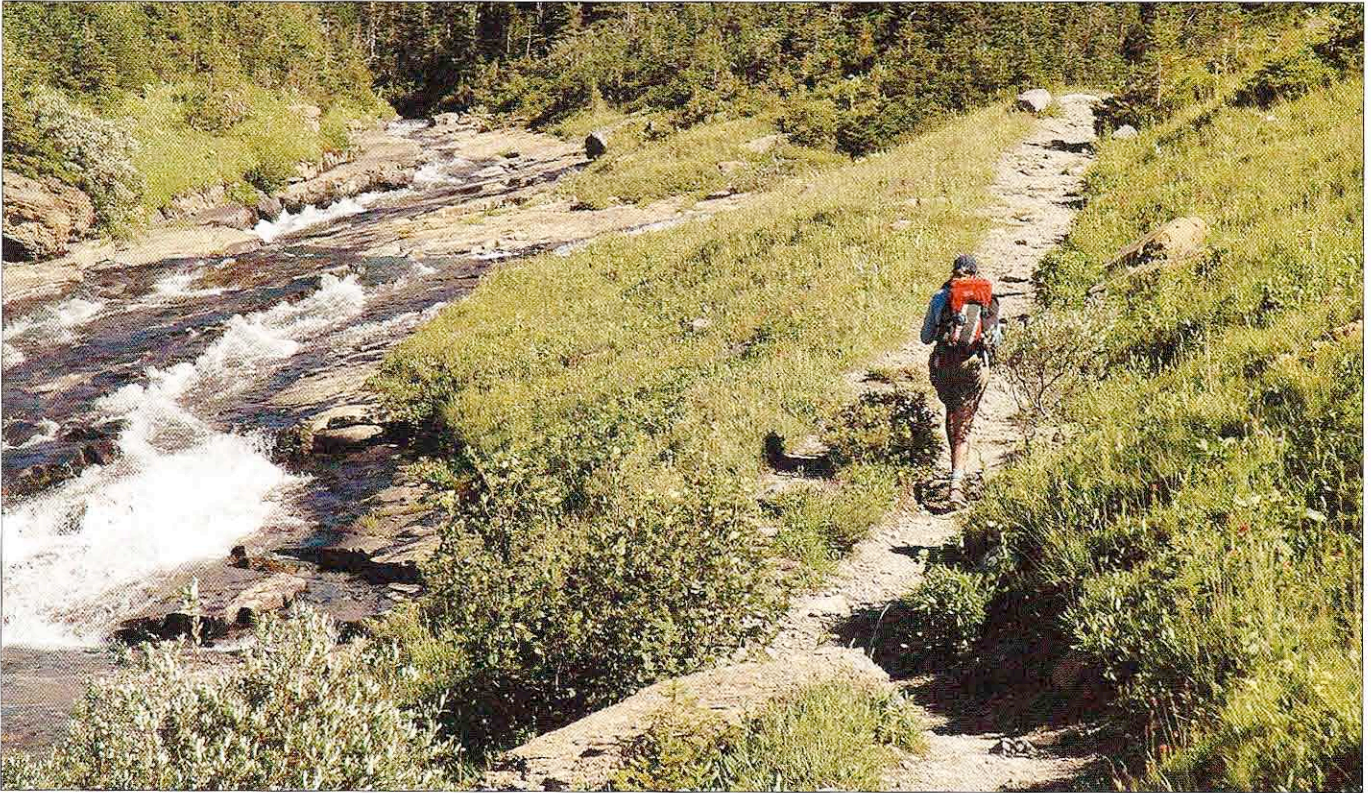


SHUTTLE SMARTS

8 MUST-DO GOING-TO-THE-SUN ROAD HIKES



With the advent of Glacier National Park's new shuttle system, hiking on Going-to-the-Sun Road just got simpler. No scrambling to reach Logan Pass before the parking lot packs full. No illegal hitchhiking to retrieve vehicles at another trailhead. While the Park Service repairs \$7 million of flood destruction and launches 8 to 10 years of major road improvements, biodiesel shuttles should lessen traffic, unlog trailhead parking lots, and ease point-to-point hiking.

Story and Photos by Becky Lomax

Running July 1 through Labor Day, two bus routes traverse Going-to-the-Sun Road, meeting at Logan Pass. On the west side, 22 wheelchair-friendly Sprinter buses, holding 12 passengers each, depart every 15 minutes from the new 4,000-square-foot West Side Transit Center. The Sprinters hit trailheads through the Lake McDonald corridor up to Logan Pass. For campers at Apgar or Fish Creek and guests lodging in Apgar Village, additional buses loop every 30 minutes to connect with the transit center. On the east side, eight 24-passenger buses with bicycle racks connect trailheads

from the St. Mary Visitor Center to the pass. While buses run from 7:30 a.m. to 11:00 p.m., individual route schedules vary.

Check trail conditions before departing, especially since washouts from the November 2006 floods may take time for trail crews to repair. Check the Park's web site—www.nps.gov/glac—for updated trail status reports as well as shuttle maps and schedules, or call 406-888-7800.

Once you've paid your park entrance fee, hop on the free shuttles. You don't need reservations, and you may spend more time hiking.

Avalanche Lake

Stats: 4 miles round trip
500-foot elevation gain

The parking lot for this popular hike frequently overflows. But with shuttles arriving and departing every 15 minutes, you won't circle loops through the picnic area to snag a spot. Begin by walking the Trail of the Cedars boardwalk through ancient standing cedars. After crossing Avalanche Creek, turn uphill above the dramatic, red argillite gorge. Use extreme caution here: Fatal falls have caught more than one hiker. From the gorge, the trail ascends through woods strewn with glacial erratics—large boulders left from receding ice and etched from its movement. A snippet of the Little Matterhorn signals arrival at the lake cirque—a beautiful, broad waterfall-rimmed bowl.

Hidden Lake Overlook

Stats: 3 miles round trip
550-foot elevation gain

When the Logan Pass parking lot fills up—sometimes as early as 11 a.m.—the wait for a slot can be interminable. The shuttle guarantees your hike to Hidden Lake Overlook. Once the snow melts out, a boardwalk climbs through fragile-flowered alpine meadows and cracked mudstones from the ancient Belt Sea. As the upper trail wraps around moraine tumbling with small waterfalls, look for mountain goats and bighorn sheep browsing on miniature flowers. At the overlook, you'll stare down at cerulean Hidden Lake, 675 feet below—a lure for swimmers and anglers. The lake adds three miles round trip—an easy drop, but a hefty grunt back out.

Highline Trail

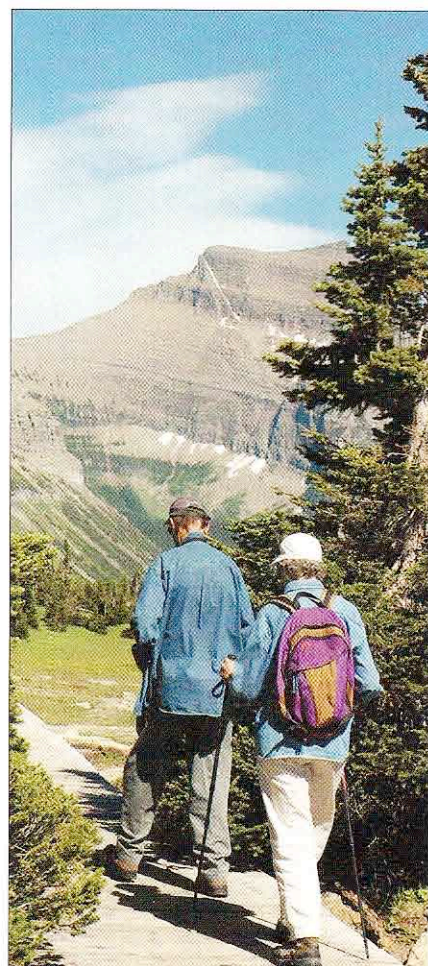
Stats: 11.6 miles to The Loop
830-foot elevation gain

With shuttles every 15 minutes, the Highline becomes a breeze—no battling the Logan Pass parking lot, no car retrieval after reaching The Loop. Begin from Logan Pass, tiptoeing on a cliff walk before traversing the steep-sided, flowered lane that gave the Garden Wall its name. At three miles, the trail packs nearly all of its elevation gain into one big ascent rounding Haystack Creek drainage. After swinging through several large basins, the trail reaches the historic Granite Park Chalet, where you can purchase bottled water (no running water) or spend the night with reservations. Add on a side trip to Swiftcurrent Lookout or Grinnell Overlook before descending to The Loop via the hot, dry slope that was burned in the 2003 fires.

Piegan Pass

Stats: 9 miles round trip
1,670-foot elevation gain

From Siyeh Bend, where a shuttle stops every half hour heading up to Logan Pass or down toward St. Mary, the Piegan Pass trail ascends two miles through subalpine forest before bursting out into Preston Park flower meadows, lush with purple fleabane dancing on tall stalks. En route, two signed junctions send Piegan Pass hikers left. From Preston Park, the trail swings through a seemingly barren alpine zone below Siyeh Peak. But look carefully—all kinds of miniature flowers bloom here. The trail sweeps around a large bowl to the pass, which sits below the Continental Divide's stark, sheer walls.

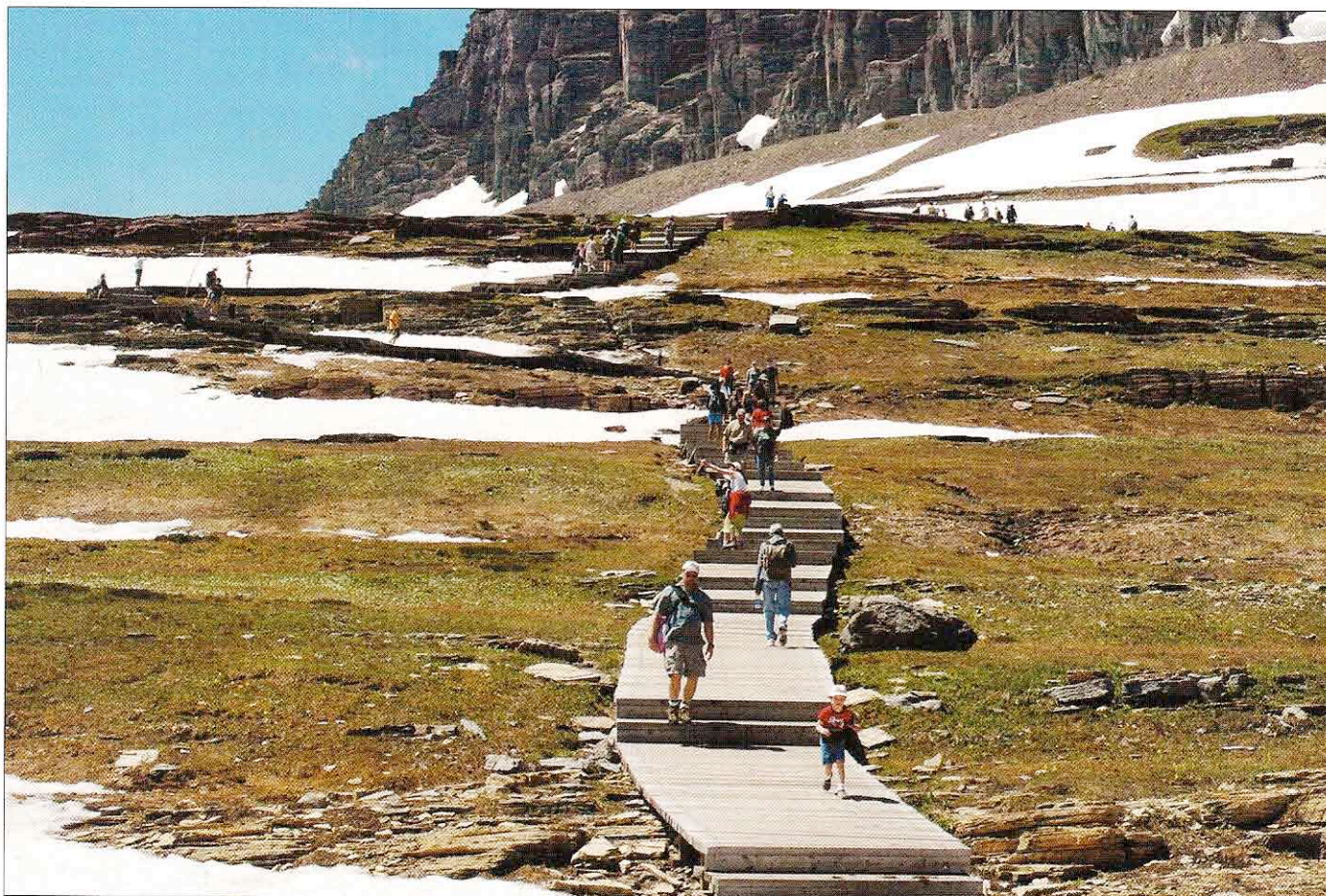


Siyeh Pass

Stats: 10.3 miles point to point
1,900-foot elevation gain

After hiking this point-to-point trail, hikers used to finish at Sunrift Gorge with a car stranded at the Siyeh Bend trailhead. Now, with shuttles departing every half hour, it's easy to return to your car, or use the shuttle for all of your transportation. From Siyeh Bend, the trail climbs two miles through a thick subalpine forest, breaking intermittently into yellow arnica meadows. It passes two well-signed junctions—go left at the first, right at the second—before tripping through Preston Park, ablaze with fuchsia paintbrush. As the trail emerges above tree line, switchbacks ascend to a false summit, which is followed by eight more hairpins before it swings through a cliff to the pass. Descending past goats, bighorn sheep, and a multicolored cliff, the trail traverses Goat Mountain's flanks before dropping to Baring Creek, which slices a frothy swath through red mudstone.





Gunsight Lake

Stats: 12.4 miles round trip
550-foot elevation gain

Shuttle connections link every half hour with Jackson Overlook, the trailhead for Gunsight Lake. After a one-mile drop down to Reynolds Creek with a right turn at the fork, the trail passes boggy mosquito ponds until the last two miles, where it ascends the flanks of Fusillade Mountain with views of the sprawling Blackfoot-Jackson Glacier Basin. Surrounded by avalanche corridors, the lake sits below 10,064-foot Jackson Peak. Bring your fishing rod to try for some of the lake's cagey 12-inch rainbows. From the lake, well-seasoned hikers complete the entire 20 miles over Gunsight Pass to Lake McDonald Lodge in one day.

Otokomi Lake

Stats: 10 miles round trip
1,882-foot elevation gain

With a shuttle stop at Rising Sun, you can hop on the Otokomi Lake Trail for a trek to the lake and beyond. After an immediate uphill gains cliff tops above Rose Creek, the trail levels into a gentle timbered hike. Take scenery breaks where the creek slices through rock slabs rimmed with fragile glacier lilies and pink shooting stars. In the last mile, the trail crosses beargrass meadows and talus slopes before arriving at the lake, where you can often spot mountain goats cavorting above. With off-trail savvy, you can venture over Goat Mountain's north ridge to hook up with the Siyeh Pass trail.



Getaway... Close to Home



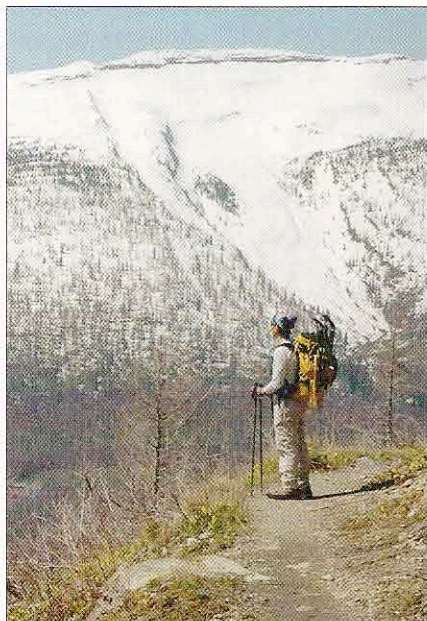
Mountain Lake Lodge

Jackson Overlook to Sun Point via St. Mary and Virginia Falls

Stats: 7.5 miles point to point
280-foot elevation gain

With shuttles stopping every 30 minutes at Jackson Overlook, St. Mary Falls trail-head, and Sun Point, the St. Mary Lake Trail just jumped up in appeal. From Jackson Overlook, drop to Reynolds Creek, where the trail forks eastward to the St. Mary Falls junction. At the falls junction, take the right spur to explore mesmerizing blue-green St. Mary Falls and climb several switchbacks to misty Virginia Falls less than one mile further. Return to the junction to continue east toward Sun Point. After passing two signs for Going-to-the-Sun Road parking lot spurs, the trail roller-coasters along St. Mary Lake. Tally up your third waterfall—Baring Falls—just before the trail climbs to Sun Point. 📍

Becky Lomax—author of Moon Handbook: Glacier National Park (available through www.glacierassociation.org)—guided hikes in Glacier National Park for nine years. She'll be riding the new shuttle buses this summer to all her best-loved trails.



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