



HIKING - FOREST SERVICE - ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION  
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

NATIONAL FOREST - San Juan RANGER DISTRICT - Columbine

Updated: May, 2003

**Vallecito Creek Trail to Johnson Creek Trail to Columbine Lake #529 to #504**

**Use:** Medium

Length: 18 mi / 29 km

**Difficulty:** Moderate

**Recommended Season**

**USGS Map (s):** Vallecito Reservoir, Columbine Pass

Spring Summer Fall Winter



**Starting Elevation:** 8,000'

Trailhead at Vallecito Lake Campground

**Ending Elevation:** 12,000'

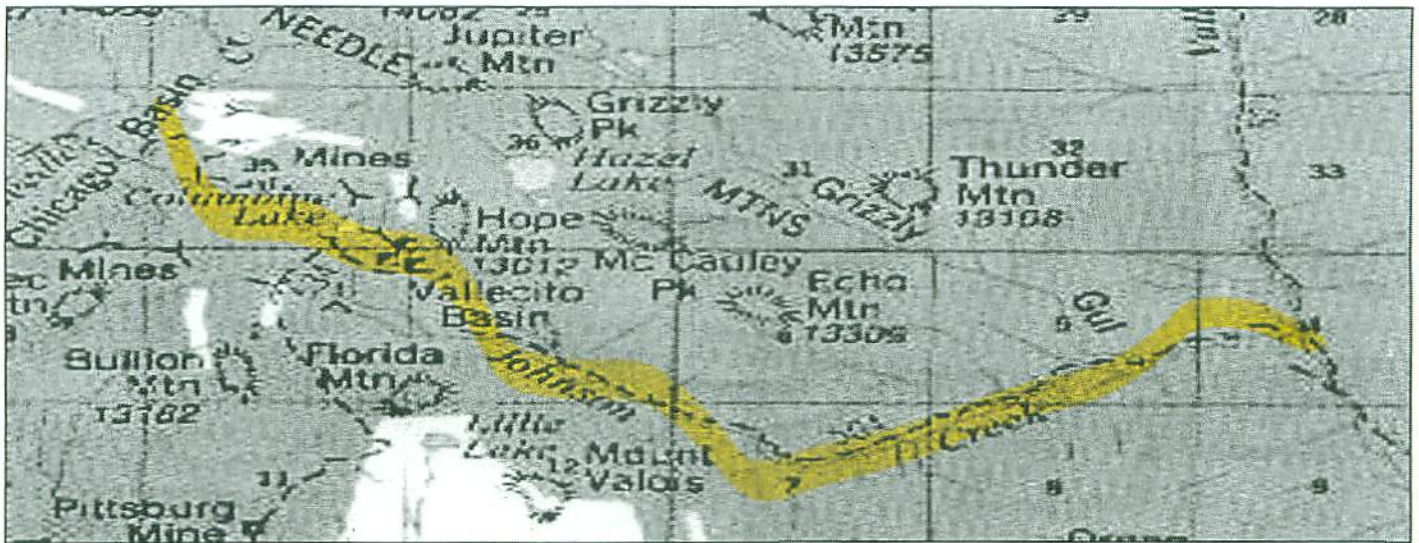
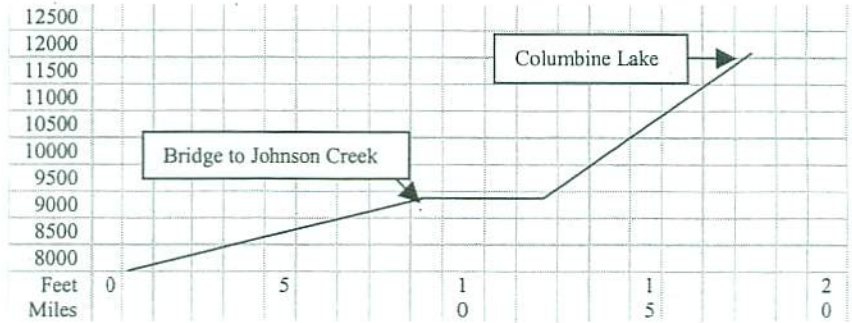
Columbine Lake

**Access # 1:**

From Bayfield head north on County Road (CR) #501, also called the Vallecito Road, for 13 miles until you reach Vallecito Lake and continue north on the west side of the lake for an additional 11 miles to the Vallecito campground where the trailhead is located.

**Access # 2:**

From Durango head north on Florida Road (CR #240) for 14 miles until you reach CR #501 and continue north on #501 to Vallecito Lake. Continue on the west side of the lake for an additional 11 miles to the Vallecito campground where the trailhead is located.



**Attractions & Considerations:**

The Vallecito Creek Trail begins in the Vallecito campground. The hike begins in a steep canyon with ponderosa pine forest, aspen and conifers. After .6 miles you enter the Weminuche wilderness. The trail climbs gradually as you follow Vallecito Creek north. You will cross Taylor Creek, Vallecito creek, and Second Creek as you continue on through meadows and aspen groves. After 9.2 miles you will come to the junction with Johnson Creek Trail. Turn left (west) and continue on 100 yards to a bridge. After crossing you will hike on easy to moderate terrain to Columbine Lake (12,000' elevation) at mile 18. You can extend the hike an additional .4 miles by continuing up the steep switchbacks to Columbine Pass, at elevation 12,680 feet. The alpine meadows are full of blooming wildflowers in late July and in August. This area provides excellent views and photographic possibilities. Water can be found off the trail in most of the tributaries, but due to Giardia it should be filtered. As with all high altitude areas, storms can move in rapidly, bringing severe wind, lightning, rain, snow, or hail at any time of the year. Plan accordingly.

*Scan of the San Juan National Forest Map*  
Forest Service Maps and other publications available at the Public Lands Center in the Durango Tech Center, ½ mile west of Durango off of Highway 160 or by calling 970-247-4874.  
[www.sjma.org](http://www.sjma.org)

**Fishing Considerations:**

Wild rainbow, cutthroat and brook trout are found in Vallecito Creek. The fish are appropriate for the size of the stream, generally 8 to 12 inch range. Deeper water may have trout 16 inches, but they are not found often. The river offers some of the finest fly fishing found anywhere. The entire Vallecito within the Weminuche Wilderness is managed as fly-and-lure-only water, with a bag and possession limit of 2. Columbine Lake is rated fair for cutthroat and brook. Please check the fishing regulations regarding limits, allowable lures, and restrictions on certain lakes, rivers, etc.

**Weminuche Wilderness Regulations:**

- Group size is limited to 15 people.
- Camping is not allowed within 100 feet of any water source.
- Outfitter-guides who receive any form of compensation must obtain a special-use permit to operate on public land.
- Possession of motorized equipment and mechanized means of transport are not permitted.
- Recreational livestock are prohibited from being restrained within 100 feet of lakeshores and streams or within riparian areas.