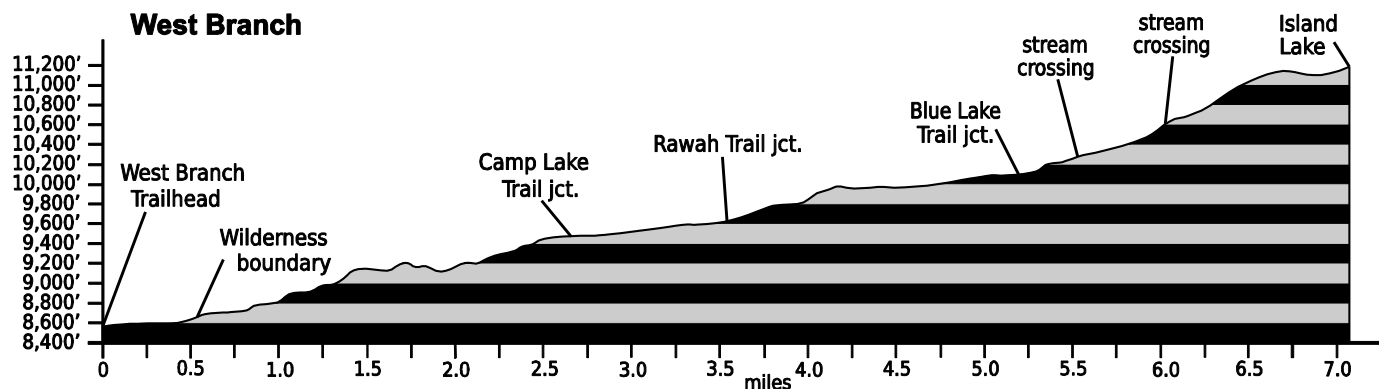


Feb. 15, 2021

## Public Trail Information: West Branch

|                                  |   |
|----------------------------------|---|
| Trail(s): West Branch #960       |   |
| Ratings / restrictions:          | Hikers – Moderate Stock riders – Difficult<br>Dogs must be on hand-held leash with hikers No wood fires above 10,800 ft<br>See complete REGULATIONS below INFORMATION OF INTEREST |
| Caution:                         | Moose; lightning in exposed alpine areas around Carey and Island Lakes  |
| Typically accessible:            | Late June, after Laramie River Road is open for the season  |
| Wilderness:                      | Rawah   |
| One-Way Length:                  | 7.1 miles (trailhead to Island and Carey Lakes)   |
| Beginning / Peak Elevations:     | 8,560 / 11,171  |
| Gain/Loss/Net Gain:              | 2,715/104/+2,611  |
| Map(s) - Trails Illustrated:     | #112 Poudre River, Cameron Pass; Mountain Jay, Rawah Wilderness   |
| Map(s) - USGS 7-½ ' Quadrangles: | Boston Peak, Rawah Lakes  |



### **TRAILHEAD LOCATION:**

**Rawah Wilderness Area:** Drive west from Ted’s Place on CO-14 for 51.6 miles. Turn right onto Laramie River Road (CR-103) at mm 71.5, and proceed 7.1 miles to the West Branch Trailhead and parking area, a short distance north of (beyond) the Tunnel Campground. The trail begins about 100 yards south of the parking area and heads west along a ditch road.

(There is a spur trail from Tunnel Campground over to West Branch, meeting it around the 0.5 mile point. The spur trail to West Branch begins near site 37 on the upper loop and goes down to a bridge, then about 0.1 mile to West Branch Trail).

Toilets and water are available at the West Branch Trailhead. The large parking lot with 2 entrances, plus the ability to park along the road, make this trailhead very accessible for stock trailer parking.

**TRAIL:** All but the upper mile of this trail passes through forest where the trail corridor is well established and very visible. The trail ends just before the lakes.

**WATER: Abundant** - There are many sources of water along this trail – Supply Ditch crossing about ¼ mile above the trailhead; unnamed tributary crossing 2.3 miles above the trailhead (about 0.4 miles below

the junction with Camp Lake Trail); crossing of the North Fork West Branch at 3.4 miles above the trailhead, just below junction with Rawah Trail (S); crossing of unnamed creek at 5.0 miles; crossing of the West Branch near the junction with Blue Lake Trail; unnamed creek crossing at 5.6 miles; crossing of unnamed tributaries at 6.0 and 6.2 miles; Carey Lake at 7.0 miles; and Island Lake at 7.1 miles above the trailhead.

**CAMPING:** A good camping location is on the east side of the West Branch Trail about 3.2 miles from the trailhead at GPS N40°39.58’ W105°53.94’, about 0.2 mile before the river crossing. Please camp at least 200 feet from the trail and river. The nearby West Branch provides an ideal source of potential drinking water.

Another option is near the Blue Lake Trail junction, just off Blue Lake Trail at approximately GPS N40°38.11’ W105°54.93’, a little northeast of where this trail crosses the West Branch of the Laramie River. This location can accommodate several tents and water is readily available.

Exposed camping (in or near alpine meadow, willows, or krummholz islands) in the vicinity of Carey and Island Lakes is possible. The rise between Carey and Island Lakes offers a couple of camping

options that are well away from water and trail and somewhat sheltered. The areas near the lakes are very exposed and unsafe during thunderstorms. Wood fires are prohibited above 10,800 ft elevation in the Rawah Wilderness Alpine Closure Area, which includes both lakes.

**SEASONAL:** Not accessible in winter, as Laramie River Road is not plowed. Some sections of the first 2.6 miles of this trail become wet during snowmelt early in the summer, so plan to get wet if hiking at this time. There is no bridge over the North fork West Branch (at 3.4 miles from the trailhead). It is usually safely forded by the first of July.

**DESCRIPTION:** While this trail may best be done as an overnight trip, it also makes a delightful day patrol. From the West Branch parking lot, follow the trail/road to the south for about 100 yards. Go west (right) at the Laramie Tunnel diversion on the Skyline Ditch maintenance road. After about ¼ mile, you will come to a lumber stringer bridge and stock ford across the ditch to your left. Cross and then stay to the right as you pass a spur trail to the Tunnel Campground. A little further up is the Wilderness boundary, about 0.5 mile above the trailhead. For the first 2.1 miles, the trail climbs up and along the West Branch Laramie River, offering some peeks of the river cascading below and many aspen trees which reward an autumn hike.

The trail intersects the Camp Lake Trail about 2.7 miles from the West Branch trailhead. At 3.4 miles,

the trail reaches the North Fork of the West Branch of Laramie River, so be prepared to wade. The area across the river used to be a very popular camping destination in the past, but this area is too close to the trail and the Forest Service is trying to rehabilitate it, and has posted it off limits for overnight camping.

About 3.5 miles above the trailhead, the West Branch Trail junctions with the south end of the Rawah Trail. About 5.2 miles above the trailhead, the trail reaches a meadow and a junction with the Blue Lake Trail coming in from the southeast. There is no bridge across the West Branch of the Laramie River at the junction with the Blue Lake Trail, so a through hike to that trail may not be possible or safe depending on stream flow conditions.

The trail continues uphill and to the southwest, and ends at Carey and Island Lakes. These two beautiful alpine lakes are located in a cirque with islands of krummholz. Bighorn sheep and elk can often be seen in this area.

**INFORMATION OF INTEREST:** 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 Timber Lake.

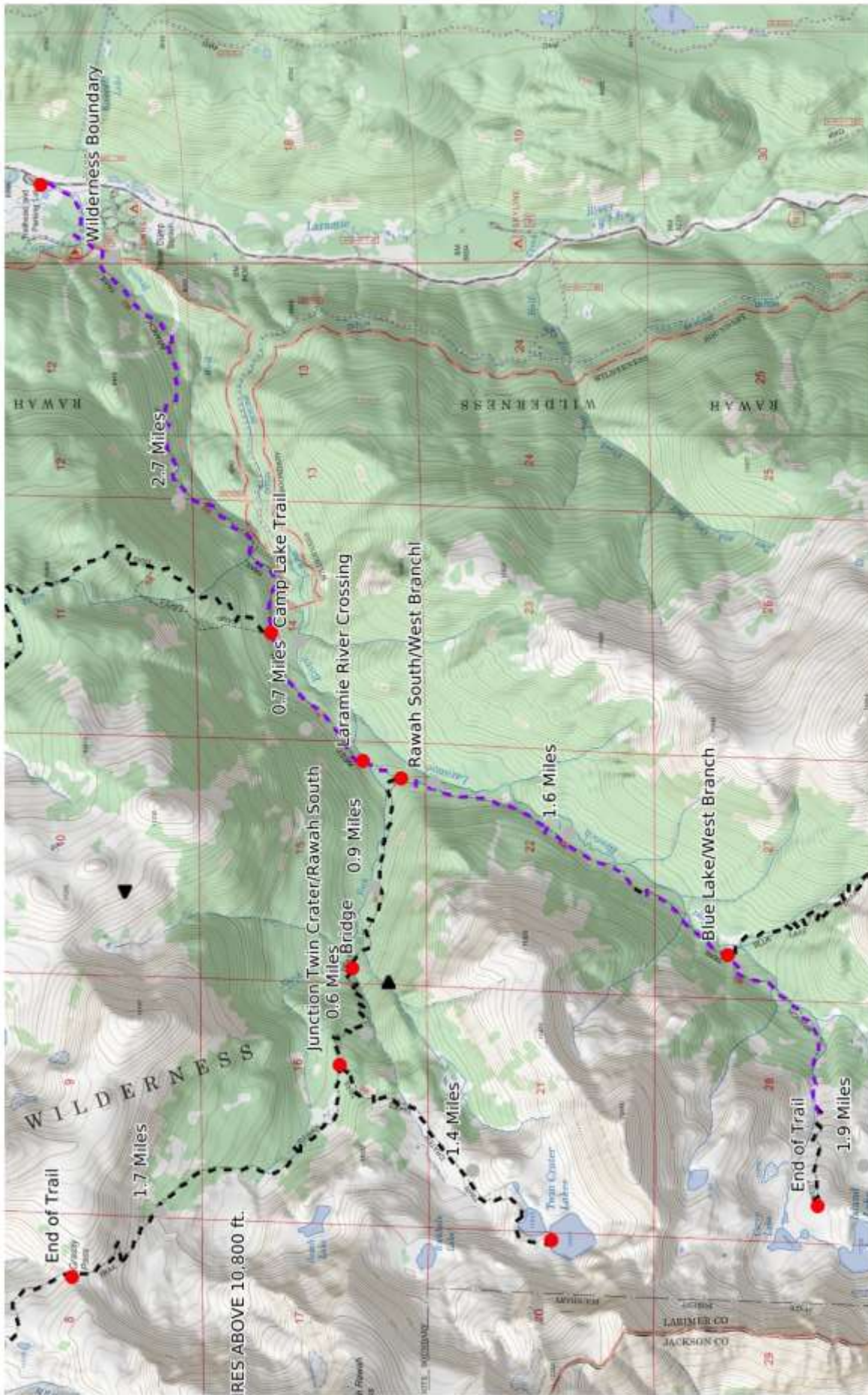
All mileages are approximate.

### **REGULATIONS:**

- Camping and Fires - Prohibited within 200 feet of trailhead. Outside the Wilderness boundary: recommend at least 100 feet from water and trail. In the Wilderness: prohibited within 200 feet of water or trail. Wood fires prohibited above 10,800 feet elevation (Rawah Alpine Closure Area).
- Dogs - Must be on hand-held leash with hikers; voice control with stock.
- Stock - To avoid spreading noxious weeds, recommend beginning 72 hours prior to the ride, stock should be fed only pellets or certified weed-free hay. Required: throughout the trip, stock *must* be fed only pellets or certified weed-free hay.
- Bicycles and Other Wheeled Conveyances - Prohibited.
- Motorized Transport - Prohibited.
- Motorized Equipment - Prohibited in Wilderness.
- Group Size - Outside the Wilderness boundary: a single group of more than 74 people must have a USFS permit. In the Wilderness: maximum 12 people and stock, combined.

| Mileage | GPS Coordinates: datum = WGS84                        | Lat/Long               | UTM                |
|---------|---|------------------------|--------------------|
| 0       | West Branch Trailhead (on Laramie River Road; CR-103) | N40°40.72' W105°51.27' | 427786mE 4503438mN |
| 0.5     | Wilderness boundary                                   | N40°40.44' W105°51.72' | 427128mE 4502371mN |
| 2.7     | junction with Camp Lake Trail                         | N40°39.84' W105°53.51' | 424629mE 4501841mN |
| 3.4     | crossing of the NF West Branch of the Laramie River   | N40°39.48' W105°54.11' |                    |
| 3.5     | junction with Rawah Trail (South)                     | N40°39.40' W105°54.19' | 423649mE 4501037mN |
| 5.2     | junction with Blue Lake Trail                         | N40°38.15' W105°55.05' | 422413mE 4498736mN |
| 7.0     | Carey Lake  | N40°37.88' W105°56.43' | 420462mE 4498257mN |
| 7.1     | end of trail at Island Lake                           | N40°37.72' W105°56.46' | 420417mE 4497962mN |

**(See next page for map of trail.)**



6 km

5 4 3 2 1

3 mi

Scale 1:37810 1 inch = 3151 feet

Mercator Projection  
WG584  
USNG 13TDE-13TDF

CalTopo

West Branch: 4