

Castle Peak Instruction

IF THE GATE IS LOCKED, you have to walk all the way up to the base of Castle Pass.* It is quite obvious that this is where the road ends (in a turnaround loop at the base of a steep rise). Otherwise, save time + energy and drive to it. The trail takes off to right up the rise. About 1/2 way up another trail goes off to the right (and down). Do not take it. At the top, the pass is marked with a sign and a cairn of ornamental cinder blocks (!). Turn right here. The trail is mostly quite evident. At each of the "hilltopping" spots I make a little loop checking for species. 2/3 or so of the way up the trail sort of disappears in a place where you have to hop up some rocks to recover it. As I told you, Erik, do NOT attempt to take a diagonal to the ridge. The trail angles to the right (south) and brings you out just below the summit. I access the summit by scrambling up a little cleft on the N side. There are several Oxyria (alpine sorrel) there. After censusing the top and enjoying the view (stay on the bottle you're on, don't try to access the others!) go back through the cleft and follow the trail down onto the ridge, and along the ridge all the way to Basin Peak. Again, check out the "hilltopping" spots en route; be very careful near the cliff on the E side! As you approach Basin Peak the trail jogs rightward into rather thick shrubs and mule's ear, then left again and then up a quick but quite vertical and slippery climb to the top, where there should be lots of stuff. Continue to the N end and descend, well to the W of the snow. You will see the very decayed remnant of a jeep trail. It curves NW-ward, then back south. Stay with it. It will lead you through a couple of gooey, spongy spots, then down to a not-very-well-marked intersection with the main hiking trail (which at that point is going left from your perspective). Follow it via a series of switchbacks. It will lead you across a little stream and into the woods on granite at the edge of Round Valley, and ultimately into the Valley a little short of Peter Grubb Hut (you will need to find a creek - easy to find obvious). Continue past Peter Grubb on trail pointing toward the Pass. Do not try any X-country here! Rises rapidly - there should still be a little snow - then evens out essentially the rest of the way, to the Pass. You have now made a circuit. Someone should drive down to the bottom, but Erik, you need to walk down to the snow gate and continue listing species on the way down. At Castle Valley (big wet meadow on your left near the bottom), walk in, past the stream, go another 150' or so and come back out. (I couldn't do this last time because it was completely flooded). You should find podarcis, etc.) -mission accomplished!

* If you do walk up, do list butterfly species seen! If you drive you'll probably only spot a few.