

Soda Lake

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Wrangell-St. Elias National Park & Preserve



Access: By car via the Nabesna Road, then by foot. Located in the north portion of the park. Start at the Lost Creek trailhead (Mile 30.8 Nabesna Road).

Distance: Approximately 12 miles from the Nabesna Road to Soda Creek plus an additional 2-1/2 miles from the junction of Soda and Platinum Creeks to Soda Lake, 29 miles round-trip.

Time: 2-3 days or more if you want to explore the lake and surrounding areas.

Maps: USGS Maps 1:63,360-Nabesna (C-4), (C-5)

Difficulty: Moderate. Requires some route finding and moderate trip-planning.

Highlights: Wildlife, open tundra, spectacular scenery.

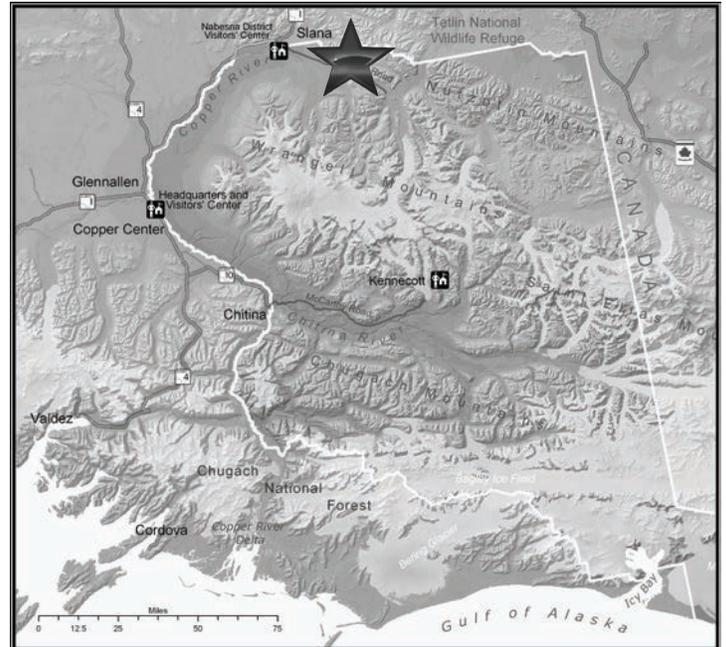
Soda Lake was created by a large landslide, most likely in response to an earthquake and past movement along the Totshunda Fault. The fascinating terrain near the outlet of Soda Lake resulted from the landslide, creating a topography which contrasts from its surroundings. The lake now seeps through this landslide rubble.

Route: Approximately 100 yards past Lost Creek, turn left into the parking area. The turn-off is not marked, but a trailhead sign is visible from the road. Follow the trail north through the woods, along Lost Creek. The trail occasionally crosses Lost Creek, although you can follow faint trails through brush at times to stay on the east side of the creek.

In about 2 miles you will see an old trail to the right. Do not take this trail, as the main trail has been re-routed and will veer off in another mile. The old trail is closed. After another 1 mile, the main trail departs the Lost Creek floodplain and heads east from Lost Creek, meandering through spruce forest, open tundra, and sedge tussocks. Pick up water at Lost Creek; it may be your last flowing water until you near Soda Creek. The trail can be very muddy in places.

After about 3 miles, the trail turns right, or south, into Platinum Creek. It is easy to lose this trail in places in the Platinum Creek wash; watch for it heading out of the wash into the bordering forest from time to time. The trail leads to the confluence with a creek draining the Karen Lakes area. The depths of Platinum and Soda Creeks can vary, depending on recent rainfall amounts, time of day, and temperatures. Soda Creek is a more reliably flowing creek.

After crossing this unnamed creek, it is another ¼ mile to Soda Creek and the beginning of the Soda Lake trail. Follow the trail upstream along the west side of Soda Creek for approximately one mile, at which point signs indicate the end of recreational ATV use. Continue hiking north along the west side of the creek for about another mile to a major creek junction marked by red cliffs between the two forks of the creek. (Although recreational ATV use is prohibited in this section of the creek, you may encounter ATV tracks from subsistence users.) Take the east (right) fork of the creek, which will require crossing Soda Creek.



A mineral spring deposit is located on the north side of the east fork 100 or so yards past this junction, and can be identified as a rounded white mineral deposit. Dall sheep tracks abound in the area, as sheep are attracted to the mineral-laden earth around the dry springs.

From the mineral spring, backpackers have two route choices. The easier option requires locating the horse trail, which departs Soda Creek approximately 300 yards upstream of the red cliffs marking the creek junction and 200 yards upstream of the mineral spring. This somewhat brushy trail heads uphill from a small campsite on the north side of Soda Creek into a landslide area and winds its way approximately ½ mile to the northwest corner of Soda Lake.

Alternatively, if you miss this unmarked junction, you can continue up Soda Creek to where it ends in a steep scree slope. Climb the steep, loose scree and rubble to a flat area above the southwest end of Soda Lake and then descend about 100 feet to the lake. Good camp and kitchen sites on the northwest end of the lake can be reached by walking the lake's shoreline to the north.

From there, the horse trail climbs along the north side of Soda Lake as it heads to Totschunda Creek and the Nabesna River. The trail is very brushy, but can be followed for some distance. Various side trip options beckon the traveler to linger a day or two by the beautiful turquoise waters of Soda Lake.

Hazards: Travel in this area should be done only by experienced parties who are able to read and follow a map and compass. This is a very remote area and the hiking is strenuous. Help is not readily available. During the spring, creek levels can be low in the morning and impassable by late afternoon. Heavy rainstorms can quickly raise the water levels. Bears may be present in the area. Proper food storage is required. Bear-resistant food containers are available at any park visitor center.

Notes: Please call the Slana Ranger Station at (907) 822-7401 for assistance with trip-planning.

Trail Creek and Lost Creek will often flood during the summer and may be impassible. Check with the Slana Ranger Station for current road and weather conditions.

