

# Historic Trail Information:

Majestic Mountain District

**Trail:** Horse Thief Trail

**Elevation:** Start 9300 Feet  
Top (Bridge of Heaven) 12,300 Feet  
Top (Engineer Pass) 12,800 Feet

**Options:** Day Hike In to Bridge of Heaven and Out– 6 Hours (8 Miles)  
One Way to Engineer Pass – 2 Days (12 Miles)  
Loop Hike Around Ouray – 3 Days (20+ Miles) with shuttle

**Maps:** Handies Peak Quad, Wetterhorn Peak Quad, Ouray Quad

**Trail Guides:** National Forest Service Trail Bulletin #215  
Ouray Hiking Guide, Kent, Wayfinder Press, ISBN 0-943727-15-4

**Difficulty Rating:** Moderate to Difficult

## Historical Significance:

The Horse Thief Trail is the only southern route out of the Uncompahgre Valley by horseback. This route was used by the Ute Indians, and early settlers to travel east, and south out of the valley. It received its name since this was a popular escape route for Ute Indians who had helped themselves to settler's horses.

Chief Ouray, the leader of the Uncompahgre Ute people, left the valley by this trail in 1880 on his ill-fated visit to the Southern Ute tribe. Soon after his arrival in Ignacio, he contracted an illness that led to his death. His body was hid in the rocks about two miles from Ignacio. Forty-five years later his partial remains were recovered and interned in the cemetery in Ignacio along with his wife, Chipeta.

## General Description:

Horse Thief Trail begins north of Ouray and climbs at an easy but steady grade into the alpine country east of Ouray. Views of the Sneffels range, Red Mountain, and of the rugged Difficulty Creek drainage are particularly spectacular. On a clear day, the La Sal Mountain Range in Utah can be seen.

Few suitable campsites exist on the northern portion of the trail. Best camp locations may be found in the Cascade and Difficulty Creek drainages. Drinking water is limited, especially in late summer.

## Directions to Trailhead:

Drive south from Ridgway on U.S. 550. Turn left on the Cutler Creek/Dexter Creek Road (there is a Forest Service road sign there). Stay on Cutler Creek/Dexter Creek Road going past the Panoramic Heights subdivision. Continue past the sign that says entering "Lake Lenore Company property". At .9 miles from U.S. 550, you are in an opening and Lake Lenore is on the right.

At 1 mile, there is a road intersection. The road to the left takes you over Dexter Creek. There is a Forest Service sign here that says "Dexter Creek". Bear right at this intersection.

At 1.2 miles, there is a road to the right which takes you to Jackass Flats and to the Blowout. Do not turn here, but continue straight.

At 1.8 miles, you cross a bridge over Dexter Creek. The road becomes a little steeper and rougher but it is still passenger car accessible.

At 2.3 miles, a little road drops down to Dexter Creek to the right. Stay on the main road.

At 2.5 miles, there is a small corral on the left. This is the Dexter Creek Trailhead. Continue on the road crossing Dexter Creek. This is the end of 2-wheel drive access. Cross Dexter Creek and keep left.

At the four-way intersection, continue straight.

At 3.1 miles, you go over a culvert. Immediately after this there is a road to the right with a chain and sign, that says "private road". Also at this point there is a county milepost "3" marker.

At 3.4 miles, there are the remnants of the Wedge Mine on the right hand side.

At 3.6 miles, a grassed-in road drops off to the left. 100 feet later, there is another road that drops off to the left and goes to a gravel area that is part of an old mine.

At 3.7 miles, you will take the low road to the right. In about 700 feet, you will come to the Horsethief Trailhead, which is well signed and gives mileage to various destinations.

THE WESTERN COLORADO COUNCIL HISTORIC TRAILS AWARD

HORSE THIEF TRAIL

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Award Requirements:

In order to earn the Western Colorado Council's Historic Trail Award for the Horse Thief Trail, a unit must complete the following requirements.

1) Each member must complete one of the following:

- a) Visit a museum centering on Native American Culture.
b) Have a speaker from a historical society share information on the Ute influence on Colorado history.
c) Read a biography about a major Ute chief and write a book report.
2) Procure maps and information on the trail in order to properly plan camps, etc. (Handies Peak, Wetterhorn Peak, and Ouray quads, Forest Service Trail Guide #215) You may also visit the Historic Trails page on the council website, www.wccbsa.org/historictrails.

For trips and overnight camps less than 500 miles, file a Local Tour Permit Application, No. 34426A. For trips over 500 miles a National Tour Permit is necessary.

Plan and complete at least a two-day/one-night hike on the Horse Thief Trail.

- 3) During the hike, complete a service project (cleaning, trail maintenance, re-signing, etc.) approved by the National Forest Service of the Ouray Historical Society. See the website above for a list of pre-approved projects.
4) Submit the completed application to the Western Colorado Council along with proper payment for patches and trail strips.

Detach and send the application below to Western Colorado Council.

WESTERN COLORADO COUNCIL HISTORIC TRAIL HORSE THIEF TRAIL

(Note: Only chartered units may apply for this award.)

Unit No. \_\_\_\_\_ Tour Permit No. \_\_\_\_\_
District \_\_\_\_\_
Western Colorado Council Action
Approved \_\_\_\_\_ Disapproved \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to:
Western CO Council - BSA
839 Grand Ave., Grand Junction, CO 81501

1. Trail covered from \_\_\_\_\_ Date to \_\_\_\_\_ Date (two days and one night required)

2. List which museum, historical society member, or biography the unit used to complete requirement No. 1

3. Describe the service project completed including the total number of hours \_\_\_\_\_

4. Total Scouts and leaders eligible for the Horse Thief Trail Award \_\_\_\_\_

5. Enter order for \_\_\_\_\_ 3"x3" WCC Historic Trail Patches (\$5.00 ea.) \_\_\_\_\_ Horse Thief Trail Strips (\$2.00 ea.)

Unit/Tour Leader Approval (signed) \_\_\_\_\_ (Print Name) \_\_\_\_\_

Unit Chairman Approval (signed) \_\_\_\_\_ (Print Name) \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address for patch order \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_