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United States Department of Agriculture

ASPEN TO CRESTED BUTTE

Only twenty-five miles south of Aspen is a town that shares much of the same history as Aspen. Crested Butte evolved from a Ute Indian hunting ground, to a mining town, to a ghost town and finally into a ski resort.

If you wish to drive there on a paved road, it is a minimum of 200 miles and 4 hours. The summer trip can be cut in half by way of Kebler Pass, a maintained dirt road. Pearl, Taylor, and Schofield Passes offer shorter distances but require a 4-Wheel Drive. You can also bike on these roads. The best routes are through the Maroon Bells/Snowmass Wilderness accessible by hiking or horse back only.

While Aspen is on the north side of the Elk Mountains, Crested Butte is nestled up to south side. The range runs from northwest to southeast between the two towns, with seven 14, 000 foot peaks and several thirteeners reaching to the sky and creating a formidable barrier. The rugged terrain serves a purpose, however, intimidating the casual day hiker and providing a safe haven for a variety of wildlife.

For memories that will last a lifetime, hike over West Maroon Pass one day (allow 5-8 hours) and return by East Maroon Pass (allow 5-8 hours) the next day. Both routes offer spectacular views and an abundance of wildlife, wildflowers, and beautiful streams. Get an early start (6-7 A.M.) and park in the overnight lot at Maroon Lake.

The first seven miles are up hill, climbing from 9580 feet to 12,480 at the pass. Crater Lake is a mile and a half into the trail with Maroon Peak and North Maroon Peak towering above on your right and Pyramid Peak on your left. Between Crater Lake and the West Maroon Pass, there are two stream crossings. Be extremely careful with stream crossings, especially in early to mid-summer when the water is high and very cold. When crossing the streams you would be wise to wear rubber soled sandals or water shoes for traction.

The top of the pass will reveal an exquisite view of the Elk Mountains in Gunnison National Forest, which includes peaks surrounding Crested Butte. The pass is a great place to have lunch and take pictures unless the weather is bad. This brings up another safety issue – Lightning. Thunderstorms are a common afternoon occurrence in the Colorado high country and the worst place to be is on a peak, ridge, or pass; Head for lower altitude in case of an electrical storm.

After a look back at the Aspen side of the pass, begin the descent into the East Fork of the Crystal River. In July and early August, the wildflowers in this cirque are beyond compare. Four miles and 2,080 feet below is the trailhead, just north of Schofield Pass. From here, you can stick your thumb out, but if you do not get a ride on the primitive road, it is a 14-mile hike to town. Instead, pre-arrange a pick-up by a mountain taxi: (970)349-2620 or (970)948-9893. If a slide from Mt. Bellview has buried the road below Emerald Lake, you will have to hike an extra 30 to 40 minutes to meet the taxi. The mountain taxis will take you to one of the Butte's many watering holes or to your accommodation for a well-deserved hot shower. Have dinner at one of the town's many excellent restaurants.

After an early breakfast, your taxi driver will take you to the East Maroon Pass trailhead just above Gothic. The elevation gain to the top of this pass is 2,200 feet (over 6 miles) and is a bit easier than the previous day's climb. The trail follows the Copper Creek Drainage through a perfect balance of aspen groves, open meadows, and dark timber. Just beyond five miles, you will hike over a rise and see the



beauty of Copper Lake and East Maroon Pass (a half-mile above the lake). From the top of the pass, it is all downhill, 3,200 feet and 11 miles through the East Maroon Creek Valley. The trail drops into the timber and to the right (east) side of the valley. Pyramid Peak dominates the landscape to the left. There are two stream crossings both at 5 and at 6 miles from the pass. The trail then stays to the east side of the creek until you reach the footbridge at the East Maroon Trailhead parking lot. After the short shuttle back to Maroon Lake, your loop is complete. Congratulations! You have just walked the most beautiful 400-mile round trips car ride in Colorado!

PERMIT INFORMATION: In order to provide quality recreation experiences and to protect the wilderness lands, the Forest Service must gather data regarding visitor use and travel patterns. **Each party overnighing in the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness is required to self-register at the Trailhead and to carry a copy of the registration with them during their visit.** There is no fee charged and no limit to the number of permits issued.

ACCESS: From mid-June through September the Maroon Creek Road beyond the T-Lazy Seven Ranch is closed from 9:00 am. to 5:00 PM. You will need to take the shuttle bus from Aspen Highlands Ski Area. Ask the Forest Service visitor information personnel for bus schedule info and September road closure hours. If you get an early start, drive 1/2 mile west of Aspen on Highway 82 to the roundabout. Go around the roundabout and turn right on Maroon Creek Road. Go 9-1/2 miles on Maroon Creek Road to the Day Use parking area at Maroon Lake. Backpackers may enter at any time but must park in the overnight lot. Stop at the Forest Service Entrance Station for a parking pass for. If the lot is full, you may park 1/4 mile down the road at the West Maroon Portal.

ETHICS/REGULATIONS: American Lake is within the Maroon Bell-Snowmass Wilderness; please educate yourself about Wilderness Ethics and the following rules:

- * **DOGS MUST BE LEASHED** out of consideration for both other people and wildlife.
- * Trash, **PACK IT IN, PACK IT OUT**--even fruit peels!
- * Limit group sizes to 10 people and 15 stock/pack animals.
- * **SANITATION** - bury human waste 100 feet from water and 6 inches in the soil.
- * Lightweight camp stoves are recommended and required above the timberline.

WILDERNESS AREAS are in a delicate state of natural balance, they are not renewable resources. Any careless act by man can upset this natural balance and result in the destruction of the beauty found in the Wilderness. By following the above ethics and regulations, you can help protect and preserve the natural features of the Wilderness for future visits. **PLEASE, RESPECT THE LAND AND RIGHTS OF OTHERS!**

PACK IT IN—PACK IT OUT!! LEAVE NO TRACE!!

