

# Outdoor Access at CU Boulder

## A General Disclaimer

This document is designed to do two things:

- Walk you through resources, such as equipment rentals, travel, and classes made available to you via CU Boulder
- Detail some of the public outdoor access in the front range

This document *doesn't* do the following:

- Serve as a proxy for general outdoor education, experience, or knowledge
- Contain instructions for how to safely experience the outdoors

So for example, if you're someone who hasn't gone skiing before, this document will contain details about the logistical side of things (lift tickets, shuttle buses, etc.), but doesn't contain any information about how to actually ski. For that, you should seek out professional instruction.

Ultimately, you are responsible for your own safety in the outdoors.

## A Brief Aside

This document will tend to limit itself to things that are easily accessible without a car, as trying to document all of the outdoor access via car in the Rockies would take up several hundred pages. With regards to public transportation, your BuffCard gives you unlimited access to public transit, such as trains and buses, that are in the RTD system.

This is meant to be a compendium of useful information, but we won't pretend that it's completely comprehensive. If you have any recommendations for additional useful information, please add a comment with the appropriate details here, and we'll get them added!

## Renting Gear

The Rec Center at CU has a phenomenal number of resources available to you for a reasonable cost. Their rental center can be found [here](#). Examples of rentable items include (but are not limited to):

- Tents
- Sleeping bags & pads
- Camping stoves
- Snowshoes
- Canoes

Renting through CU's Rec Center will be cheaper than renting through other outfitters; that should be the first place that you check.

They do *not* rent out skis/snowboards. If you're interested in renting snowsport equipment, there are a variety of shops in town, such as Christy Sports, Epic Mountain Gear, Crystal Ski Shop, and REI. As a general rule, renting from ski mountains is more expensive than renting from independent ski shops. It's also worth noting that if you plan on going a couple of times per year, it might be worth renting for the whole season, as opposed to renting on a use-by-use basis.

## Outdoor Pursuits Center

The section above details some rental information for the CU Rec Center. But there's an entire section of the Rec Center dedicated to outdoor access and education. Their homepage is [here](#). Their offerings include (but are not limited to):

- Winter Activity Courses
- Climbing Gym Courses
- Bike Clinics
- Fly Fishing Trips
- Hiking/Backpacking Trips
- Paddling and Kayaking Trips/Courses
- Scuba Courses
- Wilderness Medicine Classes

For those who don't already have some outdoor education, this is a great place to learn some skills for safely enjoying and accessing the outdoors.

## Trails for Hiking/Running

### Chautauqua Park

If you look to the west and see massive crags of rock rising up, those are The Flatirons. Chautauqua Park gives you easy access to a lot of The Flatirons.

How to get there:

- This is a 25 minute walk from campus
- If you don't feel like walking you can take the BOLT clockwise bus, get off at 11th, then walk 4 blocks south to reach the park

Trails there:

- The link to AllTrails' Chautauqua page is [here](#)

- For those who haven't used it before, AllTrails is an excellent resource for looking up and planning hikes/backpacking routes/runs
- In addition to mileage, maps, and elevation, AllTrails also has a commenting system, which typically are helpful to get a sense for conditions on the trail
- There are a number of good loop trails
  - First and second flatiron loop - 2.7 miles
  - Green Mountain loop - 6.1 miles
- There are some out-and-back trails
  - Mesa trail -13.2 miles (most people just do this until they feel like turning around)
  - Royal arch trail - 3.3 miles
- This is a pretty big park with a lot of options; take a look at some maps to figure out what kind of mileage you'd like to do

## Shanahan Ridge

This is a few miles south of Chautauqua Park and also offers access to the Flatirons. Shanahan is popular for running, as the incline for its 4 mile loop is less steep.

How to get there:

- Take the SKIP bus over to Lehigh St. and Lafayette Dr (~15 minutes)

Trails here:

- The link to this on AllTrails is [here](#)
- Shanahan is a 4.2 mile loop with ~800 feet of elevation
- You can use this trail to access Bear Peak for a bigger hike

## Water Access

### Boulder Reservoir

The reservoir is for swimming, kayaking, paddle boarding, etc. Please look at the [reservoir's guidelines](#) for swimming hours.

How to get there:

- Go to the Boulder RTD bus station (can walk or take a variety of buses to get there quickly)
- Then take one of two buses up to Gunbarrel
  - The BOLT bus up to CO 119 & 63rd St
  - The 205 bus up to 63rd and Lookout Rd
- Walk west to the Boulder Reservoir

## Creeks

Colorado is home to a variety of rivers, creeks, and streams; moving water is more common than standing water. Boulder Creek runs through town, and Clear Creek runs through the town of Golden about 30 minutes south. These are generally used for tubing and/or swimming holes.

A few general notes here:

- These streams are made up of snowmelt from the Rocky Mountains. They will be cold, especially in spring and early summer.
- **The water level in creeks changes from day to day.**
  - On some days, it'll be lower and lazy. On other days, it will be high and very dangerous.
  - Check whether or not there is a tubing/swimming ban with the city before tubing/swimming in Boulder/Clear Creek.

## Skiing & Snowboarding

### Lift tickets

You can purchase day passes for a specific mountain. But given rising prices for day passes, it's typically more cost effective to get a season pass if you plan on going 4+ times during a season. The CU FreeRide club gives you [heavily discounted Ikon/Epic ski passes](#).

For those who haven't used these passes before, details can be found here:

- [Epic Pass](#)
- [Ikon Pass](#)

Ikon Pass tends to be more popular with CU students, as it covers a number of good Colorado mountains, including unlimited days at Eldora, our closest mountain. But before purchasing a pass, it's a good idea to look into what mountains it covers, and for how many days apiece.

## Access Without a Car

### Eldora

Eldora is the closest mountain, ~40 minutes away from CU Boulder. There is an hourly RTD bus, the NB1, which runs from the downtown Boulder station roughly every hour, right to the base of the mountain.

## The I-70 Mountains (Copper, A-Basin, etc.)

The CU FreeRide club organizes buses to other mountains on the Ikon Pass that are further away; these seats fill up quickly. Their schedule (and booking page) can be found [here](#).

## Access With a Car

The bigger resorts are down I-70; traffic can get bad, and during heavy snowfall, it is often closed due to avalanches. Check travel advisories before driving in heavy snow conditions.

For access to Eldora, there are RTD Park-n-Ride lots that you can park your car in to get a lift up to the mountain via the NB1 bus. For those with a car registered in Boulder, these lots are free for 24 hours, and \$2 per day afterwards. If you're worried about the parking lot filling up, these can be a great option.

## Backcountry

CU's Rec Center offers an [avalanche rescue course](#). However, recognizing how to avoid avalanches is just as (if not more) important than knowing how to handle rescue scenarios; there are a variety of courses available in Colorado for avalanche safety. Many can be found [via the Colorado Mountain School](#).

For those considering backcountry skiing without some sort of snow science background, like the courses listed above: don't.

117 people were caught in avalanches in Colorado in 2024. And in 90 percent of all avalanche accidents, the avalanche is triggered by the victim or someone in the victim's party. Learning the science behind this stuff helps you from triggering one by accident