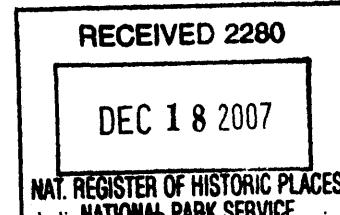


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form



1472

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determination for individual properties and districts. Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Thunder Lake Trail/ Bluebird Lake Trail

other names/site number Ouzel Lake Trail; Arbuckle Lake(s) Trail; Wild Basin Trail; North St. Vrain Creek Trail; 5BL.10293

2. Location

street & number Rocky Mountain National Park (ROMO) [N/A] not for publication

city or town Allens Park [X] vicinity

state Colorado code CO county Boulder code 013 zip code 80510

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this [X] nomination [ ] request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property [ ] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant [ ] nationally [ ] statewide [X] locally. ([ ] See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Joe Wallis Date 12-17-07
National Park Service
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property [X] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria. ([ ] See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Mark Wolfe Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer Date 8/7/07
Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Colorado Historical Society
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

- I hereby certify that the property is:
[X] entered in the National Register
[ ] determined eligible for the National Register
[ ] determined not eligible for the National Register
[ ] removed from the National Register
[ ] other, explain

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action
Edson H. Beall 1-29-08

Thunder Lake Trail/ Bluebird Lake Trail  
Name of Property

Boulder County/ Colorado  
County/State

### 5. Classification

#### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

#### Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

#### Number of Resources within Property

(Do not count previously listed resources.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
0	0	buildings
0	0	sites
1	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

#### Name of related multiple property listing.

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Rocky Mountain National Park  
Historic Park Landscapes in National and State  
Parks

#### Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register.

0

### 6. Function or Use

#### Historic Function

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/ outdoor  
recreation  
LANDSCAPE/ park  
TRANSPORTATION/ pedestrian-related

#### Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/ outdoor  
recreation  
LANDSCAPE/ park  
TRANSPORTATION/ pedestrian-related

### 7. Description

#### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY  
AMERICAN MOVEMENTS  
OTHER: Rustic

#### Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation  
walls  
roof  
other EARTH  
WOOD  
STONE  
STEEL

#### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey  
# \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record  
# \_\_\_\_\_

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

ENTERTAINMENT/ RECREATION  
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE  
POLITICS/ GOVERNMENT

**Periods of Significance**

1908-1945

**Significant Dates**

1926

1929

1935

**Significant Person(s)**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above).

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Colorado Historical Society

Rocky Mountain National Park

Thunder Lake Trail/ Bluebird Lake Trail  
Name of Property

Boulder County/ Colorado  
County/State

## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** 24.6

### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1.	13	445156	4452397	(NAD27)
	Zone	Easting	Northing	
2.	13	446471	4451275	
	Zone	Easting	Northing	
3.	13	446993	4457439	
	Zone	Easting	Northing	
4.	13	447632	4450758	
	Zone	Easting	Northing	

The UTM points were derived from heads up digitization on Digital Raster Graphic (DRG) maps provided to OAHF by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management.

See continuation sheet

### Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

### Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Sierra Standish (contract position for RMNP) (RMNP contact- Cheri Yost)  
organization Rocky Mountain National Park date 15 August 2006  
street & number 1000 Highway 36 telephone (970) 586-1394  
city or town Estes Park state Colorado zip code 80517

## Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

### Continuation Sheets

#### Maps

- A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

### Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

### Additional Items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

## Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Rocky Mountain National Park (Superintendent- Vaughn L. Baker)  
street & number 1000 Highway 36 telephone (970) 586-1206  
city or town Estes Park state Colorado zip code 80517

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

Thunder Lake Trail/ Bluebird Lake Trail  
Boulder County, Colorado  
Rocky Mountain National Park MPS  
Historic Park Landscapes in National and State Parks MPS

Section number 7 Page 1

## DESCRIPTION

Location: East side of Rocky Mountain National Park. Trail begins deep in Wild Basin and branches westward, approaching the Continental Divide.

Setting: Begins in the Subalpine ecosystem along the floor of Wild Basin and ascends alongside the North St. Vrain River and smaller drainages, passing waterfalls along the way.

General route established: Circa 1900-1908

Trail built: The section traveling to Bluebird Lake was constructed between 1900 and 1908. The stretch that connects to Thunder Lake developed as a social trail and adhered to the modern alignment by 1919.

Materials: Earth, local rock, log/wood.

Destination: Thunder Lake and/or Bluebird Lake

Length of main trail: 6.8 miles

Trail width: Ranging from 2 to 5 feet

Length of alternative trail along the North St. Vrain Creek: 1.3 miles

Length of spur to Bluebird Lake: 3.3 miles

Significant built features: Dry laid rock walls, footbridges, log and rock water bars and drains, stone steps, switchbacks. Several log stringer bridges underpinned by steel I-beams exist along the trail:

Lower North Saint Vrain Bridge – abutments date to 1939; superstructure dates to the 1960s

Calypso Cascades bridges 1 and 2 – horse bridges date to the period 1985-86

Calypso Cascades bridge 3 – horse bridge dates to the period 1985-86

Ouzel Falls bridges – 65-foot long bridge rebuilt in 2000 with substantial rock abutments

Upper Saint Vrain Bridges – reconstructed in 1990 with new rock abutments, treated plank decking, rustic log handrails and steel I-beams

Significant natural features: Hunters Creek, Copeland Falls, North St. Vrain Creek, Calypso Cascades, Ouzel Falls, Mertensia Falls, Thunder Lake, Ouzel Lake, Bluebird Lake, Mt. Copeland, Continental Divide

### Trail tour:

The Thunder Lake Trail shares an approach trail network with the Bluebird Lake Trail. Since at least 1955, park staff has considered this main trunk the Thunder Lake Trail. In this document, the trunk will be described as the lower Thunder Lake Trail.

### *Lower Thunder Lake Trail*

The lower Thunder Lake Trail—which is actually a network of trails—constitutes the central travel system of Wild Basin. The trail guides visitors past some of the most scenic, forested country in the park, including Lower and Upper Copeland Falls, Calypso Cascades and Ouzel Falls, and has inspired countless poems about the lush valley. The lower Thunder Lake Trail begins at the main Wild Basin Trailhead at 8,487 feet. Its highest point, about 3 miles up trail, attains approximately 9,500 feet.

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet****United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

Thunder Lake Trail/ Bluebird Lake Trail  
Boulder County, Colorado  
Rocky Mountain National Park MPS  
Historic Park Landscapes in National and State Parks MPS

Section number 7 Page 2

Even though it is popular, the trailhead feels remote, deeply situated in the basin and visibly cut off from the rest of the park. Visitors walk or drive two miles west of Copeland Lake down a narrow dusty road to reach the Wild Basin Trailhead. Once there, they will probably notice the rustic Wild Basin Ranger Station (building 0251, 5BL.2391) on the north side of the lot. Another residence sits approximately 75 yards southwest of the ranger station (building 0032, 5BL.2390). Both buildings were listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1988 for their association with National Park Service (NPS) Rustic Architecture in Rocky Mountain National Park.

The lower Thunder Lake Trail leaves the parking lot in a southwesterly direction. The first section, 1.5 miles long, skirts along the north side of the North Saint Vrain Creek. This waterside piece of trail utilizes stone drains, low rock walls, log checks and stone steps. Within the first half mile, the trail passes Upper and Lower Copeland Falls, a series of large boulders in rapidly moving water. By the end of this trail segment, the trail has ascended approximately 500 vertical feet, reaching 8,900 feet.

Only 1.4 miles from the trailhead, the trail splits: a less-used branch moves to the right, and the more popular branch stretches to the left. The right-hand Campsite Shortcut Trail continues to skirt the north side of the creek for 1.3 more miles, traveling in a northwest direction. As the name implies, it provides access to numerous backcountry campsites. It is steep, rocky, and follows a ridge and ends at the Siskin backcountry site, where the Upper Thunder Lake Trail begins (see description below).

Thick timber, powerful waterfalls and hefty bridges characterize the left-hand branch—the far more popular route. This branch continues in a southwesterly direction (following Cony Creek, away from North St. Vrain Creek) for about a half mile, reaches Calypso Cascades, and turns northwest for another 1.5 miles. The first bridge, the Lower North Saint Vrain Bridge, is crossed before reaching Calypso Cascades. Here, approximately 10-foot long mortared rock abutments support each end of the stringer bridge. The rocks are large, mossy and appear to be well settled. By peering underneath the bridge, one sees steel I-beams helping sustain the walkway. The pathway continues through the forest, low rock walls and bogwalks (elevated causeways) assisting the tread.

Upon reaching Calypso Cascades, the traveler reaches a junction. Here, one can choose to turn east, toward Finch and Pear Lakes, or northwest, remaining on the lower Thunder Lake Trail. By opting for the Thunder Lake Trail, one crosses the next bridge, which is actually a series of three—the Calypso Cascades Bridges. After having paralleled Cony Creek for a half mile, the trail now crosses it. Constructed with double steel I-beams with a half-log fascia, the bridges are both strong—effectively move people over rushing water in a wide, boulder-strewn area—and conform to Naturalistic Design by concealing the metal components. Most visitors are more likely to notice the bridges' exceptionally large logs rather than the I-beam stringers.

About a half-mile further, the trail crosses Ouzel Creek at Ouzel Falls Bridge, another series of stringer bridges utilizing heavy rock abutments. From the bridges, visitors can glimpse Ouzel Falls, a tall, high-volume tower of water. Just past Ouzel Falls, the forest opens up and passes a large platform of rock. This spot offers an ideal place to stop and look eastward into the drainage of the North St. Vrain Creek.

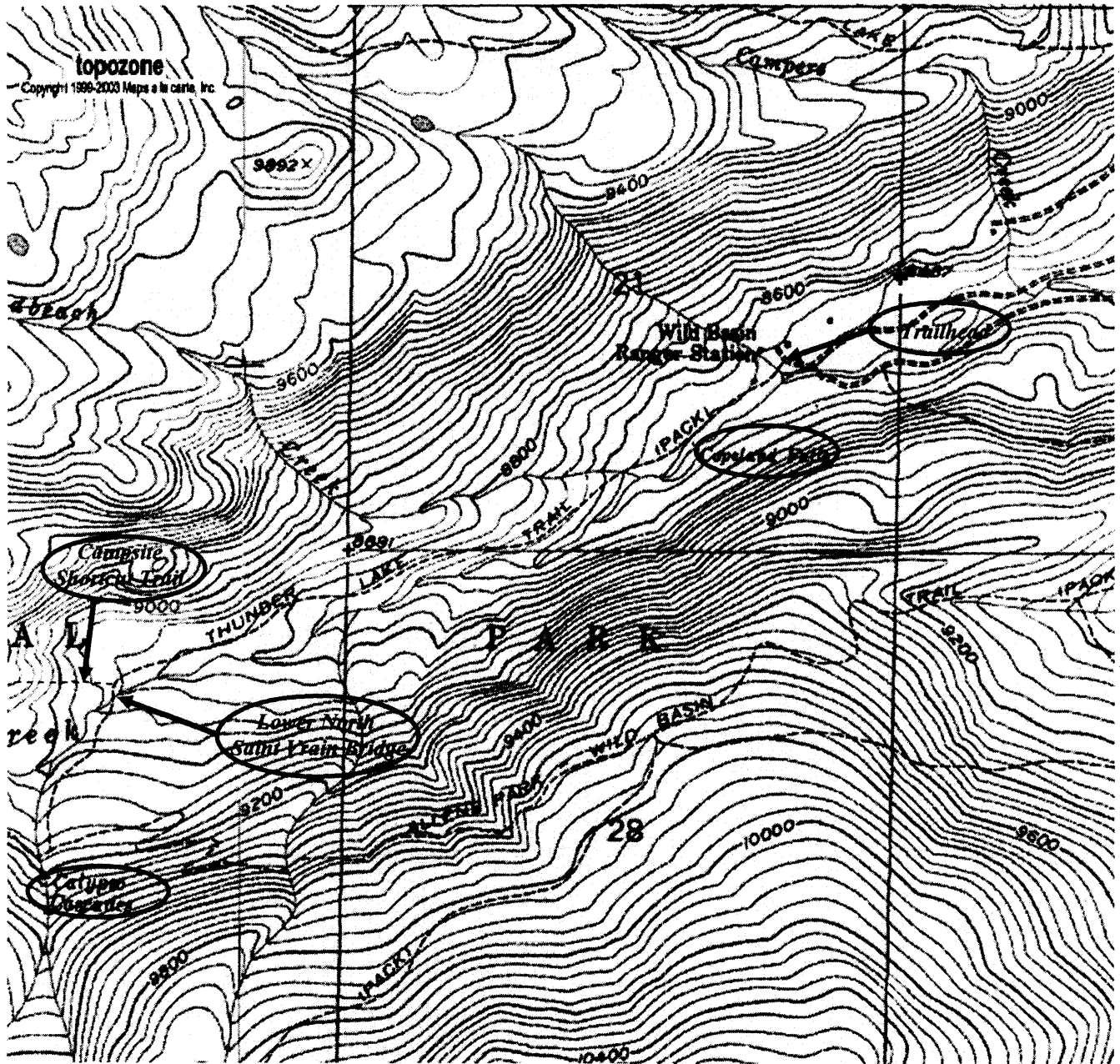
Less than half of a mile after Ouzel Falls, the trail reaches the junction with the Bluebird Lake Trail (see description below). The trail then continues in a northwest direction for another half-mile, moving on a

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

Thunder Lake Trail/ Bluebird Lake Trail  
Boulder County, Colorado  
Rocky Mountain National Park MPS  
Historic Park Landscapes in National and State Parks MPS

Section number 7 Page 3



0 0.3 0.6 0.9 1.2 1.5 km

0 0.1 0.2 0.3 0.4 0.5 mi

USGS Allenspark (CO) Quadrangle  
Projection is UTM Zone 13 NAD83 Datum

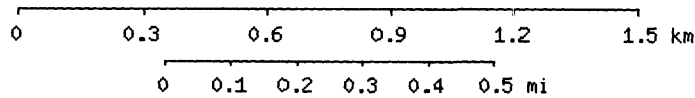
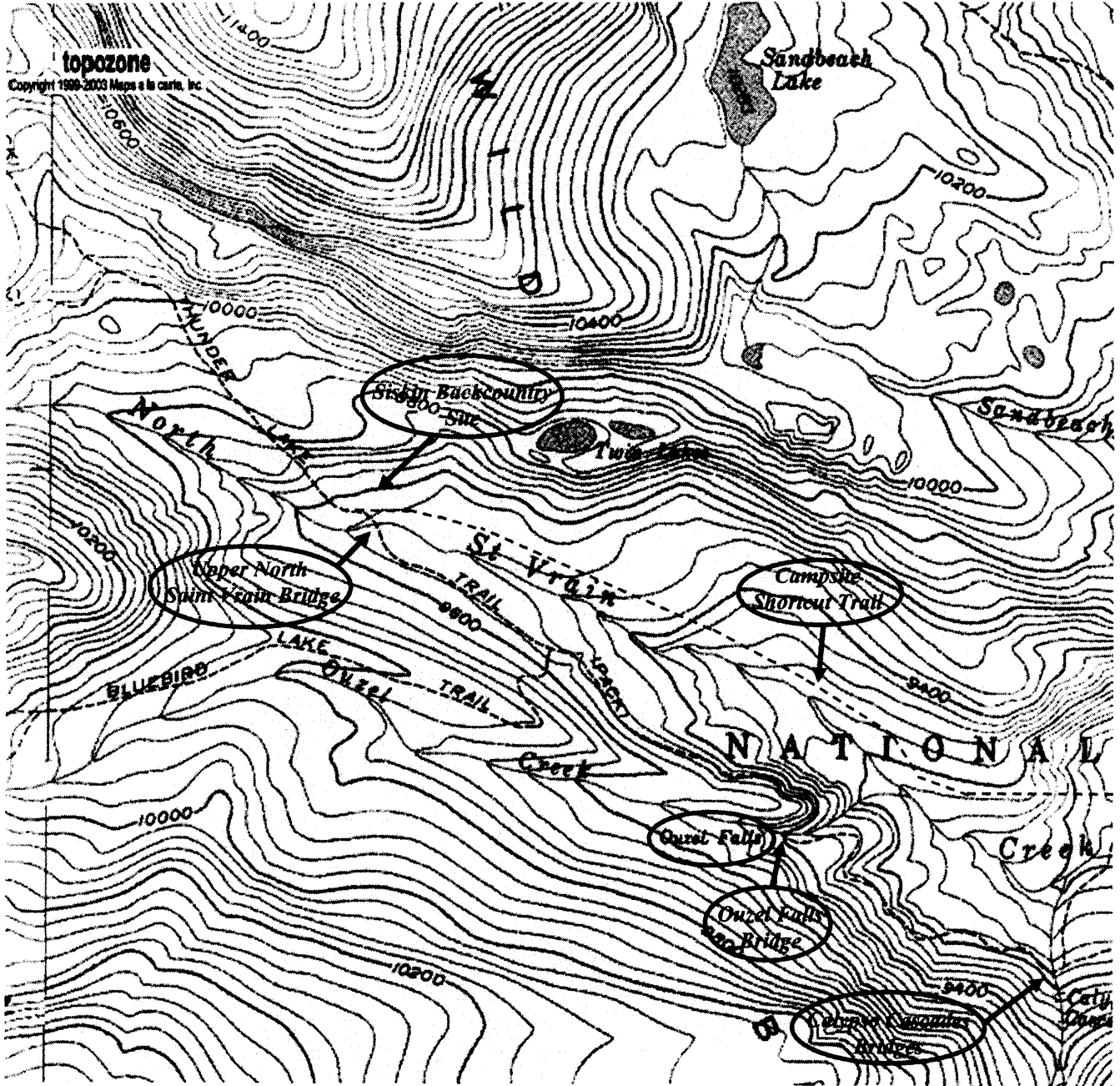


# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

Thunder Lake Trail/ Bluebird Lake Trail  
Boulder County, Colorado  
Rocky Mountain National Park MPS  
Historic Park Landscapes in National and State Parks MPS

Section number 7 Page 4



USGS Allenspark (CO) Quadrangle  
Projection is UTM Zone 13 NAD83 Datum





**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet****United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

Thunder Lake Trail/ Bluebird Lake Trail  
Boulder County, Colorado  
Rocky Mountain National Park MPS  
Historic Park Landscapes in National and State Parks MPS

Section number 7 Page 5

nearly level grade back toward the North Saint Vrain Creek. At the creek, the trail crosses its last bridge—the Upper North Saint Vrain Creek Bridge. Although not as massive as the other bridges along this trail, this stringer bridge again utilizes steel I-beams faced with a half log, and is at least 30 feet long and 4 feet wide. The creek crossing marks the Siskin backcountry site, linking the trail with the other branch of the lower Thunder Lake Trail, and with the upper Thunder Lake Trail.

*Upper Thunder Lake Trail*

The upper Thunder Lake Trail begins by the Siskin backcountry site, on the north bank of the North Saint Vrain Creek. From this junction, the Thunder Lake Trail ascends from 9,500 feet to 10,574-foot Thunder Lake in 2.7 miles. The trail climbs northwest away from the creek for 1.3 miles, achieves 10,000 feet, runs west for less than half a mile, and then climbs northwest to gain the final mile to the lake. The whole stretch dates to at least 1930, although a roughly similar alignment was established by 1919. Even though the path achieves the same travel as the North Saint Vrain Creek, its course stretches away from the waterway, taking a longer and gentler route. This choice of alignment was kept even during the manpower-heavy period of the late 1930s, when resources made total realignments a viable option.

Technical features of the trail include switchbacks (although kept to a minimum), log footbridges across minor streams, low rock walls and rock borders, and log checks. The trail remains 2 to 3 feet wide. Although the trail gains substantial altitude, it does not present excessively strenuous grade to travelers. Approximately 1.3 miles up the trail, a spur juts to the north, leading up to the Lion Lakes area.

This trail moves mostly through dense forest, offering only brief glimpses down to the southeast. However, any lack of grand vistas during the travel can be recovered by the destination—Thunder Lake presents a striking expanse of water surrounded by mountain walls. Pilot Mountain and Tanima Peak comprise a high rocky barrier to the west, separating Wild Basin and the drainage into Grand Lake. Here, the Continental Divide appears more formidable than in other sections of the park. Nonetheless, hikers frequently travel above Thunder Lake, accessing Boulder-Grand Pass and descending west toward Grand Lake. Thunder Lake's northeast aspect also offers dramatic viewing: a profile of Longs Peak and its notch are just visible over the treetops. Wetland alpine meadow and subalpine forest border the lake.

Backcountry campsites stand along the eastern and northern edges of the lake. The Thunder Lake Patrol Cabin (building 0239, 5BL.2392) was listed on the Nation Register of Historic Places in 1988 for its association with NPS Rustic Architecture in Rocky Mountain National Park.

*Bluebird Lake Trail Spur*

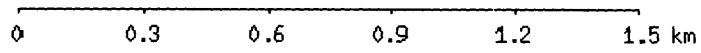
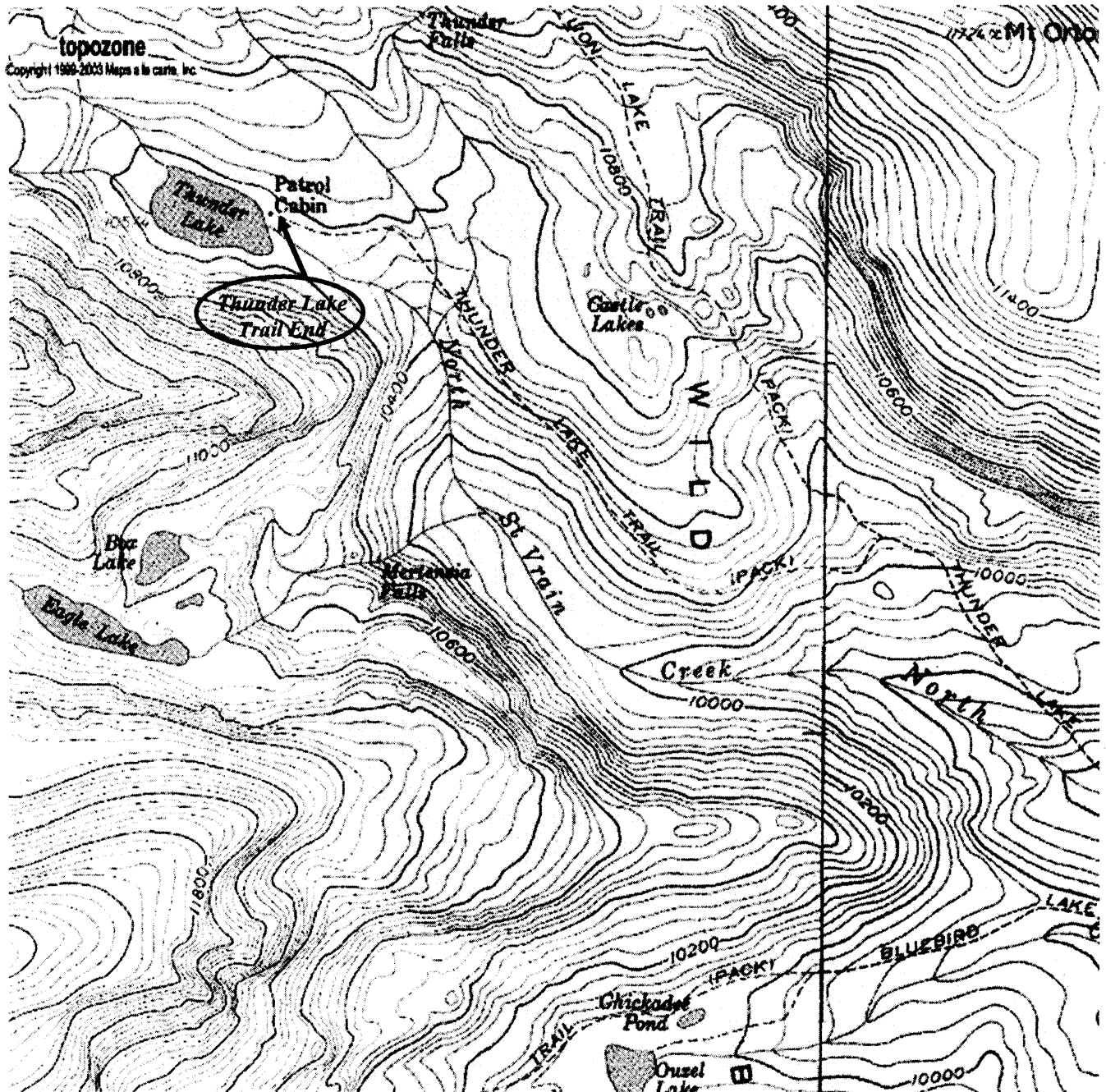
The Bluebird Lake Trail begins where it branches away from the Thunder Lake Trail, near the intersection of Ouzel and North St. Vrain Creeks, approximately three miles from the trailhead. From this junction, the Bluebird Lake Trail heads southwest, moving up and into a canyon that ends at the jagged Continental Divide. In its 3.2-mile length, the trail ascends over 1,500 feet, moving from about 9,400 (at North St. Vrain Creek) feet up to 10,978 feet (at Bluebird Lake).

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

Thunder Lake Trail/ Bluebird Lake Trail  
Boulder County, Colorado  
Rocky Mountain National Park MPS  
Historic Park Landscapes in National and State Parks MPS

Section number 7 Page 6



USGS Isolation Peak (CO) Quadrangle  
Projection is UTM Zone 13 NAD83 Datum



**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet****United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

Thunder Lake Trail/ Bluebird Lake Trail

Section number 7 Page 7

Boulder County, Colorado

Rocky Mountain National Park MPS

Historic Park Landscapes in National and State Parks MPS

Although part of the route lies below timberline, the hike is characterized by expansive views in all directions. This trail has historically followed the drainage of Ouzel Creek, passing Ouzel Lake on the way to Bluebird Lake. Relatively few structures support the pathway; the modestly narrow trail (averaging about 1.5 feet wide) and gradual grade encourage users to devote their attention to the striking scenery and, during the summer and early fall, wildflowers. Dean Babcock described the area in 1912:

Projecting boldly out into the southern corner of the Wild Basin and dominating its entire lower half is the huge bulk of Mt. Clarence King [Mt. Copeland]. It is flanked on the north by the gorge just mentioned, a great glaciated canon some four miles long, about two-thirds of it above the line of big timber; wide at its upper end around Ptarmigan [Bluebird] lake, but narrowing in at its mouth, in which is situated Ouzel lake. This quiet pool is a veritable lake-of-the-woods, being completely surrounded by a dense, tall forest; but looking up from the east shore, over the tree tops, one sees far ahead the snowy crest of the divide, and on either hand the precipitous walls of the gorge. It is an inspiring and memorable experience to witness a sunrise from the shore of Ouzel lake; when the first rose of dawn touches the long line of the finely sculptured cliffs and buttresses of Clarence King, seen over the dark, arrowy forms of the spruces; the whole picture mirrored in the still waters of the tarn. About a mile up the trail from Ouzel lake is the end of the forest, the last trees being a group of ancient giants, sturdy and symmetrical, standing in open ranks; here, at certain seasons, is a remarkably large and perfect snow bridge, arching the torrent; and beyond, a scattered, gnarled timberline growth clambers up over the steep glaciated ledges of the canon floor, clear to the edge of Ptarmigan [Bluebird] lake. From this point one gazes out into a vast sunny amphitheatre, the western walls of which are commanded by Ouzel peak, its sharp and boldly chiseled form seeming almost to overhang the sparkling, blue-green waters of the lake.<sup>1</sup>

In more prosaic terms, the Bluebird Lake Trail travels roughly southwest, ascending toward a "vast sunny amphitheatre" below the Continental Divide. The trail begins by moving onto an open ridge, one or two hundred feet above Ouzel Creek. This area burned in the 1970s, and there are few trees to obstruct views. However, as early as 1908—well before the modern fire—visitors commented on the ease of travel along this smooth ridge. The hiker can see all about Wild Basin: to the south, St. Vrain Mountain, on the southern rim of Wild Basin; to the southwest, 13,176-foot Mt. Copeland and, behind it, the rim of the Continental Divide; to the north, the drainage of the North St. Vrain Creek and, farther north, the collection of peaks huddled around Longs Peak.

After 1.4 miles, a half-mile spur branches to the left, descending into deep forest and toward Ouzel Lake and the Ouzel Lake backcountry site, which sit at an elevation of 10,020 feet at the base of Mount Copeland.

The final 1.8 miles passes through the last of the trees. Most of the section stays about .25 miles north of Ouzel Creek, just at the edge of the forest and marsh that hug the creek. Then, the last half-mile of trail re-joins the creek. This last section—securely above timberline—scrambles upward over steep slabs of granite and loose boulders. The trail brings hikers between two granite walls and then delivers the traveler to the edge of Bluebird Lake.

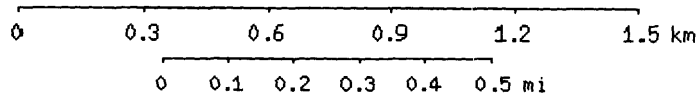
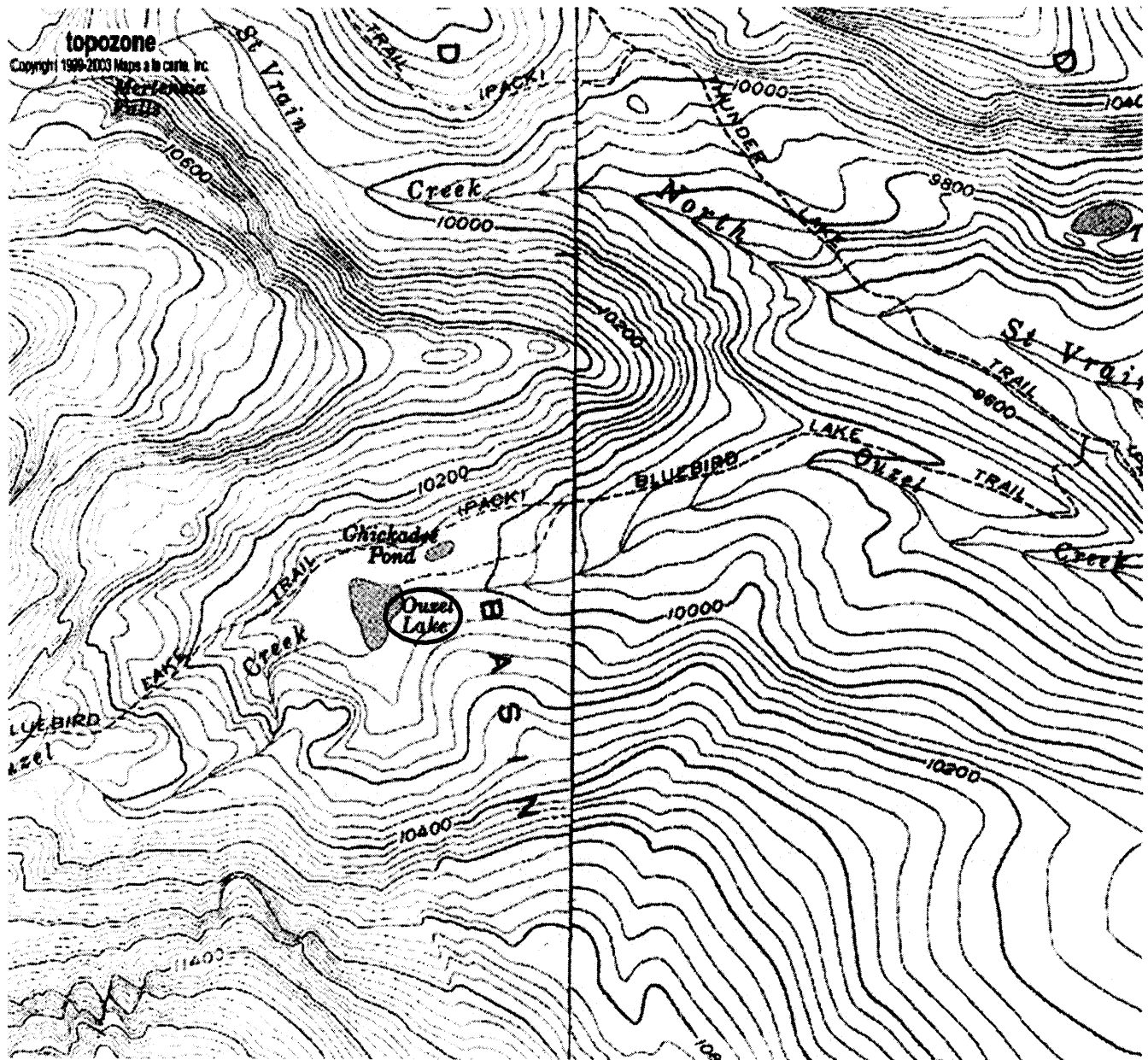
<sup>1</sup> Dean Babcock, "A Glimpse of the Wild Basin," *The Estes Park Trail*, August 31, 1912, 4-5.

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

Thunder Lake Trail/ Bluebird Lake Trail  
Boulder County, Colorado  
Rocky Mountain National Park MPS  
Historic Park Landscapes in National and State Parks MPS

Section number 7 Page 8



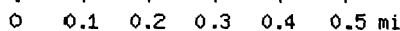
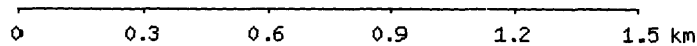
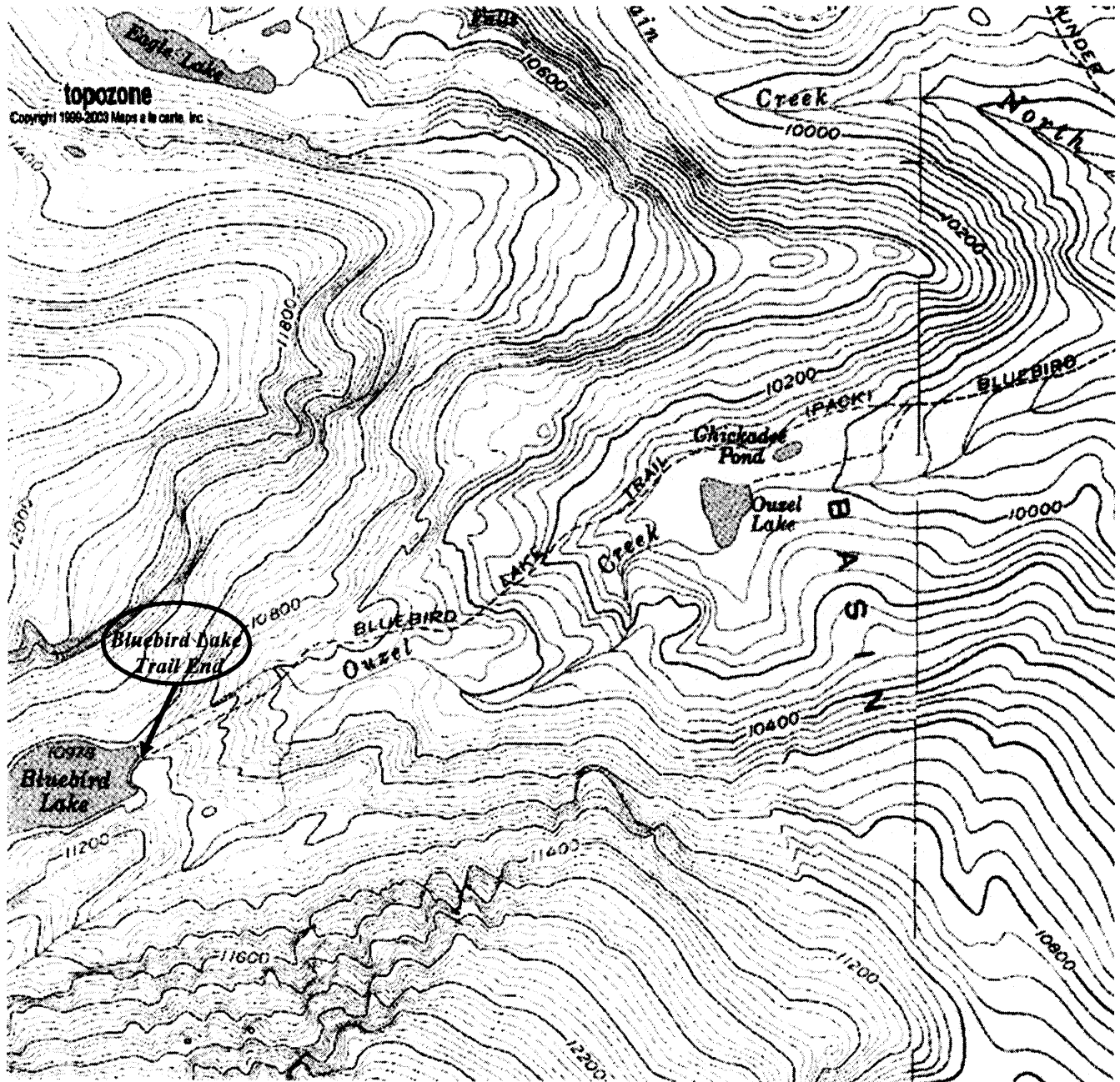
USGS Allenspark (CO) Quadrangle  
Projection is UTM Zone 13 NAD83 Datum

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

Thunder Lake Trail/ Bluebird Lake Trail  
Boulder County, Colorado  
Rocky Mountain National Park MPS  
Historic Park Landscapes in National and State Parks MPS

Section number 7 Page 9



USGS Isolation Peak (CO) Quadrangle  
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**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet****United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

Thunder Lake Trail/ Bluebird Lake Trail  
Boulder County, Colorado  
Rocky Mountain National Park MPS  
Historic Park Landscapes in National and State Parks MPS

Section number 7 Page 10

Granite seems to define this alpine lake. The western backdrop consists of bare, rocky ridges rising quickly to the Continental Divide; smaller, higher lakes are in the neighborhood, but remain out of sight, tucked into the stony landscape. The water of Bluebird Lake is clear and deep, and solid granite slopes drop quickly into the water.

Trail construction and alterations:

*Lower Thunder Lake Trail*

More than any other trail in Wild Basin, the lower Thunder Lake Trail's alignment adapted to accommodate recreation. Midway through the trip toward the lake, the trail even breaks down into two paths—one, following the old reservoir road; the other, leading to pretty tourist spots. Today, this second, more scenic trail is considered the main thoroughfare.

The lower Thunder Lake Trail's first route can be identified on 1910 tourist maps. Built sometime between 1900 and 1908 by an organization that would eventually be known as the Arbuckle Reservoir Company, the original object of the road was Bluebird Lake. The road keeps the low ground for as long possible. Future superintendent Roger Toll described the route in 1919:

A road leads from Copeland Lake Lodge about 2 miles up the creek and the lower part of this road is passable for automobiles. A horse-back trail, referred to as the North St. Vrain Creek trail, continues up the valley past some good camping sites, and then forks, one branch going to Ouzel lake (9,900 feet) and another to Thunder lake (10,500 feet).

The route is pragmatic and simple. By continuing along the North Saint Vrain Creek until Ouzel Creek, the road bypassed some of the most tricky country—and most dramatic waterfalls—in the region. Interestingly, this is the route that the National Park Service wanted the Civilian Conservation Corps to maintain in 1935—even though the park had already made efforts to construct a new, more scenic alignment a decade earlier. In 1926, Superintendent Toll reported completion of a trail that crossed the North Saint Vrain Creek farther east, about midway between Cony and Ouzel Creeks, and then met up with the old trail near Ouzel Creek to continue to Ouzel and Bluebird Lakes. By veering south of North St. Vrain Creek, this 1926 section provided access to Calypso Cascades and Ouzel Falls. By 1940, the park had modified Toll's trail to reflect the 2006 alignment; today, the trail (the main thoroughfare) crosses the North Saint Vrain Creek even farther east, near the intersection with Cony Creek. This route enables the traveler to pass Calypso Cascades and Ouzel Falls in one linear trip (without doubling back) and then continue on to either Thunder Lake or Bluebird Lake.

In 1943, a visitor at the Calypso Cascades junction enjoyed the same menu of hiking options that visitors experience today:

From these walks, as well as for most of the others, Calypso Cascades served as a main cross-trails junction point. We could turn left (east and south) there and head from Allen's Park, for Finch Lake or for Pear Lake, along a trail which afforded excellent views of Long's Peak and which abounded in an exceptional abundance of the trailing, delicate twinflower (*Linnaea*). In the opposite direction at the Cascades is a trail which passes Ouzel Falls and ultimately branches in trails to Ouzel Lake, Bluebird Lake, Pipit

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet****United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

Thunder Lake Trail/ Bluebird Lake Trail  
Boulder County, Colorado  
Rocky Mountain National Park MPS  
Historic Park Landscapes in National and State Parks MPS

Section number 7 Page 11

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Lake, Junco Lake and Thunder Lake, and from which scenically strategic Ogalalla Mountain may be approached.<sup>2</sup>

According to historic maps, the route following the old road (staying on the north side of the North St. Vrain Creek) has passed in and out of existence. Today, it is considered an official park trail, referred to by park staff as the "campsite shortcut trail," "unimproved trail" or "North Saint Vrain Fire Trail." This piece of trail sees minimal traffic, and provides a good setting for several backcountry sites.

Today, the newer trail brings visitors to several water crossings, utilizing a succession of impressive, large log bridges that utilize steel I-beams for support: the Lower North Saint Vrain Bridge, Calypso Cascades Bridges (three), Ouzel Falls Bridge (several), and the Upper North Saint Vrain Bridge.

Because it is expected that wood bridges will decay and demand replacement in a matter of decades, these sites have witnessed multiple generations of bridges. The Lower North Saint Vrain Bridge's abutments may date to 1938 or 1939, although the use of steel I-beams is newer. George Havens, Rocky Mountain National Park's trail foreman, recalled skidding the I-beams up the creek when it was frozen in the 1960s. The first two bridges at Calypso Cascades were upgraded from three simple footlogs to two, double I-beam multi-use (horse) bridges in 1985 and 1986. The third bridge at Calypso Cascades (100 feet further) was similarly upgraded in the late 1980s. The next bridge area, the Ouzel Falls connected bridge(s) were completely rebuilt in 2000, including new, more substantial rock abutments, and reaching a total of 65 feet in length. The final bridge, the Upper North Saint Vrain Bridge, also experienced recent reconstruction. In the early 1990s, the trail crew built new rock abutments and used treated plank decking, native log handrails and steel I-beams in the bridge.

#### *Upper Thunder Lake Trail*

Unlike neighboring lakes, Thunder Lake displays no evidence of use as a reservoir. No historic map shows a wagon road built to serve dam construction. Also, the route to Thunder Lake provides minimal travel purposes—while it does sit just below the Continental Divide, travelers seeking passage over the divide could find easier crossings farther north. Thunder Lake's first constructed trail, therefore, served a strictly recreational use.

Like other trails in Wild Basin, the tourist trail to Thunder Lake developed relatively late. Although nineteenth-century adventurers sought out Thunder Lake for its access to Boulder-Grand Pass, a true trail did not emerge on maps until the 1910s. It is unclear who first blazed a trail to Thunder Lake. Perhaps the mountaineers who passed through on their way to nearby peaks wanted a quick, sturdy passage to the lake. Whoever they were, the trailblazers eventually followed a moderately graded, roundabout route. By 1919, the alignment followed the same general pathway that it takes today.

In 1915, the incoming superintendent to Rocky Mountain National Park reported that the trail was in "fair" condition. Unlike other area trails, the early Thunder Lake Trail had not developed upon a former reservoir wagon road, and its design had received minimal planning. Like many other trails in the park, the Thunder Lake Trail experienced a succession of definitive projects in the 1920s and 1930s, establishing and refining its alignment. By the 1920s, the park was able to allocate more resources for trail building, and on June 21, 1929, the *Estes Park Trail* reported confidently, "It is likely that soon a

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<sup>2</sup> "The Wild Basin Outing, *Trail and Timberline*, October, 1943, 126.



**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet****United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

Thunder Lake Trail/ Bluebird Lake Trail

Section number 7 Page 12

Boulder County, Colorado

Rocky Mountain National Park MPS

Historic Park Landscapes in National and State Parks MPS

crew will be put to work on the trail in Wild Basin to Thunder Lake." Most of the trail was reconstructed that summer, the final .75 miles to be completed in 1930. This 1929-1930 effort—corresponding with the arrival of the park's first NPS-trained landscape architect who specifically concentrated on trails—likely met new standards for durability and aesthetic design. By 1935, trail plans for Civilian Conservation Corps projects indicated that the Thunder Lake Trail was four feet wide, and its grading was complete, perhaps reflecting the 1929-1930 trail work. Nonetheless, there was room for improvement. In 1936, 1938 and 1939, CCC crews spent their summers between the Thunder Lake Trail and the Finch Lake Trail, widening and improving the pathways. Between 1915 and 1940 the Thunder Lake Trail evolved from a bushwhacked route to a sustainable, modern pathway.

Since 1940, the trail has required routine maintenance but little adjustment to its alignment. The 1947 USGS map shows a new trail that coexists with the older trail, the new trail wriggling along the banks of the North Saint Vrain Creek. Perhaps the new route reflects a social trail to Martinis Falls. By the time of the publication of the 1961 USGS map, however, only the original trail remained.

Throughout the lifespan of the Thunder Lake Trail, park staff has speculated about continuing construction up to Boulder-Grand Pass, and delivering hikers to the west side of the park. To date, no lasting trail reaches above Thunder Lake.

*Bluebird Spur*

Reclamation efforts can take credit for the first lasting trails around Wild Basin. Wagon roads—built to facilitate dam construction at lakes like Bluebird, Pear and Sandbeach—marked the first real trails in Wild Basin. Over time, the roads carried more hooves and feet than wheels. The routes lost their identity as roads, and visitors and park staff modified the pathways to suit recreational interests.

Sources conflict over the exact year of construction, but the first route to Bluebird Lake dates to some time between 1900 and 1908. Shortly after 1900, a reservoir company—eventually known as the Arbuckle Reservoir Company—filed upon the water rights. At this point, some sources say that the company built an initial road and dam. A route existed by 1908, when a mapping party reported a useable, if somewhat overgrown trail, marked by blazes on trees. A 1910 tourist map—the earliest map to indicate a trail to Bluebird Lake—shows a trail using roughly the same alignment that it would hold through 2006. Later in the 1910s, the reservoir company invested more significant time and energy, surveying and building (or rebuilding) the dam.

Over the next 20 years, the trail moved in and out of existence on maps. On some maps, the trail came halfway up the drainage, stopping along the forested shores of Ouzel Lake. In September of 1926, Superintendent Roger Toll reported, "its only a trail to Ouzel of any merit." However, it is possible that Toll lamented simply the lack of a well-designed trail, rather than actual access to Bluebird Lake. Five years later, the 1931 NPS guidebook mapped out a trail only as far as Ouzel Lake, yet its text implied that the visitor could comfortably go farther: "The largest lakes of Wild Basin—Thunder Lake and Bluebird Lake—are both above timberline but are easily accessible by trails."<sup>3</sup> At the very least, then, a social trail continued on, traveling above timberline and up to Bluebird Lake. As William Ramaley describes this final section, "The last steep haul was made wherever there was room to stay out of the mud and snow. It's a narrow and walled gully."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> "Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado," United States Department of the Interiors, 1931, 22.

<sup>4</sup> William Ramaley, "Trails and Trailbuilders of Rocky Mountain National Park," unpub. manuscript, 1970s, 77.



**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet****United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

Thunder Lake Trail/ Bluebird Lake Trail  
Boulder County, Colorado  
Rocky Mountain National Park MPS  
Historic Park Landscapes in National and State Parks MPS

Section number 7 Page 13

In 1935, the park decided to apply Civilian Conservation Corps manpower to the Bluebird Lake Trail. According to the "Wild Basin-Ouzel Lake" trail plan, CCC crews would rebuild the section up to Ouzel Lake. The plan appeared to neglect the final stretch up to Bluebird Lake. However, the CCC effort must have generated some interest and momentum; the 1947 USGS map indicates that the park service had repaired or rebuilt the entire trail by 1940.

The 1935 trail plan did not outline technical work that would be completed or propose that the trail be re-routed. This suggests that the CCC and park crews simply adhered to the 1934 NPS booklet "Standards for Trail Construction," widening and grading the existing pathway to make the trail more sustainable in the future. As shown in documents and trail descriptions from the 1950s through the 1970s, no part of the Bluebird Lake Trail slipped off of the map again.

**Trail integrity:**

Though the Wild Basin trails follow original wagon routes to reservoirs high in the mountain valleys, the park spent the 1920s to 1940s improving and refining these early routes. Wild Basin trail system today retains a high degree of integrity related to these park trail improvements of the 1920s to 1940s. The trails reach familiar destinations: Thunder Lake, Bluebird Lake, Ouzel Lake, and Ouzel Falls. The Lower Thunder Lake Trail follows the 1940 alignment. Though the series of bridges near Ouzel Falls have been replaced overtime, these bridges are a good example of NPS Naturalistic Design. They incorporate steel, treated wood and relatively large-scale construction, while retaining a more "primitive" feel through the use of stone abutments, log facings (to cover the metal I-beams) and log handrails. The need for I-beams stemmed from the deterioration of the local landscape; areas adjacent to the water crossings displayed the effects of tree removal for log stringers, decking and log handrails. The upper Thunder Lake trail reflects a period of trail improvements and refinements by the park in the 1920s and 1930s. The Bluebird Lake spur reflects CCC construction in the 1930s; its alignment holds true to this period of trail improvements. The Ouzel Fire in the 1970s altered the landscape of a short section of trail, but this change of forest cover is not significant enough to diminish the overall integrity of the trail's setting.

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet****United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

Thunder Lake Trail/ Bluebird Lake Trail  
Boulder County/ Colorado  
Rocky Mountain National Park MPS  
Historic Park Landscapes in National and State Parks MPS

Section number 8 Page 14

**SIGNIFICANCE**

The Thunder Lake Trail is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A and C, meeting the registration requirement set forth in the *Rocky Mountain National Park* Multiple Property Submission. Under Criterion A, the trail is eligible in the area of *Entertainment/Recreation* for its association with the early resort industry and tourism in the Estes Park region. The period of significance starts in 1910 with the first appearance of the trail on a tourist guide map and its subsequent use by early tourists and ends in 1945, the year in which tourism in the park significantly changed due to increased automobile traffic after World War II. The trail is also significant in the area of *Politics/Government* for the involvement of 1930s federal relief agencies, specifically the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), the period of significance being the intermittent trail building seasons between 1935 and 1939. Finally, the trail is eligible under Criterion C in the area of *Landscape Architecture*; the trail design reflects National Park Service (NPS) Naturalistic Design of the 1920s through the 1940s.

The Thunder Lake Trail demonstrates the national trends described in Linda Flint McClelland's *Historic Park Landscapes in National and State Parks* Multiple Property Submission. In this second context, the trail is eligible under Criterion A in the area of *Entertainment/Recreation* for its connection to the twentieth century movement to develop national parks for public enjoyment, as well as in the area of *Politics/Government* for the principles and practices of park landscape design used by the park in CCC projects. The trail is also eligible under Criterion C in the area of Landscape Architecture for design that reflects NPS Naturalistic Design of the 1920s through the 1940s.

***Historical Background***

In 1911, William S. Cooper and Dean Babcock sketched out their "Map of Longs Peak and Vicinity, Colorado." The two ardent hikers emphasized Wild Basin's natural attractions. They drew peaks, lakes, waterfalls, landmarks and trails. The main artery through Wild Basin was what we now know as the lower part of the Thunder Lake Trail. The pathway began where the dirt road ended, plunging westward into the forest. This particularly lush corner of Rocky Mountain National Park has lured nature lovers for over 100 years, and has earned its proportionate share of attention from the park administration and trail crew.

If early tourists thought that the trail felt like a road, they would not be off base. According to some sources, the trail was built as a reservoir road. By 1910, an organization eventually known as the Arbuckle Reservoir Company had filed upon water rights to Bluebird Lake, and had probably already constructed a road to their dam site. The route took the path of least resistance, traveling along the north side of the North St. Vrain Creek, then following Ouzel Creek up to Bluebird Lake—roughly establishing the oldest part of the Thunder Lake Trail.

The wagon road probably met minimum standards for hauling dam-building materials to Bluebird Lake. No map ever acknowledged that the route could be used for vehicle traffic. Nonetheless, the "road" was a boon for tourists. Dense forest spread along the floor of Wild Basin, and any effort to clear the way helped visitors reach pretty destinations.

Wild Basin's popularity with tourists grew. The Colorado Mountain Club (CMC) brought some of the first large camping groups into the area:

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

# United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

Thunder Lake Trail/ Bluebird Lake Trail  
Boulder County/ Colorado  
Rocky Mountain National Park MPS  
Historic Park Landscapes in National and State Parks MPS

Section number 8 Page 15

Four out of eight annual camps have been held in this region, two, 1916 and 1919, in Wild Basin, the extreme southern end of the park. On both of these occasions our camp managers have received valuable assistance, graciously given, from park officials. In 1916 Chief Ranger Reed A. Higby helped us very materially by building a foot bridge over the St. Vrain at the junction of Cony Creek and constructing an important section of the trail up Cony Creek past its picturesque falls [probably Calypso Cascades] and out to the southwest toward Pear Reservoir....<sup>5</sup>

The CMC members camped near the modern-day Wild Basin trailhead, and explored some country along the lower Thunder Lake Trail. Due to close ties with the national park, the CMC's presence even initiated minor trail work by park staff.

### Alternative Trail along North St. Vrain Creek

The alternative trail—the less-used modern route, often referred to as the Campsite Shortcut Trail, which skirts along the north side of the North Saint Vrain Creek for 1.3 miles—is actually the original route of the reservoir road. This early course did not deliver visitors directly to certain popular places. Spots like Calypso Cascades and Ouzel Falls (identified on Cooper and Babcock's 1911 map) remained unserved by sustainable trails. Therefore, Superintendent Roger Toll initiated a series of trail projects in 1926 that produced a new trail that traveled on the south side of the North St. Vrain Creek in order to pass the admired waterfalls. This section of trail displays some of the most noticeable trail construction in the park. A series of large log stringer bridges underpinned by steel I-beams brings a high volume of visitors safely over rushing water. Although the wood must be replaced every few decades, some rock abutments may be over 60 years old. Other features on this piece of trail—low rock walls, stone drains, bogwalks (elevated causeways), and the gentle grade—reflect the standards of NPS Naturalistic Design. The old reservoir road—now considered the “alternative trail”—was improved by the CCC in 1935.

### Main Thunder Lake Trail

Arguably, Thunder Lake holds a wilder reputation than the other lakes of Wild Basin—it never served as a reservoir, it boasts an impressive mountain backdrop, and it provides access to Boulder-Grand Pass and several tall peaks. Visitors use the lake as a base camp for exploring not only the high country, but also for rambles to Mertensia Falls, Eagle Lake, and the Lion Lakes. In 1912, Dean Babcock described the area's magnetic appeal in the *Estes Park Trail*:

On the other side of Mt. Orton is a rough and irregular vale containing a half-dozen lakes or pools, the largest of which is Thunder Lake, near the headwaters of the main fork of the North St. Vrain. For mountain scenery which is entirely wild and rugged without being actually forbidding, the Thunder lake region can hardly be excelled. The lake is a handsome sheet of water, over a quarter of a mile long, its north shores covered with a forest of tall spruces, its south bank bare and rocky, sloping steeply up to the base of the one-thousand-foot precipice of Mt. Kirkwood. To the northwest tower the jagged aiguilles of Mt. Alice, while to the eastward the slopes drop down gently to the central part of the basin. A short distance down the outlet from Thunder lake is a series of cascades about half a mile long, tumbling down a narrow gorge in the midst of a

<sup>5</sup> *Trail and Timberline*, January 1920.

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

Thunder Lake Trail/ Bluebird Lake Trail  
Boulder County/ Colorado  
Rocky Mountain National Park MPS  
Historic Park Landscapes in National and State Parks MPS

Section number 8 Page 16

stately, open, moss-carpeted forest; falls unnamed and almost unknown, but as beautiful as many cascades of world wide reputation...<sup>6</sup>

At Thunder Lake, the mountains feel big, close and bald. Perhaps this primitive character explains why the Thunder Lake area was the destination of Agnes Lowe, the "modern Eve" who dashed into the wilderness as part of a publicity stunt in 1917.<sup>7</sup> And as Babcock explains, the lake is not "actually forbidding,"—visitors feel thrilled but not threatened. Of all lakes in Wild Basin, then, it follows that Thunder Lake would receive a good share of sightseers. The log patrol cabin, built in 1930—the only backcountry cabin in Wild Basin—helped park staff better serve this relatively high-volume destination.

In 1933, twenty-one years after Dean Babcock described the lake's charms, the *Estes Park Trail* continued to publicize the Thunder Lake region by publishing an enthusiastic "first hand" account:

In his book *The Rocky Mountain Wonderland*, Enos A. Mills lists Thunder Lake as one of the best-known lakes of Colorado, yet today we seldom hear of it. Therefore one bright August morning a party of six set out fully equipped to re-discover Thunder Lake.

...The party would have liked very much to turn aside and explore many places, but marched on and in half a days time reached their goal.

There are larger lakes and deeper lakes but probably none with more regal grandeur than Thunder Lake. Proudly Mt. Alice blocks up the back-ground with Tanima Ridge at the left, and between these two Boulder-Grand Pass leading over the Continental Divide. While over the ridge to the right the summits of Pagoda Peak and Longs Peak are visible.

Thunder Lake lies at an altitude somewhat below timberline and is surrounded by a bit of "the forest primeval." In area it is about fifteen acres or approximately half again as large as Bear Lake whose area is eleven acres.

Returning to head-quarters the brave explorers unanimously agreed that Thunder Lake should be entitled to a high place among beautiful lakes of the state. And inasmuch as the region is wild, romantic and close up under the crest of the Continental Divide they deemed it wise to reorganize for further exploration of the principal streams, lakes and peaks especially such as are accessible by trail.<sup>8</sup>

### Spur to Bluebird Lake

In the 1900s and 1910s, newspapers in farming communities called Bluebird Lake "Arbuckle Lake Number 2," referencing the reservoir company that owned rights to the water. Meanwhile, local naturalists recorded the name "Ptarmigan Lake" on their 1911 map of the region. Contemporary tourist maps followed this trend until 1915, when USGS surveyors—perhaps confusing the lake with a neighboring pond—dubbed it "Bluebird Lake." The name stuck.

<sup>6</sup> Dean Babcock, "A Glimpse of Wild Basin," *Estes Park Trail*, August 31, 1912, 3-4.

<sup>7</sup> C.W. Buchholtz, *Rocky Mountain National Park, A History*, 138-139.

<sup>8</sup> Babcock, *Estes Park Trail*.

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet****United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

Thunder Lake Trail/ Bluebird Lake Trail  
Boulder County/ Colorado  
Rocky Mountain National Park MPS  
Historic Park Landscapes in National and State Parks MPS

Section number 8 Page 17

The two groups who held a serious interest in Wild Basin—one interested in a lake's irrigation potential, the other, in its natural history—seemed to coexist but rarely crossed paths. In 1908, a couple of naturalists on a mapping expedition bumped into some irrigators near the North St. Vrain River: "We met a party of three Longmont farmers, prospecting for water sites. They looked suspiciously at our surveying instruments, as if they thought we had stolen all the water east of the Divide."<sup>9</sup>

Bluebird Lake's name reflects the particularly romantic approach that early visitors held toward remote Wild Basin. While other regions of Rocky Mountain National Park have earned notice from mountain climbers, fishermen, skiers or archaeological researchers, Wild Basin inspired exuberant interest in natural history. As one local later recalled about the region's most famous naturalist, "Enos Mill had often spoken of Wild Basin...as having more beauty and greater variety than any other nearby area."<sup>10</sup> Other locals spurred on this perception by publishing maps, flowery articles in the *Estes Park Trail*, and poetry. Another typical reflection was generated by a Colorado Mountain Club outing in 1943:

It was on this day that we saw the most colorful flowers—columbine, tall mertensia, monkshood, Indian paintbrush in all of the most beautiful shades of rose and hundreds of others. The rocks and meadows below Bluebird Lake were a feast for the eyes. The rain had brought out the colors and strata in the rocks near the lake and we wished for Moritz Krieg, his easel and paints.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the popularity of the lake, the 3.3 mile spur trail connecting Bluebird to the rest of the Thunder Lake Trail moved in and out of existence upon maps in the 1910s and 1920s. In September 1926 Superintendent Toll exasperatedly reported, "It's only a trail to Ouzel of any merit." However, it is possible that Toll lamented simply the lack of a well-designed, high standard trail, rather than actual access to Bluebird Lake. Five years later, the 1931 NPS guidebook mapped out a trail only as far as Ouzel Lake, yet its text implied that the visitor could comfortably go farther: "The largest lakes of Wild Basin—Thunder Lake and Bluebird Lake—are both above timberline but are easily accessible by trails."<sup>12</sup> At the very least, then, a social trail continued on to Bluebird Lake.

In 1935, the park prepared plans to employ Civilian Conservation Corps manpower on the Bluebird Lake spur up to Ouzel Lake. CCC crews rebuilt the section up to Ouzel Lake. The CCC effort typifies the trails-related activities of the organization throughout the park.

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<sup>9</sup> James H. Pickering, "Exploring and Mapping Wild Basin: William Skinner Cooper's 1908 Account," *Colorado Heritage*, 1989, Issue 2, 40.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>11</sup> "Irene and Laura," "The Wild Basin Outing, Individual Reactions as Told to the Editor," *Trail and Timberline*, October 1943.

<sup>12</sup> "Rocky Mountain National Park, Colorado," United States Department of the Interior, 1931, 22.

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

Thunder Lake Trail/ Bluebird Lake Trail  
Boulder County/ Colorado  
Rocky Mountain National Park MPS  
Historic Park Landscapes in National and State Parks MPS

Section number 8-9 Page 18

Nature-lovers didn't seem to mind the presence of the dam on Bluebird Lake. Nonetheless, the old reservoir was destined to become a simple lake again. By the 1950s, the dam demonstrated serious signs of weakness, and was taken out of commission in 1961. Although the lake no longer holds any more water than its natural basin will allow, its water rights still belongs to a downstream user: the City of Longmont.

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April 7, 1933

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**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet****United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

Thunder Lake Trail/ Bluebird Lake Trail  
Boulder County/ Colorado  
Rocky Mountain National Park MPS  
Historic Park Landscapes in National and State Parks MPS

Section number 9 Page 19

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*Trail and Timberline*.

January 1920

October 1943

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

Thunder Lake Trail/ Bluebird Lake Trail  
Boulder County/ Colorado  
Rocky Mountain National Park MPS  
Historic Park Landscapes in National and State Parks MPS

Section number 10 Page 20

## GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

### VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The entire trail is located within Rocky Mountain National Park. Beginning at the Wild Basin Trailhead, the trail travels westward along the North Saint Vrain Creek toward Thunder Lake. Approximately 1.4 miles from the trailhead, the trail splits. The right-hand branch remains on the north side of the creek and rejoins the other trail 1.3 miles later. The 1.8 mile left-hand branch moves across the North Saint Vrain Creek, following Cony Creek southward for less than a mile and then turning northwest before rejoining the other trail. Approximately 1.6 miles up the left-hand branch, a spur breaks off to the west. This 3.3 mile spur travels to Bluebird Lake. Back on the main trail, the last 2.7 miles move northwest toward Thunder Lake. Total mileage is 11.4 miles. The boundary of this nomination extends a distance of 10 feet from either side of the centerline of the trail.

### BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundary includes the resource and associated features such as (but not limited to) footbridges, signs, rock walls, stone steps, stringer bridges, switchbacks, and bogwalks. Although landscape features are important to the experience of the visitor traversing the trail and may contribute to the overall integrity of the trail, they are not included in this nomination.

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5.	13 Zone	449380 Easting	4449907 Northing
6.	13 Zone	450029 Easting	4449928 Northing
7.	13 Zone	451938 Easting	4450842 Northing
8.	13 Zone	449772 Easting	4449391 Northing
9.	13 Zone	449972 Easting	4449776 Northing
10.	13 Zone	448275 Easting	4450329 Northing
11.	13 Zone	448218 Easting	4450099 Northing
12.	13 Zone	444535 Easting	4449093 Northing



# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

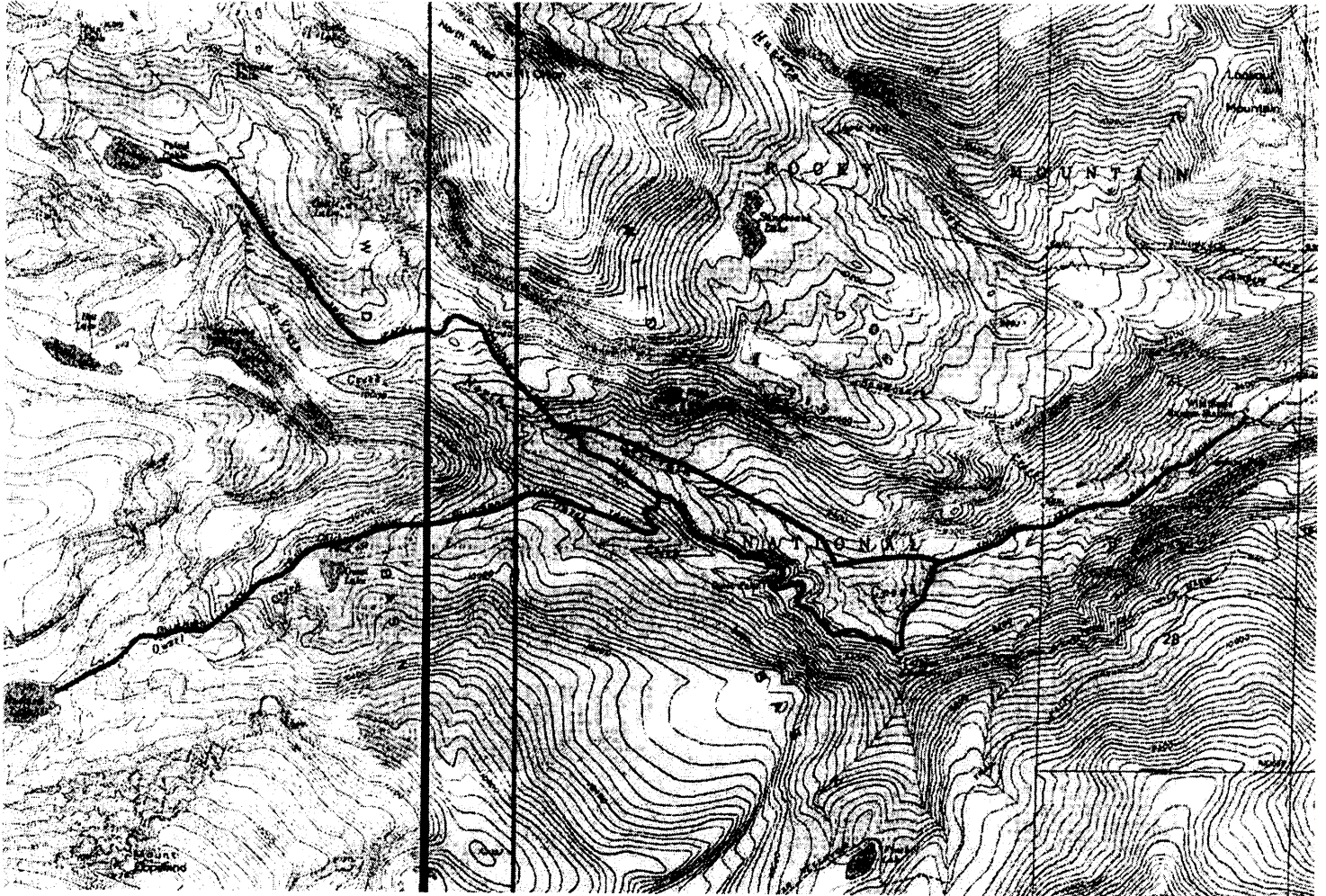
United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

Thunder Lake Trail/ Bluebird Lake Trail  
Boulder County/ Colorado  
Rocky Mountain National Park MPS  
Historic Park Landscapes in National and State Parks MPS

Section number 10 Page 21

## USGS TOPOGRAPHIC MAP

Allens Park, Isolation Peak Quadrangles, Colorado  
7.5 Minute Series  
Elevation: 8,600 feet – 11,000 feet



**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet****United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**Thunder Lake Trail/ Bluebird Lake Trail  
Boulder County/ Colorado  
Rocky Mountain National Park MPS  
Historic Park Landscapes in National and State Parks MPSSection number \_\_\_\_ Page 22**PHOTOGRAPH LOG**

The following information pertains to photograph numbers 1-9 except as noted:

Name of Property: Thunder Lake Trail/ Bluebird Lake Trail  
Location: Boulder County/ Colorado  
Photographer: Sierra Standish  
Date of Photographs: July 2006, unless otherwise noted  
Negatives: CD with TIFF images on file with NPS in Washington, DC

**Photo No.                      Photographic Information**

- 1 Lower North Saint Vrain Creek Bridge, view to northwest
- 2 Calypso Cascades Bridge, view to west
- 3 Ouzel Falls
- 4 Alternative Trail/Campsite Shortcut Trail, view to west
- 5 Switchback, upper section of Thunder Lake Trail
- 6 Thunder Lake Patrol Cabin, view to west. Taken October, 2003
- 7 Bluebird Lake Spur, view to west
- 8 Bluebird Lake Spur, approaching the lake
- 9 Bluebird Lake, view to West. Taken October, 2005