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Take a Hike

Goat Flats / Tin Can Gap

What: A rooty, muddy, and eroding trail that takes hikers high up into the alpine wilderness just outside of Granite Falls. The expansive views and surround meadows are reward enough for this nice day trip.

Where: From the Verlot Public Center (11 miles east of Granite Falls), travel west on the Mountain Loop Highway for 6.5 miles and turn left onto Forest Road 41. When the pavement ends at a junction, keep left. You will pass many spur roads as you travel further, and after 18 miles from the Mountain Loop Highway turn right. One-quarter mile up the road is the trailhead (Tupso Pass).

Length: 9 miles round trip

Difficulty: Moderately strenuous

Beginning elevation: 2,900 feet

Highest elevation: 5,200 feet

Maps: Green Trails 110 - Silverton

USGS Quad - Whitehorse Mountain

Notes: The lower part of this trail can be somewhat muddy, as a slowly upward traversing trail is taken towards Saddle Lake (3771'). There are also many roots and rocks that are on the trail that can be annoying at times, but the pain is worth the pleasure on a nice day at Goat Flats. After a lot of up and down, you arrive at Saddle Lake in 2.5 miles, surrounded by a marshy shore. At the trail junction for the Meadow Mountain Trail (No. 715), stay left and follow the trail toward Goat Flats. Another 2 miles up the twisted and eroded trail will take you to the beginning of the lower meadows and the haven for marmots. Follow the trail to the upper meadows for a breathtaking view of the surrounding mountains. A great place for lunch, but the bugs can be annoying later in the summer, so this time of year is the best timing.

Other opportunities: Experienced mountaineers can travel past the flats towards Tin Can Gap for a summit bid of Three Fingers. It requires passing some steep snowfields and a small glacier crossing early in the season where a fall could be fatal. Travel only with experienced hikers. Ice axes and crampons are highly recommended. There is a lookout tower on the South Summit of Three Fingers where people can spend the night (first come, first served). There is a very airy section climbing up ladders that can cause vertigo for even experienced climbers. Round-trip distance to the summit is 18 miles.

Permits: Northwest Pass required for parking.

More information: Contact the Verlot Ranger Station at 360-691-7791 or consult the "Fresh Reports" section on the Washington Trails Association Web site at www.wta.org. A photo gallery from previous trips can be viewed at www.questalb.com under "Gallery."

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