

**Buckskin Pass**  
by Dave Cooper



*View of Pyramid Peak from the Buckskin Pass trail*

The first time I visited Buckskin Pass, many years ago, was on a late summer backpacking trip to Snowmass Lake. From Snowmass Lake we headed up to Buckskin. As we approached the pass from the north, dark storm clouds were rolling in, harbingers of the season's first major snowfall. I still remember the astonishing view that greeted us as we crested Buckskin Pass - the ominous north faces of the Maroon Bells and Pyramid Peak, in deep shadow except for a single shaft of light highlighting one of the ridges.

I recently had an opportunity to re-visit the area, this time starting from Maroon Lake. A much shorter approach from this side, the trail offers great views right from the trailhead.

A recent snowstorm which had dropped over two feet of snow made staying on the trail that day a bit of a challenge, but the popularity of the area ensures that the trail will be tracked for several weeks to come. With more snow it might be time to take along the snowshoes.

A backpack over Buckskin Pass into the Snowmass Lake area makes a fine summer outing and offers a unique approach to a climb of Snowmass Mountain, one of the Fourteeners.

### Hike Description

From the trailhead at Maroon Lake, follow the trail southwest towards Crater Lake. The trail skirts around the north side of Maroon Lake before starting to climb gently, reaching a trail junction after 1.7 miles, shortly before Crater Lake. Turn right (west) on the Maroon-Snowmass Trail and continue to climb up Minnehaha Gulch. After 2.8 miles the trail crosses to the west side of the drainage and continues north towards the pass in open terrain. After passing the junction with the Willow Pass trail, head up the final set of switchbacks to Buckskin Pass and enjoy the view of several more peaks, notably Snowmass Mountain and Capitol Peak.

**Getting to the Trailhead:** From the large roundabout at the north end of the town of Aspen, take the Maroon Creek Road southwest for 9.2 miles to its end at the trailhead.

Note that this hike is in the Maroon Bells - Snowmass Wilderness. This is a US fee area. Additionally, during the peak season, the Maroon Creek Road is closed to traffic between the hours of 7am and 7pm. A shuttle bus is provided. For more information, go to : [http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/whiteriver/rangerdistricts/aspen\\_sopris/mb\\_scenic\\_site/index.shtml](http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/whiteriver/rangerdistricts/aspen_sopris/mb_scenic_site/index.shtml)

**Hike Statistics:** Maroon Lake Trailhead to the summit of Buckskin Pass (12,462 feet): 2800 feet of total elevation gain in 4.0 miles one way.

**Difficulty:** A moderate trail hike, possibly on snow-covered, icy trails during the Autumn months.

**USGS Quad:** Maroon Bells, CO



