

Deluge Lake

by Dave Cooper



Getting to the Trailhead: Drive to the East Vail exit of I-70 (Exit 180). Cross under the Interstate and follow Bighorn Road for 2.3 miles as it heads southeast. Park at the obvious trailhead parking area on the north side of Bighorn Road. Signs indicate that this is the trailhead for both the Gore Creek Trail and the Deluge Lake Trail.

Hike Statistics: Trailhead to Deluge Lake: 3400 feet of total elevation gain in 4.1 miles one way.

Difficulty: A strenuous trail hike to a high, alpine lake.

USGS Quad: Willow Lakes, CO, Vail East, CO.

This week's hike transports the reader, in four short miles, from the hustle and bustle of the Vail Valley to an unspoiled wilderness with rugged peaks, a pristine lake and fields of wildflowers.

One of several trails leading into the Gore Range from the Vail Valley, the Deluge Lake Trail is probably the least traveled. Part of the reason for this may be the fact that the trail gains 2300 feet in two miles before moderating somewhat! For those willing to slog up the strenuous trail, however, the rewards make the effort worthwhile. The area around Deluge Lake is definitely one of Colorado's wild and scenic places.

On a recent visit I encountered two other hikers who talked excitedly about having spotted a mountain lion near the lake.

The trail to Deluge Lake passes through pristine meadows of wildflowers

Hike Description

Start hiking east on the Gore Creek Trail, crossing into the Eagles Nest Wilderness after 0.1 miles. 30 paces beyond the Wilderness boundary is a trail junction. Take the Deluge Lake Trail to the left and follow it as it contours back across the hillside before starting the steep climb out of the Gore Creek drainage on its way to the hanging valley holding Deluge Lake. The trail is quite narrow and in places the vegetation encroaches; this is not a manicured trail, but then that's not what we should expect in a Wilderness area. Get a reasonably early start on this hike and be done with the steepest part of the trail before the heat of the day.

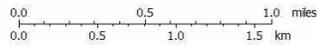
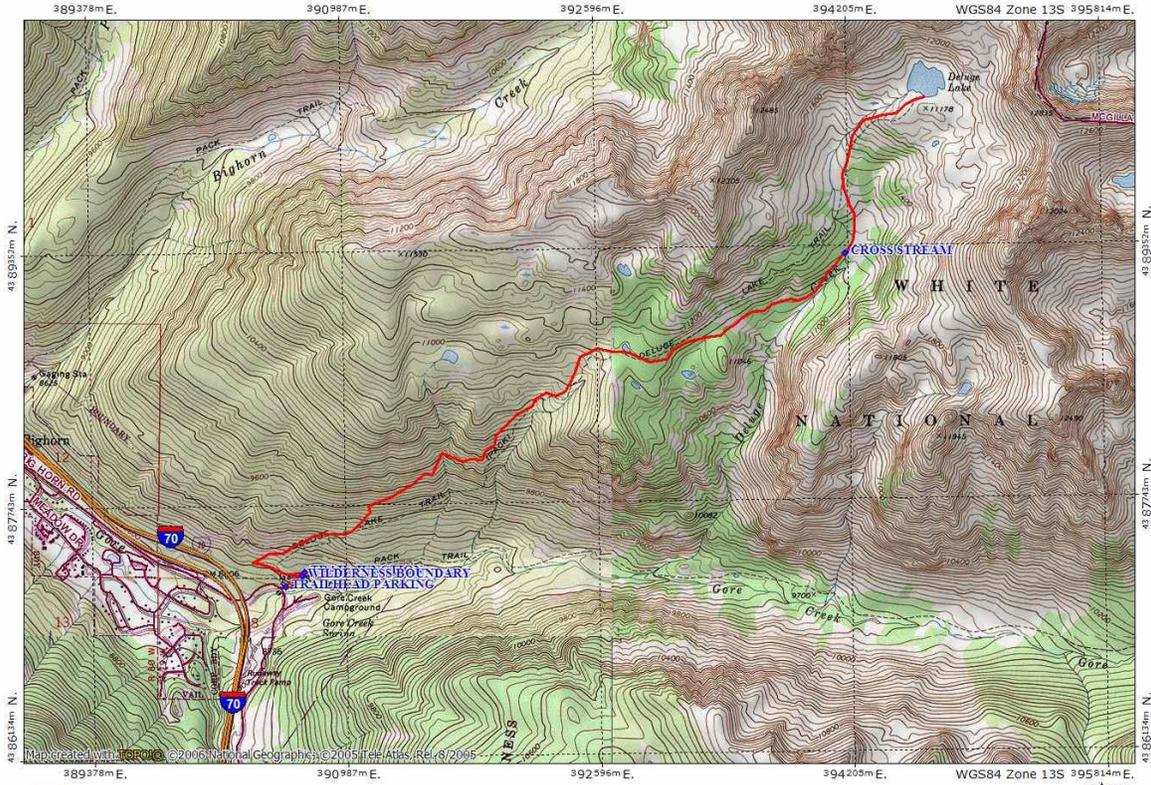
The trail flattens out on reaching 11,000 feet, even descending slightly before contouring over to cross Deluge Creek in a delightful meadow. From here you have your first glimpse of the rugged peaks and ridges ringing the upper valley. The views just get better as you continue on through stands of evergreens and across meadows filled with wildflowers, finally reaching Deluge Lake after 4.1 miles.

As of July 24th, a snowbank still sat above the lake, calving off great chunks of snow like some Alaskan glacier.



Last winter's snow still lingers at Deluge Lake

The peak visible to the northwest of the lake, Unnamed 13,041 on the map, has the unofficial name of "Grand Traverse Peak", and marks the southern end of an amazing, rugged ridge known to climbers as "The Grand Traverse". This ridge often provides an impressive backdrop for photographs of the town of Vail.



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