

Clark Peak by Dave Cooper



Clark Peak's south ridge reflected in the waters of North Michigan Reservoir-small.jpg

Over the last few years the pursuit of climbing county highpoints has gained popularity. In Colorado, the guidebook at least partly responsible for this is “Hiking Colorado’s Summits” by John Drew Mitchler and Dave Covill (Falcon Publishing).

Colorado’s county highpoints create a fascinating list. If you’ve climbed all the Fourteeners, then you can already cross 19 counties off your list, but completing the centennial peaks (the hundred highest) only adds one more county. Some peaks give you two or three county highpoints for the price of one. According to Mitchler and Covill, Blanca Peak sits at the apex of three counties; Alamosa, Costilla and Huerfano. If you climbed Crestone Peak (the highpoint of Saguache County) but didn’t take the time to bag the nearby east summit, you missed the highpoint of Custer County.

While many of the high points are popular climbs, there are also many less-travelled summits on this list. Recently in this column I described a hike to the summit of Mount Zirkel, which is the highpoint of Routt County. This week we visit another of these, Clark Peak, the highpoint of Jackson County. Though the

Getting to the Trailhead: Drive on Highway 14 to the town of Gould, 9.3 miles west of Cameron Pass. Continue on Highway 14 west and north for 2.4 miles to the junction (on the right) with County Road 41. Turn onto County Road 41 and pass through the entrance station (Colorado State Forest Park fee required). Measuring mileage from the entrance station, continue driving east on County Road 41 to a road junction at mile 1.2. Stay left at this junction, the entrance to North Michigan campground, signed to the boat ramps and water access. Continue on County Road 41 as it passes along the north side of the reservoir. At mile 4.8, turn right (east) onto Ruby Jewel Road and drive to the 2 wheel drive parking area at mile 6.8. High clearance, 4 wheel drive vehicles can continue up the rough road for a further 1.2 miles.

Statistics and Difficulty: From the 2 wheel drive parking area to Ruby Jewel Lake the trail gains 1650 feet in 2.5 miles one way. Easy scrambling via the standard route from the lake to the summit of Clark Peak (12,951 feet) adds 0.75 mile and 1635 feet of elevation one way, for a total of 3.25 miles and 3285 feet of elevation gain. Ascending the gullies shortens the distance a little but increases the difficulty to Class 2+ to Class 3, depending on the exact line chosen.

USGS Quads: Clark Peak, CO.

approach hike to Ruby Jewel Lake is extremely popular, once on the slopes of Clark Peak you'll probably have the mountain to yourself.



Clark Peak rises behind Ruby Jewel Lake-small.jpg. In this view the broad saddle used as the standard route can be seen to the left of Clark Peak. The shallow gullies which we ascended are directly between the lake and peak.

Hike Description

Assuming you start at the 2WD parking area, hike east then northeast up the rough road, reaching the upper trailhead at mile 1.2. Pass through the barrier and follow the trail as it climbs to treeline. Pass a signed trail junction to Kelly Lake at mile 1.7 and continue on towards Ruby Jewel Lake (shown as Jewel Lake on the topo. map), reaching the lake at mile 2.4. This is a very scenic spot and makes a good destination for a day hike.

If you're here to climb Clark Peak, you have a choice to make. Your objective is the broad peak to the northeast of the lake. The standard route heads north then northeast to reach a broad saddle between Clark and its western neighbor, unnamed 12654. Intermittent climbers' trails help negotiate this route. From the saddle, head east to the summit on scree slopes.

The view north from the summit of Clark Peak towards North and South Rawah Peaks-small.jpg



Mitchler and Covill also mention a more direct ascent using shallow gullies northeast of the lake. In early summer these gullies offer a moderate snow climb, but when we ascended one of them on 26 July of this

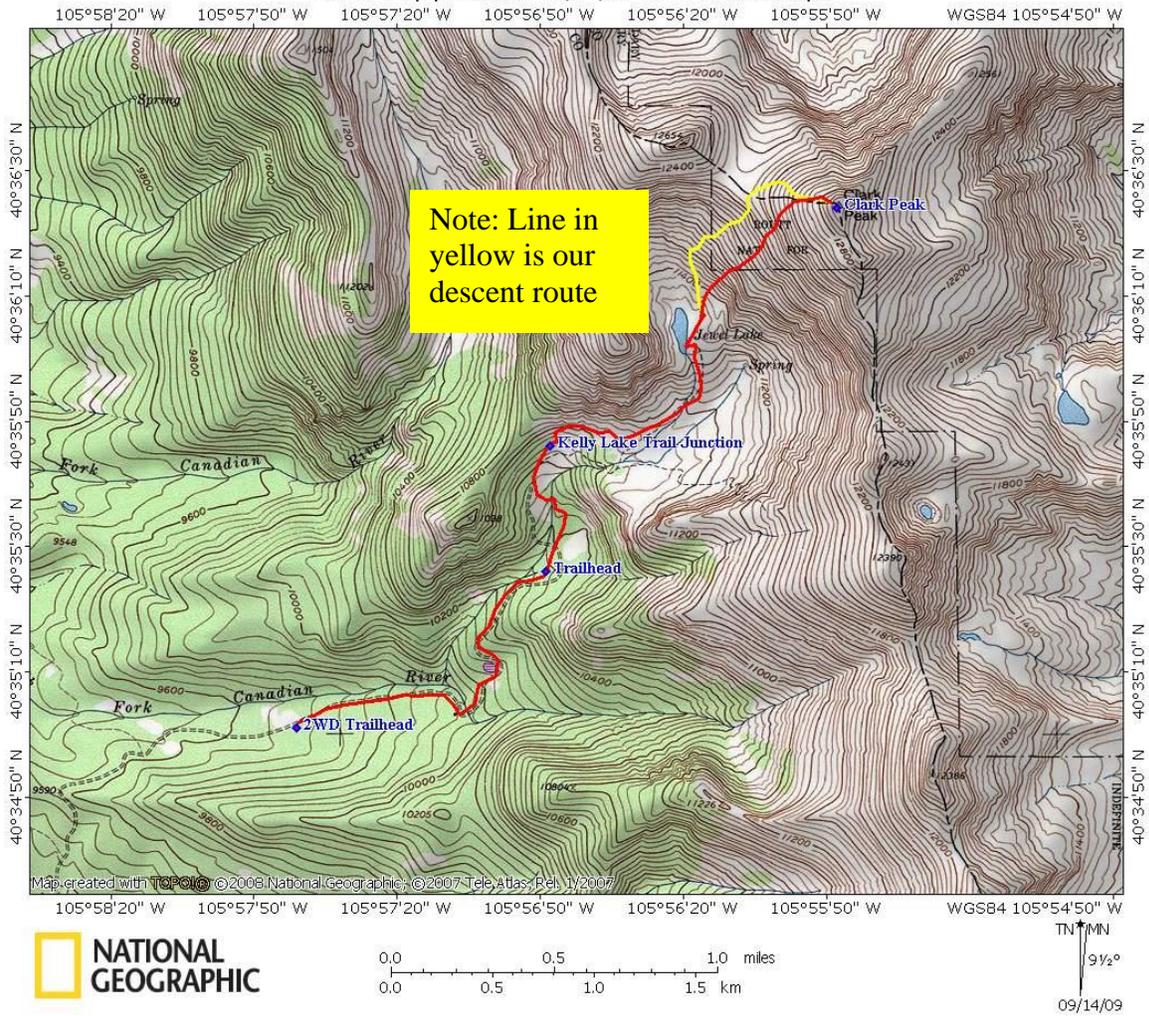
year they were totally dry and somewhat unpleasant, with loose scree and talus, requiring care to avoid dislodging rocks. Once above the gullies you'll find steep grassy slopes and more scree on your way to the summit.

The views from the summit are excellent. Looking north you have the peaks and lakes of the Rawah Wilderness, while to the south the peaks of Rocky Mountain National Park dominate the skyline.

For our descent we decided to head down via the gentler standard route to the broad saddle mentioned above, before returning to Ruby Jewel Lake.

The peaks of Rocky Mountain National Park are visible from Clark's summit.-small.jpg





GPS Latitude / Longitude NAD83 (Deg., Min., Sec.)
 2WD Trailhead, 40,35,1, -105,57,41, 9639 feet
 Trailhead, 40,35,26, -105,56,49, 10410 feet
 Kelly Lake Trail Junction, 40,35,46, -105,56,48, 10666 feet
 Clark Peak, 40,36,24, -105,55,48, 12912 feet

