

## Visit three passes in a day by Dave Cooper



*Dramatic clouds over Snowmass Mountain and Hagerman Peak - small.jpg*

This week's hike is fast becoming an autumn favorite. The loop hike visits three high passes which afford spectacular views of three distinctly different valleys, not to mention the rugged peaks ringing those valleys. On a Labor Day hike recently the alpine tundra was already turning to a sea of yellow, red and green, contrasting sharply with peaks of red and white.

### Hike Description

I'll describe a counter-clockwise loop that visits West Maroon Pass, Frigid Air Pass and an unnamed pass between Hasley Basin and the East Fork Basin. The hike can of course be shortened by omitting various sections.

The trailhead is located immediately behind a storage structure in the parking area, not along the jeep road leaving from the left end of the parking area, and is marked by an

**Getting to the Trailhead:** Drive on Highway 50 to the town of Gunnison. Turn north onto Main Street (Highway 135), and drive north to the town of Crested Butte. Continue on Highway 135 through town, towards the ski area of Mount Crested Butte. Just north of Mount Crested Butte the road, now County Road 317 and signed as Gothic Road, becomes a graded road. Continue through the town of Gothic, reaching the famed Schofield Pass 5.5 miles beyond Gothic. Continue driving north from the pass for a further 0.8 mile to a large parking area on the right. Note that the road, while steep and narrow in spots, is generally well graded and passable by many vehicles. 4 wheel drives or all wheel drives are recommended, though on one visit I followed a Honda Civic down from the pass. Beyond this point, however, the road becomes one of the roughest in Colorado, so don't try to get there from the Crystal side.

**GPS coordinates for trailhead (NAD83):** 39°1'28"N, 107°3'3"W, 10,450 feet

**Statistics:** The complete loop has a total elevation gain of 3,230 feet in 11.1 miles round trip.

**Difficulty:** A good trail to West Maroon Pass and Frigid Air Pass. If you continue on to the unnamed pass described, some routefinding will be necessary to stay on the faint and sometimes confusing trails.

**USGS Quad:** Snowmass Mtn., CO. Optional: Maroon Bells, CO.

information kiosk and sign-in box for overnight visitors.

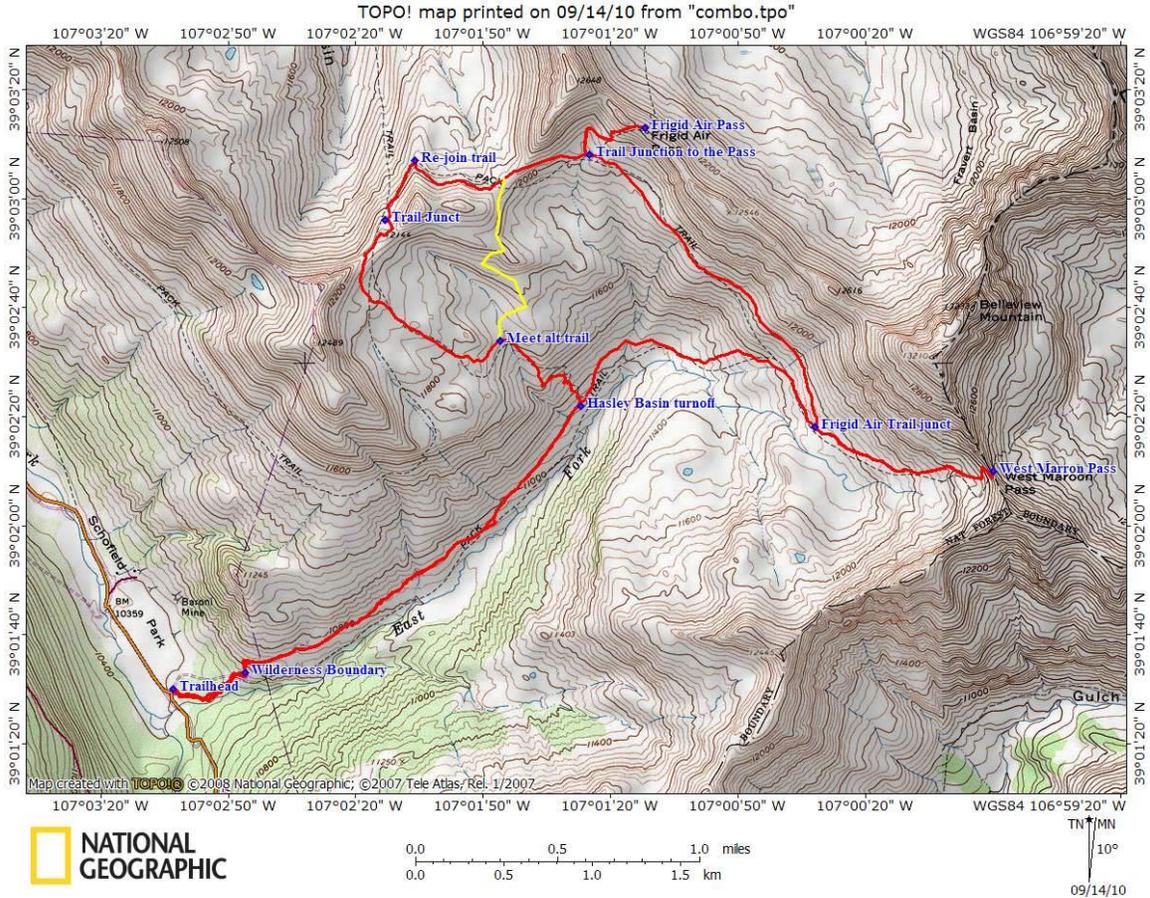
Follow the trail northeast as it initially follows the north side of the stream. Shortly after passing the remains of an old cabin, pass into the Maroon Bells - Snowmass Wilderness at mile 0.4. Continue into the scenic East Fork Basin, passing a signed trail junction to Hasley Basin at mile 2.0. Stay straight here on the trail to West Maroon Pass. (We will return to this point on the Hasley Basin Trail to complete the loop). The trail gradually bears towards the east, reaching a signed junction to Frigid Air Pass at mile 3.1. Continue straight to reach West Maroon Pass at mile 3.9 and enjoy the views of the West Maroon Creek valley, impressively framed by the Maroon Bells and rugged Pyramid Ridge.

Backtrack to the turnoff to Frigid Air Pass at mile 4.7 and follow the trail as it makes a high traverse across the head of the East Fork valley, reaching another signed trail junction at mile 6.0. Frigid Air Pass is a short, steep climb to the right, well worth the effort for the views of the Maroon Bells, directly across Fravert Basin. Retrace your steps back to the trail junction below the pass, and turn right (west) to continue the loop. After walking 0.3 miles from the trail junction you will reach a saddle at 12,020 feet, from which you have good views of Hagerman Peak. Here's where things become a little confusing. The topo map shows the trail contouring around the north side of two minor ridge points, but a well worn trail actually drops to the south onto the nose of a ridge. This alternate route requires a little more routefinding as the trail fades out at one point, and is not the one we want, so I will describe the route shown on the map.

From the saddle make a gently descending traverse on the north side of the ridge points mentioned above for 0.4 miles, choosing one of a myriad of game trails, to meet an obvious trail at 11,900 feet heading due south up the sharp north ridge of the second ridge point (mile 7.4). Join this new trail and follow it south as it traverses a steep hillside towards the unnamed pass at the head of Hasley Basin. Join another trail at mile 7.7, immediately below the pass, and head southwest to the low point of the pass.

From this vantage point you will be treated to perhaps the best view anywhere of Snowmass Mountain and Hagerman Peak, white giants to the north of Hasley Basin.

To complete the loop, head south and southeast on a now good trail to return to the main East Fork trail at mile 9.1. Continue back down the trail to your vehicle, reached at mile 11.1.



Map showing the loop trail, in Red. The yellow track shows an alternate route.

