

9-day Colorado Big Loop Tour

This itinerary describes the "car-camping" tour. If you choose to join a tour that provides hotels/cabins, the stops and locations are approximately the same. We recommend the camping tour because we will see more birds and wildlife while staying at the campgrounds. We have wonderfully comfortable tents and sleeping pads.

Day 1, Denver: You are responsible for booking your own flight into the Denver airport (DEN). You will be met at the airport and transferred to a hotel close by. Activities for the day depend on your arrival in Denver.

Day 2, St. Vrain: From the Denver airport, it is a 20-minute drive (15 miles) to Barr Lake State Park. This is an excellent place for birding, and we will spend the morning here and have a picnic lunch. From Barr Lake it is a 30-minute drive (30 miles) to St. Vrain State Park, where we will be camping for one night. The St. Vrain Campground is located just off the I-25 interstate and although we can here the highway traffic, it is a good place for birding and other nearby locations. The elevation of St. Vrain Park is 4,982 feet.

Day 3, Grand Lake: From St. Vrain State Park, we will take most of the day to drive through Rocky Mountain National Park and arrive in Grand Lake in the late afternoon. We will leave our camp and travel up the Big Thompson River to Estes Park. From there we will travel up and over Trail Ridge Road, which summits at an elevation of 12,183 feet and it is the highest continuous paved road in the United States. There will be numerous stops and short walks along the way. We will camp near the town of Grand Lake at the same location for 2-nights. The non-stop travel time between St. Vrain and Grand Lake is 2.5-hours, (85 miles).

Day 4, Grand Lake: We will spend the day walking the trails and travelling the roads of Rocky Mountain National Park in search of birds and wildlife. Rocky Mountain National Park is spectacular to say the least. The elevation of Grand Lake is 8,369 feet.

Day 5, Lake John: In the morning we will re-visit several locations in Rocky Mountain National Park, Shadow Mountain Reservoir, and the Colorado River. From Grand Lake it is a 20-minute drive (17 miles) to the Windy Gap wildlife viewing area. This will be a short stop to look for birds before we head to Walden and North Park. From Windy Gap it is a 1.5-hour drive (60 miles) to the Arapaho National Wildlife Refuge. The refuge is excellent for birding. It is situated at an elevation ranging from 8,100 to 8,700 feet, making it the highest refuge in the lower 48 states. There is a 6-miles driving loop and an easy .5-mile nature trail where we often see moose. From the refuge it is a 15-minute drive (10 miles) to the town of Walden, where we will stop for supplies. Just out of the town of Walden there are a few ponds that are good for birds. From Walden it is a 25-minute drive (15 miles) to Lake John, where we will camp at Lake John for 2-nights.

Day 6, Lake John: We will re-visit the Arapaho National Wildlife Refuge driving loop and visit other areas of the refuge. Arapaho National Wildlife Refuge supports diverse wildlife habitats, including sagebrush steppe uplands, grassland meadows, willow riparian areas, and wetlands. This 23,464-acre refuge was established in

1967 primarily to provide suitable nesting and rearing habitat for migratory birds. We will also visit Delaney Lake and Butte.

Day 7, Boyd Lake: From Delaney Butte we will head to Boyd Lake via the Cache la Poudre River and Canyon. This route will take us up and over Cameron Pass at an elevation of 10,249 feet. We will make a stop at the pass for a short walk and to look for high elevation birds. There are numerous stops along the way for birding and wildlife viewing. The non-stop drive is 3 hours (150 miles), but it will take us most of the day. We will arrive at the Boyd Lake Campground in the late afternoon, and we will camp for 2-nights at this location.

Day 8, Boyd Lake: We will spend the day birding in areas near Briggsdale, Severance, and roads that are adjacent to the Pawnee Grasslands. The elevation is 4,800 feet.

Day 9, Drop off at the Denver airport: The Boyd Lake campground is an excellent area for birding, and we will spend the morning walking the trails. From our camp it is a 1-hour drive back to the Denver International Airport. If there is time, we will re-visit Barr Lake State Park on the way to the airport.