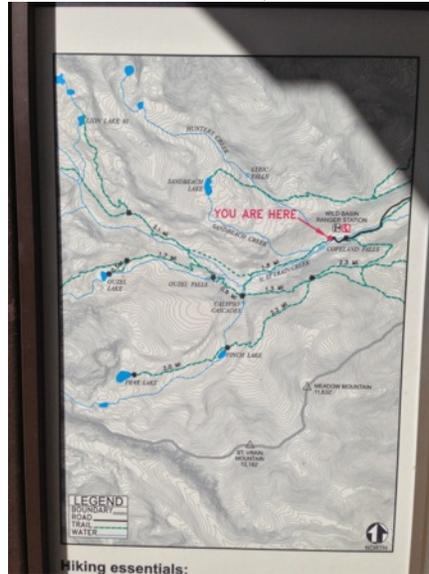


OUZEL LAKE IN THE WILD BASIN AREA OF ROCKY MOUNTAIN NATIONAL PARK

The Wild Basin area of Rocky Mountain National Park is an area which I hadn't researched very much before leaving for the trip, but we ended up checking out on the recommendation of the park rangers as it generally has less snow than the more popular hiking areas. After having visited this part of the park, I certainly believe that this is a very worthwhile destination. Despite sometimes being considered one of the less spectacular parts of the park, I found the scenery in the Wild Basin area to be excellent, and I highly recommend hiking in this area.

When we were in the Wild Basin area, the bridge just past Ouzel Falls had washed out, so we took the bypass trail to Ouzel Lake (which adds on only 0.1 mile, but bypasses Ouzel Falls and Calypso Cascades, thus we didn't get to see either of these places). The first stop on our hike was Copeland Falls, 0.3 mile from the parking area. The turnoff for the bypass trail is 1.1 miles beyond the falls, and the bypass trail has a length of 1.3 miles (it is not as heavily travelled as the main trail, as it is typically used by campers). The turnoff for Ouzel Lake is located at 4.4 miles from the trailhead, and Ouzel Lake is listed as being 0.5 mile beyond this (however, when one is battling deep snow, it feels longer!). We only saw the lake below Ouzel Lake, as we were unable to find the trail where it crossed the river (and we didn't know if it was indeed possible to cross the river).

The topographical map of the Wild Basin Area located at the trailhead (note that Thunder Lake and Bluebird Lake aren't on the map):



There seemed to have been a lot of trail damage from the 2013 flood in the park in various areas; this one affected the trail over by Calypso Cascades:



We saw later on our hike how much of the forest around Ouzel Lake must have burned in the Ouzel Fire of 1978:



Starting off on this trail; it was quite level, and we followed the St. Vrain River until we turned off on the bypass trail:



The trail to Copeland Falls soon turns off to the left:



This is the lower falls:



We continued on the trail to the upper falls; not realizing that this trail would eventually connect with the main trail, we backtracked and may have missed some more falls/rapids:



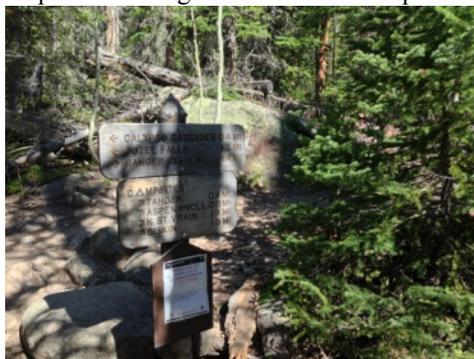
As the trail follows this main river, we got to see some more rapids:



There were lots of campsites through here:



The bypass trail, which is typically used by campers accessing the two sets of campsites located along this trail:



I was surprised to see that llamas are allowed on this trail:



The trail started off well-maintained and dry:



The turnoff for the first campsite:



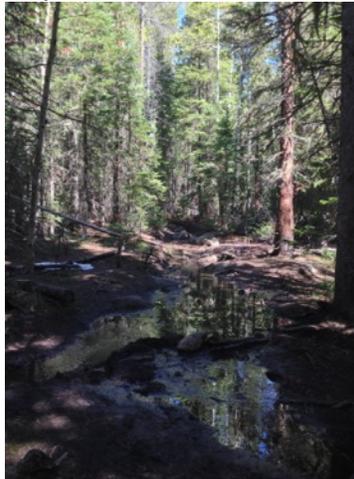
Through here, the trail was relatively level:



The second campsite:



At this point, however, the trail became wet and muddy for some distance, as a nearby creek was running along it:



After crossing this muddy section of trail, the trail became less defined and steeper, and it seemed to be more of a use trail in places; we didn't have any issue with this whatsoever, but hikers with large packs might have more difficulty if unprepared for this:



The trail finally leveled out:



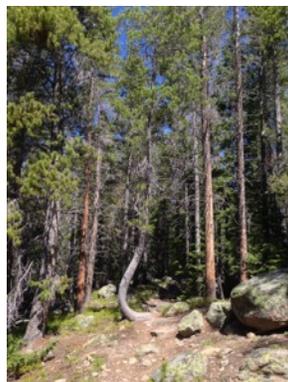
Then, it climbed steeply one last time, passing through a small meadow (which we noticed could be seen from the Ouzel Lake trail across the valley):



Looking over towards the valley which contains Ouzel and Bluebird Lakes:



This trail felt longer than we had expected, but it was a very scenic route to hike, despite bypassing Ouzel Falls and the Calypso Cascades:



Reaching the main trail again; we weren't sure of the snow conditions near Thunder Lake, but we assumed there would be a lot of snow up there:



The North St. Vrain Campsite is located at this fork:



The trail down towards Ouzel Falls and the Ouzel Lake turnoff quickly crosses the river:



The trail doesn't lose much elevation in the 0.4 mile back down to the Ouzel Lake trail:



We were beginning to see small snowpatches by the time we reached the turnoff:



The trail immediately begins to climb to the ridge between the valley containing Ouzel Lake and the valley which we had been hiking in previously:



It switchbacks once, then passes through an area of shorter trees:



We are able to get some great views across the valley through here; note the meadow just below the rock face which is left of center in the photo—that's where the bypass trail cuts through:



We were also starting to get some views up towards the Thunder Lake area, and up towards the Lion Lakes (which look from the maps to be a spectacular hike, when there isn't lots of snow):



Looking over towards the valley we will now be hiking in, and noting the devastation caused by the Ouzel Fire:



There typically are notices to visitors near the lakes in this park, this one in regards to fishing:



This was our view of the peaks above Bluebird Lake during most of the hike along the ridge:



The hiking through here had much more incredible views than we had expected to see; my photos really don't do justice to the beautiful scenery:



The trail was nice and flat while we were hiking along the ridge, which helped us to be able to focus on looking at the snow-topped peaks we were hiking towards:



The trail started to cross some patches of snow, but we were able to either cross the snow on a well-worn trail or work around the deeper pieces on nearby rocks:



The large meadow we were walking through enabled us to get spectacular photos of the surrounding peaks:



We have now reached the short trail to Ouzel Lake; from here on in both directions the trail becomes less established:



Looking up at a prominent peak from the trail to Ouzel Lake:



This certainly is a scenic hike, and it was my favorite hike that we did on this trip:



There were lots of these flowers along the trail through here:



As we approached the trees, we started encountering lots of snow, which made the hiking more difficult. Here, we are following a snowpack which is next to the river draining out of Ouzel Lake:



This metal drum was near the trail where a horse hitching post was located; I'm not sure of its use:



The trail quickly disappeared under all the snow, and we weren't sure where we needed to go, so when we saw this small lake we decided to stop here and look at the map:



The actual Ouzel Lake is up-stream of this, but as we would either be bushwhacking or battling deeper snow than we were prepared for, we chose to head back to the main trail from here:



This certainly is a nice lake; there were lots of lily-pad-like plants growing in this lake, but there were also lots of mosquitoes at this lake so we didn't stop for long:



I spotted the trail to Bluebird Lake across the way from where we were (above and to the left of the tree with the brown top in the foreground of this photo), so we chose to cut cross-country back to the main trail rather than go back through all that snow:



Looking over at this nice, small lake, with the tall peaks in the background, from here:



There were even more of the small white flowers we had seen earlier through here:



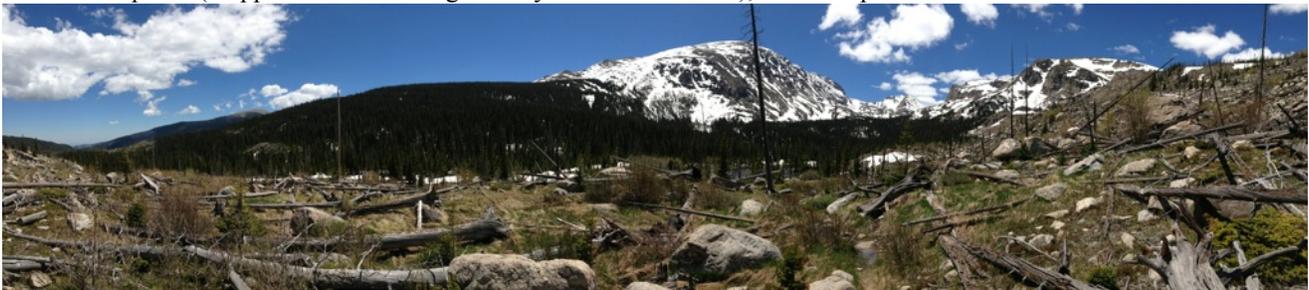
The lake outlet area was mucky and we had to carefully pick our way through it:



Looking over towards the main trail; it's just below the two tall trees seen at the skyline:



Looking back over at the small lake after having reached the main trail to Bluebird Lake; note that the Bluebird Lake trail can be barely seen in the photo (it appears to be heading directly for the small lake), as at this point it looks more like a use trail:



We didn't have time to see how far we could hike up towards Bluebird Lake, so we headed back down the trail:



It seems to me that it would be a lot shorter to get to Ouzel Lake by following the Bluebird Lake trail until the small lake is visible, then cut over to that lake and pick up the trail by the river. Just be very careful of the terrain and try to avoid walking on the native plants so as not to do damage to the area:



On our way back down the trail, we were able to get a few good views up the other valley, towards the Lion Lakes:



Spectacular panorama showing the Ouzel and Bluebird Lake area to the left, and the main valley heading up towards the Thunder and Lion Lakes area to the right, with Longs Peak just barely visible on the right:



Looking down the valley towards the parking area for Wild Basin:



The views along this trail are so spectacular:



Looking across the valley towards where the campers bypass trail cuts through:



We had a very pleasant hike back down the campers trail, except when we were crossing the mucky area (it seemed that there was more water there on the way back than on the way up, likely as more snow had melted during the sunniest part of the day):



This little squirrel seemed to be posing (thankfully not begging) on this log:



The mosses and lichens on the rocks in this area seemed to be well established:



Crossing through a smaller meadow near what looked to be an interesting area to do some rock climbing just before reaching the main trail along the St. Vrain River:



A small waterfall on the main river that I hadn't noticed on the hike up:

