

Whale Peak (13,078 feet) and Gibson Lake by Dave Cooper



Some curious residents of the area

For years I had wanted to explore the area accessed by the Hall Valley Road off US285. It wasn't until two years ago when a friend invited me to join him on a climb of Whale Peak, to help celebrate his completion of all the peaks over 13,000 feet in Colorado, that I actually made it into this area. What a fine place it turned out to be!

As the crow flies, Whale Peak is quite close to Montezuma and the Keystone Ski Resort, but approached from the south it has a very different feel. It wasn't until I saw the signs to Webster Pass that I realized how close to one of Colorado's favorite backcountry skiing locations we were. The valleys around Montezuma offer access to some fine powder skiing and there are endless opportunities for tours of all difficulty levels.

In the summer months the high alpine meadows and gentle peaks of the area

Getting to the Trailhead: Drive on US285 to the junction of Park County Road 60 (Hall Valley Road), 4.3 miles north of Kenosha Pass and 3.1 miles south of the town of Grant.

From US285, drive northwest on County Road 60 (graded) for 5 miles to the Handcart Campground. 0.2 miles beyond the campground is a junction with a four wheel drive road (Forest Service Road 120B). Turn left at this junction, signed to the Hall Valley Campground and Gibson Lake trailhead. (Note: the road is not suitable for passenger cars, so look for parking immediately beyond the junction).

Drive or hike up the four wheel drive road. Almost immediately pass the campground and continue straight on FSR120C, fording a stream 0.3 miles beyond the start of the four wheel drive road and reaching the Gibson Lake Parking area on the left, 1.4 miles up this road.

Hike Statistics: Trailhead to Gibson Lake: 1600 feet in 2.3 miles one way. Trailhead to the summit of Whale Peak (13,078 feet): 2950 feet of total elevation gain in 3.3 miles one way.

Difficulty: A moderate trail hike to Gibson Lake, with moderate off-trail hiking to Whale Peak.

make fine hiking destinations. This week we head for Gibson Lake, nestled under Whale Peak. From the lake it is only a moderate hike off-trail to the summit of Whale Peak and excellent views of Summit County.

Hike Description

From the parking area follow the trail as it drops down to and crosses the North Fork of the South Platte River. The trail quickly joins and then parallels Lake Fork as it climbs gently up to treeline, 1.5 miles from the trailhead. Here you gain your first glimpse of Whale Peak at the head of the valley. Continue on the trail as it winds its way through alpine meadows full of wildflowers, reaching Gibson Lake after a total distance of 2.3 miles. (The trailhead sign indicates the lake to be 3.0 miles away, but I measured the trail to be considerably shorter).

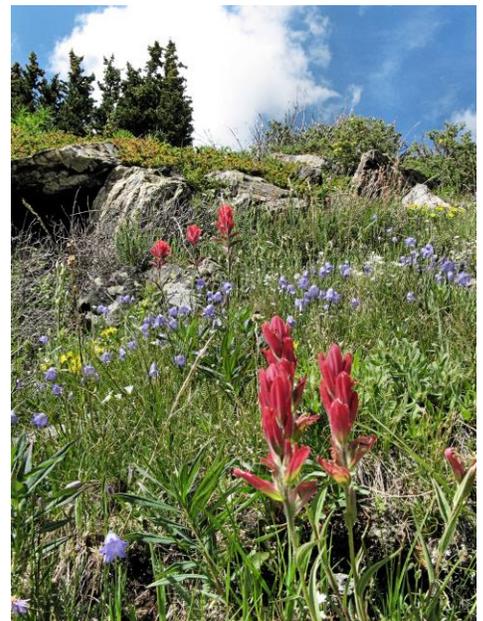


Alpine meadows with Whale Peak on the skyline

The lake makes a good lunch spot, but the hike up to the summit of Whale Peak is quite reasonable and definitely worthwhile.

Fields of wildflowers above treeline

From Gibson Lake head up the grassy slopes to the right. A social trail becomes more distinct as you reach the broad ridge which takes you up to the Continental Divide slightly north of Whale Peak. Once on the Divide, turn south and follow the trail to the summit. Keep an eye peeled for some of the area's residents - a sizeable herd of mountain goats. To descend, reverse your route.





Gibson Lake with Whale Peak beyond. To climb Whale Peak, hike up the grassy slopes at the far right of this photo.

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