

NE05: Colden and Avalanche Lake from South Meadow

“How come that rock is so big?”, the college student asked. We were on the edge of Avalanche Lake staring at the massive cliffs and slides of Colden rising thousands of feet. I suppose there is a good answer involving faults in the anorthosite but I had brought them to be awed by the rock, and my only emotion was the temptation to throw him into the lake and ask “how come the lake is so deep?”.

General

Avalanche Lake is a stunning place that evokes strong emotion. There is steep rock rising on both sides of the lake. In fact, the route is so rugged that in places it is bolted to the cliff face. Colden sits between the two Giants (Algonquin and Marcy) and has fabulous views. The route is difficult and long, but it is less so than NE07 or LC05.

Note

The starting point for this route is via the road to South Meadow. A very similar but slightly shorter route uses Heart Lake as the starting point. I prefer the South Meadow route because it has free parking and smaller crowds. However, there are plans to close the road to South Meadow. When that happens, it probably will make more sense to use access from near Heart Lake for this hike and variants.

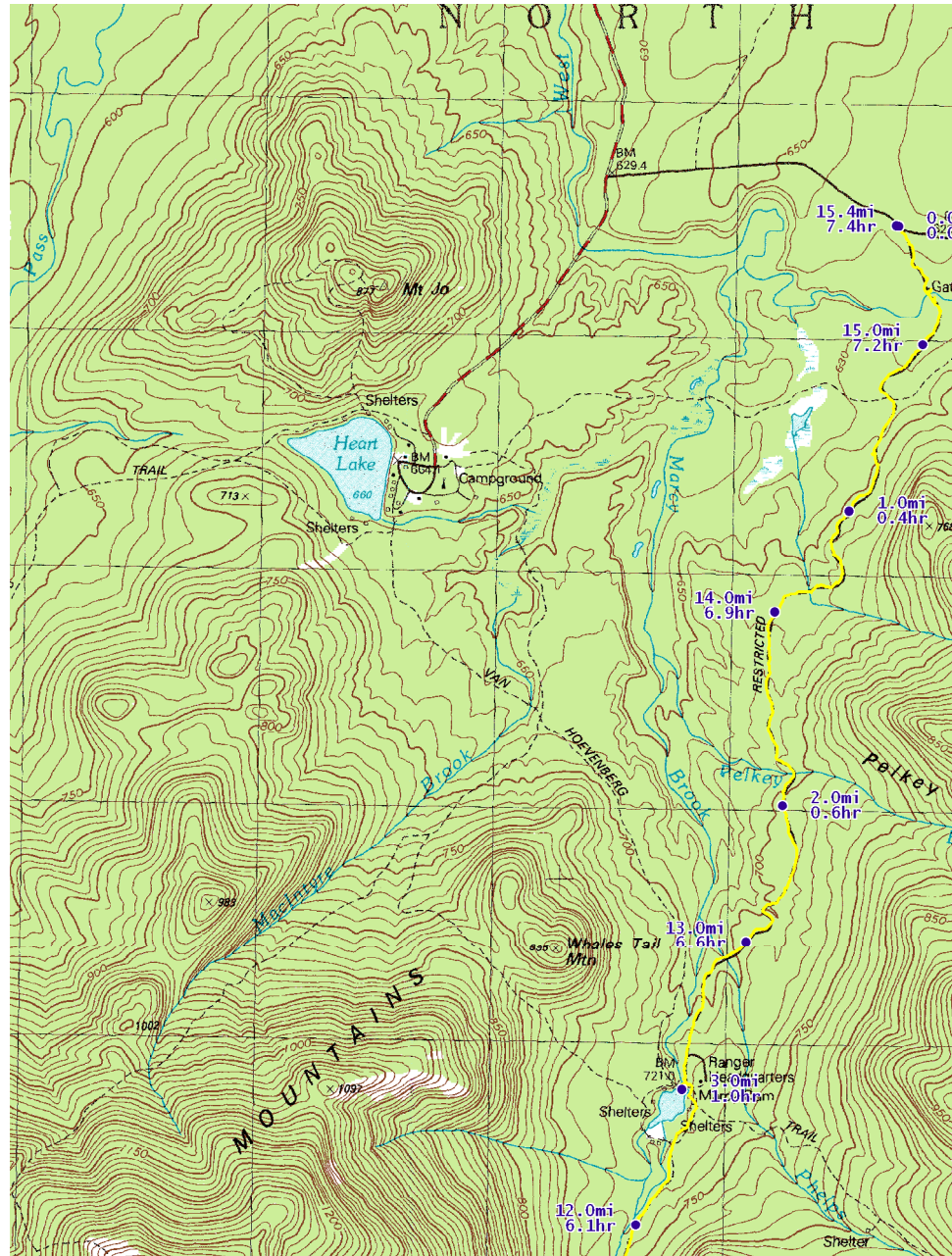
Summary Statistics

Start coordinates: (44.1916, -73.9399).

Total distance: 15.4 miles.

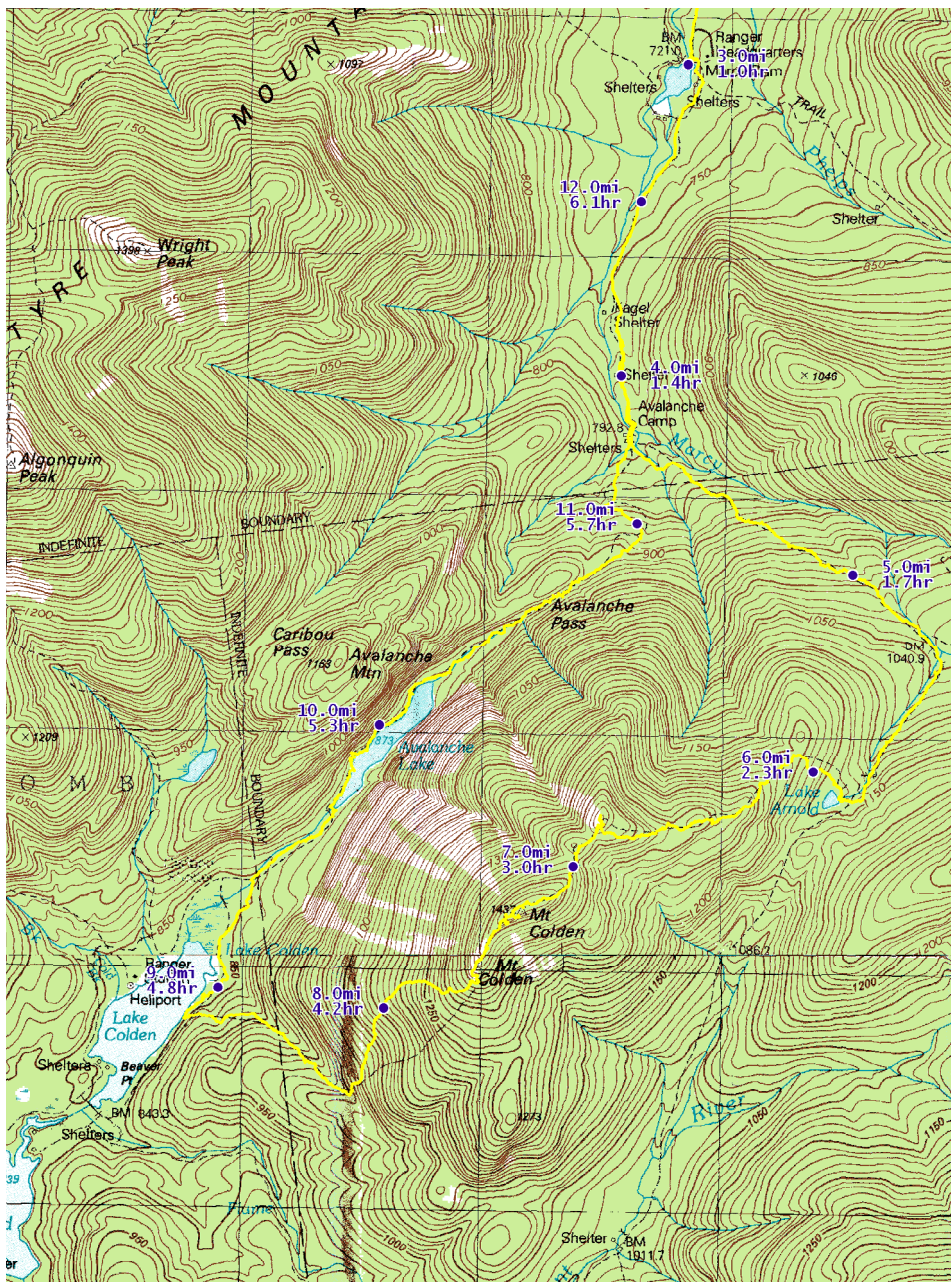
Time par: 9 hours.

Cumulative ascent: 4240 feet.



Route Description

Along the road from North Elba toward Adirondack Loj at Heart Lake there is a dirt road that leads to South Meadow. There is car camping along the road, and access to several trails. This route begins with the closed road from South Meadow to Marcy Dam. One can follow the road from its beginning or, if parking at the lot at the end of the road, it is slightly more convenient to follow a blue plastic marked trail on a diagonal over to the trail register (see the map for NE07). Here we show the route from the beginning of the closed road on the topographic map. The register is at mile 0.2. The route skirts an old beaver dam at mile 0.5 and passes a first wooden bridge at mile 1.9 and the second at mile 2.5. The trail reaches Marcy Dam at mile 3.0. This is a place with beautiful views across the pond that begs for a break, although it tends to be a busy spot with hikers from nearby camping and the Loj passing by. Moving beyond the pond the trail reaches a junction with the trail heading toward Marcy at mile 3.1. Our route continues toward the Avalanche camps along the main valley but reaches another junction at mile 4.2 where our route turns toward Lake Arnold. This route reaches the junction with the crossover trail to Indian Falls at 5.3. Continuing toward Lake Arnold, the trail crosses and re-crosses the stream between miles 5.4 and 5.7. The trail reaches the junction at the edge of Lake Arnold at mile 5.8 and our route next



follows the trail to Colder. The trail crosses a bit of open rock (beautiful anorthosite) and views back at mile 6.5 and reaches the shoulder of Colder at mile 6.8. This shoulder has some lovely arctic vegetation, krummholz and spectacular views. Moving along the ridge toward Colder, the trail reaches a col at mile 7.0. The trail passes under a rock at mile 7.1 and rises to great views over Avalanche Lake at mile 7.2. The summit and primary viewpoints are a bit further along around mile 7.3. There are wonderful views of Marcy, Flowed Lands and Algonquin. There are fine examples of krummholz tamarack near the summit that turns a lovely yellow in the fall.

Continuing over the mountain, the trail follows some open rock that lies above steep slides down to Colder. Take care here and beware this may not be a safe route when the rock is covered in ice or snow. By mile 7.7 the trail is much tamer and passes through



Sunrise in North Elba



Lake Arnold



On Colden above the snow

split rocks.

The descent remains generally steep until the trail turns to follow a ravine at mile 8.3. The trail reaches the trail along Lake Colden at mile 8.9. Our route turns right, skirting Lake Colden for a while and reaches the junction at the far side of the lake at mile 9.4. The route gets to Avalanche Lake at mile 9.7 and the next half mile is packed full of dramatic views of the cliffs of Avalanche Mountain, the lake and the incredible rock on Mt Colden. By mile 10.7 the route reaches Avalanche Pass and the trail descends to the junction with the trail to Lake Arnold used earlier (mile 11.3). From here it retraces earlier steps to Marcy Dam at mile 12.5, the register at mile 15.2 and the road at mile 15.4.



Marcy Dam Reflection