

Morning Magic Sunrise over the Conglomerate Cliffs



The first rays of the rising sun strike the conglomerate cliffs.

We would be hard pressed to find a part of Saskatchewan with as many fabulous scenic viewpoints as in the Cypress Hills. This spot ranks among the best, not only in the Cypress Hills, but anywhere in Saskatchewan.

The conglomerate cliffs consist of smooth, water-worn stones naturally cemented together. Exposed edges have been eroded, leaving steep banks with millions of pebbles looking like they're encased in concrete. Standing on the flat plateau above the cliffs, you have a sweeping view over Adams Lake far below, hilly slopes covered in spruce, pine, and aspen, and rolling grasslands stretching to the horizon. To the east, on the other side of the Gap, the highlands of Cypress Hills' Centre Block rise above the plains.

To appreciate the view at its absolute best, come for sunrise—you'll have to be here well before 5 am in summer. The prime time is early summer when the sun rises



Standing on the rim of the conglomerate cliffs, you watch the sunrise over Adams Lake.



View over Adams Lake just before sunset.

slightly to the northeast, clearing the horizon over the lowest part of the terrain. When the first light shines up and floods the east-facing cliffs, the reddish rocks suddenly become saturated with a lustrous crimson glow. The magical transformation continues for the next few minutes as nuances of colour change with the rising sun.

While sunrise is best, sunset isn't too shabby either. Most of the cliffs fall into shadow, but the evening light illuminates the tops of the trees, with the grassy hills and valleys to the east often turning an intense, almost unreal green.

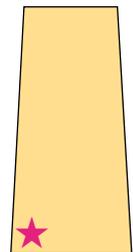
Location: West Block of Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park.
N 49.64546, W 109.84715

Difficulty Rating: ① Easy

Getting There: From Maple Creek, take Hwy #271 southwest to the park's West Block. If you're coming from the Centre Block and the weather is dry, you can head across the scenic Gap Road that connects the two sections. Since this road across pastureland can be very rough, and even impassable after a rain, it's a good idea to inquire about conditions beforehand at the park's information office. Once you're at the park boundary, winding Six Mile Coulee Road takes you up a series of switchbacks to the plateau.

Partway into the West Block, the paved road turns south toward Fort Walsh, so you have to continue west on the gravel road. Watch for signs directing you north then east to the conglomerate cliffs. These minor roads are level and generally in reasonably good shape, except in very wet conditions. The road ends at a parking area overlooking the cliffs.

To be here for sunrise, it's best to camp in the West Block (there is no other accommodation in this part of the park). Almost immediately after you descend into the valley along the main road, you can choose between two campgrounds that are close to each other along Battle Creek. Although it isn't far from the campgrounds to the cliff-top viewpoint, allow at least 20 minutes for the drive. Take it slow because wildlife, as well as grazing cattle, might be on or close to the roads in early morning.





Left: Wildflowers such as low larkspur and golden bean add a splash of colour at the base of the conglomerate cliffs. Opposite: Hidden conglomerate cliffs.

Hidden conglomerate cliffs

N 49.64100, W 109.96757

The West Block has another set of conglomerate cliffs; these overlook Battle Creek Valley. They are called hidden because you can't see them from Battle Creek Road that runs through the valley. Trees block the view from below, so the only way to see them is from the valley rim. The best way to reach the cliffs is to walk along the scenic Trans Canada Trail (also known as The Great Trail) that crosses the West Block. One access point is just off Battle Creek Road, not far from the Saskatchewan–Alberta border, and almost directly across from an old log house (the access point is signed). It's a bit of a climb up the hillside to the plateau, but once you're on top, there's one million-dollar view after another across the forested valley, the highlight being from the conglomerate cliffs jutting out from the edge.

Another way to access the cliffs is to drive along a minor dirt road that should only be attempted in dry weather, and not in vehicles with low clearance. As you drive to the main conglomerate cliffs with the sunrise view, watch for North Plateau Road branching to the west. Follow North Plateau Road west until you come to a fence line. You will see the main trail heading to the north, and a minor trail leading south into the forest. It's the south trail that you want, provided that you have dry weather conditions—you don't want to get stuck in this isolated pocket of the park. After going south for a very short distance, the trail turns west and you soon come to a large sign at a pull-off indicating the hidden conglomerate cliffs. From here it's an easy, level 1-km walk across open grassland to the valley rim and the hidden conglomerates.

Resources: Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park: www.saskparks.com 306-662-5411

