

Continental Divide National Scenic Trail Wise River Ranger District, Anaconda-Pintler Wilderness

Managed Use(s): Hike, horse (bicycles are not allowed in designated wilderness)

Difficulty: Trail climbs several passes with steep sections. Portions of the trail provide easy hiking across meadows and tundra.

Trail Length: 52 miles

Attractions and Considerations

The CDNST travels through the Anaconda-Pintler Wilderness for its entirety on the Wise River Ranger District. Traveling north through the wilderness lodgepole pine and fir forests, beargrass, and wet meadows typify the landscape along the Continental Divide until the traveler gradually climbs to reach the 8800 foot traverse above Elk Park, a high open meadow complex with wide expansive views south and east to distant mountain ranges. To Elk Park a couple lakes, small streams and springs provide ample water. At Elk Park, rugged peaks majestically begin to punctuate the skyline through the remainder of the Anaconda-Pintler Wilderness. The trail passes by numerous lakes and larger streams. Multiple high passes provide rewarding and magnificent glimpses to these surrounding mountains, culminating in a wind-swept crossing of Goat Flat. Goat Flat is the highest point within the wilderness, reaching over 10,000 feet and providing travelers the opportunity to cross the tundra. A scenic drop to Upper Seymour Lake and a gentle descent down Seymour Creek leads travelers out of the Anaconda-Pintler Wilderness.

Note: Campfires and camping with stock are prohibited within 1/4 mile of both Sawed Cabin and the Oreamnos Lakes. Maximum group size for traveling and camping together is 12 people and 12 head of stock.

Starting at Burnt Mountain, where the trail first enters the Wise River District, the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail heads almost due west along the Divide Creek Trail #125 through mature lodgepole pine approximately three miles to Trail #142 at the head of Jerry Creek. This is a jeep trail which basically follows the Divide from near the head of Jerry Creek to Hungry Hill Mine. This section of trail is used by motorized vehicles, motorcycles, ATVs and jeeps, etc. and there can be a fair amount of traffic during holiday weekends in the summer. At Hungry Hill, there are two choices of routes to follow. Both routes are described below.

From Hungry Hill, the Continental Divide heads north and west towards Grassy Mountain. There is no trail along this section of the Divide and it passes through stands of lodgepole and whitebark pine interspersed with open, grassy parks and some rocky sections. The route crosses Highway 274 just west of Sugarloaf Mountain and enters onto private land for the next mile then get back on state land.

From Grassy Mountain, a jeep trail heads northwest two miles along the Divide through an open, grassy meadow. In section 1, T3N, R12W, an old jeep trail goes north, dropping into Mill Creek. This trail soon turns into a foot trail near the bottom of Mill Creek, then crosses Mill Creek towards Miller Lake. Where the foot trail starts it enters private land again and there are private property signs here. This trail is not maintained since it passes through private land and there is no right-of-way.

From Miller Lake, there is no trail but the route heads west over a pass through talus slopes and drops steeply into the East Fork of Twin Lakes Creek where it again enters National Forest lands. The terrain is rough and you must bushwhack to Lake of the Isle

where there is an unmarked trail going to Twin Lakes. From Twin Lakes, follow Trail #44 to Storm Lake. From Storm Lake, take Trail #41 to Storm Lake Pass where the route enters the Anaconda-Pintler Wilderness.

The Alternate Route

From Hungry Hill, the marked route of the continental Divide Trail heads south approximately 1/2-mile down the ridge to the head of American Creek. From this saddle, the trail drops down American Creek following a logging road to Highway #274. Cross Highway #274 on the Mule Ranch access road, then follow an old obscure road to the northeast and north 1/2 mile where the route meets the Lower Dry Creek Road #2483. Go west on this road 1 1/2 miles to an old wagon road heading southwest on the ridge east of Sevenmile Creek. Follow this road four miles to the old Home Ranch headquarters. The only thing remaining of the once working ranch are some buildings. This area is now owned by the State of Montana and is part of the Mt. Haggin Game Range. One-half mile south of the Home Ranch, turn west and cross Deep Creek, then go south on a ranch access road to the Seymour Creek Road #934. Follow the Seymour Road west and north to its end at the Seymour Creek trailhead for Trail #132. On weekends, the Seymour Creek Road can have a lot of heavy traffic from recreationists and wood cutters, so watch for vehicles. Follow Trail #132 north up the Seymour Creek drainage. One and a half miles up Trail #131 you will enter the Anaconda-Pintler Wilderness. The trail follows Seymour Creek up the valley and is an easy walk, going through lush lodgepole pine forest all the way to Upper Seymour Lake. In June and July, small meadows full of wildflowers punctuate the trail along the lower valley. The trail is well maintained along the entire route. The last mile of trail below the lake becomes fairly steep. There are several good stock camping areas about 1/2-mile below the lake and another camp in the basin south west of the Lake. There is a marked trail starting at the outlet of Upper Seymour Lake, going to this stock use area. We ask that visitors with stock use these camping areas as the sites near the lake have no good sources of forage and there is a stock tethering and grazing restriction at the lake of 200 feet. The restriction was placed in effect to help protect the lake shore and small meadow at the lake from further damage by stock. Upper Seymour Lake has a good population of rainbow, cutthroat, and rainbow/cutthroat hybrid trout.

Above Upper Seymour Lake, the trail climbs a ridge to Goat Flats. This section of trail is narrow with numerous switchbacks, and traverses a steep side slope. Stock is not recommended on this section of trail as more than one horse has slipped over the edge of the trail to its death. Once topping out at Goat Flat, the trail levels out. There is little tread here so follow the rock cairns to Trail #41. This is high alpine tundra country and there are opportunities to see mountain goats on the flat or adjacent mountains. From Goat Flat, the Continental Divide Trail heads west along the north side of the Divide, dropping into the head of Page Creek, passing Page and Flower Lakes, then climbing a ridge just south of Rainbow Mountain. From the ridge, the trail drops into the head of the East Fork of Rock Creek and skirts around Queener Basin. Past Queener Basin, the trail meets Trail #38 which goes down the East Fork to the East Fork Reservoir, a man-made lake on Rock Creek. The Continental Divide Trail stays fairly high through the head of the Rock Creek drainage and finally climbs out of the drainage at Cutaway Pass. Even though the trail stays high, there usually is ample water along this section of the trail. The trail west of Cutaway Pass can best be described as follows in five separate sections.

1. Beginning at a high elevation (9300 feet) at Cutaway Pass, the trail heads down the mountainside toward the West Fork LaMarche Creek in the valley

below. It is moderately steep on these four miles of the trail, with several long switchbacks to ease the way down the mountain. The views are panoramic from this section of the trail, especially higher up near Cutaway Pass. From here, one is able to see the scenic high ridgeline of the Continental Divide. The trail passes through whitebark pine/subalpine fir forest all the way from the top of the pass down to the West Fork LaMarche Creek below. There are two small creek crossings on this section, neither of which is difficult.

2. The next two-mile section continues from the junction of Trail #9 with the West Fork LaMarche Trail #126 to Warren Lake. This section is lush in the lower part as it follows the West Fork LaMarche and there are lots of wildflowers such as lupine and Indian paintbrush, and dense forest stands of white pine and fir trees. Moose frequent this area as do goshawks and other birds. The trail rises gently at first, then begins into a steep section of thirteen switchbacks that lead to the Warren Lake Basin. From the hillside one can once again see a panoramic view back toward Cutaway Pass. There are good campsites at Warren lake especially on the north side of the lake. Warren Lake sits in a basin below the east buttress of Warren Peak in a beautiful setting. West Goat Peak, the highest point in the A-P Wilderness at 10973 feet.

3. From Warren Lake, the trail climbs to a low pass an 1/8 mile south of Warren Lake, then drops down sharply in a set of short switchbacks into a side valley of Fishtrap Creek. The trail follows the creek bottom for 1/2 mile then leaves the creek staying higher on the hillside but dropping at a steady rate. To the east sits Saddle Mountain where you can often see mountain goats grazing on the patches of green high on the mountain. As the trail nears the West Fork of Fishtrap Creek it drops steeply through an open stand of lodgepole pine and an old burn just above the junction with Trail #130.

4. The next section begins at the junction of Trail #9, with the end of West Fork Fishtrap Trail #130. This 3-1/2 mile section steadily climbs up Fishtrap Creek towards Rainbow Lake. The trail passes through a lush, forested area being down low in the valley and climbs to a bench, switchbacking onto the bench, below McGlaughlin Peak. There is a short spur trail off of this switchback that leads to a meadow below McGlaughlin Peak where there is forage and water for pack stock. From the switchback the trail heads south along the bench, passing a small pond before reaching Rainbow Lake. There are no stock camping areas at the lake. The best campsites are at the outlet of the lake on the east end. Campsites are limited around the rest of the lake and they are small. Rainbow Lake sits in a scenic cirque basin.

5. The last section is a steep hike out of Rainbow Lake, up to the Continental Divide. It is scenic hike as one climbs up toward the ridge across the head of the cirque basin. It is an open, steep sidehill with many wildflowers including lupine, yarrow, Indian paintbrush, water hemlock, and beargrass. One can see stunning views of Rainbow Lake below and high craggy peaks above. It is a short, steep set of switchbacks, but well worth the hike.

At the pass west of Rainbow Lake, the trail drops down a side drainage of the Falls Fork of Rock Creek to Johnson Lake. Grades are moderate and there are a few switchbacks. Most of the trail passes through whitebark pine and lodgepole pine forest. Johnson Lake is a heavily used area and no camping is permitted on or near the lake shore. The trail from Johnson Lake over Pintler Pass is somewhat steep the whole way, but is no problem for the seasoned hiker. As the trail gets higher, it opens up in spots providing scenic views of the valley below. Pintler Pass is especially stunning as one looks out over the Pintler Valley to the

southwest and Johnson lake to the north. It then descends steadily into a lush forest made up mostly of lodgepole pine, to a junction with Pintler Creek Trail #37. There is a side trail going to Oreamnos lake one-half mile west of the pass. The lake is approximately one mile to the west, in a small basin at the head of the mainstream of Pintler Creek. Oreamnos Lake sits near the timberline. Most of the lake is surrounded by slide rock, with some timber at the outlet. Heavy use has impacted the camping areas near the lake outlet and any camping should be planned away from the lake. There are good meadows 1/4 to 1/2-mile east of the lake, along the access trail.

From the junction with Trail #37, the Continental Divide Trail heads west, climbing steeply out of Pintler Creek. This section of trail is rough and rocky, with some muddy sections near the lower end. Once the trail reaches the ridgetop, it levels out but continues to climb to the head of Beaver Creek. Forest is mostly whitebark pine with open meadows at the head of Beaver Creek. An attraction here are the meadows below the trail where elk summer and Sawed Cabin to the north above Sawed Cabin Lake in Pintler Creek. The meadows are good for stock grazing, and there is an old outfitter campsite adjacent to the meadows. There is usually water in the meadow except in a very dry year. The cabin was constructed by Martin Johnson from large logs hewed from whitebark pine trees. He was also known as "Seven Dog" Johnson and is remembered for his great strength and endurance. Martin Lake and Johnson Lake are named for him. Those who remember him say this fabled woodsman trapped mountain goats and packed them out of this high country to sell to zoos.

For more information, contact the Wise River Ranger District.