

## Buffalo Meadows Loop

by Dave Cooper



*A view of the Buffalo Peaks from the Tumble Creek Trail*

This week's hike offers good views of the Buffalo Peaks, which, when dusted with fresh snow, provide a nice backdrop at this time of year for the Fall colors.

Add the benefits of a loop trail which takes us along two drainages connected by the extensive Buffalo Meadows, throw in countless beaver ponds and it is no wonder this is a local favorite.

### Hike Description

The loop can be hiked equally well in either direction. I'll describe it as a clockwise outing.

From the trailhead, cross over the bridge and walk a short distance up the trail (a hundred yards or so) to a signed trail junction. To the left is the Tumble Creek Trail (#617). To the right is the Rich Creek Trail (#616). We'll go left up the Tumble Creek Trail and return via the Rich Creek Trail.

The trail climbs gradually southeast through forest until reaching the shoulder of a ridge after one mile. As the trail starts down into the Rough and Tumbling Creek drainage (what a great name), you will have good views of East and West Buffalo Peaks. On a recent outing the aspen in this valley were spectacular.

**Getting to the Trailhead:** From the traffic light in Fairplay, take US285 south for 4.8 miles to the junction with Park County Road 5. Turn right on CR5 and follow it for 7.0 miles to its intersection with Park County Road 22. (Note that if arriving from the south, you can reach CR22 directly from US285). From this junction, drive west on CR22 for 2.9 miles to the well-signed Rich Creek Trailhead. The parking area is on the left side of the road.

**Hike Statistics:** The loop is 11.4 miles long and has a total elevation gain of 2100 feet.

**Difficulty:** A moderate trail hike with several interesting log crossings

**USGS Quads:** Jones Hill, CO; South Peak, CO

*Golden aspen provide the foreground in this view of the Buffalo Peaks*

At 2.6 miles the trail crosses over a log bridge to the south side of Rough and Tumbling Creek and immediately there will be a trail junction. Turn right and pass into the Buffalo Peaks Wilderness on trail #617, signed to Buffalo Meadows. The trail climbs more steeply from this point. At 3.3 miles the trail crosses the creek again, this time on an interesting single-log bridge. After leaving the trees the grade moderates and you can enjoy the vistas of Buffalo Meadows. Continue on to a trail junction at 5.1 miles. This is where you join the Rich Creek Trail. From here the trail climbs gradually northwest to a saddle at 6.4 miles before dropping into the Rich Creek drainage.

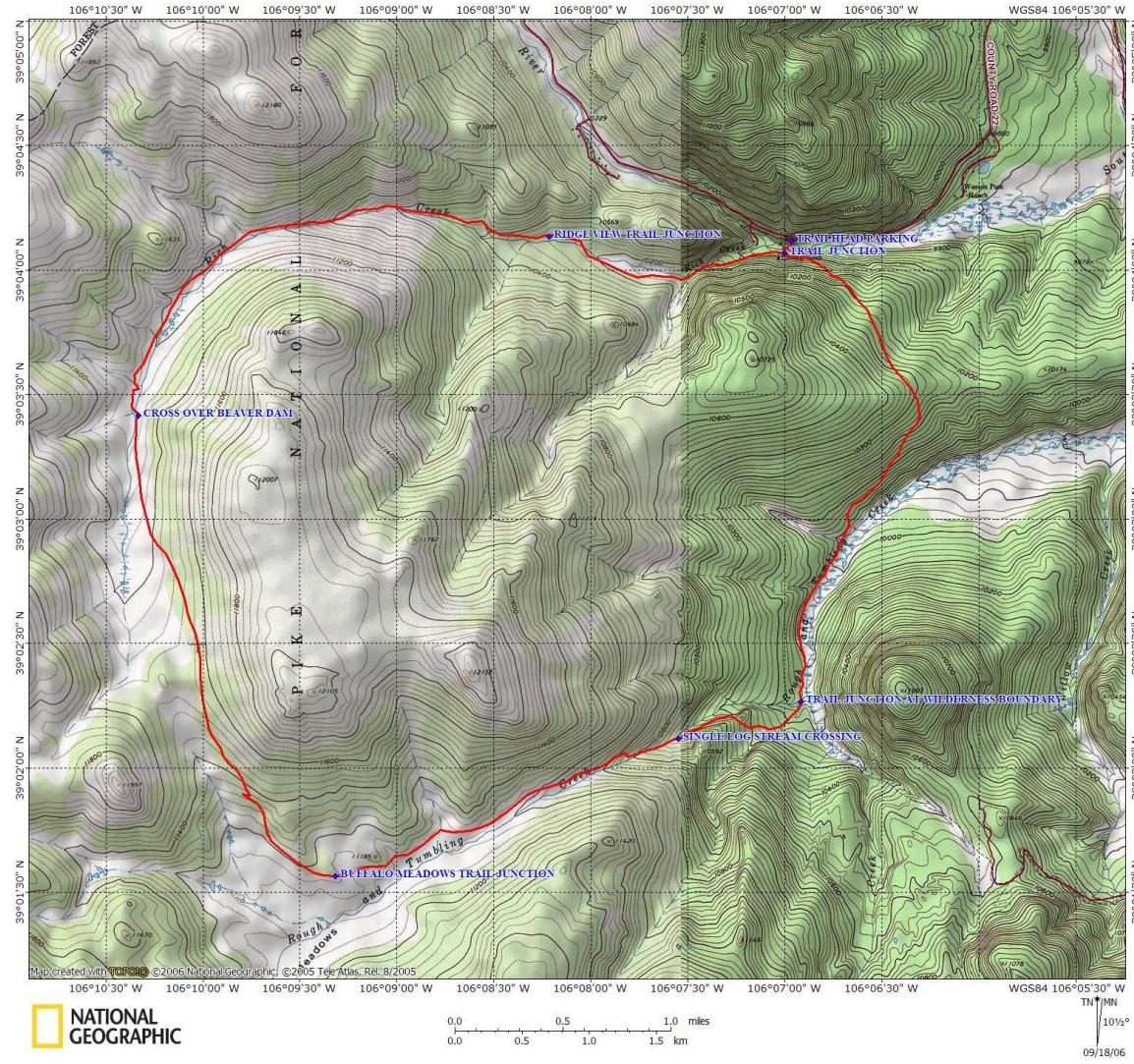


You will pass many beaver ponds as you head down the Rich Creek drainage, even crossing over the dam of one of the ponds after 7.6 miles. The trail continues along the west side of the creek, past more beaver ponds, and then follows the creek as it curves to the east in the now narrower canyon.

At mile 10.2 pass the Ridge View trail junction and continue east as the trail crosses and re-crosses Rich Creek before completing the loop at the Tumble Creek Trail junction after 11.3 miles. Continue down the trail to the parking area.



*Beaver Ponds in Buffalo Meadows*



GPS Latitude / Longitude NAD83 (Deg., Min., Sec.)  
 TRAILHEAD PARKING, 39,4,7,-106,6,58,10751 feet  
 TRAIL JUNCTION, 39,4,4,-106,7,0,10381 feet  
 TRAIL JUNCTION AT WILDERNESS BOUNDARY, 39,2,16,-106,6,55,10180 feet  
 SINGLE LOG STREAM CROSSING, 39,2,7,-106,7,33,10443 feet  
 BUFFALO MEADOWS TRAIL JUNCTION, 39,1,34,-106,9,19,11188 feet  
 CROSS OVER BEAVER DAM, 39,3,25,-106,10,20,11302 feet  
 RIDGE VIEW TRAIL JUNCTION, 39,4,8,-106,8,13,10325 feet

