

FERN LAKE AREA (IN ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK)

The parking area for Fern Lake is located off of the Bear Lake road, north of Bear Lake. The hike to Fern Lake turned out to have less snow than we had expected, though we would have needed snowshoes or similar snow gear if we had wanted to continue on to Spruce or Odessa lakes. Fern Lake is located 4.7 miles from the trailhead, with The Pool an interesting stop at 2.5 miles from the parking lot, and Fern Falls located after the first switchback on the climb up to the lake. We luckily only encountered snow just before the lake and at the opposite end of the lake.

The topographical map for Fern Lake that is on the sign at the trailhead:



The trail starts out quite flat and passes through a lightly forested area while following Spruce Creek:



The trail heads up Spruce Canyon, and we get some good but rare glimpses of the tall peaks up ahead:



We pass through a few short meadows:



The peaks are getting closer, and we are getting increasingly better views of them:



Panorama photo looking up at a cliff on the left side of the trail; note the waterfall coming down just right of center (we probably got to see a lot more waterfalls than are typically in the park due to the amount of snowmelt occurring):



These plants with all the small white flowers were abundant on one section of the trail:



Reaching the Arch Rocks camping area; this appears to be a popular bouldering site:



Now we are approaching where the trail crosses the river which we have been following:



Nice forested area to walk through here:



We are now approaching the bridge which crosses the main river just below The Pool, which is where the river we have been following cuts through a nice rock channel (from the photos I've seen, The Pool looks a lot different when there isn't a lot of water raging through it):



Panorama from this bridge looking at The Pool:



The trail forks just after the bridge, with the left fork heading off to the Cub Lake area and the right fork to the Fern Lake area (I'm not sure of the trail conditions to Cub Lake when we were there, but it wasn't possible to continue beyond Fern Lake):



The "Old Forest Inn" camping area; this looked like a great place to camp as long as one could avoid most of the mosquitoes:



Continuing up the trail, which remains relatively flat until we cross the creek again:



The bridge across the creek which drains from Fern Lake isn't as major as the bridge we had crossed previously; the only issue we had was that it didn't fully connect both sides:



The creek seems to have cut into the bank and around where the bridge attaches. Later in the season one could wade across, but the water was very cold and was moving very fast here from all the snowmelt, so we had to carefully cross on the small logs seen at the bottom of the photo below:



After crossing the creek, we continued up the trail; here is an overlook of Spruce Creek:



The trail soon switchbacked, and we began climbing up through the forest:



At the next switchback is Fern Falls, which is part of the creek draining from Fern Lake:



Looking out and across at a nearby hillside from here; because of all the trees, we hadn't yet gotten much of a view of the surrounding area:



Looking up Forest Canyon from here:



The trail does another switchback after Fern Falls, then gets steeper and rockier:



Finally, it rounds a bend and flattens out somewhat (which is quite nice after having climbed steeply previously):



As we approached Fern Lake, the amount of snow on the ground increased rapidly:



Arriving at the junction of the Fern Lake trail with the Spruce Lake trail; I'm not sure why this lake is called Fern Lake, as when we were there we didn't see any ferns (perhaps it's due to the shape of the lake?):



Part of the Spruce Lake area was closed, but it looked too snowy to get up there anyway:



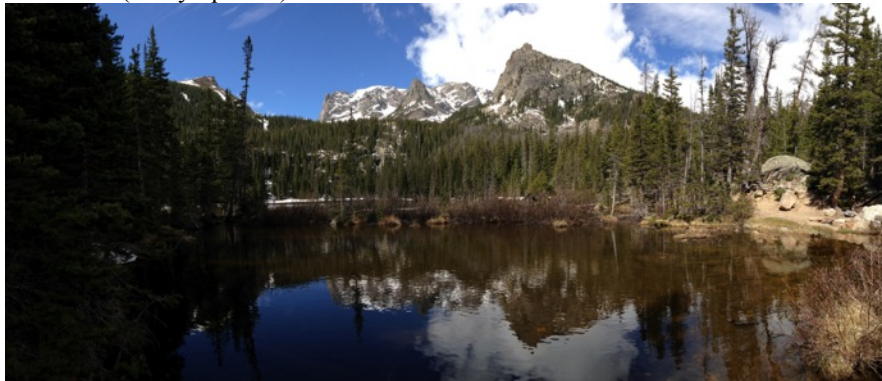
The patrol cabin at Fern Lake; I'm not sure if or when it is open, or if it is like the one at Floe Lake in Canada and is virtually never used:



The bridge crossing the outlet to Fern Lake:



The mountains behind Fern Lake are very impressive, making me think that nearby Odessa Lake must be incredible; Fern Lake itself is quite nice, but perhaps not as nice (in my opinion) as The Loch:



There are many camping opportunities along trails in Rocky Mountain National Park:



Heading around Fern Lake, we looked across the lake and over towards where Spruce Lake must be:



The trail continued around Fern Lake, crossing an avalanche chute:



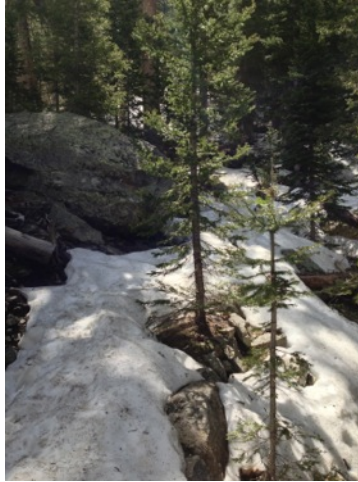
Panorama from here of the lake and some of the surrounding mountains:



We continued up the trail and crossed some of the snow coming down the avalanche chute, to see how difficult the route to Odessa Lake would be:



Unfortunately, the snow was soft and relatively deep, thus we decided that it wouldn't be a smart idea for us to continue:



Looking back out at Fern Lake and up Forest Canyon:



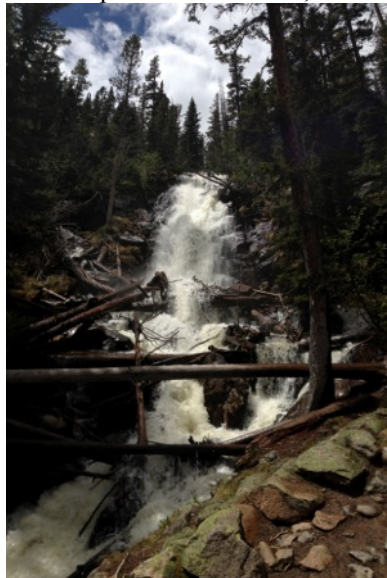
Since we hadn't yet driven Trail Ridge Road, I didn't realize at the time that the interesting lines cut through the snow on this peak were in fact a road (I thought they looked like a road, but I doubted there would be a road that high up which had been recently plowed, so I figured they must be a rock formation); I think this is the part of the Trail Ridge Road just before the Forest Canyon Overlook:



Looking up at the peaks which must be just above Odessa Lake, after heading back down the Fern Lake trail a short distance:



From here, we headed back down the trail; this is another photo of Fern Falls, in the afternoon lighting with the clouds coming in:



Just before reaching the bridge across the outlet of Fern Lake, we noticed this nice view looking through some burned-out trees at the Fern Lake outlet creek:



The route over to Cub Lake from here doesn't look snowy, but we didn't have time to check it out:



One of the rocks in the Arch Rocks area, which looks like it would be interesting to climb:



Looking out of Spruce Canyon, past some pools near the river (potential swimming holes in warmer times?), on the walk back:



Looking back up where we were hiking on the drive out from the Fern Lake Trailhead:

