



# COLORADO MOUNTAIN CLUB

## BACKPACKING SECTION



## BACKCOUNTRY CACHE

A Newsletter for Members of CMC Backpacking Section

January 2026

### CHAIR'S CORNER - Louise Campbell-Blair



While Colorado's snow seems to be taking its sweet time, your BPX Committee definitely isn't! We've been busy kicking off our 2026 Educational Series, and the season is already off to a strong start. Earlier this month, **Daniel Schweissing** got us dreaming of cozy nights and epic routes with his seminar on Planning Winter Hut Trips. Coming up next week, **Wayne Howell** will dive into the ins and outs of Winter Camping, followed in February by **Craig Townsend's** CalTopo training to help you dial in your navigation skills.

Our BPX Trip Leaders love it when participants come prepared, so we hope you'll bundle up and join us for these sessions. And if there's a topic you're itching to learn more about, let us know—we're all ears!

Waiting for snow but looking forward to summer, BPX remains focused on preparation, education, and shared adventure.

Stay connected with us – we love hearing from you on our socials and at [cmcbpx@gmail.com](mailto:cmcbpx@gmail.com).

### BPX SUMMITS - Save the Dates

Save the dates for the upcoming Trip Leader and Member Summits! Both will be hybrid events with In-person at the CMC Basecamp and also via Zoom. More information coming soon.

**BPX Trip Leader Summit:** March 19

**BPX Member Summit:** May 7

### BPX EDUCATIONAL EVENTS

## The Joys and Wonders of Winter Backpacking

Mon, Jan 26 06:30 to 08:00 PM

Led by Wayne Howell, explore the essential skills and systems that make winter trips not just possible, but enjoyable—including how to stay warm, build effective shelter and sleep systems, and fuel your body with smart winter nutrition. This session will break it down into practical, approachable pieces, helping you gain a new appreciation for snowy landscapes and crisp nights, and inspiring you to take the next step and truly embrace the wonder of winter.

Register

---

## Learn How to Navigate with CalTopo

Thu, Feb 26 06:30 to 08:00 PM

Getting lost is very uncomfortable at the least, and terrifying at the worst. The good news is that this can be avoided. Learn how to navigate with CalTopo and be safe in the backcountry. This training is geared towards trip participants as well as Trip Leaders. In it we will cover how to import a GPS Track from the trip leader into your smartphone, then how to follow that Track while recording your Route while in the field. Plus more! Registration opens on January 20 at 7AM.

Register

---

## Stop the Bleed, Save a Life

Fri, Feb 6 06:30 to 08:00 PM

The **ACS Stop the Bleed®** class is for **ALL** CMC members and will be at the CMC Basecamp. It empowers participants with lifesaving skills to respond to severe bleeding emergencies. This hands-on course, developed by the American College of Surgeons, teaches how to recognize life-threatening bleeding and confidently use direct pressure, wound packing, and tourniquets—skills applicable in everyday life, the workplace, and the backcountry. Whether you're a seasoned outdoor enthusiast or simply want to be prepared to help in a crisis, this practical, fast-paced training provides the knowledge and confidence to act when minutes matter most.

Register

---

## BACKCOUNTRY PERMIT TIME

### Mark Your Calendars: 2026 Backcountry Permit Open Dates

If backpacking is on your 2026 bucket list, permit day is where it all begins.

Knowing exactly **when** backcountry permits open is the difference between scoring a dream itinerary and refreshing Recreation.gov in frustration. Below we've rounded up the permit dates for 4 of Colorado's most sought-after backpacking areas so you can mark your calendar, set reminders, and be ready to book when reservations go live. Let's get planning!

In order of open dates:

#### Great Sand Dunes National Park - OPEN NOW!

**What you need to know:** This national park is quieter than Rocky Mountain, but has some truly special backcountry options! You can camp on the sand dunes (called *Dunes Backcountry*) or in designated sites off of the dunes along the Sand Ramp Trail. Lisa Shroyer led a trip to the Little Medano site in 2024; read her trip report [here](#).

*The best time to go is mid May through mid June.*

**Reservation Availability:** Permits are available year-round on a rolling basis, 3 months prior to your trip start date.

Learn about backpacking Great Sand Dunes [here](#). Book permits [here](#).

### **Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness**

**What you need to know:** The “Four Pass Loop” is one of the most beloved (and competitive) backpacking circuits in the country. Permits are issued by zone, so it's important to plan your itinerary carefully and chose zones that align with your daily milage and elevation gain (Remember: 4 passes!). [Here](#) is a BPX route with a suggested itinerary for reference.

**Reservation Opening Date:** February 15, 2026 at 8 a.m. MST. Book permits [here](#).

### **Rocky Mountain National Park**

**What you need to know:** RMNP has 12 backcountry permit zones, so it helps to research where you want to camp before permits open. The Wild Basin zone is a favorite among BPX trip leaders, with great options for both easier and more challenging routes, including campsites near stunning high alpine lakes.

Favorite BPX routes in RMNP are: [Bluebird Lake](#) [Sandbeach Lake](#) [Andrews Creek](#)

**Reservation Opening Date:** March 1, 2026 at 8 a.m. MST.

Learn about RMNP backpacking [here](#). Book permits / campsites [here](#).

### **Indian Peaks Wilderness**

**What you need to know:** This wildly popular wilderness area has 17 permit zones, so studying the Backcountry Zone (BZ) [map](#) ahead of time is key. The most competitive zone is Crater Lake BZ, which offers the iconic Crater Lake and its reflection of Lone Eagle Peak. For the epic (and challenging) Buchanan-Pawnee loop, you'll need to reserve permits for multiple zones and plan your itinerary carefully.

Favorite BPX routes in Indian Peaks are: [Crater Lake](#) [Pawnee-Buchanan Loop](#) [Watanga and Upper Stone Lakes](#)

**Reservation Opening Date:** March 3, 2026 at 8 a.m. MST

Permits are required for trips between June 1 and September 15, 2026. Reserve permits [here](#).

*Brought to you by BPX. Let's make 2026 an adventure!*





*BPX Trip Lisa Shroyer backpacking the Pawnee-Buchanan Loop in Indian Peaks Wilderness, Sept 2025*

**NOTE:** Check the BPX Website for the 2026 Fee-Free days in National Parks, National Forests, and Colorado State Parks. You may want to avoid these dates since general public attendance could be higher than normal.

## BPX TIPS OF THE MONTH

### New Years Resolutions for Backpackers--Simple goals for the new year.

1. Stay hydrated. Find an electrolyte and water bottle you like and **drink**. Water is free, and hydration can boost your performance, endurance, and motivation.
2. Wash your sleeping bag. This removes oils and dirt that can lower its insulation, and it may even smell better.
3. Always use sunscreen for any outside activity, including a high SPF lip balm. (I just had a friend die from melanoma, so the risk is real!).
4. Fix holes and zippers in your hiking gear. If you're like me and sew as well as you cook, use an [outdoor gear repair service](#).
5. Take someone camping or hiking for their first time. Nothing is better than sharing the outdoors!
6. Try a new hobby like hiking with your dog, fly fishing, or a climbing gym, and find a new adventure to go on.
7. Eat better food on the trail—a key to how you feel, perform, and recover. Consider dehydrating your own backpacking meals. And stay tuned for an upcoming BPX backpacking cooking event with **Chef Corso**.
8. Keep exercising, including in the off-season! And don't forget yoga to reduce stress, increase flexibility, strengthen muscles, and help sore muscles recover. Here are some [hiker-specific exercises](#) to get you going.
9. Work on your mental health with meditation and learning to be more present. Spending as little as 15-20 minutes outside in a natural setting can decrease heart rate and cortisol levels.
10. Try using a WAG bag to reduce your impact on the land.
11. Give back a little by volunteering for trail work or an outside organization. Helping with the BPX Committee is "a most excellent choice"!
12. Let your local and state representatives know that you support public lands and stay informed about public land issues.

*Reference:* Treeline Review Staff. "26 New Year's Resolutions for Outdoors People in 2026". Treeline Review, 22 Dec. 2025, <https://www.treelinereview.com/learn-skills/new-years-resolutions>

*Reference:* Roy, Adam. "Become a Stronger Hiker in 2026 With These 5 Tiny Adjustments". Backpacker, 28 Dec. 2025, <https://www.backpacker.com/skills/beginner-skills/5-small-adjustments-that-will-make-you-a-stronger-hiker-in-2026>

## Sustainability, Recycling, Leave No Trace

Someone asked me on a recent snowshoe 'What's different about Leave No Trace in the winter?' Although we still need to follow all the principals, we should pay more attention to 'Travel on Durable Surfaces'. Avoiding areas with thin snow cover – of any type – is of primary importance. The general guideline from Leave No Trace is that 6 to 8 inches of snow can usually be considered as a durable surface, but be mindful of the extra damage your traction devises might cause.



## BPX WINTER TRIPS

Not ready to store your camping gear for the winter just yet? Wayne Howell has 2 BPX winter trips--no crowds, no bugs, no bears; just a cozy night beneath the winter sky for a true cold-season adventure.

*The January trip had to be postponed until March due to not enough snow to melt for water.*

Dates / Registration Date	Difficulty	Trip
Mar 25-26 Wed-Thu	Easy	<a href="#">Lost Lake from Hessie TH (Roosevelt National Forest)</a>
Apr 2-3 Thu-Fri / Mar 2	Moderate	<a href="#">Wind River Basin from East Portal TH (RMNP)</a>

**Continue to check the CMC Website since Leaders add trips throughout the season.**

## DENVER WILDERNESS TREKKING SCHOOL

**Starts April 7**

Hiking may not be as easy as it looks! Do you know all you need for staying found, for braving Colorado's rapidly changing weather, for handling an emergency? Wilderness Trekking School (WTS) is for all – whether you want to bag a few 14ers – OR – just want to enjoy the scenery. WTS is a comprehensive course on day hiking in the mountains, with no prerequisites. If you're new to hiking, WTS provides the opportunity to learn how to travel safely and confidently in the backcountry. If you're an experienced hiker, WTS gives you a chance to review and enhance your skills, and possibly to fill in some gaps. It is also a great introduction to the Colorado Mountain Club and a place to meet new friends. Student ages range from 18 to 80, with about half under 40. WTS is a prerequisite for Backpacking School, Alpine Scrambling Course, and Technical Climbing Schools.

The course consists of streaming videos on your own, 5 Tuesday night in-person small group meetings (with a possible Zoom option), 5 field days, and weekly homework (yes, really!). Students are divided into groups of 8-11 people, based on preferred field day, with consideration as possible for fitness level.

The curriculum includes safe backcountry travel techniques and opportunity to practice them in a supportive environment. Students plan and complete a graduation hike with their field group. WTS is a great place to learn and practice new skills, make new friends, and become a safer, more confident backcountry traveler.

Tuition is \$170 until 1 week before class, \$190 on and after Tuesday March 31. Registration opens **Tuesday January 13**.

For more information, including a complete schedule of lectures and field trips and enrollment instructions, please visit our web site at [Wilderness Trekking School](#), or search “wts denver” on [CMC.org](#). Information is also available by calling the CMC office at 303-279-3080.

## SCHOOLS

*Note:* CMC has received approval from A3 (American Avalanche Association) as a Recognized Provider Network, with alignment to A3's risk management practices and confirmation that volunteer and professional instructors are using the AIARE curriculum. To become a certified AIARE instructor takes about 4 years and continuing annual education. CMC certified instructors are: Uwe Sartori (Denver), Ken Yaphe (Denver), Kristin Buckland (PPG), and Jill Yarger (Boulder Group).

DENVER	
DAY HIKER SCHOOL	More info <a href="#">here</a>
ACS STOP THE BLEED	<a href="#">Feb 6</a>
AIARE L1	Starts <a href="#">Feb 6</a> <a href="#">Mar 6</a> <a href="#">Mar 13</a>
WINTER CAMPING SCHOOL	Starts <a href="#">Feb 10</a>
AVALANCHE TERRAIN AWARENESS (ATA)	More Info <a href="#">here</a>
INTRO TO HIKING SAFETY	<a href="#">Mar 25</a>
WILDERNESS TREKKING SCHOOL	Starts <a href="#">April 7</a>

---

PIKES PEAK	
WILDERNESS FUNDAMENTALS	Starts <a href="#">Feb 23</a> <a href="#">May 11</a> <a href="#">Sep 14</a>
AIARE AVALANCHE RESCUE	<a href="#">Mar 8</a>
WINTER WILDERNESS SURVIVAL	Starts <a href="#">Mar 9</a>
LAND NAVIGATION	Starts <a href="#">Jun 1</a> <a href="#">Sep 28</a>
INTRO TO BACKPACKING	Starts <a href="#">Jun 17</a> <a href="#">Aug 5</a>

---

NORTHERN COLORADO	
AVALANCHE RESCUE	<a href="#">Feb 14</a>
AIARE L1	Starts <a href="#">Feb 27</a>
MOUNTAIN HIKING COURSE	Starts <a href="#">March 9</a>

---

## STATE

WILDERNESS FIRST AID/FIRST RESPONDER*	Multiple Offerings - Check CMC Website <a href="#">here</a>
TRIP LEADER SCHOOL	More Info <a href="#">here</a>
TRIP LEADER SCHOOL SCENARIOS	<a href="#">Boulder</a> <a href="#">Denver</a> <a href="#">Pikes Peak</a> <a href="#">Western Slope</a>
AVALANCHE RESCUE COMPANION	<a href="#">Feb15</a>

\*In collaboration with CMC Youth Programs, childcare will be offered for the Wilderness First Aid Certification Course on Feb 21 for kids 6 and up. More info [here](#).

**Continue to check the CMC Website for additional courses.**

### *CMC Backpacking Section Supports Leave No Trace*

[View BPX Calendar](#)



#### The Colorado Mountain Club

15605 W. 32nd Ave., Golden, CO 80401  
303.279.3080 ext.#3

[Manage](#) your preferences | [Opt Out](#) using TrueRemove™

Got this as a forward? [Sign up](#) to receive our future emails.

View this email [online](#).

15605 W 32nd Avenue | Golden, CO 80401 US

[Subscribe](#) to our email list.