

“The Alphabetizer” - Lost Creek Wilderness
by Dave Cooper



"Peak X" at right, with Mt. Guyot and Bald Mountain behind

Each time I visit the Lost Creek Wilderness I marvel at the pristine and remote nature of the area, located only about 50 miles from Denver.

This week's hike climbs to four twelve thousand foot summits, unofficially named "Peak X", "Peak Y", "Peak Z" and "Zephyr". In their guidebook to the area, ("Colorado's Lost Creek Wilderness", Fulcrum Press), Gerry and Jennifer Roach refer to this combination of peaks as the "Alphabetizer". They also, with their usual thoroughness, describe extensions and contractions of this outing.

With just a few access trails, including the Colorado Trail, which we will use to get close to the peaks, the area is essentially trailless. Good map and compass skills, plus preferably a GPS, are prerequisites for this hike.

The hike, in addition to providing good exercise, also rewards you with a long, pleasant ridge walk at elevation, the many rock outcroppings along the way offering as much (or as little) fun scrambling as you care for. If you're looking for solitude in a beautiful high alpine environment, this is one hike you should definitely check out.

Hike Description

The hike can be done in either direction, but works well in a counter clockwise direction.

From the parking area, cross to the east side of the stream on a bridge consisting of two railroad ties, just beyond the information sign. Turn left and follow the trail northeast for just less than 0.2 miles to a signed trail junction with the Colorado Trail. The sign doesn't indicate that if you continue straight on (east) you are on the old Hooper Trail. This is the trail we will use on our descent from "Peak X". For now take a sharp right turn on the Colorado Trail and follow it initially southwest. Soon the trail turns back to the east and gently climbs on switchbacks, reaching a gate at the entrance to a large meadow, 1.9 miles from the parking area. Pass through the gate and follow the well-defined trail as it meanders along the left (north) edge of the meadow. Over the next 1.3 miles the trail gradually loses 200 feet, to 10,700 feet. Here, where a small drainage crosses the trail, it is time to leave the trail and head up towards "Zephyr" (Unnamed 12067). Be careful not to head up too soon or you will have to fight your way through endless willows. Instead, look for the point where an aspen grove almost meets the trail. Looking up from here you can see the saddle between "Peak Z" and "Zephyr".

"Zephyr", seen from the Colorado Trail

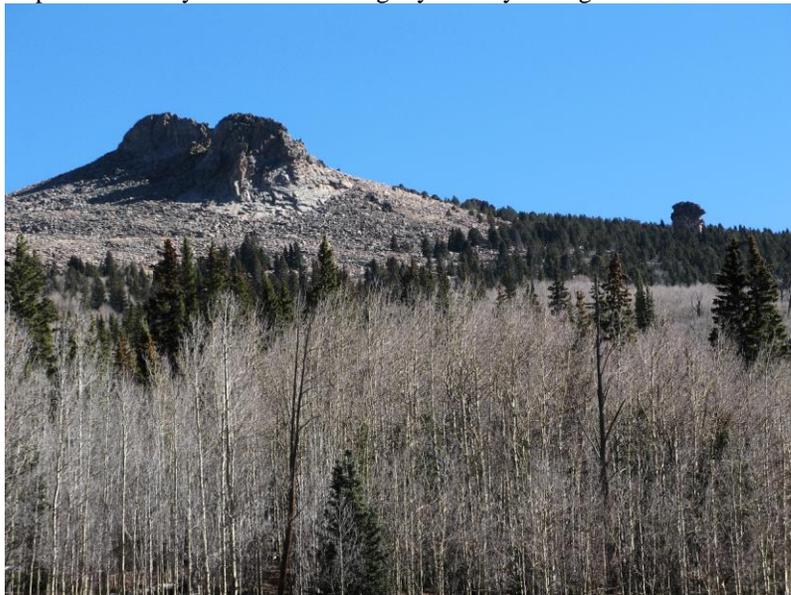
A reasonable way to proceed up "Zephyr" is to pick your way along the margin between the willows and the aspen, sometimes following game

Getting to the Trailhead: From the intersection of US Highway 285 and Park County Road 56 (1.2 miles northeast of the town of Jefferson in South Park), turn east on Park County Road 56, also called the Lost Park Road. Drive 11.0 miles to the intersection with Forest Service Road 817, staying on 56 at each of several intervening intersections. Turn left on FSR817 and drive one tenth of a mile to the parking area. Park County Road 56 (gravel) is normally fine for passenger cars, though the washboard surface will test your suspension system.

Hike Statistics: The round trip gains a total of 3,670 feet of elevation in 9.6 miles.

Difficulty: A strenuous hike, both on and off trail over four summits, all above 12,000 feet. Good map and compass and preferably GPS skills are required. Especially in late autumn and winter this can be a cold, exposed place, so be prepared.

USGS Quad: Topaz Mountain, CO



trails and staying just to the west of “Zephyr’s” southwest ridge.

At 11,500 feet you will reach treeline. Here you have a good view of your route up to the summit, boulder-hopping over the talus. Try to stay on the rocks as much as possible to minimize the impact to the delicate tundra. Heading around to the left side of the peak offers the easiest route. Try to decide which of three rocky outcroppings is the true summit, or climb all three, just to be sure.

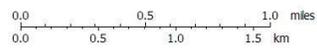
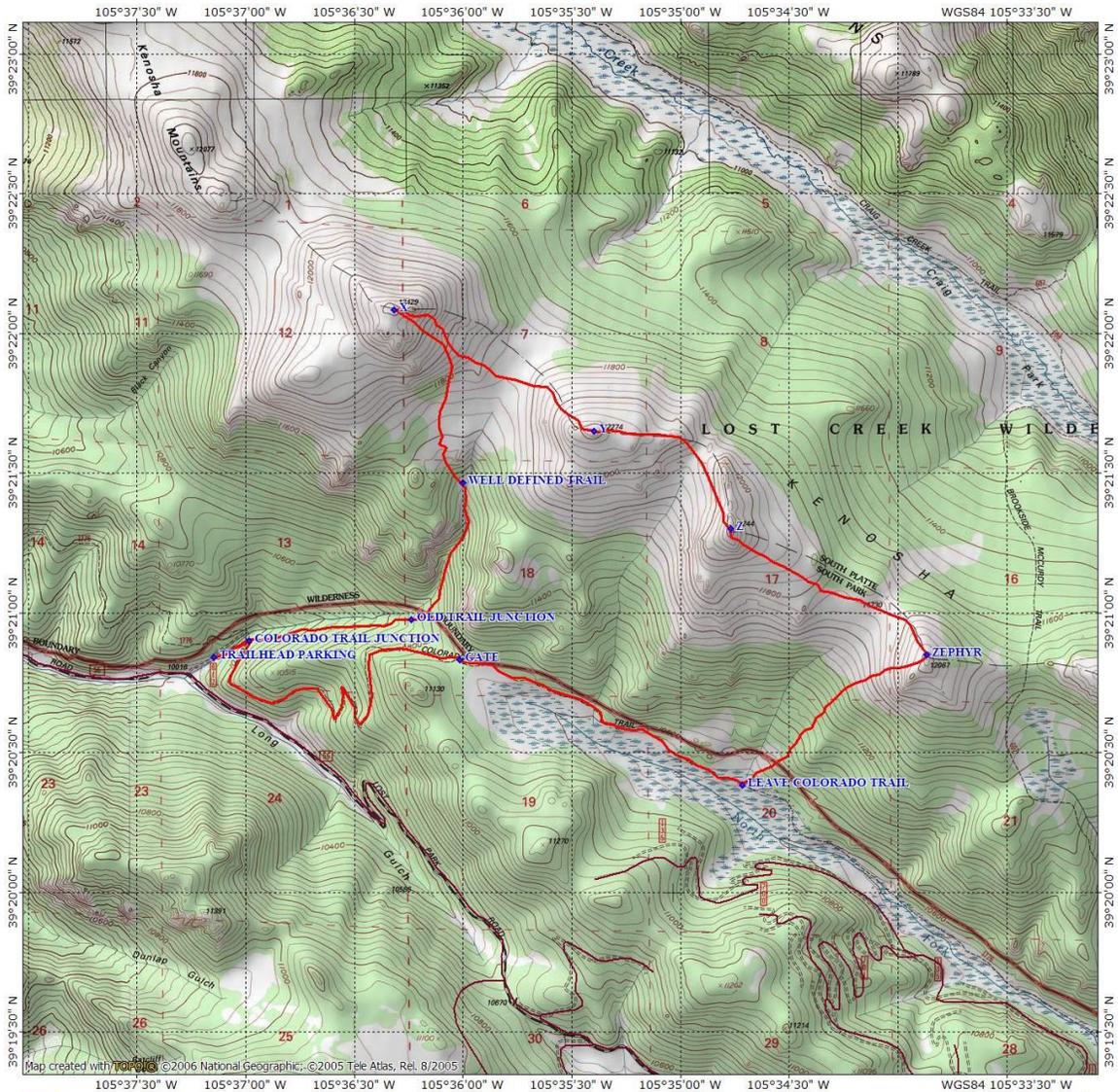
From here it is a simple ridge walk northwest over the other summits, generally dropping down to close to the intervening saddles between the peaks. The next summit, “Peak Z” (Unnamed 12,244), has an interesting boulder at it’s very summit. Can you climb it?

From “Z”, drop down to the saddle between it and “Peak Y” (Unnamed 12,274) and repeat the process until you are on top of “Peak X” (Unnamed 12429), the highest of the four summits. You may even find a faint climbers trail as you approach “Peak X”. As with all of the summits, you can look for an easy way up or challenge yourself with more of a scramble. No summit is more difficult than Class 2 by it’s easiest route, unless you are determined to clamber up the summit boulder on “Peak Z”.

To descend from “Peak X”, head down it’s southeast slopes, aiming for the obvious drainage between “X” and “Y”. Try to skirt around the willows as much as possible, again staying on the margin between the willows and trees. Join a well-defined trail as it crosses the drainage at 11,360 feet and follow the trail as it heads south down the east side of the drainage. Where the drainage turns to the west, you should pick up the Hooper Trail (10,700 feet), not named on the map. Follow the Hooper trail back down to the intersection with the Colorado Trail, then back down the last 0.2 miles to the parking area.



IMG_0038_1-an approaching early season storm



GPS Latitude / Longitude NAD83 (Deg., Min., Sec.)
 TRAILHEAD PARKING: 39,20,50N / 105,37,9W, 10102 feet
 COLORADO TRAIL JUNCTION: 39,20,54N / 105,36,59W, 10161 feet
 GATE: 39,20,50N / 105,36,1W, 10942 feet
 LEAVE COLORADO TRAIL: 39,20,23N / 105,34,43W, 10738 feet
 ZEPHYR: 39,20,51N / 105,33,52W, 12016 feet
 PEAK Z: 39,21,18N / 105,34,46W, 12221 feet
 PEAK X: 39,22,5N / 105,36,19W, 12415 feet
 PEAK Y: 39,21,39N / 105,35,24W, 12251 feet
 WELL DEFINED TRAIL: 39,21,28N / 105,36,0W, 11362 feet
 OLD TRAIL JUNCTION: 39,20,59N / 105,36,14W, 10688 feet



