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United States Department of Agriculture



HIKING

TWO ELK TRAIL #2005

Length: 11 miles (one way)
Difficulty: Moderate
Beginning Elevation: 8,772 ft. (east trailhead)
Elevation Gain: +2324 ft. - 3066 ft. = -742 ft.

Trail Use: Moderate to High
Open To: Hiking, Biking, Horseback
Ending Elevation: 8,030 ft. (west trailhead)
USGS Map(s): Minturn, Red Cliff, Vail East

Access from Vail:

EAST TRAILHEAD: Travel east on I-70 to exit 180 for East Vail. Turn right and travel 2.3 miles east on the south frontage road, passing under the interstate and past the Gore Creek Campground. Park just beyond at the road closure gate and walk 1.8 miles up the old Vail Pass road, today's recreation path, to the Two Elk trailhead on the right.

WEST TRAILHEAD: Travel west on I-70 to exit 171 for Minturn, Leadville, and Hwy 24. Turn right and travel south 2.7 miles and into Minturn to Cemetery Bridge. Turn left, cross the bridge and tracks, then proceed south past the cemetery. Go right at the first fork and left at the second fork. Follow this somewhat rough dirt road about 1.8 miles and park at the trailhead at the end.

Trail Highlights: From the east trailhead, follow the Old Vail Pass road, now the Vail Pass Recreation Trail, 1.8 miles to the junction with the true Two Elk Trailhead on the right. The trail drops from the recreation path to a bridge crossing the Black Gore Creek, then passes under I-70 into the tight Timber Creek canyon which is a cool shady forest alongside the creek. A nice shorter destination, popular with kids, is at mile 2.6 where the trail makes a sharp right across a third bridge before starting the steepest climb. The majority of the trail's altitude gain happens in this next 1.5 miles to the Two Elk Pass summit. Here you can take in views of the Gore Range, Sawatch Range, and Vail's Back Bowls before descending slowly through meadows and the valley between Vail's Back Bowls and Blue Sky Basin Bowls and finally emerging from the last section of cool aspen-pine forest to the west trailhead.

**** Note:** The portion of the trail that crosses through the bottom of Vail's back bowls (from just west of Two Elk Pass to two miles from the west trailhead) is closed for elk calving from May 6 to July 1.

Comments: *Note: Officially, the east trailhead of the Two Elk National Recreation Trail is at it's junction with the Old Vail Pass trail, but the mileages on these descriptions include the 1.8 miles of the Old Vail Pass trail you must hike to get to the trailhead.* A designated National Scenic Trail, Two Elk Trail can be hiked in either direction, although the Trail Highlights section, above, details the more popular east to west route. Two cars are needed to hike the 11 mile length of the trail without retracing your route and doubling the mileage. A shorter option is to the bridge at 2.6 miles, also described above, to make a 5.2 mile round-trip. Or, a hike to the Two Elk Pass summit would be a 8.2 mile round-trip from the east.

This map is intended for use as a general guide only, not for actual land navigation. The White River National Forest strongly suggests purchasing a topographic map and compass prior to your hiking trip.

