WELCOME to the Maroon Valley and the White River National Forest. Here you can explore a glacial valley surrounded by 14,000-foot peaks, view vast fields of wildflowers, and be close to Nature. The Maroon Bells form a backdrop that epitomizes the Rocky Mountains are all about. Mirrored in the waters of Maroon Lake, the Maroon Bells tower like massive sentinels over the valley. The mountains’ red color and distinctive bell shape led earlier explorers to give the Maroon Bells their name. From Maroon Lake, you can see into the Maroon Bells-Snowmass Wilderness, public land designated by Congress to be protected and managed to preserve its natural conditions. Careful use of this area will keep the natural treasures found here protected for generations. Enjoy your visit to the Maroon Valley.

Natural Habitats
The landscape of the Maroon Valley is covered by many different habitats that are home to a wide variety of plants and wildlife. These habitats include riparian zones near streams and other wet areas, mountain meadows, aspen groves, conifer forests, and high above the trees, alpine tundra.

Riparian Zones
Found in moist soils next to streams, riparian habitats consist mainly of shrubs such as willows, alder, and river birch, as well as blue spruce and aspen trees. Stands of riparian shrubs are good places to spot mule deer, who favor these areas because the shrubs provide good cover and food.

Mountain Meadows
Forest openings that are covered by grasses and wildflowers are important foraging areas for many wildlife species. Meadows are created by avalanches or fire, or because the soil is too wet or too dry for forest growth. Because of abundant sunshine, meadows harbor the greatest variety of wildflowers compared to any of the forest habitats.

Aspen Groves
Aspen trees grow as clones—many trees, all genetically identical, and all linked together through a common root system. Scientists consider all of the trees in a clone to be a single organism! Aspen sprout very quickly in newly cleared areas created by avalanches, fire, or timber harvest, and growth is stimulated by sunshine. Aspen trees have relatively short lives (only about 100 years or so) and are gradually replaced by spruce and fir.

Conifer Forests
Above Maroon Lake, conifer forests consist mostly of Engelmann spruce and subalpine fir, two tree species that are well adapted for the colder and wetter climates of higher elevations. Where the trees grow and how well they prosper relates directly to altitude, climate, the availability of sunshine and water, and disturbance factors such as fire and avalanches. Spruce and fir trees grow slower than aspen, but live longer, usually several hundred years.

Alpine Tundra
At high elevations, the rigorous climate makes tree survival impossible. Above the treeline, cold temperatures, a short growing season, and harsh, drying winds mean only small, specialized tundra plants survive.

Avalanche Country
Winter storms that bring snow to delight skiers often make the Maroon Valley extremely dangerous for travel because of avalanches. Avalanches send tons of snow plummeting from the steep peaks and ridges into the valley bottoms.

Throughout the Maroon Valley corridor, many of the mountain ranges appear to have little or no vegetation. Most often these are avalanche paths, swept clean of trees by sliding snow. Such treed scars remain for many years. Active avalanche paths are frequently grass-covered; less active paths are soon covered with shrubs and small trees. In the Maroon Valley’s narrow bottomlands it is not uncommon for an avalanche path to extend several hundred yards up the opposite side of the valley.

While traveling in the Maroon Valley, look for avalanche paths. The power of avalanches is obvious, even awe-inspiring, especially when you see the bottom of the path filled with broken trees and masses of debris. Imagine what the road you are traveling on would look like after an avalanche has covered it with a 20-foot deep pile of snow.

Forests and People
National Forest System lands are public lands managed for everyone’s benefit to use, enjoy, and help protect. While visiting the Maroon Bells, take the opportunity to learn more about the area.

We offer guided naturalist hikes and programs, some of which are conducted through our partnership with the Aspen Center for Environmental Studies. The interpretive program and the maintenance of the facilities and trails at the Maroon Bells are made possible through the fees collected as part of the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act.

The Forest Service strives for excellence and is attentive to public needs. If you have questions or suggestions, we would like to hear from you. You may contact any Forest Service employee, complete a visitor survey card, visit or call the Aspen District Office.

Comping/Picnicking
Camping is allowed in Maroon Valley only at the developed campinggrounds Silver Bae, Silver Bell, and Silver Queen. There are no showers or RV hook-ups. Advanced reservations can be made for these sites by calling toll-free 877/444-6777 or on the web at www.Recreation.gov. Picnicking sites are available at Maroon Lake and East Maroon Portal.

Concessions and Supplies
• There are NO vending machines, restaurants, or other supplies available at Maroon Lake. However, many Aspen area restaurants offer box lunches with advanced notice.
• Any food or beverage containers carried into the Maroon Lake or wilderness areas must be packed out. There are trash containers at the lake and on the buses.
• Public restrooms are located near the bus drop off/pick up points.
• Please remember to take only pictures and leave only footprints.

Meet the Residents
Walk quietly, look closely, and you may see some of the animals and flowers living here. But please, do not attempt to approach or feed wildlife.

• The behavior of larger wildlife species, such as bear, elk, mountain sheep, and deer can be unpredictable and dangerous.

• There are no poison snakes in the valley.

• Grizzly bears once roamed the valley, but now black bears are the only bears that occasionally wander through the area.

Walk quietly, look closely, and you may see some of the animals and flowers living here. But please, do not attempt to approach or feed wildlife.

• The behavior of larger wildlife species, such as bear, elk, mountain sheep, and deer can be unpredictable and dangerous.

• There are no poison snakes in the valley.

• Grizzly bears once roamed the valley, but now black bears are the only bears that occasionally wander through the area.

Walk quietly, look closely, and you may see some of the animals and flowers living here. But please, do not attempt to approach or feed wildlife.

• The behavior of larger wildlife species, such as bear, elk, mountain sheep, and deer can be unpredictable and dangerous.

• There are no poison snakes in the valley.

• Grizzly bears once roamed the valley, but now black bears are the only bears that occasionally wander through the area.
The Maroon Bells Bus Tour

To preserve the fragile ecosystem of the Maroon Bells, vehicle restrictions are in place on Maroon Creek Road during the summer. From 9am-5pm daily, all motorized vehicles are prohibited with the exception of overnight campers, ADA permittees and the RFTA Maroon Bells bus tour. Operated by the Roaring Fork Transportation Authority (RFTA), the bus tour provides visitors with a relaxed, scenic and educational trip from Aspen Highlands all the way to the Maroon Bells.

Getting to Aspen Highlands Village Free shuttle (five trips/hour) from the Rubey Park Transit Center in downtown Aspen. Free parking is available at Aspen Highlands.

Schedule Tours run daily from mid-June through Labor Day. After Labor Day, service continues on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays through September. Bus tours depart Aspen Highlands Village base area every 20-30 minutes, 9 am–5 pm.

Tickets Admission tickets provide access to both the bus tour and the Maroon Bells. Combination passes provide access to the bus tour, Maroon Bells and Silver Queen Gondola. Tickets are available at Rubey Park Transit Center in Aspen, and Four Mountain Sports in Aspen.

Access to the Maroon Bells Scenic Area

Macaroni Creek Trail: At the outlet of Macaroni Creek you can begin an enjoyable hike that winds its way downstream along Macaroni Creek, through rocky slopes, mountain meadows, and aspen forests. Wildlife can often be seen along the trail. At the end of your hike, the bus will pick you up on Macaroni Creek Road at the East Maroon Portal. Easy 3.2 miles one way.

Crater Lake Trail: For the more adventurous, this trail leaves the Macaroni Lake Trail at the Deadly Bells Kiosk. This steep and rocky trail enters the Wilderness, climbing an ancient rockslide that holds Crater Lake (10,076'). Be prepared for thunderstorms and cooler temperatures. Moderate 3.6 miles round trip.

You can help protect this area by staying on trails, especially through meadows and tundra, and not shortcutting trail switchbacks.

Throughout the White River National Forest, many other scenic valleys also offer wilderness backpacking worth exploring. Ask at local National Forest offices for suggested trails and related information.

Aspen Ranger District - 806 West Hallam Aspen, CO 81611 • 970/925-3445
Forest Conservancy - Box 3086 Aspen, CO 81622 • 970/925-3445

More Information • 970/925-8484
www.rfta.com