

North Tenmile Creek – Ski / Snowshoe

by Dave Cooper

One of several excellent trails originating off the I-70 corridor in the Frisco / Silverthorne area, the North Tenmile Creek offers year-round access to the Eagles Nest Wilderness.

The trail takes you deep into the southern section of the Gore Range, with its rugged peaks providing a spectacular backdrop for the scenic valley.

The route climbs quite gently for five miles (apart from one short section near the beginning of the trail) to the head of the valley and offers access to some fine glade and open hillside skiing, making it suitable for all skill levels. Popular with backcountry skiers and snowshoers, for the first mile or two you'll likely be sharing the trail with others.

For a short outing, snowshoes are fine . If you plan on heading all the way up the valley, skis are best since the return trip will be much faster. Plus you'll be able to take advantage of some fine telemark slopes, if conditions permit.

Getting to the Trailhead: Take the west Frisco exit from I-70 (Exit 201) and park in the small parking area directly north of the exit. Be careful not to block the gate.

Hike Statistics:

Trailhead to end of valley: 5.2 miles one way, depending on your turnaround point, with 1700 feet of elevation gain.

Difficulty: This is normally considered to be an intermediate-level ski tour, however completing the 10.4 miles makes for a strenuous outing.

USGS Quad: Vail Pass, CO; (the trail starts briefly on the Frisco, CO quad.)



The rugged peaks of the Gore Range provide the backdrop for this tour.



Trail Description

From the parking area head west past the closed gate and along the road. Shortly after passing some water tanks the trail leaves the road to the right and starts to climb more steeply up a narrow wooded section. On a recent visit I found lots of additional tracks, making the start a little confusing. Luckily, all of these trails come together in a few hundred feet, staying just north of the creek.

After a mile the trail flattens out near some small ponds and from here the grade remains gentle for the rest of the tour.

Continue to head west, staying on the north side of the creek. After two miles pass the sign indicating the Wilderness Boundary.

Eagles Nest Wilderness Boundary

The trail, mainly in the trees to this point, finally reaches a large clearing at 2.7 miles (Waypoint OPEN HILLSIDE). Here you have your first views of the Gore Range.

From the meadow at 2.7 miles you have your first views of the Gore Range

The slopes to your right offer lots of opportunity for the skiers to practice their downhill technique. This makes a good turnaround point for many people.

Remember to evaluate avalanche conditions before venturing onto steep terrain.

Continue across open meadows and through stands of trees, crossing the Gore Range Trail after 3.25 miles (Waypoint GORE RANGE TRAIL JUNCTION). Shortly after this the trail heads back into the trees and becomes difficult to follow. Hopefully a knowledgeable group has provided a track for you, otherwise make your way through the trees, staying just north of the creek. The terrain opens up and you can snowshoe or glide across wonderful meadows, eventually heading again into more trees which require good routefinding skills to navigate through the glades.



Go as far as you care to, avoiding some of the steeper slopes on your right. If you do a good job of routefinding you'll end up in an open area with moderate slopes and views of the head of the valley.

Skiing down through the trees, generally following your up-track, can be the high point of the day, and depending on conditions may challenge even skiers with intermediate telemarking skills.



Approaching the head of the valley, on a snowy day.

Leave the steeper slopes for later in the Spring when conditions may be more stable.

The run back down the valley can be delightful – only the last mile of skiing may be a bit challenging if the trail is icy – something that can happen if it's been a few days since the last snowfall.



