South Lake to Inconsolable Lake

By the Parchers Resort Crew

Bishop Pass Trailhead at South Lake
(4.2 Miles Roundtrip and 950 Vertical Ft.)

The best parking is up by the trailhead, when the road ends. During peak season, July 1st to Labor Day, it is best to park in the places designated for day parking, leaving the unmarked, overnight parking for backpackers. Park and make your way to the trail head signs. There is a pit toilet nearby and this will be the last facilities to use other than the woods.

Inconsolable is accessed by following the Bishop Pass Trail as it winds along the East shore of South Lake. This first ascent is the most difficult climb of this hike so don’t let it discourage you. You will be through it in minutes. As the trail opens up, there is an excellent photo op of South Lake.

The trail then moves up a small draw, away from the lake. You will notice old stumps among the willows in this meadow. This was the location of an old sawmill that was in use when they were building the South Lake Dam.

The trail then winds back toward the lake and then parallels South Lake. You are now in the John Muir Wilderness. The trail will turn south-east and you will come to a trail junction. To the right is the Treasure Lake Trail and to the left is the Bishop Pass Trail. Go toward Bishop Pass.

The trail ascends slowly on to a large bench. This bench slowly climbs, with some easy switchbacks along the way. Look for the Marie Louise Lakes trail marker and junction on the left after about ¾ of a mile of relatively flat hiking.

The Marie Louise Lakes Trail extends at right angles to the right, away from the Bishop Pass Trail. Follow it as it descends into a small meadow and crosses a seasonal creek. There are some excellent wildflowers here in the early season.

The trail crosses the meadow, ascends up the hill on the other side and makes its way over some steep switchbacks before ascending to a flat area that approaches the lake. Don’t let the switchbacks scare you. They are short lived.

You come first to the main Marie Louise Lake. There is not much of a trail from here on.

Follow the shoreline to the right until you come to a marshy meadow at the head of the lake. Cross the meadow and the creek, keeping the creek on your right side as you follow it up the draw. It is best to walk a good way to the left of the creek, on firmer ground to stay out of the willows and brush.

The creek makes a jog to the left. Stay away from the creek, following the higher ground that parallels the creek as it moves left. The creek will move right and extend up a cascade. In dry years there may be little or no water in the creek. Pretend there is a creek.
Follow the path of the creek up the rocky side to the draw staying to the left of the creek as it ascends up the cascade. At the top of cascade is Inconsolable Lake.