

The Kitchen Sink Loop

Last update: September 2024

Questions, Comments, Suggestions, Corrections
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Overview

The Kitchen Sink Loop is a 445-mile bikepacking route in Northern Colorado that starts and ends just west of Fort Collins, Colorado. The route consists primarily of dirt and gravel forest service roads but also includes some high-quality singletrack as well.

Covering almost 450 miles over 8-12 days, the route is long enough to provide an epic adventure for most riders while not requiring them to quit their jobs or cash in their kids' college funds.

The route roughly circumnavigates Rocky Mountain National Park in a counterclockwise direction. Along the way, it visits remote forests, high alpine passes, mountain towns, and the headwaters and watersheds of numerous Colorado rivers. Remote terrain and dispersed camps allow riders to settle into the simple rhythm of ride, eat, sleep, and repeat, and to leave the stresses of the modern world behind. The route will pull riders into remote areas but deliver them to cool mountain towns every day or two for food, beverages, and resupply.

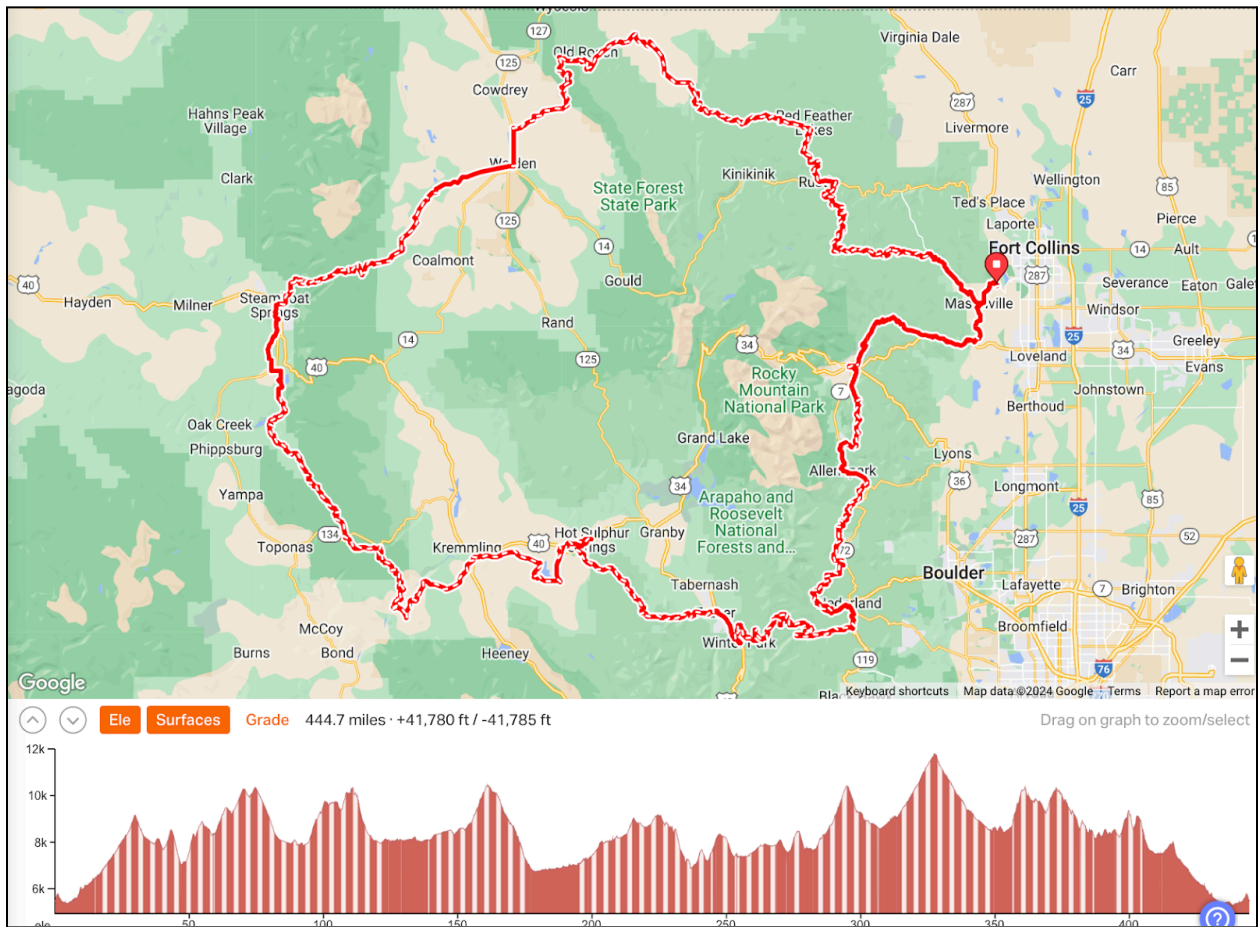
As the name implies, this route has a bit of everything (except for the kitchen sink).

- ❖ Gravel roads and high-quality single-track
- ❖ High altitude passes
- ❖ Forests, canyons, and high-altitude parks
- ❖ Historic mining, ski, and tourist towns (Steamboat Springs, Kremmling, Winter Park, Nederland, Estes Park)
- ❖ Numerous rivers (Poudre, Big Thompson, Michigan, Laramie, Yampa, Colorado)
- ❖ Restaurants, breweries, distilleries and coffee shops
- ❖ Hot Springs (Steamboat, Radium, Hot Sulfur Springs)
- ❖ Archeological sites (Rollins Pass)
- ❖ Historic fire tower (west of Red Feather Lakes)

Route Statistics at a glance

DIFFICULTY:	7.5 of 10
DISTANCE:	445 Miles
DAYS:	8 - 12
% RIDEABLE:	99%
% DIRT	73%
% SINGLETRACK:	7%
HIGH POINT:	11784 Feet
ASCENT:	41780 Feet

The Route



The route is detailed on Ride With GPS here.

<https://ridewithgps.com/routes/44806250>

A collection of routes that includes the main route and the alternate routes that bypass the singletrack can be found here.

<https://ridewithgps.com/collections/2902065>

For information on how to download the route to your phone, Garmin, or Wahoo, see the RWGPS page linked below. Your options will differ depending on whether you have a RWGPS account and the RWGPS mobile app installed on your phone. I recommend downloading the route for offline use in the RWGPS mobile app for easy viewing and sending the route to a Wahoo or Garmin for easy on-bike navigation.

[RWGPS Send to Device](#)

Route Segments

The following route segments are somewhat arbitrary. The intent is to provide an easy way to index into the route description. The segments don't represent suggested single-day efforts, although in some cases it might work out that way. All segment endpoints will have lodging or camping, but if you prefer free, dispersed camping options, you will need to stop short or continue past segment endpoints. All points of interest described below will be on the RWGPS map, so please refer to the map for precise locations.

1. Start - Glen Echo - 49 Miles

The route starts with 15 miles of pavement that brings you to the base of Buckhorn Canyon, where the gravel begins. Another 15 miles of climbing gravel will put you at the top of **Pennock Pass** at an elevation of 9240 ft. A creek flows down the canyon so you'll have ample opportunities to refill water bottles while climbing to the pass. If you started the route later in the day, you have the option of dispersed camping near the pass, but unfortunately, this area burned in 2020 during Colorado's largest wildfire, the Cameron Peak Fire.

From the pass, the route drops steeply to the Pingree Park Rd. You'll ride the road until route mile 40.3 where you'll turn off and take rougher roads to the top of the Lower Dadd Gulch singletrack. If for any reason you want to bypass the singletrack, continue straight (at route mile 40.3) to Highway 14, and then head west to rejoin the route at Glen Echo. See route <https://ridewithgps.com/routes/48206837>

If you want to camp before Glen Echo, start looking for dispersed camping options before route mile 44 where the Lower Dadd Gulch drainage narrows.

The Lower Dadd Gulch Trail includes almost 3 miles of technical singletrack with multiple stream crossings. Once at the trailhead at the bottom of the singletrack, head west for 3 miles to Glen Echo. Glen Echo is just past where the route turns off of Highway 14, so continue straight if you want to stop there. The **Glen Echo Resort** has a restaurant, convenience store, and paid tent camping near the river. For free camping options, continue to route mile 49.4 and turn off the route onto Seven Mile Road where there are multiple dispersed camping sites.

2. Glen Echo - Walden - 84 Miles

From Glen Echo, the route climbs a gravel road 6 miles to the Red Feather Lakes area. At route mile 59 is the Potbelly restaurant, and if needed you can detour east to the grocery store in town.

From here, the route proceeds west on Deadman Road. There are many opportunities to wild camp along Deadman Road and only some of them are marked on the map. If you're lucky, you may see a moose in this area. At route mile 70.4 you can turn right to

detour off route to the **historic Deadman Fire Tower**. During the summer, volunteers staff the tower, and visitors can climb and tour the tower. See [Deadman Lookout](#) for hours and other details.

The route continues west on Deadman Road and climbs above 10000 ft for the first time before descending to the Laramie River and **Hohnholz Lakes Campground** at route mile 90.

From Hohnholz Lakes, the route continues up and over the Medicine Bow National Forest before dropping into [North Park](#), a large high-altitude basin surrounded by mountain ranges, once a favorite Ute hunting ground. On its way to Walden, the route passes near the ghost town of [Old Roach](#), a company logging town. Loggers in this area cut and shaped timber into railroad ties which were then floated downriver to Laramie Wyoming. The final four miles of climbing before descending into North Park are steep in places and may require some hiking.

The town of Walden allows cyclists to camp in the town park for up to three days, and showers can be taken at the indoor pool for \$5. The park has a watering schedule posted outside the bathroom. Be sure to set up your tent where they will not be watering. You may meet TransAmerica riders or other cycle tourists in this park. If you have extra time, you can visit the historic county courthouse or the North Park Pioneer Museum next door.

3. **Walden - Steamboat Springs - 47.4 Miles**

From Walden, you will continue southwest through the North Park basin before climbing up and over the Park Range and over the Continental Divide at **Buffalo Pass**, where there is a campground and other dispersed camping opportunities

At route mile 164.6, the route follows multiple singletrack trails for the final 11 miles into town. The Flash of Gold trail is especially beautiful and flowy and is not to be missed if you're on a mountain bike. If you prefer to skip the singletrack, you can stay on forest roads and rejoin the route in town. See route <https://ridewithgps.com/routes/48282288>

Steamboat Springs is a bustling ski and outdoor recreation town. You'll find all services available here including large grocery stores and a Walmart. **Orange Peel Bikes** is the go-to bike shop for Tour Divide Racers when they pass through town. There are many good restaurants and opportunities to soak in some hot springs.

4. **Steamboat - Kremmling - 78.3 Miles**

From Steamboat, the route follows the **Great Divide Mountain Bike Route** past Kremmling to the Williams Fork Reservoir, so depending on when you go, you may have a chance to meet bikepackers or racers attempting the entire GDMBR.

The route follows the bike path and the Yampa River out of town to the south, making its way to Stagecoach Lake State Park. It then climbs 17 miles to **Lynx Pass** where there is a nice first come, first served campground with vault toilets. It should have drinking water as well. If the campground is full, there are some dispersed camping sites just a couple of miles further down the road and slightly off route. See the map.

You will descend from the pass and cross HW 134. At route mile 220 there is a historic post office/hotel and shortly after, there is a 'shoes off' crossing of Rock Creek. The route continues up a challenging and at times steep and rough climb, before descending to the **Colorado River** at Radium. There is a hike to the [Radium Natural Hot Spring](#) nearby, but you'll want to research access in advance. I created a route to the spring based on satellite imagery, but I can't guarantee that this route is open or that it will actually get you there. Please observe any local signage or closures.

<https://ridewithgps.com/routes/45733306>

From the Colorado River, the route climbs over 2100 feet on wide and well-maintained gravel roads before dropping down to HW 9. The route passes close to Kremmling which is just a couple of miles off route. Kremmling is a small town but has a full grocery store, a great coffee shop, restaurants, and motels. The **Red Mountain RV Park** has grassy tent sites for \$10 per person, and this includes the use of the showers and even a towel if you ask for one. We recommend staying at the RV park unless you plan to push on to Hot Sulfur Springs.

5. **Kremmling - Fraser/Winter Park - 55 Miles**

From Kremmling the route heads back out on the GDMBR for 17 miles, where it will turn north just past Williams Fork Reservoir. After crossing the Colorado River again, it climbs over the Parshall Divide and down to Hot Sulfur Springs. This is a beautiful, moderate, climb.

The route intentionally visits Hot Sulfur Springs to limit the amount of riding on HW 40 and more importantly for the hot springs. **Hot Sulfur Springs Resort** and Spa is a commercial hot springs with many different pools of varying temperatures. This is a great place to take a half day off. Arrive in town for lunch, soak in the hot springs, have dinner, and take one more soak in the hot springs at dusk with a re-entry pass. (ask for the pass at the front desk before leaving) Lodging is available at the hot springs, or there are motels in town. Next door to the hot springs is a first come, first served campground in the town's Pioneer Park. <https://townofhotsulphursprings.com/community/town-parks-3/> For dispersed camping options, continue another 10 miles forward on the route. The only resupply is the one gas station convenience store in Town. Restaurants in town include the 7670 Grill, and The Dean Public House, open Thursday - Sunday. <https://www.deanpublichouse.com/>

From Hot Sulfur Springs, the route briefly follows HW 40 (Be careful) before turning back onto gravel for a 2700 ft climb up to the second highest point on the route. There are many opportunities to wild camp along this section. In many cases, you will need to explore side roads to the right, but closer to the top there are obvious spots just off the road.

From the top, the route descends through dense forest into Fraser. The St. Louis Creek campground is off-route just before town. This is a popular campground so it tends to fill up early on weekends. There is one overflow site without vehicle parking that might be perfect.

The towns of Fraser and Winter Park have all services including bike shops and a rec center. There is an extensive system of singletrack here as well, just in case you need a high-intensity workout.

6. Fraser/WP - Nederland - 45 Miles

From Winter Park, the route climbs to its high point (11784 ft) at **Rollins Pass** where it crosses the **Continental Divide** back to the east side. This is a stunning alpine area dotted with alpine lakes and wilderness areas to the north and south.

Evidence suggests that people have been using this area for more than 10000 years, and the route passes by one of many prehistoric stone hunting blinds at route mile 328.3. This is well worth a short stop. Climb uphill and look for an obvious depression in the rocks. Also, if you look around you'll see the remains of stone walls contouring the mountain near this site. Please leave everything as you find it and don't move rocks around.

More recently in the 1800's and 1900's, the pass was used by a wagon toll road and the highest non-cog railroad ever built in North America. Remnants of the old railroad remain. At route mile 323 you'll encounter the **Rifesight Trestle**, and the route passes above the **twin trestles** at route mile 328.4 but they are not visible from the route. Although the trestles are closed to all traffic, you can get a closer look by continuing straight at route mile 327.2, but you'll need to return to the route the same way you went out. At route mile 328.7 the route leaves the railroad grade to hike over the closed Needle Eye tunnel to the beginning of the descent. You can stay on the railroad grade to visit the closed tunnel.

For more historical details see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rollins_Pass.

Most of this road follows the old railroad grade except for the places it detours around the old railroad trestles, so the grade is fairly enjoyable. The road sees traffic from four-wheel-drive vehicles, although thru traffic has not been allowed since 1990 due to the closure of the Needle Eye Tunnel. The road on the west side of the pass is reasonably smooth, but the east side becomes quite rocky and the descent might be slower than expected even with front suspension.

A long descent winds past the east portal of the **Moffat Tunnel** which is a half mile off route at route mile 341.7, where modern-day trains travel more than 6 miles underground to the west side of the continental divide. The descent continues to Rollinsville and Nederland where all services are available.

7. Nederland - Estes Park - 59 Miles

From Nederland, the route climbs back up to over 10000 ft on dirt roads. Some pushing may (probably will) be required on the forest road leaving the town of Eldora. At route

mile 369 the route takes the **Sourdough Trail** for 13 miles of high-quality, high-altitude, technical singletrack. This trail is rocky and rooty but is still really fun on a loaded hard-tail mountain bike and we highly recommend it if you're riding a mountain bike and have intermediate skills. If you prefer to skip the singletrack, continue a short distance to State Highway 72 (Peak to Peak Highway), ride the pavement to County Road 92, and rejoin the route at Peaceful Valley Campground at mile 387. See route <https://ridewithgps.com/routes/48207064>

The route avoids payment for another 5 miles before it must merge onto State Highway 72 for about 8 miles. This is a high-traffic mountain road, but it does have reasonable shoulders and is used by many cyclists. The route does move on and off the highway into the towns of Ferncliff and Allenspark, which has a nice pizza restaurant, and Crystal Spring which is a great place to stock up on water.

At route mile 394.4, the route leaves the highway and climbs the **Pierson Park Road** through the National Forest and then descends to the town of **Estes Park**. There are abundant dispersed camping sites along the road, and this is the last suggested area for dispersed camping from here to the end of the route. This section of road is beautiful but steep with some short sections of hike-a-bike. Although it is only 17 miles from when the route turns off the highway to Estes Park, expect this section to take 3-4 hours, and camp here unless you plan to finish the route or find lodging in Estes Park. At route mile 408 the route takes a bike path into Estes Park and around Lake Estes passing near restaurants, groceries, and a bike shop.

8. **Estes Park - Finish - 28 Miles**

Estes Park is the gateway to Rocky Mountain National Park. It is popular year-round but is especially popular and busy in the summer. Shuttle buses are available from town into the park. If you're from out of state, you might consider staying in town for a couple of days and doing some day trips into the park. If you feel like doing some more riding, you can ride the one-way, dirt, **Old Fall River Road** to the Alpine Visitor Center at over 11000 ft.

See this Strava activity for details. <https://www.strava.com/activities/9895398569>

From Estes Park, the route heads north over a small pass and down to the small town of Glen Haven. There are two very steep and tight switchbacks just over the pass, so watch your speed and be ready. The Glen Haven General Store is open during the summer. The store has a deli, freshly-made cinnamon rolls, and the usual convenience store snacks and drinks.

From Glen Haven, the route follows the North Fork Big Thompson River down to Highway 34 which it follows to the bottom of the Big Thompson Canyon. Another 10 miles of county roads lead to the end of the route. Congratulations! Of course, you still

have to get back to Fort Collins. Grab some food across the street at the Horsetooth Bar and Grill, or ride into Fort Collins for a well-earned celebration dinner.

Resupply

Surface water is abundant along the route, and purified water is available in towns. Treat or filter all surface water. I will typically carry 3L of water on the bike and carry an empty 2L reservoir that I can fill for longer stretches or dry camping. If in doubt, carry more.

The following table outlines the key resupply points and the services available at each.

Route Mile	Since Last	Name	Services
4.3	4.3	Masonville	CS
49.0	44.7	Glen Echo	CS, R, Camp
58.8	9.8	Red Feather Lakes	R, CS off route
128.6	69.8	Walden	CS, R, C, L
178.0	49.4	Steamboat Springs	CS, G, C, L, B
254.1	76.1	Kremmling	CS, G, C, L
279.5	25.4	Hot Sulfur Springs	CS, C, R
307.4	27.9	Frasier/Winter Park	CS, G, C, L, B
349.0	41.6	Rollinsville	R
353.2	4.2	Nederland	CS, G, C, L, B
389.9	36.7	Ferndale	CS
390.6	0.7	Allenspark	R
410.8	20.2	Estes Park	CS, G, C, L, B
418.7	7.9	Glen Haven	CS
433.9	15.2	The Dam Store	CS
440.4	6.5	Masonville	CS
KEY			
CS	Convenience Store		
R	Restaurant		
C	Camping		
L	Lodging		
G	Grocery Store		
B	Bike Shop		

Know before you go

When to go

This route is recommended between mid-June through September. Heavy spring snow or early fall snow could shorten this window. You can look at the current snow depth at various high points near the route using this site. To see snow depth, click a location on the map and then open the 'Parameters' section.

[Snow Depth](#)

Unfortunately, wildfires are having an increasing impact on bikepacking in the West. For details about current wildfires in Colorado, see the Inciweb site.

[InciWeb Colorado](#)

Recommended Itinerary

We first rode the entire loop in August of 2024 using an 11-day itinerary that included a wonderful half-day off in Hot Sulfur Springs. This itinerary had a great cadence. We started riding each day just after 8:00 am and rode most of the day with time to take in the scenery and stop for meals. Every day included the opportunity to eat in a restaurant at some point during the day, and we usually did. We finished the route strong and happy.

You can see the details of our itinerary here.

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1KzoBdB9WI2Hp3g6dFKnZHAfY4Ygs3qXNfeeYdCDaw/>

Recommended bike and gear setup

Personal preference will play a key role in deciding what bike to take, and as they say, the best bike is the one you own.

For the most fun and all-round comfort on both the gravel roads and singletrack, I recommend a light, hardtail mountain bike with 2.2 - 2.4 inch tires, with a suspension fork.

Gravel bikes are also appropriate for this route if they have low gears, and if the rider has experience riding technical singletrack or is willing to bypass the singletrack by riding pavement.

This route has a significant amount of climbing at altitude so I recommend keeping your camping setup as light as possible.

Mountain Safety

Hypothermia is a significant danger in the Colorado high country, even in the summer. Fast-developing thunderstorms can drop a deluge of near-freezing rain quickly, sapping precious body heat from even a well-prepared bikepacker. Be prepared to throw on rain gear with insulating layers underneath, and consider bringing an umbrella that can be used to shelter in place during short and severe storms.

Temperatures can drop to near freezing overnight in the high country. Be prepared for this with the combination of an appropriate sleeping bag and additional layers of clothing. A 32-degree sleeping bag should work well and you can wear additional clothes at night if needed.

Lightning is also dangerous in the Colorado high country, especially above the treeline. If approaching the treeline when a storm is imminent, consider staying below the treeline until the storm passes.

Leave no trace

See [Care for Colorado Leave No Trace Principles](#)

Be especially careful with fire, and avoid building new fire rings. Don't build fires on beds of pine needles as fire can burn down and spread underground.

If burying your human waste, please go the extra mile (or 100 yards) and find a very remote spot away from roads and trails to do your business.

Land ownership

The route will pass through National Forest land, Colorado State-owned land, and private land.

Dispersed camping is generally allowed in National Forests with some exceptions such as near trailheads, campgrounds, and picnic areas. If possible, make yourself invisible when wild camping.

[Arapaho & Roosevelt National Forests Pawnee National Grassland - Dispersed Camping](#)

Colorado State lands are mostly reserved for hunting and often require a hunting permit to camp. The one obvious state land area is when climbing over to Hot Sulfur Springs from the Colorado River.

The interactive map linked below does a good job of showing national forest and state land boundaries.

[State of Colorado Property Viewer](#)

Travel Logistics

If flying into DIA, you can catch a shuttle to Fort Collins with Groome Transportation. You can book online and specify that you are bringing a bicycle for a small fee. If staying at a hotel before and after the ride, you may be able to get the hotel to store your bike box for the duration of the ride.

https://groometransportation.com/denver-airport/?&sd_client_id=db0f2d1d-4ce7-457d-b990-fc8da08a348e

If driving to Fort Collins and parking a vehicle, you have several options.

1. The Fort Collins Hilton has a paid parking lot. As of Feb 2024, they allowed cars to be parked for \$15/day. You should call and confirm before arriving.

[Stay at the Hilton Fort Collins, CO Hotel near CSU](#)

2. As of Feb 2024, the Fort Collins downtown parking garages were using ParkMobile to manage payments and there are ParkMobile kiosks on site. The kiosk allowed the purchase of up to 30 days of parking. A city representative has told me that it is not legal to park on any city property or right of way for more than 48 hours, but there is no signage to that effect in the parking garage and if they sell you a 10-day parking pass, I don't see how they could tow you.
3. Take your chance parking on the street somewhere.