

Weminuche Wilderness, September 2007

Backpacking Itinerary

Day	Route
1	Drive to Missionary Ridge trailhead, hike to City Reservoir
2	Hike over Silver Mesa, Trimble Pass, Columbine Pass, and into Chicago Basin
3	Optional Rest Day in Chicago Basin
4	Climb Sunlight Peak
5	Hike down Needle Creek to Animas River, then down the Animas River to Cascade Creek
6	Hike up Cascade Gorge to Purgatory Creek and up Purgatory Creek to Ski Area

Route Distances and Elevation Gains/Losses

Location	Distance (miles)	Elevation	Gain / Loss (feet)	
			Gain	Loss
Missionary Ridge Trailhead		11,485		
City Reservoir	7.46	10,917	1,161	-1,724
Chicago Basin	7.76	11,493	2,465	-1,927
Sunlight Peak	4.50	14,059	3,388	-3,388
Junction of Cascade Creek and the Animas River	10.81	7,725	632	-4084
Purgatory Ski Area	4.55	8,832	1,641	-562
Total	35.08		9,287	-11,685

NO. 7 - CITY RESERVOIR - - - (Trailhead E)

From Gebhardt, Dennis. A Backpacking Guide to the Weminuche Wilderness. Durango, Colorado: Basin Reproduction and Printing Company, 1976, pp. 63-65

Trailhead elevation - 9,960'

Total vertical ascent - 2,360'

Highest point - 11,800'

Total vertical descent - 1,380'

Length - 12.7 miles one way (save 5.0 miles w/a 4-Wheel drive)

Maps – 7 ½' Mountain View Crest, 7 ½' Columbine Pass, San Juan National Forest

To reach the trailhead (E) at Henderson Lake you drive north from the Highway 550 cut-off (Trimble Lane) on East Animas Road for 3.3 miles until you reach Forest Service Missionary Ridge Road (No. 682). This gravel road, with bone-jarring washboard in the first few miles, will be your route for 17.5 miles and then turn right on a .2 mile road leading to Henderson Lake. You then begin a walk of 5.0 miles on a road (which could be jeeped) that will take you to the beginning of the hiking trail. Walking .5 mile past the closure sign you then leave the road at a 90-degree angle to the right and find several post-markers stretching across a meadow about .4 mile wide. Look for the blazed tree at the edge of the meadow to locate the trail and from this point it should be fairly easy to follow. The trail goes through many beautiful stands of dark timber (mostly Engelmann spruce and sub alpine fir) on the way to City Reservoir that were saved from logging by the Wilderness designation. After losing a little altitude and making a couple of turns you meet the Florida Trail (No.8) coming in from the right at mile 6.0. Continuing on, your trail crosses West Virginia Gulch at mile 7.0, a pretty little stream that wanders through pink granite with some very interesting pyrite in the streambed. At mile 8.5 you are descending into Virginia Gulch and you should keep left to cross closer to the head of the stream instead of taking the altitude-losing stock driveway cut-off that goes right. At the bottom of Virginia Gulch people who know the trail spread out pick it up in the timber on the other side. Look for blazes and post-markers to help you across. Climbing up you reach a divide (elevation 11,800') between Virginia Gulch and Missouri Gulch. From here the trail drops into beautiful and well-glaciated Missouri

Gulch, skirts Silver Mesa to the south and at mile 12.7 meets Endlich Mesa Trail (No.9) at Durango City Reservoir on the Florida River.

You have few encounters with other people on City Reservoir Trail because of the relatively difficult access. There is almost limitless camping in Missouri Gulch and above City Reservoir, and the gentleness of most of this country above timberline lends itself well to exploring and observations of nature. Also, this is excellent summer range for elk and sightings in the morning and evening are common.

NO. 9 – Endlich Mesa Trail - - - (Trailhead G)

From Gebhardt, Dennis. A Backpacking Guide to the Weminuche Wilderness. Durango, Colorado: Basin Reproduction and Printing Company, 1976, pp. 63-65

Trailhead elevation - 11,280'

Total vertical ascent - 3,243'

Highest point - 12,840'

Total vertical descent - 1,803'

Length – 13.0 miles one way

Maps – 7 ½' Lemon Reservoir, 7 ½' Vallecito Reservoir, 7 ½' Columbine Pass, San Juan National Forest

The access road for Endlich Mesa Trail is long, at the end poor, and the trail is hard to find. The section of the trail that receives the most use is from Durango City Reservoir to Columbine Pass. At mile 6.5 Endlich Mesa Trail is met by City Reservoir Trail (No.7) and this is the way you should go if you don't read maps well.

You find your way to Lemon Reservoir as described in trail No.8 but at 5.5 miles up the road from the dam site you should go straight on the East Florida Road (No. 597). This logging road climbs for 9.5 miles to a road closure (trailhead G); the last three or four miles might not be passable for passenger cars in wet weather. After the closure sign you walk on the main road as it climbs past other side roads. At mile 1.0 from the closure when you see the logging road ahead of you cutting into a steep hillside that is the ridge top, you must go left through a small clearing to find the trail in the timber at the top of the ridge. This is a real difficult trail to locate and you should use the U.S.G.S. 7 ½' quadrangle which shows the East Florida Road and where the trail takes off from it.

At mile 1.5 you break out of the timber and ascend a small hill. When you descend the somewhat steeper north end of the hill to a saddle, you must watch closely since a game trail that goes off to the left is obvious but you have to keep right and maintain a northeasterly direction of travel. You will see your trail clearly in 100 yards or less

The confusing and ambiguous part is now over and the trail is easily followed from this point on. Your reward for persistence is walking on top of the world (or so it seems) across the alpine tundra of Endlich Mesa, which averages 12,000' high for over 2.0 miles. Across the Florida River to the west is Missionary Ridge and behind that the La plata Mountains. North you can see some of the rugged Needle Mountains and east through breaks in the rim of the mesa you can look down to Vallecito Reservoir about 4,500' below.

Finally at mile 4.5 the trail goes through a saddle, drops into a basin and stays near the head of it until at mile 5.0 where it climbs a narrow ridge. Sheridan Mountain (12,795') dominates the view as you look across the next basin. This is a good place to study the headwaters of the Florida River. Notice that Missouri Gulch and the valleys above City Reservoir are perfect examples of straightening done by glacial ice. You have a good view of Silver Mesa as it rises to almost 13,000' toward the Needle Mountains between Missouri Gulch and Crystal Valley on the right.

From the narrow ridge the trail turns right to descend and after about 150 yards, it turns down a draw and soon enters the timber. At 5.75 you cross the unnamed creek that begins on the flank of Sheridan Mountain. Contouring around a ridge you come to the valley of the Florida River. Here the trail crosses the primitive dam of Durango City Reservoir and meets City Reservoir Trail (No.7) on the left. Continuing around the lake you will find camping space at the upper end. As with all high altitude lakes the fishing at Durango City Reservoir (10,917') is variable but the lake contains some fine fish. North of the lake the trail climbs steeply through thin stands of timber until at mile 8.0 you reach the 11,555' Lake Marie. Beaver have assisted the development of this body of water. The site of the mining community of Logtown, which had mail delivery and served the mining interests in the area during the 1880's is along the Florida River from Lake Marie to about .2 mile below it. You can still find a few trimmed logs at this location.

Almost even with the lake the trail switches back and climbs the side of Silver Mesa. Silver Mesa is alpine tundra and dotted with small lakes and a few prospects by miners. The trail is marked by rock cairns. At mile 10.3 you go close by the ruins of the Pittsburg Mine and at mile 11.4 you reach Trimble Pass (12,840'). Before you cross Trimble Pass you can see Lillie Lake (12,550') contained in a tight basin below Florida Mountain (13,076'). The rock-filled trail over to Columbine

Pass (12,680'), mile 13.0, is slow going but the view is superb as you make your way around the head of Johnson Creek below Bullion Mountain (13,182').

NO.6 - COLUMBINE PASS TRAIL

From Gebhardt, Dennis. A Backpacking Guide to the Weminuche Wilderness. Durango, Colorado: Basin
Reproduction and Printing Company, 1976, pp. 63-65

Trailhead elevation - 8,280'

Total vertical ascent - 4,400'

Highest point - 12,680'

Total vertical descent - 3,560'

Length - 14.25 miles one way

Maps - 7½' Mountain View Crest, 7½' Columbine Pass, San Juan National Forest

The Columbine Pass Trail which climbs Needle Creek to the 12,680' Columbine Pass and then descends Johnson Creek to Vallecito Creek Trail (No. 10) goes through the southern end of the Needle Mountains and within a mile of the Weminuche Wilderness' three largest peaks. I would like to remind potential users that this is a heavy use area for two reasons: 1) the easy access by riding the train to Needleton, and 2) the grand scenery in Chicago Basin capped by the three 14,000' peaks. Over the 4th of July I have seen as many as 50 or 60 people in the Basin and the number of hikers increases every year. If you are planning a trip to the Chicago Basin-Columbine Pass area you will have to share your wilderness experience with quite a few other people, especially if the time available for travel is weekends and holidays.

The trailhead for the Columbine Pass Trail is at Needle Creek, 11.0 miles from Highway 550 via Purgatory Creek Trail (No. 5) and trailhead (D). Or, you may ride the Narrow Gauge Railroad to Needleton and walk .9 mile to Needle Creek and where the trail begins.* The trail to Columbine Pass formerly went up the creek bottom but due to the unusually violent flood of 1971, the trail has been permanently rerouted to climb the north side of Needle Creek's canyon for 1.5 miles before descending to the creek again. Many times high waters have visited Needle Creek and the Animas River, resulting in the jumble of boulders and trees that you see along the stream beds. The trail up Needle Creek offers only a few places where camping is convenient until the lower basin begins at about mile 4.0. A good many people in poor physical condition attempt this trail via the train because it is well-known and a favorite in the area, and consequently you will find a lot of fire-rings perched in various cramped and narrow places on the way up. Be prepared for a continuous and fairly steep climb (2,920' in the first 6.0 miles, and 1,480' in the last 2.0 miles), and although the late start from the train ride makes this a more difficult proposition it is still reasonably possible to make the Basin that same day if you get on with it.

At mile 2.0 or about 250 yards before you cross New York Creek, if you cross to the other side of Needle Creek, a good-sized water wheel and other interesting remnants of the mining days can be found. This is also where you find the difficult and unmaintained manway that climbs up to Webb, Pearl, Emerald, and Ruby Lakes. New York Creek, an attractive cascading stream, makes a refreshing cold drink and is crossed on a small bridge. The trail continues with the same steady climb until at mile 4.0 where it begins easing into the first meadow of the lower Basin under Mount Kennedy (13,125') on your right. Camping becomes increasingly better as you go on from this point. As the trail levels off you begin to see the peaks that form a semi-circle at the head of Chicago Basin. On the left is the bare, wind-swept Mount Eolus (14,083') and continuing around clockwise are Glacier Point (13,704'), Twin Thumbs, Peak 11, Needle Ridge, Sunlight Peak (14,059'), Windom Peak (14,082'), and Jupiter Mountain (13,830'). It is interesting to see the west face of Jupiter Mountain in the morning before any direct sunlight has fallen on it. This mountain, named after the supreme god of Roman mythology, has massive godlike eyes, a nose, and a mouth from which one half expects a couple of hearty chuckles to roll across the Basin like thunder. This face is best seen not directly in front of Jupiter but from a half mile or so down the trail. Mount Eolus, across the Basin from Jupiter Mountain, is derived from mythology as well; the Homeric legends have Aeolus as appointed ruler of the winds.

The mining activity of years ago is pretty obvious to the visitor to Chicago Basin and prospects can be seen from right beside the trail to high on the side of the mountains. The "rush" was during the 80's and 90's and production from the Needles district had amounted to \$200,000 by 1905. The "rush" was all but over by this time.

Walking through the meadow surrounded by the magnificent summits the trail crosses Needle Creek at mile 6.0 and begins to climb to the upper Basin and Columbine Pass. The 1,480' of climb in 2.0 miles is modified by switchbacks and after attaining the upper Basin and continuing on to the Pass (12,680') the view is very rewarding. Columbine Pass is at the head of one of the 8 to 10 glacial cirques in Chicago Basin, and a look into Johnson Creek to the east reveals an equally well-glaciated drainage. Looking straight down Johnson Creek, the obvious peaks are Organ Mountain (13,032'), with many pinnacles and spires, and Amherst Mountain (13,165'). Prominent on the left side of Johnson Creek are McCauly Peak (13,554'), and Echo Mountain (13,303'), and along the right, Florida Mountain (13,076'), and Mount Valois

(13,185').

A little below Columbine Pass a rough trail goes left to reach Hazel Lake's basin (12,435') in about 1.0 miles. You will also notice a rocky trail going right and contouring along the head of the basin. This is Endlich Mesa Trail (No. 9) which reaches the 12,840' Trimble Pass in 1.6 miles. At mile 8.25 the trail levels out briefly by Columbine Lake (12,320') and traverses some very barren and scoured ground until mile 8.75 when the steep descent is resumed. After passing a few mining prospects the trail levels off at mile 10.0 where timberline is reached and good camping is possible. Johnson Creek usually doesn't have the numbers of people that are found on Needle Creek. Also, Johnson Creek averages an 11% grade, about 1% steeper than Needle Creek. At mile 10.5 the trail begins a series of switchbacks and descends steeply. Another small campsite is possible at mile 11.5. After more descent, the good-sized creek from Grizzly Gulch is crossed at mile 13.0 and .75 later, Johnson Creek which will probably have to be waded. At mile 14.25 there is a bridge over Vallecito Creek and Vallecito Creek Trail (No. 10) is met.

Purgatory Creek Trail (No. 5), Columbine Pass Trail, and Vallecito Creek Trail from mile 8.5 down to the Vallecito Campground (trailhead H) hiked in one continuous trip (33.35 miles) take you through a great variety of scenery and elevation changes.

*people who have ridden the train should add the .9 mile to the mileages given in the trail description.

NO. 5 – Purgatory Creek Trail - - - (Trailhead D)

From Gebhardt, Dennis. A Backpacking Guide to the Weminuche Wilderness. Durango, Colorado: Basin Reproduction and Printing Company, 1976, pp. 63-65

Trailhead elevation - 8,800'

Total vertical ascent - 1,040'

Highest point - 8,800'

Total vertical descent - 1,640'

Length - 11.0 miles one way

Maps – 7 ½' Engineer Mountain, 7 ½' Electra Lake, 7 ½' Mountain View Crest, San Juan National Forest

Although this trail is interesting enough in its own right, it is also an important access to the Columbine Pass Trail (No.6) and the Needle Mountains. Drive 28.5 miles north of Durango on Highway No. 550 and turn right into the Forest Service Purgatory Campground. The trailhead (D) can be found on the left about 20 yards in on the campground gravel road.

The trail begins dropping through a mostly aspen forest down to Purgatory Flats with a few moderately steep places here and there. Purgatory Creek (usually quite small) is crossed at mile .5 and Purgatory Flats is entered at mile 1.5, where the hiker will find an area of meadows bordered with aspen and views of the West Needle Mountains, Engineer Mountain (12,968'), Potato Hill (11,871'), and Coal Bank Hill (11,916'). Drinking from Purgatory Creek is not recommended because of development upstream.

At about mile 2.0 the trail again crosses Purgatory Creek (watch closely at this crossing because a lot of people momentarily lose their way at this point) and enters the narrow rocky gorge of Cascade Creek which is only one-half mile wide but averages over a thousand feet deep. As might be expected, there are some rock-strewn places on the trail, but it is generally in good shape. This is the sort of place where you should think ahead, and upon meeting horse parties, do your best to pass each other smoothly (see Manners on the Trail) since at times the trail is barely wide enough for two backpackers to pass and there are sheer drop-offs into the gorge. Geologically, this is an interesting trail, having started in the Hermosa Formation, rocks of Pennsylvanian age, then following the Cascade Creek gorge which cuts down through Precambrian gneiss and schist as it enters the Animas River canyon.

At mile 4.5 the trail switchbacks several times and descends into the Animas River canyon (7,720') making a total drop of 1,360' over the first 5.0 miles. The trail crosses the Animas River on a Forest Service suspension bridge just below the mouth of Cascade Creek and goes over the D. & R. G. W. railroad tracks and proceeds along the Animas at the south end of the railroad bridge. The trail does not cross the railroad bridge! (Drinking from the Animas is also questionable because of discharges from the mining operations upstream in the vicinity of Silverton.) The trail here is an old wagon road, almost 100 years old, which is long since grown over and used as a pack trail. The road came from Rockwood, went up the river to Needleton (now only a few cabins), and then climbed up to Chicago Basin. Do not be put off by talk of wagon roads, railroads, and cabins. This stretch of the canyon was touched by man long ago and the effect is mainly historical today, with the railroad being the only active development at present. It's hard enough to get them to stop and pick up backpackers, so don't worry about the tourists it carries. They ride through this wild, rugged canyon as detached as someone hurrying through a museum.

Walking in the Animas Canyon is especially rewarding in June when wildflowers such as clematis, violets, and shooting stars (to name only a few) are in profusion, and the many meadows and the red-barked Ponderosa pine mixed with aspen make a delight for the eye of the observant backpacker. During the spring (spring ending sometime between May 30th and June 30th) the trail has three or four spots through which the river likes to pour, making necessary some nasty climbs through thick vegetation up the steep canyon walls. Black bears and their tracks are numerous in the canyon. If you are lucky you might spot one. Be sure to keep a clean camp (see Weather, Safety, and Wilderness Travel). At mile 5.5 fill your canteen from Crazy Woman Gulch Creek, since the next couple of miles can be quite dry and hot. The Animas canyon in this section is about two miles wide at the top and averages 3000' deep.

From about mile 8.0, you will see a couple of the many spectacular peaks in the Needle Mountains, Pigeon Peak (13,972') and Turret Peak on the right (13,835').

Needle Creek, a cold and swift-flowing stream coming from Chicago Basin, is reached at mile 11.0. Crossing the Needle Creek bridge (8,240') and continuing for another 100 yards or so you cross another course of Needle Creek that sometimes runs a considerable amount of water and at other times only a little. A few feet on the other side of this are the signs directing you right to Columbine Pass Trail (No.6) which ascends Needle Creek to Chicago.

MOUNT EOLUS 14,083 feet

Eolus is the highest peak in La Plata County and the monarch of the San Juans' rugged heartland. This reclusive mountain carefully guards its secrets. Eolus' singular splendor forms Chicago Basin's northwest rampart. Eolus is named after a Greek god of the winds, and the name fits this massive monarch. The peak attracts its own winds, and the weather here can be violent. In summer, warm air from the Utah desert rises into the San Juans and creates intense thunderstorms. The storms seem to reach a climax near Eolus. In the winter, moisture-laden air wraps Eolus in a deep mantle of snow.

ROUTE

Northeast Ridge II, Class 3

From Chicago Basin: 2.6 to 4.6 miles, 1,600 to 2,900 feet

From Needleton: 18.2 miles, 5,900 feet

This is the standard route on Eolus. If you start from a camp at 11,200 feet in Chicago Basin, climb north on the good climber's trail on the west side of the creek leading to Twin Lakes. It is not necessary to go all the way to Twin Lakes. Before reaching the lakes, angle northwest into the small basin under Eolus' steep east face. If you start from Twin Lakes, contour west below some large, south-facing cliffs to get into the same basin.

Climb west up the basin under Eolus' east face past a large, sweeping slab to the north (right). Pass an initial ledge leading northeast across the slab, then do an ascending traverse northeast (right) on a higher, broader ledge. Reach the upper, western end of a flat area between Eolus and Glacier Point (13,704 feet). This flat area has a small lake at its lower, eastern end. This temporal paradise is suspended high and wild. Turn west (left) and scramble up to the northernmost saddle between Eolus and North Eolus (Easy Class 3). North Eolus (14,039 feet) is a spur summit 0.25 mile north of Eolus.

From the saddle, walk or crawl southwest along a famous stretch of ridge called the "Catwalk." The ridge narrows to two feet, and there is exposure on both sides of the ridge. Beyond the Catwalk, Eolus' northeast ridge rears up above you. Do not climb directly up the steep part of the ridge, but traverse south on the ridge's east side. Scramble up a series of exposed steps and ledges on the upper east face to reach the summit (Class 3). The easiest route can be difficult to follow. Take your time and look before launching. If you find yourself attempting a significantly harder move than those you have been making, you are probably off route. From the summit, you have a commanding view of a vast sea of San Juan peaks. You also can see Shiprock and may feel the desert's pull.

Variations

1. Class 4

Climb directly up the upper northeast ridge instead of traversing onto the upper east face. This is a harder, more spectacular finish on highly fractured blocks.

2. Class 3

From Twin Lakes, climb straight west up a steep, Class 3 couloir to reach the small lake at the eastern end of the flat area

between Eolus and Glacier Point (13,704 feet). This couloir retains snow through June and can provide a refreshing, moderate snow climb. Continue west across the flat area and rejoin the Northeast Ridge Route below the Eolus-North Eolus saddle.

Extra Credit

1. Class 3

From the Eolus-North Eolus saddle, scramble north for 200 yards to the summit of North Eolus (14,039 feet). This easy, Class 3 scramble is fun and easier than the final scramble on Eolus. You can do it before you summit Eolus to get tuned up and to survey the route on Eolus. You can do it after you summit Eolus to get a picture and feel good about what you have just done. North Eolus does not have a lot of power, but it is a named summit over 14,000 feet.

2. Class 2

From the flat area below the Eolus—North Eolus saddle, hike northeast and ascend steep talus to the summit of Glacier Point (13,704 feet). This summit gives you a spectacular view north into the Noname Creek drainage. You can easily climb Glacier Point with Eolus when you use the Variation 2 couloir above Twin Lakes.

SUNLIGHT PEAK 14,059 feet

This luminescent peak rests in secretive splendor at Chicago Basin's extreme northeast corner. Sunlight is 1.6 miles east of Eolus and even more difficult to see than Eolus. Sunlight supports three craggy ridges and, from certain vantage points, the view of Sunlight is startling. Sunlight is perhaps best known for its exposed summit block. The final move onto this block is the hardest move required to reach the summit of a Colorado fourteener by its easiest route. If the term "hardest" hinges on the difficulty of a single move, then Sunlight can be called Colorado's hardest fourteener.

ROUTES

South Slopes II, Class 4

From Chicago Basin: 2.0 to 4.0 miles, 1,560 to 2,860 feet

From Needleton: 17.6 miles, 5,860 feet

This is the easiest route on Sunlight. From 11,200 feet in Chicago Basin, hike north for a steep mile to Twin Lakes at 12,500 feet. From Twin Lakes, climb east for 0.7 mile to 13,300 feet in the high basin between Sunlight and Windom. Sunlight is north of you. The spectacular Sunlight Spire (13,995 feet) is above you on the connecting ridge between Sunlight and Windom. If Sunlight Spire were 5 feet higher, it would be Colorado's hardest fourteener!

Turn north (left) toward Sunlight Peak and climb up scrawny open slopes flanked by small cliffs. The difficulties increase as you approach the summit. The south slopes narrow to a ridge before you reach the summit. A clever, Class 3 traverse avoids the pinnacles on this ridge, but there is more than one route in this area. Reach an alcove just south of the famous, 30-foot-high summit block. Many souls have elected to stop here, but this is not the summit.

Scramble up to the summit block's east end (Class 3). The final, committing, Class 4 move onto the summit block requires you to step across an exposed gap, then pull yourself up on the rounded smooth block. As you straddle the gap, you can peer down the north face between your legs. A less exposed but harder alternative is to climb the summit block's south face (Class 5). Many people enjoy the protection of a rope on this summit block. Sunlight's exciting summit can only accommodate two or three people at a time!

Extra Credit

Most summit shots show people sitting on the summit. Center yourself and stand on the summit.

West Ridge II, Class 4 *Classic*

From Chicago Basin: 2.0 to 4.0 miles, 1,560 to 2,860 feet

From Needleton: 17.6 miles, 5,860 feet

This is a more difficult route than the South Slopes Route. It is recommended because the rock is solid (for the San Juans!), and the positions encountered are spectacular. Ascending this route and descending the South Slopes Route makes a scintillating Tour de Sunlight.

From 11,200 feet in Chicago Basin, hike north for a steep mile to Twin Lakes at 12,500 feet. From Twin Lakes, you can see the jagged Needle Ridge that forms the lower end of Sunlight's west ridge. The complete traverse of Needle Ridge is a difficult undertaking and is not part of the route described here.

From Twin Lakes, climb east for 0.4 mile to 13,000 feet in the lower end of the basin between Sunlight and Windom. Turn north (left) and climb up a rubble-filled gully to a 13,300-foot saddle between Needle Ridge and Sunlight. Make sure you climb to the saddle east of Needle Ridge. The rubble-filled gully is unpleasant, but such are the dues you must pay to reach the exciting upper climbing.

From the 13,300-foot saddle, the west ridge looks formidable. Overcome it one step at a time. Meet the challenge immediately with the ascent of a steep, Class 4 wall. The climbing above this initial wall alternates between the broken ridge and more short walls. One lower-angled, solid wall is positively primal. The climbing remains interesting, but the difficulties ease as you approach the summit. Join the South Slopes Route south of the final, Class 3 traverse to the alcove below the summit block. Continue on the South Slopes Route to the tippy top.

WINDOM PEAK 14,082 feet

Windom is 1.7 miles east of Eolus and 0.5 mile south of Sunlight. Windom is the first fourteener you see when hiking up Needle Creek, and it appears friendly. Windom is easier to climb than Eolus and Sunlight. If you are looking for a fourteener in the heart of the San Juan wilderness with views and charm, but not much commitment, then climb Windom.

ROUTES

West Ridge II, Class 2+ *Classic*

From Chicago Basin: 2.0 to 4.0 miles, 1,600 to 2,900 feet

From Needleton: 17.6 miles, 5,900 feet

This is the easiest route on Windom. You can see the upper part of the west ridge from tree line in Chicago Basin. This is a surrealistic tour in the heart of Colorado's wilderness. I have done this route many times and it always reminds me of why I started climbing.

From 11,200 feet in Chicago Basin, hike north for a steep mile to Twin Lakes at 12,500 feet. From Twin Lakes, climb east for 0.4 mile to 13,000 feet in the lower end of the basin between Sunlight and Windom. Stay south of a waterfall on this ascent. Turn south (right) and ascend snow or talus to the 13,260-foot saddle between Windom and Peak 18(13,472 feet). Peak 18 is the small, prominent peak at the west end of Windom's west ridge. It has a dramatic west face that you can easily see from Chicago Basin. Peak 18 is not named on the Columbine Pass Quadrangle.

From the Windom—Peak 18 saddle, turn east (left) and ascend Windom's west ridge for 0.5 mile to the summit. Wilderness views rise above the surrounding peaks as you climb. The ridge is Class 2 talus hiking at first, then the ridge steepens as you approach the summit. The Class 2+ scrambling over the boulders near the summit is not as hard as the Class 3 climbing on Eolus. From the summit, you have expansive views in all directions.

Variation

You can reach the Windom—Peak 18 saddle from the south. From 11,200 feet in Chicago Basin, climb east through some cliff bands to reach the lower end of the high basin between Windom and Jupiter Mountain (13,830 feet), which is 0.6 mile south of Windom. Turn north (left) and climb a couloir to the Windom—Peak 18 saddle. This route is more difficult than the northern approach to the saddle.

Extra Credit

From the 13,260-foot Windom—Peak 18 saddle, climb west to the summit of Peak 18 (13,472 feet). The easiest route is Class 4 on the ridge's south side.

Northwest Face II, Class 3, Moderate Snow (Seasonal)

From Chicago Basin: 2.0 to 4.0 miles, 1,600 to 2900 feet

From Needleton: 17.6 miles, 5,900 feet

This face is almost always climbed or descended when climbing Windom together with Sunlight. From 11,200 feet in Chicago Basin, hike north for a steep mile to Twin Lakes at 12,500 feet. From Twin Lakes, climb east for 0.7 mile to 13,300 feet in the high basin between Sunlight and Windom. Turn south (right) and ascend Windom's northwest face to the summit. Your exact line is a matter of choice. This face retains some snow until late in the summer, and the exposed

rock slabs are often wet. Choose your line carefully.

EOLUS, SUNLIGHT, AND WINDOM COMBINATIONS

Note: These combinations are Grade III only if you climb them in one day from Needleton.

1. *II or III, Class 4*

From Chicago Basin: 3.0 to 5.0 miles, 2,600 to 3,900 feet

From Needleton: 18.6 miles, 6,900 feet

This is the easiest way to climb Sunlight and Windom together. Climb Sunlight's South Slopes Route and descend that route to 13,100 feet in the basin between Sunlight and Windom. Climb to the Windom—Peak 18 saddle and continue on Windom's West Ridge Route to Windom's summit. Descend Windom's West Ridge Route. By giving up some elevation to reach Windom's west ridge, you avoid the vagaries of Windom's northwest face.

2. *II or III, Class 4, Moderate Snow (Seasonal)*

From Chicago Basin: 2.6 to 4.6 miles, 2400 to 3,700 feet

From Needleton: 18.2 miles, 6,700 feet

This is a more exciting way to climb Sunlight and Windom together. Climb Sunlight's West Ridge Route and descend Sunlight's South Slopes Route to 13,300 feet in the basin between Sunlight and Windom. Continue up Windom's Northwest Face Route and descend Windom's West Ridge Route.

3. *II or III, Class 4*

From Chicago Basin: 5.6 to 7.6 miles, 4,200 to 5,500 feet

From Needleton: 21.2 miles, 8,500 feet

This is the easiest way to climb all three peaks in one day. Climb Eolus' Northeast Ridge Route and return to Twin Lakes. Continue with Combination 1. These peaks can be done in any order, but doing Eolus first puts the difficulties of Eolus behind you early. Doing Windom last allows you to descend Windom's easy west ridge at the end of the day.