

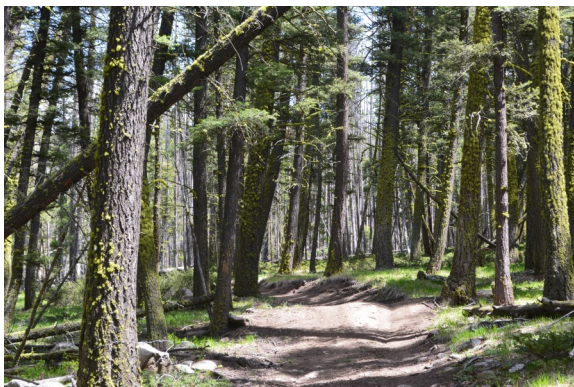
Rawhide Trail

Distance: 4.4 miles total (2.2 miles out, then back); option to continue down Ninety Cent Gulch

Elevation Gain: 1300 feet

Directions: Just south of the I-15 interchange at the Town Pump, take the Boulder Frontage Road 1.5 miles and turn right on Sloans Lane. After 1.3 miles bear left on Upper Valley Road. Continue 1 mile then turn right on Muskrat Road where the paved road changes to dirt. After 0.6 miles, there is a good pull-out at the right turn toward the trailhead. *The road from here is rutted in places and may require a high-clearance vehicle.* Park and hike the wooded road (adding 0.8 miles each way or 1.6 miles total to your hike) or continue in your vehicle 0.8 miles to the trailhead.

The Hike: Few people scout the ridgelines around Boulder looking for fire. But in the foothills of the Elkhorn Mountains, Rawhide Creek lures you up a sun-flecked draw past the outcrops of an ancient subterranean inferno.



Douglas Firs flank portions of the trail

stemon as the days grow longer. Then the trunks of Douglas fir lean in. From here, the trail climbs.

And suddenly you are upon it: Shoulders of petrified heat.

Grounded in shade amongst the yellow arnica and clematis vine, monolith knuckles of granite flank the trail, pedestals of the Boulder Batholith. About 75 million years ago, this rock was molten magma. It kindled far below the earth's surface as oceanic crust plunged beneath continental crust. The magma belched up, pooled underground, cooled slowly. By around 30 million years ago when the Elkhorn Mountains heaved themselves into today's skyline, the batholith was exposed, eroded, and fractured into totems of this forest.

A fire long-gone. Not even an ember. The shade is hushed and heavy with the stillness of rock. There is mass here, the quiet moments made more tranquil by the slip of the creek over cobbles, the

Right away there is water. Along the road to the trailhead the chokecherries and willows do little to muffle the trickle of Rawhide Creek. But step over the bridge at the trailhead and the two-track veers away from this watercourse, tracing instead the gully that feeds it. This is not a hike of grand vistas; it is a ramble up a wooded gulch, a meadow with a view. The ruffle of runoff is your constant companion. Round a bend across a second bridge where the water carves a curve between stands of aspen and alder. Warm light rises from grassy clearings studded with strawberries and but-

tercups, or geranium and pen-



Monolith knuckles of granite flank the Rawhide Trail, outcrops of the Boulder Batholith



The creek along Rawhide Trail curls in and out of aspen stands for the first three quarters of a mile.

caw of a jay. And yet, the trail climbs in pitches. With head down and lungs heaving it is easy to believe that this track has only one aspect, and that is “up”. Then a squirrel chatters. A pine siskin wheezes across the creek. A breeze carries with it a scent of rain as it lifts through branches toward the span of sky and suddenly the world recovers its loft and spread; it has dimension. Twiggy brakes of dogwood thread the ravine, offering glimpses of water where the trail crosses the flow, which it does a couple more times within the first mile.

Soon you lose the seep of the creek as you cross through the teeter and topple of lodgepole pine. But the track is well-maintained, consistently wide enough for two hikers abreast without deadfall obstructing the trail. Although Rawhide Trail is open to motorized travel, it receives little traffic particularly during the week and holds the potential for solitude even on summer weekends.

At a mile and a quarter a small clearing breaks the stutter of trunks. The true crest opens at just over 2 miles into a meadow framed with sage above a draping panorama of the ridgelines north of Boulder. At 1300 feet above your starting point, you have earned your view.



Heartleaf Arnica (Arnica sp.)

From here, the trail snakes 2 miles more down through Ninety Cent Gulch to the trailhead at Turnley Meadows. Descend this way toward views of the Elkhorn peaks, or stay and breathe in the meadow summit; there is pasqueflower and shooting star after snowmelt, larkspur and prairie smoke as the season flares to summer. Then retrace your steps past mounds of rockbound magma to your exit along Rawhide Creek.

As for the fire, that deep flame, dig in up those pitches and you’ll find it. Keep it lit, a pilot light to spark you up your next trail.



The meadow summit of Rawhide Trail offers views of the ridgelines north of Boulder