

SNOWDON MEADOWS, SILVERTON, COLORADO

Our goal for this hike was to visit a small lake just northwest of Snowdon Peak. I had found out about this lake, which appears to be called Heart Lake, from an online trip report for an ascent of Snowdon Peak from the south. To reach this lake, one first hikes through Snowdon Meadows, which are accessed from the use trail that turns off to the east from the main Crater Lake Trail where this trail reaches a hikers register. The hike to Snowdon Meadows is considered a local favorite, and some relatively uncommon wildflowers can be found in these meadows during the summer. Unfortunately, we were unable to reach Heart Lake, because the use trail eventually crossed a marshy area which was too wet to continue. We did, however, enjoy our hike on the use trail, because there is a very nice waterfall in a narrow canyon which can be visited from this trail.

After returning to the main Crater Lake trail, we continued up this trail a short distance for some views of the Lime Creek Valley. It is a 5.8 mile hike (one way) to Crater Lake from the trailhead at Andrews Lake. Since there had been some nasty afternoon thunderstorms in this area, we did not want to be too far out on the trail during the afternoon, so we had chosen for this day to instead attempt to reach Heart Lake.

I highly recommend obtaining a copy of the Latitude 40 Durango Trails TOPO map for hiking in this area. The forest service brochure on Alpine Wildflowers is also very useful for identifying flowers seen along the trail.

There is a helpful map at the trailhead, which is located at Andrews Lake.



The trails near Andrews Lake are highly developed, with a nice bridge across the outlet. The green ridge in the background of this photo is the high point which must be reached before turning off for Snowdon Meadows.



Looking southwest towards Engineer Mountain (center and in the far distance).



Looking northwest towards where the Colorado Trail goes.



This family of ducks was paddling around the western side of the lake when we left, and they were still there in the afternoon when we returned from our hike.



Looking back across the lake, towards the Grand Turk (mountain in the background).



Looking northeast towards the mountains behind Silverton. According to TOPO maps, there was a lot of mining activity in these mountains.



Looking northeast from a clearing on the trail past the lake. Notice how clear the sky is now; it would not stay that way for long.



Panorama looking across towards the slopes of the Grand Turk (behind the trees and to the right in this photo), and where the Colorado trail goes.



Our trail finally wraps around the northeastern side of the hill, and we start to see some wildflowers on the hillside.



There weren't as many flowers here as we had seen on other hikes this trip, but they were still quite nice.



This is where the use trail takes off to the east. Heart Lake is supposedly in the notch visible below the ridge and just above the trail.



Here is the hikers register for this trail. It is highly recommended that visitors register, not only so that it's easier to find them if they go missing, but also for statistics purposes, to know how approximately many people are going to what locations on this trail.



The use trail soon drops down into the first meadow, and we get a nice view of Snowdon Peak (right of center).



I think these flowers are called Fringed Gentian, but I'm not sure. They were quite common near the start of the hike.



Crossing the first meadow, the trail heads straight towards Snowdon Peak.



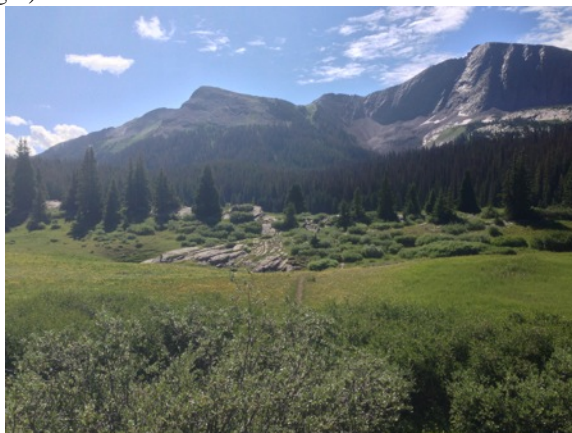
Here are some small pink flowers, and also some yellow flowers, which seemed to be the most common in these meadows.



Looking to the north and towards one of the two small lakes in the first meadow.



We found out later that there is a use trail which goes to the top of the grassy knoll to the left in this photo. From there, climbers can continue along the ridge to the south (right) to ascend Snowdon Peak.



This is the southern lake in the first meadow. Notice how many small yellow flowers were in the meadow here.



Looking to the north, across the grassy field of little yellow flowers.



I'm not sure if this is considered the second meadow or still part of the first meadow, but I'll refer to it as the first meadow. Notice the stream winding through this meadow; we would be following this stream for much of our hike up the use trail.



Looking across the meadow towards Snowdon Peak, behind the trees. The reddish patch is all Little Red Elephant flowers, which are supposedly relatively uncommon in this area.



Looking across the meadow at the ridge north of Snowdon Peak. The morning lighting made for good iPhone HDR photography.



A close-up of some of the Little Red Elephant flowers. Notice how the flowers really do look like an elephant's head, especially the trunk.



The trail soon reaches the other side of the meadow, and becomes more distinct there. Here we are looking back across the meadow.



The trail then begins to wind its way through the trees and towards the peak.



Here we are looking southeast. I think Heart Lake is supposed to be in the small valley just left of center, but I'm not entirely sure.



We began to see more wildflowers once we entered the trees. I'm not sure what the small white ones visible here are called.



This use trail is quite well-worn, and, although it did split a few times, the forks did rejoin.



Here we began to encounter more flowers. In this photo are Mountain Bluebells, Indian Paintbrush, Cow Parsnip, and a different yellow flower that I'm also not sure what it is called.



The Mountain Bluebells were the most common flower through here.



The trail was very nice to walk along, although (since we had only seen one other hiker on the trail so far today, and that was on the main trail near the beginning), we were a little concerned about bears.



Here we are seeing some larger yellow flowers.



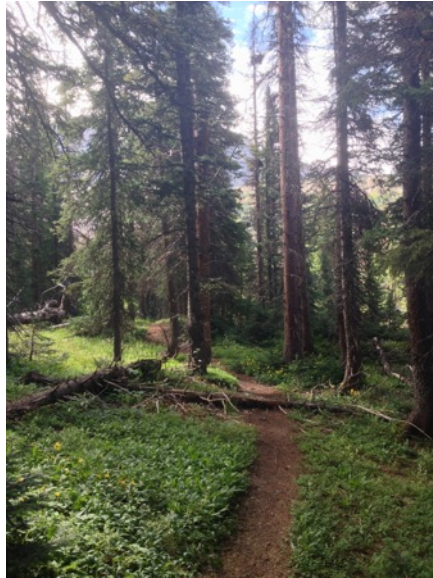
There were only a few patches of these small purple flowers through here.



The trail then began to cross a steeper hillside, and we could hear the creek rushing through a gorge below.



We could also see the outline of the ridge south of Snowdon Peak here.



The trail soon reached a cliff ledge, and we could look down on the creek far below. I hadn't realized how much elevation we had gained at this point.



There is a use trail down into the upper part of the gorge, where hikers can descend to see a nice, but small, waterfall.



We decided to check out the waterfall further on our way back, and instead continued along the trail.



Here we are entering what I'm referring to as the second meadow. Notice how much closer Snowdon Peak looks now.



Also notice that some dark clouds are starting to form. Heart Lake should be just beyond the ledge seen to the right in this photo.



Here we are looking north across this meadow, towards some tall blooming plants. We would see more of these later in the hike.



After crossing the meadow, the trail re-entered the trees, then forked. This is the left fork, which appears to be blocked off by some branches. I am not sure why this trail is blocked off. According to the TOPO map I had seen for the Heart Lake hike, the use trail would fork, with the left fork leading to the ridge north of Snowdon Peak, and the right fork leading to Heart Lake and then on to the ridge south of Snowdon Peak. I do not know if this is that fork, or even if the map I looked at before this hike is correct.



The right fork of the trail soon entered a marshy area..



Here is an interesting small flower we spotted in this area. I don't know what it is called.



I made it less than half-way across the meadow before beginning to sink into the marshy ground beyond the top of my high-top hiking boots. Since it looked like the ground would only get wetter, we decided to turn around from there.



We then tried the fork of trail which had the branches crossing it, but the trail soon began to get fainter and we encountered a large amount of what appeared to be bear scat. So, at that point we decided to return to a more major trail. Here is one last photo looking across the second meadows. I think Heart Lake is just beyond the small ridge seen to the left of center of this photo (lowest point).



We next decided to check out the waterfall we had passed on the trail earlier. By the creek, there were these very nice pink flowers.



The waterfall proved to be difficult to photograph due to the sun angle, but here is my best attempt at a HDR photo.



Panorama of the small grotto containing the waterfall. One must climb down the rock to the left in this photo to reach this spot.



There were a few Colorado Columbine blooming near the waterfall.



From here, I climbed back up to the use trail. This is the view looking down at the gorge-like area just below the waterfall.



We spotted these interesting puffy white flowers on our hike back to the first meadow.



I think this might be Cow Parsnip, but I'm not sure.



Reaching the southeastern end of the first meadows. Notice how the clouds are starting to come in now.



Looking back across the meadows at Snowdon Peak. I hope to return to this area sometime, for another attempt to reach Heart Lake as well as to ascend the small peak to the left (north) of Snowdon Peak.



Taking a closer look at this small peak. It looks like one would have great views from that high point.



From here, we followed the use trail back towards the main Crater Lake Trail. There are some interesting limestone formations in the first meadows near the main trail, where water has drained underground from the meadows.



This is a natural bridge of sorts, where the water has drained on both sides and underneath a chunk of rock. There were footprints in the mud below this bridge, but it did not look easy to climb down to the area below the bridge, or to climb back out.



Looking back at this "sinkhole"-like area from the use trail.



The multitudes of yellow and white flowers in this part of the meadow were more noticeable in the afternoon lighting.

