

Hells Half Acre

Location & USGS Map

T22S.R5E.S14, Mount David Douglas

Difficulty

Moderate

Distance

3.0 miles round trip

Elevation gain

600 feet, 4450–5000'

Bloom period

early June to late August

Highlights

wetland habitats, butterflies

Directions

Drive east on Hwy 58 for over 15 miles past Oakridge. Just beyond where the railroad trestle crosses over the road turn left at Rd 5883, Eagle Creek Rd. After 5.5 miles, just before the road makes a hairpin turn to the left, look carefully for a trailhead somewhat hidden on the right. Park on the far side of the road.



Tall mountain shooting star (*Dodecatheon jeffreyi*) brightens a dreary day in the beautiful, oddly-named Hells Half Acre, the large wet meadow at the end of the trail. In the past, the trail continued up to Verdun Rock up past the west slope of the meadows, but that path has since disappeared.



Leathery grape fern (*Botrychium multifidum*) is an odd-looking fern relative. It gets its name from the resemblance of the upright fertile frond to a bunch of grapes. It is found occasionally in moist areas, often hidden among other plants. It can be seen in August growing in a partly wooded moist area just past the lower meadows on the Hells Half Acre trail.

Hell's Half Acre is an odd name for the destination of this little known hike. The meadow at the end of the trail is actually much larger than a half-acre and much closer to Heaven than Hell—at least to a botanist! The large sloping open area is ringed with forest. The higher and drier parts of the meadow are filled with beargrass and dotted with large conifers including a splendid old growth noble fir. The meadow slopes down on three sides creating a drainage down the middle where it is very wet. Shooting stars bloom here in late June followed by elephanthead and white bog orchids in early July and Bolander's tarweed (*Kyhosia bolanderi*) and grass-of-parnassus in late July and early August. This wet area forms a creek near the bottom of the meadow which crosses the trail on its way down into the woods.

The trail begins in the forest and very quickly crosses a pint-sized wetland complete with a small bridge. Look for the drooping white flowers of trillium-leaved wood sorrel here in late July. Several species of mitreworts and a number of wetland shrubs such as gooseberries and salmonberry grow here as well. The trail then switchbacks up a dry section of woods—fairly barren except for the interesting non-chlorophyll pinesap and diminutive orchid, western twayblade—before opening up into several meadow openings where glacier lilies and tall bluebells start the season in early June and asters still bloom in August. Butterflies frequent these meadows including many fritillaries which are attracted to the large patches of horsemint. Just before the meadows end, the trail heads off to the right into the woods, but this may be unmarked and hard to find. The trail continues through the woods for another mile before reaching Hell's Half Acre. Along the way look for the small yellow daisy-like flowers of Bolander's butterweed, pink alpine pyrola and bunchberry.