

9. Narrow Hills Provincial Park

Narrow Hills Provincial Park is about 68 km north of Smeaton along Hwy #106. Other access roads are from Candle Lake on Hwy #120 into the southern end of the park, or from Candle Lake on Hwy #913 into the northern end of the park.

The forested wilderness is one of the park's greatest attractions, along with fishing for 10 species of game fish in 25 lakes. The main campground is at Lower Fishing Lake in the core area of the park which also has a playground, beach, and picnic sites. Several basic campgrounds are located at lakes throughout the park.

A unique feature known as the Narrow Hills "esker" is actually a huge mound of dirt and stones, or moraine deposits, formed into a ridge during the age of the glaciers. You can drive or hike along the winding Narrow Hills road to the Grace Lakes where there are beautiful views across the forest-covered hills to the south. Along the way visit the fire tower, and small museum in the old cabin which was occupied by the park warden in the 1930s.

The park has a network of over 100 km of snowmobile trails in addition to cross-country ski trails. There are many hiking opportunities along the ski trails, although these are not maintained in the summer. Contact the park for details and suggested routes.

On the west end of the park, a hiking trail leads around the Gem Lakes. To get there from the core area of the park, head north on Hwy #106 then turn west on Hwy #913. If you are coming from Candle Lake, travel north on Hwy #120 then take Hwy #913. Turn off Hwy #913 at the sign to the Gem Lakes and follow the gravel road for about 4 km to the start of the trail.

For more information contact Narrow Hills Provincial Park, Box 130, Smeaton, SK S0J 2J0. Phone: 306-426-2622, fax: 306-426-2066.

Gem Lakes Trails

Distance: Varies as to route chosen.

Time: 2.5 - 3 hr to follow a circuit to all five lakes.

Access: 4 km north of Hwy #913, east of the junction of Hwys #913 and #912.

Facilities: Parking area, toilets, picnic table, barbecue (no wood), map of lakes and trails on post near picnic table at Jade Lake. Barbecues, tables, or benches at lakes as indicated below.

Cautions: Trail is indistinct in some places.

Jade. Opal. Diamond. Sapphire. Pearl. The Gem Lakes are a part of a rare geological formation called tunnel valleys, formed by glacial erosion where a series of steep, sandy bottom lakes were formed, separated by hummocky hills. Surrounded by forest, each lake reflects the color of the vegetation on the steep wooded slopes, hence their being named after gemstones.

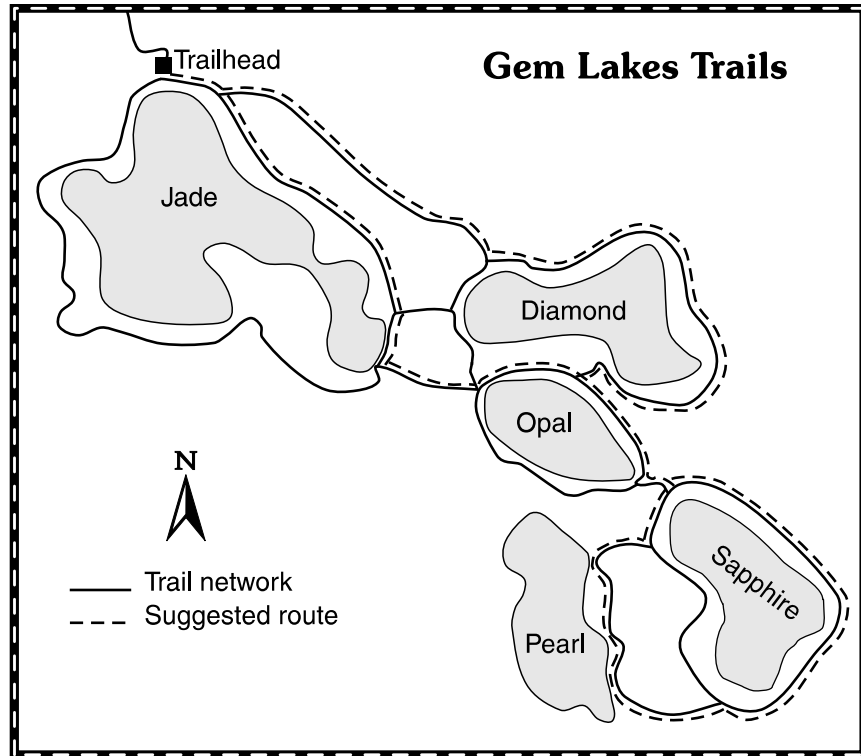
A network of walking trails leads to all the lakes and around most of them. Consult the map at the trailhead by the picnic table at Jade Lake to plan your route. You can walk as far as you want, exploring any or all of the lakes along the trail network. The terrain is mostly hilly; the steepest hill is between Pearl and Sapphire Lakes.

The road to the Gem Lakes ends at a parking area. To get to the trailhead and map, follow the path a couple hundred metres or so to Jade Lake.

The trails near Jade and Opal Lakes appear to be well used, but as you get farther away the trails vary as to condition and how distinct they are. Markers along trails to farther lakes such as Pearl and Sapphire consist of wooden stakes with flagging ribbon. When we walked through this area we lost the trail in a few places but were always able to pick it up again. The park has plans to improve signage.

Scenic views are everywhere along the trails, overlooking tiny lakes reflecting a variety of colors. Our favorite was a hillside above Pearl Lake, its water reflecting an intense green that looked almost unreal. Another excellent view is from the top of a high hill between Jade and Diamond Lakes. In the fall, the colors can be spectacular.

It takes between two and three hours to leisurely walk a route that takes



you to the five lakes. If your time is limited, a good option is to walk around the eastern edge of Jade Lake then head to Opal Lake and back, or walk around the western edge of Jade Lake on the way back.

Jade Lake to Opal Lake

The main trail heads along the east side of Jade Lake past tall jack pine and white spruce lining the hills next to the lakeshore. Farther back you can see where trees have been logged. When the water level is low the lake is divided in two with a smaller pond at the far end. Follow the trail to the end of the pond where a secondary trail leads up a little ridge. Climb this trail through fallen pines that were cut to make the path, and keep walking until you come to Opal Lake which is marked by a sign. A picnic table and barbecue are at the northern end of the lake. Depending on the light, you may see a brilliant green reflection in Opal Lake.

You can follow the path to the right to circle Opal Lake, or turn to the left to walk along Opal Lake on your way to Sapphire Lake.



Jade Lake.

Opal Lake to Sapphire Lake

It's a pleasant level walk along the east shore of Opal Lake to Sapphire Lake, marked by a sign on a brown post at the north end of the lake.

Sapphire Lake to Pearl Lake to Sapphire Lake

Turn right at the post at the north end of Sapphire Lake and follow the path a short distance until you see a trail branching to the right, leading up a hill then down again to Pearl Lake which is marked by a large sign. Pearl Lake is actually two tiny ponds divided by a grassy meadow. Near the sign watch for a trail that goes up a large hill, and follow the indistinct narrow path which is marked with colored flagging ribbon in a few places. From the side of the hill you get a beautiful view of the lake with its deep green color. The trail continues through thick forest then turns left and leads down a steep hill which may be slick if it's muddy or covered with leaves. Red paint on the trees marks the route. You emerge on the south end of Sapphire Lake.

Sapphire Lake to Diamond Lake

Keep to your right and follow the trail around Sapphire Lake as it heads north, then retrace your route to Opal Lake. About half way along Opal Lake watch for a branch of the trail on your right that leads to Diamond Lake. You go up a gentle incline which leads to the edge of the lake. When

you reach the lake turn right and head along the grassy path to a bench on the east side. When you leave the bench watch for flagging ribbon that marks the trail as it heads north through the forest. If you should happen to lose the trail, which is quite indistinct in this section, stay high above the lake rather than along the lakeshore. You eventually reach another bench and barbecue overlooking the lake.

Diamond Lake to Jade Lake

Continue walking along the north side of Diamond Lake until you come to a trail leading to the right which will take you to Jade Lake. The trail becomes wider, leading to the top of a hill offering excellent views over Jade Lake and the surrounding hills. From here the path descends the hill and ends at the trailhead on Jade Lake.



Hiking in the hills at the Gem Lakes.