

## Cloud Peak Wilderness

On September 3, 1964, the United States did something that no other nation had ever done before. They created "The Wilderness Act".

The Act states: *"In order to assure that an increasing population, accompanied by expanding settlement and growing mechanization, does not occupy and modify all areas within the United States... leaving no lands designated for preservation and protection in their natural condition, it is hereby declared to be the policy of the Congress to secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness."*

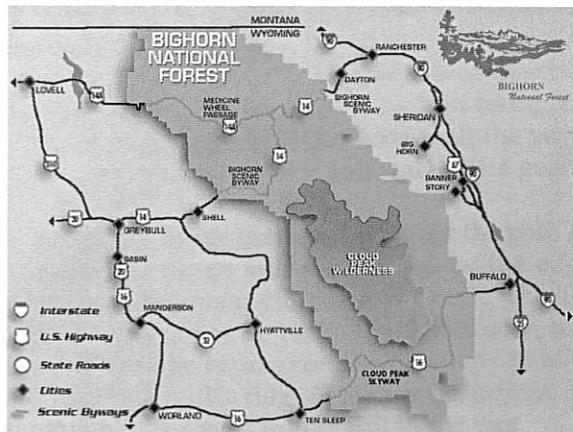
### Cloud Peak Wilderness

The United States Congress designated the Cloud Peak Wilderness in 1984 with the Wyoming Wilderness Act and it now has a total of 189,039 acres. All of the wilderness is in the state of Wyoming.

Long recognized as having some of the **most majestic alpine scenery** in America, this region was managed as the Cloud Peak Primitive Area as far back as 1932. For 27 miles along the spine of the Bighorn Mountain Range, Cloud Peak Wilderness preserves many sharp summits and towering sheer rock faces standing above glacier-carved U-shaped valleys.

Although rugged in appearance, the Bighorns are actually more gentle than other mountains in Wyoming. The area is visited each year by thousands and thousands of backpackers who hike along more than 100 miles of trails.

Named for the tallest mountain in Bighorn National Forest--Cloud Peak at 13,167 feet--the Wilderness is blanketed in snow for a large part of the year. Most of the higher ground doesn't show bare ground until July. On the **east side of Cloud Peak** itself, a deeply inset cirque holds the **last remaining glacier in this range**. Several hundred beautiful lakes cover the landscape and drain into miles of streams. The forest is an attractive mix of pine and spruce opened by meadows and wetlands <http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/bighorn/maps/rec/>



The trail now doglegs back to the west for a gentle stroll through the pines, which now are intermixed with subalpine fir. After 0.6 mile of easy traveling, a series of switchbacks leads up the short but breath-stealing final pitch to reach the lowermost of the Seven Brothers Lakes. Here, it joins the Seven Brothers Trail (see page 49, *The Seven Brothers Lakes*, for details on the lakes and their connecting trails).

## 8 Florence Pass

**General description:** A day hike from the Hunter Trailhead to Trail Park, 5.5 miles one way, or a backpack over a high pass to Mistymoon Lake, 14.5 miles from Hunter Corrals or 11.4 miles from Soldier Park.

**Difficulty:** Moderate to Powell Creek; moderately strenuous beyond.

**Route finding:** No problem.

**Best season:** Mid-July to early September.

**Visitation:** Moderate.

**Elevation gain:** 3,070 feet (from Hunter Corrals).

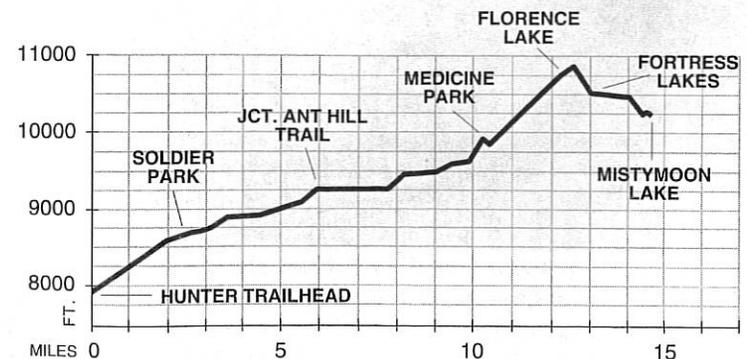
**Elevation loss:** 640 feet.

**Maximum elevation:** 10,900 feet (Florence Pass).

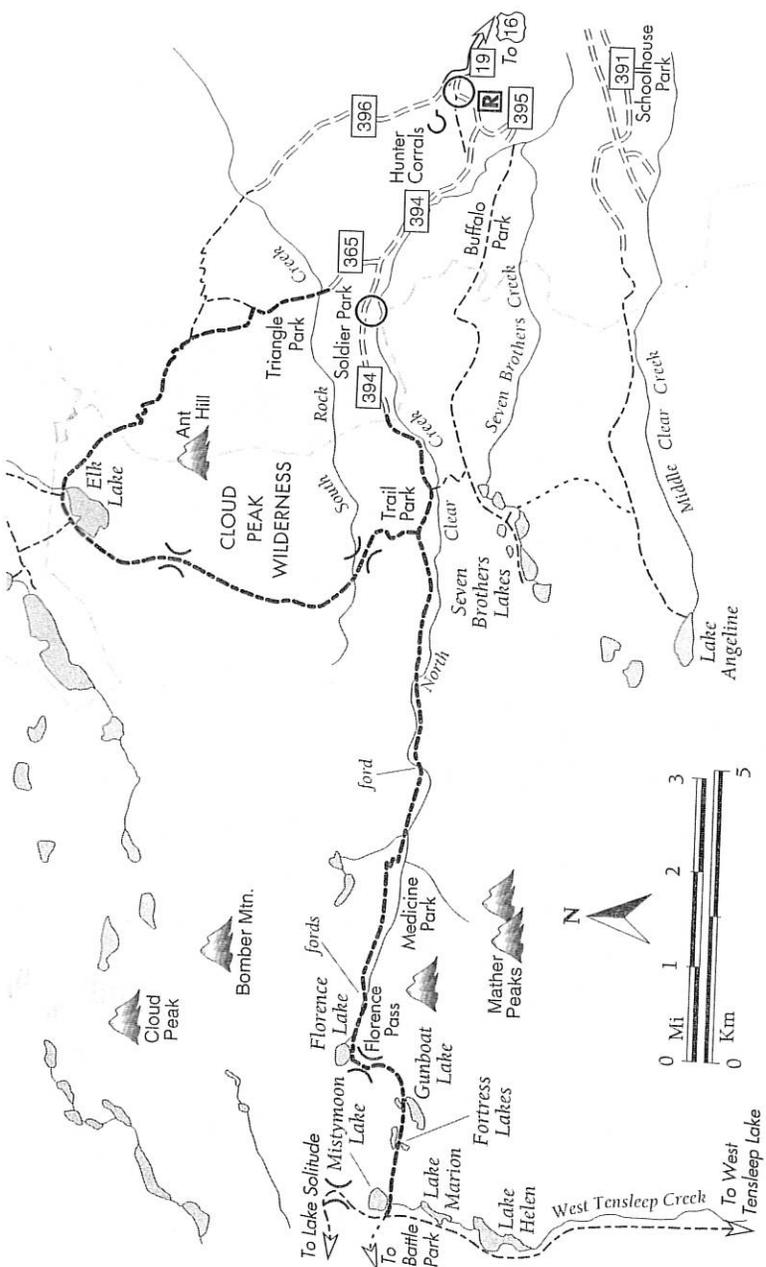
**Topo maps:** Hunter Mesa, Lake Angeline, Lake Helen, *Trails Illustrated*.

**Jurisdiction:** Cloud Peak Wilderness (Bighorn National Forest).

**Finding the trailhead:** Follow U.S. Highway 16 to mile 79.6, then drive west on the Hunter Creek Road (Forest Road 19). After 2.3 miles, veer left onto FR 394 to reach the Hunter Trailhead at the bottom of the grade. Most hikers park here. If you have four-wheel drive and are looking to abuse your rig, continue up FR 394 bearing right at the forks. Expect washouts and lots of boulders as the road runs for 2.6 miles to reach the edge of Soldier Park. Bear left at the junction with FR 365 and drive across the meadow, parking



# Florence Pass • Ant Hill • Elk Lake



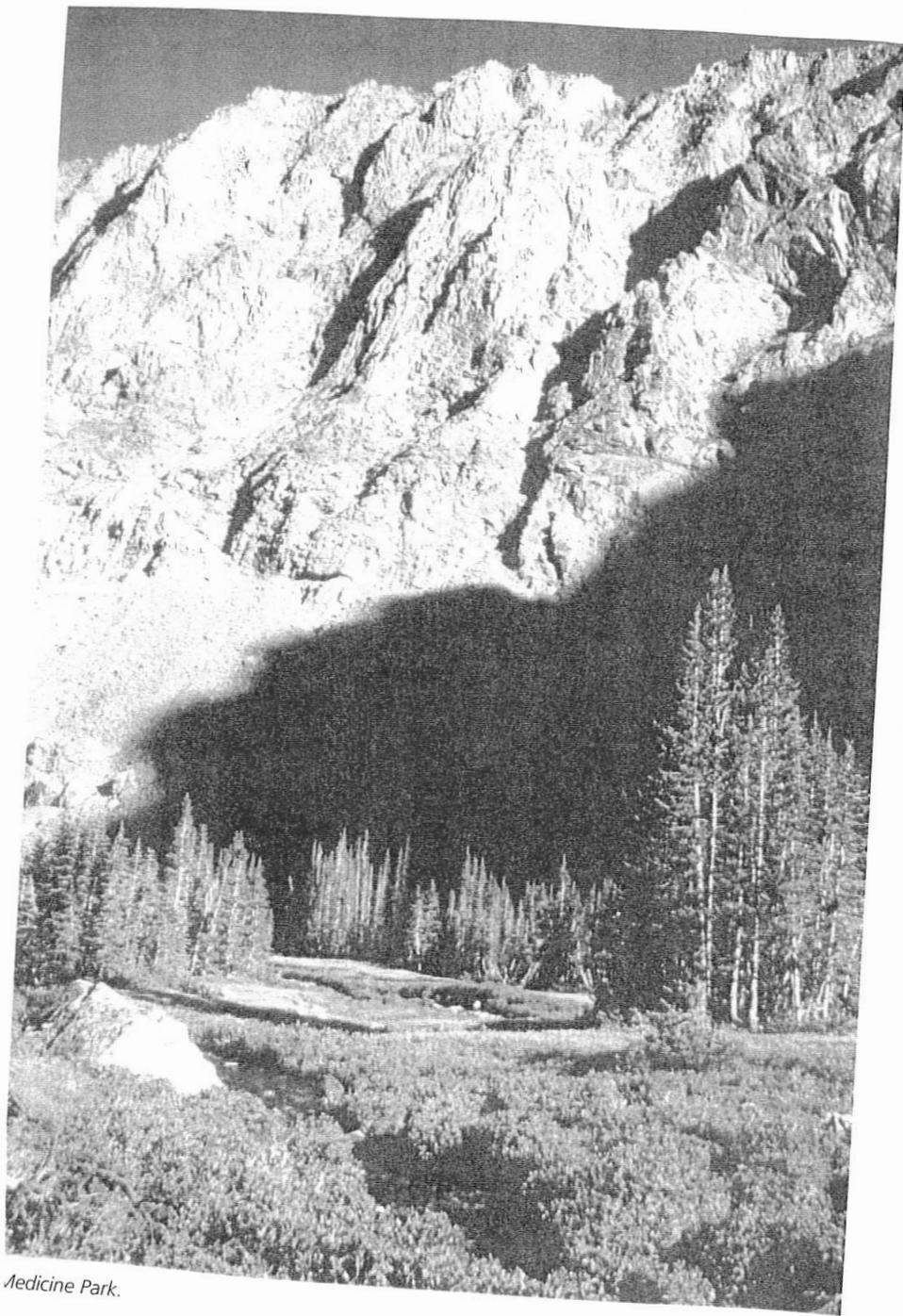
just inside the trees on the far side. Then begin the hike by walking the rest of FR 394 westward.

### Key points:

- 0.0 Hunter Trailhead. Hike over bridge and up FR 394.
- 0.2 Roads split. Bear right.
- 2.2 Road reaches site of old graves.
- 2.5 Road enters Soldier Park. Follow road west.
- 3.1 Road leaves Soldier Park.
- 4.4 Road ends as trail enters Cloud Peak Wilderness.
- 5.5 Trail enters Trail Park. Junction with Trail Park cutoff to Seven Brothers Lakes. Continue straight ahead.
- 5.8 Trail exits Trail Park.
- 6.0 Junction with Ant Hill section of Solitude Trail. Bear left.
- 7.7 Bridge leads to south bank of North Clear Creek.
- 8.8 Trail fords North Clear Creek to reach north bank.
- 9.7 Trail crosses Powell Creek.
- 10.3 Medicine Park.
- 11.8 First of three fords of North Clear Creek.
- 12.2 Trail makes final ford at the foot of Florence Lake.
- 12.5 Florence Pass. Trail starts descending.
- 13.2 Trail crosses outlet of Gunboat Lake.
- 13.5 Fortress Lakes.
- 14.3 Trail reaches shore of Mistymoon Lake.
- 14.5 Trail crosses outlet stream to reach junction with Mistymoon and Lake Solitude Trails.

**The hike:** This trail is certainly one of the most scenic and popular routes in the Cloud Peak Wilderness. Florence Pass represents one of only three passes that bear trails across the Bighorn divide. It is an integral leg in many possible loop treks, and horse parties often use it for day trips into the high country. Horsemen should note that the trail is built on broken boulders above Medicine Park and may be impassable to inexperienced horses and riders. The gem-like meadows of North Clear Creek lead up to the stony heights near the pass, where even the tundra is sparse and ragged. Florence Lake occupies a barren cirque at the top of the divide. As the trail descends to Mistymoon Lake, it visits the Fortress Lakes in their tundra basin. At its terminus, the trail links up with routes leading to West Tensleep Lake, the Battle Park Trailhead, and Lake Solitude.

Hikers who want to spare their vehicles a severe thrashing will start the hike at the Hunter Trailhead. Cross the bridge and follow the jeep track up through an open meadow. Bear right at the first fork as the road climbs through the trees to emerge in hilltop meads. It soon winds through a stand of timber that burned during 1988. Beyond it is a pair of graves from which Soldier Park derives its name. One belongs to a Frenchman named Pierre Garde who died here while serving with an Army survey party in 1877. The other belongs to a Swedish lumberjack who expired in 1922. The gravediggers could hardly have chosen a prettier site to bury the pair. The bluff looks out over the wetlands of North Clear Creek, with the granite domes of Darton



Medicine Park.

Peak, the Mather Peaks, and Bomber Mountain stretched beyond. After passing through a stretch of unburned timber, the road emerges in the grassy expanse of Soldier Park. Follow the road that runs west across the length of the meadow to enter the timber beyond.

Visitors who drive to Soldier Park will start hiking on the stony road leading westward into the forest along North Clear Creek. The jeep track becomes a pack trail as it enters the Cloud Peak Wilderness. Here, a small and grassy meadow allows early views of the Mather Peaks far up the valley. The path then enters the pines, and after a short distance the lodgepoles thin out and give way to the grassy expanse of Trail Park. This long meadow stretches for 1.5 miles along North Clear Creek. Willows guard the watercourse, while the grassy swales are studded with the blossoms of prairie smoke and penstemon. There are superb views of the peaks that crowd the head of the valley.

A trail sign at the east edge of Trail Park marks the Trail Park cutoff to the Seven Brothers Lakes. There is a footbridge at the lower edge of the meadow. The main trail runs westward through the heart of the park, then winds upward into the lodgepoles to meet the trail to Ant Hill. The Florence Pass Trail then continues up the valley, staying mainly within the trees but making one more visit to Trail Park along the way.

The path ultimately descends to cross a bridge over North Clear Creek beside a grassy opening that leads northwest to the swampy shores of Deer Lake. As the main trail follows the south bank of the stream, the lodgepoles give way to a subalpine forest of spruce, whitebark pine, and subalpine fir. Great walls of pale granite now rise skyward on either side of the valley, planed smooth by an immense glacier during the Pleistocene epoch.

After 5.7 miles, a knee-deep ford leads back to the north bank of the stream. The young firs growing in this area are subject to periodic avalanches that roar down from the steep walls above. The sparse trees yield excellent views of a stark southern crag of Bomber Mountain to the north of the creek, while the cliffs to the south are gouged with great rifts that bear tumbling waterfalls during the snowmelt season. The path crosses the bridge over Powell Creek in the midst of a grove of stout spruce trees, the Big-horns' version of old growth.

The path then begins a steady climb, zigzagging up a meadowy slope. Here, the blue larkspurs and the graceful spires of subalpine fir provide a picturesque perch for viewing the immense waterfall that emerges from a basin between the Mather Peaks. After a vigorous climb, the trail drops down to the rim of Florence Canyon, a small gorge carved by North Clear Creek after the glaciers receded.

The trail continues up the valley to reach Medicine Park, a gemlike pocket of alpine tundra—smooth and flat like a billiard table. The fragile greenery contrasts sharply with the lifeless aprons of frost-shattered granite below the cliffs to the south. After crossing the park, the trail follows the streamcourse up through a narrow ravine where the blossoms of anemones and buttercups crowd the south-facing slope. At the head of the ravine,

passage is blocked by a *terminal moraine*, a great heap of broken rubble pushed into place by a long-extinct glacier.

After threading a rocky course up the face of the moraine, the trail emerges into a harsh landscape of stone, mazes of moraines guarded by stark domes where the only color is provided by small clumps of krummholz fir and cushion-forming perennials. Soon the trees disappear altogether and the path enters a barren country of dark and brooding cliffs flecked with lingering snowdrifts and cornices. Three easy rock-hops afford crossings of North Clear Creek just below Florence Lake, a high alpine tarn of surreal beauty. The path follows the south shore of the lake, yielding excellent views of the summit of Bomber Mountain. Watch for marmots and much smaller pikas among the boulders beside the lake.

The trail then climbs the short and rather anticlimactic pitch to reach the rounded gap of Florence Pass, where a fragile veneer of tundra covers the rocks. It then descends at a steady clip, weaving among the granite outcrops as it drops into the alpine valley that bears the Fortress Lakes. Gunboat Lake is the largest of these, its turquoise waters crowded up against the sheer cliff that guards the south side of the valley. The trail levels off as it crosses the outlet stream that issues from Gunboat Lake, then wanders beside the shallow tarn to the north of the lake. The path then passes between the remaining Fortress Lakes and follows the stream that drains them.

The steady descent along this streamcourse will delight wildflower enthusiasts, as the brook is bordered by almost every timberline wildflower native to the Bighorn Mountains. The trail bottoms out at Mistymoon Lake, which is right at the timberline, and offers outstanding views of the surrounding summits including Bomber Mountain and Cloud Peak. The Florence Pass Trail now crosses West Tensleep Creek to reach its terminus at a trail junction at the foot of the lake. From here, trails run south to West Tensleep Lake, west to the Battle Park Trailhead, and northwest to Lake Solitude.

**Mistymoon Lake**  
**General description:** A day hike or backpack to Lake Helen (4.9 miles), Lake Marion (6.2 miles), or the head of Mistymoon Lake (7.2 miles).

**Difficulty:** Moderate.

**Route finding:** No problem.

**Best season:** Mid-July to early September.

**Visitation:** Extremely heavy.

**Elevation gain:** 970 feet.

**Elevation loss:** 200 feet.

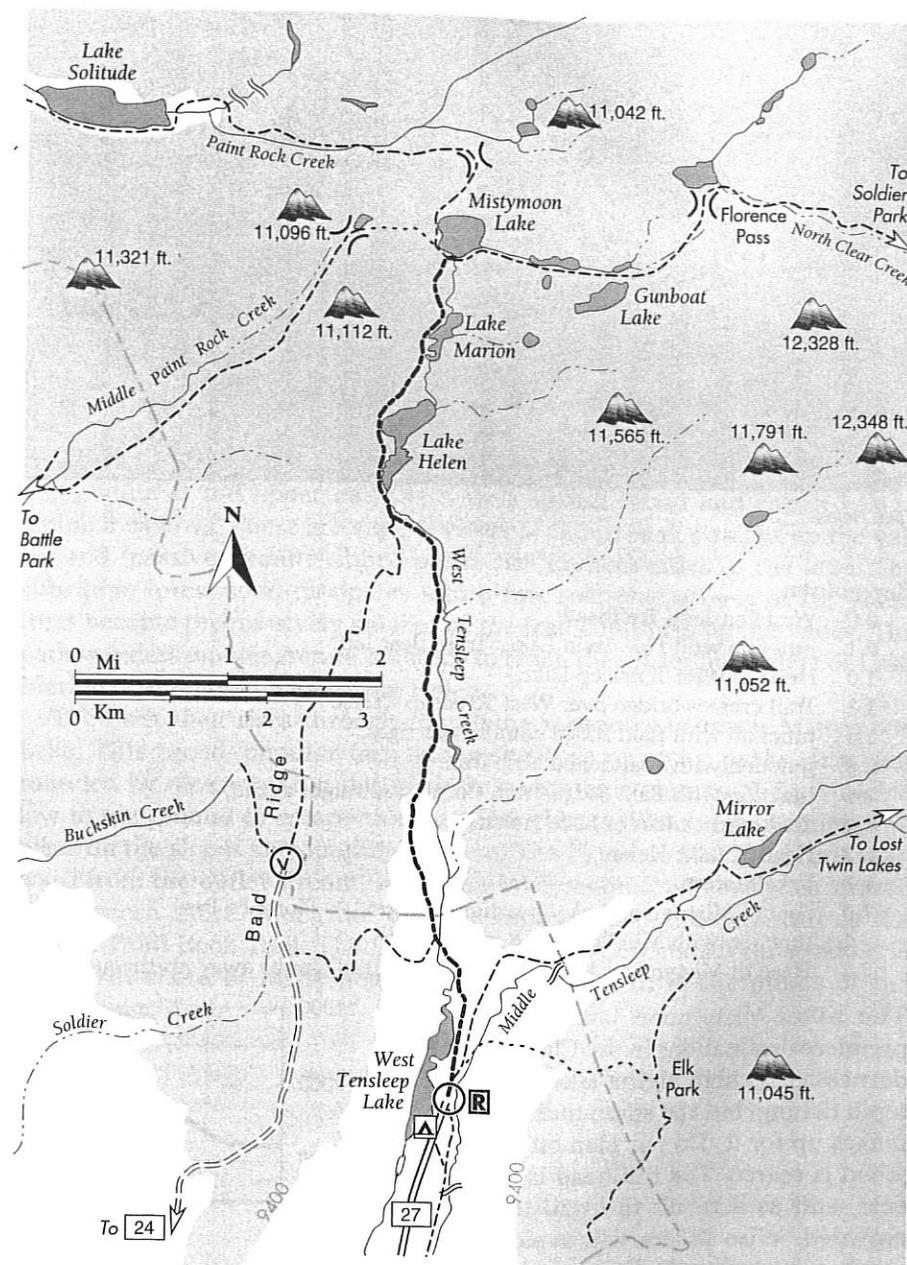
**Maximum elevation:** 10,250 feet (Mistymoon Lake).

**Topo maps:** Lake Helen, *Trails Illustrated*.

**Jurisdiction:** Cloud Peak Wilderness (Bighorn National Forest).

**Finding the trailhead:** Take U.S. Highway 16 west from Meadowlark Lake to reach the old Deer Haven Lodge. Turn north on Forest Road 27. Follow this good road north for 1.2 miles to a fork; bear right to stay on FR 27. Follow it for 6.9 miles to a fork; bear right here to reach the West Tensleep Trailhead at the road's end.

## Mistymoon Lake



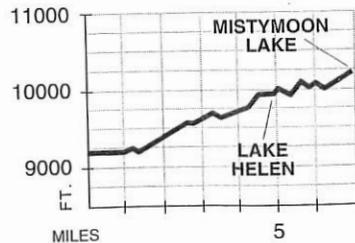


Lake Helen.

**Key points:**

- 0.0 West Tensleep Trailhead.
- 0.1 Junction with Lost Twin Lakes Trail. Bear left.
- 1.0 Head of West Tensleep Lake.
- 1.3 Trail crosses bridge over West Tensleep Creek.
- 1.4 Junction with Bald Ridge cutoff. Bear right.
- 2.8 Junction with abandoned Yost Trail.
- 4.6 Junction with Bald Ridge Trail. Continue straight ahead.
- 4.9 Trail reaches foot of Lake Helen.
- 5.3 Head of Lake Helen.
- 6.2 Lake Marion.
- 7.0 Foot of Mistymoon Lake. Junction with trail to Florence Pass.
- 7.1 Junction with Middle Paint Rock Creek.
- 7.2 Head of Mistymoon Lake. Lake Solitude Trail climbs away northward.

**The hike:** Mistymoon Lake is one of the premiere destinations in the Cloud Peak Wilderness. This high alpine lake offers rather tepid fishing, but the surrounding grandeur makes up for it. Do not plan on a fire since wood is scarce. The trailhead is easy to access, and as a result the trail tends to be crowded. Wise hikers will avoid it on the weekends. Lakes Helen and Marion are equally scenic and make fine day-hiking destinations, but camping opportunities are limited. Visitors who stay overnight should be conscientious and select a campsite hidden from the trail.



From the trailhead, hike north through the pines and take an immediate left as the Mistymoon Lake Trail glides down to the shore of West Tensleep Lake. The grassy crest of Bald Ridge rises beyond the lake, culminating in a rocky peak far to the north. At the head of the lake is a pastoral landscape of grassy bottoms, and the trail follows the east bank of West Tensleep Creek through these meadows. A brief climb through the pines leads to a bridge over the creek, and on the far side is a grassy clearing that affords the first views of the peaks at the head of the valley. It is here the faint West Tensleep cutoff trail climbs to the west to reach the top of Bald Ridge.

The main trail resumes its northward course, climbing modestly through the pines as it moves away from the creek. The trail levels off in an isolated meadow that reveals the summits flanking Bighorn Peak. The path makes a brief return to West Tensleep Creek at a spot where deep sloughs wander through a series of emerald meadows. The landscape grows rocky as the mountains crowd in around the stream and a sparse growth of spruce and pine rises between the granite balds. Expect periodic views of the rugged foothills as the gradient increases to a modest climb.

At the top of the rise is a junction with the Bald Ridge Trail and just beyond it lies Lake Helen. Its lower end is narrow and choked with boulders, while at the upper end the waters spread broad and cobalt beside alpine meadows. There are superb views of Cloud Peak straight up the valley and massive, granite-ribbed peaks rise on both sides of the lake. The subalpine forest soon dissipates into a few scattered groves of fir. These trees become progressively smaller as the trail continues up the valley. The path wanders among granite outcrops to reach the glistening waters of Lake Marion, a smaller clone of Lake Helen.

The path then rises through the alpine meadows to reach Mistymoon Lake. This broad, circular tarn sits at the base of rocky peaks. It is surrounded by alpine tundra dotted with krummholz clumps of fir, huddled low to the ground to escape the icy winter blasts. Watch for marmots and pikas on the slopes surrounding the lake. The Florence Pass Trail runs eastward from the outlet stream, while the Mistymoon Trail continues around the western shore. Along the way, a signpost marks the departure of the Middle Paint Rock Trail. The Lake Solitude Trail descends from a saddle to the north shore of Mistymoon Lake, merging with the terminus of the Mistymoon Trail.