



GLACIER NATIONAL PARK
AUGUST 12-20, 2023

THE TRIP

Often described as a paradise for hiking enthusiasts, Glacier National Park's rugged peaks, turquoise waters, and glacier-carved valleys have long been calling to us. Glacier has an extremely short season, with the bulk of the park generally only guaranteed to be entirely open for driving and hiking in July and August. And you need reservations for everything, so plans must be made well in advance. After picking a week for the trip in 2023, I found myself up and online at 2am in August 2022 when lodging reservations opened for the park. Trying to get these rooms was like trying to get tickets for the hottest concert in town. After 20 minutes of virtual line waiting and watching the page spin, when I finally got through there were no rooms left. That led us to seek lodging mostly outside of the park, a bit further from the trailheads, but that ended up working out quite fine in the end. Four months from the trip, we were online at 10am on a Saturday morning to get reservations just to drive on the roads in each area of the park. Thankfully that was a bit easier of a process. Even once all that was taken care of, all other manner of calamity was possible to keep us from our trip. Wildfires? Government shutdowns? Wildlife activity closing the trails? I am happy to say that our trip was largely unaffected and we had an amazing time. Now on with the fun stuff!

TRAVEL & DAY 1

Our travel to Glacier was mercifully easy! We boarded a 7am flight from Philadelphia to Dallas, where we had a few hours to walk around the airport, stretch our legs, and fuel up with more coffee and lunch. Our flight from Dallas was to Kalispell, Montana, just a short drive from the park. As you might imagine, the Kalispell airport was very small and nearly everyone there was renting a car. Thus, while Mike picked up our rental bear spray and our bags from the carousel, I whipped out my book and waited in line for our rental car. I kept my patience and was in no hurry, but there was lots of entertaining people watching as grumpy customers fumed, one even wondering why there was no Avis preferred line here. :)



In part, I was happy to wait because I had snagged this car rental for only \$300, a price unheard of for several years. After nearly an hour, I emerged triumphantly with keys in hand. We headed over to our ride for the week, a silver Toyota RAV4. Our first order of business was to do our grocery shopping for the week. Services on the east side of the park, where we'd be spending the majority of our time, were very limited and expensive. Armed with breakfast and lunch supplies and copious amounts of snacks, we drove into Whitefish, MT, to stop at Bonsai Brewing Project's beer garden. We enjoyed sitting outside, sipping beer, and having a dinner of delicious ahi tuna bowls.



It was now time to head towards the park, and we did so, stopping in West Glacier, MT, for...miniature golf at Golfing to the Sun. It was a fun and well-maintained course with facts about the park so we learned a lot along the way too. It was now time to make our way into Glacier for the first time, and we did so just beyond West Glacier. We had about a 45 minute drive to Motel Lake McDonald, our base for the night.



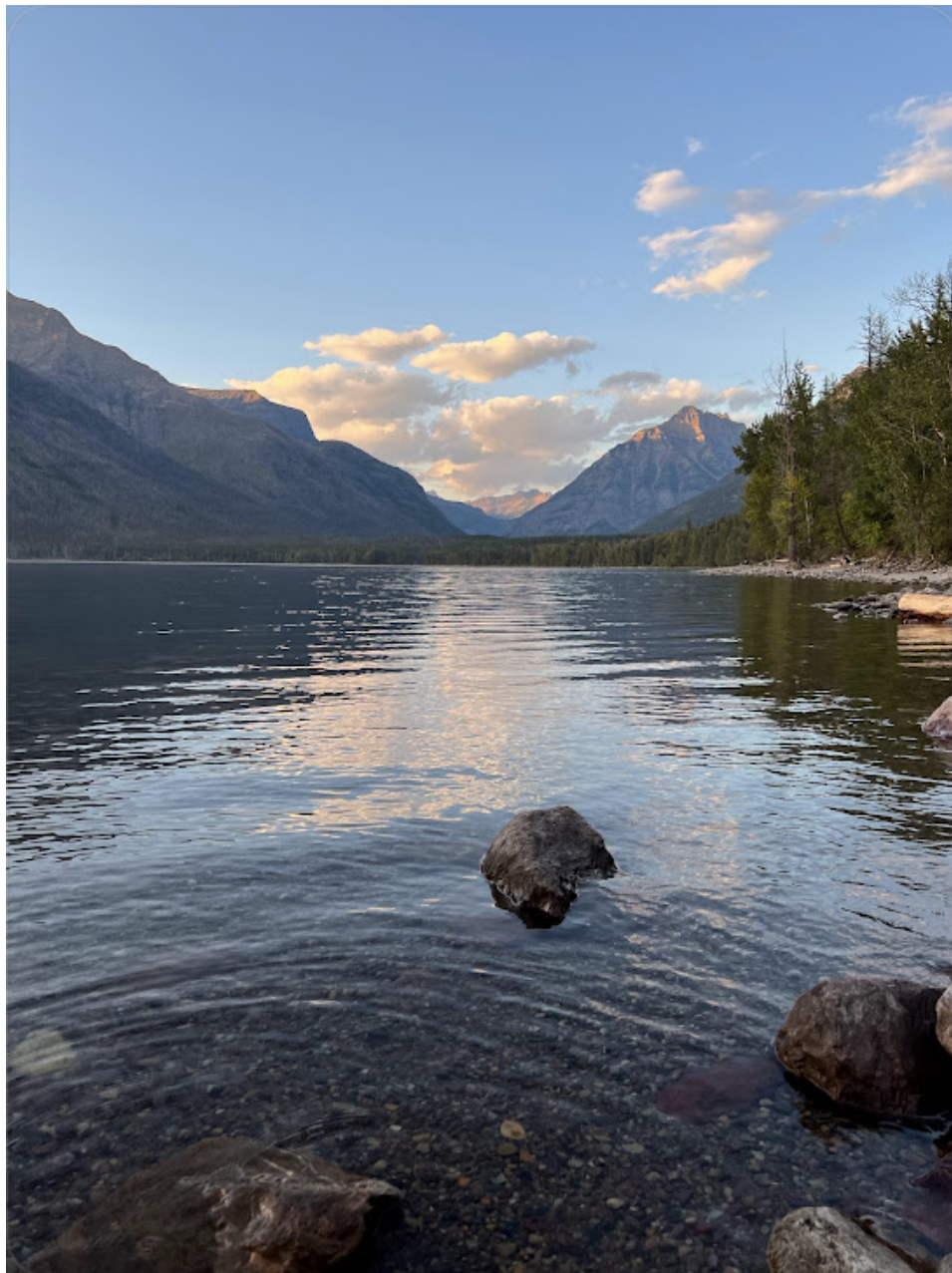
This part of the park was having construction work done, so we drove slowly along the road that had been milled down. The days are long here, so even though it was close to 8:30pm when we arrived, it was still sunny! The motel was nice and we'd only be spending a night there, so after unloading our gear, we headed out to see Lake McDonald since we knew we might not be back in the area. Our first glimpse of the park's scenery did not disappoint! We made our way back to our room to prepare for the next day's hike and settle in for just a few hours of sleep before our wake up call. Despite not having air conditioning, with the windows open and the box fan whirring, we got a decent night of sleep.



DAY 2

Our first full day in the park would take us along the Going-to-the-Sun Road (GTSR) to Logan Pass. At 6,646' tall, Logan Pass is the highest point on the road and the highest point in the park that can be reached by car. We woke up in the dark, packed up the car, filled our cooler with ice and set out along the road. Thankfully the night construction that typically closes the road until 6am does not take place on Sundays, so we

sailed through, taking in our first glimpses of the GTSR as dawn broke. For my first time driving on the road, I was glad to have no other drivers around! 45 minutes later we parked at the Logan Pass Visitor Center parking lot, setting out around 6am. I had read this lot fills extremely fast, even very early in the morning, but we had no problem.



Glacier National Park

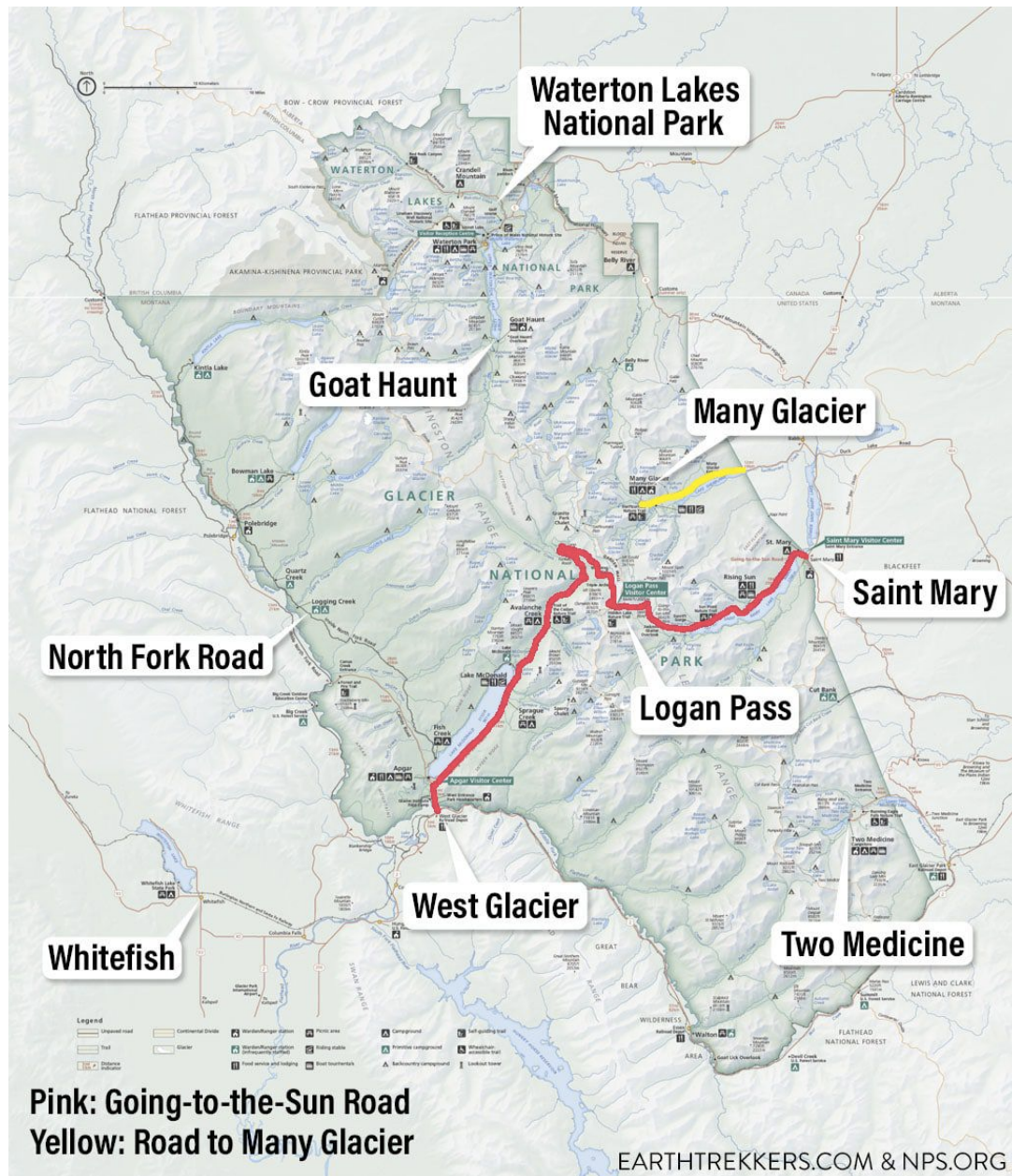
Glacier National Park was established in May 1910.

One of the most famous features of the park is the Going-to-the-Sun Road which is 51 miles long and traverses the width of the park east-west. Considered a great feat of engineering, many obstacles needed to be overcome including sheer cliffs, short construction seasons, and tons of solid rock. The road officially opened in 1933.

Plowing the road each season is a monumental feat, beginning in the spring as soon as conditions allow. East of Logan Pass, “the Big Drift” can reach as tall as 90 feet! The road typically does not fully open until late June or early July.

Together, with its neighbor to the north in Canada, Waterton Lakes National Park, Glacier is part of the first ever international peace park: Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park.

Map of main areas of the park. We visited all marked areas with the exception of North Fork Road.



nps.org





We hiked the Highline Trail, reputedly one of the best day hikes in the entire park. Within the first mile, we reached “the ledge”, infamous for scaring off people with a fear of heights early in the trail. To the right, was a cable attached to the wall if needed and to the left was a steep drop off of several hundred feet to GTSR. Although the trail was only about six feet wide in some places, it didn’t feel scary at all. The next several miles consisted of an undulating path along the Garden Falls, through small forests, fields of wildflowers, and even a few waterfalls. It was along this portion we saw a deer with antlers and our first bighorn sheep of the trip. We also



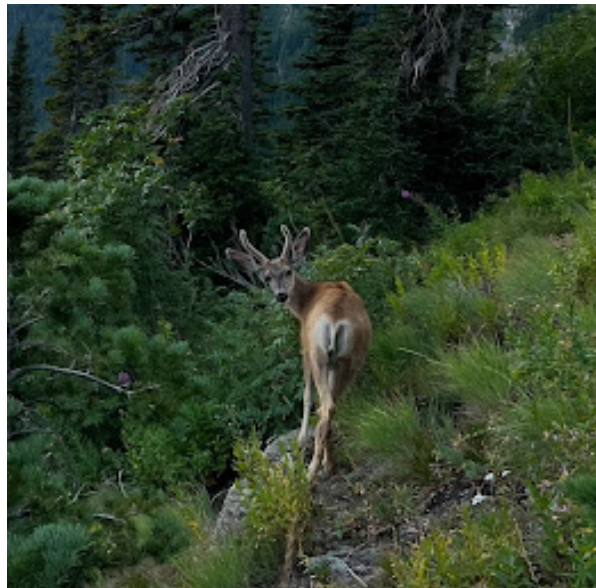
couldn’t stop turning around for spectacular views of GTSR as it snaked its way through the mountains below us.



Sign warning hikers about a grizzly bear frequenting the trail. We had our bear spray at the ready!



Furry friends



3.5 miles in to the hike, we reached the first big climb of the day up to Haystack Pass. It was basically one long switchback, making it the perfect place to take our first break at the top with a snack while resting on a rock. Continuing on, the views stunned around every corner. As we climbed higher and higher we could see far into the valley below. Reaching the junction with the Garden Wall Trail, we turned right and headed up the very steep trail gaining over 900' of elevation in just under a mile. We were happy it was still relatively cool in the morning and in the shade. Once at the top, we reached the Grinnell Glacier Overlook with commanding views of the glaciers below. It is sobering to think about how much these glaciers continue to shrink each year. We will likely never be able to see the same view again. At the end of

the Little Ice Age around 1850, there were about 80 glaciers in what would eventually become Glacier National Park. There are now less than 26, with those that are left shrinking each year. With that in mind, we relaxed and made sure to take lots of pictures, savoring the scenery we worked so hard for! We then headed back down the path to make our way to the Granite Park Chalet.





Now a National Historic Landmark, the Granite Park Chalet was built in 1915 by the Great Northern Railroad to provide comfortable backcountry accommodations to travelers. Today, it provides basic hostel-like rooms for hikers. There is no electricity or water, yet it still sells out within minutes each year! We checked out the building and ate our packed lunch on the benches, admiring the view. While this hike could be done as point-to-point, ending at another location along GTSR, after research we elected to head back the same way we came as that seemed like the better choice. Seeing the views from a different angle made it feel like a whole new hike. We thoroughly enjoyed our time on this trail. What a great start to the trip!

We stopped briefly at the Visitor Center before getting in the car and continuing to drive down GTSR towards the east. We stopped at the pull-off to see Wild Goose Island. Al-

though it is picturesque, Mike and I didn't see the appeal that makes this tiny island in Saint Mary Lake one of the most photographed spots in the park. If you think it looks familiar, it is featured in one of the opening scenes of the movie *The Shining*!

Compared to the rest of the park, as we continued on GTSR, the Saint Mary area was quite ugly. The landscape is marred by burned and dead trees as a result of the Reynold's Creek Fire in 2015.

We stopped at the park sign for our obligatory photo and minutes later, arrived in Saint Mary Village, our home for the next five nights!



Highline & Garden Wall:

- 17.61 miles
- 3,760' elevation gain
- 8 hr 35 min duration



We were staying at a small cabin along the river which was perfect for us! There was a bedroom, bathroom, small kitchenette, and sitting area. Outside there was a table and beautiful hanging plants. We spent as much time outside as possible, although it was in the direct sun which made it quite hot in the late afternoon!

For dinner, we headed just up the road to Rising Sun Pizza which turned out to be a real gem! We ate our full of wings and a large Hawaiian-style pizza. It was at this point we understood that where we were staying was technically on a reservation. In fact, a reservation-wide ban on alcohol sales was to be ending at midnight that night. No alcohol could be served in restaurants or even bought in stores. Since there's nothing like a cold beer after a hike, we were happy to have stocked up in West Glacier and kept beers in the cooler during the day.



DAY 3

While we had a list of hikes we definitely wanted to tackle on our trip, we left each day's plan fairly loose to look at weather, how we were feeling physically, and for any wildlife closures. For our first hike in the Many Glacier area of the park, where we'd be spending the majority of our time, we picked a hike to Ptarmigan Tunnel and on to Iceberg Lake. We set off early again, coffee in hand, making the 30-minute drive to the trailhead. Since we were entering the park before 6am, we did not need to show a ranger our park reservations. Road reservations are only in effect from 6am-3pm daily, which is a part of the park's pilot reservation system to reduce crowding. We parked in the small parking area near the trailhead and set off under the rising sun.



The beginning part of the trail was fairly flat and easy. With hardly anyone else on the trail, we made a lot of noise and were on the lookout for bears constantly. After several miles of hiking through the woods, we arrived at a junction that would take us towards Ptarmigan Tunnel on the right. We took a short snack break and began making our way across an open slope with a gain of about 400' and at that point we emerged to see the Ptarmigan Wall directly across from us. At 1,700' above the trail, it was quite intimidating. It is an arête, a thin ridge of rock separating two valleys that have been carved by glaciers. We wound our way along the path passing Ptarmigan Lake before beginning a climb of 500' over two GIANT switchbacks.





**Heading up the first switchback
with Ptarmigan Lake below.**



Looking down the trail



Mike going through the tunnel

At the top we paused to get our breath and enjoy views into the u-shaped valley below. The tunnel was originally built by the Civilian Conservation Corp in the 1930s for horses and early park tours. It took less than three months for crews working on either side of the tunnel using steel jackhammers and dynamite to break through. In the 1970s the NPS added steel doors to both ends of the tunnel, which now remain closed between October and the opening of the trail, usually around the middle of July. Walking through the 240' tunnel was fun and coming out on the other side was like going through a portal to another world. Below we saw more lakes in the valley and walking a bit further down the path even got glimpses of the Old Sun Glacier. We hung out here for quite a while!



We were the first hikers of the day at the top, so we enjoyed the solitude and then made our way down the trail, now in the full sun. Once back at the junction, we turned right to make our way towards Iceberg Lake. Here again were amazing views the entire way, although this portion of the trail was definitely more crowded. We even got to see our first moose of the trip! It was a cow moose grazing in the brush close to the trail, so although exciting, we couldn't get a great glimpse as she was quite shy.



In the basin just below the snowfields in the picture above, was our destination, Iceberg Lake. Close to the lake, we crossed a footbridge over Iceberg Creek, completed a short climb, and turned the bend to come face to face with one of the most beautiful alpine lakes in all of Glacier.





Situated at an elevation of 6,094', the lake is in the shadows of surrounding mountains, receiving scant sunshine, allowing ice and snow to accumulate on the water and surrounding cliff walls. Although there were no icebergs in the lake on our visit, the water was quite chilly. We sat and enjoyed our lunch and even saw our first mountain goat,

high above on mountain scree! The picture is zoomed to the max, but I promise that's a lone mountain goat.



Although it was hard to tear ourselves away from the view, eventually we left the lake behind and headed back down the trail. Earlier in the day we had met people on trail who had seen a grizzly bear near the trailhead. And in fact a few miles from the trailhead, we encountered a park ranger who was warning hikers about a bear in the area, asking us to make noise and be alert. Of course I was on even more high alert than normal, but thankfully we saw nothing. We headed back to our cabin, enjoying a beer on the patio before making our way to the hotel restaurant in the main lodge. Mike had a steak and I had the bison stroganoff, and we split a huckleberry crisp with ice cream for dessert. Everything was delicious and well-earned after a day in the sun!

Ptarmigan Trail & Iceberg Lake:

- 15.69 miles
- 3,104' elevation gain
- 7 hr 25 min duration



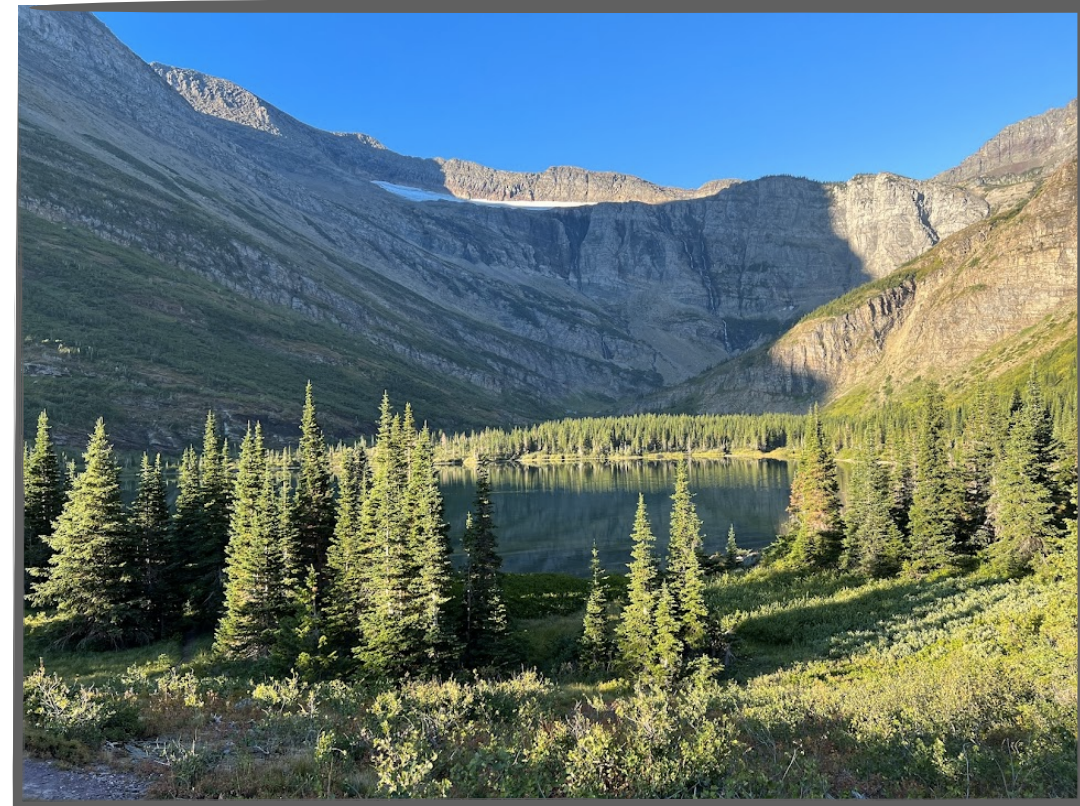
DAY 4



With more fantastic weather and clear views in the forecast, we elected to tackle one of the most difficult hikes on our trip next, up to Swiftcurrent Mountain. We again headed to the Many Glacier area of the park early in the day and set off along the trail. In the early set of miles, we passed by several lakes. The water was so still early in the morning and when we reached Redrock Lake the views were stunning. It felt almost mystical as we heard a loon continually calling out on the water.



At the far end of the lake, we spent some time exploring Redrock Falls, which is actually a series of cascades. We continued on through alternating tree canopies and open areas. Due to the abundance of lakes and water, this was supposed to be prime moose habitat but we saw none! No bears either, although there was definitely evidence of them on the trail. We crossed a swinging footbridge and came to the last lake, Bullhead Lake. With Swiftcurrent Mountain looming directly in front us, looking very high, it was a bit daunting. How were we going to get up there? We crossed another small footbridge and were ready to find out as we started our climb!

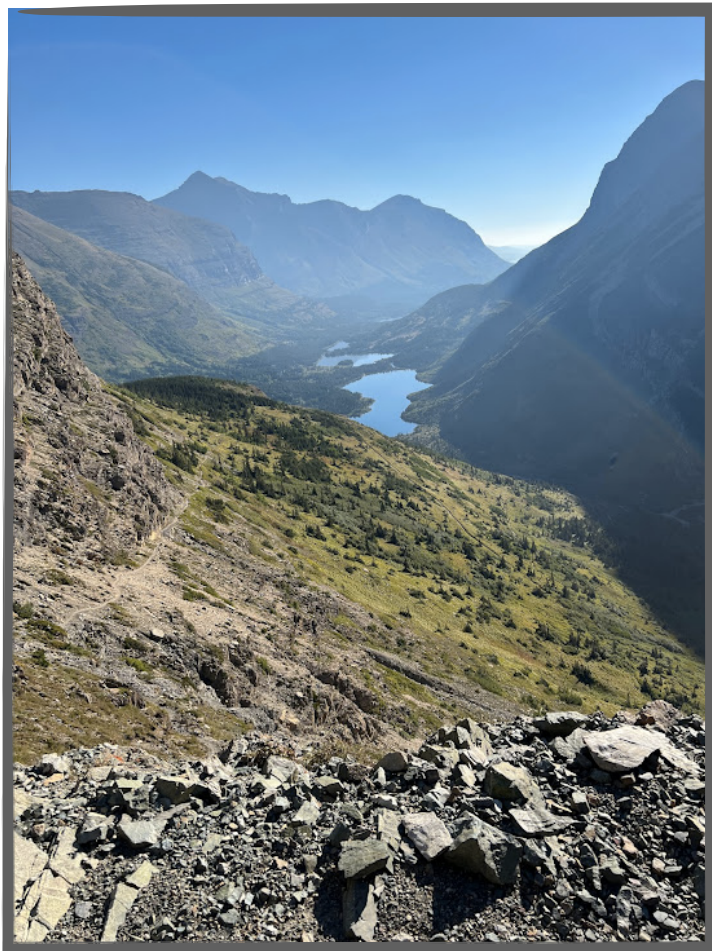


We climbed a series of very steep switchbacks and here the trail was overgrown with thimbleberry and huckleberry patches. We made sure to make noise as we ascended, eager to get higher so we could have unobstructed views.

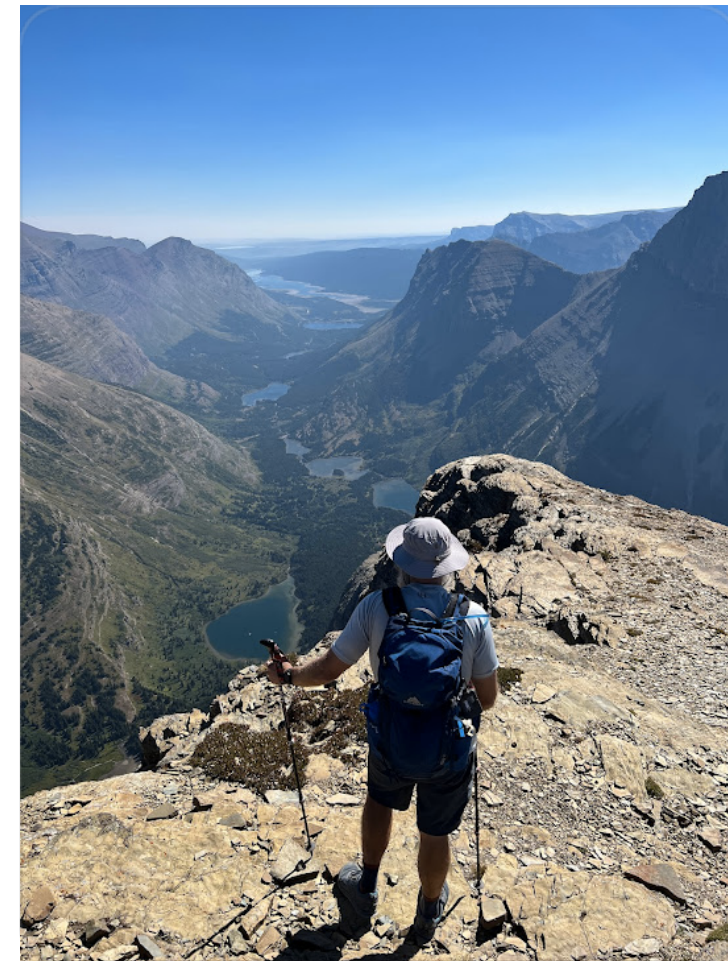
The views were pretty spectacular. On one side was a waterfall that dropped several hundred feet off a permanent snowfield. On the other, all of the lakes we had just hiked past in the valley became visible. After those switchbacks the trail also became very narrow with exposed, steep drop-offs, i.e. fun! At about six miles in, the trail leveled out a bit and we could finally catch our breath. It was here that we ran into another couple coming down the path. They let us know that ahead on the trail, a group had an encounter with a grizzly bear that bluff charged them. We were grateful for the information, but not terribly worried given this occurred on a part of the trail we wouldn't be going to, and it had happened an hour ahead of where we were. Nevertheless, we continued to be on high alert.



Seven miles in and at 7,185' we had reached the top of Swiftcurrent Pass! It is crazy that the High-line Trail and Granite Park Chalet we had visited a few days earlier, from a completely different part of the park, were less than a mile away from where we stood! We weren't going there again though, instead we turned right and up the trail to the Swiftcurrent Fire Lookout. This trail climbs 1,250' in 1.4 miles so it was steep. It is also the highest maintained trail in the park, so we'd be hiking to the highest point in the park accessible by a maintained trail. I took lots of breaks on this slog to the top.



After lots of huffing and puffing, we finally made it to the top! After seeing hardly anyone else on trail, we were surprised to see two larger groups of hikers at the top, although they had come up a different trail. We scoped out the mountain and the lookout, and then sat down for a break. The lookout is one of four manned lookouts in a chain in Glacier National Park that are staffed each season. This particular lookout was staffed by a female lookout who spends the entire season up there, with supply drops coming up by mule and sustained by several-day visits from her husband. Once again, the views were stunning and it was hard to tear ourselves away, but we had a long hike back ahead of us. On our way back down, we ran into a very cute hoary marmot on the trail. We had fun watching him munch his way through his lunch.



While we remained bear alert, our trip down the trail was uneventful. Near the top of the pass, we sat under the shade of a few trees to eat our official lunch and then continued on, loving those lake views. After making it down the bulk of the descent, we again found ourselves on the shores of Bullhead Lake, where we stopped for another break. As we were packing up to leave, Mike lamented the fact that we hadn't seen any moose at all these lakes. Just then, I looked up and saw something far across the other side of the lake that wasn't there a minute ago. It was a huge bull moose!! We grabbed the binoculars and observed the moose until he moved back into the trees. How amazing!



<-- A very grainy moose picture!

We had fun heading down the trail and continuing to enjoy the views but we were beat when we were done. It was a long day with a lot of elevation change in the sun. We did want to stop by the famous Many Glacier Hotel to check out the building. It is a historic structure built in 1915 which is a National Historic Landmark and has Swiss-style architecture inside and out.

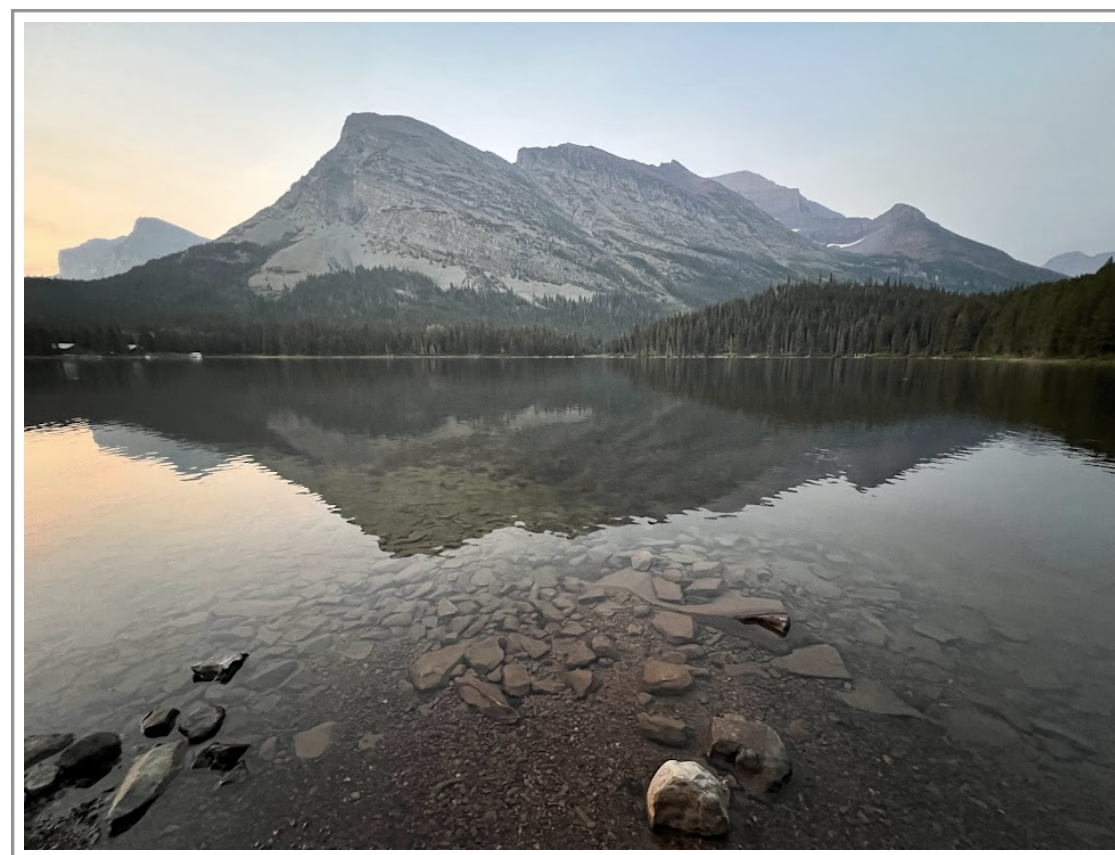
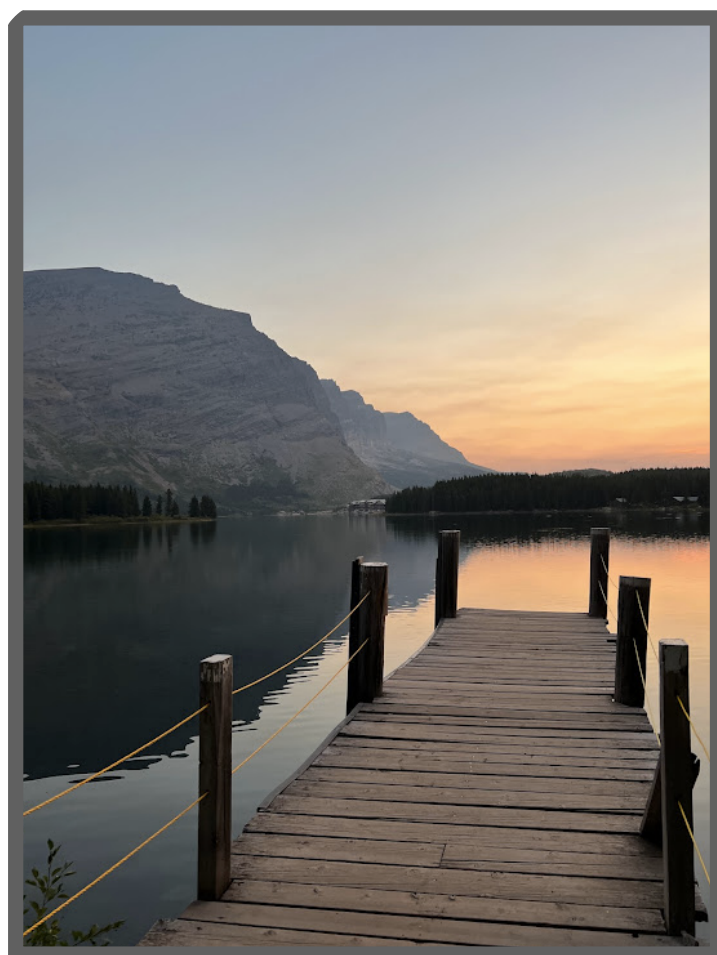
It turned out to be a very fortuitous visit as we not only got to see the beautiful lobby but also found great to-go beer in their market and were able to find very nice souvenirs, including our Christmas ornament! Once back at our cabin, I soaked my feet in the river while sipping a beer and we liked Rising Sun Pizza so much we ended up going back there for more wings and pizza for dinner!

Swiftcurrent Mountain:

- 17.24 miles
- 3,701' elevation gain
- 8 hr 54 min



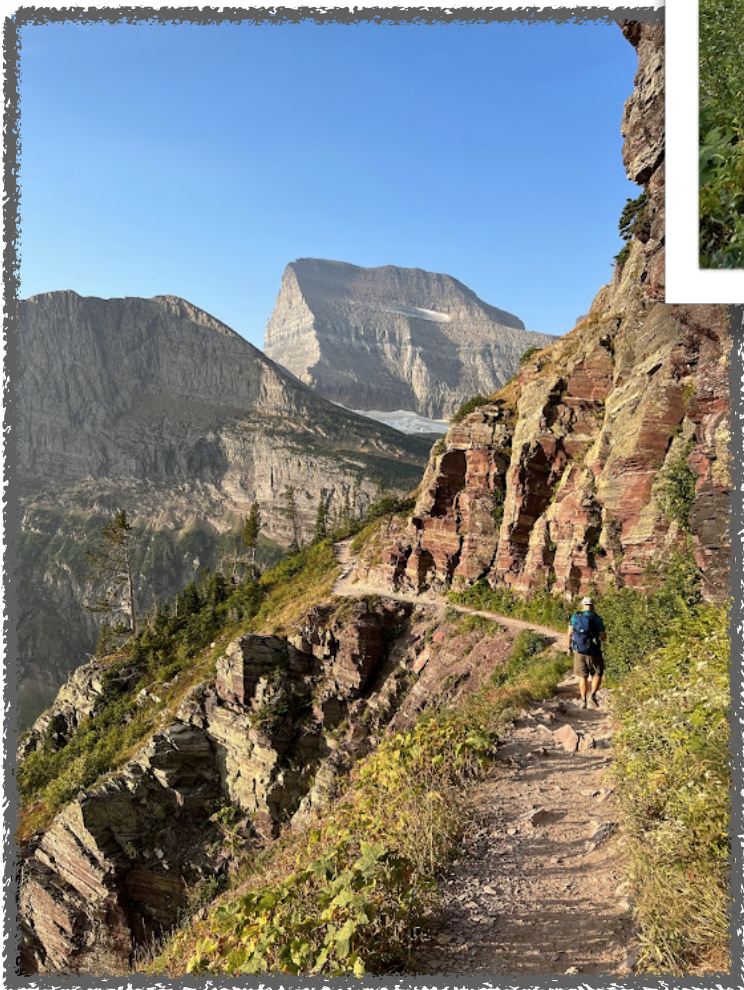
DAY 5



The hike to Grinnell Glacier was one of our most sought-after hikes in the park, so we set off on trail during our final day spent in the Many Glacier area. While there are boat shuttles you can use to quickly get across Swiftcurrent Lake and Lake Josephine, we walked the route finding it very enjoyable and not minding the few extra miles.

This is one of the more popular hikes in the park, so we were not alone, but were still able to spread out pretty well. We traveled along a raised boardwalk that kept us dry and above a wet, marshy area before climbing higher and higher, getting views of Grinnell Lake in the valley below. Once we were well above the marshy area, we spotted a cow moose in the marsh below, grazing! Stowing the binoculars and continuing on, we climbed and arrived at a narrow stretch of trail that hugged the cliff face. This was beautiful and so fun! Just over 3 miles in we arrived

at a plateau with a rest area of sorts, replete with benches. We continued on up a steep series of steps being worked on by a trail crew as we passed.



It was at this point that we noticed the sky taking on a sickly orange glow as dark puffs passed in front of the sun. It only meant one thing, the wildfire smoke we had escaped thus far in our trip had arrived. We put that out of our mind as we still had more climbing to do to reach our destination. At this point we could see several glaciers, lakes, and Grinnell Falls. As we approached the top we even saw a bighorn sheep that quickly disappeared from view.



One of the things I love most about hiking in Glacier is the “big reveal”. On most hikes you cannot see the majesty of your destination until you arrive. It is hidden at a distance. This proved to be true with Grinnell Glacier and Upper Grinnell Lake.

We hiked around to about the midway point which was deserted with other hikers, set down our packs, and enjoyed a Snickers and the view.

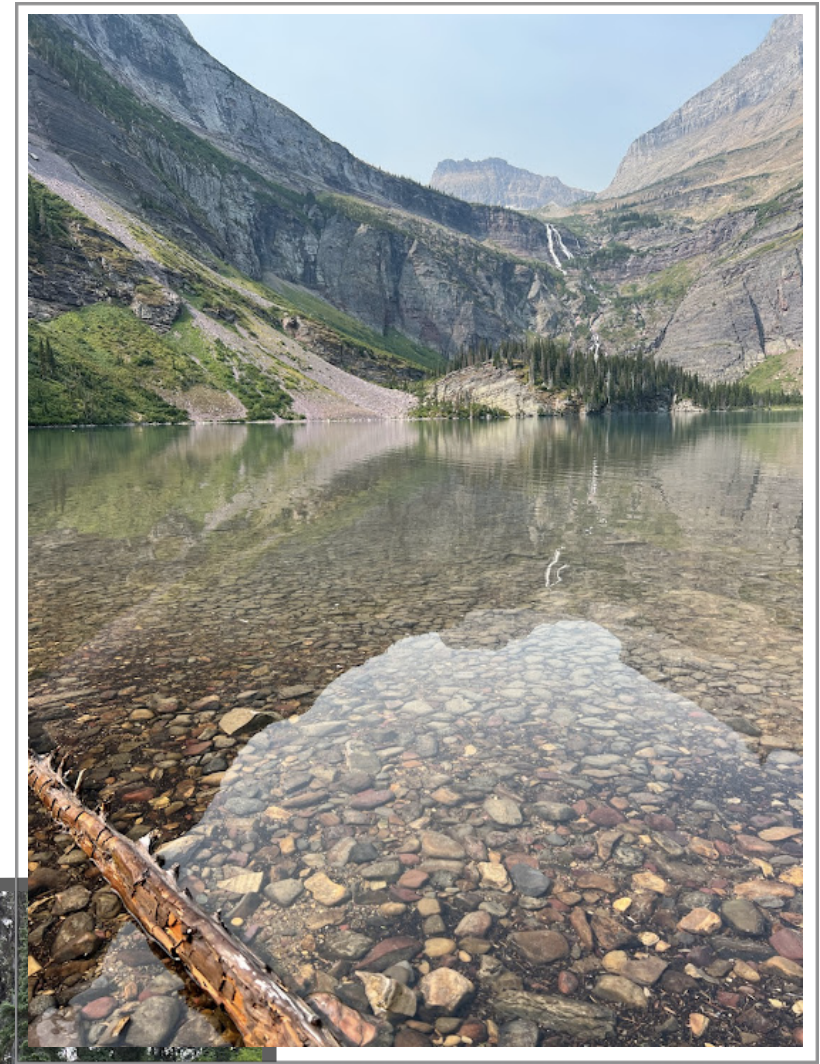




We hiked over closer to the glacier, but were not able to find an easy and safe way to cross the rushing water separating the two areas of rocks, so we turned back to head down the trail. Along the way we had another cute hoary marmot sighting, along with a bighorn sheep. Smoke was now pouring over the ridge line to our left, making for an apocalyptic scene as we were hiking down. I felt like I was in one of those movies where you see people fleeing their home from wildfires and I was worried it was very close, about to jump over to our side of the mountain. But the park rangers we encountered along the way showed no concern, so I tried to quiet down any voices in my head. Disconcertingly, we ran into a park ranger who told us there was an “incident” with a grizzly bear and some park rangers last night and to be on high alert as we went down the trail. Oh boy!



As the trail flattened out, we stopped to look down into the marshy area below. I happened to see a cow moose and her calf in the water! So we spent several minutes looking at them using binoculars before they disappeared from view. Instead of heading straight back the way we came, near Lake Josephine we took a trail junction that would take us around the head of the lake and put us on a lovely flat path through the forest to Grinnell Lake. At this point we were singing and talking on trail to scare away any potential bears. Just before reaching the lake itself, we traversed a suspension footbridge over Cataract Creek. The lake was gorgeous and we enjoyed our lunch sitting along the shoreline. It was so neat to be sitting here having just seen the lake from so high above. And also to look up and see where we had just been!





Due to trail construction and a closure, once back at Lake Josephine we needed to take a longer way back to the trailhead than we did in the morning. So we made our way along the opposite shoreline of both lakes, passed by the Many Glacier Hotel (where I stopped for a brief rest on a bench out front - my feet were tired!), and then on back to our car parked at the trailhead.

We weren't sure if time would permit us to drive along the awe-inspiring portion of GTSR again, so we decided to enter the park and make the drive up and over Logan Pass and down towards The Loop on the road. I'm really glad we got to see this portion in the daylight, although it was a bit nerve wracking with lots of cars on the road. In fact, a few weeks prior to our trip a car drove over the ledge in one part and went down into the ravine! Luckily the people survived with minor injuries, although the road was closed for quite some time as they retrieved the vehicle. Although there are restrictions on the size of vehicle that can be driven, most pickup trucks and vans had their mirrors tucked away due to the notoriously narrow roads with no shoulder. There was also the fleet of famous 1930's Red Buses to contend with, now used to transport tourists around the park.

After returning to the cabin and getting cleaned up, we headed to Two Sisters Cafe. Although there was a bit of a wait, dinner was worth the wait! We each had juicy burgers, fries, and a local huckleberry milkshake. Yum!



We made one final short detour to Hidden Falls on our way back from the lake. This was a beautiful 25' waterfall "hidden" in a deep gorge cut by Cataract Creek. There was a wooden viewing platform at the top of a steep path.

Grinnell Glacier & Grinnell Lake:

- 16.03 miles
- 2,283' elevation gain
- 8 hr 11 min

DAY 6

By this point in the trip we were looking forward to a break from all-day hiking and with smoke still in the area we decided to head over the border to visit Waterton Lakes for the day. A short 30-minute drive on a winding road led us to the Chief Mountain Border Crossing. The crossing is open from 7am-10pm and we arrived a few minutes before 7am, the third car in line. We quickly got through customs and pulled over to take a picture before continuing on for another half hour or so to Waterton Lakes. As a national park, we had to pay a day-use fee to even enter the townsite which was an usual experience!



Our first order of business was breakfast and we so we grabbed coffee and breakfast sandwiches from the Windflower Cafe in town. I had really wanted to take a popular boat trip whose ticket office opened at 8am, so we got our tickets and then ate our breakfast at a bench along Waterton Lake. We had about an hour to stretch our legs, so we walked a loop around the town stopping to admire Cameron Falls. We also saw a ton of deer grazing in the yards in various houses. It was a surprising sight to see! The time to board our boat arrived quickly and we



s o o n
boarded our
vessel, The
International.

We made our way across Waterton Lake learning many interesting facts about it and Waterton Lakes National Park itself. We then passed over the border into the US and landed at the far end of the lake at the Goat Haunt Ranger Station. As we were disembarking we got to see a beaver swim by! A small number of park service staff stay at Goat Haunt in the summer and it is one of the more remote and tranquil parts of Glacier, only visited by day trippers like us or backpackers. No passport was required for us because we were staying there for no longer than a half hour and not traveling to the interior. We had the opportunity to listen to information from a park ranger and then boarded the boat to make our way back to Canada hugging the other side of the lake. The park ranger hitched a ride back with us, entertaining passengers with riddles about the area.



An example of the Lewis thrust, where older rock (by millions of years!) slid over younger rock.



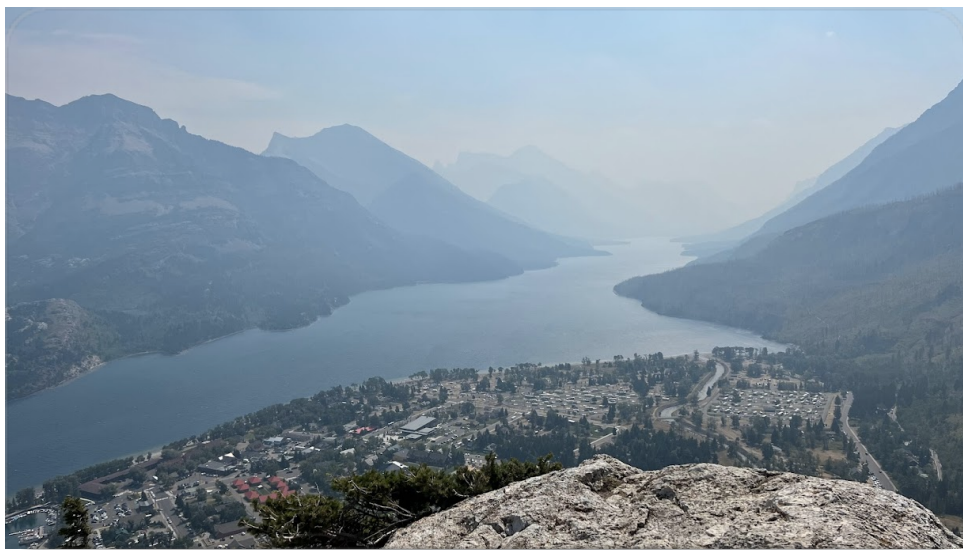
The moment we crossed the border

Once back in town it was lunch time and we tried the famous Weiners of Waterton. We had to wait in line a bit to place our order (and there was almost a riot because they ran out of sauerkraut), but it was worth it! They had unique toppings such as ginger carrot shreds and sauces like dill pickle. We both enjoyed our dogs and fries!



Waterton Park Townsite Loop:

- 2.33 miles
- 200' elevation gain
- 52 min



Our view

Bear's Hump is a short, but steep hike just outside of town that leads to an amazing viewpoint of the town and Waterton Lake below. Despite the heat, haze, and smoke, we still wanted to do the climb so we did and were some of the only people out there. The hike itself was not so nice, as the surrounding trees are all burned as a result of the devastating Kenow Wildfire in 2017. It was crazy windy at the top too!



What it looks like on a clear day!

Continuing to pack in as much as possible, we headed back into town to the park's visitor center where the park ranger we met earlier was giving a lecture entitled Grizzly Gastronomy. We learned so many interesting facts about bears and eating habits. Perhaps the most interesting is that bears in Glacier have been observed eating upwards of 40,000 army cut worm moths in a single sitting by turning over rocks to uncover their unsuspecting meal. By the time grizzlies come to feed, these moths often have over 70% of their body weight in lipids, making them far richer in calories than anything else they might hunt. Amazing!

After that lecture about grizzly food, we were hungry again so we stopped for ice cream cones. We could smell the handmade waffle cones before we even stepped inside - they were so yummy!

Bear's Hump:

- 1.59 miles
- 719' elevation gain
- 59 min



A 15-minute drive outside of town was Bison Paddock Loop. This is a short, scenic drive through the grasslands where the park's herd of bison roam in the summer. I can't imagine how hot the bison were with temperatures near 90 degrees. We found the herd all clumped together in the windiest part of the paddock, resting. It was nothing like seeing the bison in South Dakota, but still neat nonetheless. We also drove the scenic Red Rock Canyon Parkway, a 5-mile road over rolling hills. At the end of the parkway was the Red Rock Canyon itself which we got out to see and observe from a viewing platform.



Think we're done for the day? Nope! I had wanted to see the famous Prince of Wales Hotel, perched high on a bluff above Waterton, an icon since 1927. However, we were told they charge to park there, so I had the bright idea to park at the lake and walk up the path. Only we weren't exactly sure where the path was from the parking area and I ended up taking us up an insanely steep "path" that was basically an avalanche chute. Oops! Although it was hard work we got there quicker than taking the actual path! By now the skies had cleared some so we got nice views and enjoyed seeing the historic hotel lobby and the gift shop.



We ate dinner in town at a pub and shared delicious beer, fajitas, and fish tacos. Bonus? The Eagles pre-season game was being shown on the TV! Strange? They were filming some promotional material at the restaurant and we were asked if we were okay being captured. Maybe we're famous in Canada!

We came and we saw *everything* in Waterton, so we headed back over the border crossing and tucked in for a good night of sleep.



DAY 7



Today we left behind our cabin and headed out to explore a new area of the park called Two Medicine. We had two main hikes planned in the area, but as the day progressed the wind was supposed to really come in. In fact, sustained winds of 40-50 mph were predicted on the mountain passes. So, we made the decision to NOT do our long hike over mountain passes and instead stick to slightly lower elevations, starting as early as possible.

Our goal was to reach Scenic Point and we arrived at an empty parking lot at first light. After a short initial portion through the woods and a brief stop at a nearly hidden Appistoki Falls, we emerged from the tree line and the trail stayed that way all the way to the top. The views were still a bit hazy, but not terrible, and we enjoyed seeing the wide open expanse and looking down onto Two Medicine Lake. We passed through a ghost forest of dead pines and stopped at a few interesting viewpoints. After a bit we started to feel drops of moisture, but it was hard to tell where it was coming from. There were no clouds directly overhead, but it was getting quite windy. As we neared the saddle just before the endpoint of our hike, all hell broke loose. Dark clouds loomed nearby, rain began pelting us, the temperature dropped, and it became so windy we could hardly hear each other talk. What was I saying? We need to turn around and we need to do it now. It's always heartbreaking to get so close and not achieve your goal, but it seemed dangerous and looking back we couldn't see any

views through the sheets of rain. It seems the wind had come in earlier than expected, along with completely unpredicted rain.

Strapping our rain covers to our packs, we hightailed it down as safely as possible. It was freezing and a far cry from the heat of the day prior. It was also so windy at times that I had to stop and brace myself for fear of being blown off trail. The farther we descended the better things got and eventually we were able to stop and smile for a photo. Benefits of the weather? Rainbows and a way of blowing away all that smoke and haze! Once back at the car we were frozen to the bone, so we made our way into the small camp store on the shores of Two Medicine Lake and sipped on hot coffees admiring the view...from inside!

View of Two Medicine Lake from Paradise Point

Scenic Point(ish):

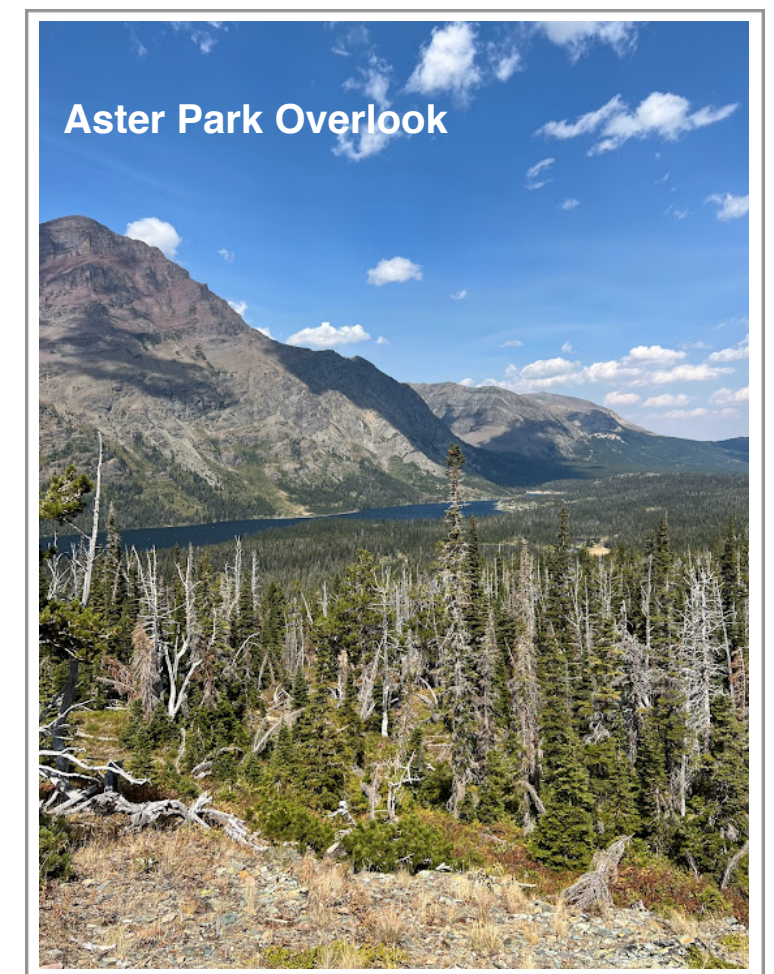
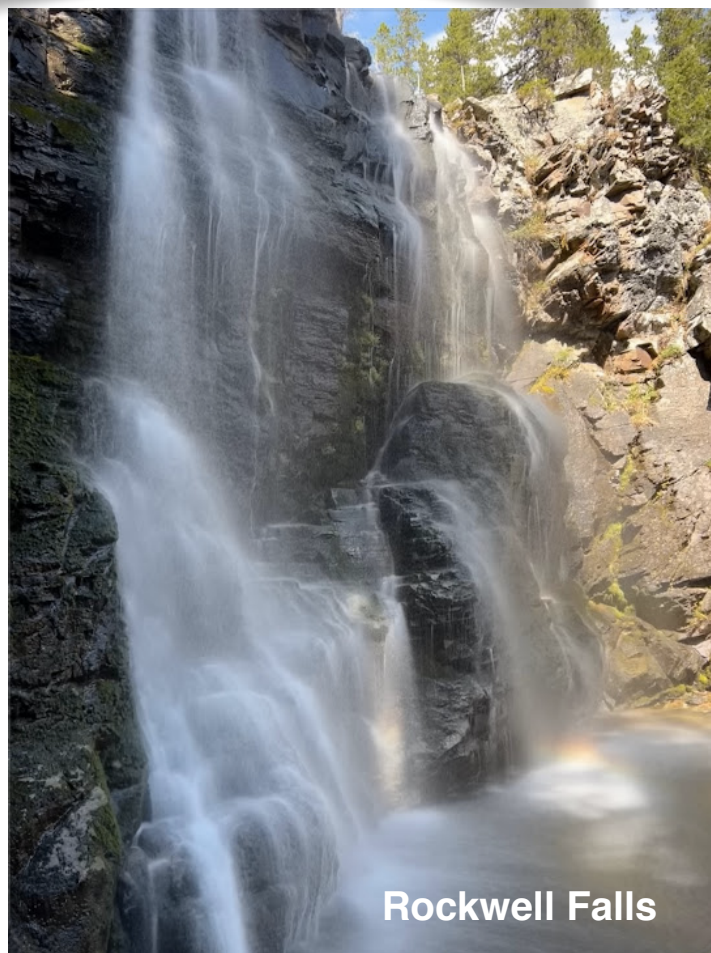
- 6.0 miles
- 1,982' elevation gain
- 2 hr 54 min





After a bit the rain did stop, so we set off on a hike in the lower elevations. No more peaks for us today in that wind! Starting at the South Shore Trailhead we made our way towards Rockwell Falls, first taking a short detour to Paradise Point which offered picturesque views of Two Medicine Lake and Rising Wolf Mountain. We then passed through a series of small beaver ponds which is supposed to be prime moose habitat. We looked and looked but no dice! Onwards the trail crossed Aster Creek and then Paradise Creek through the use of a suspension bridge. After one more trail section through the woods we arrived at the falls, a beautiful place to rest and eat lunch.

Heading back towards the trailhead we stopped at Aster Falls, a 20' waterfall cascading down a rock. We overheard other hikers saying that the nearby Aster Park Overlook was worth doing. This wasn't in our initial plan and although it was just 3/4 of a mile away, the climb was over 500'. But we did it anyway (carpe diem) and were so glad we did! We got a different perspective of the lake and surrounding mountains.





Along the way back we had the most amazing moose sightings, all within a 1/4 mile of each other!! First, we came upon a cow moose and her calf crossing a small pond. And just around the corner was another lone cow moose having a snack in a different pond. We kept our distance from these magnificent animals, but it was really neat to observe their behavior and have a close up encounter!

Rockwell Falls, Aster Falls & Aster Park Point:

- 9.59 miles
- 1,063' elevation gain
- 4 hr 43 min



On the way out of the park, I had quite a first in which I got pulled over by the National Park police! Ostensibly this was because my tags were expired! The officer was fairly nice and chatty and once he learned it was a rental, there was nothing to be done. I had never even thought to check the registration of a rental car before, but I sure will going forward! Side note: I politely complained to Avis when I returned the rental car and they said they would void the fee. They were true to their word and we were not charged at all for the rental, so all's well that ends well.



Just 15 minutes outside the Two Medicine park entrance, the historic Glacier Park Lodge built by the Great Northern Railway in 1913 would be our home for the final two nights of our trip. Our room had a shared balcony, so we sank into the chairs and sipped on cold beer overlooking the main lawn before heading down to dinner in the dining room.

DAY 8

On our last day in Glacier, we hiked a loop in the Two Medicine area up and over Dawson Pass and then over and down Pitamakan Pass. Along with the Highline Trail and Grinnell Glacier, this was a hike we were looking forward to the most. The weather looked promising with winds subsiding and no rain in the forecast. We parked and set off along the North Shore Trailhead of Two Medicine Lake. Early in the morning, especially in the woods, my eyes are constantly scanning for wildlife. This is both for safety (if we happen to see an animal up close) but excitement (if we can observe them from a distance). It was cold enough that we were bundled up in fleeces and gloves, tromping along as quickly as possible to stay warm. All of the sudden I looked to my right and saw a MASSIVE head where I was not expecting one. I literally jumped and stopped in place and said, "Mike, there is a huge bull moose right here". This moose was only about 20' from us, way closer than we should have been, but there was nothing to do now other than warn the hikers behind us and move past slowly. Watching the moose slowly turn his head and seeing the sprawling, furry antlers was simply amazing. Our pictures are terrible because we were trying to move on quickly, but you get the idea.





For the first five miles, the trail was undulating and along the lake and through the woods. We actually saw another cow moose and calf - maybe the same pair from yesterday? We gave them as wide a berth as possible and quickly moved down the trail, but they seemed completely unbothered by us. Just before the first climb began, we took a short detour to No Name Lake. From there it was a fairly steady ascent and as we looked across to the slopes of a nearby mountain, we saw a herd of over a dozen mountain goats! This was our best sighting yet for the animal that seems to be an icon of Glacier and is seemingly on every t-shirt and piece of art. We climbed above the treeline and could now see No Name Lake below and Two Medicine farther down the valley.

At the top of Dawson Pass it was WINDY! The pass is notorious for its bone-chilling wind even in the summer, so I am glad we made the decision to not do this hike yesterday. We would have been blown off the top! The pass sits along the Continental Divide at 7,598' feet. We were tired, so we sat down next to a huge rock cairn to help block the wind. We put on our winter jackets and gloves, snacking on some trail mix, watching the clouds swirl over the pass.



We were continuing on from here to Pitamakan Pass and although the trail was fairly flat, it was very exposed. We could now see into the valley on the other side of the u-shaped valley of Two Medicine. It was much more hazy with wildfire smoke on this side and very different, but this side of the trail was great fun!





Pitamakan Pass is along a knife-edge ridge and once at the top we could see views of both valleys on either side of the pass. We ate lunch here in solitude and could see other hikers making their way up to the pass. We headed down, looking at Oldman Lake below and the surrounding peaks. We had a lot of switchbacks to traverse but the trail descent was fairly gradual and the views were relentlessly beautiful. The hike down was uneventful and we made it through our last hike without any bear sightings. Phew!

Once back at the hotel we retired to the porch for beers and once again ate in the dining room, scarfing down burgers and fries before an early night to bed.

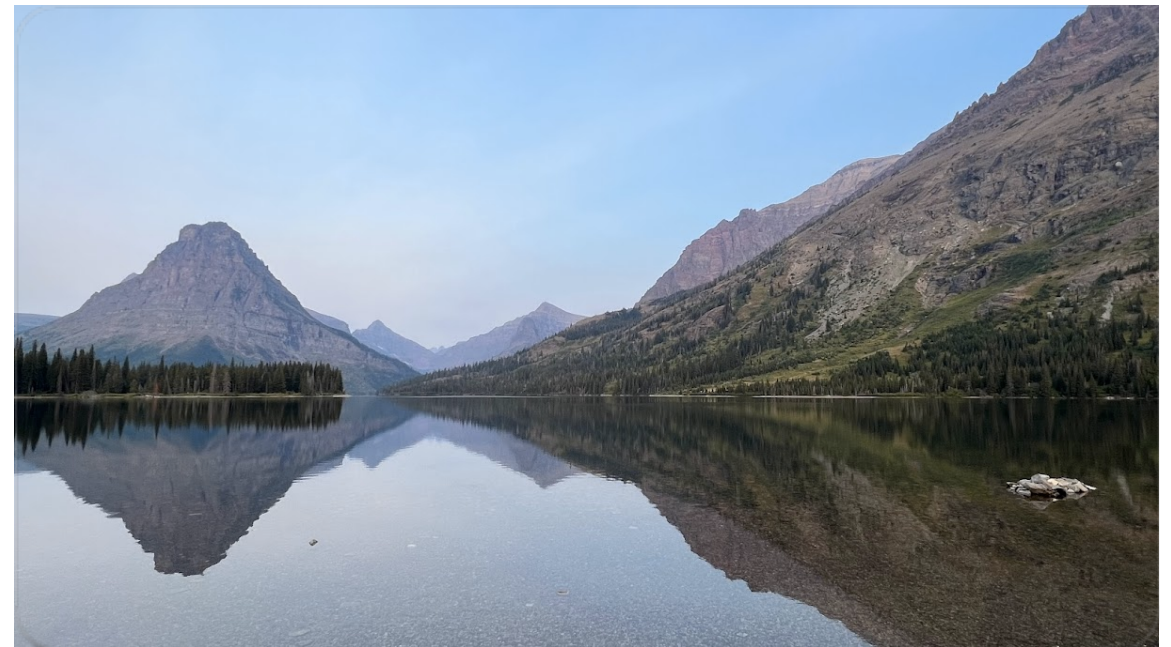


Dawson Pass and Pitamakan Pass:

- 18.36 miles
- 3,698' elevation gain
- 8 hr 47 min

DAY 9 & TRAVEL

Our flight out of Kalispell did not depart until mid-afternoon, so we made the most of our last day in Glacier by beginning the day with a boat ride across Two Medicine Lake at 8am. Before that, we enjoyed a more leisurely morning getting coffee from the hotel cafe and lingering by the lit fireplace for a few minutes. Once at Two Medicine, there was a small crowd for the early Sunday morning ride, with all passengers getting off at the dock on the far side the lake to hike, so we had a private ride back! Our captain was great and we learned more history and tales about the area and the park.



To get to the west side of Glacier we took a route alternate to GTSR, but the scenery was still beautiful. We made a quick pit stop in West Glacier to check out the shops and then ate an early lunch at a Panera Bread in Kalispell before heading to the airport. We dropped our bear spray rental back, then checked in to wait for our first flight. Once again, everything went smoothly and we had enough time during our layover in Chicago for a beer and dinner at our gate.

For a final bit of excitement on the trip, when we were about 10' off the runway in Philly the pilot aborted the landing and we shot straight up back into the sky. This had happened to us once before, in Buenos Aires, and it's quite jarring. This time we apparently got caught in another plane's jet thrust, causing instability. This made our already scheduled late landing at 12am even later, as we circled around the city and successfully landed the second time.



Our trip to Glacier was worth the wait!!!

