

Bison Peak – Lost Creek Wilderness by Dave Cooper

As the Winter months approach, consider exploring the Lost Creek Wilderness area. Located close to Denver, this area offers excellent hiking (and sometimes snowshoeing) all winter long. Lost Creek is usually accessible year-round and offers good hiking trails with little danger from avalanches. South-facing slopes are often largely snow-free, although on north-facing slopes you may encounter deep snow.

Popularized by Gerry and Jennifer Roach in their guidebook “Colorado’s Lost Creek Wilderness”, this has now become a favorite winter playground for many front range hikers and climbers.

Remember that winter in Colorado’s Mountains should always be taken seriously. Every year we read of hikers, skiers and snowshoers getting in trouble, even in areas considered mellow in the summer months. Be prepared for any eventuality, whether an equipment malfunction or a sudden weather change. Whiteout conditions can easily disorient you and wipe out all trace of your tracks. Carry and know how to use a map and compass. A GPS unit can be indispensable in the wintertime, allowing you to retrace your steps even with poor visibility. Remember to take extra batteries and keep the GPS unit warm (lithium batteries also are preferred in cold weather, since they operate in lower temperatures than alkaline batteries). Remember also that electronic equipment can malfunction, so don’t be totally dependent on your GPS. Keep your water bottles warm to avoid freezing and of course have along the clothing necessary for the conditions you may encounter (deep snow, high winds etc.). The “Ten Essentials” become even more important in the winter (don’t forget the sunblock and good sunglasses). Additionally, the days are shorter, so you may well find yourself making use of your headlamp on the way out.

With wonderful vistas and fantastic rock formations, photographic opportunities abound. I recommend this area for experienced mountaineers and also for those new to winter in the mountains. With many opportunities for long trail hikes to windswept summits this area provides a way to keep the pounds off over those winter months while enjoying one of Colorado’s most scenic winter playgrounds.



Windswept summits and spectacular vistas characterize this area (note Pikes Peak in the background)

Hike Description

From the trailhead, cross the footbridge and head up the Ute Creek Trail (No. 629). Initially paralleling Tarryall Creek, the trail soon turns northeast into the Ute Creek drainage and climbs at a steady grade for four miles to the trail junction at a small saddle (Waypoint -TRAIL JUNCTION). Turn right on the often snowy Brookside / McCurdy trail as it heads east then northeast for 0.9 miles to a point on the south ridge of Bison Peak known as “Bison Arm” at an elevation of 11,897 feet. As you leave treeline on the switchbacks below Bison Arm you will likely encounter stiff winds – a good place to add a layer or two of warm clothing.

Getting to the Trailhead:

From the Denver area, head south on US285, over Kenosha Pass and down into South Park to the small town of Jefferson. In Jefferson turn south-east onto SH77 and take this road for 20.8 miles to the Ute Creek Trailhead.

Hike Statistics:

Trailhead to Bison Peak: Total elevation gain of 4000 feet in 11.4 miles round trip.

Difficulty: Strenuous on-trail hike, with easy off-trail section near summit

USGS Quad: Farnum Peak, CO, McCurdy Mountain, CO

Leave the trail on Bison Arm and head northeast on tundra, staying to the right of the first rock outcrop. Drop down slightly towards a readily identifiable landmark known informally as the “Bison Pinnacle”. This rock pinnacle offers technical rock routes for those so inclined.



Bison Pinnacle in foreground, Bison Peak beyond

From the pinnacle continue on towards the obvious summit of Bison Peak to your north along the Arm. Take easy grassy slopes in the general direction of the summit.



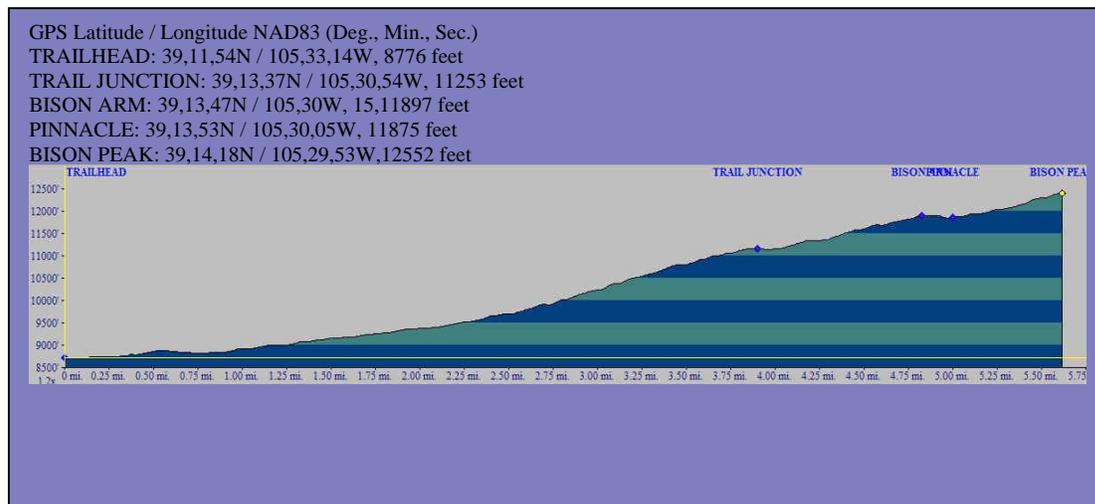
Head up grassy slopes towards the summit rocks, aiming for the right side of the formation

As you approach the summit block aim for grassy slopes to the right of the rocky summit and spiral around from the east side to the north side and finally reaching the very top on the west side, at 12,431 feet. Note the remains of a triangulation tower on the summit.



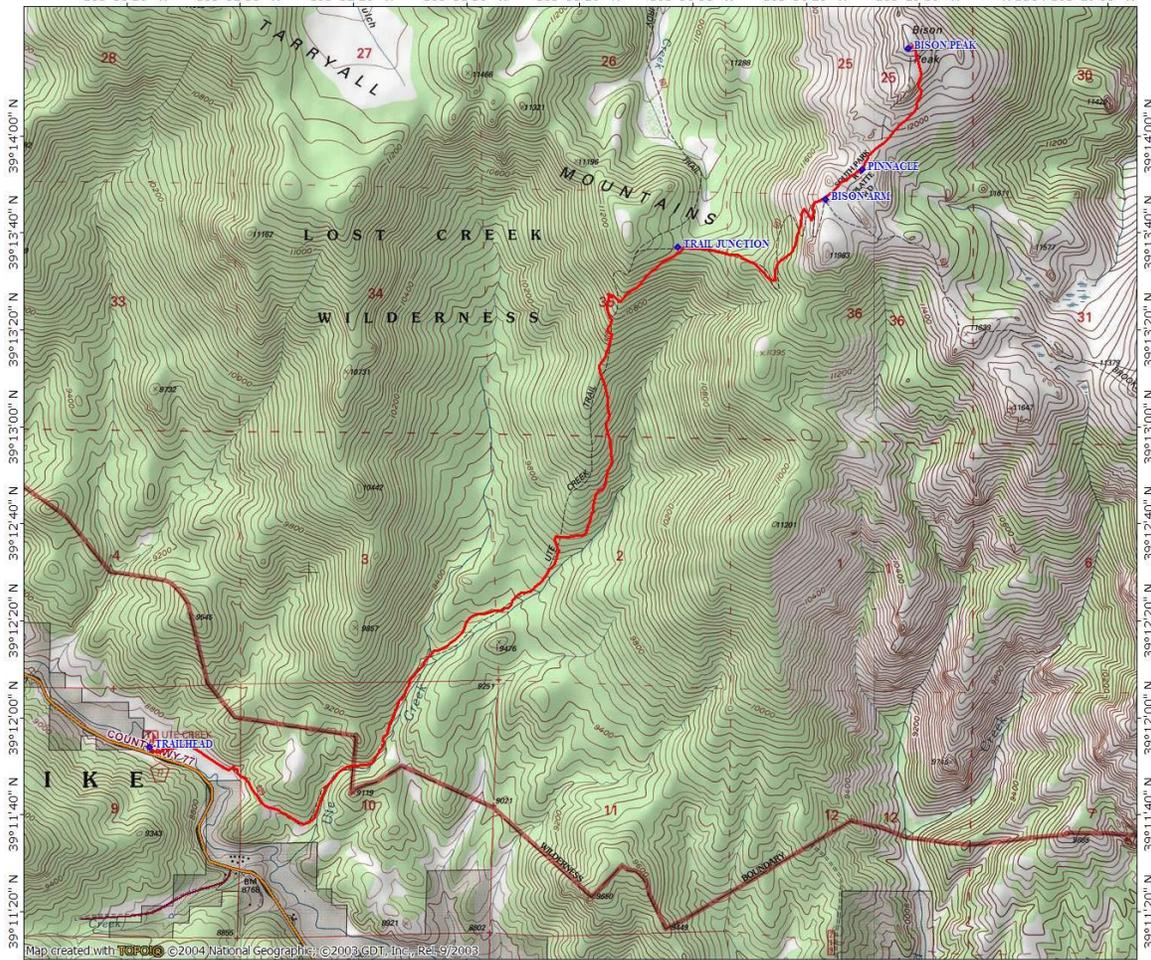
Signing the summit register. Note the remains of the triangulation point

Enjoy the views of this amazing area before heading back the way you came.

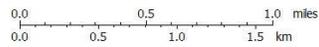


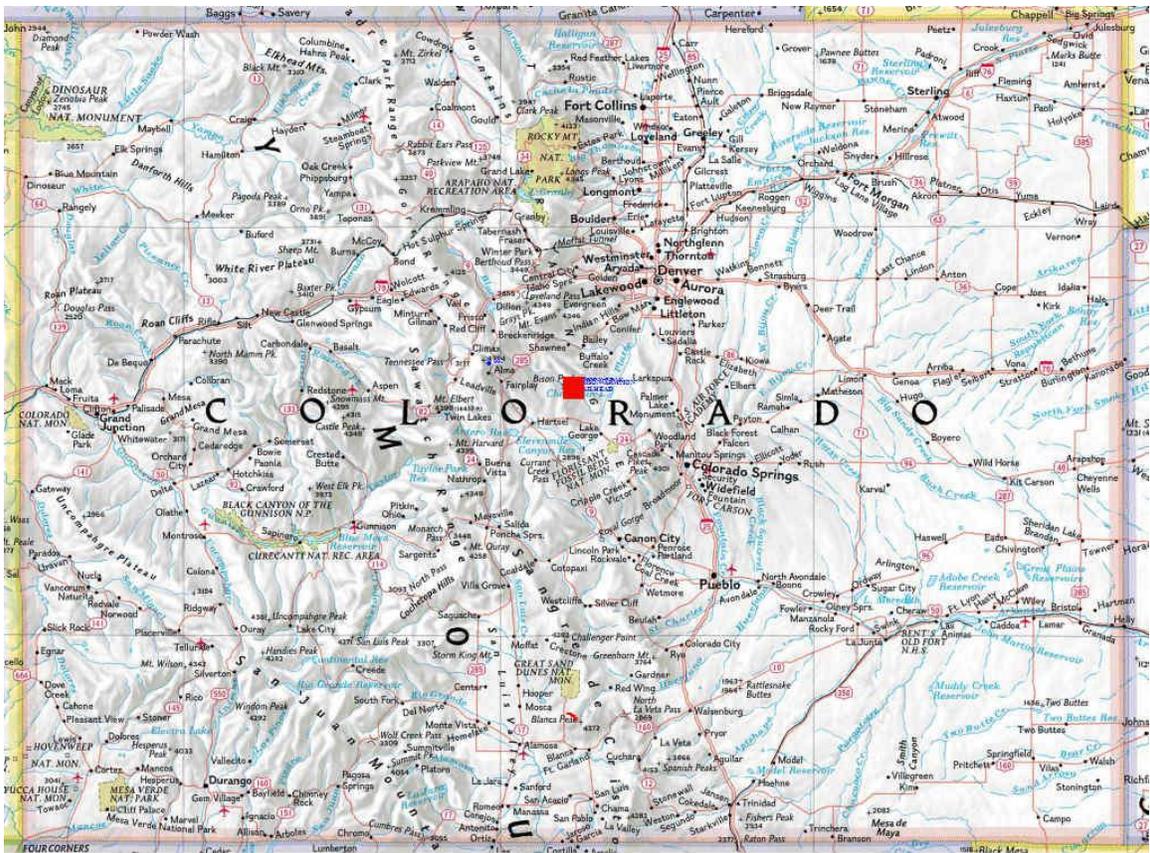
TOPO! map printed on 11/15/05 from "bison.tpo"

105°33'20" W 105°32'50" W 105°32'20" W 105°31'50" W 105°31'20" W 105°30'50" W 105°30'20" W 105°29'50" W WGS84 105°29'00" W



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Colorado locator map