

Horseshoe Gulch Ski/Snowshoe Trail by Dave Cooper



An old gold dredge near the Horseshoe Gulch trailhead - small.jpg

The country north of the Swan River, just outside the town of Breckenridge, is an area of rolling terrain ideally suited to cross country skiing. To protect the elk habitat, motorized vehicles aren't allowed, so you should enjoy a peaceful outing. Tree-covered hills and open valleys are criss-crossed by a multitude of unpaved roads, making the area a popular destination for locals. A word of caution: most of the trails are unmarked and require good orienteering skills, especially for loop tours.

The most straightforward tour starts at the Horseshoe Gulch trailhead and heads north, passing through a series of open meadows to reach a saddle on a gentle ridge, before dropping gradually towards Keystone Ranch. That's the tour I'll describe here.

Make sure to check out the old gold dredge located near the trailhead. An information sign details some of the history of these dredges, that shaped the river banks in much of the area.

Hike Description

From the parking area take the trail north, crossing a footbridge and continuing to a T-junction (mile 0.4) at the base of a hill. Turn left (west) and follow the trail as it contours into Horseshoe Gulch. Pass by a closed gate at mile 0.5, signed as an Elk habitat area, closed to all motorized

Getting to the Horseshoe Gulch Trailhead: Drive on Highway 9 to the intersection with Tiger Road (County Road 6), 2.9 miles north of the roundabout at the northern edge of the town of Breckenridge. Turn east on Tiger Road and drive 2.6 miles to the plowed trailhead parking area, located on the north side of the road.

GPS coordinates for the trailhead (NAD83): 39°31'48"N, 105°59'53"W, 8,396 feet.

Statistics: From the Horseshoe Gulch trailhead to Keystone Ranch, the trail gains 230 feet and loses 400 feet (to be re-climbed on the way back) in 2.6 miles one way.

Difficulty: Suitable for skiers of all abilities, though depending on conditions, beginners may have a little difficulty descending one or two short sections of the trail.

USGS Quad: Keystone, CO.

vehicles. Continue into the gulch on the main trail, dropping slightly towards the power lines. The trail parallels the power line for half a mile, crossing the Colorado Trail at mile 0.7. At mile 1.0 the trail leaves the power lines and climbs gently as Horseshoe Gulch turns slightly to the right. After crossing a stream the trail climbs more steeply along a hillside, entering a second open meadow at mile 1.2.

Crossing one of the meadows on a snowy day-small.jpg

Continue north along the west side of this meadow until the trail re-enters the trees shortly before reaching a saddle at mile 1.6. This is the high point of the tour. Several trails intersect here, but the main trail continues north, descending gradually until reaching a clearing at mile 1.9. Our trail contours left (west) here across the open area and quickly re-enters the forest on a northerly bearing. Glide gently downhill through forest to mile 2.6, the terminus of the tour, in the open meadow. The collection of buildings in the meadow are those of Keystone Ranch. You may well see horse-drawn sleighs at the ranch, a popular destination for tourists visiting the Keystone Resort.



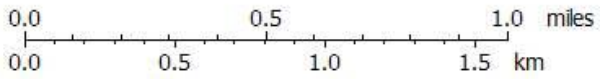
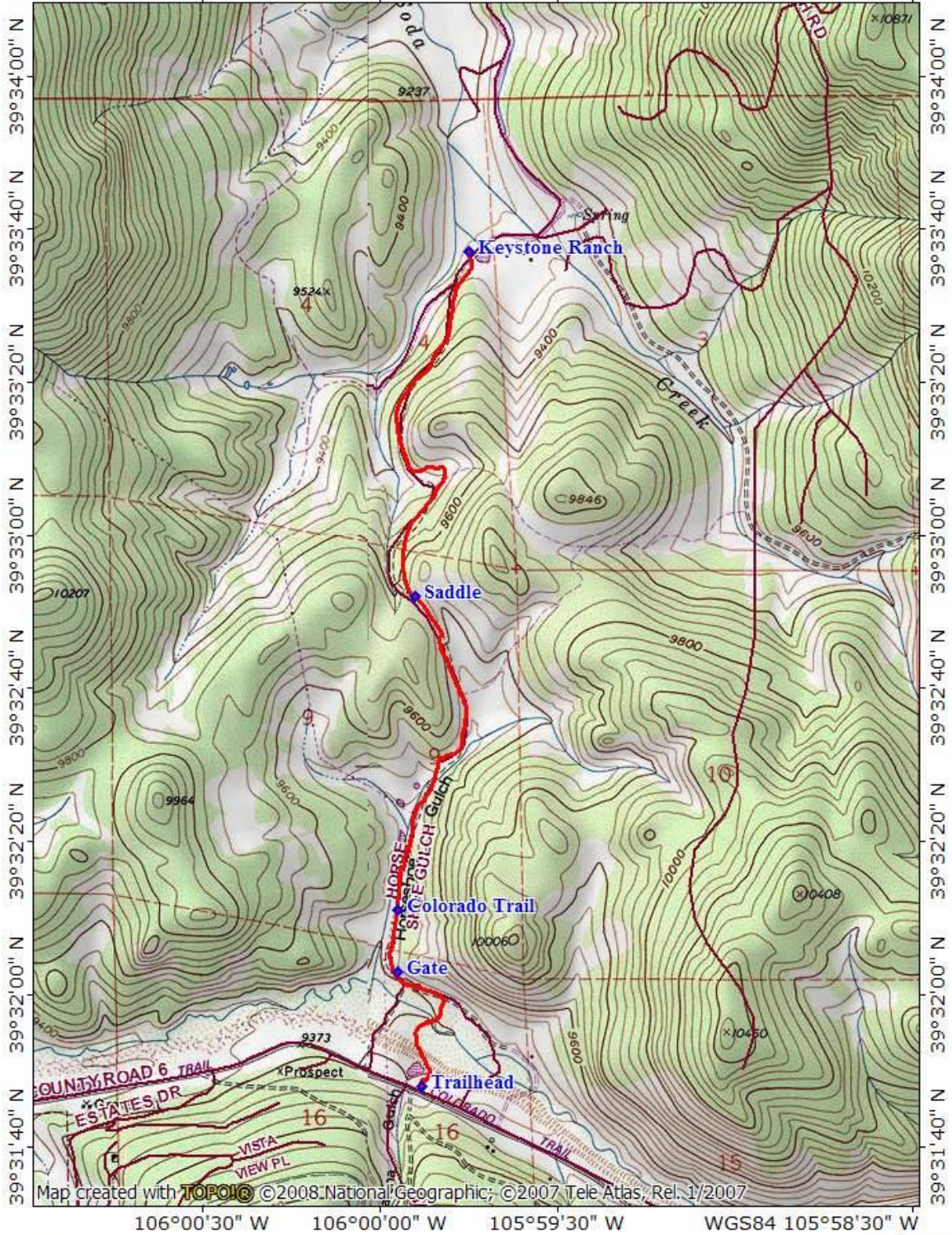
Retrace your tracks to return to your vehicle.

Keystone Ranch Sleigh ride-small.jpg



TOPO! map printed on 12/26/10 from "etrex.tpo"

106°00'30" W 106°00'00" W 105°59'30" W WGS84 105°58'30" W



TN MN
9 1/2°
12/26/10

GPS Latitude / Longitude NAD83 (Deg., Min., Sec.)

Trailhead, 39,31,48,-105,59,53,9419 feet

Gate, 39,32,3,-105,59,57,9444 feet

Colorado Trail, 39,32,11,-105,59,57,9456 feet

Saddle, 39,32,52,-105,59,54,9646 feet

Keystone Ranch, 39,33,37,-105,59,45,9250 feet

