

## Red Buffalo Pass - Gore Range

by Dave Cooper



**Getting to the Trailhead:** Drive on I-70 to the Silverthorne exit (exit 205). Drive north on Highway 9 for 1.9 miles and turn left (west) onto Willowbrook Road. Follow this road for one mile as it winds through a housing development. The trailhead is marked by an information kiosk and parking area located on the left side of the road. Note that no overnight parking is permitted at this trailhead.

**GPS coordinates for the trailhead (NAD83):** 39°39'06"N, 106° 05'53"W, 8635 feet.

**Statistics:** From the trailhead to Red Buffalo Pass (11,760 feet) you will gain 2820 feet in 6.3 miles one way

**Difficulty:** A moderate trail hike.

**USGS Quad:** Dillon, CO; Vail Pass, CO; Willow Lakes, CO.

### *Wildflowers near Red Buffalo Pass*

Our annual wildflower hike into the Gore Range took us to Red Buffalo Pass, where we found a profusion of color on the first weekend in August. Starting at the relatively new Willowbrook Trailhead, the trail follows a scenic route up South Willow Creek, passing steep canyon walls and cascading waterfalls on the way to treeline. Above treeline the trail continues to the pass through flower-covered meadows.

### **Hike Description**

From the parking area the trail quickly crosses the North and Middle Forks of Willow Creek before turning southwest to follow South Willow Creek. Pass into the Eagles Nest Wilderness at mile 0.5 and continue to a trail junction with the Mesa Cortina Trail at mile 1.1. Carefully note this unsigned junction for your return trip. Turn right on the Mesa Cortina Trail and continue to the junction with the Gore Range Trail at mile 1.6. Stay left at this junction. At mile 2.6 stay straight at a trail junction signed as the South Willow / Buffalo Cabin Connect, and reach a spur trail to South Willow Falls at mile 3.1. The short detour to view the Falls is definitely worth it.

Beyond the spur trail the canyon narrows and the trail passes under steep cliffs on the right, descending from Red Mountain's long, rugged ridge, and Buffalo Mountain's bulk to the left.

The trail climbs quite steeply to reach treeline at mile 5.4, where a cairn marks a faint trail taking off to the right. This faint trail is difficult to follow until it becomes better-defined higher up, so we chose to stay on the main trail until in the broad, wildflower-covered basin. Several trails criss-cross this area. The most

obvious trail continues south to Eccles Pass, while other trails cut back to the right to reach our destination on this day, Red Buffalo Pass, at mile 6.3.

From the summit of Red Buffalo Pass, enjoy views of Red Mountain to the north, to the west the rugged peaks ringing Gore Lake, and to the south the peaks surrounding the headwaters of Gore Creek.



