

Trail Creek to Lost Creek Loop

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 mile 29.8 where Trail Creek flows across the road. The loop ends at mile 31.2 where Lost Creek crosses the road. The creeks are signed.

Distance: Entire loop route is 21 miles, plus 1.5 between the two trailheads.

Time: 3-4 days

Maps: USGS Maps-Nabesna (C-5) 1:63,360; Nabesna 1:250,000

Difficulty: Strenuous. Requires route finding and extensive trip-planning.

Highlights: Road access, spectacular scenery, alpine tundra, flowers, wildlife, Dall sheep, a loop route.

Route: This is a spectacular backcountry route that connects the Lost and Trail Creek drainages via a 6000' pass. The route climbs from a beginning of 3000' and reaches the pass in ten miles. This is primarily a trail-less route over tundra and along gravel bars. The upper mileage of each Creek involves some route-finding around canyon obstacles, as well as keeping track of one's location on the map, so as to follow the correct drainages to the pass separating the two Creeks.

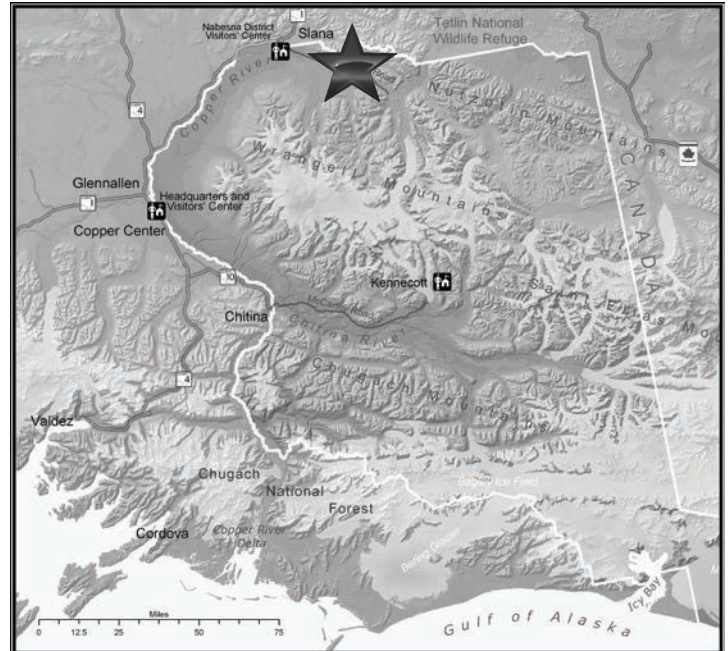
The lower sections of each drainage follow rocky braided streambeds, and require multiple crossings. Prepare to get your feet wet. Creek levels vary considerably depending on snowmelt and any recent rainfall. Good camp spots are easy to find in both drainages. There are a multitude of possible explorations among the ridges and alpine valleys near the pass.

This route can be traveled in either direction. The following description is clockwise (Trail to Lost Creek).

Trail Creek

The Trail Creek Trailhead is located at mile 29.8. The first four miles follow the meandering creekbed. Most hikers will find it necessary to cross several times, so be prepared to get your feet wet. A sometimes elusive ATV trail parallels the creek to climb over neighboring hills and along the vegetated benches. By staying to the east of the stream channel you may be able stay out of the creek most of the way.

After four miles, you reach the mouth of Trail Creek Canyon. After two more miles, the canyon narrows considerably and a sign indicates the end of the ATV trail. The creek is confined by low gravel benches covered with a carpet of alpine vegetation. There are many nice camp spots above the eastern side of the creek. The route follows the first major side canyon (the fourth drainage on the eastern side of the canyon). For the next three miles, ascend towards the pass. Some hikers may generally follow the gravel river bed, but hiking along the high ground through the lush tundra provides spectacular panoramic views, marmot sightings, and wildflowers. Look carefully among the canyon walls for flocks of Dall Sheep.



The upper reaches of both Trail and Lost Creek are very scenic and provide views of rugged Noyes Mountain, rock glaciers, and hardy alpine plants. There are nice camping spots in both upper basins, especially Lost Creek. Head up and cross over the pass by following the established sheep trails along the northern side walls.

Lost Creek

From the top of the pass there are fantastic views down Lost Creek drainage. You can choose to descend directly along the rocky stream drainage, but for easy walking and better views, follow the grassy tundra-covered ridge right down the middle of the valley. There are nice campsites to be found along this lush ridge, and a good chance of spotting sheep. Follow this ridge for one mile and descend directly down the vegetated hill between the first two forks to the creek bottom.

Once in the creek bottom, depending upon stream conditions, you may have to cross or head up and over obstacles. In early summer, snow and ice bridges may be present to assist you as you make your way downstream for 1.5 miles. Eventually, the canyon narrows to a gorge and it becomes impossible to pass through. Head up 300' along the west side to a 1.5 mile long series of vegetated benches above the canyon. One steep ravine cuts through the bench, but it is passable a little higher up. Once you pass the canyon gorge, gradually descend back to the gravel banks of Lost Creek.

Cross to the eastern side of the creek and follow it downstream. You will be walking on gravel bars and sometimes along creekside terraces of willow and dwarf birch. After 3.5 miles, you will pass the ATV trail to Big Grayling Lake. Continue along Lost Creek 1.5 miles to the trailhead and the Nabesna Road. Follow the road back to your vehicle.

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. On warm summer days, the creek may be low in the early morning but rise several feet during the day. An easy morning ford may be impassable by the late afternoon. Also, the creek level can rise suddenly during and after rain storms. The lower 5-6 miles of each creek are very rocky and can be a test of ankles & feet! Be prepared for areas of scrambling on scree slopes. Bears are present in this 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.

At times of high flow, creeks can be difficult to cross with a two-wheel drive passenger vehicle. Check on current road conditions before heading out.

