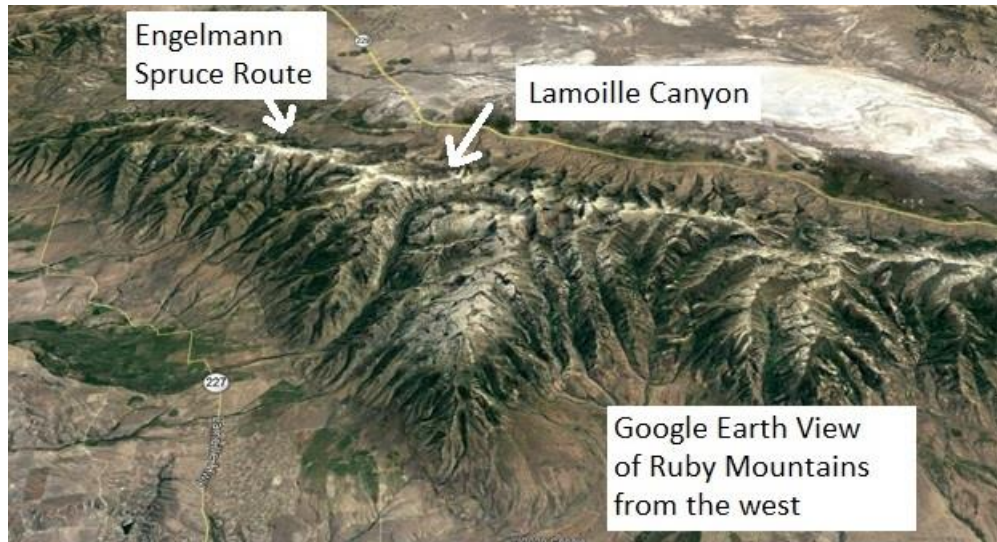


Ruby Mountain Hikes

Ruby Crest Trail

Two trails are described here, one little known one and one more popular one in a state that isn't known for an excess of popular wilderness areas, although the Ruby Mountains Wilderness area is the most well-known one in the state. Its elevation and position in the storm track give it more precipitation than most Nevada ranges. This produces more lakes and verdant forests than the typical Nevada range, and has prompted some to call it the Alps of Nevada.



The first one is a well-traveled one that begins at the end of a nice, paved road not far out of the town of Elko, Nevada. The road travels through the beautiful, glacier-scoured Lamoille canyon up to the 8,800 feet high Ruby Crest trailhead.

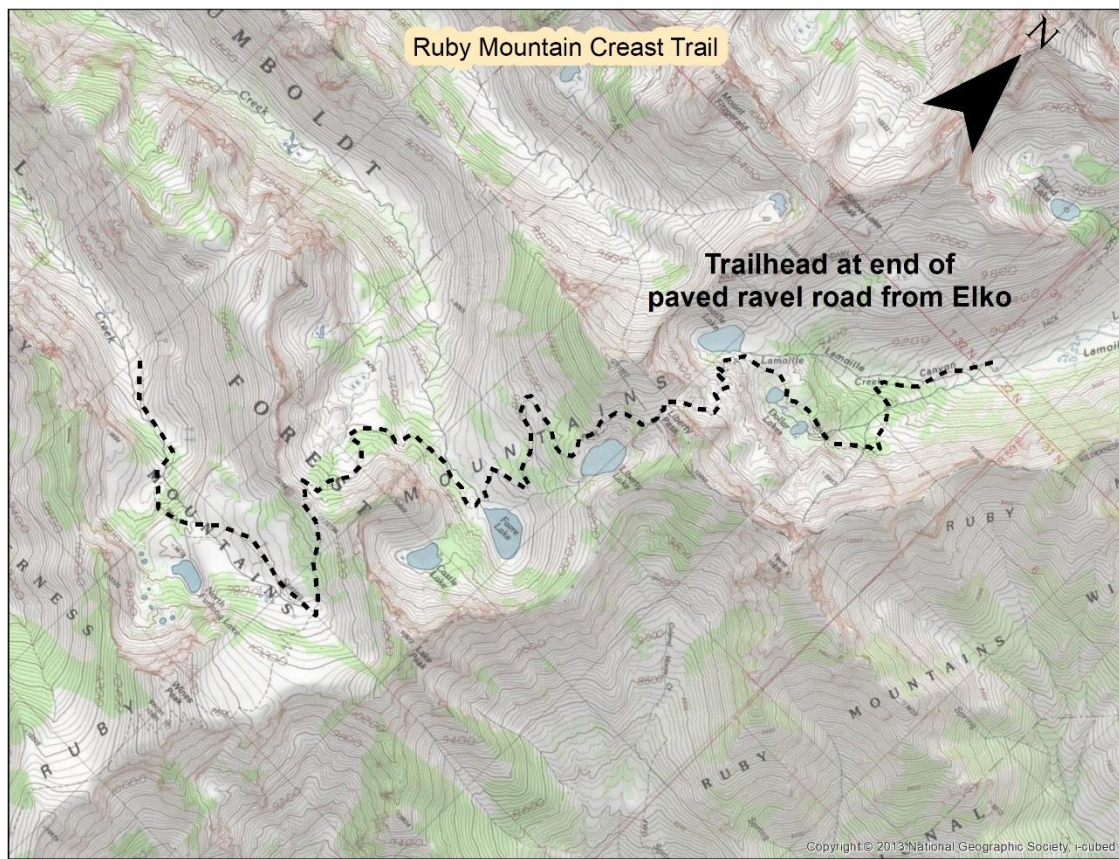


Lamoille Canyon

This trip was decades ago with my best friend Glenn. We trudged up a rather steep ascent from the trailhead, passing by Liberty Lake which sat in a granitic cirque, then ascended again to another gem, Favre Lake, where we spent the night. The next morning we climbed even further, passing through small groves of whitebark pines. We passed by North Furlong lake when the heavens erupted with a commonly expected afternoon thunderstorm. We headed west down North Furlong Creek Canyon, when we spotted a cave on the north slope, big enough to hold our tent and provide a space to sit out the storm. It actually had a small spring at the back of the cave which, along with a few dry branches afforded everything we would need for the night.

We returned after a few days, picking along the same route, more or less. When we returned to the car, we noticed that the road was undergoing a major repair, and our route out was impassable. But benefitting from true Nevada hospitality, one of the construction staff plowed the way back to the paved road, a distance of at least a few miles, as we followed in Glenn's VW bug.

This first trip of the two in this article is a little lean on details, well, because it happened fifty years ago. But that shouldn't dissuade someone from undertaking this trip, as it truly is a remarkable hike, quite unlike many of the ones you might find in the state. It has the greatest concentration of alpine lakes in the state. Its incredible vistas, from the granitic ridges and ledges are awe-inspiring.



Engelmann Spruce Trail

The second hike started a lot more recently (2011), and at a little used trailhead further north. The goal of this journey was to accurately locate and map a very disjunct population of Engelmann spruce known to be in the general area. This data gathering effort was part of a larger Nevada conifer project¹. I was joined by my retired Park Service Ranger cousin, Pat. Access to the Soldier Creek Trailhead was by a series of roads out of Elko, Nevada starting with State Route 229, then County Road 703 where the asphalt road turns to gravel. This road meets up with Soldier Creek Road #335 that leads to the trailhead.

The hike began on a well-maintained trail and ambled up a gentle grade until it ended near a trout-filled Robinson Lake. We turned north on a well-marked trail a little north of Robinson Lake, and headed upslope to Hidden Lakes. Robinson Lake was very exposed and not conducive to decent camping. The Hidden Lakes weren't all that hidden, but were surrounded by an agreeable woodland of whitebark pine, limber pine, and common juniper. The lake had been previously reported full of trout, but I saw none. I think the lake was subject to a very cold winter kill.

The next day we headed back towards Robinson Lake, then turned southwest, cross-country, up a pretty steep grade to the spine of the Rubies, and down the other side, and sloped towards Cold Lakes.



This view, looking northeast, was up the ridge from Soldier Lake, which is on the far left



Soldier Lake

Cold Lakes can also be reached from the north, but the trail appeared to be unmaintained. The lakes offered very nice campsites, but we were there just for a lunch break. These lakes provided the best fishing I have ever experienced. The eastern brook trout averaged about a pound each and were ravenous and bit at everything. The trail to it would be well worth the tough hike for most fisherman. We headed south up a very steep slope. The route should be classified as a technical one, as we had to use our hands most of the way up.



From the top, looking back toward Cold Lakes

We kept on our southern trajectory, keeping close to the ridge. We had to skirt a few basins before approaching our destination of Thorpe Canyon and the reclusive Engelmann spruce.



We are still on the spine of the Rubies, Thorpe Canyon is in the top center



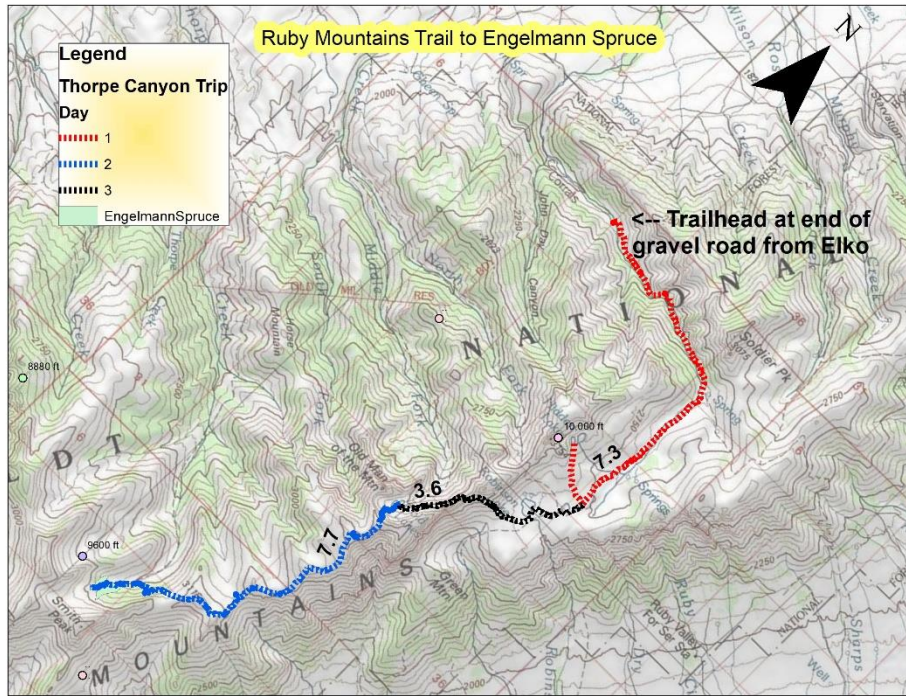
This picture is of the spruce (dark patch a little right of center)

We tried to stay at the same elevation as we approached the grove to avoid climbing again to reach our destination, but were forced down a bit by steep granite rocks. We were greeted by a very lush area with a dense group of primarily Engelmann spruce. You can see my cousin below giving a perspective on the spruce's height, as she stood in a very dense collection of green brush that included willow. We had two days of on and off again rain, sometimes rather heavy, that paid testament to the estimated 40 or more inches of annual precipitation that find the upper parts of the Rubies.

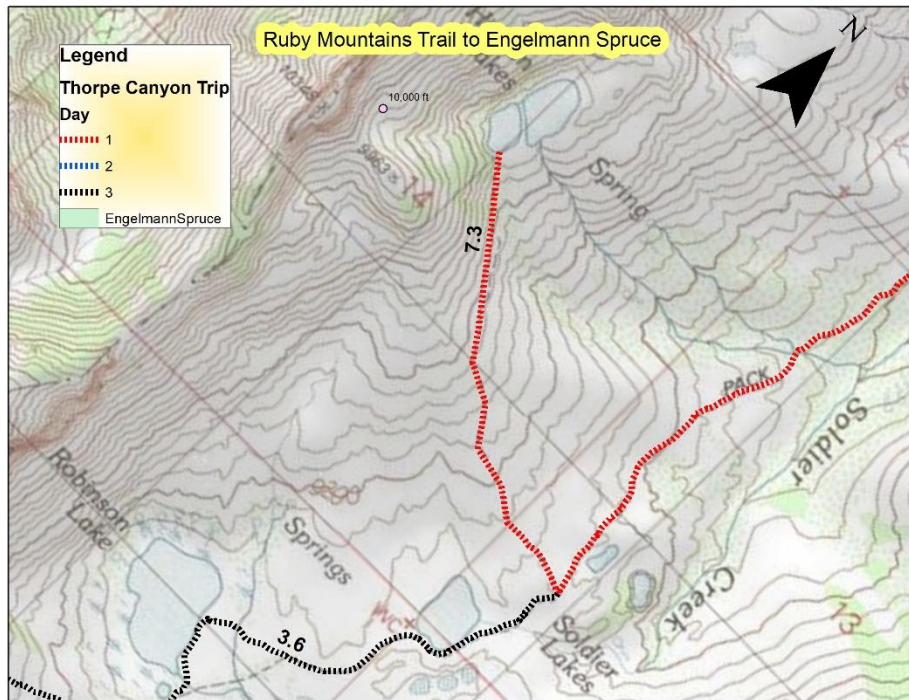


We collected the latitude and longitude of the outer perimeter trees to give the full coverage of the spruce. We also established that the location of the tree as previously reported was off by at least a mile.

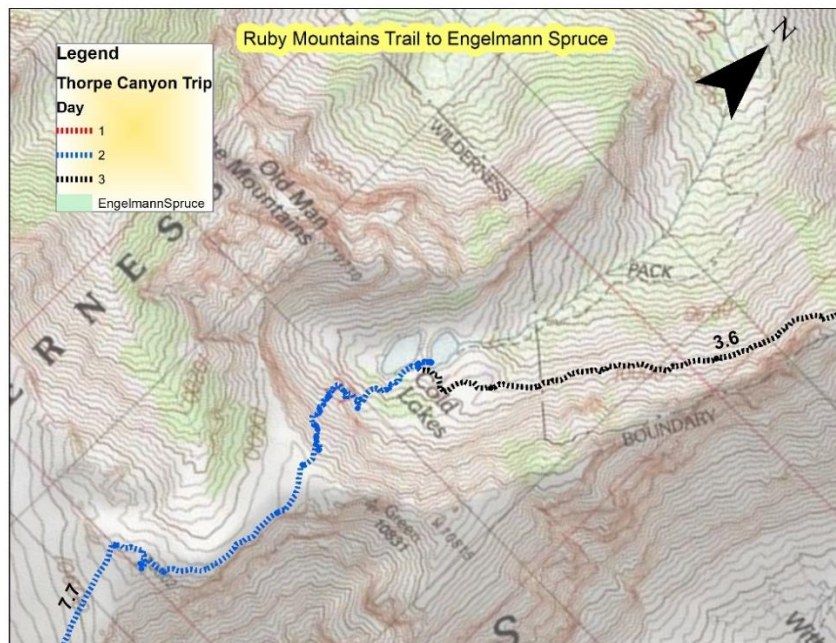
After the enjoyable, although wet stay, we headed back the same way to get to the trailhead. To add a little pleasure to the return trip (which sometimes can be anti-climactic) we were greeted by a very white mountain goat nibbling on the scarce vegetation on the dry ridgeline.



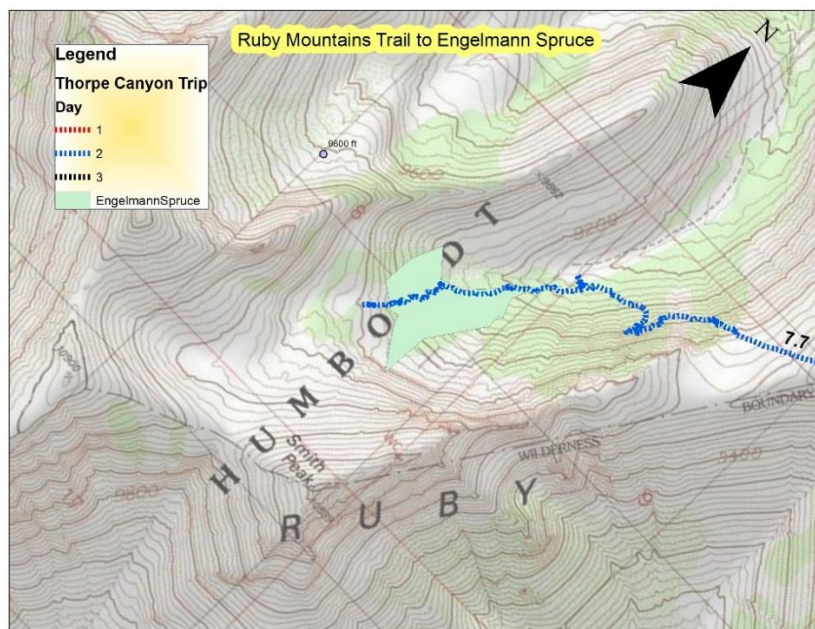
Engelmann Spruce Trail



Hidden Lakes portion



Cold Lakes portion



Thorpe Canyon portion

¹This project is an exhaustive collection of conifer locations conducted by David Charlet. He has written two books to this end: *Conifers of Nevada*, and *Mountains of Nevada*.

All photos and maps by Bob Earle