

## Fools Peak, Lake Charles and Mystic Island Lake

by Dave Cooper



*Mystic Island Lake seen from the summit of Fools Peak-small.jpg*

Few lakes have a more intriguing name than Mystic Island Lake. Located at the end of a remote valley in the Holy Cross Wilderness, this lake doesn't easily give up its secrets.

Enjoy either a long, scenic trail hike, or, for those so inclined, look down on the lake from the heights of Fools Peak, a peak whose name alone demands exploration. This week we will explore both.

The trail begins at the trailhead next to the Fulford Cave Campground and meanders up to Lake Charles, a good destination for those wanting a shorter day.

To do both of the hikes described here will probably require more than one day, so either plan on two trips here (which, in any case, is well worth it) or consider a backpacking trip.

**Getting to the Trailhead:** From I-70, take Exit 147 (Eagle) and head south, crossing the river bridge. Turn right on Grand Avenue (old SR 6) and drive to Capitol Street (the first street past the roundabout). Drive 0.8 miles before turning southeast (left) onto Brush Creek Road. Follow Brush Creek Road from its intersection with Capitol Street for 9.7 miles to a Y-junction. Turn left onto East Brush Creek Road and take this road for a further 7.2 miles to the Fulford Cave Trailhead, immediately left of the Fulford Cave Campground. Note after 5.8 miles on the East Brush Creek Road you will come to the Yeoman Park Campground. Stay straight here as the road narrows, and stay straight 0.4 miles further where a road takes off to the left. The road should be passable by passenger cars.

**Hike Statistics:** From the Trailhead to Lake Charles (11,063 feet): 1800 feet of total elevation gain in 3.9 miles one way.

From the Trailhead to Mystic Island Lake (11,306 feet): 2160 feet of total elevation gain in 5.3 miles one way.

From the Trailhead to the summit of Fools Peak (12,947 feet): 4340 feet of total elevation gain in 6.5 miles one way.

**Difficulty:** A moderate trail hike to either Lake Charles or Mystic Island Lake. A long and strenuous scramble on moderate talus slopes to Fools Peak.

**USGS Quad:** Mount Jackson, CO; Crooked Creek Pass, CO.

As a part of the Holy Cross Wilderness, self-registration at the trailhead is required, but no fee is currently charged.

### Hike Description

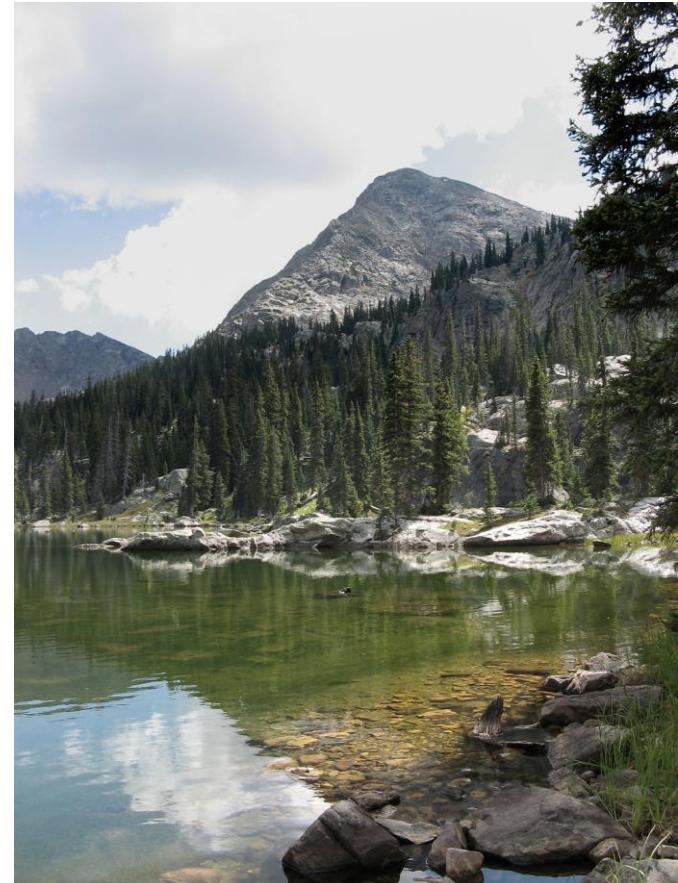
After registering at the trailhead, hike through the gate and almost immediately look for a signed trail junction. The left fork heads to Lake Charles, and that's the way we go. The trail has been re-routed recently and no longer crosses Brush Creek, as shown on the map. In fact, the Forest Service is removing the logs spanning the creek.

The trail to Lake Charles gains 1800 feet in 3.9 miles. Expect to spend at least two hours walking up this section of the trail, since its many twists and turns will slow you down a little. You will keep expecting to see the lake, only to find another hill to climb. When you do finally reach Lake Charles, however, you will be rewarded with very nice views of the lake, and also of Fools Peak beyond.

*Fools Peak reflected in the waters of Lake Charles-small.jpg*

This is decision time. Would you prefer to stay on the trail and continue on to Mystic Island Lake, or climb out of the drainage for an easy but strenuous scramble up Fools Peak?

If you elect to continue to Mystic Island Lake, follow the trail as it skirts the north side of Lake Charles before continuing up the Brush Creek drainage for a further 1.4 miles to the upper lake. This section of the trail, between the two lakes, is very wet and marshy in spots, so make sure your hiking boots are well waterproofed!



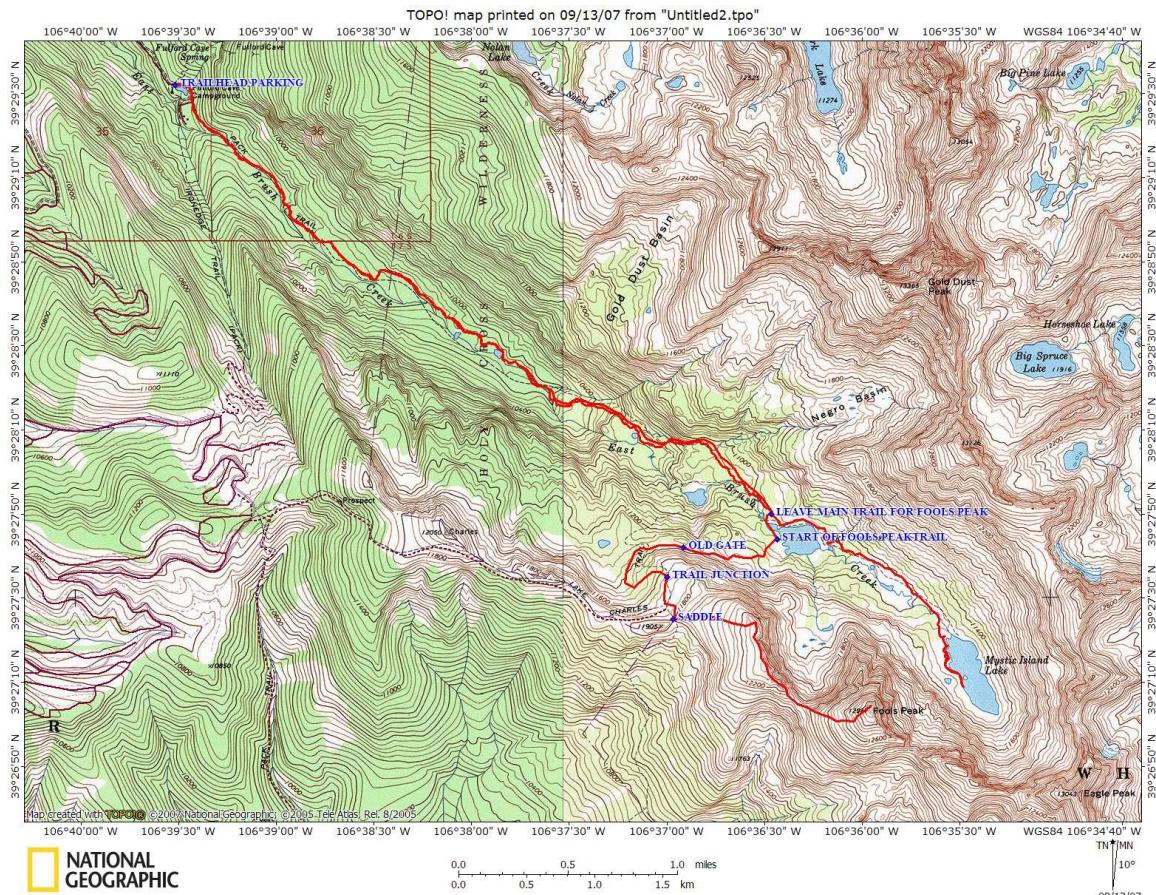
*Mystic Island Lake-small.jpg*

If you're up for a scramble up the peak (some might say on a fool's errand?), look for an unsigned trail taking off to the right (southwest) from the main trail at the outlet of Lake Charles (at the east end of the lake). Note that this trail has also been re-routed and is not as shown on the topo map. Cross the lake's outlet, possibly on a wooden plank someone has placed across the creek, and pick up a social trail which

contours around the west shore of the lake. Continue on this trail for a total distance of one tenth of a mile from the main trail and look for a cairned trail taking off to your right. This is at a point where the lake necks down before opening into the main body of water.

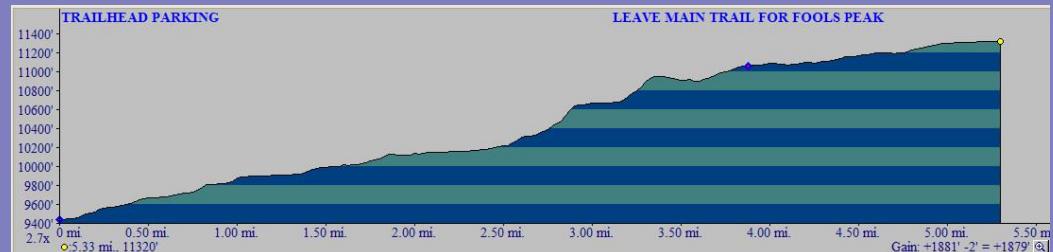
Leave the shore trail here and head southwest on a good trail, again not signed. The trail soon turns to the west and makes a long traverse below a major cliff band, passing through the remains of an old gate at 4.4 miles from the trailhead. At 4.6 miles the trail rounds the end of the cliff band and turns south, then back to the northeast. In some sections of the trail it passes through open meadows where the trail becomes faint. Luckily large cairns are frequent in these areas. The trail continues up above treeline and bifurcates. Either of these will work as you aim for an obvious saddle at mile 5.3. This saddle, at an elevation of 11,800 feet, is where you leave the trail to head left (east) up the broad ridge to a ridge point at an elevation of 12,315 feet. Fools Peak is the next high point east along this major ridge. From the ridge point at 12,315 continue east, dropping to a saddle before starting up the gentle talus slopes of Fools Peak (12,947 feet). There are excellent views of Mystic Island Lake, over 1600 feet below.

Head down the same way you came up. Once back at Lake Charles, return to your vehicle on what seems now to be the interminable trail.



GPS Latitude / Longitude NAD83 (Deg., Min., Sec.)  
 TRAILHEAD PARKING: 39,29,32N / 106,39,31W, 9482 feet  
 OLD GATE: 39,27,42N / 106,36,55W, 11319 feet  
 SADDLE: 39,27,25N / 106,36,58W, 11841 feet  
 TRAIL JUNCTION: 39,27,35N / 106,37,0W, 11673 feet  
 LEAVE MAIN TRAIL FOR FOOLS PEAK: 39,27,50N / 106,36,28W, 11033 feet  
 START OF FOOLS PEAKTRAIL: 39,27,44N / 106,36,26W, 11070 feet

#### PROFILE FOR MYSTIC LAKE HIKE



#### PROFILE FOR FOOLS PEAK

