

## Mount Silverheels (13,822 feet)

by Dave Cooper

Mount Silverheels, dominating the north end of South Park, is one of Colorado's "centennial" peaks – that is, one of the hundred highest.

The peak is named for one of Colorado's legends from the heyday of the mining boom – a beautiful dance hall performer known as "Silverheels". Reputedly she worked tirelessly to help the sick and dying miners of nearby Buckskin Joe when a smallpox outbreak ravaged the town in the 1860's. The story goes that she eventually succumbed to the disease and disappeared, never to be seen again, except perhaps at the Buckskin Joe Cemetery, where people report seeing a woman, dressed in black and wearing a black veil, visiting the graves of the miners late at night. The cemetery, located on the outskirts of the town of Alma, is worth a visit, even if you don't meet the ghost of Silverheels!

During the summer months the usual trailhead for a climb of Mount Silverheels is the Beaver Creek Trailhead, accessed from the town of Fairplay. During winter and spring, however, the best place to start your hike is from Scott Gulch, just south of Hoosier Pass on State Highway 9. Springtime can offer some excellent high altitude skiing on the western flanks of the mountain. This spring has produced some of the best skiing conditions I can recall.

**Getting to the Trailhead:** From Hoosier Pass on State Highway 9, drive south for 1.4 miles to Scott Gulch. A large parking area is located just south of the bridge on the west side of the highway. This parking area is also 4.0 miles north of the north end of the town of Alma.

### Hike Statistics:

Trailhead to the summit of Mount Silverheels (13,822 feet): 3500 feet of total elevation gain in 6.8 miles round trip (400 feet of which is on the descent).

**Difficulty:** Snowshoes or skis and climbing skins required. Moderate snowclimbing at high altitude. As always when on snow, know how to avoid potential avalanche slopes. Remember that a slope frozen in the morning when you ascended it could be primed to slide in the afternoon. On this route avalanche slopes can generally be avoided, but check with the Colorado Avalanche Information Center (<http://geosurvey.state.co.us/avalanche/>) for current conditions.

**USGS Quad:** Alma, CO.



*Descending "HeartBreak Hill". The broad ridge in the center of the photo is the normal ascent route to the west ridge. Snow gullies to either side of the ridge can offer excellent skiing.*

## Hike Description

From the parking area walk back to the north side of the bridge and start hiking east up an old dirt road (not shown on the map). The road may be difficult to follow, but generally it parallels Scott Gulch. After crossing several small clearings, reach treeline (at about 11,600 feet) in 0.8 miles.



*The view from near treeline. Aim for the bench just left of the notch formed by Hoosier Ridge and the northern end of Beaver Ridge*

At treeline the next section of the route can be seen. Contour around to the north slightly to approach a notch formed by a southern spur of Hoosier Ridge and the northern point (Point 12,420) of Beaver Ridge. The best route is to approach the notch from the north side, on a bench. The center of the notch could be an avalanche trap in certain conditions. Cross the ridge at about 12,240 feet. From here the rest of the route is laid out for you. Descend the infamous “Heartbreak Hill” (not as bad as its namesake on Denali!), losing a little under 400 feet of hard-won elevation. Remember that you will have to re-climb this hill on the way back.

Most people head up the broad ridge descending from Silverheels west ridge. Reach the west ridge at about 13,300 feet (Waypoint “MEET WEST RIDGE”), turn east and follow the ridge for 500 feet to the summit.

While you eat lunch, enjoy the views - from Baldy Mountain, Mount Guyot and Grays and Torreys Peaks to the northeast; Quandary, Pacific and others peaks in the Mosquito and Tenmile Ranges to the west.

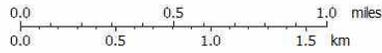
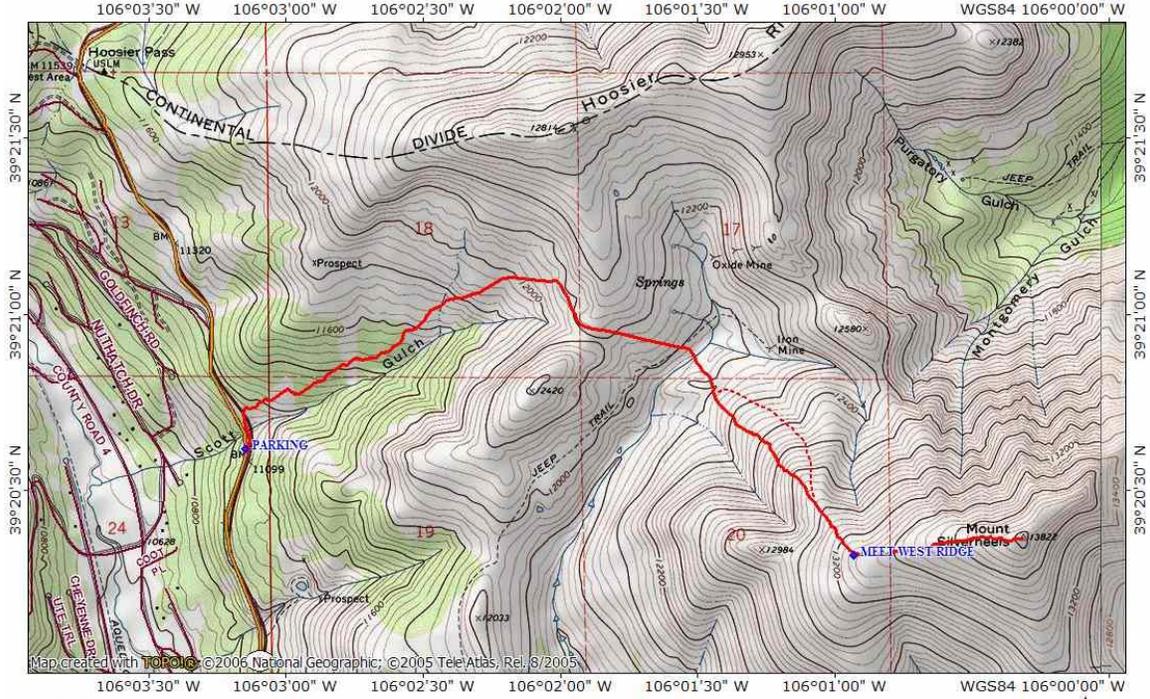


*Fletcher, Quandary and Pacific Peaks from the summit of Mount Silverheels*

Return down the west ridge to the 13,300 foot level (Waypoint “MEET WEST RIDGE”), where you leave the ridge at the same place you gained it on the way up (it’s easy to miss this point, so pay attention). From here the descent line will depend on whether you have skis or not. The shallow gully to the northeast of the ascent ridge is a great line if you’re on skis (shown on the map as a dashed line). This gully can also be glissaded or boot-skied. The gully to the southwest of the ascent ridge is more serious. Or walk back down the ascent ridge to the base of “Heartbreak Hill”.

Climb back up “Heartbreak Hill” and head back to the trailhead, generally following your up-track. As of mid-April, the snow below treeline was softening up by early afternoon, which can make for some interesting post-holing even on snowshoes!

TOPO! map printed on 04/12/06 from "topomap.tpo"



TN MN  
10 1/2°  
04/12/06

GPS Latitude / Longitude NAD83 (Deg., Min., Sec.)  
**PARKING:** 39,20,37N / 106,3,9W, 11138 feet  
**MEET WEST RIDGE:** 39,20,19N / 106,0,56W, 13337 feet

