

Jones Mountain (13,860 feet) and Niagara Peak (13,807 feet)
by Dave Cooper



Jones Mountain (left) and Niagara Peak from Burns Gulch

Often overlooked by hikers intent on scaling their better-known neighbors, these two peaks put you into the heart of the San Juan Range and provide excellent views of the surrounding terrain. All in a half day hike!

Getting to the Trailhead: Drive to the town of Silverton on US550 (the "Million Dollar Highway"). Turn onto Silverton's main street (County Road 2) and drive northeast through the town for 0.9 miles to a junction. Stay right on County Road 2.

2.9 miles from the junction of County Road 2 and US550 the pavement ends and becomes a good gravel road. Pass through Howardsville at 5.1 miles, the old mining town of Eureka at 8.8 miles, and reach a point at 11.7 miles where County Road 2 crosses to the east side of the Animas River. (Waypoint "START OF JEEP ROAD"). There are parking spots available close to this point.

Add to that the bonus of a fine snow climb on Niagara Peak in the late spring, and how can you resist?

Located close to Silverton, these two peaks combine well with hikes and climbs in the Silverton / Ouray area, so the next time you're down that way, take a morning to bag a couple of fun high Thirteeners.

Hike Description

From the bridge, follow the jeep road on the east side of the Animas River. This close to its source the river is quite modest compared to the major geographic feature it becomes further downstream. Continue on this road as it climbs gently, crossing the outflow from Grouse Gulch after about 200 yards. At a quarter mile the jeep road forks; take the left fork (the right fork only parallels the Animas River).

Hike Statistics: From the start of the jeep road: 3700 feet of total elevation gain in 7.1 miles round trip.

Difficulty: During the summer months this outing consists of an easy walk on a jeep road with easy scrambling on both peaks. During late spring, expect snow - bring an ice ax and crampons.

USGS Quad: Handies Peak, CO



As the jeep road gradually rises it curves around to the southeast and enters Burns Gulch, a spectacular high valley. Continue on the road as it crosses the creek at 11,800 feet, passing several old mines. Later in the spring and summer it may be possible to stay on the road to 12,100 feet, but when the basin is filled with snow, just head up the gentle snowfields towards the obvious saddle separating Jones and Niagara. Social trails can be found on both sides of the drainage. They all seem to converge on the saddle, zigzagging up through a minor cliff band. (Remember to choose a route which doesn't damage the fragile ecosystem here above treeline. For more information on "Leave No Trace" principles, go to www.lnt.org.)

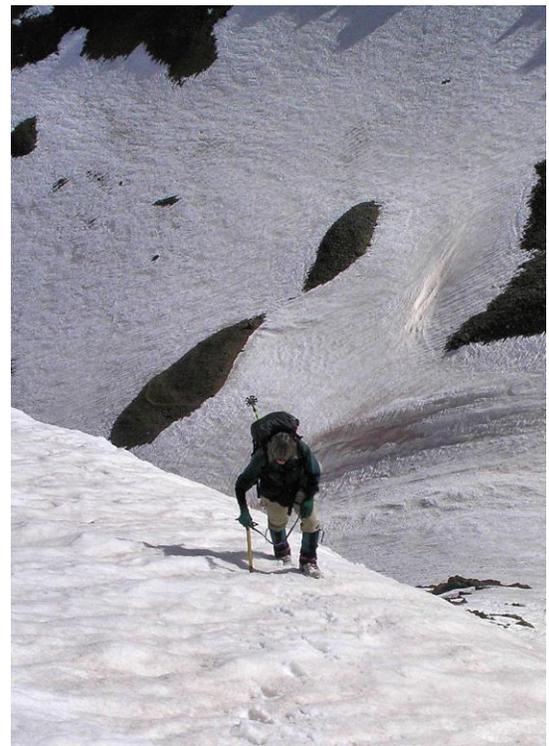
In late spring another option presents itself- snowfields on the northeast face of Niagara allow direct access to the summit - these offer moderate snow-climbing for 800 feet. On our last climb of these peaks we took a nice, moderate snow couloir, very visible as you approach the head of the valley.

Climbing a moderate snow couloir on Niagara's northeast face

If you elect to head for the Niagara-Jones saddle, turn right at the saddle and head up a climbers trail to

the top of Niagara. In spring conditions you'll want an iceax and possibly crampons for the fine knife-edge snow ridge which forms reliably each year.

Climbing snowfields high on Niagara's northeast face





The summit offers views of the Grenadier and Needles ranges, as well as the nearby fourteeners - Handies, Sunshine and Redcloud, Wetterhorn and Uncompahgre, to name but a few.

Descend back to the Jones - Niagara saddle. A climb of Jones Mountain's south ridge is a straightforward hike on a social trail.

Descend back to the saddle and thence to the trailhead.

On Niagara's east ridge

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