

Silverthorne Ski/Snowshoe Trails

by Dave Cooper



With the recent generous snowfall that Summit County received, friends and I decided to check out some of the ski and snowshoe trails accessed off Ryan Mountain Road in Silverthorne. Two trailheads provide access to the trails in the area, offering trails to suit skiers with skills in the novice to intermediate range. All of the trails described are also popular with snowshoers.

Both of the trails I'll describe head to Lily Pad Lake. The shorter trail, from the upper trailhead, is relatively well-blazed and, due to its popularity, likely to be tracked. The second trail, leaving from the lower trailhead, requires a bit more routefinding and is recommended only for the adventurous. A combination of the two trails, involving a car shuttle, offers a fine tour of the area.

A word of caution: some of the trails are not well marked, and can be confused with some of the many social ski/snowshoe trails in the area. In fact, on our first visit we didn't reach our planned destination due to this fact - leading us to spend a significant amount of time exploring spur trails. It took a second trip to finally locate the trails I'll describe this week.

Skiers on the popular Salt Lick Trail-small.jpg

A second word of caution: Moose live in the area and have reportedly been seen recently. One skier told us that a bull moose had charged her dogs. The Division of Wildlife

website gives tips on what to do if you meet a moose (<http://wildlife.state.co.us/WildlifeSpecies/LivingWithWildlife/Mammals/MooseCountry2.htm>). My past encounters with moose have always been peaceful and I fondly remember those special occasions. Just remember that moose are powerful, wild animals and to treat them with respect.

Since the trails are in the Eagles Nest Wilderness, no motorized vehicles are allowed.

Hike Description

1. Lily Pad Lake from the upper Trailhead

Cross to the south side of the road to the information kiosk at the start of the trail. Put on your skis (or snowshoes) and start up the hill, heading south. The grade is generally quite gentle, though a few of the ups and downs may challenge novice skiers. Follow the

Getting to the Trailhead:

To reach the lower trailhead, drive on I-70 to the Silverthorne exit (Exit 205). Go north on Highway 9 and almost immediately turn left at the traffic light onto Wildernest Road. Drive 0.9 miles on Wildernest before turning left onto a snowpacked road where Wildernest makes a sweeping turn to the right. Drive a short distance along the snow-packed road to a parking area just before a gate closure.

To reach the upper trailhead, continue on Wildernest (which now becomes Ryan Gulch Road) to a parking area on the left, 3.4 miles from Highway 9. Immediately after the parking area the road starts to drop back down, so you'll know if you drove too far.

Hike Statistics: The route from the upper trailhead to Lily Pad Lake gains 270 feet and loses 130 feet in 1.6 miles one way.

The route from the lower trailhead to Lily Pad Lake gains 1000 feet and loses 70 feet in 3.0 miles one way.

Difficulty: The trail from the upper trailhead to Lily Pad Lake is relatively flat, with a few undulations thrown in to challenge the novice skier. The trail from the lower trailhead is recommended for intermediate skiers.

USGS Quad: Frisco, CO

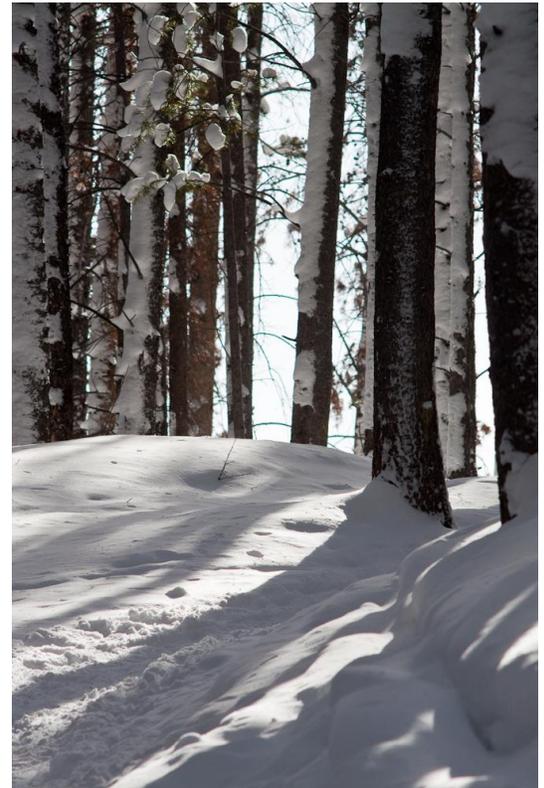
trail as it contours south through lodgepole pines, small clearings, and aspen groves. The trail crosses minor drainages on wooden bridges. The trail is marked with blazes on the trees, and is usually well-tracked.

The Ryan Gulch Trailhead-small.jpg

At mile 1.1 you'll reach a signed junction. Straight ahead the trail continues to Lily Pad Lake, while to the left (east) the Salt Lick Trail descends to eventually reach the lower parking area. More about this trail later. Continue on towards Lily Pad Lake, soon coming to a fun little dip, then contouring through the dense forest before finally dropping to the first small lake. Immediately beyond is the larger lake, a great place to enjoy lunch amid views of Peak One.



The crucial trail junction sign-small.jpg



Sunlight streams through the lodgepole pines-small.jpg

Nice views of Peak One from Lily Pad Lake-small.jpg

Follow your tracks back to the upper trailhead, or, if so inclined (and prepared, with car shuttle, map and compass), ski back to the trail junction at mile 1.1 and head down the Salt Lick Trail, a trail requiring intermediate downhill skills and offering the opportunity to make continuous turns down a nice corridor cut through the trees.

2. Lily Pad Lake from the lower Trailhead

This variation is a little longer, steeper and potentially involves more routefinding than the route described above from the upper trailhead, but for the adventurous can be a rewarding tour that offers excellent trail skiing at an intermediate level. The lower sections of the route are suitable for novice skiers.



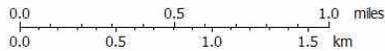
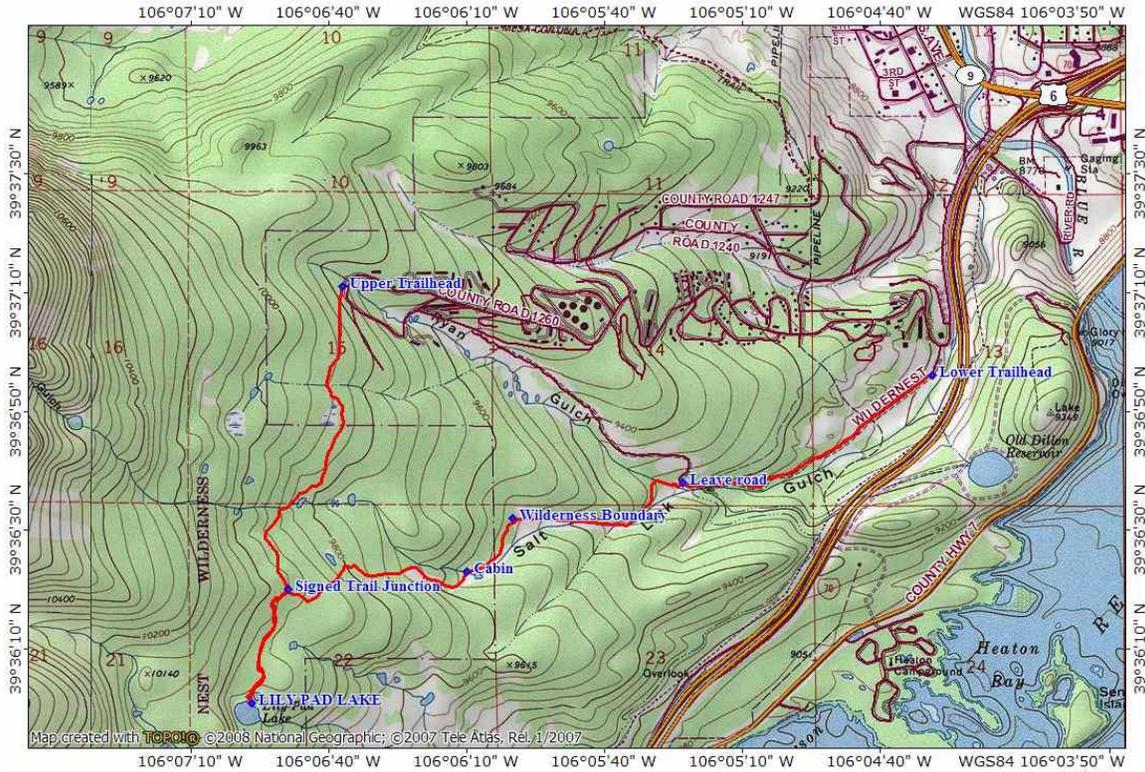
From the parking area ski southwest, passing the closed gate and gradually gaining elevation as the road cuts through several meadows. The sounds of the Interstate are quickly muted by the forest as the roads diverge. Continue on the roadbed to mile 0.9 at the confluence of Ryan Gulch and Salt Lick Gulch, where we leave the road just before it makes an abrupt turn to the right. Immediately before this abrupt bend, look for a track dropping down to the left through an open area and crossing the stream. A large standing dead conifer is located at this spot. We found numerous other tracks crossing in the vicinity, but not all head to the same place. Once across the stream, follow the trail west as it heads into Salt Lick Gulch, staying generally in the open meadows by the stream. Pass the Wilderness Boundary at mile 1.6 and continue southwest and west. At mile 1.8 the trail crosses a small stream. The remains of an old cabin can be seen to the right.



Waxing stop on the Salt Lick Trail-small.jpg

Shortly after crossing the stream you may see evidence of a trail heading sharply left, to the east. This is not the trail you want. Continue straight (west) as the trail enters dense forest and steepens. Routefinding in this area may be difficult unless tracked. We found very few blazes and no blue diamonds. After zigzagging around some downed trees the trail enters a wide cut through the trees and becomes easier to follow, eventually reaching the signed trail junction at the intersection with the Lily Pad Lake Trail described above, at mile 2.5. Turn left and follow the trail to Lily Pad Lake, reaching the lake at mile 3.0.

TOPO! map printed on 01/25/10 from "Untitled4.tpo"



TN MN
91 1/2°
01/25/10

GPS Latitude / Longitude NAD83 (Deg., Min., Sec.)

- Lower Trailhead, 39,36,56, -106,4,29,8990 feet
- Leave road, 39,36,38, -106,5,23,9268 feet
- Cabin, 39,36,23, -106,6,10,9554 feet
- Wilderness Boundary, 39,36,32, -106,6,0,9501 feet
- Upper Trailhead, 39,37,11, -106,6,37,9800 feet
- Signed Trail Junction, 39,36,20, -106,6,49,9957 feet
- LILY PAD LAKE, 39,36,1, -106,6,57,9911 feet

