

Byers Peak Trail

by Dave Cooper

Looking to the southwest as you enter the Frasier Valley, one peak dominates the skyline. Standing essentially alone, Byers Peak is not so high – only 12,804 feet – but its isolation contributes to its formidable presence.

In winter it takes a special effort to climb this peak due to the length of the approach. The good news is that this same approach offers wonderful cross country skiing and snowshoeing through the Frasier Experimental Forest on old forestry roads.

While snowmobiles are, in general, not allowed on this trail, don't be surprised to see snowmobile tracks: the Forest Service is allowed to use snowmobiles even into the Byers Peak Wilderness in order to conduct research. Nevertheless, a winter tour here is likely to be a very pleasant outing and well-worth the drive.

Recent changes in the regulations have reduced public access in the summer. However the winter route is essentially the same as it has been for a quarter century.

Description

From the parking area head southwest on the signed road to the Byers Peak Trailhead. The road climbs gently for the first 2.9 miles until it reaches the wilderness boundary. In this lower section you will pass three intersections, the first after one tenth of a mile, where a road from the Experimental Station joins from your left. Make sure on the way down to take the fork signed to the parking area. The second intersection, at 0.5 miles is where the Deadhorse Creek Loop drops down to the right. Stay left here, following the signs to the Byers Peak Trail.

At mile 2.0 reach the third junction where a road signed to the St. Louis Creek Road comes in from your left. We stay straight here and continue to climb to the Wilderness boundary at mile 2.9, located at the base of a series of switchbacks. This is the new summer trailhead for the Byers Peak Trail, which continues up the road to your right on a slightly steeper grade.

The road now switchbacks through delightful forest to its end at mile 4.7, indicated only by a small loop. Be sure to stay left on the main road at the top of the first switchback (mile 3.0) where another unsigned road continues straight. We will end our tour here. A climb of Byers Peak from this point requires map and compass skills and also good telemark technique for the sometimes tight tree skiing on the lower section of the ridge. Note that the trail is not signed.

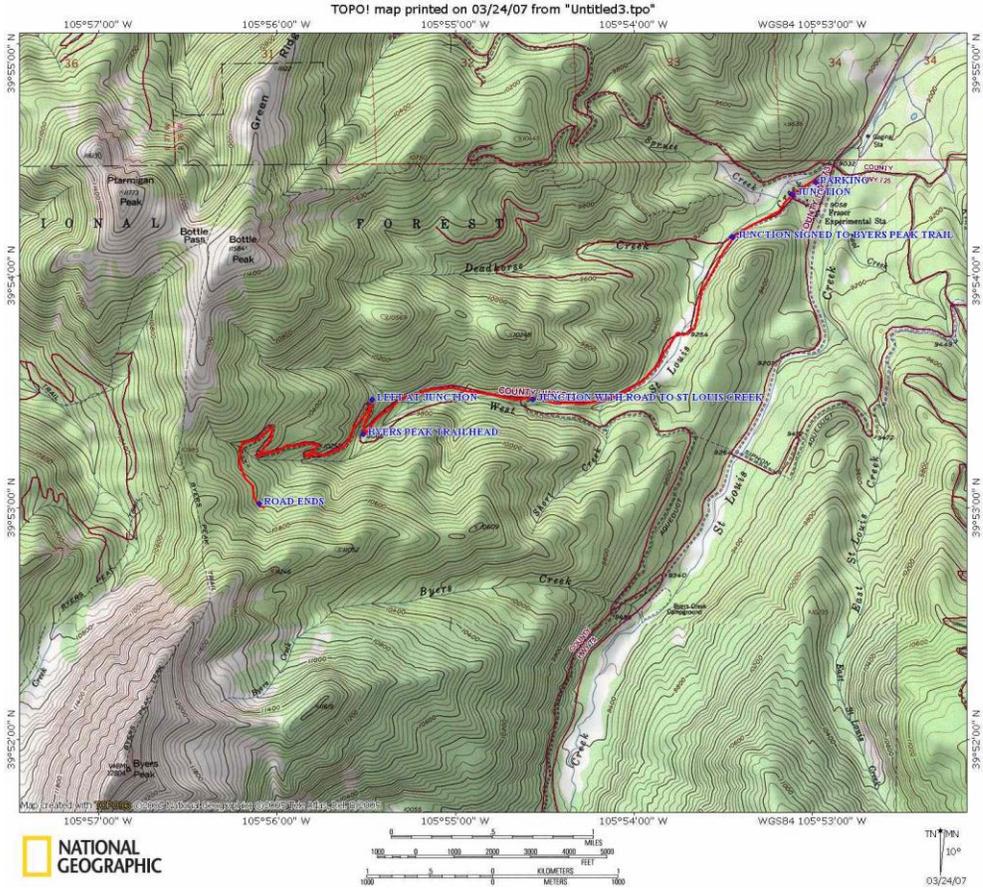
The switchbacks offer a thrilling downhill run on the descent, followed by a more pedestrian pace on the lower part of the trail. The run down is accomplished in a fraction of the time it took to climb up, which is why I prefer skis over snowshoes for this outing.

Getting to the Trailhead: Drive to the town of Frasier, 16.3 miles north of Berthoud Pass on US 40. Turn west at the Conoco station onto Eisenhower Avenue and drive across the tracks. Continue west on Eisenhower to a T-junction, 0.4 miles from US40. Turn left (south) on Carriage Road and drive just over 0.1 miles to another T-junction. Turn right (west) on County Road 73 (which becomes St. Louis Creek Road). Drive on CR73 for 4.4 miles to a well signed intersection and road closure. Turn right (signed to Byers Peak Trailhead) and drive 0.1 miles to the trailhead parking area. You will pass an information sign for the Frasier Experimental Forest after driving 1.8 miles on CR73.

Hike Statistics: Trailhead to the end of the road (10,500 feet): 1660 feet of total elevation gain in 4.7 miles one way.

Difficulty: A moderate ski/snowshoe on logging roads.

USGS Quad: Bottle Pass, CO.



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

PARKING: 39,54,24N / 105,52,59W, 9085 feet

JUNCTION: 39,54,21N / 105,53,7W, 9114 feet

JUNCTION SIGNED TO BYERS PEAK TRAIL: 39,54,10N / 105,53,27W, 9176 feet

JUNCTION WITH ROAD TO ST LOUIS CREEK: 39,53,28N / 105,54,34W, 9587 feet

BYERS PEAK TRAILHEAD: 39,53,19N / 105,55,31W, 9810 feet

LEFT AT JUNCTION: 39,53,28N / 105,55,28W, 9874 feet

ROAD ENDS: 39,53,1N / 105,56,6W, 10594 feet

