

Fall Color Guide: Best hidden hikes, drives and events

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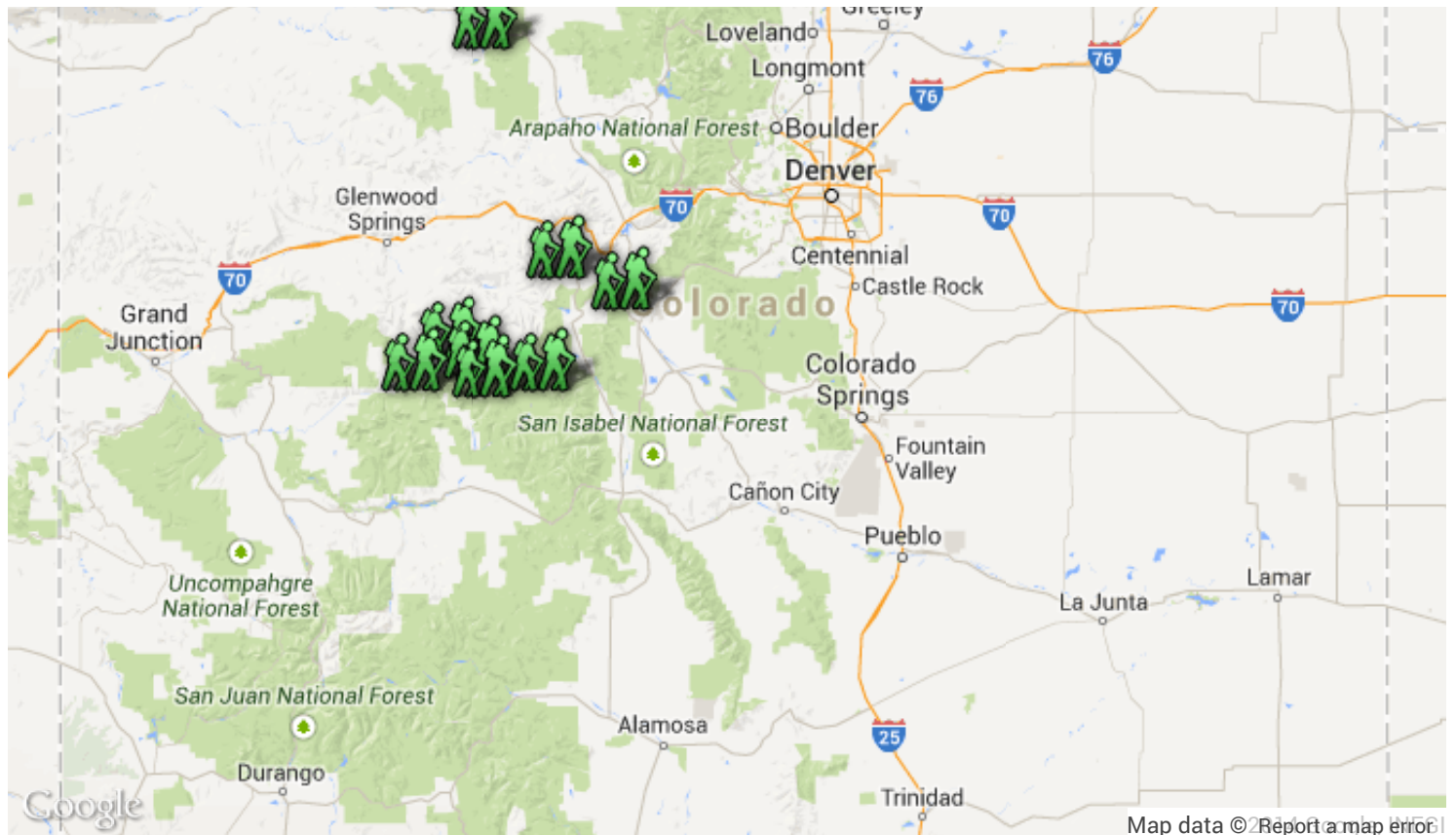
DENVER — Whether its by foot, by car or with a frosty beverage of some kind in your hand, there are all manner of great ways to see the autumn colors in Colorado this year.

And we here at FOX31 have put together a list of just a few great ways you can get out and check out the state's fall foliage.



Fall foliage at Roxborough State Park

By foot...



First up, here's a look at nine great fall color hikes that are off the beaten path, with descriptions courtesy of FOX31 Denver meteorologist Chris Tomer.

Cathedral Lake Trail

This is a stunning hike near Aspen with plenty of colorful aspen trees. It's roughly 7 miles roundtrip and the lake sits at the base of the 13er Cathedral Peak. On a calm day the lake takes on a glass-like appearance and is a beautiful green/blue color.

Getting there: Take Castle Creek Road at the roundabout just before you reach the town of Aspen and go past the old town of Ashcroft.

West Snowmass Trail

Before the newer Capitol Creek Trailhead was developed this was the standard route up Capitol Peak. This trail branches off from the popular Snowmass Trailhead and offers solitude and incredibly dense pockets of Aspen trees. You can wander as far up this trail as you like.

Getting there: Take the Capitol Creek/Snowmass Creek Road out of the old town of Snowmass.

Lead King Loop

One of my favorite places in Colorado. This area is worth the time and gas getting there. It's a huge 4x4 loop that starts near the town of Marble. The amount and placement of Aspen trees will blow you away along with the world famous Marble Mill.

Getting there: Hit the Lead King 4x4 road out of Marble.

Triangle Pass

A stunning and strenuous all-day hike near the Conundrum Hot Springs. The vista from the top allows you to see the Maroon Bells, Pyramid Peak, Conundrum and Castle Peaks. There are more Aspen trees than one can count on the way up to this Pass.

Getting there: Hike to Conundrum Hot Springs then continue up the valley following the trail to the top of Triangle Pass.

McCullough Gulch

This is the closest Fall Color hike to Denver on this list. It's really colorful and offers some great views of Quandary Peaks northeast slopes and Inwood Arete. It's popular in the Summer and Fall so plan accordingly.

Getting there: Drive to Quandary Peak and continue past the trailhead on the dirt road.

Steamboat Lake Loop

A real stunner. Huge pockets of colorful Aspen trees line Steamboat Lake. There are no bad photos. Lots of easy hiking trails circumnavigate the lake including a small harbor area.

Getting there: Drive north from Steamboat towards Hahns Peak for 45 minutes.

Steamboat Mountain Thunderhead Trail

A classic. This strenuous hike climbs Steamboat Ski Mountain while giving you amazing views of the entire Steamboat Valley. You can see all the way to the Flat Tops. Aspen trees are everywhere.

Getting there: Start at the base of Steamboat Mountain near the Gondola.

Holy Cross Wilderness

The 14er Holy Cross is a world icon and the wilderness contains big pockets of Aspen trees. I've seen bright golden Aspen trees through early October in this area. You don't have to climb the peak – just hike in as far as you want.

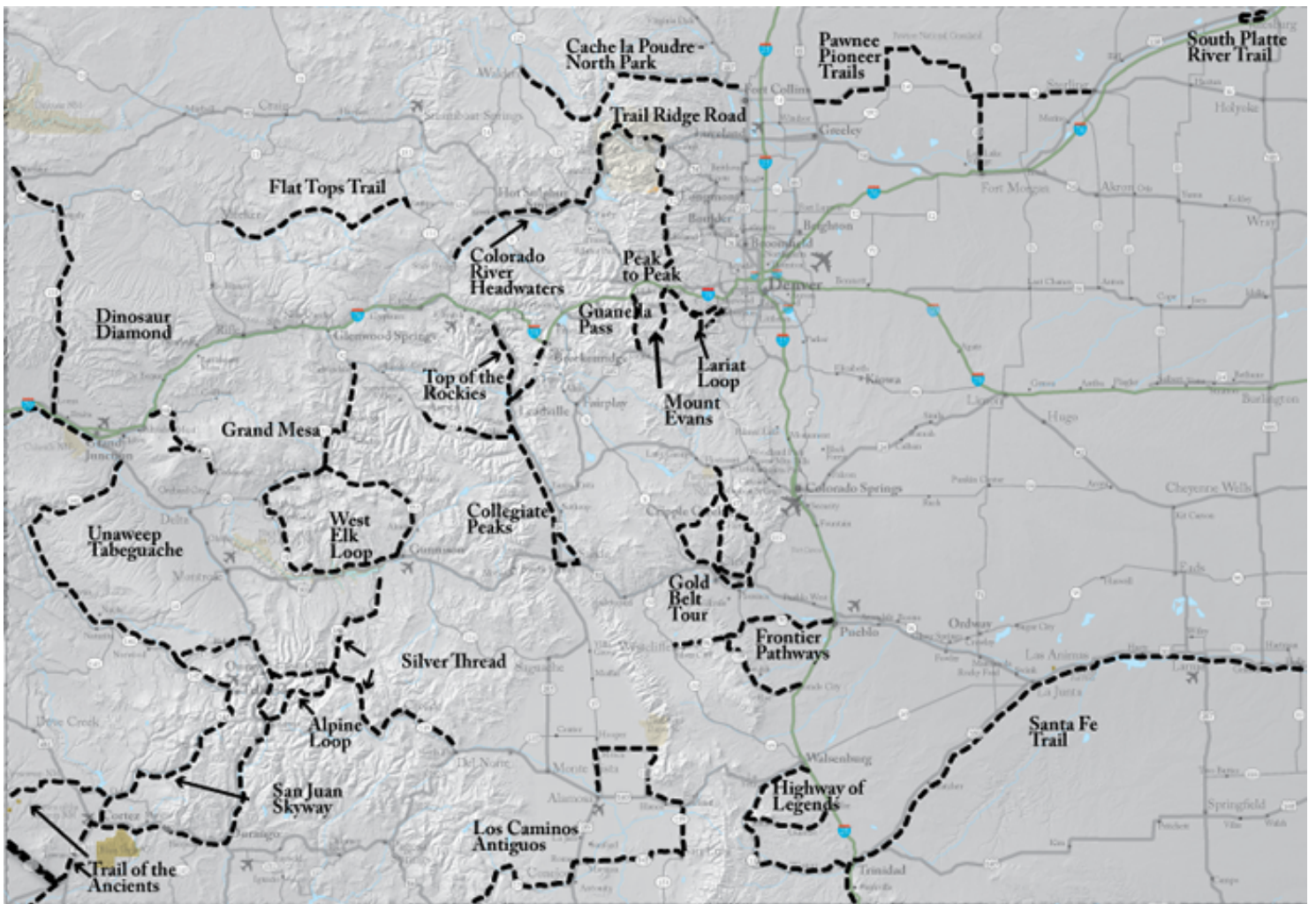
Getting there: Drive to Vail and turn south through the town of Minturn. The turnoff for the trailhead involves a drive up Tigiwon Road.

Grizzly Peak "A" via McNasser Gulch

This is the highest 13er in Colorado, but it's the approach to the peak that interests me. There are fiery Aspen trees everywhere.

Getting there: Drive up highway 82 and park at the La Plata Peak trailhead. This is a grand place full of big mountain vistas. Continue hiking past the turnoff for La Plata Peak.

By car...



The Colorado Department of Transportation released the following list of recommended routes for specific dates in September and October.

You can find travel information about Colorado Scenic and Historic Byways on their website, as well as an interactive map of Colorado's bicycle byways.

West Elk Loop

The twin summits of Mount Sopris and the incomparable Black Canyon of the Gunnison anchor the ends of the West Elk Loop. Carbondale, Hotchkiss, Crawford, Gunnison, Crested Butte, and other towns offer a slice of Colorado's rich history, varied lifestyles, and natural fall beauty.

Pawnee Pioneer Trails

This byway traverses the rugged Colorado Piedmont, a wide-open region anchored by the towering Pawnee Buttes. The landscape provides refuge for coyotes, prairie dogs, rattlesnakes, pronghorn antelope, and hundreds of bird species.

Silver Thread Scenic and Historic Byway

The colorful old mining camps of the Silver Thread offer history, scenic beauty, and a heavy dose of authenticity. The heights around Creede and Lake City remain strewn with abandoned mining structures, most of them accessible via rugged back-country roads.

Frontier Pathways

This old frontier zone south of the Arkansas River marked the intersection of Native American, Spanish, French, and American territories. The route spans from Westcliffe east to Pueblo and all the way south to Colorado City.

San Juan Skyway & Unaweep Tabeguache

You start with the major towns along the route — bustling Durango, picturesque Telluride and Victorian jewels Silverton and Ouray. Then you continue to Mesa Verde National Park, home to one of the densest collections of prehistoric ruins in the U.S. and five million acres of undisturbed national forest.

Alpine Loop

The Alpine Loop leaves pavement and people behind, crossing the remote, rugged, spectacular heart of the San Juan Mountains. It's demanding — the two 12,000-foot passes (Cinnamon and Engineer) require a high-clearance 4-wheel-drive vehicle — but the well-prepared motorist reaps unparalleled rewards: pristine views, hiking and biking, camping and ample solitude.

Peak to Peak

Less than an hour from Denver, Boulder, or Fort Collins, this 55-mile-long route provides matchless views of the Continental Divide and its timbered approaches. There is also a string of popular attractions along the way, including Rocky Mountain National Park, Golden Gate Canyon State Park, Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests, the Indian Peaks Wilderness Area and Eldora Ski Resort.

Cache la Poudre-North Park

This byway links Fort Collins with verdant North Park, a quiet, bowl-shaped valley just west of the Continental Divide. The road runs through the Cache la Poudre River canyon.

Collegiate Peaks

This paved 57-mile route parallels the Continental Divide at the foot of the Sawatch Range, the highest concentration of 14,000+ foot peaks in the country. The greater part follows the Arkansas River, the most commercially rafted river in the nation, a world-class kayaking destination, and one of the state's premier trout fishing resources.

Scenic Highway of Legends

From the impenetrable heights of the Sangre de Cristos and Spanish Peaks to the ominous redrock abutments of the Dakota Wall and the Devil's Stairsteps, this land is truly larger than life. An extension was recently added to the byway from the town of Aguilar on I-25 west over 11,248 ft. The 35-mile extension follows Huerfano/Las Animas County Road #46 through the San Isabel National Forest.

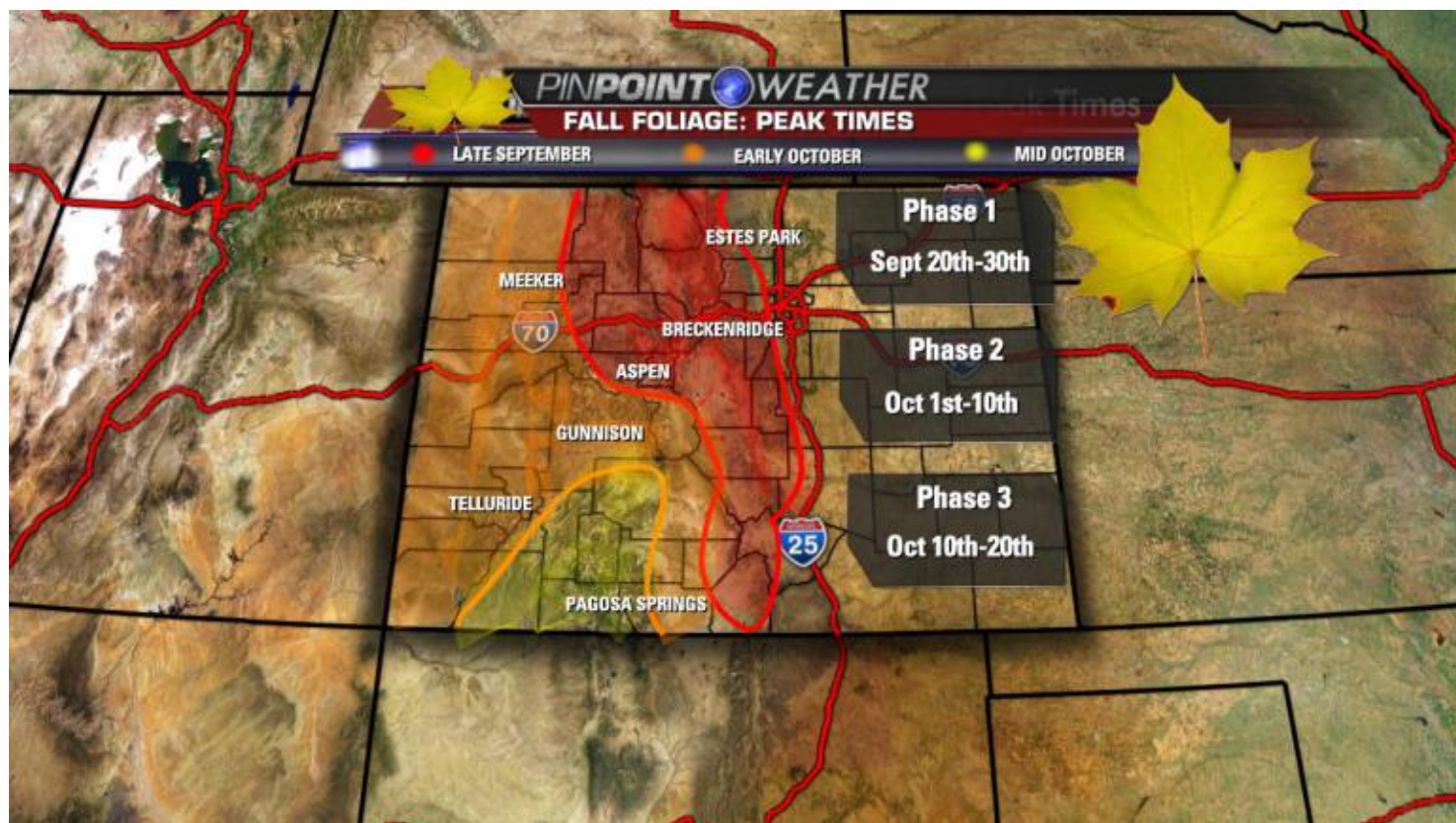
Trail of the Ancients

This 114-mile route across the broken, arid terrain of the former Anasazi civilization is heavily laden with cliff dwellings, rock art and pottery shards. Hovenweep National Monument and Mesa Verde National Park both contain dense clusters of Anasazi remains, and the Anasazi Heritage Center in Dolores offers background and interpretive information.

Gold Belt Tour Scenic and Historic Byway

In the early 1890s the mining towns in the shadow of Pikes Peak enjoyed the greatest gold boom the state has ever known. This 131-mile circuit tours historic Cripple Creek, Florence, McCourt, Adelaide, Wilbur, Victor, and other former gold camps.

Optimal times, events...



Fall officially arrives on Sept. 22, and peak viewing times for fall color typically last from the third or fourth week of the month through the middle of October.

However, trees could peak early if an unexpected cold snap or high winds happen during this time.

Need an event to get you motivated and out the door? Below are 16 of them, along with some scenic hikes and byways that could coincide with each.

- **Sept. 18-21: Colorado Mountain Winefest, Palisade**
Byway: West Elk Loop
Hike: Lead King Loop
- **Sept. 18-21: Breckenridge Film Festival, Breckenridge**
Byway: Guanella Pass
Hike: McCullough Gulch
- **Sept. 19-20: Steamboat OktoberWest, Steamboat Springs**
Byway: Cache la Poudre-North Park
Hikes: Steamboat Lake Loop, Steamboat Mountain Thunderhead Trail
- **Sept. 19-21: Pedal the Plains, Fort Morgan & Sterling**
Byway: Pawnee Pioneer Trails
- **Sept. 19-21: Creede's Fall Color Cruisin' the Canyon Car Show, Creede**
Byway: Silver Thread Scenic and Historic Byway
Hike: Cathedral Lake Trail
- **Sept. 19-21: 20th Annual Chile & Frijoles Festival, Pueblo**
Byway: Frontier Pathways
- **Sept. 20: Mountains to the Desert Bike Ride, Telluride & Gateway**
Byway: San Juan Skyway & Unaweep Tabeguache
- **Sept. 20, Uncorked Wine & Music Festival, Lake City**
Byway: Alpine Loop
- **Sept. 20: Autumn Gold – A Festival of Bands, Brats 'n Beer, Estes Park**
Byway: Peak to Peak
- **Sept. 21: North Park Stockgrowers Ranch Rodeo, Walden**
Byway: Cache la Poudre-North Park
- **Sept. 23-27: Historic ATV Color Tour, Buena Vista**
Byway: Collegiate Peaks
Hike: Grizzly Peak "A" via McNasser Gulch

- **Sept. 25-28: Spanish Peaks International Celtic Music Festival, La Veta**
Byway: Scenic Highway of Legends
- **Sept. 26-28: Mancos Valley Mesa Verde Country Balloon Festival, Mancos**
Byway: Trail of the Ancients
- **Sept. 26-Oct. 1: Aspen Filmfest, Aspen**
Byway: Top of the Rockies
Hikes: Triangle Pass, West Snowmass Trail
- **Sept. 26-Oct. 5: Dining at Altitude, Restaurant Week, Vail**
Byway: Top of the Rockies
Hike: Holy Cross Wilderness
- **Sept. 27-28: Harvest Festival, Cañon City**
Byway: Gold Belt Tour Scenic and Historic Byway