



East Side Winter Trails



NPS/Walt Kaesler

Winter is a spectacular time to visit the wilderness of Rocky Mountain National Park. With a little preparation, many fun activities await you. **Be Safety Smart: Use Good Judgment, Be Prepared and Be Aware**

Changeable Weather and Conditions

Weather conditions in Rocky Mountain National Park can change quickly. The wilderness, though beautiful, can be harsh. Expect snow, gusty winds and cold temperatures at any time. Allow for winter's short daylight hours. Be aware of your surroundings – safety is your responsibility.

Attempt off-trail travel only if you are extremely familiar with the area and remember that the snowy landscape looks a lot different than summer. Snow can be very deep once you are off-trail.

Streams and lakes can have thin ice and be very dangerous. If you choose to cross, first test your steps with a pole.

Stay Together!

Do not travel alone nor split up your group so someone is alone in the backcountry. Leave detailed plans about your day with someone, and stick to your plan.

Beware of Falling Trees

Falling trees are an ever-present hazard. When traveling or camping in the forest, trees can fall without warning. Be particularly watchful when it's windy, or following a snowstorm when branches are heavy with snow. Avoid parking or camping in areas where trees could fall.

Avalanche Safety

Avoid snowshoeing or skiing in steep gullies or below avalanche terrain. Slopes of 30 to 45 degrees can be loaded with dangerous masses of snow, easily triggered by backcountry travelers. If traveling in these kinds of areas, carry and know how to use an avalanche beacon, probe and shovel. Do not take extra risks because you have avalanche rescue gear. If caught in an avalanche, make swimming motions and try to stay on top of the snow. Be sure to check an avalanche forecast before heading into the backcountry.

Hypothermia Prevention

Hypothermia is a serious and sometimes fatal emergency medical condition that results when your body loses heat faster than it produces it and can happen when you are cold, overly tired, wet and hungry. Symptoms can include uncontrolled shivering, drowsiness, exhaustion, loss of judgment or coordination, and slurred or incoherent speech. Protect yourself with warm, adequate clothing layers (synthetic or wool, not cotton) and frequent stops to warm up. If symptoms occur, warm the chilled person with dry clothing and warm, nonalcoholic liquids, get back to your car and promptly seek medical attention.

Winter Trails

Most trails are not marked for winter use. Do not follow others' tracks, as that can get you quickly lost and in trouble. Take a good map and compass or other navigational aid and know how to use them.

Essentials to Wear and Carry

Do not rely on cell phones in Rocky Mountain National Park. Many locations in this rugged park have no service.

Dress appropriately to prevent chills or overheating.

- Lots of water - drink more than you think you need
- High-energy food - eat as you go
- Layers of warm, insulating, windproof clothing such as synthetic or wool; avoid wearing cotton
- Sturdy, waterproof, warm, insulated footwear with waterproof pants or gaiters; extra socks
- Storm gear
- Hat and gloves or mittens
- Sunglasses with UV protection
- Sunscreen
- First aid kit
- Topographic map & compass/GPS
- Headlamp or flashlight
- Waterproof matches and fire starting materials
- Multipurpose tool
- Whistle
- Emergency shelter - bivy sack and ensolite pad
- Common sense!

Regulations and Etiquette

Sledding is **NOT** allowed at Bear Lake. The only place in Rocky Mountain National Park where sledding is permitted is at the Hidden Valley Snowplay Area. Snowshoers, hikers and skiers should try to maintain separate tracks. Slower-moving individuals should yield the way to those traveling faster. Skiers must be in control at all times and give plenty of notice of their approach when coming upon others on the trail.

Be Informed

Know before you go: Be informed about the conditions. Many resources are readily available, including these websites

- RMNP Trail Conditions Reports http://www.nps.gov/romo/planyourvisit/trail_conditions.htm
- National Weather Service forecasts <http://www.weather.gov/> and put in a location like Estes Park, CO; Grand Lake, CO; Long's Peak, CO (note apostrophe; elevation 12995 ft)
- Colorado Avalanche Information Center (CAIC) Front Range Forecast <http://avalanche.state.co.us/forecasts/backcountry-avalanche/front-range/>
- Colorado SNOTEL Sites (there are 5 in the park: Bear Lake, Copeland Lake, Wild Basin [near Ouzel Falls], Willow Park, and Lake Irene) <http://www.wcc.nrcs.usda.gov/snotel/Colorado/colorado.html>
- Call the RMNP Information Office between 8-4:30 daily for conditions, updates, and information, 970-586-1206.

Emergencies

Dial 911

Many winter activities can be enjoyed in Rocky Mountain National Park. If you don't have your own equipment, the communities of Estes Park and Grand Lake have shops where winter recreation equipment, including snowshoes, skis, poles, boots, sleds, tubes, saucers, gaiters, and traction devices can be rented or purchased. Enjoy the winter magic that is Rocky Mountain National Park.

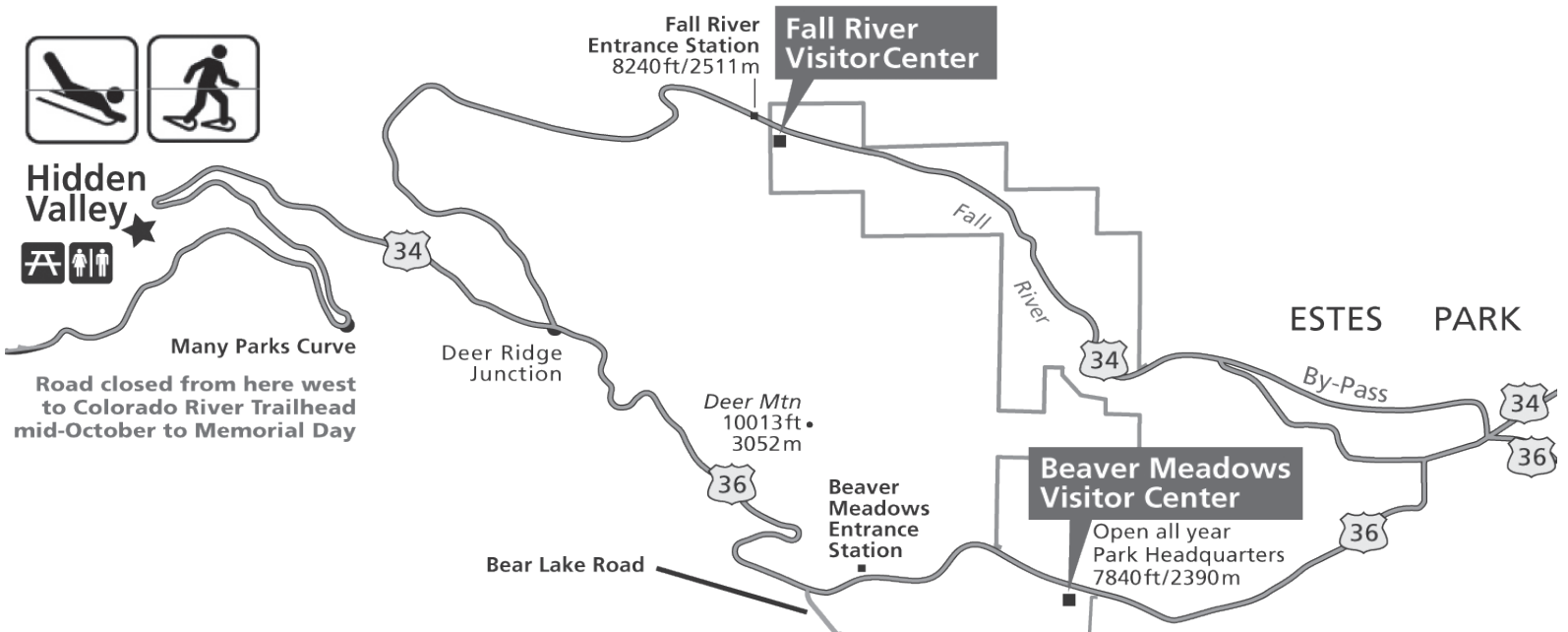
Sledding

Hidden Valley is the one place in Rocky where sledding is allowed. It is important to provide adequate supervision to children and maintain safe speeds. Sled only within in the fenced area and signed snowplay boundaries.

No tows are provided; walk your sled, saucer, or tube (no metal runners permitted) up the hill and slide down. This gentle hill is located at the bottom of the former Hidden Valley Ski Area bunny slope.

Skiing and snowboarding are not allowed in the snowplay area; however, skiers, snowboarders, and snowshoers may pass through and must use caution around sledders, and slow down to yield the right-of-way. Park rangers and volunteers may be there to help, but in general, sledders are on their own. A restroom is located at the bottom of the hill by the parking lot. On most weekends when there's an attendant, a warming room is also available.

Winter winds can scour the area, causing conditions to vary, so call the park Information Office for the latest information, 970-586-1206.



Snowshoeing

Want to experience the beautiful Rocky Mountain National Park backcountry in winter, but do not know how to deal with the snow? Snowshoeing is as easy as strapping snowshoes on boots and grabbing a couple of poles.

No training is necessary – if you can hike, you can snowshoe, and most park trails can be explored on snowshoes. A few pieces of equipment are essential, including a pair of snowshoes and warm, insulated, waterproof boots. Poles are helpful for maintaining balance but optional. Waterproof pants or gaiters help keep you warm and dry. If entering into avalanche terrain, refer to the Avalanche Safety section on page 1, and be sure to check the avalanche forecast through the CAIC; see page 1 for website.

Backcountry Skiing and Riding

The steep terrain of Rocky Mountain National Park provides a great setting for backcountry skiing and riding. The Bear Lake and Hidden Valley areas offer some of the best terrain (skiing and snowboarding are not allowed in the Hidden Valley snowplay area; however, skiers, snowboarders, and snowshoers may pass through and must use caution around sledders, and slow down to yield the right-of-way). Skiers and riders should be prepared for a variety of variable snow conditions. Much of this country is in avalanche terrain. Be sure to check the avalanche forecast through the CAIC (see page 1 for website). Skiers and riders should carry at a minimum an avalanche beacon, probe and shovel, and know how to use them. Be self-reliant.

Snowshoe or Ski with a Ranger

The Rocky Mountain National Park winter newspaper has a 'Free Ranger-Led Programs' page; it is available online at http://www.nps.gov/romo/planyourvisit/ranger_led_activities.htm. Check here for Snowshoe Ecology Walk opportunities with a ranger; reservations are required.

Wildlife Watching

Rocky is a wonderful place to look for wildlife, and many park roads are open in winter to provide access to their wintry world. Bring field guides and binoculars, and don't forget your camera. Enjoy them from a distance, and never approach or feed them.

As with any wild animals, you never know when or where you'll see them, and consider yourself fortunate to see what you can. Winter is an especially good time to look for Elk, Mule deer, Moose, and other large mammals. Elk and Mule deer are most active at dusk and dawn, and are usually seen in meadow areas. Moose are more commonly seen on the park's west side along the Colorado River, and increasingly seen on the east side too. Male elk, Deer, and Moose have antlers that shed; these females have no antlers. Both male and female Bighorn sheep have horns that are actual permanent outgrowths of their skulls. Look for Bighorn sheep along the Highway 34/Fall River corridor on the park's east side. Coyotes may be seen any time of day, and their yipping barks and howls often heard at night. Listen for the bold chattering of the Chickaree, also called a Pine Squirrel. In Rocky, these squirrels have charcoal-gray backs, white bellies, bushy tails, and are active year-round in pine forests. Members of the Jay family, including Steller's jays, with their striking blue bodies and black, crested heads, Gray jays, Clark's nutcrackers, and the iridescent, long-tailed Black-billed magpies are commonly seen in the park.