

Baker Lake

(Short: moderate to strenuous – walking sticks recommended)

DIRECTIONS TO TRAILHEAD: From Triple Creek's driveway, turn left onto the West Fork Road and drive about .7 (seven tenths) of a mile. You'll see a National Forest Access sign indicating Baker Lake. Turn left here, onto Baker Lake Road, and travel 9 miles to the trailhead (#234). Baker Lake Road gains a considerable amount of elevation, climbing the flank of the mountain via switchbacks. **Driving time is approximately 45 minutes, from Triple Creek Ranch.** Note: .7 (seven tenths) of a mile before the trailhead, you will come to an overlook on the right. (There is no sign but there is a giant rock the size of a small house situated on a U-curve.) Park on the side of the road and walk out for an incredible view of Trapper Creek Canyon and the Bitterroot Valley. Look for mountain goats!

ELEVATIONS: (approx.) Trailhead 6,900 ft; Baker point 7,400 ft; Baker Lake 7885 ft; Middle Lake 8100 ft; Gem Lake 8360 ft.

MILEAGE: The hike to Baker Lake is about 1 ¼ miles, to Middle Lake is 1 ¾ miles, and to Gem Lake is 2 miles – one way.

TRAIL DESCRIPTION: This trail is rocky; Approximately a 60-minute hike from trailhead to the first lake (Baker). Prepare for the first 20 to 40 minutes of vigorous hiking, uphill through a Lodgepole pine forest (pending your hiking ability). This steep climb loses the steepness when you get past Baker Point, a large rock outcropping just to the left of the trail. Be sure to walk out between the two largest rocks and enjoy the panoramic view of Triple Creek Ranch below you. Upon leaving Baker Point, the trail retreats west to Baker Lake. Keep in mind that you will be approaching the lake from below and thus will not see the lake until you are almost upon it. Some of the trail is in timber, but at several openings there are excellent views of Trapper Peak looming above you to the west. Every once in awhile, it's a good idea to stop and check your surroundings, especially when terrain seems to change. Whenever you stop, completely turn around, surveying your surroundings. This is especially helpful when coming back down the trail. The last 100 yards is a scramble up smooth large boulders, to the right (uphill). Look for rock cairns to mark the final approach to the lake.

To reach Middle Lake, follow Baker Lake's south (left) shore to the creek inlet. Some years there may be a more defined trail around the right side of the lake. Your goal, whichever way you choose, is to reach the stream feeding into Baker Lake. The trail to Middle Lake is on the right side of the feeder creek. The trail to Middle Lake is rough and poorly defined. Just stay on the right side of the creek and follow it for .6 to Middle Lake. From Middle Lake you can actually see the rim of Gem Lake above it. The trail continues along the right side of Middle Lake and follows the stream up a short, steep, rocky canyon about .2 (two tenths) of a mile to Gem Lake. From Gem you can follow a stream to the flanks of Trapper Peak, where even in the heat of summer, "red snow" lies in long, steep fields.

Have Fun & ENJOY!