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 permits 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.

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.

More Information: 970/925-3445

www.rfta.com

The Maroon Bells Scenic Area

Guide to the Maroon Bells Scenic Area

See Exploded Map

Easy, accessible hike for everyone. Easy 1 mile round trip

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.

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 3586
Aspen, CO 81623 - 970/925-3445
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.

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 food and cover. Mound Mountain Meadow

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 clusters many trees, all genetically identical, and all linked together through a common root system. Scientists consider all of the trees in a 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.

Alpine Tundra

At high elevations, the rigorous climate makes tree survival impossible. Above the 12,000’ treeline, cold temperatures, a short growing season, and harsh, drying winds mean only small, specialized tundra plants survive.

WILDERNESS SAFETY

Maroon Lake is at an altitude of 12,500 feet or 3800 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 thunder showers 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 that would take scouts in an avalanche (or don’t work here). Forest Service personnel have radios that can reach out of the valley in cases of emergency.

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 mountainous peaks appear to have little or no vegetation. Most often these are avalanche paths, swept clean of trees by sliding snow. Such treetless 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.

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 could look like after an avalanche has covered it with a 20-foot deep pile of snow.

Forrests 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.

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 hook-ups. Advanced reservations can be made for these sites by calling toll-free 877/444-6777 or on the web at www.recreation.gov.

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 bears that occasionally wander through the area.

Natural alpine tundra.

Other wet areas, mountain meadows, aspen groves, conifer forests, and high above the trees, alpine tundra.

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1. Buses will start at 8am and run through 4 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 extremely limited and congested 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.

2015 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 Highlands daily starting Saturday, 13 June through Sunday, 4 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’