

COAL BANK PASS TRAIL TO MEADOW BELOW ENGINEER MOUNTAIN, SILVERTON, COLORADO

The Coal Bank Pass Trail is a very popular wildflower trail for both locals and tourists during the summer months. (We had hoped to do the Ice Lakes Trail as well on this trip, but we were informed that trail is even more popular, so parking for that trail would have been difficult.) When we arrived at Coal Bank Pass (around 8am), the trailhead parking was almost full, and hikers were starting to use the parking area at the nearby overlook.

Prior to this hike, the best wildflower hike I had done was the Meadows in the Sky on Mt. Revelstoke, BC. This wildflower hike certainly surpassed that one, not only in quantity and density of the flowers but also in the variety of plants. (I would not have believed just how incredible these meadows of wildflowers are if I had not seen it for myself.) Note, however, that there are nearby trails (e.g. the part of the Colorado Trail near Little Molas Lake) which did not have the incredible wildflower display at this time.

Disclaimer: I do not know how much the quantity and location of wildflowers varies from year to year here.

I highly recommend obtaining a copy of the Latitude 40 TOPO map of Durango Trails for this hike. The trail from Coal Bank Pass to the Engineer Mountain Trail is about 2.5 miles, and it is moderately steep. From there, one can ascend on a use trail towards the climbers route up Engineer Mountain. The views from this use trail are incredible.

We had planned to continue north along the Engineer Mountain Trail to Jura Knob, and perhaps on to Rolling Pass. However, the threat of thunderstorms made us very concerned about hiking on the exposed ridges in this area, so we turned around after seeing the meadows below Engineer Mountain.

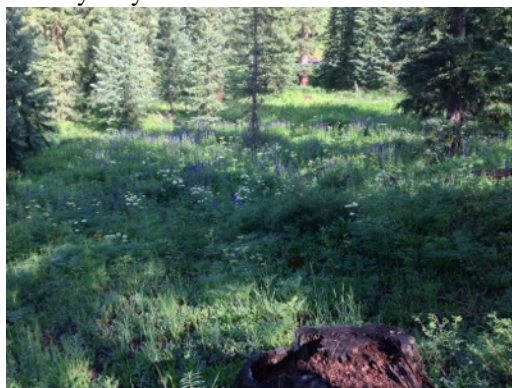
We did the Coal Bank Pass Trail in July of 2017.

Note: The Engineer Mountain Trail is not the same trail as this one. That trail is much longer, steeper, and overall more difficult.

View looking up at Coal Bank Pass from the main road (San Juan Skyway).



The wildflowers near the parking area were already very nice.



Cow Parsnip and Subalpine Larkspur (purple).



Looking up at the small peak marked 11,916 on the TOPO maps.



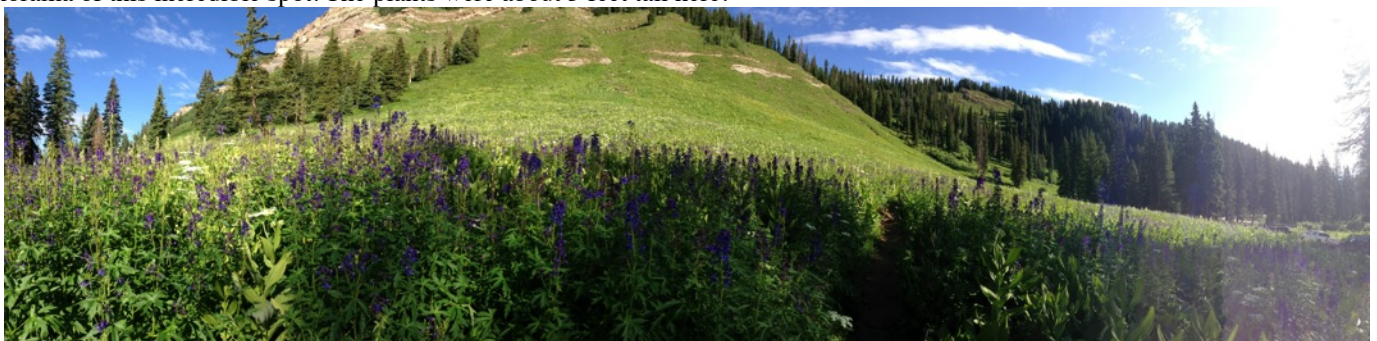
This one is called Nodding Sunflower. Note that we saw many bees on this part of the trail.



Here we are passing through a dense collection of tall flowering plants.



Panorama of this incredible spot. The plants were about 5 feet tall here.



The trail continues through this wildflower meadow for some distance.



Notice how the kinds of flowers have changed, from Subalpine Larkspur and Colorado False Hellebore (also called Skunk Cabbage) to Indian Paintbrush, Nodding Sunflower, and Cow Parsnip.



Close-up photo of Nodding Sunflower and Subalpine Larkspur.



Another panorama of this meadow, from where the plants are shorter and we are no longer in the dense patch of Subalpine Larkspur.



In the distance, up the hillside, we can see numerous Colorado False Hellebore.



Here we are in a thick patch of Indian Paintbrush.



The Colorado False Hellebore are now getting closer to the trail.



More Nodding Sunflowers here.



Looking up towards the ridge which the trail will eventually go behind.



Here is a particularly large bloom on a Colorado False Hellebore (left of center).



There were a few of these huge flowering plants scattered throughout the meadow (I'm not sure what they are called).



One last panorama of this amazing meadow of flowers. (We would be seeing another nice wildflower meadow later in the day.)



Looking back across the meadow towards the parking area. (Notice the trail follows the main road near the beginning of the hike.) I probably spent half an hour in this meadow and took about 150 photos here of the flowers.



Now the trail starts to enter the trees, but there are still many flowers.



HDR photo of the flowers along the trail as we start to enter the trees.



Colorado Columbine began to be a common sight along the trail.



More perfect Colorado Columbine near a small stream.



These flowers are very easy to photograph.



Notice how many Colorado Columbine and Indian Paintbrush can be seen in this picture.



I don't know what this pink flowering plant is called.



Looking back across the meadow and towards the peaks to the south as we start to gain elevation on the northeast side of the meadow.



Looking down towards the main road at all the wildflowers.



Here are some small white flowers which began to appear alongside the trail (I'm not sure what these are called).



The trail began to get steeper, but it never became as steep as trails in the Canadian Rockies.



We began to see small patches of Mountain Bluebells as the trail rounded a corner.



This looks like a "Lady's Slipper" sort of flower, but I can't seem to identify its name.



Three more interesting flowering plants I can't identify.



The patches of Mountain Bluebells began to increase in size.



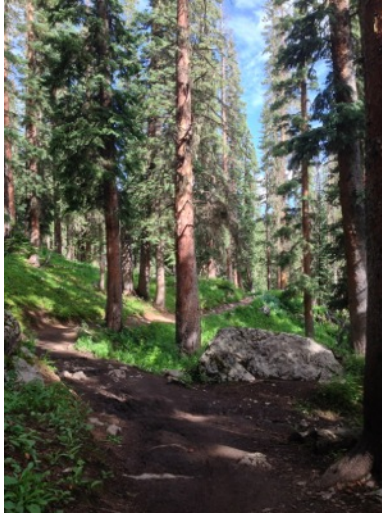
More Bluebells.



A small Parry's Primrose alongside the trail.



We soon left the major patches of varied wildflowers and began to instead walk through a nice forest.



The Mountain Bluebells, however, still appeared in large patches.



Even more Bluebells.



Notice how big this patch of Bluebells is.



This patch of flowers extends down the hillside for some distance.



A few Colorado Columbine also appeared.



Small patch of wildflowers near a switchback in the trail.



Soon, we encountered this small pond, which would have been a good lunch spot except that the mosquitoes and biting flies had the same idea.



We only saw these small red flowers, which I think are Parry Clover, in this one location.



There are more small pinkish-red flowers nearer to the pond (I couldn't determine if they were the same as the ones in the above photo).



The clouds were providing excellent lighting for HDR photography of the forest through here.



We hiked through another small patch of wildflowers similar to (but much smaller than) the one at the beginning of the hike. There were Cow Parsnip, Indian Paintbrush, Nodding Sunflower, and a few Colorado False Hellebore and Subalpine Larkspur.



Notice how the Mountain Bluebells are clustered around the tree stump in the center of this photo.

