

Black Lake

by Dave Cooper



Black Lake2, framed by Longs Peak and the Keyboard of the Winds-small.JPG

In late autumn and winter, Black Lake takes on a dramatic appearance, framed as always by the high peaks of Rocky Mountain National Park, but which are now coated with snow and ice. Ice flows cascade down from McHenry's Peak and from the slopes below the Spearhead, and wind often creates snow plumes on the surrounding ridges.

The ice that forms here attracts ice climbers willing to carry their heavy loads of climbing gear all the way in, but the spectacular setting is also enjoyed by hikers throughout the winter.

On a recent hike we found the trail to be largely snow-free but a little icy in places. As we move into winter expect to find snowy trails which

Getting to the Trailhead: From the major intersection of Highways 34 and 36 in the town of Estes Park, head west through town on Highway 36. Turn south in 0.4 miles and continue on Highway 36 as it turns west to Rocky Mountain National Park. Turn left (south) on Bear Lake Road after 4.4 miles and drive to the Glacier Gorge Parking area and Trailhead at 12.7 miles.

Hike Statistics: From the Glacier Gorge Trailhead to Black Lake: 1500 feet of total elevation gain in 8.6 miles round trip.

Difficulty: A moderately strenuous trail hike with some sections of rock slabs to be negotiated. Later in the year this trail provides a good snowshoe outing. The trail can be icy at times and requires care.

USGS Quad: Mc Henry's Peak, CO.

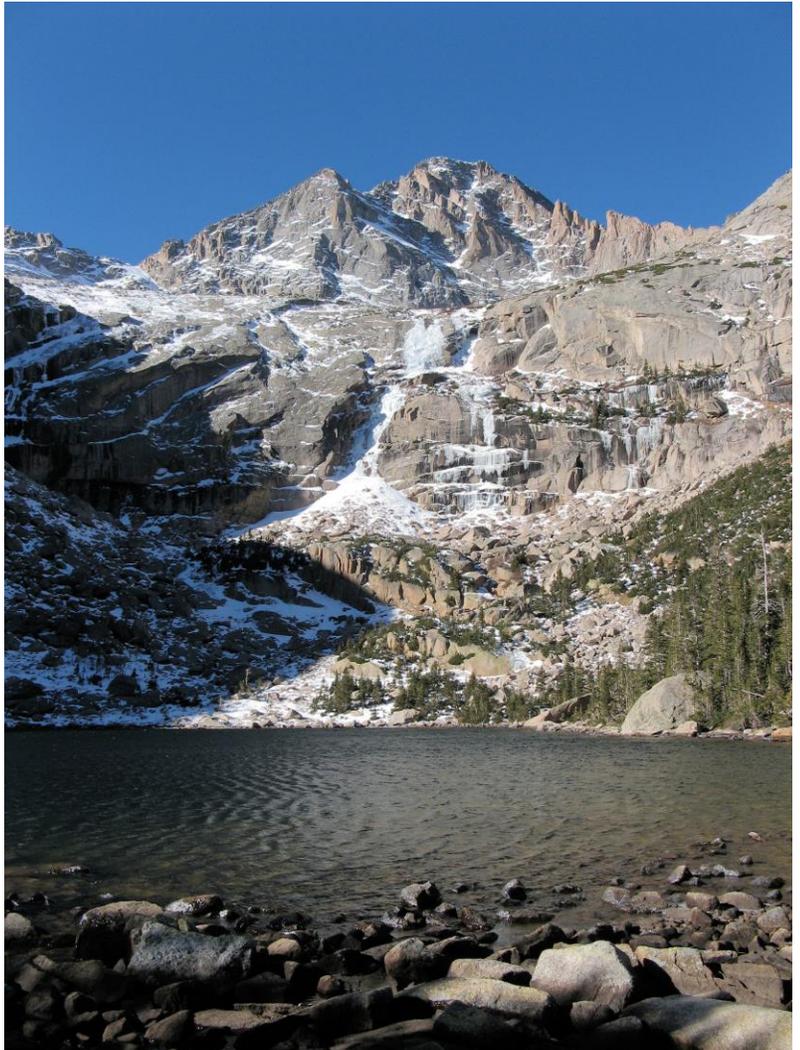
might require snowshoes, though the popularity of the area often means that the snow on the trail will be packed down.

Hike Description

From the parking area follow the signs to Loch Vale and Mills Lake. Pass two trail junctions in the first half mile, cross a series of footbridges and continue on to Alberta Falls. Pass the North Longs Peak trail junction and after 1.9 miles reach the trail junction where the trails for Loch Vale and Glacier Gorge diverge. Take the left fork at this junction, following signs to Mills and Black Lakes. Soon cross a log bridge over the creek.

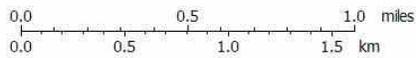
Mills Lake at 2.3 miles offers a good spot to take a break, and provides photo opportunities with Longs Peak visible beyond the lake. The trail undulates along the east side of the lake, sometimes on constructed trail and sometimes on rock slabs. Continue on the trail, reaching the outlet from Black Lake after 4.3 miles. The trail climbs more steeply immediately before the lake as it switchbacks along the east side of Ribbon Falls. Look for one of several good viewing spots around the lakeshore and enjoy the scenery in this special place.

Black Lake2, with McHenry's Peak and some of the ice to be climbed here-small.JPG



TOPO! map printed on 11/11/07 from "Untitled4.tpo"

105°39'30" W 105°39'00" W 105°38'30" W 105°38'00" W 105°37'30" W 105°37'00" W WGS84 105°36'10" W



GPS Latitude / Longitude NAD83 (Deg., Min., Sec.)
 TRAILHEAD PARKING: 40.18,39N / 105.38,24W, 9181 feet
 TRAIL JUNCTION: 40.17,50N / 105.38,45W, 9784 feet

