



FAMILY-FRIENDLY HIKES IN BOULDER, COLORADO

HIKING

By Kühl Editor on 10/03/22

Table of contents [\[hide\]](#)

- 1 Trail Safety
- 2 Choosing the Right Trail
 - 2.1 Boulder Creek Path
 - 2.2 Bobolink Trail
 - 2.3 Wonderland Lake Loop
 - 2.4 Flatiron Vista
 - 2.5 Flagstaff Realization Point
 - 2.6 Chautauqua Park
 - 2.7 National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR)
 - 2.8 Boulder Falls

Boulder, Colorado is a wonderful place to introduce children to a natural habitat adjacent to an urban environment. Visitors to the city can take advantage of 45,000 acres of city-owned open space land and over 150 miles of trails. Every day of the year, residents and visitors use this trail system for walking, hiking, running, biking, horseback riding, and rock climbing.

While it may be tempting to stray off trails to look at something unique, please stay on designated paths and off designated habitat conservation areas. Rare vegetation can be destroyed by people who are careless and do not respect the park's rules.

Decades after I first came to this college town as a student, I still stop on trails to capture images. No two visits are the same. As children explore the terrain, they experience the biodiversity of different ecosystems. Trails adjacent to Boulder Creek showcase different types of flowers, grasses, shrubs, and trees than the rockier trails at higher altitudes near NCAR or Flagstaff's summit. These scenic places are habitats for a variety of local and migratory birds, as well as small and large mammals. Sightings of mule deer, squirrels, and chipmunks are common, while coyotes, red fox, mountain lions, and black bears are less likely. Recommended by City of Boulder ranger Maria Mayer, the [Boulder Trails App](#) provides access to all trail information.

Trail Safety

When trekking through Boulder's open space and parks, be aware of your surroundings and be prepared for wildlife encounters. If a bear is nearby, talk loudly so that the bear knows that you are there. Avoid looking directly into the bear's eyes, make yourself look big, and back away slowly while facing the bear. To lessen the likelihood of dog-bear encounters, Boulder has imposed dog-leash restrictions on numerous trails from August 15 through November 1.

Choosing the Right Trail

For your family adventure, consider children's ages, athletic ability, and capability to adapt to a higher altitude. By starting with easier terrain, parents can assess what's best for their family. Make sure everyone is wearing appropriate shoes and clothing. Carry plenty of water, healthy snacks, and [a lightweight jacket](#). Weather conditions can change quickly.

If you have only a few days in Boulder, it can be challenging to select the best trails from the long list of options. After visiting these trails countless times with our children and grandchildren, I'm sharing some of our favorite family-friendly trails.



Kid-friendly Bobolink Trail, Boulder, Colorado

With a moderate climate and 300 days of sunshine, most of Boulder's trails can be accessed year-round.

Helpful Hint: Some trail head parking lots require day use fees.

Boulder Creek Path

Parents pushing strollers or walking with preschoolers share this mostly paved path with bicyclists, walkers, rollerbladers, and runners. From Boulder Canyon in the west to the Stazio Ballfields in the east, people find access points to explore Boulder at their own pace. Some segments of the path run through the business district. Stroll past the Boulder Farmers Market from the first weekend in April through the Saturday preceding Thanksgiving. Two popular options for parking are Settler's Park on Canyon Boulevard and Scott Carpenter Park at 30th and Arapahoe Avenue. Look for tubers floating down the creek during the summer months.

Bobolink Trail

Another mostly flat option with memorable views of South Boulder Creek and the foothills is the 2.5-mile Bobolink Trail. With a limited number of parking spots at the trailhead on Baseline Road, consider arriving early on weekends and during summer months. It's possible to extend this short adventure by taking the Cherryvale Trail or the South Boulder Creek Trail. Even though mosquitoes can be an issue, many families picnic along the partially shaded trail.



Three generations of Bornsteins on Bobolink Trail

Wonderland Lake Loop

If you're looking for a leisurely stroll around a small lake without much shade, consider the Wonderland Lake Loop trail. On some days, it is possible to see hang gliders and paragliders sailing overhead. These individuals launch from the top of the Wonderland Hill Trail and land in a nearby field.



Wonderland Lake Trail

In this wetland area, just a few miles north of the University of Colorado campus, it is possible to encounter prairie dogs, mule deer, fox, coyote, rattlesnakes, and raptors. Children also see a combination of streams, open waters, prairie grasslands, foothill woodlands and shrubs. Fishing is permitted, but be aware that state fishing regulations are applicable at this site.

Flatiron Vista

Driving South on Highway 93, visitors will spot the parking lot and trailhead for Flatiron Vista. In addition to the shorter loop (less than 2 miles) and the longer loop (a little more than 3 miles), adventure seekers can connect with the Marshall Mesa network of trails and the Dowdy Draw Trail.



Views on Flatiron Vista Trail

In a meadow setting, these trails offer wonderful views of Boulder's majestic Flatirons. Seasonal closures may occur due to muddy conditions. Parts of the Marshall Mesa were temporarily closed after the devastating Marshall Fire in December 2021. Check the [Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks website](#) for current conditions and closures.

Flagstaff Realization Point

To reach Realization Point, drive up Baseline Road and navigate a series of switchbacks and hairpin turns. Drive slowly, and share the road with cyclists.



Artist Point

Parking will be a premium at the Flagstaff Summit, so start early. From this amazing location, hikers can access several trails, picnic areas, restrooms, the Flagstaff Nature Center, and the Sunrise Circle Amphitheater. On a clear day, don't miss the opportunity to capture wonderful images of Boulder and the surrounding area.



Sunrise Circle Amphitheater

Chautauqua Park

A visit to Boulder would not be complete without a visit to Chautauqua Park. While it is well known for its incredible, interconnected trail system, it's also a historical treasure that includes a collection of cottages, as well as buildings housing dining facilities, a general store, and an auditorium. To avoid the hassle of looking for a parking spot on summer weekends, the city runs a free shuttle from Memorial Day through Labor Day.

Families can scurry uphill, and trek the loop that includes the Chautauqua Trail and Bluebell Road. Smaller legs may find the incline to be a bit demanding. Amazing photo opportunities are available throughout this hike. If you arrive before the crowds, you may be able to see deer grazing alongside the path.



Trail at base of Chautauqua Park

Another option is to take the McClintock/Enchanted Mesa Trails which originate near the Chautauqua Auditorium. More advanced hikers will seek out the rockier and steeper terrain that reaches the 1st and 2nd Flatirons and Royal Arch. It is also possible to reach Gregory Canyon via the Bluebell-Baird Trail. Don't forget to download a Chautauqua map before heading out.

National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR)

At the summit of Table Mesa Drive is an iconic building designed by I.M. Pei, an award-winning modernist architect. The structure houses the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR), a world-class research facility specializing in earth system science.



Mesa Trail near NCAR

NCAR is hard to miss, especially when driving north toward Boulder on Highway 93. While most of the trails are rated as moderately challenging, there are a couple of shorter trails that families can try. School age children may appreciate the signage on the short Walter Orr Roberts Trail and some of the rock filled trails heading toward the foothills.

Boulder Falls

It takes approximately 15 minutes to travel from downtown Boulder to Boulder Falls. The scenic drive on Canyon Boulevard is a bonus. While hikers may be disappointed by the short walk from the parking area to the waterfall, people who appreciate this natural phenomenon will stand in awe. The rocky cliffs and coniferous trees offer a magnificent backdrop for the 70-foot-high waterfall. The ebb and flow of Mother Nature's handiwork will be affected by the time of year and mountain precipitation. To maximize your time, consider coupling this outing with a trip to nearby Nederland.



Sandy & Ira at Boulder Falls

When Sandy Bornstein isn't trekking in Colorado or writing, she's [traveling with her husband Ira](#). After living as an international teacher in Bangalore, India, Sandy published an award-winning book, [May This Be the Best Year of Your Life](#), as a resource for people contemplating an expat lifestyle and living outside their comfort zone. For more information on Boulder, check out Sandy's second book, [100 Things to Do in Boulder Before You Die](#).
