



Photo: Ric Carless

## ROAD DIRECTIONS MIDDLE WHITE RIVER FS ROADS

Deep Lake and Driftwood Lake see page 101, Connor Lakes along Maiyuk Creek see page 105, and for access to Top of the World Provincial Park see page 76.

Also for access to Whiteswan Lake Provincial Park/Lussier Hot Springs, which has RV campgrounds, picnic areas, boat launches and fishing. The roads to Whiteswan Lake and along the White River are busy with logging and tourist traffic, but are wide and in good condition.

- 0 km Highway 93/95 turn east on to Whiteswan Provincial Park Road (5 km south of Canal Flats)
- 17 km **Lussier Hot Springs** is on the right side (south) of the road. The naturally heated outdoor bathing pools in a wilderness setting are beside the chilly Lussier River. Outhouses and change rooms are available.
- 20 km Continue straight at a four-way junction to **Whiteswan Lake Provincial Park** and White River FS Road. (Turn right for **Top of the World Provincial Park** on to the White Lussier FS Road, see page 76.)
- 28.9 km Continue straight for Middle Fork White River hikes (1.4 km past the east end of the lake)
- 30.9 km Cross White River bridge
- 31.7 km Turn right—east at the White River FS Road (avoid Fenwick Creek Road left)

42.9 km Turn right—east to Monroe Lake before 44-km sign (avoid the White-Graves Creek Road left)

44.4 km Turn left (north) at a three-way junction to Middle White Fork—Height-of-the-Rockies (avoid the road straight to Monroe Lake, Thunder Creek, right). Stay to main roads, many Forest Service Recreation (camp) Sites.

58.2 km Continue straight

64.7 km Continue straight (near 66-km sign)

66 km Continue straight (near 68-km sign)

67.4 km **Deep Lake and Driftwood Lake**—parking at the Maiyuk Creek FS Recreation Site along the Middle White River.

67.4 km Continue straight for **Connor Lakes—Maiyuk Creek trail**

70.6 km Turn right and park for Maiyuk Creek trail—Height-of-the-Rockies Provincial Park.

71.2 km Turn left for **Connor Lakes** in Height-of-the-Rockies. The Maiyuk Creek HOTR Park boundary has not been finalized. Drive about 2 km east to the end of the road. Several road forks, continue straight. No trailhead signs.

## 25 DEEP LAKE AND DRIFTWOOD LAKE

*When we finally arrived on the narrow, black, wet gravel beach of Deep Lake, my pedometer clicked out a reading of 15.6 km. Storm clouds spun on the summits and shafts of sunlight flashed onto the dramatic grey fins of Mount Lancaster. Vibrant, wet green mosses on the mountainside held the fleeting sunlight in iridescent glimmers. The lake was dark chalk-grey and still. Dense forests of spruce and fir stood impenetrable with mossy underbrush that pressed tightly against the rocky lakeshores. We set up camp on the sloping beach and looked at the uncertain weather.*

Deep Lake and its neighbour Driftwood Lake are also known as Wilcox Lakes. These two lakes snuggle below massive limestone mountains in the heart of HOTR. The mountains around these lakes rise in vertical fins hundreds of metres high. Deep Lake and Driftwood Lake are two cirque lakes that are about half a kilometre across. They are located high in the forested valleys of a vast



**Rating** difficult

**Time** multi-day backpacking

**Distance** 15 km to Deep Lake

**Elevation gain** 670 m (2200 ft.), then descend to both lakes

Deep Lake 2070 m (6800 ft.)

Driftwood Lake 2010 m (6600 ft.)

**Trail** long forested trail, many blow-downs, creek crossings, steep last 5 km to subalpine lakes

**Map** 82J/6 Mount Abruzzi

**Trail map** page 102

### Drive

**Road** gravel road—two-wheel drive

**Road map** page 87, 102

Use the road directions for the Middle White River on page 100. Follow the directions to the 67.4 km mark to the Maiyuk Creek FS Recreation Site. Most remote hikes in the Rocky Mountains require long drives on good gravel roads. Pay close attention to many road branches and carry an Invermere Forest District Recreation Map in your vehicle. See page 21 (Introduction) for where to obtain these invaluable free maps.

0 km Drive Highway 93/95 for 5 km south of Canal Flats and turn east on to the Whiteswan Lake Road. (Follow directions to the Middle White River, see page 100.)

67.4 km Park at Maiyuk Creek FS Recreation Site for **Deep Lake** and **Driftwood Lake** along the Middle White River.

67.6 km Hike back about 0.2 km over Middle White River bridge on the main road. Trailhead is just west of the bridge.

*Campsite at Deep Lake with base of Mount Lancaster on the right side of photo.*

## Mountain Footsteps

mountain wilderness. The lakes are the headwaters of a tiny tributary east of the Middle White River.

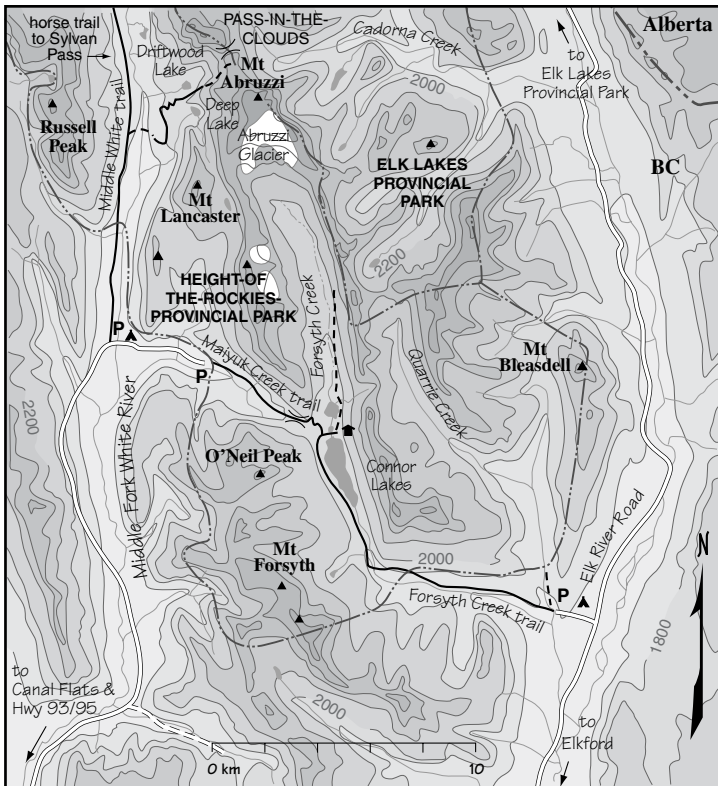
The scenery around the lakes is spectacular, but the access is long, rugged and steep through a thick forest.

Pass in the Clouds, elevation 2560 m (8400 ft.), cuts through the Rocky Mountains just east of Deep Lake and Driftwood Lake. The pass straddles the divide between HOTR and Abruzzi Creek in Elk Lakes Provincial Park.

The Ktunaxa (Kootenay people) were the first people to use this enormous talus and scree slope leading to the rugged mountain Pass in the Clouds. It apparently was an important access into the Elk Valley and then into the prairies. Archaeological evidence suggests that some HOTR trails and mountain passes, includ-

ing the Pass in the Clouds, were used by some native hikers, hunters and traders for thousands of years. (For more information on HOTR, see page 88.) After venturing up to the rugged alpine pass, I wondered if the Ktunaxa really used such rough mountain terrain for their access.

Over a decade ago, while measuring the lakes for initial fish habitat potential, researchers named these two lakes Deep Lake and Driftwood Lake. Llamas carried their inflatable boat up to the lakes. From the boat in the middle of the south lake they tied a rock to one end of a 100 ft.-long rope and lowered it overboard. The researchers were surprised when their "high-tech depth sensor" (the rock) didn't hit the bottom of the lake. So they named it Deep Lake. Driftwood





*Driftwood Lake seen from the alpine access route to Pass in the Clouds.*

Lake (just north of Deep Lake) was so-named because fallen logs from the avalanche slopes encircle the tiny lake. They are now the accepted names of these remote lakes.

Begin the hike at the Maiyuk Creek BC FS Recreation Site at 1460 m (4800 ft.). Backtrack along the main road for a couple of hundred metres (west) and across the Middle White River bridge to the trailhead. The trail heads north into the forest on the west side of the Middle White River. The first 4 km of this trail is not in HOTR Park. An agreement was made between conservationists, logging companies and the government to keep a narrow corridor along the Middle White River as an unlogged access into the wilderness.

Hike in the forest on the reasonably level trail parallel to the Middle White River. Several minor creek crossings and an easy-to-follow trail are stimulating warm-ups to the steeper access later in the trip. At 10.2 km reach a

trail junction, after climbing only 120 m (400 ft.) of elevation.

At the trail junction, the right fork heads to the river. The left fork follows the main trail north, up to a meadow campsite at 11.3 km. (The main Middle White River trail continues for another 13 km or so, past the campsite and up to Sylvan Pass.) To reach Deep or Driftwood Lake, however, you must turn east and wade across the Middle White River. Either cross at the right fork at the trail junction at 10.2 km, or cross at the meadow campsite at 11.3 km, at about 1585 m (5200 ft.).

The trail is very hard to find across the river on the flat meadows and by small creek channels. From the crossing head directly east and do not gain elevation. Search around in the bottom land until you find the well-defined trail.



Horses crossing Middle Fork White River.  
Photo by Art Twomey.

The main trail climbs from the river up along the crest of a forested ridge. For the next 5 km the trail gains most of its elevation. Some blow-down trees block the way and braided routes switchback across the steep slope up to a flattened knoll at 2130 m (7000 ft.). From the knoll in the thinning high elevation forest we saw a few glimpses of the blue-grey lakes below. For Deep Lake head down 91 m (300 ft.) on the right forks (southeast). For Driftwood Lake, follow the left trail branches (north) and descend 120 m (400 ft.).

The hike to Pass in the Clouds begins from either of these two lakes. From Deep Lake climb back up to the flattened knoll and hike along the north side of the forested ridge on a trail. Stay high and head east. From Driftwood Lake just hike east up into the alpine. Both accesses lead to a gigantic scree and talus slope that leads to Pass in the Clouds.

*Stretched out ahead of us were kilometres of rock, snow and ice below a churning mass of dark clouds. Pass in the Clouds was a sloping cut out of the barren rock of the high mountains.*

*The pass was (and probably always is) partially smothered in cloud. We appreciated the views of Mount Abruzzi and its small northern glacier. Russell Peak rose across the valley to the west as a prominent cone of grey rock. From the rugged talus slope we saw the blue-green Driftwood Lake, nestled as a scenic gem surrounded by meadows and subalpine forest. The weather deteriorated as we expected. Everything, including the pass and the views, was soon obscured by a cold, blank-white and concentrated fog. Driven by the goal of achieving our destination, we endured a drenching rainfall and fog to reach the famed Pass in the Clouds. Although we reached the sought-after pass, it still remains an allure for us to try it again—in better weather.*

The region around the two lakes and Pass in the Clouds offers outstanding views. Deeply cut low forest valleys soften the bases of massive cliffs, crags and countless summits of thick limestone. It is a long, satisfying back-packing trip to a historically significant region of the Rocky Mountains.