

# Lost Trails

Footpaths abandoned by the Forest Service, or never finished by the Park Service.  
Routes pioneered by Native Americans, the U.S. military, and horse thieves.  
We've unearthed eight trails full of history and mystery, none of which you'll find on maps.  
Until now. By Michael Lanza



IT'S UP, AND IT'S GOOD: THE VIEW FROM THE BASE OF THESE SKYSCRAPING REDWOODS TO THE CANOPY STRETCHES MORE THAN A FOOTBALL FIELD IN LENGTH.

WE'VE REACHED THE END OF THE LINE, OR so it appears. My hiking partners and I stand on an overlook where the High Divide Trail in Olympic National Park terminates abruptly above the Catwalk, a narrow, scoliotic backbone of rock maybe 200 yards long. To either side, the earth falls away abruptly; crumbling cliffs and scree give way to meadows and forest pitched at a dizzying angle. On maps and in guidebooks, this is the turnaround point.

But to a seasoned cross-country hiker, the High Divide Trail appears merely uncompleted—like it really ought to keep going onto the inviting, meadow-covered ridge stretching into the distance. And indeed, it was meant to. So Mark and Jan and I scramble carefully across the Catwalk to pick up where the National Park Service left off seven decades ago.

Back then, the NPS had plans to extend the High Divide Trail, in the northwest corner of the

Olympics, another 12-plus miles along the northern Bailey Range to link up with the Long Ridge Trail near Dodger Point. Then World War II came along, and the money dried up. In recent decades, the full north-south alpine traverse of the Bailey Range, from the High Divide Trail's official end to the headwaters of the Elwha River, has become something of a cult classic among Olympic cognoscenti. Yet it remains largely unknown—over the next 3 days, we'll see just one other party, five climbers coming off Mt. Olympus. Our 44-mile, 5-day hike from the Sol Duc River trailhead via Dodger Point to the Elwha River would cover the very route the NPS left on the drawing board.

Beyond the Catwalk, we push through a thicket of brush and stop at a sight I hadn't expected: an excellent trail where the map shows none. Pounded into the soil by the boots of the occasional hikers who preceded us, and preserved by an environment of low, slow-growing vegetation, it meanders across alpine wildflower meadows as far as we can see.

We're traveling in mid-September, and the route is snow-free. We cross treeless mountainsides ablaze with blueberry bushes showing autumn red, shoveling in fistfuls of tart fruit. To our left, open slopes soar more than a thousand feet to a crown of cliffs and spires. To our right, thick forest falls away nearly a vertical mile to the crazy-green orgy of photosynthesis that is the Hoh Rain Forest. Across that abyss, a rich blue sky frames the horned head and gleaming glaciers of Mt. Olympus.

That night, we camp in the woods by Cream Lake, where only the occasional bugling of Roosevelt elk disturbs the quiet; in the morning, we encounter a few huge bulls. The next afternoon, we pitch tents on the sandy beach of a lake cradled in Ferry Basin's stone amphitheater. Then we scramble up 6,283-foot Mt. Pulitzer, watching a family of mountain goats clatter across cliffs of crumbling rock, hundreds of feet of exposure below their hooves. On our final morning in the high country, while hiking along the open ridge to Dodger Point, we go rigid as a black bear erupts from a blueberry thicket and sprints away from us.

What the NPS once envisioned, adventurous hikers have roughed out—a hiking route across an alpine wonderland that sees so few people it feels like virgin terrain. Lucky for us, the Park Service never got around to finishing its work. 🍷

## Bailey Range Traverse

### Olympic National Park, WA

**The Hike** Start with an 8.4-mile trek on the Sol Duc River Trail, then follow the High Divide Trail 3.7 miles to its official end at the Catwalk—an easier scramble than it looks if you stay on the beaten path. Here you'll pick up the user trail traversing the west slope of the Bailey Range between 5,000 and 5,500 feet. Campsites are few and marginal between Boston Charlie's Camp (a spot for a tent beside a tiny tarn at the Catwalk's east end) and Cream Lake, but you'll pass several creeks. Some places will present exposed, difficult scrambling, and the trail is easy to lose above Cream Lake; you may bushwhack for about 40 minutes.

Above the lake, cross meadows and a rocky plateau to Ferry Basin; where campsites abound. You'll regain the user trail en route to the 5,800-foot saddle between Mts. Ferry and Pulitzer before the trail abruptly turns faint, climbing talus to just east of Ferry's 6,157-foot summit (an easy side hike). Then it improves all the way to the Long Ridge Trail junction, except for two spots, one of which is the steep descent off the saddle between Ludden Peak and Mt. Scott—exit right from the creekbed on the east side of the saddle. Minutes beyond that, the route crosses a gully and climbs very steeply up Jacob's Ladder—look for the faint trail. Once you reach the Long Ridge Trail, follow it for 10 miles (no campsites or water), then take the Elwha River Trail about 3 miles to Whiskey Bend.

The Elwha River Trail splits into two parallel braids; the lower one follows the river, passing the historic, 100-year-old Humes Ranch cabin and the 10-minute side trail to an impressive gorge called Goblin Gates. Snow lingers well into summer in the Bailey Range, and its notoriously fickle weather often brings heavy fog. Such conditions demand expert routefinding skills and possibly an ice axe and crampons. By late summer, the route is also often dry.

**The Way** You'll need to shuttle vehicles between the two trailheads. *Endpoint:* From Port Angeles, Take US 101 west for 8.5 miles, then turn south onto Elwha River Road. Continue 4 miles; just past the Elwha Ranger Station, turn left onto Whiskey Bend Road; the Whiskey Bend (Elwha River) trailhead is in 4.3 miles. *Start:* From US 101, 2 miles west of Lake Crescent, turn south onto Sol Duc River Road; the Sol Duc River trailhead is in 14 miles. A shuttle is available from Windsox ([windsox.us](http://windsox.us), [shuttle@windsox.us](mailto:shuttle@windsox.us)).

**Resources** *Climber's Guide to the Olympic Mountains*, by Olympic Mountain Rescue (\$17), and *75 Scrambles in Washington*, by Peggy Goldman, (\$19), both from The Mountaineers. Maps: Green Trails 134, *Mount Olympus* (\$5), and 133S, *Seven Lakes Basin* (\$8). (206) 546-6277; [greentrails.com](http://greentrails.com). Olympic National Park Wilderness Information Center: (360) 565-3100; [nps.gov/olymp/wic/index.html](http://nps.gov/olymp/wic/index.html)

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## Mt. OJI Baxter State Park, ME

**The Hike** Not all hiking trails are the product of brain and brawn. Take one little-known, officially closed route up obscure Mt. OJI. The “trail” was birthed when the earth moved violently—that is, massive rockslides bulldozed dense pine forest. For many years, hard-core hikers and scramblers considered OJI a prized test piece, and harder, step for step, than its famous neighbor, Katahdin.

The traditional 6.2-mile loop up and down OJI’s north and south slides has all the acquired-taste pleasures of a classic Northeast rockslide hike: steep slabs, loose rock, and the kind of exposure that makes some hikers wax poetic and others weep. But the summer of 2000 was the last time you’d have seen a sign marking the start of the North Slide Trail. That was the year the Baxter State Park Authority announced it would no longer maintain the trail; it’s deemed unsafe, but hikers are still allowed to bushwhack it.

Our take: Yes, it’s steep, not appropriate for anyone uncomfortable with exposure, and we’d avoid it when wet or if rain threatens. Yet we’d compare it to classic New England trails like Huntington Ravine on Mt. Washington, the North Slide of Mt. Tripyramid in the Whites, or Katahdin’s Abol Trail (which follows an 1816 slide). And the panoramas from OJI slabs are among the Northeast’s finest. Katahdin dominates one near horizon, while views of mountains, forests, and sprawling lakes fan out in every other direction. And the challenging scrambling is just plain fun.

Follow the OJI Trail .4 mile, then look for remnants of the North Slide Trail on your left. Bushwhack north-northeast along it for about .8 mile to the base of the North Slide, which you’ll ascend, looking for sporadic cairns and blazes. After the trail reenters the woods, follow it a quarter-mile, then turn left for an out-and-back to Old Jay Eye Rock, a boulder perched on an open ridge overlooking a vast wilderness. Double back to the main trail, and follow it a quarter-mile to the wooded summit. Descend the South Slide Trail, which remains open.

**The Way** From Millinocket, head northwest on Golden Road and follow signs 18 miles to Baxter State Park. Just past the Togue Pond gatehouse, take the gravel Tote Road’s left fork and drive 10.5 miles to a parking area on the right for the Mt. OJI Loop, just before Foster Field.

**Resources** *New England Hiking*, by Michael Lanza (\$22). Maps: DeLorme *Baxter State Park* and *Katahdin* (\$8 each). To reserve a campsite for a summer weekend, contact the park 4 months in advance. (207) 723-5140; baxterstateparkauthority.com.



## Horsethief Trail Grand Canyon National Park, AZ

**The Hike** If you wanted to stash stolen horses, wouldn’t a remote corner of the continent’s biggest, harshest, most labyrinthine canyon sound perfect? In the late 19th century, before the national park was established, outlaws routinely pilfered horses in Utah, ran them deep into the Grand Canyon via the North Rim’s Nankoweap Trail (built in 1882 by explorer John Wesley Powell), changed their brands, then drove them across the river and up the Tanner Trail to sell in Arizona.

Today, that rugged, 28-mile cross-country route between the Nankoweap Trail and Basalt Canyon is called the Horsethief Trail. Few people beyond hard-core Big Ditch insiders have ever heard of it, in part because there’s actually no trail. While you may stumble upon a few cairns—and rusty tin cans and old horse-shoes—the Horsethief demands expert routefinding. If you have the skill (and a sharp eye), you’ll find a veritable outdoor museum of Native American archaeology. The Nankoweap and Chuar Valleys and Lava Canyon are loaded; one path beaten by river runners leads to cliff dwellings just south of the mouth of Nankoweap Creek. Old mine shafts and mining camp ruins also litter the areas around Chuar Lava Hill, Lava Butte, and the mouth of Basalt Canyon. And if that’s not enough, this hike offers the big, life-list scenery you expect in the Grand Canyon, plus unparalleled remoteness and solitude.

Starting on the North Rim, descend the Nankoweap—the park’s toughest trail—for 11 miles. Where it drops into the creekbed south-east of Point 4154, head off-trail for the saddle east of Nankoweap Butte. The Horsethief route bounces strenuously through tributary canyons and saddles west of Malgosa Crest and Kwagunt Butte, past Awatubi Crest, then west of Chuar and Temple Buttes. The route ascends the Chuar Valley to campsites with water below Chivaria Point, then swings south and crosses a saddle into Basalt Canyon.

Figure at least 5 days in each direction for the out-and-back hike to Basalt Canyon. Water sources are infrequent; you can usually count on water at Kwagunt Creek, and in Chuar Valley and Basalt Canyon. Check with backcountry rangers beforehand, and be prepared to hike half a day between sources, and to carry 4 to 6 liters a day.

**The Way** To reach the Nankoweap trailhead from Jacob Lake, drive 26.5 miles south on AZ 67, and turn east onto FR 611 (just beyond the DeMotte Park Campground entrance). Continue 1.4 miles, then turn south onto FR 610 and continue 12.3 miles to the end of the road.

**Resources** Trails Illustrated 207, *Grand Canyon* (\$9); (800) 962-1643, ngsmapstore.com. (928) 638-7888; nps.gov/grca



PHOTOS BY (FROM LEFT) TK, JOHN DITTLI; TIM SEAWER, POLLIE RODRIGUEZ / ALAMY



## Ekaneetlee Creek Manway Great Smoky Mountains National Park, NC/TN

**The Hike** The enduring popularity of the Smokies long predates the national park. Native Americans scouted eight trails across these mountains—there's even evidence they considered the area a vast "park" where they would hunt but no one would live. Eventually, most of those footpaths became roads and hiking trails, but one remains in a primitive state.

The Ekaneetlee Indian Trail, which once traversed the lowest pass in the Smokies crest—3,842-foot Ekaneetlee Gap—now enjoys a second life as a "manway," the local term for bushwhacking routes used occasionally by hardy hikers who eschew maintained trails. Anyone familiar with Smokies manways understands there's no confusing them with real trails; these bushwhacks generally range from very thick to I-can't-see-the-wild-boar-a-foot-in-front-of-me dense. And the Ekaneetlee Creek Manway's streamside rhododendron thickets rank it among the Smokies' most severe hiker-versus-nature grappling matches.

That said, this seldom-used route promises a far wilder adventure than the park's often-crowded trails. Instead of cruising along a hard-packed dirt path looking for the next viewpoint, you'll move at a slug's pace through cool, shaded forest that's pin-drop quiet but for the soundtrack of nature; you'll also enjoy a rare hands-on intimacy



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with the flora in one of North America's richest biotas. And you're certain to find absolute solitude. The 6-mile manway, which ascends one drainage and descends another, requires a full day. But its endpoints are close to backcountry campsites. (It also crosses the Appalachian Trail near the manway's midpoint, south of the Mollies Ridge shelter, offering a bailout opportunity.)

Hike it on a 28-mile loop from Fontana Dam trailhead. Take the Lakeshore and Eagle Creek Trails to Lower Ekaneetlee campsite 89. On day 2, follow the manway

straight up Ekaneetlee Creek to Ekaneetlee Gap, then descend the Ekaneetlee Branch to Forge Creek campsite 12. (Trout fishermen beat a path into the manway's lower ends, but it's hard to find from the Forge Creek side, so it's better to start from campsite 89.) Loop back via the Gregory Ridge and Gregory Bald Trails, and the Long Hungry Ridge and Twentymile Trails to the AT. Don't skip the 2-mile out-and-back to Gregory Bald, one of the nicest summits in the Smokies, especially in June when the azaleas bloom.

**The Way** The loop begins and ends at the AT trailhead at Fontana Dam, off NC 28 in the park's southwest corner.

**Resources** Trails Illustrated 229, *Great Smoky Mountains* (\$10); (800) 962-1643, ngmapstore.com. (865) 436-1297; nps.gov/grsm

## Old Cavalry Trail Yosemite National Park, CA

**The Hike** In the late 19th century, when Yosemite National Park was just a few years old (and the NPS didn't exist), the U.S. Cavalry was charged with managing the park—specifically, with driving out the scores of shepherds and hundreds of thousands of domestic sheep denuding the High Sierra. In 1898 alone, the men of the cavalry expelled nearly 200,000 sheep from the park. To facilitate this monumental task, they blazed trails throughout the high country. Most have faded away, but one still exists—at least in pieces. From Merced Lake, a primo campsite, a cavalry trail climbs 2,700 feet in 5 miles to Obelisk Lake. This alpine gem sits at 9,800 feet, below the northeast spur of Mt. Clark (formerly known as Obelisk Peak).

This out-and-back dayhike is a jealously guarded favorite of Merced Lake backcountry rangers and High Sierra camp employees, and you may see no one else. Traces of the old trail remain, and modern hikers have erected some cairns, but you'll basically be trekking cross-country in a lonely corner of the park. Expect to hike all day, and bring your routefinding skills and low-impact sensibilities.



From the Merced Lake Ranger Station, follow the Merced Lake Trail three-quarters of a mile east. Cross the river where the trail passes near it (look for a downed tree, as fording could be impossible in early summer). Climb uphill west of the Gray Peak Fork, looking for signs of the cavalry trail; you'll eventually parallel the creek draining Obelisk Lake. You'll pass waterfalls and clamber over open slabs with panoramic views before you reach the lake. Leave time to enjoy the lakeside view of Mt

Clark towering above—and perhaps to give thanks to those cavalrymen, who were thoughtful enough to stock Obelisk with trout.

Make the trek to Obelisk Lake as an extra day on a 52-mile loop from Glacier Point, on trails connecting the Merced and Illilouette Valleys via Red Peak Pass. Highlights of that loop include the Panorama Trail past Illilouette Falls, Panorama Point high above Yosemite Valley, camping at Lower Ottaway Lake, and park-spanning views from 11,180-foot Red Peak Pass (Yosemite's highest).

**The Way** The trailhead is at the end of the Glacier Point Road. Bus service runs from Yosemite Valley to the frequently full trailhead lot.

**Resources** *Yosemite National Park*, by Jeffrey Schaffer (Wilderness Press, \$19). Maps: Trails Illustrated 309, *Yosemite SE* (\$9) and 206, *Yosemite* (\$10); (800) 962-1643, ngmapstore.com. To read about the Merced-Obelisk route, go to [yosemiteexplorer.com/trails/obelisk-lake](http://yosemiteexplorer.com/trails/obelisk-lake). Permit info: (209) 372-0200; nps.gov/yose



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## Trooper Traverse

TK location, CO

**The Hike** The 33 young men who first made this 4-day, 40-mile traverse from Leadville to Aspen in the winter of 1944 were facing a date with history. They would be shipping out to the war in Europe, and some would not return. But first, they intended to squeeze in some training and fun—or as much fun as one can have skiing with a 75-pound rucksack. So they blazed a route across some of the highest peaks in the Rockies, rugged terrain with hundred-mile views in what today remains a remote wilderness.

That group of soldiers from the storied 10th Mountain Division included such future outdoor luminaries as National Outdoor Leadership School founder Paul Petzoldt, Outward Bound founder Ernest “Tap” Tapley, and mountaineering icon Fred Beckey. Their journey was lost to history until Colorado ski mountaineer Lou Dawson unearthed and repeated it with two companions in 2001. “In doing the research, it was obvious to me that one of their main goals was to enjoy the mountains before they crossed the sea to harm’s way,” says Dawson. “Their ‘trooper traverse’ ended up being one of the most forward-thinking and aggressive ski explorations ever done in North American mountaineering.”

As a ski route, it’s strictly for experts; tricky navigation, avalanche hazards, and high elevation (10,000 to 13,000 feet) are among its challenges. But as a summer backpacking trip, it’s stellar; you won’t be doing technical climbs, but it’s remote and there’s plenty of off-trail travel across the Mt. Massive and Hunter-Fryingpan Wilderness Areas. With better road access in summer, the hike shrinks to about 30 miles; plan on 4 full days.

From outside Leadville, ascend the Halfmoon Creek Valley to Darling Pass, snaking between Colorado’s two highest peaks, Mts. Elbert (14,433 feet) and Massive (14,421 feet). Cross the head of North Fork Lake Creek to the Continental Divide just northeast of Peak 13,150 (sometimes called John Jay Peak). Continue west,

passing north of Lost Man Lake and south of South Fork Pass, to the Williams Mountains; then descend the Trooper Couloir (south of Peak 13,203) into the valley of Hunter Creek, which you’ll follow to Aspen.

**The Way** *Starting point:* Drive 3.7 miles south of Leadville on US 24, then turn west onto Fish Hatchery Road (CO 300). In .8 mile, turn left onto CO 11. Continue 1.1 miles and turn right onto Halfmoon Creek Road. Continue past Halfmoon Campground (at 4.4 miles) and trailheads for Mt. Elbert and Mt. Massive. From the latter (which is the farthest most 2WD vehicles can go), continue 1.9 miles to a fork, stay right, go another .75 mile to where the road bears left and crosses Halfmoon Creek. Make the crossing (and park if you’re in a 4WD), then start hiking up the drainage.

*Endpoint:* Head north from Mill Street in Aspen; cross the Roaring Fork River, then bear left and follow Red Mountain Road for 1.2 miles. Turn right onto Hunter Creek Road. Drive about half a mile, then take a hard left onto an unpaved driveway that leads up 300 feet past a water tank to the lower of two overnight trailhead parking areas. Don’t park here; instead follow Hunter Creek Road up Red Mountain about .6 mile to a 3-way intersection. Take a hard right, and go 0.1 mile to the trailhead parking.

**Resources** See Lou Dawson’s route description and maps at [wilds-now.com/articles/trooper\\_traverse/intro\\_article.html](http://wilds-now.com/articles/trooper_traverse/intro_article.html).



# Adams Slide Trail

Mt. Adams, NH

**The Hike** The verdant hills of the White Mountains may be well trod, but they're also spiderwebbed with ghost trails and logging roads, abandoned decades ago and long forgotten. Trouble is, most of them have completely disappeared under a thick mat of vegetation. Not so for most of the former Adams Slide Trail on Mt. Adams, the second-highest peak in the Presidential Range. Built in 1909 and abandoned in 1970, the trail looks like it's still maintained (at least above treeline), though nearly four decades have passed since it last saw a Pulaski. Most of its closely spaced cairns remain standing in the talus, which makes us suspect that a few self-appointed sponsors may be furtively keeping this path alive.

Below treeline, of course, the trail fades. But the bushwhacking is moderate at worst, and only takes about 30 minutes when descending. For that reason, down is the wisest direction of travel; plus, it's easy to locate the Adams Slide Trail at its top and all but impossible to find its bottom end in the woods. And when walking downhill you'll

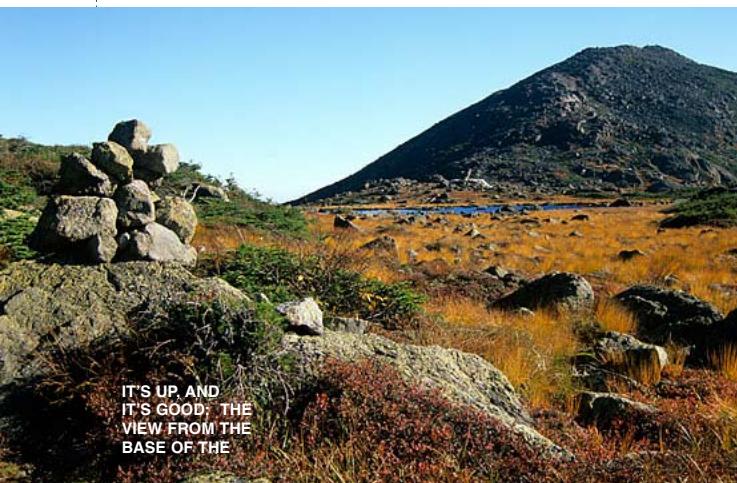
enjoy uninterrupted views across the broad cirque of the Great Gulf to the rocky heights of Mts. Jefferson and Washington—instead of gazing up at talus.

This 13-mile loop is rich in alpine scenery and panoramas of the northern Presidentials, and connects trails that see surprisingly few hikers for this area. A stout dayhike or overnight, the route ascends via the Great Gulf and Osgood Trails over 5,366-foot Mt. Madison, then follows the Star Lake Trail to the boulder-pile crown of

5,799-foot Mt. Adams. From Adams, you'll backtrack down the Star Lake Trail about .1 mile, then turn south off-trail where the path swings sharply left. Almost immediately, you'll see Adams Slide Trail cairns. Follow them to treeline to locate the old tread, which will be visible for a while in the forest, as will broken branches and similar signs of recent passage by a few other intrepid hikers. The abandoned path drops 2,300 feet in 1.3 miles, reaching the Buttress Trail .1 mile from the Six Husbands Trail, which leads back to the Great Gulf Trail.

**The Way** The Great Gulf trailhead is off NH 16 between Pinkham Notch and Gorham, about 1.5 miles south of Dolly Copp Road.

**Resources** *White Mountain Guide* (AMC Books, \$23). (800) 262-4455; outdoors.org



IT'S UP, AND IT'S GOOD: THE VIEW FROM THE BASE OF THE

# Massie Lake High Route

Glacier Peak Wilderness, WA

**The Hike** If you want to know what's not shown on today's map of the North Cascades, talk to a shepherd who knew these vast alpine meadows before they earned wilderness designation. Or read on.

Abandoned by the Forest Service, many former trails and old shepherds' routes survive; while their condition varies, hikers with solid navigation skills can follow them once the snow has melted (usually by midsummer). These so-called "high routes" access lonely alpine ridges and meadows with nonstop views of craggy peaks from high above lush valleys. Hike one of the better-preserved of these forgotten paths on a 22-mile loop that features alpine wildflowers and your pick of campsites overlooking a sharp alpine skyline flanking the deep, lush Buck Creek valley.

Start by ascending Buck Creek Trail 1513 for about 8.5 miles to where it turns sharply southwest at around 5,700 feet. Drop your pack for the 1.5-mile out-and-back hike to Buck Creek Pass and one of the region's best panoramas of massive Glacier Peak. Back at that sharp turn in Trail 1513, find an unmarked trail heading east (it's often blocked by a log); this is the Massie Lake High Route, which runs for 6 miles to Massie Lake. It remains in good condition for the most part, except for one middle stretch that's overgrown and hard to follow.

The route ascends into the basin below Helmet Butte and Pass No 10, then traverses southeast, staying mostly between 5,600 and 6,100 feet. There are several campsites along the way; perhaps the best are about 2 miles from the Buck Creek Trail in meadows at 6,050 feet. The route next crosses the main ridge south of Massie Lake at around 6,500 feet, then reaches a junction with an unmaintained trail to Massie Lake. There's camping at the lake, though mornings and nights can be buggy. Back on the Massie Lake High Route, descend steep trail a bit over a mile to Chiwawa River Trail 1550. You'll ford the river, which may be high in early summer, and hike south 4.5 miles to the trailhead. Plan two to three days.

**The Way** From US 2 at Coles Corner (a town between Leavenworth and Stevens Pass), turn north onto Lake Wenatchee Road 207. Cross the Wenatchee River bridge and continue straight onto Chiwawa River Loop Road. In 1.4 miles, turn left onto Chiwawa River Road and follow it about 23 miles to its end at the Buck Creek trailhead.

**Resources** *100 Hikes in Washington's Glacier Peak Wilderness Region*, by Ira Spring and Harvey Manning (\$17). Map: Green Trails 113, *Holden* (\$5); (206) 546-6277, greentrails.com.



PHOTOS BY (FROM LEFT) ERIN PAUL DONOVAN; GEOFFREY SANDINE