

A Walk along the Colorado Trail by Dave Cooper



Reaching the top of the ridge, with Mount Princeton in the background - small.jpg

Intent on checking out a potential cross country ski tour along a section of the Colorado Trail, we headed out on the last day of November to the Chalk Creek Trailhead, located just west of the Mount Princeton Hot Springs.

Since we had just returned from a climbing trip to Southern California, we were a little out of touch with current snow conditions. Reports of great early-season skiing conditions led us to believe that we might find a snow-covered trail. Alas; as we approached the trailhead it became clear that the skis would stay in the car this day. A mostly dry trail greeted us.

On to Plan B: hike the trail over to Browns Creek, checking out views of the surrounding peaks and scouting

Getting to the Trailhead: Drive to the town of Nathrop on Highway 285, approximately 7 miles south of the town of Buena Vista and 16 miles north of Poncha Springs. On the southern edge of Nathrop, turn west onto Highway 162 (this is also the road to the Mount Princeton Hot Springs). Drive 6.8 miles on Highway 162 to County Road 291. This junction is located directly opposite a very visible information kiosk for Chalk Creek. Turn south (left) onto County Road 291 and drive perhaps 50 yards to the trailhead parking area.

GPS coordinates for the trailhead (NAD83): 38°43'01"N, 106° 12'01"W, 8,396 feet.

Statistics: From the trailhead to the Little Browns Creek trailhead the trail gains 1800 feet and loses 500 feet (to be re-climbed on the way back) in 6.0 miles one way.

Difficulty: An easy trail hike. In winter expect challenging skiing near the beginning of the trail, where steep switchbacks will demand strong downhill skiing techniques.

USGS Quad: Mount Antero, CO.

the trail for a ski tour at a later date. We could hardly complain about the scenery. This trail starts out directly across from Mount Princeton and offers one of the best views of the Chalk Cliffs I've seen, then heads south along the foothills of the Sawatch Range, affording views of another Fourteener, Mount Antero, and neighboring Mount White. Below is the scenic valley of the upper Arkansas River. After an initial climb the trail flattens out, allowing the miles to fly by underfoot. We were struck by the thought that this trail is ideally suited to a host of activities - cross country skiing and snowshoeing in winter, trail running, mountain biking and hiking during the summer months.

Hike Description

From the trailhead, cross the wooden footbridge and head generally southeast on the excellent trail. After one tenth of a mile pass a sign for the Bootleg campsite, and continue to follow the Colorado Trail signs. At mile 0.4 the trail crosses County Road 290, then jogs to the west before heading south up into a small canyon. The trail climbs steeply through switchbacks to the head of the canyon, gaining 800 feet in the next mile. This section would require strong downhill skills if descending on skis.



Easy walking - small.jpg

At mile 1.2 the trail reaches a flat spot on an east-west trending ridge, crossing the high point of this ridge (Point 9332 on the USGS map) before starting a slow descent along the ridge. The views of the Chalk Cliffs along this section are excellent. At the eastern end of the ridge the trail crosses to the south side (stay right at a trail junction) and drops to the flats of Eddy Creek, crossing Forest Service Road 274 at mile 2.4. The trail now contours south through widely-spaced ponderosa pine forest, crossing the Raspberry Gulch Road at mile 3.8 and continuing south until mile 5.0, where it turns west and begins to climb moderately, meeting a trail junction at mile 6.0. At this extremely-well signed junction, the Colorado Trail turns east and starts its descent. Staying straight puts you on the Little Browns Creek Trail, marked by a Forest Service Kiosk and sign in register. The Little Browns Creek Trail offers one way of climbing Mount Antero. This trail junction makes a logical spot to turn around, given the shorter days of late autumn, and

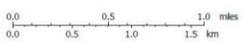
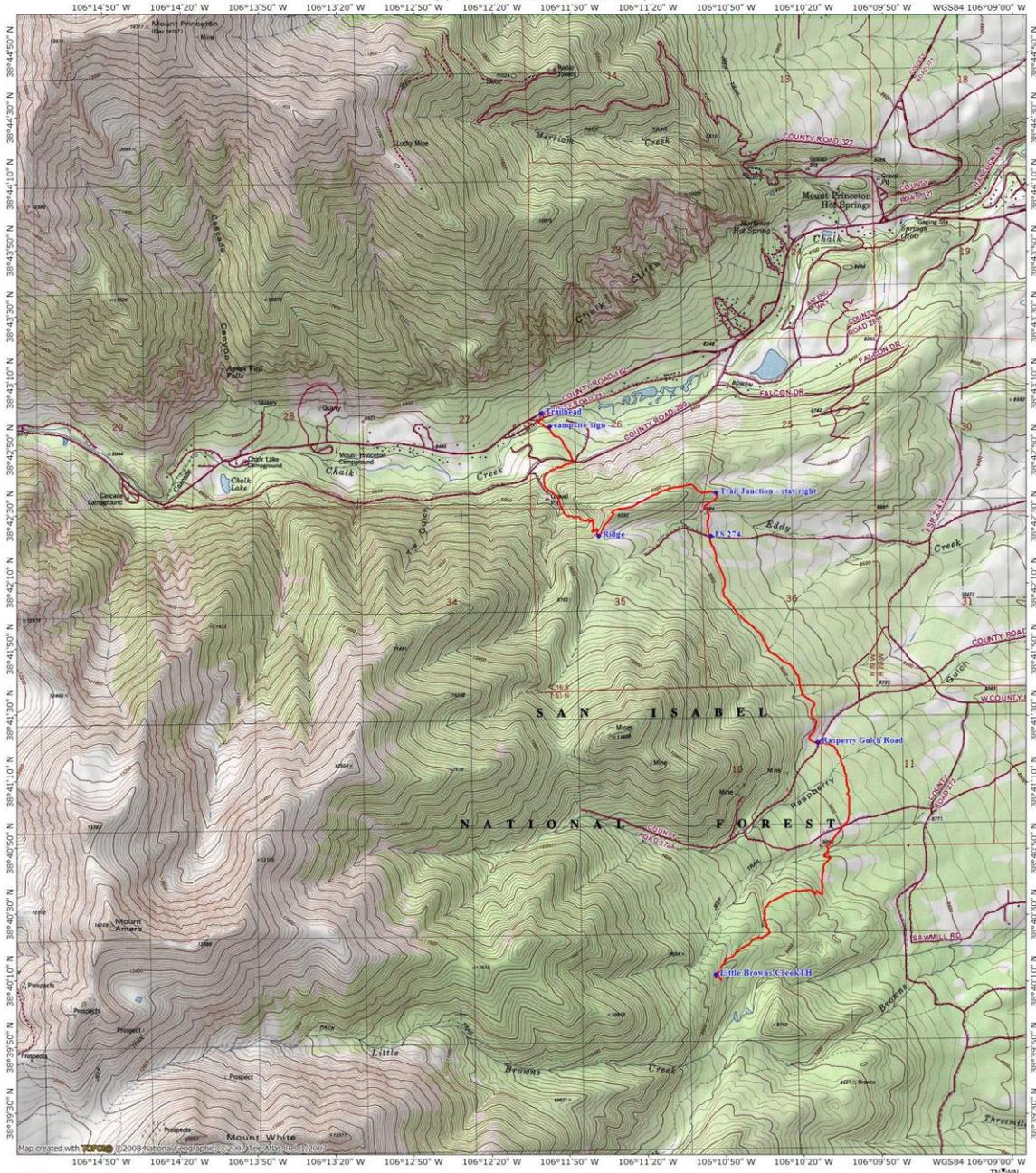
that's what we did, being treated to more good views of Mount Princeton as the shadows lengthened on our way back to the car.

Late afternoon light on the Chalk Cliffs - small.jpg



Mount Princeton- small.jpg

TOPO! map printed on 12/01/10 from "Untitled2.tpo"



12/01/10

- GPS Latitude / Longitude NAD83 (Deg., Min., Sec.)
- Trailhead, 38,43,1,-106,12,1,8396 feet
- campsite sign, 38,42,57,-106,11,58,8445 feet
- Ridge, 38,42,24,-106,11,39,9216 feet
- Trail Junction - stay right, 38,42,37,-106,10,54,9045 feet
- FS 274, 38,42,24,-106,10,56,8924 feet
- Raspberry Gulch Road, 38,41,22,-106,10,15,8924 feet
- Little Browns Creek TH, 38,40,12,-106,10,54,9715 feet

