

[Bill Menke's Outdoor Journal for 2026. This year is complete].

January 1, 2026. Dallas and I flew into Denver in the late afternoon. After renting a car and checking into the Marriott Residence Inn (East 40 Circle, Aurora, Colorado), we drove to the nearby Parkfield Lake Park (Maxwell Place, Denver). This small suburban park, though dominated by ball fields and a large pool building, has a pedestrian / ATV trail around Parkfield Lake (a small pond). The temperature was unseasonably warm – in the high fifties, Fahrenheit. Numerous waterfowl were swimming in the pond. The snow-covered high peaks of the Rocky Mountains were visible in the west. We walked around the pond as the sun set, lighting up the western sky orange. We saw a few squirrels high up in the trees along the path. The twilight was upon us as we finished the loop and returned to our car.

We had dinner at the El Patrón Grill and Cantina (East 40 Avenue, Aurora) before returning to our hotel.

January 2, 2006. After checking out of the Marriott, Dallas and I drove west along Interstate 70. Not unexpectedly, given the warm temperatures, very little snow is on the ground in the foothills of the Rockies. After stopping at Dumont (town) to pick up our sports equipment from the locker we rent there, and having coffee at Vail Mountain Coffee and Tea (Route 308, Dumont), we drove up to Summit County, arriving about 1 PM. There is more snow here, but the cover is unseasonably thin - just a few inches. We donned our micro-spikes and hiked in the Dillon Nature Preserve, starting at the trailhead off of Route 6. The day is overcast and a bit breezy. We climbed up onto the wooded ridge that parallels the Snake River Arm of Dillon Reservoir, and visited Dillon Point, a viewpoint on the edge of a cliff on the reservoir side of the ridge. It's provides superb view of reservoir and of the nearby snow-covered peaks. We were not surprised to find that much of the reservoir is ice-free. We then hiked a loop through the woods, following first the cliff-edge and then doubling back on the lower flank of the ridge. 2:00.

We stopped for coffee and pastries at True Blue Coffee (Dillon Ridge Road, Dillon Colorado). Afterward, we checked into our rental (398 Hummingbird Circle, Silverthorne, Colorado), a house where we have stayed for the last several years. Joshua, Hannah and Katie Hood arrived late in the evening.

January 3, 2026. The day is clear. Joshua, Hannah, Katie Hood, Dallas and I hiked to the overlook on the Gore 60 Trail that is between North and South Willow Brooks in the Eagle's Nest Wilderness (Silverthorne, Colorado). The day is sunny and just a little below freezing. We all wear micro-spikes, for the snow on the trails is thin and fairly well packed down. Starting from the trailhead at the top of Willowbrook Road in Silverthorne, we make out way along the Ditches and North Willow Brook Trails, passing through stands Aspen, Spruce and Lodgepole Pine Trees. Even more of the diseased Lodgepole Pines have been cut down since last year and made into wooden teepees, making the land more barren but the views more expansive. I spot a Snow Fly, a small insect capable of tolerating sub-freezing conditions. We connected with the Gore 60 Trail and after crossing the footbridge over North Willow Creek huffed up onto a highland with our lunch spot. Katie, from Scotland, was surprised that we were aiming for a particular tree trunk that we have been using as a bench for a decade or more. It would not have

lasted so long in the moist Scottish climate. I fired up my MSR stove and made tea for the group, and we ate sandwiches and chatted. We headed back the same way we came. 3:15.

January 4, 2026. The day is clear and just a little below freezing. Katie is feeling the altitude and is resting in bed. Josh is flying back to Monterey, California, today. Before dropping him off at the shuttle stop in Frisco, Colorado, the four of us drove over to Sapphire Point, a viewpoint along Swan Mountain Road in Frisco. It affords a splendid view to the southwest, including Dillon Reservoir and several of the nearby snowy mountains, such as Ten Mile Peak and Buffalo Mountain. The Reservoir's water is unfrozen, except around the very edges, and the level is very low, with the islands of Frisco Bay (where we had kayaked during the 2018 Abbott Family Reunion) now reunited with the mainland. We walked the short loop trail. A small stone amphitheater has been built along the trail since our last visit. It has a northwestward view.

Before dropping Josh off at the Shuttle Stop, we had coffee and pastries at Rocky Mountain Coffee Roasters (Main Street, Frisco, Colorado), sitting outside in the sun.

In the afternoon, Dallas and I hike in the Eagle's Nest Wilderness, starting from the trailhead at the top of Willowbrook Road in Silverthorne, Colorado, wearing micro-spikes. We take the South Willow Brook Trail. It first crosses several streams via footbridge, climbs up onto a ridge that I suspect is a glacial moraine, and then follows the bank South Willow Brook for a while. The stream is flowing in a broad wetland. A viewpoint affords a terrific view of the stream, the wetland and, in the distance, towering Buffalo Mountain, backlit by the sun. We transferred to the Mesa Cortina Trail at the signpost and then walked that trail to footbridge over the South Willow Brook and the Gore 60 Trail signpost. We were pleased to see that part of Gore 60 that heads over a highland towards our lunch spot of two days ago had been broken. We then hurried back the way we came, for the afternoon was growing late and the shadows were lengthening. 2:00.

In the evening, Hannah drove Katie down to Denver, which is four thousand feet lower in elevation, because her altitude sickness has persisted. Dallas' cousins, Sue and Dean Lausten are hosting them.

January 5, 2026. Dallas and I hiked wearing micro-spikes to Lily Pad Lake, taking the uphill route that begins at the Meadow Creek Trailhead near the easternmost Interstate 70 Frisco Exit. The day is overcast with occasional light snow. So little snow is on the Meadow Creek Trail that we discover that part of it is actually a staircase, with thick wooden beams crossing it about every six feet. They had been deeply covered with snow on all our previous visits. We transferred to the Lily Pad Trail at the junction. By my count, it a four stages: a slowly climbing section, across a pedestrian bridge and through woods; a switchback section that crosses a marshy meadow, where the trail follows the top of a low ridge that might be an esker; a straight section with two excellent viewpoints that look eastward toward Dillon Reservoir and Ptarmigan Mountain; and a switchback section through woods that leads up to the lake. We found a sheltered lunch spot by some rocks on the shore of the lake (really more of a small pond), for the wind-driven snow was beginning to fall. I set up the MSR stove and made tea for a quick lunch

(though the snow had mostly abated by the time we finished. We then headed back the way we came. 2:15.

January 6, 2026. It a beautiful, clear day. Dallas and I hike the Ptarmigan Peak Trail, me on snowshoes and she on micro-spikes, staring at the trailhead at the top of Ptarmigan Trail (road) in Silverthorne, Colorado. The first part of the trail is steeply uphill across a bare knob of a hill. The views of Buffalo Mountain and Dillon Reservoir are excellent, and the scrub vegetation protruding from the thin snow are pretty. This section of trail really doesn't have enough snow for snowshoes, but I persevere. The trail then descends the hill, passing through very beautiful open woods of Aspen and Spruce Trees. After crossing a power line right-away, it ascends Ptarmigan Mountain by a steady climb along its flank. This section has a wonderful view of Red Peak, a huge triangular horn that is devoid of any trees and is vaguely red in color.

Unfortunately, our progress was slowed by many fallen trees. Some were Lodgepole Pines, which we expected because of the disease that is killing them, but others were Aspen, which surprised us and made us think that perhaps the area recently experienced a windstorm. I counted thirty-four of these obstacles, most of which we could step over or walk around, but four of which we had to crawl beneath. Our progress was slowed, so much that we never reached the Angler Trail intersection, which we were shooting for. Instead, we had lunch on a log that was somewhat precariously perched on the hillside above the trail, with an excellent view of Red Peak. Thirty-four obstacles later, we were back at the trailhead and our car. 3:00.

In the evening, Hannah and Katie returned from Denver, with Katie much improved.

January 7, 2026. It's a clear day. Dallas and I ski at Keystone, parking at the Mountain House A lot and taking the Peru lift up onto Dercum Mountain. The snow conditions are adequate, for the resort has been making snow as fast as it can, but not great. We ski exclusively on Dercum and take the easiest trails, as this is our first day of the season. We do Spring Dipper and Paymaster, finding the latter rather too icy. After skiing four runs, we have lunch at Summit House, the lodge atop Dercum mountain. After lunch, we ski three more, bringing our total up to seven. 3:00.

In the late afternoon, Dallas, Hannah, Katie and I drive to Sapphire Point (Frisco, Colorado). We go via the Dillon Dam Road, so that Katie gets a good view of the dam and reservoir. As we drive by the Old Dillon Reservoir Trailhead, I make a mental note hike it sometime soon, for I have never done it. The sun is setting between clouds above Tenmile Peak as we walk the short loop trail around the Point. 0:30.

January 8, 2026. Dallas, Hannah and I ski at Keystone, while Katie hangs out in the Mountain House lodge. Some new snow has fallen overnight – perhaps six inches – improving the conditions of the trails. We ski five runs on Dercum Mountain, including Spring Dipper and Paymaster (but finding the latter still too icy). We end the fifth run at Mountain House, where we have lunch with Katie. Afterward, Hannah and I ski four more runs. Our route takes us to the North Peak, via Mozart (which is better than we expect) and Last Alamo (which is icier than we had hoped). We ski Paymaster for the last run, and manage to avoid the icier patches, now that we know where they are.

January 9, 2026. We get a late start, owing to being tired from yesterday's skiing. Around noon, Dallas and I hike again the South Willow Brook Trail in the Eagles Nest Wilderness, starting at the trailhead at the top of Willowbrook Road (Silverthorne, Colorado). I'm wearing snowshoes, Dallas micro-spikes. The day is partly sunny and the snow-covered conifer trees are especially beautiful. We stop to admire the wetland around South Willow Brook. We hike only as far as the Mesa Cortina Trail junction. 1:45.

Katie has now substantially recovered from her bout of altitude sickness. She, Hannah and I take a short hike in the Dillon Nature Preserve, wearing micro-spikes. We start at the Route 6 Trailhead and huff up the many steep switchbacks that climb the ridge. The sky is alternately sunny and cloudy and we are fortunate to catch some sunny moments when we reach Dillon Point. The views of the nearby rocky cliff, the Snake River Arm of Dillon Reservoir below us and Buffalo and Red Mountains in the distance is terrific, especially as the mountains sport beautiful cloud caps. We hike straight back, the way we came. 1:00.

In the evening, we have dinner at Timberline Craft Kitchen & Cocktails (Rainbow Drive, Silverthorne, Colorado). I have short ribs and an IPA.

January 10, 2026. Hannah and Katie headed back to Scotland in the morning. In the early afternoon, Dallas and I hiked from Zach's Stop in Frisco, Colorado to Rainbow Lake, taking the Peaks Trail. It's a short hike; we are saving our energy for a long one tomorrow. The day is clear and cold and the view of nearby Royal Mountain and more distant Buffalo Mountain is incredible. The first part of the trail crosses a wetland via a long puncheon. We pause to admire its beauty. Frost flowers are "blooming" on the surface of ice that covers a little stream. The trail then enters woodland, roughly following the base of Tenmile Peak. Unfortunately, large patches are completely deforested, owing to the removal of diseased Lodgepole Pine. We found a red bandana in the trail – possibly from somebody's dog – and hung it in a nearby bush to await the return of its owner. We soon reached the lake, which is really more of a pond. I think may be a moraine lake, as its downhill side seems to be impounded by a low hill that stretches more than the length of the lake. We walked around the uphill side of the lake, admiring the great view of Buffalo Mountain across it. We then took a short but steep path that led to Miners Creek Road. I found a stump protruding from the snow onto which I could set the MSR stove to make tea. We had lunch sitting on a rock near the roadside - the same rock that we have used in previous years. We then headed back the way we came. 1:45.

January 11, 2026. Today, Dallas and I took our "long hike" through the Eagles Nest Wilderness (Silverthorne, Colorado) – the one where we follow South Willow Brook up into the hills below Buffalo and Red Mountains, cross a highland area via the Gore 60 Trail, and return following North Willow Brook. The loop is a little more than six miles long. We've done two sections of it already during this vacation: the north side as far as the high viewpoint on Gore 60 (which we did with Josh, Hannah and Katie) and the south side as far as where the Mesa Cortina Trail intersects Gore 60 (which we did with just ourselves). Each was straightforward, so we have confidence that we can do the whole loop. However, the trick is the middle section, which is hilly and has a stream crossing. We began mid-morning, with the sun shining. As we already knew, the South Willow Brook Trail was well-tamped down by previous hikers. The South

Willow Brook wetland and Buffalo Mountain beyond it were beautifully lit by the morning sun. Frost flowers glittered on icy sections of the brook. We trotted along, me on snowshoes and Dallas on micro-spikes, and soon reached the Gore 60 intersection. We were glad to see that backcountry skiers had broken the trail up onto the highlands. I think of this trail as having four segments: a slow rise through open woods (well, diseased Lodgepole Pine woods) with good views of the surrounding high peaks; a slow descent through beautiful (and often cold) Spruce woods; a level traverse across fields and through Spruce groves, terminating in the stream crossing; and an ascent of a very hummocky highland region, with the trail twisting to avoid many little hollows and leading to our “lunch spot”. The first two sections were easy and we covered them in good time. Unfortunately, the skiers had left the trail to enjoy the meadow at the beginning of the third section. Although a few hikers had traversed the trail, they passed before the most recent snowfall, so the trail was covered with six inches of fresh powder. We were slowed down considerably. The stream crossing was also challenging. The unseasonably warm weather had made the stream wider than we had encountered in the past. We did not use the normal ford, which hitherto fore we could just jump across, but instead hunted around upstream, where the valley is wider, for an easier route. The going was manageable for me on snowshoes, but Dallas on micro-spikes had a lot of trouble with potholing in the unusually deep snow near the stream. We crossed at a high spot that may have been a snow-covered beaver dam and then bushwhacked back to the ford. The detour expended rather too much time and energy. The traverse of the fourth segment was straightforward but slow. The trail was easily recognized, both by the depression of the snow due to previous hikers, and by the many saw-cut fallen trees along its edges. Nevertheless, as it was the least familiar part of the trail, our nerves were at edge, as we dare not get lost. The trail, covered by six inches of powder, was also pretty slow. We resorted to walking twenty-five paces and then resting for a moment before starting again. Eventually – but well past lunch time - we reached the lunch spot. We sat on the log there, eating our lunch and drinking water laced with Nuun hydration tablets. During the course of the day, the sky has gradually developed a high haze and the air had grown a little colder. We left our lunch spot and continued along the trail, now upbeat, for we were covering very well-known ground. Nevertheless, the trail, though mostly downhill, was still covered by powder and still very slow. We hiked for another hour and a half before we finally reached our car. 5:30.

Actually, our time was only a half hour longer than in 2020 and 2022, when we took five hours each to complete the loop under much better conditions.

January 12, 2026. A sunny day with temperatures in the high twenties, Fahrenheit. Dallas and I skied at Keystone out of the Mountain House lodge. The snow quality is adequate at best, so we stayed on the better groomed trails on Dercum Mountain, such as Spring Dipper and Paymaster. We did five runs and then stopped for a break at Summit House. I mostly stayed outside, sitting in the sun, for I was too warmly dressed to stay inside for long. I had taken a bottle of Nuun tablets with me, and used the lodge’s complementary water to make myself a hydration beverage. Afterward, I skied two more runs, the last my “long route” in which I zigzag down the mountain taking mostly beginner trails to maximize the distance travelled. 3:00.

Just after sunset, the clouds on the western horizon lit up a beautiful orange, giving the silhouettes of the high peaks west of Silverthorne a brilliant halo of color.

January 13, 2026. Dallas and I hike to Old Dillon Reservoir, starting at the trailhead off of Dillon Dam Road (Silverthorne, Colorado) and wearing micro-spikes. The day is mostly sunny and very warm – in the low forties, Fahrenheit. The reservoir, which is set in a little hollow on top of a low hill, is reached by a pedestrian path that climbs the hill in a series of switchbacks. The view from the top is excellent, especially to the south, looking down into (new) Dillon Reservoir. The Old Reservoir is very small – perhaps a quarter mile across – and impounded by a low earth-fill dam on its south side. Today, it is covered with snow, in contrast to the new reservoir, which mostly has clear ice and open water. We have lunch sitting atop boulders that are set near the pedestrian path that encircles the Old Reservoir. One is a tan quartzite with glacial striae and the other is a reddish granite; a much larger boulder grey granite with xenoliths of gneiss stood nearby and acted as a windbreak. I set up the MSR stove and made tea. We then walk east along Orahood 9039 (a woods road) as far as a vantage that provide a great view of the main Dillon Dam. About a foot of snow was on the road, but a well-packed trail had been tamped down by previous hikers. Our route back took us completely around the Old Reservoir. Most of the pedestrian path had at least some snow, but we had to take our micro-spikes off as we crossed the dam, for it was bare gravel, and put them back on once we started our descent of the hill. 2:15.

January 14, 2026. It's a sunny day. Dallas and I ski at Keystone Ski Resort, out of the Mountain House Lodge. Conditions are OK, though some of the trails are fairly burned off. We have lunch at Summit House, atop Dercum Mountain and I spend some time sitting outside in a deck chair. Looking westward, I can see a fire burning in the foothills of the western mountains. I suspect that the Forest Service is burning off disease-killed Lodgepole Pine Trees. We do seven runs, in all, five before lunch and two after. My last run is the long one that zig-zags down the mountain, mainly following Schoolmarn. It is less burned off than most trails – perhaps because it is less steep. 3:00.

January 15, 2026. It's another sunny day. Dallas and I ski at Keystone Ski Resort, again out of the Mountain House Lodge. We ski over to the North Peak. I was expecting Mozart, which leads down off Dercum Mountain) to be horrible, for it often burns off early, but find it to be pretty good. On the other hand, I find Prospector to be horrible – nothing but hardpack. My skis make loud scraping sounds as I descend. We have lunch at LaBonte's BBQ. I sit outside in a deck chair, watching skiers come down the expert-level Starfire Trail. I have avoided it this year, for it (and probably most of the steeper trails) are very burned off. After lunch, we ski Santa Fe and Spring Dipper. The former has a stretch of moderate-sized moguls. They take focus to ski, but are a pleasant alternative to sliding on hard pack. Once again, I ski the long zig-zag route down the mountain. 4:00.

Dallas, however, decides to ski a more direct route down Paymaster. After I finishing my run, I get a call from her, saying that she fell after hitting a brick-sized rock that was poking up out of the too-thin snow the middle of the trail, has injured her right leg, and is being hauled down the

mountain in a sled by the Ski Patrol. I stow my gear and walk over to the nearby CommonSpirit Emergency and Urgent Care clinic, and await her arrival.

Four hours and a CT scan later, the doctors determine that no bones are broken. Dallas has been lucky.

January 16, 2026. The morning is very windy and cold. Dallas is limping around the rental house today, for the muscles in her right thigh are swollen and painful. I decide to pack up our gear and bring it back to our ski locker in Dumont, Colorado, so that our departure tomorrow is easier. The wind is howling and the snow is drifting as I drive Interstate 70 eastward. I spend a half-hour carefully squeezing everything into the locker, and then take a break at Vail Mountain Coffee before heading back.

January 17, 2026. The cold wind persists. Dallas' leg, though still painful, is much improved from yesterday. We pack up our gear, tidy up the rental house and headed back east to the airport. We've allowed plenty of time, and stop at Vail Mountain Coffee along the way. We try to spot Bison as we drive by Genesee Park, but see none. We have no trouble returning our rental car and making our way through Security to our gate. However, our plane is very late in leaving Denver. The flight crew is looking for a passenger they say is on the plane but shouldn't be. After an hour of checking everyone's ticket and searching all the lavatories, they determine that it was all some sort of mistake; no unauthorized person was aboard. Where was Jodie Foster when we needed her!

A little snow was on the ground when we arrived home in Tappan at midnight, New York and a little more fell during later that night.

January 19, 2006. I hiked to Upper Pound Swamp in Harriman State Park, New York. The day was partly sunny and a little below freezing. Six inches or so of snow was on the ground. A I parked at the pullout off of Route 106 and headed north along the Suffern Bear Mountain Trail (blazed in yellow), wearing micro-spikes. I took a short detour to admire Minisceongo Creek. It was flowing, though not strongly, and its mid-stream rocks capped with snow. I huffed up to the Irish Potato, a very large glacial boulder on the hilltop. This area is pretty, with snow-dusted Blueberry Bushes and snow-capped boulders beside the trail. I then transferred to an old woods road that took me down to the Swamp (which is more of a pond). I walked along it shore as far as the dam, which is dangerously eroded. I then headed back the way I came. 2:10.

I had heard in the news that a large solar flare was expected to cause aurora to be visible in the New York Area, so at about 8:30PM I drove to the Anthony Wayne Parking Lot in Harriman State Park in an attempt to observe them. Although some clouds passed hung over the northern horizon, I think that I would have seen them had they been active. But though I watched the sky for a half hour or so, taking occasional time exposures with my cell phone camera, I saw nothing. 0:30.

January 24, 2026. I hiked in the Rockleigh Woods Sanctuary (Rockleigh New Jersey). The day was cold, about 17F, with thin overcast. The trails were covered with ice and hard-packed snow and were ideal for micro-spikes. I first visited Sneden Ice Pond, a small impoundment near the

entrance of the Sanctuary. Its surface is covered with irregular white ice. I then hiked a loop up the western flank of the ridge of the Hudson Palisade, taking the trail that follows the southern bank of Roaring Brook uphill and the trail that follows its northern bank back down. The brook is in a substantial valley; in places one might even call it a gorge. It is flowing sluggishly, with some open water and lots of ice formations, including small ice falls. The sun brightened towards the end of my hike, making the snow sparkle. 1:15.

January 25, 2026. Snow began to fall around sunrise and continued to fall steadily all day, so that by mid-afternoon a foot or more lay on the ground. The temperature was about 12 Fahrenheit and the wind was moderate. I donned my snowshoes and walked a loop through the neighborhood. Snow was still falling and a light wind blew snow in my face. I took Pine Tree Lane and Kings Highway to the Sparkill Bicycle Path, walked a quarter mile along the path, and then took Sparkill Avenue, Washington Street and Campbell Avenue to the short pedestrian path through woods that connects back to Tina Place and Pine Tree Lane. Shoeshoeing was challenging. Progress was very slow in the deep snow on the sidewalks, even as the plowed roads lacked adequate snow. 1:30.

January 26, 2026. A total of 22.5 inches of snow fell during the storm. Dallas and I spent considerable effort shoveling the walk and driveway, heaping up five-foot high piles on their margins. In the mid-afternoon, after the snow had tapered off, and the temperature was 17F, I drove to Tallman Mountain State Park (New York) and snowshowed a short loop through the woods. I took the Orange Path to the Long Path and walked the latter as far as its intersection with the Bicycle Path. Another snowshower, ahead of me, had broken a trail. I enlarged it by walking out of sync with his footsteps. I exchanged greetings with him as our paths crosses when he was heading back. As I was almost back to my car, the sun poke through the clouds, lighting up the snow formations beautifully. 1:15.

January 27, 2026. It's a cold (15 F) and sunny morning. I park at the Lamont Campus and snowshoe up Old Route 9W to State Line Lookout (Alpine, New Jersey). The snow deeply covers this disused section of highway. My progress is slow. I walk up the hill in sets of fifty two-sided paces, with a short rest between sets. Only one person, in boots, has walked the road since the snowfall, and they leave it at the entrance to the Lamont Woods. In contrast, the road is crossed by many animal tracks. I inspect each as I come to it: the delicate tracks of birds and Squirrels, only slightly imprinting the snow's surface; the deeper paw marks of a Coyote; the deep post-holes of Deer. The morning sun casts shadows of tree trunks across the road, giving it a corrugated appearance. I am expecting to find a well-trampled trail when I reach the top of the hill, for that area is close to the Lookout's parking lot, but I find it is unbroken, too. The parking lot is only now being plowed out. I walk close to the cliff edge as I make my way to the Lookout. The view of the Hudson River and the Hudson Palisade cliffs is terrific. The river is blue, with huge octagonal plates of ice, with raised edges, floating near its banks. Although some snow clings to the cliffs, they are for the most part bare brown rock. The snow at the Lookout is unbroken too. I walk out to the end and gaze north, up the axis of the Hudson River. The area around Nyack seems to have mid-river ice. I retraced my route back to Lamont, walking out of sync with my outgoing footsteps, to enlarge the trail. 2:15.

