

Bristlecone Pine Scenic Area by Dave Cooper



The Bristlecone Pines in Winter-small.jpg

The Bristlecone Pine Scenic Area has long been one of my favorite places. Located on Windy Ridge on Mount Bross, these trees, which define the word gnarled, have withstood the harsh, high altitude environment for thousands of years.

Relatively accessible in the summertime, it requires a little work to reach them in winter, but this is the season that really complements these mountain sentinels.

The Scenic Area can be reached either on snowshoes or skis, though the gentle grade makes for an easy, quick way down if you're on skis. My goal on a recent visit was to photograph the sun setting on the Bristlecones, then hurry down before dark (although of course I was prepared to come out in the dark), so skis were perfect.

Getting to the Trailhead: Drive on Highway 9 to the town of Alma, 5.3 miles north of Fairplay. In the center of town, turn west onto County Road 8, signed to Kite Lake. This junction is almost directly opposite the South Park Saloon, one of our favorite places to enjoy Mexican food after a day in the hills.

Drive on County Road 8 as far as it has been plowed, usually a little before the Paris Mill, a distance of 2.5 miles from Alma. A four-wheel drive vehicle is recommended for this road, since it may be awhile after a storm that the road is plowed. My old Subaru had a tough time making it the last half mile or so!

Statistics and Difficulty: The tour gains 1400 feet in 3.9 miles one way. The gentle grade of the road dictates an "Easiest" designation, but some routefinding skills may be necessary above the mine if the road is untracked. Also remember that this can be a hostile environment above treeline in the winter, so bring along appropriate clothing.

USGS Quads: Alma, CO.

With the road's southern exposure and the winds for which the mountain is known, you'll want to time your trip for a calm day after a new snowfall. Even then, there may be one or two spots along the road that are blown clear.

Trail Description

Assuming that you are able to drive to the parking area just before the Paris Mill, ski up the road for 0.25 mile to a signed road junction. The right fork is signed, somewhat optimistically, as 2.5 miles to Windy Ridge. Take the Windy Ridge road as it contours across the south face of Mount Bross, staying well below treeline. Be alert for snowmobiles on this road.

Remains of the Mineral Park Mine-small.jpg

After crossing a minor ridge at 1.5 miles the road turns north, reaching the ruins of the Mineral Park Mine after 3.1 miles. The roads can be a little confusing in the vicinity of the mine, so pay careful attention here. The road swings left through the old buildings, heading northwest up Dolly Varden Gulch. 0.1 mile after the mine the road switchbacks uphill to the right and into the trees again, passing some concrete foundations. Since the road may not be tracked here, carefully follow it up through another switchback until it reaches the exposed nose of a minor ridge at 11,630 feet (3.3 miles). Follow the road just over one tenth of a mile across open slopes to the summer parking area, distinguished at this time of year only by a section of fence and small information sign.



Information sign at the summer trailhead-small.jpg

Ski through the opening in the fence and head east towards the obvious open area.

You're here, and ready to marvel at these ancient denizens of this inhospitable zone.

Winter sunset on the Bristlecone Pine Scenic Area2-small.jpg



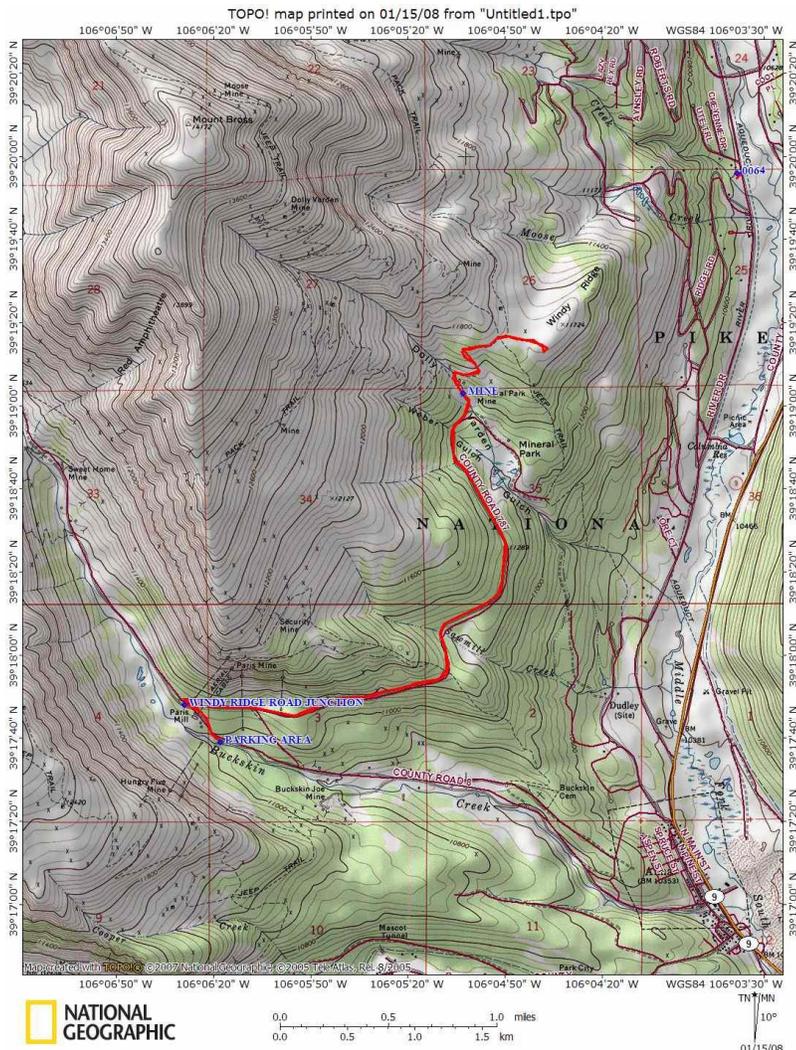
Make sure to take careful note of the way back down the road, since the wind can cover your tracks in a few minutes.



Winter sunset on the Bristlecone Pine Scenic Area-small.jpg



Winter sunset on the Bristlecone Pine Scenic Area3-small.jpg



GPS Latitude / Longitude NAD83 (Deg., Min., Sec.)

PARKING AREA: 39,17,39N / 106,6,18W, 10978 feet

WINDY RIDGE ROAD JUNCTION: 39,17,48N / 106,6,29W, 11096 feet

MINE: 39,19,3N / 106,5,3W, 11440 feet

