

“Drift” Peak (13,900 feet) – Winter Mountaineering by Dave Cooper

The east ridge of “Drift Peak” offers a fine winter/spring outing. The climbing is varied and while not technical will often keep your attention. Slightly more difficult than its neighbor to the north (the east ridge of “Atlantic Peak”) you will find plenty of scrambling on rock and snow.

“Drift Peak” is the unofficial name of Unnamed 13,900, a subpeak of Fletcher Mountain. Its east ridge forms the righthand skyline of rugged Mayflower Gulch.

The lower slopes, up to the ridge named Gold Hill on the topographic map, are a favorite place for backcountry skiers when avalanche conditions permit. Open glades in the trees offer moderate telemarking terrain. Skiing under the cornice which regularly forms, however, is not recommended. Wait for stable snow conditions before getting onto these slopes, either for skiing or for this week’s climb.

Getting to the Trailhead: Take Exit 195 off I-70 and follow the signs for Highway 91 to Leadville. (This is also the exit for Copper Mountain).

Drive south on Highway 91 for 6.4 miles and park in a large plowed parking area on the east side of the highway. This is 5.3 miles north of Fremont Pass.

Hike Statistics:

Trailhead to the summit of Drift Peak: 2900 feet of total elevation gain in 3.1 miles (one way).

Difficulty: A strenuous winter mountaineering outing on an exposed ridge – snowshoes and ice axe required (crampons optional, depending on conditions). Expect a full day, depending on the snow conditions you encounter.

USGS Quad: Copper Mountain, CO



Approaching the east ridge of Drift Peak

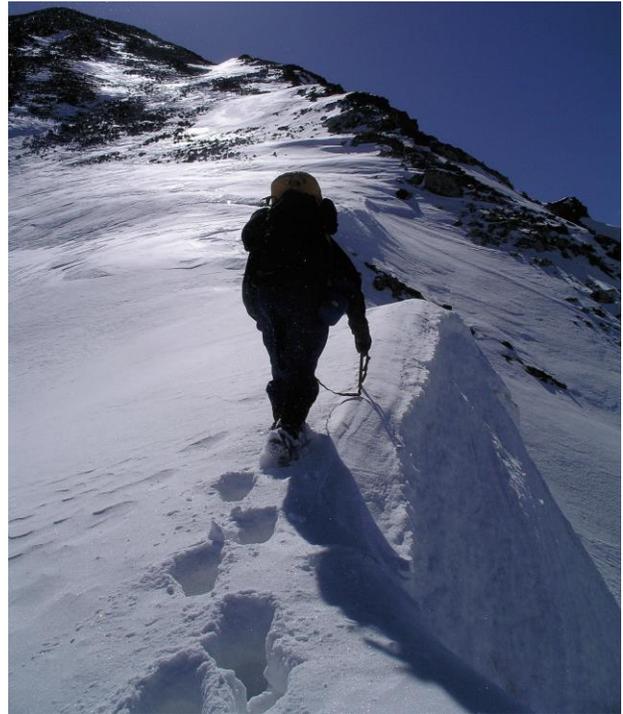
Hike Description

From the parking area snowshoe or ski up the four wheel drive road for 1.5 miles to a point where the trail divides just before the cabins of the old Boston Mine. Start climbing up to the ridge, using terrain features to avoid avalanche potential. Once on the ridge head up towards the first steep section at 12,200 feet, a good place to take off skis or snowshoes. From here the route should be obvious. If the talus is frozen the climbing can be very pleasant; if not the loose slopes can be somewhat tedious.



Climbers on the east ridge of Drift Peak

Once up the first steep section the gradient eases for a while. Usually this part offers nice snow climbing with an occasional class 3 rock step. The ridge is quite narrow in spots and requires some care, especially in bad weather conditions. Accidents have occurred along this ridge, sometimes with people stepping off the ridge due to poor visibility.



Approaching the upper ridge

At about 12,700 feet the ridge again steepens and also becomes slightly more complex, requiring a bit of routefinding. Generally the ridge crest is the best place to be.

After what seems a long time, your reward will be the summit views.

To descend, retrace your steps. Depending on snow conditions this may appear to take almost as long as the ascent. This is a long day, and with the short number of daylight hours you may need your

headlamp. Best to get an early start.



Crossing a rocky section of the ridge

In addition to the “Ten Essentials”, you may want to add a few more items to your pack for outings like this one:

- Goggles
- Facemask
- Plastic double boots
- Warm mittens
- Extra windproof and warmth layers
- Insulated water bottle carrier, plus wrap your second bottle in warm clothes in your pack

