



Longs Peak Keyhole Route Guide



The Narrows in August

The Keyhole Route to the summit of Longs Peak (14,259 feet) is an extraordinary climbing experience. The route provides stunning views as it circumnavigates the upper mountain on the way to the summit.

For Your Safety

The Keyhole Route Is NOT a Hike

It is a climb that crosses enormous sheer vertical rock faces—often with falling rocks—and requires 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.

Stay on the marked route. Straying from it can be perilous. 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; don’t shortcut.

Start Early, Make Good Choices

- Begin your climb no later than 3 am to be off the summit early in the day. The 15-mile round-trip takes 10 to 15 hours on average.
- The most important part of your climb is preparing to safely return. Resist summit fever: enjoy the experience, but be willing to turn around at any time.
- Good choices are critical! The toughest part of the climb up Longs Peak is the last 1.5 miles from The Keyhole to the summit. Know your limits. If you’re too tired, turn around. If you don’t feel well or the weather changes, turn around.
- Stay together—don’t climb alone. Tell someone where you are going and when you expect to return.

Pay Attention to Altitude

High elevations can cause altitude sickness and may aggravate existing health conditions. Use caution. Take time to acclimatize to the park’s high altitude before attempting strenuous hikes. Rest, drink lots of fluids, eat salty snacks, and take progressively longer and more strenuous hikes. If altitude sickness persists, descent is the only effective treatment.

Longs Peak’s Weather is Extreme

Before starting your trip, check current conditions online (go.nps.gov/LongsPeak) or with a ranger (970 586-1206).

The most common snow- and ice-free time of year is mid-July through mid-September. However, weather and conditions vary. There is no way to predict weather on Longs Peak. The Keyhole Route can have ice, snow, and winter-like conditions at any time, requiring greater skill and judgment. Be prepared to quickly turn back during sudden, drastic weather changes.

Carry Enough Food and Water

Food is your fuel. Pack high-energy snacks. Eat before, during, and after your climb to help maintain your energy.

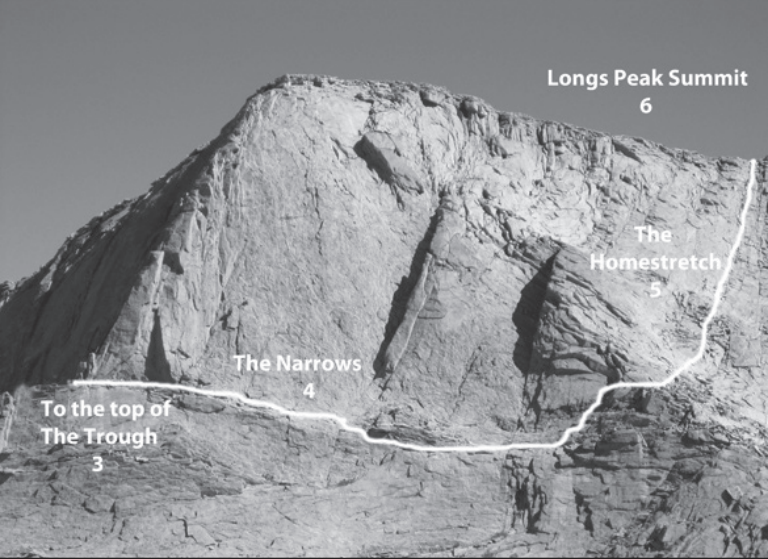
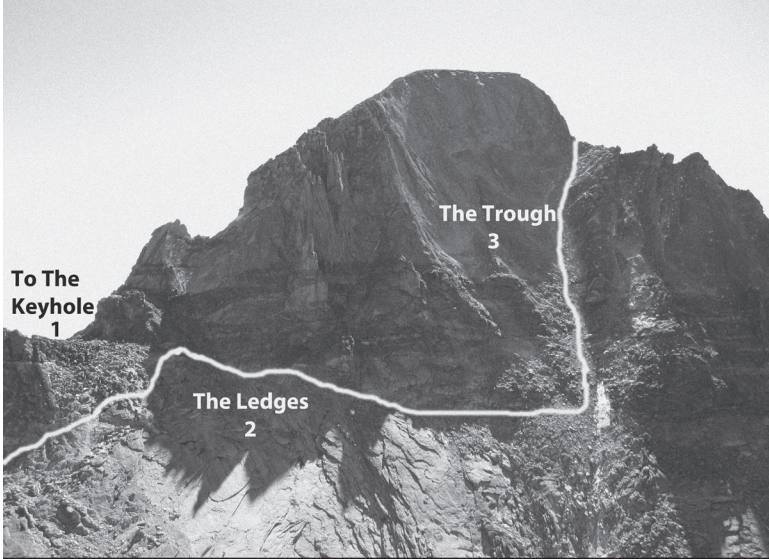
There are no water sources on the Keyhole Route. Bring at least 3–4 quarts. There are water sources lower down the mountain, but they must be properly treated.

Don’t Forget Other Important Gear

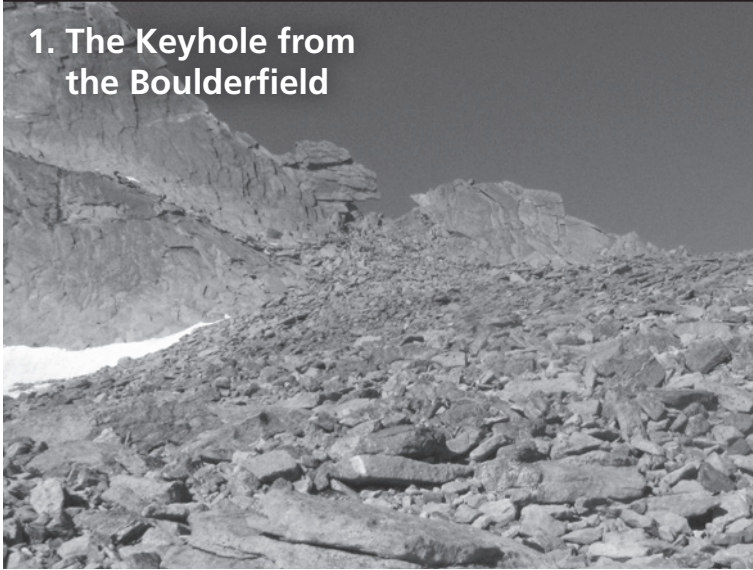
- ✓ Bring waterproof outer layers and extra layers for warmth, including a warm hat and gloves.
- ✓ Wear a hat, sunglasses, and sunscreen. Sunlight can damage your eyes and skin, even on cloudy days.
- ✓ Carry a map and compass or GPS. Know how to use them.
- ✓ Wear sturdy footwear with good ankle support and a treaded sole. Bring extra socks.
- ✓ Bring emergency items including a first aid kit, headlamp or flashlight, whistle, pocket knife, and emergency fire-starting materials.
- ✓ Don’t rely on cell phones. Many areas have no service.

Visit go.nps.gov/LongsPeak for more information and up-to-date conditions

The Keyhole Route (August conditions)



1. The Keyhole from the Boulderfield



When you reach the Boulderfield, the hiking trail ends. Cross boulder field terrain to reach The Keyhole, where the climbing route to the summit begins.

2. The Ledges



From The Keyhole, find the first of a series of red and yellow bull's-eyes marking 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 up 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 hands and feet and can have ice and snow throughout summer. Although there are many options, the bull's-eyes generally provide the best route to the summit.

6. The Summit



Once you've reached the summit, you're halfway on your journey. Take a moment, have a snack, and catch your breath. Make sure you're off the summit early in the day. Although possible 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.