

Mount Sopris (12,953 feet) by Dave Cooper



Mount Sopris. The route ascends the left-most ridge, then traverses to the main summit at the right of the photo - small.jpg

Mount Sopris, visible when looking south from Glenwood Springs, must surely be one of the most photographed peaks in Colorado. Standing alone at the northern end of the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness, the twin summits of Sopris rise dramatically 5000 feet above their surroundings.

While the most popular time to climb Mount Sopris is in the Autumn when the aspen glades are in full color, a springtime ascent of the peak offers the chance to experience the peak at its most alpine. With the flanks of the peak still covered by snow, Sopris can provide both moderate snow climbing and, for the expert backcountry skier, many excellent descent possibilities. The standard ascent route up the east ridge, a moderate though long trail hike later in the year, becomes a pleasant hike on snow around the beginning of June.

Mount Sopris, seen from the trailhead-small.jpg

Due to the length of this hike, it may best be accomplished with an intermediate camp at the Thomas Lakes. Especially with the snow conditions we found recently, making the

Getting to the Trailhead: From Glenwood Springs, drive south on Highway 82 for 11.6 miles to the intersection with Highway 133. Turn south on Highway 133 and drive through the town of Carbondale to the junction with the Prince Creek Road (County Road 111), 2.8 miles from Highway 82. Turn left (east) onto the Prince Creek Road and start measuring mileage from this intersection. At mile 2.7 the pavement ends, though most passenger cars should be able to continue. Stay right at a signed junction at mile 6.1, following the signs to Dinkle Lake. At mile 6.2 another sign indicates that the Thomas Lakes Trailhead is 2 miles further. Reach the trailhead and a large fenced parking area at mile 8.1.

GPS coordinates for the trailhead (NAD83): 39°18'14"N, 107° 7'29"W, 8635 feet.

Statistics: From the trailhead to the main summit you will gain 4350 feet and lose 100 feet, to be regained on the return, in 12.5 miles round trip. Continuing on to the west summit adds approximately 300 feet of elevation gain and 0.7 mile in each direction.

Difficulty: During the summer this is a moderate, but long, trail hike to a high alpine summit. In the springtime, the summit hike is on snow with a few steeper sections requiring an ice ax. After Memorial Day, the hike to the Thomas Lakes should be mainly free of snow and a pleasant trail hike.

Gear: Ice ax, snow shoes and possibly crampons for a spring ascent of the peak.

USGS Quad: Mount Sopris, CO; Basalt, CO (optional).



summit and back in one day from the trailhead is difficult.

Camping is allowed at designated sites around Thomas Lakes. Registration at the trailhead is required for overnight trips.

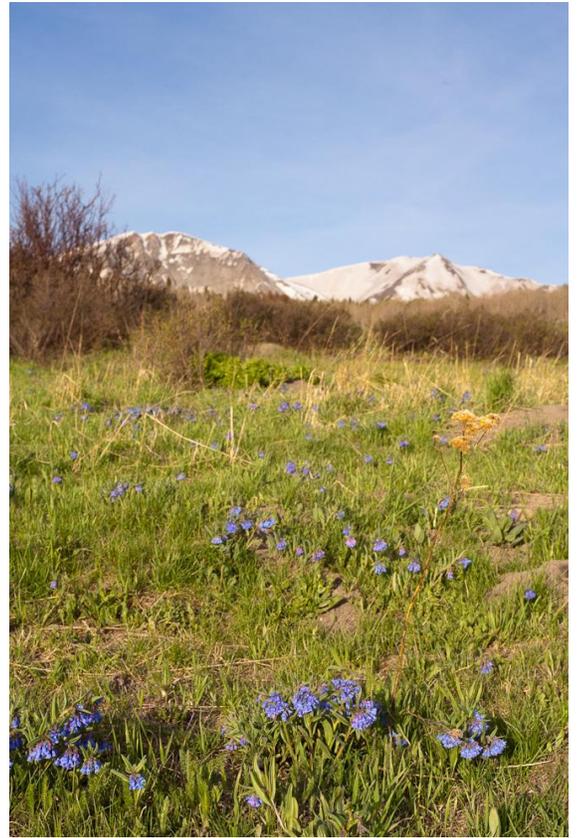
Hike Description

From the trailhead, head generally south on the Thomas Lakes Trail. Initially on an old jeep road, the trail climbs steadily up through aspen forest, passing through a gate at mile 1.1, then entering an open area allowing views of the peak.

Wildflowers starting to bloom along the trail - small-2.jpg

Continue along the road to a signed trail junction at mile 1.7. Stay to the right on the trail to the Thomas Lakes. The trail continues its steady climb to the Thomas Lakes, reached at mile 3.7. The scenic lakes, still partially frozen when we were there, make a good spot for a break and to take photos.

The trail continues south between the two main lakes, but here is where routefinding becomes challenging in the spring. Before reaching the lakes we had encountered only short sections of well-trodden snow patches. This changed as we left the lakes, aiming for the broad northeast ridge to the south of the lakes. Deep, unresponsive snow required careful routefinding to minimize the postholing. Our snowshoes stayed on our packs, of no use in the mashed potato snow conditions. Eventually we reached treeline and were rewarded with hard snow on a 30 - 35 degree slope that allowed us to reach the top of the ridge. This section required ice axes and good stiff boots to kick steps. Crampons might also be necessary under certain conditions.



Heading up the snow slopes above the Thomas Lakes - small.jpg

Once on the crest of the broad ridge, we continued on moderate snow slopes until the ridge narrowed at mile 5.0. Here we finally found the trail again for a while as the snow had melted in this section.

Above the narrow section an easy snow ridge lead to a minor bump on the east ridge of Sopris.

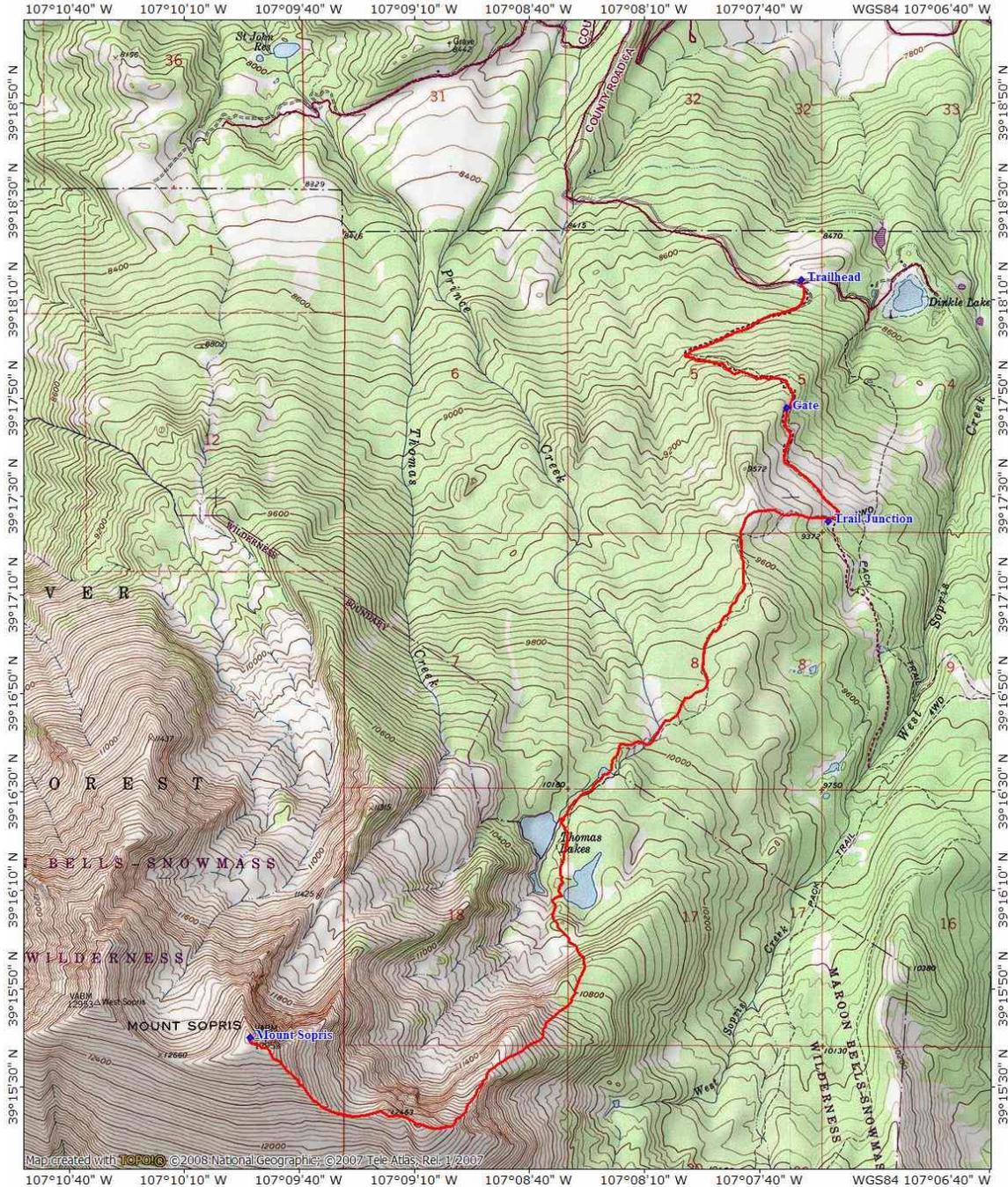
Descend west from this ridge point and follow the trail as it traverses left around a second bump (Point 12463). From here it's a long slog up the snow-covered ridge to the summit of Mount Sopris at mile 6.2. For much of the hike along the east ridge you will be rewarded with outstanding views of the Elk Range, with Capitol Peak dominating.



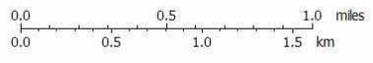
Mount Sopris panorama from the Thomas Lakes.jpg

If you have time you may want to continue on to the west summit, 0.7 mile away and the same height as the main summit. Unless you're planning a ski descent, reverse your route to descend.

TOPO! map printed on 06/03/10 from "Untitled3.tpo"



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



TN MN
10°
06/03/10

GPS Latitude / Longitude NAD83 (Deg., Min., Sec.)
 Trailhead, 39, 18, 14, -107, 7, 29, 8635 feet
 Gate, 39, 17, 48, -107, 7, 33, 9222 feet
 Trail Junction, 39, 17, 25, -107, 7, 22, 9363 feet
 Mount Sopris, 39, 15, 40, -107, 9, 53, 12897 feet

