

Loveland Mountain (13,692 feet) in Winter
by Dave Cooper



Mounts Buckskin and Democrat, seen from the summit of Loveland Mountain-small.jpg

As calendar winter drew to a close, I felt the urge to head up to the high country and bag a summit. Skiing up towards Kite Lake a few days earlier, the long ridge of Loveland Mountain had caught my eye. One of the few peaks in the area that I haven't climbed in winter, it appeared to offer a safe route to the summit, not always a certainty this season, with the unusually unforgiving snowpack.

Loveland Mountain is one of those peaks that thousands of people walk or drive past each summer without giving it a second thought. It doesn't appear on any lists, is an "unranked" peak, and is surrounded by fourteeners and high thirteeners. Still, you'll know it's a mountain when you're climbing it.

I'd noticed that the winds had scoured the slopes of the normal route, making this also a good winter route. Even so, with the winter road closure back at the Paris Mill, it's more work at this time of year, but still quite a reasonable day. Sometimes the lower peaks (Loveland Mountain is "only" 13,692 feet) offer more impressive views than those seen from the summits of higher neighbors, and I certainly think that's true in this case.

Route Description

From the winter parking area, start hiking northwest along County Road 8. Pass the road to Windy Ridge at mile 0.3 and continue to the Sweet Home Mine (a mine that has produced some of the highest quality rhodochrosite crystals) at mile 1.5. It is necessary to continue a little beyond the mine to avoid private property. Note the Forest Service Boundary at mile 1.7. Past the boundary you can choose where to cross Buckskin Creek and start the climb. I chose a spot a little further along at mile 1.9, just by the informational "wagonwheel" #8.

Getting to the Trailhead: Drive on Highway 9 to the town of Alma, 5.3 miles north of Fairplay. In the center of town, turn west onto County Road 8, signed to Kite Lake. This junction is almost directly opposite the South Park Saloon.

Drive on County Road 8 as far as it has been plowed, usually a little before the Paris Mill, a distance of 2.5 miles from Alma. A four-wheel drive vehicle is recommended for this road, since it may be awhile after a storm that the road is plowed.

GPS coordinates for trailhead (NAD83): 39°17'40"N, 106° 6'19"W, 10,939 feet.

Statistics: From the winter road closure you will gain 2700 feet in 3.2 miles (one way).

Difficulty: An easy snow climb to grassy slopes and talus, but with many of the challenges a winter peak offers.

Gear: Snow shoes and an ice ax, in addition to the usual winter gear.

USGS Quad: Alma, CO; Climax, CO.

Winter mountaineering is often an exercise in problem solving. Trails are usually covered by snow, but that's fine since summer routes are often not a good way to go in the winter. The trick is to find a safe route that minimizes the amount of "trenching", the term a friend uses to describe the wallowing on snowshoes through deep powder snow on the approach. Since summer trailheads are usually inaccessible by vehicle, we normally spend a considerable amount of time before a climb poring over topographic maps, determining the best approach to a viable route. Ridges are usually the safest routes, but sometimes there's no safe way to access the ridge. Routefinding on snow is a complex topic and shouldn't be taken lightly. Obtain expert instruction on how to read terrain, assess snow stability and acquire the other essential skills necessary to be safe in the winter.

Check on current snow conditions at <http://avalanche.state.co.us/index.php>



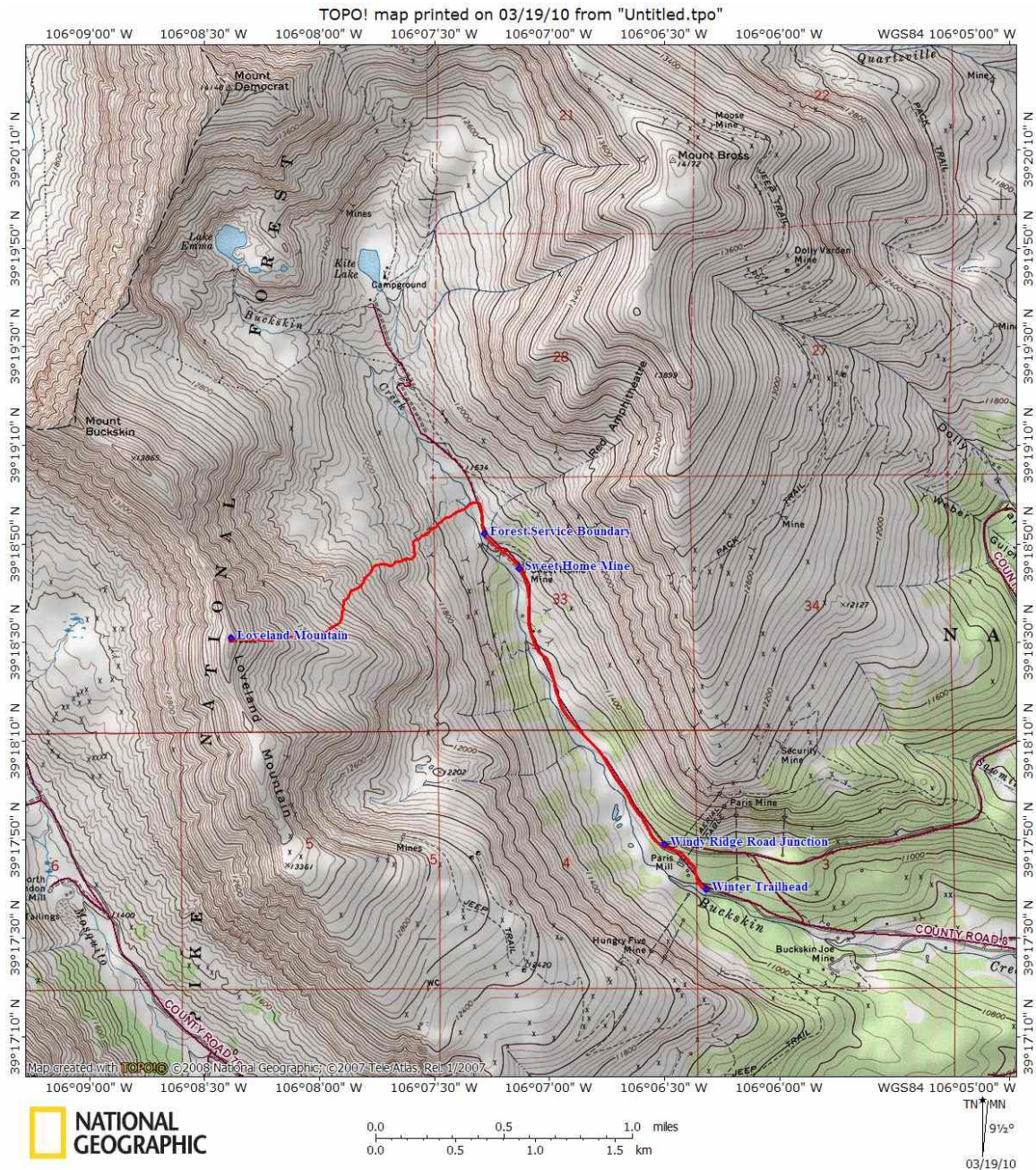
The route heads up through the trees to the wind-scoured slopes above-small.jpg

There's no way to avoid a bit of unpleasant wallowing through the willows, so cross the creek then head up through the sparsely tree-covered slopes to the wind-scoured grassy slopes above, choosing a line to avoid any avalanche terrain. Work your way generally west, eventually aiming for the gentle east ridge descending off Loveland. Follow this ridge to the summit and enjoy the views.



Sculpted snow on the flanks of Loveland Mountain. Mt. Democrat can be seen at upper right of photo.- small.jpg

If you're so inclined, the ridge over to Mount Buckskin, a mile away to the northwest, is a moderate scramble. Unless you're sure of a safe descent route off Buckskin, it may be better to retrace your steps to Loveland and then descend the same way you ascended.



GPS Latitude / Longitude NAD83 (Deg., Min., Sec.)
 Winter Trailhead, 39,17,40,-106,6,19,10939 feet
 Windy Ridge Road Junction, 39,17,49,-106,6,30,11056 feet
 Sweet Home Mine, 39,18,45,-106,7,8,11371 feet
 Forest Service Boundary, 39,18,52,-106,7,17,11486 feet
 Loveland Mountain, 39,18,31,-106,8,23,13692 feet

