

Longs Peak

An ascent of Longs Peak provides an exhilarating alpine experience for visitors in good physical condition. Safety precautions should be taken to ensure a safe and enjoyable climb to the summit of Rocky Mountain National Park.



OBJECTIVE HAZARDS

Objective hazards, such as the weather, rockslides, and avalanches, cannot be controlled. During your climb of Longs Peak, be aware of potential dangers such as:

Sudden Changes in the Weather

Changes in the weather can occur within a matter of minutes. Storms can be severe any month of the year with lightning, rain, snow, or hail often associated with strong winds. At the first sign of a storm, turn back to the safety of lower elevations. It is better to return when conditions are safe than to continue climbing in poor or dangerous conditions.

Rockslides

Steep slopes and rock walls are dangerously unstable on Longs Peak. Do not take shortcuts -- stay on established trails and routes.

Avalanches

During the winter, spring and early summer months avalanches are common in the Longs Peak area. Some trails cross avalanche paths and runouts. Be alert for signs of an unstable snowpack such as settling or "whomping" sounds. Climbers should carry proper avalanche equipment during winter and spring seasons and consult with park rangers about current avalanche conditions.

SUBJECTIVE HAZARDS

Subjective hazards, like wearing improper clothing and equipment, exceeding physical abilities, or ascending too rapidly, can be controlled. Before climbing, you should be properly equipped and know your limitations.

Hypothermia

Hypothermia is a condition in which a person's entire body temperature is lowered. It can render a person helpless in minutes, but can be avoided by wearing appropriate clothing and being prepared for sudden changes in the weather.

Dress in layers of wool or synthetic material that retains warmth when wet. Wear sturdy footwear. Carry wind jacket and pants, mittens, and a hat.

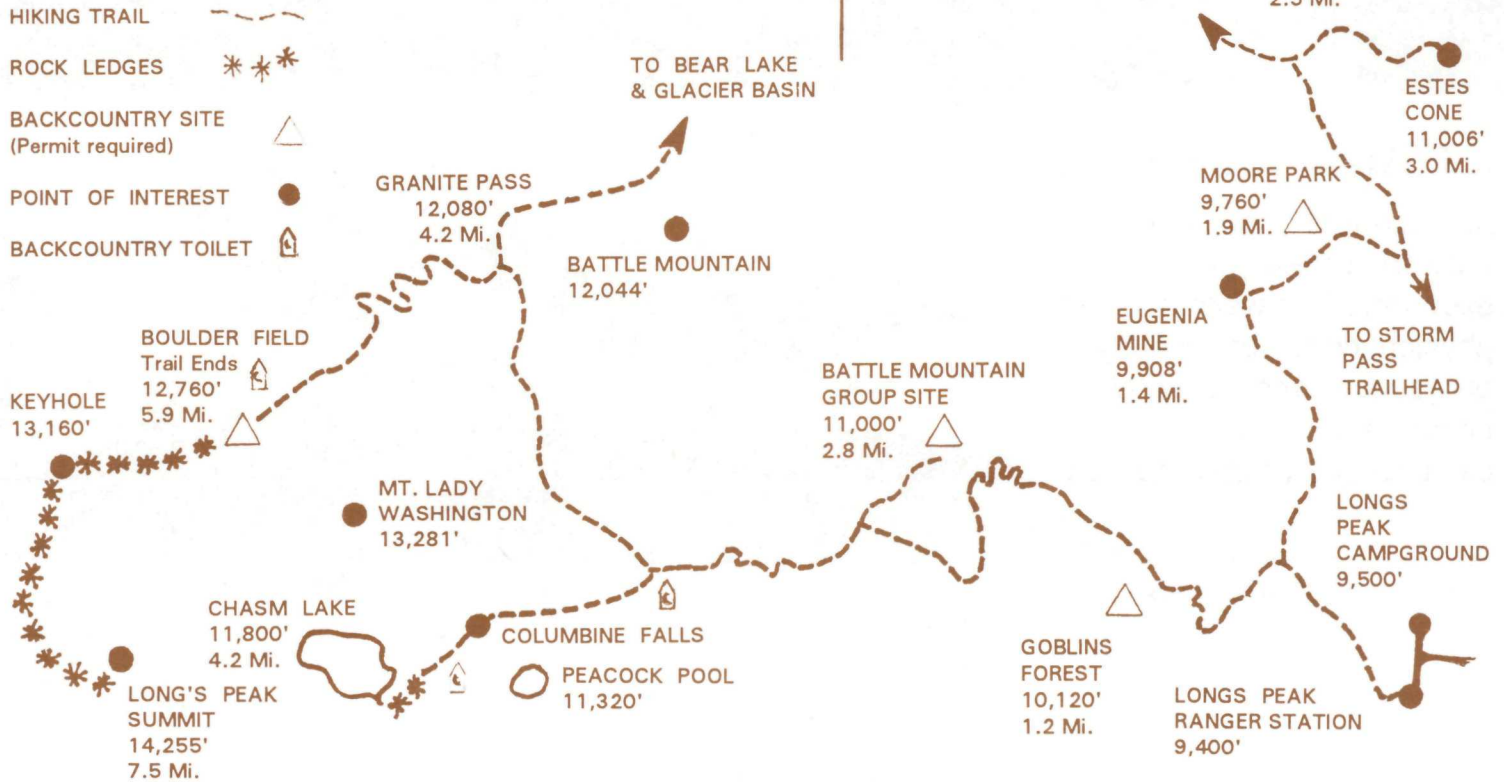
Include water and high energy foods in your pack.

Mountain Sickness

Mountain sickness results from rapidly ascending to high elevations. Breathing difficulties, nausea, headache, and lethargy are symptoms of mountain sickness. This serious condition is caused by lack of oxygen at higher elevations. The proper remedy is to immediately descend to lower elevations.

Before climbing Longs Peak, you should acclimate to higher elevations. During the ascent, hike at a steady pace with frequent rests. Be alert for the symptoms of mountain sickness. Individuals with heart conditions should consult a physician before climbing Longs Peak.

LONGS PEAK AREA TRAILS



TO THE TOP

Approach

The Longs Peak Ranger Station is situated one mile off Highway 7, eleven miles south of Estes Park, and is open daily during the summer.

Keyhole Route

The only nontechnical climb up Longs Peak (14,255 ft., 4347 m) is the Keyhole Route. The summit is 7.5 miles (12.1 km) from the ranger station with an elevation gain of 4,850 feet. The six miles to the Boulderfield, where the route begins, are a moderate hiking trail. From the Boulderfield, ascend west to the "Keyhole" where you traverse south across a steep ledge system on the west face. Ascend the "Trough", then traverse another ledge system called the "Narrows." The "Homestretch" is the final scramble to the summit. The route from the "Keyhole" to the summit is marked with yellow and red bulls-eyes painted on the rock. *Time for the round trip is about 12-15 hours.*

Seasons

From about October until July, Longs Peak is under winter and

technical conditions on all routes. In mid-July, August, and most of September, the Keyhole Route is generally free of snow and can be negotiated without technical climbing equipment.

Equipment

Be prepared for sudden, drastic weather changes. The following items, at a minimum, should be taken on a one-day ascent of Longs Peak:

Sturdy hiking boots, extra wool sweaters or synthetic pile jackets, long pants, wind and water resistant jacket and pants, flashlight, mittens, hat, spare socks, lunch, and water.

Camping

Longs Peak Campground is located near the trailhead and is on a first-come, first-served basis. The 26-site campground is for **TENTS ONLY** with a maximum stay of three nights.

Backcountry Use Permit

A permit is required for overnight trips into the backcountry. Permits are available from ranger stations in summer or the backcountry office year round.

Permits may be obtained starting March 1st by calling 970/586-1242. No phone reservations are accepted between June and September. Sites are limited.

Hints for Success

Begin your climb before 3:00 a.m. in order to be off the summit before noon. Afternoon lightning storms are common and can be fatal. If lightning occurs, get off ridges and summits. Conditioning hikes are advised. A slow, steady pace is an important key to success.

Regulations

Rangers strictly enforce park regulations. You may view a complete list of regulations at any ranger station. Please note these commonly abused regulations:

- Pets are prohibited on trails.
- Backcountry campers must have a valid **Backcountry Use Permit**.
- Wood fires are prohibited in the Longs Peak backcountry.
- Feeding wildlife is prohibited.

IT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY TO HAVE SOMEONE NOTIFY THE PARK IF YOU ARE OVERDUE.