

Chicago Lakes by Dave Cooper



Getting to the Trailhead: Drive on I-70 to Exit 240 in Idaho Springs. Drive south on Highway 103 for 12.9 miles to Echo Lake. Park at the northwest end of Echo Lake, by the picnic area (the access road into the picnic area is closed in winter).

Hike Statistics: The trail gains 1300 feet and loses 330 feet (to be regained on the way back) in 4.0 miles one way.

Difficulty: A moderate trail hike, needing snow shoes as we move into winter. Unless tracked previously, the trail may be difficult to follow when under snow, and could require good map and compass skills.

USGS Quad: Idaho Springs, CO; Mt Evans, CO.

In a recent "Trail Mix" column I recounted the details of a recent hike on a perfect late-November day (Grape Creek). Less than a week later we found ourselves in the midst of a major winter storm. So goes the weather in Colorado.

Where to hike on a day when the snowfall amounts are being measured in feet rather than inches and wind gusts are reportedly in the 80 mph range?

A brief respite from the storm allows a view of the Reservoir-small.JPG

A group of us decided that a hike below treeline was called for. A good candidate appeared to be the hike from Echo Lake to the Chicago Lakes, though standing at the edge of Echo Lake, hunched over to avoid the brutal wind gusts, we wondered about the choice. Persevering for a few minutes though, we had reached the shelter of the trees and the relative calm to be found under that canopy.

The hike up to Lower Chicago Lake turned out to be a delightful outing in a scenic location, only enhanced by the dramatic lighting and glimpses of impressive rock faces occasionally visible through the storm.

Bundled up to escape the ferocious wind gusts sweeping across Echo Lake-small.JPG

With no base to the snow, snowshoes weren't necessary on this day, but as the snow builds up (hopefully), that will change.



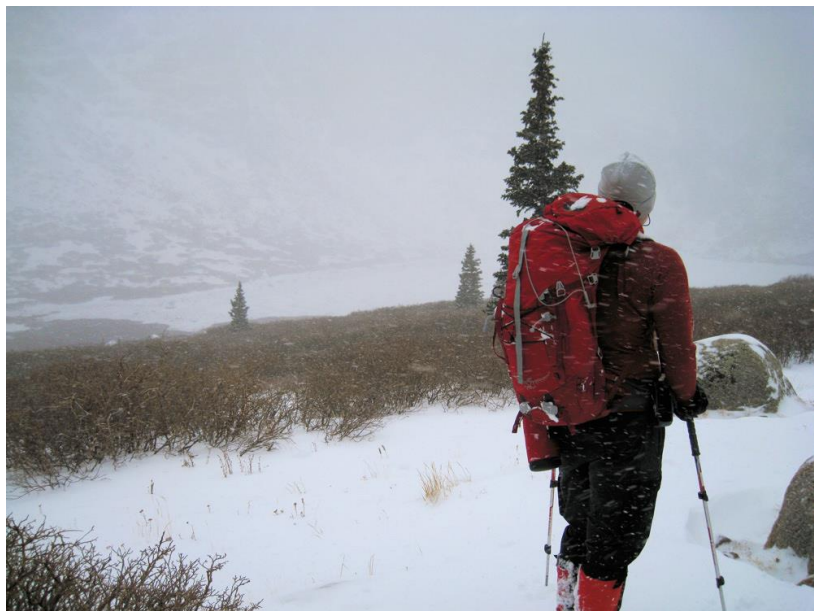
Hike Description

From the parking area at the northwest end of Echo Lake, follow the trail south along the west edge of the lake for one quarter mile. Turn right at the sign for Chicago Lakes and follow old blazes as the trail veers right at a second, unmarked junction before crossing a small ridge and turning south, beginning a gradual descent on the west side of this ridge. At mile 0.8 the trail starts to descend more steeply via switchbacks, reaching the small log bridge over Chicago Creek at mile 1.3. Almost immediately after crossing the creek, the trail joins a road. Turn left and continue past a sign indicating that the trail will follow the road for the next mile.

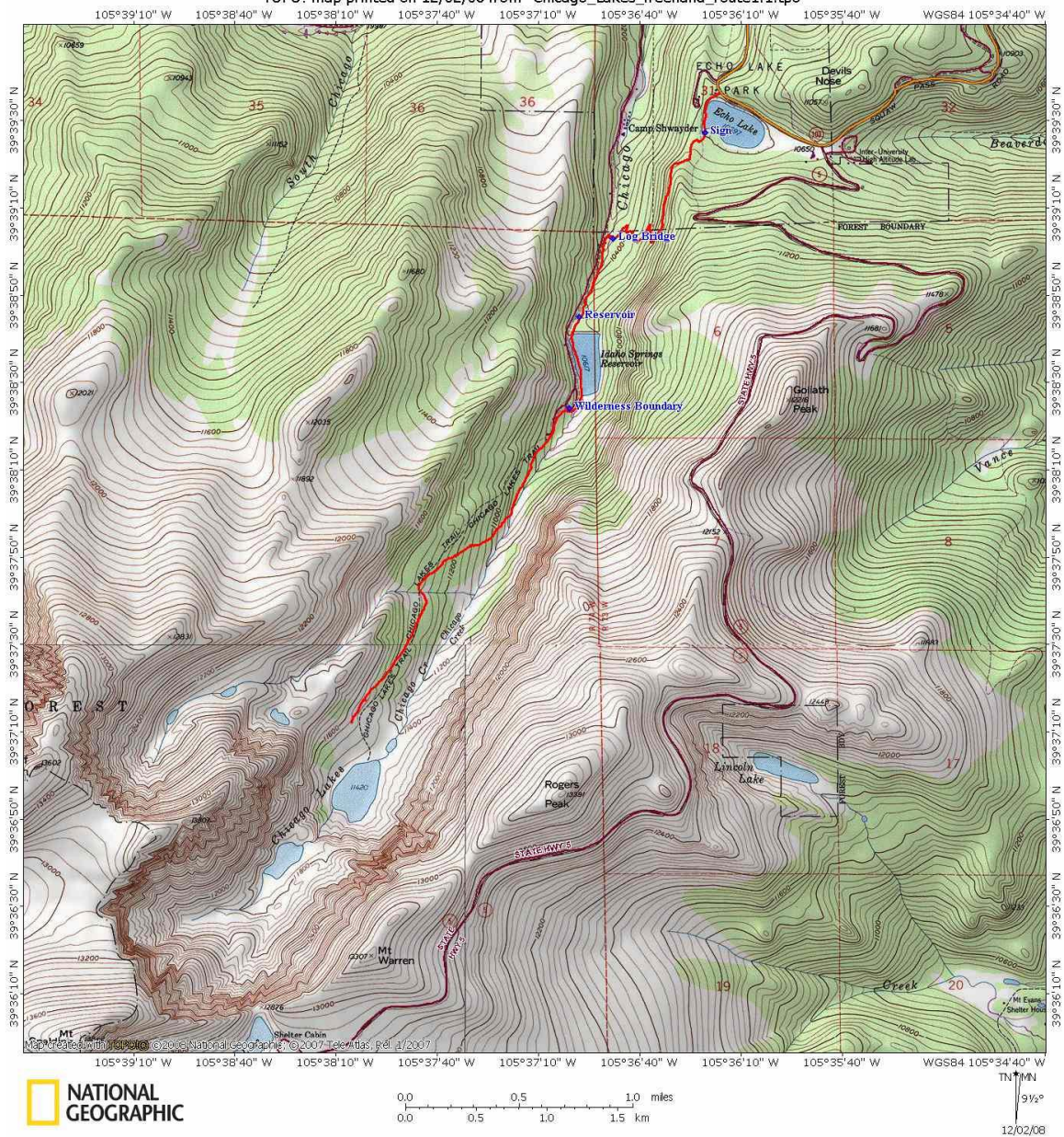
At mile 1.7 you will reach the start of the Idaho Springs reservoir. Continue along the road to the end of the reservoir at mile 2.1. where you will pass two log cabins. Here, the trail takes off to the right and immediately enters the Mount Evans Wilderness. Apparently the self-registration box is only stocked with permits during the summer months.

Follow the trail as it climbs west, gaining approximately 50 feet of elevation before leveling out and contouring above the creek. The trail cuts through an extensive old burn area. Spots where downed trees have been cleared from the trail allow the trail to be identified in this area. Look for views of the rugged face of Rogers Peak in this area. At mile 3.3 the trail turns left briefly where it crosses a minor creek and enters the trees, then resumes its southwesterly progress. At mile 4.0 the trail leaves the trees and allows views of the lower lake, a good spot to turn around on a day of inclement weather.

Lower Chicago Lake is barely visible through the storm-small.JPG



TOPO! map printed on 12/02/08 from "Chicago_Lakes_freehand_route1.1.tpo"



GPS Latitude / Longitude NAD83 (Deg., Min., Sec.)

Parking: 39,39,36N / 105,36,16W, 10607 feet

Chicago lakes Trail Sign: 39,39,27N / 105,36,21W, 10666 feet

Log Bridge: 39,39,3N / 105,36,48W, 10394 feet

Reservoir: 39,38,45N / 105,36,58W, 10629 feet

Wilderness Boundary: 39,38,24N / 105,37,1W, 10718 feet

