

Recommended Trails for Children

in the Canyon Lakes Ranger District, Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forest

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KEY:

P = recommended for preschool age

E = recommended for elementary age

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

* = Poudre Wilderness Volunteers favorites

NOTES: *Elevations are given in feet. These descriptions highlight features of interest to young families within the first mile or two of the trailhead. Experts recommend focusing on the journey, not the destination, for young hikers. For complete trail descriptions, see the Trails tab at www.pwv.org. For preparation, safety precautions and a fun scavenger hunt, look for the brochure, "Hiking With Kids in the Canyon Lakes Ranger District, Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forest", also on the Trails tab under Trails by Interest → Hiking with Kids at www.pwv.org*

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, each crossing with a log to cross. 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,Y)** -- 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. Many of the crossings have logs across, but some of them are quite high and narrow, with no railing; use caution. 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.
- * **Young Gulch (P,E,Y)** -- Beginning Elevation: 5,829; Peak Elevation: 7,008; One-Way Length: 5.3 miles. Stay on trail or worn areas to avoid poison ivy and rattlesnakes. Don't let the kids get ahead of you! And watch out for bicycles. The trail follows a creek drainage, but much of it is up along the hillside. Bridges at 0.3, 0.6 and 0.8 mile have creek access. The creek crossings beyond are wading or single log crossings, but some of them are quite high and narrow, with no railing; use caution. 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. Past about 1.7 miles, this area was severely burned in the High Park Fire in 2012. Few trees have grown back, but look for young aspen in the valley. Then, the flood of 2013 wiped out the entire trail and reconstruction was completed late 2019. This is generally a sunny trail.
- **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. Good hikers can get to the top of the summit of Mt. McConnel with wide views. The eastern portion of the summit trail is a primitive trail and not recommended, due to poor footing and steep side-slopes.

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 rough road, Old Flowers Road, (which is fine for all but the lowest clearance vehicles). Hiking through shady forest over a couple small ridges, after 0.7 mile the trail follows the creek, crossing twice with nice 2-log stringer bridges, each with a railing. 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. The first mile of the trail goes through patches of burn from the Cameron Peak Fire of 2020, then it is green and lush near Little Beaver Creek. Lots of ecological diversity within the first 1.7 miles, and a chance for older kids to see various natural fire recovery stages.
- **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 Wild and Scenic Poudre River, and only a quarter mile to the 1st overlook, which is a nice picnic rock. This is a class 5 river section in the early summer; be cautious. One can see some fire damage and regrowth, but the trail was not heavily affected in the Cameron Peak Fire of 2020 for the first three miles.
- * **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, but with some steep side-slopes. From about mile 0.5 to mile 4 it is severely burned from the Cameron Peak Fire of 2020. However, it is a good place to view the forest regeneration through abundant wildflowers in early summer.
- * **Corral Creek and Upper Big South (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. Although the Upper Big South Trail was severely affected by the Cameron Peak Fire of 2020, Corral Creek Trail (first 1.5 miles) was mildly or only moderately affected – and an educational opportunity for viewing fire recovery in mild and moderate burns.
- * **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 1/3 miles to Montgomery Cabin remains, 2 miles to 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, especially early in the season.

- * **Trap Park (P,E)** -- Beginning Elevation: 9,967; Peak Elevation: 10,547. One-Way Length: 3.1 miles. After about a mile climb, the trail reaches the lower part of Trap Park (the big meadow) and creek. This first creek crossing always requires wading. The creek allows for water play, though it is always very cold. 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. Keep your eye out for moose, beautiful sub-alpine flowers and beautiful views.

Rawah Wilderness Trails

- **McIntyre (E)** -- Beginning Elevation: 8,432; Peak Elevation: 9,926. One-Way Length: 9.6 miles. The first mile goes over a ridge to a bridge over McIntyre Creek, then steadily up but not too steep along the beautiful creek. In late June and early July the wildflowers are abundant.
- **West Branch (P,E)** -- Beginning Elevation: 8,560 Peak Elevation: 11,171 One-Way Length: 7.1 miles. The first mile is mostly gentle, then over some ridges to a crossing of 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 listed. Many granite rock outcroppings along all these trails – great for rock scrambling. Primarily Ponderosa pine forest and meadow. Moose in the area -- and elk in autumn, winter and early spring.

- **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). This former road is extremely gentle. Molly Lake (sometimes pond) is only 0.8 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). This trail is quite gentle. One can access this trail from Lady Moon Trailhead or Elkhorn Creek Trailhead, as well, although the southern end of the trail was changed somewhat during the Cameron Peak Fire of 2020 when fire control work was done. 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 and usually plenty of water in the spring and early summer and rarely dry. Look for evidence of beaver along Elkhorn Creek, and moose and elk throughout. The creek allows for water play. With many aspen in the area, this is a beautiful autumn hike. It is only a mile to the waterfall from the Elkhorn Creek Trailhead.

- * **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, and quite sunny – crossing Lone Pine Creek at 0.8 mile. There are many granite rock formations for rock-scrambling.
- * **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 with 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 some 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. The first mile and a half is very shady. Normally Dead Man Road (CR 86) is open all summer and fall. *Check the Larimer County Road Closures page to be sure, especially early in the summer, at <https://www.larimer.gov/roads/closures>*

Pawnee National Grasslands

- **Pawnee Buttes (P,E,Y)** -- Beginning Elevation: 5,420; Peak Elevation: 5,420. One-Way Length: 1.7 miles. Stay on the 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. One can find lots of wildflowers in the spring. The Overlook and Lips Bluff areas are closed from March 1 through June 30, due to raptor nesting.