

TRAIL GUIDE FOR NOVICE BIKERS

The mountain biking experience in Colorado is as good as it gets anywhere in the world! We have an abundance of trails to delight riders of every skill level. Experienced bikers already know about - and doubtless have many favorite - trails in the foothills along the Front Range, in the high country of the Rocky Mountains and on the plateaus of the Western Slope. People new to the sport, though, may not know where to go to find trails that are at once satisfying but not too challenging. Here, then, are some of the best places for neophyte mountain bikers to discover the thrill of the sport.

These trails are listed from easiest to most difficult, using a rating scale of 1 to 10. All are off-road and most are single track.



GETTING STARTED

If you are brand new to mountain biking, you are looking for trails that are non-threatening, where you can concentrate on learning how your bike operates. You want space to practice getting into and out of the toe clips on your pedals, running through the gears, learning how to shift your balance, and getting a feel for the brakes. These six locations provide a safe haven where you can become comfortable with your bike and hone your basic skills. Always be aware of and courteous to others you encounter on the trail.

1.0 **Highline Canal** - Denver

Winding for miles through the cityscape, the Highline Canal offers a wide, smooth gravel path ideal for mountain biking novices. There is virtually no elevation change, so no climbing. You can get on and off the trail at many places around the city, riding as far as you care to go.



1.2 **Cherry Creek Reservoir** - Denver

There are miles of undulating single track trails in Cherry Creek State Park. Good practice area for those new to mountain biking. Beware of those nasty goat head thorns, though! You are sure to get practice changing flat tires! Not fun, but a necessary skill, nonetheless.

1.2 **Waterton Canyon** - Denver

The wide gravel road from the trailhead to the base of Strontia Dam is a scenic excursion into a mountain canyon with minimal hassle. It's uphill going in, but on a gentle, constant grade that is not very demanding.

12.2 miles / out & back / smooth hardpack gravel / 350' gain

1.2 **Santa Fe Trail** - Monument

A "rails to trails" project, this wide, smooth gravel trail runs 14 miles on the old Santa Fe Railroad right of way from Palmer Lake to Colorado Springs. There are several points to get on or off the trail. Very consistent and easy grade.

14 miles one way / smooth hardpack gravel / mainly downhill going south

1.2 **Pineridge Loop** - Ft. Collins

The Pineridge area just west of the city is easily accessible and has excellent single track, much of which is rated "easy." As there are multiple trails in the area, you can vary your distance and elevation gain to suit your pleasure and branch out onto more challenging trails as you get better.

1.2 **Michigan Ditch** - Cameron Pass

Like the Highline Canal, the Michigan Ditch is a wide, smooth trail with very little elevation change - but it starts at 10,276' and has awesome mountain vistas! From Ft. Collins, go west thru the Poudre River Valley to Cameron Pass; look for trail on south side of highway. There is a half-mile hike to Agnes Lake at the end of the bike trail, too!

13 miles out & back / mainly smooth gravel / 800' gain / option of hike at trail end

INCREASING THE CHALLENGE

Once you are familiar with the operation of your bike and are comfortable riding on an unpaved surface, you will want to up the ante a bit. These next nine venues offer more challenge in terms of terrain, allowing you to polish your biking skills further, but without putting yourself at risk. Always ride with an awareness of the effect you have on the environment. Don't skid your rear tire, take shortcuts or ride in mud, as this damages the trail.

1.5 **Lair O' The Bear** - Idledale

This short loop trail is a great introduction to riding in a mountain setting. Ride the loop twice, reversing directions if you like, to make it worth the drive from Denver.
2 miles / loop / smooth surface / 750' gain

1.5 **Boulder Foothills Trails** - Boulder

These single track and gravel road trails in the Boulder Valley Ranch area north of town offer relatively flat terrain that is inviting to those new to mountain biking.
8.9 miles / out & back / smooth surface / 750' gain

1.5 to 3.5 **Green Mountain Park** - Denver

There are several miles of undulating single track trail around the west and south perimeter of the park. Short, mild climbs and a rocky tread will test your new skills. When you become more proficient on your bike, you can climb to the top of the mountain, using either of two switchback trails on the east side of the park. Ride down the way you came up or take either of two routes down the west side, testing your braking prowess as you go.
5 to 10 miles / loops / loose & rocky tread / up to 1000' gain

1.3 to 3.5 **Mt. Falcon Park** - Morrison

Mt. Falcon Park has wonderful trails and great scenery. Novice bikers will enjoy riding the Meadows Trail in the upper section of the park. As you gain experience and confidence, you will want to try some of the other trails, such as the Tower, Old Ute and Devil's Elbow trails.
1.0 to 6.5 miles / loops and out & back / somewhat rocky tread / 500' gain

1.5 to 3.5 **Horsetooth Mountain Park** - Ft. Collins

An impressive network of interconnecting trails runs through the park. The routes vary in physical and technical challenge from easy to difficult. New bikers should stick to the service roads or the Soderburg Trail.
4.0 miles / out & back / somewhat rocky tread / 700' gain

1.5 to 3.5 **Lory State Park** - Ft. Collins

Lory State Park is a fun place for anyone who pedals. There are a variety of trails that range from easy to hard. Beginners should explore the Shoreline and Valley trails. Distance and elevation gain depend on trails ridden.

1.5 **Bear Creek Lake Park** - Denver

There are miles of wide, paved bike paths in Bear Creek Lake Park in southwest Denver. Happily for mountain bikers, there is also an extensive network of single track trails in the park. This is a great area to practice flying through the woods, across creeks and over somewhat hilly terrain. Trail surface varies from smooth hardpack to loose scabble, with rocky creek crossings. Can be ridden out & back or in large loops. Elevation gain is very moderate at about 200'. Again, watch out for thorns!

1.5 **Rolling Creek** - Bailey / Lost Creek Wilderness

The Rolling Creek Trail courses through the woods from the Wellington Lake Road to the Lost Creek Wilderness boundary. The trail is basically smooth and sandy, with minimal elevation change. To lengthen the ride, tack on an additional 4 miles (round trip) by riding the Colorado Trail to where it, too, crosses into the Wilderness.
5.6 miles / out & back / smooth, sandy trail / 380' elevation gain

1.5 **Geneva Creek** - Grant

Starting at the Geneva Creek Campground just off Guanella Pass Road, this trail rolls through open meadows in a mountain valley on a hardpack trail with some mild rocky sections and a stream crossing to make things interesting. There are other trails in the valley that connect to this one, so you can do some exploring and add to your miles if you wish.
5.8 miles / out & back / firm hardpack / 300' elevation change



TESTING YOUR SKILLS

When you have mastered the basic techniques of mountain biking, you will be looking to test your ability. The following locales will help you build strength, increase stamina and refine your skills. Remember to always ride in control. There is no shame in dismounting and walking your bike through tough terrain.

2.0 **Switzerland Trail** - Boulder

The Switzerland Trail follows the route of a narrow gauge railroad that once ran from Ward to Eldora. The trail never has more than a 4% grade. The rail bed is quite rocky in places. This is a good test of your ability to pick a line through the rubble - and of your bike's suspension. For the easiest ride, go west from the Sugarloaf Road trailhead to the intersection with Colo. Hwy 72, then retrace your route.

12.0 mile / out & back / sometimes smooth, often rocky / 644' gain

2.0 **Rampart Reservoir** - Woodland Park

Enjoy a scenic ride on the 14.6 mile loop trail around Rampart Reservoir near Woodland Park west of Colorado Springs. Serious fun! The trail can be ridden in either direction, but clockwise is recommended. Rather high altitude.

14.6 miles / loop / mainly smooth; some steep gullies / 600' gain



2.0 **Rabbit Mountain** - Lyons

Located a few miles east of Lyons north of Colo. Hwy 66 (look for signs), Rabbit Mountain offers 5.5 miles of trails that wander through grassland and ridge top pine forest. Trails are rocky in spots with gentle inclines.

5.5 miles / O&B and loop / somewhat rocky tread / 600' gain

2.2 **Hewlett Gulch** - Poudre River Canyon west of Ft. Collins

This is a good trail with some rocky sections and numerous stream crossings (great on a hot summer day!). The ride in is a steady climb with a few steep sections, but is generally easy. You can do a loop at the top, but the descent is challenging. Better to turn around at the high point and retrace your course.

10.0 miles / out & back / mildly rocky with many stream crossings / 620' gain

2.2 **Betasso Preserve** - Boulder

The Canyon Loop Trail takes you through forests and across meadows and streams. The ride is moderately challenging, if short. Ride the trail in each direction for a good workout.

2.75 miles / loop / mildly rocky / 440' gain

2.5 to 3.5 **Fraser Valley** - Winter Park & Fraser

There are 600 miles of inviting trails in the Fraser Valley around the towns of Winter Park and Fraser. Many of them are geared to beginning riders. Especially recommended are the Flume, Creekside, Chainsaw and Northwest Passage trails, all of which swoop through the woods on a smooth surface with a minimum of roots and rocks. Highly recommended!

2 to 30 miles / loops and O&B / generally smooth trails / 100' to 1000'+ gain

2.5 to 7.0 **Lake Pueblo State Park** - Pueblo

The maze of interconnecting trails on the south shore of Lake Pueblo covers a variety of terrain from mellow trails that meander across the prairie to steep and rocky defiles in the many arroyos that drain down to the lake. A great playground in early spring and late fall. Pleasant, if barren, campgrounds. Entrance fee required.

2 to 30+ miles / loops and O & B / smooth to very loose & rocky / 100'+ gain

3.0 to 4.0 **Rustler's Loop and Mary's Loop** - Fruita

There are many miles of scenic loop trails along the rim of the Colorado River just west of Fruita. The easiest are Rustler's and Mary's loops. The best views, though, are found on Horsethief Bench and Steve's Loop, which are well worth a visit. These last can be ridden by novice bikers willing to walk around the steeper drops and more intimidating rock gardens. All the loops are relatively level, without large elevation gains. This is a great destination in early spring and late fall.

Rustler's: 3.6 miles / Mary's: 6.5 miles / loops / somewhat rocky / 800' gain

3.0 **West Rim of Rabbit Valley** - Fruita

As long as you are in Fruita, you might want to ride the West Rim Trail, as well. As with Mary's and Rustler's, you will find yourself skirting the cliffs overlooking the Colorado River and be enthralled by the scenery. There will be fewer bike riders in this lesser known area, but there will also be motorbikes on the trail. Some steep and sandy sections.

6-10 miles / out & back or loop if using Kokopelli Trail / mainly hardpack, with some deep sand and ledges / 300' gain

3.0 **Hall Ranch** - Lyons

The 10.5 mile combined Bitterbrush and Nelson Loop trail is somewhat steep in the first two miles and has several rock gardens to negotiate. It will test your bike handling skills. The loop at the top is a delight, and many bikers choose to ride it in both directions before heading back down. The trailhead can be found one mile west of Lyons on Colo. Hwy 7.
10.5 miles / out & back / mostly smooth single track / 1100' gain

3.0 to 5.0 **Centennial Cone Park** - Golden

There are three major trails in the park. The Elk Range Trail is a gravel road that runs 3.2 miles along the northern perimeter of the park and flows gently over some rolling hills. It traverses lots of open space with great vistas and is well suited to novice riders. The Travois Trail is newly constructed single track that runs almost 10 miles along the eastern and southern boundaries of the park. The grade is moderate over the entire course and the only technical challenges are the couple of dozen very sharp switchback turns and three sets of stone stair-steps. The Travois Trail is a great ride for more experienced riders. The two trails, taken together, form a loop around the park, and can be ridden equally well in either direction. The Mayhem Gulch Trail runs from Colo. Hwy 6 along Clear Creek to the upper portion of the park, where it intersects with the Travois Trail, and is recommended for strong intermediate riders. The addition of this trail affords the biker a chance for a really awesome out & back ride of 16.5 miles with huge elevation gain to match the incredible scenery.

Note: the trails in the park are restricted on weekends. Mountain bikers are allowed only on the even-numbered days, while hikers are permitted only on the odd-numbered days.

3.5 **Colorado Trail** - Buffalo Creek Recreation Area

This portion of the famed Colorado Trail (CT) is a classic single track that swoops in gentle turns through dense forest. It is mainly downhill going in, meaning you have to climb back out. A good aerobic workout, and great fun! Very little in the way of rocks and roots to worry about. You will find the trailhead on the west side of Colo. Hwy 126 about two miles south of the hamlet of Buffalo Creek. There is a fee for parking at the trailhead. Several other trails along Buffalo Creek intersect with the CT, offering the option of many loop rides covering an additional 20-30 miles over rolling terrain. Sweet!
18.2 miles / out & back / smooth tread / 1600' gain



4.0 **Klondike Bluffs and Gemini Bridges** - Moab

The trails around Moab can be as intimidating as they are spectacularly beautiful! Most are jeep roads rather than single track. Two of the best for those new to the sport are the Klondike Bluffs and Gemini Bridges trails. On the K.B. trail you will ride vast expanses of slickrock (exposed sandstone) which, despite the name, can be quite rough. There are several different routes to Gemini Bridges, so carry a map or you may get lost. Always ride in a group and carry lots of water when riding in the desert.

Klondike: 15.4 miles / out & back / sand & slickrock / 900' gain

Gemini Bridges: mileage depends on route / out & back, loop or one way with shuttle / 600' to 1200' gain

5.0 **Colorado Trail** - Kenosha Pass to Georgia Pass

The CT north from Kenosha Pass is a high altitude trail beloved by bikers and hikers alike. With few exceptions, the trail is hardpack gravel and has moderate incline. There are gorgeous panoramic views from several places. There is a lot of foot traffic and considerable roots in the first mile or so north from Kenosha Pass. The distance can be cut in half and most hikers avoided by starting the ride from the Jefferson Campground rather than at Kenosha Pass. This ride is a Colorado classic.

24 miles / out & back / very high altitude / good tread with some roots & rocks / 2000'+ gain

RIDING TO THE TOP

With practice, patience and perseverance, the time will come when you are ready to tackle any trail, even the most gnarly. It may be scary at times, but it is also incredibly exhilarating to meet and master some truly formidable single track! Pushing your limits will make you a better rider, but do so with appropriate caution.

Always ride with a helmet and gloves and carry basic tools, a spare inner tube and a first aid kit.

It is also a good idea to have photocopies of your driver's license and health insurance card in your kit, as well as a Colorado Outdoor Recreation Search And Rescue (CORSAR) card.



Other Recommended Trails:

- 2.5 Young's Gulch - Poudre River Canyon
- 3.5 Matthews-Winters Park - Denver
- 3.5 to 8.0 White Ranch Park - Golden
- 3.5 to 7.0 Golden Gate Canyon State Park - Golden
- 3.5 to 5.0 Pine Valley Ranch - Pine Valley
- 4.5 Deer Creek Canyon Park - Denver
- 4.5 Walker Ranch - Boulder
- 4.5 Peaks Trail - Breckenridge to Frisco
- 4.5 Indian Creek Loop - Sedalia
- 5.0 Apex Park - Golden
- 5.0 Sourdough Trail - Nederland
- 5.0 Blue Dot Trail - Nederland
- 5.0 Dyke Trail - Crested Butte
- 5.0 Stoopid Trail - Monument
- 5.0 to 8.0 Lion's Loop, Troy Built, Mack Ridge, Edge Loop - Fruita
- 6.0 Ribbon Trail and Lunch Loop - Grand Junction
- 6.0 Colorado Trail - Hwy 126 to Waterton Canyon
- 6.0 Hermosa Creek - Durango
- 6.0 Captain Jack's Loop - Colorado Springs
- 7.0 Dakota Hogback - Denver
- 7.0 Colorado Trail - Molas Pass to Boleyn Pass, Durango
- 7.0 Monarch Crest Trail - Salida
- 7.0 Porcupine Rim, Amasa Back, Poison Spider - Moab
- 7.5 Commando Run & Two Elks - Vail
- 8.0 Lenawee Trail - Arapahoe Basin to Montezuma
- 8.0 401, 409 and Teocalli Ridge - Crested Butte
- 9.0 Colorado Trail - Camp Hale to Copper Mountain
- 9.0 Moore Fun Trail - Fruita
- 10.0 Wings of Icarus - Fruita

Get out and ride!

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