

Best Climbs

Rocky Mountain National Park

Over 100 of the Best Routes on Craggs and Peaks

STEWART M. GREEN

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2.

Spearhead

Spearhead perches above Glacier Gorge, an alpine basin flanked by ridges and cliffs, carpeted with meadows and forests, and dotted with lakes. The Spearhead lifts its pointed 12,575-foot-high summit above an 800-foot-high northeast face. This granite wall, dwarfed by surrounding peaks, is climber friendly, seamed with vertical cracks and dihedrals, and covered with incut handholds and flakes. Numerous great climbs up to nine pitches long ascend the concave wall, offering superb climbing in a remote setting.

Spearhead is the high point of a long ridge that juts north from Chiefshead. The pyramid-shaped northeast face is broken by several features. A horizontal grassy ledge—Middle Earth—splits the lower wall. The Eye of Mordor is a north-facing dihedral above Middle Earth, and Syke's Sickle is a crescent-shaped corner below the summit. A snowfield drapes along the wall's base in June.

Spearhead's climbing season runs from June through September. The wall receives lots of summer sun. Most routes are day climbs, but a limited number of bivouac permits are available for overnight camps below

the wall. The permits are available at the Backcountry Office, next to the Beaver Meadows Visitor Center. Objective dangers include thunderstorms, snow and sleet, lightning, loose rock, and climbers above you. To avoid crowds, avoid the weekends.

Getting there: Reach Spearhead from the Glacier Gorge trailhead on Bear Lake Road. Drive west from Estes Park on US 36 into Rocky Mountain National Park. Turn south on Bear Lake Road past the Beaver Meadows Entrance Station and drive to a parking lot at Glacier Gorge trailhead a mile before the road's end at Bear Lake. Get there early or walk the 0.5-mile trail down from the larger Bear Lake parking lot, or take the free shuttle from the Park & Ride lot across from Glacier Basin Campground. Hike south on Glacier Gorge Trail for 6 miles and two hours to Spearhead. The trail intersects North Longs Peak Trail at 1.4 miles. Keep right and in 0.5 mile turn south toward Mills Lake. The trail climbs steeply 0.6 mile to the lake and continues south along the east shore another 0.4 mile to Jewel Lake. It then continues up the forested floor of Glacier Gorge for another 1.8 miles to 10,620-foot Black Lake. Hike



**Peggy Donahue climbing the
*Northeast Ridge of Spearhead.***

PHOTO TOPHER DONAHUE



Rocky Mountain National Park—The High Peaks



up steep slopes below a cliff band east of the lake and enter the upper basin below Spearhead. Follow a trail through meadows and across bedrock to the wall's base.

Descent: Descend from Spearhead's summit down scree slopes on its northwest side or work south across a large ledge system above the northeast face and then scramble right down ledges (4th class) to the basin. Watch for cliff bands, couloirs, snow patches, and loose rock.

Layton Kor owned Rocky Mountain National Park in the 1960s. Layton made the second ascent of *The Diamond* via the first ascent of the *Yellow Wall* in 1962. He made the first one-day ascent of *The Diamond* up *D1* with Royal Robbins in 1963 and then two days later did the first ascent of *Jack of Diamonds*, again with Royal. Layton made the first winter ascent of *The Diamond* with Wayne Goss via the *Enos Mills Wall* in 1967. He also did the first ascent of many routes on *Chasm View Wall* and the *Lower East Face* on *Longs Peak*, as well as new routes on *Hallett Peak*, *Sharktooth*, the *Northwest Face* of *Chiefshead*, and *Lumpy Ridge*. We're still climbing in your footsteps Layton!

1. Sykes Sickle (III 5.9+) Classic and excellent. Expect moderate climbing, good protection, and a thrilling finish. Get an early start to avoid afternoon thunderstorms on the summit slabs. The route follows an obvious sickle-shaped arch on the upper wall. Begin at the base below double crack systems directly below the Sickle and right of some streaked overlaps. **Pitch 1:** Climb the left of two parallel cracks (5.7) to a belay. 80 feet. **Pitch 2:** Continue up corners (5.4) to a terraced ledge above *Middle Earth*. Combine the first two pitches with a long rope. **Pitch 3:** Climb up left on easy terrain to a belay ledge. **Pitch 4:** Face climb (5.6) up right on flakes and cracks to a belay ledge at the base of a left-leaning dihedral system. **Pitch 5:** Jam cracks (5.7) up the dihedral to a belay below the Sickle. Alternatively, climb flakes on the face left of the dihedral (5.7) to the belay. **Pitch 6:** Squeeze up a flared chimney (5.7) on the left side of the Sickle and then traverse up right to an exposed ledge directly below a notch in the large roof above. The chimney is often wet. **Pitch 7:** Technical crux. Climb a crack to the notched roof. Stem and pull over (5.9+) past fixed pitons with exposed moves. This section can be wet in early summer. Step left into a crack and climb up left to a belay stance. The hard roof move is easily aided. **Pitch 8:** Psychological crux. Traverse delicately right 35 feet across a polished slab (5.7) to a fixed pin and

Spearhead



bolt. Climb up right on easier rock to a short corner and the summit ridge.

Rack: Sets of Stoppers, TCUs, and Camalots to #3.5 or #4; 200-foot (60-meter) rope.

2. North Ridge (III 5.6) Outstanding classic route—one of the park's best long moderates. Expect fun climbing, lots of exposure, and plenty of variations and route-finding problems. The lower pitches are easily simul-climbed or can be strung together with a long rope. Most pitches as described are 130 to 150 feet long. Begin by scrambling up and around the Northeast Face to a dark chimney/cleft below the left side of the broad *North Ridge*. Also look for an obvious groove/slot above a lower slab. **Pitch 1:** Climb up left, passing beneath the chimney, and edge up left across the slab. Climb back right to the groove/slot and belay. **Pitch 2:** Stem up the groove and chimney (5.5) and belay below a tight dihedral. **Pitch 3:** Fun climbing leads up the V-shaped

dihedral (5.4) to a right-facing dihedral. Belay on a ledge to the right.

Pitch 4: Climb easy rock up left in corners and grooves (4th class) to a big ledge. **Pitch 5:** Climb easy cracks and then a nice clean slab (5.5) to a small belay ledge. **Pitch 6:** Cruise a long right-facing corner and step left near its top to a good belay stance. **Pitch 7:** Best pitch. Climb a shallow left-facing corner (5.6) up the airy edge of the Northeast Face. At its top, move right and jam a nice crack (5.5) just left of a left-facing corner to a small stance on the exposed edge. **Pitch 8:** Step right and wrestle up a slot (5.6), then climb a crack (5.4) in the back of a chimney. End on a big belay ledge on the ridge. **Pitch 9:** Easy scrambling (3rd and 4th class) leads 200 feet to a ledge system on the west side of the summit. Squeeze up a slot (5.6) in a large block to emerge onto the airy summit. **Rack:** Light rack with sets of Stoppers and cams to #3, 200-foot (60-meter) rope.

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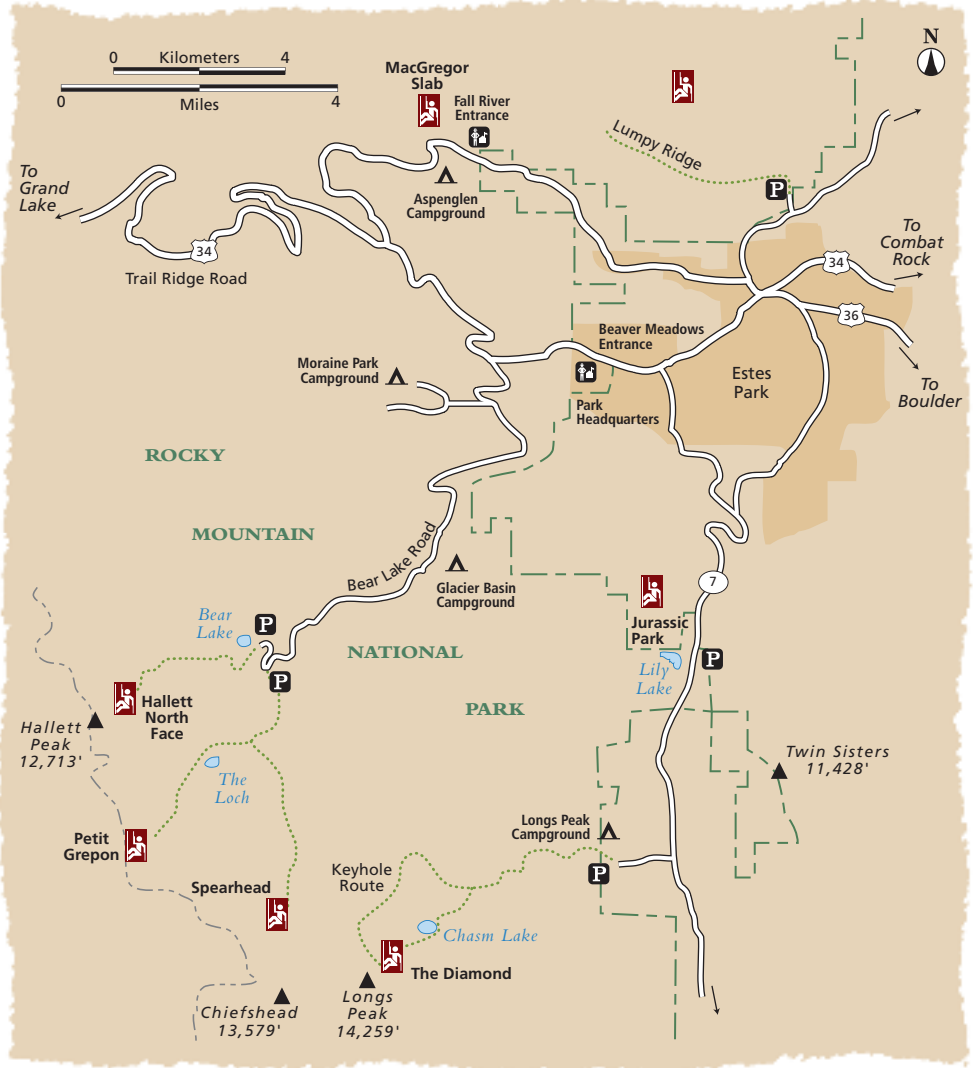
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Rocky Mountain National Park Area



Map Legend

	Interstate		Town
	US Highway		City
	State Highway		Climbing Area
	County Road		Crag/Boulder
	Gravel Road		Cliff Edge
	Unimproved Road		Mountain Peak
	Trail		Parking
	Waterway		Restroom
	Lake/Reservoir		Building
	Falls		Camping
	Glacier		Gate
	National Forest/ State Park Boundary		Trailhead
			Ranger Station

Topo Legend

	Natural gear belay stance
	Single piece of fixed protection (bolt or piton)
	Fixed belay station

Dedicated to the memory of my friend
Spencer Swanger (1940–2010)—mountaineer, adventurer,
husband, and father. Spence, we'll miss you. Just keep on climbing
and we'll see you on the other side of the mountain.

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