

Trailheads (THs) for Hikes in the National Forest near Glen Haven
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INTRODUCTION

"The mountains don't care." Not only are slips, storms, falling rock, and other mishaps inevitable, when those woes come during a hike, help may not come. You will meet few folks on most of these hikes. Let responsible people know where you go and when you return. Be prepared to spend the night. Guidebooks tell more.

In these notes EASY means a wide trail, often an old road, with few if any steep sections. MODERATE means a trail which an agile horse could traverse even on its steep parts. DIFFICULT can be off trail routes which might require using hands for balance. However, no hike is difficult in the rock climbing sense. People can use hiking sticks on all of these routes. A chart at the end of the pamphlet summarizes the hikes.

Directions are from Estes Park. All distances are approximate. Road, trail, bushwhack correlates generally, but not precisely, with EASY, MODERATE, and HARD. The maps are printed from TOPO! software available at www.topo.com. Using that software to print a map of an intended route is useful preparation for a hike. However most of the hikes east of Estes are on the Geological Survey's Glen Haven quad, available in stores. Names in quotation marks are not on Geological Survey maps. Trailheads (THs) with an asterisk (*) have fuller descriptions in published guidebooks. Trailheads with a hatchmark (#) hold snow longer than the others. Optional SIDE TRIPS are noted separately in the text and chart. THROUGH TRIPS require vehicles at start and finish.

Although I ALWAYS carry a compass, I rarely consult it. On most of these hikes the specific direction of the trail may not be the general direction that the route takes. While writing these instructions and consulting maps I have discovered errors in my sense of specific directions. If your compass reading differs from the stated direction please let me know.

Unless you demur I may acknowledge your help in the next version of these descriptions. I invite other suggestions you may have. I hope to be able to answer your questions and criticisms. Jim Disney has not stinted in offering suggestions. I thank him.

Paula Edwards has joined me on these and many other hikes. Without her inspiration I would probably be a 300 pound couch potato with a remote control device grafted into my hand.

This guide describes seven trailheads (THs) off Devils gulch Road (DGR). Since some trailheads have more than one hike, these notes describe more than seven trips.

These trailheads are on or near Devils Gulch Road (DGR), the paved county road between Estes Park and Drake. It starts as McGregor Avenue by the police station in Estes Park. When McGregor crosses Bypass Highway 34 three tenths of a mile north of the Municipal Building it becomes DGR. In about a mile it passes McGregor Ranch, in another mile Gem Lake TH, and at mile 4, the road to McGraw Ranch. These three trailheads enter Rocky Mountain National Park (RMNP). In another mile the road drops steeply down toward Glen Haven.

Note your mileage to the nearest tenth of a mile or set your car odometer to 0.0 at the lowest switchback of the double pair of switchbacks.

3 TRANSFORMERS - moderate

Two tenths mile east, down from the lowest switchback on the Devil's Gulch Road is an unofficial trailhead. Park on the right side of the road (southside) in a wide pullout, big enough for several cars. Across the road is a set of electric poles with three gray-white transformers in their crossbars. Go down across an abandoned side road and north across the drainage beside the road. Then contour northeast to find a scratch trail which heads north up a small gully about 150 yards from where you parked. This is a public gateway to a vale of Forest Service land.

The scratch trail climbs up to the northwest less than half a mile and less than 300 vertical feet.

You'll turn the ridge about 80 feet above a small saddle leading north to an obvious rock summit (disrecommended because it requires the agility and audacity of teenagers). The scratch trail continues west and meets an unmaintained trail coming up from the right, from that saddle. The trail is obvious, even in winter because off the trail is so much brush

After 300 yards or so of up and mostly down scrambling, including detours where deadfall was not cleared, the rough trail meets the rising drainage. Call this place "trail crossing". From here a disused horse trail climbs up a gentle valley half a mile to a satisfying destination, a saddle east of Cow Creek. Private property is below about 1/4 mile further on this old horse trail/old road. To the right (north), up 300 vertical feet, the steep ridge between this unnamed drainage and West Creek gives satisfying views of West Creek, Fox Creek drainage and Bulwark ridge. To the left one could contour less than 1/2 mile SE to a narrower drainage that leads up SW to another higher saddle or down NE back to "trail crossing".

Return on the scratch trail. Private land on the ridge top to the south stops public access. North from trail crossing down the drainage into West Creek leads to private land, where even an irate landowner would be nothing in comparison to the horrible bushwhack.

Hardy hikers may continue west about a quarter mile to Cow Creek. There turn right on a horse trail and descend Cow Creek to its mouth on West Creek. Four crossings of Cow Creek (not easy to stay dry in high water season) bring you to a ford (or log hop) over West Creek.

WEST CREEK - easy

Both sides of Devil's Gulch Road (DGR) below "three transformers trailhead" are private land to beyond Glen Haven. We have been politely welcomed by homeowners as we WALK up the West Creek road into what is now Forest Service land. That road begins .7 miles below the three transformers. But there is no place to park. So find West Creek Road then find a satisfactory pull out along Devils Gulch Road (DGR) to park. The right (south) side of the road .3 miles below West Creek Road is one place to park.

West Creek Road on the left side of DGR leads west and down. In the summer a white pipe gate is locked to all but residents' vehicles. The road continues west past summer cabins and year round homes. It crosses West Creek and passes more houses as it enters the West Creek narrows. Beyond are scattered summer homes. After 3/4 mile a locked gate marks the beginning of forest service land, once private, but traded back to the government. 200 yards further, after the road crosses to the south side of the creek, beaver workings on the right flooded a footbridge and former private improvements. Beyond here a double wide culvert is intermittently eroded, making the road impassable. A twisty quarter mile further a small barn on the left and beyond a falling house and garage mark a summer home where this author was a guest in the late 1950s. Beyond that the road turns right up the hill to a secluded modern home now federal property.

Where the road turns north an unmaintained trail continues west. In 200 yards find a sloping ten foot waterfall. A little further the unmaintained trail twice crosses the creek on iffy log bridges and winds for a hard mile until it reaches the mouth of Cow Creek, hidden in the brush. Use the shape of the canyon walls to guess where Cow Creek enters West Creek. 100 yards further a ford to the south shows where the Cow Creek TRAIL joins this West Creek Trail. 200 yards further, over a "crow hop" where the trail climbs to avoid a narrowing of West Creek is a trail coming in from the right. Our West Creek Trail is maintained by volunteers above this side trail. From that junction it is a long mile to the N/S trending Boundary Trail and from there a short mile west along West Creek Trail to seldom visited West Creek Falls. Of course the more prudent of us turned around when the road turned into trail.

SIDE TRIP, FOX CREEK ROAD - moderate A Larimer County trail comes over the ridge from Fox Creek to the north and joins West Creek at the two mile mark where West Creek trail maintenance starts. For a mile this horse trail climbs and traverses the south side and descends the north side of the 350-foot-high ridge. (a nearly obliterated old trail goes atop the ridge and accesses one of the finest rock summits found here or anywhere) The horse trail emerges near Cheley Camp

at the end of Fox Creek Road, which has no public parking. It is one and a half miles from there to Glen Haven and another two miles back to parking near West Creek trailhead. So the total of this loop trip would be close to 7 miles.

SIDE TRIP, FOX CREEK FALLS - difficult The boundary trail joins West Creek Trail on the left about three and a half miles up from DGR. Its 700 foot high crossing of Sheep Mountain east ridge from McGraw (Indian Head) Ranch (part of RMNP) is a shorter but steeper route to this point on West Creek. After three hundred yards of shared trail, the Boundary Trail veers north up the hill away from West Creek. It climbs six tenths of a mile and 600 vertical feet to a wide ridgeline. Then it drops 120 vertical feet in three tenths of a mile to Fox Creek. Boundary Trail enters RMNP 200 yards further on. Turn right on a faint scratch trail down the left (north) bank of Fox Creek. In about 180 yards find a two foot fall across sloping slick rock. Cautiously scramble to the bottom of that rock, cross the creek and work down another 100 yards to the higher set of falls below. These are Fox Creek Falls.

TRIANGLE MOUNTAIN - difficult (the first 50 yards up 100 vertical feet) then moderate

Drive about two miles east of (down from) Glen Haven on the Devils Gulch Road. Pass "Glen Haven Picnic Ground and park at "North Fork Picnic Ground" on the right side (east side) of the road. Find a steep scratch trail on the opposite (west) side of the road. Scramble up and slightly left for less than 50 yards. Here you find that the scratch trail turns right and follows the ridgeline first NW in a shallow climb. When the ridge levels out in a broad saddle follow the scratch trail first to the right, then left across the SE facing hillside. The ridge temporarily broadens so that the trail has a tendency to braid and is not on any arete. Note landmarks here to use on the descent. But above that bulge the trail becomes less steep and offers views both north and south. When rocky prominences block the path from staying on the ridgeline, passage is usually to the left (the south).

The view to the north beyond Dunraven Glade, beyond the east extension of Bulwark Ridge, and beyond Miller Creek is the long ridge from the Signal Mountains to Storm Mountain on the east. This ridge defines the north boundary of the Glen Haven area. The rocky high point of that tree covered ridge about a mile east of Donner Pass is a "ranked" but officially unnamed mountain. A former county official has suggested "Homeview", an appropriate name, since this high summit is visible from a lot of homes in Glen Haven and on the plains. To the south survey the gullies on the north side of Crosier Mountain. You may see DGR below.

Hike the long mile and 1200 vertical feet past the false summits to the top of Triangle Mountain. The view to the west up the valley of the North Fork (of Big Thompson) reaches to the Mummy Range. In other directions most of the routes off Devils Gulch Road are discernible. It is safer, if not easier, if you scramble the last few yards to the summit from the north.

A long established lightly used scrambling route comes to the summit from the NW ridge, but it has tricky route finding and must cross a point where two corners of private land touch. Residents of Glen Haven approach the summit on the broad ridge to the south through private land. So, in the absence of previous arrangements and knowledge, descend the ridge you climbed.

DUNRAVEN TRAILHEAD* - easy (North Fork of the Big Thompson River)

About 2 miles east of Glen Haven on the twisty "Devils Gulch" road is a junction usually marked with "house for sale" signs. This turn to the north crosses a cement county bridge and curves left toward the northwest. A large forest service parking lot with modern pit toilets is at the west end of this two mile gravel road. This is Dunraven Trailhead. It offers two popular hikes in the National Forest and other hikes not so popular.

Named because it is the old route westward to Lord Dunraven's purported hunting lodge, the "North Fork" trail starts south (sic) from the parking lot. It soon turns west and descends to the river, which it follows for nearly a mile. This course avoids a road walk up and across the saddle east of Cheley Camp. The routing also avoids intruding into the main street of the camp. The trail does hug the creek and passes within pole distance of the camp stables. The first half mile above Cheley Camp is an old road. Three miles from the Dunraven T.H. find a celebrated destination, Lord Dunraven's old hunting camp (also misnamed Deserted Village). Steeper continuation goes past

Forest Service tent sites, up the north side of the valley to the boundary of RMNP at four and a half miles. Forest Service volunteers (more are needed and invited) do minimal trail maintenance in early spring.

SIDE TRIP: LOWER BULWARK RIDGE - moderate A hike with more climbing from this trailhead is Bulwark Ridge. Walk up the road that goes west from the parking lot. After a quarter mile, at the highest point of the road, a forest service sign points northeast to a steep trail which switchbacks to the top of Bulwark Ridge about a mile from the T. H. This waterless trail then ascends the initially gentle ridge two long tranquil miles to the Comanche Peak Wilderness. Here is an excuse to turn around. The trail resumes its steep gravelly nature for the next two miles.

SIDE SIDE TRIP: After a mile, when the Bulwark Ridge trail reaches the ridgeline, a trail junction sign offers Indian Trail for your consideration. Trending north it drops 800 feet in a mile. At the bottom you are on Miller Fork loop. You must climb back unless you have arrangements to meet a vehicle on a private road.

(Two **THROUGH HIKES** starting on the Bulwark Trail over Donner Pass or over the Signal Mountains* have opposite trailheads far from Estes Park. This guide will not provide instructions for either hike. (Phone or email the author for more info and gratuitous advice)

CROSIER MOUNTAIN WEST (also known as Glen Haven Trailhead)* # - moderate

Crosier Mountain has three northside trailheads. The most traveled is the one that starts at Glen Haven just east of the Post Office up a driveway behind the stable. Walk about fifty yards to the sign showing the rocky trail bearing up to the right. A big black friendly labrador (perhaps that's redundant) may come over to say hello and has accompanied selected parties to Crosier summit. This trail climbs generally south a few hundred vertical feet to a broad saddle, drops sixty vertical feet or so to a drainage from Piper Meadows, then climbs a total of more than 2,000 feet and four or five miles to the summit of Crosier Mountain. Once away from Glen Haven, the trail is on public land, but private land, some marked by barbed wire fence, is close by. Piper Meadows, the expanse to the right of the trail about a mile up, is mostly private. An obvious Elk Route crosses the trail at right angles several hundred yards after you reach Piper Meadows. Not far above that, the trail switchbacks east into forest and soon reaches a saddle. There a trail comes up from the Barrow Pit Trailhead. (See the 2d paragraph of "Barrow Pit Trailhead" for the continuation to Crosier summit)

BARROW PIT TRAILHEAD # - moderate

A little over 2 miles east of Glen Haven just beyond the turnoff to Dunraven Trailhead but on the south side of the Devils Gulch Road pavement is the large pullout called the Barrow Pit Trail to Crosier Mountain. The forest Service calls it Rainbow T.H. I call it the Middle T.H. The trail starts at the east side of the parking. Almost immediately it turns right (to avoid private property). The route passes through north facing forests on ridges and in small drainages. After about 1200 vertical feet and 2 miles it meets the Crosier Mountain trail from Glen Haven. 200 yards below the junction of West and Middle Crosier trails is a quick (5 minute) signed side trip to Coyote Point, a panoramic opportunity.

Above the junction of the West and Middle trails, the trail rises two miles and 900 vertical feet through lodgepole pine to a point east of Crosier summit. At the higher trail junction the right hand trail climbs 1/2 mile and 500 steep feet to the summit. The left hand trail goes down to the next trailhead:

CROSIER EAST (GARDEN GROVE) TRAILHEAD - moderate

This forest service trailhead has various names. "Crosier East" seems to me most descriptive. The trailhead is an inconspicuous signed parking pullout for a few cars on the south side of the Devils Gulch Road less than half a mile from where DGR crosses to the south side of the river and the canyon widens into a valley. The trail ascends west then south then east in an arc around an open area which is public land after the first 50 yards or so. (an inconspicuous abandoned trail goes up the fall line and meets the more sensible trail at the top SE corner of the open area) the trail traverses the north facing mountainside and gullies for about a mile.

The trail turns from trending east to trending south. This gentler stretch is 160 vertical feet above the Sullivan Park. The trail continues south then west across a wide open former pasture. Then it climbs south to a ridgeline and a mile west along the head of True Gulch and up to a flat ridgeline. It is nearly four miles from the Garden Grove T.H. to the junction of the trail from Glen Haven/Barrow Pit trailheads mentioned above. (A few hundred yards east of that highest junction, the cairned route from Long Gulch joins this trail from the south. Do not try to descend that unless you have previously come up that way and are sure where to go.)

SIDE TRIP FROM CROSIER EAST TO SULLIVAN PARK - moderate After climbing about a mile the trail rounds a second ridgeline and trends southward. An abandoned homestead lies a quarter mile east and 160 vertical feet below. A remnant of a cabin is near the meeting of the drainage to your east and the drainage from Sullivan Park. A route south from the deteriorated cabin up the drainage through Sullivan Park could take you to the saddle at the top of the trail up Sullivan Gulch from highway 34. This side trip is a longer, mellower route to that saddle than the Sullivan Gulch trail.

THROUGH TRIP: Start at one of the three Crosier Mountain trailheads and finish at another.

I'd like to declare this hiking guide complete. The truth is that every time I take a hike I see others I'd like to try and then add to this guide. Please add yours.