

## Mitchell Creek Loop - ski or snowshoe

by Dave Cooper

Well, it's that time of year to get out the skis or snowshoes and head for the woods. We chose one of the Tennessee Pass ski trails for our first outing of the season and found good snow conditions along most of the route. Moderate grades make this tour an excellent warm-up for the season to come, while the length of the tour provides a good workout. Count on a full day for this route. If the trail is well tracked you should be able to complete the route on skis in four to five hours, but after a fresh snowfall expect some routefinding to be necessary. Couple this with the slower pace of breaking trail and unless you get an early start you may be glad to have your headlamp along.

The route goes well in either direction. Mileage markers along the way are organized for a counter-clockwise circuit and that's the way I'll describe it.



*Skier passing an old coke oven*

### Trail Description

From the parking area atop Tennessee Pass, cross to the west side of the highway. You will pass an information sign for the Colorado Trail and Continental Divide Trail on your left (where we will exit the loop) before passing an outhouse, then through an opening in the fence. Ski northwest along

**Getting to the Trailhead:** Tennessee Pass is located on US Highway 24, 9.1 miles north of the intersection with State Highway 91 at the northern edge of Leadville. The pass can also be reached by taking the Minturn exit (Exit 171) from I-70 and following US 24 south for 22.5 miles.

**Hike Statistics:** Cumulative elevation gain of 880 feet in 7.2 miles round trip.

**Difficulty:** A long ski on generally moderate terrain. As with any backcountry trail, map and compass skills are essential. A GPS can also be helpful if the trail is not tracked. While most of the trail is well signed either with blue diamonds, CDT or CT signs, the segment from Mitchell Creek to the Wurts Ditch road has only sporadic blue diamonds to guide you. No avalanche hazard.

**USGS Quads:** Leadville North, CO; Pando, CO.

the obvious railroad grade, staying straight at the junction with the Treeline Loop Trail after 0.2 miles. Stay right at the coke oven, still on the railroad grade and Continental Divide Trail. The trail drops gradually, passing the Powderhound Loop Trail Junction at 0.8 miles and staying left on the railroad grade at 2.0 miles where the Continental Divide Trail takes off to the right.

*A frosty morning*

At 2.2 miles pass a sign indicating that the Mitchell Creek Loop Trail continues for another 5 miles and enter an open area with good views of some of the surrounding peaks to the northwest.



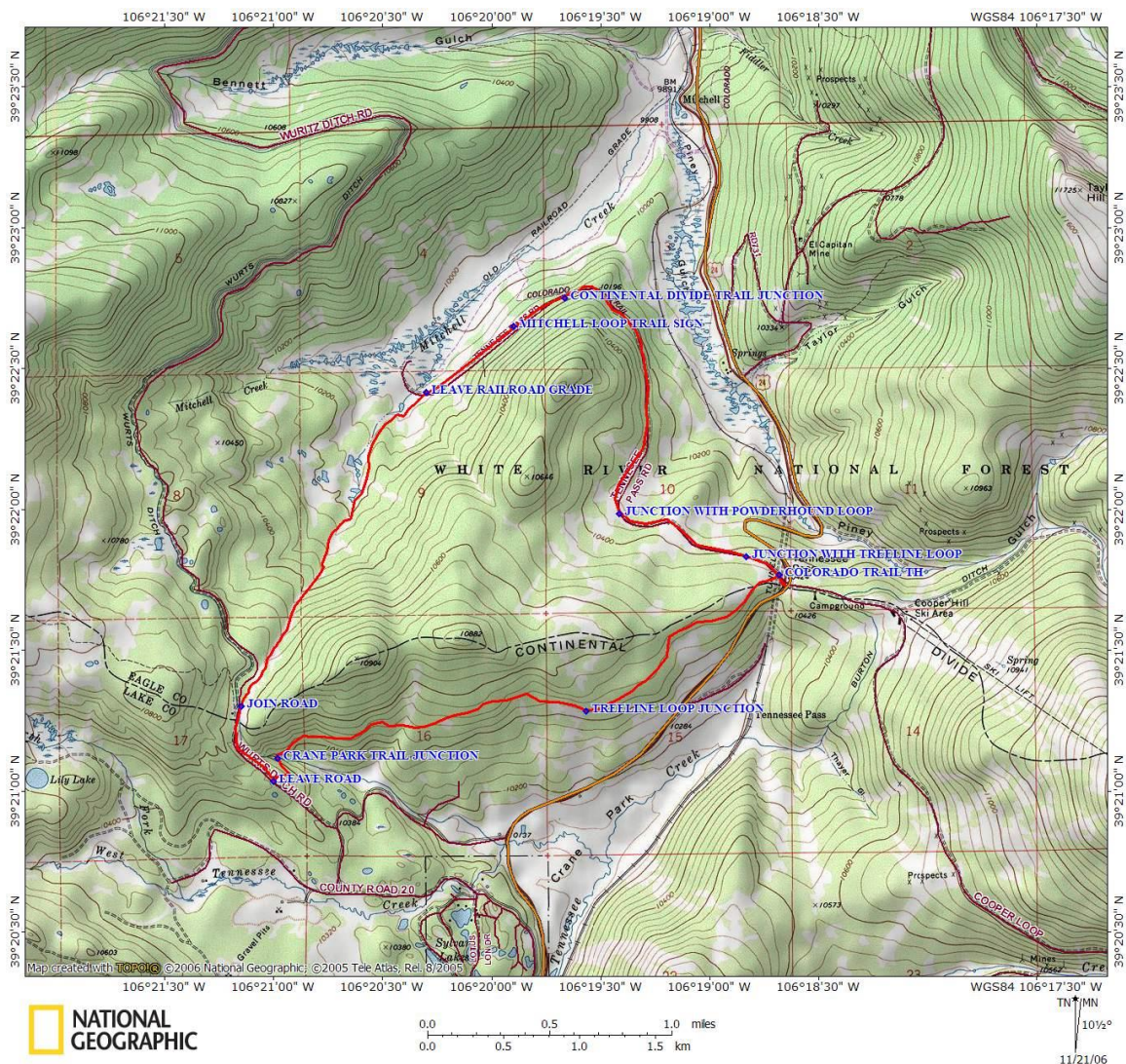
*Skiing along the old railroad bed*

At 2.7 miles the railroad grade curves to the west, and north, crossing the Mitchell Creek drainage. This is where we leave the railroad grade and continue southwest, skirting along the edge of the trees and heading up a minor drainage. The blue diamonds can be tricky to follow in this area, so pay attention. Continue southwest until you reach the Wurtz Ditch Road at mile 4.2. There is a wooden building at this location. Follow the road south (left), immediately crossing a bridge over the ditch. Continue south then southeast on the road to a trail junction at mile 4.6. Leave the road here,

taking the trail to the northeast (left), signed as the continuation of the Mitchell Creek loop and the Colorado Trail. From this point the route is well-signed and fairly obvious. At 4.8 miles the Crane Park Trail takes off to the right, but we stay straight, on the trail signed to Tennessee Pass and marked with the Colorado Trail emblem. Traverse east on rolling terrain, passing the southern end of the Treeline Trail at mile 6.1 and finally arriving back at Tennessee Pass at mile 7.2. We found the last couple of miles to have a few spots where the snow cover was a little thin, but a good storm should fix that.







TOPO! GPS Data Format DegMinSec NAD83 ElevFeet  
 JUNCTION WITH TREELINE LOOP: 39,21,50N / 106,18,50W, 10469 feet  
 JUNCTION WITH POWDERHOUND LOOP: 39,21,59N / 106,19,25W, 10381 feet  
 CONTINENTAL DIVIDE TRAIL JUNCTION: 39,22,45N / 106,19,40W, 10243 feet  
 MITCHELL LOOP TRAIL SIGN: 39,22,39N / 106,19,54W, 10194 feet  
 LEAVE RAILROAD GRADE: 39,22,25N / 106,20,18W, 10112 feet  
 JOIN ROAD: 39,21,18N / 106,21,9W, 10616 feet  
 LEAVE ROAD: 39,21,2N / 106,21,0W, 10558 feet  
 CRANE PARK TRAIL JUNCTION: 39,21,7N / 106,20,59W, 10413 feet  
 TREE LINE LOOP JUNCTION: 39,21,17N / 106,19,34W, 10440 feet  
 COLORADO TRAIL TH: 39,21,46N / 106,18,41W, 10472 feet



