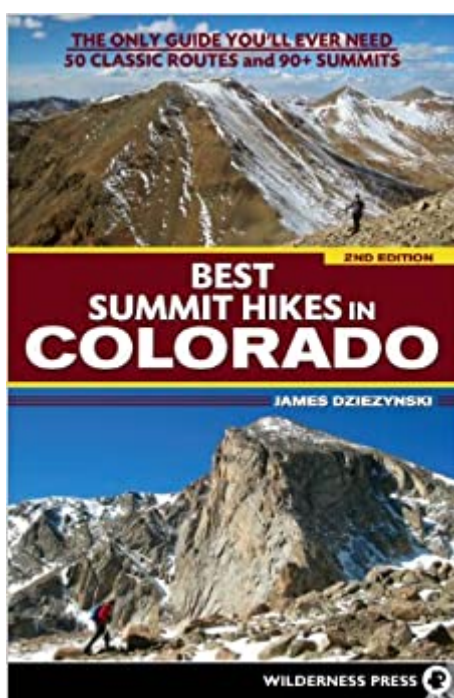


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# Best Summit Hikes In Colorado: An Opinionated Guide To 50+ Ascents Of Classic And Little-Known Peaks From 8,144 To 14,433 Feet



## Synopsis

Colorado has 53 14ers, more than 600 13ers, and hundreds of other peaks that can be reached without special equipment or expertise. Numerous guides dryly catalog these trails, but *Best Summit Hikes in Colorado* stands out from them all. Author James Dziezynski has meticulously selected 80+ of the state's absolute best peaks in more than 50 superlative hikes, and his opinionated narrative brings each route to life. Each summit is included because of a notable feature--whether it's the site of a ghost mine or airplane wreckage, has thundering waterfalls or colorful floral meadows, is the best summit for spotting wildlife or bringing out-of-town friends, or is very accessible. Some peaks offer unique opportunities, such as a trailhead accessible only via a steam-powered railroad. Several summits are described in no other publication. Covering all Colorado's major mountain ranges, including the well-known Sangre De Cristo, Gore, Sawatch, Indian Peaks, and Maroon Bell wilderness areas to the lesser-known Grenadiers, Medicine Bow, and Outer San Juan peaks, this distinctive guide makes it easy to select exactly the right hike for the right day, the right mood, and the right companions.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"The new edition of *Best Summit Hikes in Colorado* details non-technical scrambles up 14ers in every Colorado Mountain Range. Each route Dziezynski selected sets itself apart with notable features including: the site of a ghost town, a waterfall, an airplane wreck, a great meadow for wildflowers or wildlife spotting." --*Boulder Weekly*, October 2012  
"This great book covers some of Colorado's unsung hikes. I appreciate the lively detail and stories about natural and human history."

I'd even read it sitting in my armchair!" --Susan LeFever, former director, Sierra Club Rocky Mountain Chapter  
"There is so much of Colorado that is still wild and lonely, and James Dziezynski takes you there in this book. And because he has spent so much time figures these trips out from a logistical standpoint, it's an easy guidebook to follow." --Doug Schnitzsahn, editor-in-chief, Elevation Outdoors

Navajo Peak  
A trip to the glacial basin below Navajo leads you to the base of Airplane Gully, where ghosts of the past await. A thrilling scramble is the grand finale to Navajo's airy summit.  
Round Trip  
Distance 8.9 miles  
Hiking Time 6-1/2-8 hours  
Difficulty 8/10  
Class 3  
Start Elevation 10,500 ft., at Long Lake Trailhead  
Peak Elevation 13,409 ft.  
Total Elevation Gain 2,825 ft.  
Terrain Steep, loose gully, and airy but solid scrambling on summit block  
Best Time to Climb June-September  
Gear Advisor Gaiters, stiff boots, ice axe in spring, helmet, GPS  
Crowd Level Low  
Location Indian Peaks Range in the Indian Peaks Wilderness/Roosevelt National Forest outside the town of Ward  
Intro From a distance, the clean, four-sided pyramid block that sits atop Navajo Peak brings to mind ancient Mayan temples. Amongst the peaks that grace the skyline from Brainard Lake Recreation Area, Navajo offers the most challenging standard route. Half of the hike is off-trail, culminating in a gully climb and an exciting class 3 scramble to the summit. Along the way, you'll have a chance to examine the wreckage of a C-47 aircraft that crashed in January of 1948 en route to Grand Junction. Parts are strewn throughout the gully, and a huge piece of the bulkhead rests near the gully exit. Why Climb It? Shipwrecks and ghost towns fascinate humankind. We are drawn to relics, the very shells of history, which hold stories of hardship and bravery and are at the same time symbols of mortality. The wreckage on Navajo Peak is half of the appeal of this hike. Debris from the crash is strewn throughout the gully; small, rusty gears are so numerous they seem like bizarre, metallic sunflowers pushing through the rocks. Besides serving as an archive of aviation history, the scramble to Navajo's summit is exciting itself. Beginning on-trail in the beautiful Long Lake area of Indian Peaks, an easy start leads to an off-trail adventure, where you'll pass two of Colorado's permanent glaciers (Isabelle and Navajo). After a loose scramble up the gully, the remaining ridge climb to the summit concludes with an exposed but very solid scramble 35 feet to the summit block. Driving Passenger cars can make it to the trailhead with ease: the road is paved all the way. How to Get There Take Colorado Highway 72 (Peak-to-Peak Highway) to the Brainard Lake Road, which is above the town of Ward. From Nederland, it is 12 miles to this turnoff; from Lyons, it's 10.2 miles from the junction with Colorado Highway 7. If you are approaching from Boulder, it's quicker to take US Highway 36 north out of town approximately 6.0 miles and take a left onto Left Hand Canyon Drive. Stay on this

road 17 miles, all the way through the car graveyard/town of Ward. At the top of the road, take a right on Highway 32 and then a quick left to Brainard Lake Road. Follow this road 5.0 miles (you'll pass a pay station and Brainard Lake), and follow the well-marked signs for half a mile to Long Lake Trailhead. Fees/Camping As of 2006, the permit for the Brainard Lake Recreation Area is \$7 for a seven-day pass. You can buy an annual pass for \$25. Pawnee Campground fills up very quickly; if you're able to get a site, it's \$12 per night. Backcountry camping requires a permit and a small fee (\$5) from June 1 through September 15. Note that you'll have to go over the west side of Pawnee Pass to reach the designated backcountry camping zones. Route Notes The off-trail portion of this hike is a little easier in spring, when snow covers the boulders in the basin above Lake Isabelle. Snow in Airplane Gully melts out early, so you shouldn't have to bring crampons after early May. The moves to reach the summit are exposed, but the rock is very solid. The crux of the climb is the short downclimb off the summit. Mile/Waypoint 0.0 mi (1) Start at the Long Lake Trailhead and go west. Enjoy the flat trail, which is a great warm-up. At the west end of Long Lake, stay right and follow the trail to Pawnee Pass (for the time-being). 1.1 mi (2) Pawnee Pass Trail. Continue west to Lake Isabelle. 1.9 mi (3) After hiking up some switchbacks and crossing a cool waterfall, you've arrived at Lake Isabelle and the Isabelle Glacier Trail. Follow the lake on its north side; do not go up the trail to Pawnee Pass. Instead stay on the trail to Isabelle Glacier. This trail climbs above Lake Isabelle, eventually coming to a flat, marshy section with a small lake at 11,500 feet. 3.5 mi (4) You will need to get off-trail at the marshy section. However, do not follow the steep switchbacked trail to the north going to Isabelle Glacier. Instead, head southwest to the dry basin at the foot of Airplane Gully. It is best to stay on the left (west) slopes instead of dropping down to the flat part of the basin, as the tracks indicate. 3.9 mi (5) This is the base of Airplane Gully (12,280 feet). Finding the right gully can be tricky. Looking up at Navajo Peak, you'll see the Navajo Glacier on the right, the lumpy north face, and a steep gully that ends where the summit pyramid joins the ridge--this is not your gully. To the left of this gully is an outcrop of rock; Airplane Gully runs to the left of this rock. There is a minor talus fan of large boulders at the base (as well as a silver wing from the plane, with identification numbers). When you go over to the base of the gully, it will seem very climbable. There are many loose rocks in Airplane Gully, so be careful if you are scrambling above people. It's steep, but I'd still only rate the gully class 2+. More difficult than its grade is its total of 900 vertical feet. About halfway up (at approximately 12,550 feet), the gully forks. Take the right fork, despite the fact the straight south route offers a keyhole of blue sky through the rocks topping its exit. The correct fork climbs southwest. At 12,900 feet, just before the exit, lies the largest part of the wreckage. A major section of the bulkhead, motors, gears, and wires are everywhere. Do not touch or take any of

the wreckage! It's illegal to take pieces of the plane, as it's a recognized crash site. Furthermore, the heavy metal pieces sit in a loose, unstable gully--they may shift at any time. Above the wreckage, a grassy slope exits onto Navajo's east ridge.

4.2 mi (6) At the gully exit, the final pyramid looms before you. To reach the summit, hike up to the base of the block, favoring the south (left) side of the slope. Head west until you reach about 13,260 feet. There is a perilously balanced rock on the west side, known as the "Monkey Fist." This is your cue to begin scrambling north on exposed but solid rock. It's a short push, maybe 30 to 40 feet with several class 3 moves. Note that more experienced climbers can find a way up the face to the right (east face) via several class 3+ and class 4 sections. Novice or inexperienced hikers may find the exposure a bit unsettling.

4.4 mi (7) Navajo Peak's tiny summit has a register tube and a cairn. It can accommodate two people, though there are places for others to sit just below the summit. The downclimb back to the east ridge can be tricky. The safest and easiest way is to retrace the way you came, even though it looks like the rocks drop off into oblivion. There are several slightly more direct exits you can take by going down the southeast side; if you take them, you'll have short sections of face-in downclimbing, with some fall potential--class 4 stuff. Once you are safely on the ridge, return via Airplane Gully. The loose rock makes this descent tough; I'd recommend using an ice axe/trekking poles for stability, even when there is no snow. Once you're out of the gully, return to Lake Isabelle, regain the well-worn trail, and enjoy the hike out.

8.9 mi Finish. Options Hiking Navajo Peak makes for a fairly demanding day, so linking to other routes isn't really an option for a dayhike. There are some good views if you explore northeast on Niwot Ridge, which would require a left turn at the top of Airplane Gully (waypoint 6). Navajo's southeast ridge looks as if it would provide an exciting class 3+ traverse over to nearby 13,150-foot Arikaree Peak, but Arikaree has the unfortunate fate of being in the off-limits Boulder watershed. The impressive standalone peak you see from atop Airplane Gully to the east, 13,276-foot Kiowa Peak, is likewise forbidden. Fines are strictly enforced for trespassing in this area.

Quick Facts Ellsworth Bethel advocated naming a series of peaks to honor native peoples; that series is now known as the Indian Peaks. Navajo Peak is one example; others include Apache, Shoshoni, Arapahoe, Pawnee, and Arikaree peaks, as well as Niwot Ridge. A mountain was named in Bethel's honor also, though not in this range. You can spot Mount Bethel when driving east on I-70 just past the Eisenhower Tunnel, thanks to the snow fences high on its slopes, which are its trademark. The airplane wreckage is from a crash that occurred on January 21, 1948. Three men were killed when the C-47, en route from Denver to Grand Junction, was caught in bad weather and was pushed into the ridge by strong winds. The crash site was not discovered for several months. There are some who believe that the wreckage should be left alone. It is my opinion one should not

feel guilty or morbid for wanting to see the crash debris. The accident was tragic, but it serves as an example of how man and mountain are intertwined by the threads of fate. Like many scenes that remind us of our mortality, such an experience can also manifest itself as an affirmation of life.

Contact Info  
The good news: the Brainard Lake Recreation Area is free from sometime in October to early June. The bad news: the road is closed at the pay station, roughly 2.0 miles from Brainard Lake. You can park there and bike, ski, or hike in if you want to try an off-season ascent. This area is very popular in the winter for snowshoeing and cross-country skiing. Grand Country Wilderness Group (This group helps the US Forest Service manage the Brainard Lake Recreation Area)  
P.O. Box 2200 Fraser, CO 80442 (970) 726-4626  
Recorded Voice Information Hotline (303) 541-2519  
Arapahoe/Roosevelt National Forest Boulder Ranger District 2140 Yarmouth Avenue Boulder, CO 80301 (303) 541-2500

I'm not going to say this book saved my life, but it definitely made the hike WAY better. You can find some information online, but this book has all the information we needed, including how difficult the hike was, equipment recommendation, estimated time of the hike, and where you can camp. I wanted to take my younger brother hiking in Colorado, we were able to pick an easier mountain and make a day summit of Mount James. It was honestly one of the best experiences of my life. This book was a huge help in making it happen.

We've used this book for the last three months on all our hikes. My biggest complaint is that over half the hikes are 5/10-10/10 in difficulty, which to a newish hiker is more like 6/10+. The hikes have great maps, informative background info, and wonderful directions. He chooses great trails. We've done 10 or so and loved them all. Our book is worn, wet and bent because we've taken it everywhere we hike. I hope he writes a guide book for hikes that are 1/10-4/10 difficulty.

Great book. Lists all of the summit hikes and any caveats you may run into try to get to the climb or through the climb. Also has a great rating system so you don't get in over your head. Unless you have very specialized gear, I would not recommend hiking any of these hikes outside of their "Season months". This book mostly focuses on scrambling and/or climbing but some good hiking trails can be found in it as well.

Well written, ample photos depicting each hike, good maps and directions for the recommended routes, and a wide variety of summits for the hiker & climber. Also, this book doesn't cover anything

really higher in difficulty than maybe Class 3+ (which is a boon to a larger group of hikers/climbers who don't want to go technical). I would put this volume right up there close to Roach's classic compilation - although the latter is only about Colorado's 14ers. Mr. Dzienzynski deserves a medal. Thank him.

Great book.

Very helpful. I enjoy the brief synopsis of what the hike is before the detailed description of the route.

Fantastic book for all levels. James gives you all the information you need to make route finding easy. His guides are always succinct and well organized. James knows the peaks better than most anyone.

Excellent book.

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