

Chihuahua Gulch ski/snowshoe Tour by Dave Cooper



Chihuahua Gulch, ringed by, from right to left, Grays Peak, Torreys Peak, Grizzly Peak and Lenawee Mountain -small.jpg

One of the most popular, and often crowded, novice ski tours is the one that heads up Peru Creek, near the town of Montezuma.

The tour provides relatively easy access to some spectacular scenery. However, for intermediate skiers and snowshoers, a variation on a less-traveled trail offers equally spectacular views without the crowds. This alternate trail leaves Peru Creek to follow a forest service road north into Chihuahua Gulch, eventually ending in a large cirque below two fourteeners, Grays and Torreys Peaks, and bounded also by Grizzly Peak and Lenawee Mountain.

The tour described here ends at a road closure. It is possible to continue further, on the Chihuahua Trail, which starts at the road closure and continues on to Chihuahua Lake. This extension should only be undertaken by advanced skiers, when conditions permit, due to the steep and sometimes rocky nature of the trail, plus the fact that the lake is situated in prime avalanche terrain. Having said that, if you decide to continue up this challenging trail, the views from the plateau area, three quarters of a mile further, are quite stunning.

Getting to the Trailhead: The Montezuma Road can be reached either from Silverthorne or by driving over Loveland Pass on Highway 6.

If approaching via Silverthorne, take the Silverthorne exit from I-70 (Exit 205) and drive east on Highway 6 for 8.3 miles to Montezuma Road. This is 0.3 miles west of Gondola Road or 4.8 miles east of the Arapahoe Basin Ski Area. Turn south onto Montezuma Road, go straight at the stop sign and follow the road as it curves to the left. Continue on to the trailhead parking area located on the left at a large bend in the road, 4.5 miles from Highway 6. This parking area can fill up quickly on weekends.

Hike Statistics: The route described gains a total of 1300 feet in 4.2 miles one way and reaches an elevation of 11,250 feet.

Difficulty: A straightforward ski/snowshoe on old roads in a high alpine environment. Due to its length and remote location, the route is recommended for intermediate ability levels. Advanced skiers/ snowshoers may extend the tour, when conditions permit.

USGS Quad: Montezuma, CO, Grays Peak, CO.



Grizzly and Torreys panorama-small

Hike Description



Afternoon sun on snow-covered boulderfield in Chihuahua Gulch-small.jpg

From the trailhead, ski along the road as it climbs gently northeast, then east into the Peru Creek valley. Stay on the main road at mile 1.0 as it drops down and crosses the drainage before continuing along the north side of the creek. Due to the drier-than-usual conditions so far this season, sections of the road may

be covered with ice flows. Exercise caution when crossing these areas. Hopefully the ice will be covered up by future snowfall.

Pass the Maid of Orleans Mine buildings at mile 1.3, and continue past the start of the Lenawee Trail at mile 1.6. You will pass the turnoff to Warden Gulch at mile 2.0, shortly before the start of the Chihuahua Gulch road at mile 2.1. Turn left onto this road and follow it as it climbs north. Due to the southern exposure, snow cover might be a little thin on lower sections of this road.

The road passes through a large boulderfield at the entrance to the gulch. The peak to the east is Cooper Mountain (the name has a nice ring to it, don't you think?). Assess the slopes above the road for snow-loading and stability before deciding to continue.

At mile 2.8 the road cuts left to cross the creek and shortly thereafter reaches the start of a large, alpine meadow. The views here make this a tempting lunch spot, and a worthwhile destination for those not wanting a longer outing.

If you decide to continue, follow the road as it hugs treeline along the left (west) side of the valley before crossing once again to the east side at mile 3.5.

At mile 4.0 a sign indicates that Forest Service Road 263 bears left. Follow this road as it winds through the willows, reaching a closure fence and sign for the Chihuahua Trail at mile 4.2, a good destination for intermediate skiers.

