

Hike of the Week - Booth Creek

by Dave Cooper

Easy access from I-70 makes Booth Creek a popular destination

One of several valleys located close to the town of Vail, Booth Creek allows the hiker to visit the heart of the rugged Gore Range. We will visit some of the other valleys at a later date, but this drainage offers something for everyone – a short walk to a spectacular waterfall, a longer hike to one of two pristine mountain lakes, or, for the adventurous, a fun scramble to a spectacular summit.

Getting to the Trailhead: Go west on I-70 to the East Vail exit (Exit 180). Head west 0.85 miles to the Booth Falls Road. Turn right and follow this road for 0.2 miles to the Trailhead parking area.

Hike Statistics:

To Falls: 1200 feet elevation gain in 1.8 miles.

To Booth Lake: 3000 feet elevation gain in 4.0 miles.

To “West Partner Peak”: 4600 feet elevation gain in 5.3 miles.

USGS Quad: Vail East, CO

In a few weeks, this hike will offer some of the best aspen-viewing in the state. As of this past weekend, however, wildflowers still provided brilliant color in the high meadows.

Hike Description

From the trailhead, hike steadily uphill on the well-maintained trail for 1.8 miles to Booth Creek Falls. As you gain elevation, Holy Cross Mountain comes into view to the south. Shortly beyond the trailhead you will cross into the Eagles Nest Wilderness.

If you continue on to Booth Lake (2.2 miles beyond the falls), you will enter an alpine environment with spectacular views of the surrounding peaks. The trail ends here, so this may be a good lunch spot. However, with a little more work it is possible to reach the summit of the highest of the peaks surrounding this basin - unofficially named “West Partner Peak” – 13,047 feet high.

To climb “West Partner” Peak, head for the small tarn, northeast of Booth Lake at an elevation of 11,870 feet. A grassy gully will provide access to this tarn, the start of the gully marked on the map by the waypoint “GULLY”.

From this small tarn, the southwest ridge of “West Partner” rises directly to the summit. There are two options for climbing the ridge. The easiest is to scramble up grassy slopes on the right side of the ridge (following occasional cairns) until able to traverse left and gain the ridge above some obvious rock slabs (waypoint “LEAVE RIDGE”). From here it is straightforward scrambling up large talus to the summit.

The most aesthetic line, however, and the most fun (if you are comfortable on third class terrain) is to scramble up the grassy slope directly above the tarn and attack the ridge from its low point. You will find solid rock and some intricate routefinding to keep the

scrambling at no more than class 3, but whenever the choices seem limited, a reasonable option appears. This route joins the alternate line at waypoint “LEAVE RIDGE”.

When on the summit, marked by a cairn, decide if the next ridge point is higher or not – my GPS indicated that it was lower by five feet, so you needn’t go over to it unless driven! Actually, this is the start of “West Partner’s” south ridge, a slightly more difficult route than the southwest ridge.

To descend back to the tarn, follow your ascent route back to waypoint “LEAVE RIDGE” and then take the easier route down the grassy slopes. Descend from here down the ascent gully until you can regain the Booth Lake trail, a short distance below the lake.

