

Halfmoon Ski Trail

by Dave Cooper

Over the years a number of trails on public land have been lost, either through lack of use, access issues, resource limitations or a number of other reasons. This week's ski/snowshoe tour is close to being such a case.

I enjoy rediscovering these "lost" trails. Sometimes it requires digging through old guidebooks, sometimes contacting the land managers. Both were necessary for the Halfmoon Ski Trail. I think you'll agree that it was worth it as you enter a remote and pristine section of the Mount Massive Wilderness.

There is no signage at the winter trailhead and once in the Wilderness no trail signs (these have been removed by the Forest Service as part of the Wilderness policy of minimum signage), so you'll need a slightly adventurous attitude, plus map and compass skills to follow this delightful trail.

The tour starts on a public road which soon passes through private property (the Mount Massive Ranch). It is important to stay on the road and, as always, respect private property. There are currently no access issues for this trail. Let's keep it that way.

Hike Description

From the parking area ski 100 yards southwest on the Halfmoon Road. Turn right on Forest Service Road 152, unsigned except for a sign to 2815 CR11. Follow this road west, keeping the fence to your right.

At mile 0.3 reach the property boundary for the Mount Massive Ranch. Continue on the road as it crosses through a series of fences marking the private property. The road trends south, staying to the east side of an open willowy area, reaching the Mount Massive Wilderness boundary at mile 1.3. It is necessary to self-register here by filling out a Wilderness Use Permit (no fee). The Forest Service collects this information to obtain visitor use data.

Getting to the Trailhead: Drive on US Highway 24 to the intersection with State Highway 300. This is 1.5 miles south of the Leadville town limit or 29.7 miles north of the Buena Vista town limit. Measuring from this intersection, drive west on US300 to mile 0.8, then turn left (south) on Halfmoon Road (Lake County Road 11). At mile 2.2 turn right (west), still on CR 11 but now gravel. This junction is signed to Halfmoon Campground. The road is plowed to mile 3.4 at 9600 feet. Park here by a concrete structure.

Hike Statistics: Trailhead to the Colorado Trail junction : 980 feet of total elevation gain in 3.4 miles one way.

Difficulty: An intermediate ski tour on a gentle, unsigned Forest Service Road. Since the trail sees little traffic in the winter, be prepared to break trail.

With the current lack of trail markings a map and compass and/or GPS are essential.

USGS Quad: Mount Massive, CO



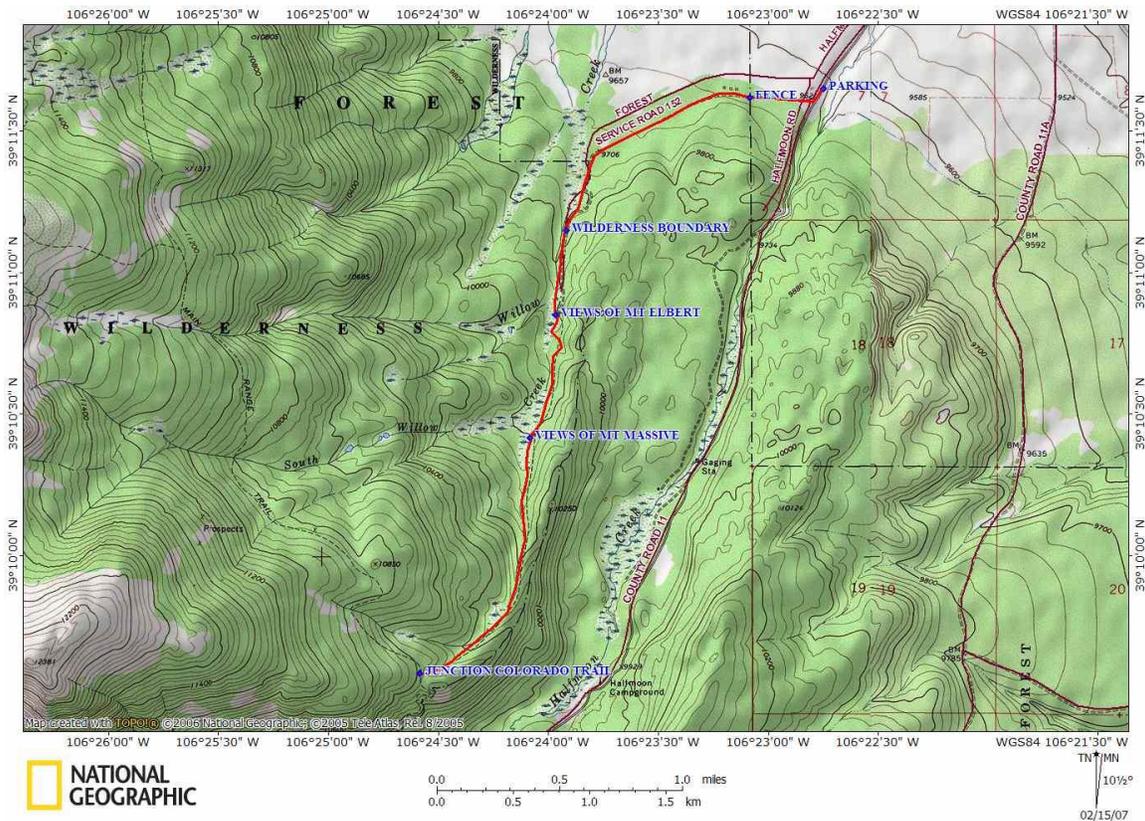
Stay on the road through the private property-compressed



Mount Elbert, seen from a clearing-compressed

Continue south on the road, staying generally on the east edge of the drainage. At mile 1.7 is the confluence with Willow Creek, which joins the drainage from the west. The open area at this confluence provides good views of Mount Elbert to the southwest. Continue south on the road to another, larger, open area at mile 2.3. This is the confluence with South Willow Creek. Continue south along the now unnamed creek, the road staying just to the east of the creek. Towards the end of the trail the grade steepens slightly before reaching the Main Range Trail, a part of the Colorado Trail, after 3.4 miles.

While it is possible to extend the tour by taking the Main Range Trail southwest from this junction to join the Halfmoon Road a little west of Emerald Lake (often packed by snowmobiles), following your tracks back down will be hard to resist.



GPS Latitude / Longitude NAD83 (Deg., Min., Sec.)
 PARKING: 39,11,39N / 106,22,45W, 9652 feet
 FENCE: 39,11,37N / 106,23,5W, 9642 feet
 WILDERNESS BOUNDARY: 39,11,9N / 106,23,55W, 9846 feet
 VIEWS OF MT ELBERT: 39,10,51N / 106,23,58W, 9902 feet
 VIEWS OF MT MASSIVE: 39,10,25N / 106,24,5W, 10079 feet
 JUNCTION COLORADO TRAIL: 39,9,35N / 106,24,35W, 10603 feet

