

The Abyss Trail

by Dave Cooper



Waxing the skis at the Abyss Trailhead-small-3.jpg

Imagine driving up an unplowed road, making the first tracks of the day through several inches of fresh snow, pulling into a deserted parking area, adding a layer of colder wax to your skis while you enjoy the bright sun on the surrounding peaks, then heading up a wide trail cutting a swath through conifer and aspen forest, to arrive after several hours at a high alpine meadow with views of fourteen thousand foot peaks. Does that sound enticing? This was our experience recently on the Abyss Trail, an old favorite that is best experienced with abundant new snow and little wind, not always easy to predict in this high mountain environment near Mount Evans.

During the summer months the Abyss Trail offers a scenic but long hike to Abyss Lake, nestled below the famous Sawtooth Ridge, the scrambling route which connects Mount Bierstadt to Mount Evans. In the winter season, most visitors are content to explore the first few miles of the trail, enjoying spectacular views and the tranquility of the winter environment.

Two sections of the trail are noticeably rocky, and can be challenging to skiers unless well-covered by snow. In fact, it may be advisable to carry skis for short sections of the trail when conditions are lean. Other than that, skiers of all experience levels should enjoy this trail as it heads deep into the Mount Evans

Getting to the Trailhead: Drive to the town of Grant on Highway 285, approximately 11 miles west of the town of Bailey.

From Grant, drive northwest on the Guanella Pass Road (County Road 62) for 5.2 miles to the Abyss Trailhead, located on the east (right) side of the road, immediately past the sign indicating the end of winter maintenance. This is 0.2 mile past the Burning Bear Trailhead.

Note that you cannot drive over Guanella Pass during the winter months.

Statistics: The trail gains a total of 1080 feet in 3.8 miles one way. The highest elevation reached is 10,700 feet.

Difficulty: An easy ski or snowshoe, except for one section of trail near the start and a second section near the terminus of the ski. Both of these are sometimes rocky and require care to negotiate on the descent.

USGS Quad: Mt Evans, CO.

Wilderness. If conditions are especially lean, snowshoes may be a better alternative, though it would be a shame to miss the gentle glide back down the trail.

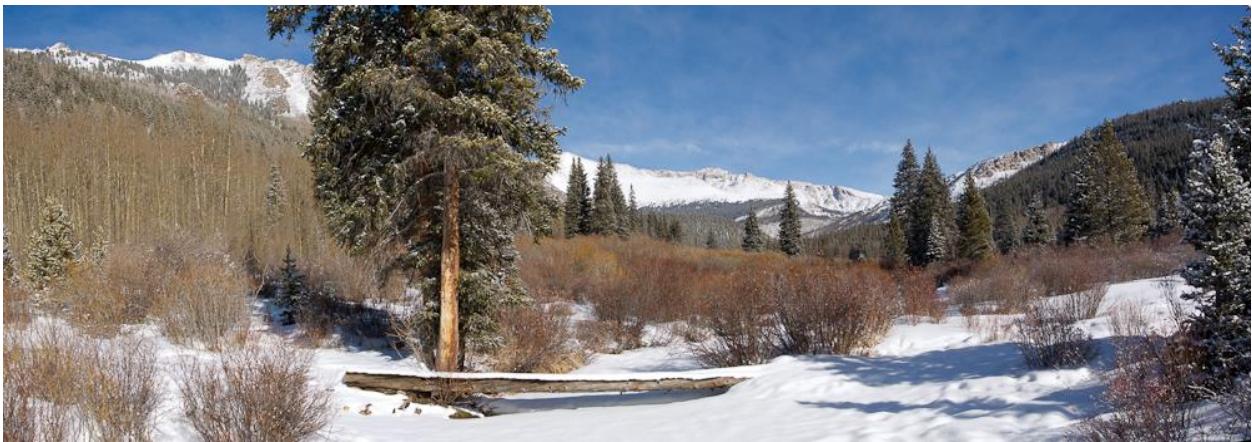
By the way, the Guanella Pass Road does get plowed as far as the trailhead, just not overnight. By the time we headed down, the road had been plowed.

Hike Description

After self-registering at the information kiosk just beyond the gate, start up the wide trail as it climbs steadily northeast for the first six tenths of a mile. This section can be one of the rocky areas, so take note for your descent. Continue on gentler terrain through lodgepole pines until reaching a clearing at mile 2.1. Here, the trail drops down to the right and crosses Scott Gomer Creek (mile 2.2).

Gliding along through the lodgepole pines-small.jpg





Crossing Scott Gomer Creek-small-2.jpg

The trail continues gently up the drainage, passing through stands of skeletal aspen until being forced by a ridge coming off Kataha Mountain to once again cross the frozen stream at mile 3.2.



*cutting tracks-
small*

*cutting tracks
2-small*



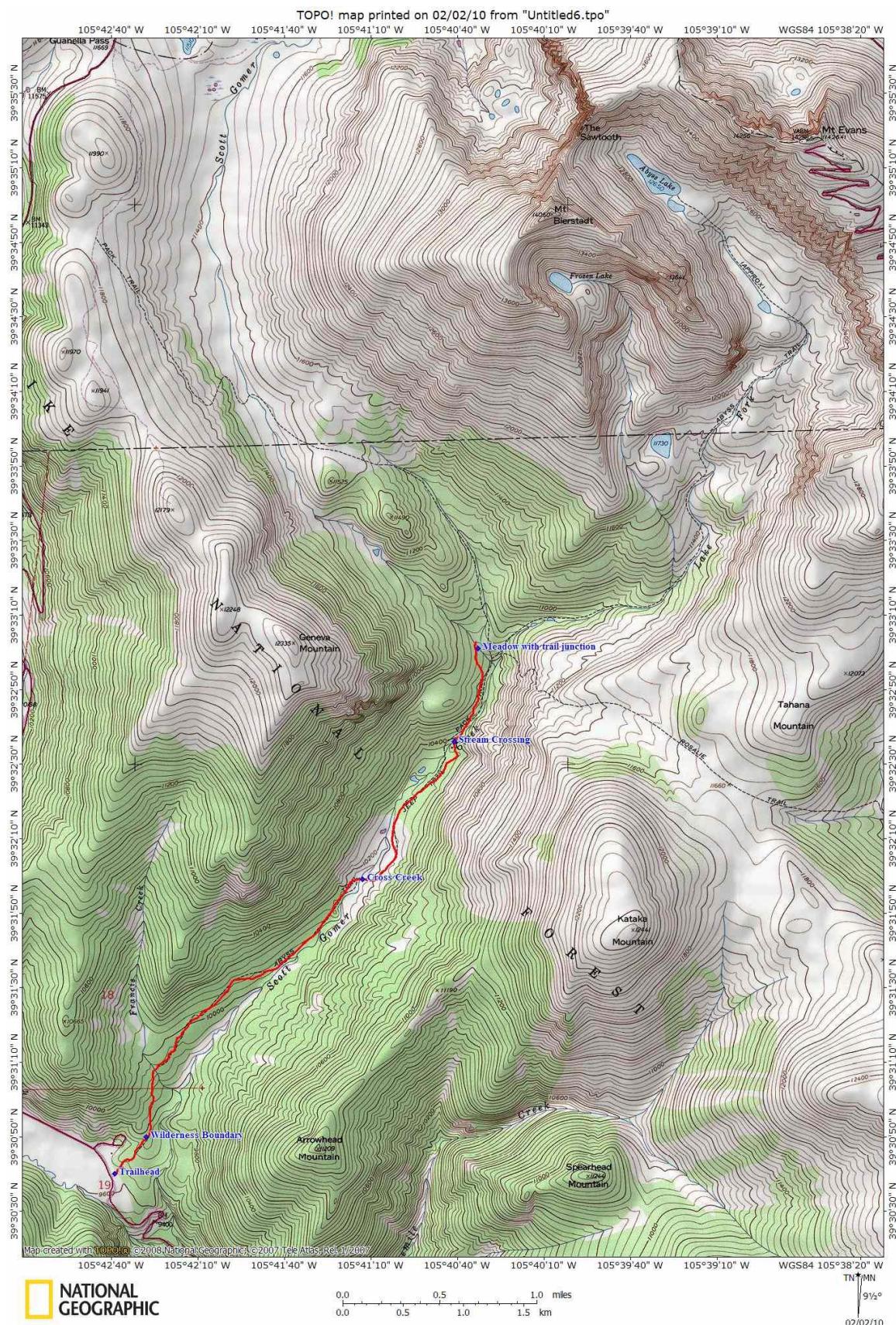
The trail beyond this crossing becomes narrow, steep and rocky for perhaps a hundred yards, and was essentially unskiable in the conditions we found. You may be forced to carry your skis for a short distance, but it's worth persevering. A few hundred yards beyond this difficult section you will reach the large open meadow at mile 3.8. Here, several trails converge. The Abyss Trail continues northeast towards the lake. To the right, the Rosalie Trail comes in from Deer Creek, while the trail to the left continues along Scott Gomer Creek all the way to Guanella Pass. This meadow is a great place for a lunch stop, admiring the views of Mount Bierstadt and adjacent peaks, before turning the skis around for the enjoyable trip back to the car.



Mount Bierstadt, with the summit of Mount Evans just visible at right side of photo, seen from the trail junction-small.jpg



Mount Bierstadt, with the summit of Mount Evans just visible at right side of photo, seen from the trail junction2-small.jpg



GPS Latitude / Longitude NAD83 (Deg., Min., Sec.)
Trailhead,39,30,40,-105,42,39,9649 feet
Wilderness Boundary,39,30,50,-105,42,28,9787 feet
Cross Creek,39,31,59,-105,41,13,10157 feet
Stream Crossing,39,32,36,-105,40,41,10422 feet
Meadow with trail junction,39,33,1,-105,40,33,10692 feet

