

Directions to Brainard Cabin

Driving to the winter parking area:

From all points south of Boulder: Take Highway 36 west to Boulder, which becomes 28th Street as you enter the city. At Canyon Blvd, turn left toward the mountains, and follow it through town and up the canyon to Nederland. Be sure to slow down as you enter Nederland re: the ever present cop, and take the first right through the roundabout after the gas station. You should now be on Hwy 72, the Peak to Peak Highway, going north. After passing the CU Mountain Research Station you'll pass the town of Ward (down the hill to your right). Just after the potential right turn toward Ward, there's a brown Forest Service sign on the right and the road up to Brainard Lake is the next left turn.

From all points north of Boulder: Make your way to Hwy 36 along the foothills, and turn west onto Lefthand Canyon (at the Greenbriar). About 5.4 miles up the canyon, turn Left toward Ward (at the first major intersection, soon after Buckingham Park). Continue 11.4 miles to and through Ward, reaching Hwy 72 (the Peak to Peak Hwy) after the hairpin turn and steep incline. Turn Right North onto Hw 72, and then take an immediate Left onto the Forest Service road for Brainard Lake (the brown FS sign is on the right side, just before the turn).

Forest Service road and parking area: Follow this road steeply uphill 2.9 miles, then park in the new lot via a right turn before you reach the fee station. The FS maintains several vault toilets here, and a cold but windproof visitor center, even through the winter.

GPS Coordinates of Important Points, WGS84 Datum

Brainard Lake Road Winter Closure Gate: 40° 04' 51" N. Lat.; 105° 32' 11" W. Long.

Brainard Cabin: 40° 04' 51.5" N. Lat.; 105° 34' 42" W. Long.

Hike the road from winter parking area to cabin: 3 miles, easy, windy. While there are many crisscrossing trails in the area, the road is unmistakable. It's the most direct and shortest route to the cabin, but often is windswept to bare pavement, treating skis and snowshoes unkindly. The biggest hill of the whole route occurs right after the road closure gate, and then it's a series of gradual climbs until you reach Brainard Lake. After the third or so uphill stretch, the road takes a sharp left turn (around the Pawnee Campground) while a footpath straight ahead cuts through the middle of the campground and cuts off some distance. When you reach the lake, veer right (north) to cross the bridges at the outlet. At the far side of the bridge a nice trail goes off into the woods, but stay on the road and you'll be at the cabin in less than 20 minutes. At the northwest end of the lake, where the road veers left to loop back around the lake, stay right as if you're going to Mitchell or Long Lake. Pass the left turn to Long Lake and cross Mitchell Creek, then watch the right side of the road for the Forest Service sign for the CMC Cutoff Trail, just opposite a wide spot in the road before the uphill left sweep of the road to the Mitchell Lake parking area. The cabin is directly uphill from the sign at the road.

South CMC trail from winter parking to cabin: 3 miles, moderate, sheltered. Skis only, please. Start on the left side of the road, before the gate. The trail goes through the forest parallel to a creek all the way to a junction with the Little Raven trail near Brainard Lake. From this junction, a short trail runs north through a brushy meadow toward the lake. From this point you can follow the road around the west side of Brainard Lake, turn West toward Mitchell Lake and to the cabin.

Waldrop (North) CMC trail from winter parking to cabin: Skis only, please. A more difficult trail than the CMC South. The trail winds its way up through forests and meadows with some tricky gullies. The trail stays north of the road and intersects with the South St. Vrain Trail after two miles. From here the trail splits and rejoins itself a few times, but all paths reach the cabin or the road near it.

Snowshoe trail from winter parking to cabin: 3+ miles, snowshoes only recommended. Follow the road past the fee station and to the base of the first big hill. The snowshoe trail turns left into the trees at a FS sign. The trail stays south of Red Rock Lake and continues on the south side of the road for about two miles. The trail then turns north and joins the road. Turn left on the road and look for another trail on the right after about one hundred feet. Take this trail, then look left for the continuation of the snowshoe trail. Follow this steadily uphill through a forest. The trail joins the road again at the concrete bridge over Mitchell Creek. After the bridge look north for the trail into the woods (connects to Waldrop and South St. Vrain), and then look left for the continuation of the snowshoe trail up a hill, winding toward the cabin. Soon before the cabin there's an intersection with the South St. Vrain trail - stay straight/left and downhill to the cabin.

Lefthand Reservoir/Little Raven Trail from winter parking to cabin: Skis only, please. Take the Sourdough Trail south for about 1/2 mile. Turn right onto the Lower Little Raven Trail. After a steep 1/2 mile you strike the Left Hand Park Reservoir Road. Go left and follow the road for another 1/2 mile. The Upper Little Raven Trail starts on the right. The upper trail descends gradually for 1.7 miles to join the CMC (South) Trail near Brainard Lake. It's a short distance from here to the cabin, along the road.