

Sample hike from Trails of the Sawtooth and White Cloud Mountains, by Margaret Fuller

WHITE CLOUDS

78. BORN LAKES

This one-way section: 3.4 miles, 825-foot gain, 500-foot elevation loss from a junction .1 mile below Fourth of July Lake

Round trip: 9.8 miles from Fourth of July Creek; **connects with** the trail down Warm Springs Creek

Elevation gain: 1,360 feet

Elevation loss (return climb): 500 feet

Highest point: 9,900 feet

Maps: Washington Peak, Boulder Chain Lakes

Trailhead GPS: 44 02.791, 114 39.454

Difficulty: partly cross-country

Time: 8 hours

Access: Following the directions for Fourth of July and Washington Lakes, hike 1.5 miles to the Born Lakes junction just below Fourth of July Lake.

What you'll see: Talus, wildflower meadows, subalpine firs and, whitebark pines enclose the tiny ponds of the Born Lakes below orange and gray splintered crags. The number of lakes depends on whether you count the two seasonal ones and the one at a distance from the others. If you count them all, there are nine. The largest is only 200 yards across, so these lakes seem newborn, but they are actually named for a prospector named Boorn or perhaps Boren. Above the highest lake, a large gray pinnacle on a fractured ridge guards a notch called the Devils Staircase. At sunset, the alpenglow paints the ridge salmon pink. On the way to Born Lakes, the green velvet bench of Ants Basin gives a view across Warm Springs Canyon of some of the White Cloud Peaks gleaming like white chalk. This entire range of mountains is called the White Clouds, but among them is a single chain known as the "White Cloud Peaks" for its color and the lack of individual names. They are mostly of white rock that is a metamorphosed limestone similar to marble but containing silica. Although most of the lower part of Warm Springs Canyon burned in the Valley Road Fire of 2005, the fire didn't reach the upper part of the canyon or Born Lakes.

Directions: At the junction just below Fourth of July Lake, take the left branch of the trail northeast. (The right one goes .1 mile to Fourth of July Lake and then on to Washington Lake.) At .2 mile, the trail crosses a meadow where a side path comes up from the lake. It continues northeast with fine views of the lake and the Sawtooths. At .3 mile, it cuts back to the northwest, and at .5 mile passes a small green pond set in talus. Above the pond, the trail climbs west along the side of the ridge and zigzags to a saddle (9,900 feet) with a view of the white peaks at 1.1 miles.

The trail parallels the saddle for 100 yards, then switchbacks down to Ants Basin (9,560 feet) at 1.3 miles. The trail from here down into Warm Springs Canyon is seldom used and there is no path for it across the basin. (That trail descends 1,100 feet in 1.5 miles to the Warm Springs Canyon Trail, joining it 4.8 miles

above the upper end of The Meadows. From that junction, the Warm Springs Trail continues up the canyon to the second Born Lake.)

Most hikers go directly to Born Lakes from Ants Basin without descending into the canyon. The trail from Ants Basin is not official, but it has recently been improved and the tread dug out. To follow it, go east from the bottom of the steep slope to the southeast corner of Ants Basin at 1.7 miles. The trail descends a gully to the northeast, then goes east across the lower edge of a talus slope, above the trees. Below the talus, at the bottom of the valley, is a meadow with a pond in it, but the route keeps well above it. Continue across talus and through trees, following the trail to the left (north) side of the second lake (9,420 feet) at 2.5 miles (4 miles from the trailhead).

To reach the higher lakes, go around the left side of the second lake, cross the creek between the two lakes and then climb a wooded hillside, catching the trail coming up Warm Springs Canyon. (This trail no longer takes the route shown on the topographic map to the fourth and fifth lakes. Instead it goes to the second lake.) Climb to the third lake, which is only a little round pond in the woods and continue to the fourth lake (9,555 feet), .7 mile from the second lake. Then go north along the creek through open country punctuated by clumps of whitebark pines, for .2 mile to the fifth and highest lake (9,700 feet). This lake is set in the rocks at 3.4 miles (4.9 miles from the trailhead). To find the other four even smaller lakes, consult the topographic map.