

mid-September. Nonetheless, hardy types swim in these chilly waters on hot days. Good campsites are available after the snow melts (sometimes not until July). Bring a stove for cooking.

The ill-kept cabin on the way to Reed Lakes is open for public shelter but is unpleasant. From the cabin, the hanging valley of Glacier Creek makes a nice alternate hike and leads by steep trail to the flattened buildings of Snowbird Mine (½ mile) and beyond to an overlook of the Snowbird Glacier (2 miles).

It is possible to connect Archangel Road with Trip 44 via a high and rocky or snowy but otherwise not technical pass accessible via Fairangel Creek. Look for an informal trail near an old mining cabin about 1.7 miles beyond the Reed Lakes trailhead. Another nearby option is the Gold-Mint Trail, which begins across the road from the Motherlode Lodge. It leads 9 miles to the head of the Little Susitna Valley.

Winter Activity in the Area

The trip from the Hatcher Pass Road to the old cabin on the Reed Lakes Trail is a good winter ski or snowshoe tour over gently sloping terrain. Snowmobiles use Archangel Road and the area west of the road but are prohibited on the Reed Creek side. The Gold-Mint Trail that begins across from the Motherlode Lodge also offers ski touring in a nonmotorized area, although the trailhead can be noisy with snowmobilers heading toward Hatcher Pass.

Farther up the road toward Hatcher Pass are other winter opportunities. The Hatcher Pass Lodge and Independence Mine State Historic Park, where road maintenance ends in winter, is good for skiing and closed to recreational snowmobiling. Popular ski options are touring on groomed tracks in the valley (pay a fee at the lodge), or touring uphill to telemark back down (no fee, but no guarantee of a trail). Popular telemark destinations are Microdot Ridge and April Bowl. Microdot Ridge lies across the valley from the buildings of Independence Mine, and skiers usually start from the lodge A-frames. April Bowl lies immediately above and south of Hatcher Pass proper. While skiers have attempted most slopes in the area, all are steep enough to avalanche under the right conditions (including portions of Microdot Ridge and April Bowl—see “Avalanches,” in the Introduction). Make sure you have the proper equipment and training before tackling the slopes.

The unplowed stretch of road over Hatcher Pass and into Willow Creek can make a grand ski tour. The route climbs about 1½ miles to the pass and descends about 12½ miles and 2,300 vertical feet to a parking area about 3 miles east of the Willow Creek bridge and about 18 miles east of the Parks Highway. The road to the east side of the pass and all areas west of the pass are open to snowmobiles. Reach the Willow end of the road to Hatcher Pass (Fishhook-Willow Road) at mile 71.2 of the Parks Highway.

44

CRAIGIE CREEK

Round trip: 3–9 miles (trip extensions possible)

Hiking time: 2–7 hours

High point: 4,250 feet

Total elevation gain: 950 feet–1,500 feet

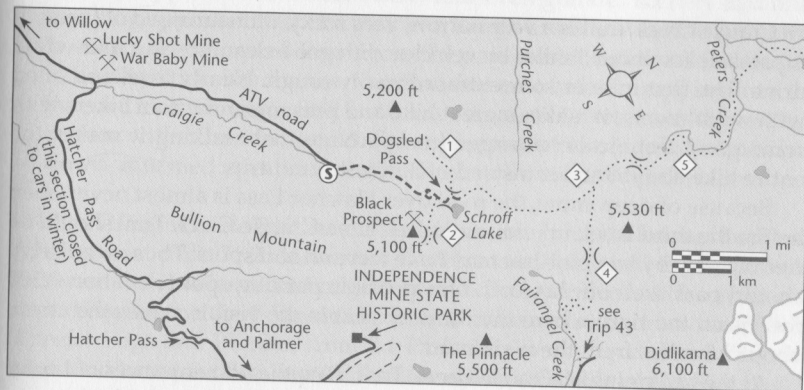
Best: mid-July–early October

Map: USGS Anchorage D7

Agency: Alaska Division of Mining, Land, & Water

Take a picnic lunch to a blue-green alpine lake at the base of precipitous peaks and spires. The short walk is just right for families with children, but don't overlook this easy hike to Dogsled Pass as an entrance to outstanding, if more-difficult, wilderness hiking deep into the Talkeetna Mountains.

Driving directions. To reach Craigie Creek, drive to mile 49.5 of the Glenn Highway (43.5 miles northeast of Anchorage and 1.5 miles north of Palmer's West Arctic Avenue stoplight), and turn west onto a road marked “Fishhook Road.” (This is also known as Palmer-Fishhook Road and Fishhook-Willow Road; see the Matanuska Valley detail map.) Fishhook Road is the road over Hatcher Pass. It is a narrow, steep, and winding route unsafe for trailers and large campers. Drive about 18.8 miles from the Glenn Highway, through the scenic gorge of the Little Susitna River and uphill past the road to Independence Mine State Historic Park, to the crest of Hatcher Pass. About 1.4 miles beyond (west of) the pass, the road forks; take the left fork. Continue another 3.2 miles to a side road that turns right into the valley of Craigie Creek and may be marked “Craigie Creek Trail.” The total distance from the Glenn Highway to this point is 23.4 miles.





Upper Peters Creek, July (John Wolfe Jr.)

Craigie Creek Trail is a very narrow, very rocky, unmaintained old road. It is passable for about 3 miles by vehicles with good clearance and four-wheel drive. The first mile or so is extraordinarily rough. Nearly level and lined with wildflowers, it makes a great hike and presents mountain bikers with some good technical challenges (rocks). Note that walking it makes the entire hike about 9 miles instead of 3 miles round trip.

Because of deep snow, the road over Hatcher Pass is almost never open before the third week in June, and often later. Craigie Creek Trail should be free of snow by late June but may have wet and soft spots. Those who drive should park well off the road. One possible parking spot (elevation 3,300 feet) is on the right where the ruins of a cabin are visible across the creek, about 2.8 miles from the main road.

At the beginning of Craigie Creek Trail, note the adit entrances of Lucky Shot and War Baby Mines high on the mountains to the left. Gold mining in

the Craigie Creek area began prior to 1919 and continued at least through 1930. On-again, off-again mining activity has taken place in recent years. If there are signs posted against trespassing in certain areas, respect the signs. The route may cross private property, although hikers have used this access for years without complications. Do not disturb buildings or equipment, and leave rocks or other minerals where they lie.

From the possible parking areas on this old road, continue on foot as the track climbs gently, passing old buildings and waterfalls. The road then becomes a foot trail leading high above brushline to Dogsled Pass (elevation 4,250 feet) and a lovely tarn locally known as Schroff Lake. The north side of the pass is covered by acres of granite boulders, which make both walking and camping difficult near the pass and lake.

Hikes and climbs abound, but the boulder field makes further access more difficult than the initial route to the pass. Several possibilities are outlined here. Numbers are keyed to the map.

1. From Dogsled Pass, an easy walk leads up the west ridge to several high points.
2. A rock scramble up the gully to the southeast next to the old Black Prospect Mine entrance leads to a ridge crest and a view of the historic Independence Mine buildings far below.
3. The upper end of Purches Creek awaits on the far side of Dogsled Pass. A traverse around the upper end of Purches Creek leads to a bowl with good camping on flat tundra, a welcome change from negotiating large boulders while descending to the north and east from the pass.
4. From the tundra bowl in Purches Creek, a difficult, rocky pass (elevation 4,850 feet) leads southeast to a high valley containing the Talkeetna Mine. Descend to Fairangel Creek, pick up a trail, and follow it to Archangel Road (see Trip 43 for driving directions to this area). The descent requires good routefinding skills and is steep.
5. North of the tundra bowl in upper Purches Creek is another pass that leads to upper Peters Creek. There, find even grander scenery and finer camping opportunities. The pass into Peters Creek is steep but has fewer boulders than Dogsled Pass. From the pass crest (elevation 4,500 feet), it is least steep to head a few hundred feet east before dropping into the Peters Creek drainage. Still farther to the north is yet another pass. It is strewn with boulders, especially on the north side, but leads to views down unnamed streams to the Kashwitna River drainage.

The Craigie Creek Trail area is also accessible from Willow on the Parks Highway at mile 71.2. In winter, the Hatcher Pass road is not plowed between the Hatcher Pass Lodge A-frames (Independence Mine area) and a parking area on the Willow side about 3 miles upstream from the Willow Creek bridge and 18 miles from the Parks Highway. Good ski touring can be found here (see also Trip 43), but the entire west side of Hatcher Pass is open to snowmobiles.