

Trail Creek Trail

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Wrangell-St. Elias National Park & Preserve



Access: Road access via the Nabesna Road, trailhead at mile 29.8 where Trail Creek flows across the road. There is not a parking lot at the trailhead - you must park on the side of the road. Do not park your vehicle within the creek drainage, as flash floods may occur.



Distance: The maintained trail is about 6 miles one-way. Up to the pass (and the start of Lost Creek) is about 10 miles one-way.

Time: 8-10 hours to go all the way up to the pass and back. Hikers can choose any distance that they want, to make a shorter hike.

Maps: USGS Maps-Nabesna (C-5) 1:63,360; Nabesna 1:250,000

Difficulty: Easy to moderately difficult, due to walking in a rocky creek bed and climbing tundra hills.

Highlights: Road access, spectacular scenery, alpine tundra, flowers, wildlife. Keep your eyes out for sheep, as this is a favorite area for them.

Route: The Trail Creek trailhead is located at mile 29.8. The first four miles follow the creekbed. Most hikers will find it necessary to cross several times, so be prepared to get your feet wet. A sometimes elusive ATV trail parallels the creek to climb over neighboring hills and along the vegetated benches. By staying to the east of the stream channel you may be able stay out of the creek most of the way. After four miles, you reach the mouth of Trail Creek Canyon. After two more miles, the canyon narrows considerably and a sign indicates the end of the ATV trail. The creek is confined by low gravel benches covered with a carpet of alpine vegetation. There are many nice camp spots above the eastern side of the creek.

If you want to hike to the pass, the route follows the first major side canyon (the fourth drainage on the eastern side of the canyon). For the next three to four miles, ascend towards the pass. Some hikers may generally follow the gravel river bed, but hiking along the high ground through the lush tundra provides spectacular panoramic views, marmot sightings, and wildflowers. Look carefully among the canyon walls for flocks of Dall Sheep. The upper reaches of Trail Creek are very scenic and provide views of rugged Noyes Mountain, rock glaciers, and hardy alpine plants.

Hazards: On warm summer days, the creek may be low in the early morning but rise several feet during the day. An easy morning ford may be impassable by the late afternoon. Also, the creek level can rise suddenly during and after rain storms. The lower 5-6 miles of Trail Creek is very rocky and can be a test of ankles & feet! Be prepared for areas of scrambling on scree slopes. Bears ARE present in this area.

Notes: There are two creeks on the Nabesna road to drive across, Trail Creek and Lost Creek. Check current road conditions before starting out. This is a popular hunting destination, especially in August. Please be aware that ATV use is permitted on this trail.

This hike can be extended into a 2-3 day backpacking loop route from the Trail Creek drainage to the Lost Creek drainage. Please see a park ranger for more details.

Trail Creek Drainage

