

Noname Creek, Weminuche, Fall 2006

Guidebook Excerpts

From Roach, J., & Roach, J. (2001). *Colorado's Thirteeners, 13,800 to 13,999 Feet* (1st ed.). Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Pub. and Rosenbrough, R. F. (1986). *San Juan Mountains a Climbing and Hiking Guide* (1st ed.). Boulder, Colorado: Johnson Pr.

Roach and Roach Description

Noname Creek Trail

Excerpt from Roach, J., & Roach, J. (2001). *Colorado's Thirteeners, 13,800 to 13,999 Feet* (1st ed.). Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Pub.

North Pigeon Creek is between Pigeon Creek and Ruby Creek, which are named on the 1972 Snowdon Peak Quadrangle. All of these drainages are difficult to identify from the Animas River. Take some time to understand this complicated terrain before you enter the wilderness. All trails and trail junctions on this approach are unsigned.

If you take the train, get off at Needleton and cross the suspension bridge to the Animas River's east side. From the east end of the Needleton footbridge, walk 260 yards north on a wide trail past several private cabins to a rickety old gate and Pigeon Creek. Cross Pigeon Creek, pass a rusty rail car and walk 0.2 mile north on the continuing Animas River Trail to a long meadow at 8,260 feet. There are several idyllic campsites here, and we call this "Camper's Meadow." The introduction is over, as one of the keys to this approach waits for you in this meadow.

Walk north as the meadow narrows and enter the meadow's 100-yard-long northern lobe. Walk around the east end of a large tree that fell into the meadow and across the trail in 2000. Twenty feet north of the fallen tree, look through the trees on the meadow's east edge and find a strong trail that angles north up the steep slope east of the meadow. *There was a cairn at this point in 2003.* This trail, the Ruby Creek Trail, does not connect to the Animas River Trail, and finding it is your key to the heights.

The mileages given along this approach are measured from the Needleton Bridge. Follow the North Pigeon Creek Approach to "Camper's Meadow" at mile 0.4. Walk north as the meadow narrows and enter the meadow's 100-yard-long northern lobe. Walk around the east end of a large tree that fell into the meadow and across the trail in 2000. Twenty feet north of the fallen tree, walk past the turnoff for the North Pigeon Creek and Ruby Creek Approaches. Twenty feet farther north, turn west (left) at a faint trail junction in the meadow. The stronger trail that goes straight ahead through the meadow's northern lobe is not the route. Take the fainter trail to the left.

Hike north-northwest out of Camper's Meadow, go down a little hill in the trees and enter another meadow called "Hunter's Meadow." Walk 120 yards north through Hunter's Meadow, pass some wooden camp structures and find the continuing trail at the northwest corner of Hunter's Meadow. Hike 100 yards northwest on the trail and join another version of the Animas River Trail. From here northward, there is only one version of the Animas River Trail.

Hike north on the now more distinct Animas River Trail, cross North Pigeon Creek at mile 0.5 and begin climbing above the Animas River at mile 0.7. This is the prelude to the infamous Watertank Hill. Contour 100 feet above the river, then climb a steep hill to 200 feet above the river at mile 0.9. Contour 200 feet above the

river and look down on the railway's old historic water tank at mile 1.0. You are now above some cliffs that bar progress along the river's edge, even in low water. Walk north to a precipitous drop-off. The introduction is over.

Descend 200 feet west down the legendary Watertank Hill, the steepest trail in this book (Class 2+). This can be an intimidating task with a heavy pack, as an uncontrolled fall here would do far more than skin your knee. Your task is compounded by the fact that you must descend Watertank Hill at the beginning of your journey, when you are not tuned up and your pack is at its heaviest. Your task will be further compounded if the hill is wet, and some parties make good use of a rope here. Your only solace is in knowing that this is the easiest route. Other routes have been oft tried, but none are easier. When you reach the river's edge north of Watertank Hill at mile 1.1, you will have paid your initial wilderness entrance fee.

After Watertank Hill, hike northeast on the Animas River Trail, cross Ruby Creek at mile 1.4 and continue northeast to reach Noname Creek at mile 2.2. There is a lot of deadfall in this section. The trail becomes obscure in the alluvial rocks near Noname Creek. Persist across the rocks to the north, cross Noname Creek and resist any temptation to hike east up the creek. That is an error that has made strong people weep. From Noname Creek's north side at 8,460 feet, hike 80 yards north to a nice campsite distinguished with two old pipes. Hike 100 yards north under some rocks on the reemerging trail and look sharp for a trail heading steeply up the hill to the east at mile 2.3. This is the beginning of the Noname Creek Trail. If you miss this junction, you will come to another nice campsite just north of the trail junction. If you have not been backpacking in a while, you may feel like you have completed a day's work when you reach this spot. If so, consider camping here. Once you start up the Noname Creek Trail, you will not reach a reasonable campsite with easy access to water for 3.0 miles—all of it hot and steep.

When you are ready, leave the comfort of the campsites north of Noname Creek and start up the Noname Creek Trail. The Noname Creek Trail stays on Noname Creek's north side all the way to the heights. Climb the initial embankment, hike northeast and reach an old utility pole that still has an insulator on top at mile 2.4. From this pole, hike east up the hill and take care to follow the faint trail over some rocks. The trail becomes more distinct above the rocks. Hike east then southeast on the trail as it climbs high above Noname Creek. You may feel like you are paying a second entry fee as you climb an unyielding, brutally steep hill to enter the Weminuche Wilderness. Persevere up the trail and, at 10,460 feet, reach the first decent campsite at mile 5.4. This campsite is under the southwest face of the Heisspitz.

Continue southeast up the trail, climb another steep hill and, at 10,740 feet, reach the Jagged Cabin at mile 6.1. Some people walk past this cabin without seeing it. It is at the west end of a long meadow where you have an unobstructed view of Jagged and Knife Point to the east. The Jagged Cabin, though old, is still serviceable and can provide basic shelter in bad weather. There is good camping nearby, and access to Noname Creek is 120 yards west of the cabin via a spur trail. Now you can start to get a return on your investment.

From Jagged Cabin, continue east-southeast through the meadow, enter the trees at the end of the meadow and head south toward Noname Creek. Fifty yards north of (before) Noname Creek at 10,760 feet, turn east (left) onto the continuation of the main Noname Creek Trail at mile 6.8. There is a campsite on Noname Creek's north side just beyond this trail junction. Even if you use this campsite, it is not necessary to cross Noname Creek. If you do cross Noname Creek here and hike south, you will be headed for Twin Thumbs Pass and Needle Creek. That is not the route.

Climb east up a brutally steep hill and, at 11,040 feet, reach another trail junction at mile 7.4. Turn northeast (left) onto the continuation of the main Noname Creek Trail. This trail junction is 100 yards before a campsite near the confluence with the branch of Noname Creek below the fourteener Sunlight Peak. Again, do not cross

Noname Creek.

Climb northeast up another brutally steep hill, at the top of which is a great view of the surrounding peaks. At 11,800 feet, pass a campsite in the trees and reach the west end of another lush meadow at mile 7.9. The trail is sketchy beyond this point. Hike around the meadow's north edge, climb yet another brutally steep hill and pass through a narrow gap in some barrier cliffs above a nasty boulder field. Hike east on easier terrain to a small lake at 12,180 feet at mile 8.5. This is an idyllic campsite; please leave no trace of your time here. To complete this epic approach, hike around the lake's north side and climb east to reach 13,020-foot Jagged Pass at mile 9.0. At Jagged Pass, you are suspended in the heart of the wilderness and can gaze east down into Sunlight Basin and south up at the climbing route on Jagged.

Rosenbrough Description

The mouth of Noname Creek is located two miles north of the Needleton Bridge. To avoid wading the Animas, it is best to cross over to the east bank of the Animas and follow a trail on that side. There is some difficult going as the trail passes through the cliffs on Watertank Hill just south of Ruby Creek. As you might suspect, Watertank Hill is located just opposite the Needleton watertank. Once past the cliffs, however, you have smooth sailing to Noname Creek, where a well-defined trail starts out to the north of the creek. It is also possible to walk the railroad tracks from Needleton and then wade the Animas or, if you get lucky, cross logs lashed together by Outward Bound groups. The crossing can only be made late in the year and even then can be difficult. From the Animas, four miles and 2,300 vertical feet will bring you to a trail junction. Left takes you toward Peak Six and Jagged Mountain. Right leads you to Twin Thumbs Pass and the Chicago Basin peaks. The left-hand trail for Peak Six and Jagged heads east about seventy-five feet before you reach Noname Creek and climbs one-half mile to a beautiful meadow with a great view of Knife Point. In the meadow, it is necessary to make another left and head north up a steep bench, if you are interested in Peak Six and Jagged. There are several excellent campsites in the upper basin of the Noname drainage.

Needleton / Ruby Creek

Roach and Roach Description

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Leave the Animas River Trail and climb the initial steep slope on the Ruby Creek Trail. Hike 100 yards east through small trees to the southern edge of another idyllic meadow called “Upper Camper’s Meadow.” Look sharp and follow the faint trail as it takes a surprise turn to the south. Hike 100 yards south then 150 yards east to the bottom of a steep slope that is the beginning of the Needle Mountains. The Ruby Creek Trail can be difficult to follow to this point, but you must find it to avoid a bushwhacking disaster. When the trail angles north up the steep slope, route finding becomes easier.

Follow the now clear Ruby Creek Trail 0.3 mile northeast to a rounded ridge at 9,200 feet. Continue 0.2 mile east on the trail as it enters the North Pigeon Creek drainage and climbs to North Pigeon Creek at 9,500 feet. *Maybe closer to 9600 feet. UTM 13S 0,263,835 / 4,169,440.* Cross to North Pigeon Creek’s north side and ponder this route’s next mystery: there are two trails beyond this point. The obvious, main trail angles northwest across the slope. This is not the route (see Ruby Creek Approach, Variation 30.A4V). A lesser-used trail climbs steeply northeast above the creek. This is the continuation of the Ruby Creek Trail and the route. The drainage above this point is rough, and we do not recommend a direct ascent up the creek. *The correct trail has a columbine carved into an aspen tree.*

From North Pigeon Creek, climb 0.15 mile northeast on the brutally steep Ruby Creek Trail and follow it up a tiny ridge to yet another faint trail junction at 9,800 feet. The Ruby Creek Approach and the North Pigeon Creek Approach diverge at this junction. The continuation of the Ruby Creek Trail leaves the tiny ridge here and does an ascending traverse northeast into the tiny drainage north of the tiny ridge. At the beginning of this ascending traverse, there is *another* aspen tree with a columbine carved into it. This is the route.

Climb 0.4 mile northeast on the Ruby Creek Trail as it enters then ascends the tiny drainage north of the tiny ridge, then climbs northeast to reach 10,340 feet on the main ridge separating North Pigeon Creek and Ruby Creek. *Main ridge UTM 13S 0,264,101 / 4,169,839.* Cross to the north side of this ridge and continue 0.1 mile east on the Ruby Creek Trail as it climbs to 10,480 feet. For the first time, you can hear Ruby Creek below you to the north and catch peek-a-boo views of Peak Fourteen above you to the northeast. Just after you climb down a 6-foot rock baffle, the trail splits and, once again, you have a challenge and a choice.

For the next 0.2 miles, you have a choice between a high and a low route. The high route goes above a cliff band and the low route goes below it. Both routes work and are equal in difficulty. The low route descends steeply at first, and then contours east. The high route climbs near to a 10,500-foot saddle on the Ruby—North Pigeon Ridge, and then descends to the east. Near the 10,500-foot saddle, another trail junction occurs. *A trail not previously described continues over this saddle. When hiking back from Ruby Lake it would be easy to miss the right turn here and hike over the saddle incorrectly.* We recommend the high route, which is better marked and more traveled. When the routes rejoin, contour 0.3 mile east and reach the western edge of an open avalanche swath at 10,500 feet. From here you have an unobstructed view of Peak Fourteen’s rugged south face. Welcome to the Ruby Creek drainage.

Follow the rough Ruby Creek Trail 0.4 miles east on Ruby Creek’s south side to a tiny lake west of Ruby Lake. There is a campsite here. Cross to Ruby Creek’s north side and hike 0.1 mile east to Ruby Lake. *The nicest camp site is on the Southwest corner of the main lake.* Hike 0.25 mile around Ruby Lake’s north side, then climb 0.15 mile steeply north away from the creek. Contour 0.3 mile east above some willows, then climb 0.7 mile southeast on the creek’s north side to a luscious meadow at 11,600 feet. This is the traditional camping area for climbs of the surrounding peaks. Pigeon is 0.7 miles west-southwest and Turret is 0.6 miles south-southwest. Animas Mountain, Peak Thirteen and Monitor Peak loom to the northeast.

Variation

From the trail junction at the North Pigeon Creek crossing at 9,500 feet, follow the obvious, main trail that angles northwest across the slope instead of the Ruby Creek Trail, which climbs north directly up the slope. Climb northwest on this easy trail, and then pay your dues. Climb up an increasingly steep trail that turns into a cairned route over several rock outcrops. Persist on the rough route and rejoin the Ruby Creek Trail at 10,000 feet.

Rosenbrough Description

This is, without a doubt, one of the most difficult trails you will ever attempt to locate. It took me four attempts before I was finally able to locate and follow the trail its entire distance.

Walk north from the Needleton bridge about one-third of a mile (roughly six minutes at a brisk pace) along the trail on the east side of the Animas River. At this point you should reach an old metal railroad car and the floor of an old cabin. Although there is no trail in sight at this point, take a forty-five-degree turn and head northeast through the woods for about one-quarter of a mile to a point where you will reach the base of the mountains, which rise from the east bank of the Animas. Traverse along the base of the slope until you spot the trail angling up the slope. The trail climbs steeply up through the woods and crosses an unnamed drainage between Pigeon Creek and Ruby Creek. At about 10,300-foot elevation, the trail crosses over the ridge, which forms the south side of the Ruby Creek drainage and after losing some elevation traverses the south side of the drainage until it meets the drainage itself about three-quarters of a mile west of Ruby Lake. It then continues on the south side of the creek until you reach the lake. At Ruby Lake, the best campsites are generally on the west or north sides of the lake.

If, like many before you, you are unable to find the trail, your next best option is to hike back to the river trail, go about three-quarters to one mile up the river from the Needleton bridge, and directly ascend the ridge which forms the south side of the Ruby Creek drainage to the point at 10,300 feet elevation, where you will meet the trail as it crosses over the ridge. Whatever you do, do not attempt to climb directly up the Ruby Creek drainage. The elevation gained from the Needleton Bridge to Ruby Lake is roughly 2,600 feet.

To continue into the upper portion of Ruby Creek, stay on the north side of the creek to climb the steep bench just west of the lake. After topping out on the bench, it is necessary to fight your way through a thick growth of chest-high willows until you reach easier walking higher in the drainage. A 12,700-foot pass just south of Monitor Peak connects the Ruby Creek drainage with the Noname Creek drainage. The basin above Ruby Lake provides access to Pigeon Peak, Turret Peak, Peak Fifteen, Peak Sixteen, Little Finger, Monitor Peak, Peak Thirteen, Animas Mountain, North Eolus, and The Index.

Tenmile Creek

Rosenbrough Description

Tenmile Creek is named not for its length but for its distance from Silverton. The Colorado Mountain Club built a trail in 1941 as part of its outing in the Grenadier area. The trail has since been un-maintained and is reported to be very difficult to find in places. To reach Tenmile Creek you begin by hiking two and a half miles south on the railroad tracks from Elk Park. The railroad tracks are located on the east side of the Animas River at Elk Park but cross over to the west side of the Animas about three-quarters of a mile south of Elk Park. Don't be tempted to leave the tracks and stay on the east side of the Animas as it is "nearly impossible" to reach Tenmile Creek from the east side of the Animas. It is necessary to wade the Animas and, hence, this

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approach is best used in late August or early September. Don't even consider this route during the spring or early summer. Ormes notes that the crossing "is impossible for anyone without otters in the family tree."

Once across the Animas, the trail up Tenmile Canyon starts on the south side of Tenmile Creek and continues up the creek for 1.5 miles where it crosses over to the north side. About two miles up the creek, a steep watercourse gives access to Point Pun. The total distance from the Animas to Balsam Lake is four miles. From the Animas, the trail starts at 8,200 feet and climbs to 11,400 feet for a total vertical gain of 3,200 feet. Balsam Lake provides access for climbs of the Trinity Peaks, Peak Seven, Peak Eight, Peak Nine, and Storm King Peak.