OFF ROAD ADVENTURE

General Information About Four-Wheeling

Although we refer to 4-wheeling throughout this brochure, this information can also be used by anyone wanting to explore this magnificent area on ATV's or off-highway motorcycles.

Four-wheeling is a wonderful means of experiencing the magnificent mountains surrounding Ouray. Bring along your ATV, dirt-bike or four-wheel drive vehicle, rent a Jeep locally or enjoy the convenience of a tour with knowledgeable, experienced drivers.

The immediate vicinity offers limitless opportunities for four-wheelers, from easy scenic drives to rugged challenges, along trails the miners built to passes that climb to spectacular heights. All of these have one factor in common: they traverse some of the most beautiful scenery in the world, abundant with wildflowers, ghost towns, abandoned mines, animal life, all with breathtaking vistas.

If you're not used to mountain driving, take the less challenging trips first. When preparing to take a four-wheel drive trip, remember the following safety and courtesy tips.

- Know your vehicle and its limits.
- Always check locally for road conditions.
- If you are feeling unsure, scout ahead on foot, rather than driving into an unknown situation.
- Stay on established roads and NEVER go off cross-country. The tundra is extremely fragile.
- On steep grades, gear down and proceed slowly. Use your gears, not your brakes.
- Always stop to lend aid or assistance if required.
- As a reminder, the uphill driver has the right-of-way but taking turns based on where turnouts are located is a common courtesy. Pull over only where there is room to pull off and yield to on-coming traffic if you are going downhill!!

The four-wheel drive trails and roads in this guide are rated according to relative difficulty: Following are these classes:

Class 1 -- Easy
Class 2 -- Moderate
Class 3 -- Difficult
Class 4 – Very Difficult
Class 5 – Use Extreme Caution

There are more four-wheel drive trails in this region than what's listed here. Topographical maps and books with more detail are available in many Ouray shops. Some are: Guide to Colorado Backcountry & 4-Wheel Drive Trails by Charles A. Wells; Mountain Mysteries by Gregory Smith; The Best of Colorado 4-Wheel Drive Roads by Outdoor Books & Maps; and 4-WD Trails Southwest Colorado by Peter Massey & Jeanne Wilson.

YANKEE BOY BASIN (Class 2, Moderate)

Follow the Camp Bird Road southwest of Ouray past the mine 10 miles up. Continue on the four-wheel drive road through the remains of the old Sneffels town site, taking the right fork that says to Yankee Boy Basin. After stopping to enjoy Twin Falls, follow the trail to the end and into the basin just below the 14,000-foot peak of Mt. Sneffels. The last two miles may be very steep and rough so you may want to park and hike the remaining distance.

Yankee Boy Basin is an ideal area for viewing vast meadows of wildflowers in mid-summer.

GOVERNOR BASIN (Class 4, Very Difficult)

Following the above directions to Yankee Boy Basin, from just above the Sneffels town site, follow the old wagon road branching left (south) passing the Ruby Trust Mine.

The trail climbs easily up the east side of the basin through pine forests, and then begins a series of switchbacks. There are several extremely steep, narrow rocky sections that should only be attempted by an experienced four-wheeler. Once you level out, the trail forks. The left fork goes to Sydney Basin and the remains of the famous Virginius Mine. If you follow the trail straight ahead you will get to the Mountain Top Mine. This mine was built against an enormous granite boulder to protect it against the numerous avalanches that occur in the area. Above this area are the impressive spires of the St. Sophia Ridge.

CORKSCREW GULCH (Class 3, Difficult)

This popular four-wheel drive road branches east of Hwy 550 in Ironton Park eight miles south of Ouray. It climbs via numerous switchbacks and the last few are steep and narrow. The summit (at 12,217 ft) is the red soil of the famous Red Mountains 1, 2 & 3 visible to the south.

The eastern descent into the Cement Creek drainage gives access either to Silverton (to the south) or up the north ridges over Hurricane Pass and down into California Gulch, connecting to the road to Animas Forks. This is beautiful above-timberline country. At the tope of Hurricane Pass, the view of Lake Como is worth the trip.

The southern trailhead into Poughkeepsie Gulch is by Lake Como. It is an extremely dangerous four-wheel drive trail and is not recommended. Do not attempt Poughkeepsie Gulch unless you have your own vehicle and are an experienced four-wheel drive enthusiast. If you do Poughkeepsie Gulch, plan to descend from Lake Como rather than going up the extremely steep grade from the Engineer Pass road.

BROWN MOUNTAIN (Class 2, Moderate)

The trail up Brown Mountain splits off from the Corkscrew Gulch trail described above. The trail is not difficult but steep in some places. You'll encounter abandoned mine sites along the way.

The basin high on the side of Brown Mountain is a fun, short trip with incredible views and a great place for a picnic. You have

some awesome views of Ironton Park, the Hayden Range, and the Red Mountain area.

IMOGENE PASS (Class 4/5, Very Difficult)

Imogene Pass is one of the more difficult four-wheel drive roads between Ouray and Telluride. Follow the Yankee Boy Basin trail description up Camp Bird Road 5 miles. The road turns off to the left over Canyon Creek, climbing along the cliffs and looking down over the famous Camp Bird Mine. The ascent up to Imogene Basin is rough and steep. There are spectacular wildflower displays in this basin during the mid-summer months.

The views from Imogene Pass, at 13,114 feet, are extremely impressive. Take time to stop and look, both to the west toward the mountains surrounding Telluride and to the east towards the beautiful Red Mountain area. You'll need a jacket at the top; it can be cold and sometimes windy.

The descent into the Tomboy Mine area and Telluride is more gradual. Total distance from Ouray to Telluride is 18 miles and takes about three to four hours. This road is the route of the Imogene Pass Mountain Run held each year in September.

LAST DOLLAR ROAD (Class 1, Easy)

This is one of the easier trails in the San Juan region and one of several that you can take from Ouray to Telluride. Some of this trail can be driven in a passenger vehicle. Much of it, however, can be made significantly more difficult if the terrain is wet, becoming very slippery on some steep sections.

After turning onto CO Hwy 62 at Ridgway, drive 10 miles to the sign indicating Last Dollar Road to your left. About six miles, after turning onto Last Dollar, the trail forks. Taking the right fork leads you to the town of Sawpit on Hwy 145. The left fork along the top of Hastings Mesa gives you great views of the west end of the Sneffels Range. It joins CO Hwy 145 just past the Telluride Airport.

OPHIR PASS (Class 2, Moderate)

This is another one of the easier passes in the area and one that will take you to the Telluride side of the mountains. It was originally a wagon road between the mines in Ophir, Telluride and Silverton. Drive south of Ouray on Hwy 550 for 18.1 miles to the "National Forest Access, Ophir Pass" turnoff on your right. The ascent is gradual, winding through aspen forests and past beautiful wildflowers, to an elevation of 11,789.

The descending trail is narrow & shelf-like, with one sharp switchback just over the pass, followed by an easy road to the bottom. Beyond Old Ophir is the intersection of CO Hwy 145. Turn right (north) onto 145 and follow the highway to a point where it turns right to Telluride or left to return to Ouray over Hwy 62. If you want to return to Ouray via a four-wheel drive road, your choices are Last Dollar Road (Class 1) or Imogene Pass (Class 4/5)

CLEAR LAKE (Class 2, Moderate)

Just north of Silverton, the route to Clear Lake is another easy, short trail you can do if you have a limited amount of time. You will encounter beautiful wildflowers during the summer season; pass some abandoned mine sites and dead-end at a spectacular mountain lake. From there you must return the way you came.

To get to the road to Clear Lake, drive south on Hwy 550 for 22 miles to the Mineral Creek Campground turnoff on the west side of the highway (approx. 35 minutes). Follow this dirt road past several camping areas to the trailhead going off at a steep grade to your right.

CINNAMON PASS (Class 2, Moderate)

One way to reach the Cinnamon Pass trailhead is out of Silverton, 23 miles south of Ouray on Hwy 550. Drive through Silverton on Greene St., veering right on CR 2. A drive of 12 miles on this dirt road will take you to Animas Forks. You should plan to allow time to explore this great ghost town.

Here you pick up the Cinnamon Pass road east to Lake City. After you've reached the top of the pass at 12,620 ft., the road becomes smoother. It descends to the Lake Fork of the Gunnison River past Lake San Cristobal and on into Lake City.

Cinnamon Pass can be linked with Engineer Pass to form a long loop trip from Ouray to Lake City, known as the Alpine Loop. Be sure to note the interpretive signs in place along the route.

Two other route options to the Cinnamon Pass trailhead are described under the Engineer Pass section.

ENGINEER PASS (Class 3, Difficult)

Although this is not as technically difficult as Black Bear & Imogene, it does demand more skill than other four-wheel drive trails. There are three routes to reach the start of Engineer Pass. The first choice is about four miles south of Ouray on Hwy 550. Look for the trail entrance on your left, marked by a cascading waterfall and a staging area for OHV trailers. This road involves some two miles of very rugged, extremely rocky areas that could be hard on many vehicles, not to mention the occupants. Proceed with caution.

For the second choice, just follow the earlier information about Corkscrew Gulch/California Gulch. When you reach Animas Forks, you pick up the Engineer Pass trailhead to the left. This should be a safer, more enjoyable route for you and your vehicle.

For the third choice, follow the directions out of Silverton for Cinnamon Pass. Both trailheads are accessible from the Animas Forks area.

At the sign for Poughkeepsie Gulch, continue LEFT. Although it looks benign, it is far from it. Poughkeepsie Gulch is one of the more difficult trails in the area and should be left to only the most experienced four-wheelers. Minimum of two vehicles strongly suggested, one vehicle with a winch. If you're renting a Jeep from a local Ouray jeep company, your contract states that this road is prohibited.

Several miles past the Poughkeepsie Gulch turnoff, there is a sign at a "Y" in the road. Left (east) continues to climb up to Engineer Pass at 12,850 feet, from which you can turn around and return or continue to Lake City. A right turn at the "Y" will take you to the old town site of Animas Forks and up over Cinnamon Pass (the southern route to Lake City) or on to Silverton.

BLACK BEAR PASS (Class 5, Extreme)

This is not for the inexperienced or "faint of heart". If you want to say you have done it, go with one of the local tour companies.

Leave Ouray south on Hwy 550 to just past the summit of Red Mountain (about 13 miles) where you turn right (west) onto a well-marked trail. Black Bear is a two-way trail from 550 to the summit but becomes ONE-WAY ONLY from there down into Telluride. The ascent is easy, with spectacular views. If you change your mind about

trying this trail when you arrive at the top, turn around and return the way you came.

If you're still feeling bold, continuing on you will soon find the infamous "steps" and sharp switchbacks. The road is extremely narrow. Narrow, short wheel base vehicles are the preferred choice. Full-size vehicles and trucks make the trip more challenging, with broken plastic and bent metal always a possibility.

On the way down, plan a stop at the base of Bridal Veil Falls. The remaining distance is easy but watch for mountain bikers.

BROOKLYN ROAD (Class 2, Moderate)

This is a beautiful, easy drive with panoramic views and lots of beautiful flowers during the summer wildflower season. Take care though. If there has been heavy rain it can be pretty mucky!

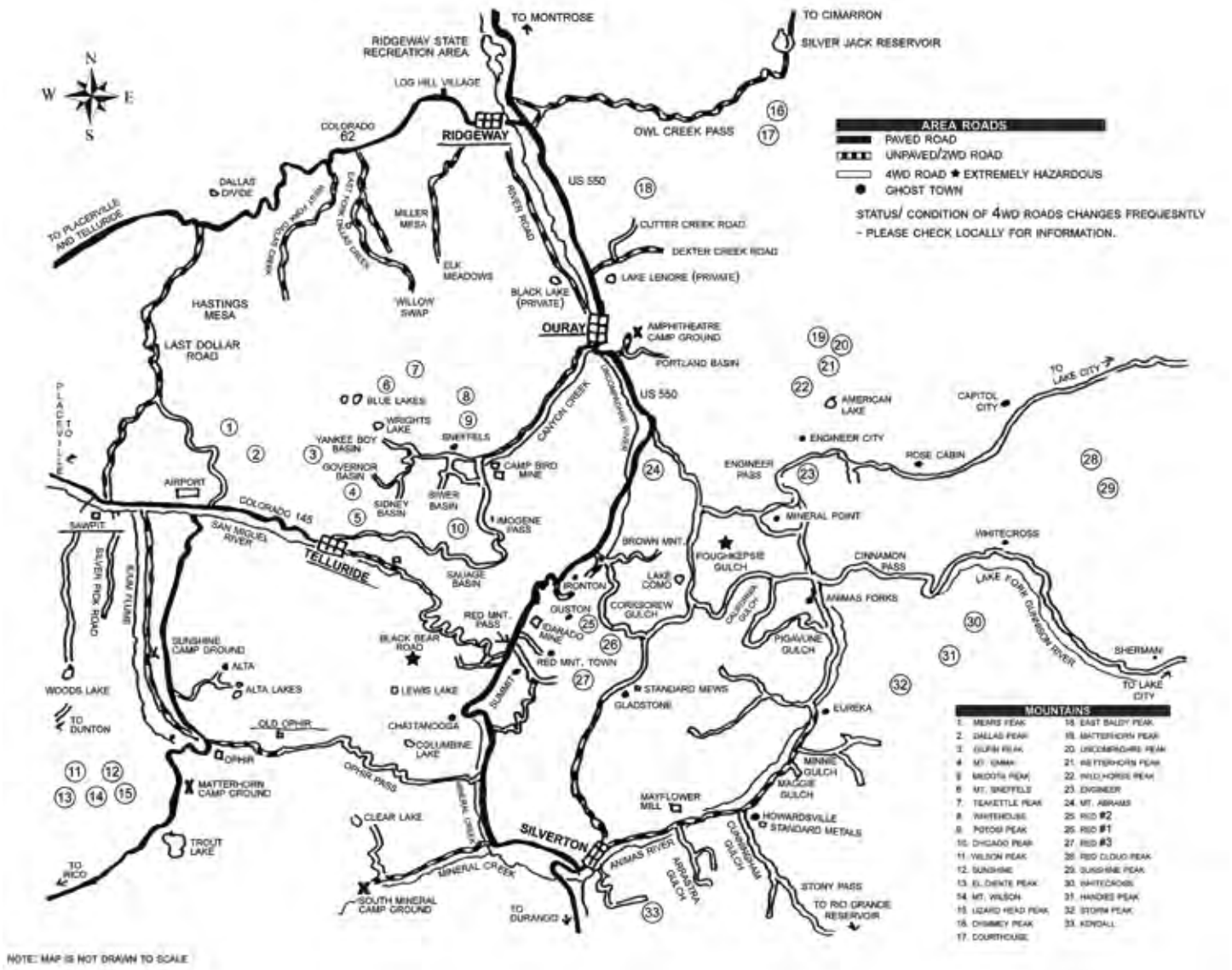
This trail originates at the top of Red Mountain Pass turning east off of Hwy 550 just beyond the Red Mountain Pass sign. This easy trail leads you past the St. Paul Lodge for back-country skiers and along a winding ledge on the west side of the mountain range. You will pass areas with mining remnants, the largest of which is the site of the Brooklyn Mine.

This is not an all-day drive. It joins Hwy 550 again just north of the turnoff to Ophir Pass that is 18 miles south of Ouray.

Proper OHV Usage in Ouray County

Many of our off highway vehicle (OHV) trails cross privately owned mining claims. Most owners have graciously allowed people to pass through their property. It is the responsibility of all backcountry enthusiasts to respect that privilege and treat Ouray's "backyard" respectfully. The future of OHV usage in Ouray County depends on the extent to which current users protect the environment and respect the rights of private property owners. To this end, we hope that you will read and abide by the following guidelines:

- Make sure your ATV or off-highway motorcycle is properly registered. If not, or you aren't sure what is required, contact the CO State Parks at the Ridgway Reservoir, (970) 626.5822.
- The peacefulness of Ouray is what brings visitors to this area. Please properly maintain your vehicle to keep noise to a minimum. Loud OHV's are not welcome.
- Rules and safety precautions are established for everyone. ALL drivers must have a valid driver's license and wear eye protection. Ouray County recommends other safety gear such as a helmet, boots and gloves.
- STAY ON EXISTING TRAILS. Do not cut across switchbacks just because a previous rider was inconsiderate enough to drive across fragile terrain. Protect all vegetation. In alpine high country, the tundra soil is thin and easily destroyed.
- Colorado trails can sometimes be wet and muddy. Save wet trails for dryer times when damage is less severe. NO WHEELSPIN!
- Many trails are very narrow and extremely dangerous. Narrow trails and blind corners require care in passing. Do not approach and pass slow-moving vehicles at dangerous speeds. Approaching an inexperienced four-wheeler on any of our narrow shelf roads can be hazardous to your health as well as theirs.
- Vehicles going UP HILL have the right of way. Don't assume everyone knows this. In all cases, common sense and courtesy should prevail.
- You are the custodians of this beautiful national forest area. Please don't litter – pack it in, pack it out.
- Weather in the high country can change rapidly. Please take along appropriate clothing.
- To protect the tranquility of Ouray, use of unlicensed OHV's is not permitted on Ouray's city streets and highways. You must trailer your OHV to designated unloading areas.
- Mining is Ouray County's heritage. Please make sure everyone in your party leaves intact what little is left of the old artifacts and mining structures for other visitors to enjoy.
- The flowers are for everybody to enjoy. Please just photograph them and leave them for others to appreciate too. One flowering plant generates hundreds of seeds. When you pick just one little flower, you reduce the number of spectacular mountain flowers for years to come.
- Trails are not a place for fast driving. Not only does dust pose a problem but also driving fast can be dangerous for game animals and other drivers.
- Please report offending OHV activity to either the Ouray County Sheriff's Office at (970) 325-7272 or to the National Forest Service Office in Montrose (970) 240-5300. If possible, note vehicle registration numbers of offenders



Information presented by Ouray Chamber Resort Association
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