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# Anglers' Guide to the LAKES of the GRANITE CREEK AREA MADERA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA



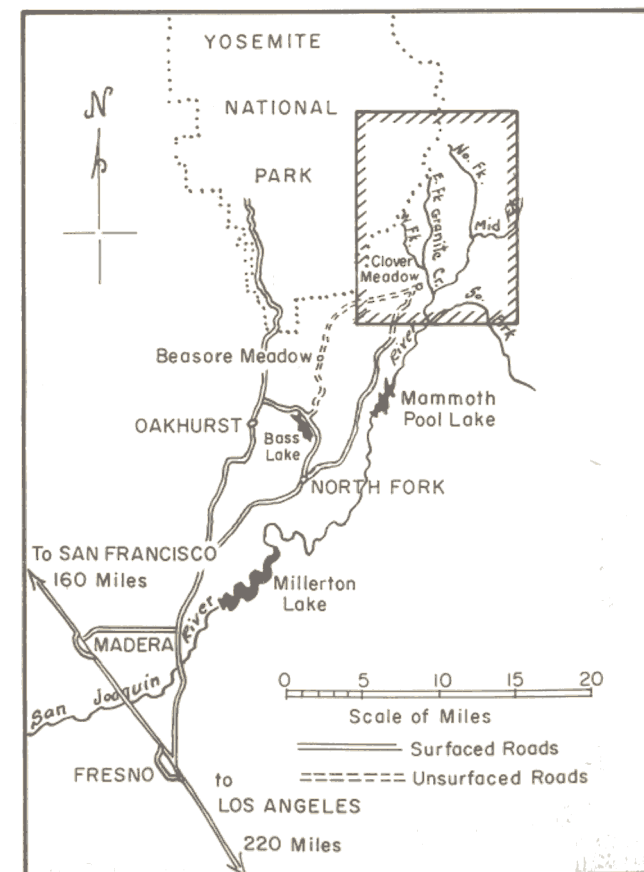
STATE OF CALIFORNIA  
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

## LAKES OF THE GRANITE CREEK AREA Madera County, California

This map is a guide to some 180 square miles of high Sierra country, much of which lies within the Minarets Wilderness Area of the Sierra National Forest. The many lakes in this area lie in a magnificent setting. To the northwest, beyond the rugged sawtooth ridge dominated by Triple Divide Peak, is Yosemite National Park. The yawning chasm of the San Joaquin drops off in a blue haze to the south, with the jagged peaks of the Silver Divide in the far distance. Northeast, across the canyon of the North Fork of the San Joaquin, is the Ritter Range—Mt. Banner, Ritter, and the famous Minarets. An unobstructed view of this breathtaking panorama may be obtained from the easily climbed granite ridge along the Yosemite Park boundary.

Most of the Granite Creek lakes are in the East Fork and West Fork drainages of Granite Creek; a few others drain into the San Joaquin River through other streams. Those above timberline (9,500 feet) are often neglected by fishermen, although most have abundant populations of eager trout. Many of the least known timbered lakes also provide good fishing.

Deer and other high Sierra animals are abundant here. The cony's shrill voice gives away its position on rocky slopes.



Location of the Granite Creek Area

Coyotes and weasels are occasionally seen by sharp-eyed campers. Trout-loving pine martens are bold night robbers—successful fishermen note. Mice in the Sierra are particularly persistent and daring.

#### ACCESSIBILITY

The Granite Creek area is a 75-mile drive from Fresno or Madera via Oakhurst and Bass Lake through Beasore Meadow, or 95 miles via North Fork and Mammoth Pool to Clover Meadow. All but the last eight miles of the Mammoth Pool route are paved while the last 25 miles of the Beasore Meadow route are unimproved dirt roads.

Blazed Forest Service Trails provide access to the Granite Creek lakes from the roadheads at Jackass, Miller, and Clover Meadows. Unmarked cross-country routes inter-connect these established trails.

Most of the lakes can be reached from the Miller Meadow pack station in 2½ to 5 hours by pack train. Although some people walk to the nearest lakes and return in the same day, most backpack in for several days or travel on horseback.

#### CAMPING

An improved public campground is maintained by the Forest Service at the junction of the East and West Forks of Granite Creek. Although none of the lakes have established campgrounds, most of those below timberline have reasonably comfortable camp sites. Lack of firewood at the higher, rockbound lakes makes camping difficult. Small meadows provide stock feed for overnight stops at most of the lakes; only a few have sufficient feed for lengthy stays. Fenced pastures are provided at Fernandez, Knoblock, and Soldier Meadows.

Campfire permits are required of all campers in unimproved campgrounds. They may be obtained from any Forest Service officer or ranger station. Please help to preserve the area in its natural state by keeping a clean camp.

#### LAKE FISHING

The Granite Creek lakes were barren of trout originally but now they have been populated with trout in the following numbers:

Eastern brook trout.....	36 lakes
Rainbow trout .....	3 lakes
Rainbow and eastern brook trout.....	3 lakes
Golden trout .....	4 lakes
Golden and eastern brook trout.....	1 lake
Brown, rainbow, golden and eastern brook trout .....	1 lake

Most of the others are too small or shallow to be suitable for trout. At the present time the Department plants many of these lakes regularly by air.

The eastern brook trout is by far the most abundant species. In spite of its name it seems especially well adapted to high Sierra lakes. In some of the Granite Creek lakes it has remained dominant in the face of repeated plantings of rainbow.

Rainbows, golden, or browns may be found only in a few lakes such as Lower Jackass, Ruth, Alpine, Rutherford, Isbergs, Rattlesnake, Joe Crane and Sadler Lakes.

Fishing in these lakes is almost invariably best in late September and October, or in the early part of the season. During the hot days of late July and August the trout move to deeper water as the surface and shallows become too warm, and they are generally caught in the early morning or late evening or not at all. Fly fishing is notoriously unproductive in this period, spinners and bait are generally better.

Lillian Lake is far more heavily fished than any of the other Granite Creek lakes, merely because it is the most widely known. Many of the less well known lakes provide fishing as good or better, and may be reached with little more effort.



Stream flow maintenance dam at the outlet of McClure Lake

The fisherman's hesitancy to try waters he has "never heard of" has cost him many a nice catch.

#### STREAM FISHING

Brook and rainbow trout are present in some sections of Granite Creek and tributaries, but deficient late summer flows limit stream fishing, with many otherwise good looking stream courses drying up completely. To remedy this the Department of Fish and Game and cooperating agencies planned the construction of flow maintenance dams at the outlets of Lillian, Rutherford, and McClure Lakes. Dams at Lillian and McClure Lakes were completed in 1953. Rutherford was completed in 1957. With lake levels raised several feet, additional water will be available for gradual release during the dry season. Some 40 miles of stream will thus be made suitable for trout. Excellent fishing may often be encountered on streams in the area. Anglers should not overlook the opportunity of some fine sport in fly fishing some of these streams.

#### ANGLING REGULATIONS

Angling and hunting are permitted in the area in accordance with State fish and game laws. The latest angling regulations are obtainable at offices of the Department of Fish and Game and the U. S. Forest Service, or from sporting goods dealers.

Remember that a good sportsman takes only as many trout as he can use; he is not out to catch the limit every time. Trout that he can't use he carefully releases and returns to the water. He may even remove the barbs from his hook to do less damage to the fish he does not intend to keep.

#### TOWARD BETTER FISHING

The California Department of Fish and Game is trying to manage the State's trout fisheries to provide the best possible angling for the greatest number of sportsmen. In order to carry out proper management, accurate information about individual waters is required. This is obtained through special surveys of the lakes and streams.

The principal objective of this work is to learn whether or not we should stock a water and if so in what way. The size of a lake and its richness in natural food are very important, for they determine to a large extent the number of fish which should be stocked. Over-stocking results in large numbers of skinny fish which are too small to provide good sport. Under-stocking results in a few large fish which are hard to catch. In between lies the happy medium we seek, wherein correct stocking allotments provide maximum numbers of large fish in good condition.

A certain amount of trial and error stocking, with close observation of the results obtained, is often necessary to determine just how heavily a given type of water of a certain size

should be planted. This requires periodic follow-up surveys, after the initial exploratory one, to evaluate the results of various stocking rates.

Examination of the fish present in a lake yields important information to our trained observers. Stunted fish indicate over-population, resulting from a combination of light fishing pressure and over-stocking or heavy natural spawning. The remedy is lighter or less frequent stocking or heavier angler use. One of the purposes of the anglers' guides is to call attention to under-fished areas, in order to increase fishing pressure where that is desirable, and to take full advantage of the available trout crop.

A knowledge of the extent of natural spawning areas available to trout in a lake is also important. Often, when spawning conditions are good, satisfactory angling can be maintained with a single initial stocking of trout, which will subsequently breed naturally and produce all the fish the lake can support. Many of our high mountain lakes, however, have no spawning areas at all, and must be stocked regularly if there is to be any fishing. Others are intermediate, requiring occasional light stocking to augment inadequate natural reproduction.

Selection of the most suitable species of trout for stocking in each lake is also very important. Eastern brook will spawn in seepage areas around the shore of a lake, while rainbows, golden and brown trout will spawn only in running water. It is often possible to develop self-maintaining populations of eastern brook in lakes which would have to be stocked regularly if rainbows or browns were used, thereby saving money which can be spent to maintain fishing in lakes where no trout can spawn.

Getting the information needed for the wise management of all of our backcountry trout lakes is no small task, for there are about 5,000 of them, and each one presents its own separate problems. Anglers who fish the Granite Creek Lakes can help the Department greatly with the trout management problems there by reporting unusual conditions they encounter such as numerous small fish, fish in poor condition, fish die-offs, lack of fish, etc. Send reports to the Fisheries Management Supervisor, Department of Fish and Game, Fresno, California. The information you provide will help to keep the Department abreast of changing conditions, and will lead to improved fishing.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The information in this guide is based on fisheries surveys made by fishery biologists of the California Department of Fish and Game. The field survey map was redrawn by Cliffla Corson, with U. S. Geological Survey and U. S. Forest Service maps as guides. Corrections in drainage relationships and locations of waters were based on aerial photographs and field observations.

Good Luck!

Good Fishing!

#### DESCRIPTIONS OF THE LAKES

**Alpine Lake.** Area—1½ acres. Elevation—10,000 feet. This little lakelet lies just to the west of Rutherford Lake in a small rocky basin above timberline. Requires occasional plants of golden trout fingerlings to sustain fishery. No campsites or firewood. Accessible on foot only.

**Anne Lake.** Area—3½ acres. Maximum depth about 25 feet. Elevation—9,500 feet. This lake lies just below timberline immediately downstream from Rutherford Lake. Brook trout occur in the lake and large fish are occasionally taken. Planted occasionally with fingerlings. Camping space is available, with ample firewood. Stock feed is sufficient for overnight use of small pack strings.

**Blackie Lake.** Area—¾ acre. Elevation—9,700 feet. This tiny rockbound lakelet lies immediately above timberline just

south of Upper Fernandez Lake. It contains a small eastern brook fishery maintained by occasional aerial planting. No campsites or horse feed are available.

**Burro Lake.** Area— $\frac{3}{4}$  acre. Elevation—9,600 feet. This tiny, above timberline lake drains into Upper Jackass Lake  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile to the southeast. It contains a small number of brook trout. No campsites or stock feed are available.

**Chittenden Lake.** Area—8 $\frac{1}{2}$  acres. Elevation—9,500 feet. This beautiful little lake on a shelf with a high falls to Shirley



Chittenden Lake

Creek below, lies at the edge of timberline about 1 mile upstream from the Staniford Lakes. The lake contains brook trout, and is one of the better fishing lakes of the region. It requires occasional planting to sustain the fishery. Camping sites are limited, and there is little stock feed at the lake.

#### **Cora Lakes.**

**Lower Cora Lake.** Area—6 acres; shallow. Elev.—8,300 feet.

**Middle Cora Lake.** Area—16 acres. Maximum depth—31 feet. Elevation—8,400 feet.

**Upper Cora Lake.** Area—7 acres. Maximum depth—18 feet. Elevation—8,400 feet.

This chain of lakes lies in the small, timbered Cora Creek basin on the Isberg Pass trail, five miles from the Granite Creek campground. The lower lake has a small population of brook trout. The middle lake is quite rich in food and provides good brook trout fishing, except during midsummer. The upper lake has lily pads along its margins. The middle and upper lakes receive occasional aerial plants of brook trout. A number of camping sites with ample firewood and stock feed are to be found at the lakes.

#### **Fernandez Lakes.**

**Lower Fernandez Lake.** Area—3 acres. Maximum depth about 30 feet. Elevation—9,400 feet.

**Middle Fernandez Lake.** Area—3 $\frac{1}{2}$  acres. Elevation—9,500 feet.

**Upper Fernandez Lake.** Area—1 acre. Maximum depth about 15 feet. Elevation—9,600 feet.

The three small lakes in this group are situated in a shallow, sparsely timbered granite basin right at timberline. They lie near Fernandez Pass which was named for Sgt. Joseph Fernandez of the U. S. Cavalry. Fernandez accompanied Lt. Benson in the exploration of the headwaters of the Merced River in 1895–97. Later Benson, as superintendent of Yosemite Na-

tional Park, especially commended Fernandez for his assistance in planting fish. Good brook trout fishing is usually afforded. Planted occasionally with fingerlings. Campsites and horse feed are limited, but ample of both are available at nearby Fernandez Meadow.

**Flat Lake.** Area 4 acres. Maximum depth about 15 feet. Elevation—9,000 feet. This is the lowermost lake of a group that includes Rainbow, Ruth, and Monument Lakes, on a small tributary of Madera Creek. It is a shallow lake with mud bottom containing fallen trees and other plant debris. Contains easternbrook trout, planted occasionally; however, some years fish loss has been reported, probably due to winter kill. Suitable camping sites are available. Stock feed is limited. There is only enough for overnight stops of small pack strings.

**Frying Pan Lake.** Area—1 acre. Maximum depth about 20 feet. Elevation—10,200 feet. This little rock-bound above-timberline lakelet lies near the head of Slab Creek between Walton Lake and the Slab Lakes. Good brook trout fishing exists, although the lake is too small to accommodate many anglers. The closest campsites and firewood are at the Slab Lakes, about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile to the southeast. Access is via a  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile hike up a steep incline beyond Lower Slab Lake.

**Gale Lake.** Area— $\frac{3}{4}$  acre. Maximum depth about 10 feet. Elevation—9,700 feet. This tiny, shallow lakelet is set in a small meadow at the foot of high granite cliffs above timberline. It lies at the southeast base of Gale Peak, which was named for Captain George Henry Goodwin Gale (1858–1920) of the U. S. Cavalry, who was acting superintendent of Yosemite National Park in 1894. Good brook trout fishing is available, although the lake is too small to stand much fishing pressure. No campsites and little firewood and stock feed are available, the closest being at Shirley Lake.

#### **Isberg Lakes.**

**Lower Isberg Lake.** Area—5 acres. Maximum depth about 15 feet. Elevation—9,600 feet.

**North Isberg Lake.** Area—2 acres. Maximum depth about 10 feet. Elevation—10,320 feet.

**Upper Isberg Lake.** Area—2 $\frac{1}{2}$  acres. Maximum depth about 10 feet. Elevation—10,100 feet.

These three little lakes lie above Sadler Lake, in shallow granite basins at timberline and above. They were so named because of their proximity to Isberg Pass which was named by Lieutenant McClure for a soldier who was with him in 1895. Isberg, prospecting for sheepherders' trails, discovered the pass.

These lakes were converted from easternbrook to golden trout in 1965–66. North Isberg Lake is accessible only on foot. Only the lower lake has campsites, some firewood and limited stockfeed available there also.

#### **Jackass Lakes.**

**Lower Jackass Lake.** Area—12 acres. Maximum depth about 30 feet. Elevation—8,600 feet.

**Middle Jackass Lake.** Area—2 $\frac{1}{2}$  acres. Maximum depth about 15 feet. Elevation—9,000 feet.

**Upper Jackass Lake.** Area—8 $\frac{1}{2}$  acres. Maximum depth about 25 feet. Elevation—9,200 feet.

These three lakes occupy the next main basin west of the Granite Creek drainage, just below timberline. The middle lake drains into the lower, while the upper lake drains into the outlet of the lower lake. The lower lake contains some easternbrook trout and also receives annual plans of rainbow, while the middle and upper lakes are planted biennially with brook trout. Fishing is usually good except during the midsummer

slowdown. Good campsites, with ample firewood are present. Stock feed is scarce. A jeep road approaches nearly to the lakes from Jackass Meadow.

**Joe Crane Lake.** Area—9 acres. Elevation—9,700 feet. It is a deep lake located on a short tributary of the East Fork of Granite Creek, near its head. It is right at timberline, with a small meadow at its upper end. Contains rainbow trout supported by biennial plants of fingerlings. Good camping sites and ample firewood and stock feed are available.

**Lady Lake.** Area 10 acres. Elevation 8,700 feet. One of the "Madera Lakes." Generally good fishing for easternbrook, sustained by biennial plants of fingerlings. Good campsites and firewood available but limited stockfeed.

**Lillian Lake.** Area—35 acres. Maximum depth about 50 feet. Elevation—8,885 feet. This is the largest and best known lake in the Granite Creek area. It is a very nice appearing wooded lake, and usually provides good brook trout fishing, except during the midsummer lull. Receives biennial plants of fingerlings. The lake is very popular, has good campsites and firewood is ample, but stock feed is scarce.

**Lost Lake.** Area about 3 acres. Elevation 9,000 feet. A small lake in a timbered area near the trail to Hemlock Crossing. About 1 mile cross-country northward from the trail before it begins its steep descent to the North Fork San Joaquin River. Fair fishing for easternbrook trout, sustained by occasional aerial plants of fingerlings.

**Madera Lake.** Area—3 acres. Elevation—8,800 feet. This lake drains off of the east slope of Madera Peak to form Madera Creek. Brook trout fishing is generally good, except during the midsummer slowdown. Air planted occasionally with fingerlings. Good campsites, with ample firewood.

**McClure Lake.** Area—20 acres. Maximum depth about 50 feet. Elevation—9,555 feet. This lake lies near the head of the east fork of Granite Creek, about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile west of Sadler Lake. It was named for Lieutenant Nathaniel F. McClure, of the U. S. Cavalry, who was stationed in Yosemite National Park in 1894 and 1895. A high cliff borders the lake on the west side, with scattered trees marking the edge of timberline on the east side. Fishing for brook trout is usually good here. Planted occasionally with easternbrook fingerlings. Campsites, firewood and some stock feed is available.



McClure Lake

**McGee Lakes.** Area about 5 acres. Elevation about 10,000 feet. This is actually two lakes, the smaller of about an acre

being separated from the larger by a distance of about 100 feet. They lie just above timberline, about a mile north of Sadler Lake. A fair fishery exists supported by occasional stockings of fingerlings. Easternbrook trout are planted in the larger lake and rainbow in the smaller lake. There are no camping places or firewood, and little stock feed available.

**Monument Lake.** Area—1 acre. Maximum depth about 20 feet. Elevation—9,000 feet. This tiny lakelet lies on an inlet of Flat Lake, which in turn drains into the Madera Fork of Granite Creek. It is situated in a flat, timbered basin just below timberline. Fishing is usually good for brook trout. Fingerling brook trout are air planted occasionally. Camping places and firewood are available, but stock feed is scarce.

**Norris Lake.** Area about 2 acres. Elevation—8,300 feet. This little lake lies at the head of Norris Creek, a short tributary of Jackass Creek. The lake is about ½ mile east of Lower Jackass Lake. Brook trout are planted biennially, and usually provide good fishing, except for a midsummer slowdown. There are a few camping places with ample firewood, but stock feed is lacking.

**Porphyry Lake.** Area—1 acre. Maximum depth about 30 feet. Elevation—10,100 feet. This little lakelet lies in a rocky basin above timberline, at the head of a small tributary of Post Creek. The lake supports a small population of nice sized eastern brook trout. Camping spots are limited because of the lack of trees and firewood. Stock feed is available in a small meadow at the head of the lake. Post Peak trail passes just to the east of the lake. The final ascent to the lake is steep, but believed passable to stock.

#### Post Lakes

**Lower Post Lake.** Area—2½ acres. Maximum depth about 25 feet. Elevation—10,100 feet.

**Upper Post Lake.** Area—3½ acres. Maximum depth about 50 feet. Elevation—10,100 feet.

These lakes lie about at timberline in a rocky basin near Post Peak, which was named for William S. Post of the U. S. Geological Surveys.

Fishing for brook trout is usually good, although because of their barren surroundings, the lakes will not support very large trout populations. There are no suitable camping places due to the absence of trees and firewood. A little stock feed is available. The closest place suitable for camping is at Lower Slab Lake, and here timber is very sparse.

**Rainbow Lake.** Area—7 acres. Maximum depth about 50 feet. Elevation—9,200 feet. This lake lies in a lightly timbered granite basin on a short tributary of the Madera Fork of Granite Creek about one mile north of Lillian Lake. It usually provides good brook and rainbow trout fishing sustained by biennial plants of rainbow. Good campsites with ample firewood exist, but stock feed is scarce.

**Rattlesnake Lake.** Area 5.7 acres. Maximum depth 30 feet. Elevation 5,580 feet. This lake lies on a partly timbered bench across the San Joaquin River from Granite Creek. It contains a sporadic rainbow trout fishery with some large fish taken. Planted biennially with fingerlings. Limited campsites, poor water supply, ample firewood and good stockfeed. Accessible by way of Miller Crossing trail and also from the Edison Lake area in Fresno County.

**Ruth Lake.** Area—5 acres. Elevation—9,500 feet. This little lake lies just below timberline about ¼ mile west of Rainbow Lake, into which it drains. It is fairly deep, and is set in a lightly timbered granite basin. Brook and rainbow trout fishing generally is good in the lake. Planted biennially with rainbow

trout. There are a few places to camp, with ample firewood, but with limited stock feed.

**Rutherford Lake.** Area—27.5 acres. Maximum depth about 50 feet. Elevation—9,700 feet. This is a good looking lake in a rocky basin right at timberline. It is set on a shelf above Anne Lake and just below Alpine Lake. The lake was named for Lieutenant Lemual McPherson Rutherford, of the U. S. Cavalry, who was on duty in Yosemite National Park in 1896. Some brook trout present but the lake is planted occasionally with golden trout. Good campsites with ample firewood are available. Stock feed is scarce.



Sadler Lake, from the outlet of McClure Lake

**Sadler Lake.** Area—14 acres. Maximum depth about 25 feet. Elevation—9,400 feet. This largest lake on the East fork of Granite Creek lies in a scenic setting. A fine meadow with permanent inlets surrounds the lake on three sides, with good stands of lodgepole pine, and timberline a short distance up on the surrounding rocky peaks. The lake was named by Lieutenant McClure in 1895 for a corporal in his detachment. Good trout fishing is usually afforded, with rainbow, easternbrook, golden and brown trout available. Planted annually by airplane with rainbow trout. Good campsites with ample firewood are present, with sufficient stock feed for large parties.

**Shirley Lake.** Area—5 acres. Maximum depth about 15 feet. Elevation—9,500 feet. This little lake is set in a shallow granite basin right at timberline. It lies near the head of Shirley Creek, about ⅓ of a mile west of Lillian Lake. Brook trout fishing is usually good, except for a midsummer slowdown. A few campsites with ample firewood and stock feed are available.

#### Slab Lakes.

**Lower Slab Lake.** Area—4 acres. Maximum depth about 25 feet. Elevation—10,000 feet.

**Upper Slab Lake.** Area—1½ acres. Maximum depth about 15 feet. Elevation—10,000 feet.

These lakes lie in a rocky basin right at timberline, about two miles south of Triple Divide Peak and near the head of Slab Creek. Brook trout fishing is usually good. Only one good campsite is available, located in a little patch of timber between the two lakes. There is ample firewood and a meadow for stock feed.

#### Staniford Lakes.

**Lower Staniford Lake.** Area—8 acres. Maximum depth about 20 feet. Elevation—8,800 feet.

**Upper Staniford Lake.** Area—4 acres. Maximum depth about 15 feet. Elevation—8,800 feet.

These lakes are on Shirley Creek in a shallow granite basin a little below timberline. Brook trout fishing is good, except during midsummer. The lower lake requires occasional aerial planting of brook trout fingerlings to sustain the fishery. Camping is possible in a number of places, with adequate firewood, but with little stock feed.

**Twin Lake, Lower.** Area—2 acres. Maximum depth about 15 feet. Elevation—8,700 feet. This little shallow, mud-bottomed lake lies on top of a ridge alongside the Fernandez Pass Trail. It is near no other lake, except the shallow and barren Upper Twin Lake, 50 yards to the southwest. Brook trout fishing is spotty, being best early and late in the season. Planted occasionally with fingerlings to sustain fishery. Camping places, with adequate firewood, can be found. Stock feed is scarce.

**Vandeburg Lake.** Area—10 acres. Elevation—8,600 feet. This is the lowermost of the "Madera Lakes". Provides good easternbrook trout fishing supported by biennial plants of fingerlings. Good campsites, ample firewood but limited stock feed.

**Walton Lake.** Area—2½ acres. Maximum depth about 20 feet. Elevation—10,200 feet. This little lake is in a granite basin above timberline, at the head of Slab Creek. It is named after Izaak Walton, the father of modern angling. Good brook trout fishing is usually afforded. Due to lack of trees and firewood, no camping sites are available, the closest being at the Slab Lakes, about ⅓ mile to the southeast. Access is via the same route taken to the Slab Lakes. From Lower Slab Lake, a one mile hike up a steep incline is necessary.

**Ward Lake, Lower.** Area—3½ acres. Elevation—10,000 feet. This lake is set in a bare granite pocket above timberline, about ¼ mile upstream from McClure Lake. Fishing for brook trout is generally good. No campsites, firewood, or stock feed are available, the nearest being at McClure Lake.



Lower Ward Lake

**Ward Lake, Upper.** Area—4 acres. Depth—25 feet. Elevation—10,160 feet. This is a narrow lake lying in a bare granite pocket directly west of Lower Ward Lake. Accessible on foot up a steep rocky incline from the lower lake, no trail. Contains a limited easternbrook trout fishery supported by occasional air plants of fingerlings. No campsites or firewood available.