



Friend and co-adventurer, Denise, looks out upon a still-frozen Lower Lamarck Lake. PHOTO: Bryan Hatchell

GET OUT

BY BRYAN HATCHELL

In early June, my friend Denise and I, eager to shed winter pounds and get in shape for the peak-bagging season, set out to breathe the alpine air and soak in the sun above treeline. The Lamarck Lakes provide a wonderful opportunity to do just that with an accessible hike 30 minutes out of Bishop. The Lamarck Lakes trail is best used from June to early September as an escape from the lower elevation heat in the Owen's Valley. With this year's particularly snowy winter, the trail was still quite wet and we encountered many snow patches along our way to Lower Lamarck lake.

We knew the hike was relatively short at 6 miles round trip, but soon realized the elevation gain is not to be taken lightly. The trail to Lower Lamarck Lake ascends roughly 1,300 feet in 2.2 miles. In the final mile to Upper Lamarck Lake, the trail ascends another 400 feet. Many backpackers use this trail as an access point for the Lamarck

Couloir, Lamarck Peak, Darwin Bench, and Evolution Valley. As the signs will tell you, you are in the John Muir Wilderness. Be prepared for your adventures and practice Leave No Trace principles.

Getting There

To access the hike, travel Highway 168 west through Aspendell until you reach a right turn for North Lake trailhead/campground. Follow this road for the North Lake/Paiute Pass trailhead. Take caution on this road! It is very steep and narrow and contains many winding turns. Be considerate of other drivers and use the pull-outs when appropriate. Parking for day use will be about half a mile away from the actual trailhead, as the immediate area at the trailhead is a campground.

Being There

You are above the tree line. Soak it in. Enjoy views of the striking Lamarck Peak while

you fish or swim in one of these splendid alpine lakes. Please note, the water is especially cold in earlier summer months! Swim wisely. While this area sees considerable day use, there are many paths to take around the lake that will provide solitude. For an additional challenge, you can summit Lamarck Peak which rests at 13,417 feet of elevation. This will add many hours to your trip. Plan accordingly.

As always when hiking and adventuring outdoors, remember to bring plenty of water, sun protection, sturdy footwear, and snacks. Denise and I enjoyed our hike and icy swim in Lower Lamarck lake. We were blessed to have the area to ourselves the entire time. It wasn't until a mile away from the car that we saw others trekking up the trail. Whether you are visiting the Eastern Sierra or live in the area, the Lamarck Lakes provide an all-around great summer hike, achievable for most. We hope to see you out there.