**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

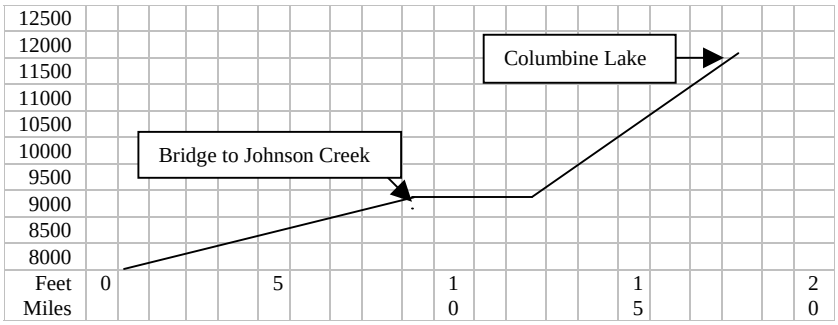
**Use:** Medium
**Difficulty:** Moderate
**USGS Map (s):** Vallecito Reservoir, Columbine Pass

Length: 18 mi / 29 km

Recommended Season

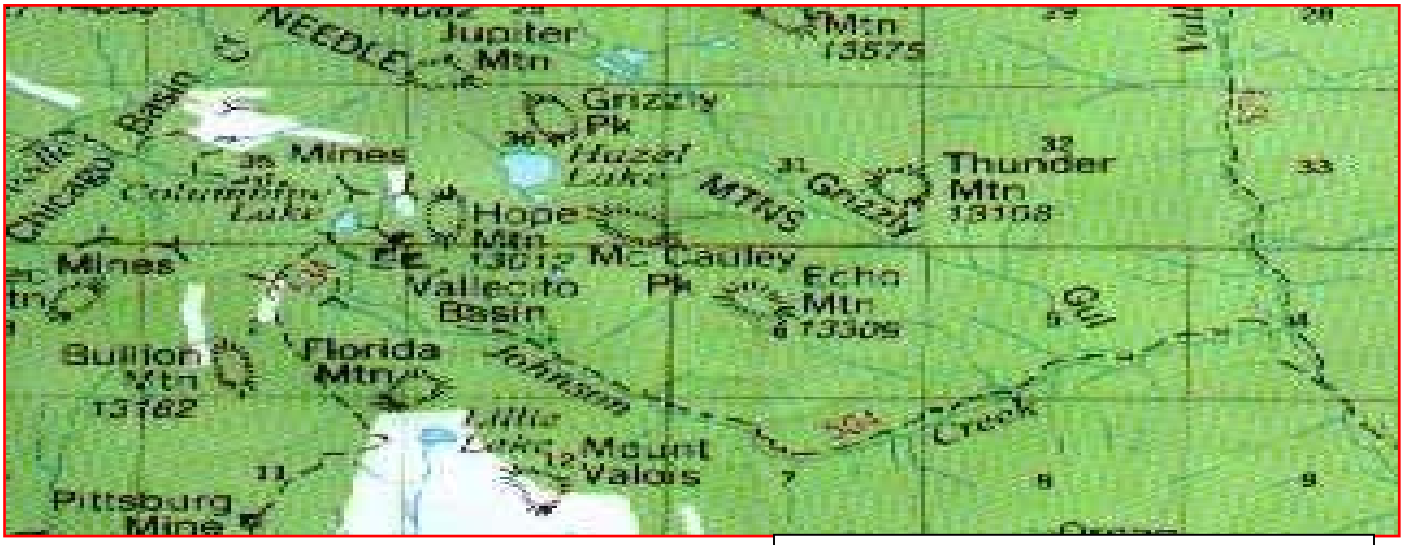
Spring Summer Fall Winter

**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 Reservoir and continue north on the west side of the reservoir 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 Reservoir. Continue on the west side of the reservoir for an additional 11 miles to the Vallecito Campground, where the trailhead is located.




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

**Attractions & Considerations:**

The Vallecito Creek Trail begins in the Vallecito Campground. The hike begins in a steep canyon with ponderosa pine forest, aspens, 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'll come to the junction with the 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 offers 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.

**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 of 16 inches, but they are not found often. The river offers some of the finest fly-fishing found anywhere. The entire Vallecito Creek drainage 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.