



Evening at the Heart Lake inlet on the south side

Fishing:

4/10

Hiking:

2/10

Scenery:

8/10

Solitude:

2/10

Distance:

1 mi 1-way

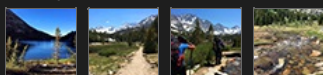
Map:



Elevation Profile:



Gallery:



See a short video of this lake (1).

Heart Lake Inyo County

John Muir Wilderness

July 3, 2017

Like 0

Getting There

To reach Heart Lake in Inyo County, follow the turn off from highway 395 to Tom's Place just north of Bishop, California. Follow Rock Creek road west and up the hill and watch as the Jagged Peaks begin to emerge in the distance. Rock Creek Road follows Rock Creek as it tumbles down from the 11,000 and 12,000 foot peaks of the Sierra Crest. You will pass [Rock Creek Lake Resort](#) on the right which offers cabin rentals and has a small store stocked with items that will make your stay at the Rock Creek campgrounds complete if you decide to stay there to acclimate the night before your trip. We found a spot at the campgrounds on the south side of Rock Lake that was secluded and had great amenities like a bear locker, picnic table, firepit and a nice flat spot to pitch our tents. The sites can be found by taking a left onto Rock Creek Campground Road from Rock Creek Road and following it to the end. There are many parking spots but they can fill up fast on a holiday weekend. From the end parking lot, follow the trail west across the footbridge that crosses over the Rock Creek inlet. As soon as you cross the bridge the campsites can be found in several areas among the trees. Some can be secluded, hidden, so take a walk around and follow some foot trails and you will find a site.

If you're gung ho and ready to thit the trail, just follow Rock Creek Road west for another mile past Rock Creek Lake and you'll begin to see pockets of parking spaces including a spacious overflow area about a half mile from the Mosquito Flat parking area. If you plan your trip at a non-peak time, you might find parking



See a short video of this lake (2).

at the Mosquito Flat parking lot which is heavily used by day hikers and overnigheters alike. We hit the trail on July 3rd, a day before Independence Day, and the parking lot was packed with some cars willing to park and idle while hikers trickled out of the trailhead. Most of the road between the overflow and main trailhead at Mosquito Flat is signed for no parking forcing you to find a space in a few usable areas. There is a [backpacker campground](#) with 10 sites at the Mosquito Flat trailhead for a one night stay and might be worth checking out if Rock Creek Lake is packed. Plan your trip for a non-peak period and you should have no issues parking.

The Hike

The hike into Little Lakes Valley starts at the [Mosquito Flat](#) trailhead and is widely known to be one of the easiest hikes in the High Sierra. The trailhead starts at 10,224 feet making it the highest trailhead in the Sierra and if you don't make an attempt to acclimate, you may be in trouble. I cannot stress enough the importance of finding a campsite somewhere in the 7000-9000 foot range in the Bishop area for the night before your entry into the High Sierra. Rock Creek Lake is an ideal choice. I felt the altitude affecting me but I had an excessively overweight pack on this trip.

The trail is very easy to hike with gentle grades and very short sections of steep climbing making it ideal for first time backpackers and kids. After ascending an even, low grade for half a mile you begin to dip into little valleys which parallel Rock Creek as it meanders down through the glacially carved valleys. All the while, the rugged peaks of Little Lakes Valley tower above on the landscape making the hike itself quite enjoyable. You'll be taking some pictures on this route for sure.

At the half mile mark you will encounter a short, steep uphill climb where Mack Lake will appear on the left. Following the trail south you will drop down into shallow valleys and the next lake (Marsh) will come into view. After another short climb you will drop down into the Heart Lake basin. As you come down the hill you will reach the footbridge that you see so often in Little Lakes Valley photos. The trail follows the west shoreline of Heart Lake closely and a fisherman's trail spurs to the left to take you all the way to the inlet coming from Box Lake. If you plan on staying at Heart Lake, look for campsites near the Box Lake outlet. We stayed at Box Lake in this area when we visited Little Lakes Valley.

The Fishing

The fishing was slow for me at Heart Lake during the day as I tried a variety of lures and flies at the inlet on the southeast side. Although I saw many anglers fishing the lake during the day, I didn't see anyone catching fish. I threw out Kastmasters and Panther Martins and had no luck. I rigged up my fly rod and tried a variety of dries and wets only to have a solitary strike on a green rock worm pattern. Fortunately for that fish, he shook my hook and got away.

I went back to Box Lake where the action was steady for small Brookies. In the evening I came back to the southeast inlet at Heart Lake and began tossing out egg patterns. From there I managed to fool a couple of Brookies and had pretty steady action for the last hour of sunlight. I got lucky on a couple of good photos and was able to get a few shots of the fish as well. I wish I had thought of egg patterns earlier in the day but I was happy with what I got. I didn't have time to walk all the way around Heart Lake but the inlet and outlet looked like the most promising areas. The south shore has an inviting drop-off that's just far enough out for my longest cast but I had no luck trying that area. I would surmise that when the flows lighten late in the season you could walk across the Box Lake outlet (southeast Heart Lake inlet) and try casting along the steeper bank on Heart Lake's east side. The point near the west inlet creek also looked promising and there were anglers casting from that spot as well. If I had more time I would have given that spot some effort.

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