

IN MY BACKYARD

BY: LEAH ROGIN-ROPER

While the state of Colorado, with its thousands of hikeable acres, has some of the finest hiking in the world, there is such a diversity of hikes in the Evergreen and Conifer area that it can often feel like a waste of time to drive out of our corridor. Hikes of every type abound, though many of us end up sticking with the same favorite few. If you find yourself going for your tenth hike around the lake without thinking about alternatives, here are a few different types of hikes to help you expand from your usual repertoire, while still keeping it close.

Hike with a kid

There are plenty of hikes for all levels of hikers, but hiking with a child presents its own set of challenges. Children can often be motivated by a hike that offers something other than just walking, whether it is assured views of wildlife or some other bonus.

Beaver Brook is a historic trail, completed by Colorado Mountain Club volunteers in 1918. It offers a variety of trails as part of its 8.65-mile length, including the Braille Nature Trail, a wonderful hike for young children.

Directions: From I-70 West, take Exit 253, the Chief Hosa Exit, and turn north at the off ramp stop sign. Then make a right onto Stapleton Drive, a dirt road which you will follow for about a mile as it wraps around, behind the fenced-in Denver Park that contains the Buffalo. In the winter, you will need to park about .4 miles from the main trailhead, but in the summer, there are typically spots right at the trailhead, and it is easy to follow the signs from parking to the Nature Trail.

Why it's good for kids: The hike starts with a mellow .3 of a mile that includes signage explaining different aspects of nature in the Rocky Mountains, including the Continental Divide, aspens and other common Colorado encounters that children may want to learn more about. The signs allow for many well-timed breaks along the way, as well. The trail leads to a clearing with picnic tables, an outhouse and a small brook for play. Parents of small children may want to pack a picnic, play here and then head back on the other side of the loop to encounter more informative signs, or if everyone is up for it, the hike can be extended down into a canyon that follows Beaver Brook to Clear Creek. Adding the Chavez Trail on the way back makes for a challenging 5-mile loop that will tire out even big kids.

Other recommendations for families: Mt. Falcon, up Parmalee Gulch, with its hike to a castle is lovely; and Lair of the Bear offers a nice, calm hike along the river with possible beaver viewings! Maxwell Falls is a nice 4-mile hike up Brook Forest Road with pretty waterfalls. Reynolds Park is also a great choice on the 285-corridor for family hikes.

Impress, but don't hurt, an out-of-towner

It's great to show off our area to out-of-town guests, but it is always a challenge as to how much they'll be able to take in without overdoing it. It is easy to forget the way the altitude can affect people coming from lower elevations and important to find hikes that are impressive but also have easy outs.

Three Sisters/Alderfer is a wonderful park near Downtown Evergreen, and, at 15 miles on 770 acres, has more trails per acre than any other foothills park. It also has a nice mixture of cool rock formations, lovely views and ponderosa pines—and is generally a peaceful, wonderful space with interesting birds, fields of wildflowers and other distinctive Colorado natural resources.

Directions: From Downtown Evergreen, take County Highway 73 to Buffalo Park Road and head west for approximately one mile. There are east and west Trailheads, about half a mile apart.

Why it is good for flatlanders: All of the hikes offer sweet views of interesting rock formations, but most of them are flat trails that allow hikers to get into the woods without committing to spending all day there. There are a variety of short trails, such as Hidden Fawn and Ponderosa, that can easily be connected into longer trails. The Summit Trail offers inspiring views of the Continental Divide. Do take a map and pay attention to the way the trails intersect. It is easy to wander the wrong way and end up hiking all the way to the lake if you are not aware of your directions.

Other recommendations for out-of-town guests: Drive to the (almost) top of Mt. Evans and hike the last few hundred yards, so guests can see what 14,000 feet feels like, or choose one of the other hikes heading up the Mt. Evans Scenic Byway, such as the Walter Pesman Alpine Garden Loop or the Mt. Goliath Natural Area.

Push Yourself:

While sometimes it is important to find easier trails, sometimes your body begs for a trail that makes you sweat, makes your muscles ache, requires an early start and a backpack.

Bergen Peak is accessible from Elk Meadow Park, the centerpiece of Evergreen, where herds of elk and herds of mountain bikers regularly congregate. The park includes a variety of trails, the most challenging of which is the hike to the top of 9,708-foot Bergen Peak.

Directions: From Highway 74, turn west on Stagecoach Boulevard and proceed 1.25 miles to the north parking lot. Pull off and park on the right-hand side of the road, across from the dog park.

The quintessential Evergreen hike: This

hike is one of the best that Evergreen has to offer in terms of beauty and challenge. An early start is required, since the storms often swirl around the nearly 10,000-foot peak starting fairly early in the day. Begin at the trailhead and follow the signs to keep going up, up, up. There are several outs if you decide that a meadow hike is more your speed or get a later start than you intended, and about two miles in, you'll be treated to a lovely view, but if you keep pushing, you'll go nearly four miles for a 1,730-foot elevation climb that treats you to an amazing view of Evergreen, with Mt. Evans and the Continental Divide serving as highlights. There are several false summits where you're sure you're almost to the top, and the best views are actually slightly before the true summit. Remember to save energy for the hike back down, as the downhill has its own kind of brutality.

Other recommendations for challenging hikes: All of the hikes listed here can actually be translated into pretty challenging hikes. The Beaver Brook hike actually extends all the way to Lookout Mountain for an exploration through Clear Creek Canyon. You can keep it just under nine miles by leaving a car at the Lookout Mountain Nature Center or

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thereabouts. Just because you can drive to Mt. Evans doesn't mean you have to, and it can be a hike of varying lengths depending on where you start.

Other Resources: The options in this area can feel overwhelming, and the directions here are only very basic. For more information, there are various hiking guides available, and both the Evergreen Library and Lookout Mountain Nature Center have maps for individual areas with more details about the lengths and access points for a huge variety of hikes, as does the Jeffco open space website. Happy trails!