

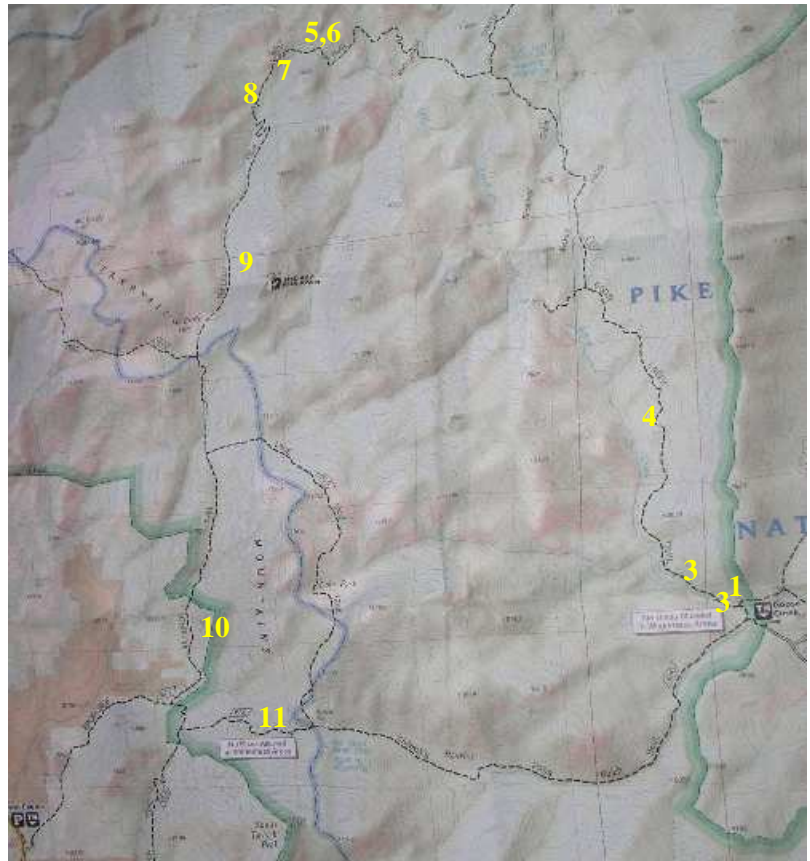
# Lost Creek Wilderness

June 10-13, 2004

This was a very last-minute trip. We got an unexpected three day weekend the week Ronald Reagan died. We decided to honor his memory by obtaining last-minute plane tickets to Denver and doing a bit of early season camping. Becca thought this was a good idea, too, so we pulled out the backpacking gear and off we went!

Intelligence from the area said that the snowpack in the high country was only melted to about 10,500 ft or so. However, Lost Creek Wilderness (southwest of Denver at the south end of the Front Range) was entirely melted, so we decided to go there. The area is lower in elevation than many of Colorado's other wilderness areas, with the elevation of the peaks topping out at 11,000+ ft rather than 13 or 14k. As this would be our first real hike of the season, and as we only had one night to acclimate before strapping on the packs, this made good sense to us. We decided to tackle the Goose Creek – McCurdy Park – Lake Park – Hankins Pass loop. The loop is about 23 miles, according to my guide book.

Well, we got off to a rough start. The plane was about 40 minutes late getting to Denver. We had to get to REI before it closed to get a fuel canister for the camp stove. We made it – barely. After a bit of searching, we found a grocery store, bought food, and left town.



We were intending to camp at one of the campgrounds on the way to the trailhead. The first one we got to (at about midnight) was full. We never saw the second one we were looking for. The one right next to the trail head was gated off, and said closed. At this point, it was about 1:30AM, and we were really tired. We decided to toss our sleeping bags on the ground a few hundred feet from the trailhead. It won't rain in Colorado in June right? Well, it actually didn't. However, the wind was unbelievable. You could hear it coming across the hills. Roaring, roaring, and then it would hit you. None of us were cold (very good test of the bags), but it was really hard to sleep with all that noise going on. The only cool part was that everytime I woke up, I would see stars through the tiny hole in my sleeping bag. Becca and I both had the thought during the night that we must be experiencing a tiny bit of what it's like to try to sleep on Everest. Of course, in the morning we took a picture of our makeshift camp.

As you can tell, the area right around the trailhead was recently burned. This was the location of the 2002 Hayman fire. The burned part was mostly to the south and west up Hankins Gulch. Very quickly on the first day, we left the burned part, and then came back to it on the way back to the car. I get ahead of myself, though.



The wildflowers were blooming, or at least starting to bloom. The trail joins Goose Creek pretty soon after leaving the trailhead and follows it for a while pretty closely. The entire first day was spent going up and down small hills. You travel along the creek for a ways, and then you come around the corner of the ridge to your right, and you can see the first of the rock formations that make this area unique. The creek goes away after a while, so we were committed to making it to where the trail meets water again. We found a great lunch spot (picture 4) where we could look up the valley toward where we were going. The goal for the first day was to get to the area right before you climb the first 1000 ft pass





(location of picture X). It was pretty quickly apparent, though, that we were going to be a bit short of that goal. Becca is a slower hiker than Gavin or I, and she was really having trouble with the altitude. (She had never been that high with a pack before.)

We eventually made camp about a mile short of our goal for the day. Due to the small amount of sleep we had all gotten the night before, we were exhausted. We basically made dinner and went to bed. We didn't even take a picture of the camp site. I think all three of us fell asleep about 7PM – well before it really got dark.

However, we all woke up ready to get up and go! Gavin used our new water purifier for the first time, and he was a much

happier camper with the faster pump rate. Instead of taking ½ hour to pump a few liters, it takes about 10 minutes to pump about 5 liters. That's including switching bottles and all. Anyway, we were starting to get into some of the really dramatic scenery very quickly after starting to hike. Becca went on ahead of us to get a head start while we finished packing up camp.

As it turns out, she only went about a mile before running into a confusing part of the trail. She got a little disoriented when she stopped to splash her face in the creek, and thought she'd come down the part of the trail that went on. In her defense, there were a lot of false trails at that point where people had walked around to find camp sites. In the end, she waited there for us to come and we picked the right trail to continue on.



Right after we met up again, there was an interesting stream fording. Gavin went first to show us how it was done. He promptly lost his sunglasses in the creek. He was pretty much on the other side, and scrambled to the bank to chase them, but when he got on dry land, the sun was glaring on the water and he couldn't see. It was an amusing couple minutes while we yelled, "they're right there" and he yelled "I can't see anything. Eventually, Becca waded into the creek to get them for him.

Becca was already feeling the altitude again, and we were just getting to our first really big climb of the hike. Even Gavin and I were a bit intimidated by the

scene that awaited us when we turned south (picture 8). We were pretty sure that we were headed up to those rocks at the top. We looked at the climb, and both agreed that we should move a ways down the trail and hope Becca didn't put 2+2 together. Unfortunately, she had been watching for the sight of the big hill she knew she'd have to climb today and saw it anyway. When we started up it was about 10AM. Gavin and I would hike a ways and then wait for Becca to catch up. About halfway up, we decided to stop for lunch. While we were waiting for her to catch up, we had a surprise: snow!



Yes, snow in June. It only lasted for about 30 seconds, and then turned into a light mist that was gone in about 10 minutes. However, I can now say I've been camping in snow in July (3") and June (trace). Anyway, eventually Becca caught up to us and we made it to the top. Gavin and I were actually quite pleasantly surprised at the trail up this pass. It was well-swichbacked with a pretty easy grade. We both were making pretty good time up the pass. I think it would have taken us about 2 hours at our pace. After getting over the pass, the



climb up the last 800 ft to McCurdy park is very easy. It climbs up through alternating meadows and stands of trees. The wind was a bit strong after the storm. I remember getting blown a couple steps once. We had a second lunch at McCurdy Park (picture 9).

For the last couple hours, Gavin and I had been discussing our options. We had intended to take the Lake Park Trail and climb another 600 ft before camping. It was already getting to be late in the afternoon, and we knew Becca wasn't going to make it up another large climb. Unfortunately, we needed to be back at the car by 1PM the next afternoon to make it to the airport in time for our flight. Gavin and I thought we'd be OK to climb either the Lake Park Trail or the Hankins Pass trail in the morning, provided we got up early. Judging by how fast we were going with Becca, we would need to get up at about 3AM to make it to the trailhead together. The plan we eventually came up with is that we'd hike down the Brookside Trail to close to the junction with the Hankins Pass trail. Gavin would take a light pack

We had intended to take the Lake Park Trail



up the pass in the morning, get the car, and drive around and pick Becca and me up at the Twin Eagles trailhead. We, therefore, proceeded down a 1800 ft drop. This area would not have been much fun to come up. It was pretty steep and not switchbacked well like the steep passes. We made camp at a really pretty site near the Brookside – Hankins Pass junction (picture 10).

By bedtime, I'd decided to climb up with Gavin to the pass (without a pack) in the morning and then come back down, get my stuff, the tent, and his bag to accompany Becca out. I had a feeling there'd be some great views from the top, and I was still feeling pretty strong. We got up at about 5AM, because we weren't sure how long it was going to take Gavin to drive around to the other trailhead. As it turns out, we overestimated the time by quite a bit. We got to the top of the pass in about 1 1/2 hours. That was much faster than we thought. The pass was about 1000 ft up, but it was well-switchbacked like the climb the day before.

I was not at all disappointed in the views. You could see one of the large mountain ranges to the northwest. I think that the large mountain is Mount Massive, but I'm not sure. The top of the pass is a young aspen grove. Here Gavin and I parted ways. He took the camera, and I've included some of the pictures below. If



you want a verbal account of this part of the trail, you'll have to convince him to write a couple paragraphs. I headed back down the way we'd come. I had plenty of time to use the binoculars on the way down. I packed up camp, and carried a very heavy backpack the 2.5 miles to the Twin Eagles trailhead.

