

Apache Peak

by Dave Cooper



Navajo Peak is at left and Apache Peak is at right in this photo. The narrow finger of snow trending lower right to upper left from the Isabelle Glacier (far right) is the Queens Way Couloir.jpg

Few would argue against the statement that the Indian Peaks Wilderness is one of the most scenic areas in Colorado's mountains. However, some people may feel that the area around Brainard Lake is just too popular.

Venture a little beyond the standard hiking trails though, and you can truly enjoy a wilderness experience in this amazing area.

Getting to the Trailhead: 12.1 miles north of Nederland (0.4 miles north of the turnoff to Ward) on US72, turn left (west) on the road into the Indian Peaks Wilderness. Follow the signs to the Long Lake Trailhead. The Brainard Lake area is a US Fee area.

Hike Statistics: From the Long Lake Trailhead to the summit of Apache Peak (13,441 feet): 3000 feet of total elevation gain in 4.6 miles one way.

Difficulty: A moderate trail hike, followed by snow climbing up to 35 degrees. Above the Queens Way Couloir moderate scrambling on talus slopes takes you to the summit.

Gear: Ice ax, crampons and helmet.

USGS Quad: Monarch Lake, CO; Ward, CO.

This week's outing takes us up one of the rugged summits at the head of the valley containing Long Lake and Lake Isabelle, but by quite a moderate route. Combining a short snow climb with a bit of talus scrambling, the route described here will take you to a spectacular summit surrounded by amazing views.

Especially at this time of year, the snow is transitioning to alpine ice, so crampons will probably be needed to supplement your ice ax. As always in the summer in Colorado, it is necessary to get an early start to ensure that you are off the summits and high ridges before the thunderstorms roll in. The early start has the

added advantage of making it more likely that you will find an available parking spot at the trailhead – not the case later in the day.

Queens Way Couloir-small.jpg

Hike Description

From the parking area, take the trail past Long Lake to Lake Isabelle. Stay straight (left) at the trail junction for Pawnee Pass at mile 2.0. Continue on past Lake Isabelle as the sometimes quite muddy trail wanders west up the St. Vrain Creek drainage to a small unnamed lake at 11,421 feet, 3.5 miles from the trailhead. The route from here depends on the season; in early summer you can head west up moderate snow slopes to the Isabelle Glacier at about 12,100 feet. As these lower slopes melt out, it is better to stay on the Isabelle Glacier Trail, which switchbacks steeply up the hillside to the north of the lake before reaching the glacier. On a hot day, the waterfall next to the trail can provide a refreshing spray on the way down.



Climbing the Queens Way couloir. The Isabelle Glacier can be seen below.jpg



Head southwest on the glacier until you see a finger of snow on your left. This couloir, named Queens Way, continues southwest to provide access to the east shoulder of Apache Peak. Averaging 35 degrees, the couloir gains 500 feet before ending on the shoulder at 13,000 feet.

From the top of the couloir make a rising traverse to the southwest, aiming directly for Apache's summit. Stay to the east of the ridge point 13,270 on Apache's northeast ridge. A faint climbers trail may make this long talus slope a little easier to negotiate.

From the summit you will be treated to great views to the southeast of Navajo Peak and the adjacent Navajo Glacier, and if you look north you can see Lone Eagle Peak and the Fair Glacier. The brilliant blue lake at the foot of the Fair Glacier is Triangle Lake.

To descend, head back to the top of Queens Way and carefully descend to the glacier. While it may be tempting to glissade Queens Way, at this time of year expect to find ice close to the surface of the snow, plus a few rocks sitting on the surface, so it is probably better to walk carefully down. Once on the glacier retrace your steps to pick up the trail again.



