

Hike of the Week – American Lakes and Thunder Pass by Dave Cooper

A pleasant Fall hike to remote lakes in a stunning setting

The area in the vicinity of Cameron Pass evokes memories of the Scottish Highlands, especially on a Fall day when the tundra has turned to gold and reddish-brown. The rounded summits are more characteristic of that far-off place, rather than of the sheer granite walls and dramatic summits of nearby Rocky Mountain National Park.

Getting to the Trailhead: From Fort Collins, take Highway 287 north (for 8.2 miles from the city limit) to the junction with CO14. Head west on CO14 for 58.4 miles to Cameron Pass. Continue to the west side of the Pass for 2.5 miles to a junction with a dirt road. Turn south on this road and drive for 0.6 miles to a junction, stopping at the self pay station and obtaining a Daily State Parks Pass for \$5. At the junction, go straight on the road signed to the American Lakes and reach the parking area after a further 0.8 miles.

Hike Statistics:

Trailhead to lower Lake: 1500 feet total elevation in 7.0 miles round trip (easy)
Trailhead to Thunder Pass and Snow Lake: 2300 feet total elevation gain in 9.4 miles round trip (moderate).

USGS Quad: Clark Peak, CO, Chambers Lake, CO (marginally), Fall River Pass, CO, Mount Richthofen, CO



Figure 1 The rounded summits of the Never Summer Range, seen from the American Lakes

The name of this range, The Never Summer Mountains, does nothing to dispel this impression.

Incongruous then in this area are the rugged peaks surrounding Snow Lake – The Nokhu Crags, Static Peak and Mount Richthofen.

The lakes were formerly known as the Michigan Lakes and still display that name on most maps, but have been re-named the American Lakes.

This hike explores the multiple lakes comprising this group, and also takes a side trip to Thunder Pass on the northern boundary of Rocky Mountain National Park. The Pass affords an unusual view of the Park, looking down its spine towards the looming mass of Longs Peak.

Hike Description

From the trailhead, pass the gate and follow the trail as it heads southeast along an old jeep road. After 1.2 miles cross a dirt road (waypoint “CROSS ROAD”). A sign for the American Lakes Trail points the way.

As you approach the lakes the trail breaks out of the trees onto tundra, affording views of the peaks encircling Snow Lake, as well as a panorama of the gentler peaks to the east and north.

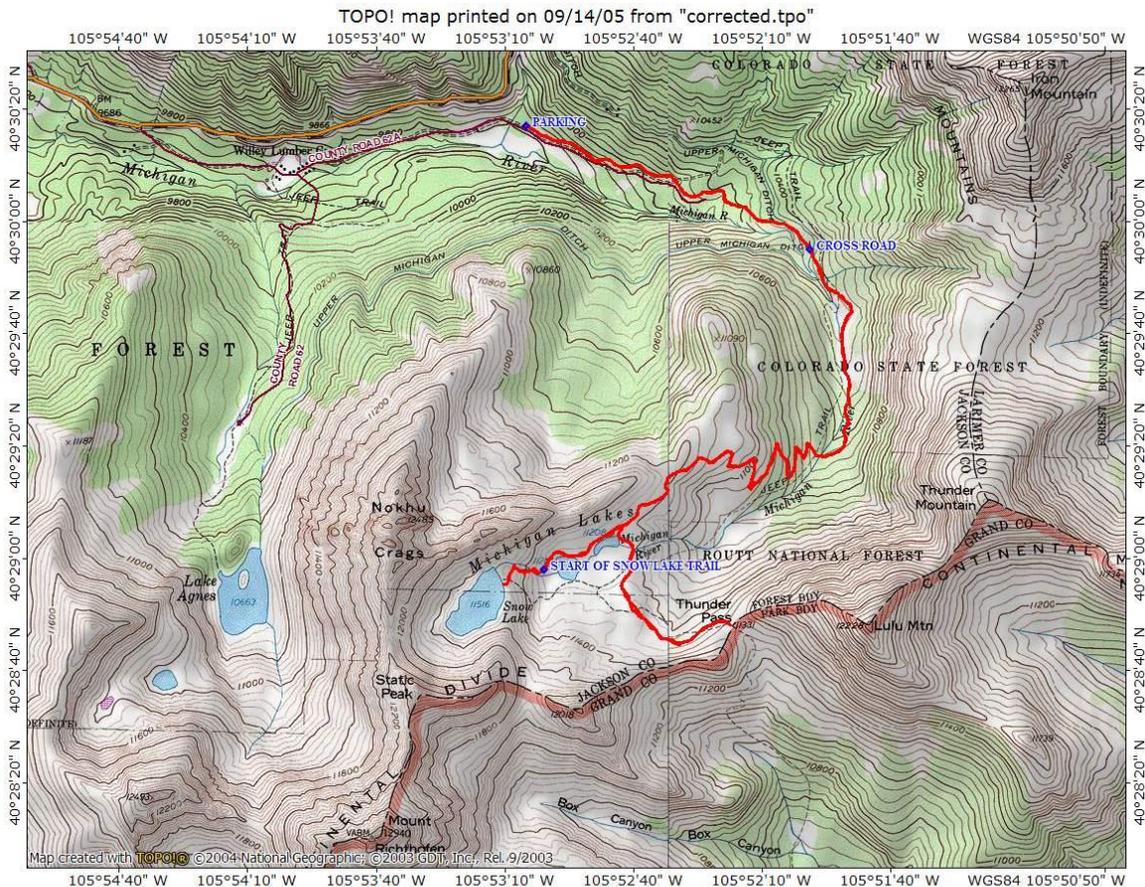


Stay on the trail as it passes the lower lakes on their north side. At waypoint “START OF SNOW LAKE TRAIL”, head steeply uphill on a rapidly deteriorating trail and scramble up to Snow Lake.

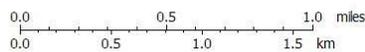
Snow Lake and the Nokhu Crags from the vicinity of Thunder Pass

Descend back to the trail junction just before the lowest lake and take the trail south towards Thunder Pass. Enjoy views of the Park before heading back down the trail.

View of the American Lakes from the vicinity of Thunder Pass



NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC



TN MN
10 1/2°
09/14/05

