

Fletcher Mountain (13,951 feet)

by Dave Cooper

As the snow conditions stabilize in the Spring, steeper snow climbs become reasonable objectives. First the ridges, then a few weeks later the couloirs, as they come into shape.

This week's snow climb is one of my favorites, and one that I have used many times to introduce mountaineering students to moderate snow climbs. The east summit ridge on Fletcher Mountain offers a very nice knife-edge climbing experience in April and May.

A bonus for this outing is that the ski mountaineering can be outstanding, with many options for ski descents from moderate slopes to somewhat steeper lines. Unfortunately, as of late April, a long section of the climb below the summit was bare of snow, so we decided to use snowshoes. Sometimes May snowstorms will fill in these sections, allowing you to stay on snow for almost the entire outing.

Getting to the Trailhead: 7.6 miles south of Breckenridge on State Highway 9, or 2.3 miles north of Hoosier Pass on State Highway 9, turn west on Blue Lakes road (dirt) and drive as far as the road is plowed, often 0.3 miles from the highway. Park in the plowed out area, being careful not to block access to the homes in the area.

Hike Statistics: Trailhead to the summit of Fletcher Mountain (13,951 feet): 3100 feet of total elevation gain in 8 miles round trip.

Difficulty: Ice axe, snowshoes or skis and climbing skins required. Moderate snowclimbing at high altitude. As always when on snow, know how to avoid potential avalanche slopes. Remember that a slope frozen in the morning when you ascended it could be primed to slide in the afternoon.

Resources: Now that the Colorado Avalanche Information Center has ceased issuing public statements for the season (after having done its usual excellent job over the winter), you may want to check out one of the on-line mountaineering forums. The one I find very helpful is www.fourteenerworld.com, where members often post current route conditions.

USGS Quad: Breckenridge, CO, Copper Mountain, CO.



*Approaching
the summit
of Fletcher
Mountain*

Hike Description

Hike west up the Blue Lakes Road from the parking area towards the reservoir. How far up this road you are able to drive will depend on the snow conditions. It is usually plowed to at least Quandary's Monte Cristo trailhead, 0.3 miles from Highway 9. From this parking area it is 1.8 miles to the reservoir, under the looming mass of Quandary Peak.

When you reach the reservoir scramble up a short, gravelly trail to the right of the dam and continue walking along the north side of the reservoir for approximately 0.1 miles until a suitable snow slope allows you to begin a rising traverse, heading north-west for a relatively flat area at 12,200 feet.



The rising traverse above the reservoir. You are heading towards the nose of the ridge in the center of the photo.

From this flat area you have two options – continue straight and climb the nose of the ridge directly west, or head up the valley to the northwest, aiming for the saddle between Fletcher Mountain and Quandary Peak.

This valley contains snow well into late spring, but has some avalanche

potential, so is best avoided unless conditions are very stable.

So we'll head up the nose of the ridge and onto the large plateau leading towards the summit block of Fletcher Mountain.

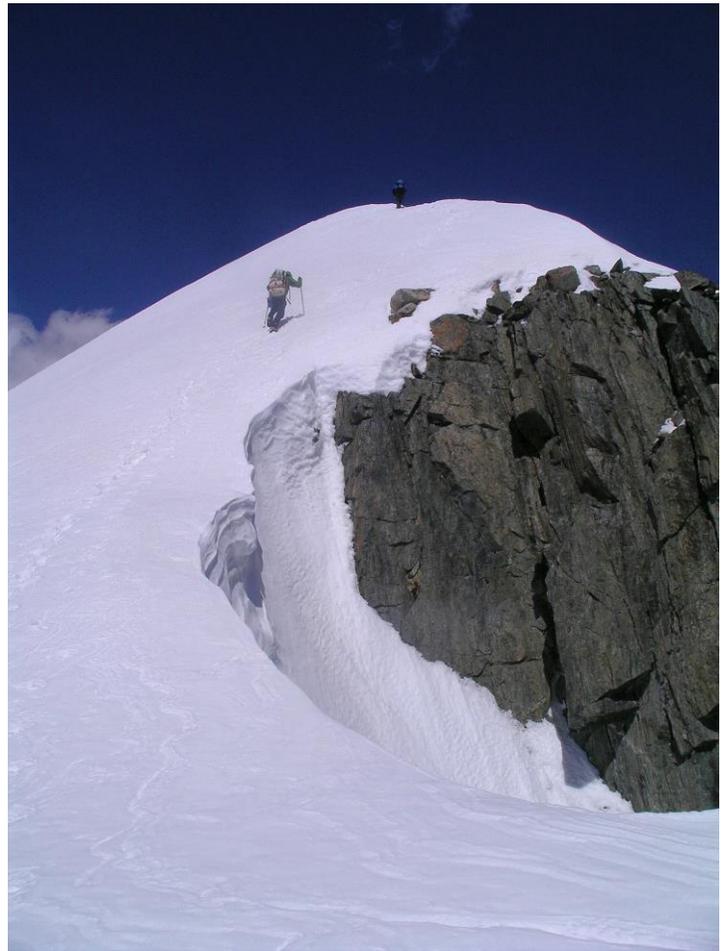
Heading up the nose of the ridge

Once up the ridge, the route to Fletcher's summit is clearly visible. Head northwest across the plateau to gain the east ridge of Fletcher at around 13,400 feet. The actual line you take will depend on snow conditions, but generally stay close to or on this ridge for the remaining 550 feet of climbing.





Fletcher's summit block, looking northwest across the broad plateau. Aim for the right hand side, near the start of the ridge



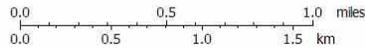
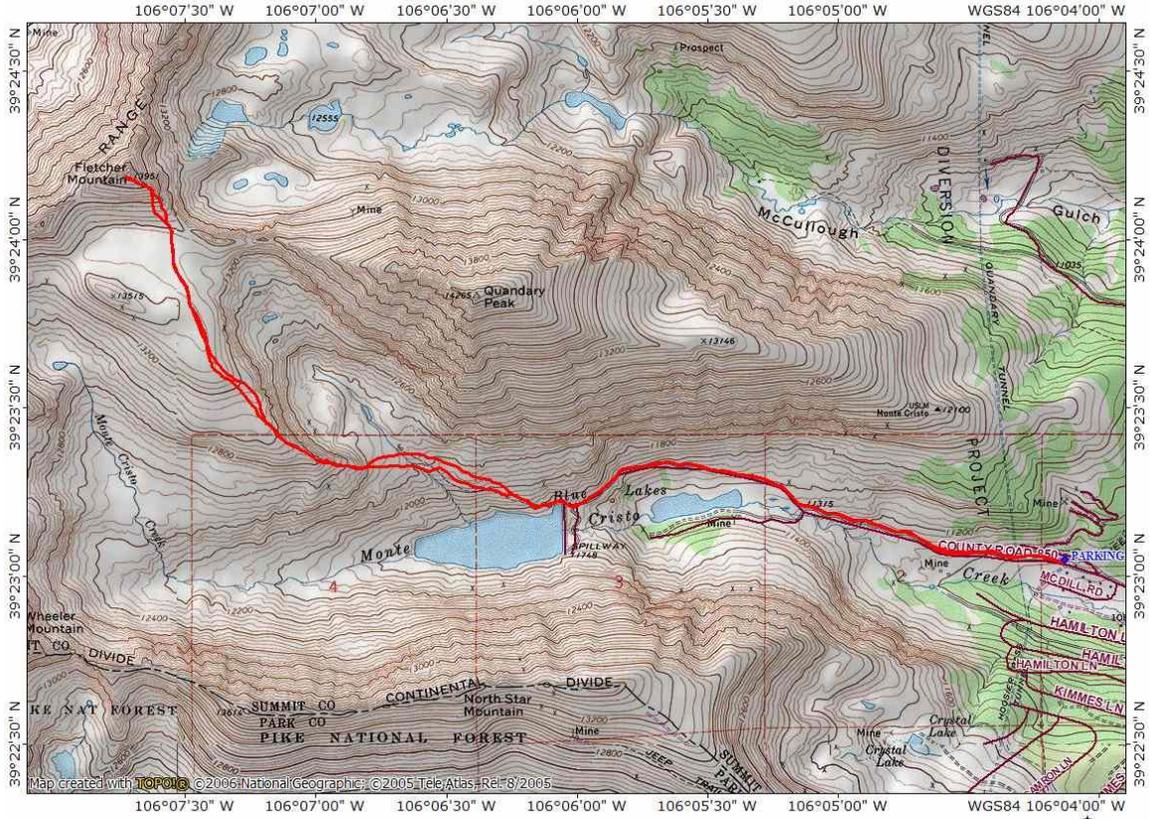
The final summit ridge

Whether you're on skis or not, there is some fine sliding on the way down.



The smile says it all!

TOPO! map printed on 04/24/06 from "Untitled2.tpo"



TN MN
10 1/2°
04/24/06

GPS Latitude / Longitude NAD83 (Deg., Min., Sec.)
PARKING: 39,23,3N / 106,4,8W, 10938 feet

