

## “Boudoir Couloir” - Horseshoe Mountain by Dave Cooper



*Approaching the horseshoe cirque. The “Boudoir” couloir can be seen at the left side of the horseshoe.-alternate-small.jpg*

May and June are perhaps the most popular months for snow climbing in Colorado. A couloir on the east face of Horseshoe Mountain offers a moderately easy snow climb in the spectacular cirque which gives the peak its name. This couloir has come to be known as the “Boudoir

Couloir”, a name given to the climb by Gerry and Jennifer Roach in their excellent book “Colorado’s Thirteeners - 13,800 to 13,999 Feet-From Hikes to Climbs”, Fulcrum Press.

On a day in mid-May when Denver was experiencing temperatures in the mid-eighties, we found ourselves in white-out conditions near Horseshoe’s summit - a reminder that our mountains can surprise us with wintry weather at any time of the year.

Our day started early, since with the warm

**Getting to the Trailhead:** From the traffic light in Fairplay, head south on US Highway 285. After 1.2 miles turn right (west) on Park County Road 18 and drive 10 miles on this road to the old townsite of Leavick (make sure you stay straight (left) on CR18 after 1.2 miles, where the road turns to gravel). This is the parking area for two wheel drive vehicles. Four wheel drive vehicles (and usually high-clearance two wheel drive vehicles) can drive 0.8 miles further to the four wheel drive parking area, where a jeep road takes off to the south (left). Be careful not to block any driveways and respect private property.

**Statistics:** From the four wheel drive trailhead you will gain 2,380 feet in 5.8 miles round trip. If you park at the two-wheel-drive parking area, add 350 feet and 1.6 miles round trip.

**Difficulty:** The approach is mainly on old mining roads, snow-covered early in the season. A moderate snow couloir takes you 1000 vertical feet to the summit of Horseshoe Mountain (13,898 feet). The descent is on easy snow slopes and mining roads.

**Gear:** Crampons and ice ax, plus stiff mountaineering boots. And don't forget your helmet!

Climbing disclaimer. Mountaineering is .....

temperatures we knew that there wouldn't be a hard freeze, even above thirteen thousand feet. By the time the sun rose we were approaching Horseshoe's east cirque. Spectacular clouds contrasted with the warm glow of sunlight on the peak. Firm snow made the approach very enjoyable, allowing the snowshoes to stay on our packs.



*Sunrise on the approach to Horseshoe Mtn2.-small.jpg*



*The sun reflects off a frozen lake on the approach to Horseshoe Mountain-small.jpg*

As we started the climb up the couloir the temperatures were still quite warm and we made steady progress up the moderate slopes, which average an angle of approximately 36 degrees. As we neared the top the weather changed abruptly, with horizontal snow stinging any exposed skin. We quickly went from being lightly-dressed to putting on full winter gear.



*Deteriorating weather-small.jpg*



*Exiting the couloir into the teeth of the storm-small.jpg*

We navigated the short distance to the summit and started our descent down the gentle northeast ridge using GPS and map. We didn't even slow down as we passed over the summit.

*Ginni looking a little frosty.jpg*

As we slowly made our way down, the storm ended, as abruptly as it had started, revealing a spectacular scene. The rest of the descent was quite mellow except for gusty winds knocking us about. We were able to enjoy the stunning scenery all around us. The challenging conditions reminded us that it is always wise to prepare for unexpected weather. Being prepared enabled us to thoroughly enjoy a fine mountaineering adventure, which otherwise could have been quite unpleasant (not to say, dangerous).



*Clearing storm near the summit of Horseshoe Mountain-small.jpg*

*Clearing storm on Mt. Sheridan-small.jpg*

Remember that before you head out for your first



snow climb you should take a class or receive other expert instruction on safe snow-climbing techniques, including the use of an ice ax for climbing and self-arresting.

### **Approach**

From the four-wheel drive parking area, walk up the jeep road (labeled as County Road 603 on some maps) as it heads south and west into Horseshoe Gulch. When the road reaches an elevation of 12,335 feet, at mile 1.5, leave the road just before it switchbacks to the right, and continue southwest into the obvious cirque below Horseshoe's summit, passing the first of two small, frozen lakes at mile 1.6. With the vertical cliffs to your right and the couloir facing you to the left side of the cirque, this is an impressive place. Choose a spot to gear up for the climb.

### **The Climb**

The "Boudoir Couloir" climbs almost 1000 feet from the center of the cirque to reach the summit ridge 300 yards southeast of the summit, at an elevation of 13,890 feet. The couloir is quite shallow in the lower part, narrowing near the top as it passes between small cliff bands. The lower part of the couloir had shallow snow cover when we did this climb, and within a few weeks will melt out. According to the Roaches' book, snow usually stays on the upper slopes until late June. The climbing is quite moderate, with the steepest sections not exceeding 40 degrees. Expect some sections to be softer snow while others can contain icy spots, making crampons necessary. We saw evidence of a small amount of rockfall, so don't forget your helmet and get an early start.

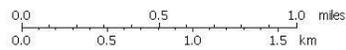
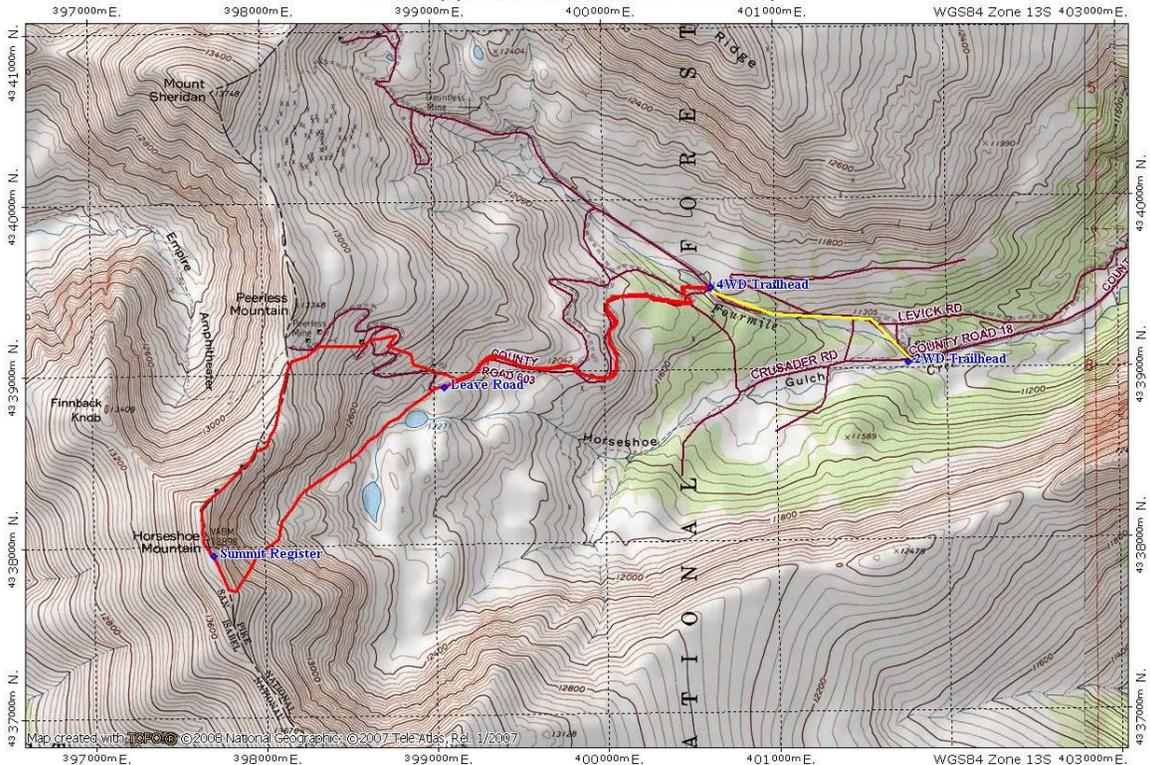
At the top of the couloir is an old mining shack. From here it is a short walk northeast to the summit at mile 2.8.

### **The Descent**

There are several possibilities for descent routes. One is a gentle snow slope in the bowl immediately south of the cirque, or take the standard route down the northeast ridge.

For the latter, walk north from the summit for 200 yards. The ridge splits at this point, with the northwest ridge descending steeply towards Finnback Knob. We take the gentle northeast ridge, reaching the vicinity of the saddle (13,260 feet) between Horseshoe and Peerless Mountain at mile 3.6. Choose a descent line from this saddle towards the east and descend snow slopes and mining roads to rejoin your approach track at around 12,300 feet. Continue back down County Road 603 to your vehicle.

TOPO! map printed on 05/13/09 from "Untitled2.tpo"



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

2WD Trailhead, 39,11,42, -106,8,15, 11253 feet

4WD Trailhead, 39,11,56, -106,9,3, 11621 feet

Leave Road, 39,11,37, -106,10,8, 12329 feet

Summit Register, 39,11,5, -106,11,4, 13927 feet

