

Rating: moderate

Time: short day hike

To Tarns:

Distance: 3.1 km

Elevation gain: 405 m (1,330 ft.)

Mause Creek

Tarns: 2118 m (6,950 ft.)

To Tanglefoot Pass:

Distance: 3.5 km

Elevation gain: 535 m (1,750 ft.)

Tanglefoot Pass: 2345 m (7,369 ft.)

Trail: good trail to main tarns; small creek crossings

Maps: 82G/11 Fernie, (NAD27);

82G/12 Cranbrook (NAD83)

Trail map: page ###

Drive

Road map: page ####; also see page #### for detail map area accessed from Wardner/Fort Steele Road

Road: high-clearance truck or 4x4
Follow detailed road directions to the Mause Creek and Wardner/Fort Steele roads, page ###.

0 km: Junction Mause Creek Road and Wardner/Fort Steele Road.

10.1 km: Fisher Peak trailhead on Mause Creek Road; road becomes steep and rocky. Continue 3 km more on a road that is deteriorating with mudholes, loose rock and a steep sidehill.

13 km: Park in a large graded area at the end of Mause Creek Road, 13 km. Motorized vehicles are not allowed past the parking lot or across the creek.

#36 MAUSE CREEK TARNs

The headwaters of Mause Creek hold a special appeal for most visitors. This area has a natural charm, but visiting the tarns is just the start of many good hikes. Many hikers just zoom by the pretty little tarns for the other popular destinations, such as those listed under Further Explorations below.

The Mause Creek tarns are a clump of four or five very shallow tarns rimmed with larch and fir trees, heather and low bushes. The tarns are scattered throughout an open, fertile meadow dotted with monkey flowers and purple asters (or showy daisies). The flowers are their best in the first two weeks of August, provided there has been enough rainfall and the flowers have not suffered a midsummer frost during mid-bloom (common in recent years). If the weather co-operates, the lower meadow by the first tarn is crammed with flowers. Summer is the most popular season to visit the tarns.

Autumn used to be my favourite time to visit the Mause Creek tarns, but over the last five years a blight of some sort has killed most of the dramatic alpine larch trees in the area. The area that once was so beautiful now looks like a swath of gnarly posts. It will take a decade or so for the immature larch that didn't succumb to take up prominence again.

Mause Creek makes a good destination in winter, although the road is not maintained. Ski touring in the basin is good for intermediate skiers, and steep mountain slopes welcome more experienced enthusiasts. Caution must be exercised, as most of this area is avalanche terrain.

Further Explorations

Tanglefoot Lake

The hike to Tanglefoot Lake (see page ###) is my personal favourite. The hike has everything, from a nice lake, high ridges, healthy larch forests (for now), great views and carpets of wildflowers.

Trail

0 km: From the parking spot on Mause Creek Road, at elevation 1707 m (5,600 ft.), where a narrow log spans Mause Creek, walk up the road 1 km and cross the small creek again. The second crossing doesn't have a bridge, but there are enough rocks to hop across. Continue up the road for another 1 km to the third crossing. This creek is attractively coated in smooth moss and the easy crossing is on an old plank.

1.9 km: This third creek crossing is just m before the abandoned Victor Mine site. It is the junction with Five Passes trail, N96196-E11048, at 1960 m (6,434 ft.). For the Five Passes trail, from the road by the mine debris, look southwest across a brushy meadow for a faint trail. There is a faded orange marker on a tree at the trail junction.

2 km: For Mause Creek and Tanglefoot Lake, continue on the old road, and another 130 m past the mining debris the road ends. There are two ways to reach the Mause Creek tarns:

1. Scenic route, creek trail. Head straight (south) and follow the creek trail east in a scenic alpine valley. A trickling creek is on your right as you head into the meadow. The well-worn trail bends left and climbs a steep section. **2.**

Five Passes

The passes are easy to cross in this compact hiking area and there are many rewarding destinations (see page ###).

The Five Passes trail is a loop traverse that begins at the Mause Creek trailhead, crosses over into Sunken Creek and into the Tanglefoot Lake area. Eventually the connection brings the weary hiker all the way back to the vehicle. It is not a new trail, but the connections to the passes are worn and obvious enough to be hiked.

Unnamed Mountain south of tarns

The mountain just south of the tarns offers a view out to the Rocky Mountain Trench and is a good uphill workout. Make your way up through forest and some steep sections gaining 90 m (300 ft.) to a pass. From the pass, hike west (right) up a rocky, but an accessible grey mound of a summit and gain another 200 m (700 ft.) to the top 2370 m (7,800 ft.).

Eastern tarn

Just east of the Mause Creek tarns and up 160 m (540 ft.) is another scenic tarn tucked amidst the grey rock. Hike up through the open forest to the east of the main group of tarns. The trees are widely spaced and the slope is crossed with a few rock bands, which are easily avoided. A few bubbling creeks and springs emerge from the soil. The Eastern Tarn, N95938-E12376, is at 2220 m (7,287 ft.) elevation.

For a good view down into blue-green Tanglefoot Lake, hike up the talus slope east above the eastern tarn and gradually hike left to the north ridge, up a series of blocky talus steps. At the ridge look to the right and see Windy Pass. It is the low alpine pass about 500 m away.

History

The Victor Mine was established in 1893. At that time some free gold in a thick, copper-stained quartz vein was reported. Today, ruined logs, planks and metal junk are piled into a mound. The site used to be a thriving mine with several buildings, a concentrator and a trestle leading up to the tunnel. The tunnel is still visible up on the rocky slope above the creek trail on the way to the tarns.

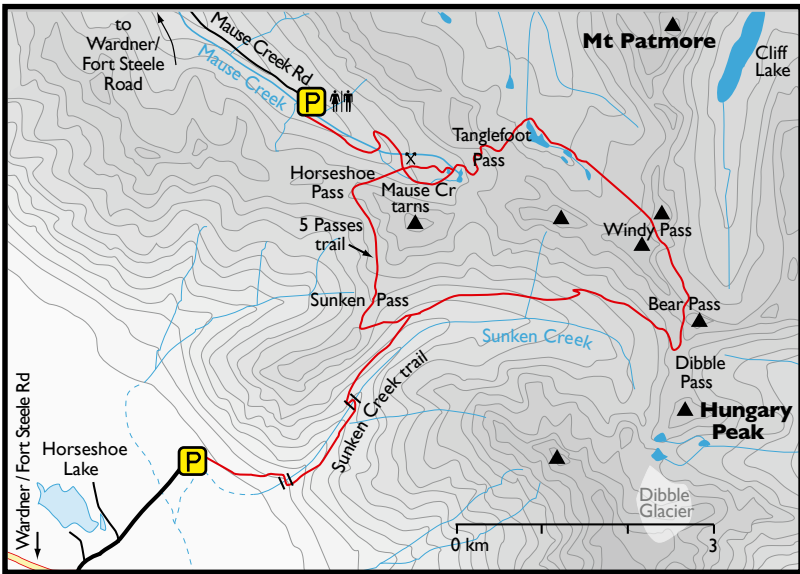
Faster route, forest trail. From the end of the road look left up into the forest and the trail switchbacks left uphill. I use the forest trail for the way down. When you are up at the tarns in the lower meadow, heading downhill, go straight for the forest trail. (The left turn in the meadow just below the tarns leads back down the scenic route).

2.8 km: Both trails climb up and meet in the

lower meadow by the tarns, N96129-E11621.

3.1 km: Follow the trail to the north tarn. Just north of the tarns the trail climbs a talus slope and gains 120 (400 ft.) of elevation. Zigzag on a defined, cairn-marked trail up and slightly to the right (northeast) to Tanglefoot Pass.

3.5 km: Tanglefoot Pass, N96438-E12069, at 2345 m (7,369 ft.). For Tanglefoot Lake, see page ###.



Mause Creek Map

Hikes: Mause Creek, Tanglefoot, 5 Passes, Sunken Creek

Mause Creek Tarns with monkey flowers. One of the tarns is centre left in this image.



Rating: moderate

Time: day hike to Windy Pass

Trail: small creek crossings; talus slope; steep sections; well-worn trail

Maps: 82G/11 Fernie (NAD27); 82G/12 Cranbrook (NAD83)

Trail map: page ###

To Tanglefoot Pass

Distance: 3.5 km

Elevation gain: 535 m (1,750 ft.)

Tanglefoot Pass: 2345 m (7,369 ft.)

To Tanglefoot Lake

Distance: 4.3 km from trailhead at Mause Creek

Tanglefoot Lake: 2100 m (6,900 ft.)

Descend

from pass: 143 m (470 ft.)

To Windy Pass

Distance: 6.7 km from trailhead at Mause Creek

Elevation gain: Tanglefoot Lake to Windy Pass 314 m (1,030 ft.)

Windy Pass: 2418 m (7,936 ft.)

Drive

Road map: page ####; follow the directions for Mause Creek Road on page ###

Road: high-clearance truck or 4x4

Trail

0 km: Mause Creek parking lot. Hike to the Mause Creek tarns and up to Tanglefoot Pass.

3.5 km: Tanglefoot Pass, N96438-E12069, at 2345 m (7,369 ft.). Head across the sidehill right (east) on a rocky slope trail with some talus sections to cross.

#37 TANGLEFOOT LAKE VIA THE MAUSE CREEK TARNs ★★★★★

The deep-blue water of Tanglefoot Lake sparkles in the afternoon light, and alpine larch trees crowd along the shore. Reflections of Fisher Peak (the eastern side of this prominent mountain) shimmer in this 300-m-wide triangular lake.

Visiting Tanglefoot Lake and Windy Pass makes an exceptional day hike. The hike to Tanglefoot Lake is my personal favourite. It has everything in a single, compact alpine region, from high ridges, larch forests, great views and carpets of wildflowers.

As a nature photographer, capturing the moment is not as easy as clicking the shutter. To find the wildflowers in perfect bloom, under a shining blue sky with no forest fire smoke and no wind, is a tall order; we have been trying for many summers.

On one exceptional day at Tanglefoot Lake, all the elements came together. The day began with crisp dew on the plants, the flowers along the trail were swaying beautifully on their slender stems and the clouds forecast for the afternoon were not materializing. Blue sky followed us to the lakeshore. We set up and after hours of photographing, we created many ideal images, culminating in the cover shot for this book.

Further Explorations

Five Passes Trail

Windy Pass is also part of the Five Passes trail that connects alpine passes via Mause, Sunken, Dibble, Bear and Tanglefoot passes in a long and satisfying alpine and subalpine loop traverse. See page ###.

3.8 km: Leaving the talus slope, enter a grassy meadow and turn downhill on a trail at the top of steep, north facing gully, N96441-12326, at 2208 m (7,245 ft.). Follow the gully trail down by flowers and tiny springs. For a quick view down into Tanglefoot Lake, hike about 50 to 100 m east from the top of the gully, to a rocky outcropping. Backtrack to the top of the gully to complete the hike to Tanglefoot Lake.

4.4 km: Cross the creek on big, flat-topped boulders at the lake outlet. Turn right along the trail and in 300 m come to a primitive bush campsite by a huge boulder. The trail

continues in the forest and starts to wind along the eastern slope. At the other end of the lake, the trail gains elevation gradually on its way to Windy Pass, beside other tarns and through larch forests. The final section to the pass is up steep alpine rubble. The pass is on a wide, smooth alpine ridge.

7.3 km: Windy Pass, N95465-E14063, at 2418 m (7,936 ft.). Climb to the summit just left (north) of Windy Pass to see Dibble Glacier; the only remaining glacier in The Steeples mountains. Cliff Lake is the long, thin lake you see below and north of the summit, 480 m (1,600 ft.).



After an autumn storm at Tanglefoot Lake, the sky cleared to a vibrant magenta and orange hue.