

Recommended Trails for Children in the Canyon Lakes Ranger District

addendum to the brochure:

“Hiking With Kids in the Canyon Lakes Ranger District, Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forest”

P = recommended for preschool age

E = recommended for elementary age

Y = can be hiked year-round, weather and snow permitting

* = Poudre Wilderness Volunteers' favorites

Elevations are given in feet. These descriptions highlight features of interest to young families within the first mile or two of the trailhead. For complete trail descriptions, see the Trails tab at www.pwv.org

For preparation and safety precautions, see the brochure, “Hiking With Kids in the Canyon Lakes Ranger District, Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forest”.

Estes Park Area Trails

- * North Fork (E,Y) — Beginning Elevation: 7,868; Peak Elevation: 8,961. One-Way Length: 4.4 miles but 0.7 mile to the bridge over North Fork Big Thompson River. The ridge to the river is just a bit rough (moderate), then the trail is very gentle. The river area offers a great variety of flora and there are side areas where water play is possible most of the year. Let the kids look for worms or larvae under the rocks in the river where / when it is low; just don't leave the critters out of the water too long or the critters will die. Historic cabin remains may be found off a side trail at 3 miles. See the entire trail description for directions and details.

Lower Poudre Canyon Trails

- Hewlett Gulch (P,E,Y) -- Beginning Elevation: 5,680; Peak Elevation: 6,794. One-Way Length: 3 miles to the end of the creek portion. Stay on trail or worn areas to avoid poison ivy and rattlesnakes. Don't let the kids get ahead of you! Gentle trail with twelve creek crossings in less than 2 miles. The creek allows for water play and fun stone-stepping crossings. Let the kids look for worms or larvae under the rocks in the creek; just don't leave the critters out of the water too long or the critters will die. Historical structures: Take a photo of the homestead map at the trailhead and make it a treasure hunt. At 2 miles, the trail splits; take the trail on the right for gentle trail, more creek crossings and a small canyon. Both the Hewlett and High Park Fires hit this trail in 2012 and results can be seen, plus some of nature's revival.
- * Lower Dadd Gulch (P,E) -- Beginning Elevation: 7,024; Peak Elevation: 8,489. One-Way Length: 3.4 miles. Follows a small creek with many crossings. The creek allows for water play and fun stone-stepping crossings. Let the kids look for worms or larvae under the rocks in the creek; just don't leave the critters out of the water too long or the critters will die. Mixed forest with much diversity.
- Mt. McConnel & Kreutzer Nature Trail (E) -- Beginning Elevation: 6,651; Peak Elevation: 7,998. Round-Trip Length: 4.4 miles. Steeper than many trails. Educational signs.

Pingree Park Area Trails

- * Little Beaver Creek (P,E) -- Beginning Elevation: 8,151; Peak Elevation: 9,785. One-Way Length: 7.0 miles. The trailhead is a half mile past Jacks Gulch Campground along a very rough road, Old Flowers Road. Hiking through shady forest over a couple small ridges, after 0.7 mile the trail follows the creek. The creek allows for water play. You may let the kids look for worms or larvae under the rocks in the creek; just don't leave the critters out of the water too long or the critters will die.

- Signal Mountain (E) -- Beginning Elevation: 8,628; Peak Elevation: 11,053. One-Way Length: 5.9 miles. First 0.1 mile is a steep downhill, then over a ridge. At 0.4 mile, you are in the Pennock Creek valley and there is an old log structure opposite the creek. A foot bridge crosses the creek at 0.8 mile and an old dam is just across the creek there. The trail gets just a little steeper at 1.8 miles, then remains of beaver ponds turning into meadows can be seen at 2.8 miles. The creek allows for water play. You may let the kids look for worms or larvae under the rocks in the creek; just don't leave the critters out of the water too long or the critters will die.

Upper Poudre Canyon Trails

- * Big South (P,E) -- Beginning Elevation: 8,457; Peak Elevation: 9,553. One-Way Length: 6.9 miles. There are many opportunities to see and hear the Poudre River, a half mile to the 1st overlook and a nice picnic rock.
- * Blue Lake (P,E) -- Beginning Elevation: 9,482; Peak Elevation: 11,040. One-Way Length: 6.9 miles. At 0.25 mile there is a bridge over Joe Wright Creek, then a nice overlook at 1.5 miles, just before the second bridge. The trail is gentle until the Rawah Wilderness Boundary at 2.5 miles. This trail is shady and sheltered from wind.
- Corral Creek and Upper Big South (P,E) -- Beginning Elevation: 10,056; Peak Elevation: 10,056. One-Way Length: 5.3 miles. There are interesting rock formations and views of the Poudre River. Chance to see moose.
- Montgomery Pass (E) -- Beginning Elevation: 10,009; Peak Elevation: 10,990. One-Way Length: 1.9 miles. Steeper than most of these trails. About 1 ½ miles to Montgomery Cabin remains, 2 miles to the Montgomery Pass, with great views and tundra landscape. Not a good day on the top if it's windy or there is lightning, though.
- Neota Creek (P,E) -- Beginning Elevation: 10,212; Peak Elevation: 10,400. One-Way Length: 1.6 miles. This trail is very gentle all the way. Mixed forest and meadow. Lovely flowers in the early summer. Chance to see moose. The trail tends to hold water and mud early in the season.
- * Trap Park (P,E) -- Beginning Elevation: 9,967; Peak Elevation: 10,547. One-Way Length: 3.1 miles. Just over a mile to the lower part of the big meadow (park) and creek. The creek allows for water play. You may let the kids look for worms or larvae under the rocks in the creek; just don't leave the critters out of the water too long or they will die. Good chance to see moose. Beautiful sub-alpine area and beautiful views. Many wildflowers.

Rawah Wilderness Trails

- McIntyre (E) -- Beginning Elevation: 8,432; Peak Elevation: 9,926. One-Way Length: 9.6 miles. The 1st mile goes over a ridge to McIntyre Creek, then steadily up but not too steep along the beautiful creek.
- West Branch: (P,E) Beginning Elevation: 8,560 Peak Elevation: 11,171 One-Way Length: 7.1 miles. The first quarter mile is extremely gentle, then fairly gentle to the West Branch of the Laramie River, at 3.5 miles. Much forest diversity. Very lovely in autumn, too.

Red Feather Lakes Area Trails (There are several other trails in the area off of these trails.) Many granite rock outcroppings along all these trails -- great for rock scrambling. Ponderosa forest and meadow. Moose in the area.

- * Granite Ridge & Molly Lake (P,E,Y) -- Beginning Elevation: 8,591; Peak Elevation: 8,648. One-Way Length: 3.7 miles (+0.1 mile for Molly Lake Spur). Extremely gentle. Molly Lake (sometimes pond) is only 1 mile from the trailhead.
- * Lady Moon & Disappointment Falls (P,E,Y) -- Beginning Elevation: 8,146; Peak Elevation: 8,328. One-Way Length: 2.6 miles (+0.6 mile for Disappointment Falls Spur). Quite gentle. One can access this trail from Elkhorn Creek Trailhead, as well. The remains of an old log hay barn beckon along Disappointment Falls Spur. The falls is a nice little falls, with a cozy shaded area in spring and early summer. Look for evidence of beaver along Elkhorn Creek. The creek allows for water play. You may let the kids look for worms or larvae under the rocks in the creek; just don't leave the critters out of the water too long or the critters will die.

- * Mt. Margaret (P,E,Y) -- Beginning Elevation: 8,097; Peak Elevation: 8,208. One-Way Length: 3.8 miles. This is a very gentle trail, crossing Lone Pine Creek at 0.8 mile. The creek allows for water play. Let the kids look for worms or larvae under the rocks in the creek; just don't leave the critters out of the water too long or the critters will die.
- * Frog Pond and East Dowdy Lake (P,E,Y) -- Beginning Elevation: 8,172; Peak Elevation: 8,177. One-Way Length: 2.7 miles. This is a very gentle trail and a lot of shade on the east end.
- * North Lone Pine (P,E) -- Beginning Elevation: 9,348; Peak Elevation: 10,689. One-Way Length: 4.6 miles. The trail follows the creek, which allows for water play and many stone-hopping crossings. You may let the kids look for worms or larvae under the rocks in the creek; just don't leave the critters out of the water too long or the critters will die. This is a very shady trail. Check with USFS that Dead Man Road is open.

Pawnee National Grasslands Trail

- Pawnee Buttes (P,E,Y) -- Beginning Elevation: 5,420; Peak Elevation: 5,420. One-Way Length: 1.7 miles. Stay on trail or worn areas to avoid poison ivy and rattlesnakes. Don't let your kids get ahead of you! This area can be very hot in summer; be sure to have plenty of water and sun gear. The trail is very gentle, located in a shortgrass prairie with tall buttes and many birds nest on or near the buttes. Lots of wildflowers in the spring.