

are commonly seen. An occasional golden eagle soars through this country looking for marmots and pikas. Down closer to the trailheads, a few mule deer and black bears make their summer homes.

## Options

Those who come in from the East Rosebud Trailhead may wish to take an alternate way back. From the east edge of the plateau to the west-northwest of Turgulse Lake, it's possible to descend into the bowl that holds Turgulse and hike past Froze-to-Death Lake and Phantom Lake. Then cross the hill back to rejoin the trail above Slough Lake. There is no trail for most of this route and some investigating between Froze-to-Death and Phantom Lakes may be necessary, but it is an interesting way out for the fit and adventurous. And high adventure is what this trip is all about in the first place. If you have arranged a shuttle or pickup, you can go out the East Rosebud instead of retracing your steps back to the West Rosebud.

## Side Trips

Even if you elect to retrace your steps back to the West Rosebud, you might want to dip over to Turgulse and Froze-to-Death Lakes.

## Camping

Camping on the Froze-to-Death Plateau or Tempest Mountain is for hardy, well-prepared backpackers only. There are plenty of places to camp. The trick is keeping your tent from blowing away. This entire area is way above timberline and gets heavy use, so please adhere strictly to zero-impact camping ethics.

## Fishing

No fishing on this route with the exception of Mystic Lake. Refer to fishing information in Mystic Lake, Hike 16.

# 18 Rosebud to Rosebud

**General description:** A moderately long and difficult shuttle best suited for a long day trip

**Special attractions:** Outstanding scenery

**Type of trip:** Shuttle

**Total distance:** 13 miles

**Difficulty:** Difficult

**Traffic:** Moderate

**Maps:** USGS—Granite Peak and Alpine; RMS—Cooke City—Cutoff and Alpine—Mount Maurice

**Starting point:** West Rosebud Trailhead

**Finding the trailhead:** Refer to Mystic Lake, Hike 16.

**Parking and trailhead facilities:** Spacious parking lot with toilet.

## Key Points

3.0	Mystic Lake Dam.
3.5	Junction with Phantom Creek Trail 17.
6.4	Froze-to-Death Plateau.
10.2	Slough Lake.
13.0	Phantom Creek Trailhead.

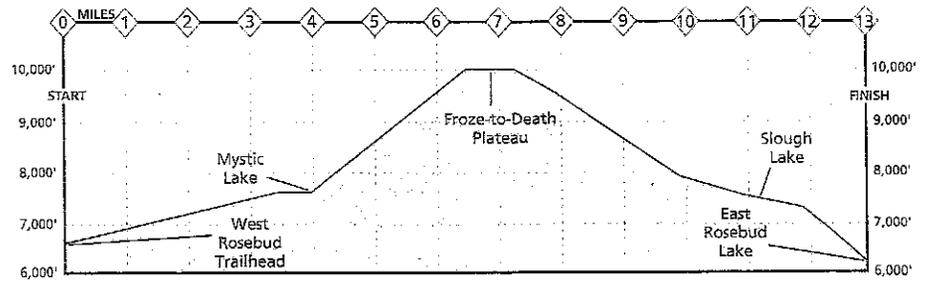
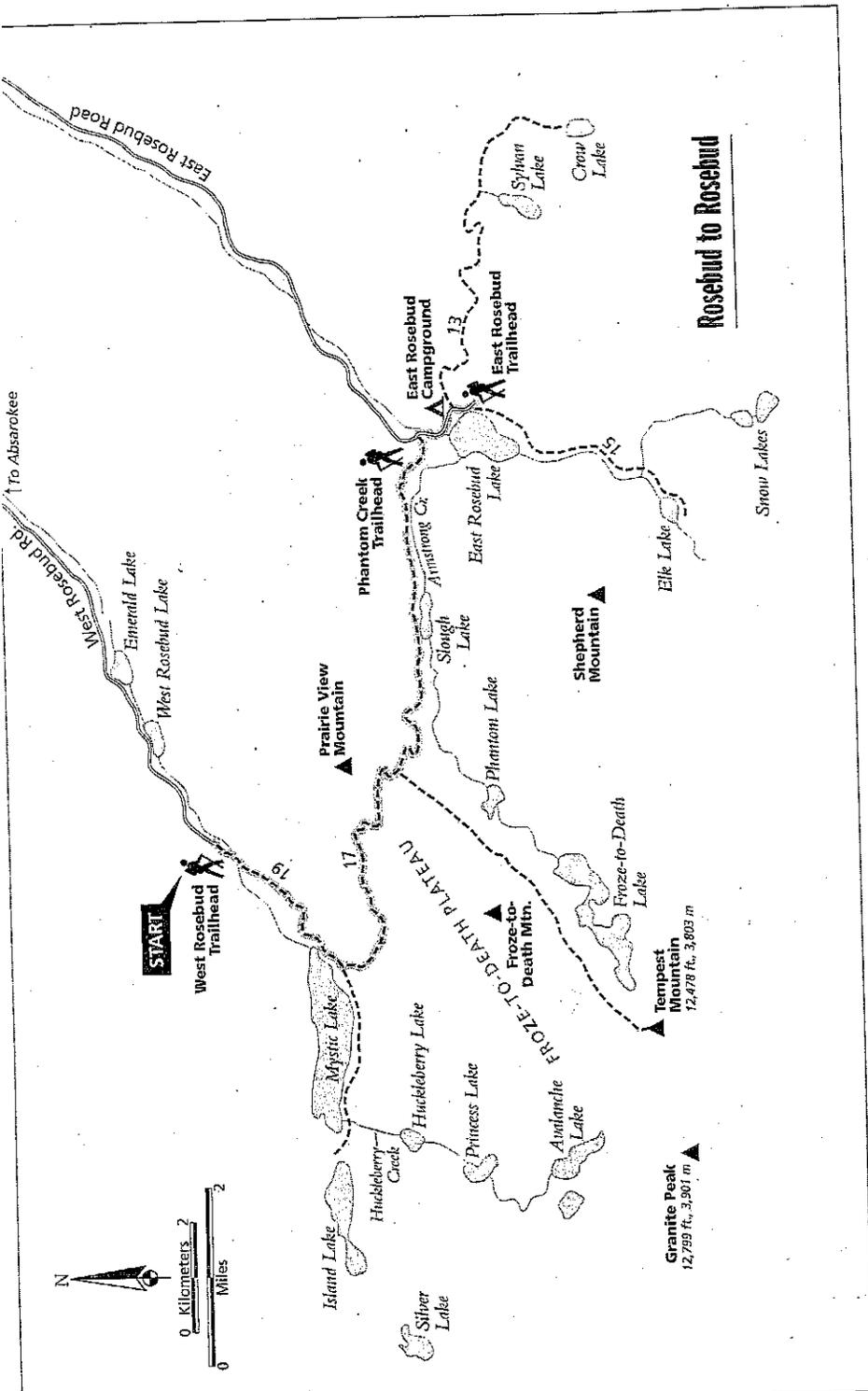
## The Hike

If you're not a climber, but you're in good shape and want to see lots of sensational scenery in one long day, consider arranging a shuttle from West Rosebud Trailhead to East Rosebud Trailhead via the Phantom Creek Trail. Even better, talk some friends into a "trade keys" hike. This hike is a perfect choice for such a plan. One party starts at West Rosebud and the other at East Rosebud. Meet on top of Froze-to-Death Plateau for lunch, trade keys, and drive each other's vehicle home.

The trading keys plan can be risky on long trips where folks want to stop to fish, climb, or partake in other activities that might lead them off the trail. In this case, most of the trip is above timberline and on a well-maintained trail. It's almost impossible to miss each other. Whoever gets to the top of the plateau first should just relax and wait for the other party.

But be sure to pick a day with a good weather forecast. And roll out of bed early. This is a 13-mile day hike with lots of elevation gain—3,668 feet from West Rosebud and 3,932 feet from East Rosebud. Weather can be completely unpredictable at this elevation, but normally the morning is better weather for hiking. Thunderstorms commonly roll over the plateau in midafternoon.

It would be difficult to argue which approach to the plateau is more scenic—definitely a win-win situation. It's about the same distance to an ideal rendezvous site on the top of Froze-to-Death Plateau. The trail is in terrific shape the entire way.



## Options

This long day hike can be launched from either end with no real difference in difficulty.

## Side Trips

Since this is a long, strenuous day hike, there probably won't be much time or energy for side trips, but a stroll along the shoreline of Mystic Lake is most pleasant. Ditto for a walk on Froze-to-Death Plateau, assuming, of course, that thunderheads are not descending upon you.

## Camping

This trip really doesn't offer much for overnight campsites. But camping is available at the upper end of Slough Lake on the East Rosebud side and along the east shore of Mystic Lake on the West Rosebud side. Those who camp should practice strict zero-impact camping techniques, as this area receives heavy use (mainly because of the fanatical interest in climbing Granite Peak).

## Fishing

If doing this as a day hike, there won't be much time to get in any relaxed fishing. The rainbows are generally willing in Mystic Lake, as are the brookies along the lower stretches of Phantom Creek.

# 16 Mystic Lake

**General description:** An easy day trip

**Special attractions:** Mystic Lake, definitely worth the trip, and the Mystic Lake hydroelectric project

**Type of trip:** Out-and-back

**Total distance:** 7 miles

**Difficulty:** Moderate

**Traffic:** Heavy

**Maps:** USGS—Granite Peak and Alpine; RMS—Cooke City—Cutoff Mountain

**Starting point:** West Rosebud Trailhead

**Finding the trailhead:** Drive 15 miles south from Columbus, Montana, on Montana Highway 78 through Absarokee. About 2 miles past Absarokee, turn right (west) to Fishtail on County Road 419. Drive through Fishtail and go west and south about 1 mile. Turn left (south) along West Rosebud Road. About 6 miles later, take another left (southeast) at the sign for West Rosebud Lake. It's another 14 miles of bumpy gravel road from this point to the trailhead. In total, it's 27 miles from Absarokee and 42 miles from Columbus. The road ends and the trail begins right at the Mystic Dam Power Station.

It might not seem clear exactly where the trail begins. After parking your vehicle, walk up the road about 200 yards through the Montana Power Company compound to the actual trailhead.

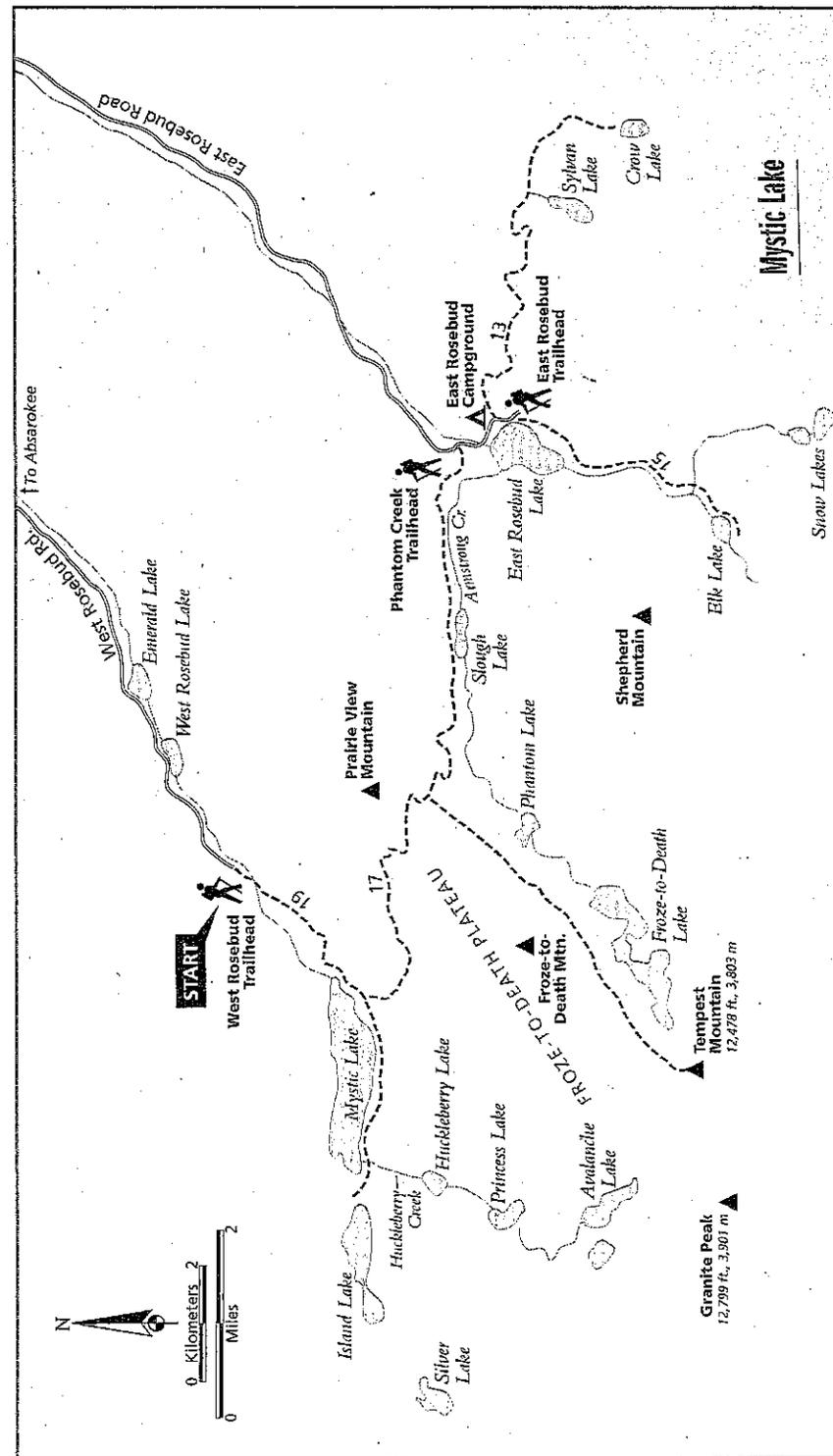
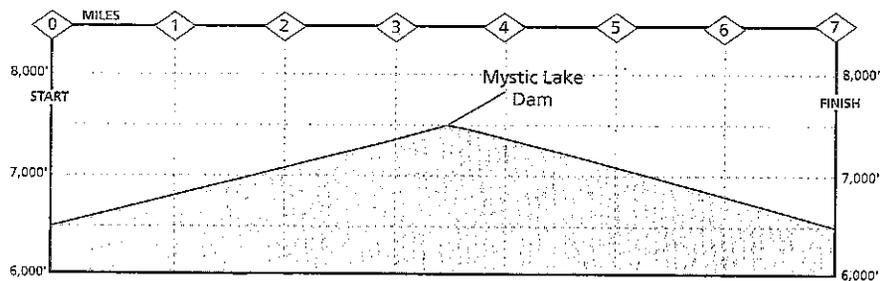
**Parking and trailhead facilities:** Spacious parking lot with toilet.

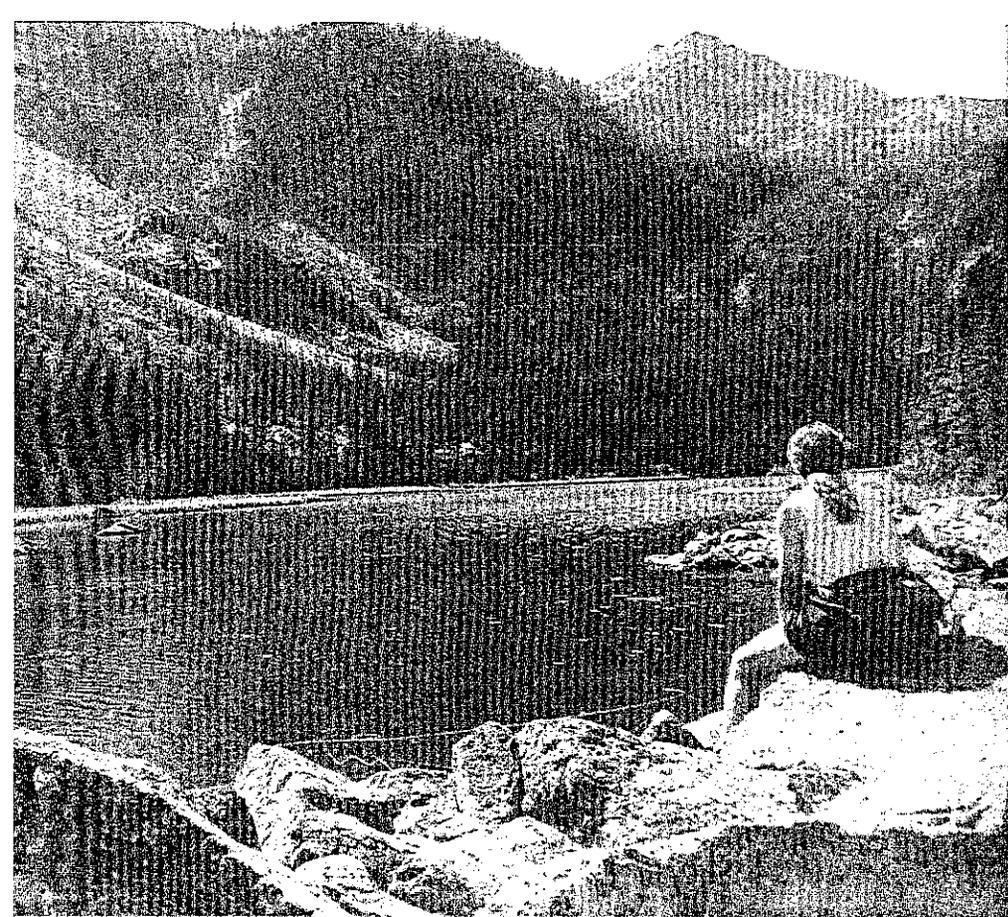
## The Hike

For those who aren't interested in strenuous mountain climbing or long arduous trips, the Mystic Lake trail offers an excellent choice for an unhurried day in the wilderness. It also offers some spectacular scenery with the unusual twist of being able to observe how the Mystic Lake Power Station was built.

Besides being a popular day trip, this is also the major launching point for the legions attempting to climb Granite Peak each year. Don't expect to have the trail to yourself.

From the trailhead follow West Rosebud Creek. After crossing an overpass and a bridge over the creek, the trail follows a power line for a short way. After leaving this "sign of civilization" behind, the trail switchbacks through open rock fields, offering a great view of the West Rosebud valley, including West Rosebud and Emerald Lakes.





*Mystic Lake, the deepest lake in the Beartooths.*

The climb doesn't seem that steep, but by the time the trail reaches the dam at the stern end of Mystic Lake, it has ascended 1,200 feet in 3 miles, barely a Category climb. Normally, that would be considered a big climb, but for hikers who aren't in a hurry, it really doesn't seem like it.

When the trail finally breaks out over the ridge, it affords a great view of Mystic Lake. Mystic Lake is a natural lake, but the dam increased its size and depth, now, at more than 200 feet, the deepest in the Beartooths.

The sandy beach along the east shore of the lake below is perhaps the largest in the Beartooths. This makes a good lunch spot for those who plan to turn back for the trailhead. But it's far better to set aside enough time to walk along the lake for a while. The trail is very scenic, flat, and well maintained. Plus, it's difficult to realize the full scope of Mystic Lake from the first overlook. This is a huge lake, and a walk along the shore is the best way to appreciate this fact.

Some people might think that the presence of the dam detracts from the wildness of the place. But Montana Power Company has done as much as possible to keep the intrusion to a minimum, and after all, the dam was here long before the Absaroka-Beartooths was designated as wilderness. At any rate, most visitors have little difficulty enjoying the scenery and fresh air.

### Side Trips

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If you still have some energy left when you reach Mystic Lake, consider hiking along the shoreline for one or two miles before heading back. If you're very energetic, you could hike up to the top of Froze-to-Death Plateau from the lake.

### Camping

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You can find several camp spots along Mystic's east shore, but the shoreline is heavily used and seems more suited to leisurely day hiking than camping.

### Fishing

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There are a lot of fish willing to be caught north of the trailhead at Emerald and West Rosebud Lakes. Both lakes support hefty fish with brown trout, cutthroat trout, and whitefish all common. Rainbows are stocked in both lakes to provide some additional excitement.

Mystic Lake supports a rainbow trout fishery that is great when the fish are feeding and frustrating when they are not, although the fickle rainbows found there can usually be coaxed. The rainbows can be counted on for a good workout. The stream up to Mystic is very steep and doesn't provide great habitat for fish, so save your effort for the lake.

# 19 Island Lake

**General description:** One of the easiest-to-reach base camps in the Beartooths, but still with numerous options for side trips

**Special attractions:** So much to see and do all within reach of base camp at Island Lake

**Type of trip:** Out-and-back

**Total distance:** 12 miles, plus side trips

**Difficulty:** Moderate, but with some difficult (optional) side trips

**Traffic:** Heavy around Mystic Lake, light at Island Lake

**Maps:** USGS—Granite Peak; RMS—Cooke City—Cutoff Mountain

**Starting point:** West Rosebud Trailhead

**Finding the trailhead:** Refer to Mystic Lake, Hike 16.

**Parking and trailhead facilities:** Spacious parking lot with toilet.

## Key Points

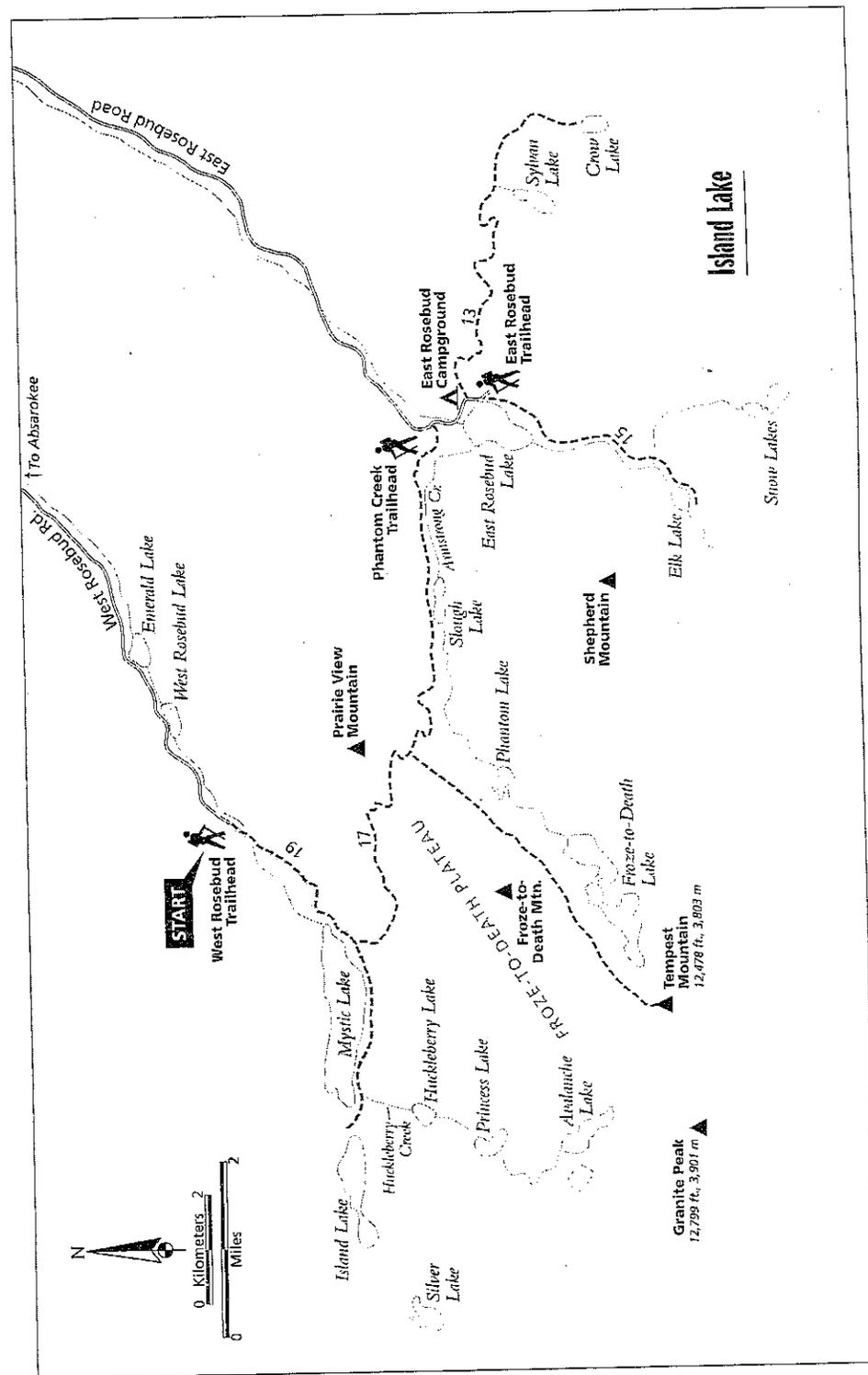
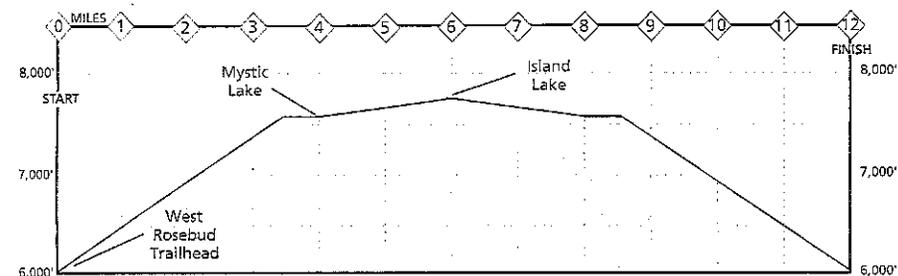
- 3.0 Mystic Lake Dam.
- 3.5 Junction with Phantom Creek Trail 17.
- 5.7 Huckleberry Creek.
- 6.0 Island Lake.

## The Hike

The West Rosebud Trailhead seems to have one disadvantage—or advantage, depending on your point of view. It's mostly suited for “just passing through.”

The first three trips from this trailhead offer either day hikes or trips that pass through the West Rosebud for other destinations. Island Lake, however, affords a great chance to stay a few days and enjoy the many wonders of the Upper West Rosebud valley. It's especially suited for hikers who like to base camp.

The first 3 miles up to the Mystic Lake Dam are described in the Mystic Lake trip, Hike 16. From the junction of the Mystic Lake and Phantom Creek Trails, hike along the east shore of Mystic Lake on a well-maintained trail for 2.5 miles. Then it's another 0.5 mile to Island Lake. Just before the end of the lake, the trail crosses Huckleberry Creek, which tumbles down from several lakes in the west shadow of Granite



ite Peak. This is a big stream, but fortunately, the Forest Service has built a sturdy bridge over it.

If you're staying overnight at Island Lake, you must cross West Rosebud Creek to get to the choice campsites on the west side of the stream, and there's no bridge. In August or September, this won't be a problem. You can cross easily on a logjam at the outlet of Island Lake. Early in the year at high water, however, this crossing could be more difficult. Lots of water comes down West Rosebud Creek. The Forest Service does not maintain the trail beyond a point just before crossing West Rosebud Creek or above Island Lake.

## Options

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This route works well as a base camp, but you can also make this an enjoyable day hike.

## Side Trips

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The trail continues on beyond Island Lake to Silver Lake, which also offers base camp opportunities. The trail to Silver Lake is muddy and brushy, and the campsites aren't as pleasant as those at Island Lake. Instead, consider visiting Silver Lake on a day trip from base camp. Another good possibility is a hike up Huckleberry Creek to Princess Lake and, for the well conditioned, on to Avalanche Lake.

Two more potential side trips include a long trek to Grasshopper Glacier and a climb up to a series of lakes—Nugget, Beckworth, Franco, Nemidji, and Weeluma—just west of Island Lake. Only those in good shape and savvy in wilderness skills should attempt these side trips. It's possible, of course, to just hang around and explore the Island Lake and Mystic Lake country for a day or two and not miss out on anything.

Refer to the list of side trips in Where to Go from Island Lake on page 115.

## Camping

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Just after crossing West Rosebud Creek, you'll find a huge flat area where many large parties could camp and still not bother each other.

## Fishing

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Starting at Island Lake anglers will begin to find an occasional cutthroat trout mixed in with the rainbow population. These have migrated down from Weeluma, Nemidji, Nugget, Beckworth, and Franco Lakes, all pure cutthroat fisheries. Silver Lake sports some nice-size hybrid trout that are hard to catch, but worth the effort.

While many people use Trail 17 to access Granite Peak, a lesser-used alternative is up Huckleberry Creek. Huckleberry Lake supports a healthy rainbow population, while Avalanche and the Storm Lakes above are stocked with willing cutthroats that

grow above average in size and weight. Mountain goats frequent this basin, and although this route is a steeper approach to Granite Peak, the added aspect of great fishing may make the climb worth it.

**WHERE TO GO FROM ISLAND LAKE** After arriving at base camp at Island Lake, most people want to spend a day or two exploring. Here's a list of suggested day trips rated for difficulty as follows: Human (easy for almost everyone, including children), Semi-human (moderately difficult), or Animal (don't try it unless you're very fit and wilderness-wise). Also refer to more detailed rating information in the chapter Using this Guidebook.

<u>Destination</u>	<u>Difficulty</u>
Granite Peak	Animal
Froze-to-Death Plateau	Human
Silver Lake	Human
Princess Lake	Semi-human
Avalanche Lake	Animal
Weeluma and Nemidji Lakes	Animal
Franco, Nugget, and Beckworth Lakes	Animal
Star Lake	Animal
Grasshopper Glacier	Animal

the East Rosebud Drainage, including East Rosebud Lake about 2,400 feet straight down.

On the ridge, the trail markers fade into a series of cairns for a few hundred yards, so be alert to stay on the trail. Also, don't miss the junction where the spur trail heads up to Sylvan Lake and Trail 13 continues on to Crow Lake. The junction is well marked, but inattentive hikers could end up at the wrong lake.

### Side Trips

An overnight stay at Sylvan Lake does allow time for the short side trip over to Crow Lake, which probably surpasses Sylvan Lake for beauty, at least above the surface. Below the surface, the brook trout are not nearly as beautiful as the golden trout of Sylvan Lake.

### Camping

Even though it's 10 miles total, Sylvan Lake is more suited for day trips. There is one campsite on a small plateau to the right just before the trail breaks over the last ridge into the lake basin. Camp here, however, and people will be walking by the front door of your tent. There are no good campsites right at the lake. Sylvan Lake is at timberline, so please refrain from building a campfire.

### Fishing

Anglers intent on pursuing the golden trout of Sylvan Lake should plan to spend the night. Goldens are shy and more easily caught in the morning and evening, precluding a day hike. The golden trout of Sylvan Lake reproduce readily, so don't worry about taking a few home, even if it's just to put one of these beauties on the wall. Anglers who make the trek to Crow Lake will find that the brook trout there are larger than average and are much easier to catch than the goldens at Sylvan.

## 23 Slough Lake

**General description:** A leisurely day trip

**Special attractions:** Terrific view of the upper Phantom Creek drainage and Froze-to-Death Plateau from the lake

**Type of trip:** Out-and-back

**Total distance:** 4 miles

**Difficulty:** Easy

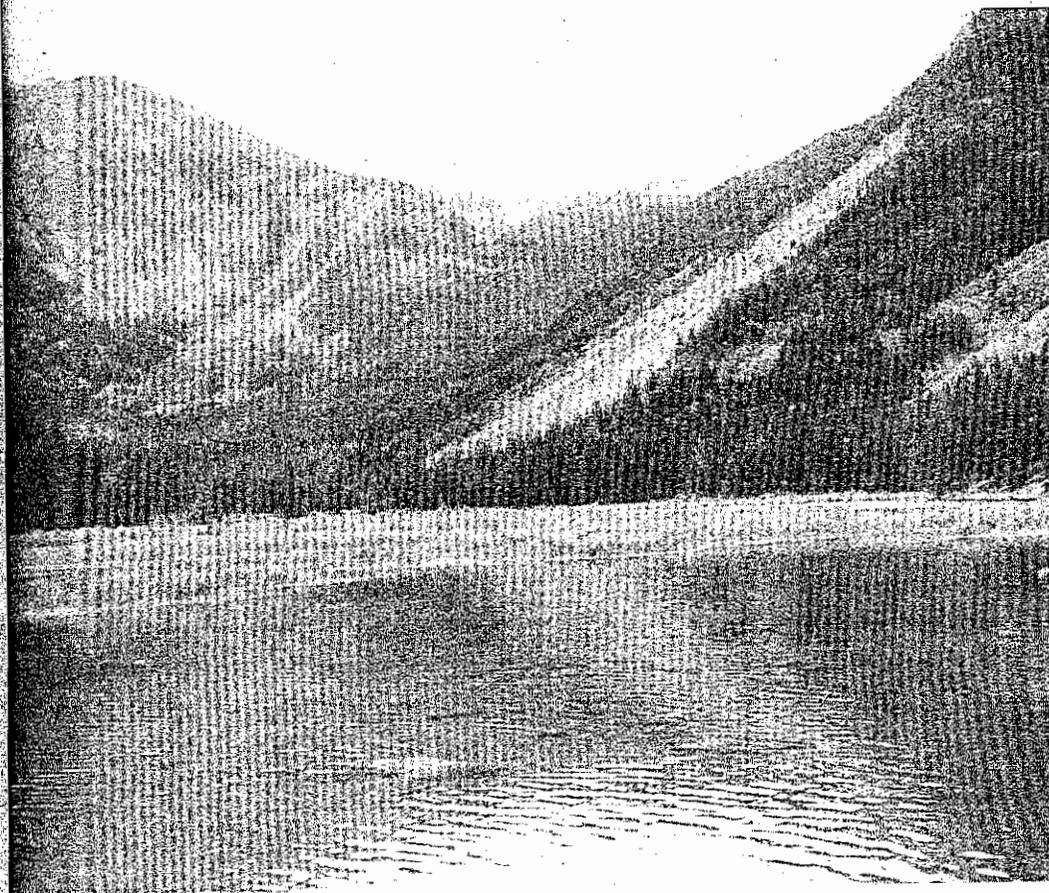
**Traffic:** Moderate

**Maps:** USGS—Alpine; RMS—Alpine—Mount Maurice

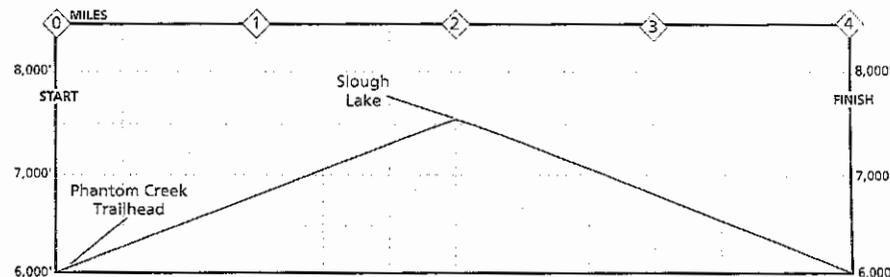
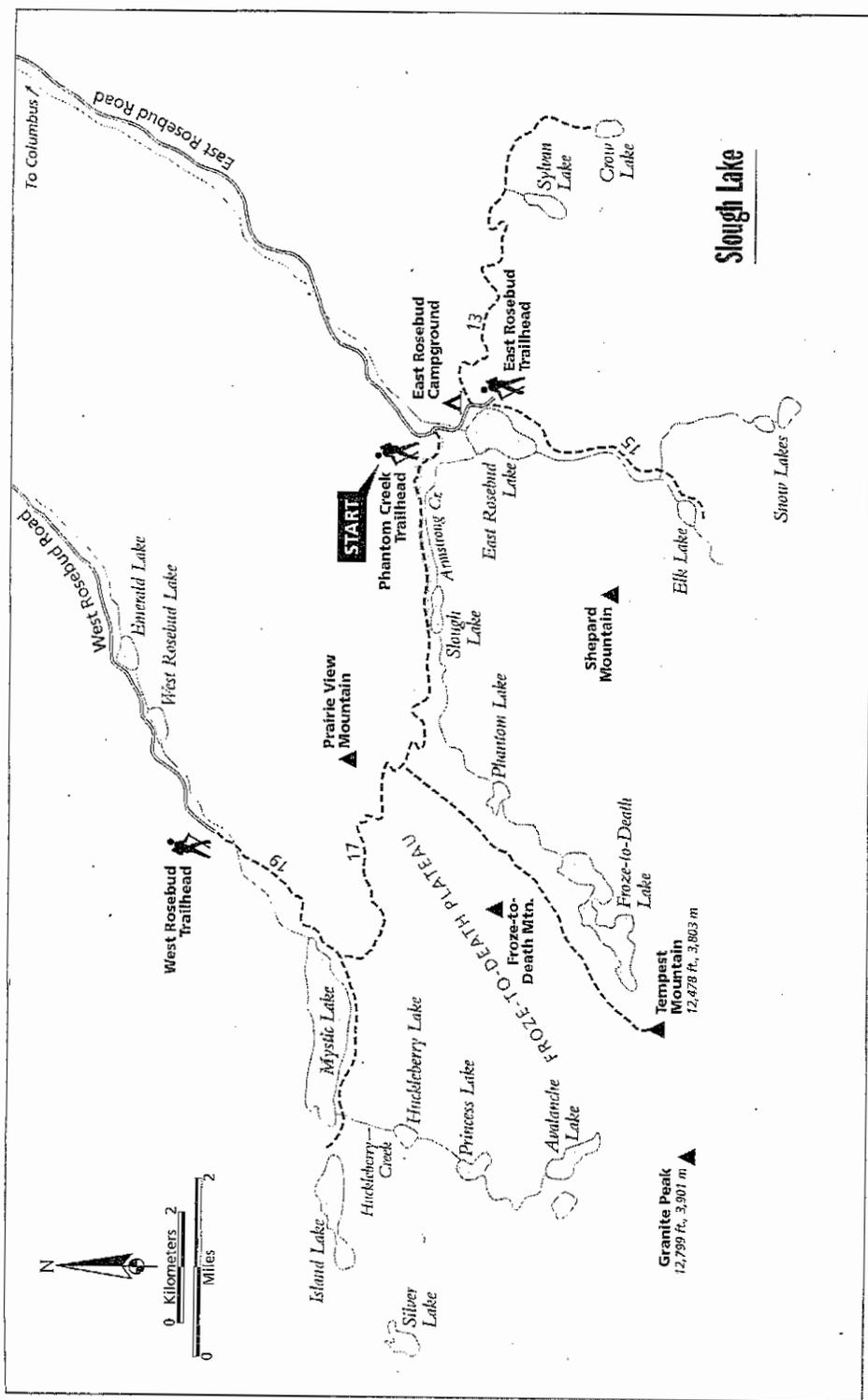
**Starting point:** Phantom Creek Trailhead

**Finding the trailhead:** Refer to The Beaten Path, Hike 20. The Phantom Creek Trail 17 begins on the right (west) side of the road a quarter mile before East Rosebud Lake. This is a popular route to Froze-to-Death Plateau and Granite Peak.

**Parking and trailhead facilities:** A large parking lot (often full) and toilet.



Slough Lake.



## The Hike

This trail is perfectly suited for that leisurely, quiet day in the wilderness amid some great scenery.

Trail 17 climbs, with gradual switchbacks, along Armstrong Creek (yes, it probably should be called the Armstrong Creek Trailhead) for about 2.5 miles before it breaks out of the forest into a great panorama highlighted by Hole-in-the-Wall Mountain to the south. Look ahead to see how the trail climbs up to Froze-to-Death Plateau.

The trail reaches Slough Lake (no relation to the Slough Creek that drains south from Boulder River country to the west) about 0.5 mile after the forest opens up. This is a gorgeous, glacier-carved cirque, and Slough Lake sits in the midst of it like a little pearl. Actually, there are two small lakes, and there's one campsite at the upper end of the second lake, for those inclined to stay overnight.

Even though this trail receives heavy use, few people take their time along here or even hike stop at Slough Lake. Most are rushing to the top of Froze-to-Death Plateau to climb Granite Peak. Lucky for the rest of us that they hurry right by this pastoral pond, a perfect spot to sit on a sunny day savoring the spirit of the wilderness.

## Camping

There are a couple of campsites on the north shore of Slough Creek near the trail, so this can be an easy overnighiter.

## Fishing

Slough Lake provides a good source of willing brookies for dinner or for fun.