

Seven Sister Lakes, Holy Cross City and Holy Cross Ridge

by Dave Cooper

High alpine lakes, a ghost town and a rugged scramble in this Holy Cross Wilderness sampler

Located south of the Vail area, the Holy Cross Wilderness offers rugged peaks in a remote setting. Only a short distance from a famous fourteenner, the hike described here takes you to an area of scattered high altitude lakes offering solitude and a sense of wildness.

As a bonus, a side trip to Holy Cross City provides insight into Colorado's past.

Getting to the Trailhead: Take the Minturn exit (Exit 171) from I-70 and drive south on US24 for 12.9 miles to Homestake Road. Take this washboard road for 7.9 miles to a road junction signed to Missouri Creek and Holy Cross City, passing the Gold Park Campground and the start of the rugged four wheel drive road also signed to Holy Cross City (the trail is only suitable for specialized off-road vehicles). Turn right at the junction on FSR704 and drive 2.2 miles to a T- junction at the Fancy Lake Trailhead. Turn right on FSR 727 and follow the now rougher road (may not be suitable for some low-clearance passenger cars) for 1.0 miles to the next junction. Continue to the right on FSR727 for a further 0.8 miles and park in a flat area at 10,290 feet (waypoint "PARKING"). A good dirt road continues to the left at this point, signed FSR 727.1A. This is not what you want, as it only goes to a water diversion dam.



One of the Seven Sisters Lakes

Hike Statistics:

Trailhead to lower Seven Sister Lake: 1600 feet total elevation in 6.0 miles round trip (easy).

Trailhead to upper Seven Sisters Lake: 2600 feet total elevation gain in 8.2 miles round trip (slightly strenuous, with some off-trail hiking on steep, grassy slopes).

The Holy Cross City detour adds 1.8 miles round trip and 300 feet of elevation gain.

Holy Cross Ridge: 4600 feet in 11.8 miles round trip (strenuous, should only be attempted by strong, experienced hikers).

USGS Quad: Mount of The Holy Cross, CO

Hike Description

From the parking area walk northeast for 100 feet up the hill to join the four wheel drive road. Turn left and follow the rough road for 1.5 miles until it makes an abrupt left turn on its way to Holy Cross City. Drop down to the right into the meadow and join an old road/trail (waypoint "LEAVE ROAD") which actually starts shortly before this bend, marked by a road closure. This trail takes you past a nice lake, Hunky Dory Lake, before climbing up into alpine meadows.

Abundant moisture in the atmosphere may not bode well for hiking but certainly makes for a spectacular sunrise



Looking back, Homestake Mountain dominates the skyline. The trail continues to climb until it reaches the first of the Seven Sister Lakes. The trail crosses the outlet at waypoint “TRAIL CROSSES LAKE OUTLET” and continues on to two more lakes and passes between them. Continuing on the trail would take you to Fall Creek Pass, but we leave the trail here, at waypoint “LEAVE TRAIL”, either to find a good lunch spot by these lakes or to continue on up to the most remote of the Seven Sisters.

To reach this upper lake at 12,750 feet requires a bit of a hike up steep, grassy slopes, picking your way between rock slabs as you head generally northwest to waypoint “CAIRN”. Enjoy one of the nicer alpine lakes Colorado has to offer.



The upper of the Seven Sisters

Only strong, experienced hikers should continue to Holy Cross Ridge. The terrain difficulty doesn't exceed Class 2, but good scrambling skills on talus slopes are required as well as good judgement.

From the lake, head up towards the saddle between Unnamed 13,768 and Point 13,618, then turning north to reach Point 13,768 (a Bicentennial peak). It is also possible to head up to the southeast ridge of Point 13,768 and then follow that to the top.

From here, it is a straightforward scramble along the ridge north to Unnamed 13,831, the high point of Holy Cross Ridge and a Centennial peak. Enjoy the views of Mount of the Holy Cross.

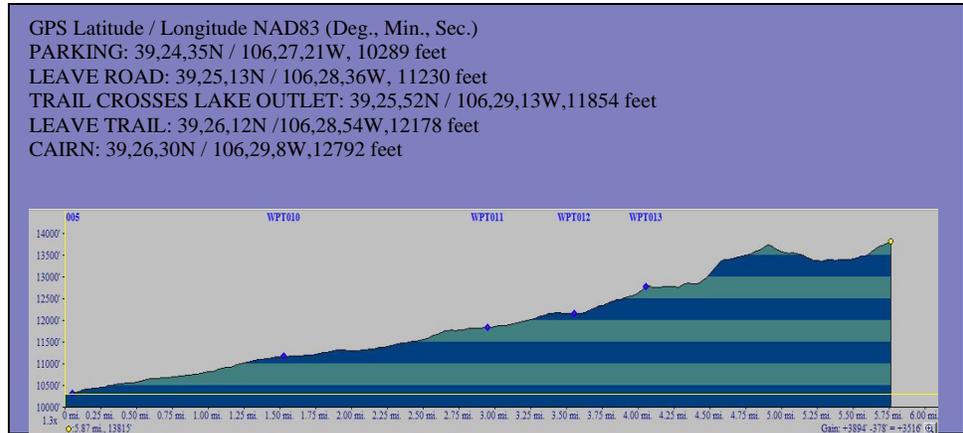
Return by climbing over Unnamed 13,768 or, more reasonably, contouring on its west side back to the saddle before descending past the upper lake to the trail.

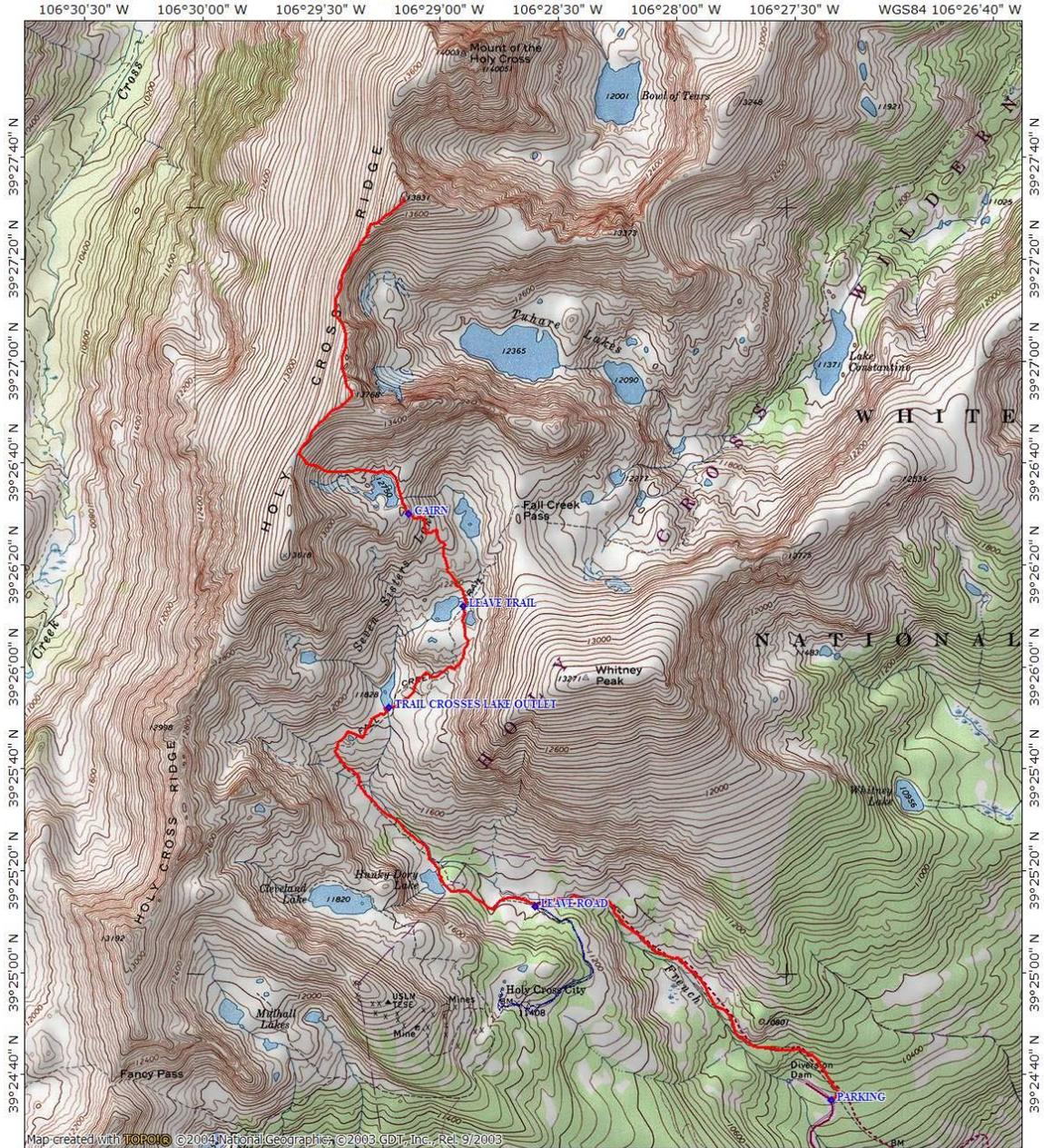
Side Trip to Holy Cross City

From the bend in the four wheel drive road where we left the road on the way up (waypoint “LEAVE ROAD”), rejoin the road and follow it uphill for 0.9 miles to the remnants of the old town. Be careful to

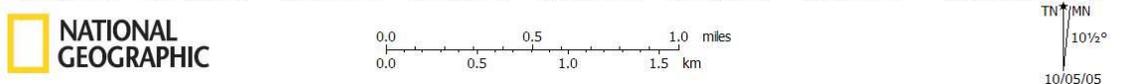
stay away from structures and take only pictures. The town apparently enjoyed a brief life back in the 1880's and '90's. Quite a bit of equipment and some of the structures can be seen.

Be aware that this trail is used by jeep clubs, so expect to run into a few vehicles.





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0.0 0.5 1.0 miles
0.0 0.5 1.0 1.5 km

TN MN
10 1/2°
10/05/05