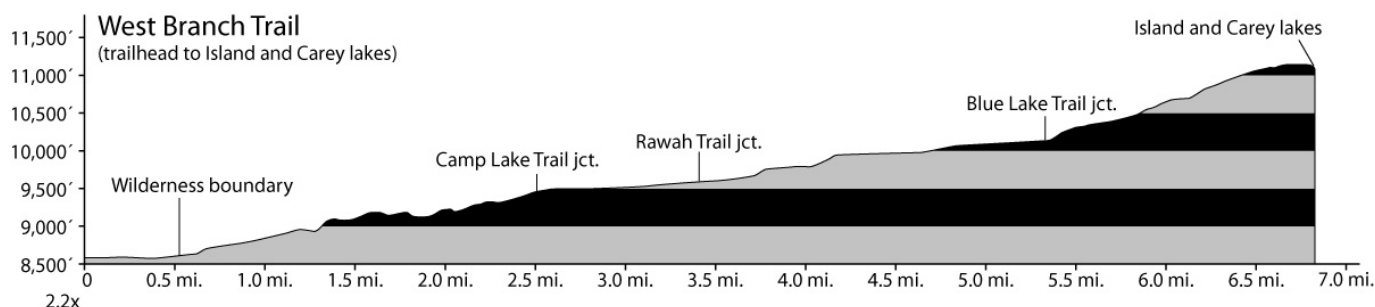


## Trail: West Branch 960

Priority:	<b>HIGH</b> (patrol methods: backpack; ride stock; day hike)
Ratings:	Hikers – Strenuous; Stock riders – Challenging
Open for summer patrol:	June 29 <sup>th</sup>
SPOT/USFS Radio:	<b>REQUIRED</b> (Radio: 02 > 01; Priority 1, Moderate reception)
Wilderness:	Rawah
One-Way Length:	7.1 miles (trailhead to Island and Carey lakes)
Beginning Elevation:	8,560
Peak Elevation:	11,171
Gain/Loss/Net Gain:	2,715/104/+2,611
USFS Regulations:	National Forest > Wilderness
Trails Illustrated:	#112 Poudre River, Cameron Pass
USGS 7-1/2' Quadrangles:	Boston Peak, Rawah Lakes



**Trailhead Location:** Poudre Canyon; drive 51.6 miles from Ted's Place, turn right on the Laramie River Road (CR-103) at mm 71.5, and proceed 7.1 miles to the West Branch parking area, a short distance north of the Tunnel Campground. The trail begins about 50 feet south of the parking area and heads west along a ditch road. The trail then crosses the ditch to your left and heads uphill to the Wilderness boundary. Stay to your right when the trail divides at this point. Facilities, water and stock trailer parking are available at the trailhead.

### GPS Coordinates:

trailhead:	N40°40.722' W105°51.267'
Wilderness boundary:	N40°40.50' W105°51.59'
jct. Camp Lake Trail:	N40°39.845' W105°53.482'
jct. Rawah Trail (South):	N40°39.395' W105°54.186'
jct. Blue Lake Trail:	N40°38.148' W105°55.053'
Carey & Island lakes:	N40°37.818' W105°56.329'

**Trail Description:** While this may best be done as an overnight trip, it also makes a delightful day patrol. From the West Branch parking lot, follow the road to the south for about 100 yards. Stay right at the Laramie Tunnel diversion and follow the Skyline Ditch. After about 0.25 mile, you will come to a lumber stringer bridge and stock ford across the ditch to your left. Cross and stay to the right—you will soon enter the Wilderness. For the first 3.5 miles, the

*The West Branch Trail provides access to the Camp Lake Trail, as well as connecting to the southern part of the Rawah Trail and the Twin Crater Lakes Trail via the Rawah Trail (S).*

trail climbs up and along the West Branch of the Laramie River, offering some great views of the river cascading below. Some sections of the first 2.5 miles of this trail become a stream during snowmelt early in the summer, so plan to get wet

if hiking during this time.

There is a junction with the Camp Lake Trail about 2.7 miles from the West Branch trailhead. About 0.8 mile after passing the junction with the Camp Lake Trail, the trail reaches the North Fork of the Laramie River. Note that the 2-log stringer bridge across the North Fork of the Laramie River

is washed out so, even if you are prepared to wade the stream, a through hike to the end of the West Branch Trail may not be possible/safe during high stream flow conditions. There are good campsites about 0.1 mile before the crossing, between the trail and the river. The area across the bridge was a very popular camping destination in the past, but the Forest Service is

trying to rehabilitate this area and has posted it off limits for overnight camping, although some visitors still camp in this area. Check for illegal campsites and fire rings. Explain the closure to people who might be camped in this area.

About 0.15 mile above this bridge (about 3.5 miles above the trailhead) you will come to a junction with the south end of the Rawah Trail. As you continue up the West Branch Trail, look for people camping too close to the stream or trail. About 2.25 miles above the junction with the Rawah Trail (about 5.3 miles above the trailhead) you will reach a small meadow and a junction with the Blue Lake Trail coming in from the southeast. Good campsites can also be found in this area, across the stream to the east. This is a popular camping destination. Note that the 2-log stringer bridge across the West Branch of the Laramie River at the junction with the Blue Lake Trail is washed out, so a through hike to that trail may not be possible/safe depending on stream flow conditions. After setting up your camp, continue your patrol up to Carey and Island lakes; two beautiful alpine lakes located in an area with islands of krummholz. Note

that no campfires are allowed above 10,800 ft (Rawah Wilderness Alpine Closure Zone). Bighorn sheep and elk can often be seen in this area.

If you have the time and want to visit Timber Lake (which is about 0.7 mile southeast of Island Lake at 10,850 ft elevation), you could travel cross-country from Island Lake, contouring to the south-southeast to an unnamed lake at 11,280 ft elevation and then descending to the east to the lake to see that there are no illegal campsites or wood fires near the lake. From Timber Lake, return to the upper West Branch Trail by traveling cross-country to the north.

Both the Rawah Trail (South) and the Twin Crater Lakes Trail are close by. If you intend to patrol either of these trails on your trip, be sure to schedule and report them separately.

