

Mount Kreutzer (13,120 feet) by Dave Cooper



Early morning on the trail - small.jpg

It was over twenty years ago when Bob Martin described this week's hike in his excellent guidebook "Hiking Trails of Central Colorado" (Pruett Publishing Company, Boulder, CO). Back then there were no maintained trails on this classic long ridge walk. Martin's advice was to stay on the generally broad ridge crest the whole way. In 2010 things have changed a little. Not yet complete, two sections of the Colorado Trail parallel the ridge from Cottonwood Pass to Mount Kreutzer, our objective.

The question then, is: "Do you take Martin's advice and hike the scenic ridge crest, or stay on the maintained trail as far as possible?" I suggest a combination, using the newly-constructed trail partway and then climbing up to the ridge crest for a pleasant stroll over several points to the summit of Mount Kreutzer.

This hike, though on moderate terrain, is not to be taken too lightly. Above 12,000 feet for 13 miles (roundtrip distance) and with over 3500 feet of accumulated elevation gain, you should be thoroughly acclimated and in reasonable shape before undertaking the complete hike described here. Of course, it is also possible to hike a shorter section and still enjoy some of Colorado's finest

Statistics: The route described has an accumulated elevation gain of 3540 feet in 13.1 miles round trip.

Difficulty: A high altitude ridge walk, partly on trail with some moderate off trail hiking. Good map-reading skills are necessary.

USGS Quad: Tincup, CO.

Getting to the Trailhead: If approaching from the east, drive on Highway 24 to the town of Buena Vista. At the traffic light, turn west on County Road 306, signed to Cottonwood Pass. Follow CR306 for 19.5 miles to the large parking area atop the pass. CR306 is paved on the east side of Cottonwood Pass and graded on the west side.

GPS coordinates for the trailhead (NAD83): 38°49'40"N, 106° 24'34"W, 12152 feet.

alpine terrain. Another concern is the weather. Since you're well above treeline the whole way, only attempt this hike when the likelihood of summer thunderstorms is low. An early start is advisable.

Hike Description

From the parking area, head southwest on the well-manicured trail. Three trail junctions occur in the first 0.4 mile. Stay right at all of these. The trail climbs over the first of many ridge points at mile 0.6. From here, take a look back to the north, where many of the Sawatch's more rugged peaks are located.

The Sawatch Range, looking north from Cottonwood Pass- small.jpg

We encountered some snow patches on this first climb which created icy spots in the early morning. The trail continues south just to the west of the ridge before crossing to the east side to bypass Point 12,792. Switchbacks take you back up to the ridge at mile 2.2. The lake to the east of the ridge, complete with island, is named, surprisingly, Lost Lake (we expected it to be named Island Lake, of course).



At mile 3.0 the trail leaves the ridge. An alternate route to the one we took would be to stay on the ridge at this spot and continue along the Continental Divide all the way to Kreutzer, but we decided to follow the trail further, to its current terminus at mile 3.8 where it crosses the northwest ridge of Point 12,850. From here we started up the moderate ridge to reach Point 12,850 at mile 4.3, then turned south on tundra using the remnants of a faint climbers' trail. The next ridge point crossed was Point 13,055 at mile 4.9. Continuing down the south ridge for 0.2 mile, we reached a saddle where another segment of the Colorado trail crosses. Note this saddle, since the trail provides a way to bypass Point 13,055 on your return.

Some sections of the trail are still snow-covered-small.jpg

Continue south along the ridge over three more minor points to the summit of Mount Kreutzer (13,120



feet) at mile 6.6. The darkly-impressive peak further south is Emma Burr Mountain (13,538 feet), 1.8 miles further.

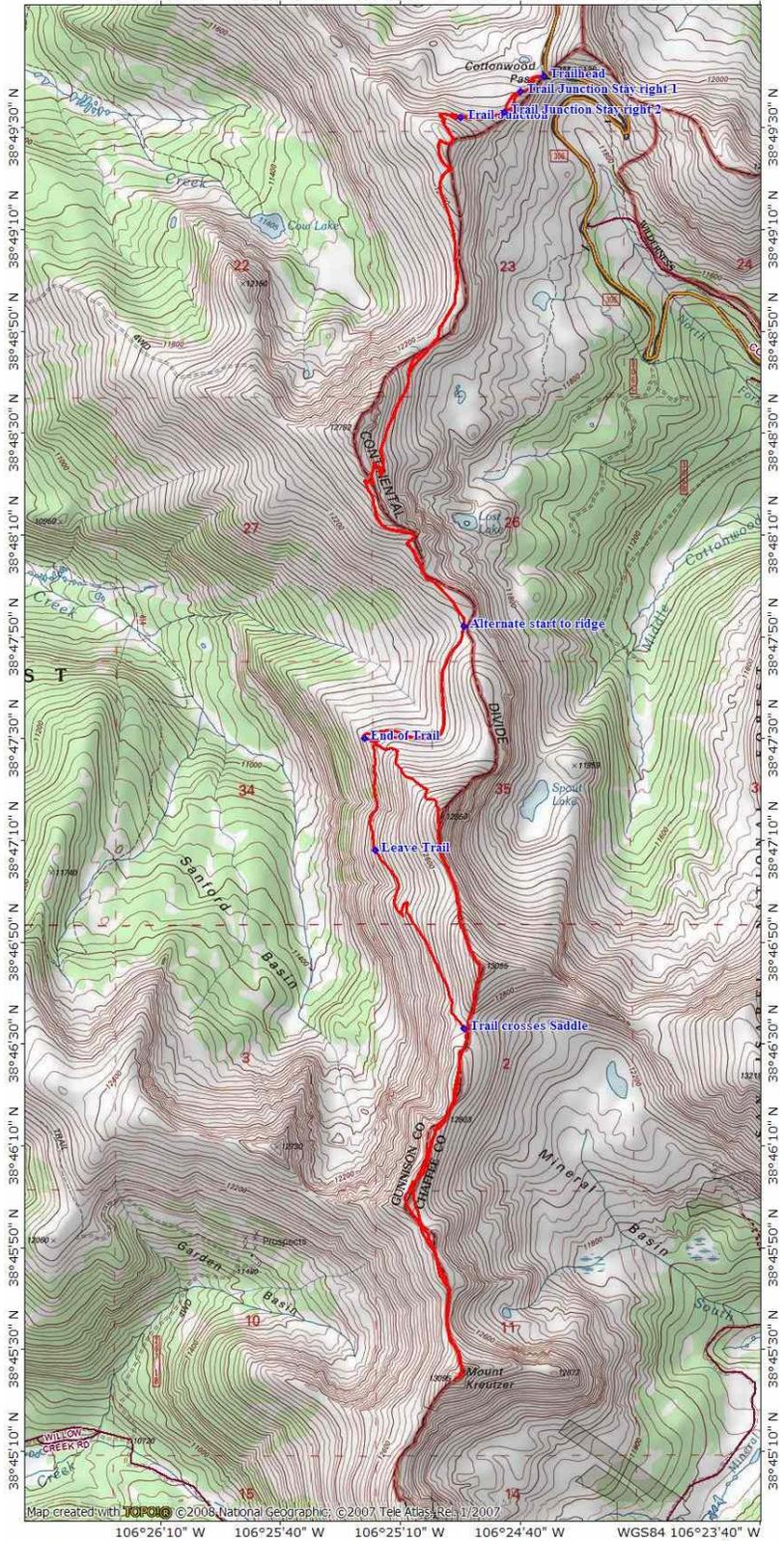


Approaching Mount Kreuzer (center of photo). The higher peak to the right is Emma Burr Mountain-small.jpg

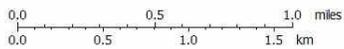
Now for the return trip. Either reverse your ascent route, or save some elevation gain by bypassing Points 13,055 and 12,850 using the Colorado Trail, as we elected to do. Picking up the trail at the 12,772 foot saddle immediately south of Point 13,055, follow the trail as it makes a descending traverse across the west face of Point 13,055, losing 600 feet. Just before the trail ends (this will change in the future), it is necessary to leave the main trail at a switchback at 12,140 feet. A primitive trail, 0.4 miles in length, occasionally marked with pink flags, continues north from the switchback and contours to join the ascent route on the northwest ridge of Point 12,850, 70 feet above the Colorado Trail. This is a rough trail and requires some care to follow, but taking this shortcut does save quite a bit of elevation gain and loss. Continue on the trail (which now seems like a highway) back to your vehicle.

TOPO! map printed on 06/20/10 from "Untitled2.tpo"

106°26'10" W 106°25'40" W 106°25'10" W 106°24'40" W WGS84 106°23'40" W



Map created with TOPO! © 2008 National Geographic, © 2007 Tele Atlas, Res. 1/2007



TN MN
9 1/2°
06/20/10

GPS Latitude / Longitude NAD83 (Deg., Min., Sec.)
 Trailhead, 38,49,40, -106,24,34,12152 feet
 Trail Junction Stay right 1, 38,49,37, -106,24,40,12234 feet
 Trail Junction Stay right 2, 38,49,33, -106,24,44,12283 feet
 Trail Junction, 38,49,32, -106,24,55,12411 feet
 Alternate start to ridge, 38,47,52, -106,24,54,12241 feet
 End of Trail, 38,47,30, -106,25,19,12077 feet
 Trail crosses Saddle, 38,46,33, -106,24,54,12772 feet
 Leave Trail, 38,47,8, -106,25,16,12136 feet

