

Greg Mace Peak (12,580 ft.)
by Dave Cooper



Greg Mace Peak-compressed.jpg

The area around Pearl Pass provides some of the most spectacular winter scenery the state has to offer. With an abundance of avalanche terrain it also demands great care.

Getting to the Trailhead: From the large roundabout on US Highway 82 at the north end of Aspen take the Castle Creek Road (signed to Ashcroft) for 11.0 miles to the winter road closure, just before the Toklat lodge. The first parking area reached is the one to use for overnight parking.

Pearl Pass offers the most popular winter route between Aspen and Crested Butte. The area is served by several huts in the Alfred Braun and Friends Hut Systems (go to www.huts.org for information). On a recent climbing trip to the area we preferred the flexibility offered by winter camping, but the Tagert and Green Wilson Huts (co-located) make a great basecamp from which to explore the area.

Hike Statistics: Trailhead to the summit of Greg Mace Peak (12,580 feet): 3030 feet of total elevation gain in 6.3 miles one way. Normally an overnight trip.

Difficulty: Snowshoe or ski tour with a moderate climb of Greg Mace Peak. Routefinding skills may be required to avoid potential avalanche terrain.

USGS Quad: Pearl Pass, CO; Hayden Peak, CO

The peak described here, Greg Mace Peak (named in honor of the Mountain Rescue Aspen leader who died in a fall on the Maroon Bells in 1986) offers reasonable access in the winter with less exposure to avalanche terrain than many of the surrounding mountains, yet puts you in excellent position to view the scenery from a unique perspective.



Dramatic early morning views.jpg-compressed.jpg



Early morning sunlight glistening off the snow crystals compressed .jpg

Hike Description

From the overnight parking area walk or ski south for 2.0 miles to the start of the Pearl Pass road. This road takes off to the right at the road closure and is well signed. Follow the road through trees and the occasional clearing as it gradually climbs into the upper part of Castle Creek. At mile 3.4 the road crosses Castle Creek on a bridge and continues to head southwest, now on the south side of the creek.

The road passes several avalanche chutes on the northwest face of Greg Mace Peak as you gain elevation, so take the usual precautions in these areas (beacons on, one person crossing at a time etc.). After 4.9 miles you will reach the trail junction where the road into Montezuma Basin takes off to the right. Stay left here

and soon reach the Tagert and Green Wilson huts at mile 5.1. The road continues southwest along the hillside before emerging into the spectacular open bowls below Pearl Pass.

Continue southeast, slowly gaining elevation to a point at 12,170 feet where you will have a great view of the southwest ridge of Greg Mace Peak. Contour east around a shallow basin, aiming for the start of the ridge at 12,140 feet. The ridge is quite straightforward and can be climbed either on foot or with snowshoes.

Heading up the southwest ridge of Greg Mace Peak-compressed.jpg

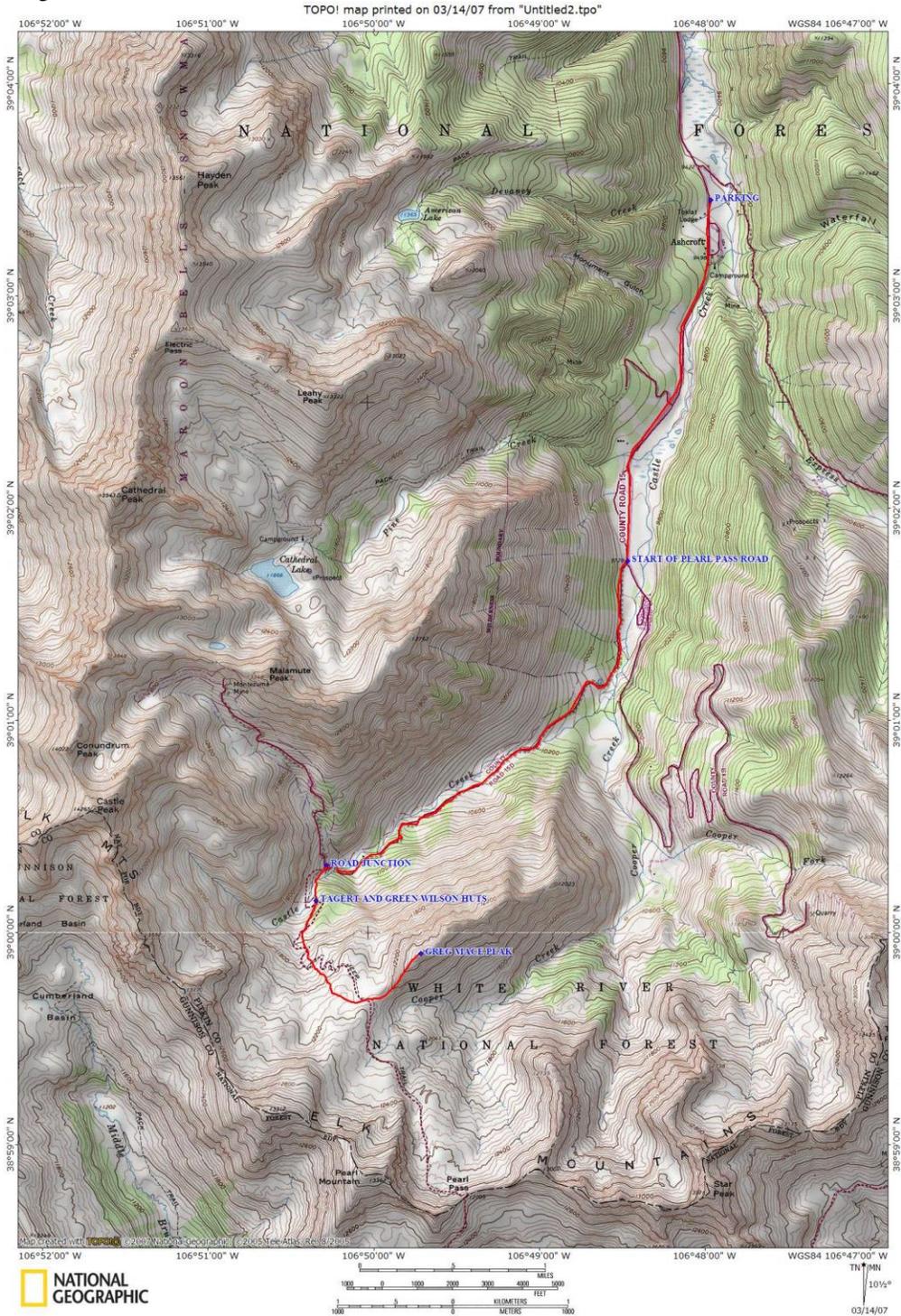
From the summit you'll be treated to extraordinary views of fourteener Castle Peak.



Castle Peak from Greg Mace Peak- compressed.jpg

By the way, there are five points along the summit ridge and it isn't obvious which is the highest point. We stopped at a likely summit point towards the southwest end of the summit ridge. Climbing the sharp ridgepoint a few hundred feet northeast requires a traverse on a suspect snow slope to gain the far ridge. Snow conditions this day convinced us to forgo this point, plus we had other peaks to climb!

If on snowshoes you'll want to follow your track back down. On skis, there are many options for a fine descent, but be sure to pick a route which provides safe passage. The day we were here the avalanche danger was considerable and dictated conservative decisions.



GPS Latitude / Longitude NAD83 (Deg., Min., Sec.)
 PARKING: 39,3,27N / 106,47,58W, 9431 feet
 START OF PEARL PASS ROAD: 39,1,45N / 106,48,28W, 9735 feet
 ROAD JUNCTION: 39,0,19N / 106,50,17W, 11141 feet
 TAGERT AND GREEN WILSON HUTS: 39,0,9N / 106,50,21W, 11362 feet
 GREG MACE PEAK: 38,59,54N / 106,49,43W, 12459 feet



