

Fancy Pass to Missouri Pass loop by Dave Cooper



Backpacker near Treasure Vault Lake

Looking for a moderate, scenic loop hike on good trails? Throw in a couple of high passes and a scattering of beautiful lakes and this hike rivals any in Colorado.

Both Fancy Creek and Missouri Creek have carved deep little ravines in places, providing spectacular views along the trail. Both lead to scenic lakes and then onwards to high alpine passes.

Connecting the passes is a pristine hanging valley complete with its own lake, Treasure Vault Lake.

Getting to the Trailhead: Take the Minturn exit (Exit 171) from I-70 and drive south on US Highway 24 for 12.9 miles to Homestake Road. Take this washboard road (recently graded, though) for 7.9 miles to a road junction signed to Missouri Creek and Holy Cross City, 1.0 miles past Gold Park Campground. Turn right at this junction onto FSR704 and drive 2.2 miles to a T-junction at the Fancy Lake Trailhead. The last couple of miles are rougher, though usually passable by most passenger cars.

Hike Statistics: Total elevation gain around the loop is 2560 feet in 7.8 miles.

Difficulty: A moderate/strenuous trail hike over two high mountain passes.

USGS Quad: Mount Jackson, CO; Mount of The Holy Cross, CO



Missouri Creek cutting through the rock

With both trailheads within about 50 yards of each other you'll only need one vehicle, which is good, since the parking area can fill up quite quickly. The trails are in the Holy Cross Wilderness and regulations for that Wilderness apply. Remember to self register at the trailhead and obtain a no-fee permit which must be carried by a member of the group. If you decide to do the hike as an overnight trip, make sure you understand the camping rules. Many of the camp sites around the Missouri Lakes are too close to the lake (less than 100 feet) and should not be used. There are also restrictions on where campfires may be used.

The hike works well in either direction. For a shorter outing, just head up one of the drainages and return via the same trail.

Keep an eye peeled for thunderstorms since you will be above treeline for quite a while. You don't want to be caught between the two passes.

Hike Description

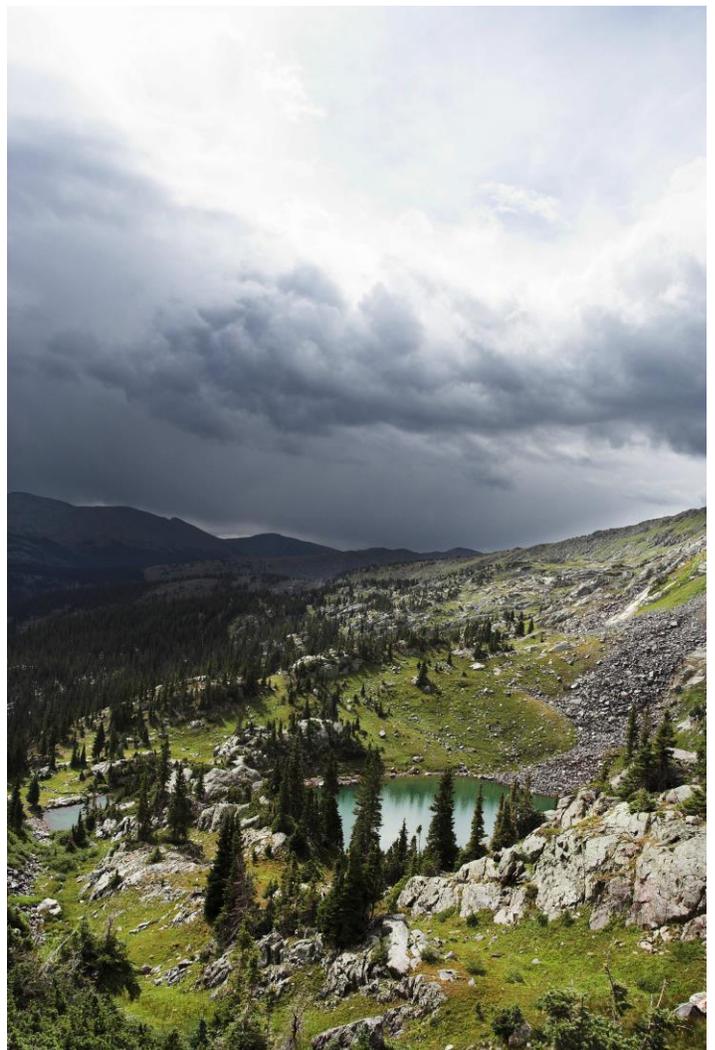
The hike is described in a counter-clockwise direction. From the parking area head up the Fancy Lake trail, which winds its way over to the Fancy Creek drainage. The trail climbs gradually to a point below Fancy Lake. The last bit up to the lake is steeper, but well switchbacked, and arrives at the lake after a hike of 2.3 miles.

From Fancy Lake pick up the trail as it heads to the right (northeast) before shortly reaching a trail junction, where a trail from Holy Cross City comes in. Turn left (west) at the junction and climb towards Fancy Pass. There is a nice viewpoint looking down on Fancy Lake, before the trail again heads up more steeply towards the pass. Just below the pass are some old mine ruins. The trail is a little confusing in this area, but if you follow the left branch it will quickly improve, heading up a narrow slot to Fancy Pass, the high point of the hike at 12,400 feet.

Looking down on Fancy Lake as a storm passes

The view from the pass is spectacular - a remote part of the Holy Cross Wilderness with rugged ridgelines, alpine meadows and lakes. Fancy Pass cuts through Holy Cross Ridge; Mount of the Holy Cross is out of sight to the north.

Drop down on the trail as it heads over towards Treasure Vault Lake. The trail winds through small tarns and alpine meadows before reaching the junction with the Cross Creek Trail shortly before the largest lake, Treasure Vault Lake. At the junction take the trail to the left, signed to Missouri Pass. Climb up to the pass, which often holds patches of snow all summer long, though as of August 24th the trail was dry.





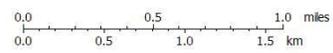
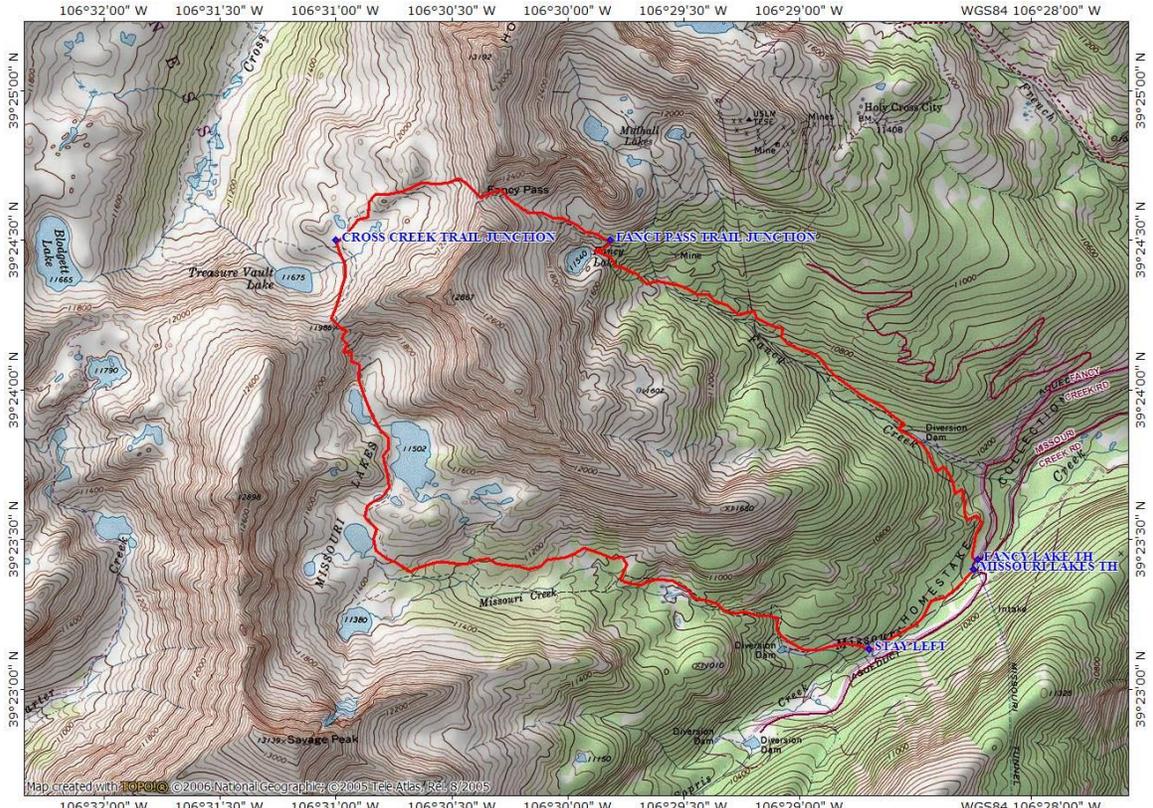
IMG_2856-01 The view from near Missouri Pass towards Treasure Vault Lake



From Missouri Pass, follow the trail down to the Missouri Lakes. As you pass the largest of these, at 11,502 feet, there is an unmarked trail junction. Turn right (south) towards the lower lakes. The left fork is a fishermen's trail.

The upper Missouri Lakes

Continue past the lower lakes and continue on the Missouri Lakes Trail as it heads down the Missouri Creek drainage. Shortly after passing the Wilderness area boundary, by the diversion dam, the trail turns left and parallels the road back to the trailhead.



TN MN
10 1/2°
08/31/06

GPS Latitude / Longitude NAD83 (Deg., Min., Sec.)
 PARKING: 40,18,13N / 105,32,11W, 9158 feet
 TRAILHEAD: 40,18,11N / 105,32,7W, 9190 feet
 TREELINE: 40,17,33N / 105,31,19W, 11070 feet

