

Orchid Walks #2A and #2B: Lost Lake Trail and Lost Falls Trail from Roosevelt Lodge

This is the best place in Yellowstone to see Fairy Slippers (*Calypso bulbosa*), the rock star of the western orchid world. Enjoy the “Old West” ambiance of Roosevelt Lodge, walk through old growth Douglas Fir forest (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), count over 150 tree rings in a stump, and meander up a cool valley to a secluded waterfall.

Kids will like: The fragrance of the Fairy Slippers will make a big contrast to the fragrance of the Wild Onions that you can also find on this trail. If you go to Lost Lake, kids will like looking for ducks, and the Uinta ground squirrels popping out of their burrows. If you go to the waterfall, they’ll love that. And see how many tree rings they can count in the big Douglas Fir stump near the trail to Lost Lake.

Visitor Center/Ranger Station: The ranger station is on the Grand Loop Road just west of the recycling/restroom/gas station area at Tower Junction.

Orchid species: Fairy Slipper (*Calypso bulbosa*), and Yellow Coralroot (*Corallorhiza trifida*)

Best time for blooms: Late May to mid-June (both Fairy Slippers and Yellow Coralroots). Seed pods visible other times.

GPS: Trailhead for both walks, N44° 54.723' W110° 25.042' at 6380 ft

Other interesting flowers: In July look for tall stalks with the odd-shaped, dark blue flowers of Monk’s Hood (*Aconitum columbianum*). When the Fairy Slippers are blooming, you can usually find the dark red blossom of the Short-styled Onion (*Allium brevistylum*). These smell like onions. Look in shady, moist, mossy spots for the evergreen leaves and white, pink or green blossoms of three different species of Wintergreen (*Pyrola asarifolia*, *P. chlorantha*, and *P. secunda*).

Orchid Walk #2A: Hundreds of Fairy Slippers en Route to Lost Lake

Round trip distance: Minimum 1 1/4 miles to orchids. Lost Lake round trip: approximately 2 miles. Up to 3 1/2 miles for the Petrified Tree loop.

Elevation gain: Minimum 300 ft. gain to orchids (6660 ft elev.), 350 ft gain (6720 ft elev.) to Lost Lake.

Time: 45 minutes to 2 1/2 hours.

GPS:

- Fairy slippers (*Calypso bulbosa*), N44° 54.695' W110° 25.269', and other places
- Yellow coralroot (*Corallorhiza trifida*), N44° 54.681' W110° 25.319', below the trail in deep moss

Other interesting plants: Look for the dark red blossoms of Wild Onions (*Allium brevistylum*). Also, you can find Franklin's Phacelia (*Phacelia franklinii*), a beautiful blue flower that has very hairy leaves.

Other attractions: Lost Lake, an old growth Douglas fir forest, and a Petrified Tree in a cage.

Let's Get Moving!

The trailhead is behind Roosevelt Lodge. To find it, face the Lodge and go to the left toward the rear between the Lodge and cabins. You'll pass the doors to the Lodge restrooms on your right. There is a confusing array of informal trails, but follow one of these and you should see a large trailhead sign near Lost Falls Creek. Read the trail sign, and look at the map.

To go toward Lost Lake, head to your right (downstream) and cross the creek on a footbridge. After the bridge the trail is very clear. Along the trail, notice the giant Douglas fir trees (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*). There are some dead trees that have been cut out of the trail, giving you the chance to count the tree rings – 150 to 200 years? Also, see how the widths of the tree rings vary quite a bit? The narrow tree rings correspond to periods of drought and the wider rings to years of higher precipitation.

Once the trail starts uphill, immediately start looking for Fairy Slippers. Usually I see these orchids on the uphill side of the trail, sometimes almost on the trail. There are very large colonies here. It seems like there are plenty, but **Don't Pick**. And **watch where you put your feet**. Try the "sniff test" on one that's close to the trail. The fragrance of these orchids is unique and pleasant. Also note whether the lip is mostly pink or mostly white – I've seen both white and pink-lipped blossoms here.

As you gain elevation the Fairy Slippers become even more numerous. They extend all the way up to where the trail starts to cross a slight draw. Just below that point, downhill from the trail in deep moss, look for the Yellow Coralroots (*Corallorhiza trifida*). There are a few large clumps of them. Sometimes you'll see only the seedpods from last year, standing about 6 inches above the moss like dead sticks. Coralroots don't have green leaves. They are 'saprophytic', taking nutrients from fungi and bacteria in the soil rather than making nutrients by photosynthesis using the sun.

Historical orchid sightings. Records show Fairy Slippers (*Calypso bulbosa*) blooming near Tower Junction since at least 1952.¹ Although I found no Yellowstone collections of Yellow Coralroots (*Corallorhiza trifida*) in the online herbarium records, Tweedy's 1886 book says the Yellow Coralroots are common in moist woods in Yellowstone. He says these were found near Swan Lake, Gibbon Meadows, and Lewis Lake. So if you go to those places, keep your eyes peeled for orchids.

Keep Going or Turn Around?

From where the trail crosses a small draw it is only a short walk to Lost Lake, and you've already climbed up most of the elevation gain. Options after finding the orchids: 1) if you're tired, go back to the trailhead, enjoying the orchids again on the way down, 2) go back to the trailhead, then take Walk #2B to Lost Creek Falls from the same trailhead, 3) continue to Lost Lake, enjoy its serene ambiance, then turn around, 4) leave a second car or arrange a pickup at the Petrified Tree, and 5) hike the loop past Lost Lake, down to Petrified Tree, and back through the woods to Roosevelt. Lots of options!

Lost Lake is shallow, and there are often a few waterfowl paddling its waters. There is a fine colony of the dark blue blooming Larkspur (*Delphinium* species) uphill from the lake in dry areas. Yellow Pond Lilies (*Nuphar polysepalum*) grow in the lake itself. In wet areas on the west end of the lake you can find Silverweed (*Potentilla anserina*), while in the drier areas there will be Elk Thistle (*Cirsium scariosum*) and Prairie Smoke (*Geum triflorum*). The meadow at the west end of Lost Lake has an amazing floral display in late June and early July. Also, the ground squirrels will stand upright in the entrances to their burrows to keep an eye on you. You might see these burrow-builders chomping down some lovely wildflowers.

Whatever option you choose, back at Roosevelt Lodge you can take in the "Old West" atmosphere, and relax with your friends in front of the massive fireplace or on the front porch.

¹ Idaho State University Herbarium, accessed in Consortium of Pacific Northwest Herbaria, <http://www.pnwherbaria.org/index.php>

Walk #2B: Fairy Slippers and Coralroots en Route to Lost Creek Falls

See Fairy Slippers and Yellow Coralroots in a shady cool valley that ends in a waterfall. This trail has the same orchid species as Walk #2A, but follows Lost Creek to Lost Creek Falls. Here the orchids are much harder to find, but the walk is shorter, cool on a hot day, and the elevation gain is less.

Kids will like: The deep moss along the trail, and the waterfall.

Round trip distance: Approximately 2/3 of a mile

Elevation gain: Approximately 250 ft, 6380 ft at trailhead to 6640 ft at the falls.

GPS:

- Fairy slippers (*Calypso bulbosa*), N44° 54.630' W110° 25.143', N44° 54.680' W110° 25.083'
- Yellow Coralroots (*Corallorhiza trifida*), N44° 54.695' W110° 25.077', under other plants in moss.

Other interesting plants: Look in the dark and damp spots for Wintergreen species with their whorl of evergreen leaves and pink or white blossoms (*Pyrola* sp. at least two kinds).

Thimbleberry (*Rubus parviflorus*) grows along the trail. It is a relative of raspberries, and it has huge leaves with white blossoms in June and edible red berries in August.

Let's Get Moving!

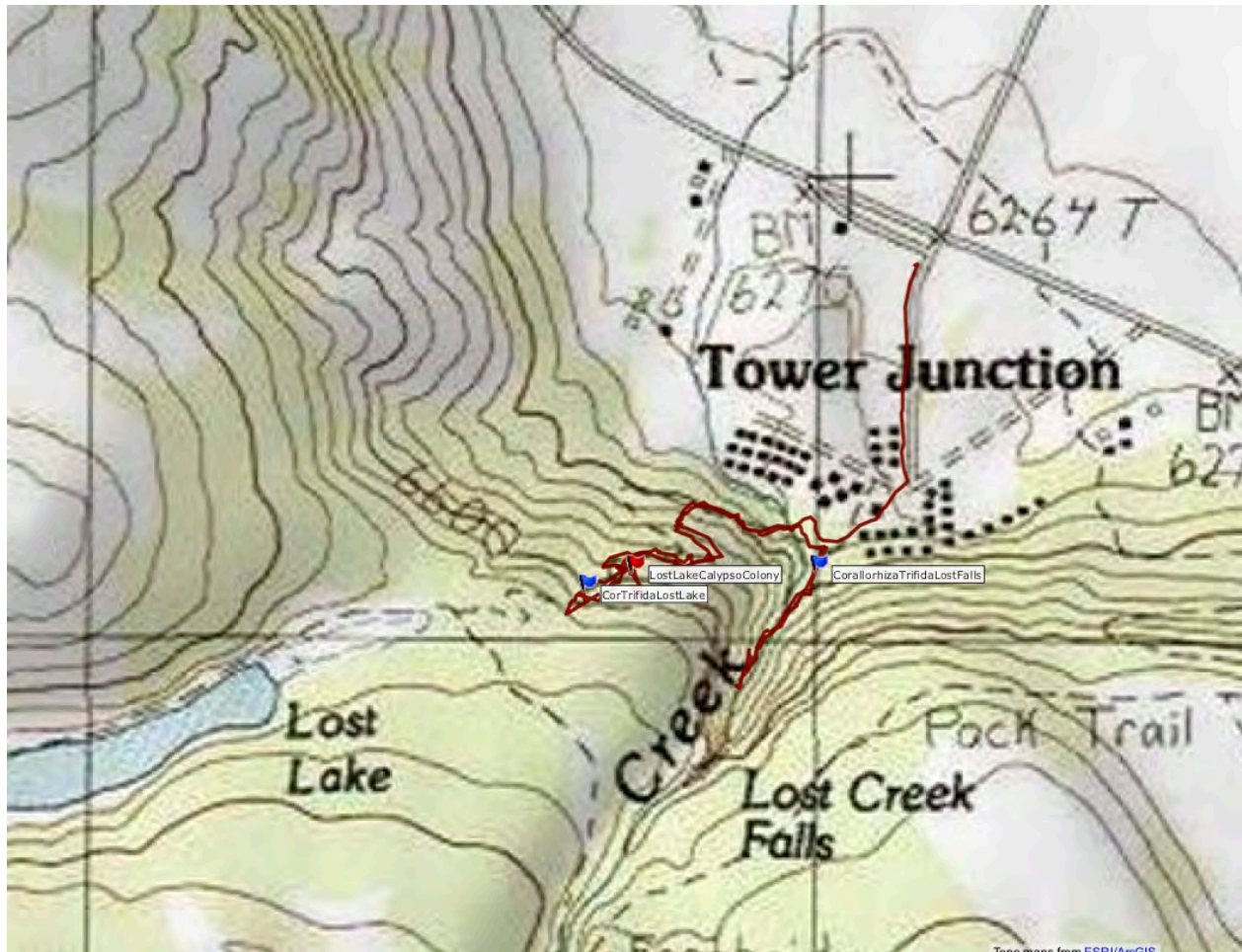
Start behind Roosevelt Lodge from the same trailhead as Walk #2A. Read the trail sign and check the map. For this walk, go left at the trailhead sign, and don't cross Lost Creek. This trail is much bushier and damper than the trail to Lost Lake. The trail goes straight upstream (south) along the creek to a nice view of Lost Creek Falls. But en route, we're after orchids. Immediately start looking to the left of the trail under the brush, especially if there is moss. In 2014, I found a couple of Yellow Coralroots (*Corallorhiza trifida*) only about 25 yards from the trailhead. They were really hiding under taller plants because they like the shade. Also, there are Fairy Slippers (*Calypso bulbosa*) along here in the moss on your left, back from the trail 5 to 10 yards or so. Use your zoom lens to avoid trampling the moss and flowers. I've only seen Fairy Slippers here in ones or twos, not the huge colonies that are on the Lost Lake trail.

Keep Going or Turn Around?

After searching for orchids and enjoying this secret, shady valley, continue to Lost Creek Falls. Depending on the season, this 50 foot waterfall is either ethereal and wispy or a robust and powerful cascade.

After viewing the waterfalls, enjoying the wildflowers, and swatting some mosquitos, it is probably time to sit in one of those rockers on the porch at Roosevelt Lodge.

Map of Lost Lake and Lost Falls Area



(Map created in <http://www.GPSVisualizer.com> from data recorded personally by me.)

Fairy slipper (*Calypso bulbosa*)

Large Colony



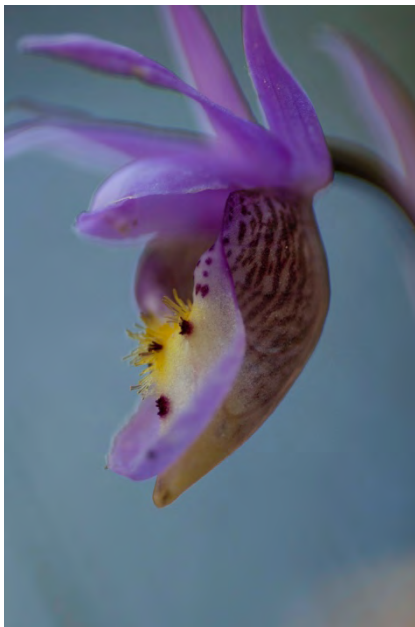
June 14, 2015 Lost Lake Trail

Single plant in context



June 12, 2015 Elephant Back Trail

Blossom detail



June 15, 2013
Trout Lake

Wilting Colony



June 26, 2014
Lost Lake Trail

Yellow Coralroot (*Corallorhiza trifida*)

Plants in context



June 14, 2015 Lost Lake Trail

Plants



June 14, 2015 Lost Lake Trail

Blossom detail



June 14, 2015 Lost Lake Trail

Previous Year Seed Pods



May 30, 2015 Lost Lake Trail