

64

Buck Lake



Coordinates

Trailhead:

N 45° 13.169'
W 116° 16.009'

Buck Lake Overlook:

N 45° 13.741'
W 116° 14.378'

Distance: 3.8 miles out-and-back

Total Elevation Gain: 1,850 feet

Difficulty: Strenuous

Elevation Range: 5,700 feet to 7,500 feet

Topographic Map: Hazard Lake, Indian Mountain

Time: 2 to 3 hours

Season: Late June through mid-October

Water Availability: None, unless you descend the unmaintained trail down to Buck Lake

Cautionary Advice: Bring adequate water as there are no reliable water sources along the trail.

Information: Payette National Forest, New Meadows Ranger District (208) 347-0300

Pit Latrine: No

Buck Lake

It's difficult to decide which is a greater wonder—the spectacular scenery near Buck Lake or the fact that so few hikers venture here. Other than hunting season, and maybe not even then, you are unlikely to see other people. This beautiful trail is about 22.0 miles northeast of New Meadows and explores the rugged topography on the extreme west edge of the Salmon River Mountains.

The route to the lake includes hillside meadows, open forest and plenty of summer wildflowers. Outstanding views are a constant. One noteworthy destination is the open meadow about a mile into the hike that offers breathtaking views into the deep canyon containing the Little Salmon River, and beyond to 8,048-foot Pollock Mountain and the serrated Seven Devils Mountains skyline. The final segment of the hike ascends to a granite outcropping perched 700 feet above the beautiful Buck Lake, challenging the meadow for “best of scenery.”

Although there is no official trail down to Buck Lake, there is a user-created footpath. It is steep and faint in spots, but those who make the journey will be one of the few who actually have the opportunity to dip their toes in this



Buck Lake in late October after an early fall snowstorm

hidden oasis. The lake is surrounded by steep scree slopes, so backpacking is not an option.

The dirt road to the trailhead is good except for the last 0.4 mile, which requires a high-clearance vehicle. Passenger cars can park where the road gets rocky and hike to the trailhead, adding 0.8 mile (out-and-back) to the trip. The trail does travel through sections of burned forest from the Tepee Springs Fire of 2015.

Trailhead Directions

From downtown McCall, drive west on ID 55 for 11.8 miles to the three-way intersection of ID 55 and US 95 in New Meadows, and turn right onto US 95. Continue north another 15.4 miles, and look for a sign “Hazard Creek Road” between mile markers 176 and 177. Reset your tripmeter, and turn right onto the well-graded FR 287 (Hazard Creek Road). Travel 0.9 mile to a Y-junction. Take the left fork of the road, and proceed another 6.2 miles to the signed trailhead. A high-clearance vehicle is recommended for the last 0.4 mile of the road. If you have a passenger car, there is adequate parking along the road before it gets rocky.

The Hike

From the signed trailhead, head north onto an open slope with many summer wildflowers and then into forest. The trail enters burned forest from the Tepee Springs Fire at 0.3 mile and makes a steep rise of more than 300 feet to a hillside meadow at 0.6 mile. The trail is ill-defined here. Make sure not to cross the meadow. Instead turn east (right) and ascend along the edge of burned forest. As you ascend, the trail will become more apparent. Over-the-shoulder views are spectacular looking west.

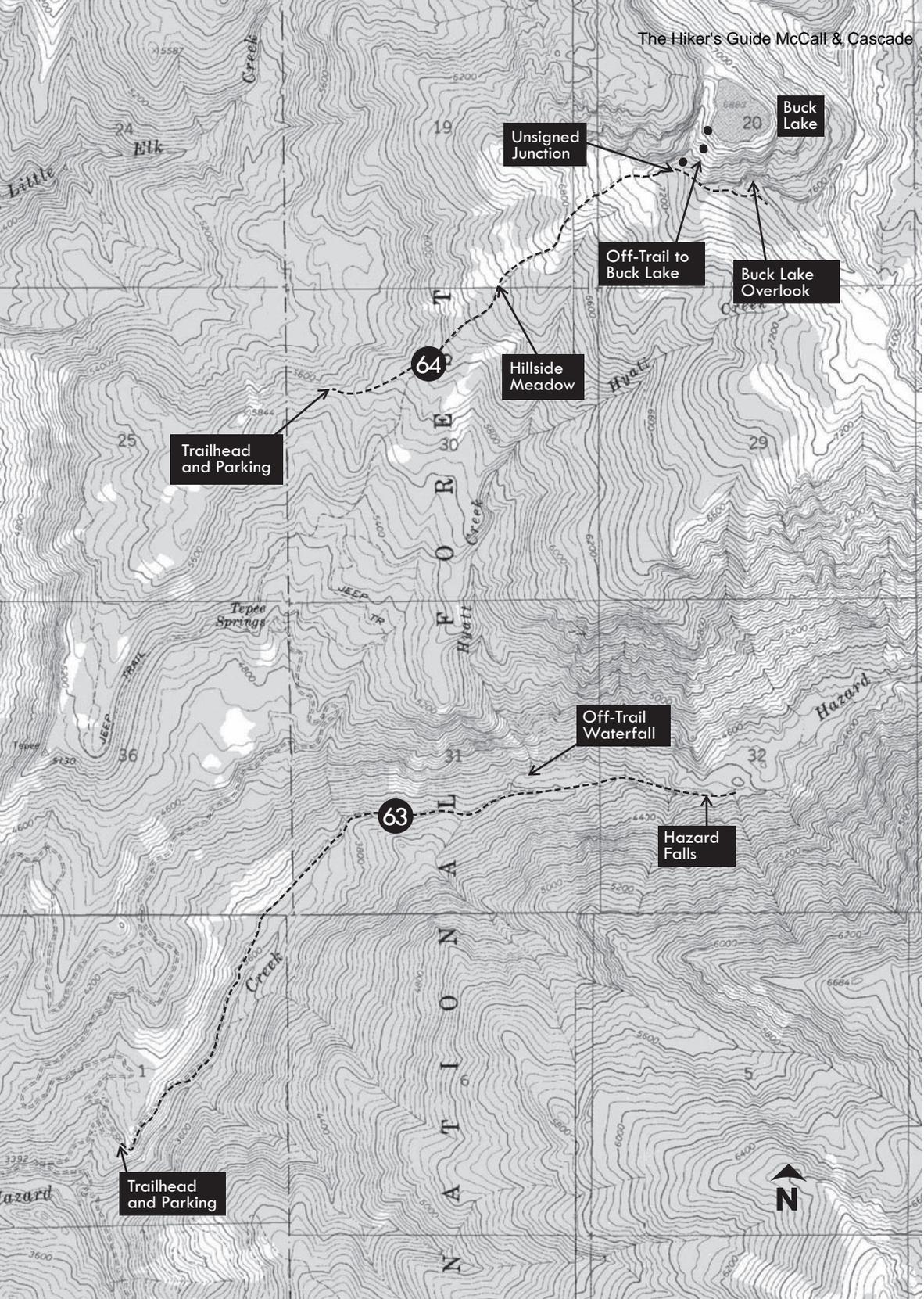
At 1.0 mile, the trail turns northeast up a steep hillside and winds behind a little knoll that blocks views looking west. After a bit more elevation gain, the trail levels in a patch of old-growth evergreens at 1.4 miles. Enter burned forest again, and climb a little over 100 feet to an unsigned junction at 1.6 miles more than 400 feet above Buck Lake (see map).

Veer left here if you want to descend down to Buck Lake. The route is very steep and requires a bit of route-finding. The footpath weaves through forest and over rocky knolls to the south side of the lake. There are no campsites near the lake due to the steep canyon walls surrounding the lake.

Past the unsigned junction, the trail makes a final rise of 250 feet over the next quarter-mile to a granite outcropping (about 50 feet off-trail) sitting high above Buck Lake. The views are phenomenal especially looking south and west.



View looking west from the hillside meadow



Trailhead and Parking

Hillside Meadow

Unsigned Junction

Off-Trail to Buck Lake

Buck Lake Overlook

Buck Lake

Off-Trail Waterfall

Hazard Falls

Trailhead and Parking