The Maroon Bells Bus Tour

To preserve the fragile ecosystem of the Maroon Bells, vehicle restrictions are in place on Maroon Creek Road during the summer. From 8am-5pm daily, all motorized vehicles are prohibited with the exception of overnight campers, ADA permitees and the RFTA Maroon Bells bus tour. Operated by the Roaring Fork Transportation Authority (RFTA), the bus tour provides visitors with a relaxed, scenic and educational trip from Aspen Highlands all the way to the Maroon Bells.

GETTING TO ASPEN HIGHLANDS VILLAGE Free shuttle (five trips/hour) from the Rubey Park Transit Center in downtown Aspen. Free parking is available at Aspen Highlands.

SCHEDULE Tours run daily from mid-June through Labor Day. After Labor Day, service continues on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays through September. Bus tours depart Aspen Highlands Village base area every 20–30 minutes, 8 am–5 pm.

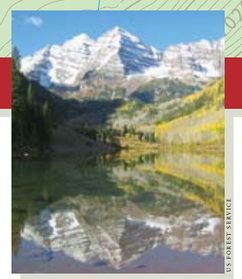
TICKETS Admission tickets provide access to both the bus tour and the Maroon Bells. Combination passes provide access to the bus tour, Maroon Bells and Silver Queen Gondola. Tickets are available at Rubey Park Transit Center in Aspen, and Four Mountain Sports in Aspen Highlands Village. Adults/$6 • Under 18/$4 • All ages Combination Pass/$27

More Information • 970/925-8484
www.rfta.com

THE CITY OF ASPEN

RFTA ROARING FORK TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY "Connecting our region with transit and trails"

MAROON LAKE TRAILS



Maroon Lake

Maroon Lake (9,580') provides one of the most memorable scenes in the Rockies. The lake occupies a basin that was sculpted by Ice-Age glaciers and later dammed by landslide and rockfall debris from the steep slopes above the valley floor. Here you can picnic, fish, photograph, hike, stroll, or simply sightsee.

There are several trails in the vicinity of the lake for you to enjoy:

MAROON LAKE TRAIL ❶ Follow this short trail from either the bus stop or the parking lot to get closer to the lake and meadow. Examine the beaver lodge and look for their trails to the aspen trees, which they use for food and building materials. The trail along the lake is an easy, accessible hike for everyone. *Easy 1 mile round trip*

SCENIC LOOP TRAIL ❷ The path starts at the upper end of the lake just past the bridge. This short trail into the Wilderness offers the sight and sound of a rushing stream, cascading waterfalls, and the quiet of a beaver pond hidden in the aspens. *Easy 1.5 mile round trip*

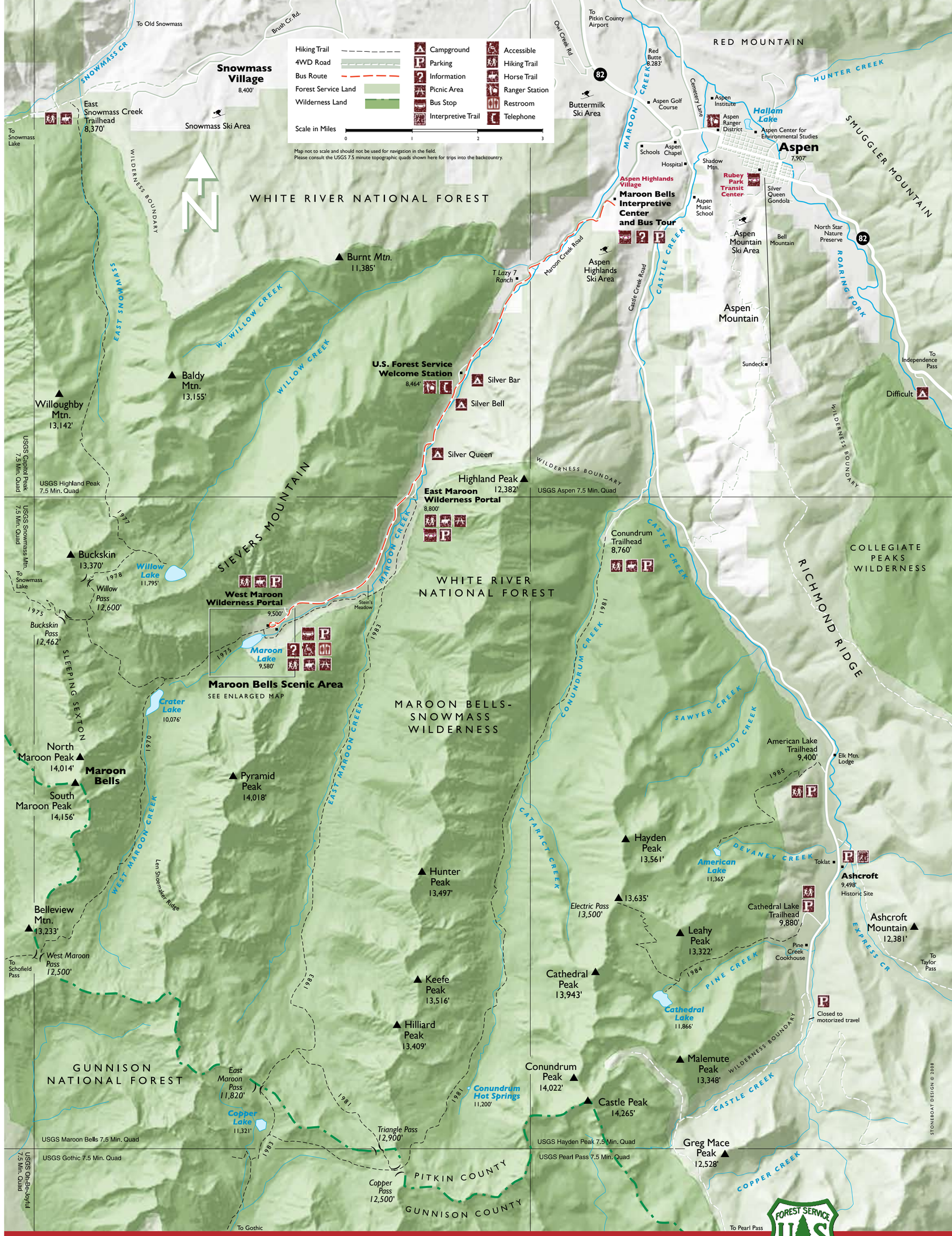
MAROON CREEK TRAIL ❸ At the outlet of Maroon Lake you can begin an enjoyable hike that winds its way downstream along Maroon Creek, through rocky slopes, mountain meadows, and aspen forests. Wildlife can often be seen along the trail. At the end of your hike, the bus will pick you up on Maroon Creek Road at the East Maroon Portal. *Easy 3.2 miles one way*

CRATER LAKE TRAIL ❹ For the more adventurous, this trail leaves the Maroon Lake Trail at the Deadly Bells Kiosk. This steep and rocky trail enters the Wilderness, climbing an ancient rockslide that holds Crater Lake (10,076'). Be prepared for thunderstorms and cooler temperatures. *Moderate 3.6 miles round trip*

You can help protect this area by staying on trails, especially through meadows and tundra, and not shortcutting trail switchbacks.

Throughout the White River National Forest, many other scenic valleys also offer wilderness backcountry worth exploring. Ask at local National Forest offices for suggested trails and related information.

Aspen Ranger District • 806 West Hallam
Aspen, CO 81611 • 970/925-3445
Forest Conservancy • Box 3136
Aspen, CO 81612 • 970/925-3445



GUIDE TO THE MAROON BELLS SCENIC AREA

FOREST SERVICE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

The USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Guide to the Maroon Bells Scenic Area

White River National Forest

DAVID HISER • PHOTOGRAPHERS/ASPEN

Guide to the Maroon Bells Scenic Area

The Maroon Valley

U.S. Forest Service

WELCOME to the Maroon Valley and the White River National Forest. Here you can explore a glacial valley surrounded by 14,000-foot peaks, view vast fields of wildflowers, and be close to Nature. The Maroon Bells form a backdrop that epitomizes what the Rocky Mountains are all about. Mirrored in the waters of Maroon Lake, the Maroon Bells tower like massive sentinels over the valley. The mountains' red color and distinctive bell shape led earlier explorers to give the Maroon Bells their name. From Maroon Lake, you can see into the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness, public land designated by Congress to be protected and managed to preserve its natural conditions. Careful use of this area will keep the natural treasures found here protected for generations. Enjoy your visit to the Maroon Valley.

WILDERNESS SAFETY

Maroon Lake is at an altitude of 9,580 feet or 2880 meters. Compared to sea level, there is less oxygen available, the air is very dry, and the sun's rays are stronger. So, drink lots of water to keep hydrated, wear sun screen and protective clothing including a hat, and listen to your body.

- **Symptoms of the effects of altitude such as nausea, headache, dry mouth, fast heartbeat, and restlessness can be minimized by eating lightly and drinking plenty of water. Also, while a T-shirt and shorts may feel comfortable in Aspen, the weather can be dramatically different at the Maroon Bells. Be prepared for afternoon thundershowers and dress in layers.**
- **If you need help, let others know. The nearest phone will be a hike to the parking lot and a drive to the entrance station (cell phones do not work here!). Forest Service personnel have radios that can reach out of the valley in cases of emergency.**

Forests and People

National Forest System lands are public lands managed for everyone's benefit to use, enjoy, and help protect. While visiting the Maroon Bells, take the opportunity to learn more about the area.

We offer guided naturalist hikes and programs, some of which are conducted through our partnership with the Aspen Center for Environmental Studies. The interpretive program and the maintenance of the facilities and trails at the Maroon Bells are made possible through the fees collected as part of the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act.

The Forest Service strives for excellence and is attentive to public needs. If you have questions or suggestions, we would like to hear from you. You may contact any Forest Service employee, complete a visitor survey card, visit or call the Aspen District Office.

KEN MCGRAW

Camping/Picnicking

Camping is allowed in Maroon Valley only at the developed campgrounds: Silver Bar, Silver Bell, and Silver Queen. There are no showers or RV hookups. Advanced reservations can be made for these sites by calling toll-free 877/444-6777 or on the web at www.Recreation.gov. Picnicking sites are available at Maroon Lake and East Maroon Portal.

CONCESSIONS AND SUPPLIES

- There are NO vending machines, restaurants, or other supplies available at Maroon Lake. However, many Aspen area restaurants offer box lunches with advanced notice.
- Any food or beverage containers carried into the Maroon Lake or wilderness areas must be packed out. There are trash containers at the lake and on the buses.
- Public restrooms are located near the bus drop off/pick up points.
- Please remember to take only pictures and leave only footprints.

Natural Habitats

The landscape of the Maroon Valley is covered by many different habitats that are home to a wide variety of plants and wildlife. These habitats include riparian zones near streams and other wet areas, mountain meadows, aspen groves, conifer forests, and high above the trees, alpine tundra.

KEN MCGRAW

RIPARIAN ZONES Found in moist soils next to streams, riparian habitats consist mainly of shrubs such as willows, alder, and river birch, as well as blue spruce and aspen trees. Stands of riparian shrubs are good places to spot mule deer, who favor these areas because the shrubs provide good cover and food.

MOUNTAIN MEADOWS Forest openings that are covered by grasses and wildflowers are important foraging areas for many wildlife species. Meadows are created by avalanches or fire, or because the soil is too wet or too dry for forest growth. Because of abundant sunshine, meadows harbor the greatest variety of wildflowers compared to any of the forest habitats.

ASPEN GROVES Aspen trees grow as clones: many trees, all genetically identical, and all linked together through a common root system. Scientists consider all of the trees in a

KEN MCGRAW

clone to be a single organism! Aspen sprout very quickly in newly cleared areas created by avalanches, fire, or timber harvest, and growth is stimulated by sunshine. Aspen trees have relatively short lives (only about 100 years or so) and are gradually replaced by spruce and fir.

CONIFER FORESTS Above Maroon Lake, conifer forests consist mostly of Engelmann spruce and subalpine fir, two tree species that are well adapted for the colder and wetter climate of higher elevations. Where the trees grow and how well they prosper relates directly to altitude, climate, the availability of sunshine and water, and disturbance factors such as fire and avalanches. Spruce and fir trees grow slower than aspen, but live longer, usually several hundred years.

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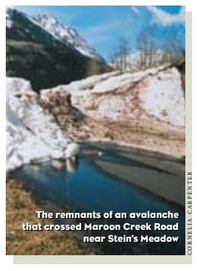
ALPINE TUNDRA At high elevations, the rigorous climate makes tree survival impossible. Above the 11,40' treeline, cold temperatures, a short growing season, and harsh, drying winds mean only small, specialized tundra plants survive.

Avalanche Country

Winter storms that bring snow to delight skiers often make the Maroon Valley extremely dangerous for travel because of avalanches. Avalanches send tons of snow plummeting from the steep peaks and ridges into the valley bottoms.

Throughout the Maroon Valley corridor, many of the mountainsides appear to have little or no vegetation. Most often these are avalanche paths, swept clean of trees by sliding snow. Such treeless scars remain for many years. Active avalanche paths are frequently grass-covered; less active paths are soon covered with shrubs and small trees. In the Maroon Valley's narrow bottomlands it is not uncommon for an avalanche path to extend several hundred yards up the opposite side of the valley.



The remnants of an avalanche that crossed Maroon Creek Road near Stein's Meadow

TERRY ALTHOUSE

While traveling in the Maroon Valley, look for avalanche paths. The power of avalanches is obvious, even awe-inspiring, especially when you see the bottom of the path filled with broken trees and masses of debris. Imagine what the road you are traveling on would look like after an avalanche has covered it with a 20-foot deep pile of snow.

This brochure was produced in partnership between the US Forest Service, the Forest Conservancy, and the Roaring Fork Transportation Authority © 2008

Rocky Mountain Rocks

It took Nature 300 million years to form the scenic Maroon Valley. The geologic history here includes eons of sedimentation, uplift, faulting, and erosion by wind, water, and ice.

Sedimentation started the mountain-building process. It took millions of years for streams, lakes, and inland seas to deposit sedimentary layers 10,000 feet thick. Those sediments eventually became transformed into the rocks you see in the valley today. The red color in the Maroon Formation results from the weathering of hematite, an iron-bearing mineral. Color variations are caused by differences in the original sources of the sediment, as well as the effects of mineralization caused by heat during a period of uplift around 34 million years ago. The process of geologic uplift, along with faulting, gave the Maroon Bells their height. Erosion gradually shaped the peaks and ridges.

North Maroon Peak from Buckskin Pass

US FOREST SERVICE

Two million years ago, the earth's climate cooled. Glaciers formed throughout the Rockies. Rivers of ice filled the Maroon Valley and its major tributaries. These glaciers scraped their way along the mountainsides and created the distinctive U-shaped profile of the main valleys. Though the glaciers retreated long ago, wind, water and other erosive forces

Meet the Residents

Walk quietly, look closely, and you may see some of the animals and flowers living here. But please, do not attempt to approach or feed wildlife.

- The behavior of larger wildlife species, such as bear, elk, mountain sheep, and deer can be unpredictable and dangerous.
- There are no poisonous snakes in the valley.
- Grizzly bears once roamed the valley, but now black bears are the only bruins that occasionally wander through the area.

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Pika

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Rufous Hummingbird

CONNIE CARPENTER

Colorado Blue Columbine

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Red Fox

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Bighorn Sheep

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Western Red Paintbrush & Silver Lupine

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Red-breasted Nuthatch

KEN MCGRAW

Yellow-bellied Marmot

KEN MCGRAW

Blue Grouse

KEN MCGRAW

Great Horned Owl

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Mule Deer

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Porcupine

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Red Osier Dogwood

CONNIE CARPENTER

Brook Trout

KEN MCGRAW

Gray Jay

STONEBOAT DESIGN © 2002

Maroon Bells National Recreation Area

1. **Buses will start at 8am and run through 11 June - 2 October; the road is closed 8am-5pm.**
2. **Dogs are not allowed on the Scenic Loop Trail due to moose.**
3. **Bear proof containers are mandatory for all the Maroon-Bells Snowmass Wilderness Area.**
4. **During peak weekends, especially in autumn, parking is <u>extremely limited and congested</u> at Aspen Highlands; your visit will be more pleasant and less stressful by taking the free Castle-Maroon Bus from downtown Aspen to Highlands to access the Maroon Bells. DO NOT count on a parking space at Highlands.**

2016 Access Info

The Maroon Bells is a National Recreation Fee Use Area, it is never "free." The $10 fee supports the maintenance and care of the area. All National Passes are accepted, as well as the 'local' Bells pass.

Buses run 8am-5pm from Aspen Higlands daily **starting Saturday, 11 June through Sunday, 2 October**. Vehicles are restricted with the following exemptions:

- Campers in Silver Bar, Bell, or Queen.
- Vehicles with a handicap placard, or disability license plate.

Dependent upon space, the following exemptions *may* be allowed:

- Infants, 2 years old and younger
- Vehicles with 11 people or more, $3/person.

All other visitors, backpackers included, take the bus from Aspen Highlands during bus hours. Passes *do not* exempt visitors from the bus.

Tickets are available at Four Mountain Sports, located in the Highlands ski area base village. Dogs are allowed on the bus.

The last bus from the Bells to Aspen will leave promptly at 5pm, it is YOUR responsibility to make the last bus to town.

Maroon Bells General Information

Vehicles will not be allowed to the Bells because the lot at Highlands is full, nor is parking allowed at the Aspen Rec Center or schools. On peak weekends, plan to take the free Castle-Maroon bus to Highlands and plan for early road closures.

Dogs need to be on a leash at all times, and are not allowed on the Scenic Loop Trail due to moose interactions.

All overnight visitors need to have bear canisters; the bears know how to undo a bear hang. The Ute Mountaineer in downtown Aspen rents bear canisters.

Camping is only allowed at: Silver Bar, Bell, or Queen, and at designated sites around Crater Lake. Reservations are strongly encouraged through www.recreation.gov, reservations are not taken at the Welcome Station.

There are NO services at Maroon Lake, or in the backcountry. Be prepared for your visit before leaving Aspen.

There is no fee for cyclists, but cyclists need to practice basic safety (ride single file, etc), there are ample bike racks provided, and bikes are not allowed at Maroon Lake. Maroon Creek Road is extremely busy even with vehicle restrictions.

For more information, to see current alerts, to follow fall color updates, please visit: www.fs.usda.gov/detail/whiteriver/specialplaces Click on 'Maroon Bells Scenic Area'

Aspen Ranger Station: 970-925-3445
Sopris Ranger Station: 970.963.2266