



# Hidden Creek Valley



J. Steyaert

Beautiful alpine meadows and towering limestone peaks await visitors to this remote valley. Hidden Creek is dammed by the side of the Kennicott Glacier and the seasonal lake that fills each summer (Hidden Lake) is filled with icebergs. The lake drains every summer, after which the lake bed is strewn with bergs. The valley is a steep walled which means there are miles of side hill hiking over rock and scree slopes and fragile alpine meadows. Creek crossings and brushy willow and alder thickets make it hard, but very rewarding traveling.

## Access:

Access this area by arranging an air taxi flight from McCarthy to the Hidden Creek Strip located west of the lake, or fosse strip located along the western edge of the Kennicott Glacier. You could also hike to this area from Kennicott via the Donoho Peak route and then cross the Kennicott Glacier (approx. 9 miles).

## Distance/Time

approximately 10 miles one way from Fosse to Hidden Creek pass. 4 to 5 days in Hidden Creek Valley, more if hiking from/to Kennecott.

## Maps:

Wrangell-St. Elias Trails Illustrated Map, USGS Topographic Quads 1:63,300 McCarthy C-6 and McCarthy C-7

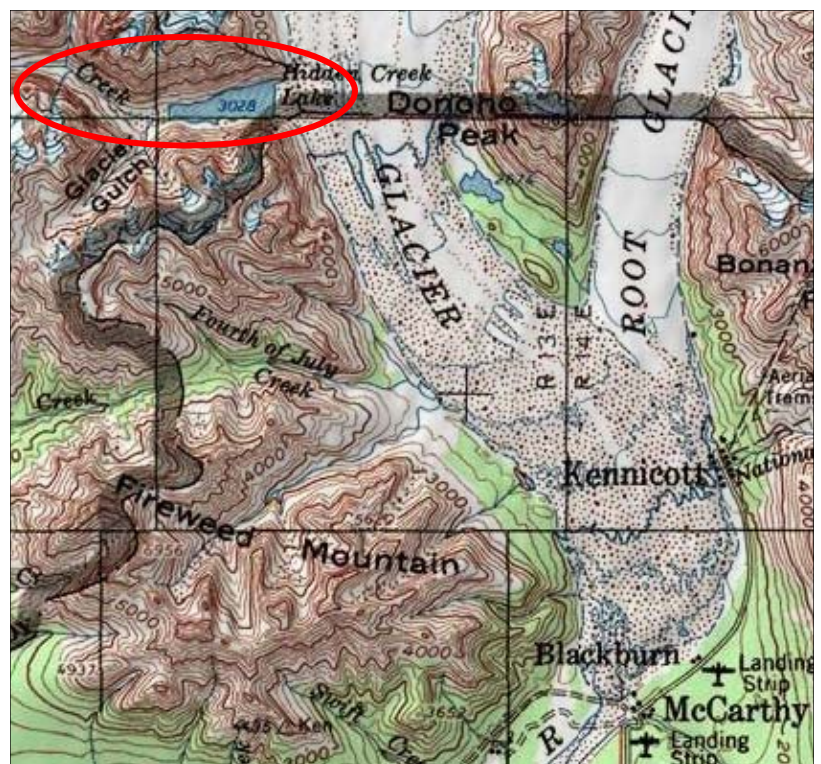
## Difficulty:

Strenuous, with some exposed terrain, lots of side hilling, several creek crossings, and heavy brush. Glacial travel required to hike from Kennecott. There are NO trails in Hidden Creek Valley. Route finding, reading a topographic map and using a compass are necessary skills. Hidden Creek is a glacial fed stream so crossings may be impassable during hot weather due to increased melting.

## Highlights:

Spectacular views, icebergs in Hidden Lake, waterfalls, pristine alpine meadows, and wildlife.

*There are many possible ways to enjoy this area:*





## **Version 1**

### **Route up/down Hidden Creek Valley to/from Hidden Creek Airstrip**

The Hidden Creek airstrip is located on the south bank of Hidden Creek and just upstream of where Glacier Gulch enters Hidden Creek. Leaving the Hidden Creek airstrip, hike west, up and over the steep side hill and back down to the creek. The creek can be crossed here if a safe crossing can be found. Hike up the creek on the hillsides. The amount of bushwhacking will vary on the south and north sides of the creek.

If taking the north side of Hidden Creek, there will be one more tributary creek to cross in order to continue following Hidden Creek up the valley. Past this tributary you can stay to the north of Hidden Creek, bushwhack up a snout of land and then hike the steep side hills to the upper valley. Alternately cross Hidden Creek to the south side, (the creek is gullied at this point, so crossings are limited, but there may be seasonal snow bridges) and bushwhack up a steep slope to where the creek draining out of Fohlin pass is located. From here hike and side hill up towards the head waters of Hidden Creek, or head up to Fohlin Pass.



Near the headwaters of Hidden Creek are alpine meadows (spread out while hiking so that your group does not leave a trail). From the meadows, hike up onto the rocky till left behind by the glaciers. Ascend until reaching the pass. From the pass one can descend to hike by some fragile alpine lakes and into the Lakina Glacier Valley, or return down Hidden Creek to one of the airstrips (Hidden Creek or Fosse), or hike all the way back to Kennecott by crossing the Kennicott Glacier, its medial moraines and melt water streams.

## **Version 2**

### **Entering or Exiting Hidden Creek Valley from the Fosse Fosse to Hidden Creek Airstrip.**

Hike to or fly into the fosse. The fosse is the zone between the glacial lateral moraine and the mountain slope. It is a fairly flat level trough. The airstrip is located about a mile north of the Hidden Creek Lake cliffs. Hike south in the fosse, it will lead up onto the lateral moraines at its end. Then follow the moraines south until they end in cliff walls. Follow the steep gully up, staying to the right. Ascend several hundred feet. Bushwhack through a short segment of alder, turn left in alder to pop out on the knob, with views looking out over the Kennicott Glacier and Hidden Creek Lake. To connect with the 'goat trail' around the lake, descend and curve around the south end of the knob. There is a 10 foot down-climb, which can be tricky with a full pack.

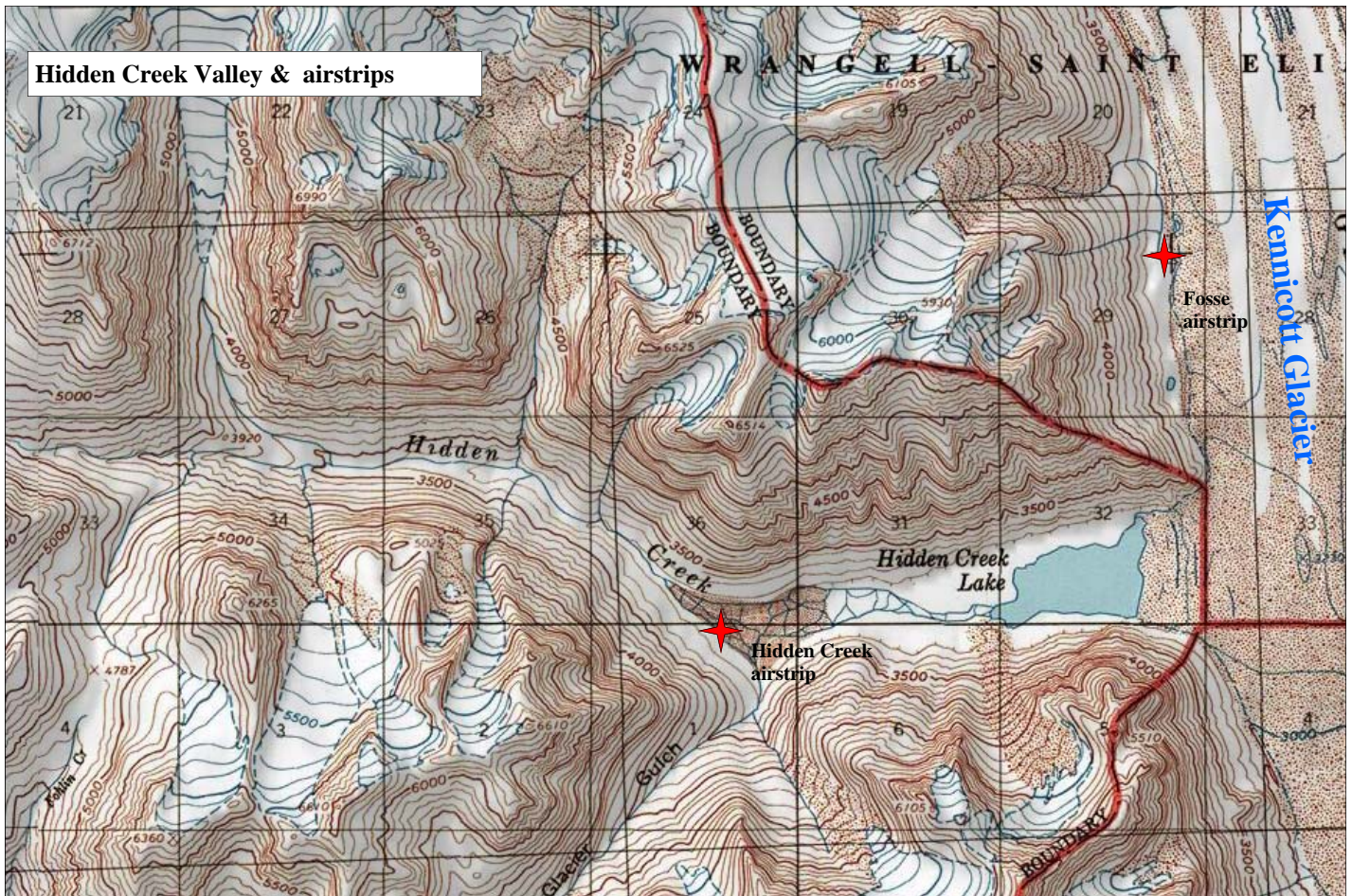


The trail is on an exposed mountainside following a true goat trail that has also been used by people. An ice axe is highly recommended for balance and self arrest on the slopes. Follow the goat trail as it side hills and descends towards the lake. If returning the same way, take note of where to find the trail again as you come out into the more open lake side area. Hike west along the steep lakeside and down into the flat creek plain. Hike up the valley about one mile to Glacier Gulch. Find a safe creek crossing and cross Hidden Creek to gain access to the airstrip. Hidden Creek is a glacial fed stream. Mornings tend to be the best time to cross, because the glacial melt is at its lowest.



Hidden Creek Lake and Valley

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## Things to be aware of:

- Bears are present throughout this area. Proper food storage is required in Wrangell– St. Elias National Park & Preserve. Please contact the Park for information on approved food storage methods. Free bear-resistant food containers are available at all Park Visitor Centers.
- Practice Leave No Trace by camping on durable surfaces, packing out your garbage and toilet paper, and not leaving fire circles . Spread out when hiking on fragile vegetation to avoid creating a trail. The fragile plant life of the alpine meadow is susceptible to trampling.
- An ice axe is highly recommended for self arrest on exposed terrain and balance on long side hills.
- Hidden Creek is a glacially fed stream. During hot weather the creek may become impassable due to high melt water. Morning is when the melt water flow is at its lowest and is the best time to cross glacial streams.
- If hiking to or from Kennecott across the Kennicott and Root Glaciers and their moraines, you will need crampons for glacier travel. The surface melt water streams of the glacier can also become impassable in hot weather.



Hidden Lake icebergs and fireweed

*R. Dineen*