Squamish Climbing Information

The small town of Squamish is located on the Canadian west coast just north of Vancouver, and calls itself the "outdoor recreation capital of Canada" because of the endless possibilities for outdoor enthusiasts. Climbers from all over the world come to Squamish for the superb granite cliffs. Squamish has something to offer to every climber, whether it's long-multi-pitch routes, single pitch trad and sport routes, or world-class bouldering. When topping out on the Chief or the other cliffs, the views of the Howe Sound, and the surrounding mountains are amazing.

With the campground at the base of the cliff and the convenience of all the amenities of the town of Squamish around the corner, climbing and staying in Squamish couldn't be easier or more comfortable. Best of all, most of the climbing is only a short walk from the campground.

Because of the coastal climate, it doesn’t get too hot in the summer, and on the occasional hot days the fresh breeze over the Howe Sound brings some relief. In addition, the coastal climate ensures that you can enjoy a forced restday once in a while due to rain, but even then Squamish has plenty of options to occupy your time.

For more information on classic Squamish climbs and other climbing areas visit www.GearLoopTopo.com
Climbing

The word that best describes the climbing in Squamish is "variety". The climbing varies from single move boulder problems to multi-pitch routes with more than 20 pitches, and everything in between. Although all the climbing is on near-perfect granite, there is something for everyone's tastes with a great variety of slab, face and crack climbs.

Almost all the trad climbs in Squamish take protection very well, and if no gear can be placed, there is usually a convenient bolt that you can clip. However, note that on some of the old-school slab routes the bolts can be far apart, testing your slab climbing skills and your nerves. The cracks in Squamish are not perfectly parallel, which means that you don't need a great amount of similar-size cams. In general, 2 sets of cams from thin fingers (0.4-0.5") up wide hands or fists (3"-3.5") will allow you to adequately protect most of the routes. Of course, there are exceptions and some climbs require bigger gear, like the off-width test piece Pipeline (5.10d), or might require more gear of the same size.

The descent for most of the multi-pitch climbs consists of a walk-off, which means that a single rope will do fine since there are no rappels involved. A single 60m rope works best, although a 70m will give you more opportunities to link pitches or pass slower parties. If rappels are involved, a single 60m rope will work in most cases, although there are some exceptions where double ropes are required to rappel, for example, if you climb the Grand Wall only until the Split Pillar.

If you plan to do any bouldering, bring at least one super-sized crash pad because the landings are often on rocky uneven terrain and can be tricky. During the main climbing season in the summer, it will be no problem to team up with other boulderers to avoid ankle breaking landings. The climbing scene at the climber’s campground below the Chief makes it quite easy to find a climbing or bouldering partner.

Great Recommended Multi-Pitch Climbs

5.8: Diedre, Banana Peel, Calculus Crack
5.9: Snake, Vector, Sparrow, Cream of White Mice
5.10a: Rock On, Over the Rainbow, Jungle Warfare, Smoke Bluff Connection
5.10b: Birds of Prey, Ultimate Everything, Apron Strings, Borderline-Blazing Saddles, Sunblessed
5.10c: Exasparator, Squamish Buttress, Angel’s Crest, Stairway to Heaven, Centerfold
5.10d: The Great Game, Cruel Shoes, Borderline, Apron Odyssey, Edge of Anxiety
5.11: The Grand Wall (11a), Millenium Falcon (11b), Dream Symphony (11b), Freeway (11d)

Climbing Shops

Climb On Equipment is a dedicated climbing store with lots of gear and knowledge about the climbing in Squamish. They are located on the northern end of 2nd Avenue, close to Save On Foods. (38165 2nd Avenue, Phone: 604 892-2243).

Valhalla Pure Outfitters is located in the mall opposite from McDonalds, just next to Nester’s Market. They have a good selection of climbing and other outdoor gear and many guide books. (Squamish Station Plaza #805 - 1200 Hunter Place, Phone: 604 892-9092, Toll-Free: 1-877-892-9092).

If you are driving through Vancouver, you can also stop at Valhalla Pure Outfitters Vancouver (222 West Broadway, Phone: 604-872-8872, Toll Free: 1-888-551-1847) or MEC Vancouver (130 West Broadway, Phone: 604 872-7858).

Climbing Guides

There are several guiding companies in Squamish that provide a whole range of guided climbing and instructional courses. The Squamish Rock Guides are "the rock specialists" and are run by Marc Bourdon, author of various local guide books. With their intimate knowledge of the area they can tailor to your needs (Phone 604 815-1750).

If you are looking for guiding companies that offer more than pure rock climbing, check out: Slipstream, West Coast Mountain Guides, or Canada West Mountain School.

Climbing Gyms

Squamish does not have any climbing gyms. The closest gyms are either in Vancouver (Cliff Hanger, The Edge) or Whistler (The Core). So, if you are caught in a rainy period and really want to climb, combine the visit to the gym with some sightseeing in either of those places.
Guide Books

There are several guide books available for Squamish. Some focus on the most popular climbs only, while others also contain lesser known climbs.

**The Climbers Guide to Squamish** by Kevin McLane, 2005. This guide book covers all the climbing in the direct vicinity of Squamish. It covers all the routes, but the description’s are short and the topos consist mostly of photos with the line of ascent drawn over it. No bouldering is included in this guide.

**Squamish Select** by Marc Bourdon, 2004. As the name already suggests, this guide book only has a selection of the best routes. The book covers the climbing and bouldering around Squamish, but also includes the (mostly sport) climbing in Cheakamus Canyon and Whistler.

**Squamish Bouldering** by Marc Bourdon and Scott Tasaka, 2003. This guide is dedicated to the thousands of boulder problems around Squamish, and in the Sea-to-Sky corridor. A must-have for any boulderer.

**Whistler Rock Climbs** by Kevin McLane, 2000. This guide covers the climbing in the Sea-to-Sky corridor along highway 99 north of Squamish, most of it is sport climbing.

How to Get There

**Car Travel**

Squamish is located just north of Vancouver at the end of the Howe Sound. Many climbers will arrive to Squamish from Vancouver, and the drive from Vancouver takes about 1 hour. The highway has just been expanded from 2 to 4 lanes for the 2010 Winter Olympic Games, making the drive very fast and convenient.

If you are arriving from the east (Calgary), you can also take a more scenic and only slightly longer variation: from Kamloops go west and follow highway 99 south through Whistler.

**Air Travel**

Vancouver is the closest international airport and is probably the best choice if you are arriving by plane. If you want to combine climbing in Squamish with a trip to the Bugaboos or climbing in the Canadian Rockies near Banff and Canmore, flying into Calgary is also a good option. Both airports have plenty of car rental facilities.

**Public Transport**

There are several bus connections between Vancouver and Squamish. **Perimeter** runs a direct shuttle from the Vancouver Airport to Squamish, with fares around $35 one way. You can also take the **Greyhound** to Squamish, which is a bit cheaper but there is no direct connection from the airport.

Most of the climbing is in close proximity to the Stawamus Chief Provincial Park Campground, with approaches usually shorter than 30 minutes to the base of the climb. So, if you are arriving by plane and/or bus, a car is not essential, although it is handy for the shopping and a few areas that are further away.

If you don’t want to rent a car, but also don’t want to walk everywhere, you can rent a bike. You should check out **Vertical Reality Sports** on the southern end of 2nd Avenue, which has inexpensive long term rentals of refurbished bikes.

Permits and Regulations

The main cliffs are located within the boundaries of the Stawamus Chief Provincial Park. Park management recognizes climbing as a key and important recreational activity within the park, and works closely together with the climbing community. The park has an official Rock Climbing Strategy that covers many topics such as the trail, signs, route cleaning, fixed protection etc. As always, act responsibly, stay on the trails, and clean up your trash, and you won’t have any issues and will enjoy climbing in this beautiful provincial park.

The only climbing restrictions are the seasonal route closures on part of the Chief’s main wall because of nesting of Peregrine Falcons. These closures are usually in effect from March 15 until July 31, and are posted on the BC parks information boards.

No permits are required and no fees are charged for climbing in the park. However, fees do apply for staying in the Stawamus Chief Provincial Park Campground. Parking fees apply for the parking near Shannon Falls and
Murrin Lake. If you want to climb in the Shannon Falls area, you can walk from the Chief’s campground or park across the street at a small parking. This parking might disappear with the road expansion. The parking fee at Murrin Lake is only $3 per day.

Weather

The climate in Squamish is strongly influenced by the Pacific Ocean. This means that the summers don’t get too hot, and the winters don’t get too cold. However, it is not the temperature, but the rain that controls the climbing season in Squamish.

**Summer** is by far the best time to visit since July and August are the driest months of the year. On warm days, the afternoons can be hot on the mostly west facing cliffs, but you can always find some climbs with more shade, or simply climb early. It can rain heavily, even in summer, but the temperatures and wind usually dry the rock pretty quickly. Climbs with many trees will be wet a little longer due to seepage.

**Early fall** has cooler temperatures and a little more rain, but can provide perfect climbing weather. The lower temperatures increase the stickiness (of your shoes) on the granite, and is perfect for climbing slabs and bouldering.

**Spring, late fall, and winter** are usually too wet to climb, although dry spells do occur. You will only find the weather hardened locals on the rock.

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Camping and other Accomodations

**Stawamus Chief Campground**

The Stawamus Chief Provincial Park Campground is THE place to stay for a climber. It sits just below the Chief at walking distance from many climbs and boulders. During the summer months the campground is packed with climbers, and free spots can be hard to come by, especially on the weekends. The campground has more than 60 sites, and most of these are walk-in, but there are some vehicle accessed sites (not suited for big RVs).

Each walk-in site has a large tent platform, so if there are no free sites, try asking around if anyone minds sharing their site. It is not allowed to sleep in your car or van in the campground parking, but there are many parkings around Squamish were you can spend the night in your car if you keep a low profile.

The campground has water and pit toilets, but no showers. A cooking shelter provides a roof over your head for preparing your meal on rainy days. This is (black) bear country, so don’t leave any food in your tent, and use the food lockers provided throughout the campground. There are more sites than lockers, so please share the lockers and don’t put any locks on them.

Camping fees are $10 per night for each site, and the campground hosts try to enforce the 14-day limit for staying in the campground.

**Alice Lake Campground**

The Alice Lake Campground in Alice Lake Provincial Park is a more family oriented campground. If you come with the whole family and kids, it might be a good place to set up camp. It is located 10km North of Squamish at Alice Lake. The fee is $24 for a vehicle site and $19 for a walk-in site. For that price you have potable water and there are hot showers. It is very busy in summer, especially on weekends, so it is not a bad idea to reserve in advance. The lake has a sandy beach and a nice picnic area. There are also great mountain bike trails in the area around the lake.
Other Accommodations

Squamish is a popular tourist destination during the summer, so there are many other campgrounds, motels, hotels and a hostel. See the complete list of all the Squamish Accommodations for details (www.mysquamish.com/mySquamishDining.html).

Food and Restaurants

Groceries

There is no shortage of grocery stores in Squamish. Save on Foods has the largest selection of food and is located just right of Cleveland Avenue when you enter the town center. Nester’s Market, located next to the Valhalla climbing store, is a bit smaller but has a larger selection of organic foods.

About 1km north of town along highway 99, is a large Wall Mart, but they don’t have a large selection of food. Drive a few kilometers north of town to Garibaldi Highlands, and you’ll find an Extra Foods, which is a slightly cheaper option than Save on Foods.

Cafes and Restaurants

I you don’t feel like cooking, there are many restaurants and bars in Squamish, and you are almost guaranteed to find what you are craving for. See the complete list of all the Squamish Dinning for details.

- The Howe Sound Inn & Brewing Company is a great place for food, drinks, and microbrews. They have specials everyday, but Tuesday is the climbers favorite: 1/2 price pizzas if you buy a drink. Best of all, they are not just cheap, they are also very good, with different pizza specials every week. You will meet many climbers there on Tuesdays.
- Mountain Burger House has great burgers and there homemade veggie burgers are excellent. “Place isn’t much but the food is great” as they say themselves on the sign.
- If you are in the mood for some excellent mediterranean food try Yiannis Taverna on Cleveland Avenue.
- Sushi Goemon on 2nd Avenue has great sushi at reasonable prices. They also have a few non-sushi dishes. They are open for lunch and dinner, but are closed on sundays.
- The Sunflower Bakery Cafe on Cleveland Avenue has tasty and healthy bread, pastries and lunches. They make all their baked goods on location.
- If you are looking for a refreshing treat on hot days, check out Gelato Carina, simply known as Gelato, for amazing homemade icecream and sorbets. They are located a few doors right of the Sunflower Bakery on Cleveland Avenue. They have nice couches to relax and enjoy your treat. The Juice Bar right next to the Climb On climbing shops offer a great selection of healthy refreshing smoothies and drinks.

Water and Shower Info

Potable Water

There are water tabs at the entrance to the Chief’s campground. However, this water is taken directly from the mountain stream behind the Chief and is not filtered. During summer months there is usually a sign saying that the water must be boiled before consumption. Most climbers drink the water directly without boiling, but consider yourself warned. If you don’t want to take the risk, and don’t want to boil the water either, get some bottled water from one of the many grocery stores in town, or bring larger water container and fill them in town.

The hiking trail to the south summit of the chief, which is the descent route for most Grand Wall routes, runs parallel to the bottom section of the stream. If you use the stream to refresh yourself after a warm day on the wall, be sure not to pollute the intake of the water for the campground. Refresh yourself down stream from the water intake!

Showers

The Brennan Park Recreation Centre has a swimming pool with a hot tub and showers. For a full ‘treatment’, go for a swim, treat your muscles to the hot tub, and enjoy the showers. On a rainy day, you won’t be the only
climber in the pool. If you only want to use the shower, you first have to pay the fee to get into the swimming pool ($4.35), but if you stay less then 20 minutes you get money back and effectively only pay $1.25 for the shower.

Lakes
There are many small lakes near Squamish that can provide a welcome cool dip and cleansing bath on a hot summer’s day. Browning Lake at Murrin Provincial Park is a logical choice after a day of cragging at the park. Alice Lake at Alice Lake Provincial Park is one of the bigger lakes and has nice sandy beaches. Other popular lakes are Brohm Lake and Cat Lake.

Internet
The Squamish Public Library has several internet terminals for free public use up to one hour per day. In addition to this, they have one 15 minute Internet Express terminal. You can register as soon as you enter, but to avoid waiting you can book ahead (call 604-892-3110). They have free wireless internet access if you bring your own laptop. You can also read a book or a magazine in one of the many comfortable chairs.

The Squamish Adventure Center has wireless internet if you bring your own laptop. The name is a bit misleading, and it is best described as the Visitor Information Center. The center is located on highway 99 just below The Smoke Bluffs, across from the McDonalds. They have a small cafe with friendly service and drinks and small treats. They have many tables, but the power outlets are limited. In summer, the center is open everyday from 8am to 6pm and is a very good option when the library is closed.

Another option is The Hot Spot, a non-profit community resource center (38027 Cleveland Ave, 604-815-4142). You can use their computers for $1/30mins or bring your own laptop and use their wireless connection for $2/30mins! They also provide facilities for scanning, printing, faxing, and copying.

If you only want to quickly check your emails, Valhalla Pure Outfitters has a computer where you can use the internet for a short period of time. Donations for the computer use goes to the rebolting fund.

First Aid
The Squamish General Hospital is "conveniently" located just north of the Chief (38140 Behrner Drive, 604 892-5211). When driving north from the Chief to the town of Squamish, the hospital is visible on your right on top of the small hill.

For non-urgent problems, you can visit the Sea-to-Sky Walk-In Medical Clinic. The clinic is located at Garibaldi Highlands a few miles north of Squamish (Garibaldi Village Mall, 604 898 5555).

Dog Access
Dogs are allowed in the Stawamus Chief Provincial Park, but must be on a leash at all times except on the Chief summit trails. In Murrin Provincial Park dogs are strickly prohibited in the main beach area, but they are allowed in the rest of the park if they are on a leash. If you do bring your dog, please clean up!

On many multi-pitch routes the descent walk-off doesn’t bring you back to the base of the route. So, if you brought your dog along, plan accordingly. The cragging areas like the Smoke Bluffs and Murrin park are generally quite dog-friendly.

Animals and Plants
Bears
Squamish is bear country, so store all your food and scented items accordingly. The Chief’s campground has food lockers at several central places around the campground, so please use them. Unfortunately, there are more sites than lockers, so share the lockers and don’t put any locks on them.
Ticks
Ticks are present, especially in spring. They like sunny bushy areas, from where they can jump onto your body. Once on your skin they like to migrate to warmer places like the back of your knees, armpits, or your neck. So, if you have been doing lots of bushwacking, check yourselves for ticks in the evening in order to avoid getting Lyme disease. The sooner you get them off, the better. If the tick has buried itself deep into your skin, it is best to seek medical attention and have it properly removed.

Peregrine Falcons
Since the mid-1980’s Peregrine Falcons have been returning to nest in the Dihedrals area. Climbers have observed a voluntary closure to protect the nesting falcons from disturbance. Following up on this effort by climbers, BC Parks places restrictions on certain routes from March 15 - July 31. Please observe all closures.

For 2008, the closed routes are (may change pending peregrine falcon behaviour): Millinium Falcon, Sports Illustrated, Cloud Burst, Sea of Tranquility, Getting Down on the Brown, Supernaut, Clean Corner, Negro Lesbian, Crap Crags, Slow Dyke, Illusion, Planet Caravan, Warriors Wasteland, Freeway (above 5th pitch), The Big Stick, Brothers in Arms, Western Dihedral (4th pitch and above).

Open climbs are: Arrow Root, Cleaning the Brain, Deadend Dihedral, Rutabaga, Sticky Fingers, Slow Duck, Time Passages, Freeway (to the top of 5th pitch) and Western Dihedral (to the top of the 3rd pitch).

Rest Days
Squamish is the “Outdoor Recreation Capital of Canada”, so it has many things to offer if you want to take a day off from climbing. There are tons of activities to choose from, whether you like to relax or have a real workout. The Squamish Adventure Center can suggest or help you choose the best activity for you.

If you still want some action on your day of, you check out some of the excellent mountain biking trails around Squamish. In case you did not bring your own bike, renting a bike in Squamish is easy. For more downhill madness, go check out the Whistler Mountain Bike Park.

If you are looking for something more refreshing, you can choose between canoeing or rafting on one of the local rivers, or try some kite surfing on the Howe Sound. Or, simply take a dip in the swimming pool or one of the small lakes surrounding Squamish.

For a more leisurely day off, go do some sightseeing or shopping in Vancouver, or check out Whistler, both less than an hour drive away. If you have more time, consider visiting Vancouver Island.