

## Be Smart: for Your Survival and to Enjoy Your Climb

For more information and latest conditions report, visit [nps.gov/romo/planyourvisit/longspeak.htm](https://nps.gov/romo/planyourvisit/longspeak.htm)



## Essentials to Wear and Carry

- The summit of Longs Peak is 14,259 feet and the highest point heading north between central Colorado and the Arctic Circle. It takes several days to adjust to the altitude. Condition yourself with progressively longer and more strenuous hikes.
- Begin your climb no later than 3 a.m. to be off the summit early in the day. Time for the 15-mile round-trip averages 10 to 15 hours.
- Good choices are critical! Know your limits: if you are tired, it's okay to turn around. If you don't feel well or the weather changes, turn around. The toughest part of the climb up Longs Peak is the last 1½ miles from The Keyhole to the summit.
- Don't climb alone and stay together. Tell someone where you are going and when you expect to return.
- Stay on the marked route; straying from it can be perilous.
- Take and drink plenty of fluids such as water or sports drinks. You will not find water sources along the Keyhole Route. There are water sources lower down on the mountain, but this water must be treated properly. A minimum 3-4 quarts should be planned.
- Food is your fuel: pack high-energy snacks. Eat before, during and after your climb to help maintain your energy level. Salty snacks can help maintain electrolyte levels.
- High elevations can cause altitude sickness and may aggravate existing medical conditions; use caution and consider descending to a lower elevation.
- Only wear sturdy foot gear with good ankle support and a treaded sole.
- Ice and snow can be present at any time. Be aware of conditions and make decisions wisely.
- Always take storm gear; thunderstorms often develop quickly.
- In the event of a developing storm, descend quickly.
- The most important part of your climb is to prepare for your safe return.
- Lots of water
- High-energy food
- Layers of clothing (jackets & pants), including insulating, windproof clothing like synthetic or wool
- Sturdy footwear & extra socks
- Storm gear
- Hat and gloves
- Sunglasses with UV protection
- Sunscreen
- First aid kit
- Topographic map & compass/GPS
- Flashlight or headlamp
- Waterproof matches
- Pocket knife
- Whistle
- Common sense!

# Rocky Mountain

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of Interior

Rocky Mountain National Park



## Longs Peak - Keyhole Route



### The Peak

The Keyhole Route to the summit of Longs Peak (14,259 feet), one of the most popular routes in Colorado, is an extraordinary climbing experience. The route circumnavigates the upper mountain on the way to the summit, providing stunning views.

In general, the most snow-free and ice-free time of year to climb Longs Peak is mid-July through mid-September. However, weather and conditions vary so it's best to check with a ranger or online for current conditions, 970-586-1206 or [nps.gov/romo/planyourvisit/longspeak.htm](https://nps.gov/romo/planyourvisit/longspeak.htm).

**The Keyhole Route is NOT a hike!** It is a climb that crosses enormous sheer vertical rock faces, often with falling rocks, requiring scrambling, where an unroped fall would likely be fatal. The route has narrow ledges, loose rock, and steep cliffs. The terrain requires good route-finding and scrambling skills. Use caution, as injuries requiring rescue are very dangerous and take many hours, if not days, to evacuate.

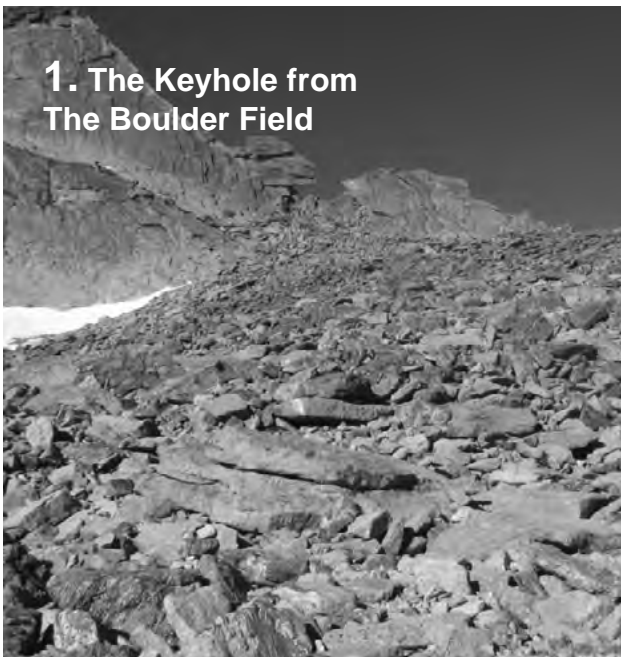
The best route follows red and yellow bull's-eyes. If you lose the bull's-eyes you are likely off-route and will encounter more difficult climbing with more severe consequences. It is important to retrace your steps back to the bull's-eyes before continuing, rather than shortcutting.

There is no way to predict weather on Longs Peak. The Keyhole Route can experience winter-like conditions at any time, requiring greater skill and judgment. Be prepared to turn back during sudden, drastic weather changes.

The high elevation may affect your condition and judgment. Careful descent is the best treatment.

Don't have summit fever: Enjoy the experience, but be willing to turn around at any time.

## 1. The Keyhole from The Boulder Field



Upon reaching the Boulder Field, the hiking trail ends. From here you will cross boulder field terrain to reach The Keyhole. The Keyhole is where the climbing route to the summit begins.

## 2. The Ledges



From The Keyhole, locate the first of a series of red and yellow 'bull's eyes' markings indicating the best route to and from the summit. Travel across a series of very narrow ledges along a cliff edge. Carefully climb a constricted slot-like section with two iron bars drilled into the rock. Continue upward toward the high point along the Ledges section. Then follow a gradually descending traverse to the base of The Trough. Take note of the Ledges/Trough junction, as some climbers have had difficulty locating this point while on the descent.

## 3. Looking Down on The Trough



Continue up to the broad gulley called The Trough. This section is full of loose rock. Be careful of other climbers and rockfall. At the top of The Trough, you will come to a short steep section. Carefully climb this section to the start of the Narrows.

## 4. The Narrows



The Narrows crosses a sheer vertical rock face on a narrow ledge. A series of boulders and hand holds will assist you on this constricted ledge. Continue to the base of the Homestretch.

## 5. The Homestretch



The Homestretch is a polished granite slab that guards the summit. This section requires scrambling with your hand and feet. This section can have ice and snow throughout the summer. Although many options exist, the bull's-eyes will generally provide you with the best route to the summit.

## 6. The Summit



Once you've reached the summit, you are halfway on your journey. Take a moment to have a snack and catch your breath. Be sure to be off the summit early in the day. Although they occur at any time, afternoon thunderstorms are likely in the summer months and will greatly increase the difficulty and time required to descend. Remember to use caution and stick to the route. Most accidents occur on the way down.

## The Keyhole Route (late summer conditions)

The Keyhole Route on Longs Peak circumnavigates the upper mountain on the way to the summit



Narrow ledges, loose rock, and steep cliffs characterize this route. Sudden weather changes including high winds, freezing temperatures, rain, snow, and lightning are common. Be willing to turn around at any time.

*All brochure photos were taken in August*