

West Dallas Road

by Dave Cooper



The West Dallas Road passes through the Double RL Ranch-7584-small.JPG

This week's tour takes us through the Double RL Ranch. Winding through the ranch, the West Dallas Road allows public access to Forest Service land beyond. Since Ouray County doesn't plow this road (also known as County Road 9) in the winter, the roadbed makes a nice cross-country ski and snowshoe trail. Long a favorite of photographers in search of fall foliage, the road offers equally spectacular views during the winter season.

Since the land on both sides of the road is private, just be sure not to stray off the road.

On a recent visit we enjoyed un-tracked snow and unspoiled views of the incomparable Sneffels Range. While snow plumes were creating a halo along the high ridges, we were quite sheltered in the meadows along the north side of the range.

The snow cover at the beginning of the road may sometimes be a little thin, so catch this tour after a recent snowfall if possible. After an extended dry spell it may be better to use snowshoes, though you would then miss out on the enjoyable return trip with 6 miles of gentle downhill gliding.

Getting to the Trailhead: Drive to the intersection of US Highway 550 and State Highway 62 in Ridgeway. Turn onto Highway 62 and drive west for 6.2 miles to the intersection with County Road 9 (West Dallas Road). Turn onto CR9 and park along the edge of the road on the gravel shoulder being careful not to block access. Since this road is not plowed, a 4WD vehicle might be advisable.

Hike Statistics: From the parking area to the Forest Service boundary you'll gain 1460 feet in 6.0 miles one way.

Difficulty: A long but relatively easy snowshoe or ski, along a county road.

USGS Quad: Mount Sneffels, CO.

Hike Description

Ski through the gate, which a sign indicates should be left as you found it. Ski south on the roadbed along fenced terrain. If a short section of the road has been plowed recently, it may be necessary to ski on the margin of the road. The plowing is to allow the rancher to get feed to the cattle. Once beyond this point, at a road junction at mile 1.2, the snow conditions should improve rapidly. From this junction the road turns to the southwest and quickly reaches the west fork of Dallas Creek. Take a moment to look down into the impressive gorge that the creek has cut.

The road curves to the south, away from the gorge, and reaches a very scenic spot at mile 4.3. A log cabin here enjoys what has to be one of the most spectacular views in the State.



From the start of the tour the views of the Sneffels Range are outstanding-7591-small.JPG



This log cabin shares a spectacular setting-7610-small.JPG

Stay on the road and follow it as it curves around some hilly terrain, passing a gated road off to the left at mile 4.6. Continue south as the road heads back towards the West Fork, eventually climbing to the crest of a minor ridge. At mile 6.0 you will reach the Forest Service boundary, a good spot to enjoy lunch before heading back.

The energetic can continue for a further 0.8 mile to the junction with the West Dallas Trail, in Box Factory Park. This trail is also used to access the North Pole Hut, 9 miles from Highway 62. The North Pole hut is a part of the San Juan Hut system. For more information, go to:

http://sanjuanhuts.com/ski_nordic_adventures/

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

Parking: 38,7,28,-107,49,59,7644 feet

Stay straight: 38,6,36,-107,49,44,7828 feet

Log cabin: 38,4,33,-107,51,7,8668 feet

Gated road: 38,4,23,-107,50,49,8668 feet

FS boundary: 38,3,28,-107,51,8,9078 feet

